



## Light Key vs Local Color

**Always Remember,  
the presence or absence of light  
changes our perception of color.**

This method of study allows one through constant observational scanning ( in which all colors were quickly compared to all other colors) reset the perceptual norms.

**Perceptual norms are the “named” colors or otherwise known as the “local” colors such as green trees, blue sky etc.**

The foundational principles of this method are the idea that:  
each local color (defined as an objects named color seen at close hand and under a steady white light seen with our field of vision was almost always modified from its named color by a great number of variables.

Some of these being the kind of day (sunny, grey, atmospheric, etc) or time of day (early morning, mid day, late afternoon, dusk, etc) or

seasonal angle of the light, (or types of artificial lighting), atmospheric conditions, humidity, dust, etc. Any particular combination of these variables and their collective effect upon that observed local color during the short and defined period of study is the light key

**This is of course why green trees at a distance are blue or at sunset are orange or at dusk are deep violet, these physical modifications brought on by the light or lack of light and other combined conditions.**

**The upshot of all this is that local color as a simple reality is almost nonexistent,** although most people believe they perceive local color as such.

In other words perception does its best to erase all these modifications and maintain a steady state of comprehension not just with white but with all named local colors, when in truth the light key changes are usually fairly conspicuous especially if one has set themselves the task to see those differences even with the light key modifications, if painted to its refined relationship, that one could still recognize the local color of each one of the objects as modified, because all have been affected in the same manner.

So the impression upon the eye was that, even though none of the color notations contained any of the objects actual local color, in the overall relationship each was still recognizable as such excepting that now it was a truer rendition of the subject by having taken all the light key modifications into consideration.

For example, a white block in relationship with other objects done outdoors on a grey day will still appear as a white object within that scene even though the 3 planes showing to the eye may be a pale lavender on top, the lit side plane being a light mid tone green, and the more shaded plane a medium blue violet. Even so the effect was to truthfully show a white object as modified. One did not look for local color in an area but were instructed to look for the color in each area which best represented the light key in

that area.

**This method of study allowed one to do through constant observational scanning (in which all colors were quickly compared to all other colors) was to reset the perceptual norms.**

This had the result of not allowing previously conditioned perception to erase these light key modifications but to clearly register them. This was done by training the eye to a level of sensitivity that allowed one to see these light key modifications not only at a distance in the larger landscape but also at a very short distance, as in a still life set up out doors or a head 4 feet away from the eye or in whatever subject or whatever lighting. This was done through specific comparisons of every mass color note as well as every major and minor color variation as constantly compared to one another (this I will attempt to describe and explain in further detail in the next post called doing a color study).

As each color note was lain into its proper area it would of course affect how the colors adjacent to it appeared to the eye, in turn each of those were slightly modified to bring and keep all notes in a balanced relational harmony that represented the light key in each area.

For example cadmium scarlet out of the tube, although having a specific intensity is neither a light color nor a deep color in isolation but can stand as a light or deep within a relationship where the perception of it is modified by its surroundings, this being true of all colors. So regardless of a colors specificity, which is an unchallenged physical fact, **how things are perceived is completely relational.**

This being true because no color can be removed from the lighting (modifications) under which it is being perceived.

**Light key trumps local color, always!**

**The eye is very sensitive to all color changes,**

**it is the visual perceptual areas of the brain that must be re-trained** away from biological presets as well as accumulated biases and personal preferences and this could be done through extended and persistent comparative color study.

Perception's auto default setting is to perceive in black and white, it is for survival because color camouflages dangers.

But we all have the capacity to expand our color perception from the average persons 25000 or so colors to 10 or 20 times that number, but as with all capacities it requires training and development to reach its individual potential.

So in turn each student ends up painting according to the capacity they have developed or unfortunately to the reprogramming biases they preferred. Even if one studies in the right way there is no guarantee of success. That is totally dependent on the character of the student.

**We must start from the savage, the vivid, the robust coloration to throw off the shackles of visual concepts, but we also must be careful not to get hung in any of these over colored developmental stages**

or else we will never fully perceive the complex color relations of true light keys, if we mistake generic light effects for light keys and push our perception no further then we will simply become decorative illustrators and never reach our true potential as color painters.)