Many beginning artists do not realize that when they are working with color, they are working with value as well. The comparative lightness or darkness of a color is its chromatic value. A standard yellow, for example, is far greater lightness than a standard violet, although both colors may be modified to the point that they become virtually equal in value. The relative values of various colors are often easier to compare after they have been translated into their corresponding achromatic values. The value scale can be a useful tool for finding the appropriate level of gray for any color.
Color as Value

from *Drawing: Structure and Vision*

Fritz Drury / Joanne Stryker
An important issue in value-based drawing done from observation, but without the use of color media, is whether the tonal values refer to light and shadow or to the local colors in the subject. Every color has a value, or a degree of lightness or darkness that can be matched to a value scale. When creating a value-based drawing you will need to understand the inherent value of local colors of objects and translate the colors to their value equivalent. In the everyday world you see objects with many different values. For instance, if there were an evenly lit white bowl filled with deep red cherries, you would notice that the bowl has a very light value and the cherries a much darker value.
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In a tonal drawing of this still life, the value range would show the difference in value of the white and deep red.
But, imagine a dramatically lit charcoal portrait in which the hair is represented as the darkest value of the drawing. The darkest value could tell you one of three things: The first possibility is that the hair is in the deepest shadow of the drawing, the second is that the local color of the hair, say brown or black, is a very dark value even in full light, or third, the dark value could be the result of a combination of shadow and local color. You want to be able to determine which is the reason for the dark value of the hair.
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Color and black and white reproductions of two drawings by Claudio Bravo demonstrate the translation of color to value.
oil on canvas  h: 78.7 x w: 59.1 in
oil on canvas       h: 78.7 x w: 59.1 in
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>White Composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material</td>
<td>oil on canvas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurements</td>
<td>30-1/4 x 24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Artist** Bravo, Claudio, Chilean, b.193
black and white reproduction

Bravo, Claudio, Chilean, b.193
White Composition
1970
oil on canvas
Measurements  30-1/4 x 24
The subject of the first image is simply a piece of white rumpled paper. Therefore, each variation of value is due to the shadows and cast shadows caused by the light striking the planes. The black and white reproduction loses the warm colors, but the value relationships in both reproductions are equivalent.
CLAUDIO BRAVO, Babouches (2005)
pastel on paper, 29 1/8 x 42 7/8 in.
The drawing of the gently illuminated shoes with widely varying local colors is complex to translate to value because each differently colored shoe could have a different value. It is easy to see that the orange and blue shoes are naturally darker values than the white stripes on the multicolored shoes. However, until you look at the black and white reproduction, it may be more difficult to see that even though the local color of the orange shoes compared to the blue shoes is very different, their values, or their relative lightness or darkness are very similar.
CLAUDIO BRAVO, Babouches (2005)
pastel on paper, 29 1/8 x 42 7/8 in.
In the color reproduction, because of color contrast the orange shoes stand out much more than the blue shoes do from the blue floor. In the black and white reproduction however, the orange and blue shoes all merge with the rug, because there is little contrast of value between these shoes and the rug. But the white stripes on the multicolored shoes have a strong value contrast to the rug. All of the value variations in Bravo’s paper drawing refer to light and shadow, but in the shoe drawing, the value variations refer primarily to the local color of the objects.
In contrast to Bravo, Richard Diebenkorn drew without color and he gave a general representation of the values of the objects. In this boldly graphic and angular composition, the lightest value shapes represent paper, scissors, and other objects against the dark desktop. Dark-framed glasses were layered on top of the light paper to break up its shape. Unlike Bravo’s drawing of paper, the value range in Diebenkorn’s drawing does not result from a particular lighting situation, but from the light and dark values of the local colors of the objects, which are placed in relationship to each other to activate the page. While the juxtaposition of light and dark values seems haphazard or hurried, Diebenkorn succeeded in building a composition that teeters on chaos but ultimately pulls together, involving the viewer in a protracted and stimulating experience.
Richard Diebenkorn

Still Life: Cigarette Butts and Glasses, 1967
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Diebenkorn, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art
1990.101.1
Contemporary artist James Valerio also drew without color, but unlike Diebenkorn he referred to light, shadow and to local color simultaneously, and in a very specific way. As you can see from the direction of the shadows cast by the doughnuts, the light source is from the left and slightly behind the setup. A combination of our familiarity with the subject and Valerio’s careful representation of values and textures makes it evident that some of the doughnuts are chocolate iced and some are covered with coconut or powdered; the viewer can “see” the colors even in this value drawing. Further care with surface reveals that the small white covered dish on the right is opaque and much lighter in value than the table cover, while we see through the transparent glass bowl on the left. Valerio combined qualities of local color, texture, opacity, transparency, and light and shadow with clear description and delicate value variation, while Diebenkorn created a bolder, more graphic depiction of his still life. All the value changes in these drawings are there as a result of deliberate decisions by the artists but give very different results.
James Valerio, *Donuts* (1999), pencil on paper, 28.7 x 40 in., George Adams Gallery
Once you begin to see and understand the role of value in revealing light, shadow, form, texture, reflectance, and color of objects, you should observe it everywhere. For instance while riding in a car on an open highway on a sunny day, notice the location of the sun and how it illuminates the cars in front of you. How are the value ranges different on white cars, red cars, and black cars? What is the different reflectivity of shiny, new cars versus older cars whose paint has dulled? As the day goes on and the earth changes position in relationship to the sun, watch how the light and shadows change, especially the shadows the cars cast onto the road. As mentioned, similar observations can be made as you walk outside with your own cast shadow, which can be in front of you, behind you, or directly under you, depending on your changing relationship to the sun, streetlight, or other source of light. Observe the houses or buildings around you. Which planes are illuminated or in shadow at different times of day? How do the color and material of the building affect the value range and character of the lights and shadows? How are values, textures, and surfaces different when they are lighted by streetlights or moonlight as opposed to sunlight? In every instance, notice how the light and shadows reveal or give information about the structures you are seeing.
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by Fritz Drury & Joanne Stryker
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