

The Limited Palette

Art & Design

Fewer colours, mixed by you, give more harmony than a full box of tubes.

Three historic palettes worth working through in order.

Zorn palette

Yellow ochre

Cadmium red light

Ivory black

Titanium white

Black stands in for blue

Split primary

A warm and a cool of each primary

Six tubes plus white

Any mix can be kept clean

No accidental mud

Earth palette

Yellow ochre, red oxide, umber

Low chroma throughout

Value range is unrestricted

Historic, before modern pigments

Why it works

Every mix shares a common parent

Harmony arrives for free

Fewer decisions per stroke

Value has to carry the picture

A limited palette is a constraint chosen in advance. Restricting yourself afterwards is just correcting mistakes.