

Local hues are the inherent and associative colours of things. In everyday life, familiar things are described by particular colours, and these often are identified by reference to familiar things; the green of grass and the grass green of paint, for instance. Although, as the Impressionists demonstrated, the inherent colours of forms in the real world are usually changed by effects of light and atmosphere, many of the great “primitive” and classical styles of representational painting are expressed in terms of local hues.

Tone is a colour’s relative degree, or value, of lightness or darkness. The tonal pattern of a painting is shown in a monochrome reproduction. A painting dominated by dark colours, such as a Rembrandt, is in a low tonal key, while one painted in the pale range of a late Claude Monet is said to be high keyed. The tonal range of pigments is too narrow for the painter to be able to match the brightest lights and deepest darks of nature. Therefore, in order to express effects of illumination and dense shadow, he must lower the overall tonal key of his design, thus intensifying the brightness value of his lightest pigment colours.