

## Article 5 Color Perception Part 1

In the article I introduced you to some of the important theorists in the field of color. This week it's time to stop talking and start showing and I want to start with some color perception exercises.

Faber Birren wrote a book in 1976 called *Color Perception in Art*. It built on the work of Josef Albers 1963 book *Interaction of Color*....among other works. In these books they explore color beyond the physics of light waves and light reflection and delve into what happens to color in our eyes and in our brain.

I want to start this topic by showing you a few examples and I encourage you to do these at home with your own fabrics. I remember when I was first shown this exercise and I suddenly understood some of the problems I encounter when selecting fabrics for a quilt. This particular exercise had to do with the effect of one color on an adjacent color.



Take these 2 pink swatches. They are from the same fabric so are identical in color.



I placed one on a blue background and one on a yellow background. Now, looking at these swatches side by side, it looks like the pink are two different shades. The interaction of the pink with the blue makes the pink look lighter and redder while on the yellow the pink looks purpler, like a light magenta.

That has nothing to do with the actual colors but everything to do with how we perceive them.



Let's try another exercise. I picked 2 fabrics from the yellow family. One is a light buttery yellow and the other is more of a gold.



With the gold placed on a purple fabric and the yellow placed on a light green I am able to make the two yellows look like they are almost identical in color. By placing the gold on a dark and dull background I have made it look lighter and brighter. By placing the yellow on a very light, bright green background I have made the yellow look darker and duller.

I remember one of the very few times that I made a mystery quilt. I picked out a focus fabric and then picked several other fabrics that looked like they would work perfectly. The mystery project gave us very little information up front to determine proportions of any of the fabrics. It turned out that the focus fabric was used in larger chunks than I expected and once in the quilt, looked horrible. The fabrics that I picked as accents made the focus fabric look horribly dull. In the end I kept all of the fabrics except the focus fabric.

Let's do one more exercise because this principle of perception also applies to value.



Here are 2 swatches of a medium value red.



Here are those same swatches placed on a light value and a dark value. Now the medium on the light looks darker than the medium on the dark.

You see, it's all relative!