

Article 9 – Luminosity

In my opinion luminosity is an easy concept to get in theory but more difficult in practice. In simple terms luminosity is the effect of color giving a glowing impression. We know it when we see it in a Monet or Turner painting.



Impression: Sunrise 1872

Claude Monet



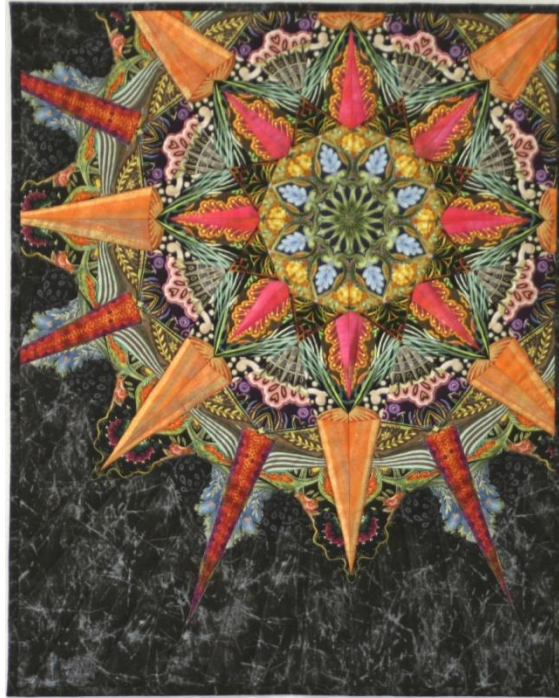
Fisherman at Sea, 1796

JMW Turner

That's all well and good but how do we get that effect in our quilts and why would we want it in the first place?

First, luminosity is just another tool to make our quilts stand out. Like value and temperature, we can use luminosity to add focal points and excitement to our quilts; to make them stand out in a crowd. Today I will talk about techniques for adding luminosity to your quilts.

One very simple way to add luminosity to your quilt is to outline your blocks in black. This is most common in stained glass quilts. This kaleidoscope quilt that I made a couple of years ago is an example.



The black surrounding the color areas make them all the more luminous. This quilt would not have the same effect with a brown or red background.

Luminosity is always going to be an effect based on colors being next to each other and there are some basic rules:

- The luminous area is smaller than the surrounding area
- The luminous area is a lighter value than the surrounding areas
- White as a background weakens the luminous effect of the color

A red and white quilt is not going to exhibit luminosity. That doesn't make it unsuccessful at all. It's just not luminous. A red and white quilts works because of the striking difference in value.

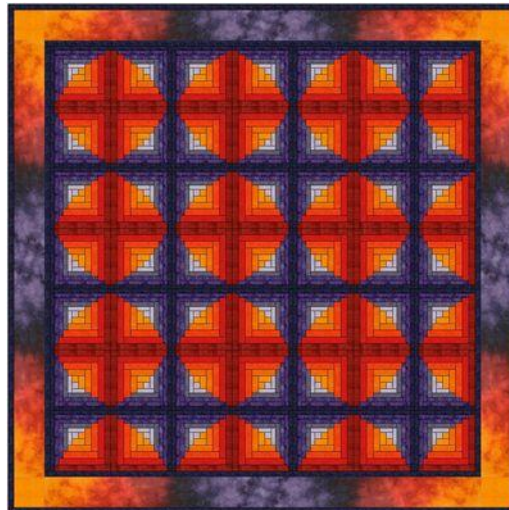
However, a red quilt done in a variety of values and temperatures is going to exhibit luminosity. You will see the lighter and warmer colors of the red as glowing against the "background" of the rest of the quilt.

Watercolor quilts use luminosity very effectively as a tool for drawing you into the quilt. In my opinion not one has this mastered as well as Wanda Hansen. Check out her quilts at exhuberantquilts.blogspot.com She is a master of luminosity.

But you can achieve luminosity in your traditional quilts as well and I am always striving to have a luminous effect on most of my hand dyed gradients.



In the Summer Sunset gradient I have achieved luminosity with the deep gold and orange dyes at the end. They glow against the deep red and dull purples that makes up the rest of the print.



In this quilt layout you not only get the glow from the luminous effect of the gold but you can even feel the warmth from the red and orange.



Luminosity doesn't have to be "warm". In this quilt based on the Monarch gradient the luminosity is created with the small amount of the pale green in the gradient border and the patches set against a black background. There's not a lot of the pale green, just enough to get the effect.



In this quilt from the Nelly Moser palette it's the lime green that adds the luminosity and, frankly, is the thing that makes it interesting. Imagine how flat this quilt would look if that lime green wasn't there.

It's a nice tool to have in your design kit. The next time you are struggling with a quilt design that just isn't working ask yourself if you could add something to make it more luminous.