

Adding and Deleting Pigments from My Watercolor Palette

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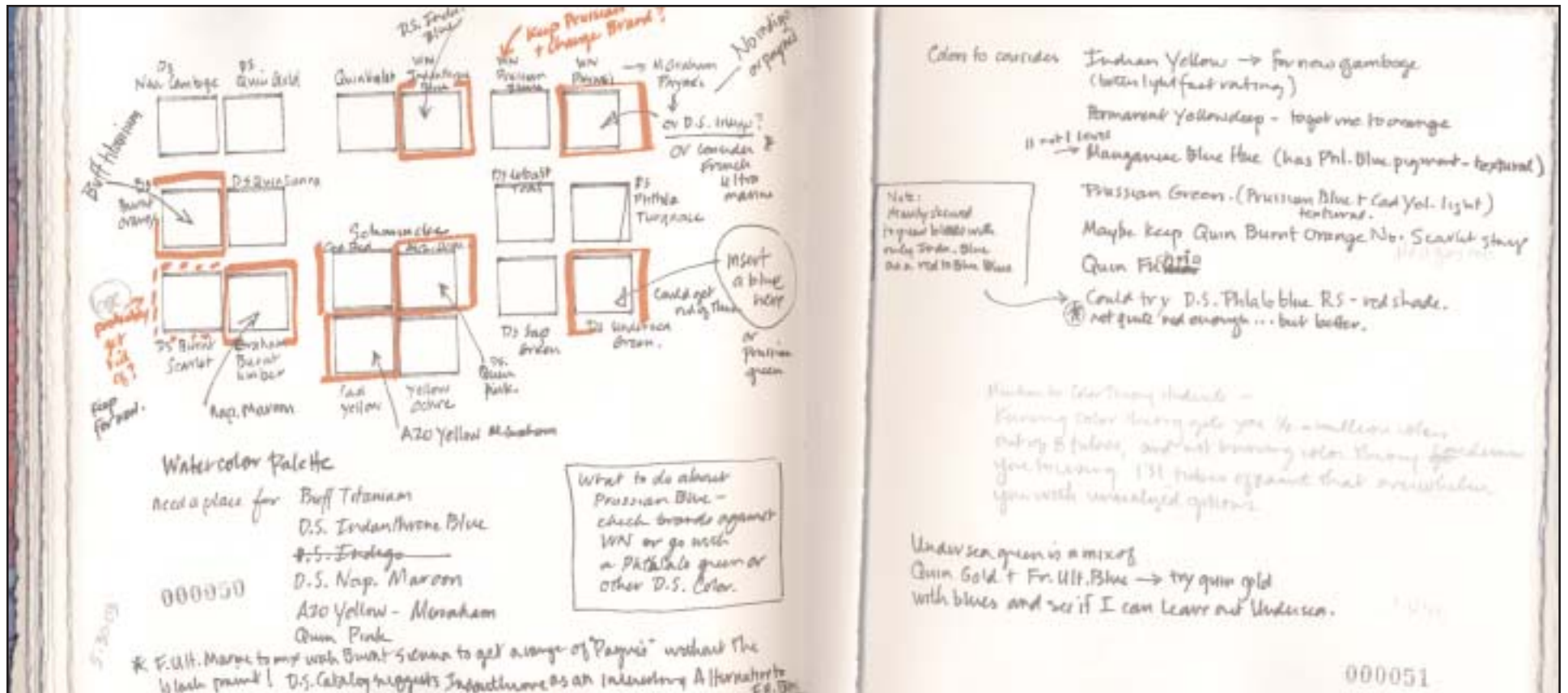
The following is a short discussion (with scans of color mixing experiments from my journal) of changes I made to my watercolor palette in June 2003. I am posting this on my website in the hopes that my past and present color theory students will find it an interesting “real world” example of how to work out which colors they want to add and delete from their own palettes.

Color choices are personal, they have to work for us. We have to be able to mix the colors we want to use. Being aware of which pigments are in which paints makes these choices and experiments easier and fun.

Since my scanner cannot scan the entire 16 inch width of my journal's page spread, I had to splice spreads together. They appear at 50 percent original size in this discussion.

There are no missing pages. Tabs visible in the gutter were sewn into the journal at construction to allow for my collage work. These color experiments took place over several days, so not every journal page related to the experiments.

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Having decided that things are going to get a little complicated I take time to make a chart of the palette the way it currently is and which colors I'm thinking of changing.

I have had Schmincke (S) Alizarin Crimson on my palette for ages but never use it, so it's the first thing I know will go. (See verso page, diagram center 4 squares.) I know that I will be adding a rose or pink here.

I have long loved Payne's gray and Indigo. In fact I want to add DS Indigo to the palette. In the top right corner of the diagram I make notes about what will go in this "blue" square. In an about face which startles even me I decide to go with DS Prussian Blue, DS Indanthrene Blue, and get rid of Indigo and

Payne's Gray. Part of my reason for this is I look up the pigments contained in those two paints. Both contain Indanthrene Blue and Carbon black. I had earlier decided that I wanted to eliminate colors that were pre-mixed versions of what I already could mix with colors on the palette. Since I have Indanthrene Blue and can mix darks with it by adding Quin. Sienna, there didn't seem any point to keeping the other two on my palette. This allowed me to expand my blues to include DS Prussian Blue and DS Phthalo Blue Red Shade. I do mixing later with these colors to determine whether they work for me.

Burnt Umber is a color I haven't used much at all so it is easy to weed out. I take a hard look at DS Burnt Orange and DS Burnt

Scarlet. My notes indicate what I am trying to add. My task is now to find what I can live with or without to make room for these new colors.

Next to go is Undersea Green. I love this green and use it a lot, but looking up the pigments it is made of I discover that it is made from Quin. Gold and French Ultramarine Blue. I consider adding the latter to my palette, but that isn't a blue I like. Instead I keep Quin. Gold and mix it with Indanthrene Blue. The color looks almost exactly like Undersea Green so I have freed up one space. (See next spread for that mix.)



Above, verso page, on the right you will find Quin. Gold mixed with Indanthrene Blue, mentioned earlier.

Also on this page I am deciding whether or not the Burnt colors will stay or go. I am mixing them with greens, blues, and New Gamboge to see what mixes I can get. I have two interesting discoveries. I think that Quin. Sienna and Nap. Maroon might yield a color similar to Burnt Scarlet, which would mean I could get rid of Burnt Scarlet and free up another space. I test this bottom left on the recto page. I also blend Nap. Maroon with Sap Green and get a more than satisfactory red brown and interesting range of greens.

Still dealing with Burnt Scarlet, however,

I find that it makes a delightful mix with Phthalo Turquoise. Can I live without this? On the next page spread, page 55, I find that I can indeed, because Quin. Sienna, Nap. Maroon, and Phthalo Turquoise make a wonderful rich range of darks. Burnt Scarlet is out.

In the meantime, on the above recto page, I experiment mixing with my various blues on my palette.

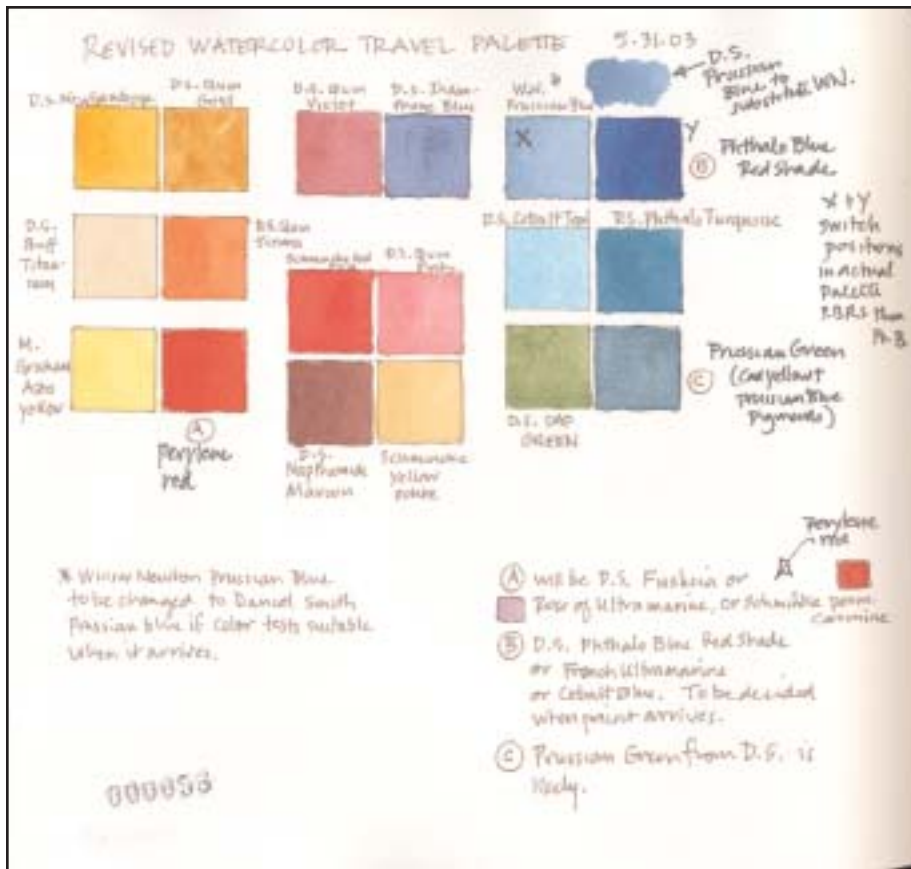


I decide that one of my colors should perhaps be saved for a purple or lavender. I try out S. Ultramarine Violet and find it to be very gummy. It also has a low lightfast reading and a very weak tinting strength.

I toy with the idea of Rose of Ultramarine, the large pinky lavender color on the recto page. I notice that Quin. Violet and Ultramarine Violet mix a color very similar to it (top right corner of verso page). But I'm just not sold on Ultramarine Violet, either M. Graham's or Schmincke's.

I start thinking about DS Quin. Pink. Do I want to use that more than DS Fuchsia? or is Schmincke Carmine a better choice? Reds of

course get me thinking about orange, which I don't have on my palette (just New Gamboge and Quin. Sienna). I find that Azo Yellow and Quin. Pink make a lovely orange.



I create a new chart on a clean page and fill in the colors that I have decided I want to keep. I leave other squares blank to be filled in later.

At this point I have decided on DS New Gamboge, DS Quin. Gold, DS Buff Titanium, DS Quin. Sienna, MG Azo Yellow, DS Quin. Violet, DS Indanthrene Blue, DS Quin. Pink, DS Nap. Maroon, S Yellow Ochre, DS Prussian Blue, DS Cobalt Teal, DS Phthalo Turquoise, DS Sap Green, and DS Prussian Green.

The last is an impulse choice. Something I decide I want to try because I don't have Cadmium Yellow on the palette any longer and wouldn't be able to blend this color

(which is made from Cad. Yellow and Prussian Blue pigments).

My notes show how I am waiting for paints to arrive to make final assessments.

When they do I do the tests on the right page above. I like Indian Yellow and Verona gold, but the latter is too close to Quin. Gold to buy me anything. (A call to DS corrects bad info in their catalog, all three yellows are the same high rating of lightfastness.)

The Violet is too streaky. The Phthalo Blue Red Shade is a delightful surprise and I decide to add it after making a couple tests.

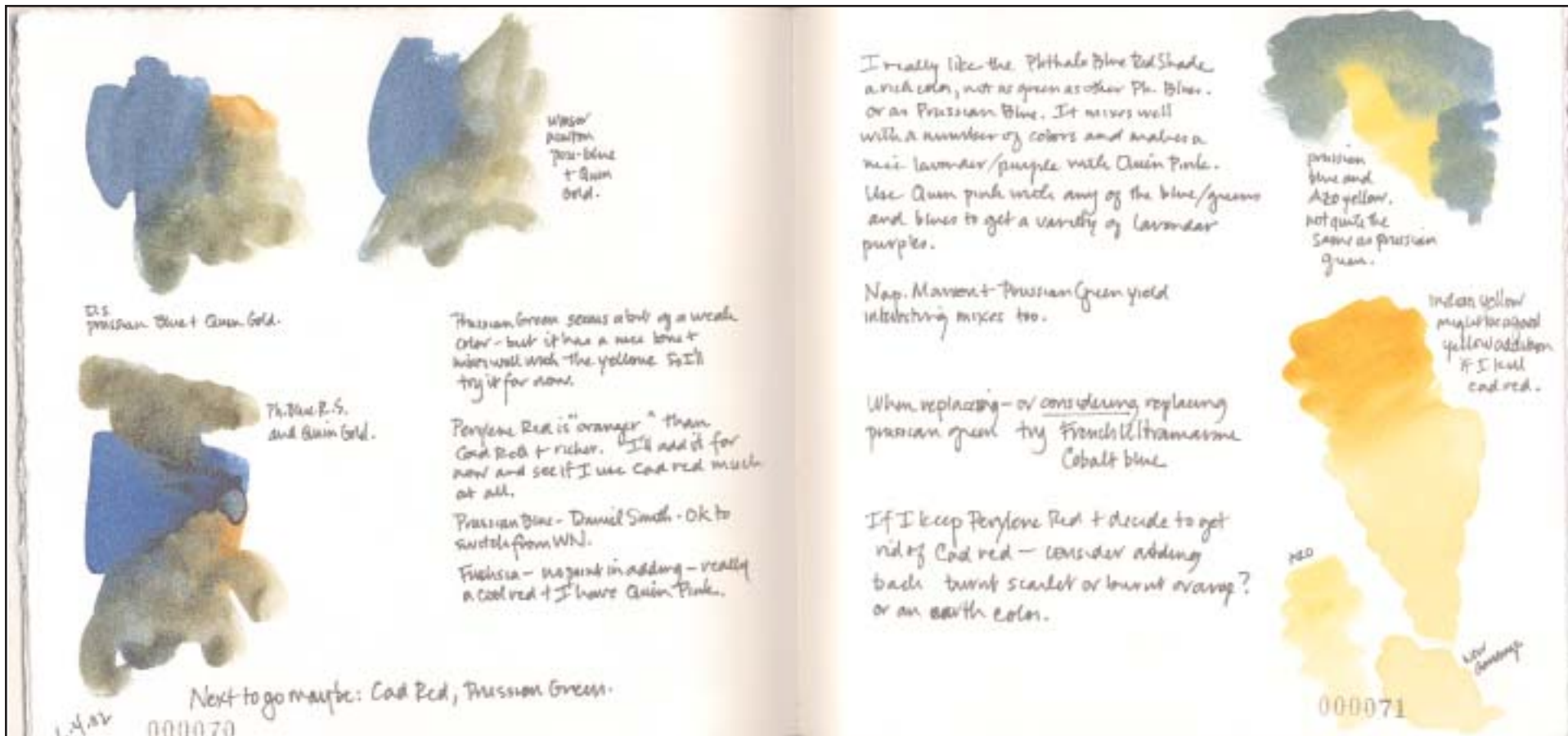


Above, on the verso page I'm working out whether or not the Cab. Violet is usable. It isn't. And I'm trying to decide on this spread which reds and blues I want to finally use.

Fuchsia, which looked promising mixes without too much interest. Perylene Red and Permanent Carmine give me a bit of a struggle. I'm totally in love with Phthalo Blue Red Shade.



How my blues will mix with reds now becomes my focus. I'm wondering what types of "purples" I can get. I have to decide which reds I'm going with. And, on the recto page, I have to decide if I really want to use Prussian Green.



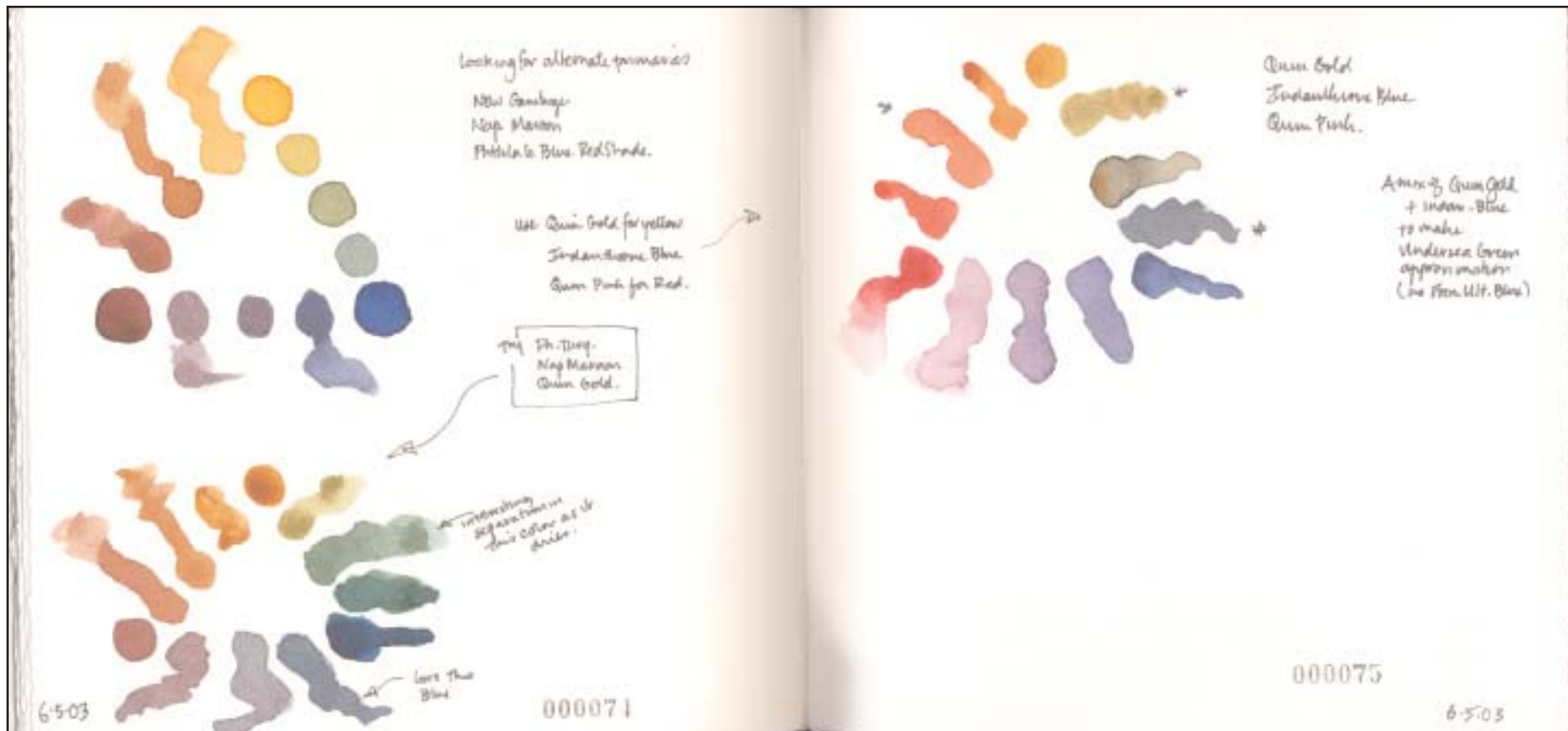
Above I'm still messing around with Prussian Blue and Phthalo Blue Red Shade, to see how the mixes differ. I'm also debating about using Prussian Green and which reds to use in my notes. I decide to go with the Prussian Green for now.

I consider getting rid of Cad Red, but in the past I've been too quick to get rid of my basic red color so I decide to keep it for the time being and see if I still use it. I decide to keep Perylene Red from DS as it makes such a nice orange and seems a rich color.

On the recto page I make final notes to myself about other directions to go if I'm unhappy with the current choices. I find it is

useful to keep these types of notes because even only 3 months after these tests I'm already forgetting details of what I wanted to experiment with next. These notes will help me jump right back in.

I fill the final color choices into the color table on page 63.



My final series of experiments is with triads. I look for “alternate” primaries, new triads to build on. These are immediately recognizable as in keeping with my love of “neutralized” colors.

Overall I’m very pleased with the range of colors the new palette yields. Quin. Pink with Indanthrene Blue yields a particularly sweet range of lavenders.