

Colors in Conversation

By Kelly Beekman

Relationality in Art and Life

Building and maintaining relationships with others is the work of human life. The quality and flexibility of our social interactions reveals our ability to engage in the world at many levels. Our resilience depends on our ability to ask for help, and our success, at whatever level we are seeking, requires that we develop stable and supportive connections with like-minded individuals.

Relationality is the soul process and activity of fostering relationships and developing them over time. We arrive at an understanding that relationships change and develop. They require different things from us at different stages, to keep them stable and mutually rewarding.

Relationality asks us to be observant of what lives in the space between ourselves and other human beings. What do we bring to the meeting? Are we aware of what the other brings? Can we awaken to the qualities of our own nature? How do we cultivate a healthy conversation when we meet another human being, whether spoken and unspoken? How do we create a space where we can truly meet the other? Mutuality requires both speaking and listening, action and resting.

Relationality among colors

The activity of painting can be a wonderful medium for exploring ideas about relationality. A painting is, really, a relationship among colors on the page. The artist's responsibility is to find balance between the colors and an arrangement that elicits an experience of beauty and harmony. Relationality asks us to consider many different aspects of the color relationship and make individual decisions that affect the interaction.

Let's explore some of these ideas by painting with two colors, yellow and red.

First, we consider the **qualities** of the colors we include in our work. Yellow is glowing and expanding. It wishes to ray out and bring light and happiness into the world. Red is more confident. It does not need to shine out. Red pulses and throbs in its place and draws attention to itself. When the artist brings these two colors together on the paper, what "becomes" within the perimeter of the paper?

If we paint a picture of a red fire engine, streaking down the road. Red will be the center of attention. "Here I come!" Yellow will surround it, lighting the way for the speeding vehicle.

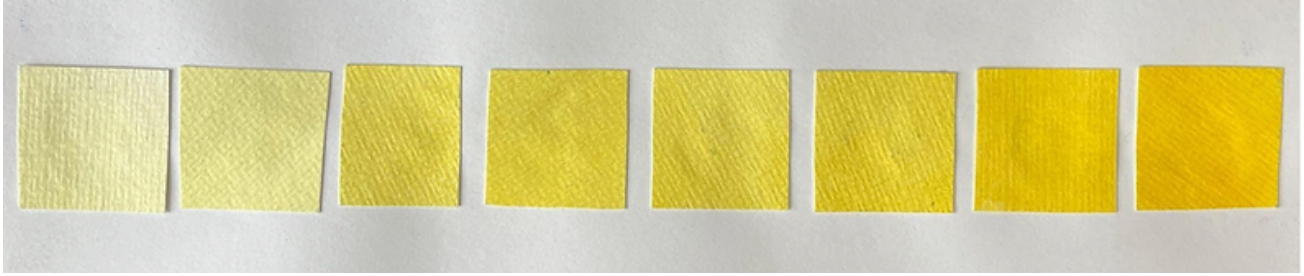


If we choose to paint the yellow fire itself, yellow is allowed to shine. "I ray and glow!" Red will surround it, with qualities of warmth, strength, and gravity, so that yellow doesn't fly away. The qualities of the colors and their inner nature inherently affect the relationship.

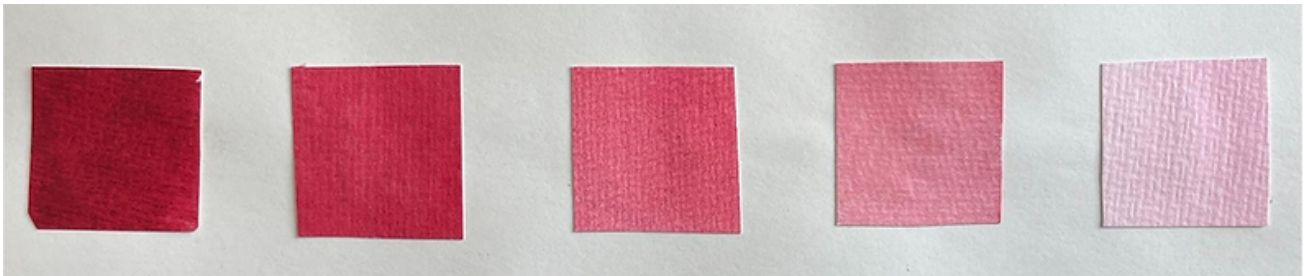


Next, Let's consider the **value** or **intensity** of the color. Color always lives on a sliding scale between light and dark, and between less saturated and more saturated color. We can note that yellow is most often lighter than red, but how does the relationship change when the yellow we

choose for our painting is more golden, darker and more intense? That yellow burning fire will glow hotter...

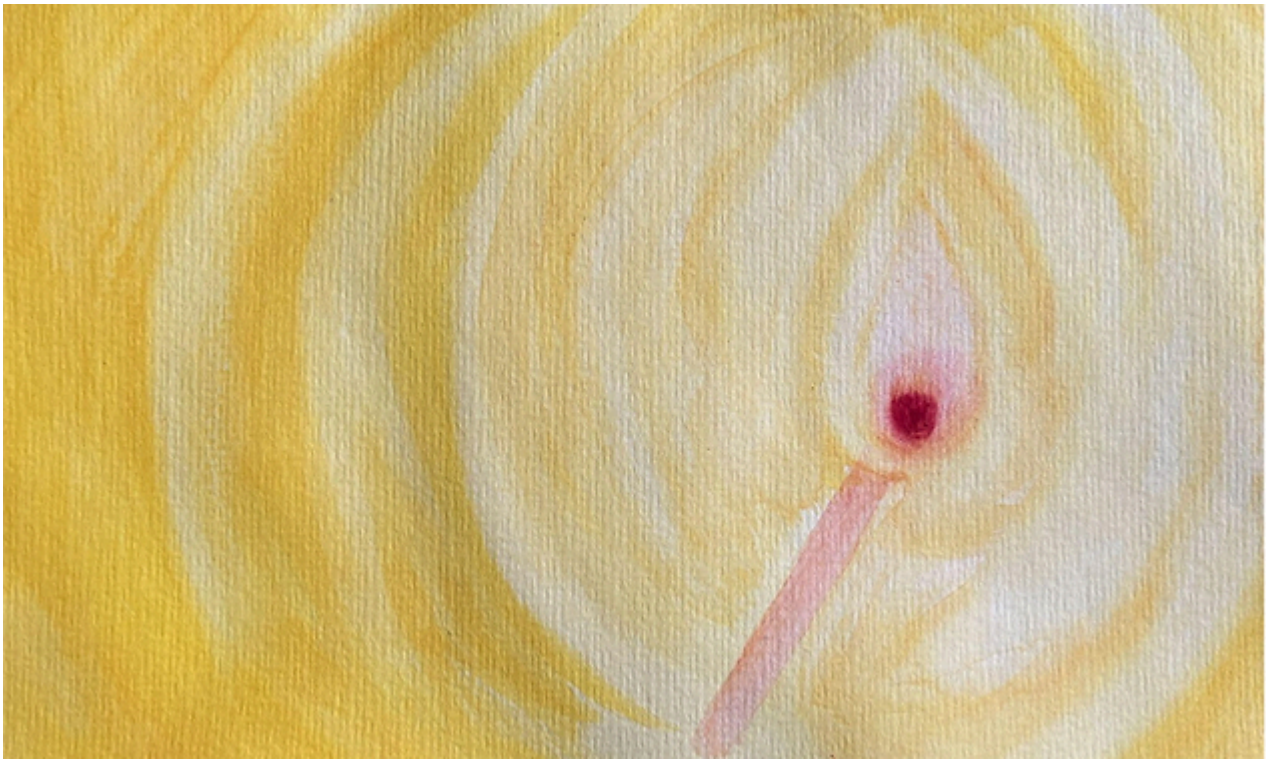


Or when red becomes lighter, more like pink? That fire engine would certainly get less attention.



When the artist shifts color intensity and introduces deliberate lightnesses and darknesses in a painting, the color relationship becomes more complex. Our choices change the mood or emotional tension.

The **scale** or **amount** of a color within the painting also affects the outcome. We have given parameters in which we can work - the size of our paper. It is up to us to decide how much red to use and how much yellow. What are our objectives? What is the mood we are trying to create? The answers to these questions help us to make appropriate choices. Sometimes colors can get out of balance and the mood of the image shifts. We get a very different feeling when yellow fills the page and we have just a spot of red?

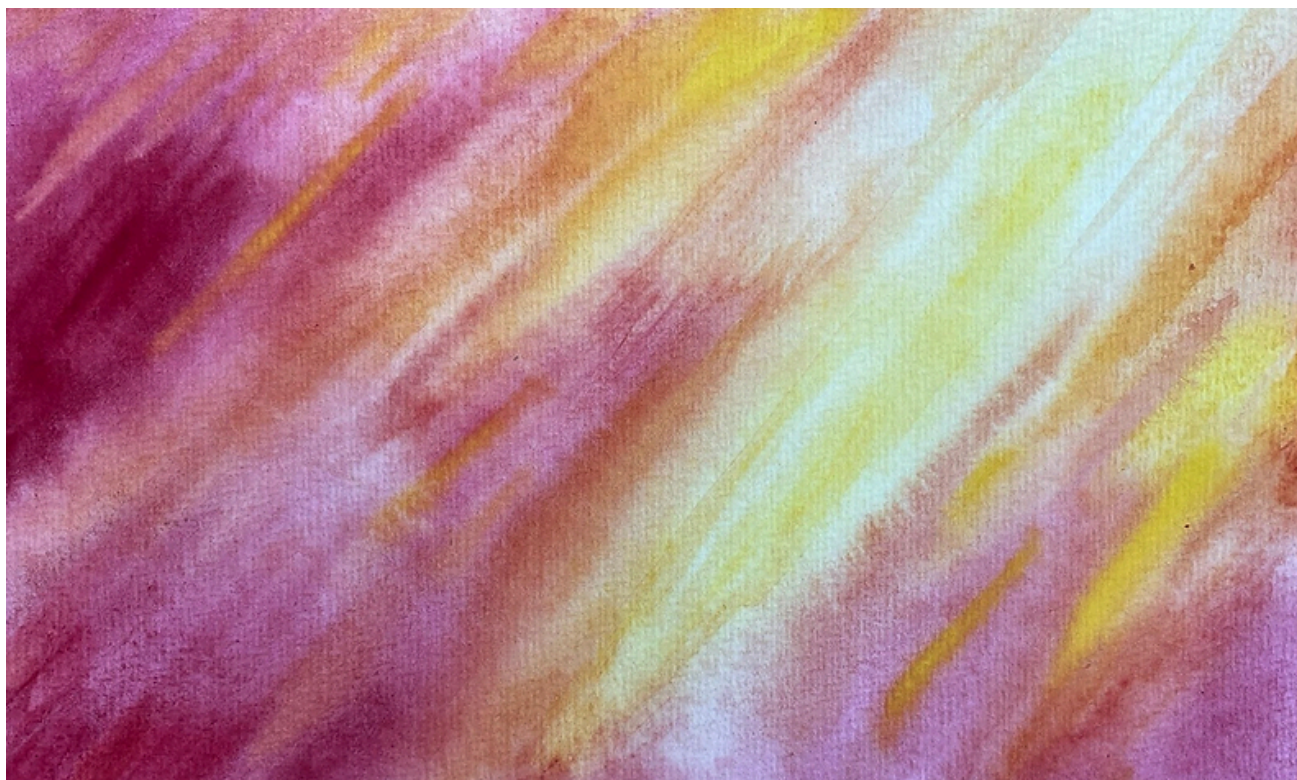


Or when red takes over and yellow gets squeezed out?



What happens to the relationship? Tensions may arise, and in some cases, there is a feeling that something is missing. Something is lost when yellow can no longer shine and loses its place in the composition, or when red is relegated to this tiny spot and cannot bring its warmth and influence to other parts of the image.

Lastly, we must consider the **interaction** between the two colors. This aspect requires the most attention in painting. Interaction is the how, where and how often colors meet on the page. These choices are driven by the artist's objectives and inner vision of the desired image. They also can be modified based on the results experienced in the painting process. If it doesn't look good, the interactions can be modified as the painting develops. Interaction can be modified by the different tools and materials we have at our disposal. The artist can make hard or soft edges. Colors can stay separate from each other, or they may softly intermingle. Colors may blend so that a new color arises. When this occurs, additional considerations have to be made to observe the qualities of that new color and find ways to integrate it into the whole. Managing the interactivity between the colors requires care and attention, and means that we have to take all the ideas discussed above into consideration, modulating the colors as needed. This brings complexity into the composition, builds visual interest and stabilizes the relationship between the colors.



In the end, beauty arises when each color gets to show off its own qualities and supports the qualities of the other colors at the same time. Yellow brings light and clarity and red brings inwardness, gravity and substance.

Relationality among humans

If you can agree that color is a language of the soul, let's take these painting ideas and apply them to our personal interactions.

How would you characterize your own personal **qualities**? Would you consider yourself blue or orange, or another color? Do you acknowledge your own qualities in a relationship or are you blue pretending to be green? Do you take the time to identify the qualities of another through observation or reflection? This is an important first step.

How much **lightness or darkness** do you bring to a relationship? Does your color shine, or can it be darkened? Are you aware of your **intensity** and how it affects the relationship? Have you had experience adjusting these inner aspects when the relationship requires it? Does your presence lighten or darken the qualities of another?

The **scale or amount** of our participation varies, depending on the type of relationship we are in. Sometimes we have to fill the space, bringing our strengths and qualities to shine, and sometimes we have to come to the aid of another who needs support. Sometimes we have to hold ourselves back to make room for another's ideas, emotions or activity. Relationality awakens an inner awareness that helps us to assess our situation and decide how much of ourselves we bring in. Sometimes it's more and sometimes it's less.

The last principle is the awareness of our **interaction** with another human being. As in painting, this requires finesse. Do we have hard edges or soft ones? Do we make demands of another person, or do we give in to their demands? Are there rules or boundaries? We may need to strengthen them and maybe we break them. The beauty and harmony arises when the interaction lies somewhere in between, where each person has the courage to make their needs understood. Mutual agreements and arrangements become possible. In this blending, something new can arise. A new quality of being together is possible and the relationship is strengthened. Both individuals have the opportunity to shine and benefit from the interaction.

Becoming more aware

When considering the various relationships in our lives we may feel uncertain about our place or value in the relationship, or we find it to be unsatisfying or non-productive. In such cases, we may find some relief through therapeutic activities with painting.