

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF WESTERN ART

THE ANSCHUTZ COLLECTION

American Museum of Western Art—The Anschutz Collection and Lighthouse Writers Workshop’s Write Denver Project **Writing the West: Western Color Palette**



Warm-Up: Ralph Blakelock, *Indian Encampment Along the Snake River, 1871*:
The following descriptions of Western color were taken from Wallace Stegner’s *The Sound of Mountain Water*, a book of essays about living and working in the West:

“...a transparent crystalline quality of the light, a new palette of gray, sage-green, sulphur-yellow, buff, toned white, rust red...”

“All I knew was that it was pure delight to be where the land lifted in peaks and plunged into canyons, and to sniff air thin, spray-cooled, full of pine and spruce smells, and to be so close-seeming to the improbable indigo sky.”

“It is good to get out of the monotonous green of tamed land and out among the changeable grays and browns and ochres and glaring whites of the desert.”

Think about the colors you’ve witnessed as being most prevalent in the Mountain West, Southwest, or West Coast and create a color palette of one of these regions. Then, pick a painting whose subject matter looks to be from the same region. Is its color palette similar or different than what you described? Write down your observations.

Writing the West is a collaboration between the American Museum of Western Art—The Anschutz Collection and Lighthouse Writers Workshop. Please visit our websites for more information: www.anschutzcollection.org, www.lighthousewriters.org, www.writedenver.org.



Fernand Lungren, *Desert Sunset*, after 1903:

What is the subject of *Desert Sunset*? Is it the landscape, an emotion or abstraction, or is it the colors themselves? If the subject has something to do with the Western color palette, what is the subject's motivation? In other words, as a writer, how do you motivate color? Let's try answering that last question by choosing a painting and writing a scene or poem where a point of view character is in some way being affected by the colors of the West.

***Phoenix*, 1976, Helen Frankenthaler (1976):**

Abstract expressionist artist Helen Frankenthaler's obsession with Western color led her to coin the color Sedona red. Look around the galleries until a color from one of the paintings takes hold of you in an obsessive way. Spend a few minutes with your color and then coin a new name for it. Then, write a poem or a scene where this color is featured.