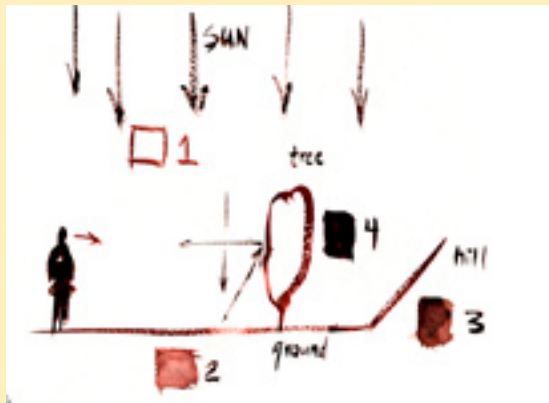


How to Assign Values to Landscape Planes



Follow the Light: In this simplified model, the light source—the sun—is overhead, so the sky is the lightest value (number one). Since the ground shape receives the light from above, it has a lower value (number two). The hill is at an incline and doesn't receive direct light from above, so it has a slightly darker value (number three). The tree receives bounced light from the ground and has the darkest value (number four).



The Plan in Action: Using the value plan described in diagram A, I assigned the proper values to the large shapes in each landscape plane. The distinct value shifts of these planes need to be easily recognizable, otherwise the distinction of the planes could be lost. This is what makes the sky go overhead, the ground lie flat, the hills incline, and the verticals, in this case trees, go up. (The same principle can work for buildings). Note that the sky, ground, hill and trees all read properly without any unnecessary detail.

Slight shifts in value give character and interest to each plane, but these value shifts should be kept within the assigned value range, otherwise you risk confusion as to where one plane ends and another begins.



The Wrong Way: In this example, the ground plane is not sufficiently darker than the sky, causing it to look like a continuation of the sky and not the horizontal plane that it is.

The trees and house float in space. Overworking the grass detail only compounds the problem.



The Right Way: In this example there is a proper value shift from the sky to the ground plane. Now the ground lies flat and comes forward, helped by a few, sparse details in the foreground. The sky goes up and overhead because it's lighter than the ground plane.



Cap hed to come I ran a wash over the boundary of the two boats in the bottom left-hand corner of *Madeira* (watercolor on paper, 22x30). By connecting the boats I created a large and much better shape, a soft edge and a sense of reflected color—all leading to the feeling of looseness. The palms are nothing more than flat washes of intense, unconventional red. I focused on the characteristic outside edge to give identity to the palms.

light from above, much like an opaque bathroom window catches the light from the bathroom and tends to look illuminated, while a clear window allows the light to pass through. But whether you're painting an overcast or sunny day, the sky is still the light source, so it's assigned our lightest value (number one).

The second lightest value (number two) will be assigned to the ground plane because it receives the full impact of the light source from straight overhead. In order for the ground to appear flat and below the sky in our model, the ground needs to be a darker value than the sky. For example, even though we think of yellow as a light color, in order for a field of sunflowers to lie flat against a blue sky, the ground plane of the flowers needs to be a darker value than the sky. Too often I've seen workshop students struggle with identifying a ground plane by heaping on loads of grass swatches, when the problem actually lies in the fact that their ground value is the same as the sky.

The other midtone (number three) goes to the hill mass. Since the hill—in this case, an incline in our midground—is at an incline and not re-



Cap hed to come To simplify the painting, the shadow of the building on the right is incorporated into the figures in *Montepulciano, Italy* (watercolor on paper, 22x30). Whenever I paint masses of people like this I do all I can to avoid the figure, figure, figure look. In this case, the figures are all interconnected so that no one stands alone, creating one large, simple shape. The outside edge of the figure mass shape gives identity to the figures while the inside splashes of color attract the viewers eye.