

Painting the Colors of Winter

By Dennis Payton Knight

If I were an artist set on depicting a winter's scene, what paints would I choose for my palette? I think of a gray sky that foretells the coming storm. But such a sky is not a monotone of gray at all. It is dappled with purples and blues, and influenced by rays of yellow sunshine fighting for the stage from behind the steely curtain.

Then I might picture a crisp blue sky that celebrates the fallen snow, and those shades of purple are still there. The sunbeams, even as the temperature falls below zero, have now emerged, to evaporate and reclaim the icy crystals. Sunbeams, I must remember, are depicted by an artist with light, not with color.

It is the season of Christmas and I shall have holly berries red, representing Christ's sacrificial life and death, and ivy in the green that stands for life, nature, peace, and eternity. But winter is a blanket that covers other people, too, and so in my picture I would add, to the greens and reds, ebony to recognize Kwanzaa. Black is for the people, red for their struggles, and green for their hopes and future.

For Hanukkah, I would need blue suggesting the sky, wisdom, faith, and truth, and white for purity and light. And then, weeks after we have recognized and passed into our own new year, I would break out the joyful reds and yellows again for the joyful lunar new year celebrated by those whose families came from Japan, China, and other nations of Asia.

I would think about painting a childhood winter in my hometown. For that scene, I would need dark blue for the bulging parkas Mom would zip us into for our treks to school in the deeply frigid Laramie mornings, with temperatures often falling to ten or twenty below zero. I would pick red, green, and yellow for the mittens Mom attached at the end of a length of yarn threaded through our coat sleeves to guard against probable loss. I would mix white and red into a rosy hue for the glow of our frozen ears and noses. Then I would need more colors to depict our walk home in the afternoon, throwing and dodging snowballs with hands ungloved and parkas unzipped to let in the warming sun.

And, were I an artist, I would paint a landscape of winter at Windsor Gardens. I would select earthy colors for our buildings and the now barren trees. Browns and yellows would color leaves, partly covered by snow, tramped down by bicyclists, hikers, and puppy dogs. I would dab purples, and oranges at the edges to escort the setting sun. The white I would lay down here and there for snow would be but another canvas upon which I must carefully apply all the hues ever known, hoping somehow to capture the prismatic reflections cast by crystalline frost.

These, my friends, are the colors of winter.