Spiraling Through Color

The late great color theorist Albert Munsell once envisioned color harmonies that deal in more dimensions than just a color’s hue, like the ones we’re most familiar with. These new harmonies treat colors as though they exist in a three-dimensional solid organized by a color’s hue, value (how light or dark a color is), and chroma (the saturation of a color). Essentially, Munsell pictured multi-dimensional spirals inside of this color solid, arguing that if you selected colors from along these paths, you could create a new kind of color harmony. One of them looked like a tornado, twisting upwards through the space as its colors increase in value and chroma. Another more closely resembled a spring, only rising in value while chroma stayed the same. The third and final spiral lay flat in the color solid, staying at the same value while increasing in chroma. However, after extensive research online and digging through my color theory textbook, examples were in short supply. So, I created a program that takes in a few user inputs to generate potentially thousands of these harmonies, in the form of usable palettes. What I discovered, is that new patterns emerge from within these previously unexplored harmonies, dependent on the number you get when you divide the number of swatches by the number of loops in the spiral, and whether it’s a whole number or not. This could mean a whole new world of possible color combinations for artists to explore in the realm of color theory.