

Some Handy Bits & Pieces to Remember about Pastels That I find Useful

These are only suggestions I came up with that may help you along.....

Types of Pastel

Sticks-full length or you can buy the sticks in half-lengths, which can give you more assortments for your money, also the sets made up can come in Landscape/Portrait/Assortment. They can also be bought individually.

Pastel pencils-you sharpen and use them like ordinary pencils. They are hard rather than soft and are especially good for detail but not good for covering large surfaces.

Hard pastels-i.e conte are not so easy to blend as soft ones, but can be good for detail.

Soft pastels-great for covering large areas and easy to blend-very dusty.

You can use all types of the above pastels together in the same painting.

Tape down your paper onto a board before you start or use "bulldog clips", otherwise it may slide around when you work.

Don't outline or draw on your picture using a lead pencil, as the pastel will not cover it. You can use a pastel pencil of a neutral colour, a pastel stick or charcoal for instance, but nothing too gaudy- you probably don't want it shining through your finished painting.

Roughly choosing my colours and having them to hand before I start my painting can save a lot of time and frustration especially if I find myself on a creative roll!

Use ground rice or similar to clean your pastels -I find a shallow container useful, I can leave my pastels in it as I work.

A putty rubber can be used for lifting mistakes as can a bristle brush (such as an old oil painting brush) although a trace of pastel is usually likely to be left.

There are many ways to put the pastel onto the paper. Some artist's tend to put it on direct without smudging much. This can give a very vibrant effect.

If you want to blend-there are a lot of ways to improvise but I use fingers, rubber pointed brush like tools called "shapers" and tortillons (tightly bound paper pencil shaped tools-you can buy them from art shops).

Try not to blow the excess pastel off your painting (it's not very healthy) instead stand it upright and tap it on your table or similar. I sometimes use a mask over my mouth & nose to stop inhaling the dust.

Do be aware that it can be very messy and best to avoid painting beside computers etc.

If for some reason you have to abandon a pastel painting whilst in mid flow and nip out, DO remember to check the mirror before you leave the house! - You'll thank me for that one!

As you paint your picture take time out to stand back and see it from a different distance. This will help you identify areas which you may want to improve as you are looking at it with a “fresher eye”.

Another way to achieve this is to stand with your back to your picture and look at it through a mirror to see the image “round the other way” and smaller.

Don't feel you should finish a painting in the first sitting. I find it always beneficial to get away from it for a good few hours, if not overnight and then I can see it with a fresh eye. Things will be more obvious to you once you get a rest from it.

When I draw something (a horse for example) which may be one of the main things in my picture, I usually leave it overnight before I continue. This gives me time to see it fresh and I find that ‘mistakes’ jump out at me. This saves loads of time in the long run. Although pastel is far more forgiving than watercolour you are still left with traces if you make mistakes.

Double mount your pastel painting which should keep it away from the glass, especially if you haven't sprayed it with fixative.

I find fixative dulls the colours in my painting, but I do now use it as I build up layers. If I have to spray it on at the end I go over the highlights again with fresh pastel.

Before deciding to use fixative try a small test area on your paper surface, as some I have found are not compatible. i.e the wet fixative can lift the surface off the paper rendering it useless. Also have a piece of the same paper to test your colours before applying them to your picture, as it can save muddiness and again, frustration.

Don't be a slave to a photograph-you can change things to suit yourself. I find it rare for a photo to be exactly what I want.

Greaseproof/baking/tracing paper or similar can be used against your painting for transporting when it's not practical to leave it uncovered. These papers are less likely to stick to the pastel and smudge it.

Look at other artist's work and see how they use the medium, the more input you get from other sources will help you develop your own style. You'll be surprised how many different effects can be achieved and it'll open up lots more possibilities for you!

Have fun and experiment as there are no definite rules with art, the more you try other mediums and ideas the more you'll find what you enjoy!

HAPPY PASTELLING.....