

Pastel Paper

Pastel paper sold in pads is mostly Ingres type paper which is a medium weight paper with a lightly textured surface. **Ingres** paper is also sold in single sheets. It is supplied in a wide range of colours. Its main limitations are:

- a. it can get saturated with pastel quite quickly
- b. it can have a very regular, lined texture which can detract from the drawing.
- c. it must be 'fixed' using a spray fixative to prevent the pastel from smudging

Other papers commonly used (but more expensive) are :-

Sovereign card, which has a coated surface akin to sandpaper (it is in fact small pieces of cork). This paper takes a lot of pastel before it becomes 'clogged'. Pastel blends beautifully and there is no need to use fixative. In fact, because of the way it is manufactured, Sovereign card must be kept dry, otherwise the coating would simply fall off. The downside is it costs around £5.00 per single sheet – pricey!!

Spectrum paper, made by an Australian company called Art Spectrum, is also commonly used and is even more like fine sandpaper. It is slightly less expensive than Sovereign card and is waterproof. Often artists who use this paper will use watercolour or acrylic washes to create an underpainting and then apply pastel on top. Pastel can also be diluted with turpentine using this paper. It is extremely flexible. It is lighter in weight than Sovereign card but can sometimes "buckle". Art spectrum also produce a priming mixture, **Colourfix Primer**, which can be applied by roller or brush to almost any surface to give a sanded textured finish. They now sell this on card too. Both Esther and I have used this and it produces good results, however, because it is quite abrasive, the fingertips can suffer if you do a lot of blending !!

Probably the cheapest option is **fine sandpaper** or emery paper from any DIY outlet. This is great to work on, comes in a lot of useful colours but is usually only supplied in small sized sheets. Good for small practice pieces of work.- Can use your pastels up fairly quickly! (watch the finger tips.....they can wear out!)

Selecting the colour of the paper

Usually the guideline here is to try to select the colour of the paper to match the mid-tone of the subject you want to paint. The beauty of this is it lets you more easily establish the lights and darks in your painting quickly and the colour of the paper 'adds' to your painting rather than creating empty white holes. It is also usually easier to estimate the tonal value of a colour against the mid-tone than it would against a blank white sheet.

(remember the tonal value is the lightness or darkness of any given colour and objects which are darker in tone will generally appear to come forward in your painting, while those lighter in tone will recede – think of hills in the distance)

Pastel Sets

If choosing a set of pastels in a box, you probably want to buy a set designed for "Landscape" painting. Here, the colours will have been chosen for their usefulness in landscape subjects. The choices here are too many to mention, but here are a few to help you along:-

Conte Pastels: Most commonly these have a square section and are slightly harder than other pastels. They are sold individually and in sets. E.g. landscape set of conte costs around £18.

Individual Soft Pastels: most manufacturers sell pastel sticks individually. They vary in price from just under a pound to almost £2. Common makes are Rowney, Winsor & Newton, Unison, Sennelier, Art Spectrum. The differences between manufacturers are mainly down to “softness” of pastel, although some makes offer quite unique colours.

In our opinion and experience so far, **Rowney** soft pastels are the most satisfying to use. They come in a good range of colours and are “coded” in degrees of darkness using an 8-point scale, which makes selecting them very user-friendly. They should cost individually around £1.30 each. We have seen some special offers of sets of thirty Rowney pastels for less than £30.

Pastel Pencils: Again, the choice of pastel pencils is too great to list. Rowney, Winsor & Newton, Bruynzeel are common makes. Some pastel pencils are described as “coloured charcoal”, quite what the difference is I’m not sure. Most pastel pencils are harder than their “stick” equivalent.

How to approach starting to paint: Look at your chosen subject. Look carefully at your subject through your eyelashes – this will help to establish the main tonal areas of your painting (and it helps to eliminate detail)

Follow areas of interest and try to think about how you are going to achieve the desired effect in your painting. Then, look at your subject again. This is important. Looking at the subject at length BEFORE starting to work will help you make decisions more quickly in the long run. Start by establishing the largest areas of the subject. Think of how these areas sub-divide the page – avoid splitting the page in two equal parts.

Eliminate all detail in these early stages, don’t be too heavy with the pastel, better to build it up slowly than be too heavy early on.

Remember sometimes a tiny patch of sunlit hillside can be more effective than a large area of bright colour.

Ask yourself: What is/are the dominant colours? How can I enhance them? (complements and discords) What is the predominant overall tonal value of your painting? Is it dark? Or light?

If you’re working from a photograph bear in mind that the photograph will have distorted reality by flattening the shadows and probably making them too dark. **DON’T BE A SLAVE TO THE PHOTOGRAPH. IT SHOULD BE A DEPARTURE POINT AND NOT A DESTINATION.**

Have fun !! Look at as many paintings by other artists as you possibly can.