

Getting Started with Soft Pastel Painting

with
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Soft pastel is probably the easiest of all mediums to use, it is unique in so much as it can be used both for painting and drawing, no other medium is so versatile. Soft pastel is enjoying a great revival, many manufacturers are now producing superb quality pastels in extensive ranges of colours and super surfaces, papers and boards to produce exciting vibrant pictures on. Soft pastel has become the *In* medium to use so look around at galleries and art exhibitions and see all the exciting ways artists have been using it.

Essentially pastels are made from pure pigment, mixed with an amount of binder such as gum tragacanth, shaped or pressed into sticks, either round or flat and then dried. The 'hardness' of the pastels depends on the amount of binder used, the softest will be almost pure pigment while the harder ones will have increasingly more binder so that they form quite hard sticks and are used in pencils. It is a good idea to have a selection of all types. With pastels you do not have to just stick to one manufacturer just select the colours and type you fancy. There are no hard and fast rules with pastels, however, generally it is easier to work soft pastels over hard (fat over lean) but some artists work in reverse. Pastels are so versatile, just about anything you can do with other mediums you can do with soft pastel . . . and lots lots more!

With such a choice, purchasing pastels can be quite daunting, however it does not need be expensive. A box of 64 ½ sized pastels for around £9 together with a sheet of Canson Mi Tientes or the new Somerset pastel paper in a medium colour is all you need to get started. Or if you are feeling a little more adventurous (and flush!) Sennelier do a superb set of 20 very soft ½ sized pastels for just over £20 or choose a Unison set in either Landscape or Portrait. It is useful to add a pastel pencil to your list plus a large pack of blu tack to keep your hands clean, baby wipes are excellent for a good 'clean up'.

One thing to remember, as with any successful painting and drawing, there's rarely instant success, lets face it, I guess all of us fell down a few times before we could walk!! So here are some tips to get you started.

- Use a good quality paper such as Canson Mi Tientes or the new Somerset
- Select a medium shade of paper and use the smooth side,
- Never use a lead pencil to draw with, soft pastel won't cover it
- Use a smooth board or some sheets of newspaper or similar to rest your paper on, otherwise you may 'pick up' some unwanted lines and marks
- Think about what you are going to paint before you start, make a few small sketches
- Plan what you are going to do and practice on a spare piece of paper
- Practice techniques such as blending, side strokes, hatching etc
- Don't slavishly copy colours on photographs they are rarely true!
- Remember – simplify – pictures benefit as much from what is left out as what is left in
- Blu tack is great for keeping your hands clean and for lifting out unwanted pastel
- You will also find a small brush and ordinary rubber useful too
- For more information just contact me on www.colbeckart.co.uk

Have Fun and enjoy using the exciting colours and this versatile medium