

# Pastel Painting Techniques

by Jan Colbeck

The first marks you make with pastels are usually line strokes ~ using the pastel in the same way as a pencil or pen ~ drawing techniques ~ some artists only ever use these strokes whilst others will only use side strokes as both can be as varied depending on the pressure, direction of the stroke and size of the piece of pastels used. However exciting effects can be achieved by using pastels in a variety of ways, here are some pastel techniques to help you create some exciting pictures. It is very rare for any specific technique to be used in isolation, normally you will find many techniques used in a single picture. The best way to start is to practice some of these techniques on their own, watch what actually happens then you will be able to choose what will be the most effective for your picture.

- **Blending** ~ traditional pastel painting method with a variety of ‘tools’.
  - **Hand** ~ my preferred method especially for large areas
  - **Brush** ~ short hog hair brush to spread the pastel
  - **Torchon or stump** ~ tight roll of paper shaped like a pencil
  - **Shaper** ~ rubber tips in a variety of shapes, supper for blending small areas where fingers are too big
- **Overlaying colours** ~ building up layer upon layer of colours, overlaying thin loose strokes of pigments to allow you to build up tones and colours gradually without overworking the surface
- **Blocking in** ~ use side strokes in broad colour quite thinly to lay in the main shapes and broad colour areas of a composition before starting to develop the detail thus giving an overall impression of the subject. Some artists will draw first but others will go straight in working direct from either the subject or sketch.
- **Building up** ~ the best approach is to work all areas of the image to the same level of detail at each stage before moving on to more complex or intricate elements ~ the picture seems to ‘grow’ out of the paper.
- **Masking and Stencils** ~ to give sharp clean crisp lines and edges, work into specific shapes, place an edge of paper where you need a sharp line and work to it, run your pastel down between 2 edges close together. Mask off areas to brush out or ‘fix’ to add highlights etc.
- **Linear Marks, Hatching and Cross Hatching** ~ any stroke applied using the tip or short edge is basically linear in character. There is a wide variety of line qualities you can exploit both in structuring a drawing (gestural marks) and developing the overall colour as in hatching and cross hatching – classical methods to create tonal values.

**Hatching** consists of a series of closely spaced lines, roughly parallel to one another, they can be straight or curved, very often they will follow the contours of the object.

**Cross hatching** is the overlaying of one set of hatched lines over another roughly at right angles to produce a woven, mesh like quality.

Both hatching and cross hatching are useful techniques for keeping an active, open surface when you are working over a previously laid pastel colour blocked in or blended.

Different effects occur depending on the hardness of the pastel. Optical colour mixing can be created with hatching and cross hatching different pigments.

- **Pointillism** ~ picture built up in a series of small dots, using optical colour mixing, the smaller and closer together the dots the more intense the colour, very laborious!
- **Highlights** ~ points of light, the last ‘touch’ in the painting and added with quick decisive touches of soft pastel. If the pastel ‘skids’ off mask the area and lightly brush off a layer or spray just that area with fixative.
- **Gradation** ~ gradual transition from one colour to another, side strokes of graded colour then blended together smoothly or hatched closely together.
- **Scraffito** ~ scratching back, layer one colour over another then scratch back to reveal the lower colour.
- **Feathering** ~ quick light linear strokes often added over blended colour.
- **Scumbling** ~ sides strokes dragged over blended background.
- **Erasing** ~ brush – blutac using a clean piece with each lift – rubber (on paper or acrylic surface only) if necessary for last bits of colour left.
- **Frottage** ~ reproducing an effect of a specific texture by placing your paper of a textured surface and side stroking the pastel over it. The different features of the underlying texture will show through, different effects will be achieved by using different pastels (hard or soft) and moving the underlying texture and laying in different colours.

*You will probably note that many of the techniques seem almost the same, well I think that too! In essence you will develop your own combinations of techniques to call yours, and as you practice you will be unclear which particular technique you are using. It’s just like learning to drive a car – when you start you wonder how on earth you will remember to look – in the mirror, to your side, through the wing mirrors – then switch on the indicator, brake, depress clutch, change gear and manoeuvre the car around the corner ... .. all within a few seconds – but in no time at all this is what you are doing!!*