

..... INTRODUCTION TO .....

# SOFT PASTELS

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By Unison Colour Artist

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UNISON COLOUR  
HANDMADE SOFT PASTELS

# WELCOME

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Would you like to know more about how to use pastels? Would you like to get more life into your pastel work? Maybe you have a new set and you're not sure how to use them. This guide is here to help you get started.

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## SECTION 1

# GETTING STARTED

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## WHY USE PASTELS?

- **Because they are beautiful! Unison Colour pastels are made of pure pigment, and are beautiful just to look at, even before you pick them up.**
- **Because pastels are versatile and forgiving. You can use them in lots of different ways.**
- **Because they don't dry out, and are easily transportable.**

## IS IT DRAWING OR PAINTING? IT'S BOTH!

Depending on the way you use them, you can draw and paint with pastels, and produce work that ranges from detailed and delicate sketches to vibrant and expressive paintings. You hold the pigment in your hand, so can work immediately and directly, with no drying times to slow you down. You can combine several techniques, work in layers, and rub out or go over areas that you don't like.



## WHAT IS A PASTEL?

A good quality pastel is a mixture of premium pigment and very little binder. At Unison Colour, the pigment and binder are mixed with water to form a paste, then as they dry and form a dough, they are rolled into shape, and left to dry.



## HOW MANY PASTELS DO I NEED TO GET STARTED?

Using pastels is a bit different here to paints; although you can mix them, you need more than 3 primary colours. A mixed set of 30 half sticks is probably enough to get started with. You do not need the whole range, although that would be lovely! Don't be fooled into buying a set of cheap, 'student quality' pastels to get started, as they will not be made using pure pigments. They will not be light fast, and you won't have a good range of colours and tones. You get what you pay for with art materials.

## WHAT SURFACE SHOULD I WORK ON?

There are a huge variety of pastel surfaces to choose from, and it can be confusing at first knowing what to use. For pastel work your surface needs enough 'key' (texture), or the pastel will slip around and not adhere.

It is easiest to start with pastel papers, such as Canson Mi-Tientes paper, or Winsor Universal paper. Some art suppliers have selection packs so that you can try a few and see which ones you like.

There are also many different types of textured surfaces, such as Colourfix primer, Sennelier Sand Card, Pastelmat, Velour, UArt and Canson Touch, to name but a few.

The lovely thing about pastel papers is that they are available in lots of different colours and tones.

For beginners the hardest colour to work on is white so try to avoid that and go for a mid-tone paper instead.

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## WHAT ELSE DO I NEED? ... NOT MUCH!

Some artists also use a few hard pastels or Conté crayons as well as soft pastels. You can use charcoal with pastels.

An eraser can be useful while sketching out and in the early stages of a piece of work.



## SETTING UP YOUR WORKSPACE

You don't need much space at all....the end of a table, or a corner of a room are fine. It's best to work upright if you can, with a board on an easel, a table easel, or just rested on a pile of books. This means that any dust will drop down, and won't pollute your work, and also that you can stand back regularly to review your work and see 'the bigger picture'



### IS IT VERY DUSTY?

You can minimize the fall-out by having a rug (or two!) underneath you on the floor that you can vacuum and wash sometimes. The best thing about soft pastels is that they don't smell or dry out, so you can work anywhere and walk away and leave your artwork set up. Do be careful of your pets though!



## PROTECTING AND STORING YOUR WORK

Pastel drawings and paintings are vulnerable to being damaged. You can spray them with fixative, although many artists prefer not to. The important thing is to cover them, either with a sheet of paper, cellophane or glassine paper, but also to fix it in place along one edge. This means that every time you lift the protective sheet to look at them, it will go back in the same place.



### CLEANING YOUR PASTELS

Don't panic when your pastels get dirty! It is easy to cope with..... You can clean your pastels as you are using them, and afterwards, with soft tissue or a piece of cloth. Some people shake them in a tub of ground rice from time to time. Don't, however, clean them with wet tissue though, as this will seal the outside surface of the pastel so they won't work properly.

*Now let's see what we can do with them....*



# MAKING MARKS AND GETTING INSPIRED



## LIMBERING UP

You can make lots of different marks with a pastel stick, especially if you take the label off. Then you can use the side, the end or the edge of it. You can break them in half unless you are working on a BIG piece of paper.

Time spent experimenting is worth its weight in gold. You can use the pastel stick on its side to make straight marks, or by twisting and turning it, or you can use it on its end to make little marks, dots and dashes. Vary the weight you apply. Try leaving the marks untouched in one area, and then blending and smudging in another. Notice the difference this makes.

Now let's look at different techniques and marks individually. You can then combine these techniques in layers. Feel the pressure! With all of the following techniques, try them with different amounts of pressure applied. By varying the pressure, you will really change the marks that you make.

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# BROAD ENERGETIC STROKES

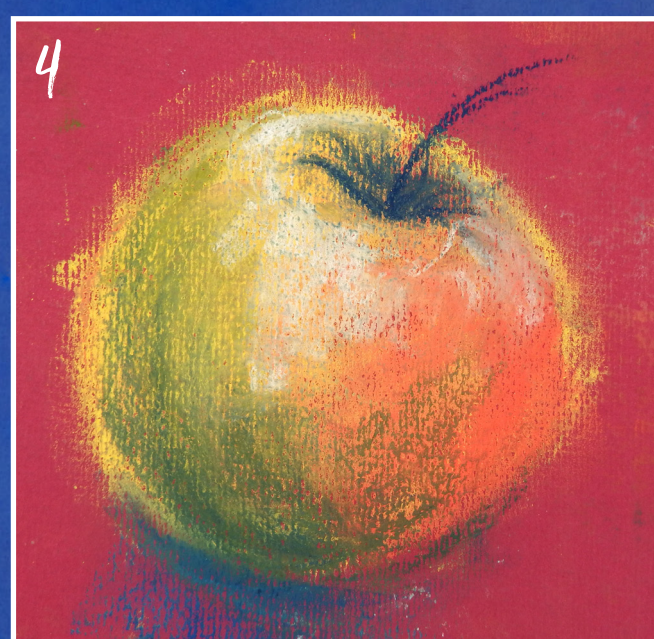
Using the pastel on its side, make sweeping strokes, painterly marks. You can lay colours over each other, and even without smudging they blend and mix. This is a great technique for expressive work, and to get movement and energy into your paintings.

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You can create these marks by holding the pastel like this and applying the marks sideways.

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You can lay one colour over another, this is a lovely way to blend colours, without smudging.

# SMUDGING

Colours can also be blended by smudging and softening, to produce a smooth and gradual blend. Your fingers are the perfect tool for smudging. This is a great techniques for skies, soft textures, or to depict smooth surfaces.

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Smudging 1: Use broad strokes laying the pastel on its side.



Smudging 2: Smudge and blend softly with your fingers.

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Smudging 3: Smudging to produce shine.



Smudging 4: Smudging to create soft fur.

# HATCHING

You can hatch colours together by making lots of marks with the end of the pastel. As you lay marks of different colours over each other, they blend together, but you can still see all of the colours showing through in places. You don't have to make the marks go in one direction. This is a useful and versatile technique for animal work, portraits, landscapes; in fact, all sorts of things.

The marks don't have to be straight; try making lots of little marks going in the same direction, or in lots of different directions, or following the contours of the object you are drawing. Use lots of colours and overlap the marks, seeing how they blend without being smudged.



Hatching 1: Hatching is great for portrait work



Hatching 2: Pastel grip for hatching marks with the end of the pastel.



Hatching 3: Blending by hatching several colours, perfect for subtle changes of tone and hue.


# TWISTING

By changing which part of the pastel you make your marks with, and twisting and turning it to make these changes, you can get varied and exciting marks. Have a go, and notice the different qualities of mark that you can make. Imagine that you are making the pastel 'dance' on the paper, and keep varying the pressure that you apply.



Twisting technique, using the end and side of the pastel, and getting it to dance around the paper. This is great for conveying movement, rocks, water and for animal work.

# COMBINING THE TECHNIQUES



Here there are lots of hatching marks on the pony's face, the background has broad strokes smudged in places & the mane has lots of twisting, linear marks.

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SO WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? **IT'S TIME TO GET STARTED,**

**WE HOPE YOU ENJOY DISCOVERING** & USING YOUR PASTELS.



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Rebecca is an Associate Artist of Unison Colour. She founded the New Pastel School in 2013 with Nel Whatmore and they run courses in the UK and Italy. Rebecca is an Associate member of the Society of Equestrian Artists.

There is more information, projects and inspiration in Rebecca de Mendonça's book, *Pastels for the Absolute Beginner*, published by Search Press.

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