

Pastel Painting Studio: Focus on Still Life

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Schweinfurth Memorial Art Center, Auburn, New York
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Still life painting has been around a long time. Images of foods were painted on the walls of Egyptian tombs to give the dead something to eat in the afterlife. Later, in Christian Europe, still life painting sent a moral message to viewers with depictions of objects laden with meaning. Realist painters from the 16th thru 18th century used the genre to explore precise detail in foods, beverages, dead animals, and flowers. Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, and Fauvists used still life subjects as an opportunity to play with paint-handling, color, and composition. We will do precisely that as we paint from colorful arrangements based on actual still lifes by 19th and 20th century masters.

Pastel's high pigment load and versatility make it the ideal medium to capture these still life arrangements. Pastel is intensely colorful and can be applied in a myriad of ways, from a fine line to a broad passage of color.

This workshop is an opportunity for you to receive individualized instruction in the pastel medium. For individuals new to pastel, my goal is to educate you about the broad range of pastel products and techniques, to assist you in developing your personal style, and to encourage creative exploration. For experienced pastellists my goal is to provide feedback in a supportive working environment.

Pastel Supplies:

This materials list is an overview of pastel products and is intended to be a resource to guide you should you want to purchase pastels and/or papers.

For those of you new to pastel I will make available pastel sets and papers for you to use for this workshop. The fee will be \$35 and you will need to notify me at the time of registration and no later than October 22. The pastel sets will be returned to me at the end of the workshop.

You will want to have a minimum of twenty pastel sticks, enough to give you some variety of color, saturation, and value. More pastel sticks will give you more options so I encourage a larger selection when possible. You will want to choose supports (i.e., papers or boards) that are appropriate to the type of pastel you will be using.

Pastel is versatile; it can be a drawing medium or a painting medium, a colorful line or a painterly mark. There are many pastel products available so it is important to consider your preferences and intentions as you acquire supplies. If you prefer to work in a more linear style, use hard pastels. If you like heavier applications with broader marks choose soft pastels. I have many different brands of pastels in my box; you may decide that you want to use a varied selection.

For a good overview of pastel supplies visit Rochester Art's web site www.fineartstore.com. The site also has links to online instructional videos focusing on various pastel brands, pastel papers, and techniques. Pastels are also available through internet/catalogues like Blick (www.dickblick.com) and Amazon. Most pastel manufacturers offer pastels both as open stock

and in sets. A set is a good way to begin to build your palette and 1/2-stick sets are a good value. Some companies put together still life, landscape, or portrait sets.

If pastel painting is new to you I recommend purchasing one of the following sets of pastels: Prismacolor NuPastel (a hard pastel product) set of 24 or larger; Art Spectrum (moderate density) 20 or 40 1/2-stick set; Faber Caselli (moderate density) 24 1/2-stick set; Rembrandt (moderate) 30 1/2-stick set; Schmincke (soft) 60 1/2 stick set; Sennelier (soft) 20, 30, or 40 1/2-stick set; Great American (very soft) 60 1/2-stick set. You can see all of these at www.fineartstore.com.

To experience the range of pastels available I recommend purchasing one of Rochester Art Supply's "Tasty Pastel Samplers". Depending upon the number of pastels included, they retail from \$21 to \$48.

I own a variety of different pastels, each purchased for its hue and value. Among my favorite manufacturers is Terry Ludwig, <https://terryludwig.com/>. Sign up for his newsletter and you will receive notifications of his sales. Another favorite is Blue Earth Pastels sold by Dakota Pastels, located in Washington state, <https://www.dakotapastels.com/>.

Pastel Papers:

If you select NuPastels, Art Spectrum, or Rembrandt your paper doesn't need to have a "tooth" to hold the particles of pigment. You can use any manufacturer recommended paper for charcoal or pastel, for example Canson Mi Tientes or Strathmore. Other options are Colourfix or Mi Tientes Touch. Both of these papers have more of a tooth and will hold more pigment so the resulting painting will have a richer quality. They are available in a variety of colors. It is fun to work on colored papers because the paper's color will affect the appearance of your pastel hues and values.

If you purchase any of the "soft" pastels (Schmincke, Sennelier, Unison, Great American, etc.) you'll want a "toothier" surface to grab the particles of pastel. Use Pastel Premier Sanded Paper (available in fine or medium grit and in 5 colors), LaCarte Pastel Paper (14 colors, cannot take water based media), Unison Pastel Paper, Pastelmat Pastel Card, Richeson's Unison Pastel Surface, UArt (a toothy sandpaper-like surface available in 5 grits from course to fine, takes water-based paint), Colourfix, and/or Mi Tientes Touch. You can see these papers on Rochester Art's website

Dakota Pastels sells Lux Archival Pastel Paper which is similar to Pastel Premier or Kitty Wallace. Dakota has monthly sales on selected products that are often good deals.

Miscellaneous Supplies:

Bring a rigid surface such as a drawing board. If you don't have one buy a sheet of 1/8" or 1/4" foam core and cut it to a size that is larger by several inches than the paper you will be working on.

In order to make a black and white study bring some inexpensive drawing paper (white, gray, or tan) and few sticks of vine charcoal, compressed charcoal, and/or conté.

An assortment of brushes can be useful for blending and for removing soft pastel from drawing surfaces. Blending tips are useful also, especially when a finger is too large for a small area. Rochester Art Supply is now carrying Colour Shapers, silicone tipped tools for blending. They come in 5 sizes/5 shapes. I find Pan Pastel Sofft Tools, particularly Sofft Sponges, very useful. Fixatives are not always necessary. If you are working with soft pastel on a textured surface, the tooth of the paper will hold the pigment. In my experience even hard pastel on smooth surfaces stays in place — that is, when the painting is handled carefully. However, fixatives can be used to isolate a layer of pastel from subsequent applications. Recommended brands are Sennelier's Latour or Lascaux.

Glassine paper is a smooth, archival, inter-leafing paper that will protect pastel pictures in transport and storage. In a pinch you can use wax paper, or any very smooth paper.

Skin protectants and barrier creams (Gloves in a Bottle or Dermashield) or disposable powder-free gloves will protect your hands and make clean up easier.