

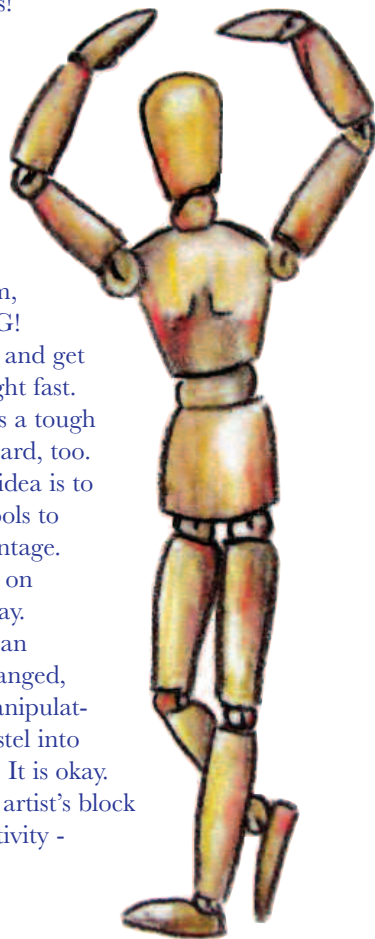


# all about™ PASTELS!

## Getting Started

At first glance, a new box of pastels is seductive. The pristine colors sparkle at the potential artist with excitement. After buying the set, they get taken home to the artist's "studio" (often the kitchen table). Once home, the box is opened again. Glorious!

But oh so intimidating! Anything that happens to them will mess them up, not to mention the clean paper to go with them, right? WRONG! Get on with it, and get over that thought fast. Believe me, it is a tough thought to discard, too. But the whole idea is to use these art tools to your best advantage. Get something on paper right away. Remember it can be covered, changed, erased, and manipulated. Break a pastel into smaller shapes. It is okay. The heck with artist's block or fear of creativity - LET GO and have fun!



Pastels are ground pigment combined with binder (usually gum tragacanth) and filler (clay, chalk or talc) and compressed into stick form. They feel like chalk when applied.

Pastels have different quality levels from student to professional grade and may be labeled to indicate quality. Price is also a good indication. Loew-Cornell offers three quality levels. Those pictured to the right are a middle grade and a great place to start.

## Work Safely

Though many pastels are considered non-toxic (including Loew-Cornell's) it is important to develop good work habits. Breathing in pastel dust is at best unpleasant and should be avoided. Never blow dust from your artwork. Tap pastel dust off onto paper or into a trash container. Use a lotion made for sealing the skin - it will protect your hands from absorbing pigments. And, keep moist towelettes handy for cleaning your fingers.

## Storing and Cleaning

Storing pastels can be easy. After years of carrying all the original boxes of pastels I owned, I rearranged them into smaller boxes by color family (below). This makes finding the right color and value easier. Notice the colors are



arranged from light to dark. When you have enough pastels in a new color group, it is easy to expand by getting another box. A good size box is the kind that checks come in. Line the boxes with foam padding to help protect the pastels from breakage.

Your personality will dictate how you manage your tools. Some artists are neat and some are disorderly. If pastels are tossed into a box and the sticks get too dirty by rubbing on each other, they can be cleaned. To make a cleaning bag for your pastels, fill a plastic bag with cornmeal. Put a pastel inside and rub the cornmeal over the pastel until you can recognize the color of the pastel again. Keep your cleaning bag on hand for the next time you need to shine up the pastels. Just don't make muffins with the used cornmeal!



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## Surface

The surface used for pastel is usually paper. There are a variety of papers made for pastel. While any paper will work, a good choice of paper is a heavier stock with some tooth. Often, pastel papers come in colors and have a “tooth” or slight texture to the surface. Pads of pastel paper with a variety of colors can also be purchased.

When you are ready to try a full finished pastel painting, you may wish to try pastel boards. These boards cost more, but have different finishes for different effects.

Sanded paper is just like sandpaper, only finer. The pastel really grabs into the sanded finish and is less likely to fall off.

There is also a flocked velour paper. This looks like velvet and makes soft lines easily. Velour paper is great for making fur for wildlife or hair for portraits. But, it is difficult to change a mark once put down. Make the line sure when using these papers.



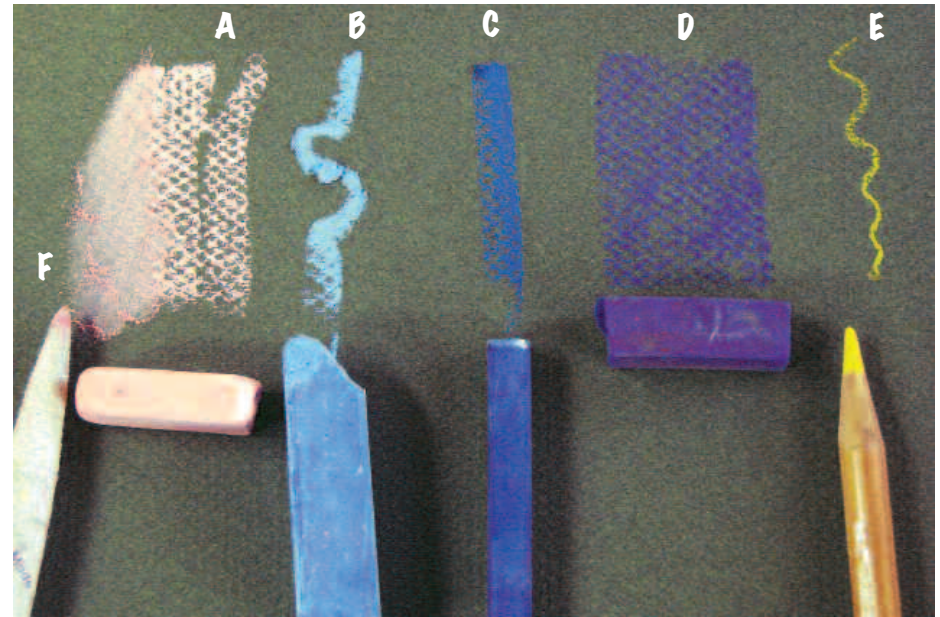
## Protect Your Work

Start your pastel drawing at the top of the page and work your way down. This will help in avoiding unwanted smudges from your hand. Loosely cover your work if it will not be completed in one session.

The finished pastel artwork can be called a drawing or painting depending on the style of usage. A final workable fixative can be sprayed to preserve the fragile pastel. Test it on a sample piece first, because it can darken color. Many pastel artists do not use fixative. Art works on paper are traditionally framed with a mat under glass. Mats should be spaced to allow any pastel dust to fall behind the mat.

# Making Marks

Experiment and become familiar with your pastels by making a variety of line widths, line directions, and values. Apply different amounts of pressure when making these marks. Pressing the pastel harder will make a darker mark, while less pressure will result in lighter value marks. Eventually you can replace “making marks” with “drawing”. Making marks sounds less intimidating, so start there. Put pastel on the paper with the edge of the stick. Next, try using the tip only, then try using the narrow edge, or using the whole side. Break the pastel and have a whole new set of widths to try out. Variety is not only the spice of life, but an important element of art design.



Canson "Mi Tientes" (used here) is a good pastel paper that comes in many colors and has a texture or "tooth".

- A.** Color applied quickly with lighter pressure will only touch the high points of the paper texture and leave the paper color to show in the low areas.
- B.** Change direction of the line for interest. This line was created by tipping the pastel on the corner of the leading edge.
- C.** Applying more pressure makes darker marks that cover both high and low areas of the paper.
- D.** Use the wide side of the pastel for a big stroke of color.
- E.** Pastel pencils or compressed pastels are harder and are a good choice to begin a drawing, and for detail work. Some artists begin a drawing by using charcoal.
- F.** "Soften" color by smudging with your finger, a tortillon or a blending stump.



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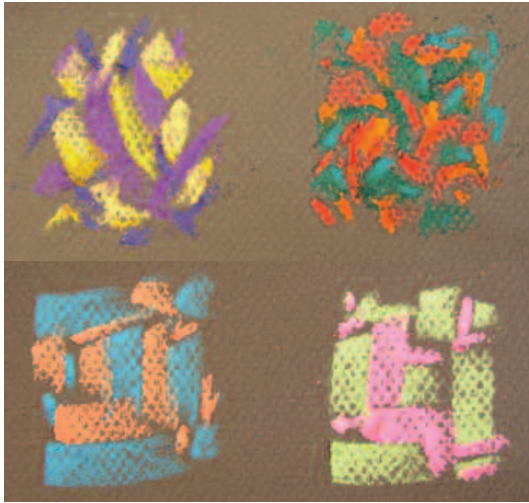
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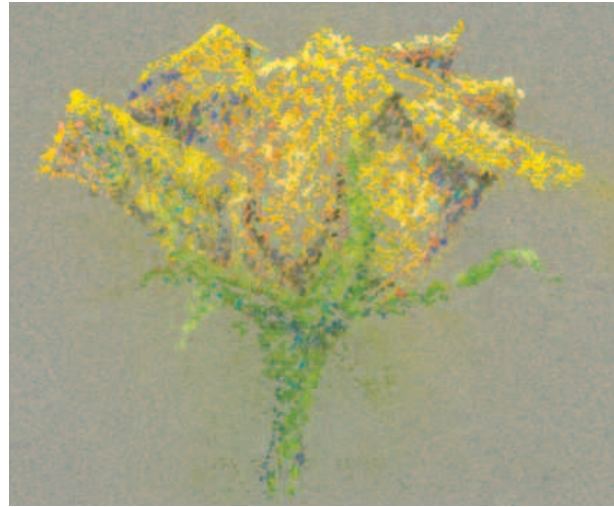
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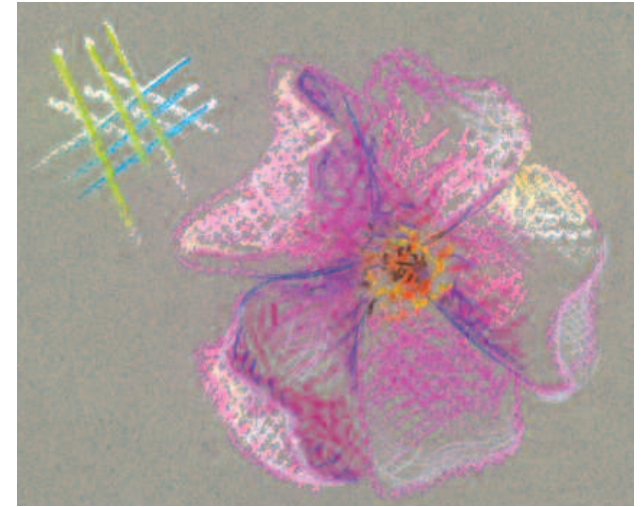
# Play With Color



Try little abstract color combinations to see what colors you like together. The combinations shown here use complimentary colors - colors that are found on opposite sides of the color wheel. Pastel was applied to brown pastel paper. This medium value paper allows both light and dark value pastels to show well.



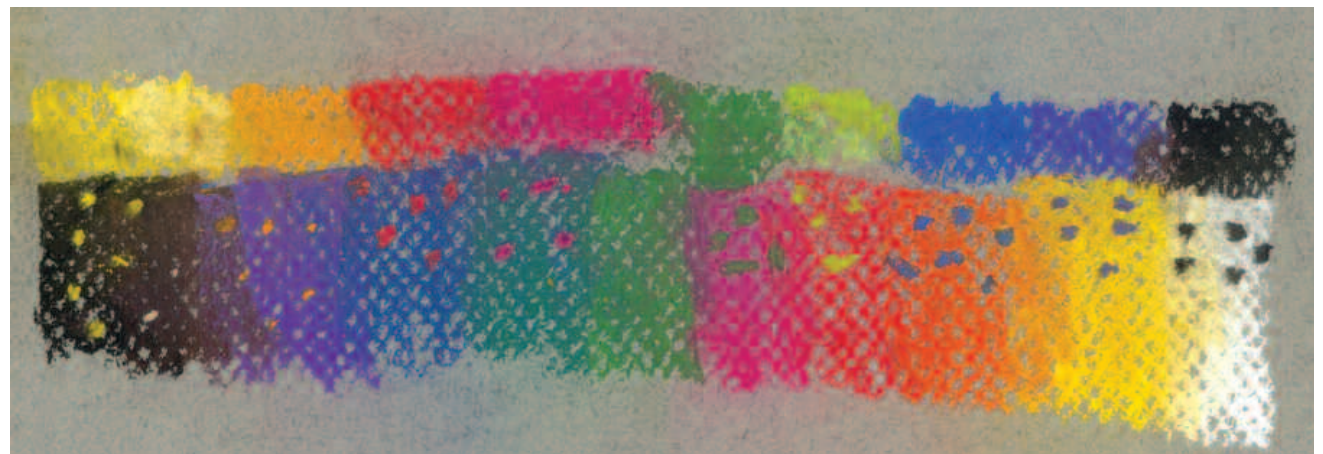
Look at works by the French Impressionists from the nineteenth century for examples of juxtaposing colors without over-blending. They used dots of pure color which are blended by the eye.



Crosshatching is another technique of applying color. Add colors in different directions within the crosshatch marks.

Pastel colors are not mixed, as with liquid colors. The artist needs to superimpose different colors to create the desired effect. Start with a 40 or 50 color pastel set.

Start with dark colors and gradually use lighter colors on top. Contrast is achieved by using a dark value next to a light value, making an exciting transition. Lay colors over one another to visually blend color.



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# Making Your Pastels Dance!

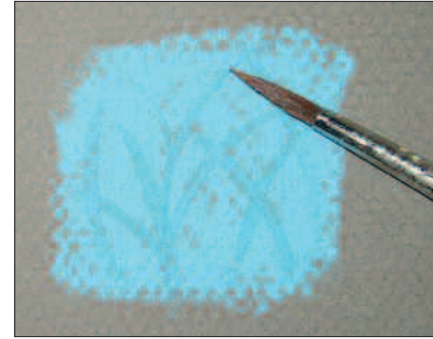
Rub a bristle brush against a pastel stick and let pigment fall on paper. Rub brush on paper to soften. Here, I used light pigment on dark paper.



Give paper an antique look by applying pastel along the edges with a bristle brush. This example used two dark colors on light paper.



Brush lines of water over pastel to make a subtle, darker area.



Apply acrylic medium over pastel for a subtle, shiny, darker area.

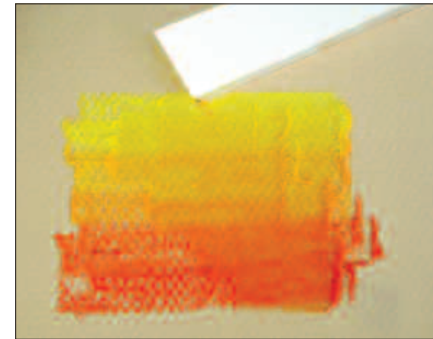


Cool shadows and warm highlights make this ballerina more interesting.

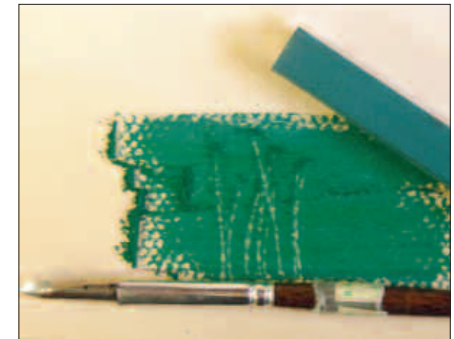
Look to history for more artistic inspiration: French Impressionist Edgar Degas was well-known for drawing dancers using pastels.



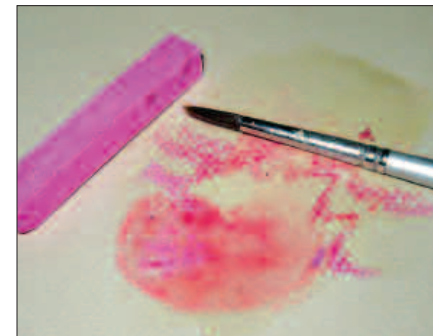
Blend pastels using a tortillon, stump, finger, or a beveled piece of foam core.



Scratch away pastel with an Exacto knife or a scratch board nib for thin lines.



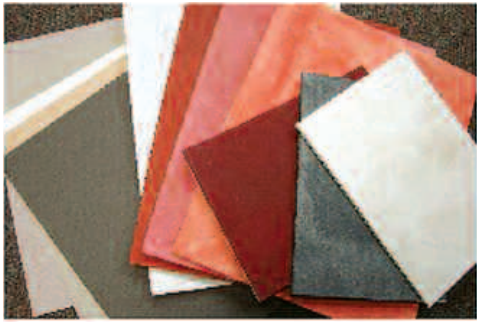
Brush acrylic medium on top of pastel to soften for a painted look.



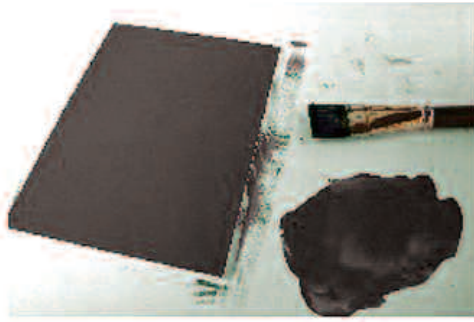
Start dark, and put light values on top for a cute, quick embellishment.



# Start a Pastel Project



**1.** The first decision is substrate, or what surface to choose. There are many colored papers, and surfaces available for pastel such as sanded paper, flocked paper & pastel boards that are ready to use.



**2.** Another option is to make your own board. I made the board for this piece by painting gator-foam with acrylic paint, then with acrylic medium that had pumice in it.



**3.** Gather your supplies, surface, and reference material and get ready to have fun!



**4.** Landscapes are a good topic. Here is my inspiration photo from a recent trip to New Mexico.



**5.** Starting with the black board that was shown in step 2, I stroked on pastels in several colors.



**6.** Blend the pastel with a blending tool. I used a beveled strip of foam core. Fingers blend well, but it will wear on your skin if you use them too much.



**7.** Add horizon of mountains - try not to put them exactly halfway up the page, which makes for a boring design. Add more pastel.



**8.** Add foreground grass and tree line in front of the mountains.



**9.** The 5"x7" finished piece took 30 minutes - quick & easy - and loosely followed the photo. Making miniatures allows for experimentation without investing lots of time or materials. Pick your best mini and make it big!



**About the Artist:** Colette Pitcher is a life long artist who translates her vision into paintings and sculpture. "Having good drawing skills is a basic must for any artist and a constant battle to keep sharp", says the artist, "It's a good thing that drawing is so much fun to practice." Art has always been a part of her life - from working as a computer game designer in New York, to owning the Showcase Art Center in Colorado for the past decade. Colette writes a monthly column on watercolor for *PaintWorks* magazine. Colette's husband Gary, owner of Dragon Casting, a bronze art foundry, is also a creative resource for making the impossible come true daily. Visit [www.ColettePitcher.com](http://www.ColettePitcher.com)



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