

Pastels

Buying

When buying pastels buy 1 dark to 2 lights. (Graham W Smith)

Hard and Soft Pastels

Pastels come in a huge range of brands, both hard and soft.

Hard pastels lend themselves well to drawing and the early stages of a painting and are recommended for preliminary sketching. The points and edges are good for cross hatching as well.

Soft pastels provide depth and a build-up of colour. There is a variety of soft and very soft pastels which can enable quite a few layers of pastel to be applied to the paper resulting in the tooth of the paper being filled with softer and softer pastels as work on the painting continues.

Pastel sticks are supremely responsive to the slightest change in pressure. Learn to manipulate the pressure to achieve the possible variations of tone and colour. (Betty Sutton)

Hardness or Softness of a Pastel

The hardness or softness of a pastel depends on the amount of binder or filler in its makeup. There are advantages to each style of pastel. (Betty Sutton)

Medium and Hard Pastels

Have less pigment and more binder. They are firmer to work with but the colours are not as vivid. They are good for making crisp lines and details as they can be sharpened to a point. They are often used for outlining or adding intricate details to work done in other media. Because hard pastels are less vivid, some pastel artists use them for background colour. Hard pastels include:

- Faber Castell;
- Cretacolour;
- Nupastel;
- Conte (favoured for detailed sketches and life drawing, also for fine linear marks and highlights to finish a soft pastel picture). (Betty Sutton)

Oil Pastel

Can only be successfully used under charcoal or soft pastel if the oil pastel is first dissolved with a medium such as alcohol based products such as isochol, certain odourless solvents or turps. This sets the oil pastel into the surface of the paper allowing the application of charcoal or soft pastels to be worked on top. (PSA)

Pan Pastels

Are soft artists quality pastels packaged in stacking and interlocking jars. Using a unique process requiring minimal binder and fillers resulting in a rich, soft, low-dust formulation. They are erasable and compatible with pastel sticks, pastel surfaces and fixatives. They give a painterly effect, and can be mixed, blended, layered and applied like paint. It is possible to block in large areas in a very short time and they clean up easily. The artist can apply the pastel with a soft sponge or stipulate with a cover. (Betty Sutton)

Pastel Pencils

Pop your pastel pencils in the freezer for a few hours and they will sharpen easier. (Betty Sutton)

Pastel Pencils are very suitable for lines, shading, delicate colour transitions and extended areas. Because they are pencils they are clean and easy to control. Pastel Pencils include:

- Derwent;
- Bruynzeel;
- Caran d'Ache;
- Pitt Pastel – Faber Castell;
- Swan Stabilo CarbOthello (Betty Sutton)

Pigment Dust

Is probably the biggest concern for pastellists. Whenever possible it is better clean dust with a wet rag, sponge or paper towel than to sweep it up (which causes more dust). Care should be taken if using a vacuum cleaner as often the pigment is finer than the bag and can blow through causing quite an unhealthy dust storm. (The Mount Vision Pastel Company)

Soft Pastels

Contain less binder which gives them their velvety texture. They contain more pigment so the colour is rich and can easily be blended or smudged with a finger or soft tool. The down side is that they are more delicate and can break easily. The same softness that makes them easy to blend also allows them to be accidentally smudged, so it's a good idea to use a spray fixative once you complete your work (this is a personal preference). Their soft texture creates more dust which can be a problem for some people. There are many brands of soft pastels including but certainly not limited to:

- Art Spectum;
- Rembrandt;
- Sennelier;
- Unison;
- Terry Ludwig;
- Schmincke;
- Great American. (Betty Sutton)