

Blocking is the key

Pastels provide a colorful means of creating art

This is the fourth in a series of art and drawing lessons by artist David Messing. A Wayne State University graduate with a bachelor's degree in fine arts, Messing has been teaching art for eight years. He also operates an art supply store in Livonia, Art Supply and More.

By David Messing
Special writer

Picture a teen-age girl in white Levis and powder-blue top. She comes into my store for her art lesson. Checking the list of lessons she sees she is to try pastels, for today's lesson.

Confidentially she starts her beginning sketch. As the forms take shape she begins blocking in a few colors, stepping back to look at her drawing in deep concentration, she rests her hands on her hips, leaving colorful fingerprints.

Energetically she scrubs in large areas of color, creating a cloud of colored smoke which rises from her paper. The dust tends to tickle the nose so she daintily rubs her nose, here too leaving a streak of color. With all the colors "blocked" in she sees that much of the details are temporarily lost.

Breaking into a sweat, she pushes her sleeves up on her arms, leaving multicolored sleeves. By now the real work of art is on her rather than in front of her.

AND SO it goes, as frustrations set in. Finally, after her lesson, she leaves looking much like a living-color wheel.

Of course this blocking can happen in any media, but only in pastel is the frustration of mind and hand so graphically displayed on face and body.

In the order of my lesson plans, pastels are usually the first stumbling block. First of all what are pastels? Color is often referred to as pigment. Pigment in an oil base is known as oil paint. Pigment in a resin or plastic base is known as acrylic. Pigment in a casien or tempa base is known as watercolor. And finally pigment in a glue base is known as pastel.

Now the quality ranges according to the amount of pigment in the glue. Less expensive pastels have an addition to chalk to the glue base. These are most common (even though they are dusty) because they are economical. A set of 48 colors costs about \$11.50.

Pure pigment pastels are my favorite, and they are a pleasant step up after you have used the lesser quality pastels. A 30 half-stick assortment of

Artifacts

pure pastels cost around \$14.95. It is still best to start with a lower quality set because when you begin artwork in color it is best to have a wide range of colors.

START WITH a paper that has somewhat of a tooth to it. Now you can make background colors with pastels or use colored paper. First line draw the basic shapes of your subject in vine charcoal and make corrections with a kneaded eraser.

Vine charcoal is merely a charred piece of wood, and it makes a warm, gray line. A kneaded eraser is an artist's best friend and my dog's favorite treat. It is soft and pliable, and when it gets dirty you stretch or "knead" it until it becomes clean.

One of my art students, Angie, holds the official "Art store and more kneaded eraser stretch" record. . . 18 feet, and my standard poodle has eaten at least \$14.85 worth of kneaded erasers during her seven years. So much for kneaded erasers.

AFTER YOUR LINE drawing looks complete begin "blocking" in the main colors. Blocking means putting in large areas of color with a minimum of care or accuracy. Then mix your colors by stroking one over the other. The back of a bluebird for example is a rich blue so make a base color of a similar blue.

To lighten the area, simply stroke a lighter blue over the base color. This is similar to painting. Dark colors shade the base color, and light colors tint or lighten the base color.

All in all the most difficult stage in a pastel drawing is not the beginning structure, nor the finishing details, but the middle. This stage looks messy, is somewhat confusing, and most often arouses fears of failure.

I tell my students that this stage

should look like a "paint by number" picture. Don't try to blend colors, just place them where they should be. Blending will come with the finishing.

MANY FINISHED pastels are very light and almost a ghost image of the subject, but the pastels that win awards and sell fast are rich with color. So don't be afraid to press hard on the pastel stick and don't spend a fortune buying hundreds of colors. Make the right colors, by blending them one over the other.

A fine assortment would be 24-48 colors. Gradually add some "pure pigment" pastels. They range in price from 80 cents to \$1.60 per stick. As your drawing approaches completion you are forced to render details. Here pastels feel very "stumpy" and hard to handle.

You can either buy pastel pencils, which are around 90 cents each, or

Art lesson No. 4

rend your pastel stick into a point. By the way, pastel pencils have a much harder glue base and do not blend as readily as a pastel stick.

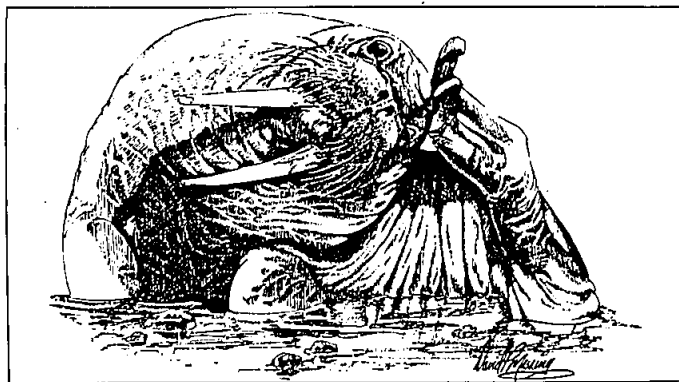
Pastels on white paper is nice. But please try pastel on colored paper or mat board. The colors are much more vivid against a colored background. Pastels are opaque (not transparent) in their pure stroke and will stand out beautifully against a dark-colored paper or board.

Now the best for last . . . pastel on velours. I know the mental image which comes to most people when they hear the word velours, a vacant gas station lot, with a man in a pickup camper

overlooking an assortment of 50 "original" paintings, two for \$25. All in living, fluorescent colors. But try it, you'll like it. Most of my students have really enjoyed it. Some have sold them for \$55 even before they were finished.

QUESTION: Since you advise drawing animals, where do you get photos and is it copying to draw from someone's photos in a magazine?

ANSWER: I like to look through nature magazines for my drawings, maybe read the article to get a feeling for the animal and then compose a drawing from several photos. This drawing of a walrus is made up from three different photos. So my drawing is original because I used the best of several poses and it is accurate because I checked it against the photos. For me a greater fear than copying is a fear of being inaccurate.



Artist Dave Messing created this drawing of a walrus from three different photographs of walrus. He advises copying from photos to ensure accuracy.

Patriotic celebration

Christ Church Cranbrook's star-spangled Independence Day celebration will include a free carillon concert, a lawn performance by the First Michigan Colonial Fife and Drum Corps and an ice cream social on Sunday.

Festivities begin at 3 p.m. with a performance by the Fife and Drum Corps dressed in Revolutionary War regalia. Under the direction of Mark Logsdon, the marching group will play tunes such as "The Girl I Left Behind Me," "Chester," "Black Bear" and "Yankee Doodle."

Beginning at 4 p.m. a carillon concert by Christ Church carillonneur Beverly Buchanan will include "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," "You're a Grand Old Flag," "My Country 'Tis of Thee," and "America the Beautiful," among other favorites.

The finale will be an old-fashioned ice cream social on the lawn. There is a \$1 fee for this event.

The July 3 concert is part of a series of free musical events held throughout the summer at Christ Church Cranbrook, Cranbrook and Lone Pine, Bloomfield Hills.



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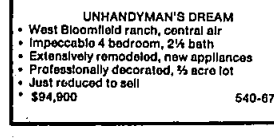
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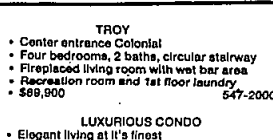


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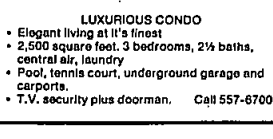


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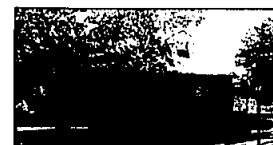


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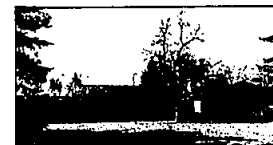


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\$83,900

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