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July 2014

TIPS ON PASTEL BLENDING

Methods of blending Pastel

Unlike wet paint (oil, acrylic), pastel is blended on the surface of the support used. Methods of blending are as many and various as there are types of pastel and papers.

Is it totally necessary to blend? Arguments for and against.

No it isn't. Many artists don't blend at all - it is part and parcel of their style. Of course 'style' - the element that most artists are trying to achieve in their own work - is down to how you apply pastel to the surface. (In other words - the equivalent of the oil painter's 'brushstrokes'). So in effect if you take 10 pastel artists in a class and give them all the same sky to paint - with the same pastels - they will all paint it differently - using different strokes and ways of applying pastel. So at this stage you have got 10 individual artists - very different renditions. If you then ask all 10 artists to blend their sky (usually with their fingers) you will end up with virtually the same sky in 10 paintings - having rubbed away their individuality.

So there are artists that do and those who don't, and those who maybe use a method which mixes some blended work with some unblended work.

Blending in itself can lead to some wonderful atmospheric effect - and is without doubt best used in skies and backgrounds -

where the fusion misty effects can give a wonderful contrast to your textures in a landscape, or portrait.

The problems arise when - (usually having had no pastel tuition) the artist is under the impression that every part of the painting should be 'blended'. Finger blended foliage and trees - in themselves full of wonderful texture - will often ruin a good painting. Finger blending the face when painting a portrait - will result in a false looking mask in the hands of anyone other than a really experienced artists. As a portrait painter - with 40 years experience in pastel - I don't finger blend the facial panel.

Always bear in mind that finger blending in whatever area of your painting is the quickest route to a muddy finish. All depends on the colours you lay down, but if put more than one colour down, and dont understand the effects of some colours when blended - mud is easy to achieve.

Blenders other than fingers

Pastel blenders are little rubber tipped tools - for tiny areas. Other than that anything other than skin will have varying effects depending on the paper or the pastel you use.

A tissue will blend but also remove a lot of pastel, as will a soft brush. A hard brush (hog) will remove pastel.

Torchons (tortilons) - rolled paper blenders have been marketed for well over 100 years. These are for blending sanguine - a form of pastel which looks like a terracotta stick or pencil. Torchons are only meant to blend one colour - traditionally this was sanguine which is the softest form of pastel and which was traditionally used for portraiture. If you use touchons on your work as posted - it will remove as much as it blends.

A touchon was used to blend the sanguine passages on 'Marie' (reconstruction of 17th century Russian artist Maria Bashkirtseff)

When the brown and black the pastel did the blending and the torchon remained free of any other colour.



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. Without any doubt whatsoever the very best method to 'blend' pastel is pastel itself. Pastels are worked in layers. They work best from dark to light (like oils - but not like watercolour which work from light to dark), and from hard to soft.

In theory you lay down the first pastel - and overlay it (on the side of the pastel - not the tip), with a slightly lighter one. eventually you can build up many many layers ending up with 'glazing' with slightly harder pastels - and one of these can end

up being the final 'blender'. When you get used to doing this - you realise the fabulous layering effects you can achieve - colours hidden under colours - many still being evident in the final glaze - and nothing muddy. Very different from a finger blended background



A Pastel glazed background in which I hope you can see the layers of colours - up to 9 or 10 colours in the glazes.

Obviously a finger blended background would have ruined this effect; it would have reduced all the colours to a single mud colour and taken away the feeling of 'light'.

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