



ODIHAM ART GROUP DEMONSTRATION REPORT

Demonstration of Soft Pastel by Graham Oliver, 2nd January 2016

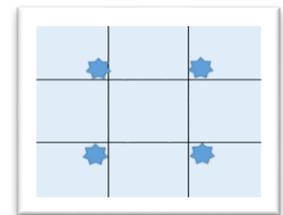
Graham has been painting with pastels for 30 years and holds regular workshops at his studio in Salisbury, as well as hosting seminars and workshops on various P&O cruises throughout the year (lucky man!). He split his presentation into two parts; the first dealt with preparation and planning a painting, including materials, supports and framing, whilst the second part was a practical demonstration of his pastel technique.

Soft Pastels. Graham recommended *Unison, Schminke and Rembrandt* soft pastels, his favourite being Unison as they don't crumble. When buying pastels consider the colours you frequently use, then buy a light tone, a dark tone and a middle tone of that colour. If the colour has 'earth' after it the colour will be more muted. Don't be afraid to use pastel pencils and/or conte crayons for detailed work in the final stages of a painting, as they give a good sharp edge for fine detail. Have a carton full of dry rice, sago or similar to hand when using pastels, so you can drop the pastels you are using into it to keep them clean and stop other colours contaminating each pastel stick.



Paper/support. He recommended two kinds of paper; for those who were just starting out then *Canson* paper would be best. It holds the pastel well and has two sides, a smooth side and a slightly honeycombed side (which can show through the pastel so may suit some more than others, depending on your subject and style). It has a good range of colours, especially in the mid tones, that suit most pastel paintings. He suggested buying large sheets and then cutting them to size rather than buying tear off pads, as it is very unlikely you would use all the colours in a pad. He then went on to recommend *Fischer 400 sandpaper* as the 'Rolls Royce' of pastel supports. It is more expensive than usual pastel paper but gives excellent results and holds a large amount of pastel. This is an artist grade sandpaper – you can try using ordinary woodwork sandpaper @ 400 grade but it is not suitable for high quality finishes. Either way, always be careful with sandpaper – you don't want a nice bright streak of blood red across the painting!

Composition. Graham always does a preparatory sketch to finalise composition and made the point that it is important not to put the focal point dead centre of the painting or right on the edge. He suggested using the prep drawing to finalise where the focal point would be by measuring the top of the paper then splitting the image into nine sections (as shown on this diagram) so you can ensure the focal point is in the areas indicated by the blue stars.



Colours. Decide which colours you are going to use before you start, pull them out of your main container and keep them separate - this way you will not be tempted to use too many colours thereby losing cohesion of the image and you'll know which ones you are using so will not pick up the wrong stick by mistake. As a general rule warmer shades should be in the foreground whilst cooler shades used in the background to give the illusion of depth.

Foundation layer. To start, draw a fine outline of your composition onto the paper using a neutral shade of pastel or pastel pencil. Then fill in the basic shapes to create a foundation layer, ensuring all the paper is covered. Echo colours around the painting and resist the temptation to concentrate on one particular area at this stage. Add colours over others, overlapping edges and ensuring you don't lose the sense of the direction of light, whilst using brighter colours for the focal point to draw the eye.



Smoothing. Graham rubbed the pastel into the paper, using the side of his hand for large areas. This softens and combines the image, although he does leave some areas rough to create texture where needed. It is important to have enough pastel on the paper to ensure you don't rub your skin sore if using sandpaper as a support. Once this stage is complete you can lightly brush off any excess pastel with a large soft decorators brush or similar.



Orchestration. This what Graham calls the final stage, first stepping back from the painting to ensure the balance is right before completing the more detailed work on the image. He then puts a rough mount around the image as a final check before mounting and framing the painting. When framing he tends to 'close frame' larger paintings, not using a mount but placing a filler piece of card or wood between the frame and the painting, ensuring the glass is raised off the image. For smaller paintings he uses mounts with a 'well' behind the mount to catch any pastel that falls off the image.

This demonstration was a very useful reminder to all of us on the difference that proper planning makes to the end result and was appreciated by all those present.

Christine Sharp

