Lisa Dinhofer

MASTERING
COLORED PENCIL

AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO MATERIALS, CONCEPTS, AND TECHNIQUES FOR LEARNING TO DRAW IN COLOR

WORKBOOK EXERCISE: CREATING COLOR PENCIL GRIDS

Throughout the exercises and homework assignments we will be working with the two characteristics of the medium—the "color" and the "pencil" delivery of the pigment—separately and simultaneously. This sounds contradictory but is inevitable since the pencil itself cannot be separated from the color.

I developed this series of exercises that use a simple grid format to show the versatility of the colored pencil. These grids are a teaching tool that demonstrates how the pencils work, including texture, color, and density.

For the following grids I chose groups of specific pencils. They form what is known as a warm/cool palette. (We will get into the variants of color itself in the next chapter, starting on page 47.)

Note: These are primary color variants—red, blue, and yellow. Each color has different properties. Again, I will go into detail in the next section. Right now it is important to get to know your pencils and experience what they can do.

Supplies
- Prismacolor Premier, wax-based pencils
- 2 Blues: Ultramarine Blue, True Blue
- 2 Reds: Poppy Red, Alizarin Crimson
- 2 Yellows: Canary Yellow, Lemon Yellow
- 1 White and 1 Blender pencil
- Solvent (turpenoid, gamasol, Zest-it, or alcohol)

Coloring the Grids

Here, and throughout the book, I'll present one completed exercise grid, and one blank template grid, so you can do the same exercise yourself. I encourage you to do these exercises. They are a very fast way to acquire a working vocabulary of color pencil technique. Here is a breakdown of the process.

1. Label Your Grid

Before applying the colored pencils on the grid, please label your grid following the example of the completed grids that follow. It is important to label your exercise because these grids will be a reference for the particular color. Plus, once the grid is complete, you may not remember what utensil made which effect.

You can repeat this grid for any wax-based color pencil.

2. Row 2: Colored Pencil Plus White for Burnishing

In the second row of the grid, you'll use color pencil plus a white pencil. Using your white pencil is not just for a value change, although it will step down the intensity of your color. As you will observe, the white pencil will also remove your stroke lines. This is known as burnishing. You are putting another layer of wax on the page and smoothing the surface. Color the squares in the second row with your color pencil first, moving left to right, from darkest to transparent as you did in step 2. Then go over each square with the white pencil. The pressure of the white pencil should be uniform across the row.

3. Row 1: Weight of Your Hand for Pure Color

How hard you press down on the pencil will

bring out different effects. In the top row of the grid, the color is pencil only. This row acts as your control of the color. In the first box (far left) press down hard on your pencil in order to lay down the densest amount of wax and pigment. In the second box (center) use a medium weight of your hand to create a middle tone. In the third box (far right) use a light hand, hardly pressed down. The white of the page should be apparent with a slight film of color. The three boxes together should feel like a gradation of color across the surface from dense to transparent.

Note: Repeat this process throughout the grid. Each subsequent line should have, from left to right, a dense tone, middle tone, and a light tone of color pencil.

4. Row 3: Colored Pencil Plus Blender for Blending

The blending pencil is devoid of color. It is a shaft of pure wax. The blender will enhance your color and put another layer of wax on the paper. Blending will not remove your stroke entirely but will soften it. Color the third row of the grid with your color pencil as you did in step 2. Then use your blender, pressing uniformly over the applied color. Notice how the blending pencil enhances the color as well as softening your stroke.

5. Row 4: Colored Pencil Plus Solvent

Color the fourth row of the grid as you did the first three rows, then apply the solvent. The solvents for a wax pencil are: turpenoid or gamsol (petroleum derivatives), Zest-it (a citrus derivative), or alcohol. I recommend turpenoid or gamsol. The solvent melts the wax and forms a wash. The effect can be very painterly. It is also a good way to lay down a large swath of color quickly. Your paper is not protected by a primer (like gesso), so it is important that you skim the surface of your color with the solvent rather than saturating it. The solvent may destroy your paper if you use too much. Use a cotton swab, sponge, or brush to apply the solvent.

Lisa Dinhofer, *Bugs on Parade*, 2011, colored pencil on paper, 9" × 31" (23 × 79 cm)
Choosing the configuration of your picture plane (the boundaries of which are the four corners of your page) is essential. Here I wanted to stress the march of the insects. I chose a long narrow piece of paper to enhance the concept of the march.
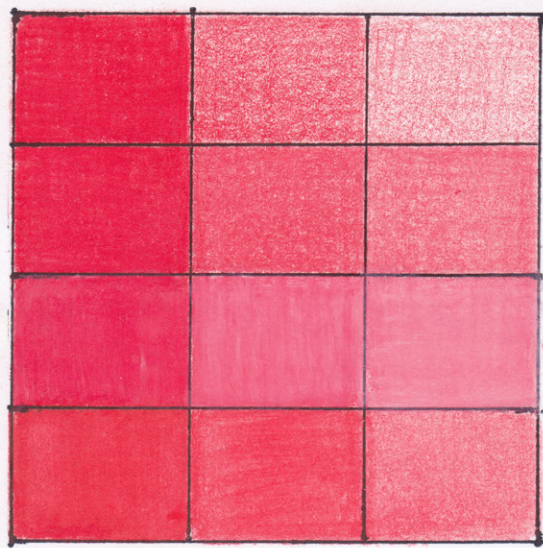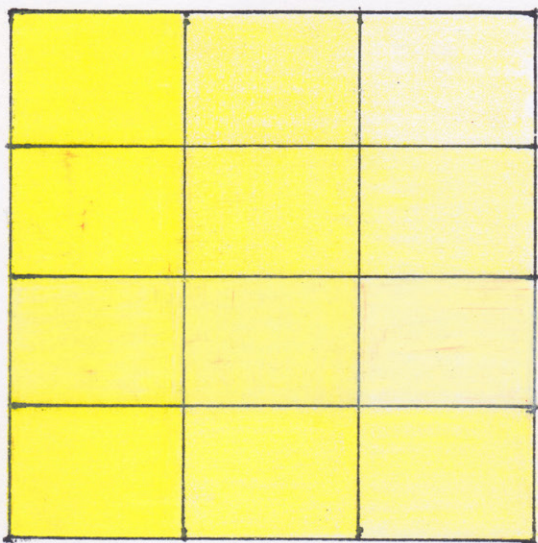
PRIMARY COLOR GRIDS

WARM

POPPY RED

			— PENCIL
			— PENCIL + WHITE
			— PENCIL + BLENDER
			— PENCIL + SOLVENT

CANARY YELLOW

ULTRAMARINE

COOL

CRIMSON RED

PENCIL
PENCIL + WHITE
PENCIL + BLENDER
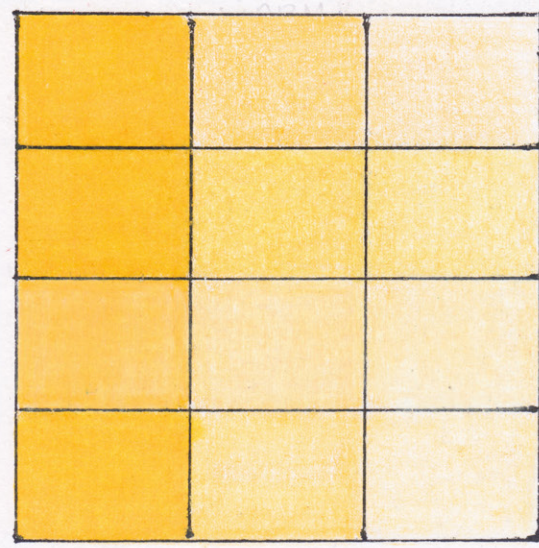PENCIL + SOLVENT

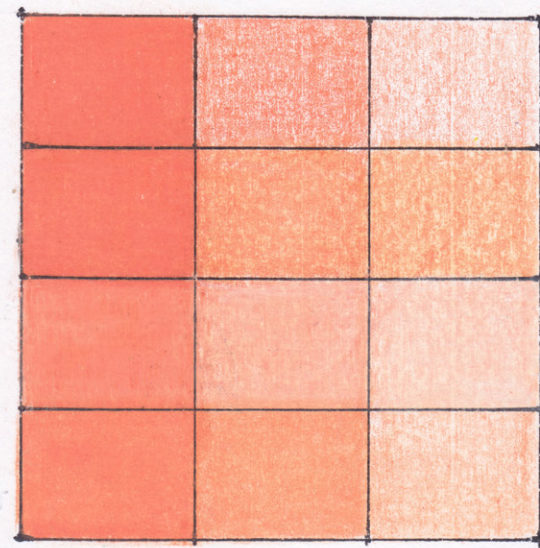**LEMON YELLOW**
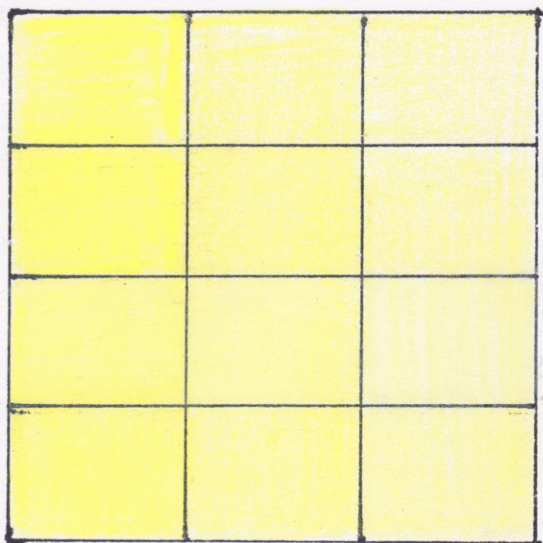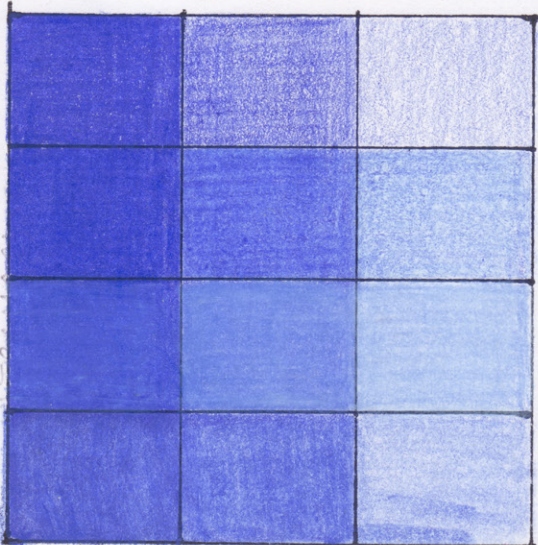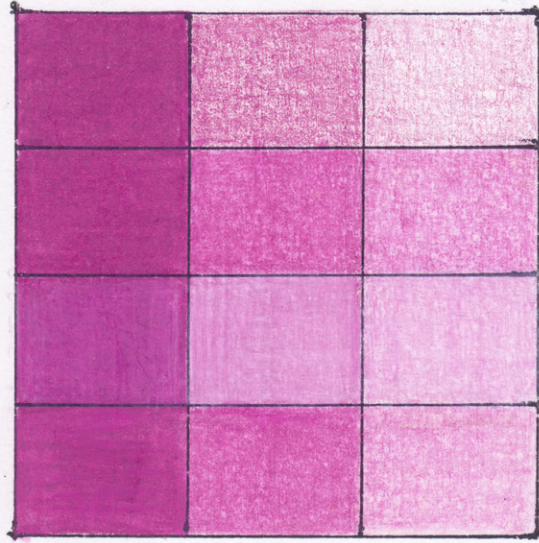
TRUE BLUE
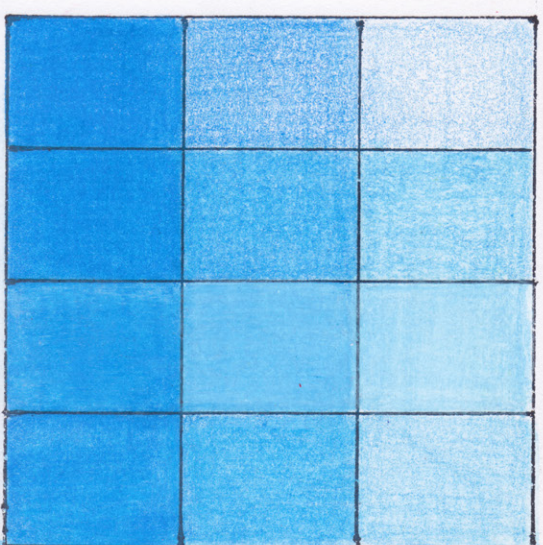
SECONDARY COLOR GRIDS

WARM

SPANISH ORANGE

PENCIL
PENCIL + WHITE
PENCIL + BLENDER
PENCIL + SOLVENT

MULBERRY

SPRING GREEN

COOL

ORANGE

VIOLET
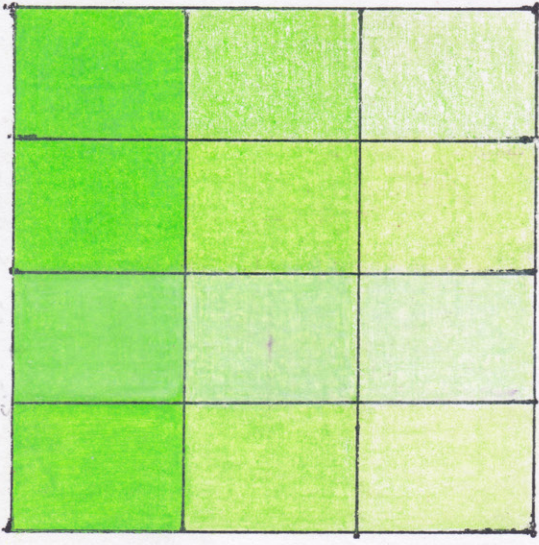
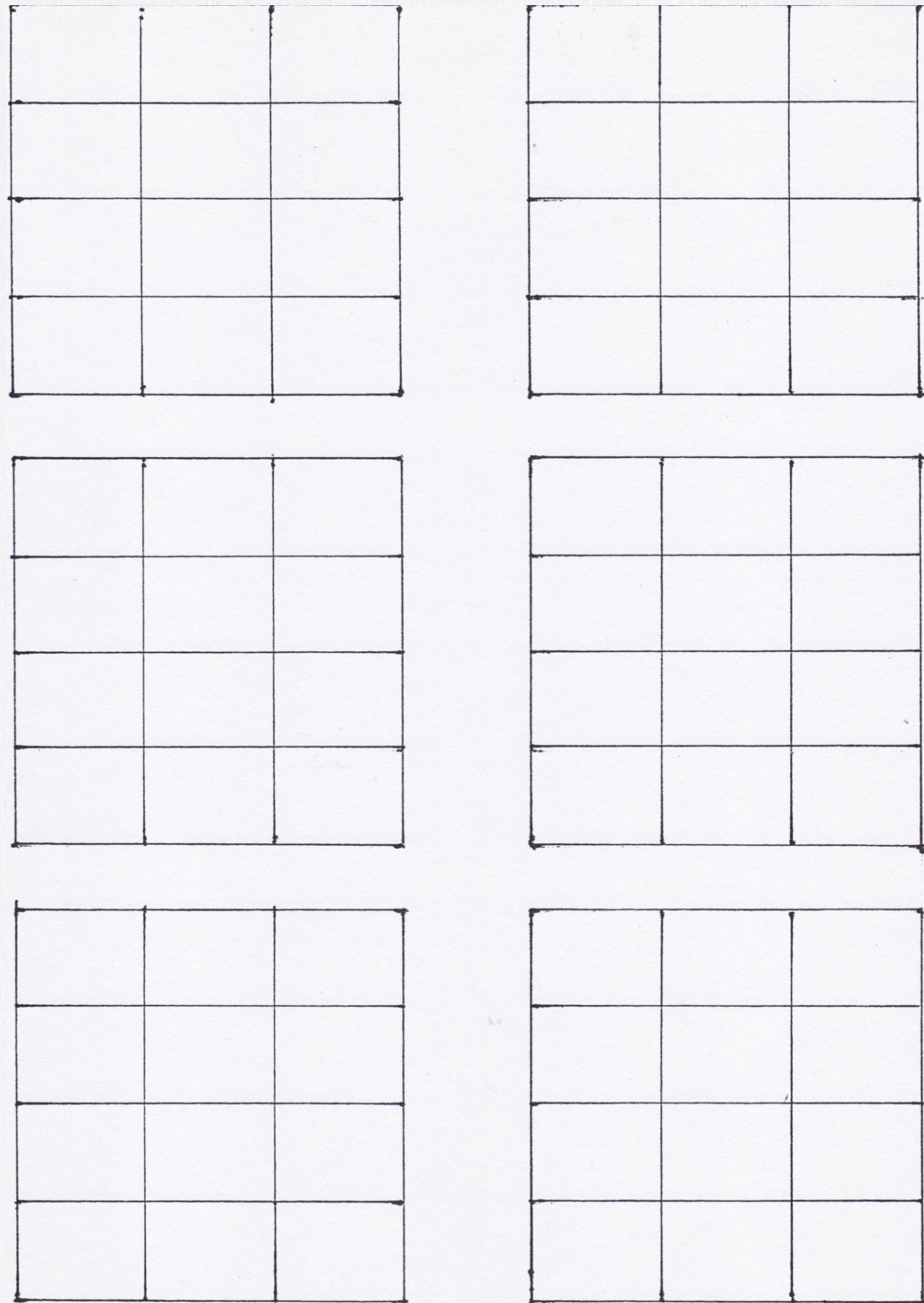**TRUE GREEN**
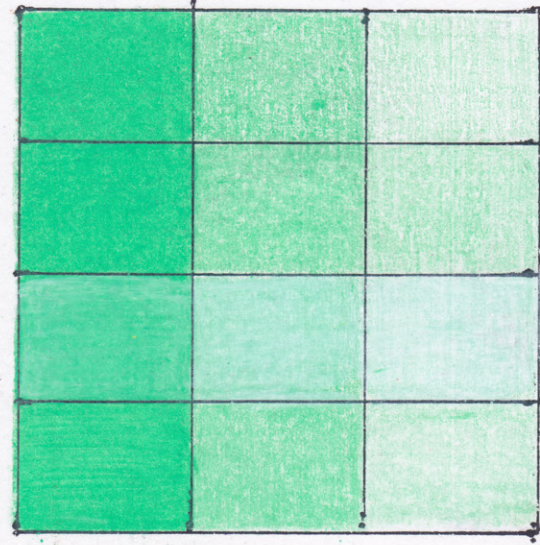
SURFACES

Color pencils can be used on many different surfaces. Paper, of course, but you can also experiment on clay boards, gesso canvas boards, or 2- or 4-ply museum board. Any hard, flat, prepared surface will do.

For this book we will concentrate on working on a paper surface. I find paper to be very versatile—the surface can be as smooth as a mirror or rough as a sandy, pebbly beach—the choice is yours. As described in the Supplies section (page 19), paper comes in different weights (how thick is it) and different textures (smooth to rough). The heavier (thicker) the paper, the longer you can work on it and the more punishment it can take—i.e., you can erase many times, add solvent, add layers of pigment, and burnish and blend without damaging the paper. (We will explore other techniques that work on different surfaces as the book progresses.)
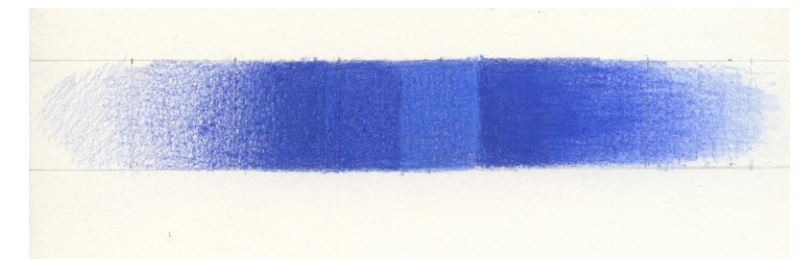
The illustrations at right show five different papers of varied weights and textures. I have done a sample on each paper type in order to show the differences in texture and what the pencil can do.
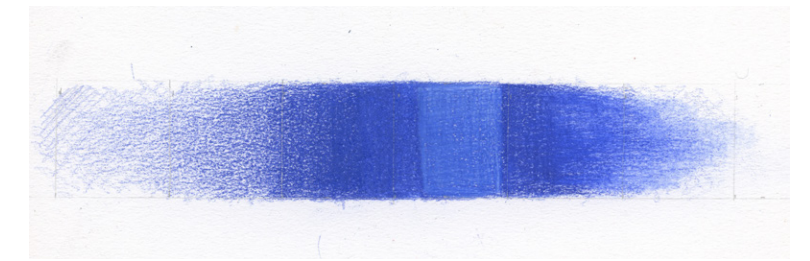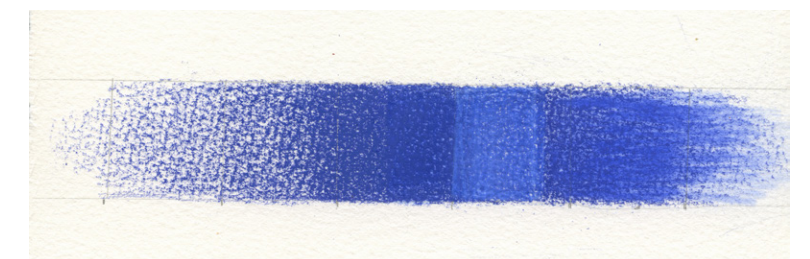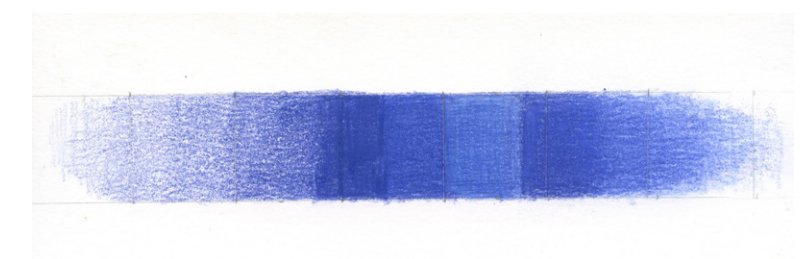
90-pound vellum (from a pad)
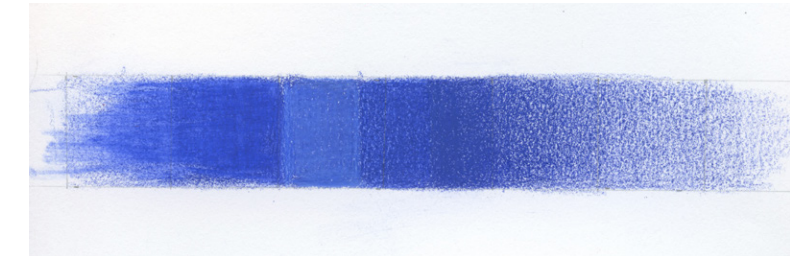
40-pound Fabriano Artistico, Extra White, hot press paper

300-pound cold press paper

40-pound rough paper

2-ply museum board

Blank Grid Template

COLORED PENCIL REFERENCE BOOK

One of the most useful tools in my own studio is the colored pencil reference book. I developed it to solve a basic problem I was having. I like to work my pencils down almost to the nib, and thereby sharpen away the pencil's color name and reference number. When I found I needed a particular pencil to complete a piece or a passage, I had absolutely no idea what the name or the reference number of that pencil was. I would try to match the color in my art supply store, which sometimes worked but often didn't. After several frustrating experiences I decided to create a reference book where I would color a grid with the pencil and record the color name and reference number under it. Why didn't I just use the color chart from the pencil's manufacturer? Because a printed color chart does not give you the exact color or texture of the pencil. Creating this reference book takes quite a bit of time and is not for the faint of heart. In fact it is something for the totally obsessive person, like me.

The cover and page 37 of my personal colored pencil reference book.
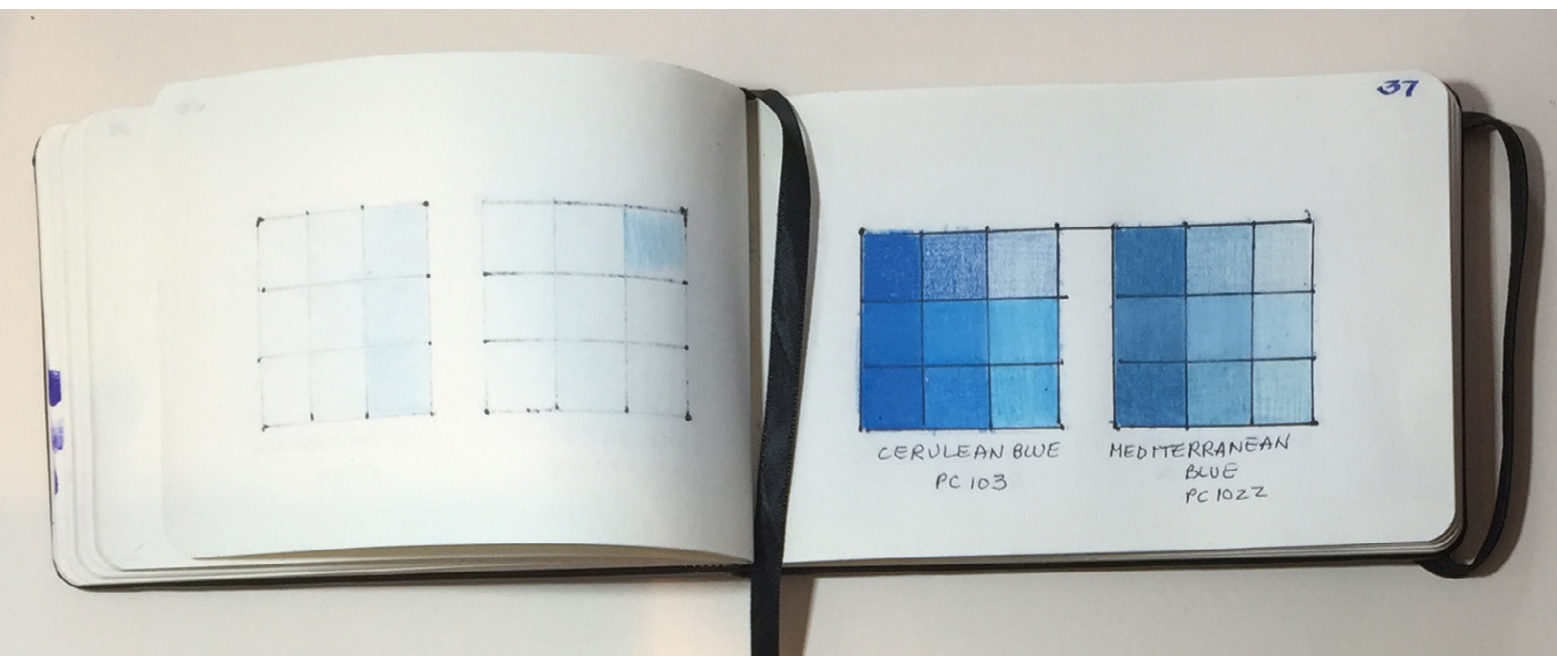
MAKING A COLORED PENCIL REFERENCE BOOK

Supplies

- 1 small landscape sketchbook
- I used a 3½" × 5½" book. You can put two colors on each page. Prismacolor has 150 colors, so you'd need at least 75 pages for your references.
- 1 ruler (to map out your grid)
- 1 fine point ink pen (to draw your grid)
- 1 pushpin
- All your color pencils

1. Label your book along with your name and contact information. On the first page, record the pencil company name and pencil type, for example: Prismacolor Premier. Keep each manufacturer separate. You can divide into sections, or use separate books for each manufacturer.
2. Draw your grid using the pen and ruler. I make a nine-box grid three boxes across by three boxes down. In each row, I show the gradation of the color from transparent to dense (light, middle tone, heavy). The first row is for pencil alone, the second row for pencil and blender, and the third row for pencil with white.
3. Your grids should be the same size from page to page. I didn't want to measure a new grid for every page, so I used a pushpin to pierce each corner of the grid through to the next page. You can use these pin dots for ruler placement as you draw the new grid. The more pressure you put on the pin the more pages you will mark.
4. Under each grid, record the name and reference number printed on the pencil, for example, Ultramarine, PC 902.
5. Color your grid as outlined in step 2 above.

Uses for the Colored Pencil Reference Book

There are two main uses for this book. The first is to figure out the name and reference number of any pencil, so it can be replaced. The second is to see what this particular colored pencil can do. As you get further into this medium, knowing the range of the color and the texture of a particular pencil will become important.

How to Use the Reference Book

When your pencil is sharpened past the name and number, take the nib and a swatch of scrap paper and color a square at the edge of the paper. Place the colored swatch against the reference grid. Compare the colors until you find the right one. Now you know the exact pencil you need to purchase.
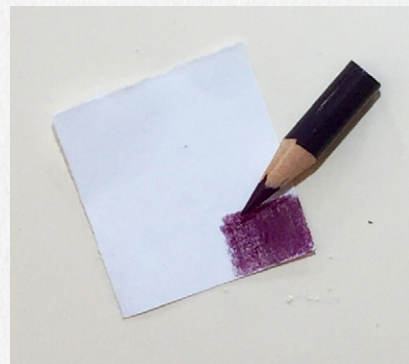

Purple color reference swatch
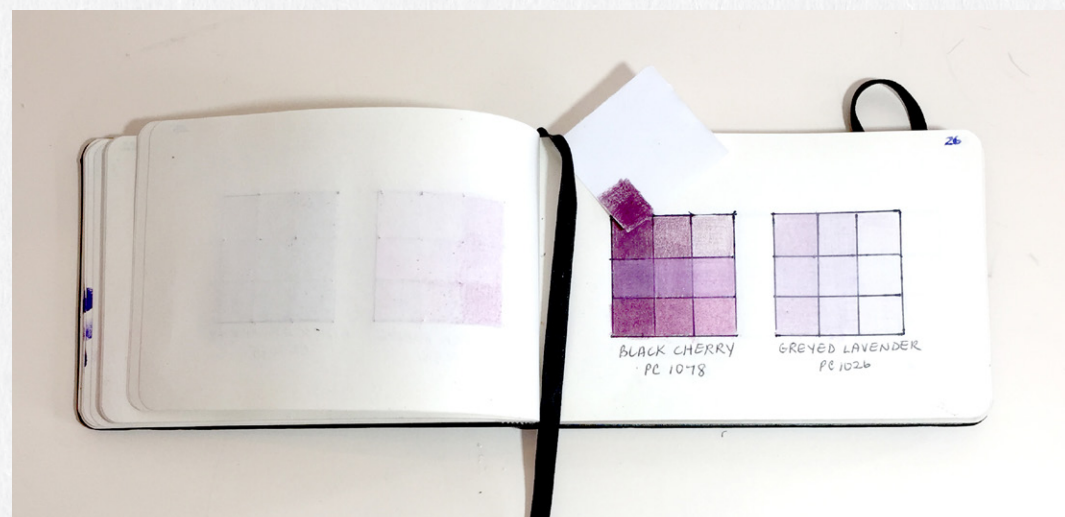
Laying the purple swatch on the grid.
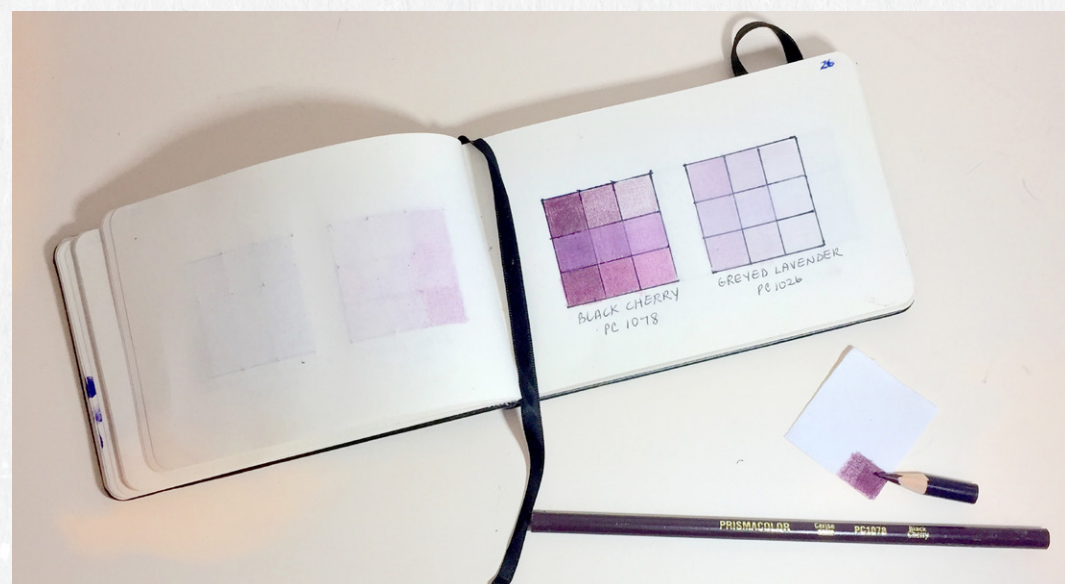
Identifying the correct color for the pencil.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT #1: DRAW YOUR BREAKFAST

Every time I give this assignment someone will inevitably say, "I don't eat breakfast." My reply is, "You don't eat at all during the day?" Breakfast is simply breaking your fast from the night before. So, think about whatever breaks your fast and draw that.
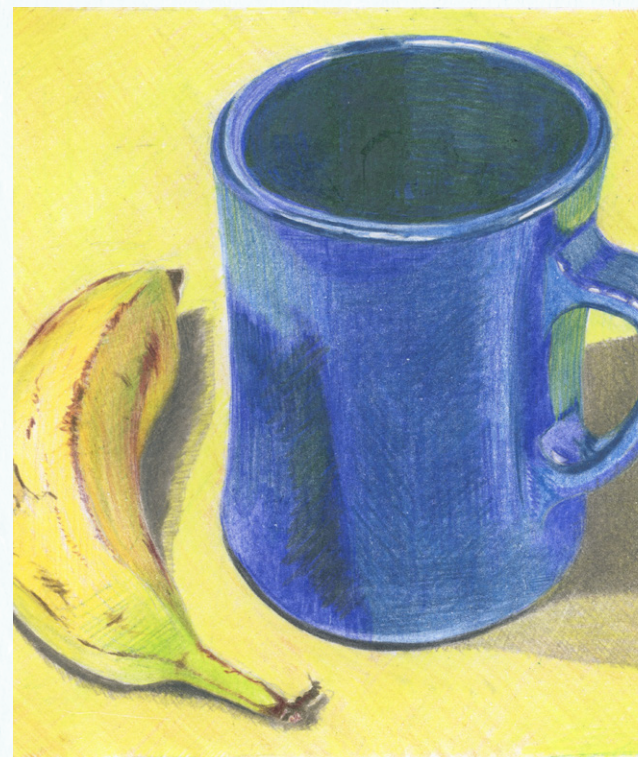
Edward Zimmerman, 2015, colored pencil, 6¼" × 7" (16 × 18 cm)
Success: Ned's success lies in his color choices. The two dominant colors are primaries, yellow and blue. They are equal and opposite at the same time. This creates a dynamic interaction on the page.

Satoko Takahashi, 2015, colored pencil, 11" × 14" (28 × 10 cm)
Success: Satoko's success lies in her choice of subject: an iconic fast-food sandwich. This choice is personal and universally recognizable at the same time, a reflection of the time in which we live.