

Painting With Colored Pencils

Class Syllabus

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Supplies:

- Watercolor pencils:
 - Affordable: [Prismacolor Premier Watercolor Pencils](#)
 - High end: [Faber Castell Albrecht Durer Watercolor Pencils](#)
- Soft core colored pencils:
 - Affordable: [Prismacolor Premier Soft Core Pencils](#)
 - High end: [Caran d'Ache Luminance Colored Pencils](#)
- Brushes
 - [#2 round](#)
 - [#4 filbert](#)
- Paper
 - [Fabriano Artistic](#)(140lb/300gsm and above)
 - [Rives BFK](#)(white, 270gsm and above)
 - [Strathmore 400 Series Cold Pressed Watercolor Paper](#)(Comes in pads, blocks or loose sheets)
- Other supplies
 - [Alvin Brass Bullet Sharpener](#)
 - [Gamsol OMS](#)
 - [Colorless blender](#)

Soft Core Prismacolor Pencils Used in Demo Painting:

- Marine Green PC908
- Sap Green Light PC120
- Lime Peel PC1005
- Chartreuse PC989
- Pale Sage PC1089
- Deco Yellow PC1011
- Cream PC914
- French Grey 10% PC1068
- White PC938
- Pink Rose PC1018
- Neon Orange PC1036
- Orange PC918
- Tuscan Red PC937
- Crimson Lake PC925
- Crimson Red PC924
- Permanent Red PC122
- Poppy Red PC922

Notes:

1. Types of Colored Pencils

- a. Before we get into colored pencil techniques, let's go over types and varieties of colored pencils.
- b. There are dozens of brands of colored pencils, some very affordable, costing 10-20 cents per pencil, and others on the higher end costing more than \$5 a pencil.
- c. For the purposes of this class, we're going to divide them all into two main groups:
 - i. **Soft core** colored pencils. These are pencils with a wax or oil based binder that holds together the pigment. Crayola, prisma, ateza -- are all examples of soft core pencils. In fact, most colored pencils fit in this category, and cannot be blended with water.
 - ii. **Water-soluble** colored pencils, sometimes called watercolor pencils -- these are colored pencils that have a water-soluble binder holding together the pigment. When they're wet with water, the pigment moves around freely, just like watercolor.
- d. Recommended pencils:
- e. Soft core recommendation: low, Prismacolor; high, Luminance.
 - i. These are both soft, creamy varieties that have high levels of pigment.
- f. Water-soluble: low, Prismacolor; high, Faber Castell albrecht durer
 - i. Both have high levels of pigment
- g. You can use very inexpensive colored pencils with the techniques we'll cover in this video, but they will usually have a higher proportion of binder to pigment, so the hues may not be as vibrant.
- h. That's why I recommend Prismas as the baseline.
- i. If you're put off by the price, consider starting with a smaller set. A small set of better pencils is preferable to a large set of low quality ones.

2. Paper Types

- a. In this lesson we're going to talk about paper and which varieties work well with WCP and SCP.
- b. Most colored pencil artists decide to work on paper.
- c. This is because in order to work well, colored pencils need to have a porous, surface that can grab onto and hold all of the pigment. This is especially true when working with a combination of WCP and CP.
- d. So, when choosing a paper, the first things you'll want to consider are **weight** and **texture**.
- e. Generally you want heavyweight (300 gsm +).
 - i. Heavier weight papers are generally sturdier and will hold up better to layering.
- f. Texture can be either rough or smooth — both work for colored pencil and will create different effects.
 - i. **Rough** (Cold pressed) has more tooth, and will usually accept/hold more media and create a more textured look.
 - ii. **Smooth** (Hot pressed or printmaking) has a shallower tooth and will generally take less media, but you can work at a smaller scale and still develop detail.
- g. Note: Very smooth surfaces like Mylar will not work well with CP. Bristol board, or ordinary printer paper can work, but they won't be suitable for wet media and won't allow you to layer much.
- h. Other things to consider when choosing a paper:
 - i. Is it suitable for both wet and dry media?
 - ii. How sturdy is it?

- iii. Does it warp?
- iv. Color of the paper?
- i. Recommended papers:
 - i. Rough: Fabriano (high), Strathmore (budget)
 - ii. Smooth: Rives BFK (high)
- j. And a final note on paper for any art making: always be sure it's acid free.

3. Other Supplies

- a. A few additional supplies you'll need to create colored pencil paintings.
 - i. Pencil sharpener: my favorite is the brass bullet
 - ii. Solvent: Gamsol or other OMS
 - iii. Brushes for blending: #2 Acrylic round, #4 watercolor filbert
 - iv. Sharpie paint pen or Posca
 - v. A cup for water, rags/paper towels

4. Mark Making

- a. Just as your handwriting is special and distinctive, the way you lay down your colored pencil is unique, and after doing it for long enough, your mark-making will become a part of your style and you likely won't even think about it.
- b. Some ways of laying down colored pencil:
 - i. Unidirectional hatching
 - ii. Cross hatching
 - iii. Even circular
 - iv. Wild circular
- c. Big vs. small — all of these strokes can be done on a large scale, making them more prominent and loud, or on a small scale, making them more quiet and smooth.
- d. Smaller marks with a smoother look tend to be more understated and draw attention to the subject itself.
- e. Larger, bolder marks are louder, and can be used to create interest, draw attention and express emotion.
- f. There's no "best" or "right" mark making style. They each have different effects, and you may find that you gravitate towards one, or several.
- g. Stroke style will also be impacted by how much pressure you apply, the type of paper you use, and whether you're blending either with water or solvent.

5. Building a Palette with Colored Pencils

- a. When preparing to work with colored pencils (either SCP or WCP), you'll need to build a palette, just as you would if you were working with oils or acrylics.
- b. With CP, most of the colors you'll be using are mixes, and have been made with multiple pigments, so palette building looks a bit different than the classic oil painter's layout
- c. So, rather than selecting one cool yellow, one warm yellow, one cool red, one warm red, etc, essentially, you want to look closely at your subject, and make your best guess at which colors you'll use during the course of the painting.
- d. Are you painting bread? You'll probably use a lot of ochre, and gold, and sienna. Are you painting a hydrangea? Probably lots of blues and violets.
- e. Sort through your box of CPs, and pull out these colors.
- f. Having them set aside will make it easier for you (less time digging around for colors)
- g. Will also help you keep the color consistent throughout the piece if you're working in multiple sittings.

6. Making an Underpainting

- a. In this lesson we'll talk about how to use watercolor pencils to develop an underpainting for your soft core pencils.
- b. An underpainting is a less detailed version of your painting, kind of like a colored sketch. It focuses mainly on the big areas of color/value, and doesn't worry too much about detail.
- c. Working with watercolor pencils can take some getting used to, and there are many

different techniques and approaches.

- i. Dry laydown on dry paper, blended fully or partially.
- d. To use watercolor pencils in the dry on dry method, just lay them down directly on dry paper
- e. The harder you press, the more pigment will end up on the paper, and the darker/more saturated that area will be once you've wet it down.
 - i. So try your best to have a light hand when initially laying down the pencil.
- f. With both watercolor and colored pencil, you can always go darker later, but going back and getting lighter is very difficult and sometimes impossible.
 - i. If you plan to fully blend your WCP layer, you don't need to worry too much about your marks being neat or consistent,, because they'll get blended out and covered up with soft core pencil later.
- g. For blending, use water and a size 2 round acrylic brush, and gentle, circular strokes
 - i. You can use a watercolor brush as well, but watercolor brushes are softer so you may end up with more visible pencil lines.
- h. Keep in mind, you're using the friction of the brush as well as the water to blend, so try to use as little water as possible initially. This will make it easier to move the pigment around in a controlled way. You can always add more if you need it.
- i. 2 things to keep in mind when working with WCP combined with SCP:
 - i. WCP should always be your first layer(s). They're water based, and need to be able to absorb into the paper. Since other colored pencils are wax or oil based, they'll form a barrier over the top of the paper, and you won't be able to use WCP on top.
 - ii. The color you lay down may look different once blended with water. Because of this, it's good to make color swatches just as you might with watercolor, in order to become familiar with how they look when in use.
- j. Once your base layer is completely dry, you can add additional watercolor colored pencil (or other water-based media), or you can move on to soft core colored pencils.

7. Working in Layers

- a. In this lesson we're going to go over some CP basics and talk about working in layers.
- b. Just like artists working with oils or acrylic, many CP and mixed media artists, myself included, work in layers.
- c. I prefer this method, because it keeps me from getting too caught up in a given section of the piece and I can focus on making sure the whole is cohesive.
- d. When working in layers, use a light touch, gradually building to heavier applications.
 - i. This is sometimes called FAT OVER LEAN in classic oil painting, and it works well here too.
- e. This technique allows you to blend as you go, without creating muddiness, or flattening out the tooth of your paper too early.
- f. Keep in mind, that when working with CP, fixing an area that has been overworked or made too dark/too light too soon, is more challenging than it is when working with acrylic.
 - i. This is because you can't scrape off or cover up.
 - ii. Working in layers and considering the piece as a whole, tends to help minimize these kinds of mistakes.

8. Starting with Midtones

- a. When working with colored pencils in layers, I generally recommend starting with mid-tones.
- b. Mid-tones are the colors that are neither dark, nor light when compared to the other colors in the subject.
- c. The reason I recommend starting with mids rather than darks or lights, is that unless you're working with a very dramatic light source, most of the colors in your subject will likely be mid tones.
- d. Getting these down early will help you better determine the overall shape of your subject

(think of it like sculpting -- a sculptor starts with a big chunk of rock or clay, and gradually adds detail)

- e. You'll also be better able to see what is a true dark, and a true light.
- f. Color and value don't happen in a vacuum -- the way you see every color in your subject is affected by the way you see the surrounding colors.
- g. While working in your mid-tones, you can either leave the shadow areas unworked, or you can go right over them with the mid (unless your mid tone has a lot of white in it).
- h. On the other hand, if you think that an area of your subject will be very light in the end, try to leave it untouched, just as you would when working with watercolor.
 - i. Adding white on top of color never looks as bright
- i. Once you have the overall mid-tones down, you'll have a sense for the dimension and color story of the subject, and will be better able to add the darkest darks and lightest lights, which is what we'll discuss in the next lesson.

9. Adding Darks and Lights

- a. Now that you have the basic mid-tones down, we can talk about adding darks and lights.
- b. Once you've identified the dark areas, rather than going right in with black, ask yourself, how much darker is this area than the mid-tone? Or, if this were compared to pure black, how dark would it really be?
- c. I rarely use pure black in dark areas as it can create a muddy look. I recommend using darker colors instead, since most shadow still has color unless it is VERY, very dark.
- d. For darkest shadows, using the complementary color layered on top of the main color rather than black, will create a nice, deep shadow that still looks alive.
- e. So, in a red subject, like a strawberry, the darkest areas of the red would have green layered over them, and the darkest areas of the green would have red layered over.
- f. Once you feel that you've gotten the shadows mostly as you want them, pull back and pause. It's time to add lights.
- g. These are not necessarily highlights (which are added last of all) but are just the areas of your subject that are overall lighter than the midtones.
- h. Again, thinking of your subject as a sculptor would, imagine which areas are rising up higher than the rest, catching more of the light.
- i. At this stage, you can begin using colored pencils with a lot of white in them to help the light areas pop out.
- j. At this point, you should have your underpainting finished, with your basic mids, darks and lights layered on top, and you'll now be ready for blending.

10. Blending with OMS

- a. Now that we have the mid-tones, initial darks and initial lights down, we're going to talk about blending.
- b. Working in layers as we have been will give you the ability to blend somewhat as you go. But if you like a very smooth creamy look, or you want to minimize texture in some areas of your piece (in shadow, for example) you may want to use OMS to blend out the layers.
- c. OMS is a solvent that will dissolve the wax/oil binder in the colored pencils, allowing you to move the pigment around freely, and create a smooth effect, similar to glazing with oil paint.
- d. Once it's dry, you can layer more CP on top (and blend again)
- e. My OMS of choice is Gamsol which is made by Gamblin, and it the safest of the OMS.
- f. Regardless, all OMS should be used with plenty of ventilation, and kept in a sealed container, following manufacturer safety instructions.
- g. To blend colored pencils using Gamsol, take a tiny, tiny amount on the tip of your brush (As little as possible!) and swoosh it around in little circles or back and forth movements just like you did when blending watercolor pencils.
- h. When blending early layers, depending on how much pigment you have down, the area may look washed out or patchy initially. There may also be a faint yellow-tinge when wet if the area is very light. Once it's dried and you add more layers and blend again, your piece

- will look more finished and have a richer color.
- i. I prefer to use a slightly softer brush for OMS blending, ideally a filbert, but you can use any brush that works well for you.
- j. Work in small areas, being careful not to lay your hand down over any part of the piece that has OMS on it (it can be mildly irritating, and can smudge your piece, just as if you were working with paint)
- k. If your brush gets dirty or if you're going between very different colors, just rinse and blot with OMS.
- l. Wait until the piece is dry completely to add additional layers.
- m. You can tell that it's dry by looking at the back of the paper. All translucency should be gone. It usually takes anywhere from 1-3 hours depending on how much OMS you've used.
- n. Up next: we'll talk about adding more layers to further refine your colored pencil painting.

11. Layer, Blend, Repeat

- a. After having made your first pass at mids, darks and lights, and a little blending, you now have at least 2 layers down (WCP and soft core)
- b. The overall form of your subject should be emerging, and you should take some time to step back and compare it to your reference or model.
- c. At this point, you might want to add additional layers (Usually I have anywhere from 3-5 layers in a typical piece)
- d. You can use these to further refine the details in your subject, and/or to more explicitly carve out the form and dimensionality.
- e. You can blend between each layer, or you could forgo blending in favor of keeping some sharper, more refined moments of detail.
- f. Generally, my process is something like this: layer, blend, layer, blend, layer.
- g. Leaving out the blending in the final layers to preserve detail and some interesting textures.
- h. In some cases, I'll opt for a little spot blending with burnishing.

12. Burnishing

- a. In this lesson we'll discuss an alternative form of blending: burnishing.
- b. This is essentially using the friction and pressure of your pencil or a colorless blender to push more pigment deeply down into the tooth of the paper, so that it appears darker, smoother and richer.
- c. You can use this instead of blending with OMS, or in addition to, or in other areas of your piece.
- d. To burnish, press hard with your pencil, holding it a more vertical position, working in uniform strokes, whether circular, or hatching.
- e. This allows you to push more pigment into the tooth of the paper, while blending the pigment that's already there from previous layers.
- f. Unlike OMS blending, burnishing should only be used once you're close to finishing your piece.
- g. The reason you want to save this until the end, is that if you start burnishing too early, you'll flatten out the paper, and won't be able to add any more pigment
- h. You'll also want to be careful when burnishing, as doing so while using a lower quality paper that's already had several layers applied can tear or shred the surface of your paper.
- i. I prefer to use burnishing in small areas, usually either in the darkest darks, or the lightest lights.

13. Adding Highlights

- a. Once your piece is 99% done, it's time to add highlights.
- b. You can use either a white soft core pencil for softer highlights or a paint pen for sharper ones, to add tiny, bright highlights.
- c. Some subjects, like a juicy piece of fruit in strong lighting will naturally have a lot of these, others, like a portrait, will have only a few.

- d. If you want to create a sense of realism, be careful not to overdo it with highlights.
 - e. If on the other hand, you like a more stylized look, you can go wild with it!
14. **Final Thoughts**
- a. Well done! You're now ready to put the principles we've learned into action, and begin making your own colored pencil paintings.
 - b. Remember, like any artistic medium, the best way to learn to use colored pencils is to practice!
 - c. So I encourage you to make 1, 2 or even all of the class projects, and share them with the community.
 - d. Thank you so much for taking this class, I can't wait to see what you make!

Class Projects

1. **Make swatches with watercolor pencils**
 - a. Download the Class Template, and transfer to your art paper using a light tablet or a sunny window. (Or you could go freehand, like me!)
 - b. Organize your watercolor pencils by color
 - c. Lay down each color on your art paper, and mark it's title or number below in waterproof ink
 - d. Blend with water
 - e. Take a photo of your swatches and watercolor pencils and share with the class
2. **Build a palette based on a reference photo using either watercolor pencils or soft core pencils -- or both!**
 - a. Download the strawberry reference image [HERE](#), or use one of your own
 - b. Look through your colored pencils, and select the colors for your palette
 - c. Take a photo of your reference alongside your colored pencil palette and share with the class.
 - d. **Bonus:** Divide your palette into darks, mids, and lights
3. **Practice Mark-making with soft core pencils:**
 - a. Download the template, and transfer to your art paper.
 - b. Try each of the strokes in turn; you may wish to try using them at different sizes, different weights, or on different types of paper.
 - c. Take a photo of your mark-making sampler and share with the class!
4. **Layer complementary colors to create form and shadow**
 - a. Download the template, and transfer to your art paper.
 - b. Select your base color, and complementary color
 - c. Lay down your base color, and use the complementary color to create form and shadow
 - d. Optional: use your mark-making sampler from the first class project, and simply add the complementary colors to create the shading
 - e. Take a photo of your complementary color shading sampler and share with the class!
5. **Practice blending with OMS**
 - a. Download the template, and transfer to your art paper.
 - b. Select your base color, complementary color (dark) and light
 - c. Lay down your base color, and use the complementary color to create shadow; add the light to emphasize the form of the subject.
 - d. Optional: use your same sampler from the first class project and the last one
 - e. Use Gamsol or another OMS to blend
 - f. Take a photo of your OMS blending sampler and share with the class!

6. Practice blending with burnishing

- a. Download the template, and transfer to your art paper.
- b. Select your base color, complementary color (dark) and light
- c. Lay down your base color, and use the complementary color to create shadow; add the light to emphasize the form of the subject.
- d. Optional: use your same sampler from the first class project and the last one
- e. Use your colorless blender to burnish
- f. Take a photo of your burnishing blending sampler and share with the class!

7. Put it all together; follow along with the strawberry demo to create your own colored pencil painting

- a. Download the sketch, and transfer to your art paper. Or create your own sketch
- b. Build your watercolor pencil palette
- c. Create your underpainting with watercolor pencils
- d. Build your soft core pencil palette
- e. Work in layers with soft core pencils, beginning with mid-tones, working up to darks and lights
- f. Blend with OMS
- g. Add additional layers, and blend as desired
- h. Finish with paint pen highlights
- i. Take a photo of your completed work and share it with the class!