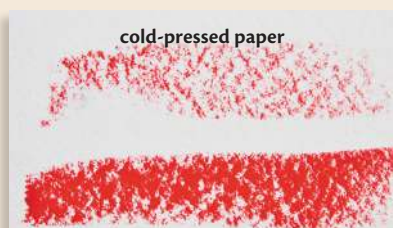
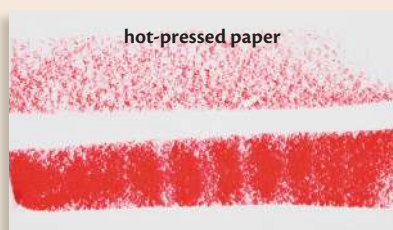


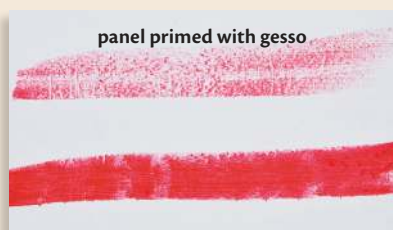
rough paper



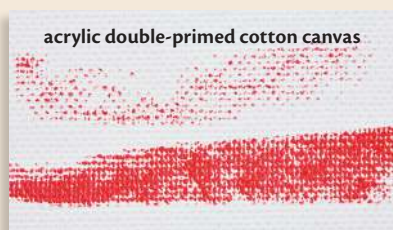
cold-pressed paper



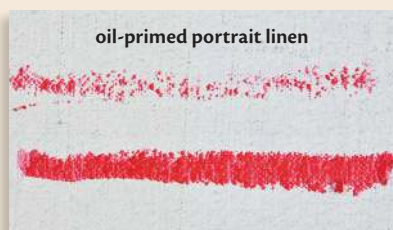
hot-pressed paper



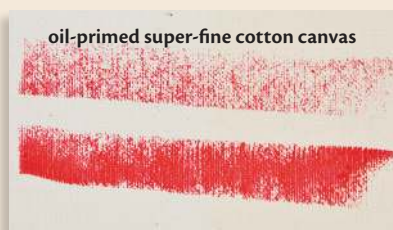
panel primed with gesso



acrylic double-primed cotton canvas



oil-primed portrait linen



oil-primed super-fine cotton canvas

FAQs



What surface should I use?

Oil pastel works well on many surfaces. The two things to keep in mind when selecting a suitable surface are how you plan to store or display the finished artwork and how the surface will react to the oil in the pastel.

Good quality papers, such as archival, cotton-rag paper or other heavy print-making papers, are excellent surfaces to work on. Pastel or charcoal papers are also good and very popular, although less substantial. Several paper manufacturers offer oil pastel cards, charcoal paper mounted on boards and multimedia board. Oil pastels adhere to glass and metal as well, and you can try sandpaper for something really toothy.

Oil pastel can also be used on primed canvas (stretched or on a panel) and hardboard. The primer has a slightly rough surface that is very receptive to oil pastel and is the preferred surface if you are combining oil pastel with other oil-based media.

Can oil pastels be combined with other paint?

Yes, but the resulting work may be less long-lasting. The vegetable oils in oil paints will cause an unprimed surface to deteriorate over time. A light sketch in oil paint can be used as an underpainting for oil pastels. Because oil pastels don't dry completely, generally they should be used for the top layer only; oil paint over oil pastel may crack or craze as it dries. Oil pastels can also be used over acrylic or watercolor paintings; watermedia over oil pastels won't adhere.

What's the difference between oil pastels and oil bars?

Oil pastels are made with an inert oil such as mineral oil; oil bars and sticks are made with vegetable oils and are essentially oil paints in stick form. Oil pastels never dry completely, whereas oil bars will dry in a way similar to oil paints.

What's the best way to store and display oil pastels?

The best way to store oil pastels on paper is flat, in a dust-proof container, protected by glassine sheets (thin paper that is grease- and water-resistant). A flat file is ideal but expensive; storage boxes designed for works on paper are good and very practical. Oil pastels on rigid surfaces can be stored upright between pieces of matboard with a glassine sheet against the pastel surface.

Oil pastels should be displayed under glass with spacers to protect the pastel from dust and damage.

Can finished oil pastels be protected with fixatives?

Yes. If you use a fixative, use products specifically formulated for oil pastels. Often several light coats are required; let the surface dry thoroughly between coats. Fixatives may alter the colors slightly. Some artists use acrylic gel medium as a varnish—note that any coating applied to a nondrying medium is irreversible. Experiment with practice drawings on various surfaces before exposing a finished work to any fixative or protective coating.

Must-Have Tools

Oil pastels generally go straight from your hand to the surface, so you can get by without special equipment. This directness is one of the most appealing characteristics of oil pastel, but you can also have a lot of fun experimenting with tools and techniques. The oil pastelist should have the following in his or her studio:

Containers: Keep oil pastel sticks organized in boxes so they're protected and so you won't have to hunt for the color you want. Good storage will keep them cleaner, resulting in purer colors in your pictures.

Inexpensive substitutes for art boxes include tackle boxes and pen trays.

Paper towels: Use them for blending, wiping foreign colors from the tips of the sticks and keeping your fingers clean.

Blending stumps: Use a sanding pad to keep them clean.

Brushes: Stencil brushes and bristle brushes are useful for softening edges and blending colors.

Cotton swabs: Use these common household items to blend colors.

Scraping tools: Palette knives, craft knives, razor blades, wooden sticks and almost any rigid tool can be used to scrape oil pastels to reveal the colors beneath.

Solvents: Mineral spirits or Turpenoid can create blending and brushing techniques when you're painting on an appropriate surface.

Tips

- Oil pastels vary in hardness by brand.
- Keep oil pastel sticks away from heat—they can melt.
- Use a knife or sanding pad to keep a sharp tip on your pastel sticks.
- Layering soft oil pastels over hard allows for a greater buildup of color.

PHOTOS BY ADAM HAND



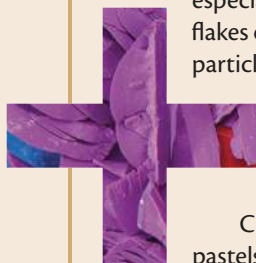
Safety and Cleanup

Oil pastels are safer to use than soft pastels because there's no danger of breathing in dust. However, the same toxic pigments used in soft pastels and paints—such as cadmium—are used in professional oil pastels.

Take care to remove pigment from your fingers to avoid accidental ingestion. In other words—keep your hands away from your face. Keep paper towels and detergent or baby wipes around to keep your hands clean when working with oil pastels. With some techniques, especially scraping, it's possible to create small flakes of oil pastel, so be careful to remove these particles from tools, clothing and work surfaces.

Ensure that your workspace has adequate ventilation if you're using solvents such as mineral spirits or Turpenoid.

Children should use student-grade oil pastels and be properly supervised.



Techniques

Underpainting: Oil pastels can be used over a thin underpainting of acrylic, oil or watercolor on primed surfaces. This underpainting can remain visible through subsequent layers.

Crosshatching: Strokes of color can be built up with tightly spaced parallel or perpendicular lines.

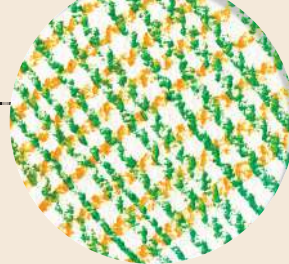
Blending: Oil pastels can be blended and intermixed with paper towels, blending stumps and brushes.

Layering and *impasto*: Oil pastel can be built up in layers or in thick deposits of color. Note that this isn't recommended on flexible surfaces such as stretched canvas, because cracking can occur.

Scumbling: Softer oil pastels can be applied in a broken layer over harder pastels with a technique similar to scumbling with paints.

Scraping (*sgaffito*): Layered oil pastel can be scraped back with a rigid tool such as a palette knife, razor blade or even combs and plastic forks to reveal the colors underneath.

Solvents: Oil pastels can be manipulated with brushes, tissues or cotton swabs dipped in a solvent such as mineral spirits or Turpenoid.



crosshatching



grading



blending



scraping




lifting with solvent



Chemistry

Oil pastels are made with the same powdered pigments used in soft pastels. Instead of the gum binder used in soft pastels, the pigments in oil pastels are mixed with an inert, non-drying oil, such as mineral oil, and a wax binder. The result is a soft, slightly oily stick; hardness varies by manufacturer. Once they're applied, the pigments stay put.

The oil used in professional-grade pastels is inert, meaning it will not change chemically as would organic oils, such as linseed. Oil pastels never dry completely—they harden over time but remain workable. Student-grade oil pastels may be slightly acidic and therefore are not permanent.

Oil pastels can be manipulated with solvents such as mineral spirits and Turpenoid. They can also be mixed with linseed oil and other oil painting mediums. Note that integrating organic oils will negatively affect the archival stability of an oil pastel work and shouldn't be used on absorbent surfaces such as paper. 

■ **Greg Albert**, author of *The Simple Secret to Better Painting* (North Light Books), lives in Cincinnati, Ohio.



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IMAGINATION IS the only reference material that I used for *Wild Bunch* (below). As I learned from my private teacher, Marianne Grunwald-Scoggin, originality is of utmost importance. And nothing is more original than one's imagination.

For this painting, I wanted to evoke a ceramic type of sheen, so I chose foam board rather than the acid-free board I normally use. With

no preliminary drawing, I cut the flower stems and outline of the glass vase into the foam board in a rhythmic action with a single-edge razor blade.

Next, I applied a background tone with light yellow oil pastel and

BELOW: *Wild Bunch* (oil pastel, 19x21) was a finalist in the still life/floral category of the 27th Annual Art Competition.

rubbed it into the surface with Winsor & Newton Liquin until a soft, creamlike tone emerged (note that the more one rubs the oil pastel, the less intense the color becomes). After attaining my desired tones, I added the table line and apple arrangement to complete the composition.

Moving on, I applied the deep green color to the stems and foliage area and removed any excess, until fine lines appeared from the earlier etching process. This procedure is a bit tricky because the green bleeds into the yellow background, but I was able to reapply the yellow as needed to adjust the tone. The art is to know just how much of the green tones to remove without losing the density and color variation. I used the same method for the vase and then applied various shades of blues and violets, suggesting flowers and paying particular attention to compositional arrangement and minimum detail. With this painting, less is definitely more.

Finally, I reapplied dark green to some of the stems for variety of shape and tone and scratched across the table and apples with the razor blade to connect the composition. ■



Competition Spotlight artists are chosen from our annual competition finalists. Learn more at www.artistsnetwork.com/annualcompetition.