COMPLETE COURSE ON PAINTING AND DRAWING

Drawing with Crayons, Pastels, Sanguine, and Chalks

BARRON'S

Drawing the nude with sanguine crayon

Some of the great masters of painting have found sanguine crayons (and other related materials) to be an excellent medium for their figure studies. Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Rubens, Watteau, François Boucher, to name just a few of the great artists of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, made frequent use of sanguine crayons in their wonderful studies, many of which, thankfully, have been preserved for posterity. Innumerable famous artists, ancient and modern, used the sanguine crayon in their drawings of the nude. Here we will confine ourselves to just three masterly examples.

Left. *"Nude study," by Jean-Antoine Watteau. Sanguine and sepia-colored chalk on cream-colored paper.*

Left. *Impressive study in sanguine crayon of "The Sibyl of Lybia" by Michelangelo (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). In fact, this is a collection of studies on a single sheet of paper, in which the great artist made preparatory drawings before embarking on the definitive fresco painting.*

Above. *"Springtime figure," by Jean-Antoine Watteau. Sanguine, charcoal and white chalk on cream-colored paper. This is a very old technique that Watteau described as a* dessin à trois crayons *(drawing with three pencils).*

Composition in the portrait

Before beginning a portrait from life, the artist must deal with an initial problem: Composition. This can be divided into two elements: Positioning the model within the picture and establishing the pose. Positioning the head, even with the neck and shoulders, is not difficult. Follow these basic rules:

- When the model faces directly forwards, the head should be centered on the vertical axis of the picture (**a**).
- When the model is seen in profile or at an angle, the head should be positioned off-center, with more space in front than behind the nape of the neck (**b** and **c**).

Another thing to consider is whether to incline the head to one side, or upward or downward. On this point it is best to let the model adopt the position that comes naturally and spontaneously. In fact, the question of composition really begins only when making a half-length portrait. Composition is so important that most masters make a preliminary study of the pose, always guided by the individual characteristics of the model. Of course, doing a portrait of a politician or businessperson, will be a different exercise than portraying a teenager or a society matron. Finding the right pose is, as the artist Francesc Serra will demonstrate, a significant part of the process. Let's follow his train of thought:

1. Putting a young woman in a seated position, with one arm resting on the back of the chair, gives an air of langor to the pose, but creates a gap that focuses too much attention on the chair.

2. Moving the body closer to the chair back may solve this—but, no, that doesn't look right either.

3. By making the pose more natural, with her hands in her lap, we keep the oval rhythm of the arms, which works well. But now the right shoulder slopes the same way as the tilted head, and too much skirt shows in front of the hands.

4. That's it! Now the figure fills the picture: The left shoulder slopes, accentuating the rhythmic line of the neck; the oval shape formed by the arms, although visible, is less obvious because the left arm has been drawn back a bit. And the chair has disappeared completely. Now nothing distracts the viewer's eye. The languid pose remains, but within a more convincing composition.

Studying the pose

When studying a pose or movement, it is useful to work from the diagrams of the human body seen on this page.

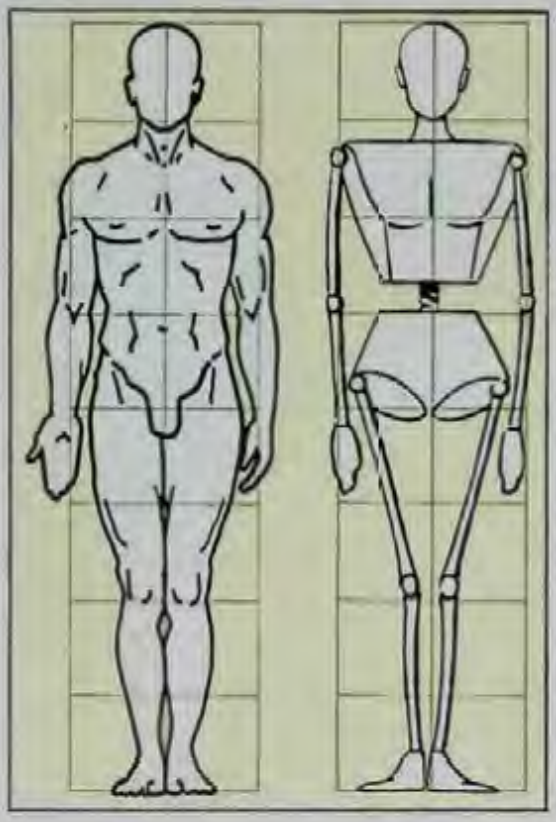
1. An upright, static position comprised of three sections: The head, the trunk and the pelvic region, with the extremities indicated by a suggestion of their skeletal structure.

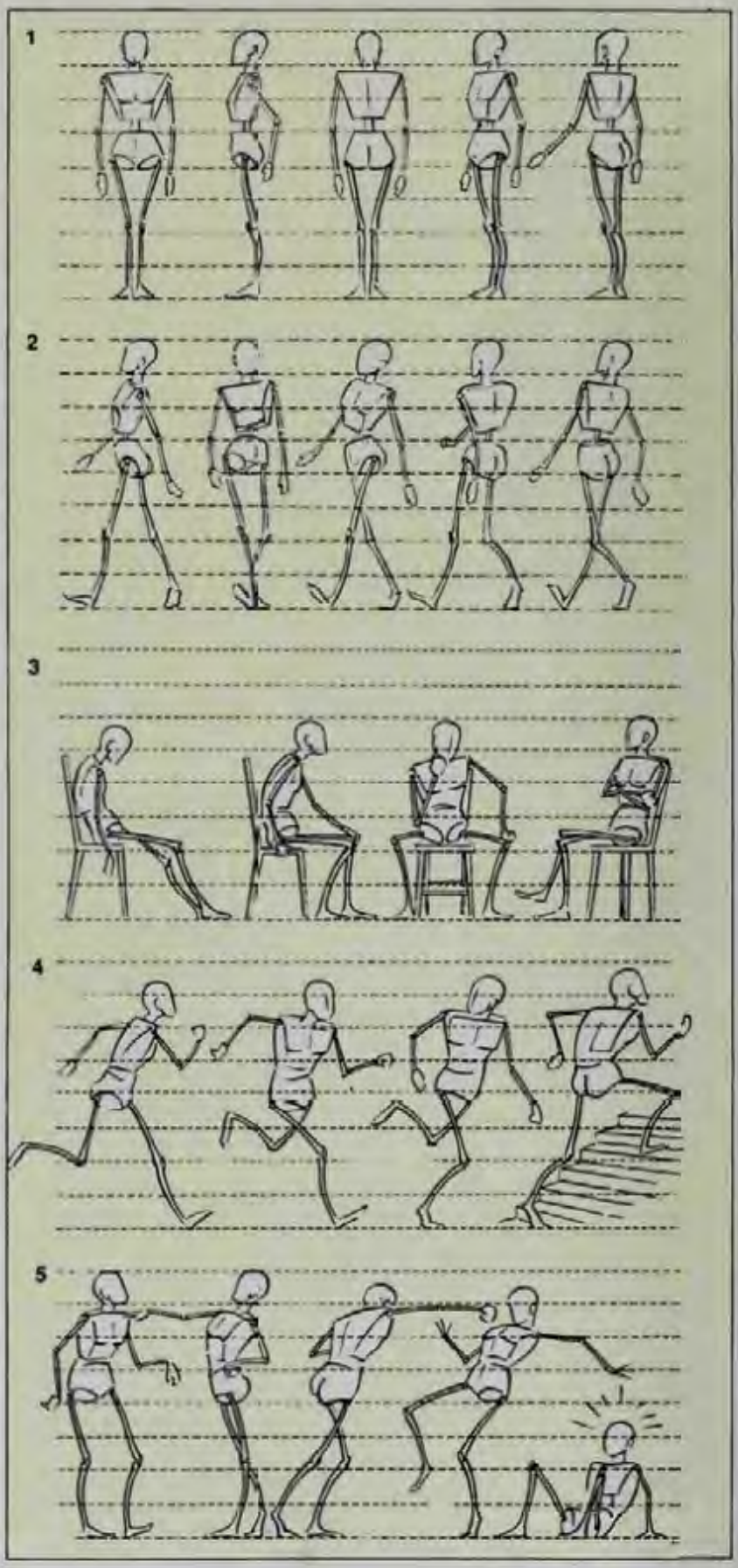
2. Without losing sight of the "eight heads" rule, our doll-like figure is now given movement. Notice how it walks: Always remember the opposing slant of shoulders and hips.

3. Look at the diagrammatic representation of four characteristic poses: Relaxation, attention, meditation and waiting for something.

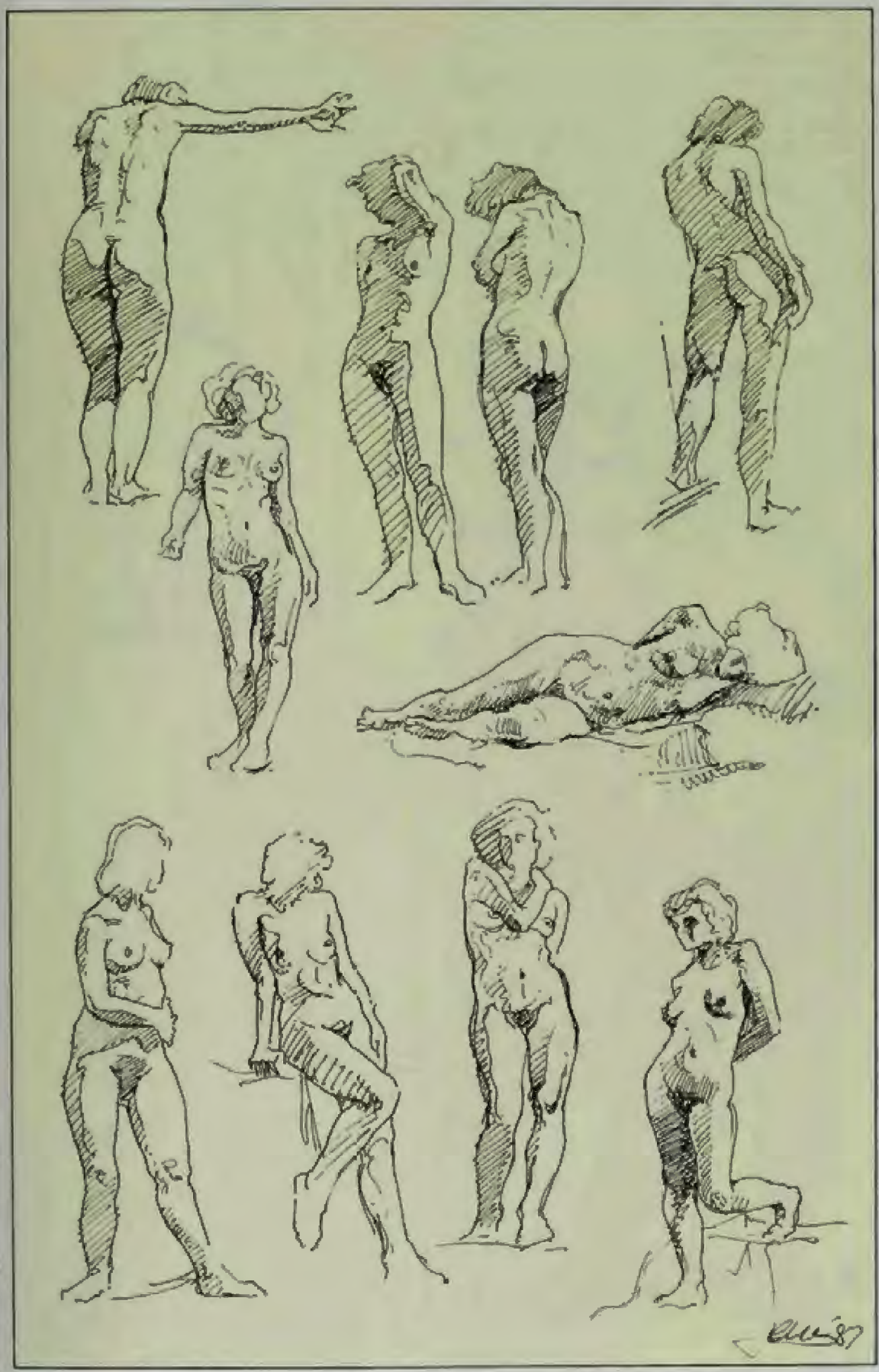
4. Analyze, through our diagrams, the different stages of running; in your sketches, try to achieve the sense of impetus created by the arms and the inclination of the trunk and head, which is always projected forward.

5. Once you memorize this diagrammatic rendering of the human body, you will be able to use it to express any pose and any movement. The usefulness of working from this diagram becomes clear when you draw greatly foreshortened poses.





Poses



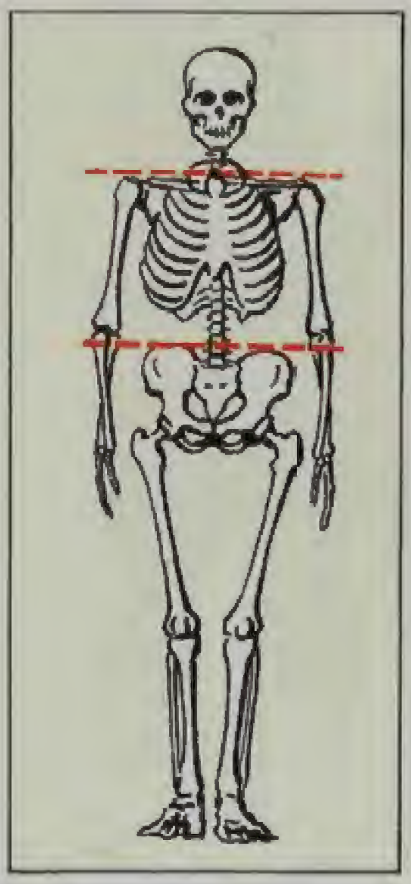
Deciding on a pose and knowing how to capture its rhythms is no easy task. In this, as in so many things, practice is the best teacher. Look at these ten sketches by Ferrón, drawn from nature in a single one-hour session.

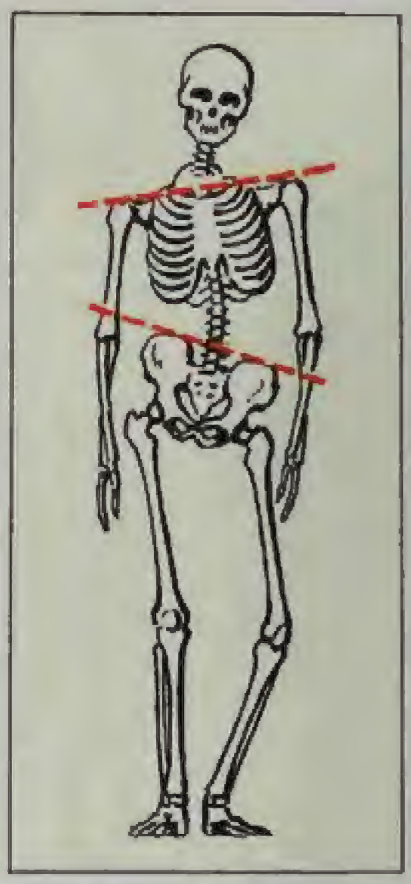
Each sketch took an average of six minutes. On this occasion, Ferrón used a fine-nibbed felt tip pen, compelling himself to draw a clean line without possibility of alteration. To produce sketches like these, which synthesize form and pose with confident strokes and a perfect rendering of the shaded areas, is only possible after going through vast quantities of paper. Ferrón's example is a goal toward which you can work. Try to imitate his work and do not get despondent at some initial failures. Find some cheap paper and be prepared to use up a lot of felt tip pens. Do not go for perfection, but rather for spontaneity of line—even if your first efforts are not particularly accurate. It takes a good deal of perseverance to master figure drawing.

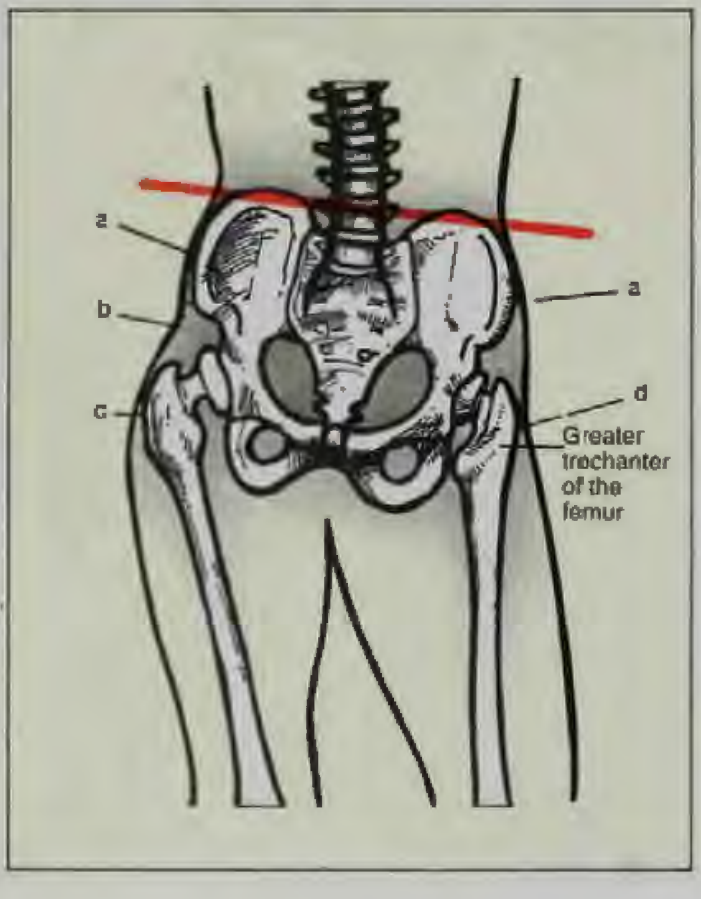
Contrapposto

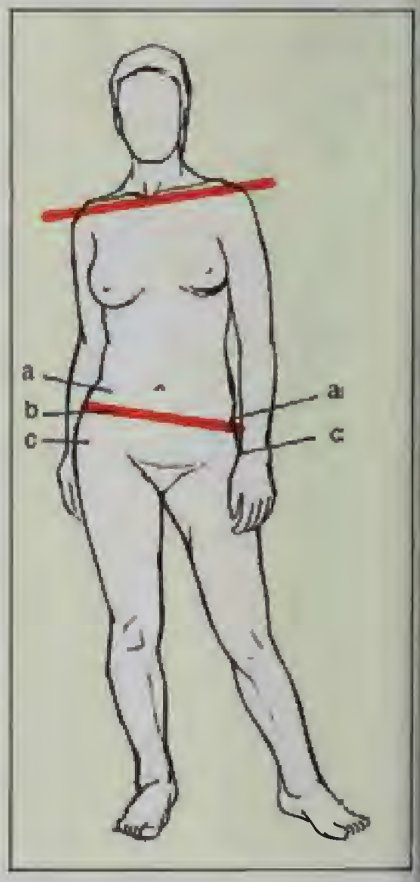
The classic pose for human figure drawing is based on the Renaissance principle of *contrapposto*, in which the whole weight of the trunk is supported by one leg, while the other leg remains relaxed. Irrespective of the posture adopted by the arms and head, there will be *contrapposto*, a pose in which the following points may be noted: The hip of the leg on which the weight is carried is higher than the other; the shoulders and chest slope in the opposite direction.

Contrapposto also brings about certain differences in the appearance of each hip. These can be seen in the illustrations on this page.









Above. *In* contrapposto *the axis of the sacrum tilts towards the leg that is rigid: the pelvis tips up on this side and the shoulders slope in the opposite direction, causing the spine to curve.*

Right. *Look at the profile of the hips seen from the front. The iliac crest bulges outward* (a), *followed by a hollow* (b) *and another bulge* (c) *for the trochanter of the thigh bone. Notice that on the side of the relaxed leg, the hollow disappears* (b) *and the trochanter is marked by an indentation* (d) *rather than a protuberance.*

Sketch of a figure in contrapposto

Here are the three stages of a sketch carried out by Juan Sabater. Note (1) that when the figure is in *contrapposto* a vertical line drawn down from the chin passes through the heel of the supporting leg. This is important to remember when making any sketch in *contrapposto*. The second stage shows the figure with all its contours and also indicates where the shadows will fall. Sabater finishes his sketch by applying some basic tone which is enough to lend character to this lively and spontaneous little drawing. This sketch was drawn on fine-textured Canson watercolor paper.

Still life with reflections on metal objects

The exercise we have set for you here is to produce a still life using pastels. Our example is a work by Juan Sabater, who has two objectives in mind.

The first is to offer you the opportunity to explore pastels more thoroughly and to become more confident with them. The second is to teach you how to solve one of the most fascinating problems in painting and drawing: How to show reflections on polished surfaces.

If you have not used pastels for some time, we recommend that you take a few steps back to relearn the fundamental skills and techniques of the medium.

It would be well worth briefly reviewing how to draw a circle in perspective, as it is an essential element in the exercise we created for you.

Finally, Juan Sabater would like to stress that his work is simply an example, a way of approaching the problem, and his subject matter is no better or worse than any other. This means that you are free to copy his picture faithfully, or to adapt the subject to a different color scheme, a different style and even different objects—as long as they are still metallic. It all depends on how confident you feel with the medium; but remember that, for the moment, it is much more important to learn about skills and techniques than to try too hard to be original. There is no shame in copying in order to learn, and even less so if you are a beginner.

Three examples by Ferrón

Before starting on your own picture, study these little drawings by Miguel Ferrón, which are good examples of his personal style with pastels. He prefers to leave the contrasting colors just as they appear directly after being applied, but does not sacrifice the technique of blending color, which he uses primarily where there is a thick layer of color.

Notice the unusual way in which the different areas of color barely describe the objects. They merely offer an impression of form, the main outlines being defined by black lines strategically situated in the composition after the principal colors have established the basic shapes and tonal and chromatic contrasts.

Equipment

Sabater used the materials shown in the picture on the right:

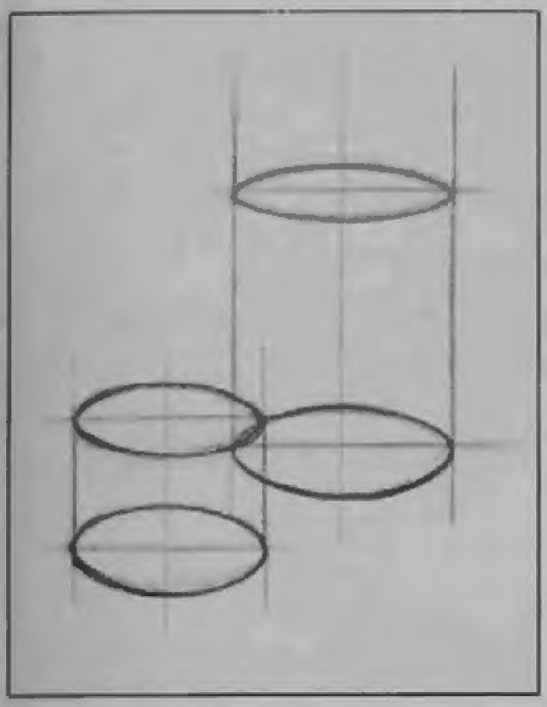
- Soft pastels (manufactured by Rembrandt).
- Charcoal.
- A torchon.
- A putty eraser.
- A sheet of medium-textured Canson watercolor paper about 13½ × 19½ in. (35 × 50 cm).
- Drawing board with clips; a rag or absorbent paper.

The subject

Here is a photograph of the arrangement Sabater chose to paint from life. In spite of the differences of color that result from a photograph (colors always seem deeper than in real life), it represents a sufficiently good guide on which to base the picture. It is clear that the pictorial interest of this still life lies in the sharp reflections produced by the metallic surfaces. We feel that this particular quality of the subject justifies titling the work "reflections on metal objects." However, from the artist's viewpoint, the reflections are not a separate entity, but rather incidental chromatic effects, sometimes very striking, that fall within a consistent overall color scheme.

Look at the subject: Can you define a clear tendency toward one color range? Would you go for a warm or cool range? Sabater will offer his solution, but you may have one of your own.

Against a cool, blurred background, the warmer foreground stands out clearly, and, against both of them, the metallic surfaces with their cold highlights and the reflections of the warm colors of the wood have a powerful impact.



Preliminary studies

Although it is not essential (Sabater has not done it himself), we suggest that you carry out a preliminary study of the layout and perspective of the two stainless steel objects that make up the theme of our still life.

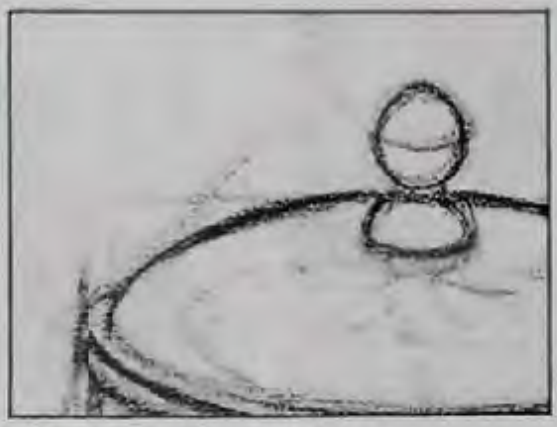
With a lead pencil (a 2B, for instance), establish the shape of the objects, starting with two cylinders. Study the layout, paying attention to the question of perspective.

The definitive sketch

Whether or not you have done any preliminary studies, the next step is to draw a definitive sketch of your subject. You can do this in charcoal or, if you prefer, with a stick of sepia-colored chalk, applying strokes that define the general shapes of the objects. Look at Sabater's sketch; you can see the guide lines on which he based this first stage: The vertical axes, lines of perspective, and so on. When you are happy with your sketch, take a rag and brush the lines away, so that the definitive shapes can then be laid in on top of the traces of the sketch, as shown in the photograph below.

The definitive drawing

In this second stage, the artist firmly and accurately establishes the forms, definitively outlining the objects and the surface of the table. Sabater does not want to have to modify his drawing once he is working in color. He prefers to dedicate as much time as necessary to producing in charcoal a linear representation of the subject. On top of this he can then apply color while remaining absolutely faithful to the outlines, which, from this point on, should be regarded as sacrosanct. It is not a waste of time to linger over this stage—quite the reverse. The time you take now will pay dividends later when you find that you can apply color without having to rectify mistakes along the way. All you will have to worry about is preserving the original drawing, which is a very different exercise.



Right. *Close-up details of some of the circles in the drawing. Don't forget to apply the rules of perspective. Remember that, when drawing a cylinder, the intersection of the curve of its base and its vertical sides should be a continuous line.*

Setting the tone

It is clear that when starting his picture, Sabater did not opt for a specific color scheme. In the early stages of his work, there is no marked tendency towards any particular range. More apparent is his intention to divide the composition into two opposing halves: A cool background and the warmer colors of the receding plane of the table.

For the moment the metallic objects have been given very little color. Sabater's main objective was to place the white reflections in contrast to the larger black areas. The chromatic harmony between the two objects and the colors surrounding them is hinted at with touches of violet (similar to the cold background color) and other touches of brown (like the warm colors of the table surface). Now it is your turn. Follow Sabater's methods, but without worrying too much about reproducing the colors exactly. You can certainly try to stay within the same range, but let yourself be guided by your own ideas.

At this stage, work exclusively with the pastels, rubbing them against the paper but without penetrating too deeply into the grain.

Left. Close-ups showing cool colors being applied in two contrasting areas of the picture: Green in the background and a pale violet on the metal surface. Observe how the artist has worked: He has used individual, separate strokes, intending to create an initial vision of the colors that may dominate the picture and of their distribution throughout the composition.

Right. Close-ups showing the velvety effect created with pastels after having been engrained in the texture of the paper with the fingertips. Compare these close-ups with those on the previous page and you will see the difference between the fragmented color applied by the pastel sticks and the unified color spread across the surface of the paper with the fingertips. In the latter, any unevenness of color has disappeared.

Color blending and final stage

With your fingertips (Sabater prefers to use his thumb and index finger), blend the pigment in all parts of the picture. Remember to either change the finger used each time you start working on a different color or to clean it first with a cloth. The goal is to blend colors that until now have appeared rather fragmented, but not to mix them together. Blur the harsher lines so that the different surfaces take on that softness characteristic of pastel painting where the pigment is deeply engrained in the paper surface.

The blending process tends to flatten areas of contrast, so you will have to add some more color to these parts. On the right you see how Sabater's picture looks after the general blending process and then, on the opposite page, when it is finished.

So what did the final stage consist of, exactly?

Color was added to the blended pigment to achieve a more luminous background with more interesting contrasts; the presence of three little patches of pink are enough to suggest the presence of flowers that strike a warm note in an extremely cold part of the picture.

The teapot and sugar bowl have been brought into harmony with the foreground through the warm colors in the reflections and with the background light (seen on the metal surfaces) through the introduction of blues and blacks.

A few touches of ochre, blue and white have brightened up the wooden table surface. To sum up, then, we have a warm foreground (containing the metal objects) and a background dominated by colder tones.

Wax crayons

The technique of using wax crayons is probably not new to you. As a medium, they are sometimes compared with oil pastels because of certain characteristics they have in common. You will find this out for yourself by following this step-by-step exercise, in which Ester Serra, who just gave us her personal interpretation of a floral theme in oil pastels, will explore a similar subject using wax crayons.

Let's take a look at the main characteristics of this medium:

• Crayons are applied directly to the support and may be blended (though only to a limited extent) using the fingertips, a torchon or a cloth.

• Wax crayon is very difficult to erase. The best method of removal is to scrape as much as you can from the surface and then to use a plastic eraser. However, some pigment w always remain.

• Wax crayons may be dissolved in turpenti essence. It is always best to work with the mo refined product, although everyday materia will also give good results.

• Crayons are extremely opaque colors ar may be superimposed.

• When you use a blade or pointed impleme to scrape the surface of a superimposed colo the underlying color will appear. This featu offers a wide range of possibilities as far as te ture is concerned.

• Normal fixative may be used on wax crayo drawings.

We will assume you are familiar with thi; info mation, and that you can now follow withou difficulty the practical demonstration Este Serra has drawn as an example.

Three examples from masters of the medium

Left. *Detail from a study by Miguel Ferrón, demonstrating in a single work most of the techniques of wax crayon drawing. The white areas have been reserved with masking fluid and the background has been painted with a brush, using wax crayon dissolved in turpentine. The carmines, greens, and yellows have been applied directly in wax crayon. You can see that, after the masking fluid was removed, new shades (basically blue and green) were introduced using a brush with dissolved pigment; these overlapped the reserved whites in a few places.*

Above and left. *Two good examples by Francesc Florensa, showing the quality wax crayons are capable of producing when they are applied directly to the paper and then diluted with turpentine using a soft-haired brush. The middle range of tones look similar to those produced by water-soluble colored pencils, although wax crayon color is perhaps more luminous.*

A floral subject in wax crayon

A composition study

Before starting work on the actual picture, Ester Serra made a few preliminary studies based on the subject you see in the photograph on the right. Her intention was to find a viewpoint that offered her the most balanced composition within a square area. She decided to work from the viewpoint from which the photograph was taken. The compositional study not only helped to establish a balance between the different planes and volumes, but also defined certain areas of tone and color. In this floral theme, the shapes described by the various elements approximately determine the main areas of color.

Right. *Preliminary study carried out by Ester Serra, on which the compositional construction has been indicated. Notice that the arrangement of the elements revolves around dividing the square into different triangles. You will see that each triangle corresponds, more or less, to one of the main colors.*

Zone A: *Background triangles, predominantly pale gray.*

Zone B: *Triangle containing the color green.*

Zone C: *Triangle containing most of the flowers. Red.*

Zone D: *This corresponds to a more stable element—a square—which is predominantly white.*

Zone E: *Dark gray triangle corresponding to the drapery beneath the flower pot.*

Zone F: *Small triangular area at the base, pale gray in color.*

Layout sketch

On a textured paper, similar to Ingres paper, our artist made a layout sketch of her subject, using an earth-colored pastel stick. The fact that she has used a pastel and not charcoal allows her to apply wax crayon on top of a subtle base color that will breathe through without dirtying later color applications.

Left. *Sketch of the subject made by Ester Serra using a burnt sienna pastel. Observe the simplicity with which she interpreted the compositional layout of the previous page.*

Bottom left. *Close-up photographs taken during the application of the first areas of color (step 1). See how the wax crayons are applied, flat against the paper, so that their whole length is used. The intention is to block in color, rather than to define form.*

Step 1

Ester Serra has started by blocking in the gray of the basecloth and the red of the flowers on top of the previous sketch. These form a link through color between two of the main triangular areas of the composition. The method of working is illustrated in the two close-up photographs on the previous page.

Right. *How the picture looks after the color of the two main areas of the composition were blocked in. At this point the advantage of having made the base sketch in sienna pastel rather than charcoal becomes clear.*

Bottom right. *In these two close-ups (which correspond to the second stage of the picture's development) you can see how the colors were blended after being applied directly with wax crayon. A hog's hair brush loaded with turpentine was used to produce this effect. The tip of the crayon is applied (far right) to build up tone and define form.*

Step 2

The artist began the second stage of her demonstration by coloring in all the leaves around the flowers in bright green. She then reinforced in reddish brown the folds in the drapery that appear in shadow. After working directly on the picture in wax crayon, she blended the color using the methods described in the two close-ups on the previous page.

This technique of blending the pigment has been used extensively on the leaves and flowers where there is a greater variety of shades and where the forms are more complex and irregular.

Ester Serra gave the background a brown base color on top of which she applied a thick layer of white wax crayon. This superimposition of color created the warm gray seen in the photograph. The brown she used for the background is the same as the one used for the shaded areas in the folds of the drapery and also in the first touches of color applied to the vase.

Left. Close-up photographs taken during the blending, with the help of plenty of turpentine, of the white and brown colors of the background, after which neither the texture of the paper nor that of the wax pigment remain visible.

Step 3

This shows a transition stage during which the artist worked on making the drapery beneath the vase more substantial and on defining more sharply the different parts of the plant. She outlined in white the edges of those parts that stand against a white background, and in violet those in shadow. Notice in the illustration directly above that the vase has been given greater volume through a subtle gradation of grays around its surface, with the brown of the background breathing through.

Step 4. Final stage

In the final step of Ester Serra's picture she enriched the color and clarified some of the forms that, until now, were still a little vague. Look at the three close-up pictures on the right and in the finished picture on the opposite page, and observe the colors used in the different areas of the composition:

In the flowers: On a base of uniform red, the artist worked with ochre, deep carmine, gray, and orange. *On the leaves:* On top of a green base there are touches of Prussian blue, ochre, violet, and deep green. *On the drapery:* Over the brownish-gray of the darkest areas, touches of violet have been added. Prussian blue has been used to outline the edges of some of the folds. More pigment has been added to build up the highlighted areas of the folds in the cloth over the base gray color and white. The colors were applied directly with the crayons and then a torchon was used to even out the color of certain areas: Look at the second of the three close-ups.

In the finished work the harmony of color is easy to see. Throughout the picture the background brown breathes through (this in itself is a harmonizing influence) and there are no violent contrasts. The carmine color in the drapery represents a visual link between the violets on the leaves and the reds and ochres of the flowers, preventing any feeling of a sudden impact between the two.

Left, opposite page, from top to bottom. *Working in ochre on some of the flowers to suggest a foreshortened view of many of the petals. Notice how the light falls differently on them. The torchon being used on the leaves is to give a greater feeling of depth. Prussian blue being applied on top of one of the violet-colored leaves. Deepening the color brings the viewer closer to the picture. In contrast, those parts softened with the torchon tend to recede.*

Above. *The finished work. Each area of the composition has been treated in a different way.*

Still life in wax crayon

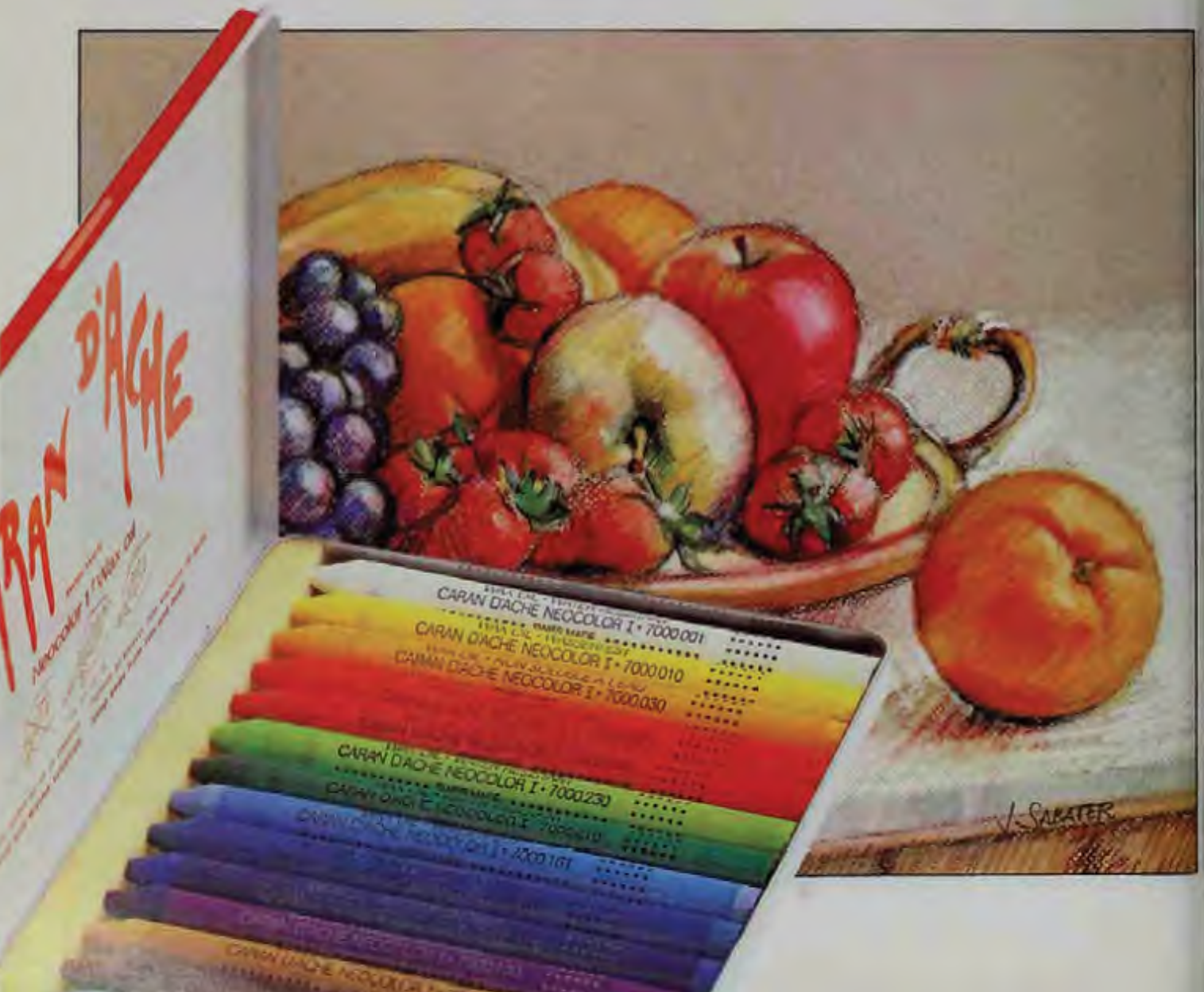
Wax crayons as we know them today, presented as solid colored wax sticks, are relatively modern. They can be used in a way similar to colored pencils although, in the hands of an expert, they can produce more pictorial and less draftsman-like results. In addition, the possibility of dissolving them in turpentine makes them a very versatile medium.

Other techniques with wax crayons

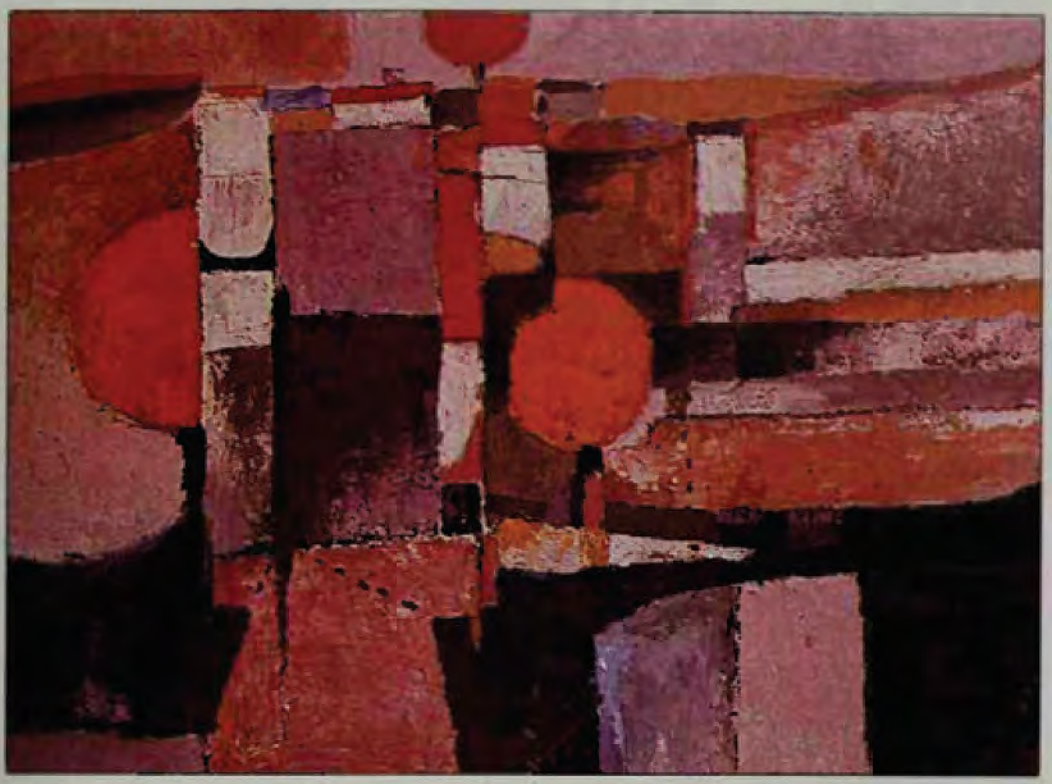
Modern crayons have virtually eliminated the technique of encaustic, which is hardly surprising given the complications involved in employing it. Encaustic is a method of mixing colored pigment in hot wax and then applying it (generally on a wooden surface) with spatulas and other implements heated to ensure that the wax stays in a melted state. In addition to this, the wooden support often needs to be kept at a temperature that prevents the layers of wax applied from becoming totally hard while work is in progress. As you can imagine, this is slow and difficult technique.

Wax crayons are much easier to apply and are perfect for working on paper with a deeply grained surface. Varying textures may be obtained by juxtaposing areas of dense color (which penetrates the paper surface completely) with others in which the grain remains clearly visible.

This is one method employed by Juan Sabater in producing the still life we are about to show you. This work will be an example of a classic way of dealing with composition as well as being classic in its conception. As always we would like you to regard this exercise as compulsory, although, of course, you are free to use it merely as a guide for your own work. If you prefer, set up your own still life, but interpret it in wax crayon following Juan Sabater's methods.



Two examples from masters of the medium



Left. *Abstract composition by Josep Maria Avila, encaustic on wood. Encaustic is a pictorial technique now considered as "historical," as egg tempera and fresco painting.*

Below. *Still life drawn in wax crayons by José Maria Parramón on a medium-textured Canson watercolor paper. Notice the pictorial quality achieved by applying successive layers of color (without fear of exerting too much pressure) and by working the surface extensively with the fingers. The warmth of the hand softens the wax and makes it possible to produce beautiful effects with blended color.*

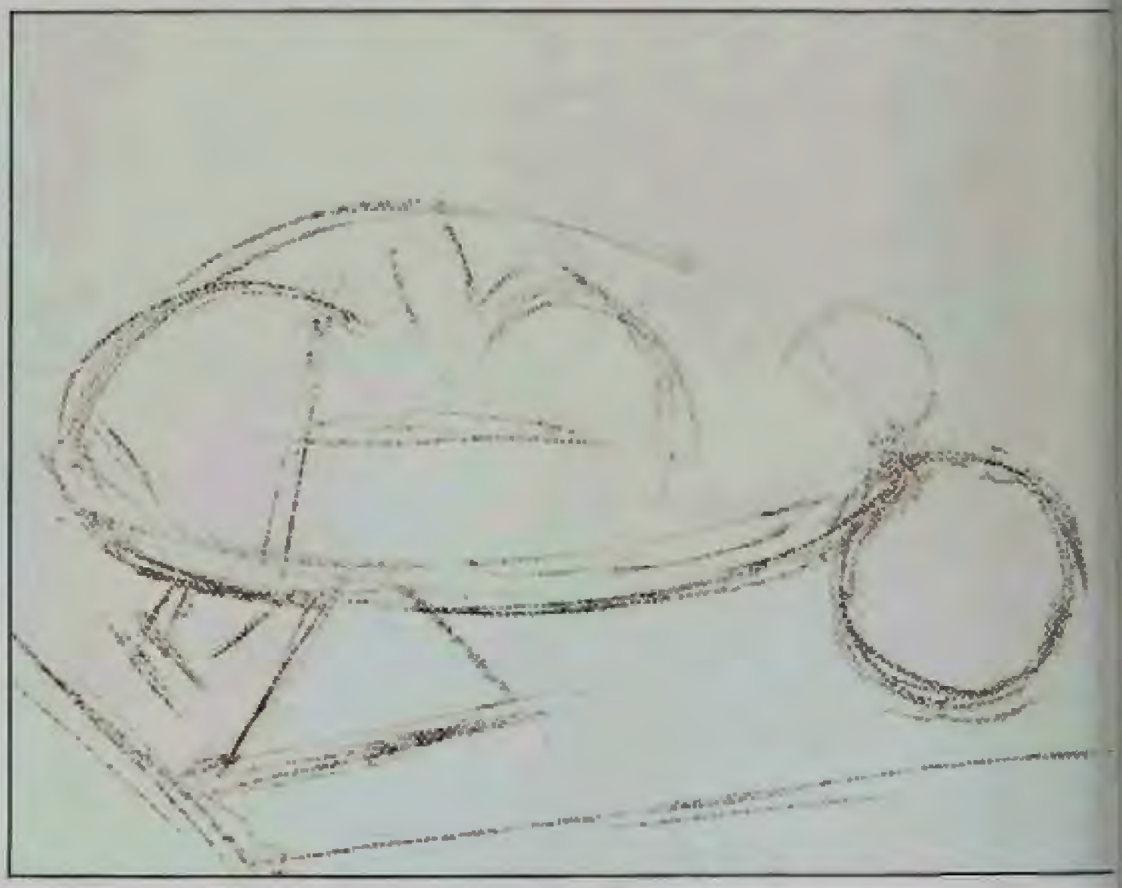
The composition

Take a look at the fruit you have in your refrigerator and arrange some in a still life in which yellows and reds are the dominant colors. If you are lucky enough to find some fruit with a violet color, such as the grapes Sabater has used (figs will do nicely too), you will be able to counterbalance the predominantly warm color scheme with a cooler element. Notice how in our composition the orange on the right balances the excessive weight that the bunch of grapes gives the left half of the picture.

Layout sketch

Use a sheet of medium-textured Canson watercolor paper, about 10 × 14 in. (25 × 35 cm). Try and find a pale, warm gray-colored paper like the background of the photograph, so this can become the base color in your picture and save having to draw it.

On this paper, with a few fairly general lines, locate the main areas of the composition: The more or less oval shape of the arrangement of fruit, the sphere of the solitary orange and the triangle formed by the three strawberries. Work with a black-colored pencil, as charcoal or graphite will prevent the wax from adhering to the paper surface.



Preliminary drawing

Using the layout sketch as a base and with the same black-colored pencil, Juan Sabater has built up a line drawing in which each element of the picture is perfectly situated and its outlines are defined.

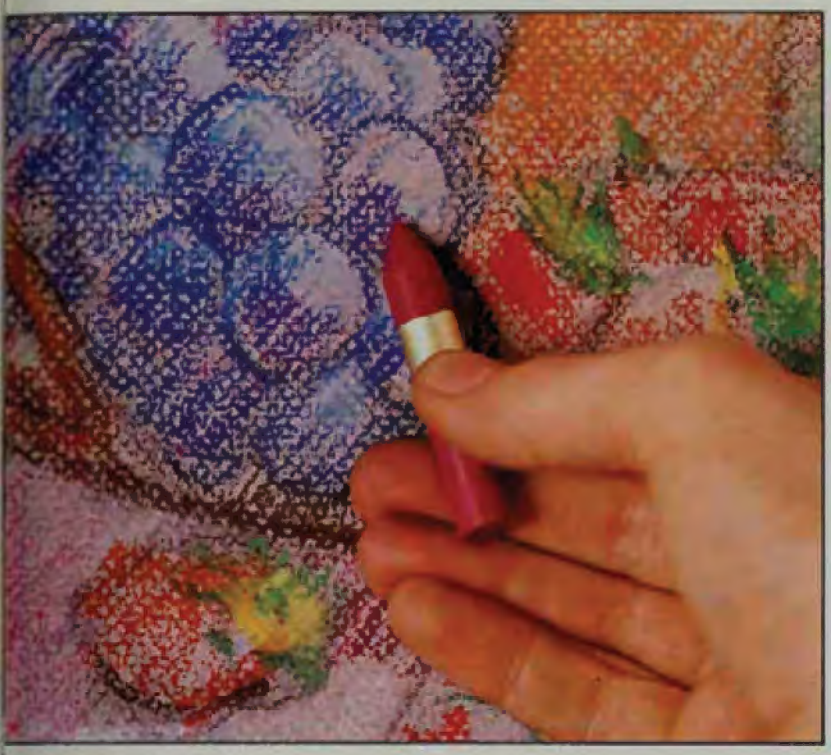
When you reach this stage in your own still life, try to smudge the drawing as little as possible. Work carefully, putting little pressure on the pencil while establishing the position of each fruit. Once you are sure of its shape, size and location, you can firm up your drawing using a much harder, thicker line.

Left. *Close-up of the line drawing. In this full-size illustration, you can see how heavy and thick the lines are.*

Below. *Line drawing produced prior to applying color. As you will see later, the black outlines will still be visible in the finished picture.*

Right. *Close-ups showing the first layer of base color being applied to the fruit, mainly yellow-orange and vermilion. Notice that a less bright color has been used for the red fruit: A burnt sienna, in fact, which has been lightly applied.*

Below. *Sabater's work after the first application of color. Observe how the artist has tried not to penetrate the paper surface. For the moment, the texture of the paper is visible through each area of color.*



General application of color

After blocking in the first areas of color with cadmium yellow, cadmium orange, and burnt sienna (see the illustrations on the previous page), Juan Sabater continued to work on the general, definitive coloring of his composition. Study the grapes. They have been given a base color of ultramarine blue while in the darkest areas, a layer of carmine has been laid on top. Deep vermilion has been applied very skillfully; pressure has been exerted where it was appropriate for the color to be quite thick (in the darker places), whereas in the most brightly lit areas (such as on the strawberries), the grainy texture of the paper has been left clearly visible.

Left. *A layer of carmine being applied in the areas in shade, on top of the blue base color of the grapes.*

Below. *General look of the still life after the main areas of color have been blocked in. Note the two different textures already visible at this stage.*

Final evaluation of tone

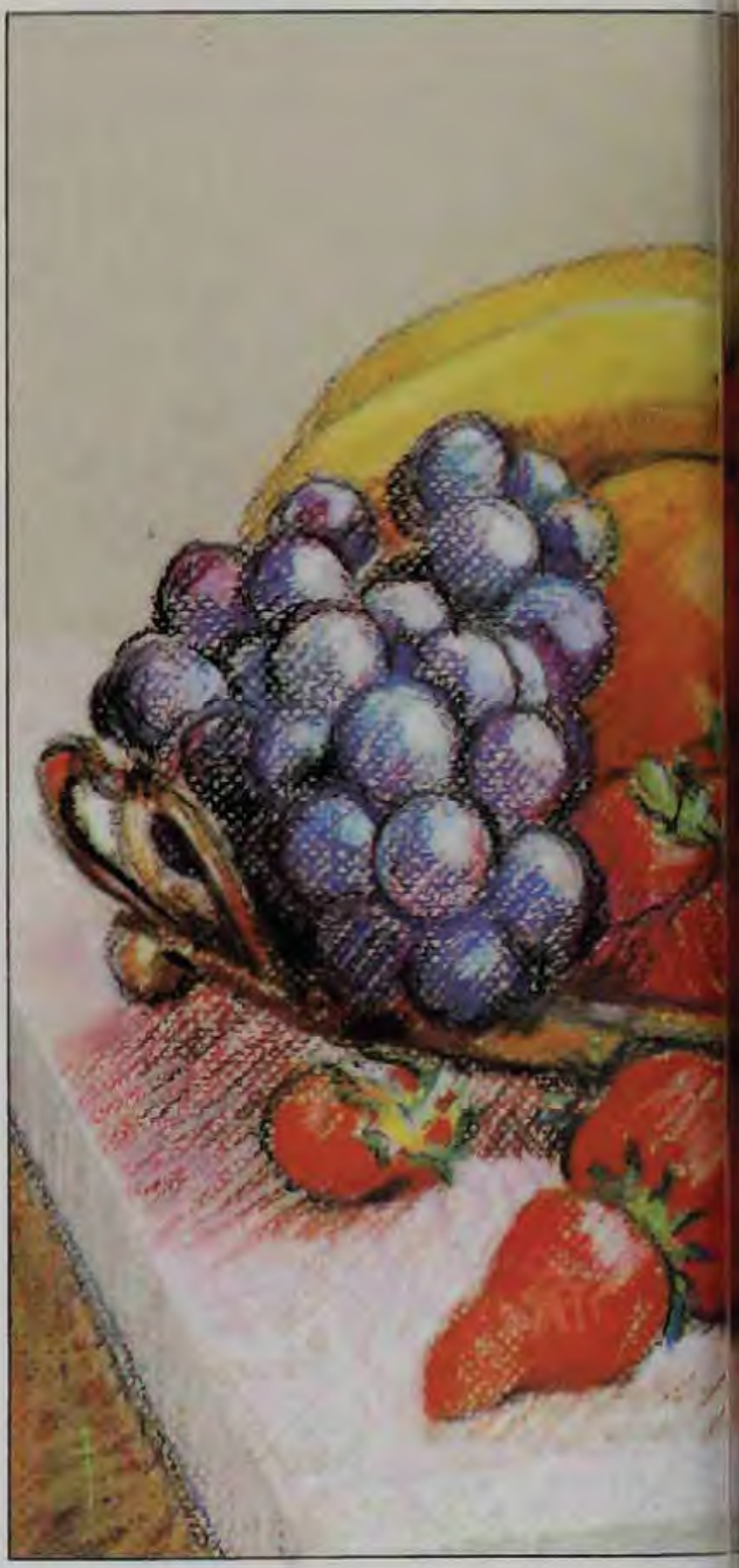
After the general color was laid in, as shown on the previous page, Juan Sabater began to work on the nuances of color and the highlights that gave his finished picture the look he sought. He worked at building up the pigment (ingraining the wax into the paper) in those areas that appear as highlights (see the original photograph of the subject on page 80) and he also applied white wax crayon to those parts of the picture that demanded more sophisticated gradation or reflected highlights: On the scarlet-colored apple, on the grapes, and some of the strawberries, for instance.

Notice a few details: The background has not been colored. The artist has used the color of the paper itself, without any modification. The black outlines of the preliminary drawing, although slightly obscured by the color, still play an important role in describing the different forms.

The same colors that dominate the composition appear on the table top. Shades of the colors of the fruit are visible in the white marble and this contributes significantly to the overall chromatic harmony of the picture. Finally, notice the two ways in which the wax crayons have been used. As we said at the beginning of this exercise, Sabater intended to create a counterpoint between the smooth texture of the pigment itself when applied thickly and the more vibrant texture of the paper's grain when it is allowed to show through.

Below. *Close-up showing the contrasting textures described above.*

Right. *The finished picture. A good example of wax crayon work.*



V. SABATER

Five special techniques

The application of any pictorial medium might be called an original technique. Any technique adapts to the characteristics of the medium being used. The technique of oil painting, for instance, consists of applying it with a brush onto a canvas, regulating the thickness of the color with linseed oil or turpentine. However, we all know that oil colors may be applied in many different ways: With a spatula, using an impasto technique, overlaying thin washes of color, mixing the pigment with gypsum powder to create textured surfaces, and so on. With any pictorial process, techniques can be found that depart from traditional methods and offer unexpected and sometimes very attractive results.

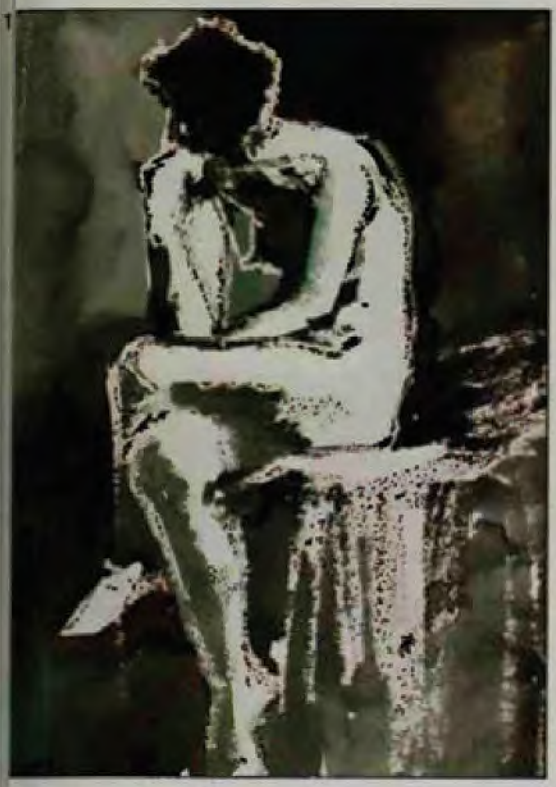
Wax crayons are no exception—quite the opposite, in fact. Wax crayon is a medium that particularly lends itself to the exploration of new methods and techniques. Besides the traditional method of using the crayons, in a way similar to pencils, a series of techniques is possible that we have decided to call "special," for want of a better word.

Our goal in choosing these examples is to introduce you to five different ways of using wax colors. We are not going to ask you now to do any specific exercises (we will do this later on), but we will try to show you some tricks you might be able to put into practice when working by yourself. We will also present you with some examples demonstrating each special technique.

You will need the equipment shown in the photograph below: A selection of wax colors (a box of individual crayons), a piece of cheap canvas, a fine-haired brush (No. 8 or similar), another hog's-hair brush (No. 12, for instance), some watercolors or gouache paints, and a bottle of turpentine.

Five examples

1



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4

1. Watercolor figure drawing using the "negative" technique with wax.

2. Floral theme painted in watercolor showing various "negative" effects obtained by using wax.

3. Seascape in wax crayon showing the effect of scratching out and of applications of turpentine.

4. Landscape in wax crayon with scratching out on layers of superimposed color.

5. Village street in wax crayon with applications of diluted pigment.

5

1. Working in negative
With some ordinary or paraffin wax (you might use the stub of a candle, for instance), cover parts of a piece of medium-textured Canson paper. The wax will reject any water-based color applied on top of it and will give you some attractive negative effects showing the original paper color.

1

2. Working in negative with different colors
On a piece of coarse-grained paper, make patches of different colors using wax crayons. Go over these with a wash of black paint, which will only be absorbed where there is no wax.

2

3. Using turpentine
Apply wide lines of wax crayon on a piece of fine-textured paper. With a sufficiently wide hog's-hair brush loaded with turpentine, brush over these lines. A uniform and transparent effect is produced.

3

4. Scratching out
On any base color (red, for example) apply another, darker, color. If you scratch the surface with a scalpel or a razor blade using different strokes, you will reveal the color underneath.

4

5. Melted wax
Wax melts when subjected to heat. Take advantage of this to produce lumpy-textured surfaces and layers of brilliant color. Apply the color when the wax is soft or by allowing it to drip onto the paper.

5

Although it may appear to be the case, this is not an intuitive work but, rather, a carefully considered one. The artist begins with a sketch, executed with the greatest precision, in which the outlines and shaded areas are perfectly defined.

Notice that the wax has been applied with the aim of covering (though not too precisely) the illuminated areas of the drawing.

Another observation: The washes have been applied using the wet-into-wet technique, beginning with the lightest tones, and superimposing darker shades. The different tonal values in the background make a powerful contribution to the visual impact of the picture. The darkest tones are adjacent to the most illuminated area, while the lighter parts fall alongside the darker shades of the head and chest, lending a sense of depth to the picture.

This technique may be used in combination with others to achieve a particularly effective touch within a picture. The artist may choose to make this effect the focal point of a picture, as is the case in this magnificent example by Miguel Ferrón. Using this method involves sacrificing precision in order to convey a feeling of form, created by a negative image of vague outlines.

Nonetheless, the resulting image may well be an attractive vagueness, a visual impression that suggests unequivocally a certain form and pose, without leaving the viewer in doubt as he or she contemplates the washes of color and contrasting areas of white.

Above. *Pencil sketch used as a basis for the application of wax and the washes that were laid over it.*

Right. *Watercolor by Miguel Ferrón with negative areas drawn in wax.*

Working in negative with colors

forms, it demanded a great deal of thought from the artist. This does not mean, however, that he has abandoned his intuition. Look particularly at the white areas: They have been obtained by using the negative technique, which means that their size and position in the picture have been thought out in advance. It is important that when preserving areas with wax (on white paper), the artist keeps a mental image of what he or she hopes to achieve. Despite having the pencil sketch to refer to, this kind of work requires constant thought to prevent the liquid color wash from spreading into areas intended to be negative. This could result in the loss of the initial idea as well as overall control of the picture.

Remember that the basic idea is to cover with wax pigment those parts of the picture that require a particular color and that must not be affected by later washes applied on top of them. The idea is not to obtain a negative image, as in the previous example, but rather to cover up specific areas of color, to protect them from the effects of the water-based paint. In this example by Miguel Ferrón you can see the skill with which he regulated the pressure applied when laying down the areas of wax color. Some parts are completely opaque while others show "pores" into which the watercolor penetrated so that when dry a grainy appearance can be seen in parts of the finished work. On this occasion, too, the artist used as a guide a pencil sketch in which, applying bold strokes, he indicated the main tonal values he wished to maintain in his colored version.

Although this seemingly carefree work seems to be an intuitive color sketch with its vague

Using turpentine

For an artist, "turp" is a familiar piece of professional slang. Turpentine essence is used in various painting techniques and may be applied over wax crayons. The usual method of doing this is demonstrated in the example provided for us on this page by Miguel Ferrón. Whether working from a photograph (see right) or directly from nature, the goal is to make a crayon sketch in which the forms are clearly defined (there can be no subsequent modifications), and to which the first touches of color have been applied.

Once this is complete, you can get to work with the brush and turpentine. Using various brushes, soft- or hog's-hair according to your requirements, the wax is dissolved on the paper. Drag the color to give direction to the brushstrokes or allow different pigments to blend together. Soft-haired brushes will give uniform brushstrokes, whereas hog's-hair brushes will leave drag marks on the paper. The brushstrokes contribute to the drawing process and suggest the texture of different materials, such as the sand on this beach.

Left. Seascape in wax crayon with turpentine washes, produced from the colored sketch you see above. Notice the difference between the way the sea (soft turpentine washes applied with a sable brush) and the beach have been treated. To represent the harder surfaces, Ferrón used hog's-hair brushes, taking advantage of the marks they leave to show the texture of the sand. In the case of the boats and the ropes, he used the scratch technique to good effect.

Scratching out

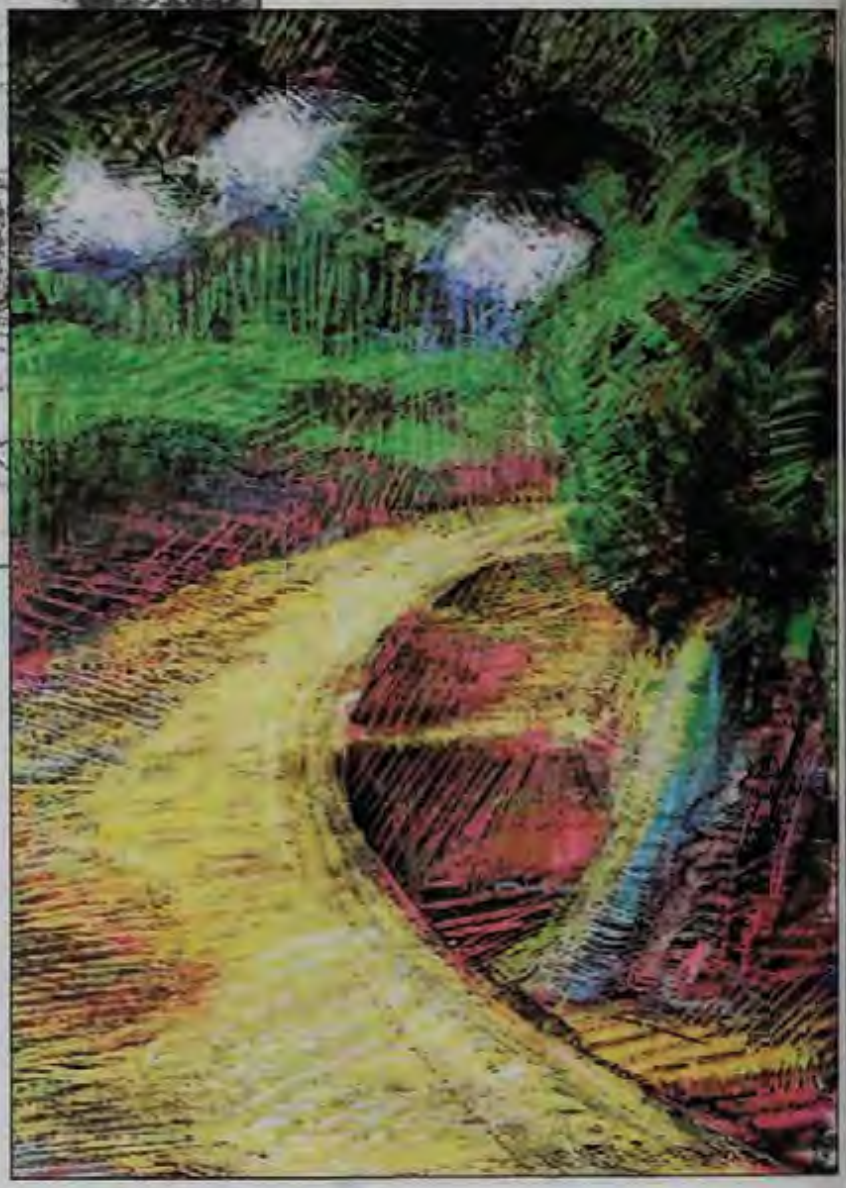
meticulous approach to produce fine, parallel lines or cross-hatching if you want to represent minute detail. In either case, the process itself will be similar: A preliminary tonal sketch will help you keep sight of your original idea. When applying layers of wax, the usual method is to work from light to dark. This does not preclude the possibility of reversing the process in certain areas or to achieve different effects.

Scratching out is a technique with which you can have a lot of fun. It is always possible to find a new shade or a new effect by using a different color or stroke. The artist may get carried away, but it is important to guard against this and not to turn a serious and well-considered piece of work into a jumble of unrelated details.

As explained a little earlier, the scratch technique in wax crayon drawing consists of revealing an underlying color by scratching a superimposed color away. A variety of strokes are used.

Ester Serra has given us one example of this technique. She worked in her own way as you, no doubt, will work in yours. With practice, you will find your own style, which will give character to the drawings in which you use this technique.

You can use the scalpel or razor blade decisively, even furiously. Or, you can adopt a



Right. *Scratched out landscape in wax crayon drawn by Ester Serra. Look closely at specific areas (the tree, the road, the road side, and so forth) and you will see that there are up to three layers of different colors in some places.*

The melted wax technique

To the layman's eyes, this final picture in our exploration of wax crayon techniques might well pass for an oil painting. The thickness of the color applied to the support is more reminiscent of oils than any other pictorial medium. However, this village street has been drawn by Miguel Ferrón entirely in wax crayon.

The method is simple: Whether you are working from a photograph or from nature, you first produce a wax crayon drawing of your chosen subject in the traditional way—by rubbing the crayons directly on to the paper and, at the very most, using your fingers to blend or gradate the color.

The next step is to apply the layers of melted wax color. You will have to bring your wax crayons to their melting point (you can do this with the flame of a cigarette lighter or a candle). The colors must then be applied to the surface of your picture before they become hard again. In this way some wonderfully luminous layers of thick color can be created, especially when seen in contrast with a different background color. Be careful not to go overboard with this technique, though. Limit yourself to applying melted wax in just one or two colors and only in specific areas of the picture.

Left. Village street. Wax crayon drawing with layers of melted wax.

Notice how the artist restrained himself, using this technique only for certain areas of white, (on the brightest walls), ochre, and scarlet. See how the thick coat of melted white wax on the wall shines out against the ochre base color.

Landscape in wax crayon with turpentine wash

For this exercise we are going to use one of the five special techniques using wax crayon described on page 86. This one takes advantage of the fact that wax pigment is soluble in turpentine. We will use this to work with a brush on certain areas of color, to give uniformity to certain shades, or to blur some of the more obvious individual strokes.

We would like you to carry out this landscape in wax crayon, using a brush and turpentine for parts of the exercise.

As an example, we will show you the development of a painting by Juan Sabater. It is an autumn landscape in which the bright green grass provides a strong contrast with the golden leaves of the trees.

Our example is just that: Something for you to copy. You may paint your own landscape, as long as you use the same materials and follow the same steps as Sabater.

Left. Photograph of the scene Juan Sabater painted with wax crayons and turpentine wash. Undoubtedly, the most attractive feature of this landscape is the contrast between the greens in the foreground and the ochres in the middle plane, a reflection of the autumn leaves as they bask in the light of a sinking sun.

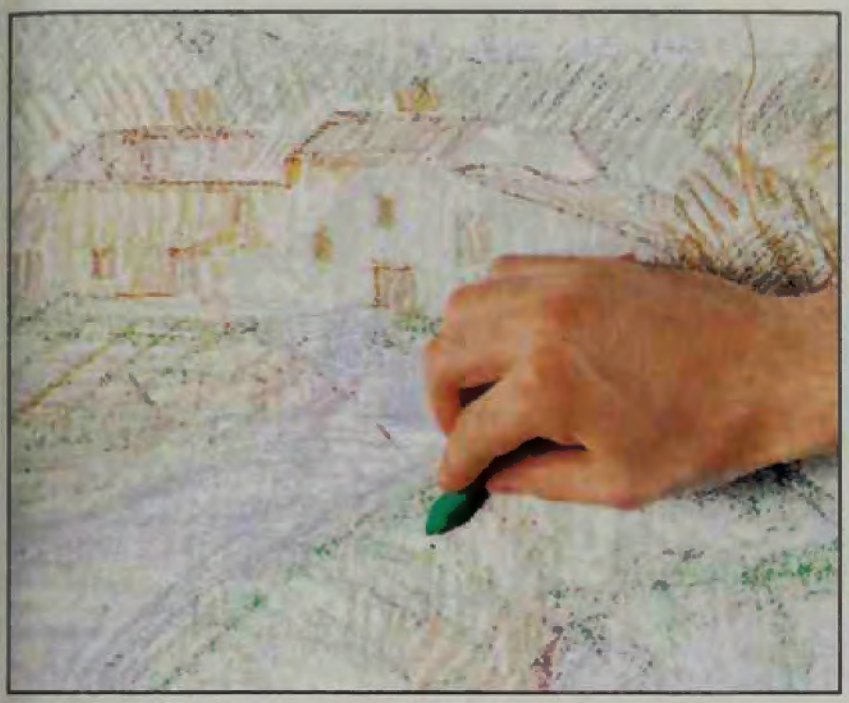
The layout sketch

As usual, the artist has begun this work by making a layout sketch. In this instance, Sabater used a fairly hard HB graphite pencil. He has been careful not to make too many pencil strokes because these could spoil the wax colors, especially as turpentine is going to be used which will pick up any traces of graphite. So with this in mind, Sabater has made a faint sketch, simply to indicate the essential elements of the picture.

Initial color

Sabater's second step is to introduce the first areas of subtle, warm color on which he will base the tonal and chromatic contrasts to be established later. If Sabater, with his customary enthusiasm when embarking upon a new picture, had allowed himself to overwork the initial pencil sketch, these pale, almost transparent areas of color would already have been spoiled by specks of graphite dust.

These early warm tones have also been applied with considerable restraint, given that the subject could easily have led to a generous but dangerously liberal application of color. At this stage, the artist is still forming his ideas about which colors he is going to use and the order in which he is going to superimpose them. Although one can scrape off wax crayons easily, it is also true that getting rid of color in this way leaves its mark; the color is dirtied in areas where pigment has been scraped away.



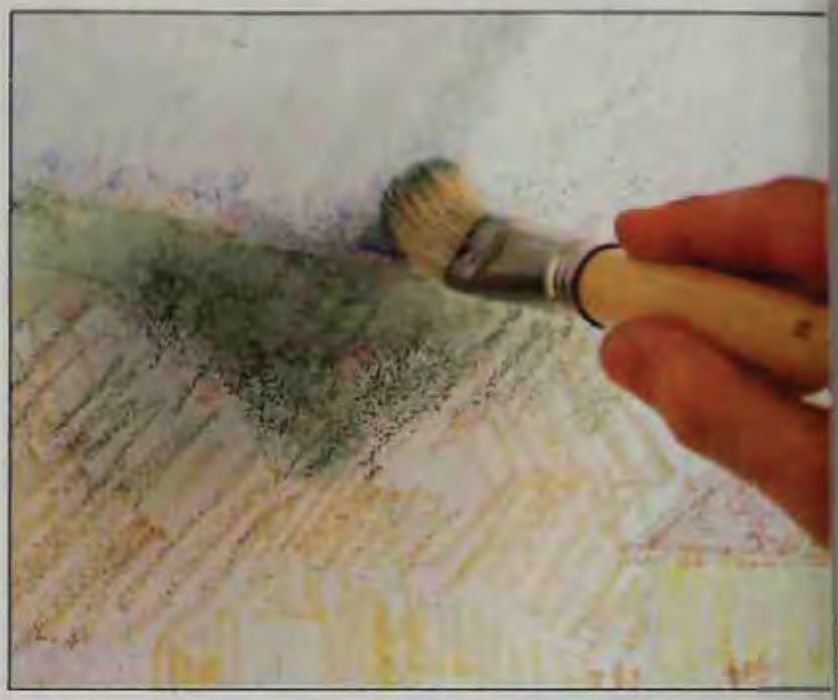
Continue to block in color as Sabater has done. Add a few cold tones on top of the base of warm colors to contrast with the ochre of the wooded area. Suggest the greens of the grass, the blue of the sky, and the uneven surface of the little road with its distinctly violet tinge.

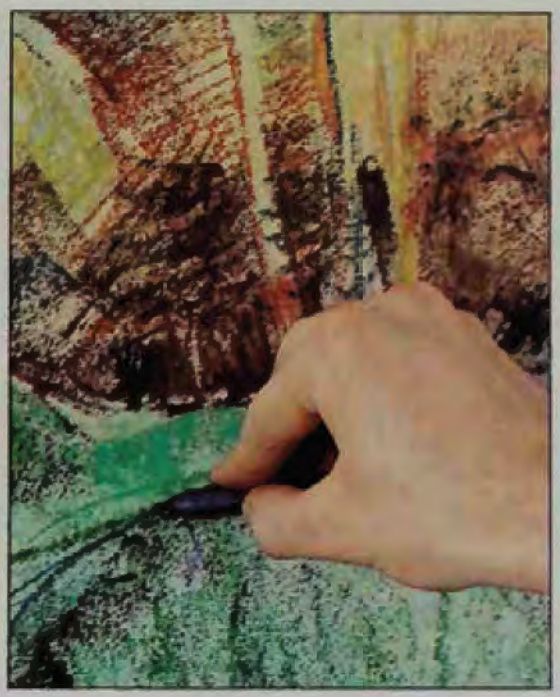
***Left.** Photograph showing the artist superimposing green over the ochres and earth colors used to cover the field in the foreground. Notice that the wax crayon is being applied lengthwise.*

General turpentine wash

Once Sabater completed his soft base color, he decided that it was time to turn the rather irregularly applied strokes into a more uniform spread of color that, as with any wash, provided a good color reference for his picture. To achieve this, he used a flat, No. 12 hog's-hair brush and artist's quality turpentine. In the close-up photograph on your right, you can see that the liquid was applied directly onto the paper, the idea being to dissolve previously applied color. There is no need to dissolve the wax pigment on a plate before applying it. Using the method shown, you can achieve perfectly good coverage, uniformity and transparency of color.

Practice will show you that the brightness of the white paper surface will help you to regulate the transparency of your color while spreading it around or mixing it with adjacent areas of color.





Dark colors

Working with bits of wax crayon of different sizes, Sabater has introduced the darker colors, both warm and cool. He has established a clear distinction between light and shade throughout the picture.

The end of this process (see below) marks the completion of the general tone setting. From the contrasts established at this stage, the artist will go on to enrich the colors of his painting.

Final stage

Whites, grays, greens, blues, and yellows were used to fill in many of the gaps still visible in Sabater's picture after the application of the turpentine and the dark areas of the previous stage. He enriched the overall color of the picture, partly by applying wax crayon directly, and partly by using a brush and turpentine to dissolve existing strokes of color. Another technique used by the artist (especially on the grays of the road and the yellows in the grass) was to apply wax crayon to his chosen area before the turpentine was completely dry; the crayon became soft again and produced a very interesting, rather smudgy effect. In order to take advantage of this possibility, you have to work after the turpentine wash has been applied.

You can also dampen a small area with turpentine if you wish to produce this effect in one particular spot.

J. JAGATER

Study of a work by Degas

This work, according to its creator Juan Sabater, is intended to be an accurate and respectful study of a work by a great master Degas. The objective? To learn that it is possible to bring together the spirit of investigation and an interest in retaining classical themes.

Sabater tells us, "I must admit that Degas is a personal favorite, precisely because, with his almost poetic style, he was able to combine the two concepts: Investigation (the search for new paths) and tradition (remaining faithful to the timeless themes of art).

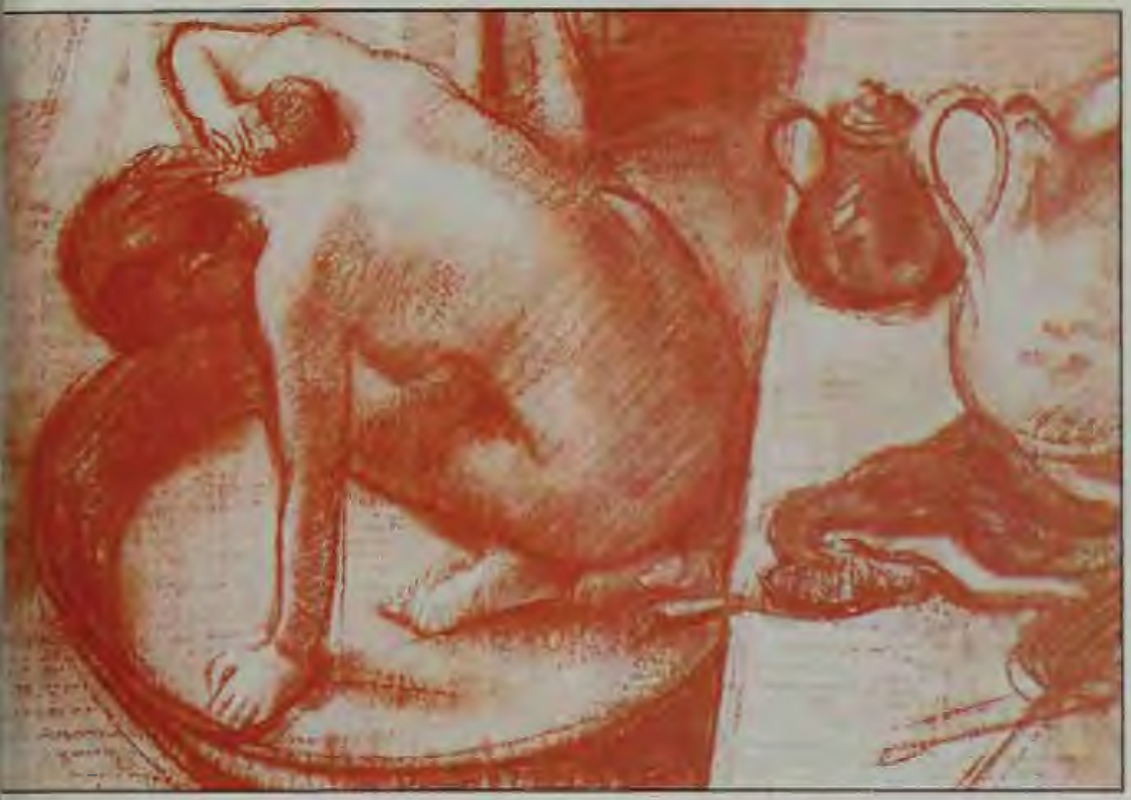
"I would like the reader to understand the difference between my idea of making a study and that of making a copy.

"First, I was very aware that the original picture was created in pastel, a medium of which Degas was undeniably a master. In contrast, I have produced my study in wax crayon on white Basik paper. Initially, this imposes technical limitations, but also poses a challenge to my ability to interpret a great work of art.

"As you follow the steps I took in this absorbing exercise, I want you to retain a respect for the original work at the same time that you work boldly, without resorting to grids or any other precise measuring process. Work in an intuitive way, trying to appreciate space and form.

"There is little else for me to say, really: The few words that accompany the illustrations showing the development of my work will be more than enough for you to understand each stage.

"So, off you go—don't be afraid!"



1. Preliminary study

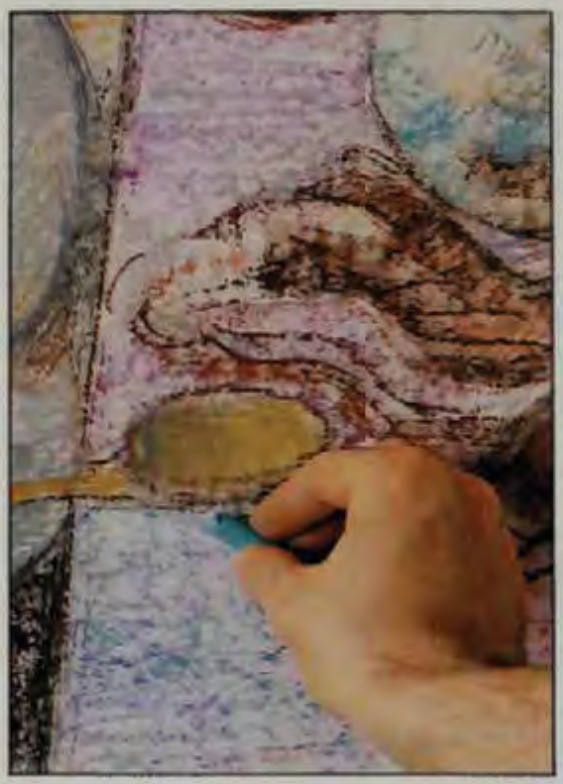
"Having clarified my ideas, I began a study in sanguine crayon, on a 7½ × 11½ in. (20 × 30 cm) piece of Ingres paper, exploring the form, composition and tonal values of the original work."

2. Layout sketch (below)

"I made a lively charcoal sketch on a piece of Basik paper about 19½ × 27½ in. (50 × 70 cm), adapted to the proportions of the original. I tried to locate only the basic forms, feeling that the color and the tonall values are also part of the drawing process."

3. The initial background color

"After brushing a cloth over the outline sketch and fixing it, I started to apply wide strokes of gray crayon that I then contrasted with some touches of warm color; from the beginning these warm touches seemed important to the balance of the composition. The white of the paper helps in establishing an early feeling of volume. These close-ups show the two main ways of applying wax crayon: Holding it flat or using its tip."



4. Applying more color

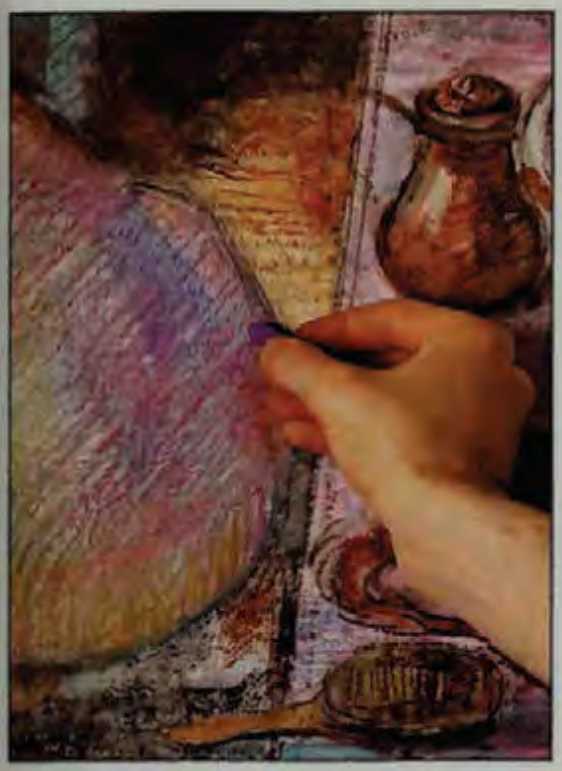
"By this time I am completely absorbed in my picture; I have built up some of the important tones that define the general shapes, and also some of the shading and projected shadows (those the figure projects on the bathtub, for instance).

"However, the most significant step is the introduction of new colors: Ochres, blues, and violets. Continually playing with warm-cool contrasts, I introduced some base color in areas that had been neglected up to this point."

5. The first layers of color

"In fact, when I refer to layers of color, I mean vigorous strokes that leave a thicker deposit of wax on the paper. In the close-ups on the right, you can see what I am describing in the lumbar region of the figure.

"In reality, this stage is no more than a continuation of the previous one; there is no break between the two. Notice, in the close-up pictures that, to achieve total coverage of some areas, I resorted to a brush and a little turpentine."



6. Balancing the color scheme

"As soon as the previous stages had given my study a certain pictorial quality, I decided to take a break. When I returned to my work, I realized that the next stage would have to consist of establishing a definitive equilibrium between the cool and warm areas. I forced myself to work confidently, without allowing myself too much time to think, outlining some of the forms and intensifying the earth colors and the violets."

Right, close-ups
a) The gray wax crayon at work on a highlight.
b) The black wax crayon outlining objects on the dressing table to give them more substance.
c) Applying a complementary color. The blue strokes tone down the yellow and, in combination with it, produce a vibrant effect. The same thing has been done on parts of the floor.

a

b

c

7. Nuances of color

"On top of the strong base color that dominated my study until now, I started modifying the highlights and shadows by using touches of white and gray. These helped me to create a soft and elegantly modeled figure. By applying the black outlines and complementary colors in some places (always using Degas' original as a guide), the light is more clearly defined and so, as a consequence, are the various forms."

Above.
The finished study. It is interesting to see how the vibrancy of color (the quality in which different colors are seen simultaneously without losing their individual character) has been achieved by applying pigment without mixing it together. Each color "breathes" through the one above it so that in every case there is a visual fusion, an illusion of blended color that does not actually exist. Finally, notice the importance of the direction of the strokes in marking out the principal planes of the composition. If you have the opportunity to study Degas' work, you will see that he is the undisputed master in applying these techniques.