

Dee Cowell - Flowers in Pastel

Dee's demonstration gave us three talks in one.

She explained how to use pastels effectively while painting a display of roses and irises.

Then, since she was born in Zimbabwe - Southern Rhodesia, she illustrated her talk with African and safari incident; and third, she showed us how to use two tv cameras to show her work on screens so we could see exactly what she was doing while drawing on the flat.

"I use Daler Rowney Derwent black Murano drawing paper - it's smooth on one side and rough on the other - I'm using the smooth side."

Dee then showed us her pastels box



- and her tray of pastel pencils.



"I use the hard pastels underneath and the soft ones on top. The hard ones have a square section with a sharp edge and the soft ones are round."

"Drawing comes first. Work from the centre of the flower but not in circles – you'll end up with a cabbage. Draw a series of straight lines." She then demonstrated how a rose can be made this way.

"And as for a vase, start with an upright centre line and measure to the edge of the vase and wherever the outline changes direction measure the same distance from the centre line to the other side - this makes sure it's symmetrical. Looking down on a vase is much more interesting than looking at it straight on from the side.



So we start with a hard pastel to block in the overall composition - the shape of the arrangement. I don't put pastels back in the box, otherwise I'd lose them. I put them on a paper plate next to the painting. Now I'll add the pink and the deeper blue - then the green leaves."

By this time we'd heard about Dee going to school in Harare, 'O' and 'A', levels and going on to study art at University.

"I'm going to use a lightish blue for the background using the side of the pastel. I don't blend colours on the paper except for the background - and I do that with the side of my hand. Unlike watercolour, pastels don't get lighter as they dry - what you see is what you get. I think I've got a rose in the wrong place - let me take it out by lifting it off with this dry brush"



“Now in go the vases - the white is good to add for contrast and glass is lovely to paint. I don't often use black but with a light touch it makes a lovely contrast by the side of the bowl and the petals.”

“Sharpening pencils can be very tiresome – they're always breaking. But Daler has produced a very simple and cheap plastic tool for holding the pencil while you sharpen it – most effective. And here's their Derwent embossing tool which is fun – and their electric rubber for lifting off unwanted pastel - all useful little gadgets.”

Dee then told us how with her husband she moved to Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. She now lives in Wimborne.

“I discovered that the same pigment is used in all the different media. Cobalt blue is the same colour whether it's in oils, acrylic or pastels, so if I run out of a particular pastel I may be able to find the same colour in a bit of watercolour paint. Pastels are all water soluble and I sometimes use a brush with some water to paint with. It's just like using watercolour. And on canvas it can work really well. Here's a painting of irises I did on canvas using watercolour. Yes, watercolour on canvas is very effective.”



We were then taken on a safari with accounts of her trips out to see giraffes and elephants, and how she used this experience to illustrate a friend's story books for teaching children to read English.

“Now I've got several layers of newspaper under what I'm doing, so I can press really hard as I add touches of white to the edges of the rose - and of course the pencils are very good for the detail. The inside of the roses will be a darker red, and the petal edges and the highlights on the glass bowl will be white.”



“So what do you think ? I'll do a bit more on it when I get home. Mind you it's a messy business !”

This is what we, the audience, saw - the two television screens. The one on the left was from the camera above Dee's drawing paper which showed us what she was doing, and the one on the right was the camera looking at the flower arrangement to show us what Dee was seeing and painting.



Robert McLeish