

Colin Courtice – Pastels – 9th September 2013

Colin was embarking on a pastel landscape in the New Forest. The majority of pastel artists use soft pastels for general work but hard pastels are good for detail work and come in square sticks. These are sharpened with a surgical scalpel and an emery block like the ones used for finger nails.

As far as paper is concerned Colin uses Canson Mi-Tentes paper which is softer. There is a paper called 'Art Spectrum' which comes from Australia but is very rough. The coarser the paper the brighter the colours will be but will use up pastels very quickly.

Colin said he can't start a painting unless he has a visual guide, i.e. a photograph, he doesn't copy directly from a photo but uses it as a starting point, sometimes several for different aspects. He also does a quick charcoal sketch so he can arrange the composition to his liking. Tick marks are placed around the sketch for a scaling up grid to keep the proportions correct.



A few guide lines were put in from the basic sketch; the main tree, path and another clump of bushes and during the process he will keep referring back to the plan. Pastel is very forgiving and if there is a bit that one is unhappy with it can be just brushed away.



Choosing the colour of the paper will help you into the painting, Colin, in this instance, was using 'Australian Grey' which has a purple/pinkish tinge to it.

Pastels, by their very nature, cannot be pre-mixed and so he has 300ish different colours and shades of colour but they can be blended by rubbing with the finger.

He started with an 'under-painting' of white to highlight the focus of the painting, then yellow blended in with the finger-tips.



A green under-paint was then applied but leaving a gap for the main tree, it does however go past the edge of the tree as it will be highlighted later



The background trees were worked in in layers. When working on foliage, think in terms of light source and which is the far side of the tree; start with the far side of the tree and work forward.



When selecting colours to use Colin has a tray nearby for the ones he decides to use at the time and any that are wrong for the current picture after trying them are returned to the box.

He then started on the main tree with light green and brown down the shaded side, this will be returned to later. Some of the branches were put in; not straight of course; if the pastel is twisted with the fingers it is impossible to have a straight line. Charcoal is then used for the shaded undersides of the branches, then the foreground foliage was put in with light green; not stippled but using small strokes.



The fore and mid ground where the bluebells will be put was darkened down with a darker shade of green using vertical strokes to represent the flower stems and leaves. Light blue was then put in for the flowers using small strokes, not quite stippling, as before, then a darker blue for the flowers in the shaded parts.





The finished painting.

A few tricks of the trade:-

The old masters used pastels as a sketching medium in the field.

When doing pastel paintings always use an easel with a gutter at the bottom to catch the pastel dust.

To make corrections, a hog's hair brush can be used; the gutter as mentioned above will be useful during this.

Colin never uses fixer as it makes the pictures darker but when finished the picture is banged down on a table to remove loose pastel. Then a newspaper is placed over the painting and then it is rubbed over with something smooth such as a carpenter's pencil.

When framed the mount should be double and have a gutter made with extra strips of card to catch any dust falling off the painting.



Colin with the finished painting.