The Potential of Pastel
AFAC Conference 2011

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What is pastel?

- Soft/dry pastel is a stick form of the same pigment used in other fine art mediums (oil, acrylic, watercolour etc.)

- Ground pigments mixed with a binder (usually gum tragacanth) and sometimes a filler such as chalk (especially in lighter tints)
  - Very different from coloured chalk!

- Comes in varying degrees of hardness based on amount of filler; softest are pure pigment

- One of the most permanent of mediums, does not change over time
- Very different from oil pastels, which are oil and wax based and never fully dry (soft and oil pastels are not usually used together)
Advantages of pastel

- Dry, always ready to use
- No solvents or liquids required; tactile, direct
- Portable, good for plein air
- No change to tone or hue once on surface
- Stable, unchanging over time, very archival
- Opaque, mistakes corrected, changes easily made, relatively easily learned

- Flexible, many ways of applying

- Can be used to draw (support visible) or paint (support mostly covered)

- Brilliant, sparkling, intense colour!
Disadvantages of pastel

- Need for many sticks, which are relatively expensive
  - limited ability to mix colours

- Results with cheap pastels are disappointing

- Materials not (yet) readily available

- Sticks are dusty and fragile
- Must be framed under glass

- Supports must be archival/acid free for longevity

- Prejudice in market against works on paper
A history of pastel

- Humans have used earth pigments as a medium since the time of the caveman (Lascaux)
- ‘Invented’ as a fine art medium by Jean Perreal in 1499, in the court of Louis XII
- Used by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519; dry colouring) as a highlight on charcoal and red chalk drawings (portrait of Isabella d’Este, Duchess of Mantua, Louvre)
- Others named it “pastello” from Italian for paste

- Used in northern Italy throughout 1500’s for portraits and cartoons for large religious paintings

- Often on blue paper (carta azzura) which enhanced its effect

- Louis XIV’s portrait by Le Brun (Louvre)
18th century pastels

- Bourgeois women of Venice commissioned society portraits

- Rosalba Carriera (1675-1757) became much in demand for pastel portraits
- Took the fashion to France where it became wildly popular (50 pastel portraits in Paris in 1720)

- Beau-monde society demanded superficial, pretty images but some artists explored the medium more deeply
Jean-Baptist Chardin (1699-1779) took up pastels when failing eyesight prevented him painting in oils
- Explored modeling via slashes of pure pigment, subtle layering
- Depicted everyday scenes of the household
  - Influenced Corot and the Impressionists
Jeanne Etienne Liotard (1702-1789) Swiss pastelist whose unusual perspectives and inclusion of costumes and objects from Constantinople influenced Cezanne and others
Other female pastelists at this time included Theresa Concordia Mengs, Adelaide Labille-Guiard, and Elizabeth Vigee-LeBrun (1755-1842), a court favourite until the Revolution.
Maurice Quentin de Latour (1704-1888)
- Very popular portrait pastelist who sought to depict the sitters’ psychology as well as their appearances
- Worked in broad strokes that enabled him to complete large pieces
  - Madame de Pompadour—King’s mistress—full length portrait (4 x 6 ft, multiple pieces of paper; Louvre)
  - Hung in Salon 1755 and was one of two glories of the great age of pastel (his portrait of the president of the Paris Parlement the other)
Delatour self-portraits
Delacroix to the Impressionists

- Pastel portrait market ended with the French Revolution
- Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863) renewed interest in pastels
  - Plein air sketches of countryside influenced young artists
Eugene Boudin (1824-1898) used pastel for rapid sketches of seascapes.
- Impressionists very influenced by photography and Japanese prints
  - Edouard Manet (1832-1883) blurred edges in his pastels to give the feeling of photographs
Edgar Degas (1834-1917) was the Impressionist most interested in pastels

- Unlike other Impressionists, worked in studio
- Foreshortening, cropping, simulating artificial light
- Built up pigments in layers, fixing with steam or secret formula of chemicals in between
- Illustrated the brilliance and textures of pastel, although fragility of paper has compromised their longevity
Mary Cassatt

- Influenced by Degas to work in pastel
- Did many paintings of mothers and children
- Collected by Louisine Havemeyer —
  - Daughter Electra founded Shelburne Museum; large collection in Vermont
20th century

- Odilon Redon (1840-1916) used pastels to create a Symbolist expression of the subconscious and for colourful flower studies
Joan Miro (1893-1983) and Paul Klee (1879-1940) used the rich colour of pastel for their Fauvist and abstract works.

Many modern artists have used pastel in mixed media pieces.
THE PASTEL RENAISSANCE
Today’s masters: United States (a selection)

- Wende Caporale
- Doug Dawson
- Margaret Dyer
- Dawn Emerson
- Alan Flattmann
- Ilene Geinger-Stanfield
- Sam Goodsell
- Daniel Greene
- Albert Handell

- Liz Haywood-Sullivan
- M. Katherine Hurley
- Wolf Kahn
- Richard McKinley
- Elizabeth Mowry
- Susan Ogilvie
- Claudia Seymour
- Sally Strand
- Duane Wakeham
- Jimmy Wright
Albert Handell

[Images of Albert Handell's artwork: a rocky landscape, a tree, and a stream with rocks and trees.]
Richard McKinley
Wolf Kahn
M. Katherine Hurley

Coming to Ontario May 13-16!
Duane Wakeham
Liz Haywood-Sullivan
Susan Ogilvie
Doug Dawson
Alan Flattmann
Daniel Greene
Wende Caporale
Sally Strand
Sam Goodsell
Margaret Dyer
Ilene Gienger-Stanfield
Jimmy Wright
Dawn Emerson
Today’s masters: Europe

Mark Leach
England
Claude Texier
France
Today’s Masters: Canada

- Aili Kurtis
Michael Chesley Johnson
Brittani Faulkes
Tim Daniels
Dianna Ponting
Horace Champagne
Dave Becket
Materials: pastels

- Range from inexpensive, hard
  - Nupastel
  - Winsor & Newton

- To middle softness, medium cost
  - Rembrandt
  - Unison
  - Girault
  - Mungyo

- To very soft, very expensive
  - Terry Ludwig
  - Diane Townsend
  - Roche
  - Great American Artworks
  - Sennelier
  - Schminke

Buy lights in soft; darks and neutrals in harder pastels.
Materials: pastel pencils

- Not required for most work, but some like them for detail and line work
- Good for your signature, or for sketching in composition
- Derwent, Conte, others all comparable
Pan Pastels

- Introduced about 2007
- Pastel pigment with fewer fillers, packed into small round jars like cosmetics
- Applied with various “sofft” sponge tools
- Can achieve rich strokes or sheer veils of colour
- Some love them, others hate them!
Materials: supports

- Range from minimal “tooth” (pastel holding ability) to very rough (pastel-eating ability!)
  - Canson Mi-Teintes (can use rough or smooth side)
  - Heavy watercolour paper
  - Sanded papers
    - Art Spectrum ColorFix
    - Kitty Wallis
    - PastelBord
    - PastelMat
    - Sennelier LaCarte
  - Artist-made supports
    - Gessoed board, card, fome-cor, paper
    - Can be made to preferred grit with pumice or marble dust/gesso mixes or prepared pastel medium (Golden)

Always use acid-free/archival supports.
Materials: fixative

- Often used between layers to renew “tooth”
- Avoided by many as final layer as it darkens colours, reduces brilliance
- New product (old idea) casein-based fixative (Spectrafix) seems to get better results
- Pastels must still be framed under glass
**Materials: framing**

- Can be framed with a mat, as other works on paper
- Current trend to frame with spacers between work and glass, no mat
  - Looks more like an oil painting
  - Some find these sell better
Techniques: strokes

- Tip of pastels (or pastel pencils) for fine line work or clean edges
- Sides of pastels for broad strokes
- Edges of pastels for texture/lines
- Hatching/ cross hatching for colour mixing
- Blending with fingers, styrofoam peanuts, rags, Q-Tips
- Scumbling light over dark
- Glazing dark over light
- Typically work hard to soft, dark to light
Techniques: underpainting

- Grisaille tonal studies (fixed charcoal, fixed pastel, watercolour, acrylic)
- Watercolour or acrylic or oil wash underpaintings, abstract or relatively “finished”

Richard McKinley
- Pastel washed with water, rubbing alcohol, turpentine
- Complementary underpainting

Brenda Boylan
- Or no underpainting!
  - Tinted paper as underlying tone

Richard McKinley
How to learn pastel: resources

- Self-study and practice
  - Many good books out now (Albert Handell, Elizabeth Mowry, Hazel Harrison, Maggie Price, Richard McKinley, Richard McDaniel)
  - *The Pastel Journal* magazine
  - North Light videos (Richard McKinley, M.Katherine Hurley, Deborah Secor)
Classes
- Ask at local galleries and community organizations
- Ask if local pastel artists teach in their studios
- Check workshop listings in PJ magazines/online
How to learn pastels: organizations

- Pastel Artists Canada (PAC)
  - www.pastelartists.ca
  - Website with member galleries
  - Member and juried annual shows
  - Regular workshops and events

- Pastel Society of Eastern Canada (PSEC)
  - www.pastelsec.com

- Pastel Society of America (PSA)
  - www.pastelsocietyofamerica.org

- International Association of Pastel Artists (IAPS)
  - Biennial convention and workshops
  - June 2-5 2011, Albuquerque New Mexico
In summary...why do we love pastel?

- I love its tactile nature. Of all the means that artists use to express themselves, none compare to the feeling of a stick of pure, rich pigment being drawn across a surface quite like soft pastel. The direct connection and sense of touch that's derived from the pastel stick being in direct contact with the hand produces an intimacy that's lacking in other media that rely on an additional instrument for deployment.

- I admire its ability to adapt to a variety of mixed-media techniques, making it unrivaled when it comes to creative expression. It gets along with just about every other painting medium. Its introduction expands the individual potential of other media, often providing the means to take an otherwise good painting to the point of exceptional. It is without a doubt one of the most versatile media currently available.

- I adore the inherent patience of pastel. Since it contains no additional products that dry or alter its final appearance, it's always quietly waiting for my return. It's just as I left it and I'm able to pick up where I left off.

Richard McKinley
Sources of historical/technical data in this presentation

- *Pastels Made Easy*, Hazel Harrison; Southwater, 2008

- *An Introduction to Drawing and Painting with Pastels*, Diana Constance; Apple Press, 1990