

Oil Pastel: An Introduction

In 1949 Pablo Picasso asked Henri Sennelier to create a completely new medium that had the qualities of oil paint and soft pastel in an easy-to-apply stick form. Picasso told Henri, 'I want a coloured pastel that I can paint on anything...wood, paper, canvas or metal without having to prepare or prime the surface.' This collaboration between the a modern art genius and a master colourist gave birth to Sennelier Oil Pastels, pure intense colour drawing sticks, with a completely new form of consistency and smoothness.

Sennelier, *Oil Pastels*

The generic definition of pastel is a stick of ground pigment mixed with just enough binder to keep its shape. Oil pastels are made with ground pigments combined with a slight amount of wax softened with a smaller amount of oil; in professional-grade formulas, it's refined oil.

"Oil Pastel for the Serious Beginner", by John Elliot

Compared with traditional soft or 'dry' pastels, oil pastels are not chalky or powdery to the touch. Unlike soft pastel, oil pastel is a clean, dust-free medium capable of producing rich and varied painting effects.



Images from Sennelier

Oil pastels range in quality and softness. An artist-quality oil pastel is completely different from the oil pastels you may have used in school. Sennelier Oil Pastels are so creamy and smooth, it feels like drawing with lipstick. Testing the direct application of such buttery colour always elicits "oohs and ahhs" during our workshops. These pastels come in 120 colours in cylindrical sticks with a perforated wrapping for easy peeling.

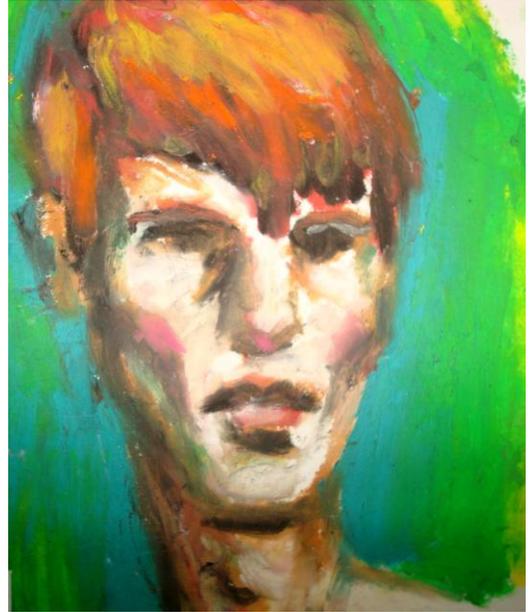
In comparison, Holbein Artist Oil Pastels are firmer but still uniform in consistency. They are particularly good for rough surfaces and better for artists with a heavier hand. They come in 144 colours in square unwrapped sticks. Lack of a label is a bit tricky. It is best to make your own labeled colour swatches in a notebook so you can remember which ones you need to replenish.

Both Sennelier and Holbein oil pastels are acid-free and chemically stable with no oxidation of colour. This quality prevents deterioration of the surface and the support while guaranteeing non-yellowing colour. The brands will intermix. Both have colours ranging from opaque to semi-transparent to transparent, depending on the pigment. Oil pastels can be applied to all pastel cards and watercolour papers. We recommend acid-free papers, 80 lb and heavier, for best results. Oil pastels can be used even on dark-coloured backgrounds. Indeed, as Picasso desired, they can also draw onto almost any surface: canvas, wood, ceramic, plaster, metal, and plastic, glass and photographs.

Oil Pastel: An Introduction

Versatile pastels offer numerous means of expression:

- Apply colours directly or mix colours on your support of choice by blending with a rag or your fingers. Dilute colours with Eco House Citrus Thinner or odorless mineral spirits (Stevenson, Tri-Art, Gamblin) and blend them with a brush for soft background effects.
- Oil pastel is a perfect medium for mixed media and collage. Use it as a resist for watercolour, gouache, ink or light acrylic washes. These water-based materials will be repelled by the oil pastel but will colour the area around it.
- Thick applications of oil pastel can also be modified by scraping and manipulating with a palette knife. Create 'scraffito' effects by using a stylus and other pointed objects to scratch into layers of pastel. Colours may be sculpted with a preheated palette knife. After heating, adhere and inlay pigments, sand, sawdust, wood, paper, glass or metal into the moist colour.



By Travis McEwan

Oil pastels should not be confused with oil sticks or oil bars, an oil paint that comes in a stick form. Like any other oil paint, oil sticks will dry to create a hard outer skin. By contrast, oil pastel will harden over time, but never forms a hard outer skin. Oil pastels remain supple and slightly moist, ensuring protection against cracking. It remains forever somewhat workable. Therefore, an oil pastel artwork should not be varnished, but preferably framed to prevent accidental scratching or smudging. Store your works of art interleaved with sheets of glassine and hold them together with a bulldog clamp to prevent smudging.

Are you inspired to start working in oil pastel? Visit us.



By Christine Wallewein