



PASTEL

PART TWO

AMY SANDERS KNOWS WHY, AGAINST ALL COMMERCIAL ODDS, SHE PERSISTS WITH PASTEL – IT’S ALL IN THE LAYERS!

SPONTANEOUS RENDERING OF DEEP AND RICH LAYERS

Pastel artists are hardy souls. We survive in a collectors’ world that generally favors oils, tolerates watercolors and acrylics, yet often overlooks pastels. Frequently, fully rendered pastels are relegated to the level of drawings rather than paintings. Drawing is line; if pigment fully covers the surface, I’d contend that it’s a painting, not a drawing. So, what keeps us in pastel?

For me, the answer lies in the illusion of depth and richness that layering can provide. While layering certainly can be accomplished (often beautifully) in other mediums, pastel stands alone in its ability to allow a spontaneous rendering of many rich layers of color. Some colored pencil artists are gaining on us in this, but pastel to me still has an edge for its richness and velvety look, and side-steps the issue of wax bloom. It’s also gentler on the wrist if one is going for a fully saturated look.

My journey towards layering was seeded early, though it wouldn’t actually grow for many years. I clearly remember my art mentor, Ron Parent, saying once that tree bark contained all the colors there were, but I only saw brown, or maybe gray. I had no idea what he meant at the time, so I filed away the comment and looked a lot at tree bark (to no particular avail).

I started as primarily a watercolorist. When one wanted a certain color, one mixed it and used it on the paper. Layers of color did not show as such. Today, some folks are using layering in watercolor, but the results are significantly different than when layering is used in pastel.

Somewhere along the way, I shifted to pastel because I was frustrated with the difficulty of stretching watercolor paper and feeling like I had little more to explore with the medium. I was intrigued by pastels; oils, though I had them, never appealed to me because of

the drying time and the odor of both the paint and solvents causing nasty headaches. At that time, only non-sanded paper surfaces existed. They didn’t take many layers so my technique stayed pretty much the same, with the addition of a few layers. I was recognizing potential in the medium and liked the richness of the colors. I began to expand my collection of pastels (which now numbers in the thousands, with full or partial sets of nearly every brand of soft pastel and pastel pencil on the market).

Then I discovered sanded surfaces, gradually increased the use of layers, and began to discover the richness that one could get by playing multiple colors off each other within a given area. The first “trick” I discovered quite by accident, was the use of a rich green (on the bluish side), and a pure purple to make an incredible cloud color

(see “November Sky”). Now I understood what Ron was saying! I was off and running in the world of layering.

Layering makes for a very rich surface appearance. Nevertheless, it’s a practiced skill - looking at colors with more depth. To be truthful, I still “see” the simple colors, but I realize that to make a painting pop, I need layers of color to give it depth.

Obviously, to use many layers of color in pastel, you need a sanded surface. I have tried every sanded surface on the market, and know exactly how my style will work with each (and it changes remarkably on some). I prefer to work on Wallis, UArt and Pastelmat. Wallis takes the most layers, but is aggressive and

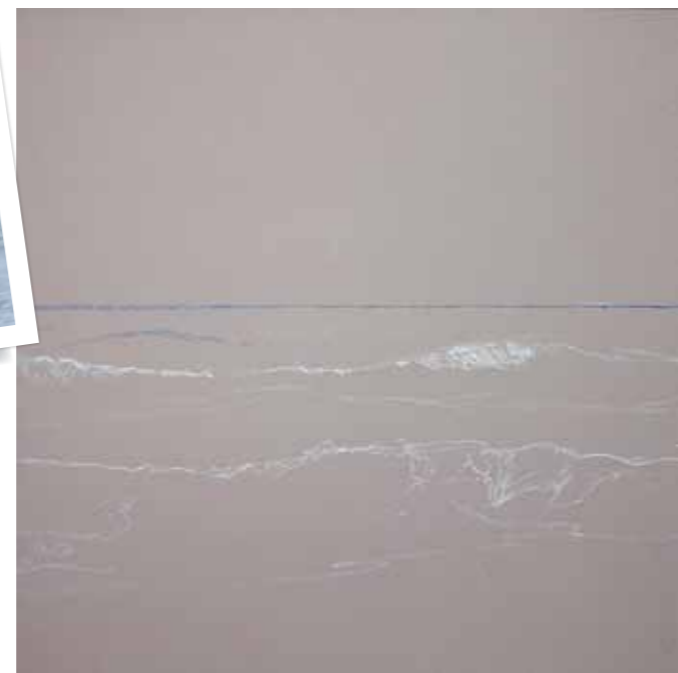
my art in the making

Squall to the East

pastel, 10.5 x 10.5" (26 x 26cm)



I took this reference photo several years ago while watching the most incredible squall slide by to the east. What made it so spectacular, was that you could see all the detail in those angry clouds, yet be sitting in the sun. I loved the play of the deep cloud colors off the paler green of the sun-drenched water, and the white of the sea spray. I painted one variation of this years ago, and decided it would be an ideal time to revisit it, as it beautifully illustrates a variety of layering effects.



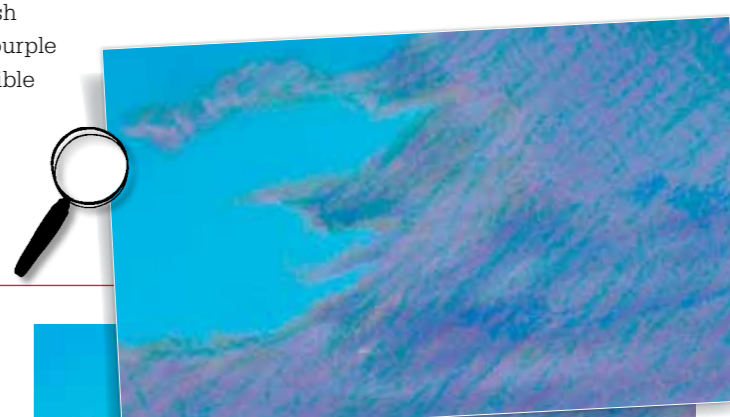
Stage 1

I sketched in the horizon and major waves, and began the sky. The blue sky was simple (3 tints of Winsor Blue Red), and to start the clouds, two shades of Winsor Violet to define the values.



Stage 2

This step shows additional layers of Winsor Green Blue, and Winsor Blue Red, and small strokes of Yellow Ochre and Permanent Rose for sun highlights on the edge of the clouds. Only some of the blending is done.



sometimes fussy. UArt is gentler, yet still takes many layers. Pastelmat (new on the market), initially appears as if it won't take any at all, but actually takes a great deal. I've yet to saturate this paper. It has different working characteristics, however, that takes some getting used to.

I usually start the base layer with the darkest color I can see within the color plane. Often, I do this with multiple colors to get a richer, more varied base color, such as the green/purple cloud combination. With sand, I use a mid-toned base, since bringing it up from the darkest color is very hard, given how light sand is. My base layers cover the surface fully, with a full stroke; sometimes

a set of strokes, depending on the coarseness of the surface.

In my second set of layers, I bring up the mid-tones. These layers can be dotted or stroked. Strokes vary in intensity of pressure, width, length and direction, depending on the effect that

I am after. Subsequent layers are added for additional colors, such as reflections. Top layers are highlights and very fine details.

For the effect of sea spray, I'll shave a white Nu-Pastel to dust, sprinkle the dust onto the surface, and then push it into the surface with the hard end of a Colour Shaper. Then I blow off the excess dust and work with what's left, creating my desired look. For example, if its blowing spray, I might drag the dust very lightly in the direction of the wind. I'll do this as many times as needed to get the effect I am after. Occasionally, I will put a sheet of glassine over the piece and use a brayer to push the highlights in even further.

I blend layers with my fingers (not on Wallis), Colour Shapers, or the edge of a rolled finger cot (removes the least pastel). Sometimes, I blend very lightly with another pastel or pastel pencil. I never use tortillons or stumps because they both remove too much

“Layering makes for a very rich surface appearance; it's a practiced skill – looking at colors with more depth.”

In All Her Splendor, pastel, 12 x 16" (30 x 40cm)

This was a sunset from a friend's deck. Who could resist. Challenges here included the many layers of clouds that were present already, each of which would take me multiple layers of varied colors to render. Another serious challenge that worried me until the end was the value shift involved because of the presence of the sun in the image. I wasn't sure I could get that convincingly, but I was pleased with the results. This is Pastelbord.



Detail



Stage 3

The sky is finished, and blended as much as I am going to do. The detail shows that you still can see many of the individual strokes. The varied colors present more interest than just tints of one color alone.



Stage 4

I start to layer in the water, from horizon to foreground, each with many layers. Here you see repeating layers of 15 different shades and colors, with varied strokes and different degrees of blending.



Stage 5

Moving into the foreground, the strokes get choppy and I carry in reflected sky colors on the horizontal planes of the water. I am up to using all 29 colors/shades in the water now.



pastel. Other tricks I've read about for blending haven't worked as well for me on sanded paper.

For me, pastel is an unparalleled medium. I love the velvety texture, the color combinations are endless, and I'm energized by the play of one color against another and the intricacies of detail that it can capture. Nothing beats watching the image emerge from the blank sheet of paper! So, while I'll dabble in other mediums, I think I will always remain a pastel artist at heart. □

**Snow Pond, pastel,
12 x 18" (30 x 46cm)**

I aimed to capture a calm, early fall day, on a small pond few know about. While the entire piece is obviously well layered, the biggest challenges here were the light ripples on the surface of the water, and the spot farther out where a light breeze ruffles the surface just a touch, changing the reflections. This piece is done on Wallis, and the dark green behind the foliage is underpainted with watercolor.



about the artist

Amy K. Sanders is an award-winning artist and Signature Member of the Pastel Society of America (PSA). She considers pastel to be her primary medium, although originally she worked in watercolors and was a member of the Connecticut Watercolor Society. She still paints occasionally in watercolors, acrylics and oils, but she finds pastels allow her to capture more expressively the beauty and depth of the scenes that she is drawn to paint.

Amy is largely a self-taught artist.

She studied with outstanding art teacher, Ron Parent, for several years and has also painted under guest artists at Truro's Castle Hill Center for the Arts. Her artistic style creates velvety, richly detailed paintings.

Her paintings have been sold in a series of auctions to benefit non-profit organizations, and are in a variety of private collections. She has exhibited in galleries in Connecticut and on the Cape, and has been represented by the Addison Art Gallery of Orleans, Massachusetts since 1998.

Artist's Website: www.amyksanders.com

**Addison Art Gallery, Orleans, Massachusetts:
www.addisonart.com/sanders.html**



Detail

Stage 6

The front wave starts with more of the greens. Note the sky colors do not reflect onto vertical planes. The water patterns are formed with Earth Green and White hard pastels. Rembrandt White is used for brighter areas.



“To make a painting pop, I need layers of color to give it depth.”

Stage 7

The rough foreground water is mostly white, so I used pale tints of sky colors, mixed with all the other colors used so far, and layered repeatedly with strokes of Rembrandt White. I'm pretty fast and rough with these strokes.