

Introduction

Welcome to the London Art Colleges correspondence course in pastels. We hope you enjoy the study planned for you and become better able to paint or draw as you progress through the course. We aim to provide a flexible, non-pressurised and enjoyable means of developing your artistic talents through the medium of pastels.

Whilst we encourage you to complete the various study units in sequence, there is no rush, study in your own time - but try to keep a bit of momentum going. It is a good idea to set a regular time each week, or day and to stick to it, when you are least disturbed and least likely to be disturbed, unless you are a highly sociable sort of artist!

You will have been sent a syllabus from which to work. If you have any difficulty understanding what is taught and what is asked of you please feel free to write a note to your personal tutor or telephone and ask at the tutors centre. Upon completion of each set of exercises, after your tutor has had chance to look at what you have done, you will get feedback and guidance about how you are doing; and how to work towards getting the sort of enjoyment you want when using pastels.

We will cover all the practical issues related to drawing and painting with pastels except for making your own. So you can expect a comprehensive (but not exhaustive) coverage of the medium. At the end of the course you should have built up a collection of work and we will suggest further avenues of study and development.

You will require: a drawing board of about 55 x 70 cms and 1 - 1.5cm deep. It should be made of plywood or MDF (medium density fibreboard) and should be flat, clean, grease free and have no rough edges. If you are unable to get one then use the card backing to a sketch pad or a table top that you are happy to work on. The advantage of a drawing board is that work in progress can be left on it, it can be put away, takes up little space and protects and supports the work. Art shops sell them ready made, it is cheaper to buy the pre-cut material from a hardware store and sand down the edges yourself if you have the time, space and energy. After this you will need to wipe off any dust with a clean, damp, lint free cloth. You will also require a selection of papers to draw on (sizes and types are listed in study unit 5). Some tracing paper will help and you should have some pencils, erasers, paint brushes, fixative, masking tape, gum strip, scissors / craft knife and straight edged rule. A dust sheet helps (available from DIY stores) and you will require an area to work in which has some daylight to it. If you plan to work into the night, then you are advised to get a daylight adjusted bulb for accurate and sensitive colour usage. Some sort of folder is necessary for you to keep work in. These can be expensive and vary in size and type. Ideally you should have an A2 sized one which is usually made from card. You can get stronger, plastic presentation ones, but these are not really necessary. Or you can make your own, using cardboard from boxes (used to package large things like fridges etc.) and parcel tape.

Pastels

Finally you require a set of soft, chalk pastels. They can be purchased for a modest amount from any good artists suppliers. It is suggested that you do buy a starter pack rather than rush out and spend lots on this aspect of the medium before you have become acquainted with it. Later, you may wish to use oil pastels (which we cover in Study Unit 11).

Colour Theory

Having covered organising yourself to work, health and safety aspects of using pastels, fixing and handling, papers and supports, we are now going to address the technically complex issue of colour.

When you open a new pack of pastels it is like looking at a pack of sweets, or a rainbow. The various colours are exciting and in their pristine condition they have a scientific order and clarity to their appearance.

Consider them for a while before taking them from the pack. Which ones appeal most to you? What colours do you go for?

Then think a bit more about your immediate colour environment. What is your eye colour? What colour are your clothes and in your home, which colours predominate? If you had to name the colour of the daylight, what would you call it?

When we speak of colours we use a great many names and terms.

COLOUR AND LIGHT

To start with we must consider the physical constitution of colour and how this interacts with our perception. Isaac Newton made some of the first studies of colour vision in his great work 'the Opticks' of 1704. Newton observed that white light is made up of all the spectral colours. We can see proof of this if we look at Newton's Wheel, a prism or a rainbow. By experimenting with the projection of coloured lights Newton was able to demonstrate how white light consists of what are termed the three light primaries: red, green and blue.

Working with coloured lights Newton demonstrated that white light is shown to consist of the three primary colours and if we remove one of these and only mix two, we get a completely different colour to white light:-

red + green (minus blue) = yellow
red + blue (minus green) = magenta or bright pink
green + blue (minus red) = cyan or light blue

For your still life, use an A3 rectangle in portrait or landscape format, which is a decision you will have to make for yourself, and work to the edges of the rectangle. Make your paper slightly bigger than A3 and draw the rectangle carefully within the paper. Use Canson mi teints paper and choose a suitable ground colour.

Composing a picture begins with its two dimensional qualities. So when you place an object so that part of it is in front of another you change the sort of shapes you have in your drawing. To make a picture have certain qualities we can do things to influence the composition. With your still life, we suggest you build in a sense of security to the subject by placing the objects so that there is one which is higher than the rest, this will form the apex of a triangle. A triangle can appear very firm and stable if the longest edge is flat on or near to the base of the picture. To form the other two corners of the triangle, place an object so that each point is defined by the object or an edge of the objects. (see illustration)

Set your still life up so that you have a tall object forming the apex of a triangle and the other ones forming the two base corners. Try to get the centre of interest slightly off centre.

