

Painting Faces with Soft Chalk Pastels



Introduction and Important Information

Soft chalk pastels are especially useful if you want to paint the whole face and/or to create a face with dramatic value changes.

Soft chalk pastels:

The softer the pastel the easier it is to paint the face. Sennelier® (softest), Schmincke® and Rembrandt® (least soft) are the brands of soft pastel that I use. While painting the face have some paper or scrap fabric handy to test the pastels you want to use. Both for colour and for hardness. Even within the same make of pastel, some will be harder or softer than others. Breaking soft pastel sticks will produce sharper edges that can be used for finer details.

Pastel pencils are harder than the soft chalk pastels. I use Carbo- Othello®. They can be used for the delicate/finer details, as they are easier to sharpen. Alternatively rub the pastel sticks with Lee Valley Microbrush® applicators or to a small stiff paint brush and transfer the pastel to the face. Use the harder pastel pencils first as soft pastels can paint over hard but not vice versa. Although some success can be had with painting with the pencils over softer pastels after first spraying with a workable fixative. Sharpen pastel pencils with a sharp knife or a good electric pencil sharpener (battery operated sharpeners will not be strong enough).

Fabric:

Rougher fabric will hold the pastel better than a smooth one. I use good quality muslin. It also works on the smooth side of craft velour.

Blend pastels with Q-tips®, fingers, blending sticks, a bit of chamois or other soft cloth, or Lee Valley Microbrush® applicators, etc. Many of these can be washed and reused.

Keep your hands clean to avoid transferring colour to inappropriate places. Keep a rag, towel, or cloth on hand to wipe your hands frequently, especially between colours. You can also use it to clean your blending tools.

Fixatives. Shake very well before you spray, and follow the instructions on the can. Spraying with several thin layers instead of fewer thick layers is better to maintain the colours. **Use only in a well ventilated area.** Use **workable fixative** between layers. **Note:** Faces will be darker and more transparent after they are sprayed with fixative. When you are sure the face is finished spray with **Krylon® Matte Finish** or similar product. Dabbing on Acrylic Matte Medium will also work but if you have to sew something on (like hair) over it you will find it hard to get the needle through.

If you don't finish your face in one sitting spray it with workable fixative and wrap it in **tissue paper**. This will protect it and reduce the amount of pastel transfer to other surfaces.



Painting Faces

You can use your typical method face painting substituting soft chalk pastels instead of your usual medium or you can use some or all of the following technique.

Painting Faces Technique*

Small areas with pastel pencils

Use pastel pencils first.

Do the eyes (including eyeliner), nostril holes, and mouth if it is too small for the larger pastel chalks. The pastel pencils do not work well when used over the softer sticks so if there is any detail you want to paint with the pencils, do it now. (The pastel pencils will work somewhat over the sticks if the softer pastels are first sprayed with workable fixative.)

Underpainting with soft pastel sticks and/or applicators.

Paint with thin layers, if necessary you can smudge the pastel with a blending tool so that it covers more of the fabric. I sometimes wait till the very end before smudging or blending.

Shadows: - Use **dark colours** lightly in the shadow areas. I suggest cool colours such as green, blue, or purple.

- Crease over eye
- Sides of nose and face
- Under the nose, mouth, and chin

Highlights – Use light –coloured soft Pastel sticks on the chin, cheeks, and forehead. I suggest using warm colours (yellow or orange).

Colours – Use any colours of the appropriate value in any areas you think is appropriate. Paint in thin layers. If you like the effect it is easier to increase the intensity with more colour than to cover up a very intense colour.

At this point there are several options.

- Stop: -if you like the effect that you have achieved so far.
- Blend the edges of the different colour areas in some areas.
- Continue with the overpainting

Overpainting

Use one or several different “flesh” coloured soft pastel sticks to overpaint all but the highlight areas. You might want to first spray the face lightly with a workable fixative. Paint lightly, building up colour; touch up any colour or highlight you may have covered up.

Fill in any colour holes with surrounding colour by smudging with a bending tool or by applying more pastel.

Blend hard edges as required/desired.

* This technique is adapted from the method I developed while painting pastel portraits.

Touch up the whites of the eyes. It will be necessary to first spray with workable fixative.

Very fine details such as the highlight in the pupil can be added using gel or other pens after the face has been sprayed with workable fixative.

Finishing

Use a protective finish such as Krylon® Matte Finish spray .

Acrylic Gloss Medium can be painted on (dab- don't drag the brush) the eyes and/or lips to make them shine.



Marvin's face, hands and arms are painted in chalk pastels.

Photography by Nancy Leigh-Smith and Roberta Russell.