



**LISA'S LIST**  
TERMS, BRANDS,  
GROUNDS, CARE  
AND MORE

LISA OBER PSA, IAPS/MC  
[LisaOber.com](http://LisaOber.com)  
[LisaAOber@gmail.com](mailto:LisaAOber@gmail.com)  
636-443-3266 (okay to text)

*Pastel painting is one of the most versatile and rewarding of mediums. Armed with a little knowledge you can quickly begin experimenting with the richness and luminosity it uniquely provides. Below is a quick overview to get you started, and if you're anything like me you will get hooked and delve even deeper into the possibilities. I hope you find this information helpful. Don't hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions. **Happy painting!***

*Lisa Ober*

## COMMON PASTEL TERMS

**Note:** This is not an exhaustive list of terms but rather some commonly used words that will help you navigate the world of pastel painting.

### **PASTEL**

(From Wikipedia)

A pastel (UK: /'pæstl/; US: /pæ'stel/) is an art medium in the form of a stick, consisting of pure powdered pigment and a binder. The pigments used in pastels are the same as those used to produce all colored art media, including oil paints; the binder is of a neutral hue and low saturation.

**SOFT PASTEL**-Same as above but distinct from oil pastel which has a different binding agent.

**DRY PASTEL**-Same as soft pastel but used more frequently in other parts of the world.

**Note:** Within the **soft pastel** category, there is a distinction between hard and soft pastels.

### **HARD PASTELS**

Hard pastels contain more binding agent than soft pastels. Because of this, they tend to have a shallower value range. They also tend to lack the intensity and richness of softer pastels (which contain more pure pigment) and do not hide previous layers as well. They are more difficult to blend but are great for the foundational layer of a painting and are useful in conjunction with other painting techniques. Hard pastels are generally more affordable than soft pastels.

### **SOFT PASTELS**

Soft pastels contain more pure powdered pigment than hard pastels. For this reason they are excellent over the top of hard pastels and quite capable of hiding previous layers of color. There are wonderful brands available and each has its own unique qualities of application, color range, value range, shape, and price.

### **TEXTURE (of paper, surface, or painting)**

This typically refers to the "feel" of the paper or surface. It can also refer to the way marks of pastel are distributed on the surface. Smoother feeling paper not only feels less textured but once pastel is applied, the disruption of pastel strokes is minimized for a smoother look. Paper that has more texture

not only feels rougher to the touch, but may also provide a visible pattern to the pastel marks (think sandpaper) allowing the surface to show through the painting.

### **TOOTH (of paper or surface)**

This usually refers to the ability of a surface to "bite" or hold onto the pastel thus determining its ability to stick to the paper or board on which the pastel is applied. If a paper has a lot of tooth it is likely to hold many layers of pastel/heavy application.

**Note:** A paper can have a lot of texture but not good tooth. It might feel rough but not hold a lot of pastel or allow for multiple layers of application. This could be simply the quality of the paper. When we have trouble adding pastel to a painting it is often because the paper has run out of tooth.

### **BLENDING**

Blending can refer to the use of hands or tools to combine colors in order to achieve a smoother appearance. It can also refer to intentional marks which combine colors and values to create a cohesive form.

### **LAYERING**

Much like a common oil painting approach, layering in pastel refers to the progressive application of pastel on top of previous layers to achieve a desired effect. Entire paintings can be layered or selections of paintings. Generally, layers in pastel progress from the harder pastels to the softer pastels.

### **PASTEL BRANDS**

**Note:** This list is not intended to be exhaustive. It is a list of materials I use and consider as good options for professional results. It's always fun to try new brands and techniques to determine your own favorites!

#### **HARD PASTELS**

**REMBRANDT**-A good harder pastel for initial layers and for subtle tonal changes on top layers. Slim and cylindrical, this pastel comes in a nice variety of colors.

**CARAN D'ACHE CUBES**-A good harder pastel similar in size to NuPastels. Great for an entire painting, base layers, or tonal adjustments in top layers. Colors matched perfectly to their pastel pencil counterparts.

**PRISMACOLOR NUPASTEL**-A good harder pastel for initial layers. Wide variety of colors but a slightly narrower band of values compared to some brands. Has the darkest black I have found. Thin, narrow and cubed shaped.

**RICHESON SEMI-HARD SQUARE PASTELS**-Shaped much like NuPastels, these are softer than the others in this category but not creamy (dry feeling). They often work well for making tonal adjustments to a top pastel layer.

#### **SOFT PASTELS**

**UNISON**-A real workhorse and probably the most popular professional grade soft pastel. Will do almost anything and comes in a wide range of colors. Unisons allows for good coverage with multiple layers and will play well with other brands. Good with water media. Cylindrical in shape (thumb sized).

**TERRY LUDWIG**-Rich, high hiding, highly pigmented, and beautiful colors. Comes in a small brick shaped stick. Good with water media. Excellent for plein air painting and for people who like to leave

their pastel marks showing. Terrific dark pastel selection. Great for details due to the sharp edges that retain their shape well.

**SENNELIER**-A very soft and sometimes fragile pastel with some of the richest colors of any pastel. Not greasy feeling and an excellent color range. Good with water media. Slightly slimmer than Rembrandts.

**SCHMINCKE**-Buttery soft pastels for fine work in a nice color range. Slightly larger in size than Rembrandts. Good with water media. Slightly difficult in combination with some other brands. Fills the tooth of paper quickly due to its very fine pigment particles.

**MUNGYO GALLERY HANDMADE SOFT PASTELS**-Only available from Jerry's Artarama, these are very similar in shape and size to Unison but with a good color assortment. Not great with water media. Be sure to purchase the handmade sticks. Excellent for a starter set.

**MOUNT VISION**-Excellent very large cylindrical sticks, very soft and dry feeling. Perfect for covering large areas and very easy to blend. A little goes a long way.

**DIANE TOWNSEND**-Ultra soft if not crumbly, these are so soft that they make a perfect top layer or highlight layer when nothing else will stick or cover previous layers. This brand is ideal for top layers. Semi-rectangular and difficult for details.

**BLUE EARTH**-Available from Dakota Art Pastels, these are ultra fine (tiny pigments particles) and very soft. They are brick shaped like the Ludwigs but are smaller and are more fragile. Available in a unique color/value arrangement.

**RICHESON HANDMADE SOFT PASTELS**-Sized economically to last a while, these soft pastels are rich in pigment and very soft, similar to the consistency of Diane Townsend Pastels (dry as opposed to creamy) with a little less opacity. Great for finishing layers.

**GREAT AMERICAN**-These are cube shaped soft pastels which have a slightly greasy feel. Difficult to layer over and under certain brands. Many artists love them. Nice color selection.

**PAN PASTEL**-A pastel cake that is applied with sponge-tipped tools available in a variety of shapes. Easy coverage over large areas. Quite pigmented but fills some paper tooth quickly. Better on papers that are not sanded. Fun for experimenting with combinations of techniques.

**PASTEL PENCILS**-Many artists have great success with pastel pencils. In order to retain their shape they tend to contain more binder and are therefore considered to be at the harder end of the soft pastel spectrum. For this reason the colors tend to be less rich and pigmented and the value range is more limited. They are excellent for the initial drawing for a pastel painting.

**Some good brands to try:**

CARAN D'ACHE  
STABILO CARBOTHELLO  
CRETACOLOR  
DERWENT  
FABER-CASTELL

## SURFACES/GROUNDS

**Note:** There are many excellent surfaces available so this is just a good list to get you started. You can even make your own!

**Uart Sanded Pastel Paper**-Consistent surface, grips pastel well, holds a huge number of layers, archival, available in paper or mounted board and in 7 grits (textures). Available in a neutral beige color but can be toned with watercolor if mounted or on board. Dark tone available soon.

**Art Spectrum Colourfix Pastel Paper**-Nice fine toothed surface in a variety of colors. Okay with a number of layers. Available in paper or board. The board will allow wet media to be applied and can be "repaired" with matching Colourfix Primer.

**Ampersand Pastelbord**-Nice marble dust textured surface in four colors on very sturdy and thin hardboard. Available in standard sizes but a bit difficult to cut. Holds up to liquid and other painting mediums.

**PastelMat**-Very unique smooth fiber surface really grabs pastel. Difficult for blending but very durable to many layers so it's perfect for artists who want their pastel strokes to stay put. Comes in 8 colors or in pads.

**Canson Mi-Touch**-A textured sanded paper surface much like Colourfix but texture is stronger. Will not hold quite as many layers as some but comes in a variety of colors.

**Velour Paper**-A fuzzy synthetic fiber paper that gives a somewhat diffused look to the overall painting. Good for softer edges and popular with many portrait and animal artists.

**Sennelier La Carte Pastel Card**-A textured surface available in many colors. Nice adherence of pastel with a strong texture. Good for artists who like to see paper texture in their paintings.

Make your own ground with:

**Art Spectrum Colourfix Primer**-A paste that comes in a variety of colors and can be applied with a brush or foam roller. Colors match pre-coated papers.

**Golden's Acrylic Ground for Pastel**-An almost-clear gritty paste that can be applied with a brush or roller. Matte acrylic can be added for color.

Apply your ground to MDF, Masonite, Gatorfoam, foam core, or heavyweight paper surfaces.

## UNDERPAINTING/TONING

Many artists choose to create an underpainting or foundational layer for their pastels. This could be for the purpose of toning the paper or for a specific technique. The most popular options are listed for you here. Please use safety precautions when using solvents.

1. **Watercolor Wash**-An initial layer of watercolor paints can be placed on surfaces that can accept liquid. This could be used to tone the paper or to achieve a special desired effect.
2. **Dry Pastel with Water**-Because soft pastels contain very little binder, many brands can be diluted with water after being applied to the surface. This can create some interesting effects.

3. **Mineral Spirits**-An alternative option for creating a wash or underpainting on top of applied pastel. Evaporates.
4. **Rubbing or Denatured Alcohol**-An alternative option for creating a wash or underpainting on top of applied pastel. Dries faster than water.

## **CARE AND FRAMING**

### **FRAMING**

Properly handled and stored, pastels will last as long as any other medium, but they do need to be protected. The most common way to insure the durability of a pastel painting is to frame it behind glass. Additionally, creating an air space between the artwork and the glass is best. This can be done with matting, an acrylic spacer, or another support. The purpose is to prevent smudging and minimize the effect of condensation created in humid environments. As for glazing, it is best to use UV protection. Recently, Museum Glass has become affordable and offers good protection. Use extreme caution with acrylic sheets because they tend to warp and because they can hold a static charge which will attract pastel particles.

### **CARE/STORAGE OF PASTEL PAINTINGS**

Because of the pastels susceptibility to smearing, a pastel painting should be carefully stored. It is best to store the pastel flat. You can store it in a shallow box with a lid or you can secure it (hinged) to a backing board covering the pastel painting itself with Glassine or similar product. Glassine is a frosted paper that is water and grease resistant and it can be placed directly on the painting. You should consider a top protective board which will allow you to create a “sandwich” of backing board, painting, Glassine, top board.

Ideally, your paintings should be stored in a dry environment as they are sensitive to humidity. Proper care will ensure the longevity of your work.

Here is a good link for more detailed information:

[http://www.pastelsocietyofamerica.org/index\\_thepastelmedium.htm](http://www.pastelsocietyofamerica.org/index_thepastelmedium.htm)

### **FIXATIVE**

There is an ongoing debate in the pastel community regarding the value and use of fixative (a protective spray). Fixative will change the appearance of a pastel painting so it's a good idea to test its effects before using it. Many artists use these effects to their advantage as part of their technique.

### **STORING/TRANSPORTING PASTELS**

There are fabulous cases and storage systems available for a variety of purposes including travel. Many of them have foam cushion inserts to help prevent breakage to pastels. Take time to look at the options and consider how you will use your pastels (travel, plein air painting, or in the studio).

I have created my own cheap and easy system which is stackable, can be shipped, and is easy to store using inexpensive materials available online. I have not experienced ANY serious breakage to date.

Here is a link to instructions for making the boxes I use every day both at home and in workshops:

<http://www.lisaober.com/blog/necessity-is-the-mother-ofpastel-packaging-for-workshops>

## **FRAMING PASTELS**

Below is one of the best overviews I have seen regarding the framing of pastel paintings. Sorry for the long link address. Special thanks to Frametek for this thorough article.

[frametek.com/assets/images/articles/FT-Pastel-Article-for-printing-interactive.pdf](http://frametek.com/assets/images/articles/FT-Pastel-Article-for-printing-interactive.pdf)

## **PASTEL ORGANIZATIONS**

**Please consider joining and participating in these organizations. They offer a wealth of knowledge, a great way to meet artists with similar interests, and opportunities to exhibit your work.**

### **Pastel Society of America**

[www.pastelsocietyofamerica.org](http://www.pastelsocietyofamerica.org)

Founded in 1972 by Flora B. Giffuni, The Pastel Society of America (PSA) - the oldest pastel society in America - is largely responsible for the current renaissance of pastels in American art. The society's annual exhibitions at The National Arts Club in New York are the premier event for pastel artists in this country and abroad. PSA encourages artistic advancement through prestigious awards distributed during its annual exhibitions. Pastelists showing technical acumen and creative use of pastel techniques are awarded prizes for their achievements.

**Note:** The Pastel Society of America has a very active and informative Facebook group. Please consider joining it and tell them I sent you. The only requirement is an interest in soft pastel. Here is the link to it:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Pastelsocietyofamerica>

### **International Association of Pastel Societies**

[iapspastel.org](http://iapspastel.org)

The International Association of Pastel Societies (IAPS) was founded in 1994 as a non-profit organization representing pastel societies worldwide uniting in the common cause to demonstrate the validity and quality of pastel fine art. This coming together of pastel societies provides a strong voice for pastel artists and the luminous medium of pastel. The foundation of IAPS is based on networking and sharing. Individual artists benefit and expand their knowledge through the IAPS Member Society of their choice.

**Note:** There are a number of wonderful overseas, regional, and local pastel groups. Do consider joining one of them. It's amazing what can be learned from other pastel artists!

*There you have it! You are on your way to discovering the spectacular things pastel painting has to offer. I would love to see what you create and hear your thoughts on this medium. Please keep me updated on your successes!*