

Oil Pastel Art — Workbook

This workbook turns the Oil Pastel Art course into hands-on practice. Each section maps to one course module, mixing drills, planning worksheets, and checklists so you build real control rather than just reading about it. Work through it with sticks in hand, keep your throwaway practice sheets, and use the templates to track materials, plan compositions, and catalogue finished work.

Meet the Medium: Materials, Marks, and Surfaces

Get to know your sticks, surfaces, and core marks before painting anything representational.

Exercise: The Five-Mark Drill

On a single sheet of pastel paper, divide the surface into five labelled boxes and fill each with one mark type. Repeat the whole sheet with a student-grade stick and again with an artist-grade stick so you feel the difference in softness and pigment load.

- Which mark felt most natural, and which needed the most pressure to control?
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- How did the artist-grade stick behave differently from the student-grade one?
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- Where in a real painting would you use scumble versus impasto?
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Worksheet: Surface and Tooth Comparison

Lay the same three-colour blend on four different surfaces, then record how many layers each held before it stopped accepting pigment. Fill in the table fields for each surface tested.

Surface name and brand

Tooth (smooth / medium / sanded)

Toned or white

Layers held before refusing pigment

How easily it blended (1 to 5)

Best use for this surface

Checklist: Starter Kit Ready-Check

- Soft sticks for blending acquired (e.g. Sennelier or Mungyo Gallery Soft)
- A toned pastel paper or gessoed board prepared
- Blending tools on hand: tortillons, foam wedge, clean rag
- Solvent set up: Gamsol in a lidded container plus bristle brushes
- Sgraffito tools collected: skewer, metal stylus, old card, craft knife

[] Baby wipes and paper towel within arm's reach

Blending, Layering, and Building Colour

Drill the technical core: clean blends, solvent underpaintings, and mud-free layering.

Exercise: Three Ways to Blend One Gradient

Create the same two-colour gradient three times: once blended with a fingertip, once with a tortillon, and once dissolved with Gamsol on a brush. Keep all three side by side for comparison.

- Which method gave the smoothest transition, and which kept the most texture?

- Did any method lift or muddy the underlayer, and what did you change to stop it?

- For a soft evening sky, which blend would you choose and why?

Exercise: Mud Versus Luminosity Test

On one half of a sheet, rub a complementary pair (such as red and green) together until they mix. On the other half, layer and cross-hatch the same pair without rubbing. Compare the two results from across the room.

- Describe the colour you got from rubbing versus the colour you got from layering.

- At what viewing distance does the layered area start to optically mix?

- What rule will you set for yourself about blending complements?

Worksheet: Layer Order Plan

Before starting a small painting, plan your layer sequence so lights stay clean. Complete the fields for the subject you intend to paint.

Subject and surface

Darkest values and local colours (layer 1)

Mid-tones (layer 2)

Lights and highlights (layer 3)

Reserved pure-white and brightest accents

Where solvent underpainting will be used

Checklist: Clean-Colour Discipline

[] Blended from light into dark to protect highlights

[] Used the lightest pressure that still moved colour

[] Wiped fingers or tool between different colours

[] Built dark to light rather than smearing complements together

[] Reserved pure white and saturated accents for the final marks

[] Let any solvent layer dry to matte before adding dry pastel

Texture, Sgraffito, and Composition

Carve light back in, design texture on purpose, and structure the image before painting.

Exercise: Sgraffito Sampler

Lay a thick light base, cover it fully with a thick dark layer, then scratch a small sampler: fur, grass, whiskers, and stars, each with a different tool. Wipe the tool between strokes.

- Which tool produced the finest line, and which the broadest?

- How did line quality change when the tool clogged with wax?

- What subject in your next painting would benefit most from sgraffito?

Worksheet: Composition and Value Plan

Plan a painting using three thumbnails and a value study. Record your decisions in the fields below before laying any colour.

Chosen thumbnail (1, 2, or 3) and why

Focal point location on the thirds grid

Three big value masses (what is light, mid, dark)

Where peak contrast will sit

Leading lines or edges guiding the eye

Where smooth versus textured passages will go

Checklist: Pre-Paint Composition Check

- Made at least three thumbnail sketches
- Completed a quick three-value pencil study
- Placed the focal point off-centre near a thirds intersection
- Confirmed the focal point still pops when squinting
- Planned smooth areas to recede and textured areas to advance
- Decided where the heaviest impasto and sharpest sgraffito will go

Finishing, Preserving, and Displaying Your Work

Take a painting from final stroke to a fixed, framed, catalogued piece on the wall.

Exercise: Correct and Recover Drill

Deliberately overwork a small passage into mud, then recover it: scrape it back with a card, lift the film with Gamsol on a cotton bud, and repaint cleanly once matte. Note each step as you go.

- How much pigment lifted with scraping versus with solvent?

- How long did the cleaned area need before it accepted fresh pastel?

- How will this change how freely you experiment in future paintings?

Worksheet: Finishing and Framing Plan

For a completed painting, plan its protection and framing. Fill in each field before you spray or frame.
Painting title and size

Fixative or varnish chosen and number of coats

Test-spray result on a scrap (colour shift yes/no)

Mat or spacer method to keep glazing off the surface

Glazing type (UV glass or UV acrylic)

Intended display location and light conditions

Checklist: Archival Framing Checklist

- Sprayed fixative in light coats outdoors or in strong ventilation
- Tested the fixative on a scrap for colour shift first
- Hinged the artwork with archival tape along the top edge only
- Ensured nothing touches the surface via a mat or hidden spacers
- Used acid-free mat and backing board
- Fitted UV-filtering glazing and sealed the frame back against dust
- Chose a display spot out of direct sunlight and away from humidity

Your Action Plan

1. Assemble your starter kit: soft blending sticks, a toned pastel surface, blending and sgraffito tools, and Gamsol in a lidded container.
2. Fill one full sheet with the five core marks using both a student-grade and an artist-grade stick.
3. Run the surface and tooth comparison and record which surface held the most layers.
4. Practise all three blending methods on the same gradient and the mud-versus-luminosity test.
5. Plan and paint a small study using a written layer-order plan and a solvent underpainting.
6. Complete the sgraffito sampler with four different tools and identify your favourites.
7. Plan a full painting with three thumbnails, a three-value study, and a composition worksheet.
8. Paint that composition, reserving peak contrast, white, and sharpest sgraffito for the focal point.
9. Practise the correct-and-recover drill, then fix and varnish a finished piece using a tested spray.
10. Mat or spacer-mount, frame behind UV glazing, photograph, and log the work in your catalogue.

