



THE Romance OF HANDMADE PASTELS

A departure from assembly line art supplies, the production process of artist John Hersey's pastels is pure artistry. A labor of love, Hersey brings back the romance of finely-made supplies with his handmade pastels.

Pastel artists love to feel pastel pigment covering their paper and their fingertips—it gives them a sense of unity with their work. That's why the texture and response of premium handmade pastels often turn artists away from less expensive brands. Soft handmade pastels flow onto the paper smoothly. The slight irregularity and taper of their shapes gives them more character than "perfect" machine-made pastels. Introduce your customers to the benefits of quality pastels, and they'll relish what fine pastels can add to their work.

It was a desire for premium pastels that led to Unison Colors' line of handmade pastels. British artist John Hersey had been using soft charcoals for years and loved the medium's texture and its bold, absolute black. His work in black and white gave him a keen awareness of light and shadow. He wanted to be able to create that same awareness using color, but he couldn't find pastels that suited him in both performance and color. This inspired him to create his own line of handmade pastels—products that would perform well with color, texture and response.

HANDMADE BENEFITS

In pastel factories, pigments are mixed with water, gums and other additives in large mechanical mixers. The pastel "dough" is then pushed through the barrel of an extruder by a long revolving screw. The solid dough is forced through a circular opening at the extruder's end. It emerges from the extruder like a long pencil and is then cut into sticks. These sticks drop onto a conveyor belt to be dried, then wrapped.

"The problem with extrusion," Hersey says, "is that it squeezes the pastels very tightly, compressing them. And they are often overheated in the drying process. The compression and heat makes them hard, scraping the paper instead of flowing easily onto it. In the handmade process, the pigment is barely pressed at all. The sticks are rolled lightly. This makes the pastels flow easily. Like soft charcoal."

Establishing consistent performance from every pastel color was a particularly thorny problem for Hersey. Pigments vary in their physical properties. While some pigments hold together well after being mixed



Hersey measures and mixes pigments in single batches according to his formulas.

with water, others fall to pieces when rolled and dried. For pastels likely to crumble, Hersey adds some weak starch or gum to give the best response without interfering with color.

"Some of our colors are pure, single pigments," Hersey says. "But most of our colors are blends of

three, four or five different pigments. We blend in very little white or chalk because artists are generally looking for intense pastels. I've found that pastelists get bored with the endless array of pale pastel shades. They want some really strong colors. The strongest colors are made solely from pigment and nothing else."

COLOR = LIGHT + SHADOW

Many manufacturers make up their color sets by the simple addition of either black or white to each pigment mix. That results in sets which are a series of isolated color tints having no reference to a coloristic whole. Hersey, however, creates cycles of related hues. Each color in the set is mixed to create a harmony with the next. The variations in the color set are created by altering the proportions of the various pigments used.

"I develop colors that work in terms of how your eyes see things," Hersey says. "In nature, one sees centers of intense color and all the varieties of that color until it gets so weak or so influenced by something else that it becomes another color. Stable color does not exist; it's an illusion of the sun. If you look out the window, you'll find that what was a beautiful pale green is now a dark bluish-green. The color changes as the light changes—as a cloud goes over the sun, or the sun sets, or rises, or as one season becomes another.

Love at first cut!



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