



Oil Pastel Demo, Haflinger Pony: “It’s In the Way You Walk”

By Linda Shantz

I’ve been working with oil pastels since I was a teenager, which makes it over 20 years now. I was fortunate enough to start with a decent set of Grumbachers, which have only recently been replaced with the introduction of Sennelier and Holbein. I still haven’t been able to get any Caran d’Ache here in Canada, much to my dismay, so they will have to wait until I can make a cross-border trip!

I use Canson Mi-Tientes almost exclusively, as I’ve found its texture just enough to hold the oil pastel while allowing extensive blending. I have used some of the sanded papers for my own originals, but for commissioned portraits I stick with the Canson.

While for my own projects I sometimes draw right on the paper, with commissions I always start elsewhere and transfer the drawing to the paper once I’m happy with it so that I save the paper from too much abuse. I then work on the drawing until I have all the important detail in place. Often I will go in with some coloured pencil just to indicate some of the darks and lights.



The drawing on Canson, with the beginnings of some coloured pencil in areas.



Highlights and darks indicated with coloured pencil

With this piece, I jumped in and started with the head, as there wasn't much of his face showing beneath that forelock, and I have a tendency to start with the ears. I didn't take a photo of this until the head was more or less done. The head was rather nit-picky anyway, so it will be easier to explain how I work starting with the shoulder.

Just an aside — when I was working on this painting, I was still using Talens Panda oil pastels, and had just introduced some Holbein artists' quality. I've since eliminated the Pandas as Sennelier has a good range of browns I've managed to work with, though I've had to adjust things a bit as the Senneliers are so soft. The Pandas are hard but smooth, and I quite miss them! They worked well for the initial layers.

I started off with some raw sienna (Panda) for the lightest area, because I need the warm undertone for the colours that will be laid overtop.



Raw Sienna laid in on the shoulder – I've also laid down some Naples Yellow in some of the highlight areas I indicated with the coloured pencil.

Burnt Sienna is the first colour that goes overtop, with some Burnt Umber over that in the darker areas. I don't need to cover the whole area – in fact, I have to be careful about that, because if I lay the pastel on too thick, it can quickly become mud when it takes up all the tooth. When I blend it, the paper will be covered.



Burnt Sienna and Burnt Umber introduced, unblended.

Next, I've laid some of the Holbein over. You can see they're much softer, they go right on over top of the Pandas, but when I blend the warmth from the Panda raw sienna will come into play.



Holbeins laid over the harder Pandas, still unblended.

Next I've done some blending, using stumps, also known as tortillions. Stumps play a huge role in my work as I use them extensively to move around the OP, blending and shaping the musculature.



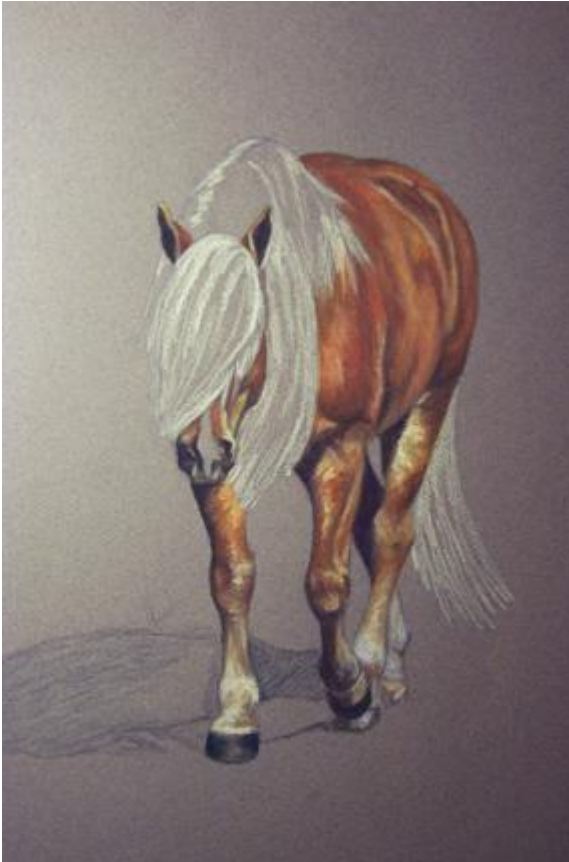
At this point I've punched up the contrast a bit, laying some Naples Yellow over the lighter areas to lighten them more still, and some Sepia over the darks. Later I'll adjust it further, and bring in some dark blues and purples for the darks, some white for the highlights, and often some green and lighter blues (for grass/sky reflection).



I carry on in the same fashion over the rest of the body, introducing other colours as I need to on the legs and such.

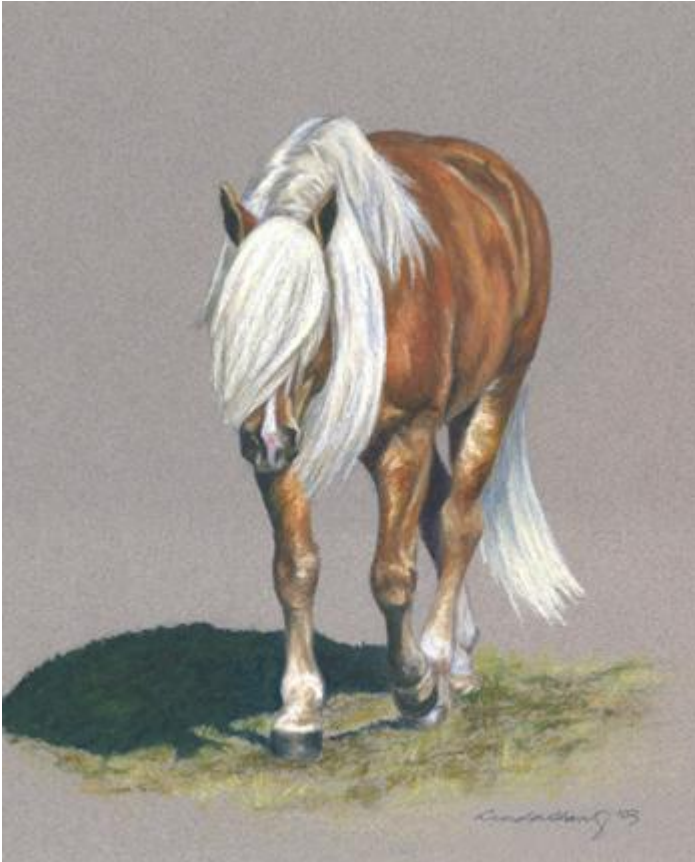


Once the majority of the body is laid in and blended, I'll carry on to use some coloured pencil to define some areas, then go back in with pastel in some spots where I need more depth of colour. I've left his gorgeous mane and tail for last, dying to get to it and praying that I don't mess it up! This piece went very smoothly — there are only about two hours' work into it at this point.



For the mane, I lay the strokes downward in the direction it falls, and follow the same procedure of laying down colours side by side, then blending, then going back in with the OP and/or coloured pencil to adjust the contrast. The stumps allow me to pull off the OP to get the flow of the mane and tail.

Last steps were to ground him with the shadow and some grass, and make any final adjustments of the highlights and shadows to punch the contrast. I just left this as a vignette, and that decision hasn't hurt its popularity any!



Completed painting, "It's in The Way You Walk" 14 x 11 Oil Pastel on Canson

When I need to cover large areas, I will use a cotton swab with just a touch of turpentine to blend, then manipulate the colour further with a stump before the turpentine is dry. I'll then go back in with more colour and either repeat the process, or just use the stump as at this stage the tooth is mostly taken up and the OP blends quite readily. I don't apply anything over the finished painting, just frame matted behind glass.

The versatility of oil pastel makes it perfect to handle anything from the sleekness of a horse to a more textured coat of a dog or fuzzy new foal. Using stumps, and with a bit of help from coloured pencil, one can manipulate the oil pastel to achieve significant detail for a very realistic end result.