

Some thoughts on oil pastel and plein air

by Joan Crice

Joan Crice, a member from Washington state, USA, shares some thoughts on her experiences using oil pastels in plein air work.

My dear friends - I just spent the day at a wonderful location here in Washington called Columbia Hills State Park - Horse Thief Lake. If you have not looked at local state parks or federal and even county in your area you would do well to investigate them for your Plein Air work outs.



Beacon Rock is a favorite location.

We have a group here and try to go out every Tuesday in good weather. I have been working with the oil pastels for only a year and it has taken that long to get some understanding of the various choices available. I have chosen to take the water soluble ones on site as it is easier to deal with water than turps, oils or other. I have learned to combine two characteristics of the rather dry and hard Cretacolor sticks and the very soft ones by Binny - Smith . I use Canson Mi Tientes paper taped to a firm board as a backing. The results were quite satisfactory. The Cretacolors can be spread with brush and water to get quicker coverage and there is still plenty of tooth left for the Portfolios to be applied and spread with fingers or however you like. In caring for these pastels I suggest taking an ice pack if it is very hot as even the Cretacolors will soften and start to droop without some cooling. Usually the Cretacolors are hard enough and don't spread with fingers but even they can wilt in our hot and dry climate. Do take a brush or two to spread the hard pastels as it will speed up coverage. Remember that each brand has its own characteristics but with some experimenting you can have good results. Hope some of you can use the hints - enjoy anyway.

Joan is the only oil pastelist in her plein air group. But she has found that is not a problem. We were wondering how her plein air group got started. Here is what Joan has to say about her group.

I checked with a couple of the original members of this very loose knit group and this is how it all started. In the beginning, a few artists decided they would like to paint on location. So they formed a little group and sallied forth once a week to various places of interest. The group is not close knit nor does it require dues, roll call or regular meetings, just the way most artists like it. When just one member became overwhelmed with the responsibility of selecting sites and e-mailing everyone she rebelled and said we all have to participate in selection and notices. We have done this and it is working. When the weather turns nasty and the colds is too much we meet for lunch for a session of critiques. Sometimes it is a restaurant and sometimes a private home.

The critiques are meant to help and be constructive, no flaming here. A good opportunity to pull out those paintings that we know are not working and see what can be done. We all encourage each other and offer our best advice.



This is a group picture of everyone busy painting on location, note that not everyone is painting the same view The place is Parkdale OR

I joined this group at the invitation of a local member and have been on location most every week. Most of them work in acrylics, watercolor, pastel, pencil but I am the only one trying my hand at oil pastels – it has been a learning experience. The e-mail list is very large at 30 or so but only a few ever really show up. Each person who volunteered must select a place and notify all on the list. Most of our outings are within 30 minutes drive time from Hood River , OR. We have many natural wonders right at hand with Mt. Hood, Mt. Adams, parks with views of lakes, rimrock and Columbia hills, the Columbia River, old barns and old houses. Lots of wild life and birds to photograph and draw.



This photo was taken on location at Rasmussen Farm, Hood River, OR. As you can see various media are used.

I have learned a few things in my trips that I will pass on. When you are working with a group you need to think of more than just a special view. Since we go out at 9 AM until at least 2 PM there needs to be good bathroom facilities within a reasonable distance. If you have high heat during the summer months as we do here around Goldendale, WA, you need shade, either trees or you can use the umbrella or a variation. You can carry your own shade but trees are a big plus. Wind can be a big problem around this area so plan early outings when the wind is down. Check the sites for any charges, good views and not overcrowded. I have seen parks too manicured to be of interest and too crowded to be pleasant. Lots of other sites might be perfect if



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there is just one or two cars involved. You could park just off the road for special views of barns, houses, windswept trees or whatever is interesting. Just be sure you are safely out of traffic's way. Be sure to bring your camera to get the best shots in ever changing light conditions. That way you have your sketches and photos for inspiration. Just get out there and do it. This is really good fun, especially with a friend.

Hope the information will encourage people to get out and look around, oil pastels work very well for sketching or even for finished work.