

Tools for working with Oil Pastels

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It is always fun to look over another artist's shoulder to see how he or she does it. So think of this article as looking over the shoulder of several artists as they share photos of their tools and explain how and why they use them.

This is a snapshot of just a selection of implements that CJ Crichton-Kelly uses to whip these oily little sticks into submission.



#1. Old paintbrush - for applying odourless solvent/turps to create washes or to dissolve mistakes!

#2. Candle - for heating up #3 - #6

You don't need to heat OP's. It is just something I have chosen to do after reading discussions on it. I wanted to really stretch the capabilities of OP, I wanted it to do more than what I could achieve using the soft pastels. I really really wanted to explore the sculptural possibilities of OP's (must come from my need to push things around). I wanted to get texture that I could touch. And heating does that.

#3. Home made heating tool, made from a child's building block and a screw-in hook (the type used for hanging up your pot-plants) When heated over the candle, the black soot immediately wiped off with a thick rag, I can scrawl thick or thin swathes through heavily applied OP, to create interesting, almost calligraphic, textures.

#4. Teaspoon - heated over the candle, creates broader, flatter swathes, giving the melted OP a sheen, and 'setting' it so that as soon as it has cooled and hardened, another layer can be added.

#5. Palette knife - heated, wiped, and applied by pressing into the thick OP layers to create an oil paint effect. Also used for scraping back (either intentionally or ridding errors), or scratching lines into the OP to reveal under layers of colour.

#6. Potters tool - I picked this up because I saw the possibilities of heating the ball tipped ends (hard to pick up in the photo - sorry), and it melts fine lines into the OP - great for neatening hairy, untidy edges or just for texture.

#7. Potters tool - another I picked up fairly cheaply, with very hard rubber ends which pushes the OP around really well. Great for blending large areas of colour, and pushing the OP into stubborn canvas holes.

#8. Colour Shaper - grey synthetic rubber tip, which is harder than the ivory tips used in soft pastels, but not as hard as #7. The point allows for blending into tight corners, and smoothing out fine lines.

#9. Home made blender - made with an old paintbrush handle, a rubber band and a chunk of #10.

#10. Very hard eraser (in this case a Faber Castell) which is probably the cheapest option and does the job of all the other blenders. The top eraser has been carved up with a knife, the chunks used to blend. The bottom eraser is the original, intact eraser.

#11. Domestic iron - no picture of this one as it should be familiar to everyone, and if it isn't then power to you!! I use a sheet of baking paper to cover the painting, iron it (not too hot). This sets the OP and gives it a texture, and sheen, that can be immediately worked over. Good for initial colour 'washes' or setting your underpainting. You can also manipulate the OP while it's still hot, scratching, scraping etc. I have also ironed leaves etc into the OP (under the baking paper of course) to get added texture.

Ah, the most important tool...hate to give you the finger, but hey...couldn't do OPs without...I can spread the OPs around but mostly I use the finger for the fine blends...I can run it very lightly to keep the sheen moving in the direction I want, I can run colors lightly into each other for perfect transitions.

razor knife for keeping clean edges or sgraffito (scratching designs into the OP)

Prismacolor pencil for original sketch, sometimes for accenting a line.

Q-tip cotton swab for dabbing soft blends

craft knife for scraping

the blob at the top is a kneadable eraser...on my homemade surface or art spectrum I can use it to clean up lines and sometimes to reduce the intensity of an area.

The two jars are acrylic mediums...which she no longer recommends after a failed painting.

Alexander Semenko does not use many tools, but here's what he uses constantly.



One in the bottom I sneaked from my mum. Must have something to do with cuticles, I figure. Right side is used for settling down loose particles with its convex polished surface. Left side I have sharpened and it's very good for scraping, sgraffito thing, etc.

One of tortillions that I made is in the center.

You see half of pastel stick - I'm illustrating my recent idea to use masking tape when pastel is stripped of wrapper. MUCH less messy this way.

I use the brushes with turpentine, forgot to put them in, not a big deal I figure.

Bought kneadable eraser this week, never seen them before. Very funny thing. I don't know if it's of any use for OPs.

Below (on next page) are the tools that Becky McConnell uses.

#1 - Sennelier OPs, Grands, I think I have most of the others except flourescents.

#2 - Synthetic brush for underlaying on Wallis or other support which can handle turps.

Oil Pastel Primer

#3 - Turpenoid - I use this for underpainting, after I lay down a base, usually with the Sennelier Grands.

#4 - John Elliott's book, Kenneth Leslie's is in the mail and of course WetCancas.com!

#5 - Paper Towels for blending.

#6 - razor, palette knives and paint scraper for blending, scraping and smooching special effects.

#7 - Sakura electric eraser and kneadable eraser - to be honest I mostly use the kneadable eraser to play with while I'm staring at my painting wondering what to do next! Electric erasers can be used for blending while the OPs are pretty wet and it will take the OPs off almost completely after a couple of days - don't use on Colorfix paper, though -unless you're careful. I'm not...

#8 - Stumps and tortillions - great for sharpening lines and blending

#9 - ColourShaper tools - I use these for blending, sharpening lines, etc - the big one comes in handy for smoothing big areas of color.

#10 - Walnut Hollow pencils - I use these for detail and initial drawing - I also got these from Dick Blick, but I understand you can buy them from hobby/craft stores, too.

