

Wareham Art Club Demonstration

Nina Squire – 8th October 2018

Using Pastels in Landscapes and Animal Portraits



Nina took a degree in Illustration in Falmouth, followed by a PGCE, which led her into teaching. During this period, she developed a preference for working in pastels, specialising in landscapes and animal portraits. She now lives in Dorset and earns her living from commissions and running classes, predominantly in this field of study.



In the first half of her demonstration, Nina worked on a portrait of a boxer dog, whilst explaining about the materials and techniques she employs.

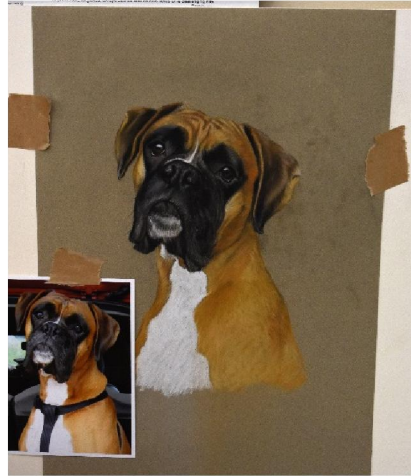
She prefers to work on Sommelier pastel card, which has a “toothed” surface, rather like emery paper, allowing the pastels to be applied in layers. She uses both large stick pastels and finer pastel pencils, as these permit large areas or fine details to be achieved, depending on the subject. Unison pastels are her medium of choice, being handmade and of consistent quality. Nina sharpens her pastels by using a knife rather than a sharpener. It is also possible to use fine sandpaper to get a sharp point.

Nina also uses acrylic paper as a basis for some work, notably when creating mixed-media pieces.



In order to achieve a more painterly effect with the pastels, it is possible to use a specifically manufactured liquidiser. However, Nina has discovered that a very similar affect can be created much more economically by using vodka in a spray diffuser. This process can be seen in some detail in a YouTube video showing time-lapse images of a piece of work, which can be accessed via a link on her website. The website address is www.thepastelartist.co.uk

When working on a commission, where possible Nina will try to meet the animal as well as talk to the owners. This allows her to take her own photographs whilst collecting valuable information about the animal's characteristics. The quality of any images used for a portrait are of paramount importance, although Nina also uses her own knowledge and experience to make decisions about the final outcome.



Usually, Nina will work on a number of different pieces of work at any one time. She tends to choose a neutral colour for the background, as this helps focus attention on the subject of the picture, without the need for too much embellishment. Backgrounds are often kept to a minimum, unless there is a particular request from the owner to include contextual information. One technique which Nina passed on as a helpful tip, was to occasionally turn the image upside down. This has the advantage of correcting preconceptions about the subject, notably with proportion and shape. Initial work tends to concentrate on building up areas of light and dark tones in a sketchy way, followed by more detailed work. Eyes are often completed quite early on, as they have a large bearing in establishing the character and expression of the subject.

Colour is mixed directly on the paper, working in successive layers in order to achieve subtle tonal and colour variations. Nina likes to keep groups of colours together when working on a single piece, to

make it easier to return to any given area at a later stage. Blending is achieved with the pencils themselves rather than with fingers, as the latter has a tendency to lose luminosity and clarity. A putty rubber can be used to remove any unwanted areas of colour or smudges. The opacity of the medium facilitates the ability to create highlights over darker areas, especially towards the end of a commission.

Nina prefers to work with the paper on a vertical surface, as this allows the pastel dust to fall off the work, instead of collecting on the paper or hands or face!



After the tea break, Nina continued her demonstration by working on the early stages of a spaniel portrait, with particular attention to building up the details of its eye. She explained that the highlights were crucial in giving a sense of vitality and liveliness in the subject. Tonal contrast was also very important in conveying the underlying bone structure, before going on to surface effects, such as the direction of the dog's hair.

This was followed by a further demonstration, this time a mixed-media study of a shoreline scene, using pastels and alcohol on Fisher 400 paper. Nina showed how it is possible to capture the sense of incoming waves and a partly cloudy sky by adding pastel, followed by spraying with a mist of alcohol, which was then blended with a soft brush. This process could be repeated several times, either while the work was still damp, or alternatively waiting for the alcohol to evaporate. Additionally, it is possible to achieve a sparkling effect on the water, by scraping pastel dust onto a wet surface. These techniques encouraged a freer approach to the work, especially when the addition of finer details is less important.

