⚹ More Than Meets the Eye ⚹

A surprisingly smooth surface - Multimedia Artboard - turns out to be the perfect ground for creating texture.

I've often marveled at the wonderful textures achieved by the great master pastelist Edgar Degas (1834-1917). He built up layers of sparkling color, which conveyed the illusion of depth at the same time they exhibited abstract qualities. Degas achieved his textures through many unusual techniques - he held paintings over steaming kettles to liquefy the pastel, scrubbed liquid pigments with bristle brushes and experimented with tracing papers. He also made his own fixative. Sadly he didn't keep records, so many of his methods remain a mystery. As contemporary pastelists, we still can take a lesson from

Trestle on White Horn Creek (29x39)

Degas and never be content to use only the standard materials and techniques of our time.

With that in mind, I recently discovered a new surface that's wonderful for creating the beautiful textures that are unique to pastel. Multimedia Artboard is a resin-permeated paper that's stiff, non-warping,

archival and suitable for all painting media. When I felt this smooth board, I was skeptical about how it would work for pastel. The surface seemed to have too little tooth to allow for the build-up of multiple layers of color. When I began painting, however, it became clear that my assumption was incorrect. As long as I applied the strokes with enough pressure, the pastel lay beautifully on the surface with a texture similar to the jewel-like one I so admire in Degas' paintings. Thus, I embarked on a mission to explore textural effects more fully on this exciting surface.

WORKING ON A DARK GROUND

Multimedia Artboard comes in both black and white, and I gravitated toward the black immediately. You can achieve rich color on a black surface. The key of the painting is lowered and there's built-in color harmony. In addition to working on the black board, I also tried the white board - toning it with dark values of liquid acrylic. Working on a dark background requires a mental adjustment in seeing the value of your colors. Initial layers must be dark enough. What seems to be the right color is usually a value or two too light. When I work on a dark surface, I proceed more slowly, going from dark to light in small steps to make sure I'm choosing the correct values.

TECHNIQUES TO CREATE TEXTURE

Multimedia Artboard has a nice, random texture, and there are many techniques you can use to enhance that effect. Side strokes will deposit more color depending on the amount of pressure you exert on your pastel stick. The greater the pressure, the the thicker the deposit of pastel. Crosshatched strokes can build a beautiful web of color. You can peck away with dot-like marks in a pointillistic manner or achieve nice random marks by rolling your pastel. I like to combine all these methods according to the needs of my painting.

From my own experience of making pastels, I know darker pastels are generally harder than light colors; therefore, I save the richest buildup for my lighter values and apply my dark values more thinly. Soft pastels work best on the Multimedia Artboard, and pressure is important with this surface. You can push layers of pastel

These details of *Trestle on White Horn Creek* give a close-up view of the textural effects you can achieve on Multimedia Artboard.

into the surface almost indefinitely, but you must be aggressive to make the pastel build up.

KEEP SIGHT OF YOUR VLAUES

Seeing the value of your colors accurately is even more critical when working on a dark ground. It's also important to be able to identify colors that are close in value. Weaving colors of similar values together can lead to some great textural effects. In addition, complementary colors of the same value, such as an orange and an olive green, create exciting color vibrations. In skies, a light pink and a light blue of the same value shimmer with the silvery quality of a hot, hazy summer day. Light yellow and pale lavender is another combination I like. Deep purple and deep blue-green is a great dark combination; a dark value combination of these two colors is so much richer

and interesting than a simple dark area of each color in isolation. Colors of the same value that are closer on the color wheel can be just as lovely. Pink and gold is a combination I often weave together. Because the Multimedia surface is wonderful for broken color effects, I try to let colors in each layer show through each subsequent layer.

Multimedia Artboard accepts all media, so it's ideal for mixed media work. I use everything from water and walnut drawing ink to acrylics, acrylic matte medium, and aluminum oxide grit to create a range of effects. (See the step-by-step demonstration that follows for more details).

BALANCING TONALITY

When creating texture from different color layers, it's important not to lose sight of the color temperature of the painting as a whole. I try to make my paintings either predominately cool or predominately warm. Most landscapes are cool with lots of blues and greens; thus, hot colors in small amounts can increase color interest. It's easy to adjust the color temperature of an area by glazing lightly, using the side of the pastel. You also can dot a few strokes of color in an area to push the color mixture toward warm or cool. I'm not overly concerned with achieving realistic color as much as I am making color combinations that feel right for the painting. After all, if the value is right, the color will work!

Sunny Field **(11x15)**
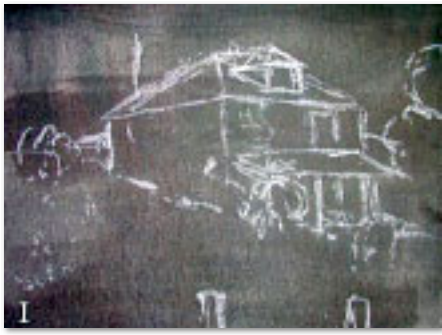
Step 1: I used a gray-toned Multimedia Artboard that I created when I brushed over a failed painting with acrylic matte medium. (You can "redo" paintings indefinitely with the Multimedia Artboard by brushing acrylic matte medium over the surface and starting again). Once the matte medium was dry, I began the painting by using a light-colored pastel to draw in the composition.

Step 2: I began roughing in the basic value structure with side strokes. I intentionally kept my colors dark. I planned to lighten the values in progressive steps, building textures as I went.

Step 3: I wanted to minimize the sky texture, so I liquefied the pastel by brushing water over it. I also washed over the shadow side of the house and areas of grass. These washes helped unify my color, but in later steps I went back over these areas with additional layers of pastel.

Step 4: I worked back over the wash areas, restoring the richness of the colors and bringing out new textures. I began hatching many colors of similar value into the grassy area in the foreground. As I worked over the washes I lightened up my values.

Step 5: To make more pronounced texture on the shadow side of the vine-covered house, I mixed acrylic matte medium with white aluminum oxide grit and loosely brushed it into the pastel. Matte medium increases tooth, darkens as it dries and allows the brushstrokes to show through. When I went over the dried texture with pastel, I achieved the crusty texture I wanted.

Step 6: Near the end, I tightened up details and added sparkling glazes of gentle side strokes over the grassy foreground to make this area more interesting.

Step 7: I corrected small drawing problems and tightened a few details using a black pastel. I also

added the strand of barbed wire to create interest in the foreground. Then, using Daniel Smith walnut drawing ink and a liner brush, I drew into dark areas with quick hatching strokes. The sepia tone added a subtle richness and atmosphere to *The Fixer Upper* (16x20).

BLENDING DOS AND DON'TS

Excessive blending can ruin the jewel-like color quality you can get from using pastel on the Multimedia Artboard. There are times that you need to blend to soften an edge or to modify a passage that seems to interfere with the overall effect. I like to blend my skies to reduce the amount of texture there. My favorite blender is a small, folded piece of a Foamie, a soft vinyl material readily available at craft and discount stores. I cut it into small pieces and use quick, upward strokes with gentle pressure to feather edges. Stronger pressure and circular strokes blend the layers more completely. Usually when I use the Foamie to blend this way, I intend to add layers of cross-hatching or side strokes over the blended area. Keep in mind that blending neutralizes the broken color effects that are so effective on a dark ground, so be careful!

THE POWER OF PURPLE

Purple has long been admired as a color of mystery and power. I've found that toning my Multimedia Artboard with a magenta / purple tone produces exciting glowing effects in a pastel landscape. I use Delta Ceramcoat acrylic in eggplant aubergine. I apply the color with a piece of foam, rubbing the color as I drip the liquid acrylic straight from the bottle. This technique is quick and easy and produces a transparent tone on the previously bright white board. I especially love the gorgeous skies that I've been able to paint with this purple ground. I apply blues, lavenders, pinks, golds and salmons on top of it in layers. As I build up the layers, the glow of color becomes more intense.

The purple ground tones down subsequent strokes of green but makes them richer. In addition, pure ultramarines seem to sparkle on the purple surface. One caveat: As with a black ground, you need to make a mental adjustment to choose colors a value or two darker than what you might ordinarily choose.

For all the reasons I've mentioned - from the sparkling texture possibilities to the ease of using mixed media on the surface - I recommend Multimedia Artboard. Give it a try. Perhaps, like me, you'll get hooked!

7 Tips for Painting on Multimedia Artboard

1. Combine side strokes with cross-hatching and dotting to build a beautiful web of texture.

2. Vary the pressure with which you apply your pastel to control the amount of color you apply. The more pressure you apply, the more pastel you put on the surface, creating a "blanket" of more opaque color that can obliterate the strokes underneath. In a bright-or light-value passage, a blanket of pastel can create great drama in a painting. Light pressure, on the other hand, deposits less pastel and creates a transparent glaze that allows the layers of pastel underneath to shine through.

3. Avoid excessive blending, which will destroy the jewel-like quality of pastel.

4. Use acrylic matte medium and water to liquefy pastel. Apply the matte medium and, while it's still wet, paint into it with pastel. As the matte medium dries, the pastel grips onto it and builds up in a unique way. You can also apply the medium to existing areas of pastel to darken the value. Or use a liner brush to apply the matte medium to areas where you want to create texture. This practice works especially well for foreground grasses and detail. The matte medium will stay the same color as it dries.

5. Use liner brushes to make graceful linear strokes and subtle textures in pastel. Simply use the liner to draw into your pastel with water. Be advised that the color will dry lighter.

6. Remember that you see less texture as you move into the distance, so you can use the corner of a Foamie to blend areas of a painting, such as in the clouds and at the horizon, where you want a soft transition between land and sky.

7. Use a razor to cut into the surface, creating sharp lines that are the same color as the ground. This works well for foreground textures and details, such as tree branches and fence posts. For more information on Multimedia Artboard, call 1-866-278-8731 or visit www.multimediaartboard.com.