



## Paul deMarrais Pastels

[www.pauldemarrais.com](http://www.pauldemarrais.com)

### ✘ Pastel Painting in Public ✘

Promotion is a key ingredient in making a living as an artist. Many artists live far away from the art centers of New York City and Santa Fe. In these smaller markets, new collectors are a challenge to find.

Galleries can help an artist find an audience but artists cannot expect galleries to do all the promotional work. By getting out in the community meeting people and talking about their art, artists can enhance their chances of survival. One way of getting out there is by demonstrating art whenever possible.

During the last three summers I have completed pastel painting demonstrations at the Oakes Daylily Festival in Coryton, Tennessee, near Knoxville.

Daylily lovers gather each blooming season to walk through and admire the display gardens of the Oakes Daylily company. This year over 2,500 people attended the festival over a warm weekend in late June.

Oakes Daylilies has collaborated with my gallery in publishing limited edition giclée prints of my pastels, and offers them for sale in their mail order catalog.

With all the colorful clothing and daylily blooms, the scene is an exciting subject for painting. Painting in a crowd of people is not as terrifying as it would seem and can be both fun and rewarding for an artist. I have assembled some tips to help make the process less intimidating.

#### SCOUTING AHEAD

I always arrive early to find a good location for a painting. At the daylily festival, a large tent was erected in the display garden. After an hour, I discovered several good views looking out into the garden. Scouting ahead eliminates the anxiety of walking in “cold,” not knowing what you will encounter. I could envision what my painting might look like with the crowd among the daylilies. Demonstrating can be stressful, so eliminating needless anxiety is very helpful.

#### PREPARING FOR THE ELEMENTS

Tennessee summers are hot and humid! I take sunscreen, sunglasses, and my faithful, floppy painting hat which helps

reduce glare. Drinking plenty of water is critical when you're out in the sun. I pack a lunch with some fruit to snack on and take a few breaks to walk around and stretch my legs. Painting "*en plein air*" is physical work. Being as comfortable as possible makes a huge difference in having a successful outcome.

## GEAR DOWN AND TRAVEL LIGHT

I take a minimum of gear, which allows me to set up and clean up quickly. My pastel set contains 75 of my handmade pastels, housed in a lightweight tackle box organizer. (Organizer 199 is available at Home Depot for around \$9.00). I place two-inch mattress foam in each of the

compartments. Pastels are laid on the foam and covered by another two-inch layer. The soft mattress foam and the width of the box prevent the pastels from rattling around and breaking when the lid is closed. A sturdy lightweight handle makes the box easy to carry.

I organize my supplies so that I am ready to paint in seconds and can clean up and be ready to leave in a minute or two. I like to sit on a step-stool type of tackle box and hold my pastelboard on my lap. This way I avoid peering around an easel, and can sit directly in front of my subject. The step stool opens up and inside I store fixative paper towels, hand cleaner, pre-mixed watercolor washes, brushes and other gear.

Painting on location requires tremendous physical and mental energy. By not wasting precious energy hauling heavy and awkward gear, an artist saves all available energy for the painting process.

## START QUICKLY TO BUILD CONFIDENCE

When I arrive, I like to set up and begin immediately. I make a rough map of my composition with vine charcoal. This is an important step, as I can readily see problems and make changes. My confidence builds as I become comfortable with my composition. Then I get out my soft pastels and begin painting. With a good strong start I can relax a bit and enjoy the process.

## CONCENTRATE... AND BE FRIENDLY

Demonstrating in public is a multitasking exercise. I want the painting to go well and show my skill, but I'm also there to talk to





people and make connections. Art and promotion need to compliment each other.

There is an element of theater involved. I realize that at the daily festival I am only a small part of the entertainment. I know people will be watching me and I am prepared for many interruptions. Some people enjoy chatting to the artist while others enjoy quietly watching the painting take shape.

I have developed the ability to talk and paint at the same time. This skill takes practice. Part of my brain is very focused on painting, and another part carries on a conversation. If the conversation becomes complex, I briefly stop painting. Critical details in the painting are saved until I have full concentration.



Visiting with children is especially enjoyable for me. Kids are natural artists and often ask intelligent questions. They enjoy telling me what they like to paint and draw. People want to connect with me and I want them to know I'm one of them - I just happen to make a career as a pastel artist. Although I'm an introvert, I like people. A people-friendly attitude is essential for any dealings between the artist and the public.

## POSITIVE BENEFITS

It can be scary to paint in front of people. You are putting your skills on the line without a safety net. There have to be rewards for taking the risk.

My painting experiences at the Oakes Daylily Festival have been very beneficial for my career. I've sold original paintings, and I've made new contacts which resulted in sales at my gallery. I have been approached for workshops, have made new friends and revisited old friends. Hundreds of people from all over the country know about me and my paintings. Some have purchased prints as a reminder of how much they enjoyed the festival.

Artists can gain confidence, practice in promotion and critically important income from this kind of exposure. Painting in public is a good opportunity for an artist to grow and prosper.

*Paul deMarrais has worked in pastels for the past 25 years. He lives in rural Tennessee, on a farm which is the subject of many of his paintings.*