

Online Tutorial – Pastel Artists Canada

The Lure of Velour

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It was love at first sight! Seeing and feeling the lush colours available in suede matboard were a sensuous experience indeed. Putting the first strokes on it with extra soft pastels had me hooked!

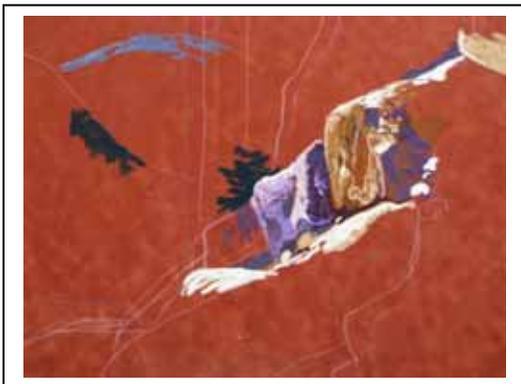
Yet pastel is not a medium I came to early in my lifelong pursuit of art. I was a watercolour painter from when I was a youngster and continued to perfect my craft until I was in my middle years. At that point I was looking for a medium that had more punch. I took on acrylics and later on oils, all of which I love for their particular qualities. However, none of these mediums are as direct and immediate as pastels. It is just so much fun having all these bits of pure pigment at your fingertips. A little dab of this or that is just so easy with all the colour choices available. It is an ideal beginner's medium as well as being ever so practical when on location out of doors, however; excitement for pure colour only takes you so far! Naturally, one must deal with those essential ingredients like composition and design, values and temperature to achieve a successful painting.

I use Schmincke pastels almost exclusively for their buttery consistency. As suede board is my favourite support to work on, they make a perfect combination as the pastel particles are held down beautifully by the velvety surface. There is very little dust to deal with. I usually start with a few value sketches. I choose the colour of the suede board to complement the colour scheme of my subject matter. My methods are quite direct without much layering. By not covering the surface completely, I use the little bits of ground showing to unify my painting. I love negative space. I have also found that the lush colours of the suede board have an effect on me. It frees up those preconceived ideas of local colour. I let the ground colour talk to me while working on it. I make colour choices not according to what I see but according to what the painting needs or what my response to the colours already on the painting is. I think of complementary, triad and analogous colours. I am not afraid to choose a sky that is red or green if that is what the other colours dictate. Nobody will say to you that reality is not so. Your painting will have that “wow” factor because it works!



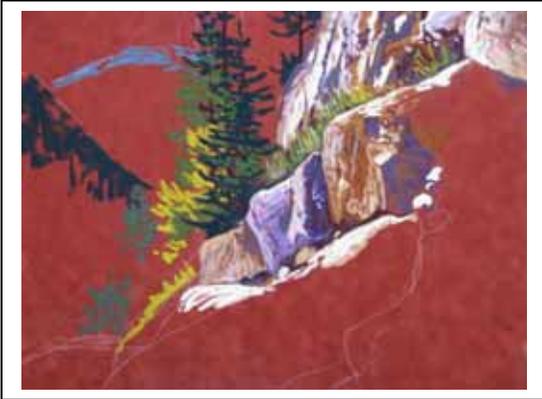
Reference Photograph:

This scene depicts the curvy road going up to Red Rock Canyon in Waterton National Park in Alberta, one of my favourite places to be.



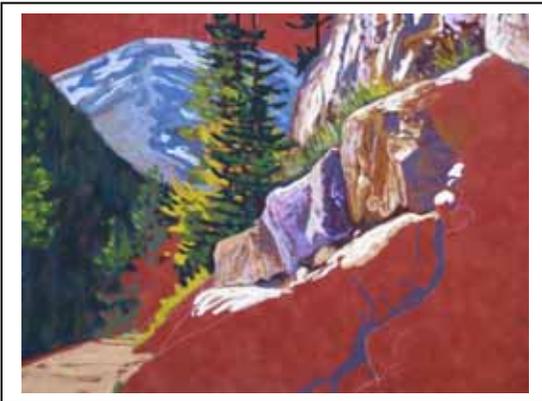
Step 1 – Initial Drawing and Start

I felt such warmth radiating from the rocks that I chose a persimmons red suede board for my support to keep this mountain scene warm. With a harder white pastel stick I draw in the major shapes but then immediately turn to my favourite Schmincke and Unison pastels and start painting the rocks using a more direct approach. I put colours mostly next to one another with some but not too much layering. At this stage, I already go for some highlights and dark colour swatches all over to give me a sense of where I am going. This also gets my creative juices flowing.



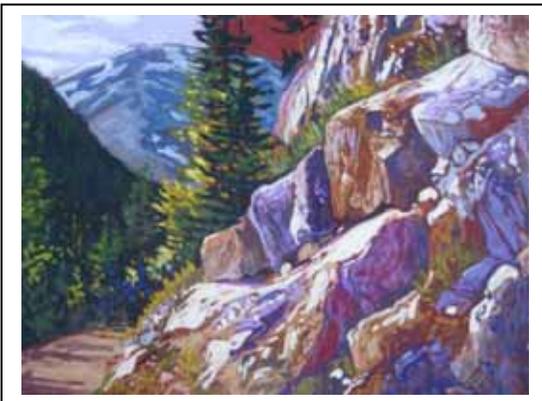
Step 2 – Getting a Sense of Colour and Form

I develop the rocks a bit more and lay in the trees, a dominant feature in my painting as well as some of the dark slope on the left.



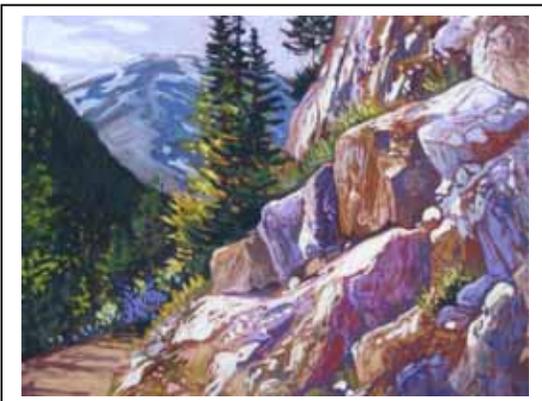
Step 3 – Working on All Elements

Being careful to choose softer values and edges to push back that part of the painting, I paint in the mountains. Now the whole left dark slope is being blocked in, creating texture and using different greens to simulate the appearance of a treed slope in shadow. The composition may possibly need a bush where slope meets the big trees to interrupt the long diagonal but I leave that item to be decided on later.



Step 4 – Nearing Completion

I keep working on the rocks having fun with the luscious colours, shadows and highlights. I try on some sky colours for size, am tempted to go for some orange glow but decide to keep it muted with only some lighter clouds to keep the strongest lights and focus on the rocks. I add more interest to the left slope, bridging the distance and foreground with muted middle-value green trees highlighting some where the sun hits.



Step 5 – Finished Painting “Canyon Road” 14” x 18”

The painting gets a good “look-over”, turning it upside down and sideways to ensure that my composition is satisfactory, that colours are not isolated, that my values are correct and that lights and darks make my eye move throughout the work. I move some colours around in places, adjusting some highlights and calling it “done”!