

BROKEN COLOR

Using “broken color” means applying paint or pastel in small, separate strokes of pure color, without BLENDING, so that the picture is built up in the same way that a mosaic is. From the appropriate viewing distance, these small strokes appear to fuse, but because they are fragmented, they reflect more light and movement than blended color does.

It was the English landscape painter Constable (1776-1837) who first used flecks of broken color, in his desire to capture “the dews, breezes, blooms and freshness” of nature. His lush green meadows and sparkling foliage appear so because they are composed of large numbers of different greens juxtaposed on the canvas rather than blended together.

The French artist Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) developed Constable’s ideas further, and anticipated the Impressionists by using pure, unmixed colors.

However, it was the Impressionists — notably Bazille (1841-70), Monet (1840-1926), Pissarro (1831-1903) and Sisley (1839-99) — who exploited the full potential of the technique of broken color. These *plein-air* (open-air) painters were eager to capture the fleeting, evanescent effects of light on the landscape, and found that small dabs and strokes of color allowed them to work quickly and render these effects before the light changed or disappeared altogether. In addition, their fragmented brushstrokes seemed to quiver with light, enhancing the feeling of warmth and sunlight that pervades most Impressionist paintings.

The broken color approach can be used with any medium, but it is important to keep your colors fresh and unsullied. Clean your

brushes frequently, and re-charge your dipper or water jar at regular intervals.

This technique is very absorbing and rewarding, and is excellent for developing your powers of observation. As the Impressionists did, you must rid your mind of preconceived ideas about the colors of things — observe closely and paint what you see, not what you think you see.

Finally, it is advisable to stick to a fairly limited palette of colors so as to achieve an overall harmony rather than a discordant hotch-potch of color. The Impressionist palette usually consisted of a selection of the primary colors (red, yellow, and blue) and secondary colors (orange, green, and violet) only. By juxtaposing complementary colors, they achieved brilliant hues; by mixing complementaries, they created colorful darks and neutrals, without the need for black, which tends to muddy colors. Thus a typical Impressionist palette might contain cadmium yellow; yellow ocher; viridian; emerald green; cobalt blue; ultramarine; vermilion; crimson alizarin; and cobalt violet. In addition, lead white was used to lighten colors and for its light-reflective properties.

Oil • Acrylic

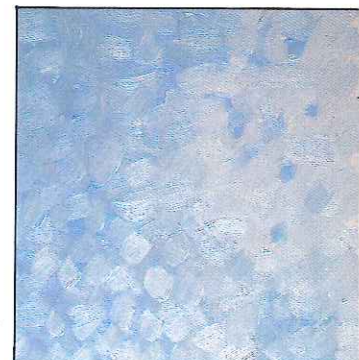
Oil or acrylic paint used when applying broken color should be fairly thick and dry so that each brushstroke retains its shape on the canvas without running. Rather than working on one area of the canvas at a time, aim to cover the canvas with colored strokes and then add further layers if necessary. Each stroke should be applied confidently and then left alone; overworking will ruin the immediacy and spontaneity you are aiming for.



Broken color • Short strokes



Broken color • Fluid strokes



Broken color • Stippled strokes



Fluid strokes

Here the artist uses a No. 4 flat brush to apply fluid, curving strokes. Light and dark tones are juxtaposed, without blending, to build up a mosaic of color. The rhythmical force of these strokes brings to mind the paintings of Van Gogh.



Short strokes

Claude Monet was perhaps the greatest exponent of Impressionism: he covered his canvases with tiny, irregular strokes like these, color over color.



Stippled strokes

The gentle, shimmering quality of Alfred Sisley's paintings derives from his use of pale, translucent colors, applied with small stippled strokes with the end of the brush. Notice how the pale, creamy ground shows through in places.

Watercolor • Ink

Because inks and watercolors are transparent, you can overlap strokes of contrasting color to achieve interesting optical mixtures.

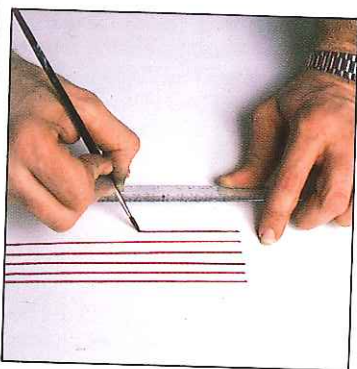
Pastel

Pastel is well suited to the broken color technique, because it is a direct way of applying pigment. Because the strokes of color remain separate, it is possible to use the color of the paper as part of the total painting. In addition, you can place strokes of color on top of each other to create a web of sparkling color.

BRUSHRULING

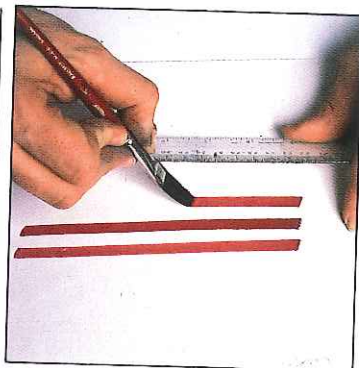
Making a perfectly straight line with a brush and paint can be tricky, because the brush tends to wobble and it is difficult to control the flow of the paint. It is best to use masking tape or a ruler if you don't have a steady hand. In order to avoid smudging, keep the ruler well away from the paint and always make sure that the underlying color is smooth and dry before attempting to paint over it.

In most representational paintings, perfectly straight edges and lines are not desirable because they remove any "painterly" effect. But brushruling is useful if you are painting in a deliberately hard-edge style, or if your subject is architecture or other manmade objects.



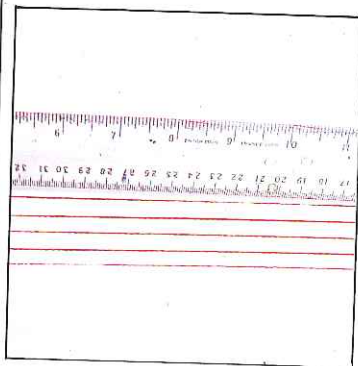
Brush Ruling • Fine Lines

Hold the ruler at a 45-degree angle to the paper with your fingers bunched underneath it so that the edge is not actually touching the paper. Gently draw a small sable brush along the ruler. Keep the ferrule of the brush against the ruler's edge to insure a straight line.



Brush Ruling • Broad Lines

Holding the ruler in the same way as before, draw along it with a well-loaded flat brush. Again, keep the ferrule of the brush against the ruler. When the line is painted, remove the ruler carefully to prevent smudging.



Brush Ruling • Imprinting Lines

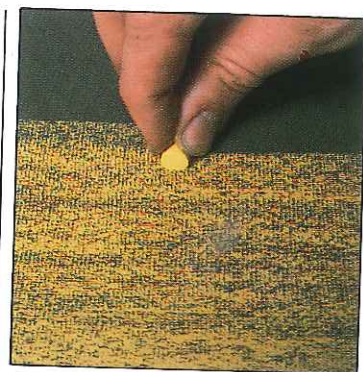
Use the brush to apply thick, fairly dry paint to the edge of the ruler. Press the edge of the ruler down firmly onto the paper. Lift the ruler off quickly to leave a thin line of color. This method is useful where a straight but less "mechanical" line is required.

BUILDING UP

In essence, building up is the pastel equivalent of the *IMPASTO* technique in oil painting, in that several layers of color can be applied one on top of the other, without blending. Pastel (as well as watercolor) often suffers from the "little old lady" image — people assume that it is about delicate flower studies and wispy portraits of young children. Of course, the *BLENDING* and *FEATHERED* strokes typical of these paintings have a valid place in pastel painting but the medium is also capable of producing rich, resonant effects. One way of giving strength and body to a pastel painting — particularly in portrait painting — is through the technique of building up.

Contrary to popular belief, pastel *can* be laid on, coat after coat, so long as each layer is sprayed with fixative. (You must, however, make allowances for the inevitable darkening of the color after spraying). Edgar Degas (1834-1917) often used this method, applying layer after layer of contrasting hue in scribbled hatchings. The result was a rich patina of color "like a cork bath mat," according to the English artist Sickert (1860-1942).

Building up has the best results with soft pastels, used on their side. One of the advantages of the technique is that it enables large areas of the composition to be built up quickly. It will also encourage the faint-hearted pastellist to develop a bolder, more confident approach to the medium.



Building up

1 In the building up method, the side of a soft pastel stick is used to build the thick, solid layers of color. Here the artist applies the first layer of color, boldly and thickly.



2 Spraying with fixative between each layer allows you to build up several coats of color. However, allow for the darkening effect of fixative.