



# Flesh Tones in Pastel with Carol Peebles

A guide for Portrait & Figure Painting application of color in the Classical Realist Tradition (flesh tones after completing a drawing and likeness) CarolPeebles.com BlueEaselClub.com

Begin with a Grisaille: a monochromatic drawing of your subject with the values, proportions and likeness well established. Technically, that is a gray ('gris' means gray in French), but you can use a different color. Some artists use a green, called a Verdaille ('verde' means green) or a Verdaccio underpainting, because they feel that a complimentary color to the final warmer color helps make the flesh tones vibrate. I do not do this, but it is an interesting idea to consider. As long as you establish a drawing with correct proportions and value, you will have a good foundation.

Instead of green or gray, I use a cocoa brown (sometimes sanguine or sepia), drawn out in Nupastel hard sticks (or any similar brand and color in hard sticks). If the subject has darker skin, I draw out the 'grisaille' in cordovan (a dark wine color). The underdrawing is the most important part of the finished piece. Examples (right), are sanguine and sepia underdrawings on a beige or soft umber grit pastel paper.

Next, mark your hierarchy of light and dark in the colors you see on the person. You are now integrating the local color on top of your grisaille. If you fail to establish the hierarchy right in the



beginning, you will be guessing your way through the entire piece and it will not end well. An understanding of the extremes of light and dark should govern all further applications of color. See the example (left) of the simplified 'grisaille' in cocoa brown, with a spot for the lightest light and a spot for the darkest dark, beginning the process.

Don't use plain white for your lightest light- is it an extremely light yellow, blue or green? And don't use black for your darkest dark- could it be an eggplant color or dark blue? Photos can make all darks look black and all lights look white, so be careful of that and sometimes work from life to help your understanding of color. This example has a light yellow as the hierarchy of light and a sepia as the dark over the grisaille in cocoa brown.



After establishing the value hierarchy of local color, begin to layer in hatching marks over your grisaille. Work dark to light. Start to introduce the colors more specific to your model. There is no formula for flesh tones as every model and lighting situation is different. Indoor light differs from outdoor light. Every ethnicity's color varies person to person. Observe the color on your subject and learn to see local color rather than memorizing ideals. Study Classical Realism in oils as a great resource for learning color theory and its application. But, even a beginner can make some educated guesses about the color they see. Is it warm or cool? Study a color wheel and learn the tints, tones and shades of tertiary, complimentary and primary colors.

See the attached list of hard pastel sticks and pencils which I use for flesh tones to begin, working dark to light. Notice there is a pistachio green. Lightly veil a cool green over any section which looks too warm. The most common mistake in flesh tones is to make flesh too orange. If that happens, then consider veiling some cools over parts of it. This is much like 'glazing' in oil painting. It takes patience and a steady hand with very light strokes. Keep in mind there can be many cool colors and grays in flesh tones. Add any grays



and greens to the list I have given (next page). Hatch each layer lightly in a different direction so that the previous layer shows through a little. Think of each mark like hay in a haystack which rest on top of each other with air in between.



Hatch lightly while you integrate colors. Beginners often put way too much pastel down very quickly, which makes it difficult to layer. Flesh often reflects the colors around it. Nature marries everything. Integrate the surrounding colors a little bit within the flesh tones.

Once the colors are layered relative to the person you are drawing, then use soft pastels for the icing on the cake. Soft pastels have a wider range of colors and their supple, buttery texture can add variety to your piece after it is drawn out. I do not use them a lot, but they are helpful to finish a piece well. It is important to note that once you start to apply soft pastels, you should not go back over any parts with hard pastel to correct the drawing. Your drawing should be completely finished before you move on to soft pastel. I use many brands of soft pastel, they are all good. Get a basic 'flesh tones' set from any manufacturer to develop your drawing. Jack Richeson, Giralt and Terry Ludwig are great.

Remember, the value hierarchy which you completed in your grisaille directs your choice of the tints, tones and shades of the pastel color. Value is everything. Study the impressionists to see how flesh tones could be purple, green or any color, but if they are orchestrated with a good understanding of value, they will work.

Color theory will help you see temperature differences. Note: there is usually a color change at a value change. One value plane to another often has a connecting color which helps skin look translucent.

Finally, as you develop layers of color for skin, it is important not to smear the final touches. This way, the under drawing and the previously layered color can show through. Smearing light color on top of dark colors can make skin look pasty or like make-up. Learn how to hatch lightly by doing practice scales, then you will be more confident when you are trying a complicated subject. You can do it! Happy Drawing :-)



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#### Paper:

This pastel painting technique must be done on a paper with some grit. I use 20"x28" COLORFIX brand sanded paper, soft umber works well as a base for flesh tones.

**Hard Pastels (not in pencil form):** Any hard pastel like Prismacolor NuPastel or Cretacolor. Make a small value scale to keep in your box as a reference (very important). Nupastel recommendations:

Sandalwood #204, Raw Sienna #233, Cocoa brown #253  
 Peach, # 376, Burnt Sienna #203, Sepia #293  
 Cordovan, #353 Burnt Umber #223 Nut Brown #313

**For the following, get only one of each to keep the price down or get all for more variety:**

Black #229, White #211 (several cool and warm), Grey #219 (several cool and warm), Green #248 (several cool and warm), any Dark Blue. There can be many other colors in skin and hair, but these are basics for the under drawing.

**Pastel Pencils:** These are only for drawing details. Do not shade large areas with pencils because they wear down too quickly so you'll be sharpening every five minutes.

Pitt Pastel #188 (sanguine), #1122-192 (deep red)

Cretacolor #471 31 (tan light)

Conté à Paris Pastel #049 (pinkish), #48 (light pink), #018 (sanguine)

And any of these brands in Sepia, Burnt Umber, white, black, grey, light/dark green, light/dark blue, light/dark yellow, etc.

