Colored Pencils

by Phyllis Sickles

There are both wax and oil based pencils which are compatible with each other. Most of the pencils available at Michaels are wax based pencils. Those that I have used are Prismacolor, Derwent Studio, and Caran D’Ache Luminance. After doing a 3 month sunlight test, I found the less expensive Prismacolor to hold the color as well as the more expensive Caran D’Ache and have the same feel when using them. I would not recommend Derwent. The color faded quickly. The lead was also harder, was not as creamy and did not cover as well. I know there are Derwent pencils that are softer but I still suspect that the color would fade.

Some of the products that are used with pencils

1. Odorless mineral spirits – This is a solvent that speeds the colored pencil painting process and eliminates pencil strokes. It can be used with both wax and oil based pencils. It dries quickly and leaves no yellow residue.
2. Weber Turpenoid – A thin colorless refined turpentine substitute which evaporates quickly and leaves no residue.
3. X-Acto Knife – I used the knife to scrape away (erase) color along with sandpaper.
4. Pencil Extender – This is used when the pencil gets too short to hold or sharpen. It extends the life of the pencil.
5. Workable Fixative – When the surface is completely filled with the pencil medium, applying a spray coating of workable fixative will allow you to apply 2-3 additional layers of colored pencil. This will also allow you to lighten or darken an area that is just too saturated with color.
6. Colorless Blender – Primacolor makes this product. It contains the same binding materials as the main pencil lines but has no pigment. It is used to blend colors.
7. Pencil Sharpener – Make sure to keep graphite pencils around because sharpening colored pencils can cause a wax buildup. Sharpening graphite pencils will clean and lubricate your sharpener.
8. A Soft Brush – Used to clean away colored pencil crumbs. If they are brushed away with your hand, marks can appear where they are not wanted.
9. Ground Gesso – It can be sprayed on the gourd to give it a white background and make the gourd surface work more like paper. The pencil coverage is quite different than coloring the raw gourd.

Working with colored pencils by using the layering method

Begin with light colors with light pressure. Use fine strokes that are close together for a smooth, even coverage. Continue layering colors going with stronger pressure in the medium and dark areas. Deepen the colors with darker hues. Try not to use black to darken an area because it has a tendency to deaden the color. Use a white pencil to blend the other layers. This will lighten your initial colors. At this time you could use the colorless blender to blend your colors instead of white. That would keep the color close to what you intended.

After heavy working with wax-based colored pencils, the wax has a tendency to build up creating a milk like film called a “wax bloom”. This can be fixed by gently wiping the surface with a tissue and then spraying with a workable fixative.
Working with colored pencils by using the fusing color method

This is a technique in which you apply color in a smooth manner with stokes fairly close together. Add solvent with a cotton pad or QTtip evenly by using a gentle tapping motion to dissolve the pencil strokes. When it is dry, another layer of color can be added if desired.

After trying this technique on my gourd piece, I found dipping the tip of the colored pencil in the solvent and then coloring the gourd to work better. The Q-Tip had a tendency to pull the color off of the gourd surface.

Creating Highlights

In order to obtain a bright highlight on an object, add white only to the area and then continue with coloring the rest of the object. Add white to the main color, blending it into the white highlight. White can have the tendency to dull the color and will not create a stark white when used on another color because it is also translucent.

Erasing Colored Pencil

You might read that colored pencil can be removed by pressing tape on the surface and rubbing the back with a ball point pen. This did not work on my gourd piece. I can see where it would work on paper but not the hard surface of a gourd. I think the only way to remove color is by using the X-Acto knife.

An X-Acto knife can be used to scrape off pigment in order to add highlights or remove a mistake. Various highlights can be rendered including lines against dark backgrounds, cracks, and highlights on hair and fur. Since the gourd surface would then show, a light color can be added to these scraped spots. I found that there was a coating of wax left on the gourd and didn’t allow the highlight color to cover well. By gently sanding the area after scraping, I was then able to cover the highlight.

Combining Pencils with Other Products

Colored pencils are versatile and can be combined with wet mediums such as acrylic washes, water color, inks and dyes. They will go over most wet mediums once they are dry. The exception is acrylics when they are applied thickly. Colored pencils can also be used with metal leafing, Rub and Buff and other metallic finishes other than thickly painted metallic acrylics. Using the colored pencils first and then other products over them does not always work. The paint just bubbled up and I suspect inks and dyes might also.

Preserving Colored Pencils

 Spray work with Krylon UV-Resistant clear acrylic coating to protect it from fading. Even though it is a matte finish, it has a satin appearance. This can be corrected by spraying it with Krylon Matte Finish once it is dry.

The information in this article was gleaned from “Colored Pencil, Painting Bible” by Alyona Nickelsen and “Creative Colored Pencil Workshop” by Carlynne Hershberger and Kelli Money Huff.