



Creative Studio

Welcome to the studio, a place to relax, to be inspired and to develop your own creative potential. Here, we will explore ideas and create art with mediums and techniques that will have you achieving rewarding results with your own art.

Oil pastels offer the diversity of producing strong, intense color as well as delicate pastel tones. They can add a wonderful texture, yet are also blendable.

In this lesson plan, we borrow a few of Vincent van Gogh's painting techniques, and create a lively work of art in oil pastel.

Materials:

FC Goldfaber Oil Pastels 36 Count

FC Connector Paint Box

Brushes- flat

Pencil

X-Acto knife

Palette with wells for mixing

Paint Thinner

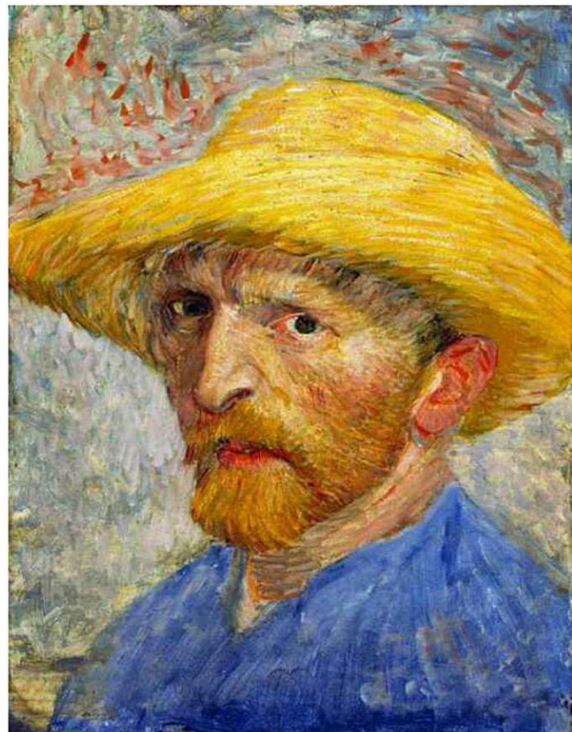
UArt Premium Sanded Pastel Paper 9 x 12, 400 Grit, Beige

Masking Tape

Easel, Cardboard

***“I put my heart and
my soul into my work,
and have lost my mind
in the process.”***

*~Vincent van Gogh
1853-1890*



In this lesson plan, I have chosen to pay tribute to Vincent van Gogh and his liberated painting style, because it lends itself so well to executing the apple tree project presented here. Van Gogh's style reflects a letting go of minutia, and focuses instead on shape, color and movement in a composition. His style is loose yet deliberate, lively and strong.

The inspiration; an apple orchard in Maine

I took these photos one beautiful October morning I spent apple picking in Maine.

The branches and perspective made me think of van Gogh's Almond Blossom painting, thus, inspiring me to create my own painting done in his style.



Almond Blossom 1890
Vincent van Gogh
Oil on canvas

The Underpainting

An underpainting is the initial step used by the old masters to help create a plan or “road map” for the creation of a finished painting in oil or pastel. It is the first layer of paint applied to the canvas, and serves as a foundation for the painting, determining future color placement, values and tones.



An underpainting can be executed with most any kind of thinned down paint, or even colored pencil, however this “Connector Paint” is a real favorite of mine. It’s ability to be somewhat transparent or opaque, along with the variety of great colors, make it a real go-to paint for almost any type of project in my studio.

Underpaintings are light in color and done in a loose style. Sometimes they are done with the intention of peeking through the final art in areas, adding subtle dimension and texture. An underpainting done in a single tone can have a dramatic affect by adding a warmth or coolness to the overall finished painting.

Finally, an underpainting works well because it can ease a painter into the beginning of a painting, eliminating the intimidating blank white canvas space.



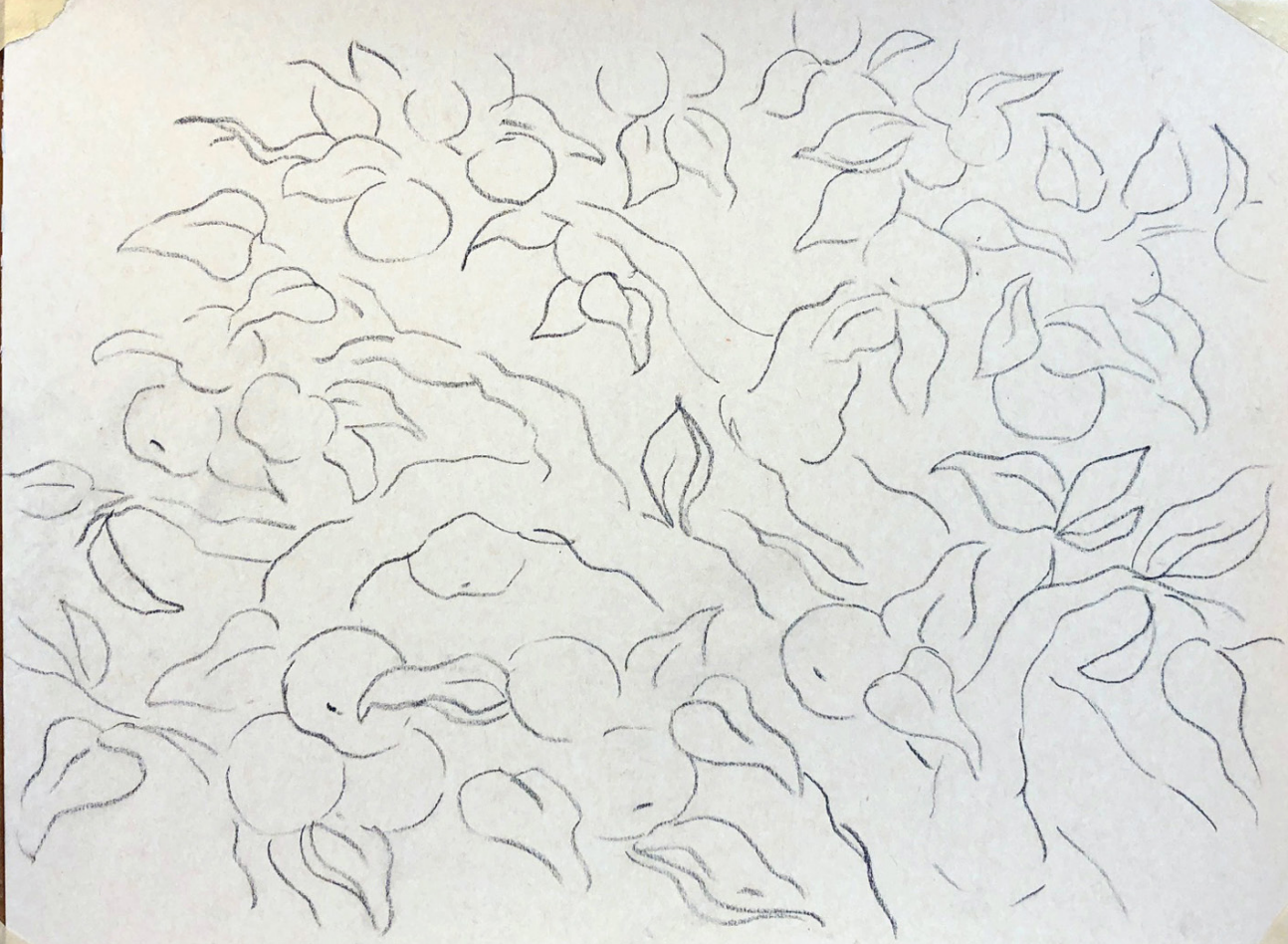


Preparing to use Oil Pastels

Looking carefully at my reference photo, I choose as many pastel colors as possible, keeping in mind that more colors and layers will add more interest, depth and complexity to the painting.

Shown here are the pastels to be used in two ways:

- 1) I break the pastels into pieces to be able to use the sides of them, gaining more control with handling the small areas of the artwork.
- 2) I also crush shavings of the pastels and mix them with paint thinner to use as a form of paint.



Beginning with a Sketch

Referring somewhat but not completely to my photos, I spend some time loosely sketching and composing branches and apples on tissue paper. After combining a few sketches, I arrive at this composition, a perspective looking upward toward the sky. I then trace the drawing onto my final piece of pastel paper using a light table. You could also use a bright window for tracing.

TIP

Paper—Instead of white paper, choose a toned, textured pastel paper for your art. When choosing the paper, consider its tone or value rather than actual color. A good middle toned grey or warm beige is a good start. The more “tooth” or texture to the paper, the better it will accept many layers of pastels, thus giving beautiful results.



The Underpainting

Using the Connector paints, I begin with the background. I create an opaque light blue and green by mixing the white gouache included in the set to the two colors. I then paint the blue/green haze of the apple tree much like Van Gogh would have, by making short diagonal brush strokes alternating the colors. The paint is watery and bleeds together in areas.

TIP

Experiment with different colors, strokes and pressure on a scrap sheet of the pastel paper throughout the painting process.



Next, I loosely paint the leaves and tree branches in their lightest values. This foundation allows me to build on it with layers of more paint, and later, oil pastel.



When the foundation is dry, I continue to add earthy browns and greens to the branches. I begin to form a rounded look to the branches with brushstrokes that wrap around them, much like Van Gogh painted his almond branches.

I add a darker green and a few spots of blue to some of the leaves. The beauty of painting in a Van Gogh style is that you can be very loose and impressionistic, using visible brush strokes and leaving seemingly unfinished areas.

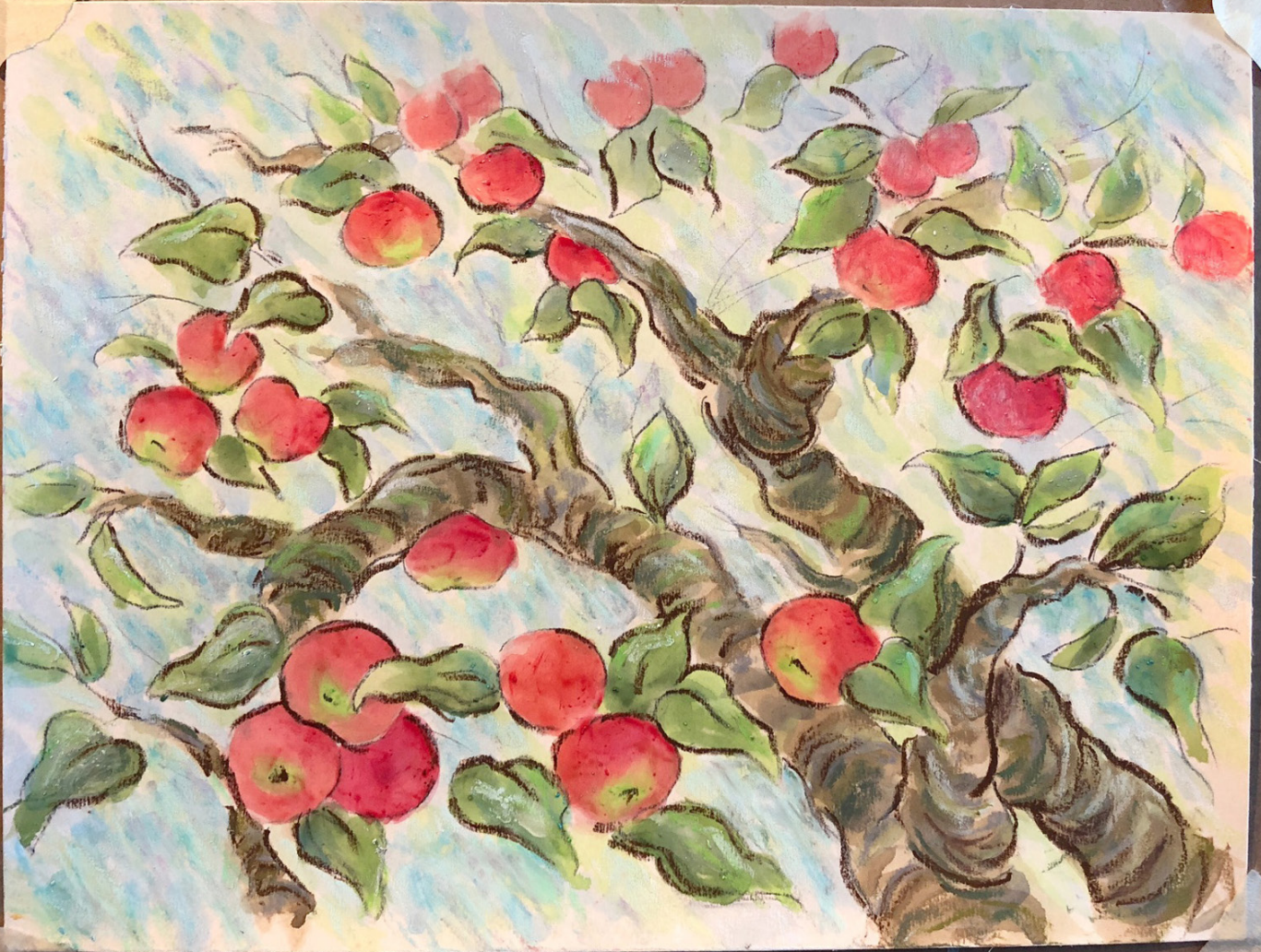
For the apples, I paint a lime green area for the bottom of the unripened apple, and while it is still wet, I paint the rest of the apple in a light red. The two wet colors soften into each other.



Adding Oil Pastel

I begin adding layers of oil pastel to the underpainting. I cover the background first, using the small pieces of blue, green, lavender and grey pastel. I then blend these colors together by going over it with white. I leave some areas of the underpainting and plain paper peeking through. All areas of the artwork are brought into play as the image develops, as I contour the branches with a variety of browns, greens and a little blue, and I apply dabs of green to the leaves. Single marks of color are left to model the form, rather than blending.

I use the thinned pastel to paint the apples, being careful to leave the green of the underpainting showing through the bottom of them. I leave the apples at the top edge of the paper light and flat, so as to lose them into the background.

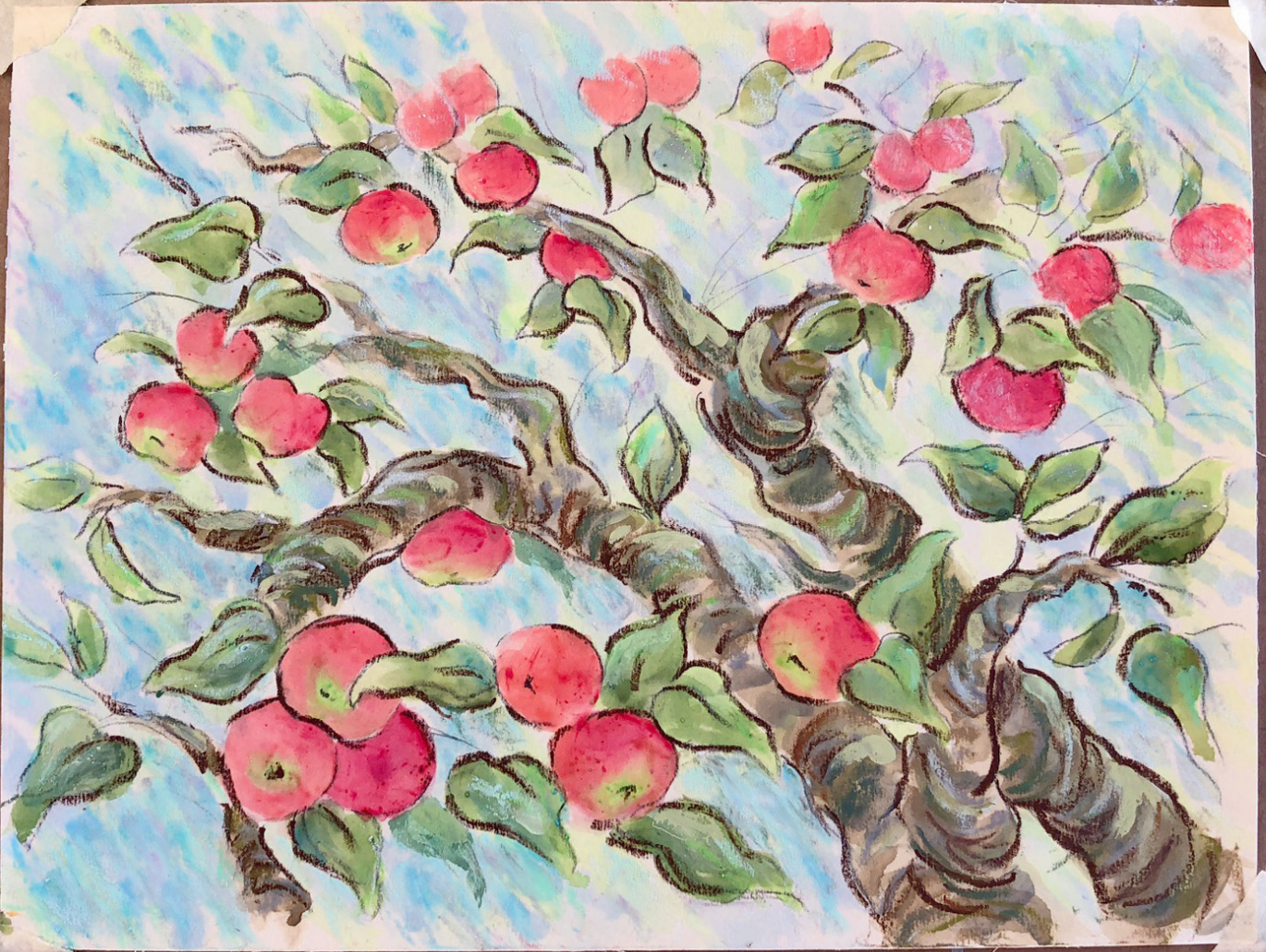


Refine

In this step, I add one of Van Gogh's most characteristic elements in his paintings, the bold outline. He would often add this strong line in the final stages of a piece as a graphic device to enhance the structure of the image. Using a dark brown pastel, I very loosely outline a lot of the branches and some of the leaves with a broken line. In some areas, I leave my earlier pencil lines. I also use the dark brown to add more detail and contouring marks to the branches.

TIP

Erasing—the best way for removing unwanted oil pastel is to gently scrape away what you can with the X-Acto knife, and continue to work over it. The thick, opaque nature of the oil pastels combined with Van Gogh's forgiving painting style, significantly reduces stress, and allows you to continue with success.



Unify the Elements

Here, I consider the painting as a whole, and judge how the color and tones work together. I add final details with the paint, including highlights here and there on the branches and leaves. I continue to work the background, adding more of the blue and white marks over the top distant apples. I leave some branches and leaves sketchy and unfinished.

Finally, be very careful not to overwork the painting. It's beauty and drama lie in it's interplay between bold detail and loosely painted areas.