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## Count the Possibilities

By combining a variety of materials with different techniques, says colored pencil master Kristy Kutch, you can enjoy the precision of a pencil while creating a wide array of visual effects.



*Glorious Twining*, 2007, colored pencil on Rising 4-ply museum board, 9 ½ x 16 in.

One of the things all artists must surely have in common is a love of color. From eye-popping hues to the most subtly nuanced neutrals, we love our pigments. But how we get them onto the painting surface is another story. Some artists like to literally pour or splash the color on in its most liquid form. Others prefer to lay it down in big, firm



*Asian Lilies*, 2007, colored pencil and watersoluble pencil on Fabriano Artistico HP paper, 17 ½ x 11 in.

[click here to enlarge the painting](#)

strokes, to be pushed and pulled at some later phase. And then there are those who prefer a high degree of control and precision. For them, colored pencil is perhaps the most perfect of all media.

It's certainly true for Kristy Kutch. Kristy can still recall in vivid detail the night she discovered colored pencils: "It was a light bulb moment. When I was a young mother in my 30s, my husband and sister encouraged me to take drawing classes at the Michigan City Art League. I had a dynamic teacher named Teresa Suarez, and one night she brought in some old Prismacolor pencils and suggested we try them. I started to draw with them, and I thought, 'Oh, the colors are so rich!' That was a milestone."

At the time, Kristy says, there weren't as many opportunities to learn about this lesser-known medium. Few books had been published, and not many artists were teaching workshops on colored pencil. And the Colored Pencil Society of America hadn't even been formed yet. (Kristy was a charter member when it formed in 1989.) But Kristy sought out—and has continued to seek and share through her own workshops—as much information as she could find about colored pencils. What she's discovered and mastered is a medium that's controlled yet incredibly versatile, lending itself to a wide variety of effects depending on the materials and techniques you use.

### *Recognizing Your Options*

First, explains Kristy, there are the many surfaces that lend themselves well to colored pencil work. Some, such as museum board or hot-pressed watercolor paper, provide an ultra-smooth finish with little tooth. This cuts down on the graininess and enables



*Farmers' Market Peonies*, 2000, water-soluble pencil on Strathmore HP watercolor board, 14 x 18 in.

blending. Kristy adds, "A smooth surface is perfect for precise detail and shiny surfaces, such as apples and cherries." Then there are some textured drawing papers that have some tooth, which are ideal for creating a grainier finish and emphasizing built-in texture. And if you really want a rugged texture, why not try a sanded paper, such as a pastel board? It's a little hard on the pencils, but you can achieve some very exciting effects. "In my workshops," notes Kristy, "I ask my students to work on a different surface each day so they can discover which surfaces they prefer."

Then there are the pencils themselves. Some brands, like Prismacolor and Derwent, make a firmer wax-based pencil. Other brands, such as Faber-Castell and Caran d'Ache, are a little softer, made with a vegetable oil base. "The oil-based pencils tend to be a bit smudgier," explains Kristy, "which is a quality you can view as the glass being half empty or half full. If you're really controlled, you might think of smudgy as being detrimental to your work. Then again, you might see this quality as a help in blending and creating softer edges." Both types can be used together in the same piece.



*Glorious Morning*, 1998, colored pencil on 4-ply Rising museum board, 20 x 16 in.

[click here to enlarge the painting](#)

Speaking of blending, there are a great many tools you can use to blend colored pencils, which is why blending is the technique that multiplies the number of effects you can achieve exponentially. One way to blend is to apply a solvent, such as Eco-House Citrus Thinner, which Kristy prefers because it's non-toxic. Prismacolor makes a convenient Colorless Blender Marker that contains an alcohol-based solvent within the marker. Solvents release the binder, allowing the pigments to flow and creating slick, smooth, shiny surfaces. For softening and blending,

### Takeaway Tip

There are lots of art materials that have been developed for use with one particular medium, but that's not to say they can't be used with other media. As long as they're archival and don't do anything that would break down the chemical construction of the pigments, they should be safe to use. Visit the product's website or contact the manufacturer if you need more technical info about a product you'd like to try.

you can also go over the surface with a stiff-bristle brush. Blending can also be achieved by layering color on color or by adding a layer of colorless blending pencil between applications. Layering with pressure this way, or "burnishing" as it's called, smoothes out the finish by pushing the pigments deeper into the tooth of the paper. Finally, Kristy adds, "You can also burnish by layering white in between other layers of colored pigment. You'd think it would create a milky appearance, but instead it just burnishes the colors together and enriches their density."

Adding to a colored pencil artist's repertoire of techniques are the half dozen or so ways to lift pigment. You can use poster putty, a kneaded eraser, or a white vinyl eraser. Kristy says her favorite is a hand-held, battery-powered eraser. Not only do these change the look of the application, they're great for fixing mistakes. "That's very liberating," says the artist, "because you never have the feeling that you might be about to ruin the piece."



*Trinity Amaryllis*, 2004, colored pencil on 4-ply Rising museum board, 15 x 20 in.

Many colored pencil artists also like to employ their medium's cousin—watercolor pencils—on occasion (see the demo below). Kristy describes them as a good bridge between painting and drawing. Obviously, with this many variables, an artist just needs a little creativity to extend the range of visual effects even further. "Other artists working in other media don't have a corner on these products," says Kristy with a laugh, "so go ahead and try them all."

### *Composing With Classics*

While Kristy believes in experimenting with everything, she has evolved strong preferences in subject matter as well as a personal style over the years, which she



*High-Noon Hollyhocks*, 2003, colored pencil on Crescent 4-ply museum board, 20 x 16 in.

[click here to enlarge the painting](#)

describes as realism with a twist. "I'm inspired by nature, so although I admire those artists who can render, say, a beautiful crystal vase for their flowers, I prefer to present my flowers in fresh, informal settings," she explains, adding, "I find the beauty in things that may be taken for granted by other people, or to put it another way, it's the simple beauties and intimate scenes that impress me."

Kristy finds that her natural inclination when setting up her subjects is to gravitate to one of three basic compositions: the S-shaped arrangement, the pyramid shape arrangement, and the radiating arrangement, in which elements spiral out from a central element. "I don't mean to make light of composition, but I have an innate sense of it," she says. "Only later do I realize why my arrangements work—they're classic compositions."

Although she loves to work from life whenever possible, she also works from photographs, especially when she's doing a subject that will wilt or decay fairly rapidly since colored pencil is one of the more time-consuming media. She sets up her arrangements almost exclusively outdoors in natural sunlight where she can capture a strong interplay of light and shadow. And then she typically arranges and rearranges her subject repeatedly, easily shooting 50 to 70 versions of the same little bouquet or set of objects with her digital camera.

#### *Getting to "Oh, Yes!"*

Whether drawing freehand or using a grid to enlarge more complex subjects, Kristy begins by developing a full-size drawing on drafting vellum—what she calls "the uphill climb" of the process. She adds, "A drawing is going to require erasing before I get



*Vancouver Begonia*, 2006, colored pencil and watersoluble pencil on Schmiecke Sansfix paper, 12 x 15 in.

it just right, and I prefer to make those adjustments on the vellum so I don't roughen the painting's surface." When finished, Kristy hinges the final drawing onto her painting surface with tape, slips a transfer sheet between the two, and carefully traces over the main lines of her drawing until she's transferred her initial drawing to her final painting surface.

Two hallmarks of Kristy's style as she develops each piece are value contrast and vivid color. The need for value contrast is something she learned the hard way: by discovering that a juror had rejected one of her early works from a show because it didn't have enough contrast. "I admit I was hurt at first," she says with a chuckle now, "but after some careful consideration, I realized he was right. When I started to intensify value contrast, my paintings started to read better from a distance and have more pop."



*Plumeria*, 2007, watersoluble pencil on Cartiera Magnani HP watercolor paper, 8 x 10 in.

As for color, Kristy credits fellow artist Janie Gildow as well as the French Impressionists with influencing her color sense. Janie introduced Kristy to the color wheel, and showed her how color complements (opposites on the wheel) can be used to create form, neutralize colors, and add lively interest to a painting. From the French Impressionists, she learned to avoid using black in order to keep the colors exciting, and to use warm colors to bring areas forward and cool colors to make areas recede. What Kristy has brought to her own work is a desire to take liberties with color, pumping up the vivid hues and adding splashes, dashes, and dabs of exaggerated color to give her paintings more visual interest.

The day *after* she thinks she's finished a new painting, Kristy returns to it with a fresh eye to make sure it meets her high standards. "This is hard to

explain, but there has to be an 'Oh, yes!' factor to the piece," she says, laughing. By this she means she wants to see great contrast in value and color, and most of all, the initial inspiration for the painting must be obvious to all who view the work.

*Finding Pleasure in Discovery*

"It's amazing what you can do when you put your mind to it," says Kristy, and that's certainly proven by the many effects she has learned to create over the years through trial and error and experimentation with various materials and techniques. Of course, she says, she's enjoyed every minute of the process. When you're as passionate about a medium as Kristy is about colored pencil, the journey of discovery is a joy.

*Don't miss Kristy's demo below!*



*Poppyburst*, 1997, colored pencil on Rising 4-ply museum board, 16 x 20 in.

### Painting Demonstration

Demo: *Emmalie's Rose*, 2003, watercolor pencil on Ampersand Aquabond, 5 x 7 in., collection of Emmalie Cowherd.

#### Step 1

On Ampersand Aquabond (formerly named Claybord Textured), I drew in the rose with a light-valued colored pencil. I then applied dry layers of watercolor pencil on the petals to show the light-to-dark values: pink madder lake, fuchsia, pink carmine, and as the deepest value, madder. I also added a little dark cadmium yellow on the petals closest to the viewer's eye. At this point, the surface looked very bumpy and granular.

**Step 2**

With a No. 6 round brush, I wet each petal one at a time, skipping or alternating petals so that two adjacent petals would not be damp at the same time. This prevented the colors from accidentally flowing into each other. To create a few highlights, I cleaned the brush with clear water, wiped it well so it was nearly dry, then dragged it across the surface to lift up some of the wet pigment.

**Step 3**

Since this surface dries slowly, I had to patiently work around the subject, gradually dissolving the pigment on each remaining petal of the rugosa rose. When dry, I applied heavy layers of dark cadmium yellow and dark chrome yellow to the center of the flower and wet with either a very fine round brush, such as a No. 2, or the fine point of a Prismacolor Colorless Blender Marker. On the leaves, I layered (light to dark) May green, permanent green olive, and pine green, emphasizing pine green in the shadowy regions.

**Step 4**

I used the same process as shown in Step 2 to wet and dissolve the pigments on the leaves. Next, with heavy pressure, I layered the background with Prussian blue, indianthrene blue, and purple.

**Step 5**

As I wet the background with water, I used the brush in a swirling, circular motion to give it movement and texture. After allowing the painting to dry completely, I used a fresh, very sharp blade to incise lines for the stamens in the flowers, the veins in the leaves, and my signature. For accents, such as on the incised stamens, I used very sharp pencils, which I then dissolved with the fine point of the Prismacolor Colorless Blender Marker.





*Kristy Kutch is a graduate of Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, with both bachelor's and master's degrees in education, as well as a life license in teaching. She has taught almost 200 colored pencil workshops nationwide for students of all ages. Her educational style is friendly, relaxed, enthusiastic, and supportive of the individual student's uniquely personal style. Cultivating the enthusiasm of her students, Kristy tailors her instruction to beginners and accomplished artists alike. She is both a charter member and Signature Member of the Colored Pencil Society of America. Her book, Drawing and Painting with Colored Pencil, was released in 2005 by Watson-Guption Publications; her instructional DVD Colored Pencil Landscapes: Beyond the Basics was released by Artist Palette Productions in 2006. She was featured in International Artist Magazine and Drawing Magazine and is also a contributor to The Best of Colored Pencil 1, 3, and 5; Creative Colored Pencil; Design: Illustration; The Best of Business Card Design 3 and 5; Creating Radiant Flowers in Colored Pencil; Exploring Color (revised edition); Floral Inspirations; and Colored Pencil Explorations. To learn more about Kristy, visit her website: [www.artshow.com/kutch](http://www.artshow.com/kutch).*



*Bouquet, 2006, colored pencil on HP Cartiera Magnani watercolor paper, 12 x 15 in.*

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