

PORTRAITS IN SOFT PASTELS with BARBARA ETTER

This course will cover the basics of animal, human and floral portraits particularly bringing an image or drawing to life with colour, detail and dimension. You do not need to attempt human portraits if you do not want to.

Portraits will be done from photo references (although you may want to bring a floral arrangement along to paint from). Animals will include birds, farm animals, reptiles, wildlife, insects and creatures of the sea and ice.

There will also be an opportunity to do floral portraits and the tutor will refer to leading Australian floral pastelists such as Lyn Diefenbach and Stephanie Clark and their approaches. The tutor was able to spend 10 days on retreat in Switzerland in 2023 with Lyn Diefenbach which included tuition in floral portraits.

The class will focus on the following:

- ☐ Choosing your picture and composition (where to find copyright free images);
- ☐ Choosing your materials: soft pastels: hard v soft, pencils v sticks, paper type (velour, Pastelmat, Canson Velvet, Pastelbord, Colourfix and other papers) and colours (making the colour work for you) – special curated animal and portrait sets e.g. Unison and Emma Colbert or J Luda and Stephanie Clark - [J Luda Soft Pastel Set Picture and Details](#);
- ☐ Importance of close and careful observation – where is the light coming from?;
- ☐ Colour, value, line and edge – the importance of contrast, hard, soft and “lost” edges;
- ☐ Basic features of the human face, positioning and relative proportions (ball and plane or Loomis method), the three different zones of the face – getting the biometrics right;
- ☐ Pantone colours and colours used for flesh or skin tones;
- ☐ How to progress your portrait – drawing up (including using the grid method) colours, layering, dark to light, when and how to do the background (including the use of Pan Pastels);
- ☐ Being brave and bold with colour – making the colour of your paper work for you, using black paper, blocking out and underpainting – using artistic licence;
- ☐ Backgrounds – including using Pan Pastels – avoiding the “cut out” or halo look and bokeh style;
- ☐ The role of vignettes - [Understanding Vignettes: A Comprehensive Guide \(daisie.com\)](#) – where “less is more”;
- ☐ Light and light/shade pattern: light side, shadow side, cast shadow and reflected light;
- ☐ Capturing mood;
- ☐ Getting the right texture (fur, feathers, scales, skin/complexion). Using special texture effects on your paper, as with the waffle/honeycomb effect on Mei Tinte pastel paper;
- ☐ Different types of skin and “fur” (guard hairs v underfur)- [31 Examples of Animals With Fur \(A to Z List with Pictures\) – Fauna Facts](#);
- ☐ Getting the important details right: ears, nose, mouth and eyes and their relative location;
- ☐ The eyes – if you get these wrong, you can ruin your whole portrait;
- ☐ Getting fur or feathers right – nap of fur (“Nap” can refer to any fabric that has a directional appearance or texture), directional movement, intersections;
- ☐ Fixing any mistakes – erasers, going over in pastel, Colorfix pastels in background colours;

- 📄 Setting aside and the final touches – highlights and reflections in the eyes, shadows, to fix or not to fix?;
- 📄 Knowing when to stop, stepping back and the importance of restraint as well as suggestion/indication;
- 📄 Where to find useful online tutorials on human, animal and floral portraits;
- 📄 Protecting and framing your portrait;
- 📄 Ongoing learning and useful artists to follow (e.g. Alain Picard re human portraits, Jason Morgan and Emma Colbert in the UK re animals, Lyn Diefenbach and Stephe Clark in Australia re florals).

Attendees will be provided with online and in class demonstrations and mentored in completing their own portraits as part of the course. Participants will be encouraged to develop their own style and to eventually try different approaches such as those of famous artists (Klimt, Degas and Van Gogh and others) or even caricatures or Pop Art. Students will also be encouraged to try the use of other mediums in their pastel artworks.

The course will cater for the inexperienced as well as intermediate artists. A number of reference books on portraits will also be available for perusal and inspiration.

You will need to bring:

- **Reference photos** – your own, or free photos from Pixabay <https://pixabay.com/en/photos/> or Wet Canvas – Reference Image Library under Content Areas <http://www.wetcanvas.com/RefLib/> or see Facebook e.g. Free Reference Photos
- Desk easel and backing board (although these will also be available at the studio for use on the day)
- bulldog clips or masking tape
- Paper towel or hand towel
- Baby wipes to clean hands
- Kneadable eraser
- Ruler for grid method use
- Pastel pencil or something suitable for drawing on pastel paper
- Soft Pastels (not Oil Pastels), including pencils (optional) and sticks (in colours appropriate to your subject) and Pan Pastels and tools/applicators (optional and if you have any). A portrait set of pastels would be most helpful if you wish to undertake human portraits.
- Quality Pastel papers or boards (including a variety of colours including black). I recommend Pastelmat (available in single sheets from Artery or in pads), UArt, Pastelbord or Colourfix.
- Sharpeners suitable for pastels (Swordfish or Derwent) or Stanley knives
- Tracing paper and transfer paper (if required) - handy to check whether you got it right or not and getting to know a face you would like to portray
- White and black charcoal pencils (optional)
- Willow charcoal
- Gold or metallic pastels or materials e.g. ink, acrylic etc. if undertaking Klimt type portraits (optional)
- Fixative (entirely optional) and not recommended for the final layer
- Sponges, cotton buds, tortillons or stumps (optional) – used for blending.

