

Reverse Pastel Paintings

(art + history)

The technique of painting on clear glass so that the image is viewed from the other side has been practiced for centuries in cultures around the world — it's a process as old as glass itself. Because the glass provides permanent protection from wear and a durable, clear, gloss finish, it has often been combined with gilding in religious artwork, on furniture items and in clockmaking.

Where standard painting builds an image from the background forward, reverse painting requires careful planning, as the artwork is created in a backward fashion — foreground first — with each phase applied so the background finishes the painting.

The following lesson plan provides an easy and inexpensive way to create reverse paintings in a safe manner, using oil pastels instead of oil paint and acetate instead of glass. A backing of metallic foil reflects light through the pastel in the same manner as gilding.

Grade Levels 3-12

Note: Instructions and materials are based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Cut acetate and metallic paper to approximately 10" x 12-1/2", using scissors or a paper trimmer.

Process

1. Create preliminary sketches on paper or find images to trace. Place the acetate, matte side up, on top of the sketch. If desired, secure it to the tabletop with masking tape.

Materials

[Matte Acetate Sheet](#), .003" (55508-1003); share one 25" x 40" sheet among eight students

[Sakura® Cray-Pas® Expressionist Oil Pastels](#), 50-color set (20012-0509); share four sets across class

[Hygloss™ Metallic Foil Paper](#), Silver (11205-2526) or Gold (11205-4026); share two rolls across class

[Delta® Sobo® White Glue](#), 4-oz (23820-1004); share four bottles across class

[Student Modeling Tool Set](#) (30361-1009); share one 7-piece set among five students

[Blick® White Sulphite Drawing Paper](#), 60-lb, 9" x 12" (10209-1023); need one sheet per student



OPTIONAL:

[Crescent® 14-Ply Posterboard](#), black (13113-2006); share one 28" x 44" sheet among eight students

[Blick® Fine Point Permanent Marker](#), Black (22164-2020), one per student

[Latex Finger Cots](#) (35207-1001)
[Masking Tape](#), 1/2" (24126-1012)

Process, continued

2. Paint with oil pastels. Tips:
 - Paint highlights, light or white areas first to keep them clean and bright.
 - Blend using a Colorless Blender (two are included in the set), a soft cloth or finger cots (to keep fingers clean).
 - Place strokes of color side-by-side to create an impressionistic style.
 - If mistakes are made, wipe the area clean with a paper towel.
 - Oil pastels dry very slowly. Keep colors from smearing by placing a piece of waxed paper under your hand as it rests on the table.
3. As the painting is created, place the foil sheet between the acetate and the sketch from time to time, to view the light reflecting through the oil pastel.
4. When the painting is complete, attach the foil paper as a background using small dots of glue along the outside edges of the colored side of the foil paper. The oil pastel does not need to be dry — glue the foil paper directly onto the painted surface. Press gently, so the paper has good contact with the pastel. NOTE: Do not glue the paper to the gloss side — this is the side from which the painting will be viewed!
6. When the glue is dry, mount the painting to a heavy board for display.

Options:

1. Gently crinkle the foil paper and smooth it back out again before gluing it onto the back. This adds sparkle and texture effects behind the color.
2. Use multiple colors of metallic foil in the background.
3. Draw with permanent marker to define areas of the artwork. Draw on the gloss side, away from the oil pastel.
4. Use masking tape to create a border around the acetate prior to painting. When finished, the border will make a metallic frame around the artwork.

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes

K-4 Students use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner

5-8 Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas

9-12 Students conceive and create works of visual art that demonstrate an understanding of how the communication of their ideas relates to the media, techniques and processes they use

Content Standard #4 — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

K-4 Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures

5-8 Students analyze, describe and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, resources, ideas and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art

9-12 Students describe the function and explore the meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, times and places