

Pastels

Andrew Dodge

To make pastels, a pigment is mixed with kaolin, a type of clay used as a filler. This is then mixed with diluted gum arabic, a liquid binder. This is rolled into crayon sized cylinders, and the solvent is then allowed to evaporate, leaving behind the dry stick of pastel. Since



the gum is a binder but doesn't have very good adhesive properties, the pastels can be easily mixed on paper. First, though, to make an azurite or malachite pigment, copper sulfate is mixed with sodium bicarbonate and stirred slowly until the reaction ends. The liquid part of the mixture is then filtered into a beaker, and the precipitate is left on the filter paper. This then dries into a powdery blue-green pigment.

Pastels haven't been around for too long, compared to other types of art, but it became very popular very fast. In the 1700's, pastels were often the medium of choice for portraits. They have continued to become popular in recent years because of their extremely large range of bright colors.

I thoroughly enjoy using pastels. The colors are typically softer and mix very easily. Very complex, professional artwork can be made from what seems like a child's color stick, and I like being able to color like I'm in elementary school again.