



Flowers and Fish

An unexpected tool brings a layer of motion and energy to pastel work.

By Anne Strutz

Movement, energy, pattern, balance. For me, these are the elements that are foremost in my mind when composing a painting. It's a constant balance of yin and yang, impulse and control, simplicity and complexity. By combining a brayer underpainting with pastels, I find that these dichotomies fuse, creating the feeling of energy and emotion designed to capture a viewer's attention.

Using a brayer is a relatively new addition to my painting practice, but it has resulted in personal satisfaction and professional recognition.



I created a colored brayer underpainting (above) on UART 400 sanded paper, scraping various objects into the paint, before applying Diane Townsend, Unison, Girault and Terry Ludwig pastels to complete **Yin Yang** (right; 00x00).





When creating floral paintings such as **Lindsay's Flower** (right; 00x00), I always work from fresh flowers to observe. I'm not aiming to create a replica of what I see, but to use the live setup as a reference and a starting point. As I work, my eyes shift constantly between the flowers—capturing their qualities—and responding to what's happening on the paper. Allowing myself to respond to the marks creates a euphoric experience in the studio and brings energy to the work.

Here's the path I took to get there—and how I leverage the tool to “draw” and create energetic underpaintings.

Beyond Botanicals

At one point in my creative studies, I had participated in a botanical arts program, in which the goal was to create anatomically correct and detailed representations of lone specimens of flowers. Proportion, scale and color were to be rendered with precision to convey genus and species.

Although the program enhanced my technical drawing skills, I found that something was missing in the process for me personally. I just wasn't moved by the work I was creating. After seeing the floral work of Piet Mondrian (Dutch, 1872–1944), I was inspired to create flowers filled with personality and expression.

Finding the Flow

Having grown up near the ocean, fishing was one of my hobbies—and



a favorite painting subject. Much like botanical art, fish often are painted in a scientifically technical, illustrative style to depict a species. After painting these more realistic renderings of fish, I again found myself unfulfilled. I wanted to create more expressive work that would enable the viewer to “feel” the flow of the fish swimming through the water.

On a Roll

Once I started to create with a brayer, I discovered how to free my interpretations. My work became more expressive and began to flourish.

A brayer is a printmaking tool that uses a rubber roller to apply ink evenly across the surface of a prepared image that, traditionally, has been carved or etched.

I used fresh flowers in a vase as a reference for the brayer drawing (below). I first applied a layer of pastel to UART 400 sanded paper and sprayed with rubbing alcohol. I used a flat 3-inch brush to set the pastel into the paper, creating a color background. This allows the water-soluble oil paint to adhere on top of the pastel. I applied Girault, Diane Townsend and Great American pastels over the underpainting in *Poetry in Motion* (right; 00x00).



To see how I've used a brayer to create an underpainting in preparation for pastel, check out *Chaos* (page 00), *Lindsay's Flower* (page 00), *Poetry in Motion* (above) and *Yin Yang* (opposite).

Brayer Basics

The best way to learn how to “draw” with a brayer is the same as any new skill you're developing—through practice and experimentation.

To try this technique, all you need is printmaking or drawing paper 11x17 inches or larger; a brayer (start with a

2½-inch brayer); black water-soluble oil paint; and a smooth work surface.

Before you make a mark with the brayer, it's important to first decide where and what type of mark you're going to make. Using the entire roller allows you to mass in darks, while using the edges of the brayer lets you create lines. How thickly you apply the paint on the brayer determines the opacity of the marks, enabling you to mass in background effects. After creating brayer marks, contemplate where you'd like to leave the brayer work untouched.

Choices are endless for how to make use of a brayer underpainting. Maximize the qualities of different types of pastels to create a variety of marks intertwined with the brayer painting. PanPastels, for example, will allow you to apply a transparent or semiopaque wash of color over the brayer work. Harder pastels, meanwhile, will allow you to create gestural work. Softer pastels, depending on the pressure you use, can cover the brayer work completely.

Finding Freedom

Drawing with an unconventional tool forces you to accept the unexpected. It also helps you learn to pay close atten-

tion to the compositional elements and design of the work. You start to build a beautiful harmony with dark and light. By manipulating your entire arm and hand to make a variety of marks, you begin to court your painting in a creative dance.

Anne Strutz (annestrutzfineart.com), an associate member of the Pastel Society of America, earned a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design. Her work has appeared in a number of juried exhibitions and was part of the 20th and 21st Pastel 100 competitions.

demonstration Chaos

Step 1: I created three brayer designs on high-quality drawing paper using the tool and black oil paint, altering the composition and mark-making for each.

Stage 2: I used a sponge applicator to spread a thin layer of PanPastel over the brayer work.

Step 3: The second round of pastel also featured PanPastel; I applied it in more opaque strokes.

Step 4: I used a black pastel stick to darken the work in a few areas to create more contrast. I also added color using orange and gold pastels.

Final: I used a variety of pastels—Diane Townsend, Art Spectrum and Girault—to add detail and definition. *PJ*

Chaos (00x00)

