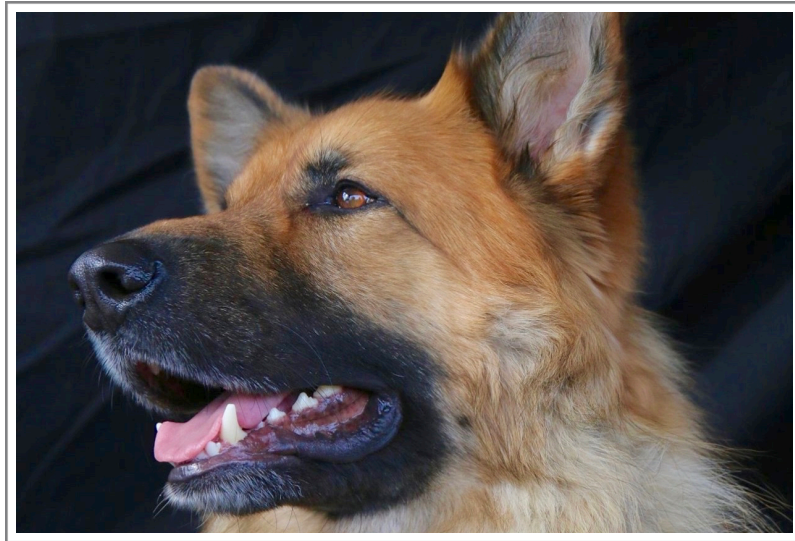


Pastels or Oil pencils ?

an experiment



(Reference kindly provided by Scotia M Photography)

Julie Heath 2020

Experiment to discover the differences between a pastel portrait and a coloured pencil portrait of a dog

Rationale

There are some people that ask " what is the difference between a coloured pencil portrait and a pastel portrait? Why are there differences in price? They look similar to me... "

This is not an easy question to answer. Apart from the techniques of laying down pigment, the end product can certainly look remarkably similar. The finished portraits are shown below with the criteria for each one.

Method

A good quality reference photo was selected with grateful thanks to Scotia M Photography. It was important to be able to see the lie of the fur and its correct colour. A basic line drawing was produced from the reference making an image of approximately 8" x 6", and then transferred onto pastelmat using a carbon based transfer paper. The drawings were to be produced side by side on the same piece of pastelmat. The left hand side of the pastelmat was then covered with glassine paper to keep it clean as I work from right to left, being left handed. I decided to draw the coloured pencil one first, keep it covered completely whilst drawing the pastel one from the same reference. That way I was not trying to copy the one on the right.



	<u>Pastels</u>	<u>Coloured pencils</u>
Brand used	Stabilo Carbothello and Caran D'Ache Pastel pencils	Faber Castell Polychromos, Karisma and Caran D'Ache luminance, Verithin black and dark brown for fine detail.
Technique	The eyes were the first to be drawn. As the drawing was a little smaller than a normal portrait would be, care had to be taken with the thicker points of the pastels. A base layer of white, light cream and tan colours was then laid down and finally detail added with two or three layers of finer pointed pastel pencils. The longer fur had a looser technique than the coloured pencils	Again the eyes were first, more easily drawn with the harder finer points of the Verithin and Karisma pencils. Polychromos were ideal for the fur build up, both for base and top coat details. More layers were used to obtain a smooth finish especially using the coarse pastelmat.
Layers of blended pigment	approx 3	approx 8
Time taken for completion (approx)	14 hours	22 hours
Overall finished appearance	A matte chalky finish with vibrant colours, no fixative applied but may smudge slightly on touching.	A smooth satin finish akin to oil painting. Slightly less vibrant pigments than the pastels, no fixative applied, minimal smudging

Conclusion

Although the time taken to complete the portraits varied with each technique the results definitely look similar. It was decided to upload the photo onto social media in order to gather comments.

A selection of comments from Social media (Respondents 73)

More depth, brighter, vibrancy, Richness of colour, contrast or intensity in the pastel work (17)

More detail, sharpness, in coloured pencil work (5)

Coloured pencil looks a bit softer (7)

Surprise at time difference (6)

Probably easier to do second piece because had previous experience with it

Medium can depend on subject drawn, suggestion that artist advises clients on medium to be used

Each portrait says something different – Col pencil dog says “ am I getting a treat?” and the pastel one says “ thank you for my treat, I love you”

Question as to whether one was easier than the other

If time is the biggest issue should client pay more

If outcome is so similar, it makes better business sense to do the one which takes less time.

It is the artist that makes the difference not the medium used. Like drumming, it is not the kit it's the drummer that makes a difference

Stated personal preference

Pastels (5) Col pencils (8) Both equal (12)

Pastels



Coloured pencils



Thoughts six months on

1. Technique

Pastels and coloured pencils are very different mediums to work with, requiring different skills and techniques. There are a lot of different colours available in both mediums, so it was quite easy to match the colours in the reference. The same surface was used for both drawings, and from an artist's perspective there were few differences in the way pigment was laid. The coloured pencil drawing needed more layers, and therefore more time, to complete, whilst the pastels blended more easily on the surface. It is also true that pastels can be more messy, particularly if softer varieties are used. A light touch is always recommended for both to avoid saturating the surface, and ease of making slight changes if necessary.

In addition the question "is one easier than the other" was interesting. If "easier" means less effort, the pastels were easier, however my personal experience of pastels is more extensive than coloured pencils, so must influence my judgement. The skill of the artist makes the portrait what it is, so experience and practice is vital to achieving technique in either medium.

2. Detail

Quite a lot of detail is required for an accurate pet portrait and here the reference was clear enough to see lie of fur, tonal values and small details of eyes etc. Using coloured pencils one can achieve a high level of detail and subtle changes in fur texture and colour, which is probably due to sharp pencil points. Pastel pencils are thicker and not quite as sharp. My personal feeling is that pastels are more painterly, whereas coloured pencils can achieve a finer degree of detail.

3. Final appearance

Both drawings were acceptable likenesses of the dog. The pastel one was chalky and smudged easily, whilst the coloured pencil one was a satin-like finish and not as easily smudged. The final appearance is what matters to the client of course, and from a distance they appeared very similar indeed. So time seems to be one of the biggest issues in its production.

Both need protection under glass, and a mount used to prevent particles sticking to it. It is often said that pastels keep their vibrance over time whilst oil pencils can fade, though the newer coloured pencils do have a higher lightfast rating, so this may not be an issue.

4. Choice and price

It seems that both technique and time are important as well as final appearance. I feel it is justifiable to charge a client a little more for a coloured pencil drawing as it takes longer to do and the final drawing is more detailed.

Coloured pencil art is definitely becoming more popular and more artists are choosing to use them in commissions, particularly for animals and realistic renditions. Pastels are traditional and still used widely especially for animal portraits. I do like both and find it hard to choose which I personally prefer. The client needs to see best examples of your work in both mediums, leaving the final choice to them. If the final result is similar it can be difficult to choose, and often it is down to price. Perhaps making a smaller coloured pencil drawing would be an option. At the end of the day it is up to both the client and artist to choose which medium to suggest.

This has been an enjoyable and useful exercise. As an artist in my 70's I will still continue to offer commissions in both mediums for years to come.