

Rick Holmes
Boats in Pastel Demonstration
Friday 19th March 2021

Rick Holmes is a Surrey based artist who has been painting for 40 years. He has worked in watercolour and oils and recently he has moved to Soft Pastels developing a unique style where he starts by using inks and a roller to create a base on which to lay the pastels.



At the start of this Zoom demonstration Rick explained that he had pinned the reference photo to the board next to where he would be working. Only a small portion of this photograph would be visible in order to ensure that the area where Rick would be working would be on camera. However, the reference photo had already been sent to all the participants. Rick was going to work on grey mount card, but mount card does not have any tooth which is needed to help the pastel hold well. In order to create a good surface to work on he uses Fine Tooth Colour Fix Primer which he thins down with water. Other primers will

also do the job.

Rick pointed out that it is best to do pastels upright because they create a lot of dust and by working upright the dust falls away. He likes to make a little L-shaped shelf of card to put along the bottom of the board he is working on to catch the dust.

To begin Rick uses acrylic inks. The picture he is going to draw will be a square. He starts from the centre and works out. He uses the squeezer from the FW ink to drop it onto the board and then he uses the roller to spread it. He began with a Prussian Blue. He then sprays the ink with water to make it run down the page. He then added other colours in the same way, turquoise, light red and white. He wants to create an exciting surface to work on. He does use the reference photo to help determine where he is going to put his lights and darks.



Once the acrylic inks have dried Rick uses a Faber Castell pitt pastel white pencil to sketch out his picture. He marked the centre of his board with a white cross and started to draw in the boat shapes and mast from that point. From now on he is going to work in pastel. He was given a landscape set of Unison Soft Pastels, a British make made in Northumberland. He discovered he really liked them.

From the initial small set, he has certainly expanded to a much larger collection. He sets his pastels out in three trays, warm colours on one side and cool colours on the other with mid tones in the middle. He does not have a fixed formula, but he tries not to go over anything twice as he wants to maintain the luminosity. He will blend some elements of the water and the colours in the sky. To maintain a continuity, he tries to use relatively few colours, probably around 20, and as he uses each colour, he puts it into another small tray which he keeps by him.



The reference photo is of a place near Montpellier in France called Villeneuve-lès-Maguelone. It is a complicated scene but while it looks complicated Rick works in blocks and puts in as much detail as he wants. He thoroughly recommends that people should go away and immerse themselves in a place. He also recommends finding a good tutor. It may not be cheap but from his personal experience when he did this himself it was life changing.

He did not go to art school although he did 'O' level art and he remembers the day, 7th August 1980, when he was on holiday in Cornwall. There was an old tin mine near to where they were staying. It never stopped raining and there was not much to do so he got his wife to drop him at the tin mine and he began sketching. He showed us the sketch he had made that fateful day which set him on course to being an artist. These days he exhibits regularly at the Mall Galleries with the Pastel Society and the Royal Society of Marine Artists. He is also a member of the Wapping Group of Artists and the Chelsea Art Society.



He also showed us a lot of the work that he has in his studio at the moment. The painting of Cranes at Battersea has been selected to be included in the 2021 Pastel Society Exhibition at The Mall Galleries. Some of the paintings he showed us can be seen here on his website:

<https://rickholmesartist.com>

This year, during the lockdown, Rick has been painting with the Surrey Hills Plein Air Group on Elstead Common. It was the anniversary of the start of this recently and he counted up the paintings he had done to find there were 134. He decided to have a small exhibition of some of these and was able to donate £750 of the proceeds to the local surgery as a way of saying thank you to the NHS.

It was coming towards the end of the demonstration and it was at this point that Rick decided to put in the sky. To do this he turned the work upside down. He chose a light turquoise to make it have a Mediterranean colour. He added a deeper shade of turquoise to create depth. He then used a torchon to blend these colours together. Pastel is pure pigment. It will not fade or darken but it does need to be mounted.



Rick uses Glassene which he buys from Jacksons to protect his pastels when he has finished rather than spraying them with fixative or hairspray. He demonstrated how fixative can dull the luminosity of the colour. Pastels should be mounted under glass and when he does this he puts a little strip of card at the bottom behind the mount to catch any loose pastel that might fall over time.

Rick preferred not to mute people while he worked which ensured that it was not only an enjoyable, informative Zoom demonstration but it was friendly and interactive too. Although some people could not be seen on their Zoom due to some technical glitch, luckily everyone could see it. Rick wants to enthuse people and he said if he has done that, he will be happy.

Write up: Carole Head