

MAKING YOUR OWN OIL PASTELS

a visual step-by-step guide

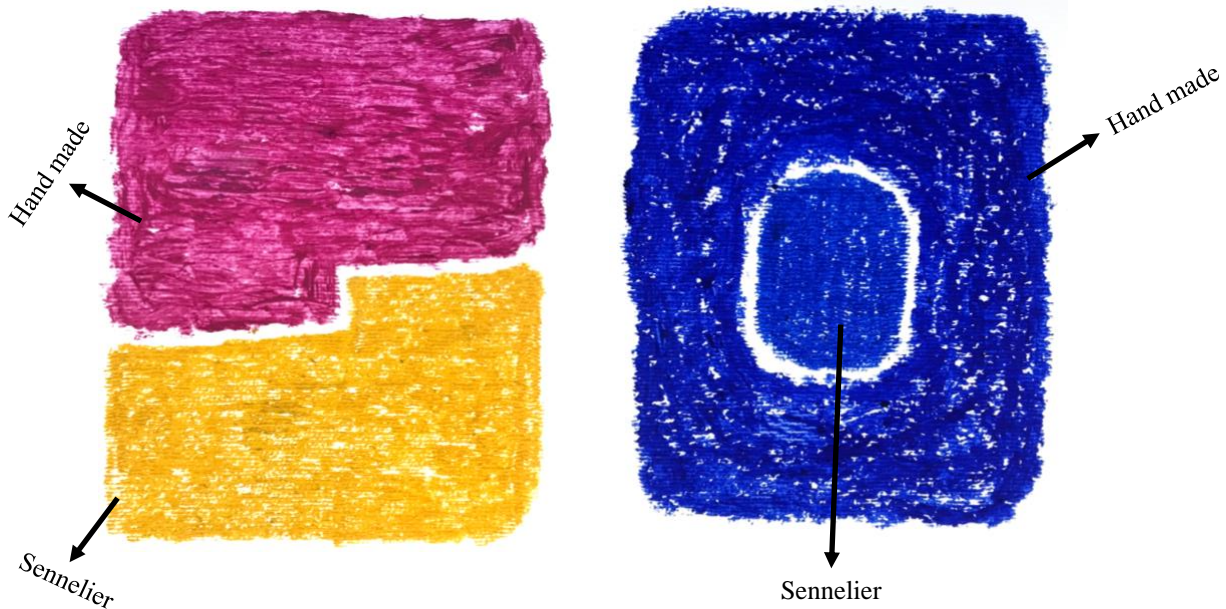
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Oil pastels are a very versatile tool. They stand between drawing and painting, allowing interesting accidents to happen. They are made of a mix of pigment, oil and wax.

When making your own oil pastels you can control the oil/wax ratio to make the pastels have the consistency you want. I like mine softer. It's also cheaper to make your own if you are for example working on a very large drawing and need a large quantity of one specific colour.

Below are pictures comparing store bought pastels (Sennelier) and my own:



You can see that the handmade ones look much richer in colour and softer in texture, just how I like it. It took me some time to adjust the recipe to my liking, but once you start with the standard ratios and have that as reference, you can start experimenting. My pastels have a slightly higher oil content than the Sennelier ones, which means that they don't smudge as much after they dry (oil pastels never fully dry FYI), retaining its brilliancy with a very high pigment content.

Here's the recipe:

- Pigment
- Any kind of paint thinner. If you are working on a confined/shared and low ventilated space I recommend using low odour solvent (e.g. Sansodor)
- Stand oil
- Bleached beeswax
- 2 tin cans
- Tin foil
- Plasticine to make a mould (Alternatively, you can use regular clay or air-dry clay, but these materials will dry and harden. Plasticine doesn't dry so you can reshape the mould if necessary).

Make moulds for the molten pastel mixture. Fold a 20x16 inch length of foil into three to give a stable wall. Roll around a piece of dowel or anything that has a chunky cylinder shape (I found my acrylic markers excellent for this) to achieve a well-rounded shape, seal the end and embed into plasticine to hold the mould upright to accept the molten mixture.



Mix the pigment with the solvent in the tin can that has been crimped to form a spout. Transfer the mixture to a glass slab and work through with a palette knife to form a lump free paste, return to the can and cover to keep moist.



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Melt the beeswax in a clean can by placing it in a pan of water. Warm the wax slowly until melted.

Remove the wax from the heat and add stand oil at a ratio of 1:3 or 1:4 (oil: wax). These ratios should give a creamy pastel that will harden. If the wax solidifies (it will a bit as you mix the cold stand oil), return the can to the water bath for a few minutes.

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Pour recently melted oil/wax mixture into the pigment paste that is in the other can, 50:50 ratio; if it is not satisfactory the result can be melted and adjusted. Mix with a stick of some sort or the back of an unloved brush.

Pour carefully into the moulds, if wells form in the centre top up with more of the mix. Allow several hours to harden before removing the foil. I also put the mould inside a container in case of a leaking disaster. Very annoying to clean up afterwards, a friend told me 😬



There you have it!



Notes from my experience:

- Ratio 1:4 (oil:wax) will produce a very similar pastel to store bought ones.
- Ratio 1:3 (oil:wax) will give a richer and creamer consistency.
- I experimented with a 1:2 ratio (oil:wax) and the results are very much like of an oil stick, not so much an oil pastel. Mine has completely dried which means I don't have to worry about smudging afterwards. Also, it behaves very much like an oil stick when painting with it.
- You can oil out your surface before using the pastels if you don't like the resistance or try dipping the pastel in oil before applying.



Here's some of my own work (oil pastel on paper)

