

VIKTORIA MALIAR

OIL PASTEL ART

About This Ebook

This ebook is a collection of insights, methods, and lessons gathered directly from my own artistic practice. Everything here comes from years of exploring oil pastels, studying art, experimenting on my own terms, and learning from both failures and breakthroughs. The information is entirely original and deeply personal — shaped by real experience, not by theory alone.

The design and layout were created in Canva. To refine the language and ensure a smooth reading flow, I used ChatGPT as an editing tool, but every idea, explanation, and piece of guidance in these pages comes from me. All brands mentioned throughout the book are included simply because I use and trust them — none of the recommendations are sponsored in any way.

Images of famous artists' paintings, as well as some reference photos of art materials and studios, are copyright-free and sourced from Rawpixel.com and Canva.

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Foreword

(Or, How I Accidentally Fell in Love with Oil Pastels)

Hello everyone — I'm Viktoria, your guide into the world of oil pastels.

I'm a professional painter, a graduate of the Art Academy in Berlin, and since 2019, a full-time freelance artist. My work has taken me from solo exhibitions to group shows, from intimate workshops to international collectors' homes.

These days — winter 2025 — more than 300,000 people follow my art journey on Instagram and other platforms. It's a joy, a responsibility, and a constant reminder that I have an incredible community walking alongside me.

I like to think I'm one of those artists who's helped bring oil pastels out of the shadows. Not too long ago, they were an underrated, almost forgotten medium. Now they're finally stepping into the spotlight — and I'm proud to have played my small part in their renaissance.

But here's the thing: my story with oil pastels wasn't love at first sight. In fact, *I discovered them completely by accident.*

The Break-Up (and Make-Up)

Some of you may know that I used to be a deeply devoted oil painter. I adored the richness, the depth, the sheer juiciness of oil paint. No other medium could match it — or so I thought.

After I first tried oils, nothing else felt quite the same. I already had a few boxes of oil pastels in my Berlin studio, along with all the other mediums I'd tried, but my hands kept reaching for the tubes, the brushes, the palette knives.



Photo by Tom Borchwardt

And then I got pregnant.

Now, as much as I love oil paint, it does have its drawbacks — namely, the toxic solvents, mediums, and varnishes that come with it. I realized this was going to be a break from oils. But I couldn't take a break from making art. That was non-negotiable.

So I started researching: What medium could give me the same richness, the same color intensity as oils... without the fumes?

Some of you might immediately think acrylics.

I say: *absolutely not*.

The Plot Twist

Only oil pastels have the same unapologetic, straight-out-of-the-tube color power as oil paint. Their formula is deceptively simple: mostly pure pigment, with wax and non-drying oil to hold it together. That's it.

Of course, this is where things get confusing — there are pigment sticks, oil sticks, soft pastels, wax pastels... all cousins, but none quite the same. We'll sort through all those differences later in the book.

For now, just remember this: in their look and feel, oil pastels are the closest you can get to oil paint without actually opening a paint tube. If they had existed 150 years ago, I'm convinced the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists would have gone wild for them.

That's how my "temporary" switch became a complete artistic transformation. Oil pastels didn't just fill the gap left by oils — they opened up a whole new world of texture, color, and expression for me. And now, I can't imagine my art practice without them.

And that brings me to something important. In this ebook, I didn't want to simply hand you technical information and neat, polished tips — though you'll absolutely get those. I also wanted to bring you into the studio with me, into the real process, the surprises, the experiments, the doubts, the wins.

This year I taught several in-person workshops and retreats, and I noticed something again and again: people are endlessly fascinated by the behind-the-scenes reality. The things we artists take for granted — the peculiar habits, the strange discoveries, the unexpected failures — often surprise, inspire, or completely defy people's expectations.

No profession carries as many myths as the artistic one.

The artist's path is beautifully unordinary.



Every artist has their own story, and part of my joy is sharing a piece of mine with you.

What I've observed — both in my own journey and in those I teach — is that making art isn't just about mastering the medium. It's intertwined with personal growth. Sometimes your art deepens not because your technique improves (though that's wonderful too), but because life shapes you, and your work follows. It becomes more honest, more grounded, more you.

Along with sharing my love for oil pastels, I want to share a few behind-the-scenes moments from the artistic process — the kind that make the medium come alive in a whole new way.

So, if you're ready, let's start by answering the big question...

Why are oil pastels so special?

(Flip the page — I'll tell you everything.)



Surfaces (& other things we need)

Let's start with a little confession: *oil pastels never fully dry*. Not in a week, not in a year. Over time, the strokes do harden and become more stable, but they never turn completely “untouchable.” That luscious, buttery mark you make today may still retain a little give years from now. And honestly? No one can say for certain how it will behave decades down the line — but that's part of their charm: a medium that feels alive, responsive, and wonderfully dynamic.

Unlike some paint that might crack or fade over the time, oil pastels keep breathing on the surface. But it does mean you, the artist, need to think one step ahead.

Where will this artwork live? Behind glass, safe and framed? In a portfolio, stacked with siblings? Gifted to a friend who might, inevitably, run their fingers across it? The surface you choose isn't just a background; it's the stage, the architecture, the home where your pastel will live its long, soft life. Choose wisely.

Paper — Smooth vs. Textured

Paper is the oil pastel's natural playground — the first surface most artists reach for, and for good reason. It's accessible, simple, easy to store, and even easier to ship or digitize if you want to scan your work. Plus, there's something comforting about opening a fresh sheet and knowing all you need is a stick of pastel and your hands.

That said, a little friendly advice: paper is fragile, especially when you're working with a medium that contains oil. As I mentioned before, professional-quality materials — including paper — are preferable over student or beginner grade.

Paper for oil pastels comes in two temperaments: smooth and textured, each offering a different kind of character.

- Smooth paper (hot-pressed watercolor) is all about glide and precision. Pastels skim over the surface like skaters on ice, making clean lines and delicate blending possible. Perfect for detail lovers. The catch? Smooth papers fill up fast — too much layering can overwhelm them.
- Textured paper (pastel paper, sanded paper, cold-pressed watercolor paper) has tooth. It grips pigment, layer after layer, holding on without complaint. Your strokes will break slightly on the grain, which can look charmingly raw or maddeningly scratchy, depending on your mood.

My personal take:

Though most teachers recommend textured paper, I often lean toward smooth. I adore how visible and sharp each stroke becomes, like a brushstroke in paint. But I pay attention to thickness — flimsy paper won't survive the pressure. Right now, my go-to is Hahnemühle Britannia hot-pressed watercolor paper (smooth, satin, solid). Another gem is Clairefontaine PaintOn, especially in the warm “Naturel” shade — lovely to use, though it does leave faint oil stains on the back. For something different, PastelMat by Clairefontaine (a fine sandpaper-like surface) is brilliant, especially for dry pastels like Mungyo Gallery. Also, Arches Dessin “Creme” works beautifully with Mungyo if you want to try a slightly textured paper.

And here's the joy: the paper market is endless. Experiment. Even a humble piece of cardboard can become a worthy playground. Each paper behaves differently with each brand of pastel — sometimes surprising, sometimes remarkable.



*Hahnemühle Britannia
Hot Pressed (Satin)*



*Clairefontaine PaintOn
Naturel*



Clairefontaine Pastelmat



Arches Dessin Creme



Mark-Making — The Handwriting of Your Art

Oil pastels may look straightforward, but the moment you start making marks, you're essentially signing your name over and over again. Every stroke carries a bit of your rhythm — the way your hand hesitates, speeds up, presses down, or backs off. A firm line has one attitude; a light touch has another. I've learned that these differences aren't quirks to fix — they're the beginning of your artistic identity.

Think of mark-making as visual handwriting. Two people can draw the same apple, with the same colors, on the same paper — and the results will still feel completely different. One artist builds the form with energetic, angular strokes; another moves slowly, shaping everything in softer, rounded marks. Neither is “more correct.” They're just different ways of thinking, moving, and seeing.

I notice this every time someone studies my work and tries to copy it for practice. They follow each step carefully, match the palette, imitate the technique — and still, their own touch shows up immediately. And honestly, that's the best part. You can mirror someone's process, but you can't erase your own voice.

It's there from the start, and oil pastels make it impossible to hide.

It's your fingerprint, your rhythm, your unique pulse. And you should protect it, not erase it.

But there's a difference between writing in your own script and merely copying symbols you don't understand. In this chapter, I'll show you how to organize your mark-making so it works for you — so your strokes build volume, create atmosphere, and make the viewer feel your art more deeply.



Structural Drawing

When I first began working seriously with mark-making in oil pastels, it felt brand new to me. In oils (and many other liquid mediums), you work with surfaces — laying skin over skin, surface over surface, to describe form. But oil pastels are different. They are closer to drawing than painting, closer to the scratch of pencil than the wash of brush.

That means mark-making isn't just decorative — it's structural. Every stroke builds the illusion of volume, every dash is a little bone in the skeleton of your subject. In some sense, we could even call it hatching, that classical discipline where lines follow the shape of what you see.

And let me pause here to say: this is my approach. Oil pastels are gloriously lawless. You can smear, blend, cover whole surfaces like paint, or avoid marks altogether. But I find their real magic in mark-making — letting every stroke carry both form and feeling.



Learning from the Greats

The main academic rule of hatching is simple: follow the shape. Your strokes should wrap around the object, like fingers tracing its form.

For inspiration, look at Vincent van Gogh's drawings. I discovered them only recently, and to my surprise, they captivated me even more than his paintings. Why? Because in the drawings everything is stripped down to its bones — simple yet astonishing marks that show light, shadow, rhythm, and space without a single touch of color.

Notice how many kinds of marks he uses: short lines, long lines, dots, even tiny circles. They move in different directions, yet they support one another, creating harmony and depth, almost like instruments playing together in a symphony.

Or take Anders Zorn. His drawings and etchings deserve just as much attention as his famous paintings, exactly because they reveal the logic of his mark-making. The way he turns a form with just a few confident strokes has influenced me a lot in my own work.

I made countless copies of different artists before I finally understood what “following the shape” actually means. So don't worry if it doesn't happen immediately in your art. This is simply the area to pay attention to — once you see it, you'll know what to practice. And remember, your marks won't look exactly like Van Gogh's or Zorn's. Through practice, you'll discover your own.



Vincent Van Gogh - Arles View from the Wheatfields



Anders Zorn - Dagmar



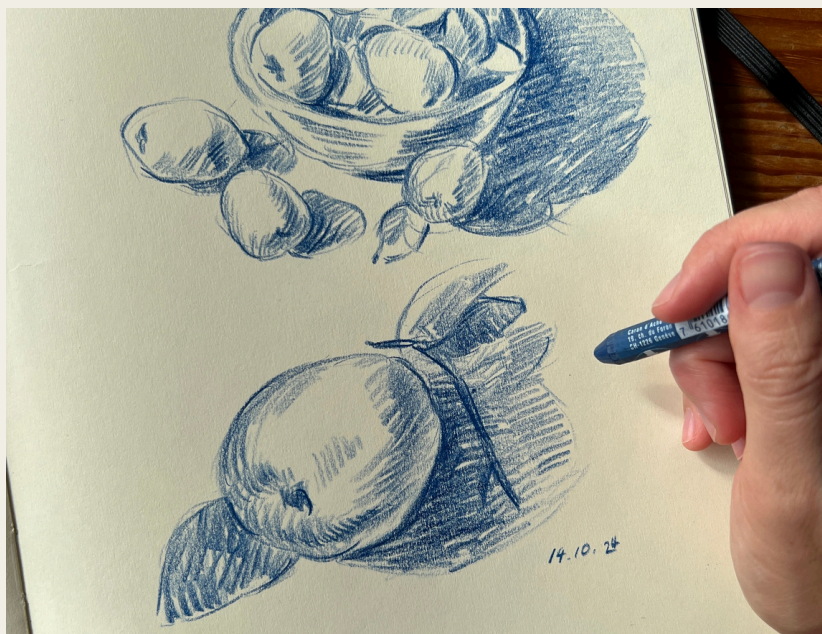
The Two Pillars: Rhythm and Contrast

No matter which kind of mark-making you choose, two instruments give it power: rhythm and contrast. Yes, you might hear about these tools from composition, but they are the best to describe, how to make your mark making impressive.

Rhythm in art isn't just about movement — it's about order. When you repeat marks in a certain way, you create patterns that the eye instinctively follows. Our brains are wired to recognize rhythm, whether in music, poetry, or visual art. In oil pastels, this rhythm emerges through mark-making: the way you lay down strokes, their direction, their spacing, and their repetition.

This is where the free preview ends. If the journey so far resonates with you, you can continue reading — and explore the full ebook — by purchasing it here:

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