



PART THREE

AMY K. SANDERS SHOWS HOW WIDENING THE RANGE OF VALUES IN YOUR WORK PLAYS THE PRIMARY ROLE IN COMMUNICATING DEPTH

PASTEL

USING DEPTH AS DRAWCARD

Artists, and potential collectors, are generally inundated with art - they can see literally thousands of paintings in galleries, magazines, and multiple other places. We all have the experience of passing many of these works, and then suddenly being stopped in our tracks with a piece that is simply stunning. What is it that draws a viewer into a certain piece? I would imagine there would be as many answers to that question as there are people to ask, but I would propose that for many people, the appearance of depth in a piece would be a primary drawcard.

How can 3-dimensional depth be portrayed on a 2-dimensional surface? There are of course, quite a few tricks for this, such as linear perspective and color usage (i.e., blues increase as distance grows, while items closer have more saturated or pure color), but widening the range of values in your work perhaps plays the primary role. This seems especially true with rendering work in the tradition of realism.

Values are, as most artists are well aware, defined as simply the degree of lightness and darkness present in a work. The range of values

can be easily seen in any black and white photograph. Nevertheless, it's been my experience that many painters who are frustrated by not seeing the depth in their work that they wish, are failing to adequately expand their value range. Most often they seem to fail to get dark enough values, but I have seen people fail to go light enough as well. I was once told by a student that a prior teacher had told her it was against the rules to use black or white in her work (a silly rule in my opinion in pastel at least, since the darkest 'colors' are mixed with blacks, and the lightest tints are those same colors mixed with white), but even if you chose to follow that 'rule', there are still many dark rich colors available in all mediums' color ranges, as well as a wide variety of lighter ones.

There are exceptions of course, to every rule (like "no black and white"), and value ranges can be varied as well. There are occasions where an artist may deliberately chose to narrow his or her value range (even in realism). Monet for instance, often kept his work of mid to high value and rarely dabbled in dark values, as do many impressionist painters (but by no means all). Whistler occasionally did the opposite, with value ranges from mid range to dark, with scarcely a lighter value to be seen. There are times that call for narrowing value ranges in order to capture a particular feel or mood, such as some beach scenes in bright midday sun, where the goal is to emphasize the light. Watercolorists too often head for higher value pieces (lighter), though this is by no means a rule for all.

Nevertheless, widening your value range is more often than not, highly important if increasing the appearance of depth is what you are after. Even those paintings that stay largely within a narrower range of values, often will have one or more spots that are deliberately quite a bit out of that range and use that contrast for emphasis or depth. Failing to adequately expand your values can make your work look shallow, and can also make it hard to know where the focal point is, as value contrasts can also be used to move the viewer's eyes around a painting.

Broadening the values in my work with rocks and shells is especially critical, because I cannot rely on tricks of color (not enough distance to work with) or line. Students have asked in the past how it is done. Again, there are lots of answers to that. I generally match by eye. □



Reflections, pastel, 7.5" x 7.5"

This was a challenge to see if I could capture the texture of a rock beneath a smooth sheen of water while still catching the glassy reflections of the sky and surrounding rocks. The center top rock took three tries to get it right. A further, though not originally anticipated challenge was the bubbles in the water to the upper right. This remains one of my favorites.



High and Dry, pastel, 8 x 8"

Another of Nature's fine compositions - a brightly colored quahog shell that settled into a dip in the rocks as the tide went out. The sun had dried all the water from the shell leaving behind the sand, and also cast intense shadows. This didn't photograph well because of the strong light, so I used an overexposure which captured what I needed for the rocks, and took the shell home so I could render it directly from life.



All Lined Up, pastel, 17.5" x 15.5"

The main goal for this piece was to convincingly render the half inch of water these rocks were sitting in. Nature also provided some highly varied rocks for this piece, the most challenging of which was probably the center deep red conglomerate. Failing to get the values correct on that rock would leave something looking like old gum, and not the solid rock that it was.

HELPFUL IDEAS

Paint what you see, not what you think you see

You think an apple is red, but if you paint only red, your apple will look pretty flat. Really look at that highlight, and that shadow. How does it compare to the middle valued red of the apple?

Extend the values even further

Sometimes I make a shadow lighter than I see on a photograph, and sometimes I make it darker, depending on what I want to emphasize. I don't hesitate to use white, and I don't hesitate to use black.

Use a support if necessary

I don't have a value chart, but I've been known on occasion to use Photoshop to figure out why something isn't working. It's a rare event for me now because my eyes have been trained extensively to see values well. The more you practice, the less you'll need this as a fall back.

Practice, practice, practice

Here's a pain in the neck strategy that really helped me long ago to be where I am today. Once a dear art teacher made us copy over the course of a year, a zillion little color swatches cut out from magazines, using only a small simple watercolor box, that contained the primary and secondary colors, and black. Not only did it sharpen my eye for color mixing, but it made me highly aware of values, by having to be attentive to how much I had to lighten (add water) or darken (use of black or a dark color when possible) a given color to match that swatch. It's a dull exercise, but I owe a great deal of my technical skill to it.

And in conclusion...

In short, I've heard it said by many an artist that color doesn't matter (it does for my work) but value does (it does in everyone's work). A highly valuable 'rule' to keep in mind. If you want your work to really stand out, with richness and depth, expanding the range of values in your work may very well be the key.



Receding Tide, pastel, 13.5" x 14"

I liked the composition and the contrast between the two center rocks, one dark and one bright, with both colors also present in the rocks around them. It had a wide variety of textures to work with and a bit of receding water as the tide was going out. Without a strong rendering of values showing those varied textures and minerals, as well as where there is dampness, this piece wouldn't be quite as strong.



Spring Water Flow, pastel, 13.75" x 13.75"

This piece depicts all the complexity that can be seen in the spring water run off from the beach to the sea at the lowest of tides. These tiny streams (anywhere from 1 to maybe 5 inches wide) are full of interest, and the coldest water imaginable. This was entirely Nature's composition.

my art in the making Making Wet Sand

pastel, 10 x 10"

This image was taken at Beverly Beach, Oregon, on a trip with my brother. I was struck by the composition, but mostly by the incredible patterns in the sand, which is much finer than where I live. I knew it would be a challenge to paint this because of the simplicity of color. I knew I would need to bring that color up a bit by emphasizing the small differences, and that a strong value range would also be crucial, making it an ideal piece for this article.

What the Artist used

Support

UArt, dry-mounted to foam core board.

Other materials

General's Charcoal pencil 6B
Latex finger cots,
Colour Shaper tapered point, 2.0

Pastels used

Winsor Newton Pastels

Gold Ochre, Tint 5
Payne's Gray, Tints 1-5
Indanthrene Blue,
Tints 2-4

Rembrandt Pastels

Burnt Umber, 409.7, .8, .9
Gold Ochre, 231.3, .10
Mouse Gray, 707.7
Raw Sienna, 234.5, .9
Turquoise, 522.8
Phthalo Blue, 570.9
Grumbacher
Burnt Sienna

Faber Castell Polychromos

Pastel
Warm Gray #3, 272
Nu Pastel
White, 211
Violet, 224

Pencils used

Rexel Derwent pencils

Indigo, 36B, 36D
Prussian Blue, 35D, 35F
French Gray, 70B
Burnt Sienna, 62F

Dark Violet, 25B

Terra Verte, 77B
Forest Green, 76D
Brown Ochre, 57B
Umber, 79D
Olive Green, 51D
Ultramarine, 29D
Conte pencil
White

Ultramarine, 10

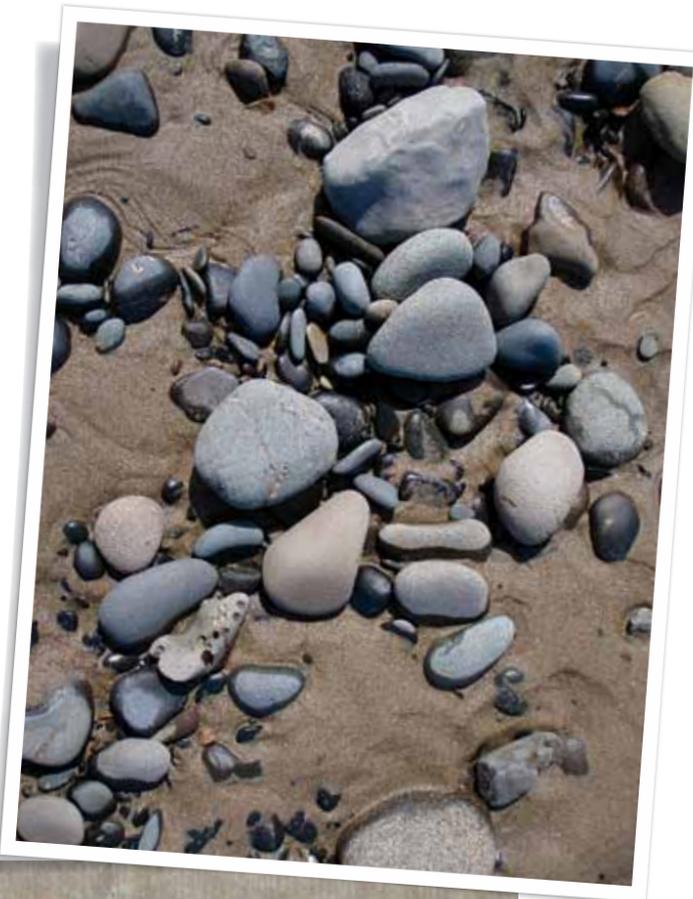
Rose, 11
Natural Umber, 54

Carb Othello Pencils

Dark Flesh, 680
Ultramarine Blue, 405
Gold Ochre Light, 692
Bruynzeel
Orange, 828

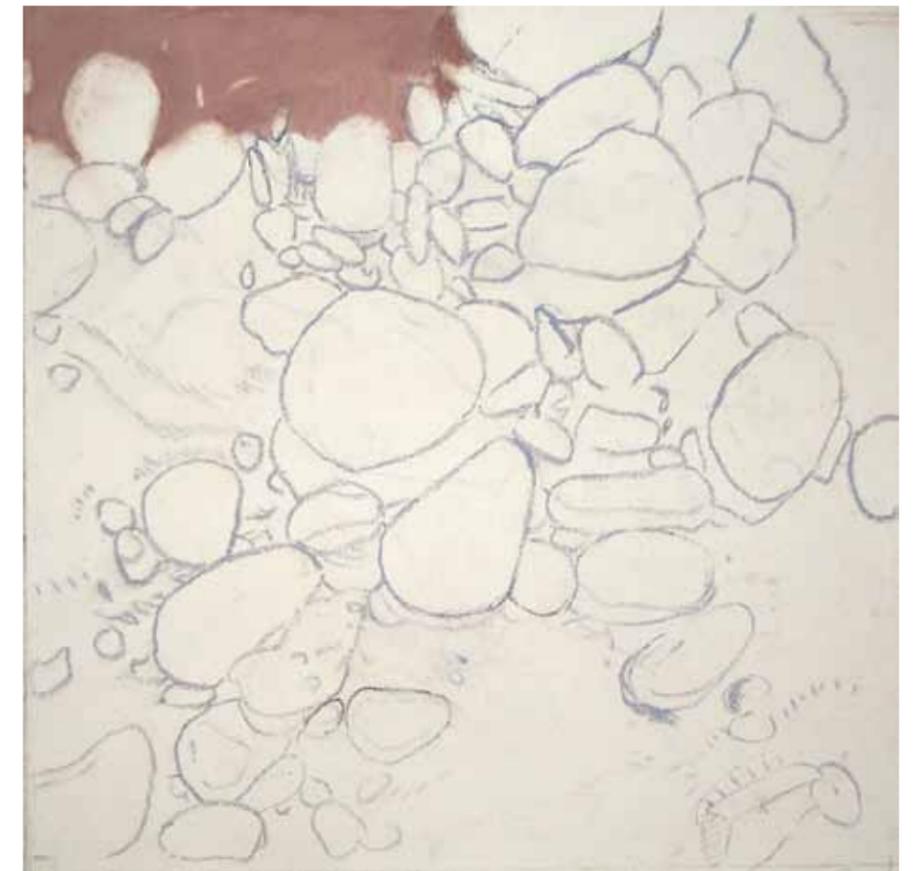
Faber Castell/Pitt Pencils

Walnut Brown, 177
Bistre, 179
Sanguine, 188



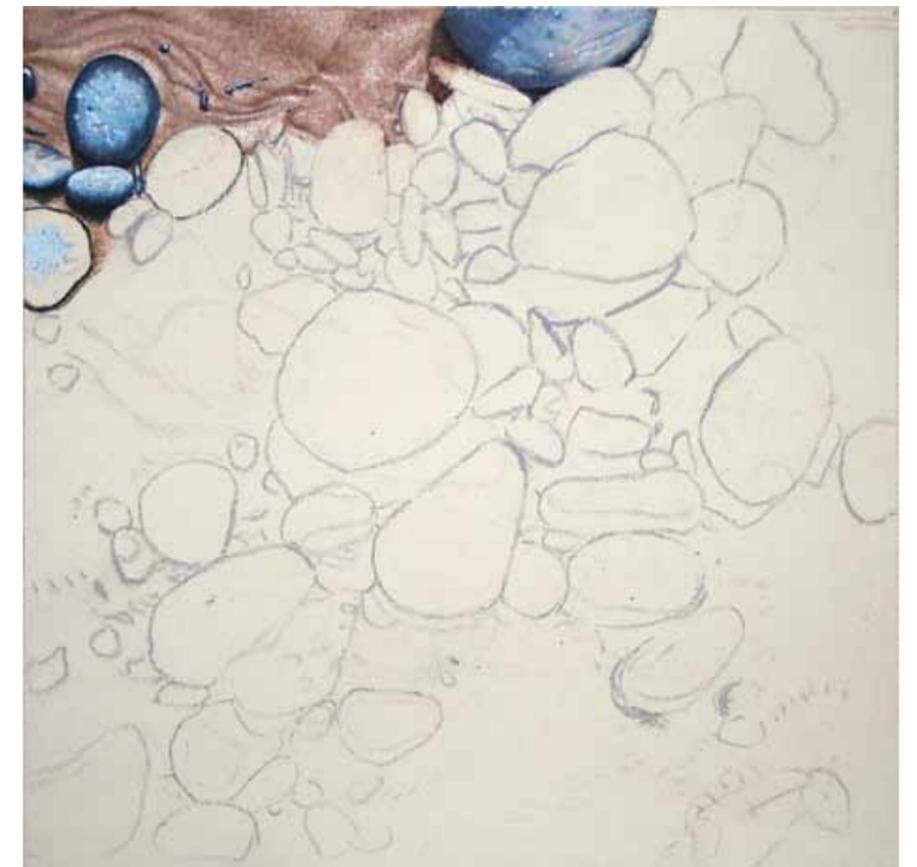
Stage 1 Base layer

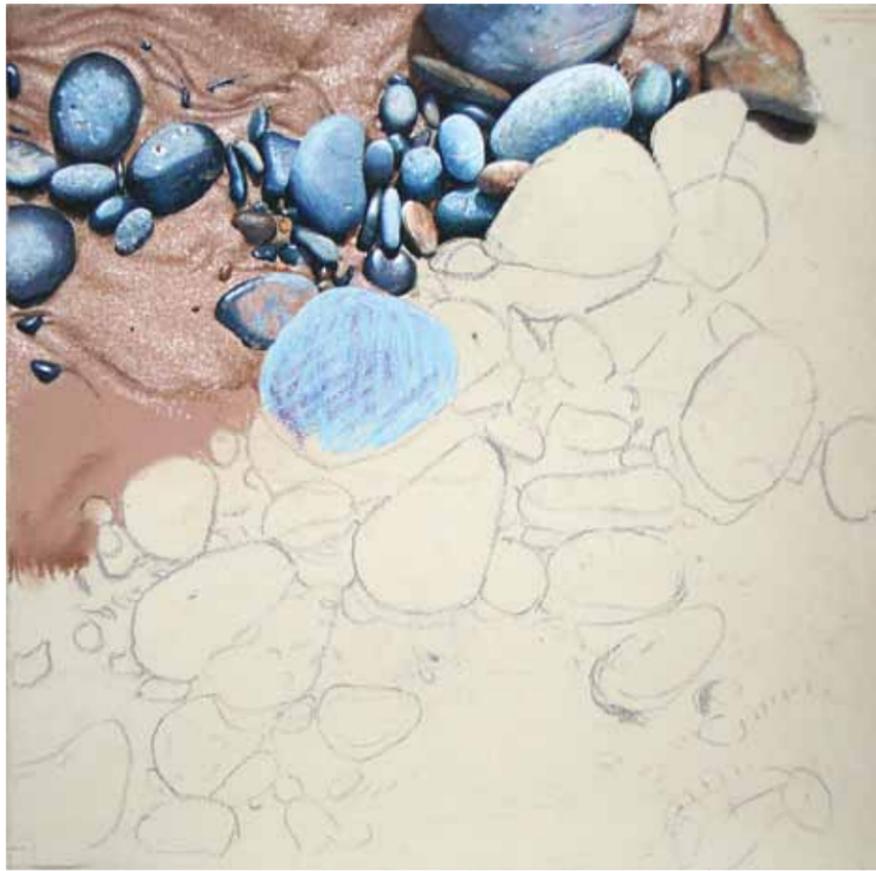
This image shows the rough drawing and the base layer of sand, mostly Rembrandt Burnt Umber, darkened in a few places. I generally start dark and then lighten.



Stage 2 Water flow

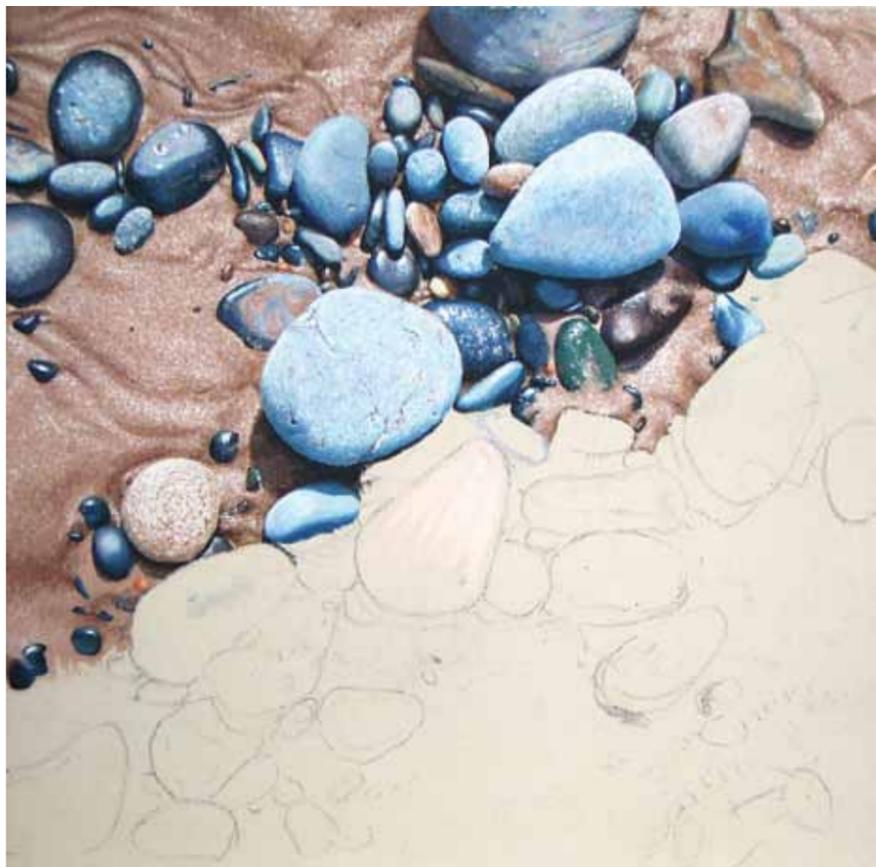
Three sizable rocks are finished, along with considerable work to show how the water's flowed through the sand. While the piece is relatively monochromatic, there are actually 17 colors in the top rock.





Stage 3 Rock values

Many more rocks are in here now, along with a second section of sand. Note that rocks have the widest range of values possible (charcoal black to white Nupastel), to render their roundness and mass.



Stage 4 Individualisation

I work at making sure that no rock looks like any other in color combinations or texture. I've increased the color saturation from the photo to show them as I saw them (note the green one here).



Stage 5 Dots and variations

Almost done here. Lots of dots in the sand (a few strokes, but mostly dots) to render its form, and attention to subtle variations in the colors of the stones to avoid repetition in any one area.



Stage 6 Adjustments

Finishing the corner rocks (no easy task, those two!) and sand, making a few adjustments all around (checking consistency and placement of highlights and shadows) and I'm done.

THESE IMAGES SHOW HOW I BRING UP ANY GIVEN ROCK



STAGE 1
Base layer of Rembrandt's Phthalo Blue, 570.9



STAGE 2
Addition of Faber Polychromos Warm Gray #3, 272; Rembrandt's Raw Sienna, 234.9; Burnt Umber, 409.9; and Winsor-Newton's Paynes Gray Tint 1. No blending yet, other than by stroke.



STAGE 3
Pencils are used for blending. Here I've used Rexel's Olive Green 51D, Burnt Sienna 62F, and Indigo 36 B and D; Conte's Natural Umber 5; Faber Castell Pitt's Walnut Brown 17.



STAGE 4
The shadow and streaks are laid in with additions of Conte's Rose 11 and Natural Umber 54; Rexel's Ultramarine 29D and Umber 79D; FCPitt's Walnut Brown 177; General's Charcoal 6B and CarbOthello Dark Flesh 680.



STAGE 5 AND 6
White is added for highlight, and varied pencils are used to blend, smooth and perfect the texture until it is complete. No other blending is used here, though I do sometimes use more blending on smoother rocks.



Washashore, pastel, 6.5" x 9"
This is my first piece on Pastelmat. I never intended to fully finish it, but rather to see what the paper could do, but as I progressed, I began to really like what I was seeing and decided to complete it. In addition to the quahog's color, shape and shadow, what really excited me was rendering the small amount of water in the shell that had not yet evaporated. Strong values are required for a convincing sense of depth here.



The Collection, pastel, 10 x 12"
For this piece, I threw a bunch of my collected shells (all but the spider conch on the left, and the white starfish were my beach finds) into a grapevine basket and went to work with how they fell. I wanted to challenge myself with the textures, having never done seashells before. While some say this is photorealistic, it is actually not at all. The colors are way stronger in the painting than in reality.



about the artist

Amy K. Sanders is an award-winning artist and Signature Member of the Pastel Society of America (PSA). She considers pastel to be her primary medium, although originally she worked in watercolors and was a member of the Connecticut Watercolor Society. She still paints occasionally in watercolors, acrylics and oils, but she finds pastels allow her to capture, more expressively, the beauty and depth of the scenes that she is drawn to paint.

Amy is largely a self-taught artist. She studied with outstanding art teacher, Ron Parent, for several years and has also painted under guest artists at Truro's Castle Hill Center for the Arts. Her artistic style creates velvety, richly detailed paintings.

Her paintings have been sold in a series of auctions to benefit non-profit organizations, and are in a variety of private collections. She has exhibited in galleries in Connecticut and on the Cape, and has been represented by the Addison Art Gallery of Orleans, Massachusetts, since 1998.

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