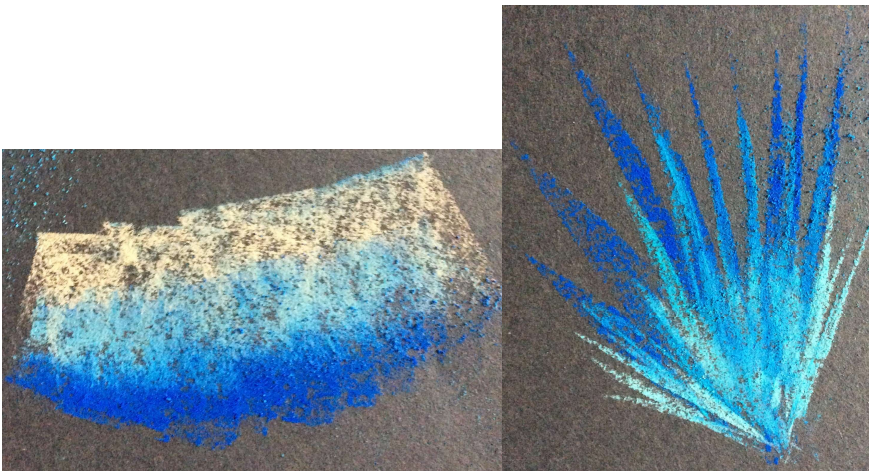


In this session we're looking at using soft pastels to create a stunning image of a rainbow betta fish. If you don't have soft pastels, don't worry: you could use coloured/watercolour pencils, oil pastels, or felt tips instead. Again, if you're not using pastels, instead of a toned paper, use white paper.

Soft Pastel Techniques

Before starting your image of the fish, try out these blending and pastel techniques that will help you in your finished piece.

When working on this reference image, I would recommend working from dark to light and not over blending with a finger. I've used lighter colours over darker ones to blend instead.



Top left: using the side of your pastel add a band of dark blue. Take a mid-blue, and again using it on its side, drag it down from just above your first colour into the darkest one. Repeat with a lighter colour. Experiment with pressure- sometimes it's good to see a little of the toned paper underneath.

Top right: Using the edge of your pastel, drag your darkest colours in upwards motions to represent the tail area. Use a mid-blue and repeat. Repeat finally with a light blue. Notice how the lighter colours blend the darker ones where they meet.

Tip: three colours always give a more pleasing blend than two.

Bottom left: lay down a darker colour and experiment making scales on top with a lighter colour. If you have a charcoal pencil or dark coloured pencil, work lightly into this to see the effect.

Bottom right: white is a great colour to use to blend. Lay down a colour and blend over the top with white. Note the fluffiness at the top of the pastel work- a cotton bud has been used to blend the pastel.



A few hints:

- If you're working in soft pastel, don't use a paper that is very smooth – you need a bit of a tooth to the paper to help the pastel adhere to the surface.
- No matter what surface of paper you use, there will be only so many layers of pastel that you can add before it reaches a saturation point; the pastel will no longer stick to the paper and layers underneath will be pushed from the surface.
- In this tutorial, we'll be working from dark to light, allowing the lighter colours to blend the ones underneath – experiment with pressure; sometimes you'll want a hard blend and sometimes a very soft one where you simply drag the side of your pastel over the page
- If you want to soften any edges with blending, do try a cotton bud. It's nice and small and dainty so you'll be able to control any areas you want to blend easily.
- Don't work too small when working in pastel – you want a big enough area to really enjoy the medium. The image I've worked is on A3 paper.

Main Task: Rainbow Betta Fish

Equipment needed: toned paper or cartridge paper, soft pastels: see image below for colours: L-R- white, buttermilk, peach, lilac, turquoise, light, mid and dark blue, violet, red, dark brown and navy (please substitute for oil pastels, coloured pencils or felt tips if you don't have these), cotton buds. Additional extra: charcoal pencil or a dark coloured pastel or watercolour pencil – a colour such as dark brown or navy is good.

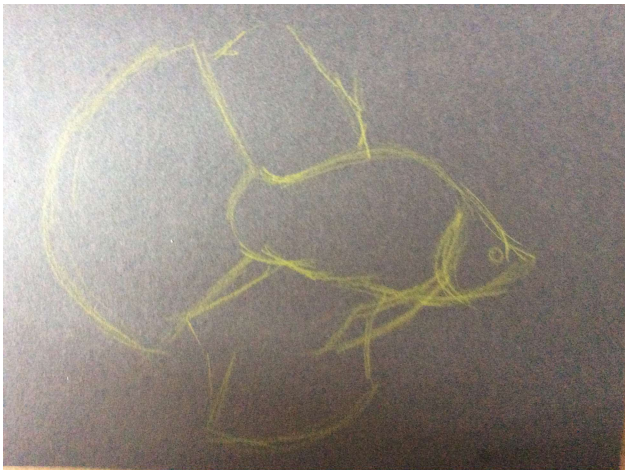
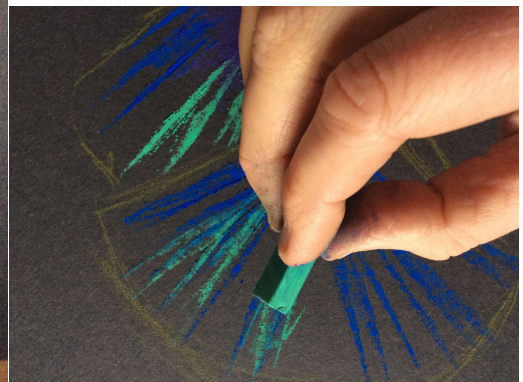
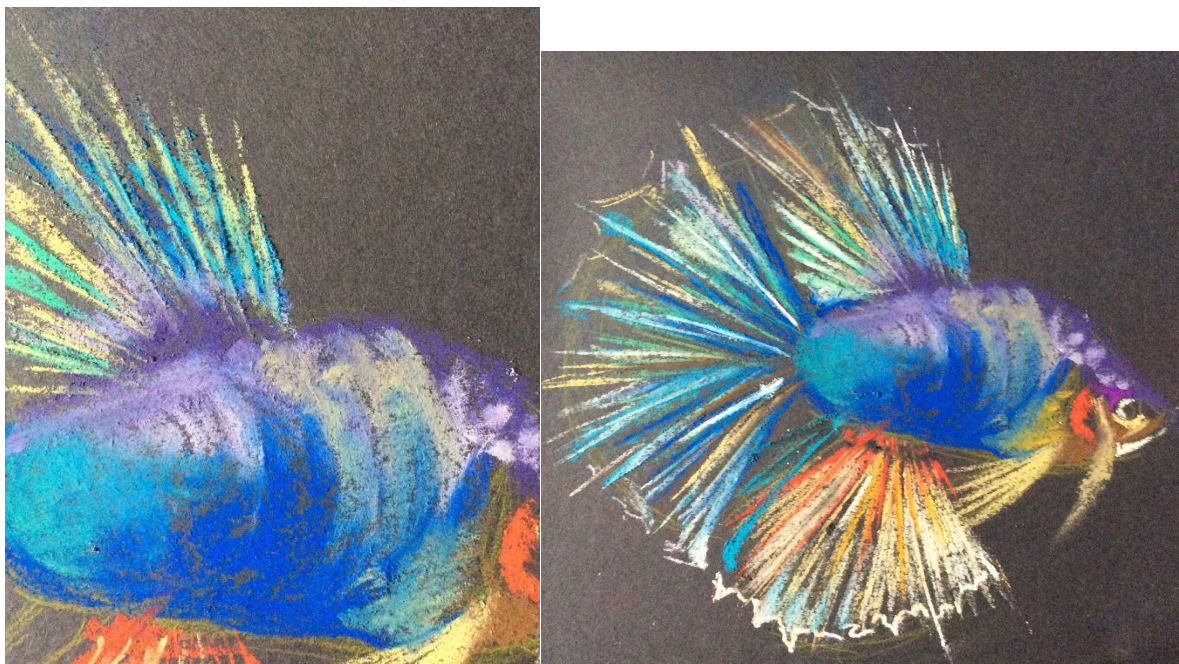


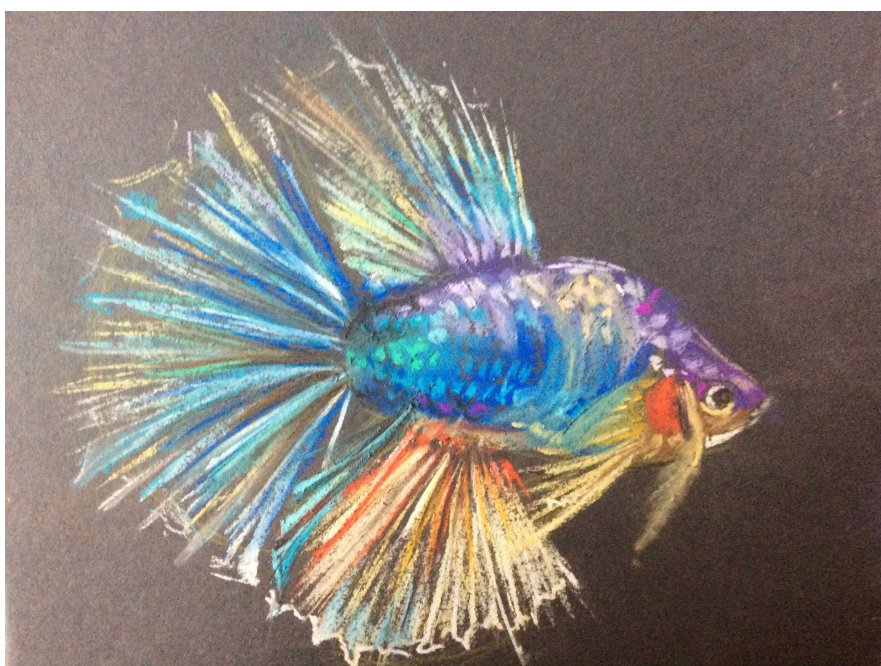
Image One: Begin by sketching out your image. As I'm working on black paper, I've done this using a soft coloured pencil. White chalk is great to do this as you can smudge away any mistakes. I've kept the shapes very simple – I'm not going to draw in detail as I want the pastels to do the work.

Image Two: I then begin to add the colour I see – I look for the darkest colour of each area. Follow the contour of the different parts of the fish. In image three I'm using the edge of the pastel for the tail. Notice how vibrant the colours appear on black paper.

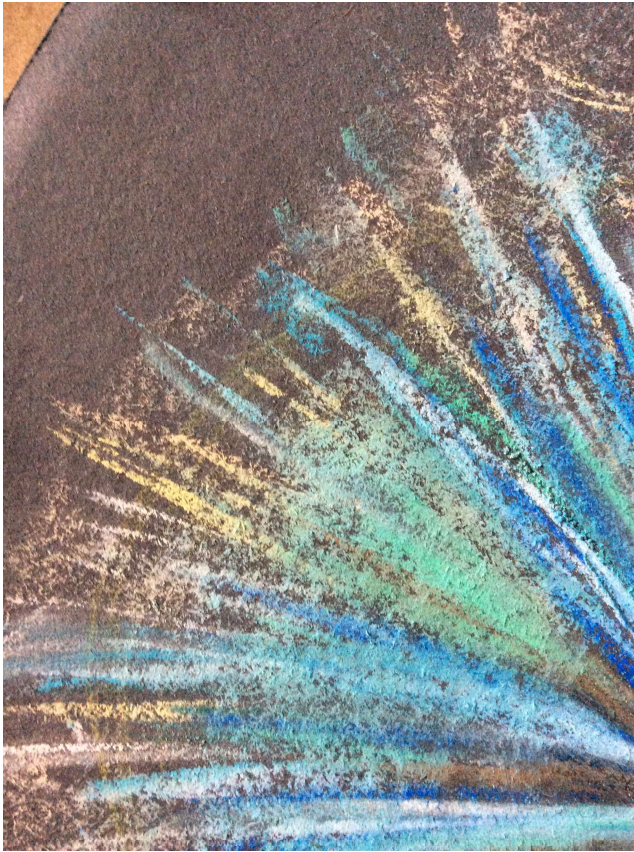




Now I want to begin to use lighter colours to blend. Using some of the techniques explored earlier, I use these lighter hues to begin to add tone and a little more shape – always be conscious of the direction of your marks. On the fin nearest to the eye of the fish, I use a cotton bud to gently blend the edges. I use the top edge of the pastel to add some angular marks to the frills on the tail and side fins.



A solid base has been created so it's time to add a little more detail. A variety of dots and dashes are used on the main body to represent the scales; where the tail and fin meet the body, a dark brown pastel is used to add some shadow; the top of the pastel is used to begin pulling out some definite highlights.



On the image above, I felt that the tail lacked a little softness, so taking the buttermilk coloured pastel, I gently dragged the side across the top end of the tail. A white pastel would work just as well.

Finally, I took a very soft navy watercolour pencil and began to add a little definition in between some of the scales.

The finished image is below.



Reference Image Used

