

COLOURWHEEL Art Classes

Oil Pastels: Tree Frogs



In this session we'll be looking at using oil pastels to create drawings of tree frogs which I promise is a lot of fun! If you don't have oil pastels, great effects can also be achieved with soft pastels, coloured pencils and felt tips/markers – just be aware that the scraffito technique, as described below, will not work.

If we take a look at these images of tree frogs from other artists, there are a variety of ways we can approach this project.

Both David Joffe and Holly Coggin have used black paper/card to work on. Louis Miller has used a scraffito technique which will be demonstrated in these notes.

Please feel free to deviate from these examples – both different colours of toned paper and white will work well also.

Louis Miller Copyrighted Image



David Joffe Copyrighted Image



Holly Coggin Copyrighted Image

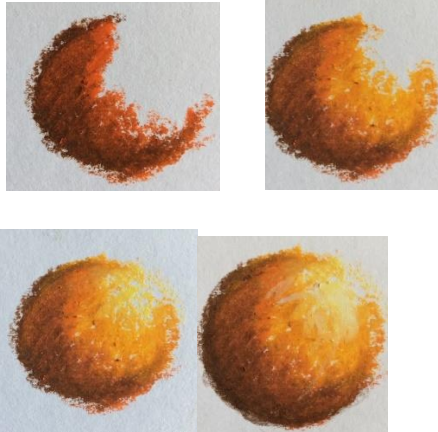
Oil Pastel Techniques

Blending is important when working in oil pastels but do bear in mind that the more we blend pastels, the less vibrant the colours will look and they may become muddy. They can be blended in a variety of ways including paper stumps, your fingertips or a cotton bud. Try dipping a cotton bud or paintbrush into baby oil or white spirits and swiping over your pastels – this will almost turn the pastel into paint.

Colours can be made more intense and luminous with repeated layers of different tones or by applying more pressure on the pastel against the paper.

Much of the blending used in the tutorial relies on heavy blending whereby a hard pressure is used to build layers of colour.

Right is an example of heavy blending. If we look at the toes of the tree frog, they are quite spherical. I begin by laying down some dark brown, thinking about moving this to follow the contour of the shape. A dark orange and light orange is added to this, before a pale yellow is used to catch the highlight. A little white is added, again with a hard pressure. Since oil pastels can be a blunt instrument, a dark brown pencil is used to just neaten up the darkest edge.



White

White is a useful colour to use when working in oil pastels, try laying down some colours you see in the tree frog e.g. I've laid down the blue, purple and green I see in the leg. I then use white to blend working from the lightest colour to the darkest.

Some oil pastel artists like to lay down a heavy blend of white first and then work colours over the top of this. This allows subsequent layers to glide smoothly over the surface of the paper but also tints the colour.



Scraffito

Scraffito is the process where a heavy layer of one colour is laid down and then covered with a heavy, second layer.

Scratch through this top layer with any suitable object e.g. a mussel shell, credit card, blade, twig etc. to reveal the first colour. You also don't have to stick to one colour in your first layer. In the third image I've placed three down, thinking about Amazonian colours, overlaid this with black. When the black is scratched out, an ombre effect is achieved.

Main Task: Tree Frog

Equipment needed: cartridge paper/multimedia paper/toned paper/black paper, oil pastels, coloured pencils or watercolour pencils, 2H or HB pencil.

I've chosen to use white paper for my tree frog to allow me to experiment with the scraffito technique but if you're not keen on this, try a black or toned paper. Do have a piece of scrap paper at hand to rest your hand on so that you don't smudge your pastel work. Also be careful with black oil pastel. Using this too early on will contaminate other colours.

Reference Image



Begin by sketching out your image using a 2H/HB pencil. Press on lightly. If you're using black paper, consider using chalk or white pencil for this. Make sure that you're happy with your drawing as this is your scaffold. If you're using oil pastels, don't go too small as this will be more difficult to achieve detail. My tree frog fills an A4 sheet of paper. Using a dark and light orange and a yellow, I use a heavy blend to work on the eye. Once I'm happy with the colour, I add the black pupil and white highlights. I then begin to work hues of green, hues of blue and white into the main areas of green – I work dark to light and allow the lighter colours to blend the darker ones. A little yellow is added and again, white worked over the top to knock it back a little.



Belly areas

I then want to start to get some colour into the belly. I lay down white first to allow my darker colours to glide over this surface and also to knock back some of their strength. A dark blue, grey, purple and pale pink are worked into this area taking note of shapes I can see and following contour lines

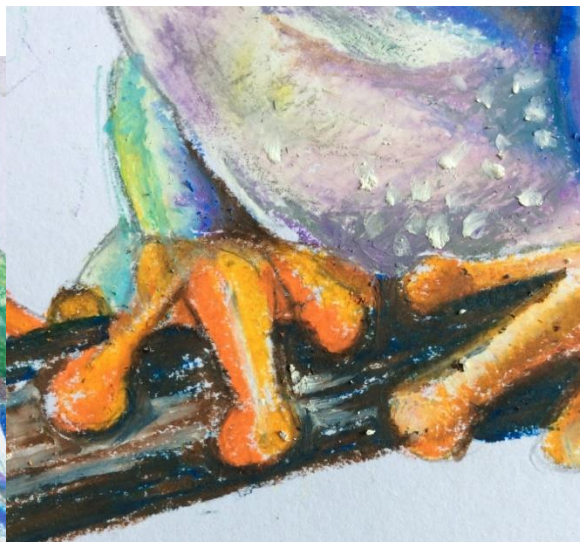


Feet: Thinking back to the blending work above, I use the technique as described when working on the spherical shape, reserving the dark brown for the darkest areas. White is added at the end to catch the highlights.

Branch: To really make the dark colour needed on the branch, I begin with a dark blue and apply this to the darkest areas using strokes to mimic the texture of the wood. I then use dark brown to go over this, again with a heavy pressure – note the difference between the brown over the white of the paper and over the blue. White oil pastel is then used to add highlights.

Detail

I then want to think about detail, so still using oil pastels, I begin to work more finely, adding features such as the white marks on the belly and giving a little more definition of shadows and highlights. When I feel as if I've done as much detail as I can with oil pastels, I use a dark brown and dark blue pencil to sharpen up areas such as around the feet and eye.





Background

I'd be quite happy leaving the tree frog on a white background but I want to have a little fun. Using a heavy pressure I lay down three colours, keeping my darkest nearest to the log and lightest further away. Over the top I lay a heavy pressure of black – do take care and ensure your strokes are all going in the same way to create as matt a surface as possible. Adding the background now is also useful as you can carve into the outline of the frog and eliminate any fuzzy lines.

Now for some fun! I use a sharp twig and begin to carve patterns of leaves into the background. Do vary the thickness and directions of your marks as you don't want it looking too uniform. Don't worry if you make a mistake. The beauty of this method is that you can take your black oil pastel and just go back over any errors.



Additional Images



