



OPPOSITE PAGE, ABOVE

**Southbound 8:15
a.m.**

2006, pastel, 16 x 20.
Private collection.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW

**Southbound 8:15
a.m. (details)**

RIGHT

Breeze

2008, pastel, 11½ x 12.
Collection the artist.

BELOW

Breeze (detail)



Sally Strand: Build Pastel Paintings Stroke by Stroke

“The pastel strokes I apply to the paper are like my own handwriting, the way brushwork is to an oil painter,” says Sally Strand. The artist goes on to explain that she layers using the edge of the pastel to create strokes. She scumbles primarily in the beginning, laying in large masses in broad strokes with the side of her pastel.

The first step in Strand’s painting process is underpainting with watercolor, acrylic, gouache, or occasionally oil washes. Sometimes its purpose is to tone the surface to get rid of the white, other times it’s to establish values of the main masses or add complementary colors. But she keeps the value structure low—nothing lighter than midtones or darks—so that she can build up slowly to the highlights. She strokes and cross-hatches, building up some areas, keeping others flatter, allowing the underpainting to peek through, and not necessarily following contours but rather working out a tone with color. “I mix

different colored strokes on the paper, making sure they are all of similar values, to create a single tone,” she explains, “the way an oil painter would mix colors on a palette. I don’t just find the right color in the box and apply it.”

When it comes to figures, Strand notes that she has no formula, no box of flesh-tone pastels. For example, looking at her painting of a young girl, she points out how she layered over a rust-orange-colored chin with a yellow-green and how in the shadow side of the face she borrowed blues and violet from the background and stroked in earth tones from the hair. The viewer’s eye mixes these strokes visually and reads them as flesh tones.

Like many pastel artists, Strand works from hard to soft pastels. Her “favorite workhorse” is her box of Rembrandt pastels, which are slightly harder and good for initial layers. Unison and Girault, which she considers halfway between hard and soft,

produce a velvety stroke, but they can also be layered over. She reserves very soft Senneliers, Schminckes, and Terry Ludwigs for the end. She particularly likes Terry Ludwig’s greens and darks and Schmincke’s reds and greenish grays—colors she hasn’t found elsewhere. Sennelier, she notes, has good runs of subtle colors. Although she tends to mix her colors on the gray side, at the end the artist adds a spot or two of pure color such as cadmium red or turquoise to give zing to the painting. For variety, she sometimes dissolves sections of pastel with turpentine to create a texture very different from the look of built-up strokes.

For years Strand worked on watercolor paper at a time when there weren’t too many other choices for pastel painters, and she still uses Arches 140-lb cold-pressed paper for workshop demonstrations. Today she paints on a variety of surfaces, including papers from UART and from Wallis; Colourfix from Art Spectrum; La Carte from Sennelier; and Rives BFK printmaking paper.

For more information on the artist, visit her website at www.sallystrand.com.