

# POINTILLISM

Pointillism is a method of painting that relies upon small dots of pure color to create shapes, tones, and color effects. These dots are placed close to each other, but not overlapping, so that from a distance they appear to merge (see also *STIPPLING* and *BROKEN COLOR*).

This same principle can be seen if you look at a color photograph in a magazine through a strong magnifying glass: the image is composed of thousands of tiny dots of color, which the eye forms into recognizable shapes.

Georges Seurat (1859-91) and Paul Signac (1863-1935) are the two painters chiefly associated with Pointillism (which Seurat preferred to call Divisionism). Seurat was greatly influenced by the scientific discoveries about light and color which had been made by Michel-Eugène Chevreul. He found that a color becomes more vibrant when placed next to its complementary (the color that appears opposite it on the color wheel). In addition, he maintained that adjacent, but separate, colors mix in the eye of the spectator and so produce other colors.

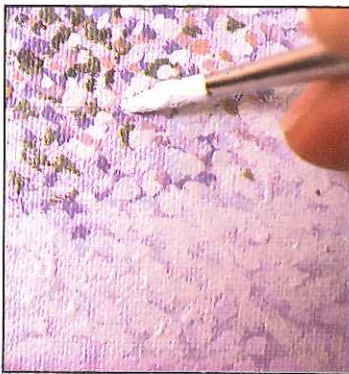
What Pointillism achieves is not so much a color of greater intensity, but a more luminous color. This is because the incomplete fusion of the dots produces a flickering optical sensation, known as "luster." As a result, the surface of the picture appears to palpitate with light.

The use of complementary colors adds to this luminous effect, because small areas of complementary color placed next to each other also set up an optical vibration. If you look closely at a painting by Seurat or Signac, you will notice how, among the blues of a shadow for example, touches of contrasting yellow are often added to depict the warmth of

reflected light penetrating the shadow.

Using tiny dots of color also allows the artist to note even the most minute gradations of tone and hue, and so register all the subtle halftones, shadows, and glints of reflected light that are experienced in nature. This amplifies still further the feeling of light and luminosity.

Pointillism is regarded by some artists as too exacting a system of painting, at odds with an artist's need for freedom of expression. It is a method worth experimenting with even so, because it can teach you a lot about the behavior of colors and about the infinite gradations that occur within a seemingly flat area of color. Pointillism can be used in any medium, even oil pastel, so long as the pastel stick has a sharp point. It is particularly suited to egg tempera, exploiting to the full the luminous quality of the paint.

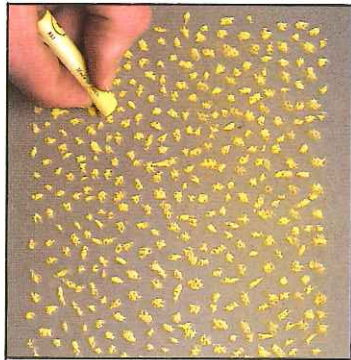


## Pointillism • Oil

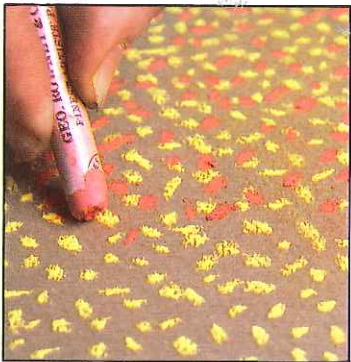
In this technique, dabs of different colors are laid next to and on top of each other. The colors link up so that forms emerge and develop gradually into solid shapes.

## Pastel

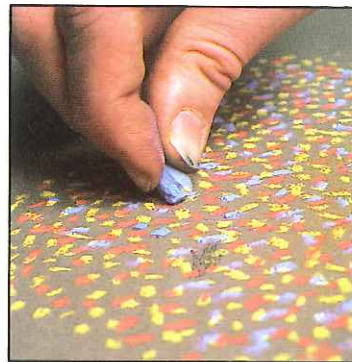
Pastel is particularly suited to the pointillist technique because of the vibrancy of its colors and ease of manipulation. Hard or semi-hard crayons work best — soft pastels tend to smudge more easily. The technique doesn't have to be applied methodically — used in a free manner it still produces more sparkle than flat color does.



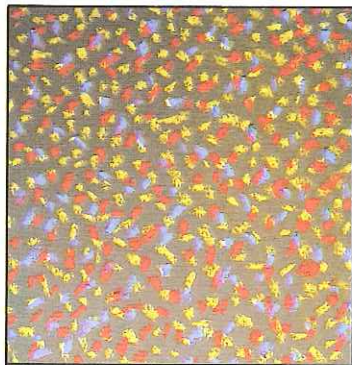
1 Using the sharpened tip of the pastel stick, the artist makes a pattern of yellow dots, evenly spaced, on a dark-toned paper.



2 He then works over the area with dots of another color, keeping the dots separate and unblended.



3 Dots of a third color are now added.



4 The finished effect. Because each dot of color is separate, this technique makes it possible to exploit the effects of tinted papers. Here you can see how the underlying green tint of the paper acts as a unifying element, against which the vibrant pastel colors appear to scintillate. Alternatively, you may choose to build up the dots more densely so that they overlap each other and create a web of sparkling color.