

# Sandy Phifer

Nine years ago I enrolled in a drawing class. I was learning basic graphite skills, and working next to many who were experienced artists in a variety of media. Several students were members of a local colored pencil group. I was invited to attend one of the group's weekly meetings . . . and was instantly hooked on colored pencil!



Ask any successful colored pencil artist what the best colored pencil technique is and you will get a different answer from each one! Versatility is one of the appealing qualities of colored pencil as an art medium. Colored pencils can be softly layered, heavily burnished, melted, or used with solvents, brushes, or other tools. Some can even be used with water. They are effective on traditional drawing papers, watercolor or sanded papers, drafting film ("Mylar"), canvas, tile, wood, and other surfaces. They can be used to create incredibly crisp detail or soft subtle images. The "best" technique to use is the one YOU enjoy and that provides the results you are looking for.

I am, largely, a self-taught artist. I spent several years in education, first as a middle school science teacher and then an administrator at a Sylvan Learning Center. Prior to the drawing class, I had never considered myself as an artist and my experience with a colored pencil consisted of red corrections on school papers! However, my association with the other artists became an important asset. I watched the artists in the group at work. Mixing their ideas and techniques with my own, I created an individual style. It has been very motivating to belong to a network of artists and I encourage others to consider joining local or online art networks for the support and knowledge that other colored pencil artists can offer.







I tend to be “wired for detail” and my artwork reflects that. I’m drawn to compositions with detailed backgrounds, bright colors, and textured surfaces. I use Prismacolor pencils and find them to work well on all the surfaces I mentioned above. My favorite surface at present is Mylar because applying colored pencil to Mylar feels a little bit like painting with a brush. It affords a smooth, wide stroke of color, and allows me to work more quickly than I can on other surfaces. I have a “light touch” and, although Mylar won’t accept the number of layers of pencil that many papers will, I’ve found that I can apply 10 to 15 layers, which is sufficient to build up rich, intense color.

Regardless of the surface I’m working on, I usually begin by putting in the very darkest of the darks first. This helps me to more accurately gauge the rest of the values in the painting. I proceed by working on the background, filling in the very lightest areas first and applying washes of darker color on top of the lighter areas. This type of layering allows me to create “glowing”, almost jewel-like colors. Usually I burnish every few layers of color, either with a light colored pencil or with a colorless blender, in order to get a very smooth, even surface. Sometimes I leave the last few layers unburnished to create texture,

like you might see in rocks, tree trunks, or fabric. Contrast can help add drama to artwork; so in my paintings I try to include a combination of smooth and textured surfaces with intense darks and shiny brights.

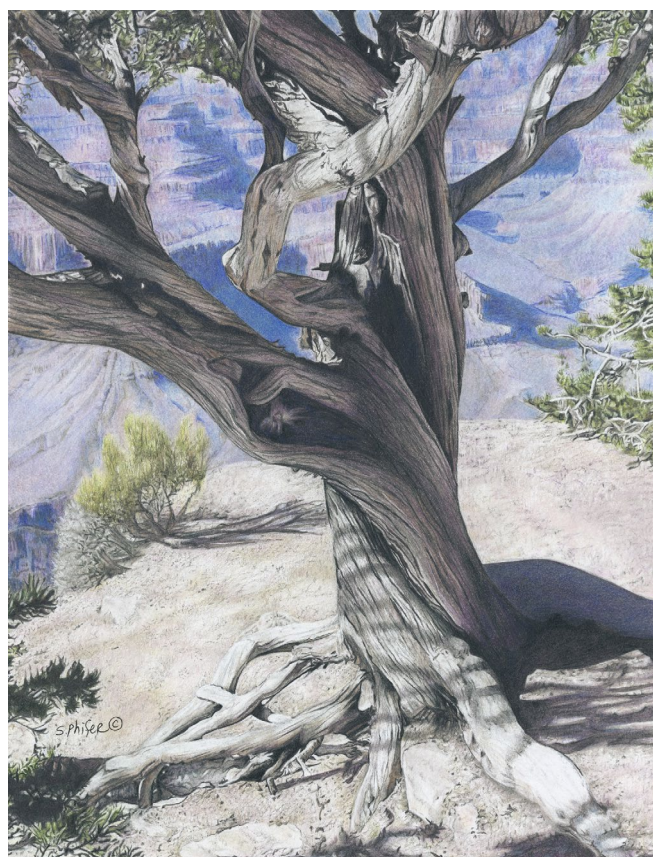
I save the focal point of the painting for last. I believe that I’m less likely to mess up the most important part of the painting if I’ve had practice working on the rest of it first! Also, when I have most of the painting completed, I am able to better judge the colors and values in the focal point. Working in this order, I spend much less time “tweaking” or “reworking” that important area.

I prefer to remain enthused and excited about my work. To maintain my interest I have been branching into new directions as an artist. The past couple of years I’ve been enjoying the digital artistry involved in creating custom websites for fellow artists. My colored pencil creations are changing too, as I am becoming more interested in bright, bold blocks of color and less involved with photo-like detail in my work. The beauty of colored pencil, of course, is that this versatile medium will adapt right along with my changing interests as an artist.

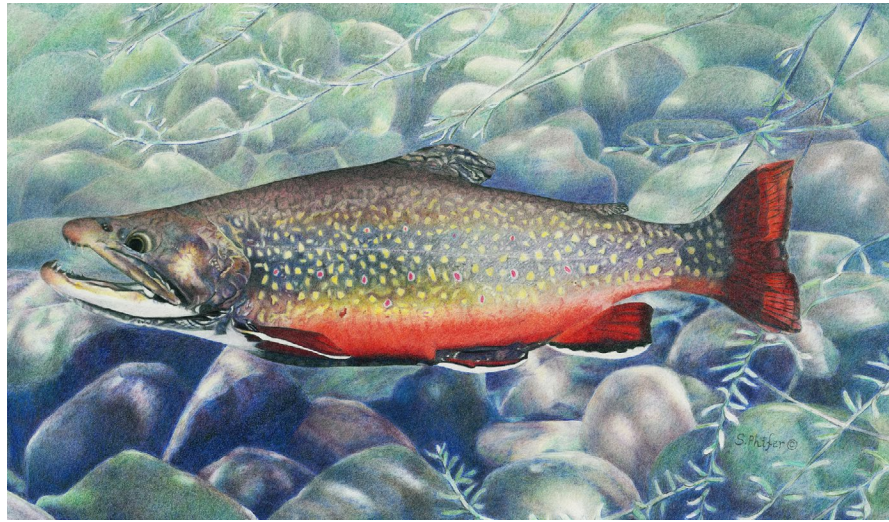
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