

Plein Air Painting With PanPastel



PanPastel® Meet Plein Air

by Cheri Ginsburg

A lot of you have been asking about my plein air set-up for working with PanPastel Colors.

If you haven't tried PanPastel Colors for *plein air*, you definitely should put them on your "to do" list, as they are the perfect medium for *plein air*.

With a set of 80 colors; and a little practice, you can easily mix nearly any color you might need, to quickly capture the fleeting light and shadows of the changing landscape. And Sofft® applicators and sponges offer a great way to loosen up your painting style while maintaining outstanding control and precision.

Molded plastic palettes engineered for durability, storage and ease of use allow you to arrange your colors to suit your work habits, and applicators are densely designed to withstand the abuse of sanded papers and panels.



"House At The Bend In The Road" Plein Air Painting by Cheri Ginsburg©

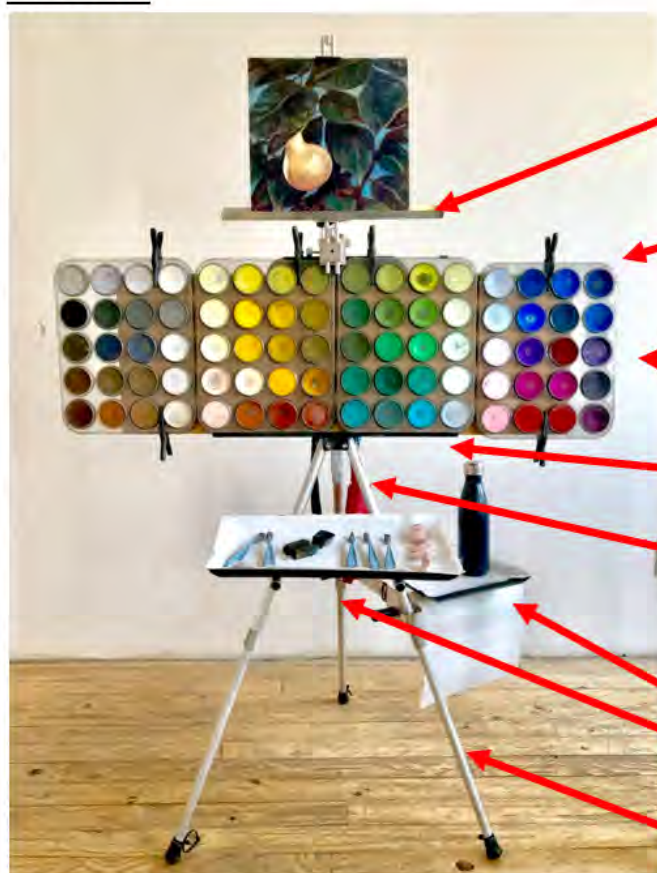


But to work even faster and to achieve an almost hand's free means of having ALL my PanPastel Colors available to me at the same time in the field; I started experimenting with equipment I already had hanging around in my studio to try to come up with a combination that would streamline my painting style even more, yet still remain lightweight and compact enough to carry with me in a backpack for plein air.



So, this is the set-up that I was able to come up with, with equipment I already had. But working with scavenged materials, and there being so many different tripods and easels out there, you may have to experiment a bit until you find the combination that works best for you. So please just consider my set-up a roadmap to creating your own PanPastel plein air experience... and then ENJOY!

MY SET-UP



Heilman Easel®, same easel that fits into Heilman® Pastel Box.

Sturdy lightweight board backing, (to support PanPastel Colors), cut to size from foam core, cardboard or corrugated plastic; hinged with duct tape for folding, and stabilized from folding while in use with clips or a taped-on dowel or yardstick.

PanPastel Colors, in molded plastic palettes, attached to support with clamps available from hardware store. (I found these "needle nose" clamps at Menards)

Crossbar support shelf from an old travel easel

(Visible behind tray) Attached bag for holding camera mount or other small tools when not in use. Suggested to also have hook or carabiner to hang backpack, bag of rocks or water bottle to help stabilize tripod.

(2) Easel Butlers® used here, both holding trays for Sofft® Tools, other tools, beverage, paper towels, etc.

Sturdy lightweight tripod with standard camera mount

First, I found a sturdy yet lightweight standard tripod. (Mine happens to be aluminum).

- *You may have to play with different tripods until you find one that will give you the height you need, But I have found that most standard sized tripods have worked fine as long as they have a standard tripod camera mount that will attach to a Heilman® easel.*
- *The Heilman® easel is the same easel that fits into the Heilman® pastel boxes. Mine came with a standard camera mount to fit onto a standard camera tripod.*

I then separated the central pole of the tripod, from the tripod's legs so that the easel was in two parts.



To create a shelf for the back-board support and PanPastel® palettes, I borrowed the crossbar support shelf from an **old metal travel easel**.

I then bent the square appendage in the *center back* of the easel's crossbar shelf so that it had a slightly more rounded shape, just enough to allow the central pole of the tripod to pass through. (*What you need to do here may be different depending on the shape of your tripod and/or easel crossbar*).



Crossbar shelf from old travel easel

Metal back appendage of crossbar shelf bent

Thread center pole of tripod through crossbar shelf from old

This merging of an old easel and the tripod became the foundation for my new plein air easel for use with PanPastel Colors®

Next, I extended the center pole of the tripod up to near its full height and locked it in place.

I then prepared to attach my **Heilman® Easel** heilmandesigns.com (link below), to the top of the tripod, using the tripod camera mount attachment that came with it.



Heilman® Easel for Heilman® Pastel Box



Camera Mount Screw-

This is the screw that fits into the top of a tripod as if to hold a camera.

(Some camera mounts screw in and others clamp so you may have to improvise to adjust for your equipment).



Attach camera mount screw to Heilman® Easel.

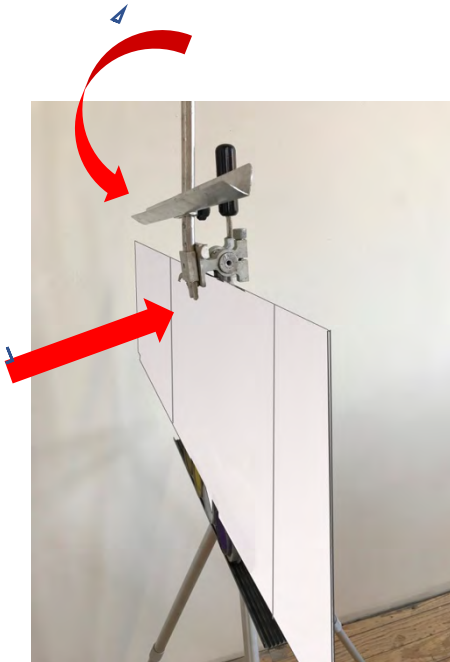
Place the prongs of the easel into the channels of the Heilman® mount, and secure.



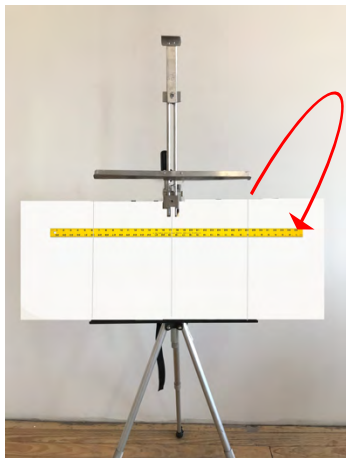
Then, with the Heilman easel in a horizontal position, drop the protruding base of the screw) into the top “hole” of the tripod mount and tighten to secure.

(Or alternately, fit clip of attached easel mount into the top clip receptor of the tripod.)

(Again, some camera mounts screw in and others clamp so you may have to improvise to adjust for your equipment).



Set the backboard support (core board or other sturdy, yet lightweight material), onto the lower crossbar support (from the “old” easel), and ROTATE the Heilman Easel that is attached above into an upright position (as if to hold another painting in the top easel), **catching** the top of the back support below with the lip formed by the base of the tripod camera attachment **AND TIGHTEN**. This “lip” should hold your backboard securely.



* If you are using a **folding** back support; to keep it from folding in on itself, you can flip the board over and tape or clip a yardstick, dowel, or a couple of rulers to the **BACK** OF THE BACKBOARD to keep it from bending... then flip it back over so that the front surface is again flat.



Now you can start clipping your molded PanPastel Color palettes to the back-board support, starting with those palettes closest to the center... also supporting the bottom of outer palettes with clips to support weight.

I also like to add an **Easel Butler**® or two, and trays to hold tools within easy reach.

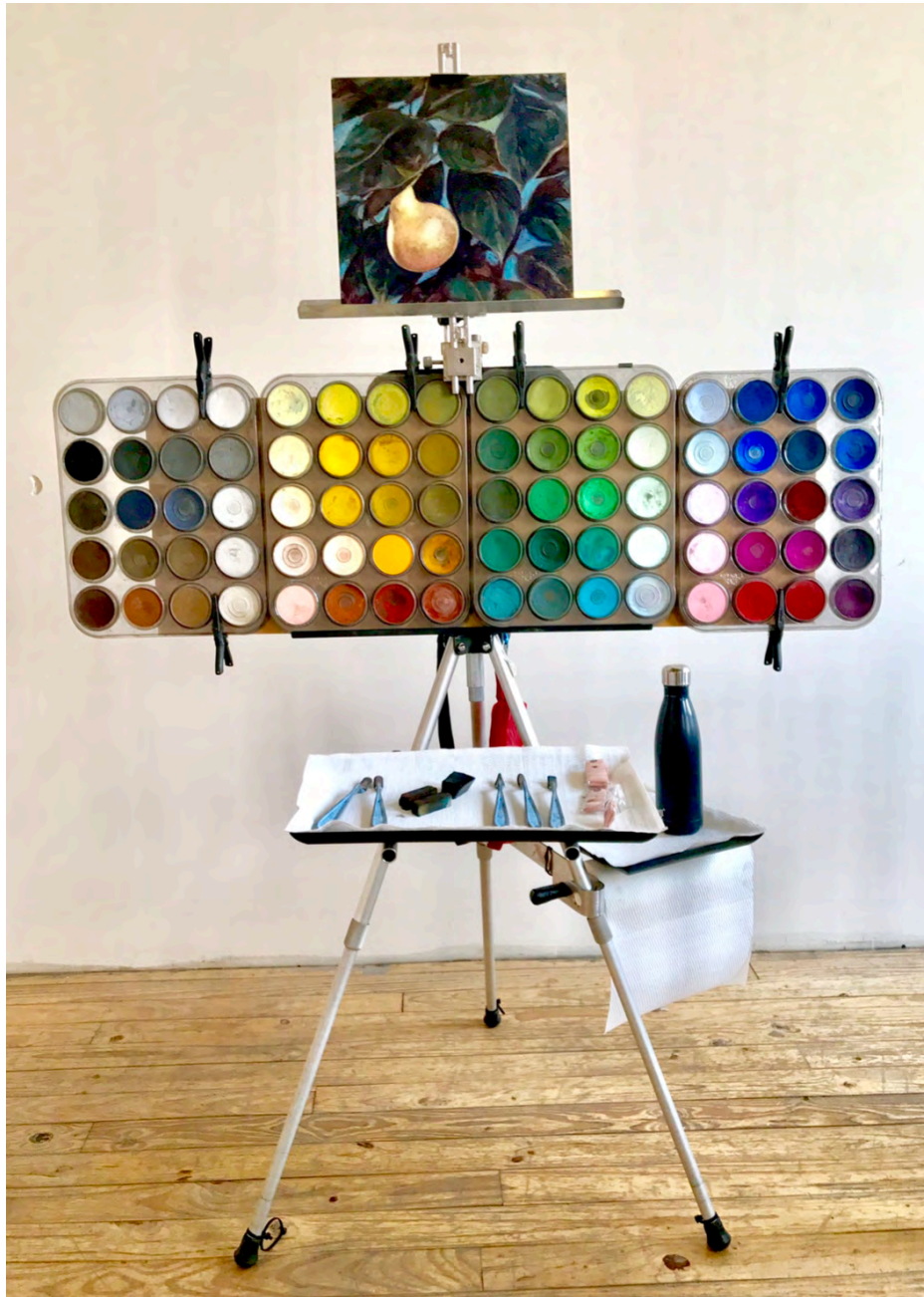


For those unfamiliar with **Easel Butler**, it is a great little super-lightweight, 3-piece investment for a plein air painter that can create a minimal yet sturdy perch on your tripod (and some travel easels), upon which you can place a palette or tray to hold additional pastels, tools, and/or beverage. You can even hang paper towels on the side supports. (I save 2/3rd used rolls of paper towel for plein air).

easelbutler.com (link below)

THE FINISHED SET-UP

ADD ARTWORK...
AND SECURE...



**You are now ready to start your
PanPastel®
Plein Air Experience!**

*** ANOTHER OPTION FOR CARRYING YOUR NEW EASEL FOR PLEIN AIR**

While I can fit my PanPastel Colors, Sofft Tools and easel set-up into my backpack; I still prefer to carry the easel set-up and other hardware separately.

This is because weather can change quickly and a sudden storm or shift in wind conditions can cause you to scramble to pack up quickly. So, I don't want to have to waste time trying to stuff everything back into one bag. In other words, I've learned the hard way to be ready to grab and go.

A scavenger hunt through my garage yielded a bag from a folding camp chair. The roomy nylon case with a shoulder strap turned out to be the perfect size to throw over my shoulder, easily carrying all my easel parts, three Easel Butlers, even my umbrella and an additional easel if I want one. *(Sometimes I work on more than one piece at a time).*

Using this additional bag allows me to quickly gather all my awkward equipment, leaving me more time to properly stow and protect my artwork, my PanPastel Colors, tools and other pastels in my backpack.



SOME WORDS OF WARNING FOR ALL PLEIN AIR PAINTERS, NEW AND OLD... as we're all guilty of getting absorbed in our work...

DO be aware of your surroundings.

- Don't set up too close to a roadway, a cliff, railroad tracks or water, etc.
- Watch for poison ivy or oak, thorns, rocks, cactus, snakes and creepy crawly things that may sometimes wander into your space. (My suggestion--- wear boots.)
- Try to clear the space beneath your feet and work on solid level ground.
- In the winter, again make sure that you are on solid ground (I actually fell through some ice on what appeared to be solid ground when temperatures rose on a warm winter day in the mountains.)
- And don't forget to bring and use bug repellent and sunscreen... and bear spray in some areas.
- Wear a hat to protect your eyes and reduce glare as you work.
- And sunglasses. Really you can! Try it. Believe it or not, it doesn't affect your color choices or outcome!
- Stay hydrated.

▣

AND WITH THIS PANPASTEL SET-UP...

MAKE SURE THAT YOUR ARTWORK IS ADEQUATELY SECURED, AND THAT YOUR EASEL IS TETHERED TO SOMETHING OR WEIGHTED TO KEEP IT STABLE.

Your Pan Pastel “palette wings” will make you much more susceptible to the whims of sudden wind shift, which could cause your set-up to tip suddenly if you have not taken precautions. So, taking a few preemptive steps by bracing your easel with rocks placed in a bag or by hanging your backpack from the center of the tripod, before there’s a problem, can save you a lot of trouble should the wind suddenly become a factor... a recommendation that goes for any plein air set-up. Just ask anyone that’s lost an easel over a cliff due to an unexpected gust of wind.

TRUE STORY

On a recent plein air trip to New Mexico, a sudden strong wind gust out of nowhere, sent my easel setup tumbling into a shallow river. Remarkably, my artwork landed unscathed on the dry river bank, but my PanPastel Colors were not so lucky and had to be retrieved from the icy water.

But “FUN FACT”. While I lost some of my applicators in the quickly running water; my PanPastel Colors were fine! Water rolled right off of the top of the PanPastel Colors and I was back to working with those that had been on the river bottom within minutes.

For some reason, I don’t think that my traditional pastels would have fared so well.

Just another reason to love PanPastel Colors for plein air!

Hope that I have been able to answer your questions and give you some ideas for plein air painting with PanPastel Colors!

Happy Painting!

Cheri Ginsburg