

IN THIS ISSUE

My Muse • 2014 Online Workshops • Printmaking Paper • Determining Paper Weight

My Muse

Written by: Gail Piazza

After my children were born, I took the leap. I quit my job as a Technical Illustrator to pursue my dream of becoming a children's book illustrator. My determination to succeed was fueled not only by my passion to create art for children's books, but also for the freedom to stay home with my children while still earning an income.

It was soon after I had made this leap that I came across my muse. I had been working tirelessly to build my portfolio when a little boy named Charles coyly waved at me from across the lunchroom at my daughter's elementary school. There was just something about him that spoke to me. His unique features were beautiful, and his soul seemed to call to me from behind his sweet, angular eyes.



Charles, The Summer of 1993

Prismacolor® colored pencils on Strathmore® 500 Series Bristol Vellum

Colored Pencil Society of America Award 1998 - featured in *American Artist* magazine 1998

Re-illustration of Everett Anderson's *Goodbye* by Lucille Clifton

I decided that day to contact his mother to see if I could use him as a model for a book I was interested in re-illustrating for my portfolio. The story was about a young boy who lost his father, and I felt that the illustrations needed to portray deep emotions. I knew I could capture it with Charles.

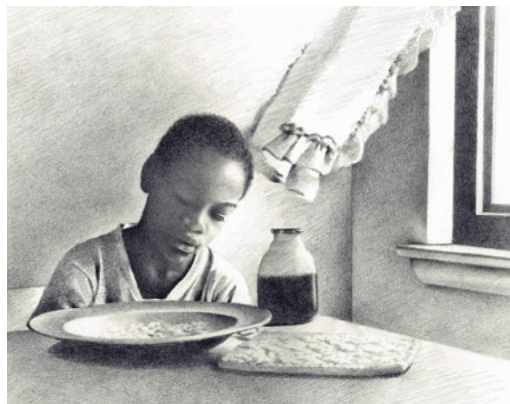
A couple weeks later on a sticky summer day, I pulled up to the home that Charles shared with his mother and two sisters. They welcomed me with open arms and were excited to be part of my project. The images I captured of Charles and his two sisters are, to this day, some of my favorites.



Charles I, The Summer of 1993

Graphite pencil on Strathmore 500 Series Bristol Vellum

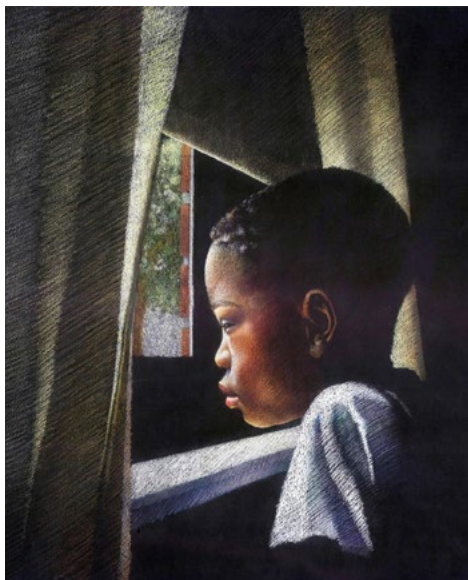
Re-illustration of Everett Anderson's *Goodbye* by Lucille Clifton



Charles II, The Summer of 1993

Graphite pencil on Strathmore 500 Series Bristol Vellum

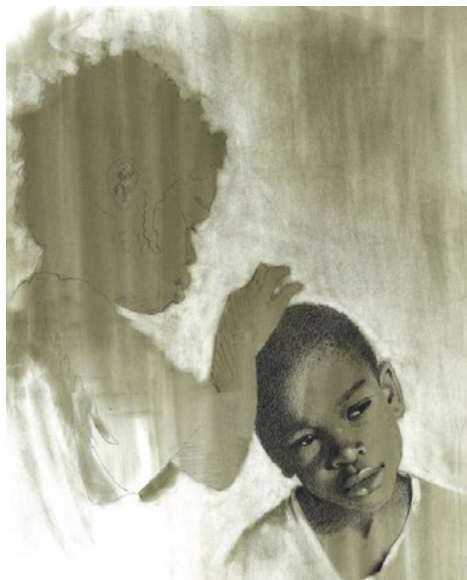
Re-illustration of Everett Anderson's *Goodbye* by Lucille Clifton



Charles Grieving, The Summer of 1993

Rembrandt and Sennelier chalk pastel on Strathmore 500 Series Charcoal Black paper

Re-illustration of Everett Anderson's *Goodbye* by Lucille Clifton



Charles and Medina from the Summer of 1993, 2014

PanPastel® and kneaded eraser on Strathmore 500 Series Mixed Media paper

Inspiration Piece



Charles from the Summer of 1993, 2014

PanPastel, CarbOthello pastel pencils, kneaded eraser on Strathmore 500 Series Pure Paper Tint paper

Inspiration Piece

The images of Charles, who is now 30 years old with a wife and son of his own, continue to inspire me. In fact, when I'm seeking inspiration, I still pull out images from that day to work from.

All those years ago, I didn't know yet where my illustration career would take me. Now my connection to Charles makes sense. I have, time and time again, sought to give voice to the voiceless through my work. Many children unfortunately can be stereotyped, overlooked and dismissed by society, and drawing Charles gave me the opportunity to focus on portraying the beauty, innocence and humanity in his eyes.

In this way, I view my work as deeply political. Though I have only become aware of the overt political nature of my work recently, I know it has been there all along. Viewing my work encourages one to truly see my subjects as the complex, beautiful human beings they are. It is my hope that my images give my subjects a voice and allow them to truly be seen.

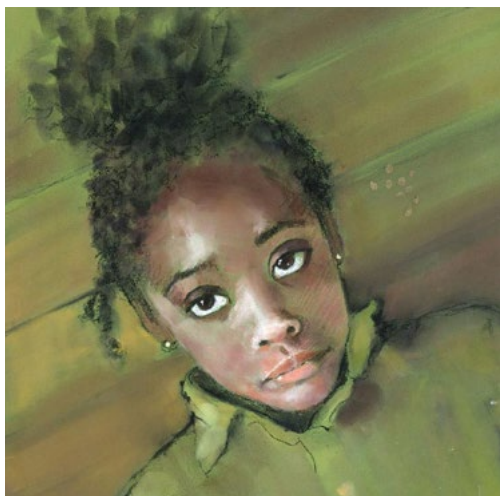
Recently when I reached out to Charles to produce a piece of him as an adult, I learned he was incarcerated and would not be available for a photo shoot. I was heartbroken for Charles and his family but this news gave me a renewed sense of purpose, and gives my newer work of local children even more significance.



A Little Boy From My Neighborhood 2014

PanPastel, CarbOthello pastel pencils, Rembrandt and Sennelier chalk pastels

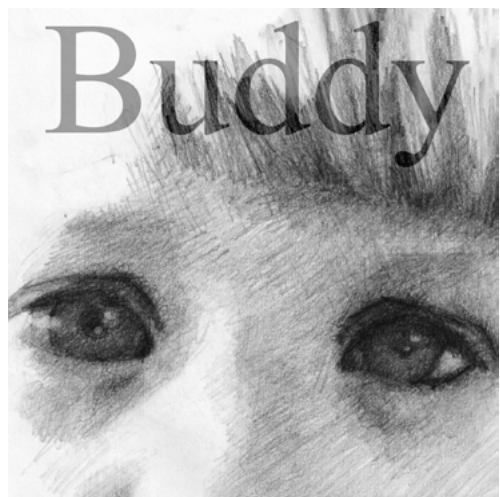
Inspiration Piece



A Little Girl From My Neighborhood 2014

PanPastel,
CarbOthello
pastel pencils,
Conté and Sennelier
chalk pastels

Inspiration Piece



Cover art for my children's picture book *Buddy* - 2014

Graphite pencil

The book is available on Amazon.com

If my work gives you pause, makes you wonder what happens to these children as they grow, and what role we all play in protecting these vulnerable children, I know my work has been done.

It is with this same mission that I have taken on my newest project. As the proud mother of a gay son, I based my newest project off of his childhood. My daughter and I have created a children's picture book titled *Buddy* with the goal of showing the beauty and innocence of children who don't conform to customary gender norms. All children need to be celebrated, and it is our intention to portray that in this book. It is my hope that capturing the humanity in *Buddy* will allow more people to see every child as they would any beautiful, innocent child.

My Process

Creating art that elicits an emotional response is imperative in my work. I wanted to offer a glimpse into my process, and the techniques that I use to capture the complexity and soul in my subjects.

IT'S ALL ABOUT LIGHT

I teach art at a university where I talk about my process non-stop. The one thing I emphasize the most to my students is lighting. Light must be hitting your subject on one side, creating a contrast of light and shadow. This contrast is key.

I suggest squinting at your subject and making sure that this contrast is detectable. Repeat this squinting technique as you begin rendering your subject to make sure you are capturing it.

If you plan to work from a photograph, take a million! I take photos from a bunch of different angles in hopes that a few turn out to be worthy of an amazing piece of art.

Working with quality materials is also key. I work in graphite pencil, colored pencil, and chalk pastels. For graphite drawing I use a range of grades of pencils from 2B-9XXB (yes there is a 9XXB!). My standard go to is a 6B. I keep H pencils around only for unclogging my X-ACTO® School Pro sharpener.

When I am working with colored pencils I use regular Prismacolor® and Prismacolor Verithins®. My pastel choices are CarbOthello pastel pencils, Conté pastel sticks, Rembrandt and Sennelier pastel sticks and my new favorite, PanPastels®.

And don't forget your kneaded eraser! I have a million little pieces around the house, but somehow end up rummaging around to find one! I use my eraser for lifting layers of pencil to lighten values as well as using it as a drawing tool.



My drawing table with my book *Buddy* in the process of being created



My organized colored pencils

Finally, THE PAPER. High quality paper is worth every penny. It makes such a difference. The first paper I fell in love with 27 years ago was Strathmore 500 Series Bristol Vellum. The texture on the paper works well with my pencil and colored pencil technique, giving it a stippled look. Layering colored pencil on Strathmore 500 Series Bristol Vellum is a dream. The colors lay so beautifully and will start to glow if done correctly. Additionally, I can erase the heck out of the paper without any change to the surface.

I can even use an X-ACTO blade and shave off some of the top layers of pencil. Caution: be careful with this because if you dig a little too deep, you are sunk!

My new favorite paper is Strathmore 500 Series Pure Paper Tints. It is simply luscious! I have always used Strathmore 500 Series Charcoal paper for my pastel drawings, which has been wonderful, but now that I have been introduced to the Pure Paper Tints, I don't think I will go back!



My pastels and Charles



Drawing in progress, *Bronx Girls*, on Strathmore Pure Paper Tints Dark Gray paper, PanPastels, and CarbOthello pastel pencils

Once my materials are collected, I finally start drawing. Depending on the look I am going for, I will either trace from my reference for a semi photo-realistic look, or start with a free hand drawing for a more organic sketchy look.

Some artists don't like to reveal the secrets of tracing. I believe an artist should use whatever resources they have available in order to create beautiful art. After all, Renaissance artists like Vermeer used the camera obscura, an optical aid used for tracing, to create his realistic, breathtaking art. When tracing though, you must rely on it ONLY for a guide. Your drawing will be flat and lifeless if you let it do the work for you. The best work comes from time, attention, and love.

The following videos will show you what happens next!

[PanPastels Portrait Drawing](#)

[Speedy Garlic Drawing](#)

Since the beginning of my career as an illustrator, I have gravitated towards illustrating stories through the expression on children's faces. Whether I'm illustrating an actual story book, or making social commentary through my art, the supplies, techniques and tips I've shared with you have helped me to capture intensity and emotion - both essential elements to successful art if you ask me!

If my work inspires you, please take a look at my [website](#) for more on my process and demos. Contact me at gail@gailpiazza.com to speak at your event, host a workshop, for personal online instruction, or just to say hello!

About the Artist

Gail Piazza

Gail started her love affair with drawing when she was a little girl. Watching her mother bring stories to life with her beautiful drawings was like magic to her. Now, after finding great success in the illustration industry, with over 30 books to her name, Gail's renewed passion is to bring to life the stories of children who are under-represented in the children's book industry.

Her masterful colored pencil and pastel technique breathes life into each of her illustrations, revealing the soul of the children she draws.

Gail is passionate about teaching others to do the same in their work. She teaches at the university level, and is now inspiring artists around the country through online instruction, and engagements as a guest speaker, and workshop host.

Her newest project, [Buddy](#) is now available on Amazon or Create Space.



You can connect with Gail on Twitter [@GailPiazza](#), [Facebook](#), and [Tumblr](#).

Visit her website www.gailpiazza.com for more info!

Strathmore® 2014 ONLINE WORKSHOP SERIES

Workshops are FREE and are open now.

Learn techniques from experienced artists through online videos and downloadable instructions.

Get inspired by other students in our virtual classroom. Keep motivated with ideas and tips from your instructors.

Our online workshops are free and self-paced. Workshops are held in our virtual classroom website. Each workshop consists of four video lessons and supporting downloadable instructions. Students can participate in conversations in our discussion boards or share work in the classroom photo gallery.

Workshop 1: Back to Basics - NOW OPEN

Workshop 2: Visual Journal Fodder - NOW OPEN

Workshop 3: Watercolor Sketching and Journaling - STARTS SEPTEMBER 1!

Register for our 2014 Online Workshop Series today.



Workshop 3: Watercolor Sketching and Journaling

Instructor: Gay Kraeger

Start date: Sept. 1, 2014

As the world continues to become more digital and immediate, the feel of a hands-on art experience with the slow and easy pace of watercolor becomes more and more appealing. The tactile method of capturing your world through art in a journal is a low-tech, highly rewarding experience.

In her friendly and conversational workshop, Gay will guide you through learning watercolor one step at a time. She will start by showing you the basics, then move into using quick sketches, page design, lettering and more watercolor techniques to give you all the tools you need to learn how to keep a special illustrated journal of your surroundings.

Gay's encouragement and enthusiasm will inspire you and as you practice, skills improve and you will be able to keep a priceless record of your unique interpretation of the world through watercolor. Join her to embark on a watercolor sketching and journaling adventure!



Register for our free workshops today at: www.strathmoreartist.com/artist-studio/register

NEW!

Printmaking Paper

A complete line of printmaking papers for recreational, student, and professional artists.

Printmaking is a growing art form, attracting a wide variety of artists. Yet there is no complete line of printmaking papers to meet the range of needs from beginners to professionals...until now.

Strathmore 300 Series Lightweight, 400 Series Heavyweight and 500 Series Cotton printmaking papers are ideal for a wide variety of printmaking techniques including relief, lithography, intaglio, screen print, and more.



300 SERIES

Lightweight Printmaking 120 g/m²

Suited for relief printing, practicing and proofing. Available in four ready-to-frame sized pads.



400 SERIES

Heavyweight Printmaking 280 g/m²

Suited for printmaking processes that require a heavier paper such as lithography, intaglio and screen print. Also suitable for relief printing. Available in four ready-to-frame sized pads and full size sheets.



500 SERIES

RiverPoint® Printmaking 280 g/m²

100% cotton, archival paper ideal for a broad array of printmaking applications. Features two deckled edges. Available in full size sheets.

• Soft and absorbent • Strong and durable • In convenient sizes and formats • Acid free • Made in the U.S.A.

Developed in partnership with:

river
POINT

Strathmore Printmaking Papers were born out of a unique collaboration between Strathmore Artist Papers and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

Learn more at www.strathmoreartist.com

Determining Paper Weight

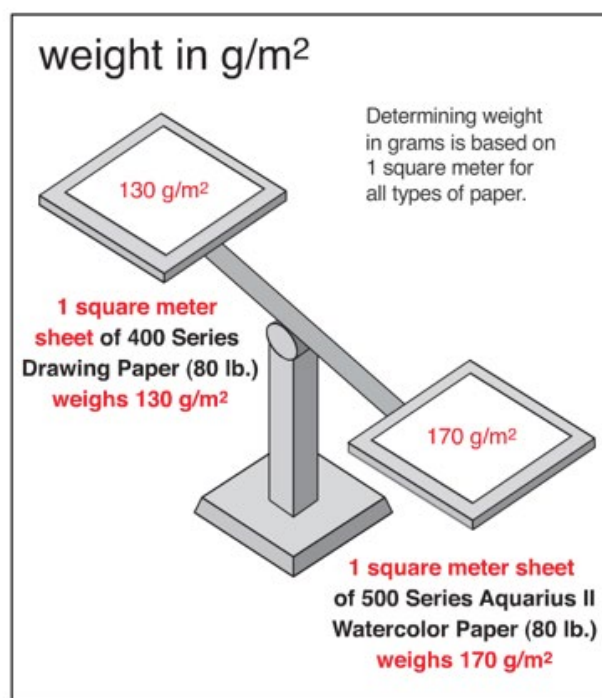
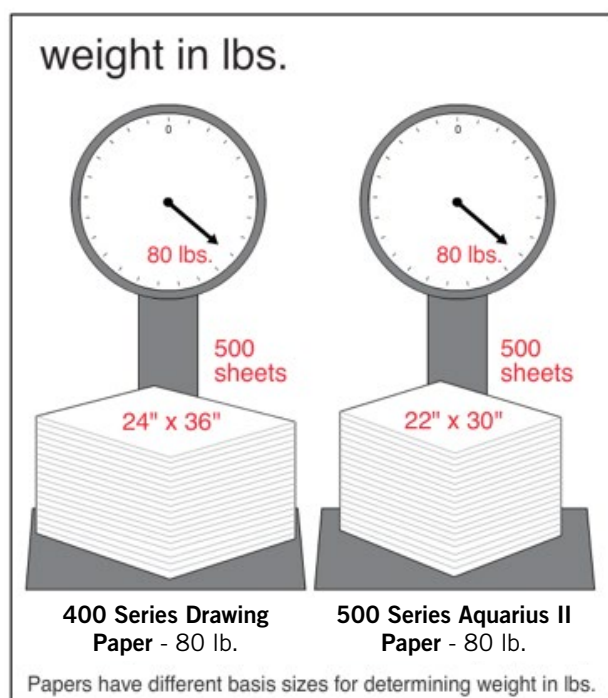
Paper weight can be confusing. There are two ways that paper weight is measured and stated. The United States measures paper weight in pounds, whereas it is standard to measure in grams per square meter outside of the U.S.

Paper weight in the U.S. is stated in lbs. and is determined by weighing 500 sheets (a ream) in the basis size of a particular paper. For example, the basis size (or in other words, the master sheet size) of our Watercolor papers is 22" x 30". If you place 500 master sheets of our 400 Series Watercolor paper in the 22" x 30" size on a scale, it should weigh approximately 140 lbs.

However, not all paper has the same basis size, which can create confusion when weighing it in lbs. For example, drawing papers have a basis size of 24" x 36", versus watercolor papers which have a basis size of 22" x 30".

500 Sheets of 400 Series Drawing paper (24" x 36") weighs 80 lbs. Compare that to our 500 Series Aquarius II Watercolor paper which is also listed as 80 lbs. but has a basis size 22" x 30", not 24" x 36". So it's not exactly an apples-to-apples comparison.

On the other hand, weighing paper in grams per square meter gives you a clean, apples-to-apples comparison. Measuring paper weight in grams per square meter (commonly referred to as gsm or g/m²) is the weight in grams of 1 square meter of paper. So even though both Drawing and Aquarius II are listed as the same weight in pounds (80 lbs.), the master size sheets being weighed are not the same (24" x 36" versus 22" x 30"). When these two papers have the same size (one square meter), we see that the Aquarius II Watercolor paper actually weighs more than the Drawing paper (170 gsm versus 130 gsm).



Common Paper Weights

This chart shows various papers and their common basis sizes and weights. A paper's weight does not necessarily reflect quality. It is usually a reflection of intended use. Watercolor papers are heavier weight because of their need to hold a lot of water, versus drawing and sketch papers which are intended for dry media.

You will find the weight of our papers stated in both lbs. and gsm on our packaging, in our catalogs, and on our website. Understanding paper weights is another tool you can use to select the right paper for you.

Paper	Basis Size	Weight in lbs.	Weight in grams
Watercolor	22" x 30"	140 lbs.	300 g/m ²
Drawing	24" x 36"	80 lbs.	130 g/m ²
Sketch	25" x 36"	60 lbs.	89 g/m ²
Bristol	20" x 26"	100 lbs.	260 g/m ²
Charcoal	25" x 38"	64 lbs.	95 g/m ²