WELCOME BACK TO
Summer of Drawing

class no.9: CONTE CRAYON trois couleurs
Conté Crayon

Invented in France in 1795 by Nicolas-Jacques Conté especially for drawing and sketching, this is a drawing medium composed of compressed powdered graphite or charcoal mixed with a clay base. They were invented in 1795 by Nicolas-Jacques Conté, who created the combination of clay and graphite in response to the shortage of graphite caused by the Napoleonic Wars (when the British naval blockade of France prevented import). Conté crayons had the advantage of being cost-effective to produce, and easy to manufacture in controlled grades of hardness. They are now manufactured using natural pigments (iron oxides, carbon black, titanium dioxide), clay (kaolin), and a binder (cellulose ether).

Conté crayons are most commonly found in black, white, and sanguine tones, as well as bistre, shades of grey, and other colors.
Conté Sketching Pencils

Conté Pastel Pencils
‘Aux trois couleurs’
or ‘trois crayons’

Trois crayons is a drawing technique using three colors of chalk: red (sanguine), black, and white. The paper used may be a mid-tone such as grey, blue, or tan. Among numerous others, French painters Antoine Watteau and François Boucher drew studies of figures and drapery aux trois crayons. The technique was, most notably, pioneered and popularised by the Flemish master Peter Paul Rubens.

- Wikipedia
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Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721)
Nicolas Lagneau (c. 1600–50)
Look for where the subject is tinged with red...
Plaster casts from David’s head
(Michelangelo sculpture, Louvre Gallery)

Caprioni Collection, Woburn, MA
Trois Crayons method of skin tones

• Can be done using any colored drawing media on toned paper: black, white, and red pencils or chalk. Examples include Conte crayon, colored charcoal, colored pencil

• The artist is looking for the tinges of color within the subject – less is more.

• The toned paper works as the midtones of the subject. Toned paper acts as a fourth color in the drawing.

• Use only enough dark shading (in black) to suggest the shadows and form, and likewise the white highlights go only on the lightest areas.

• The reddish or sanguine color, or third color you have chosen for your subject, only goes exactly where you see the color occur.

• The trois couleurs or crayons method works because it emulates where we see the blood vessels closest to the surface of the skin. It breathes life into black and white drawings.
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