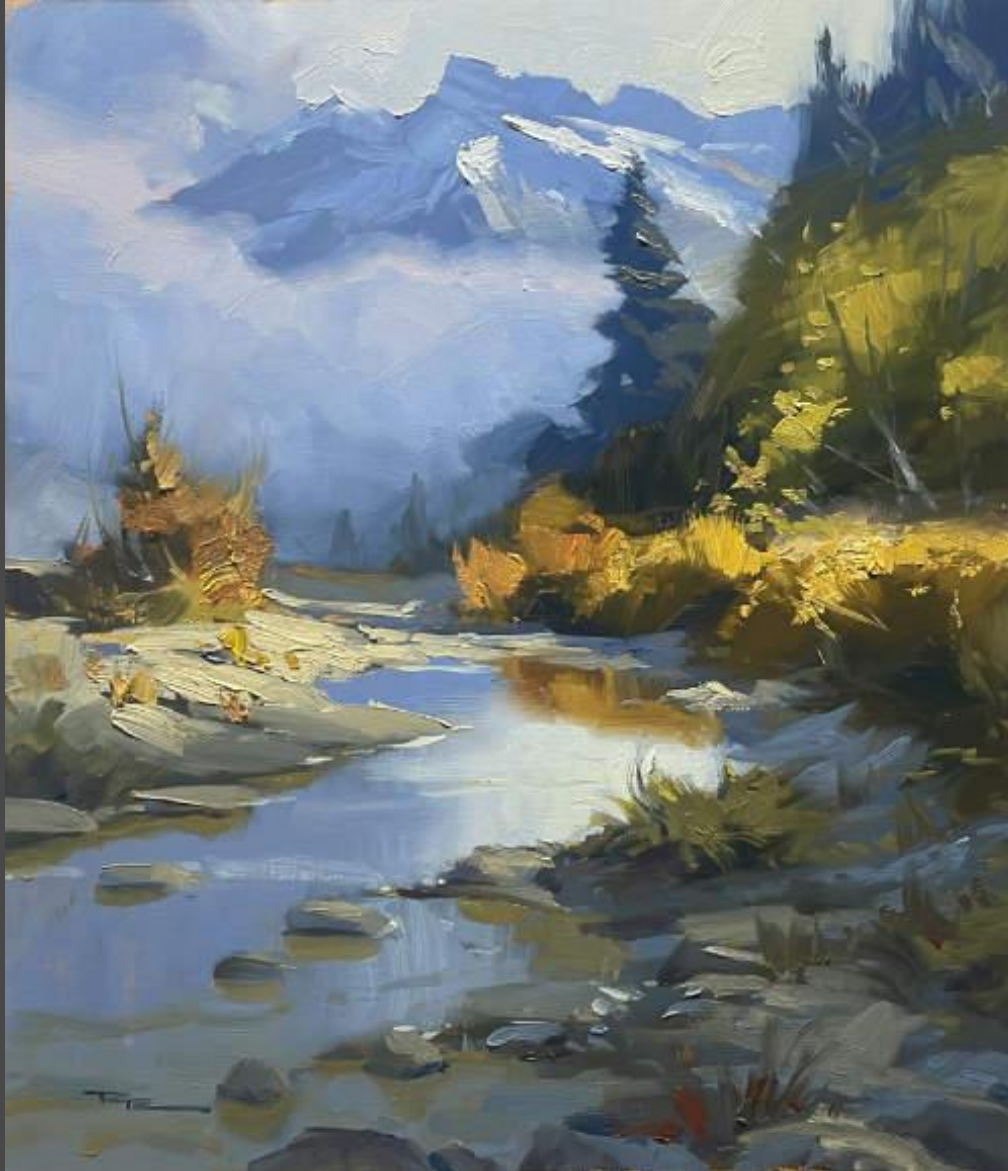




Mountain Stream

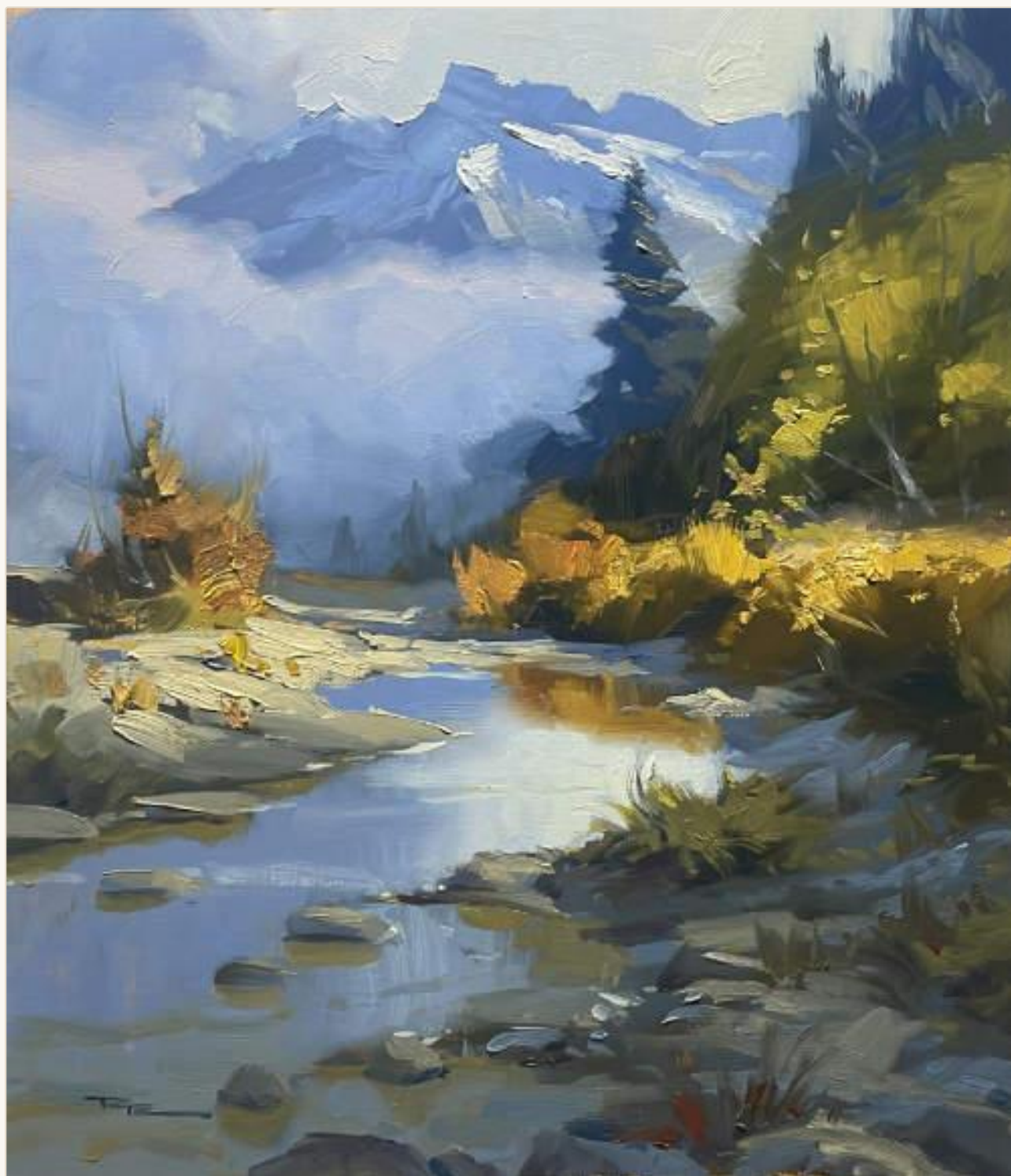
A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/259-Mountain-Stream>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we'll explore the enchanting scene of a mountain stream in New Zealand, a perfect subject to delve into the art of orchestrating light and shade. This lesson is designed to help you master the technique of bending light to your will, rather than merely copying what you see. By focusing on the interplay of light and shadow, you'll learn how to spotlight the center of interest in your painting, a skill that will elevate all your future works. We'll walk through the process step by step, starting with the foundational design of your shapes, ensuring they have variety and guide the viewer's eye. You'll discover the importance of working from darks to lights, using thin to thick paint, and how to apply your lights with thick, expressive brushwork. As we reach the finishing touches, I'll encourage you to engage in a dialogue with your painting, listening to what it needs to feel complete. This approach not only enhances the realism but also allows your intuition to shine. Whether you're using oils or acrylics, this lesson promises to be a rewarding journey, leaving you with a beautiful depiction of a mountain stream and newfound confidence in your artistic expression.



Mountain Stream 12x14" Oil on Board



REFERENCE PHOTO

The scene as Richard found it.

Materials

Gather these materials before you start. If you don't have the exact same supplies, use what you have and substitute freely.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- M. Graham & Co. Oil Paints
- Titanium White
- Cadmium Yellow Light
- Yellow Ochre
- Cadmium Red Mid
- Burnt Sienna
- Ultramarine Blue
- Painting medium
- Liquin or M. Graham & Co. Walnut Oil or Walnut Alkyd Medium
- Solvent
- Gamsol
- Surface
- MDF panel primed with 2 coats of acrylic undercoat. Sand lightly between coats.
- You could use a canvas panel or anything you prefer.
- Brushes
- [Rosemary & Co. Richard Robinson Brush Set](#)
- Palette Knife
- Paper Towels
- Container for solvent
- Container for painting medium

1 Focusing on Key Elements

Identify Key Elements

Ask yourself what one or few things you love most about the scene. Focus on these elements to guide all your decisions for the painting.

Enhance the Key Area

Pour all your effort into enhancing the key area by subduing other areas. Use shape design and light design to lead the viewer's eye to that spot.

2 Lighting Techniques

Capture Different Lighting Conditions

Take photos periodically as the light changes. This will allow you to capture various lighting conditions and choose the best one for your painting.

Create a 'Light Sandwich'

Overlay one photo over another and delete parts of the top layer to reveal the desired lighting. This technique helps you create a composition with alternating light and shadow.

Guide the Viewer's Eye with Soft Shadows

Use soft shadows in the foreground to subtly lead the viewer's eye into the center of interest. This creates a beautiful and effective way to guide attention in your painting.

Orchestrate Lighting for Composition

Focus on orchestrating the lighting to enhance the painting's composition. This helps guide the viewer's eyes through the painting, improving overall focus and composition.

3 Shape Design and Variety

Incorporate Variety in Shapes

Ensure your painting holds the viewer's attention by incorporating a variety of shapes. Use different sizes and forms of similar objects to add interest and keep the painting engaging.

Guide the Viewer's Eye

Design shapes that lead the viewer's eye through the painting. Implement S curves or triangular shapes to direct the viewer deeper into the scene.

Alter Shapes for Interest

Make shapes more interesting by slightly altering their forms. Add zigzags or cut into shapes to create unique outlines that capture attention.

Enhance Contrast with Light

Position the light source to create direct light, enhancing the painting with stronger shadows and brighter highlights. This increases contrast and visual interest.

Add Mist for Atmosphere

Introduce mist to give the painting a romantic or epic feel. This can make elements like mountains appear to rise from the mist, adding depth and atmosphere.

4 Preparing the Canvas

Prepare the Canvas

Tape out an MDF board to the size of 12 by 14 inches. Double prime the canvas with an acrylic undercoat to ensure it is ready for painting.

Tone the Canvas

Mix white and yellow ochre to create a tone for the canvas. Dip a big synthetic brush in water, then use it to apply the tone evenly across the canvas. Allow the toned canvas to dry for about an hour before proceeding.

5 Materials and Tools

Select Your Oil Colors

Use Ultramarine Blue, Burnt Sienna, Cadmium Red, Yellow Ochre, Cadmium Yellow Light, and Titanium White for this painting.

Choose Your Brushes

Select Rosemary & Co. long synthetic flats, a fill bit, a shorter flat, and a rig brush for detailed work. Use sizes 12 and 10, along with some smaller brushes for finer details.

Prepare Your Painting Medium

Use Liquin as your painting medium for this lesson. Alternatively, walnut oil or other mediums can be used if preferred.

Considerations for Acrylics

If using acrylics, you do not need to use any painting medium.

6 Initial Sketch and Composition

Choose Your Sketching Tool

Use a brush dipped in liquid with a little ultramarine or a pencil for the initial sketch. Choose based on your preference, as the shapes are simple and large.

Position the Horizon Line

Place the horizon line just above halfway on your canvas. This is a false horizon line because the actual horizon is hidden behind the mountains.

Sketch the Mountains

Draw the mountains above the horizon line. Focus on capturing their general shapes rather than specific details.

Add Trees

Include a roundy tree and some pointy trees in your sketch. The specific types don't matter; aim to capture their general shapes.

Vary Shapes for Natural Look

Vary the shapes in your composition to avoid repetition and create a more natural look. Randomness in shapes and spacing helps avoid a man-made appearance.

Plan the Lighting

Think of the lighting as a 'light sandwich': shadow in the foreground, light in the middle, shadow in the background, and light on the mountain. This creates a balanced and dynamic lighting effect.

7 Blocking in Darks

Mix Dark Base Color

Start with ultramarine blue and a tiny touch of burnt sienna to create a complementary mixture. This combination gives you a nice dark color that isn't too blue. Add yellow ochre if you want to push it towards dark greens.

Apply Paint with Big Strokes

Use a big brush to apply the paint with big gestural strokes. Ensure the paint is thick enough to cover the canvas but not so thick that it creates big lumps. Focus on covering the canvas without worrying about details at this stage.

Maintain Soft Edges in Shadows

Keep the edges in the shadows soft to maintain obscurity, preventing the eye from being drawn to them. Save sharp edges for where lights meet darks to create contrast and focus.

Adjust Shadow Tones

To adjust the shadow tones, add more blue to make it cooler or a little white to lighten it. Add more burnt sienna or yellow ochre to warm it up or push it towards green.

8 Mountains and Reflections

Block in the Riverbed

Identify where your darkest darks and big shadowed areas will be in the riverbed. Use gestural, big brushstrokes with soft edges to block these areas in. Focus on enjoying the process with a big brush.

Add Detail to the Trees

Use yellow ochre and a little bright yellow to add more detail to the trees. Create soft edges and form a big, soft, amorphous shape with these colors.

Prepare for Mountains and Reflections

Switch to a clean brush and dip it in your painting medium, such as liquid. This prepares your brush for the next part of the painting.

9 Building Up the Riverbed

Mix a Blue-Grey Color

Start with blue and add a little strong red to it. Then balance it back with some blue to achieve a blue-grey color. If the color is too purple, add some yellow ochre to tone it down.

Adjust the Color Tone

If the color becomes too green, add a tiny touch of red to bring it back towards a cool, bluey type grey.

Apply Paint with Big Strokes

Brush the paint in with big strokes, focusing on zigzag shapes and soft edges. Avoid getting into detail at this stage to maintain a loose composition.

Create Depth with Lighter Tones

Add a little more white and blue to the paint to lighten it, which helps push shapes back into space and create depth.

Indicate Background Foliage

Use soft edges to indicate foliage in the background, creating the effect of plants in the mist or clouds.

Build Layers for Depth

Build layers slowly, working back into the distance with soft edges to create depth and a sense of space.

Darken Paint if Necessary

If the paint is too light, darken it by adding a little red to start with a darker tone before lightening it up.

10 Creating Mist and Sky

Create Depth with Layers

Start with a darker layer and then add a lighter layer on top. This technique adds depth and dimension to your painting, making it more interesting.

Identify Mid Value Colors

Compare your color to a mid-gray palette. If the color is similar in lightness or darkness to the mid-gray, it is a mid value.

Block in Mist

Block in the big shape of the mist first to get the paint on. This is the easiest and fastest way to start creating soft edges for mist.

Soften Mist Edges

Use a zigzag swish motion with your brush to soften the edges of the mist. This technique helps blend the edges into the surrounding area.

11 Reflections in Water

Paint Reflections of Mountain and Mist

Use the same color you used for the mountain and mist. Apply it in the foreground using down strokes or side strokes to create the reflection effect in the very still water.

12 Foreground and Midground Details

Simulate Water Depth

Add a little touch of yellow ochre to your water color to push it towards green. This simulates the appearance of seeing the bottom of the water and the color of the sand beneath.

Adjust Mountain Color

If your mountain color is too dark, mix in some white to lighten it. Add a touch of burnt sienna to warm it up slightly.

Paint Snow and Shadow Details

Use a smaller brush, such as a filbert, for painting snow and shadow details. This provides more precision and control in these areas.

Enhance Snow and Shadow Intensity

Mix white and blue with gray, then add a very light touch of bright yellow. This combination will make the snow and shadow areas more intense.

13 Adding Light to Mist

Mix Light Color for Mist

Start with a blue-grey color and add white to it. Add a touch of red to shift it towards pink and a tiny touch of bright yellow to shift it towards orange. This creates a lighter and warmer color for the light on the mist.

Apply Light Color to Mist

Apply the light color to the top of the mist, leaving a small gap. This helps create depth and dimension in the mist.

Soften Edges and Create Shapes

Fill in the gap with the mist color and soften the edges. Focus on creating interesting shapes, as they are crucial for composition and visual interest.

14 Sky and Mountain Edges

Soften Edges

Use a back and forth whisking motion over the area you want to soften. This technique helps create interesting shapes and adds variety to your painting.

Create Contrast with Edges

Incorporate both soft and crisp edges to create contrast in your painting. This contrast adds variety and helps hold the viewer's attention longer by making the painting more interesting.

Add Variety to the Sky

Introduce a slightly different sky color by adding some blue and a tiny bit of yellow to warm it up. This creates a contrast with the surrounding areas.

Enhance Mountain Edges

Use crisp edges on mountains to create a contrast with the soft edges of the sky and mist. This makes the mountains stand out more and adds interest to the painting.

Warm Up the Sky

Add a lighter and warmer sky color, especially near the sun, to enhance the realism of the painting. This reflects the natural light and warmth of the sun.

15 Refining Sky and Reflections

Paint Light Areas Near Dark Areas

Paint the shapes of the light areas up to the edges of the dark areas first. This technique prevents the dark areas from muddying the light areas, maintaining their brightness.

Refill Your Brush

Ensure your brush is well-loaded with paint to effectively combat the dark paint. This helps keep the light areas bright and vibrant.

Use a Soft Touch

Drag the paint off with a very soft touch using your brush. Opt for a smaller brush if you prefer more control over the details.

Paint Reflections with Vertical or Horizontal Strokes

Use vertical or horizontal strokes when painting reflections to enhance the reflective quality of the water. Avoid diagonal strokes, as they can disrupt the effect.

16 Enhancing Grasses and Reflections

Create Grass Reflections

Leave space for reflections of grasses and the bank in the water. Use horizontal and vertical strokes to suggest these reflections in the dark area.

Switch Brushes

Switch to a slightly smaller size 10 flat brush to add lights in the mid-ground and foreground.

Mix Base Color for Grasses

Start with ochre, add a little burnt sienna, and a bit of blue to tone it down. This mix creates a good base for the grasses.

Build Soft Transitions

Avoid going straight for the lights to prevent muddy colors. Start with mid values to build a soft transition between dark and light areas.

Paint Grass Tops

Brush out to paint the top of the grasses using both upward and downward strokes to achieve the desired effect.

17 Foreground Bushes and Trees

Soften Reflections

Use your finger or a dry, soft brush to soften reflections. This creates a more natural and subtle look in your painting.

Darken Reflections

Ensure reflections are slightly darker than the objects they reflect. This contrast makes the reflections appear more realistic and believable.

Enhance with Red Glow

Add a little red glow softness with a brush to create a glowing effect. This enhances the vibrancy and depth of the painting.

Vary Colors and Tones

Change colors and tones as you move across the painting. Darken areas and introduce different colors like red to add interest and prevent monotony.

Use Different Shapes

Incorporate different shapes, such as big shapes joined with smaller ones, to add interest and complexity. This technique helps lead the eye and create a dynamic composition.

Create Soft-Edged Shapes

Use the corner of your brush to make interesting little shapes and blobs. This softens the edges and blends the shapes naturally.

Keep Foreground Bushes in Shadow

Avoid using full light colors for bushes in the foreground. Tone down the colors to maintain the shadow effect and create depth in your painting.

18 Foreground Rocks and Reflections

Mix Foreground Rock Color

To create a darker green for the foreground rocks, mix a little blue with a touch of burnt sienna. This combination will help tone down the green and add a grayish quality to it.

Create Grassy Textures

Use a flicking motion with your brush to create grassy shapes in the foreground. This technique leaves a soft edge and uses the bristles to suggest the texture of grass.

Add Detail with a Smaller Brush

Consider using a smaller brush, like a rigger, to add more detail to the foreground. This allows you to suggest details without painting every blade of grass.

Paint Rock Reflections

To add reflections of rocks in the water, imagine where the rocks will be and paint their reflections with a toned-down color. Adding a little warmth to the color can help it work for the light and reflections.

19 Riverbed and Rock Details

Create Sky Reflections on Rocks

Use a bluish darkish grey color, about 75% grey, by mixing blue and burnt sienna. Apply this color to the rock surfaces angled towards the sky to reflect the sky's light.

Vary Rock Shapes and Sizes

Change the angle and pressure of your brush to vary the shapes and sizes of the rocks. This technique helps create depth and avoids a uniform pattern, adding interest to your painting.

Lighten Warm Colors

Add white to the warm colors to lighten them. If the color becomes too vibrant, add some blue to tone it down, as blue complements orange. Work gradually from a lighter than mid-value to the lightest light, keeping edges soft for smooth transitions into shadows.

Use Impasto and Smooth Paint

Apply thick impasto paint to areas that catch more light and use smooth, thin paint for other areas. This contrast in textures helps differentiate parts of the landscape based on how they catch the light.

Mix and Apply Warm Grey

Create a warm grey that is mid-value or slightly darker, warmer than a pure neutral. Use this warm grey to add half-light to the tops of rocks, enhancing the feeling of warm light reflection.

Add Sand Patches for Contrast

Include patches of sand among the rocks to create smooth areas that contrast with the rocky textures. This variation conveys a sense of warm light reflection and adds visual interest.

20 Final Touches and Accents

Define Tree Back

Add a little more mist in the area behind the tree to create contrast and make the tree stand out against the background.

Subtle Tree Lighting

Mix a color similar to the existing shade using blue, burnt sienna, a little white, and yellow to add light to a tree without making it too bright. Keep the light subtle to maintain harmony.

Create Impasto Shapes

Use thick paint in an impasto style to create interesting shapes. These shapes will catch the light and add a little sparkle to your painting.

Paint Tree Trunks

Use a thin line of grey paint on the end of your brush and dash in the tree trunks with a very light touch. This helps to integrate them naturally into the scene.

Soften Light Edges

Use a clean brush to gently brush over the light areas on a tree. This will blend the light into the tree and soften the edges.

Add Dark Accents

Mix blue, red, burnt sienna, and a touch of white to create a neutral dark color for occlusion shadows. Apply these shadows to areas like cracks under rocks and bushes to create depth and realism.

Take Your Time

Slow down during the final stages of your painting. The last 5% can take the longest, and careful attention is needed to avoid ruining your work.

Summary & Key Takeaways

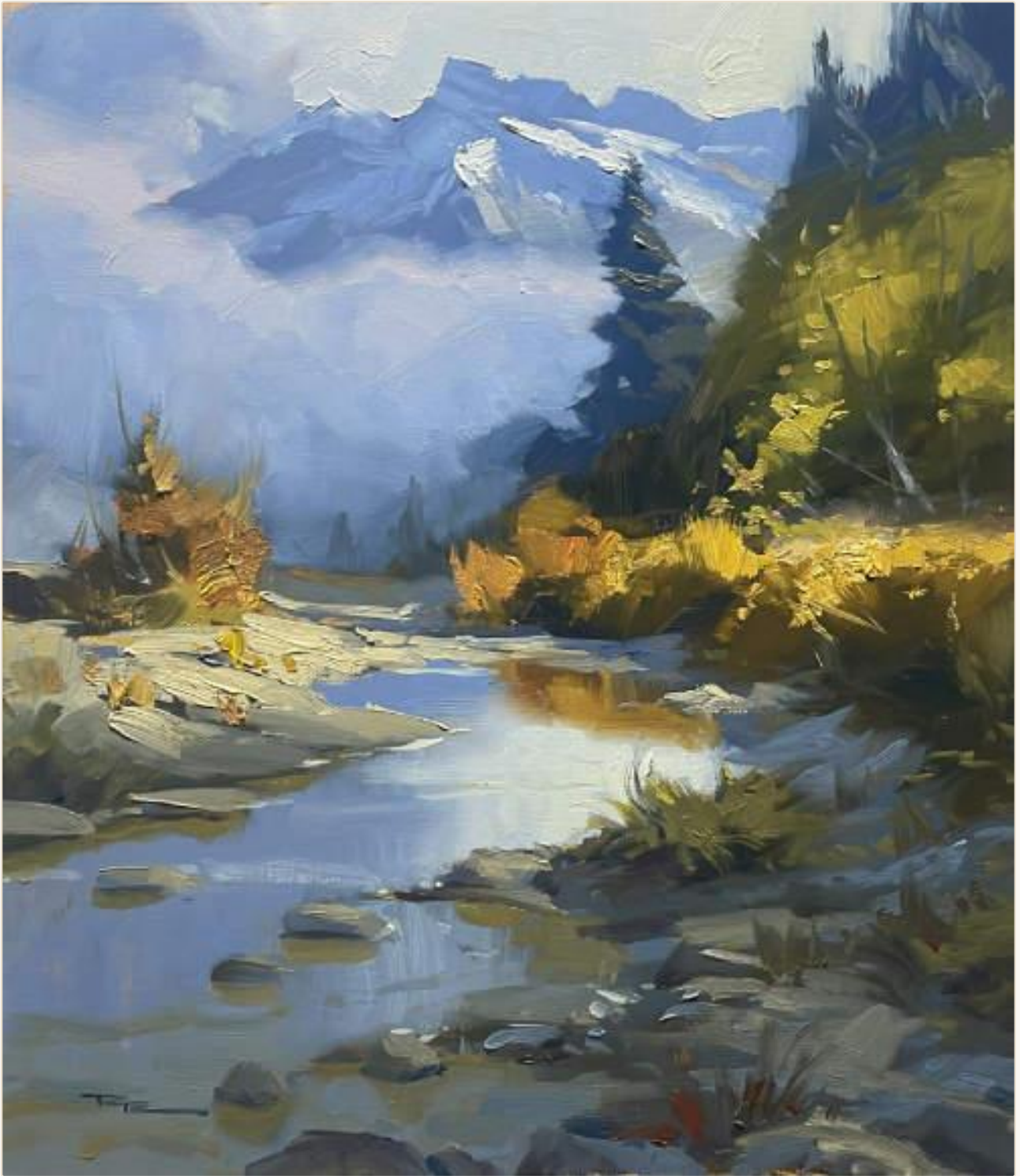
In this lesson, you embarked on a journey to capture the serene beauty of a mountain stream. Begin by identifying the key elements that captivate you the most in the scene, and let these guide your artistic decisions. By focusing on these elements, you can effectively lead the viewer's eye to the most captivating parts of your painting. Use shape and light design to enhance these focal points, creating a harmonious composition that draws the viewer in.

As you progress, pay close attention to lighting techniques. Capture various lighting conditions through photographs and use them to orchestrate a composition with alternating light and shadow. Soft shadows in the foreground subtly guide the viewer's eye to the center of interest, enhancing the overall focus and composition. Incorporate a variety of shapes and forms to maintain interest and direct the viewer deeper into the scene.

Prepare your canvas carefully, ensuring it is primed and toned for the painting process. Use a range of materials and tools to bring your vision to life, from the initial sketch to the final details. As you block in darks and build up the riverbed, focus on creating depth and dimension through layers and soft edges. Finally, refine your painting by enhancing reflections, adding light to mist, and balancing the sky and mountain edges to create a dynamic and engaging landscape.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Focus on the key elements you love most about the scene.
- Use soft shadows to subtly guide the viewer's eye to the center of interest.
- Incorporate a variety of shapes to keep the painting engaging.
- Prepare the canvas with an acrylic undercoat and a toned base.
- Use Liquin as a painting medium to enhance flow and drying time.
- Avoid drawing attention to areas where dark meets dark.
- Use down strokes or side strokes to create reflections in still water.
- Focus on achieving nice soft edges first, refine details later.



Mountain Stream 12x14" Oil on Board

Student Critiques

Club members painted their own versions of this scene and I critiqued each one. Their paintings — and my feedback — are a wonderful way to see this lesson's ideas in action.

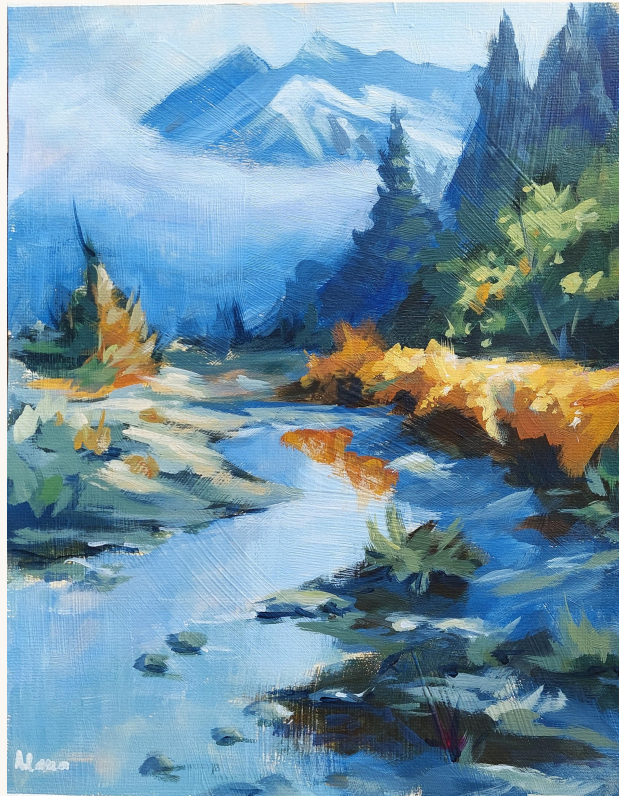
“Oil on board , great fun as always” by Stephen Dickens



Oil on board , great fun as always

Hi Stephen, bold and energetic. Nice! Keep it up. Always lots to learn.

“mountain stream, acrylic on primed paper, 30x40 cm” by Adana VIRNA



mountain stream, acrylic on primed paper, 30x40 cm

Lovely expressive style, Adana! I admire calligraphic brushwork like this that seems to dance across the canvas. The only thing I'd change is in the shadow sides of the orange tussocks, to make the transition from mid orange to darkest dark a little softer, either with soft edged brushwork or a darker transitional colour between the two. My rule of thumb is that all transitions within shadows should be soft edged.

Anyway, I love it! Looks like you enjoyed painting it.

“Mountain Stream 12x16 Oil on Canvas” by Nancy Newton



Mountain Stream 12x16 Oil on Canvas

Strong sense of light in this one, Nancy, with high contrast, high chroma warm lights versus dark subdued shadows. Nice! The transition in the water from light to dark is particularly well done.

“Mountain Stream after Richard Robinson, acrylic on canvas” by Rachel Chard



Mountain Stream after Richard Robinson, acrylic on canvas

Hey Rachel, some good work in here! You've created a sense of depth and your shapes are interesting and defined well. It's trickier with acrylics to get those gradations and soft blends behaving like with oils. I can see you're working to get those right. You'll find that has a lot to do with speed, because as soon as you start painting over dry layers you'll get that gravelly broken paint rather than a smooth transition. You'll find then, that if you painted this a second time, building each section at a time from sky to foreground, you'd be able to work faster and avoid layers drying on you. (This is the second time I've painted this one.)

It's a shame the mountain got smooshed and softened as that's supposed to be the payoff for the end of the eye's journey through the painting. Seems like you might need some new, crisp brushes to be able to create some sharper shapes. It's worth it!

Looking forward to seeing your next one.