



The River Bend

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/260-The-River-Bend>

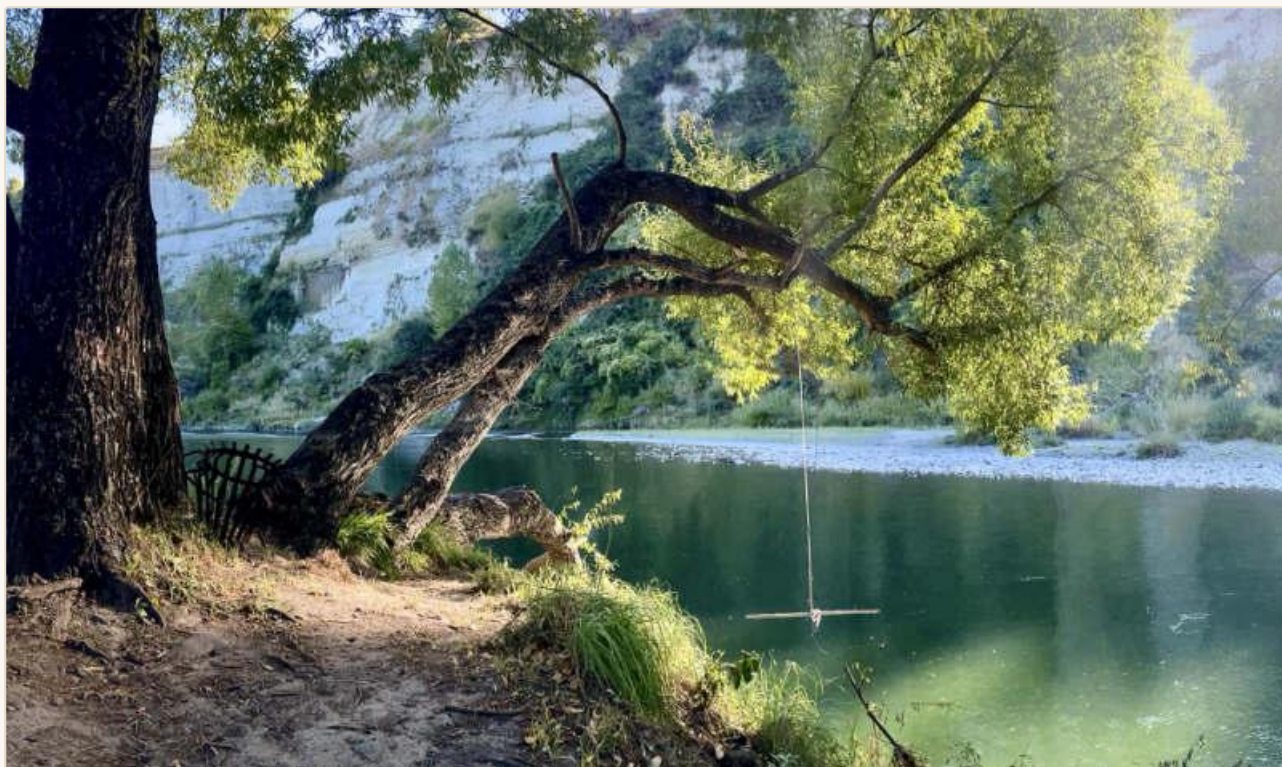
MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we embark on a creative journey with 'The River Bend,' a delightful scene from the Rangiteiki River in New Zealand, captured in a 10x14" oil painting. We'll explore the process of transforming a simple photograph into a captivating piece of art, using both traditional techniques and the innovative assistance of AI. Starting with a triple-primed MDF board, I'll guide you through selecting and emphasizing the elements you love most in the scene—perhaps the play of dappled light through the trees or the serene curve of the river. We'll consider the shape and size of your canvas, making necessary adjustments to the composition to ensure harmony and focus. As we paint, we'll delve into the joys of alla prima, working wet-on-wet to maintain freshness and spontaneity. You'll learn to balance detail and simplicity, using a range of techniques to bring the scene to life. Whether you choose to incorporate AI in your process or not, this chapter is about finding joy in painting and letting curiosity lead you to new artistic paths. Together, we'll create a beautiful painting that captures the essence of this tranquil river bend, step by step.

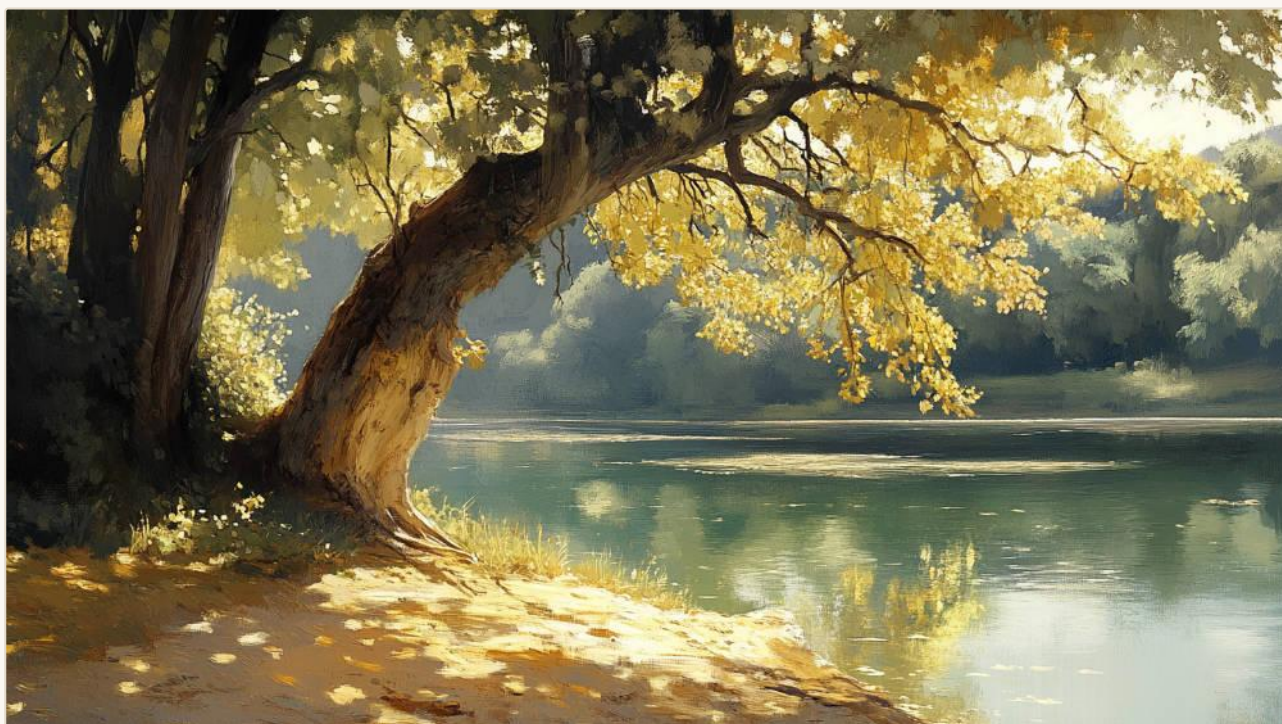


'The River Bend' 10x14" Oil on Board by Richard Robinson



REFERENCE PHOTO 1

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 2

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

- Winsor & Newton Oil Paints
- Winsor Blue Red Shade
- Venetian Red
- Gold Ochre
- Cad Yellow Pale
- Titanium White
- Painting medium
- Liquin
- Solvent
- Gamsol
- Surface
- MDF panel primed with 2-3 coats of acrylic undercoat or gesso. 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 Photo Analysis and Composition Planning



Analyze the Photo

Examine the photo of the scene you plan to paint. Identify elements that you love and want to emphasize in your painting. Focus on the areas with light and interesting features that capture your attention.

Adjust Composition for Canvas

Consider the shape and size of your canvas. If your canvas is more square, adjust the composition of the scene to fit this format. This may involve cropping or altering the panoramic view to better suit your canvas dimensions.

Modify Elements for Aesthetic Appeal

Identify any elements in the scene that feel awkward or less appealing, such as angular tree shapes. Plan to modify these elements in your painting to create a more harmonious composition.

Focus on the Main Subject

Decide on the main subject of your painting, such as the light in the trees or a particular area of interest. Ensure that this becomes the focal point, with other elements acting as supporting features or background.

PRO TIP

Choose the elements you love most in the scene and make them the focal point of your composition.

2 Digital Sketching and Design Adjustments



Adjust Tree Design

Make the tree the center of interest by enlarging and thickening it. Opt for a single trunk instead of two, ensuring it has character with curves that counterpose each other for an interesting shape.

Simplify the Bank

Simplify the bank's design, maintaining a natural balance. Consider splitting the single trunk into several to enhance balance, and add a bush to join the darks into a cohesive piece.

Enhance Foliage and Background

Create cohesive foliage that is thicker and darker at the top. Darken the corner area to contrast with the light, and change the background to a hill with more light, avoiding dark tones.

Incorporate Light and Reflection

Add texture to the backlit leaves, making them the focal point. Introduce reflections of the sky and overhanging leaves, and add dappled light for a warm, inviting atmosphere.

Add Bounced and Direct Light

Introduce bounced light reflecting off the water onto the tree, and filter light onto the tree's side. Keep the bounce light subtle to avoid it looking like direct light, but add a fine edge of direct light for emphasis.

PRO TIP

Ensure the tree trunk has character by adding curves that counterpose each other for an interesting shape.

3 Using AI for Image Generation



Prepare Your Sketch

Ensure your sketch is ready and captures the design and idea you want to maintain. This will serve as the basis for the AI-generated image.

Upload Images to Mid Journey

Visit midjourney.com and click on 'Create'. Upload your two images by clicking on them to add them to the generator.

Customize AI Settings

Type in what you want to see in the generated image. Adjust the settings to fit your desired outcome, keeping the shape roughly the same as your sketch.

Generate and Select an Image

Hit the 'Go' button to generate four images. Review the options and select the one that best fits your vision. Download the chosen image to use as a reference for painting.

PRO TIP

Experiment with different settings in the AI generator to see how they affect the final image.

4 Blocking in the Sketch



Block in the Sketch

Choose your preferred medium for sketching, such as pencil, charcoal, or paint. Use blue paint for this exercise. Identify the horizon line or the largest horizontal line in your painting. Position it slightly below the halfway mark and draw it straight across the canvas. Feel free to use a ruler or masking tape for precision.

Shape the Landscape

Adjust the horizon line to angle slightly upwards to reflect the river flowing away from you. Sketch the hills and riverbank in the background. Use straight lines to shape curves, as they are easier to manage. Add the main trunk of the tree using straight lines to capture its form.

PRO TIP

Use straight lines to shape curves; they are easier to manage and angle correctly.

5 Drawing and Composition Tips



Practice Drawing

If your drawing skills need improvement, dedicate some time to practice. Achieving perfect accuracy isn't always necessary, especially in landscapes where slight deviations go unnoticed.

Focus on Major Shapes

Identify the major shapes in your composition, such as the cast shadow. These shapes are often abstract and organic, adding interest to your painting.

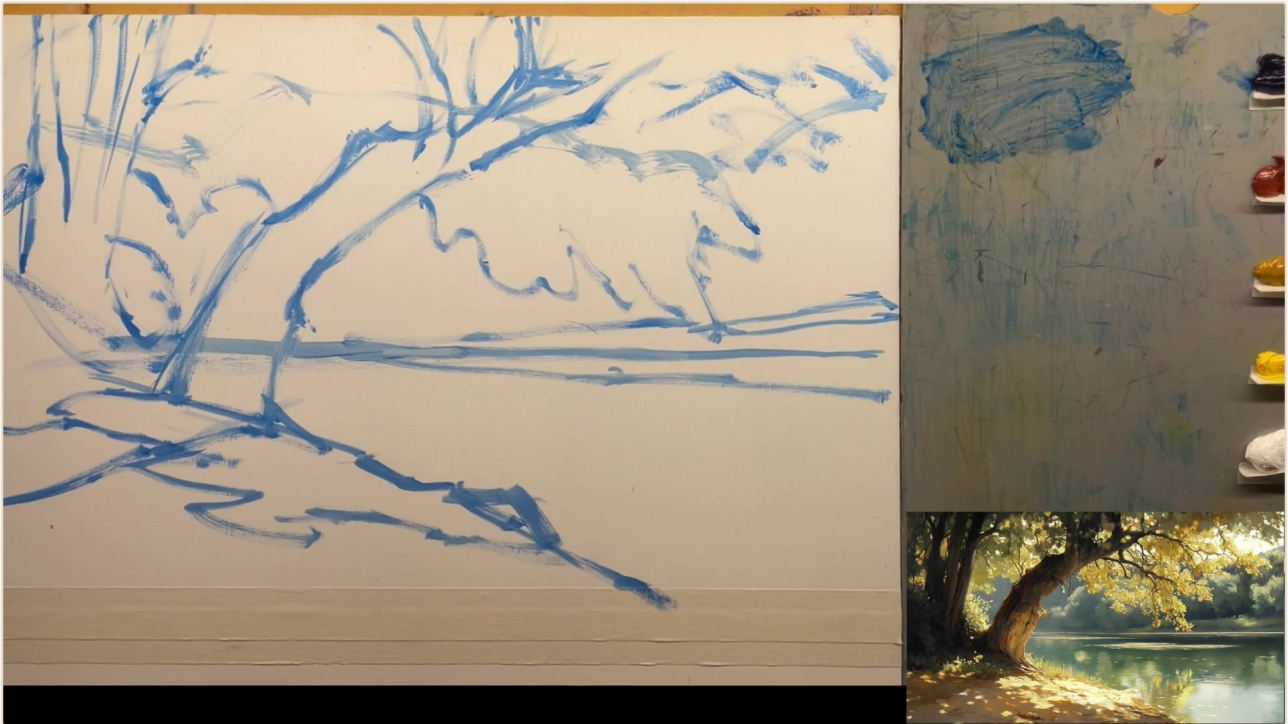
Observe Design Elements

Notice the interplay of curves and shapes in your scene. These subtle design elements can enhance the composition and bring out the beauty in your landscape.

PRO TIP

In landscape painting, slight deviations from the sketch are acceptable, as they often go unnoticed.

6 Painting the Background



Prepare the Brush

Dip your larger brush into the painting medium to loosen it up. This will help the paint flow smoothly onto the canvas.

Mix the Background Color

Start with blue and add a little gold ochre to create a cool green tone. Introduce a touch of Venetian red to dull the color slightly. Add white to see the resulting shade, aiming for the darkest dark under the trees.

Apply the Darkest Dark

Paint the darkest areas under the trees where little light reaches. Extend the paint slightly beyond where you want it to stop to allow for blending with the next layer.

Create Texture and Lighten the Color

Lightly brush the paint to build texture for the trees. Mix a lighter, bluer version of the color as you move downstream, considering atmospheric perspective. This will create depth and distance in the painting.

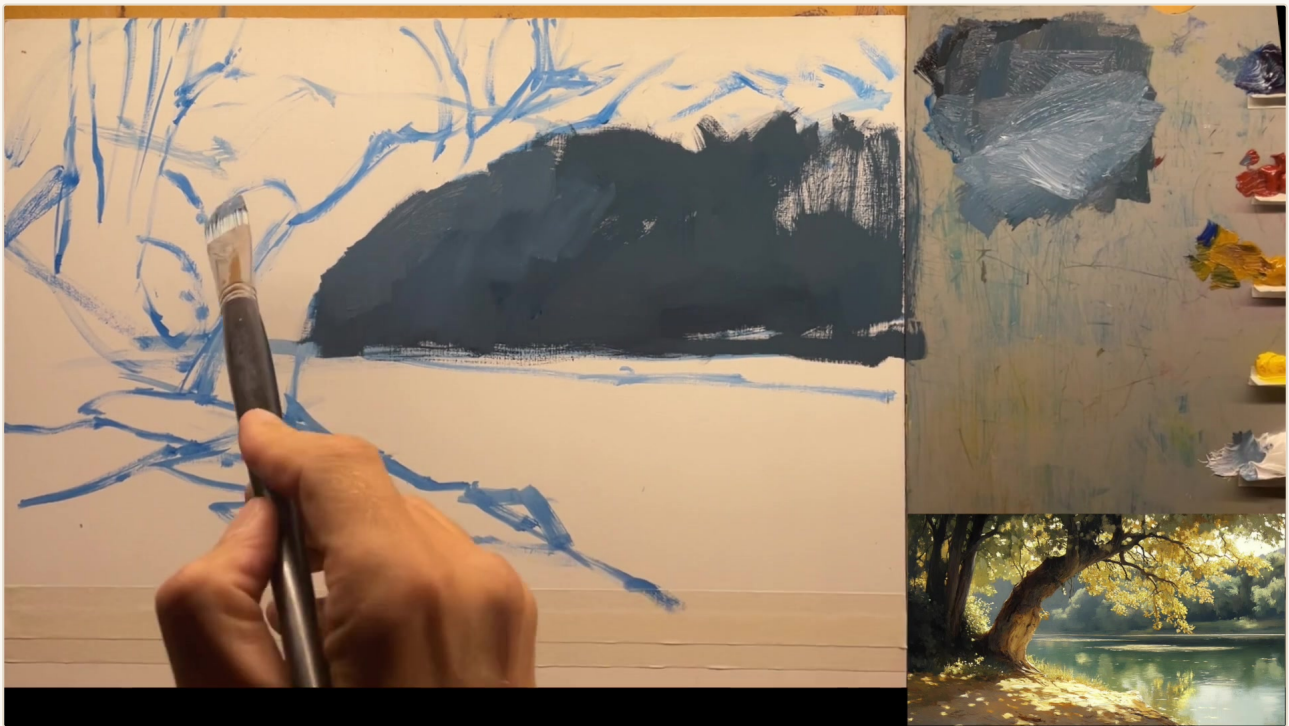
Prepare for the Next Layer

Don't worry about painting over the tree area. You'll wipe out some of this layer later to accommodate the yellowish paint for the trees.

PRO TIP

Mix more paint than you think you'll need to save time and ensure color consistency across the area.

7 Adding Reflections and Atmospheric Perspective



Paint Reflections

Use the same color as the river to paint in the reflection. Block it in and soften the edges to create a natural look. Add a darker shade where the trees cast shadows on the water.

Add Distant Hills

Introduce distant hills by softly working the color down into the top of the dark foliage mass. This adds depth and atmospheric perspective to the scene.

Mix and Apply Dark Greens

Mix a dark green by adding yellow ochre to your base color. Apply this darkest green first, especially under the trees, to create depth. Break the edge to suggest clumps of foliage.

Layer Lighter Greens

Add more yellow ochre and a touch of Cad Yellow Pale to your mix for a slightly lighter green. Leave spots of the darkest green visible to suggest shadows under the bushes.

Highlight with Light Greens

Mix in a little white to your green for highlights. Paint these on the faces of the trees facing the viewer. Use a puffball technique to create overlapping foliage, ensuring the values are close but distinct.

PRO TIP

Leave spots of the darkest green visible to suggest shadows under the bushes.

8 Painting the Water and Reflections



Lighten and Cool the Water

Add white to the water as it moves downriver to gradually lighten and cool it. Consider white as a cool color, which helps blend with the blue without needing additional blue paint. This creates a natural transition in the water's appearance.

Add Highlights to the Grass

Mix bright yellow with a little white to create a highlight color. Use the very tip of the brush to paint small spots on the grass where the light catches. This adds interest and dimension to the scene.

Subdue the Background Greens

Ensure the greens in the background remain subdued and more blue to allow the yellow tree in the foreground to stand out. Use soft, varied strokes to create a backdrop that supports the main focal point without overpowering it.

Create Cloud-like Bushes

Use the tip of a flat-ended brush or a filbert brush to paint the tops of tree patterns. Think of the strokes as a family, with larger strokes followed by smaller ones, to mimic the appearance of puffy clouds.

Blend Colors in the Water

Include some blue and more white as you move down the painting to reduce contrast. Aim for a cohesive blue-gray-green color that blends seamlessly into the water, reflecting the light direction.

PRO TIP

Use varied brush strokes to create natural, cloud-like patterns in foliage, enhancing the painting's texture and depth.

9 Sky and Light Effects



Reflect Darker Tones

Paint reflections in the water slightly darker than the actual subjects being reflected. This creates a more realistic effect as reflections often appear darker.

Add Punchy Green Reflections

Introduce a lighter, punchier green to reflect the color of the water. Ensure the strokes are horizontal and vertical to maintain the reflective quality.

Incorporate Blue Reflections

Add a touch of blue to the reflections, similar to the top of the hill. Use vertical strokes and add light dashes across the surface to enhance the reflection.

Reflect the Sky

Paint the reflection of the sky with lighter and bluer tones. Fill in the area without touching adjacent areas, then adjust the edges for a clean transition.

Maintain Clean Brushwork

Keep your brush clean when painting light into dark areas to avoid muddy colors. Clean off any dark paint collected on the brush before continuing.

Adjust Paint Thickness

As you move from dark to light, increase the thickness of the paint. Use thin paint for dark areas and thicker paint for lighter areas, allowing the paint to sit on the canvas without flattening.

PRO TIP

Keep your brush clean when transitioning from light to dark areas to maintain vibrant colors.

10 Sky and Hill Transitions



Block in the Sky

Carefully block in a little bit of the sky, painting around the dark edge to keep the paint clean. Fill in the area completely before adjusting the edge to maintain a neat appearance.

Add Texture to the Sky

Add a few little spots within the sky area to enhance the texture. This will add interest and depth to your sky.

Transition to the Hill

Move down to the hill area and use a downward brushstroke to create a soft edge. This soft edge simulates the effect of light blowing out the hill, enhancing the sensation of light.

Refine the Hill's Edge

If the brush picks up muddy colors, clean it and wipe off the area. Add back in the lighter color to keep the edge pure and bright.

PRO TIP

Use a downward brushstroke to create a soft edge on the hill, enhancing the light effect.

11 Foreground Rocks and Water Details



Paint Foreground Rocks

Mix a dark blue-grey color for the rocks on the riverbed. Use a larger palette if needed for ease. Angle your brush to create a sharp edge on the bottom and a rougher edge on the top, simulating rocks touching the water.

Add Water Shimmer

Create a shimmer effect on the water's edge by flattening out the paint and gently touching the canvas with a fine line. Avoid covering the entire edge; a little shimmer goes a long way.

Highlight with Sunlight

Use a big brush to apply stronger sunlight highlights on the rocks. The edge of a good brush can create surprising effects.

Adjust Color and Size

As the rocks recede upstream, mix in more blue to cool and darken the color. Make the rocks smaller and thinner to enhance the sense of distance.

PRO TIP

Use the edge of a good brush to create sharp and rough edges for realistic rock textures.

12 Painting the Tree Trunk



Block in the Darkest Darks

Mix blue with Venetian Red to create a dark tone for the tree trunk. Apply this thinly with a large brush, extending beyond the intended area to allow for blending with future layers. Focus on the overall shape rather than details, ensuring the trunks are not evenly spaced to avoid a man-made appearance.

Add Brown Tones

Mix Venetian Red with Gold Ochre to push the color towards brown. Use the fine edge of your large brush to create zigzags and vertical strokes, leaving space for the darks. Vary the size of your strokes to add interest and variety, mimicking natural textures.

Consider Lighting and Texture

Avoid painting into the darkest core of the trunk, which represents occlusion shadows. Use sideways strokes to mimic bark texture. Be cautious not to make reflected light too light, maintaining the distinction between shadow and light areas.

Incorporate Blue and White

Add a touch of blue and white to your mixture for variety, reflecting the blue sky. Apply this in select areas, leaving some of the darkest darks visible. This helps to create a sense of depth and texture in the trunk.

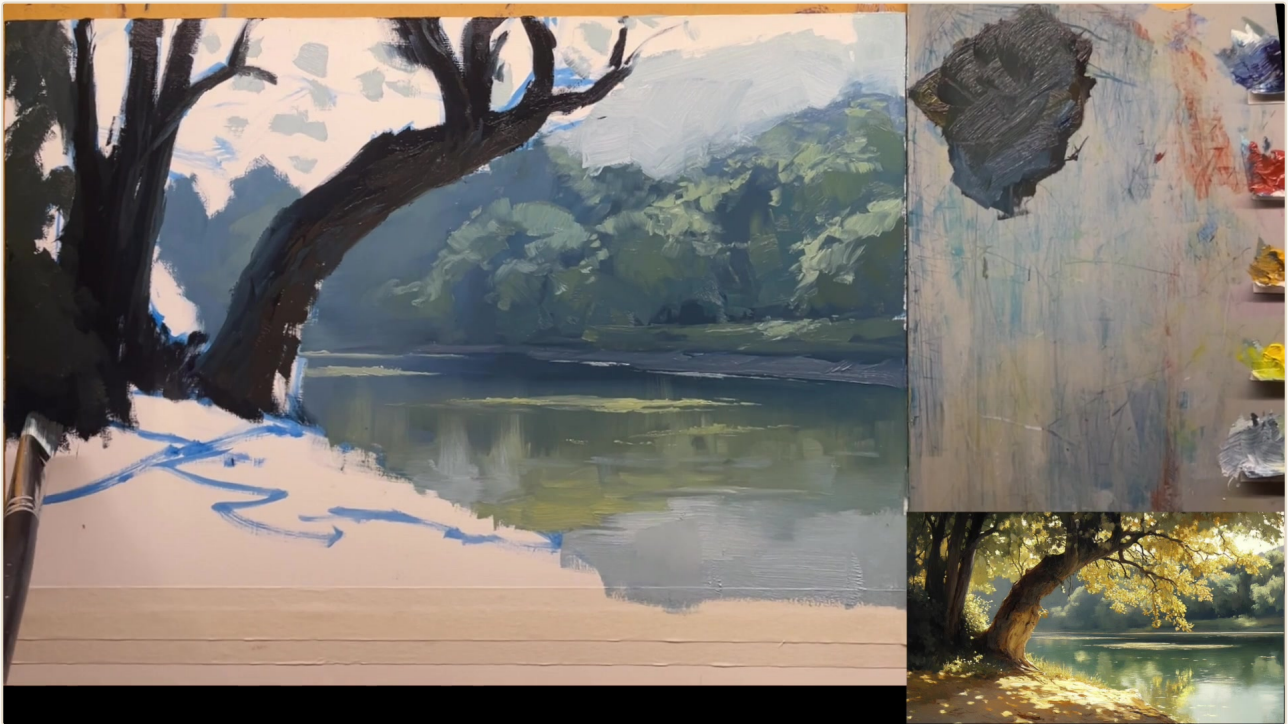
Paint Surrounding Foliage

Mix a dark dull green for the foliage around the tree, applying it thinly. Ensure the foliage appears darker than other elements to maintain depth and contrast in the scene.

PRO TIP

Use a large brush with varied strokes to create natural textures and avoid uniformity.

13 Foliage and Tree Details



Prepare the Half Tone

Add more yellow to your mix to create a half tone between the light and dark areas. This tone should be slightly punchier as it is backlit, paving the way for a glowing effect.

Create Ground Spotlights

Apply the prepared half tone to the foliage on the ground. This will create beautiful spotlights and enhance the scene's natural beauty.

Apply Greens to Upper Areas

Use the same greens to add foliage details to the upper areas. Start with the darkest tones, mixing them well to create a patchwork effect.

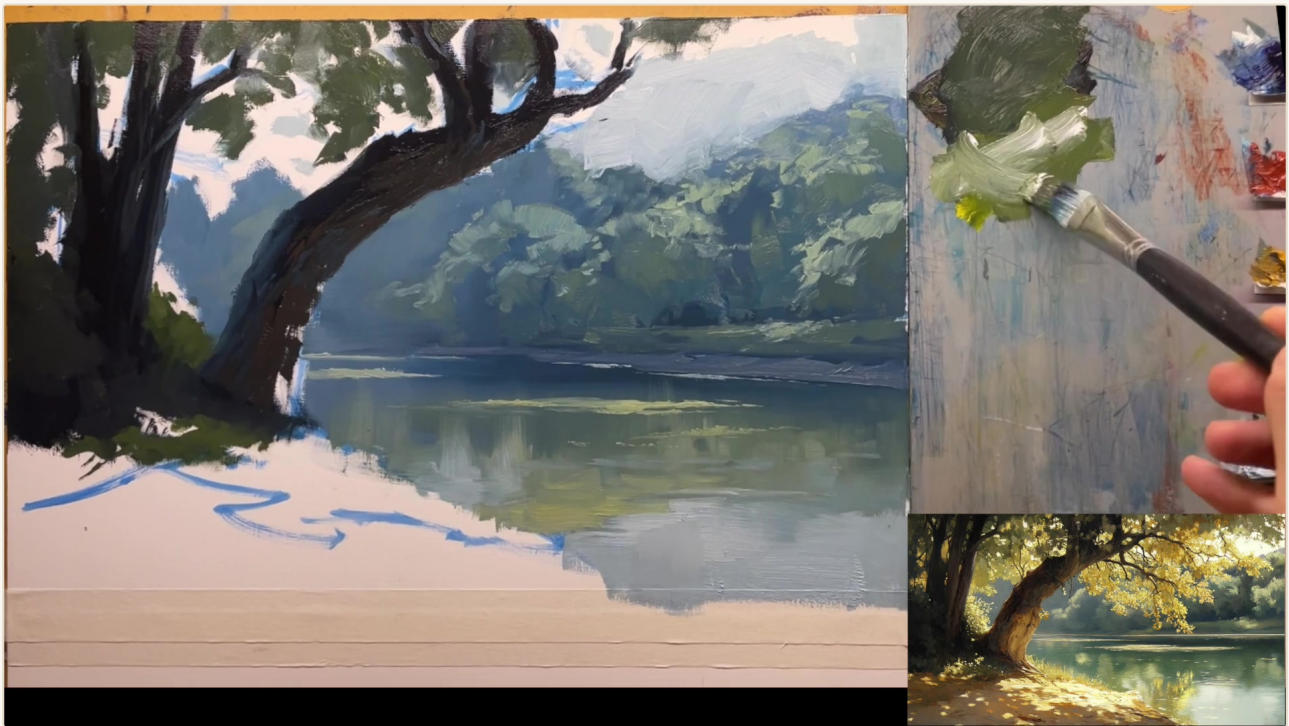
Subdue Upper Foliage

Keep the upper foliage fairly homogenous in value and dark to avoid drawing attention. This will ensure the main interest remains on the focal points of the painting.

PRO TIP

Use a patchwork quilt approach with your brushwork to allow for more gestural freedom and less focus on exact detail.

14 Building Up Light and Color



Add Light to the Scene

Mix some white with your blue and ochre to lighten the color. This will help you highlight areas and create a sense of light in the scene. Be mindful of the edges of the branches; some should remain sharp to maintain realism.

Create Varied Greens

Mix four or five different types of green. Make them warmer and yellower in some areas, cooler and darker in others. This variation will help convey the light and depth in the painting.

Build Up to Brightness

Resist the urge to use your brightest colors immediately. Gradually build up to the brightest areas to create a focal point. This approach will enhance the impact of your painting.

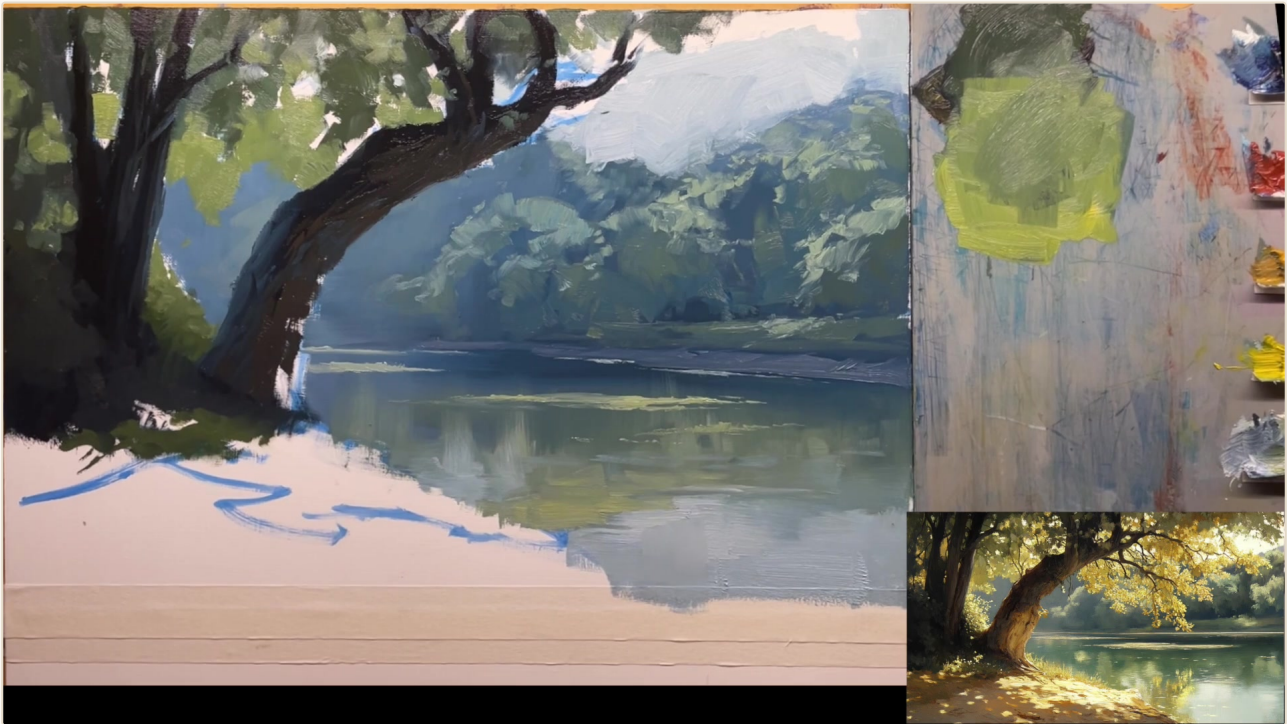
Preserve Key Elements

Avoid brushing over the big trunks and branches you've painted. If needed, you can always paint them back in. Patience is essential; enjoy the process of adding color carefully.

PRO TIP

Gradually build up to the brightest areas to create a focal point and enhance the painting's impact.

15 Adding Highlights and Sky Holes



Prepare the Area

Warm up the color as you move into the new area. Be cautious of brushing dark into the light sky paint; wipe your brush if necessary to prevent unwanted mixing. This helps create an effect of light burning through.

Wipe Out Big Shapes

Identify and wipe out big shapes in the area where the tree will be painted. This prevents muddy paint and makes it easier to apply new colors. Embrace the process of painting over or removing previous work to improve your painting.

Apply the Darkest Light Color

Begin with the darkest light color in the area, avoiding the lightest tones for now. Use thicker paint to cover dark areas effectively. This step lays the foundation for adding more detailed elements later.

Add Lighter Colors

Switch to a smaller brush and clean it. Mix a little more yellow and white to lighten the color. Focus on big areas rather than individual leaves, adding occasional individual leaves for texture.

Create Shape Families

Avoid creating a 'measles' effect by focusing on big shapes with smaller shapes branching off. This technique mirrors individual brushstroke work, creating a cohesive look.

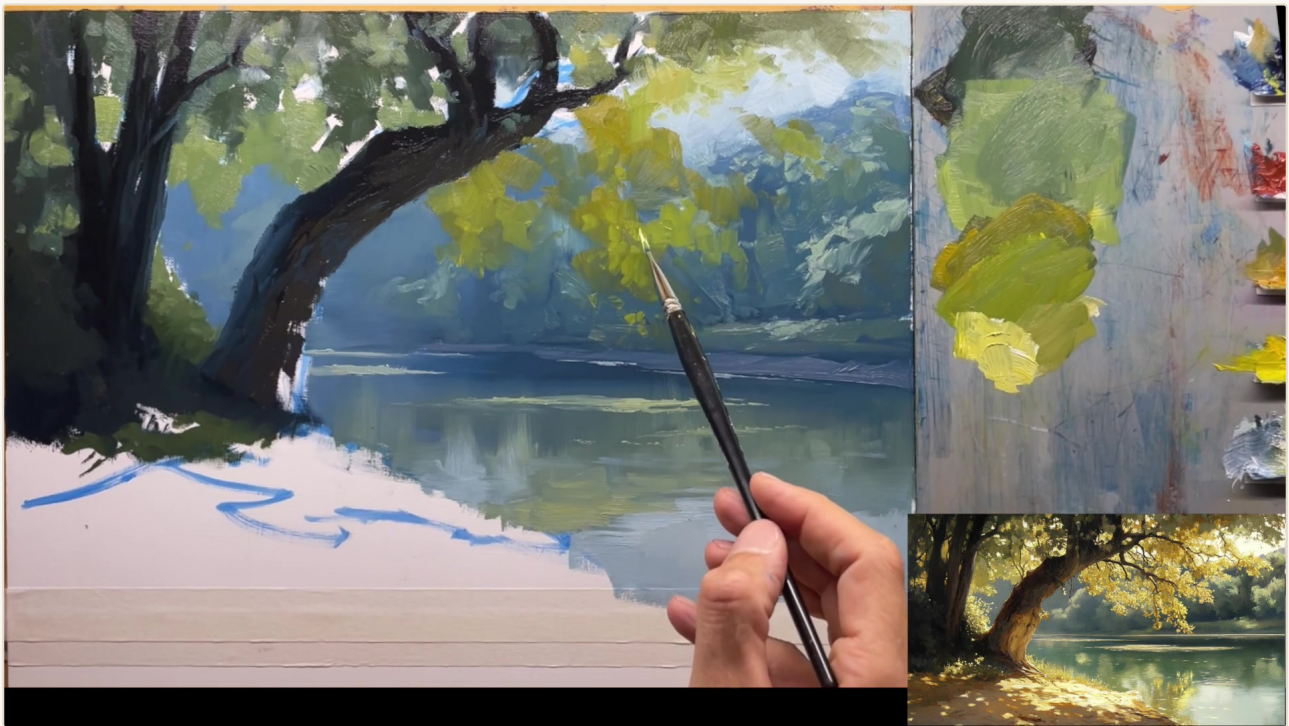
Blend with the Sky

Allow some of the lighter colors to mix with the sky, enhancing the effect of light pushing through. This blending adds depth and realism to your painting.

PRO TIP

Wipe out big shapes to prevent muddy paint and make it easier to apply new colors.

16 Camera Glitch and Repainting



Add Highlights

Use the very tip of your brush to add small highlights. Ensure the highlights vary slightly in color, with some being a bit darker. Keep them similar in size to avoid drawing too much attention to any one spot.

Cool Down the Colors

As you move to cooler areas, mix in a little blue and white to your paint. Clean your brush thoroughly before adding light blue spots to represent the sky. Make sure the color is clean and vibrant.

Vary the Sky Holes

Create sky holes that differ in shape and size to avoid uniformity. Darken the sky holes as they move into darker areas to reduce contrast, using very small spots with the corner of your brush.

Repaint After Glitch

If you encounter a mistake or technical issue, don't hesitate to scrape off the paint and redo the section. This ensures the final result is consistent and allows you to demonstrate the process effectively.

PRO TIP

Keep sky holes varied in shape and size to maintain a natural look.

17 Tree Trunk and Bark Texture



Restate Dark Areas

Reapply some dark tones to the tree trunk to establish depth and contrast. This will serve as a base for the bounced light effect.

Add Bounced Light

Lighten the dark color slightly with a touch of ochre to simulate bounced light from the surrounding area. Apply this lighter color to the underside of the tree, leaving gaps to mimic the natural texture of bark.

Create Bark Texture

Use your brush both vertically and horizontally to create a bark-like texture. Make sure the strokes are wiggly and varied, not straight, to enhance the natural look of the bark.

Blend and Adjust Light

Blend the lighter ochre with the dark areas as you move up the tree to create a gradient effect. Be cautious with the amount of white added to avoid making it look like direct sunlight.

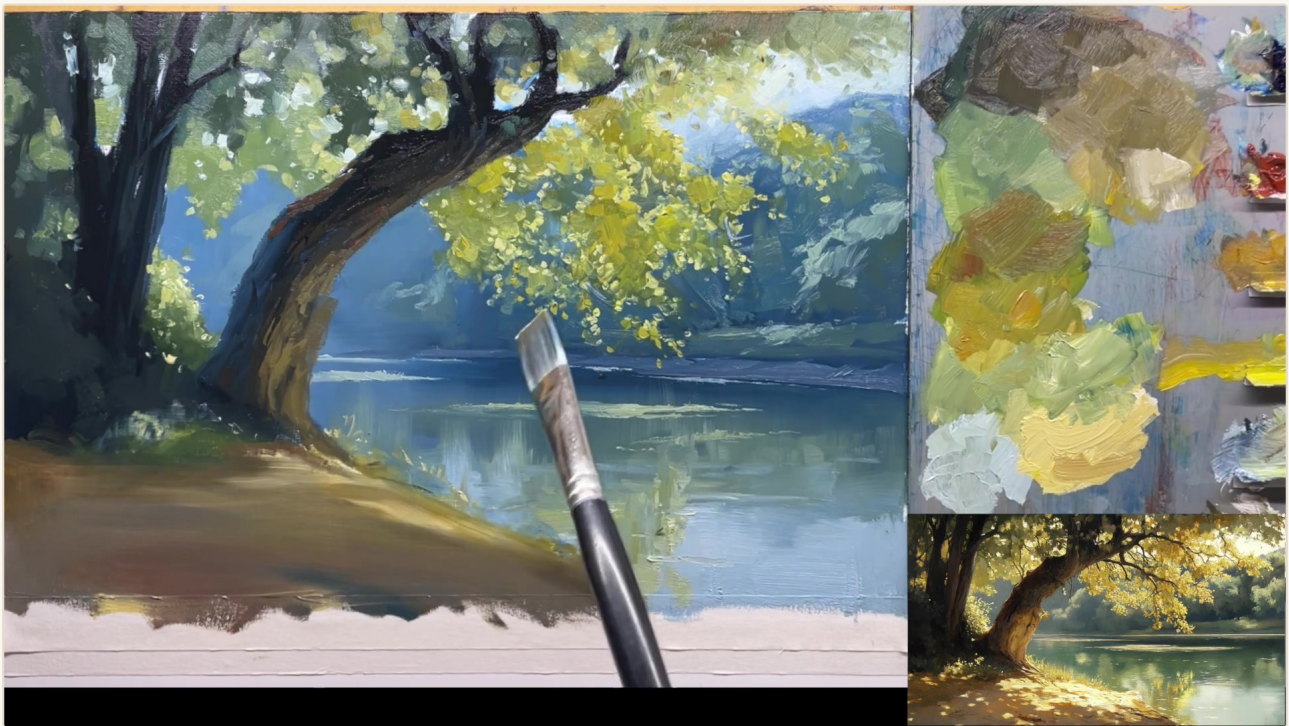
Add Subtle Highlights

Add a slightly lighter highlight to the tree trunk for depth, but keep it subtle to maintain the shadowed appearance.

PRO TIP

Drag the brush on its side to add more texture and variation to the bark.

18 Ground Plane and Dappled Light



Establish the Ground Plane

Mix ochre with a little bit of red and blue to create a base color. Brush this onto the ground plane, starting with the darkest dark in the area. Spread the paint around to cover the desired section.

Lighten the Ground Plane

Add more yellow ochre and a touch of white to your mix to lighten the color. Apply this lighter tone without completely covering the previous layer, allowing some of the darker color to show through.

Adjust the Color Temperature

Introduce a little more blue to the mix to create a cooler, grey tone. Be cautious with the blue as it is a strong color. Start with the darker version and gradually add more white to lighten it.

Create Texture and Interest

Apply the paint fairly thickly in the foreground to contrast with the thinner, smoother paint in the background. Use different brush techniques to add interest to the area.

Warm Up the Light Areas

As you approach the light areas, warm up the color slightly to enhance the glowing light effect. Focus on areas around the main light source and any spots that might catch light.

PRO TIP

Apply paint thicker in the foreground to create contrast with the thinner background.

19 Grass and Foreground Details



Create Dappled Light

Use a smaller brush to mix white with both yellows. Apply this mixture to create a dappled light effect, focusing on texture. Work around the lightest area, considering big shapes and their smaller counterparts.

Vary Brush Strokes

Ensure your brush strokes vary in shape and direction. Use the brush's side for thinner strokes and the flat for thicker ones. As shapes recede, make them thinner, flatter, and smaller.

Add Interesting Colors

Introduce a slightly darker and more orange hue to some areas for variety. This color difference adds depth and interest to the painting.

Apply Lightest Lights

Mix white with bright yellow and apply it thickly for the lightest lights. Use thin strokes in the distance, getting larger and fatter as they come forward. This broken paint texture enhances the foreground.

Create Glowing Light Spots

To make light spots glow, paint just inside the light area without covering it completely. This technique creates a glowing effect.

Highlight Details

With a smaller brush, sharpen highlights for crisp details. Add darker green for grass with soft edges, then lighter green for highlights. Consider adding small white flowers for a touch of light.

Reflect Skylight on Leaves

Add a touch of blue to reflect skylight on leaf tops, enhancing their visibility. Apply this to various leaf areas for consistency.

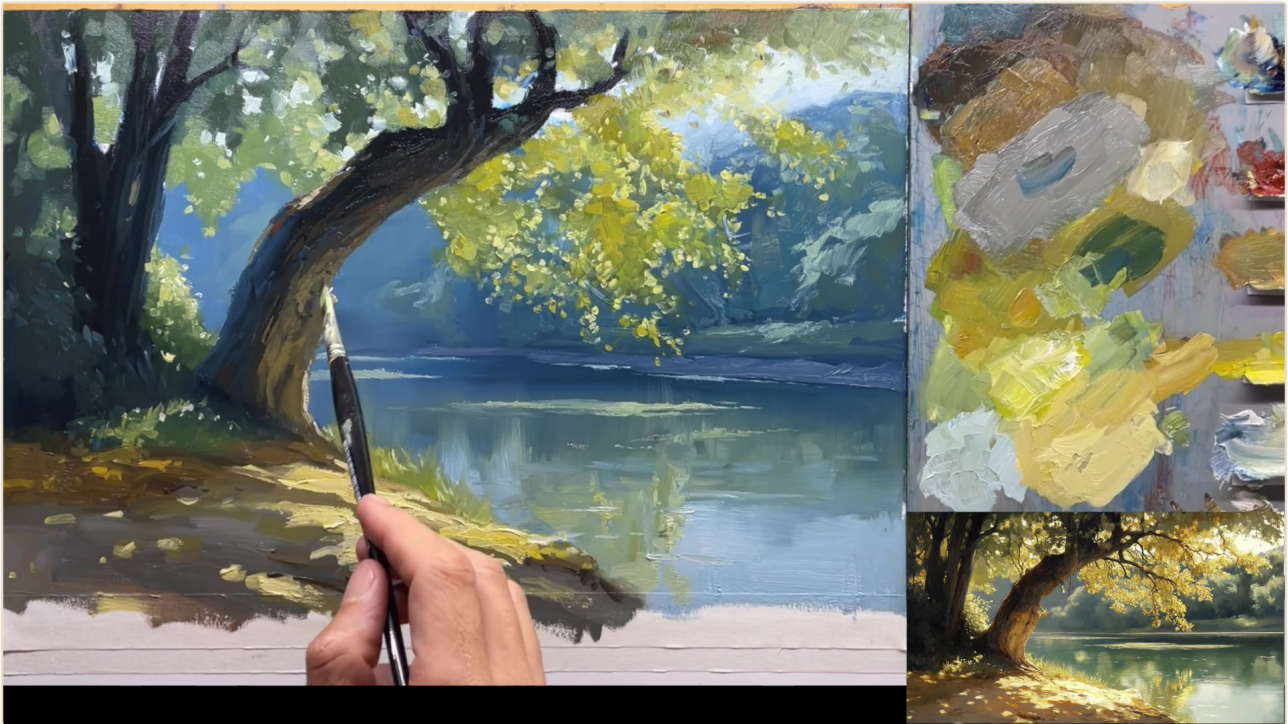
Add Dark Accents

Clean the brush and add dark accents like twigs and small details. Highlight bright grasses with lighter tones, thinking of them as clumps rather than individual blades.

PRO TIP

Think of grass as clumps rather than individual blades to create a more natural look.

20 Painting Branches and Fine Details



Prepare Your Paint

Mix blue and Venetian red to create a suitable color for the branches. Ensure the paint is loaded onto the brush by squishing it flat and pushing the brush into the paint to form a ridge.

Paint Initial Branches

Use a fine synthetic brush to start painting the branches. Hold the brush further back to allow for more fluid, calligraphic strokes, giving the branches elegance and grace.

Add Finer Details

Switch to a Rig-a-Brush for even finer details. Use the very tip of the brush lightly to achieve crisp edges and avoid over-painting every branch.

PRO TIP

Hold the brush further back to create more fluid and graceful strokes for the branches.

21 Using a Rigger Brush for Fine Lines



Prepare the Rigger Brush

Dip the rigger brush in liquid or linseed oil to lubricate it. Ensure the brush is well-covered with paint to create a crisp edge for fine lines.

Create Fine Lines

Use the long bristles of the rigger brush to make fine, calligraphic lines. If the paint isn't flowing smoothly, add more liquid or oil to the brush.

Add Branch Details

Paint in a few more branches to hold the foliage. Allow some lines to remain broken, as leaves will cover parts of these branches.

PRO TIP

Ensure the rigger brush is well-lubricated to achieve smooth, fine lines.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by thoroughly analyzing the scene you wish to capture. Identify and emphasize the elements that draw your attention, ensuring they become the focal point of your composition. Adjust the composition to fit your canvas size, and modify any awkward elements to create a harmonious scene. Use digital sketching to refine your design, focusing on interesting shapes and cohesive elements.

Utilize AI tools to generate a reference image that aligns with your vision, and begin blocking in your sketch with your chosen medium. Establish the horizon line and main elements with precision, using straight lines to shape curves for easier management. As you paint the background, mix ample paint to maintain color consistency and build texture, considering atmospheric perspective to create depth.

Incorporate reflections and atmospheric perspective by using varied brush strokes and color mixes. Pay attention to the interplay of light and shadow, ensuring reflections are slightly darker for realism. As you add details to the foreground and tree trunk, use a large brush with varied strokes to create natural textures and avoid uniformity. Finally, enhance the scene with foliage and tree details, using half tones to create a glowing effect and bring your painting to life.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Choose the elements you love most and make them the focal point.
- Ensure the tree trunk has character by adding curves.
- Experiment with different settings in the AI generator.
- Use straight lines to shape curves for easier management.
- Mix more paint than you think you'll need for consistency.
- Leave spots of the darkest green visible to suggest shadows.
- Keep your brush clean when transitioning from light to dark.
- Use varied brush strokes to create natural textures and depth.



'The River Bend' 10x1" Oil on Board by Richard Robinson

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.

“The River Bend Oil on Oil paper” by Geoffrey Geeson



The River Bend Oil on Oil paper

Hey Geoffrey this is a great painting full of strong colour and intense contrasts, exciting brushwork and solid drawing skills. Painting oils on paper certainly gives it a different feel, somewhat softer than canvas or panel. I bet this one looks great on the wall. Lovely job.

“River Bend' by Fay Thomson - 12" x 16" Oils on Canvas Board” by Fay Thomson



'River Bend' by Fay Thomson - 12" x 16" Oils on Canvas Board

Hi Fay, lovely work! The harmonious colour scheme and soft treatment of the light create a beautifully serene mood. I love that you've included what looks like bark peeled off the trunk and the upper reaches of the tree, along with the subtle colour shifts that accompany it—such a thoughtful touch. Your brushwork is very gestural, adding a lively, expressive quality. The one thing I'd like to see changed is the value of the green reflections in the water, which could be a little lighter to enhance their realism. Other than that, this is a beautiful painting.

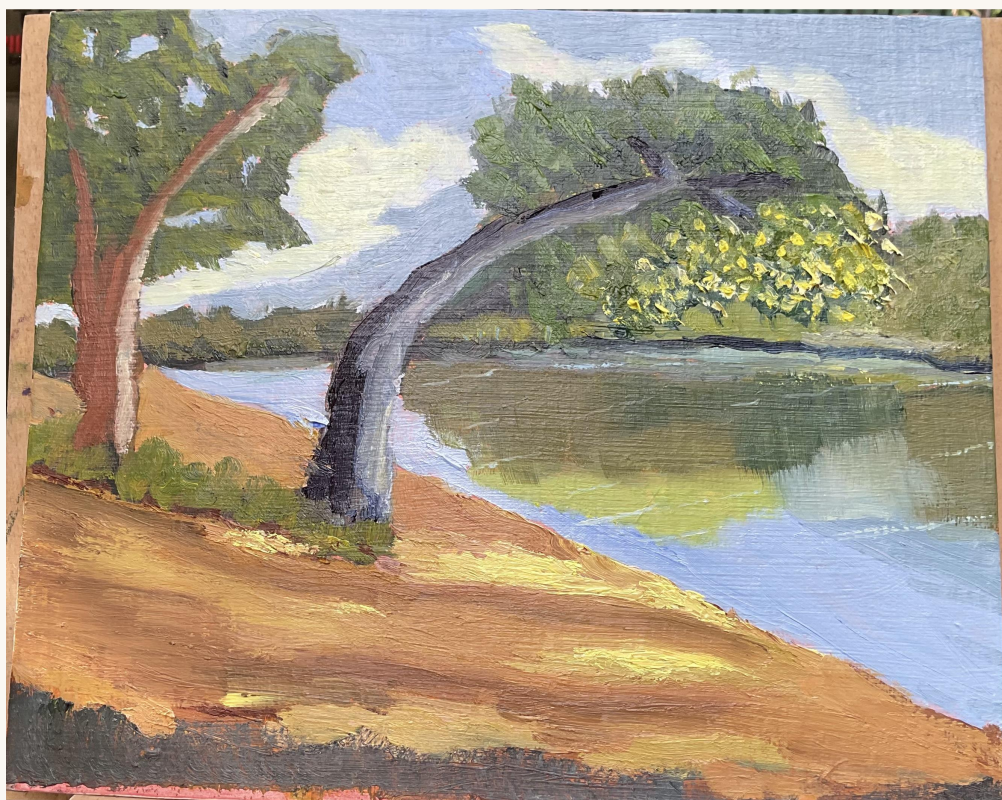
“"Rangitikei River Bend" in NZ, in Acrylics, Toronto, ON, Canada.” by **Eric Hillmer**



"Rangitikei River Bend" in NZ, in Acrylics, Toronto, ON, Canada.

Hey Eric, wow, that's an interesting take on this painting! You certainly have a different eye, and it shows in the really interesting organic shapes you've created in the tree trunks. There's a lot of engaging action happening in the foliage and the riverbanks, which adds a lively energy to the work. The smooth, calm area of water provides a nice moment of rest for the eye, but I do feel it could benefit from a slight horizontal shimmer somewhere to enhance the effect of flat, reflective water. Nice work.

“My attempt at River Bend 10x12 Oils” by Stephen Dickens



My attempt at River Bend 10x12 Oils

Hey Stephen, great effort on your painting! It's good to see you're not afraid to get the paint on the canvas—you've got a nice thickness of paint there, which many artists apply too timidly, so you're off to a solid start. I can see you've avoided the trickiest part of the painting, which is the lacy effect of the sky peeking through the leaves. It's natural to want to oversimplify, but I encourage you to have a go at this area using two brushes—one for the sky and one for the foliage—to capture that delicate interplay.

Speaking of oversimplifying, you've also simplified the shape of the riverbank and the trunks of the trees. By taking a bit more time to note the subtleties of these shapes through practice, you can create a more realistic effect.

It all comes down to drawing, which is where every painter needs to start honing their skills, because painting is just drawing with colour. So, I encourage you to work on those drawing skills, keep a sketchbook, and practice drawings of simple things, then move on to your hand and more complex subjects. You'll see improvement over time. It's all part of the journey! Enjoy.