



Up the Creek

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

Simplifying a scene and using bold brushwork. Follow me step by step as I show you the techniques I use to simplify a complex scene and bring out the best of a subject with exciting brushwork.



"Up the Creek" 11x14" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson.



REFERENCE PHOTO

The scene as Richard found it.

Materials

Here's everything I use for this painting. Don't worry 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
- Alizarine Crimson
- Phthalo Blue
- Ultramarine Blue
- Burnt Sienna
- Cadmium Red
- Cadmium Orange
- Yellow Ochre
- Cadmium Yellow Light
- Titanium White
- Painting medium
- M. Graham & Co. Walnut Alkyd Medium or Walnut Oil
- Solvent
- Gamsol
- Canvas
- Fredrix ultrasmooth canvas (Giving it a light sanding first helps the paint stick better).
- 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

What was the first thing that stood out in the scene for the painting?

The first thing that stood out in the scene was the brightly lit foreground set against the dark background, along with the shape of the tree set amongst all the light. This contrast and composition were the main elements that captured my interest. For more insights on focusing on key elements in your painting, visit the lesson page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

Why did you choose not to include the tops of the trees in the painting?

I chose not to include the tops of the trees because including them would take away from the main focus of the painting, which is the brightly lit foreground and the shape of the tree. Including too many elements can dilute the message of the painting. To learn more about simplifying your composition, check out the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How does focusing on fewer elements affect the message of a painting?

Focusing on fewer elements helps to strengthen the message of a painting by keeping attention on the main features that initially captured your interest. It prevents the painting from becoming about too many things, which can dilute its impact. For more techniques on enhancing your painting's message, visit the lesson page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

2 Simplifying the background

Why did you choose not to have a plain dark background in this painting?

I chose not to have a plain dark background because I wanted to suggest that the trees were receding into the distance. This approach adds depth to the painting without letting the background compete with the detailed foreground. For more insights, you can explore the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How did you simplify the background in your painting?

I simplified the background by using large shapes with different values that recede into the background. This technique helps to keep the focus on the detailed foreground, making it the star of the show. You can learn more about this technique by visiting the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What is the benefit of simplifying the background in a painting?

Simplifying the background allows the detailed elements in the foreground to stand out and become the focal point of the painting. It prevents the background from competing with the foreground details, creating a more harmonious composition. To delve deeper into this concept, check out the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

3 Adjusting the viewing angle

Why did you lower the viewing level of the scene?

Lowering the viewing level of the scene changes the angle of the river, allowing it to flatten out. This adjustment helps in cropping the scene tighter without losing too much detail. You can explore more about this technique and its benefits on the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How does changing the angle of the river affect the composition?

By changing the angle of the river, the composition flattens, which allows for a tighter crop of the scene. This means you can focus on important elements, like keeping a specific tree large in the scene, which is a focal point of interest in this painting. For more insights into composition adjustments, visit the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What is the benefit of keeping the tree large in the scene?

Keeping the tree large in the scene emphasizes its importance and makes it a focal point in the painting. This approach highlights the tree's shape and detail, which are key interests in this particular composition. To learn more about focal points in painting, check out the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

4 Stream shape and interest

How should I draw the edges of a stream to make it more realistic?

When drawing the edges of a stream, it's important to note that they don't curve away in a smooth, continuous curve. Instead, the banks move away in sharp, segmented pieces. This means they drop down, go flat, drop down again, and so on. Paying attention to these details will help you create a more realistic depiction of a stream. For more insights, visit the lesson page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What can I do to make the shape of a stream more interesting in my painting?

To make the shape of a stream more interesting, you can break up the shape if it appears too simple or uninteresting. For instance, you might bring a bank out or add a sandbank to create more visual interest. This approach helps avoid a monotonous 'shark fin' shape and adds complexity to your painting. Explore more techniques on the lesson page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

5 Initial sketch and planning

What colors are used for the initial sketch in the painting?

For the initial sketch, a very thin mixture of blue, red, and walnut oil is used. This combination helps in laying out the major shapes without focusing on details. For more insights into the techniques used in this lesson, you can visit the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

Why is it important to adjust the placement of major shapes in the initial sketch?

Adjusting the placement of major shapes in the initial sketch is important to ensure that the composition feels balanced and central. In this lesson, the instructor moves the shapes to achieve a better composition. For more detailed guidance on sketching and planning, check out the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How do the clumps of grass help in understanding the bank's perspective?

The clumps of grass on the side of the bank help indicate how the bank is turning away from us. As these clumps turn away, they appear smaller and closer together, similar to the pattern on a tractor tire on its side. This perspective is mirrored on both sides and is also reflected in the water. For further exploration of perspective techniques, visit the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What is the purpose of planning shadow and light areas in the initial sketch?

Planning shadow and light areas in the initial sketch helps in establishing the overall lighting and mood of the painting. It provides a guide for where to apply different tones and colors later in the painting process. To learn more about planning and executing a painting, visit the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

6 Mixing and applying darkest darks

How do you mix the darkest dark color for the painting?

To mix the darkest dark color, use a combination of mainly blue and yellow ochre, with a touch of red and a little touch of white. This mixture results in a color that is not quite black. You can learn more about this technique and see it in action at the sales page: <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What medium do you use to thin down the darkest dark color?

The darkest dark color is thinned down using a lot of walnut oil. This makes the paint just thick enough to cover the canvas. For more details on using walnut oil in your painting, visit the sales page: <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

Where should you apply the darkest darks in the painting?

The darkest darks should be applied where you think they will appear in the scene. This helps to establish depth and contrast in your painting. For further guidance on placing darkest darks, check out the sales page: <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How do you mix a base color for the background?

To mix a base color for the background, use mainly blue, a little bit of yellow ochre, a touch of white, and a tiny speck of red. This creates a color that is a little bit lighter and a lot bluer than the darkest dark. Discover more about mixing colors for backgrounds at the sales page: <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

7 Background base color

What medium did you use to thin the paint for the background base color?

I used walnut oil to thin the paint for the background base color. This helps ensure that the paint is just thick enough to cover the canvas without the weave showing through too much. For more details on using mediums like walnut oil, you can explore the lesson further at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How do you modify the color in the background base?

To modify the color in the background base, I added more blue as I moved up to the right and even more blue as I went over to the left. This creates more variety in the large section of color at the back. For a deeper understanding of color modification techniques, you can visit the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

Why do you add more white to the mixture when painting the trees in the background?

I add more white to the mixture when painting the trees in the background to help push them back into space. This technique helps create a sense of depth in the painting. To learn more about creating depth in your paintings, check out the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

8 Foreground shadows and reflections

How should I approach painting the shadows in the foreground clumps of grass?

When painting the shadows in the foreground clumps of grass, it's important to use a color that complements the overall palette. Add a bit more yellow to your color mix and focus on painting just the shadow parts, leaving spaces for the light to come in later. This technique will help create depth and vibrancy in your painting. For more detailed guidance, you can explore the lesson further at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What technique should I use for painting reflections of the grass in the water?

When painting the reflections of the grass in the water, use only vertical strokes. Avoid diagonal or horizontal strokes at this stage to accurately capture the reflection. This technique helps to maintain the natural look of the reflection in the water. To learn more about this technique, visit the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How can I ensure the foreground area glows with beautiful color?

To make the foreground area glow with beautiful color, be careful not to make your darks too dark. Aim for a mid-value in your darks and then apply the lights on top. This approach will help the area to glow without overpowering the scene. For additional tips on achieving vibrant colors, check out the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

Why should I avoid adding too much detail in the foreground area?

Avoiding too much detail in the foreground area allows the viewer's eye to flow smoothly past it and focus on the sharp detail in other parts of the painting, like the top of the bank and the tree. This technique helps to guide the viewer's attention and create a more dynamic composition. For more insights into composition techniques, visit <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

9 Color variation in darks

How can I achieve color variation in dark areas of my painting?

To achieve color variation in dark areas, you can adjust the hues slightly by adding different colors like blue and yellow ochre. This helps prevent large blocks of uniform color, adding depth and interest to your painting. For more detailed techniques, you can explore the lesson 'Up the Creek' at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

Why is it important to avoid large blocks of the same color in a painting?

Avoiding large blocks of the same color is important because it can make a painting look flat and uninteresting. Introducing color variation, even in dark areas, adds depth and complexity, making the artwork more engaging. To learn more about this technique, check out the 'Up the Creek' lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What colors can be added to dark areas to create variation?

In dark areas, you can add colors like blue and yellow ochre to create variation. These subtle changes can enhance the richness and depth of the painting. For further guidance on using color effectively, visit the 'Up the Creek' lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

10 Tree shadow and light planning

What color should I mix for the underneath of the tree?

For the underneath of the tree, you should mix a very warm dark green, almost a brown. This color choice helps to simulate the effect of light bouncing off the grasses in the foreground and warming up the underside of the tree. For more detailed guidance on color mixing, check out the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

Why is it important to leave little bits of the dark color showing through?

Leaving little bits of the dark color showing through is important because it adds depth and dimension to your painting. It creates a more realistic effect by suggesting shadows and the natural play of light. You can explore more techniques for achieving depth in your paintings at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How should I plan the transition between light and dark areas under the tree?

To plan the transition between light and dark areas under the tree, work into the dark areas you've previously painted, extending slightly into where you want the light to appear. This allows you to bring the light back into the shape later and adjust the edges for a smooth transition. For more tips on managing light and shadow in your paintings, visit <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

11 Warm foliage and water reflections

What color is used for the warm foliage in the painting?

The warm foliage in the painting is created using a very warm green, primarily composed of yellow ochre. This choice helps to create a nice contrast against the cooler background. For more on this technique, you can visit the lesson's sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

Why is it important to get all the darks done first in a painting?

It's important to get all the darks done first so that your mid-tones and lights can work back into those shapes. This approach allows you to play with your edges more effectively. You can learn more about this foundational technique by exploring the lesson further at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What is the purpose of blocking in a shadow under the tree?

Blocking in a shadow under the tree is crucial as it should be included in the darkest darks of the painting. This helps to establish depth and contrast, setting the stage for mid-tones and highlights. For a deeper understanding of this process, check out the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How is the warm greenish color used in the water reflections?

The warm greenish color is applied to the water reflections in the back of the painting, using the same warm green tone as the foliage. This helps to create a cohesive and harmonious look. To explore this technique in more detail, visit the lesson's sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

12 Reflecting background in water

Why do you use two different brushes for painting the reflections in water?

Using two different brushes helps to keep the dark and light areas distinct, which is important for creating depth and contrast in the reflections. One brush is dedicated to the darks and the other to the lights, allowing for smoother transitions and cleaner colors. For more insights into this technique, you can visit the lesson page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How should the brush strokes be applied when painting water reflections?

When painting water reflections, the brush strokes should be applied vertically downwards. This technique helps to mimic the natural way reflections appear on water surfaces. To explore this technique further, check out the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What is the main idea behind painting water reflections in this lesson?

The main idea is to have the water reflect the background, which includes a big gradation of light. This approach helps to create a realistic and cohesive look in the painting. For a deeper understanding of this concept, you can visit the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How do the colors change as you move the reflections forward in the painting?

As you move the reflections forward in the painting, the colors should get lighter and cooler. This change helps to create a sense of depth and distance in the water. To learn more about this technique, you can visit the lesson page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

13 Water reflection technique

How do you achieve the reflective look of water in a painting?

To achieve the reflective look of water, you can add more blue and white as you move towards the middle of the water, especially where it's vertically underneath a big light shape in the background. This technique helps create the illusion of reflection. For more detailed guidance, you can visit the lesson page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What colors should be used to reflect the grasses on the side of the bank in a water painting?

To reflect the grasses on the side of the bank in your water painting, you should incorporate the colors of the grasses into your water reflections. This ensures that the water reflects its surroundings accurately. For more tips on painting reflections, check out the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How can you achieve a purer, lighter blue in the center of a water reflection?

To achieve a purer, lighter blue in the center of a water reflection, clean your brush before applying the lighter blue. This helps maintain the purity of the color, making the reflection more vibrant. For further techniques on painting water reflections, visit the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What technique can be used to add perspective to water reflections?

To add perspective to water reflections, you can use a few dashes of horizontal strokes across the surface. This technique helps to enhance the depth and realism of the water. For more detailed instructions, you can explore the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

Why is it important to practice brush strokes before painting them on water reflections?

Practicing brush strokes before applying them to water reflections is important because it helps you achieve the desired effect in one smooth stroke. This practice can make your reflections appear more natural and fluid. For more painting tips and techniques, visit the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What breathing technique is suggested when painting horizontal strokes on water reflections?

When painting horizontal strokes on water reflections, it's suggested to breathe out as you make the stroke. This can help you maintain a steady hand and create smoother lines. For additional painting techniques, you can refer to the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

14 Background trees and sky holes

What colors and materials are used for painting the background trees?

For painting the background trees, Richard uses blue, yellow ochre, white, and walnut oil. These colors help create a cooler and lighter background compared to the previous dark tones. You can explore more about this technique on the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

Why does Richard prefer long bristle brushes for painting the background?

Richard prefers long bristle brushes because they can hold more paint, allowing you to paint longer with a single brush load compared to short bristled brushes. This can be particularly helpful when working on larger areas like the background. For more insights, visit the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How does Richard suggest creating depth in the background trees?

To create depth in the background trees, Richard suggests adding more white and blue as you move further back into the space. This helps create a sense of distance and atmospheric perspective. You can learn more about this technique at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What is the purpose of painting sky holes in the background trees?

Painting sky holes in the background trees helps to create a more realistic and natural look by showing gaps between the branches. This technique adds depth and interest to the painting. For a deeper understanding, check out the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How does Richard adjust the brightness of the sky holes?

Richard adjusts the brightness of the sky holes by using pure white, but he notes that some spots may become too bright. He suggests playing around with the shapes until they resemble tree-like forms. For more detailed guidance, visit <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

15 Tree highlights and color variation

What color is used for the light on the top of the tree?

For the light on the top of the tree, a thick paint mixture with bright yellow, specifically primary yellow, is used. This choice maintains warmth in the color, avoiding a lime green tone. You can explore more about this technique on the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

Why is lime green avoided in this painting?

Lime green is avoided because it lacks the warmth that is desired in the painting. Instead, a bright yellow with warmth is preferred to maintain the desired color tone. For more insights on color choices, visit the lesson's sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What color variation is added to the top of the tree?

A much more blue-green color is mixed and added to the left-hand side of the top of the tree to introduce color variation. This helps create depth and interest in the painting. You can learn more about adding color variation by visiting the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What is the purpose of cleaning the brush before painting the highlights?

The brush is cleaned to prepare for using a lighter color for the highlights on the top of the tree. This ensures that the new color is not muddied by the previous paint, allowing for clear and bright highlights. For further details on painting techniques, check out the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

16 Foreground grass highlights

What type of paint consistency is used for the foreground grass highlights?

For the foreground grass highlights, a very thick paint consistency is used. This thick paint is applied without any walnut medium, allowing for a rich texture on the canvas. You can explore more about this technique on the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How should the paint be applied to achieve the desired effect for the grass highlights?

The paint should be applied with a few light brush strokes to avoid squashing it flat, ensuring the paint remains thick on the canvas. Reloading the brush with new paint frequently helps maintain this texture. For more detailed guidance, visit the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What color mixture is used for the warmer highlights in the foreground grass?

A mixture of yellow ochre, white, and a little bit of green is used to create a much warmer version for the highlights in the foreground grass. This mixture is applied very thickly to enhance the texture. Learn more about this color technique at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How does brush selection affect the painting of grass highlights?

Using a brush with thicker bristles makes it easier to achieve very crisp highlights, as the individual hairs can create the effect of individual pieces of grass sticking out into the light. This technique is further explained on the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

17 Brush technique for variety

How can altering the condition of your brush help in creating random marks?

By intentionally messing up your brushes so that individual hairs poke out, you can easily create more random marks on your canvas. This technique allows for a more varied texture in your painting. For more insights on brush techniques, explore the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

Why is the angle at which you hold your brush important?

The angle at which you hold your brush is crucial because it affects the variety of brush marks you can achieve. Holding your brush at the same angle all the time limits the diversity of strokes you can make. To learn more about mastering brush techniques, visit the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

18 Dry bushes and energetic brushwork

How can I paint dry, weedy bushes in a landscape scene?

To paint dry, weedy bushes, you can mix a lighter brown or orange to apply on top of the bushes, capturing the effect of light hitting them. This creates a nice color contrast against a cooler background. For more detailed guidance, visit the lesson sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What technique should I use to create energetic brushwork for painting bushes?

To achieve energetic brushwork, move your brush very quickly and lightly across the top of the canvas. This technique results in a more energetic and somewhat transparent brush mark, which is ideal for painting subjects like dry, weedy bushes. For further exploration of this technique, check out the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

Why is it important to use a lighter color for the top of the bushes?

Using a lighter color for the top of the bushes is important because it simulates the effect of light catching on them, creating a bright highlight. This not only adds realism but also provides a nice color note against the cooler background, enhancing the overall composition. For more insights on color usage, visit the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

19 Background tree highlights

How do you create the effect of light on the top of background trees?

To create the effect of light on the top of background trees, you can use a green that is actually very blue in hue. This color should be close in value to the color going on top, which helps to suggest light hitting the tops of the trees. For more detailed techniques, you can explore the lesson further at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What is the purpose of using a blue-green color for the background trees?

The blue-green color is used to suggest the light hitting the tops of the background trees. This color choice helps to create a sense of depth and light in the painting. To understand more about color choices and their effects, you can visit the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How do you ensure the highlight on the trees looks continuous?

To make the highlight on the trees look continuous, you follow the highlight area from the right of the tree to the left, making it appear as though it continues behind the tree. This technique helps to create a seamless and natural look. For more insights on creating continuity in your painting, check out the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What additional elements are added to the scene later?

Thin branches of the tree will be added over top of the existing layers a little bit later. This adds detail and complexity to the painting. To see how these elements come together, you can view the complete lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

20 Details in shadows and highlights

What color should be used for the light on the sandbank?

For the light on the sandbank, a very light gray is recommended. This helps to create a subtle yet effective highlight on the sandbank, enhancing its form and texture. You can explore more techniques for painting highlights on the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How can I create sharp details in my painting?

To create sharp details, you can use the sharp edge of your brush to make precise marks. Additionally, using a fine signing brush can help you add intricate details effectively. For more tips on adding details to your paintings, visit the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What technique is suggested for painting weeds in shadow?

A cool grey is suggested for painting weeds that are in shadow. This color choice helps to maintain the subdued tones typical of shadowed areas. You can learn more about painting shadows and their details at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How should I apply paint to create bright highlights?

To create bright highlights, use pretty much pure white for areas in the light. These bright little sparkles can be achieved by using the very tip of the brush to avoid broad marks. For further guidance on painting highlights, check out the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What is the importance of using the brush tip when painting details?

Using the very tip of the brush is crucial for painting fine details, as it prevents the creation of broad marks that can obscure the intricate elements of your painting. This technique allows for precise application of paint, which is essential for adding delicate details. For more detailed instruction, visit the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

21 Key detail branches

Why are the little branches considered a key detail in the painting?

The little branches are a key detail because they are dark and sharp, creating a striking contrast against the bright highlight behind them. This contrast helps to draw attention and add depth to the painting. For more insights on this technique, you can visit the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How does adjusting the color of the branches affect the painting?

By making the branches a little bit lighter and a little bit bluer, you can balance the weight of the tree on the left with these branches. This subtle color adjustment helps integrate the branches into the overall composition while maintaining their role as a key detail. To explore this technique further, check out the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What technique is used to integrate the branches into the foliage?

The technique involves softening the bottom of the branches so they disappear into the foliage. This creates a seamless transition and helps the branches blend naturally into the surrounding elements of the painting. For a deeper dive into this method, visit the sales page at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

22 Final touches and details

How can I add detail to the background of the painting?

You can enhance the background by adding details of dark fallen trees. This adds depth and interest to the scene. For more techniques on adding background details, check out the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What color should I use for the distant sand bank?

A dark bluish grey is recommended for hinting at a distant sand bank. This color helps create a subtle yet effective contrast in the painting. For more color tips, visit the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How can I make the left-hand riverbank more interesting?

Adding a little sand bank in the front of the left-hand riverbank can make it more interesting. This small detail can enhance the composition of your painting. Explore more ways to improve your painting at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What technique should I use for the reflection ripples?

You can block in the reflection ripples with a warm grey. This technique helps to define the reflections and adds warmth to the water. For a deeper dive into this technique, check out the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

What color is suggested for the cast shadows on the riverbank?

A dark bluish grey is suggested for the cast shadows on the riverbank. This color choice helps to create a realistic shadow effect. Learn more about shadow techniques at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

How can I add interest to a big dark space in the painting?

Adding a couple of little branches catching the light can add interest to a big dark space. This creates a dynamic contrast and draws the viewer's eye. For more ideas on adding interest, visit the lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/81-Up-the-Creek>.

Summary & Key Takeaways

In this painting journey, I set out to capture the essence of a serene creek scene, focusing on the interplay of light and shadow, and the striking contrast between the foreground and background. By honing in on key elements like the brightly lit foreground and the shape of the tree, I aimed to create a composition that speaks to the viewer without overwhelming them with too many details. Simplifying the background was crucial in ensuring that the foreground remained the star of the show, allowing the painting to convey a clear and powerful message.

Throughout the process, I experimented with various techniques to enhance depth and interest, such as adjusting the viewing angle and adding subtle variations in color. These adjustments helped to create a more dynamic composition, drawing the viewer's eye to the focal points of the painting. By carefully planning the initial sketch and considering the placement of light and shadow, I was able to establish a strong foundation for the painting, ensuring that each element contributed to the overall harmony of the piece.

As you embark on your own painting adventures, I hope you take away the importance of focusing on key elements, simplifying where necessary, and using color and composition to guide the viewer's eye. Remember, the goal is to create a painting that not only captures the scene but also evokes a sense of place and emotion.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Focus on fewer elements to strengthen the painting's message.
- Simplify the background to enhance the foreground's impact.
- Adjust the viewing angle to create a tighter, more focused composition.
- Use segmented shapes for natural features like stream banks.
- Plan your initial sketch to balance composition and light.
- Mix darkest darks with a touch of color for depth.
- Add color variation in dark areas to avoid flatness.
- Use warm greens for foliage to contrast with cooler backgrounds.

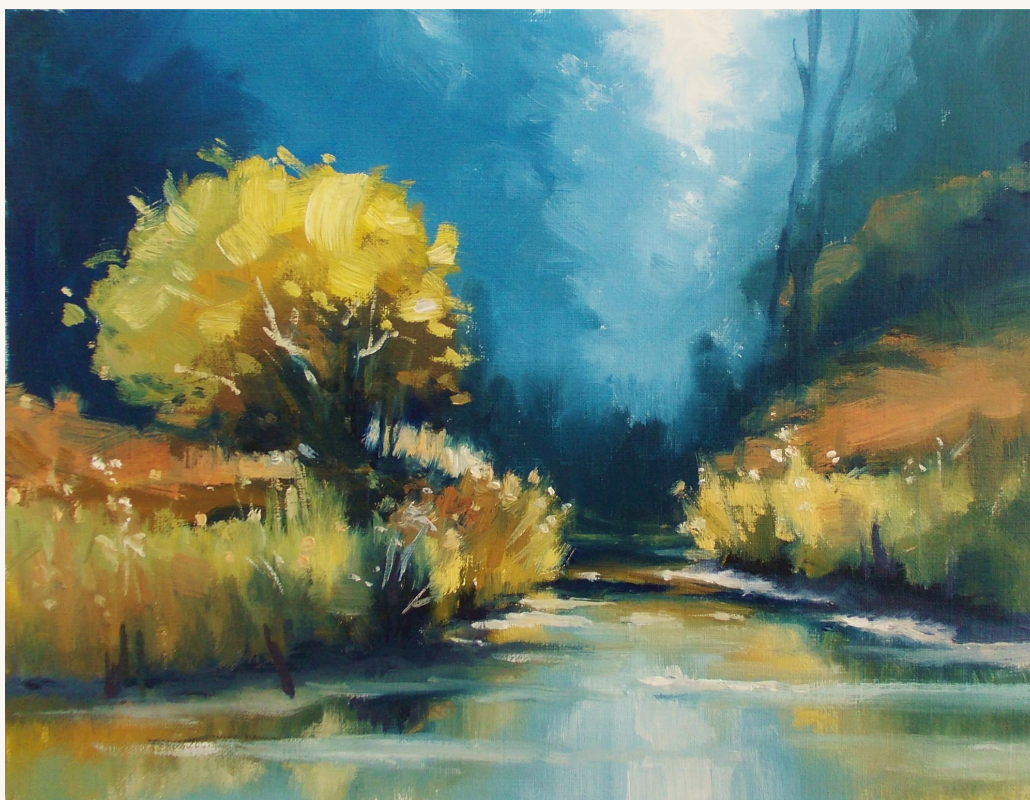


"Up the Creek" 11x14" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson.

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.

"Workshop 37" by Janet Buckton



"Workshop 37" 9x12" Oil on Canvas by Janet Buckton

Bold colour, Janet and lovely and warm in the foreground contrasting with the cool background. I get the feeling the background is a little too blue and could do with a touch of grey-green in it to create some connection with the foreground. My painting is a little guilty of that too. Also the darkest dark in the foreground is too blue making it stand out whereas it should recede beneath the mid values and lights. If the left side of the tree was a little darker it would add more roundness to it - at the moment the value is very similar all over and it's causing it to flatten out a little. You've done very well with your edges creating depth by contrasting sharp edges in the foreground with soft edges in the background. Overall you've made a very good copy of the demo painting and I hope it helps inform your other work in some way.

"Dark Passage 2" by Nancy Sands



"Dark Passage 2" 5x7" Oil on Canvas by Nancy Sands

Hi Nancy, I do like the design of this a lot but unfortunately it's all got a bit muddy and garbled. Your cool darks have mixed with your warm lights through too much dabbing and not keeping your brush clean enough and reloading with fresh colour. Can I suggest you take another look at the demo video and follow the process more strictly of darks, then mid values, then lights. Also the thickness of the paint is important. If you put too much medium in your darks to start with it makes it hard to paint over and if you put too much medium in your lights they'll tend to mix in with the darks. If you give yourself a bigger canvas you'll have more room to move too. You can do it!

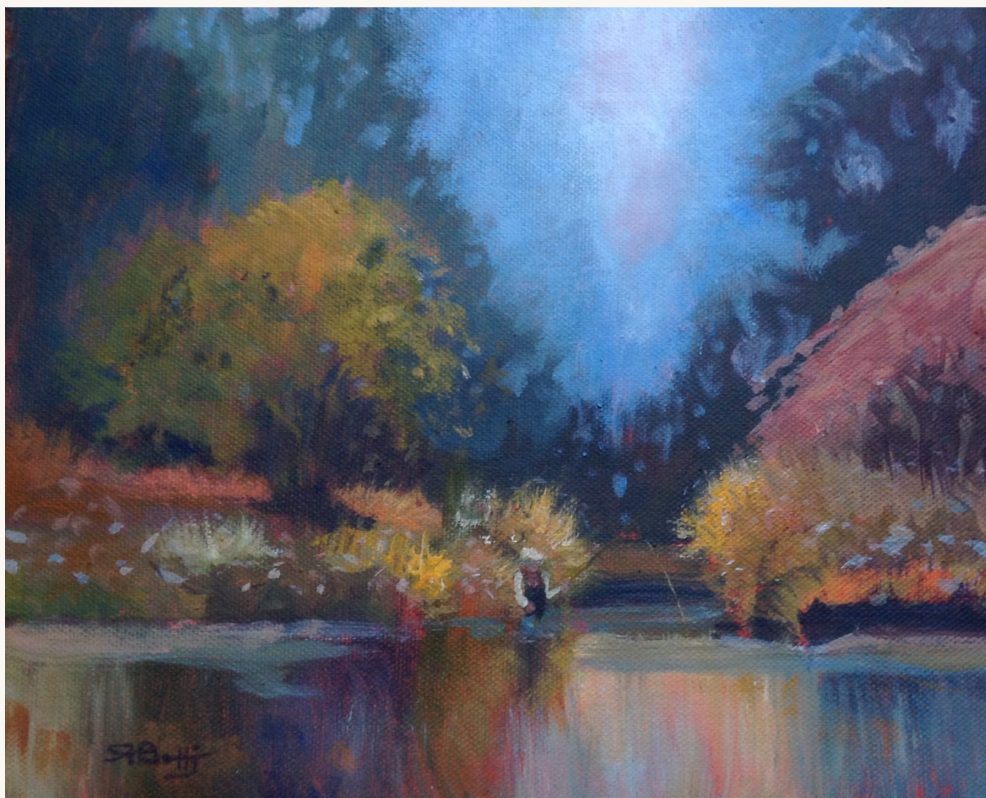
"RR Workshop 37" by Howard Bagley



"RR Workshop 37" 11x14" Acrylic on Canvas by Howard Bagley

Hi Howard, this is a great painting with just a few adjustments needed. Your colour is beautiful and the drawing is good, the brushwork is confident and interesting. Three small changes I'd make would be to add some soft edges and small details to the edge of the green tree, make the background shapes a little more tree-ish, and make the white flowers/weeds smaller in the background. That's it. Otherwise, great work!

“Anglers Retreat” by Sarah Bottjer



"Anglers Retreat" 8x10" Acrylic on Canvas by Sarah Bottjer

Hi Sarah, there's a real jolly feeling to this piece caused largely by the warm colours in the foreground and the sparking little details throughout. The figure is a nice addition too but unfortunately he's about a third the size he should be compared to the rest of the scene which gives him the appearance of a garden gnome.

The value structure of the painting is good, including the depth you've created in the background, though the V shape there is a little too regular and the sky holes are creating more of a lacework pattern than actual tree shapes. That blue sky should also be reflected in the water. By flattening out the base of the river banks you've lost some of the shape interest. A few things to look at but overall a good result.