



Tuscan Fields

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/79-Tuscan-Fields>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

As I settle back into my studio after a memorable trip to Italy, I find myself inspired by the enchanting landscapes of Tuscany. This chapter invites you to join me in capturing the essence of these idyllic Tuscan fields, reminiscent of Monet's Poppy Fields from 1837. While none of my photos from the trip are perfect as standalone paintings, they provide a rich tapestry of elements that we can weave together to create a captivating scene. Imagine a classic Tuscan landscape with its rolling hills, stately poplar trees, and a charming stone house perched on the ridge. We'll explore how to enhance this scene by incorporating figures strategically placed in light against a darker backdrop, adding dynamic contrast and interest. Through a series of sketches and value studies, you'll learn to highlight the interplay of light and shadow, creating a spotlight effect that draws the viewer's eye. By breaking up the sky with mid-ground trees and extending fields to form pathways, we'll add depth and narrative to our painting. This chapter will guide you in transforming a simple sketch into a vibrant composition, complete with poppies in the foreground to enrich the story and invite viewers into this timeless landscape.



Tuscan Fields - Closeup



REFERENCE PHOTO 1

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 2

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 3

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 4

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
- 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 Scene Description and Initial Sketch



Visualize the Scene

Imagine a classic Tuscan landscape with a sloped hillside, tree forms, a stone house on the ridge, poplar trees, and distant mountains. This iconic scene sets the stage for your painting.

Plan the Composition

Consider adding figures to the scene to enhance interest. Place them in the light against a darker background to create contrast. Think about including strong light areas and darker bands for dynamic visual interest.

Create a Thumbnail Sketch

Draw a small sketch focusing on a dark background with a light field in the foreground. Position figures strategically to draw attention. Use this sketch to guide your composition and value study.

Develop a Value Study

Transform your sketch into a value study. Highlight the contrast between light and dark areas, creating a spotlight effect. Break up the sky shape with a tree in the mid-ground to add depth.

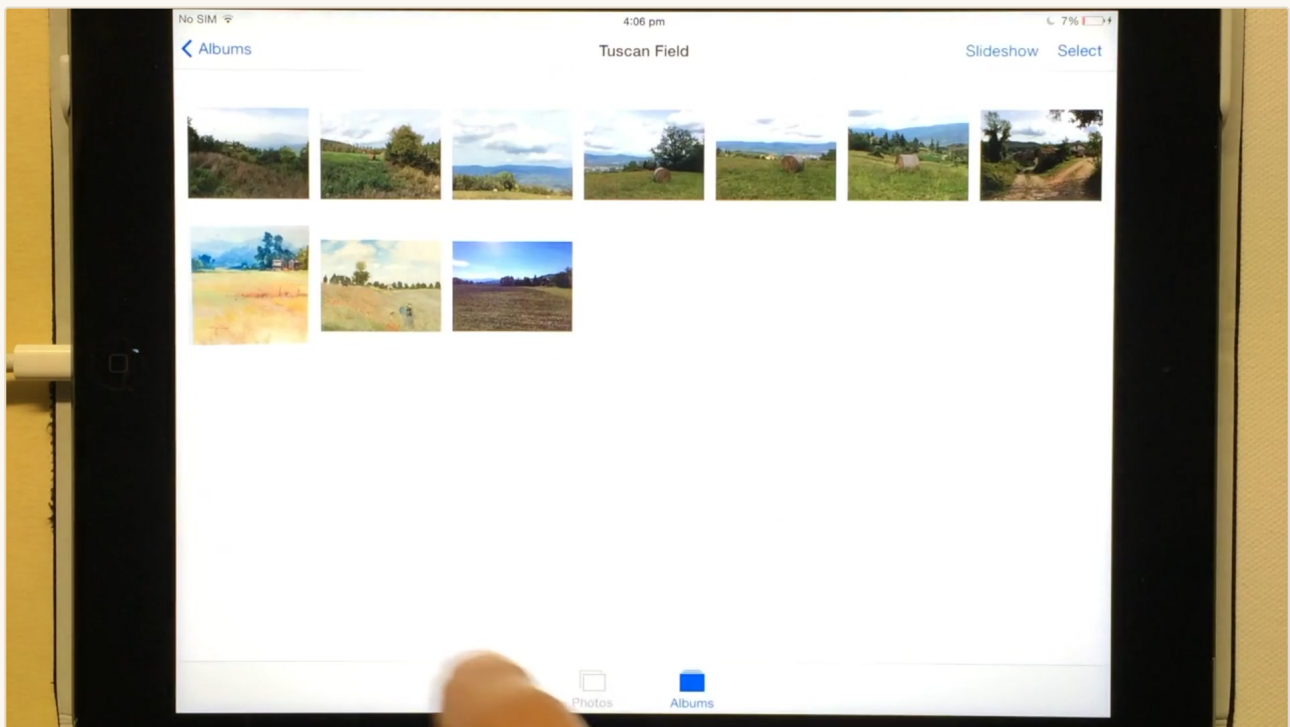
Enhance Depth and Interest

Extend the field behind bushes to create depth and a pathway. Consider adding poppies in the foreground to give the figures a destination and enhance the scene's narrative.

PRO TIP

Use figures in the light against a dark background to create strong contrast and focal points.

2 Design Process and Value Study



Explore the Photos

Examine the available photos of the Tuscan scene on the online resource page. Use them to gather inspiration and details for your painting. Feel free to copy and paste elements that appeal to you, but aim to create something uniquely yours.

Design and Value Study

Before starting with color, focus on designing your composition and conducting a black and white value study. This step helps you understand the tonal range and balance of your painting, setting a strong foundation for your color work.

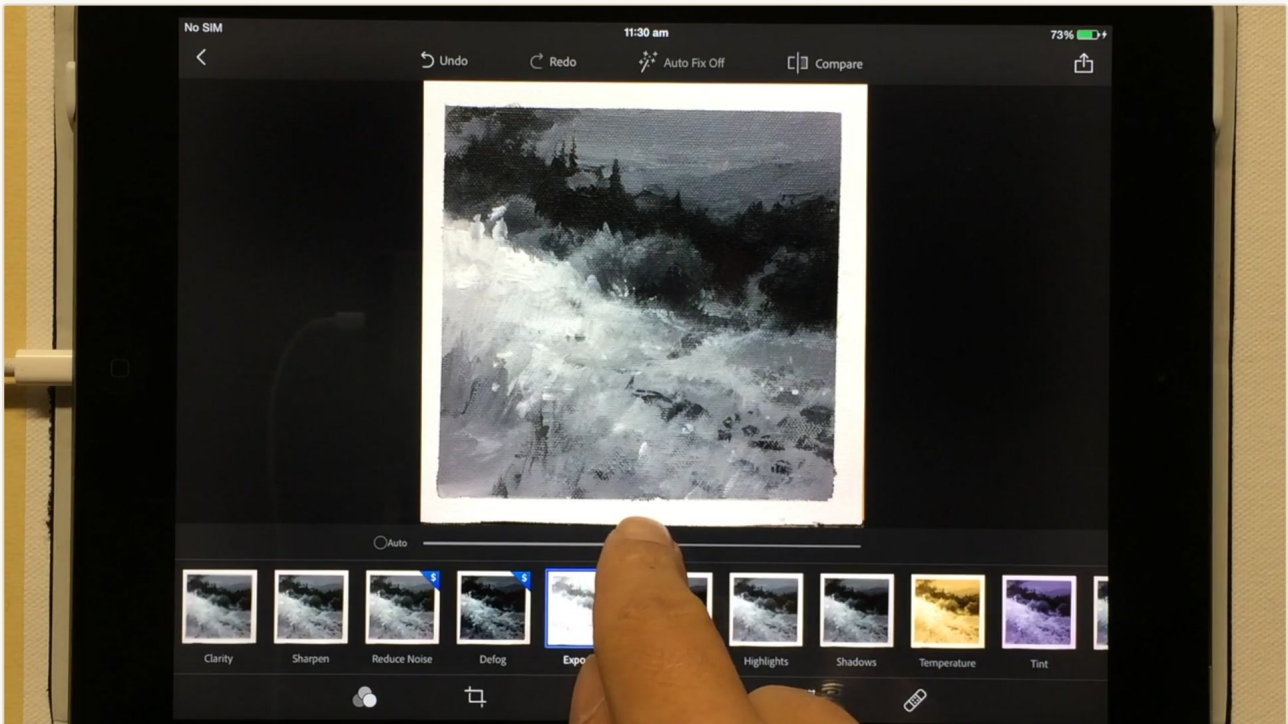
Consider Digital Adjustments

After completing your value or color study, photograph it and use a computer to experiment with adjustments. This allows you to make significant changes quickly, eliminating the need for numerous small studies to refine your vision.

PRO TIP

Conduct a black and white value study to establish tonal balance before adding color.

3 Digital Adjustments and Design Considerations



Adjust Exposure for Mood

Change the exposure to alter the mood of your painting. Lowering the exposure creates a mysterious, moody feel, while increasing it results in a sunnier, more playful atmosphere. Choose the exposure setting that best suits the mood you wish to convey.

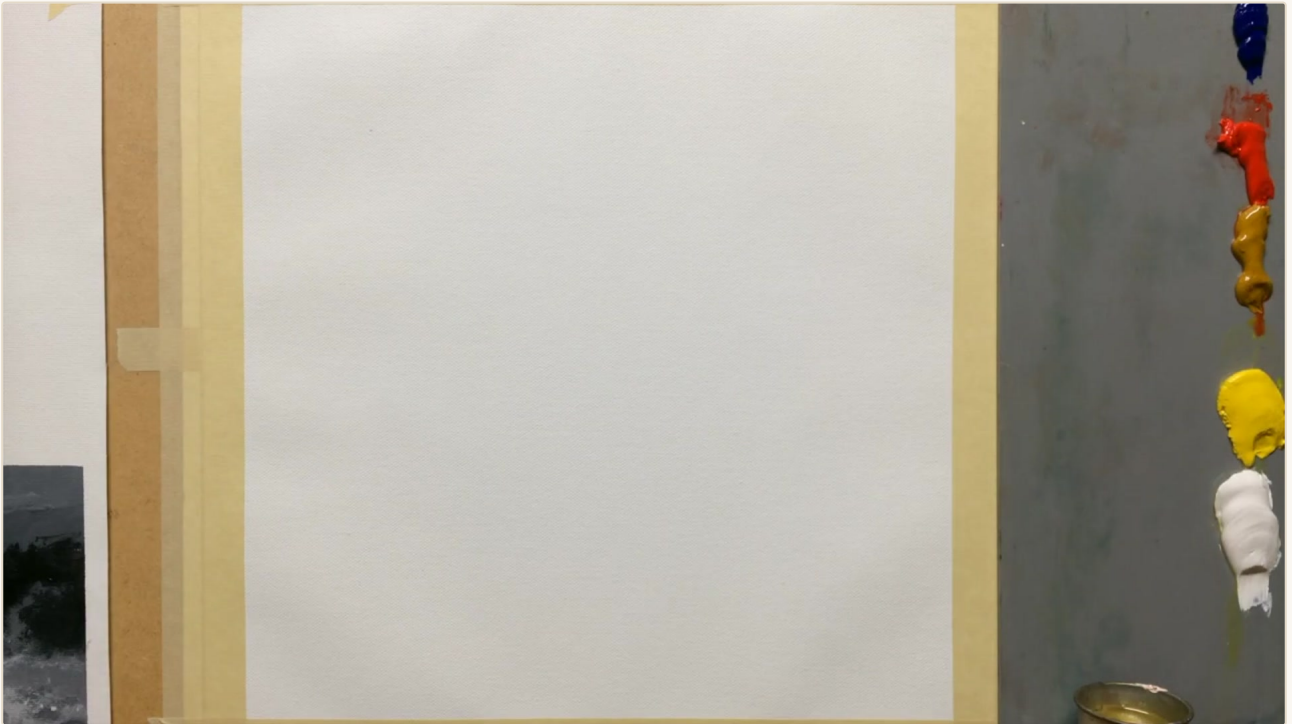
Understand No Tan Studies

When designing with no tan studies, focus on the relationship between dark and light shapes. Remember that dark shapes in your study don't have to be black in your painting. Ensure there is a clear distinction between darks and lights, but feel free to adjust the darkness of the shapes as needed.

PRO TIP

Adjust exposure to explore different moods in your painting, from mysterious to playful.

4 Materials and Canvas Preparation



Select Your Canvas

Choose a 12-inch square canvas for this painting. Use an Ultra Smooth canvas by Fredericks for its fine weave and smooth finish.

Prepare Your Palette

Set up your palette with water-mixable oils. Ensure you have a range of colors ready for your painting.

Gather Your Brushes

Use a few size 8 bristle brushes. Designate one brush for dark areas, one for light areas, and a small brush for detail work.

Set Up Your Painting Medium

Have a palette knife and walnut oil ready as your painting medium. Keep the walnut oil in a small pot for easy access.

PRO TIP

Use an Ultra Smooth canvas for a fine, smooth finish that enhances your painting's detail.

5 Initial Sketch on Canvas



Prepare Your Brush and Paint

Mix red and blue together with plenty of walnut oil. Use a big brush to ensure broad, expressive strokes.

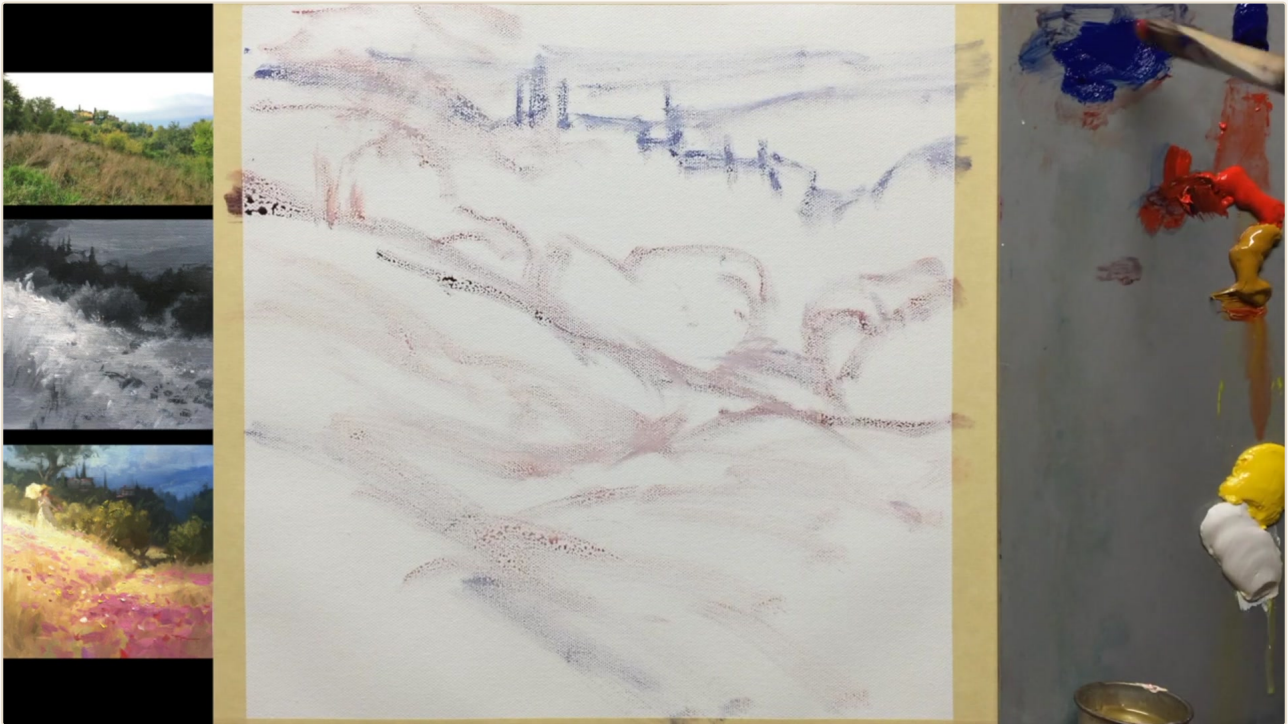
Sketch the Big Shapes

Focus on sketching the large shapes on your canvas. Refer to your thumbnail sketches and grayscale study to guide your composition.

PRO TIP

Use a big brush to quickly lay in the major shapes without getting caught up in details.

6 Blocking in Dark Areas



Mix the Darkest Dark

Combine blue, red, and yellow ochre to create a very dark mixture. Add a bit of walnut oil to thin it, ensuring it's just thick enough to cover the canvas.

Block in the Background

Use large strokes to block in the background area with the dark mixture. Focus on indicating the shapes of poplar trees without worrying about detail.

Modify the Color

As you move to the right, add a little blue to the mixture to vary the color. This suggests the land is further away and affected by the bluish atmospheric color.

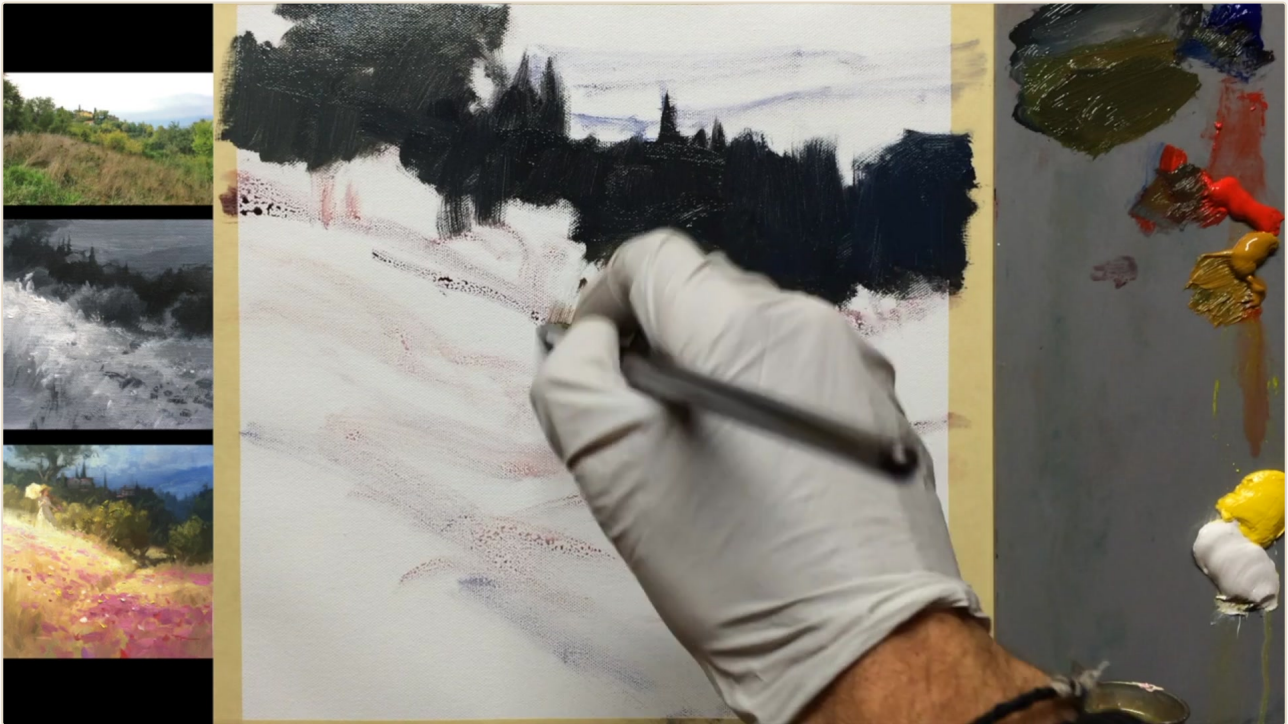
Lighten the Left Side

On the left, closer to the light source, lighten the color slightly by adding warmer tones like red and yellow. This begins to create a light haze or glow, suggesting light filling the space.

PRO TIP

Use large strokes to block in areas without focusing on detail, allowing for a more expressive and dynamic background.

7 Painting Dark Greens and Shadows



Paint Dark Greens in Shadows

Focus on the shadow areas of the main clump of bushes in the foreground. Use yellow ochre instead of bright yellow, reserving the latter for highlights. Follow the dark to light process, starting with the darkest shadows before moving to midtones and lights.

Add Variation to Bushes

Modify the color slightly as you move from bush to bush to create variation. On the left side, make the color a bit lighter and warmer to suggest a glowing light area.

Create Textured Highlights

Mix a thick paint with a little bright yellow and apply it using the side of your brush. This technique will give a textured finish and suggest light on the tops of the bushes.

Indicate Shadows and Path

Use a dark neutral grey to paint the shadow cast by the bush onto the grass. This color can also indicate a path through the grass with slight shadows.

Enhance Warm Glow

To make the field glow with warm color, use a dark warm grey slightly lighter than the base dark green. This will suggest warm color bouncing into the shadow areas of the trees.

PRO TIP

Use the side of your brush to apply thick paint for a textured finish on highlights.

8 Background and Sky Painting



Paint Distant Hills

Use a clean brush to mix blue, red, and white for the distant hills. Carefully apply this mixture, avoiding contact with the dark mixture in front to prevent contamination. Clean and reload the brush frequently to maintain color purity.

Create Sky Color

Mix white and a little bright yellow into the blue to create the sky color. Add walnut oil to keep the paint thin, allowing for later adjustments. Paint around the shapes with a very soft edge to push the scene into the distance.

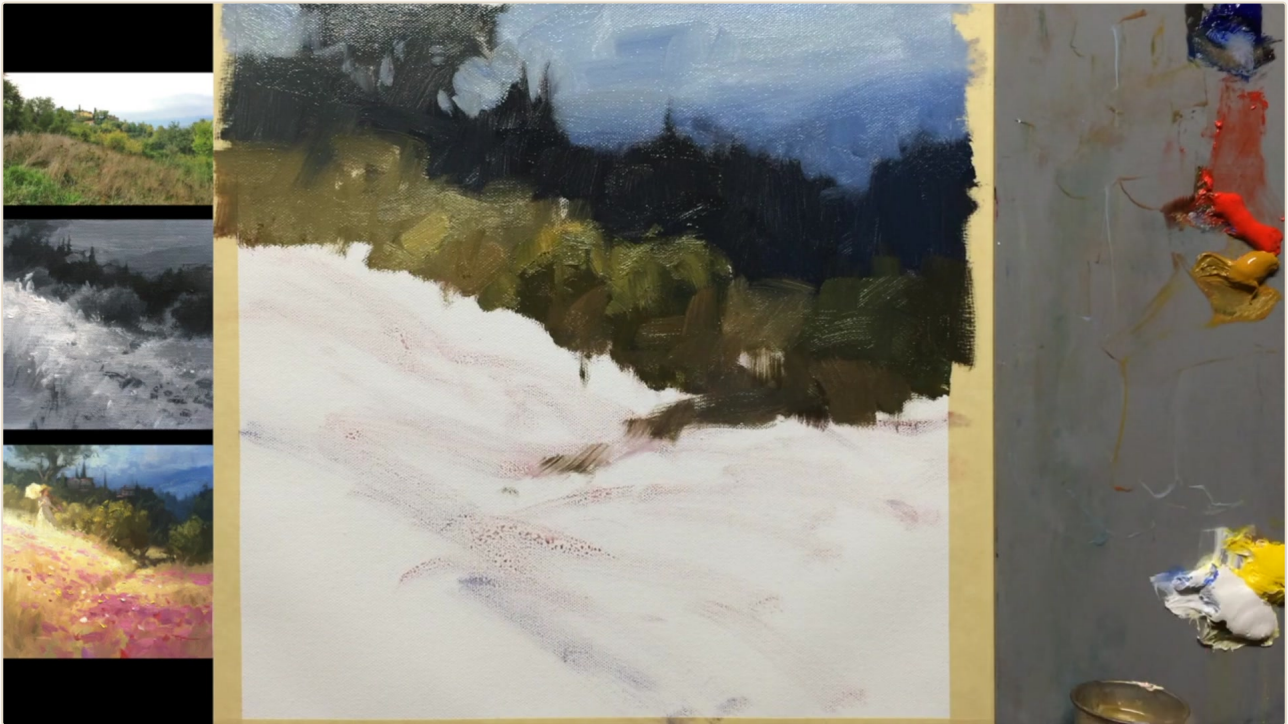
Lighten and Warm the Sky

Lighten and warm the sky by adding white and red to the mixture. Focus on the left side, which should be warmer and lighter as it is closer to the sun. Add a couple of small sky holes in the dark tree mass to enhance the effect.

PRO TIP

Keep the brush clean and frequently reloaded to maintain the purity of the color when painting distant hills.

9 Foreground and Light Areas



Prepare the Foreground

Use a large brush to start on the foreground. Begin with yellow ochre, noting that it is a mid-value color. Add a lot of white to create a glowing light effect in the foreground field.

Apply Thin Mixture

Mix in a generous amount of walnut oil to achieve a very thin mixture. Brush it on quickly to establish big dark shapes, ensuring the color has slight modifications for added interest.

Introduce Light Variations

As you move into the light areas, maintain a similar value while changing the hue slightly. This adds variation and prevents monotony in the painting.

Adjust Brush Strokes

Ensure grass clump shapes get smaller and thinner as they recede into the distance. Use larger brush strokes in the foreground compared to the background for a sense of depth.

PRO TIP

Add walnut oil to create a thin mixture for glowing light effects in the foreground.

10 Adding Texture and Details



Create a Warm Transition

Add a warm color to the transition area between the light and dark in the background. This will give the appearance of a glow into the dark background.

Add Texture with a Toothbrush

Use a toothbrush with some water on it to flick paint into the foreground. Dab it with a tissue to pull off a little bit of paint, creating interesting texture.

Enhance Texture with Paint Flicking

Load the toothbrush with paint and flick it onto the canvas. This method adds additional texture that enhances the visual interest.

Extend the Field into the Background

Paint the extension of the field into the background behind the trees. While doing this, create small holes in the trees to show the field in the back, adding sparkly interest that draws the eye.

PRO TIP

Use a toothbrush to flick paint and create unique textures that can't be achieved with a brush.

11 Refining Foreground and Background Shapes



Refine Foreground Shapes

Add more definition to the shadow shapes and highlights in the foreground. Focus on creating a soft edge to the left and a sharper edge towards the bottom. If the edge is too sharp, use an intermediate color to soften it.

Adjust Tree Highlights

Experiment with adding punchier highlights to the tree. If the highlights appear out of place, scrape them off. Don't hesitate to remove elements that don't feel right.

Differentiate Foreground and Background

Ensure the foreground and background shapes are distinct. Increase the size of the foreground bush to create a more interesting background shape.

PRO TIP

Use an intermediate color to soften overly sharp edges.

12 Enhancing Background and Tree Details



Intensify the Background Blue

Add a more intense blue to the background. Keep your brush clean to avoid picking up dark paint, and refill it often. This will help maintain the purity of the blue and prevent muddying the colors.

Paint Tall Poplar Trees

Use the edge of a large brush to paint tall, pointy poplar trees. This technique provides a more gestural effect and avoids the need for a small brush.

Mix and Apply Mid-Grey for Stone Buildings

Mix a slightly warm mid-grey for the stone buildings on the hill. Ensure the color is not too warm or bright, as these areas are in shadow and should not stand out. Add a bit more red to the mixture for the rooftops and include a few small windows to finish off the buildings.

Add Highlights to Background Trees

Mix a green that is slightly lighter and greener than the background blue. Apply highlights to the left side of the bushes or trees, as the light is coming from the left. This adds detail and realism to the background.

PRO TIP

Use the edge of a large brush to create gestural effects for tall trees, avoiding the need for a small brush.

13 Adding Flowers and Foreground Details



Mix Flower Colors

Add magenta to your palette for the flowers and grasses. If you don't have magenta, use alizarin crimson. Mix in ultramarine blue and white to create a nice violet tone.

Adjust Color Tone

To ensure the violet tones blend well with the glowing areas in the grass and foreground, add a little yellow. This will help the colors not stand out too much.

Apply Light and Dark Mixtures

Use lighter color mixtures in the glowing areas and darker mixtures as you move into the foreground. This creates depth and interest in your painting.

Paint Flowers

Add a few poppies using red, and include some yellow and white flowers for added interest. Focus on painting large clumps or areas of flowers with a few individual flowers extending from them.

PRO TIP

Use larger brush strokes in the foreground and smaller ones in the background to create depth.

14 Painting the Figure



Study the Figure

Examine Manet's figure closely to understand the accuracy in drawing and detail in coloring. Conduct a small study on your palette to solve potential issues before starting the final painting.

Begin with the Parasol

Mix yellow ochre and white to capture the sunlit effect on the creamy white parasol. This sets the tone for the light source in your painting.

Paint the Dress Shadows

Use a warm grey for the shadow side of the white dress, reflecting the warm light bouncing from the grasses. Apply a slightly lighter, cooler grey for the reflected light from the sky.

Highlight the Dress

For the light on the dress, use mainly white with a touch of yellow. Apply thick paint to emphasize the light on the side of the dress, the hat, and the arm.

Add Finishing Details

Soften the edges at the bottom of the figure to blend it into the grasses. Add small details like the parasol handle and a bunch of flowers to complete the figure.

PRO TIP

Conduct a small study on your palette to solve potential issues before starting the final painting.

Summary & Key Takeaways

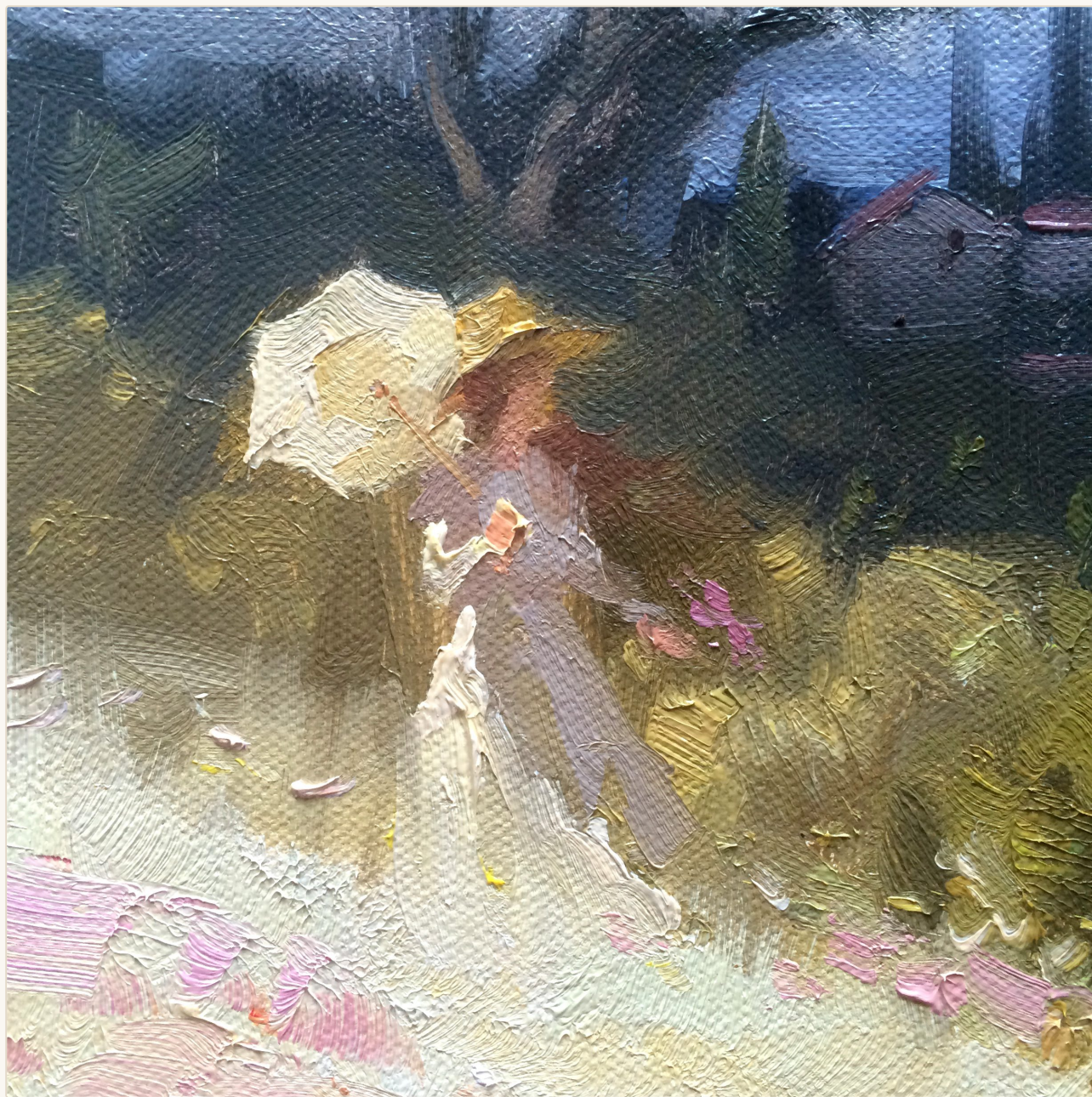
Embark on your Tuscan Fields painting by envisioning the classic landscape with its rolling hills, stone houses, and iconic poplar trees. Begin with a small sketch to establish your composition and value study, focusing on the contrast between light and dark areas to create dynamic interest. Use figures strategically to enhance the narrative and draw attention.

Move into the design process by conducting a black and white value study, which will help you understand the tonal balance and set a strong foundation for your color work. Experiment with digital adjustments to explore different moods and refine your vision before committing to the canvas.

As you transition to painting, prepare your materials and canvas, and start with broad strokes to block in major shapes. Gradually build up the scene by adding texture and details, ensuring a harmonious blend of colors and values. Pay attention to the interplay of light and shadow, and use creative techniques like flicking paint with a toothbrush to add unique textures. Finish with careful attention to foreground details and figures, ensuring they integrate seamlessly into the landscape.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use figures in the light against a dark background to create strong contrast.
- Conduct a black and white value study to establish tonal balance before adding color.
- Adjust exposure to explore different moods in your painting.
- Use an Ultra Smooth canvas for a fine, smooth finish that enhances detail.
- Use a big brush to quickly lay in the major shapes without getting caught up in details.
- Use large strokes to block in areas without focusing on detail.
- Keep the brush clean and frequently reloaded to maintain the purity of the color.
- Use larger brush strokes in the foreground and smaller ones in the background to create depth.

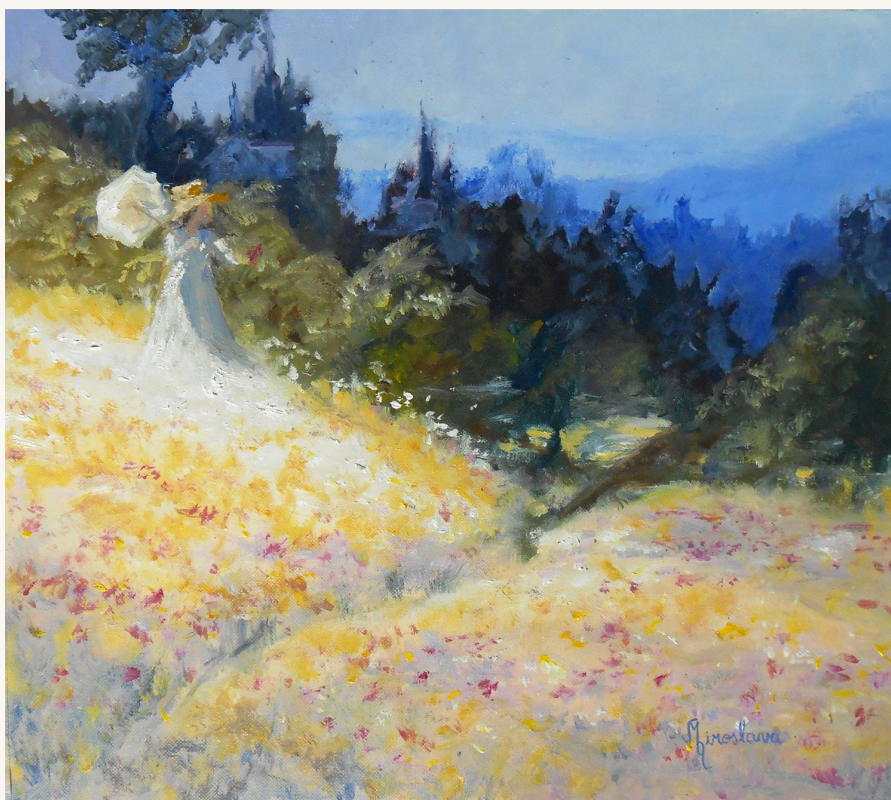


Tuscan Fields - Closeup

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.

"Monet's Lady in Tuscany" by **Silvana M Albano**



"Monet's Lady in Tuscany" 28x30" Oil on Paper by Silvana M Albano

Hi Silvana, good work here. You've keep the value pattern of the painting strong and given it some punchy colour although I don't think the greys in the foreground are helping at all because they're all the same value as the yellows there so it loses its sense of form. Below is the greyscale comparison of yours versus mine so you can see what I mean. Another thing that's a little confusing is the lighter blue shapes within your dark trees behind the green bushes. Not sure if those are intended to be holes or lighter accents on the trees. Your figure is good although the head could be a little smaller - something I'm often guilty of too. That little dark strip on the path leading into the bushes looks a little odd, not least of all because it joins in a straight line to the bush on the right. Needs looking at. Just a few things to think about. Good work!

"Tuscany Homes" by Laura Xu



"Tuscany Homes" 11x14" Oil on Board by Laura Xu

Nice work Laura! You've managed to get a real impressionist look to this painting with your bold brushwork and broken colour, especially in the road and the sky. It's a strong design with large simple shapes though I'd like to see the edges of the road broken up more to add to the rustic charm of the place. The flower edging is a nice touch and I especially like the shape of your large tree on the left - really nice and varied with just enough detail to express the character of the tree. Your major hills are copying each other - always an easy trap to fall into. The drawing of the central barn is good but the other is a little off because the apex of the roof is too far to the right. Also you could have made the dark side of that building a touch darker to help with the form. Overall really a really nice result with just a few things to tweak.

“Tuscan Farm Scene” by Jessica Futerman



"Tuscan Farm Scene" Oil on Canvas by Jessica Futerman

A really pleasant scene Jessica with a lot going for it. The big fluid shapes are appealing, if a little oversimplified. The colour is strong, the greyed sky making the foreground look all that more colourful and inviting. Your poppies are well painted as is the shadow effect cast onto the distant hills by the low cloud. The subtle darker shapes in your field are receding as they should because they're not clearly getting thinner and closer together further away. That's the main reason the field is looking a bit flat, and also that the pathway isn't thinning out much as it approaches the buildings. Rethinking the path and the field would do wonders for this painting as that seems to be the weak link.

"Tuscan Fields" by Valerie Kenward-Harrison



"Tuscan Fields" 12x12" Oil on Canvas by Valerie Kenward-Harrison

Good work Valerie, I can see the effort and struggle that's gone into this one. The green bushes have all become very similar in size and their layout is echoed by the dark hill behind and then again by the distant hills which all conspires to remove variety from the design - something our brain does automatically because it loves to put things in nice tidy rows so we must fight it constantly when painting. One place I failed in this too in my painting was where I put the tree directly above the figure which gives the feeling that she might be balancing it on her head. You've dutifully followed my poor example so I can't blame you for that one but it's a good lesson for us both. I like your lost edge in the mountains but you've muddled and muddled the sky around the tree which negates the recession you gained with the lost edge. Your figure's good, if a little laboured and too dark in the shadows which cancels out the glowing effect you so carefully created in the grasses there. Also you could have softened some more of the edges of the green bushes to stop them looking like cutouts. Your flowers are good but have become a little muddled around the edges and could do with some grass painting back in to cover some of the greys there and define a few edges. Overall a good effort with just a few things to look at.