



# Gondola in Venice

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A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/76-Gondola-in-Venice>

MY PAINTING CLUB

# Introduction

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When I first encountered Monet's unfinished gondola painting, I was captivated by the strength of its design and the simple elegance of its dark shapes and negative spaces. Yet, it lacked the light and color that Monet would have infused into it, making it a piece yearning to be completed. In this chapter, we embark on an exciting journey to finish what Monet started, imagining how his final vision of Venice might have looked. By examining Monet's other Venetian works, I crafted a sketch in Photoshop, combining elements from two of his paintings and introducing light into the foreground. Together, we'll explore the techniques needed to bring this scene to life, honoring the grand master of Impressionism. As you follow along, I encourage you to delve into Monet's Venice paintings, available on our online resource page, and perhaps even devise your own interpretation of this enchanting scene. Let this be a reminder that even Monet found new subjects challenging, and with perseverance, we too can capture the beauty of Venice on canvas.





*"Gondola in Venice" 11x14" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson after Claude Monet.*





**REFERENCE PHOTO 1**

*The scene as Richard found it.*





**REFERENCE PHOTO 2**

*The scene as Richard found it.*

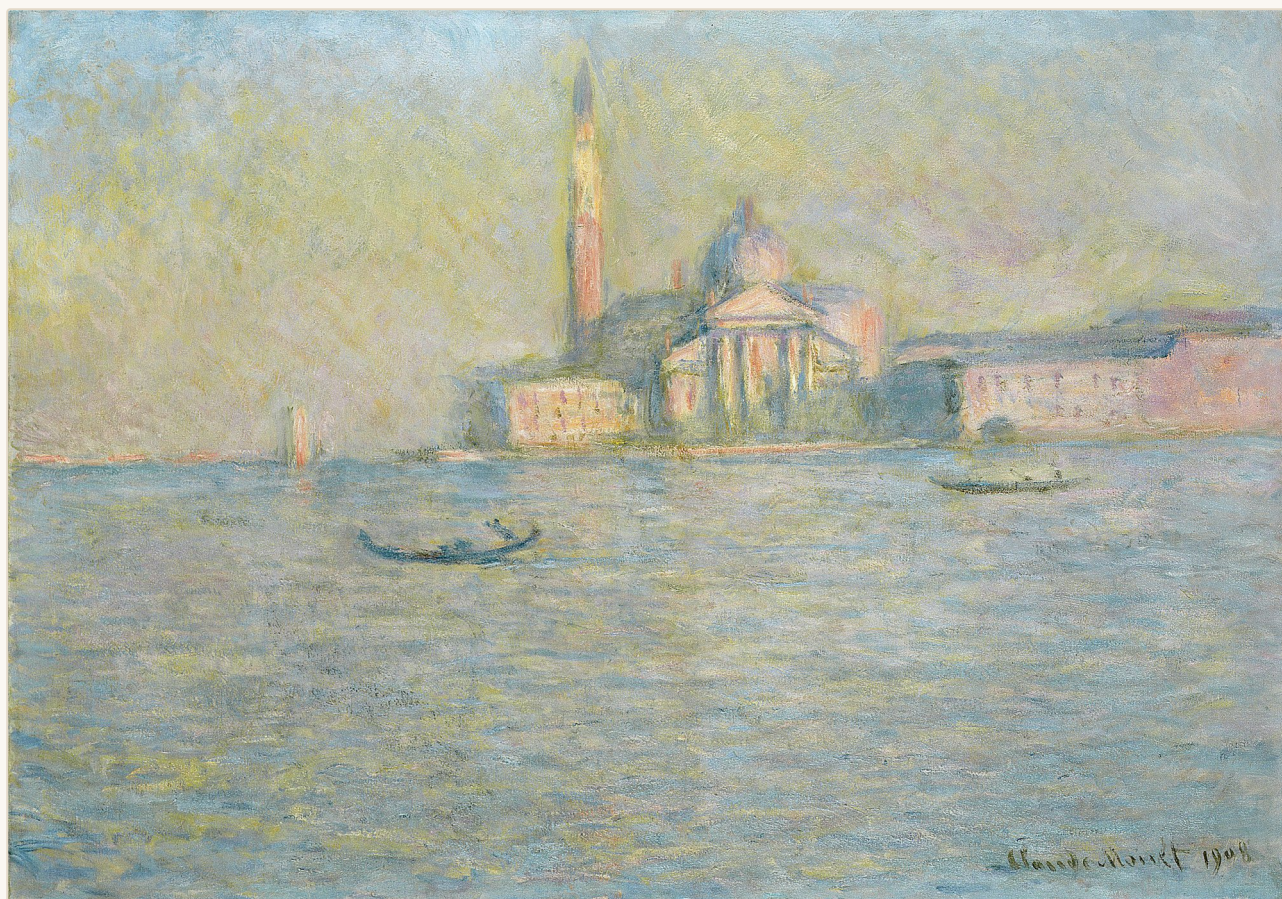




**REFERENCE PHOTO 3**

*The scene as Richard found it.*





**REFERENCE PHOTO 4**

*The scene as Richard found it.*



# Materials

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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 Monet's Venice Experience



## Understand Monet's Venice Experience

Reflect on how Claude Monet, at 68, was initially hesitant to paint Venice due to its popularity among artists. Consider how he was inspired by the city's beauty, leading him to create 37 paintings during his two-month stay.

## Embrace New Challenges

Acknowledge that Monet, despite his experience with water lilies, found painting Venice challenging at first. Use this as encouragement to persevere when faced with new subjects in your own work.

### PRO TIP

*Allow yourself time to adjust and find inspiration when painting new scenery, just as Monet did in Venice.*

## 2 Monet's Unfinished Gondola Sketch



### Understand Monet's Approach

Consider Monet's unfinished gondola sketch as an example of how an artist may choose to leave a piece incomplete. Reflect on the reasons an artist might abandon a painting, such as time constraints or a shift in creative focus.

### Embrace Unfinished Work

Recognize the value in unfinished work. It can offer insight into the artist's process and intention, and sometimes leaving a piece incomplete can add to its intrigue and narrative.

#### PRO TIP

*Reflect on the reasons an artist might leave a painting unfinished, as it can provide valuable insight into the creative process.*



### 3 Recreating Monet's Sketch



#### Prepare the Canvas

Tone your canvas with a light pinkish color using an acrylic wash. This will provide a warm base similar to Monet's approach.

#### Sketch the Scene

Mix a slightly purplish color to begin sketching. If you're unsure of your drawing skills, consider using the grid method to transfer the drawing onto your canvas.

#### Adjust Shapes with Lighter Paint

Add white to your sketching color to adjust and refine the shapes. This technique helps to define the composition more clearly.

#### Create Color Harmony

Incorporate a warm yellowish mixture into the water area. This will suggest a color harmony between the warm background and cooler foreground, enhancing the overall balance of the painting.

#### PRO TIP

*Use a light pinkish acrylic wash to tone your canvas before sketching.*

## 4 Background Composition Choices



### Select a Background

Choose a background that adds interest and drama to your painting. Consider using the church of the Santa Maria della Salute for a striking effect.

### Layer Your Paint

Apply several layers of thick paint to build up texture and complexity. This technique can be done over multiple sessions or in one, depending on your preference.

#### PRO TIP

*Use thick, broken paint to achieve a complex surface similar to traditional techniques.*



## 5 Painting the Church and Water



### Paint the Church Shadows

Mix blue and white with a tiny touch of magenta to create a very light mixture. Apply this to the shadow areas of the church, keeping in mind that the church is far in the distance with air in between. This will help it sit back in the painting.

### Extend Blue into the Water

Continue the blue from the church down into the water. As the water comes closer to you, gradually darken the blue by adding more blue, a touch of alizarin, and yellow ochre. This creates a sense of depth as the water appears to come forward.

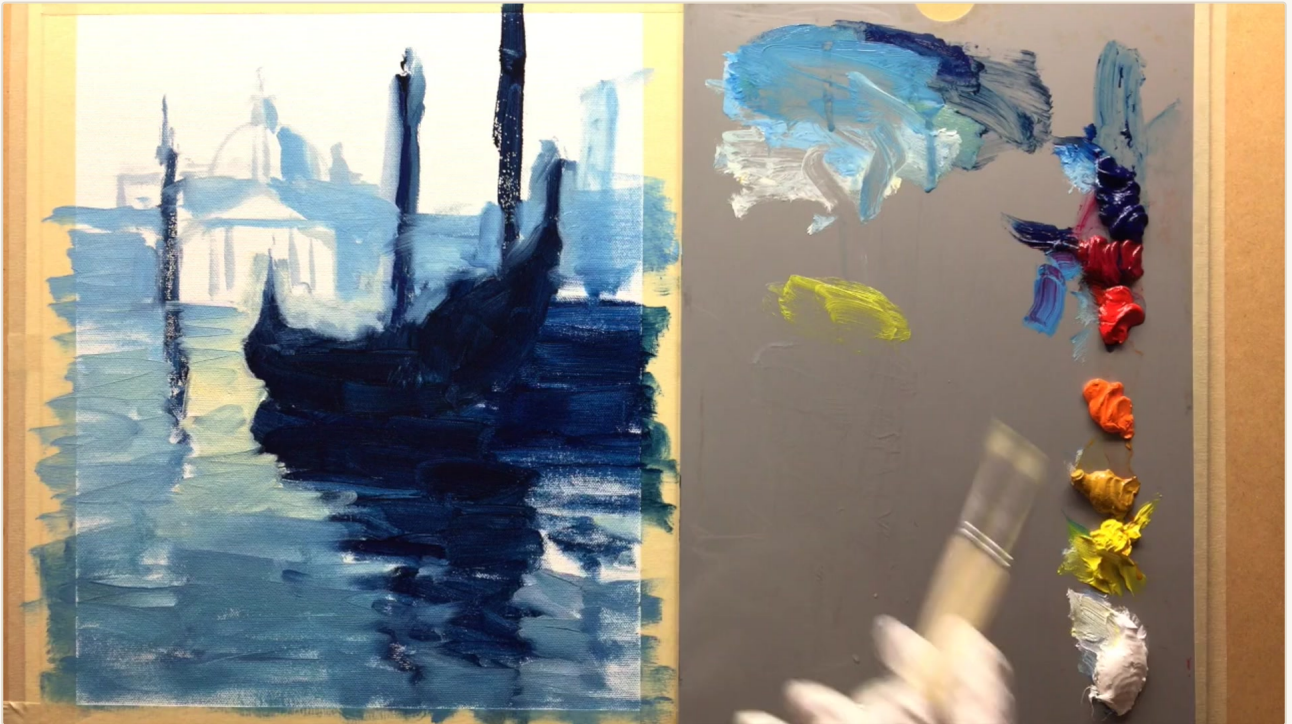
### Adjust Brush Strokes for Depth

Use larger brush strokes for areas closer to you, which are lower on the canvas. Make the strokes smaller as they move higher up or further away. This technique enhances the depth of the painting.

#### PRO TIP

*Use larger brush strokes for areas closer to you to create depth.*

## 6 Painting the Warm Sky



### Create a Warm Sky Base

Mix primary yellow with white to achieve a warm, light color. Apply this mixture thinly across the sky area, ensuring a clean brush to avoid muddying the colors against the dark areas already painted.

### Highlight the Building and Water

Use the same yellow-white mixture to add sunlight highlights on the front of the building. Extend this warm color down into the water to reflect the sky's warmth.

#### PRO TIP

*Keep your brush clean when transitioning between light and dark areas to maintain color purity.*



## 7 Adding Warm Light to Gondola



### Prepare the Surface

Wipe out the dark blue paint from the areas where you want to add warm light. This will create a clear space for the new colors to stand out.

### Apply Pure Yellow

Start at the top of the gondola where the sun is strongest. Use pure yellow to capture the intensity of the sunlight.

### Transition Through Warm Colors

As you move down towards the shadow, gradually transition from yellow to oranges, reds, and mauves. This will create a natural gradient of warm light.

#### PRO TIP

*Wipe away dark paint to make room for vibrant warm colors.*

## 8 Maintaining Drawing Accuracy



### Maintain Drawing Accuracy

Keep a close eye on the drawing accuracy as you work with loose brushwork. This ensures that the overall composition remains true to your initial sketch.

### Reflect Warm Light in Water

Incorporate the warm light into the water reflections, but remember that these reflections are often slightly darker than the source. This adds depth and realism to your painting.

### Observe Monet's Brushwork

Study Monet's fluid and circular brushwork, which is more rhythmic compared to straighter strokes. Try to incorporate this fluidity into your painting for a more dynamic feel.

#### PRO TIP

*Reflect the warm light in the water with slightly darker tones to maintain depth.*



## 9 Painting the Church with Texture



### Create Color Transitions

As the faces of the church move into the sun, transition the colors through the spectrum. Start with blues, then move to reds, and finally into yellows. This will mimic the natural lighting and add depth to your painting.

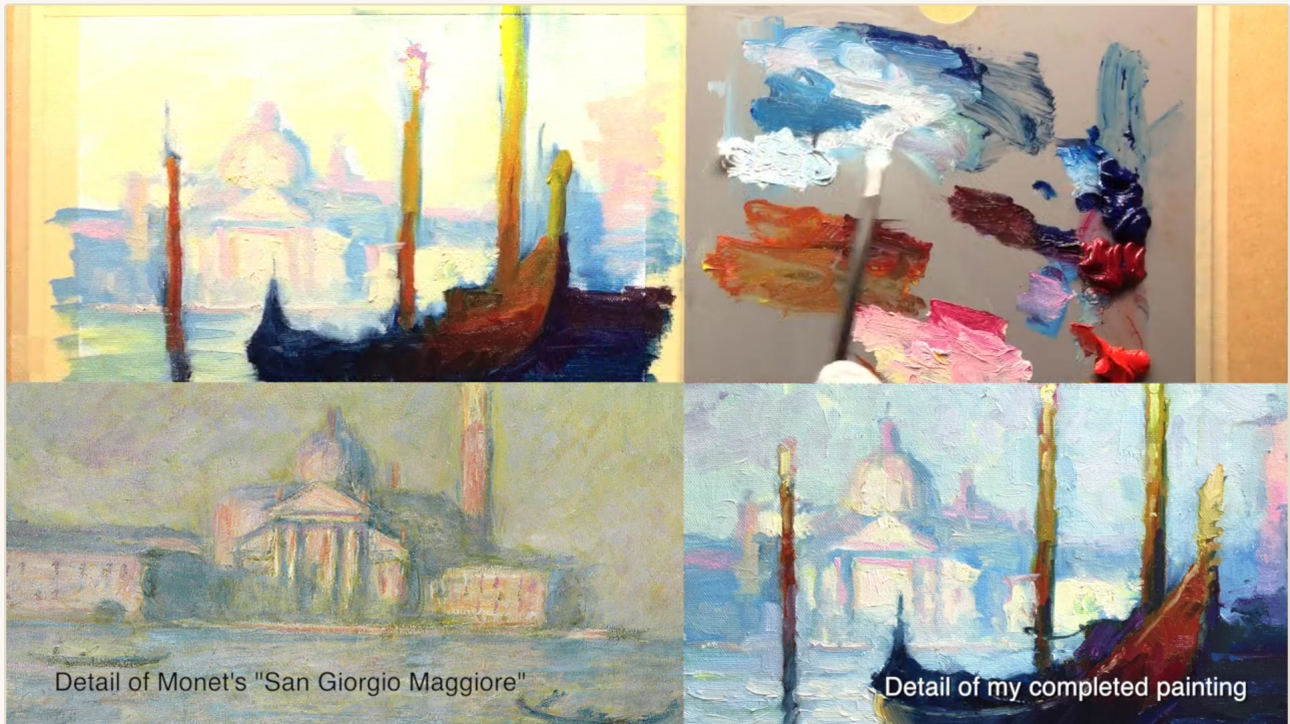
### Add Texture with Brushwork

Load your brush with as much paint as possible to create a thick layer on the canvas. Pat the brush down in addition to stroking it to create a raised surface. This technique will add texture and interest to the church's surface.

#### PRO TIP

*Pat the brush down to create a raised surface for added texture.*

## 10 Adding Texture to the Sky



### Apply Light Blue

Work a really light blue onto the thin yellowish base in the sky. Use a smaller brush to ensure precision and control. This will create a soft, harmonious blend with the underlying color.

### Add Light Pinkish Colors

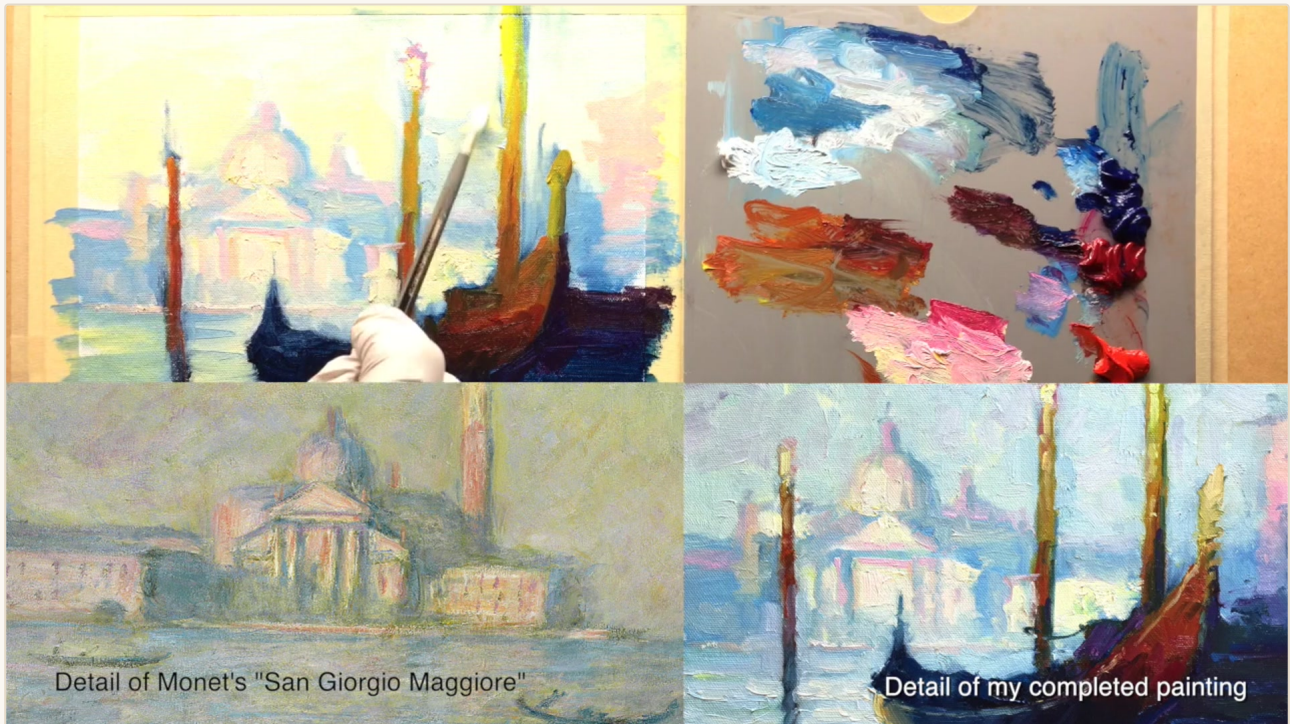
Introduce some light pinkish colors over the blue. Continue using the smaller brush to dab the paint, enhancing the texture and interest in the sky.

#### PRO TIP

*Use a smaller brush to apply paint with precision and create interesting textures.*



## 11 Monet's Brushwork and Color Vibrations



### Observe Monet's Technique

Look at the finished painting in the bottom right-hand corner to see the shimmering effect Monet is known for. Notice how the brush strokes of slightly different colors combine to create this effect.

### Understand Color Vibrations

Monet achieved color vibrations by using broken color techniques. He placed strokes of different colors next to and on top of each other without blending them, allowing the eye to blend the colors naturally.

### Apply Loose Brushwork

Emulate Monet's loose brushwork by applying strokes freely and without overworking the paint. This technique helps to create a rich, colorful shimmer in your painting.

#### PRO TIP

*Use broken color by placing different colors next to each other without blending to achieve a vibrant effect.*

## 12 Reflecting Colors in Water



### Reflect Sky Colors in Water

Mix a very light mauve using mostly white with a touch of phthalo and a tiny touch of alizarin or magenta. Carefully apply this light color to the water, avoiding the dark areas to prevent muddiness. If the brush picks up dark paint, clean it off and reload to maintain the lightness.

### Enhance Warmth with Cool Contrast

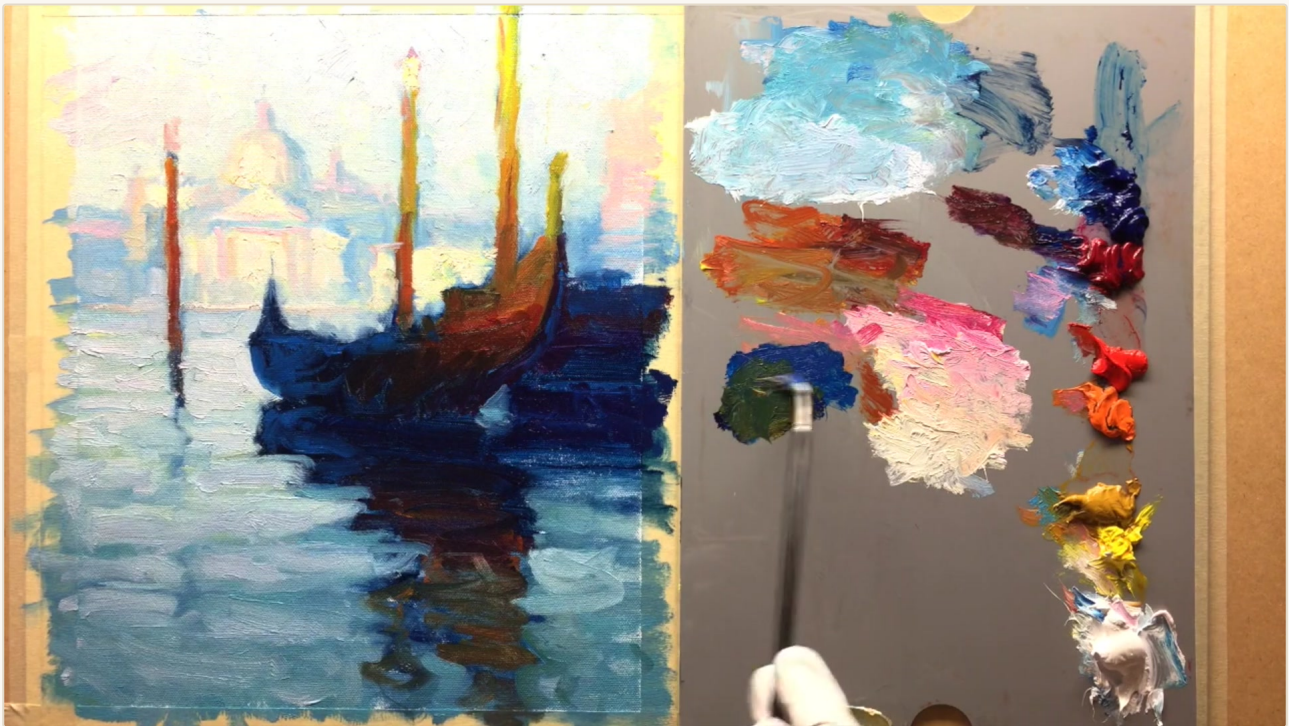
Contrast the warm area on the prow of the gondola with an intense blue. This will enhance the warmth by comparison. Use the blue elsewhere, as many gondolas have blue covers, and reflect some cool lights into the shiny, lacquered side of the gondola.

#### PRO TIP

*Be meticulous about cleaning your brush to prevent light areas from becoming muddy.*



## 13 Using Long Bristle Brushes



### Offset Warm Colors with Greens

Introduce greens into the water in the foreground to balance the reds and oranges in the gondola. This will create a harmonious contrast in your painting.

### Use Long Bristle Brushes

Select a brush with long bristles to achieve a calligraphic stroke. This technique is inspired by Monet's lyrical brushwork, allowing for expressive and fluid lines.

#### PRO TIP

*Use long bristle brushes for more expressive, calligraphic strokes.*

## 14 Reflections and Waterline Details



### Observe Reflections

Study the reflections on the side of the gondola. Notice that they are diagonal along the hull and become warmer and lighter as they approach the sun.

### Consider Waterline Angle

Pay close attention to the angle of the waterline of the boat. Even if it's not clearly visible, it provides important information about the boat's angle and position, as well as your viewpoint relative to the boat.

### Adjust for Viewer Perspective

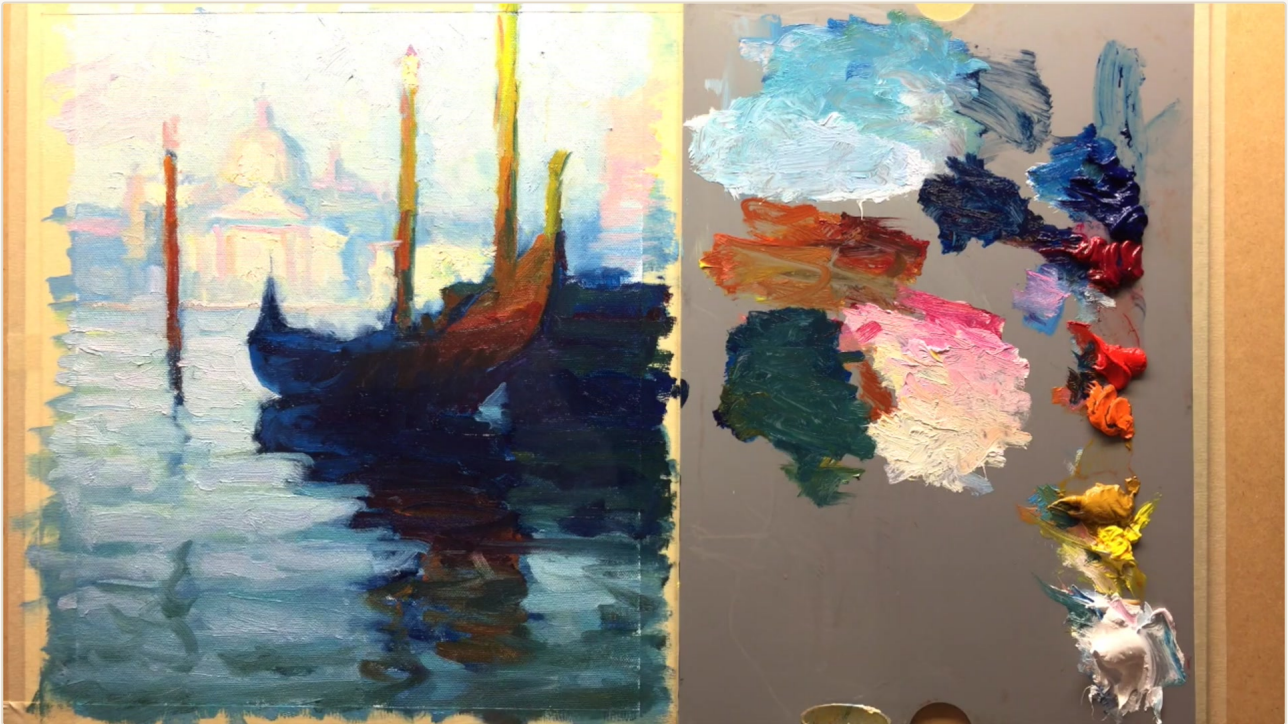
Remember that as your eye level gets closer to the water, the boat's waterline appears less rounded and more horizontal. Use this to adjust your painting for a realistic perspective.

#### PRO TIP

*Use the waterline's angle to determine the viewer's perspective and the boat's position.*



## 15 Adjusting Reflections and Colors



### Separate the Pole from the Gondola

Adjust the pole's position or color to clearly distinguish it from the gondola. This prevents it from appearing as a mast and maintains the painting's clarity.

### Tidy Up Reflections in the Water

Examine the reflections in the water and make necessary adjustments to ensure they are tidy and realistic. This enhances the overall composition and realism of the scene.

### Darken the Corner Rectangle

Keep the rectangle shape in the corner dark to prevent the viewer's eye from being drawn away from the center of the painting. This helps maintain focus on the main subject.

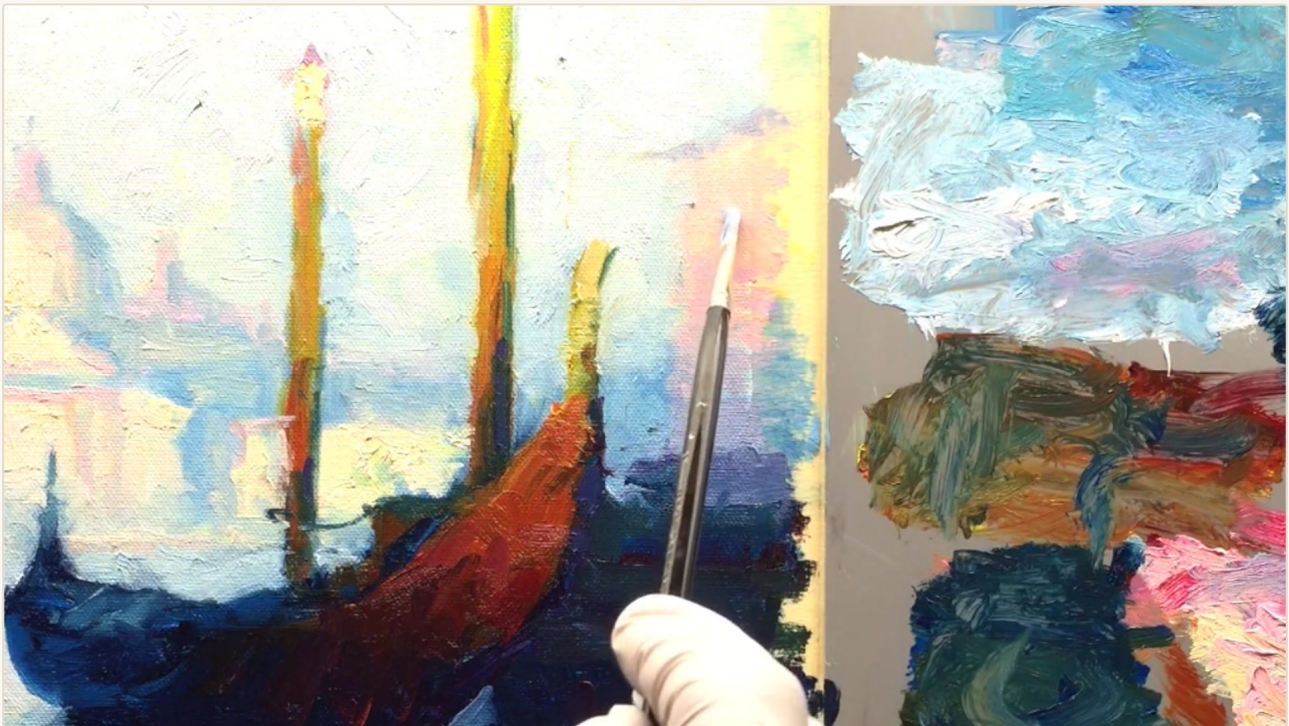
### Darken Light Reflections

Use red and orange to darken any reflections that appear too light. Despite the glossy surface, remember that black absorbs a lot of color, so adjust accordingly to achieve a balanced look.

#### PRO TIP

*Use red and orange to darken glossy reflections while maintaining the surface's reflective quality.*

## 16 Gondola Symbolism and Construction



### Add Soft Edges to the Building

Indicate a building catching the light with very soft edges to suggest distance and atmosphere.

### Apply Cool Reflected Light

Add a little cool reflected light on the top of the steps to enhance depth and realism.

#### PRO TIP

*The metal prow of the gondola, called the ferro, is S-shaped to symbolize the Grand Canal's curve.*



## 17 Final Touches and Warm Reflections



### Reflect Warm Light

Load your brush with thick paint, avoiding any walnut oil or painting medium. Apply the paint softly across the top of the water to reflect warm light from the building. This will enhance the warm highlight on the stern of the gondola.

### Create Depth with Color

To achieve a warmer and darker effect as the reflection comes closer, mix in a little bit of red and a touch of orange. Ensure there is already some yellow ochre in your mix to maintain consistency.

#### PRO TIP

*Use thick paint without medium to maintain an impasto texture for reflections.*

## 18 Finishing the Painting



### Add Final Touches

Add a little bit of warmth and darkness to enhance the painting's depth and contrast. This will give your artwork a richer and more dynamic appearance.

### Sign Your Painting

Sign your painting to mark it as your own. This is an important step in completing your artwork and gives it a personal touch.

### Remove the Tape

Carefully peel off the tape from the edges of your canvas. This will reveal clean, sharp borders and make your painting look polished and professional.

#### PRO TIP

*Sign your painting to give it a personal touch and complete the artwork.*



# Summary & Key Takeaways

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Embark on your painting journey with the spirit of Monet, who found inspiration in the enchanting city of Venice despite initial hesitations. Allow yourself time to adjust to new subjects, just as Monet did, and embrace the challenges they present. Begin your work with a warm-toned canvas to set the stage for a harmonious composition.

As you progress, focus on building texture and depth through layered paint and thoughtful color choices. Use larger brush strokes for foreground elements and smaller ones for distant features to create a sense of depth. Emulate Monet's technique of broken color to achieve vibrant effects, and let your brushwork flow freely to capture the dynamic essence of the scene.

In the final stages, pay attention to the details that bring your painting to life. Reflect the warm light in the water, adjust reflections for realism, and maintain drawing accuracy to ensure your composition remains true. Finish with personal touches, such as signing your work, to complete your artistic expression.

## LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Allow yourself time to find inspiration when painting new scenes.
- Use a light pinkish acrylic wash to tone your canvas before sketching.
- Apply thick, broken paint to build texture and complexity.
- Use larger brush strokes for areas closer to you to create depth.
- Keep your brush clean when transitioning between light and dark areas.
- Reflect warm light in the water with slightly darker tones.
- Use broken color by placing different colors next to each other without blending.
- Sign your painting to give it a personal touch and complete the artwork.





*"Gondola in Venice" 11x14" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson after Claude Monet.*



# Student Critiques

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

## **"Oil after Richard's Monet" by Candi Hogan**



*"Oil after Richard's Monet" 11x14" Acrylic on Canvas by Candi Hogan*

Nice work Candi, I think you've captured something of Monet's work here, especially in the church and sky. You've really done a great job of copying my painting. The only advice I could give on this one would be to strengthen the darks in the gondola and remove some of the reflections in its middle which are confusing the shape somewhat. Great work!

**"Monet Study" by Jane Cerami**



*"Monet Study" 12x16" Acrylic on Canvas by Jane Cerami*

Great work Jane. The warm glow coming off the church is great contrasting against the cool blues and greens elsewhere. I also like the grey you've used in the sunlit prow of the boat which does seem more realistic than my attempts to add punchy colour there though I do miss the strong colour note. Your drawing is great - nicely done, because it's so easy to lose the drawing while applying the paint so loosely. It's a shame you left speckles of canvas showing through in places because it breaks the illusion somewhat in this case. Better if you'd toned the canvas warm or cool beforehand. Overall, really nice work.



**"Gondola at Twilight 2" by Stuart J. Gourlay**



*"Gondola at Twilight 2" 10x12" Acrylic on Canvas by Stuart J. Gourlay*

Stuart, good to have you back - though you've sure not been idle as I can see from all the paintings you've uploaded recently. I love the design of this painting! I guess you spotted that I flipped Monet's church over to suit my painting. I prefer yours in some ways because it reads left to right for us Westerners. Your colour work is good, although like mine it's beginning to look like a black gondola dipped in a pot of orange paint rather than glowing with the fires of a sunset. You could have transitioned that orange better through reds and crimsons to get to the dark blue/black to help with that. A similar transition could have helped in the sky too, instead of just mixing the warm yellow base a cool zenith together which invariably makes mud.

You did well to subdue the background with glazes in order to let the foreground dominate. You could have helped this further by lightening all the background by a value step or two. It's good to see the variety of edges you've used - quite soft in the background versus sharper in the foreground - nicely done. Overall it's great work Stuart - just a few things to think about.

**"Monet in Venice" by Colin L. Williams**



*"Monet in Venice" Oil on Canvas by Colin L. Williams*

Hi Colin, there's some great paintwork going on in here - all that shimmery broken colour in the sky and water - terrific! I like that you've thought to include the spiralling red line so many of the poles in Venice have - a nice touch. Another nice touch was adding the little gondolas in the distance. The drawing of the big gondola could use a lot of fixing whereas you've drawn the distant buildings admirably well, though the oranges you used there are too dark which spoils the illusion of depth.

At the front of the gondola you could have transitioned the colour from light to dark better (orange > red > burgundy > dark blue). I'm in two minds about your foreground water. I could either implore you to use techniques like mine or congratulate you on using various techniques as Monet often did. It depends on what you were trying to achieve. Do you think you succeeded? If so, well done, if not, take another look at the demo video.