



Country Road

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/74-Country-Road>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, I invite you to join me as we explore a charming rustic farm scene just down the road from my home in Rua Kaka, New Zealand. This spot, nestled right alongside the main highway, is often overlooked by passersby, but to me, it holds a unique beauty that captures the essence of our farming community. Although the roadside noise made it impractical to paint on location, I captured photos and video to bring back to the studio, where we'll recreate this scene together. You'll learn how to simplify complex subjects, create glowing light, and use edge variety to bring your painting to life. I've made a few personal adjustments to the scene, such as transforming the vibrant green grass into a warm golden brown—a nod to my preference despite living in lush New Zealand. Additionally, I've opted for strong light in the foreground to draw the viewer's eye into the heart of the painting, highlighting the intriguing structures. Through this lesson, you'll gain insights into capturing the character and charm of rural landscapes, making this a rewarding subject to paint.



"Country Road" 15x15" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson.



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 Materials and Initial Sketch



Prepare Your Materials

Set up your palette with Cobra water mixable oils from Royal Talens. Use a 15 by 15 inch Frederick's ultra smooth canvas for this painting.

Select Your Brushes

Choose long flat brushes, including two bristles and one synthetic. Keep a small signing brush handy for adding details later.

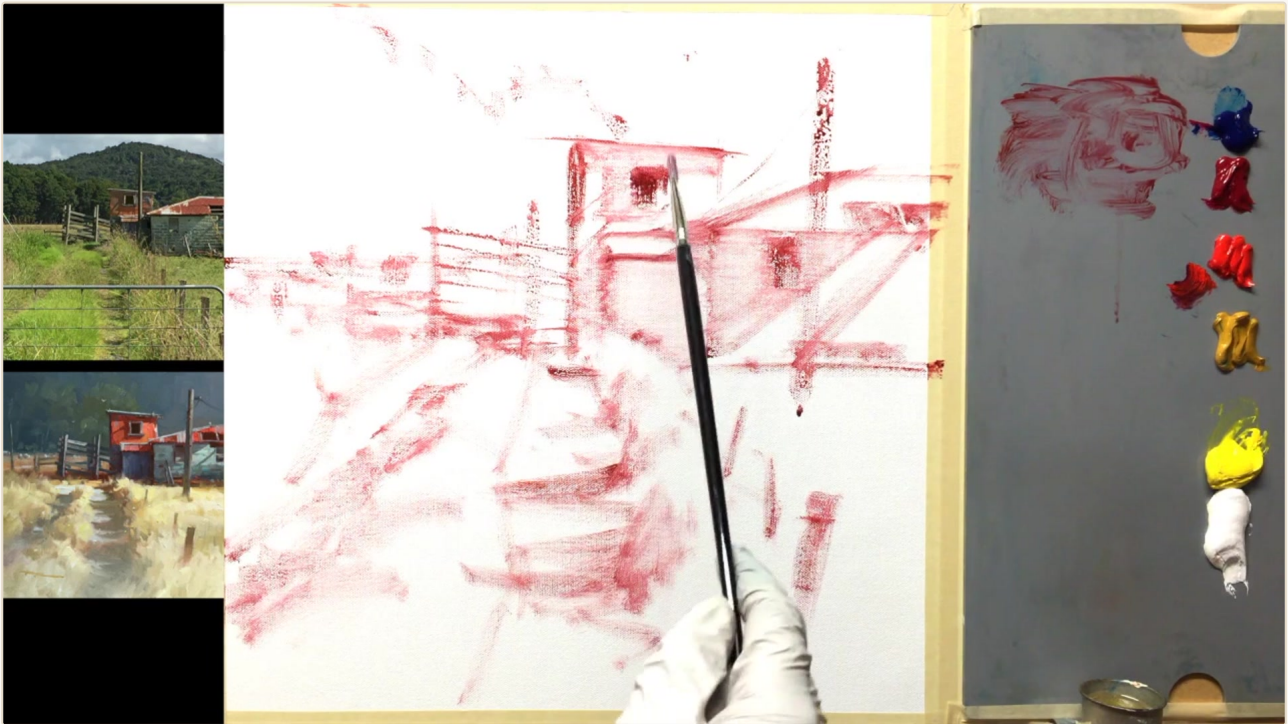
Begin the Initial Sketch

Mix a very thin solution of walnut oil to sketch your initial outlines on the canvas. This will help establish the composition before adding more paint.

PRO TIP

Use a very thin mixture of walnut oil for sketching to keep the initial lines light and easy to adjust.

2 Painting the Darkest Darks



Mark Big Shapes and Shadows

Use red and blue to lightly mark in all the big shapes and where the shadows will be. This will serve as a guide for placing the darkest darks.

Mix the Darkest Dark

Create a warm dark mixture using mainly red, yellow ochre, a tiny bit of blue, and perhaps a touch of alizarin or magenta. This combination will help achieve a rich, warm dark tone.

Apply the Darkest Dark

Paint the darkest dark thinly using a fair amount of walnut oil to ensure it just covers the canvas without the weave showing through. This thin application allows for easier layering of mid-tones and lights later.

PRO TIP

Apply darks thinly to avoid muddy colors and ensure easier layering of subsequent paint layers.

3 Adjusting Grass Color



Warm and Lighten the Dark Areas

Add a little bit of yellow ochre to the dark color mix. This will warm and lighten the mixture, creating a more natural transition in the grass.

Apply the New Color

Apply the warmed and lightened color to the base of the building and other areas where this hue is visible. This helps shift the grass from green to brown, enhancing the natural look.

Transform Dark Shadows

Use the new dark brown mixture in the shadowed areas of the grass. This replaces the dark green with a dark brown, adding depth and realism to the scene.

PRO TIP

Use yellow ochre to warm and lighten dark areas, creating a natural transition in the grass.

4 Cool Darks and Fence Details



Create a Cooler Dark

Mix a dark color using mainly blue, a little alizarin, a touch of white, and maybe some red. Keep the mixture thin with walnut oil and apply it to the darkest cool areas on the side of the shed.

Add Color Variation to the Fence

Mix both yellows into the dark mixture to paint the fence, adding color variation. Lighten the bluish dark by adding more white for a slightly lighter shade. Twist the brush to create a nice little triangle shape.

Enhance with Blue and Yellow

Lighten the mixture slightly again and add more blue and yellow. Use this color for the top of the fence to create a subtle difference from the bottom.

PRO TIP

Twist the brush to create small triangular shapes for added detail.

5 Mixing and Applying Shadow Colors



Clean Your Brush

Give your brush a thorough clean before mixing new colors to ensure no unwanted hues mix with your warm colors.

Mix Shadow Color for Orange Building

To create the shadow color for the orange building, mix orange with its complementary color, blue, to achieve a brown tone. Add more red and yellow to enrich the vibrancy of the shadow color.

Test and Apply the Shadow Color

Test the shadow color on a small area to see how it looks. If satisfied, proceed to fill in the shadow shape on the building.

Add Reflected Light

Add a touch more yellow to the bottom of the shadow to simulate reflected light from the roof beneath it.

Adjust the Composition

Move the pole to the right to balance the composition and keep the focus on the orange building.

PRO TIP

Always test your mixed color on a small area before applying it to the main section of your painting.

6 Foreground Light and Depth



Establish Darkest Darks

Use a very dark brown to paint in the darkest areas of your composition. This will serve as the foundation for the lighter values to come.

Create Depth with Background

Mix a greyed-down green, pushing it more towards blue and lightening it slightly. Apply this to the background to create depth and contrast with the vibrant colors in the foreground.

PRO TIP

Greying down the background and pushing it towards blue enhances depth and makes foreground colors pop.

7 Background and Tree Modeling



Thin the Background

Thin the paint with walnut oil to ensure it covers the canvas easily and sits flat in the background. This will contrast with the thick and chunky lights in the foreground.

Add Yellow Ochre

Introduce a little yellow ochre to the light side of the tree to push the color towards green. This green will make the orangey-red colors pop, creating a vibrant harmony.

Enhance Shadows

Darken the shadow areas by adding a slightly darker mixture to prevent them from appearing flat. This adds shadowy depth and dimension.

Create Subtle Depth

Mix a little white and blue into the dark grey mixture and apply it flatly across the back. This introduces a subtle level of depth.

Warm the Right Side

Add a touch of red and white to the mixture on the right side, closer to the sun, to lighten and warm it. This creates a slight gradation in color across the area.

Model the Tree

Add a little white and blue to the green of the tree to enhance its form without making it overly bright. This subtle modeling maintains the large gray shape of the background.

PRO TIP

Use walnut oil to thin the paint for easy coverage and a flat finish in the background.

8 Adjusting Overlapping Forms



Identify Overlapping Forms

Observe where the big pole in the foreground overlaps with the apex of the building behind it. Ensure that overlapping forms are easily readable in your painting.

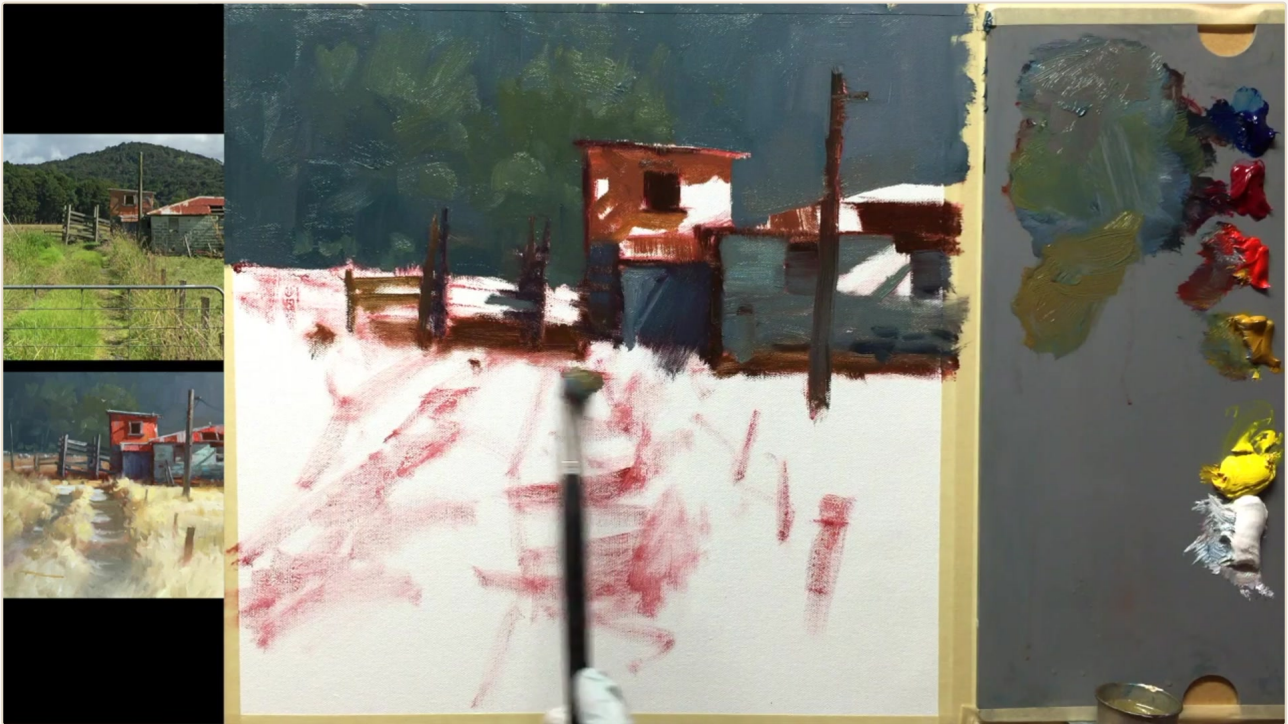
Adjust the Overlapping Forms

Choose which element to adjust for clarity. In this case, shift the apex of the roof to avoid obstruction by the pole. This adjustment helps maintain clear and distinct shapes in your composition.

PRO TIP

Shift elements in your painting to ensure overlapping forms are easily readable.

9 Grass Shadows and Light Interaction



Mix Shadow Color

Create a dark brownish green by mixing your base colors. Add a touch of yellow ochre to lighten and warm the base of the pole, reflecting the warm light from the grasses.

Paint Shadow Shapes

Paint the shadow shapes with an eye for variety and interest. Connect the darks into one large shape to ensure the painting is easily readable from a distance.

Lighten and Warm Shadows

Add more yellow ochre and a lot of white to your mix to lighten and warm the color as it comes forward. This represents the shadow side of the grass clumps.

Consider Light Penetration

Remember that grass is semi-translucent, allowing light to penetrate and take on the grass's color. This results in vibrant shadow sides, similar to the effect seen in trees with translucent leaves.

PRO TIP

Connect dark shadow shapes into one large shape for better readability from a distance.

10 Foreground Light Effects



Add Light and Warm Fence Posts

Use smaller brush strokes to dash in the fence posts. Ensure they are really light and warm to contribute to the glowing effect in the foreground. Avoid making them dark to maintain the desired light effect.

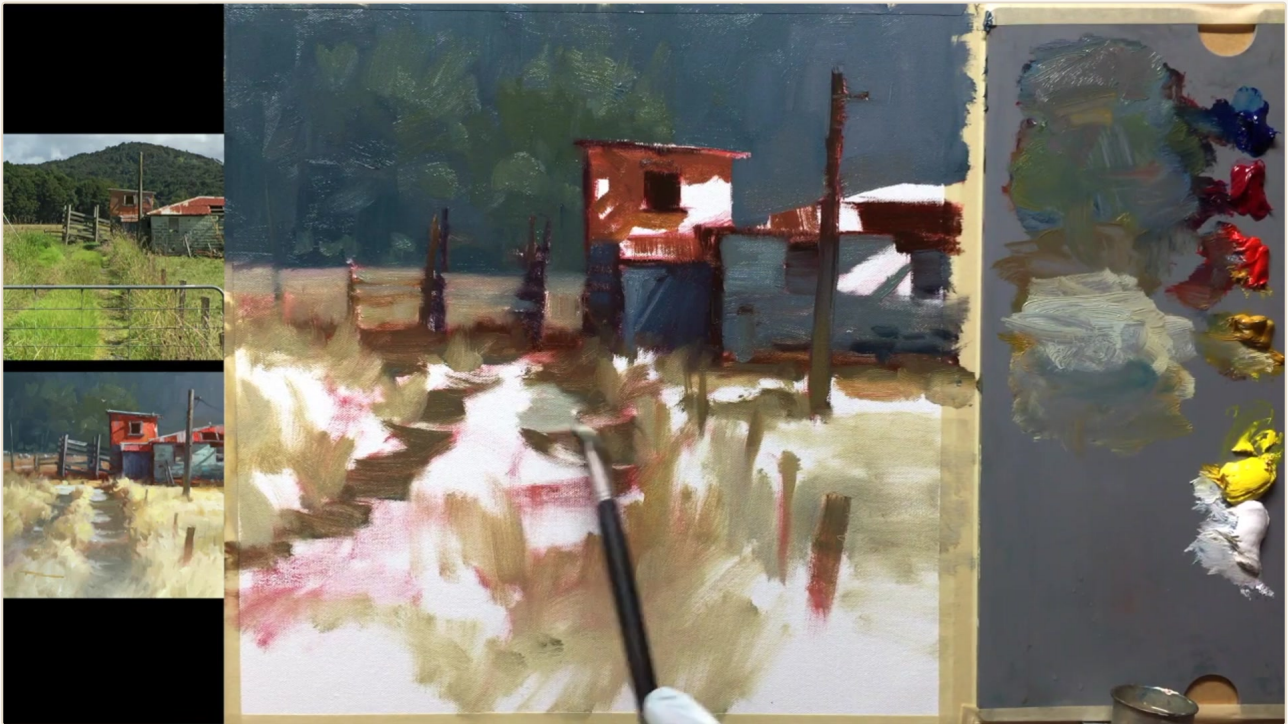
Enhance Foreground Glow

Focus on intensifying the light effect as it moves towards the bottom of the canvas. This will create a stronger, more vibrant glow in the foreground, enhancing the overall composition.

PRO TIP

Use smaller brush strokes for details like fence posts to maintain a light and warm effect.

11 Painting the Road



Mix Road Color

Add some white and a little bit of blue to your existing color mix. This will create a harmonious tone that ties in with the blue grays in the background and buildings.

Paint the Road

Apply the mixed color to the stones on the road. Consider the type of stones and adjust the color if needed, but aim for a cohesive look with the rest of the painting.

Lighten the Foreground

Add more white to your mix for the section of the road closest to the foreground. This will create a sense of depth and draw the viewer's eye into the painting.

PRO TIP

Adjust the road color to harmonize with the background and buildings for a cohesive look.

12 Grass Light and Detail



Mix Light Warm Colors

Combine yellow ochre, bright yellow, and a lot of white to create a light warm mixture. Apply this to the light shadow areas of the grasses you've already painted.

Use Big Strokes in Foreground

In the foreground, apply the paint with really big strokes and a lot of paint to create a strong visual impact.

Manage Brush Edges

Be mindful of your brushwork. The start of your brush stroke has a hard edge, while the end has a soft edge. Decide where you want these soft edges, as most of the grass should have soft edges.

Enhance Color Near Buildings

Add more yellow to the grass color as it approaches the buildings to emphasize the center of interest.

Add Fine Details

Include a few fine details with crisp edges near the buildings to draw the viewer's eye to that area.

PRO TIP

Pay attention to where you leave hard edges, as most of the grass should have soft edges.

13 Building Lights and Details



Switch Focus to the Building

If you're feeling stuck with the grasses, shift your attention to the building. This change can help refresh your perspective and prevent overworking any area.

Mix and Apply Neutral Grey

Create a neutral grey slightly darker than mid-grey. Use the edge of a palette knife to carefully apply this to the front facing edge of the roof for a rustic effect.

Lighten the Roof

Add white to your grey mix to create a lighter shade for the top of the roof. This will help highlight the roof's surface and add dimension.

Detail the Window Frames

Use the neutral greys to paint the window frames. Tidy up the details with a small signing brush for precision.

Soften Edges with Light Brown

Soften the edges of the building with a light brown on your brush. This will help push the building back into the distance.

Add Lights to the Shed

Mix a light grey for the top of the shed. These lights should appear almost white but are actually a light grey, adding subtle highlights.

Mix Light for Building Side

Combine mainly white with a little blue, yellow ochre, and a tiny touch of red for the side of the building. Add more blue further down for variation.

PRO TIP

Use the edge of a palette knife for precise application of neutral greys on the building's roof.

14 Final Touches and Details



Highlight the Pole

Use a light neutral grey with a hint of yellow ochre to highlight the pole. This will give it a subtle warmth and make it stand out.

Add Core Shadow

Apply a dark neutral or blue-gray to create a core shadow on the pole. This adds depth and dimension to the structure.

Paint Sheep in the Field

Add a few small sheep in the field to bring life to the scene. Aim for about eight sheep to reflect the local character.

Enhance the Road and Fences

Apply thick light paint on the road and fences using a neutral grey. Use a rigger brush for precision and avoid using walnut oil in the lights.

Add Texture with Palette Knife

Carefully use the edge of a palette knife to apply very thick paint, leaving out one of the fence palings for a ramshackle effect.

PRO TIP

Use a rigger brush for precise light application on roads and fences, holding your breath or exhaling slowly for steady control.

15 Final Adjustments and Softening



Enhance Grass Shape

Add more shape interest to the grasses by varying the brushstrokes. Keep the colors light to maintain the illusion of strong light in the foreground.

Avoid Dark Darks

Refrain from using very dark colors in the foreground grasses. Dark tones can disrupt the effect of bright light in the scene.

Add Color to Foreground

Incorporate more yellow ochre into the half tones of the foreground. This will help balance the white and prevent the colors from appearing too pasty or chalky.

Soften Foreground Edges

Ensure all edges in the very near foreground are soft, except for the post. Soft edges contribute to a cohesive look and enhance the light effect.

PRO TIP

Use yellow ochre in the half tones to avoid a chalky appearance in the foreground.

16 Finishing Touches



Add Final Details

Dot in a few small flowers or weeds in the foreground to add interest and texture. Use a fine brush and a variety of colors to create a natural look.

Sign Your Painting

Choose a corner of the painting to sign your name. Use a small brush and a color that stands out against the background but complements the overall palette.

Remove the Tape

Carefully pull off the tape from the edges of your painting to reveal clean lines and a finished look.

PRO TIP

Use a fine brush to add small details like flowers or weeds for a natural touch.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by setting up your materials and sketching the initial outlines with a thin walnut oil solution. This foundational step helps establish your composition and guides the placement of darks and lights. As you progress, focus on building depth and contrast by layering darks thinly and adjusting colors with warm and cool tones. This approach ensures a natural transition and enhances the realism of your scene.

As you move through the painting, pay attention to the interaction of light and shadow, especially in areas like grass and buildings. Use color mixing techniques to create vibrant shadows and highlights, adding dimension and interest to your work. Remember to test your colors on small areas first to ensure they harmonize with the rest of the painting.

In the final stages, focus on adding details and refining your composition. Use smaller brush strokes for intricate elements like fence posts and road stones, and apply finishing touches like flowers or weeds to enhance texture. Maintain soft edges in the foreground to emphasize the light effect, and ensure your signature complements the overall palette. With these steps, your country road scene will come to life with depth and vibrancy.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use a very thin mixture of walnut oil for sketching initial outlines.
- Apply darks thinly to avoid muddy colors and ensure easier layering.
- Use yellow ochre to warm and lighten dark areas for natural transitions.
- Twist the brush to create small triangular shapes for added detail.
- Test your mixed color on a small area before applying it broadly.
- Grey down the background to enhance depth and make foreground colors pop.
- Shift elements to ensure overlapping forms are easily readable.
- Use smaller brush strokes for details like fence posts to maintain a light effect.



"Country Road" 15x15" 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.

"Snack by the Sea" by the Sea" 20x25cm Oil on Board by Silvana M Albano



"Snack by the Sea" 20x25cm Oil on Board by Silvana M Albano

Great to see you playing with the scene Silvana. The beach and sky itself are quite believable however you've placed the horizon too high which is throwing everything out of kilter. I've altered it in Photoshop so you can see the difference.

Another few things I altered were to remove the seagulls which were too large for their positions on the beach and also to change the shape of the shadows in the right-hand track because they were making a 1,2,3,4 pattern of equal size and spacing. The horizon is now flat which is always important in painting the ocean like this. While I was fiddling with your painting I also darkened the tree and extended it to the left so it wasn't in line with the edge of the building anymore. The final touch was glazing a soft shadow across the foreground to see how that looked.

So there are a few ideas for you. There's plenty of good work in your painting - the colour is good, if a little muddy in places where you've let the cools mix with the warms in the halftones (between light and shadow). Your brushwork is varied and interesting, creating that rough tussocky texture nicely. Your drawing, apart from the horizon level, is very good. Keep up the good work!

"Country Road" by Shoman Mohamed



"Country Road" 16x16" Acrylic on Canvas by Shoman Mohamed

A nice colourful piece Shoman. I can see you're a very careful person from your crisp edges down to your stylish signature - much like I started out till I got all painterly, which just takes brush miles. A lot of things are working well here from your punchy colour contrasted with the grayed backdrop, the precise drawing and the attention to tonal values. Some observations... the crisp edge where the cast shadow on the drive meets the grass could be more naturally portrayed by darkening the grass there somewhat and making the edge less regular.

A little more textured paint in the foreground and more attention to defining individual clumps would add more realism and depth to the whole foreground. Don't make the roof gutter line bend just behind the big pole because it makes us believe the pole is somehow influencing the shape of the building. The edges of your orange building are swelling outwards slightly which very subtly indicates health and ripeness to us. Better on a decrepit building to bow the edges slightly inwards. That should keep you busy. Well done.

"Snack by the Sea" by the Sea" 20x25cm Oil on Board by Silvana M Albano - Altered



"Snack by the Sea" 20x25cm Oil on Board by Silvana M Albano - Altered

The painting altered in Photoshop.

"Workshop42" by Manneherrin



"Workshop42" 11x14" Oil on Canvas by Manneherrin

Great colour and exciting brushwork in this one, Mannerherrin. Those dark darks are really helping the colours pop off the canvas and you've kept the values really light through the foreground which is creating that beautiful glowing light effect we were trying for. It's a shame those three Stooges (posts) on the right are spoiling the illusion a bit. They're all the same and all the same dark gray which should be a warm gray brown. You see how the colour looks muddy around them too where the warm grass has mixed with the cool gray in the posts? Very easy to fix that.

I'm all for cropping a painting down to its minimum but I do feel that the building is just ducking into the painting - not quite enough head room. Again, your brushwork is really strong but if you'd taken just a little more care with the drawing in a few places like making the poles straight and the top most roof line more sure it would have raised this painting up another notch. Just a few points there because overall it's really a good painting.