



Sunset Beach

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/73-Sunset-Beach>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we'll explore the stunning sunset beach scene at Proctor's Beach, a cherished spot of mine just over the hill from Oceans Beach, near my home. It's not only a favorite painting location but also a delightful place to slide down the sand dunes. The scene we're capturing is from an older photo, which I've painted numerous times, each attempt offering new insights and techniques. In this lesson, I'll guide you step by step through the process of painting this inspiring sunset. We'll focus on creating a large glowing light effect, mastering atmospheric perspective, and employing beautiful brushwork. To start, I moisten the canvas with a little water, allowing the paint to spread smoothly. Using a large brush, I apply acrylics to transition from warm lights to cool darks, capturing the essence of the sunset. This scene is a rewarding subject, offering endless opportunities to experiment and learn, and I hope you'll find as much joy in painting it as I do.

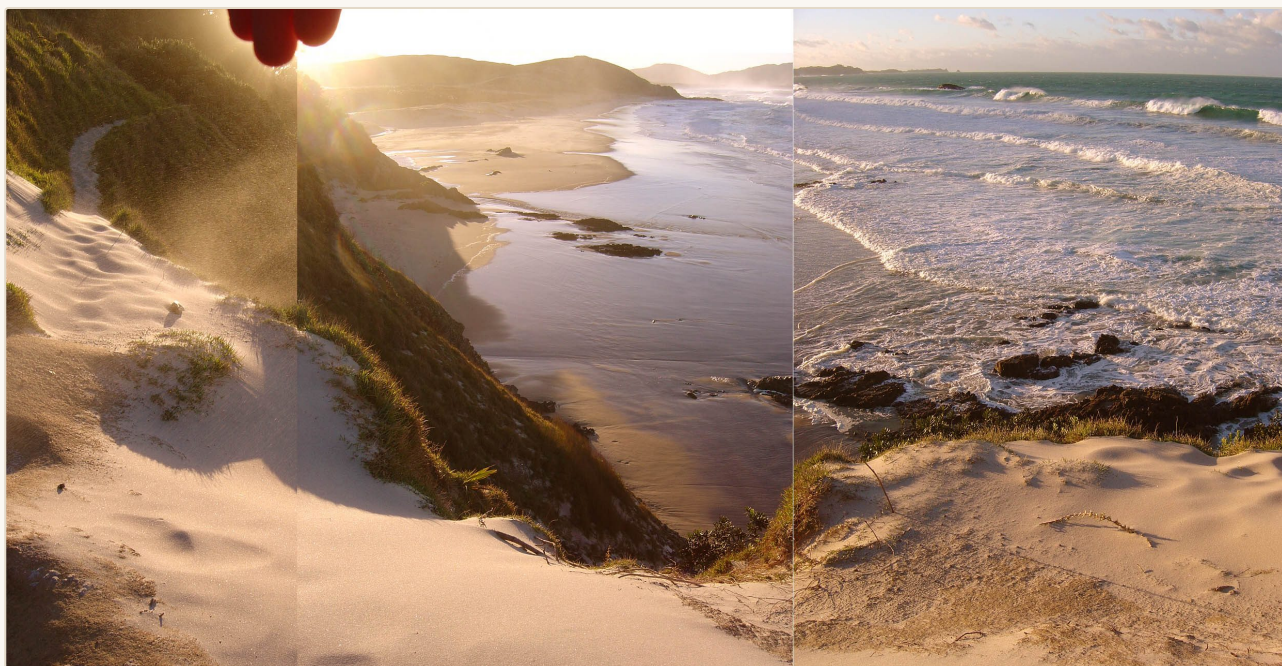


"Sunset Beach" 15.5 x 20" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson.



REFERENCE PHOTO 1

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 2

The scene as Richard found it.

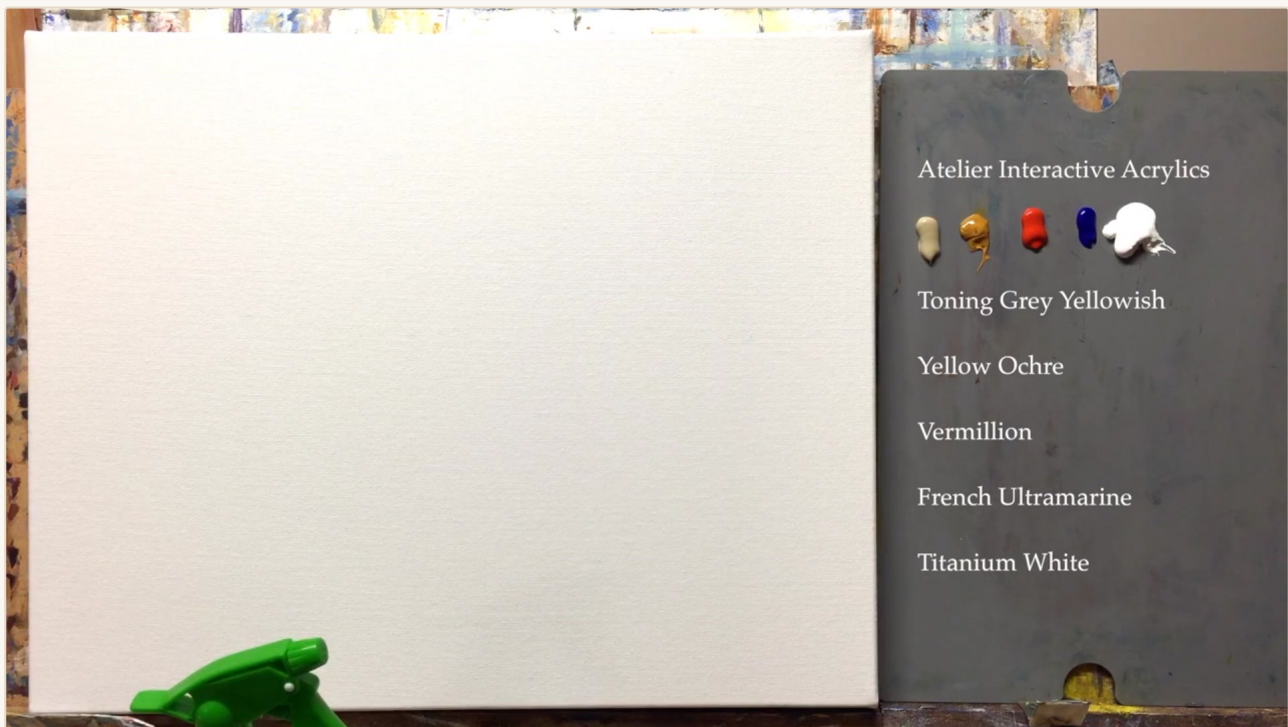
Materials

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 Toning the canvas



Moisten the Canvas

I get a little squirt of water to moisten the canvas, which helps the paint spread smoothly.

Apply the Tone

Using a really large brush, I apply acrylics to create a big glowing effect, transitioning from warm lights to cool darks.

Dry the Canvas

I let the toned canvas dry for a whole day, but a couple of hours is sufficient in warm weather.

PRO TIP

Toning the canvas isn't critical, but it can enhance the glowing effect in your painting.

2 Initial sketch with oil paints



Prepare the Brushes and Palette

I gather a large bristle brush, two large flat bristles, a synthetic flat, and a couple of small brushes for detail work. I also have a big palette knife ready for use.

Mix the Initial Sketch Color

I create a very oily mixture using mainly red with a little bit of blue. This results in a thin, watery consistency ideal for sketching.

Sketch the Big Shapes

I use the oily mixture to sketch in the big shapes on the canvas. At this stage, I focus on capturing the variation in shapes rather than any detail.

PRO TIP

Using an oily mixture for the initial sketch allows for easy adjustments and keeps the sketch light and flexible.

3 Mixing darks for receding hills



I mix four different darks to paint the receding hills. This helps create a beautiful glowing effect and ensures the hills don't look identical. I carefully observe the lines of the hills to avoid them copying each other.

PRO TIP

Pay close attention to the lines of the receding hills to maintain variety and depth.

4 Color mixing for hills



Mix Dark Hill Colors

I mix blue, red, and yellow ochre to create the dark colors for the hills. The first mixture is slightly greener than the second one.

Create Lighter, Vibrant Mix

I lighten the mixture and add more orange to make it vibrant. I include a touch of blue to tone it down and keep it slightly grey.

Final Light Mix

I take a bit of the third mixture and add yellow ochre, some white, and a touch of bright yellow to it.

PRO TIP

Adding a touch of blue can tone down vibrant colors and keep them slightly grey.

5 Painting light colors first



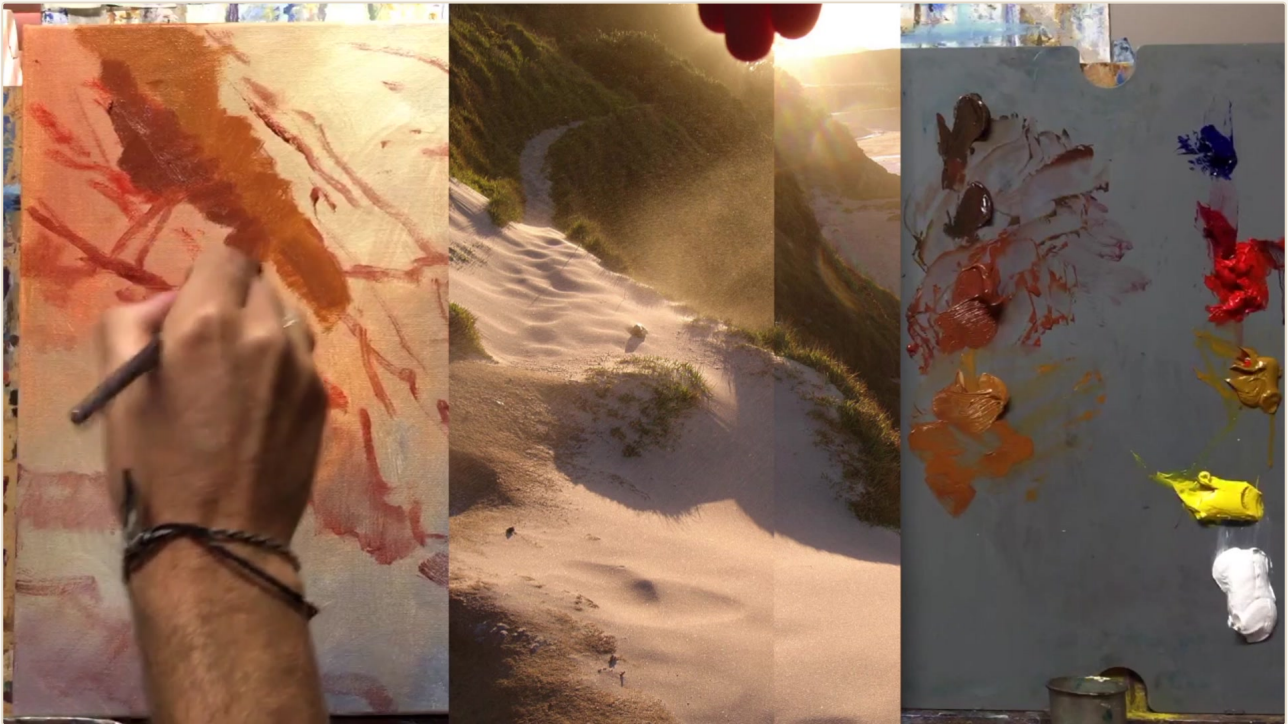
Start with Light Colors

I begin by painting the lighter colors first, focusing on maintaining their vibrancy. This approach is particularly effective in glowing light situations like a sunset.

PRO TIP

Painting light colors first helps maintain their vibrancy in glowing light scenes.

6 Using a black and white reference

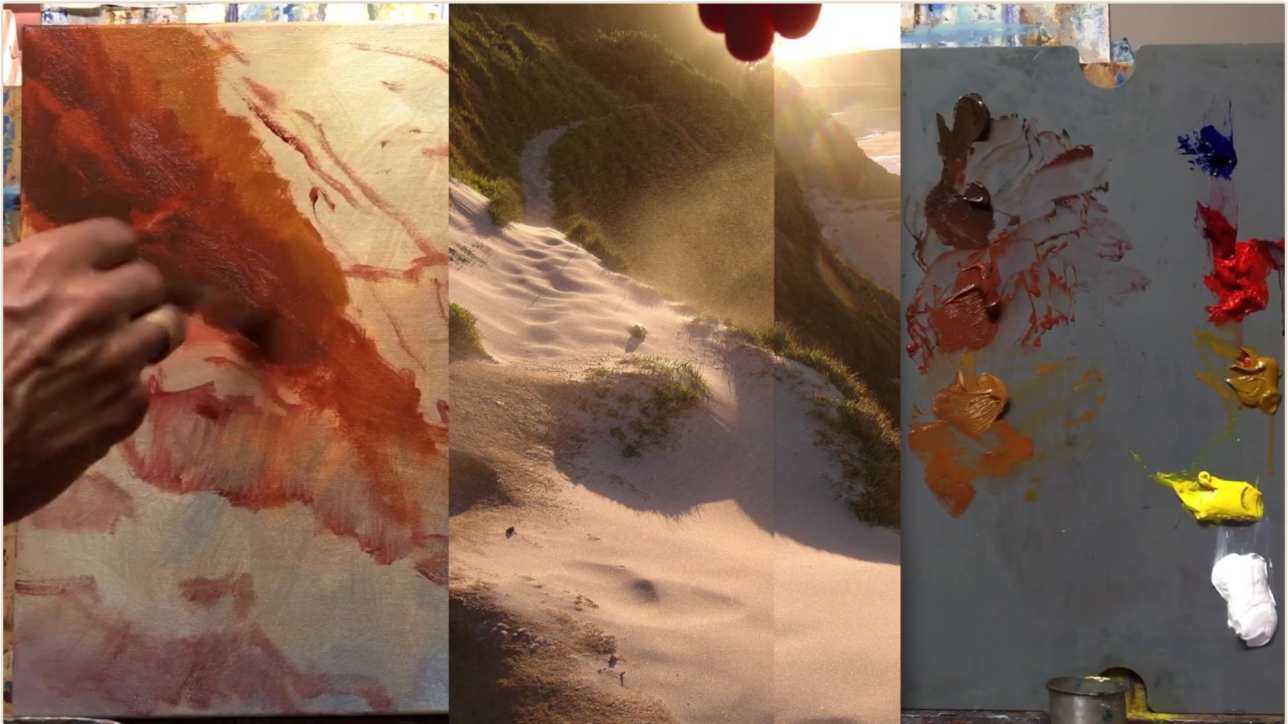


I use a black and white printout of the photograph as a reference. This helps me focus on the values and shapes without being influenced by the colors in the photo.

PRO TIP

Using a black and white reference allows me to concentrate on value and composition without the distraction of color.

7 Painting grass and bushes



Painting Grass

I use the brush sideways to achieve that thin, clumpy grass look. I avoid painting the entire area a flat color by leaving little gaps, which will form the tops of the grass clumps.

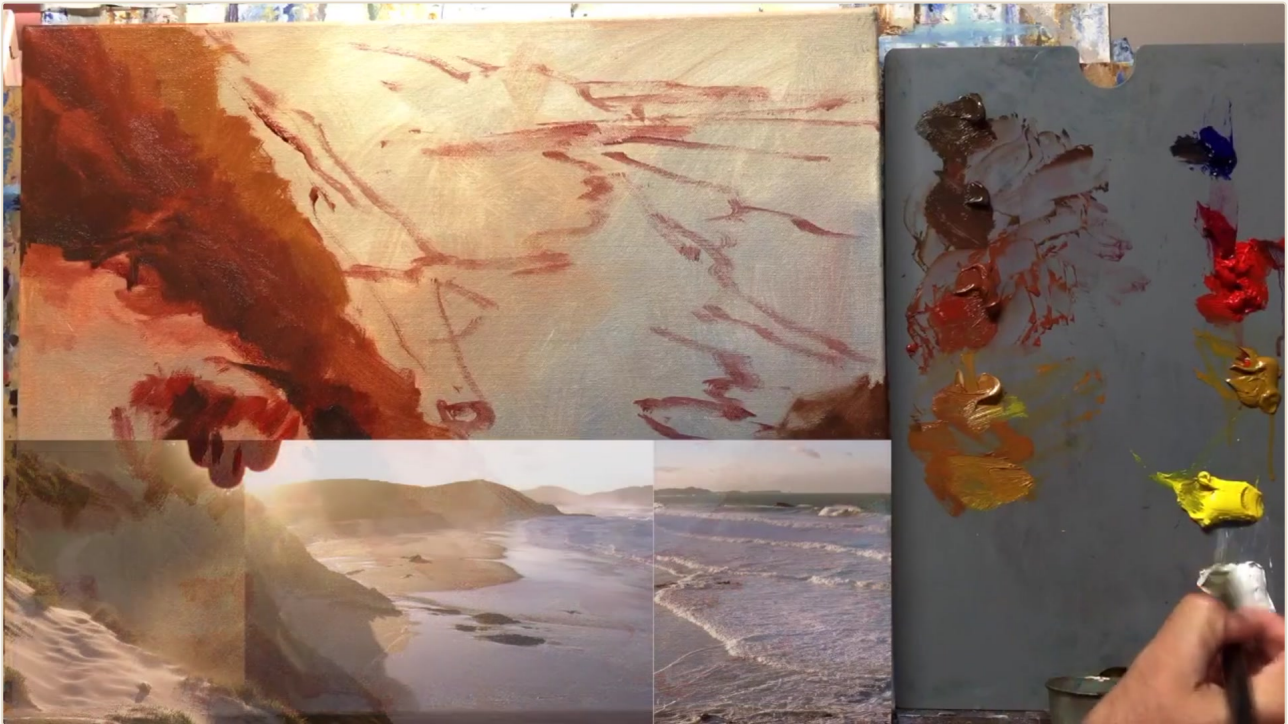
Adding Vibrancy to Bushes

I introduce a more vibrant red into the shadow side of the bushes to enhance their depth and interest.

PRO TIP

Using the brush sideways helps create a natural, clumpy grass effect.

8 Adding light to hills and background



Add Light to Hills

I grab the lightest color and mix in some white and a little bit of bright yellow. I brush it thinly into the area closer to the sun.

Lighten Distant Hills

I add more white and yellow to the mix and move to the next set of hills, which are much lighter due to the distance.

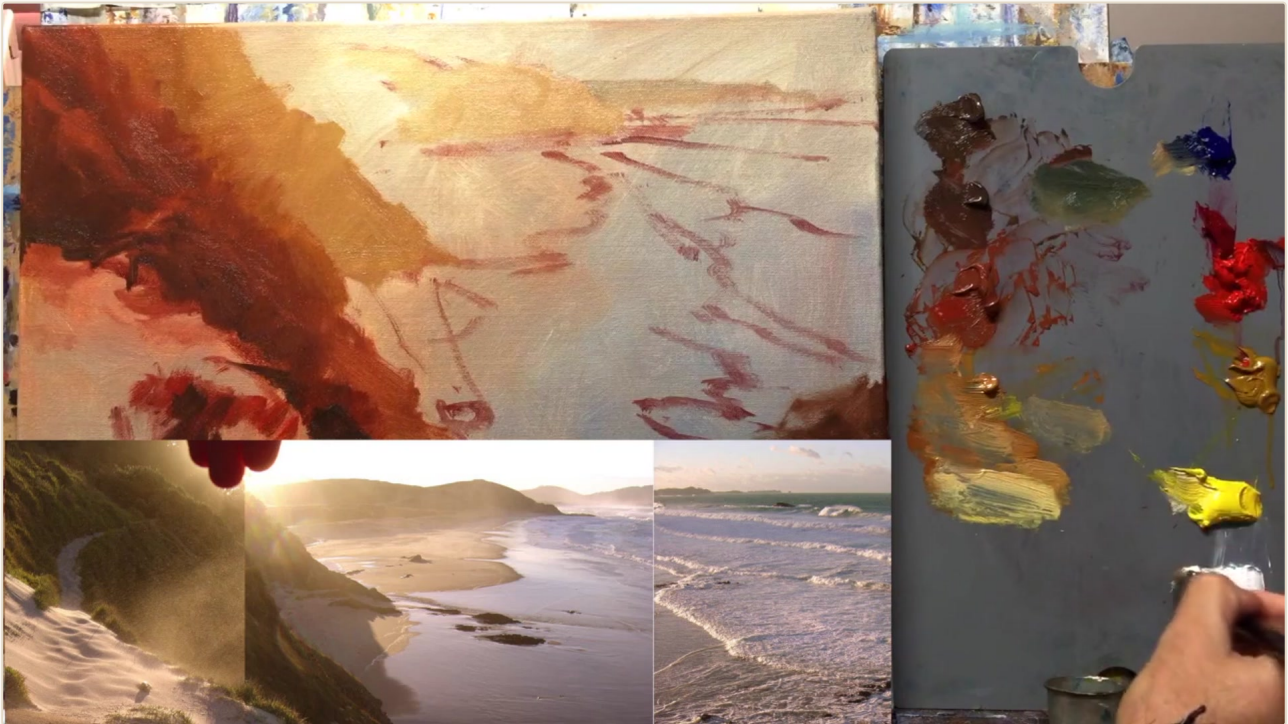
Adjust Background Colors

I add a touch of blue to the background to make it a bit darker and cooler, differentiating the land masses.

PRO TIP

When painting distant hills, remember to lighten the value and cool the color to create depth.

9 Mixing colors for ocean and rocks



Mixing Ocean Color

I mix a dull green color for the ocean. It's important to note that this is not a vibrant green at all.

Adjusting Values

I notice the ocean is too dark compared to the landmass on the left. To maintain the depth of color in the ocean, I decide to darken the landmass instead of lightening the ocean.

PRO TIP

When adjusting colors, consider changing surrounding elements to maintain desired depth and contrast.

10 Color and value considerations



Mixing Darker, Warmer Color for Rocks

I mix a darker, slightly warmer color for the rocks. Since I'm working from a black and white photograph, I focus on getting the value correct rather than the exact color.

Adjusting Color for Value

I aim for a color that's a little darker and cooler than the area closer to the sun. This helps create depth and contrast in the painting.

Creating Mid-Value for Wet Sand

I mix a purplish mauve-ish grey for the wet sand at the bottom of the hill. It's a mid-value color that helps ground the scene.

PRO TIP

Focus on getting the value right; you can always adjust the color later with oil paints.

11 Adjusting colors for light and distance



Warm Up the Beach

I add a little bit of white and a little bit of bright yellow to warm up and lighten the color. I dash it on up the beach, making it warmer and lighter as it gets closer to the sun.

Cool Down the Distance

I add a little bit of blue to cool the color down as it gets further away from the sun. This helps create a sense of distance in the painting.

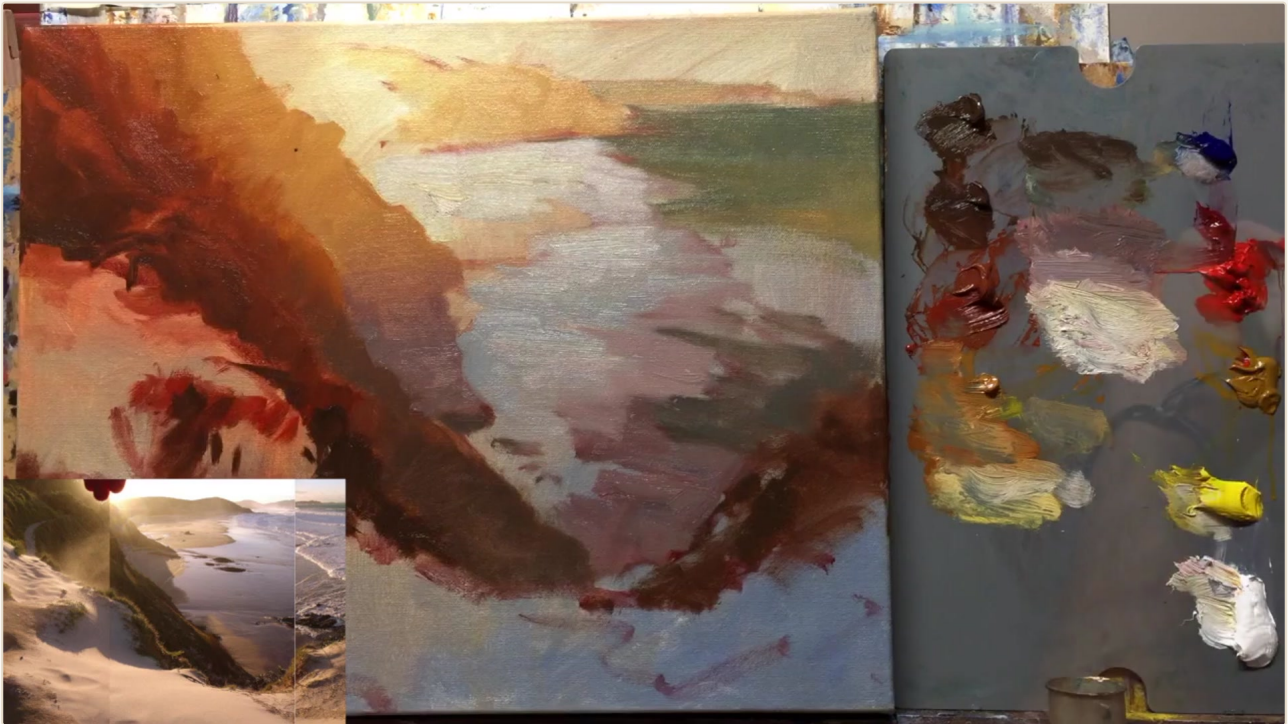
Apply Thick Highlights

I apply the lights without using any walnut oil because I want them to be quite thick, especially in the foreground. This adds texture and emphasis to the highlights.

PRO TIP

Use thicker paint for highlights in the foreground to create depth and texture.

12 Mixing sky colors



I mix a very light green for the sky. Although you might expect blue, the warmth of the sun lightens and warms the color. By combining yellow and blue, I achieve the green needed for this effect.

PRO TIP

Remember that the sun's warmth can transform expected colors, like turning blue into a warm green in the sky.

13 Mixing and adjusting shadow colors



Mixing Shadow Color

I mix up the shadow color for the main big shadow in the sand in the foreground. It's important to remember that this color is surrounded by warmth, so anything I put there will look cooler than it actually is.

Adjusting Color Temperature

I make the shadow color more neutral than expected because it will appear bluer when surrounded by warm colors. This helps balance the overall warmth of the scene.

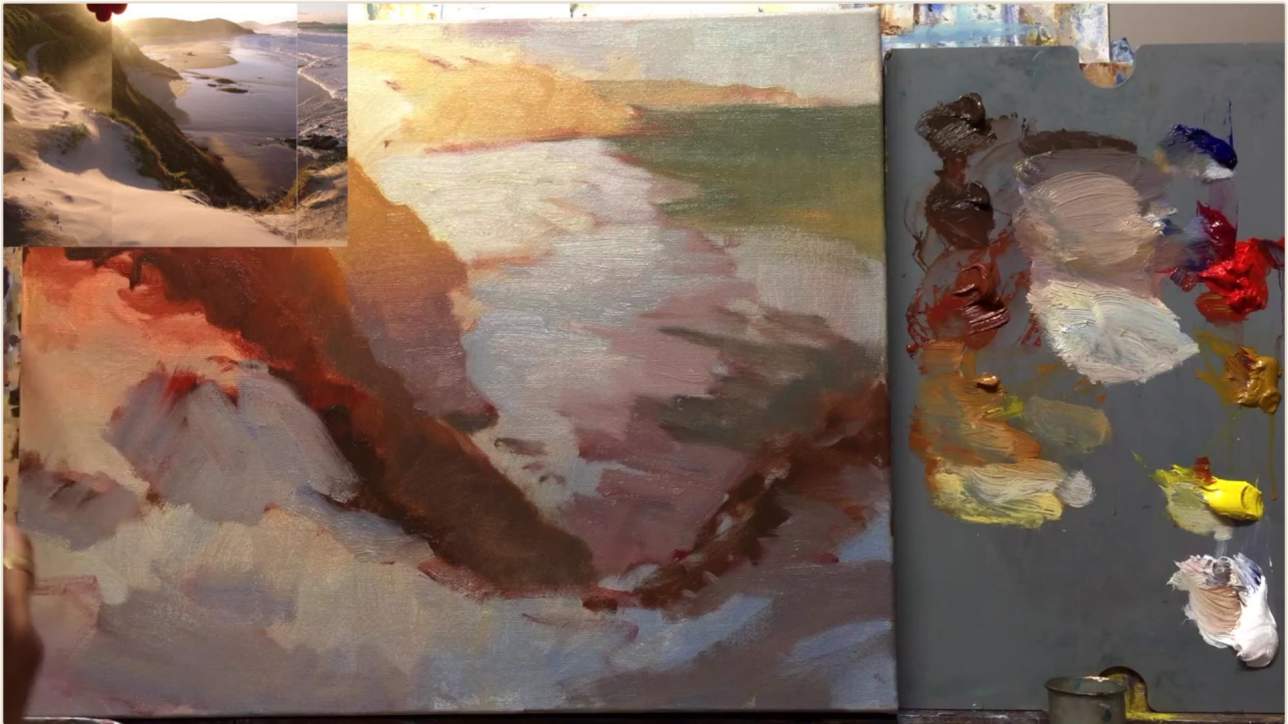
Lightening the Shadow Value

I lighten the value of the shadow color compared to the photograph. This compensates for the camera's tendency to make darks appear darker when surrounded by strong light.

PRO TIP

Make shadow colors more neutral and lighter to counteract the warmth and camera deficiencies.

14 Enhancing shadows and glowing effects



Darken and Warm the Shadow

I darken and warm the shadow color in the right-hand corner. This reduces color contrast, ensuring the eye isn't drawn to the bottom right corner of the painting.

Lighten Shadow for Glow

I lighten the shadow color slightly to enhance the glowing effect. This subtle change helps convey the sunlit atmosphere.

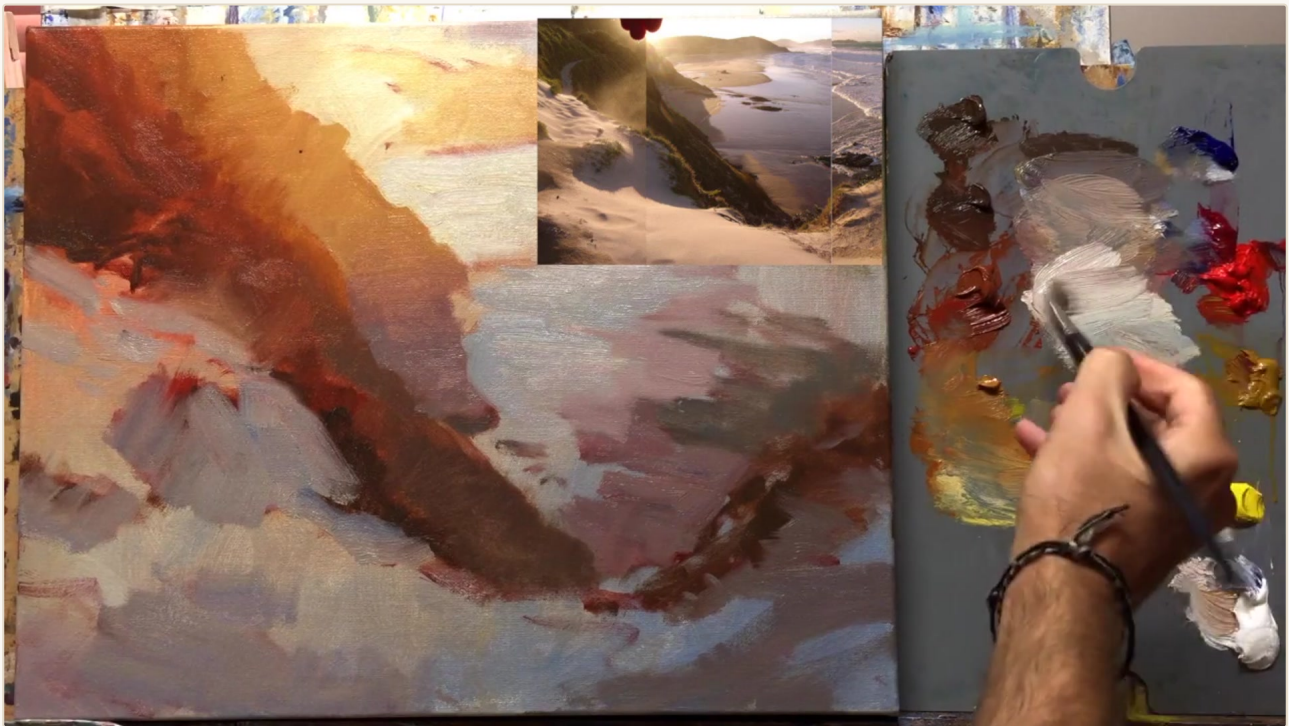
Create Sand Dune Effect

I mix a bit of orange and brush it out lightly. This simulates the effect of sand being caught by the sun, adding to the scene's vibrancy.

PRO TIP

Lightening shadow colors can help create a glowing effect, enhancing the sunlit atmosphere in your painting.

15 Mixing light colors for sand



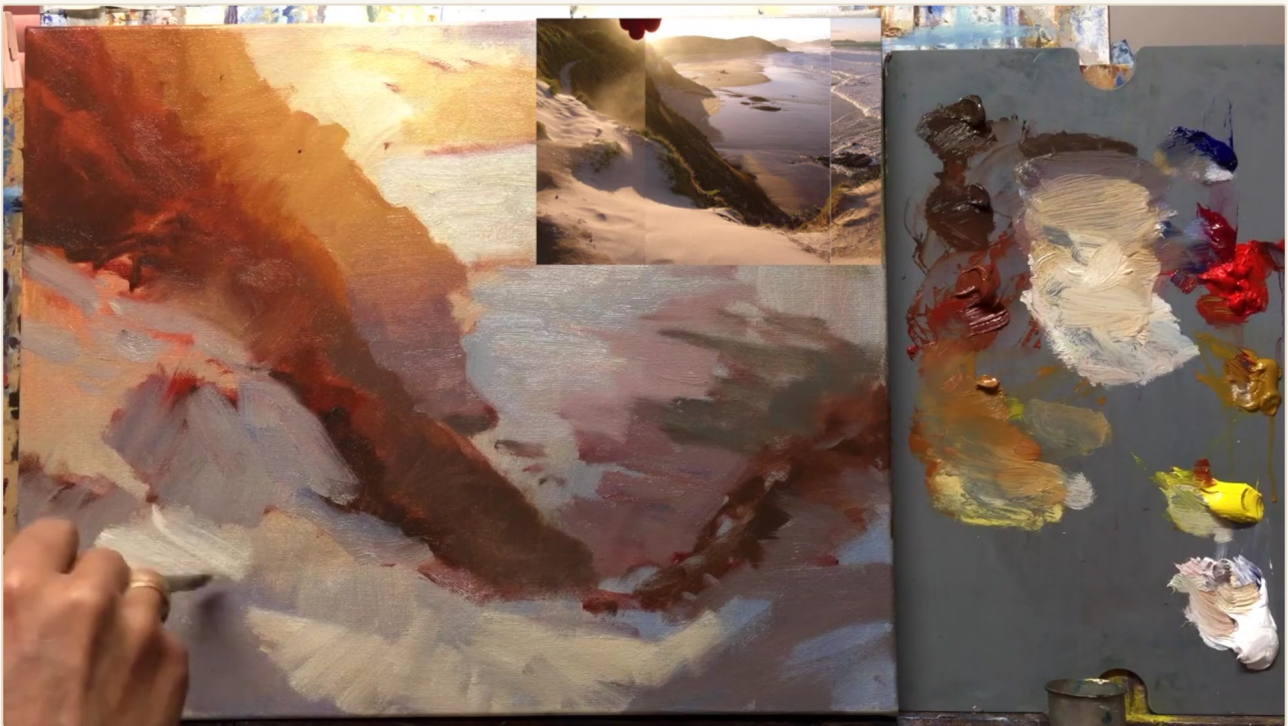
Mixing Light Sand Colors

I mix mostly white with a touch of yellow ochre to create a warm base for the sand. I add a bit of gray to tone it down and give it a more natural look. I make sure not to go too light initially, leaving room to add highlights later.

PRO TIP

Avoid starting too light with your sand colors to maintain room for highlights.

16 Painting shadow edges



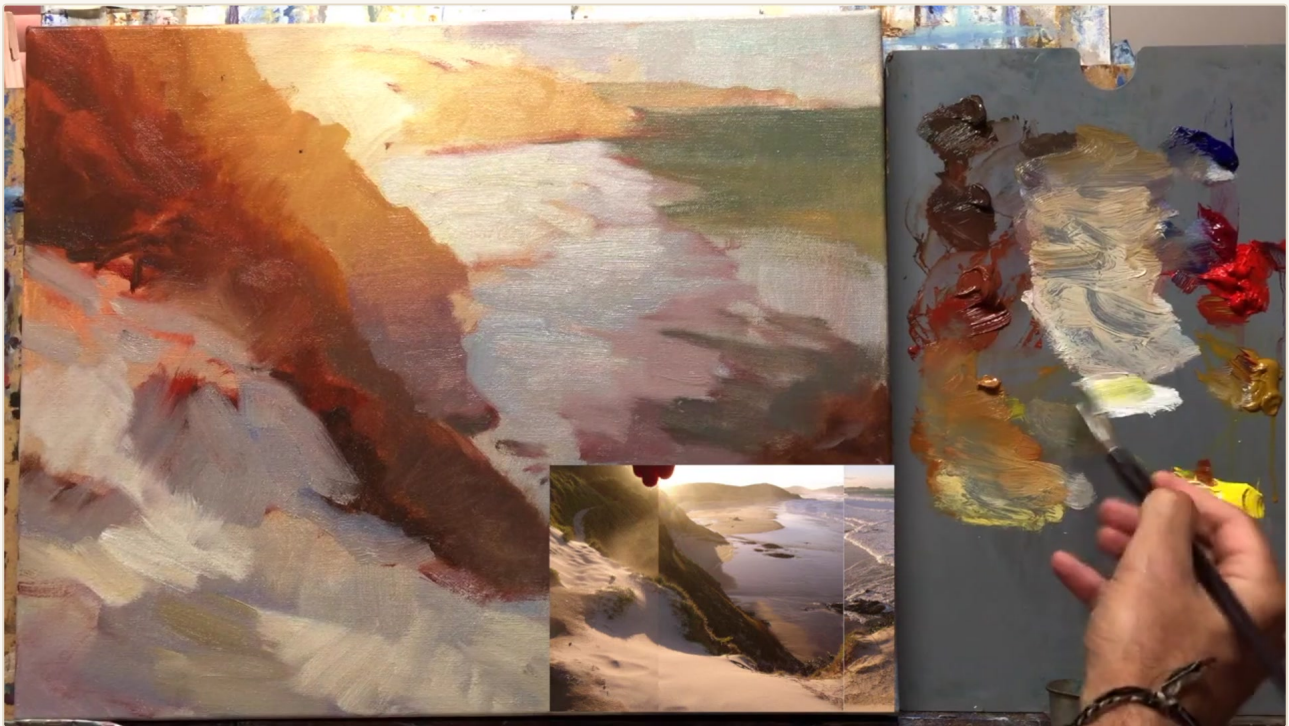
Consider Shadow Edges

I think about the edges created by the grasses casting shadows on the sand dune. I focus on how these edges appear wispy and change along the surface.

PRO TIP

Pay attention to how shadow edges change and the effect they have on the overall composition.

17 Painting sun glow



Paint the Sun Glow

I mix a lot of white with a little bit of yellow to create the color for the sun glow. I start painting in the middle of the sun glow area, then work outwards. As the paint runs out, it naturally blends into the surrounding colors, creating a smooth transition.

PRO TIP

Starting in the middle and working outwards helps blend the sun glow seamlessly into the existing colors.

18 Blending landmass colors



Darken the Landmass

I mix a warm gray or grayish brown to darken the landmass so it harmonizes with the ocean's color. I blend it out into the warmer tones as it approaches the sun.

Layer and Blend

I apply a second, darker layer, blending it not as far as the first layer. This creates a smooth transition as it moves away from the sun.

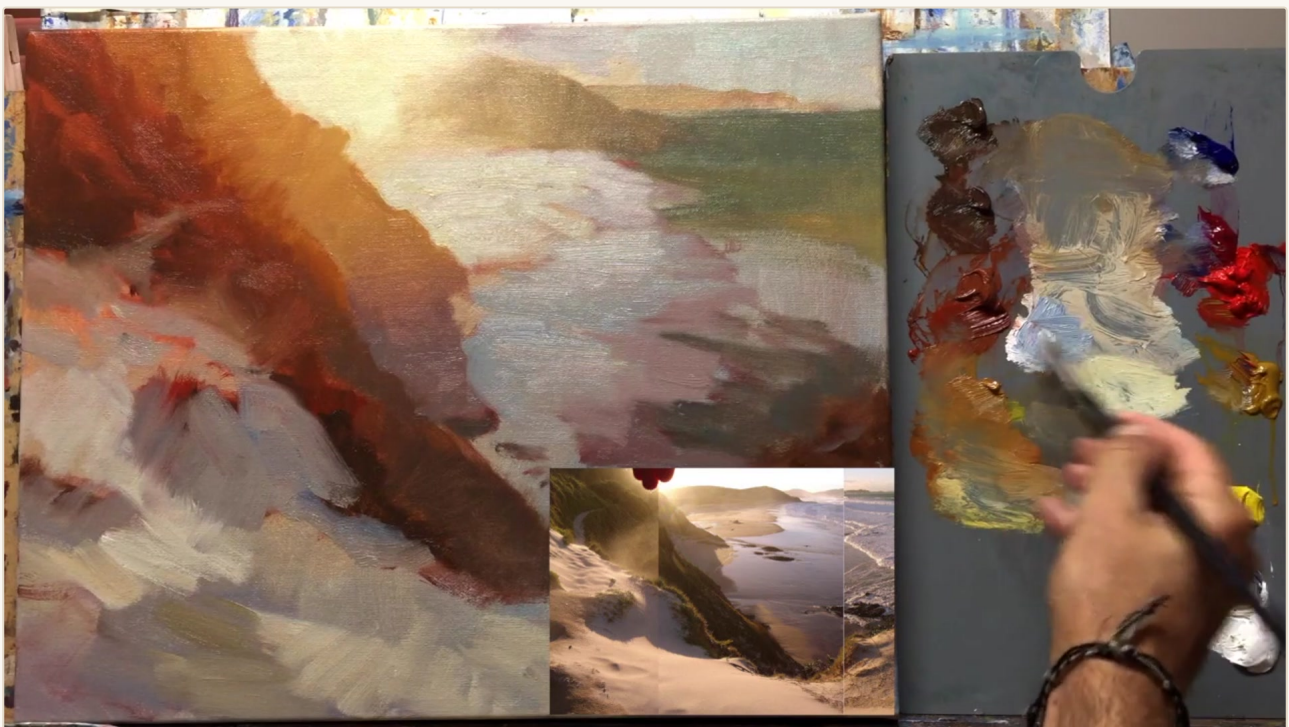
Use Color for Path

I use the same grayish brown for the path along the hill. Surrounded by warm reddish-brown tones, it appears cooler and slightly bluer.

PRO TIP

Blending multiple layers with varying darkness creates a smooth transition in the landscape.

19 Painting ocean foam



Mixing Foam Color

I mix a light blue for the foam, graying it down slightly with reds and other colors already on my palette. This creates a natural look for the foam lying flat on the water.

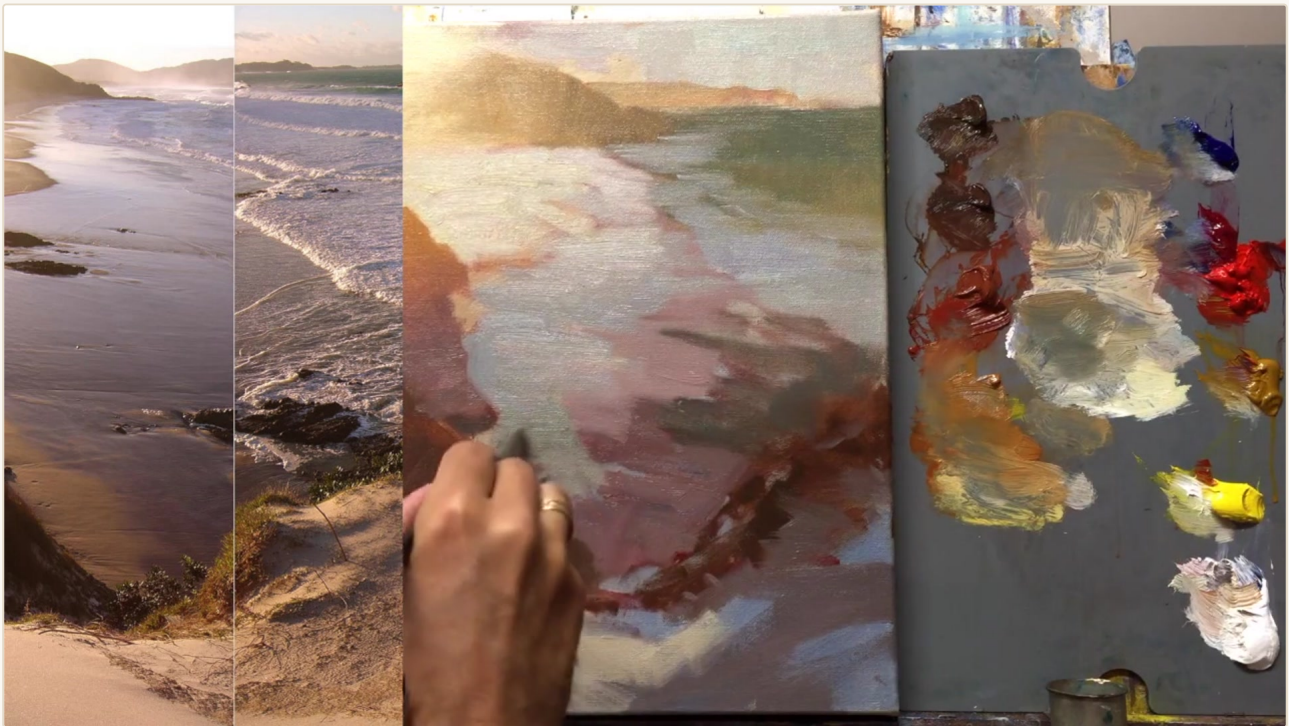
Adjusting Surf Lines

I notice the photo has been stitched together, so the surf lines aren't accurate. I use the resource photos online to better understand how the surf should appear from this angle.

PRO TIP

Using a mix of light blue and a touch of red creates a realistic foam color.

20 Surf and white water placement



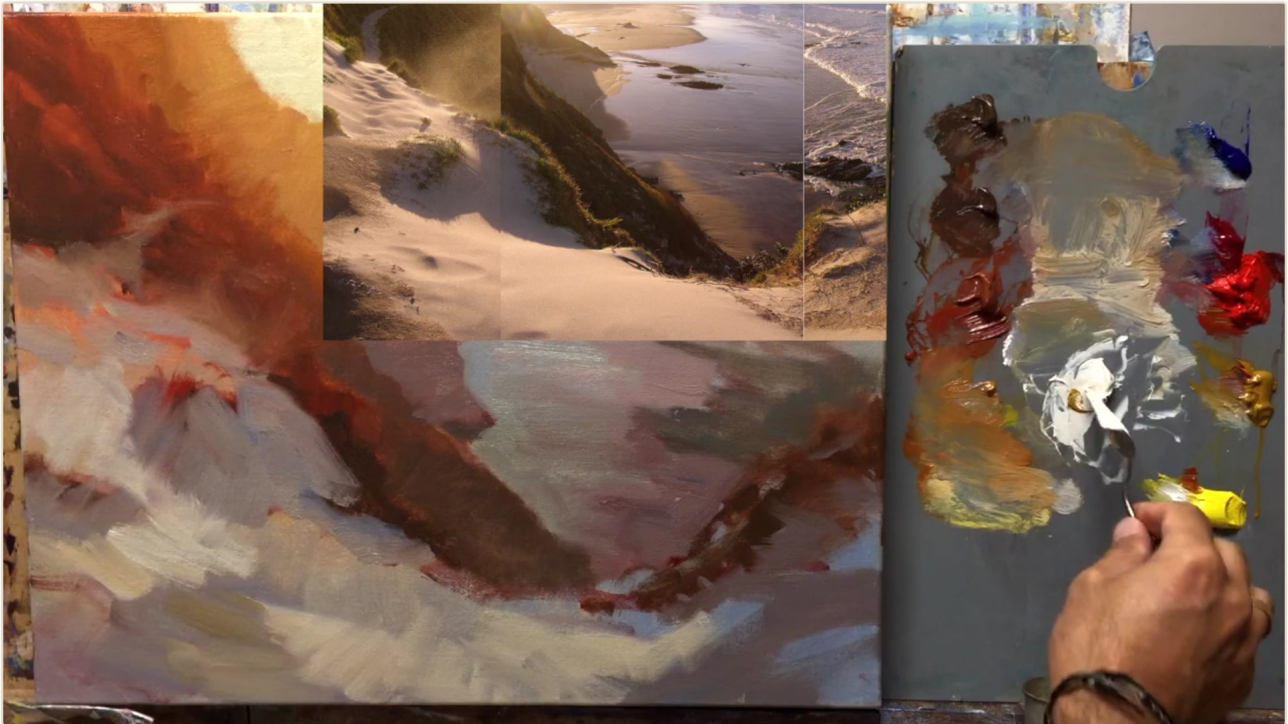
Determine White Water Placement

I consider the size of the surf to decide how far out the white water should extend into the ocean. Bigger surf means more turbulence, so the white water will be further out. I choose the placement based on the scene's dynamics and my artistic vision.

PRO TIP

The larger the surf, the further the white water extends due to increased turbulence.

21 Mixing and applying sand highlights



Mix Sand Highlight Color

I use the palette knife to mix the color for the highlights on the sand in the foreground. This allows me to mix a large amount of paint efficiently, as the brush tends to spread it out too much.

Apply Sand Highlights

I apply the paint thickly using either the palette knife or a brush. I focus on maintaining clean edges around the shadows to ensure the highlights stand out effectively.

PRO TIP

Mixing with a palette knife helps create a large, consistent batch of color for thick applications.

22 Retrospective adjustments



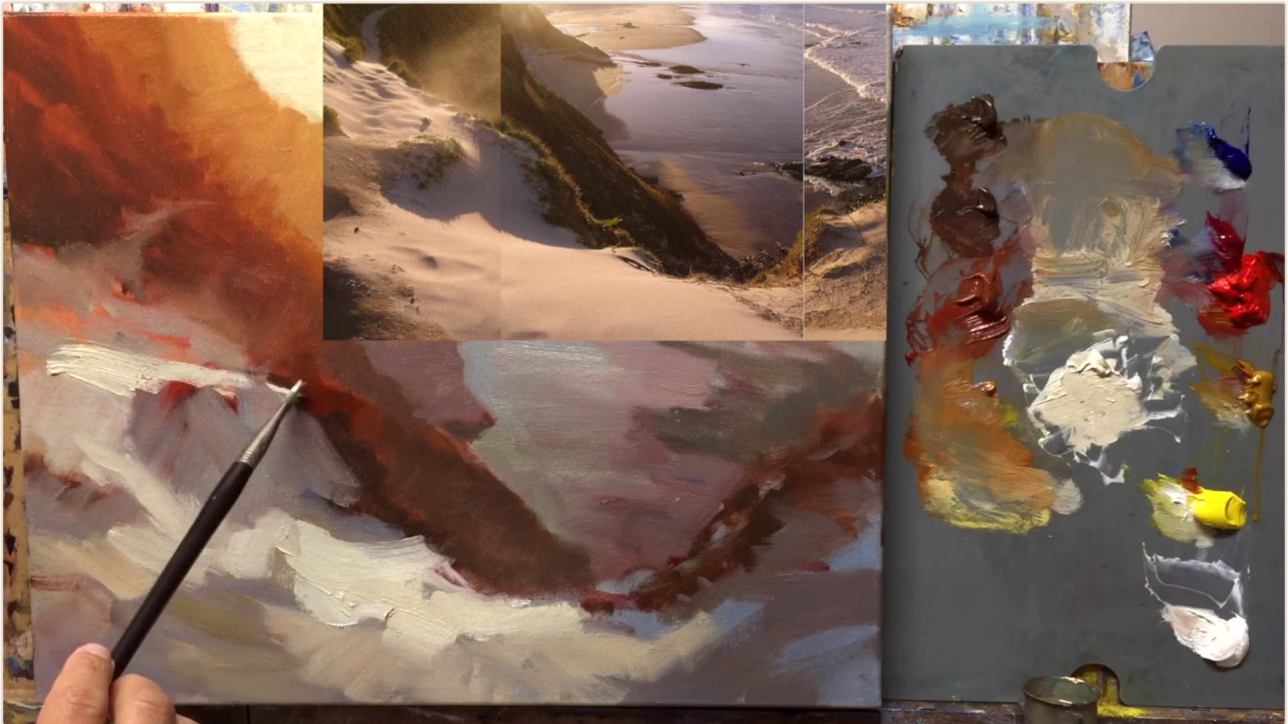
Adjust Sand Tone

I could have made the sand area a step or half a step darker. Adding more warmth to the sand would enhance the glow of the sun by reducing the brightness in the foreground.

PRO TIP

Darkening the sand slightly allows for more color in the area and enhances the sun's glow.

23 Final brushwork considerations



Consider Final Brushwork

I focus on my brushwork more in these final layers, as this is what viewers will see. I look for creative ways to use my brush to achieve the textures and edges I want.

Create Interesting Brushstrokes

I avoid repetitive strokes like dab, dab, dab, which can make the painting look uninteresting. Instead, I aim for variety in length and direction to add interest.

Aim for Beautiful Brushwork

I strive to say as much as possible with the fewest number of brushstrokes, creating a more engaging and dynamic painting.

PRO TIP

In the final stages, focus on making your brushwork varied and interesting to enhance the overall impact of your painting.

24 Adding detail to hills and path



Detailing Hills

I add a little more detail to the edges of the hills with some trees and bushes. Using a flat brush sideways, I create crisp little details by dabbing, which makes a big difference.

Adjusting Highlights

As the highlights get closer, I change the color to more orange and slightly darker. I also make them slightly larger and use thicker paint to add depth.

Avoiding Patterns

I focus on making these shapes similar but not identical, avoiding a neat, planted look.

Highlighting the Path

I add a little highlight along the path as if the sun is catching it, and use a white and yellow mixture to create sky holes for more detail.

PRO TIP

Use thicker paint and larger highlights as they get closer to add depth.

25 Highlight impact demonstration

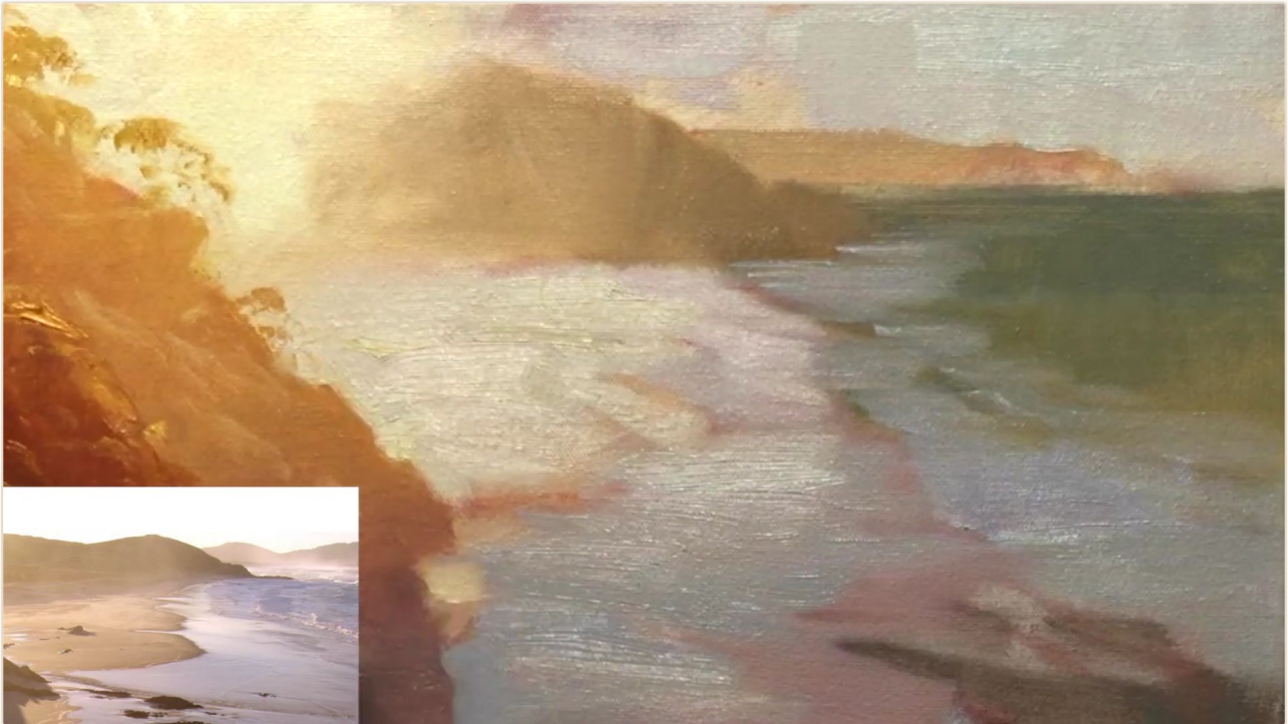


I show you the painting before adding highlights and then after. You can see the dramatic difference highlights make to the overall impact of the painting.

PRO TIP

Adding highlights can significantly enhance the depth and vibrancy of your painting.

26 Adding clouds and background details



Enhancing Hills and Beach

I add more detail to the hills and the beach, spending a few minutes refining these areas to create a more engaging background.

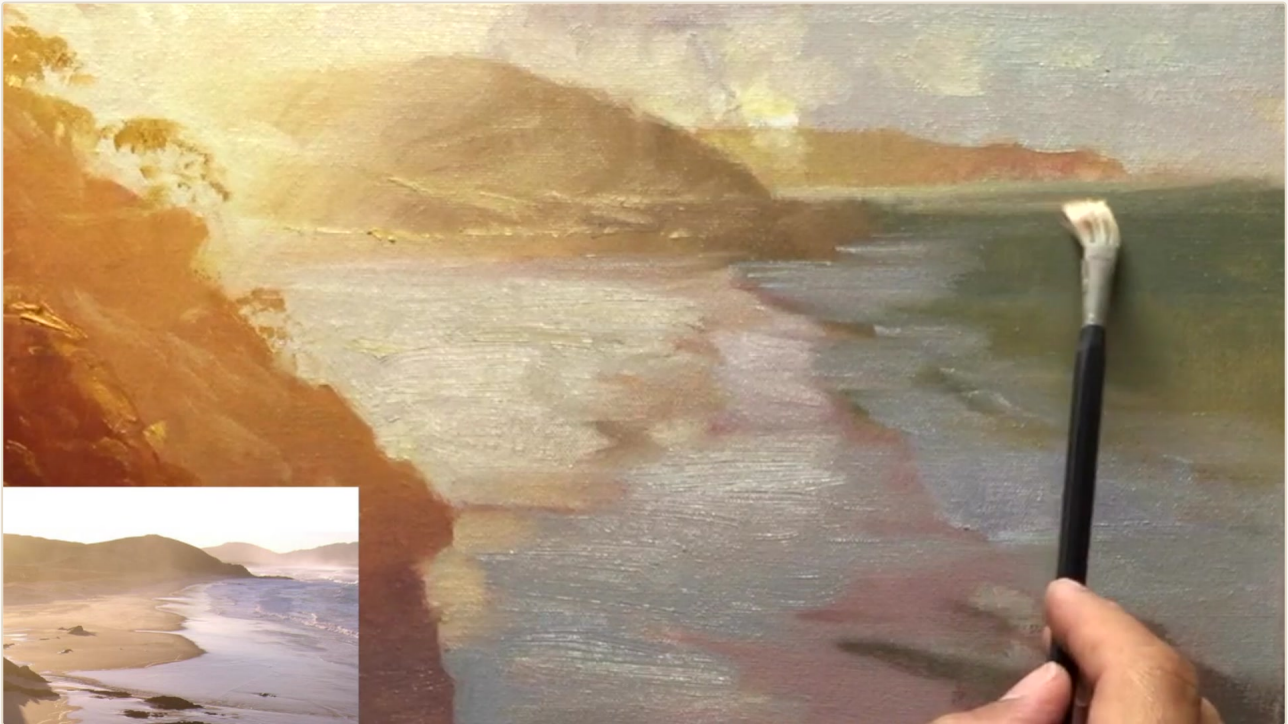
Adding Sunlit Clouds

I decide the sky needs more interest, so I paint some sunlit clouds. I bring a bright cloud down to the top of the hill, which could also be interpreted as sea spray, adding a magical touch.

PRO TIP

Bringing elements like clouds or sea spray into the background can add a magical touch to your painting.

27 Painting ocean light effects



Identify Light and Shadow

I observe the photo and notice the big hill casting a long shadow across the water. This shadow creates a contrast with the sunlit areas on the ocean.

Paint Sunlit Ocean

I focus on painting the area where the sun breaks through the landscape, illuminating the ocean. This involves capturing the light effects on the water's surface.

PRO TIP

Pay attention to how natural elements like hills can create dramatic light and shadow effects on the ocean.

28 Adjusting white water highlights



Mixing the Highlight Color

I mix white with a little bit of yellow ochre to create a dulled down, yellower version for the sunlit, foaming white water.

Applying the Highlight

I apply this mixture to the white water in front of the waves, ensuring it blends naturally without sticking out too much.

PRO TIP

Using a touch of yellow ochre with white helps the highlights blend more naturally into the scene.

29 Applying impasto highlights



Applying Fine Lines

I use the very tip of a large flat brush to create these fine lines. This technique helps me add detail without overwhelming the painting.

Mixing Impasto Highlights

I mix the paint lightly on the palette, under-mixing it to create interesting effects. This allows for a variety of textures that enhance the painting.

Applying Thick Highlights

I apply the paint really thickly, focusing on the most important highlight of the painting. These highlights are slightly darker than those on the left, adding depth and realism.

PRO TIP

Under-mixing paint on the palette can create unique textures and effects that enhance the painting's realism.

30 Foreground and background separation



Using the Palette Knife

I use the edge of my palette knife to create crisp, sharp lines, and the flat of the knife for broad textural effects. It's important to be aware of where the paint is on the knife and how much paint I'm using.

Adding Highlights

I add impasto highlights to the painting, focusing on areas like the shiny river to create a sense of light and depth.

Creating Depth with Dark Details

I paint a few dark details in the rocks to enhance the sense of depth. Adding a little bit of dark bluish gray at the bottom helps to separate the background from the foreground.

Textural Brush Strokes

I use thick, textural brush strokes in the foreground. The brokenness of these strokes suggests fine detail, enhancing the separation from the background.

PRO TIP

Using thick, textural brush strokes can help indicate fine detail and separate the foreground from the background.

31 Adding reflections and shimmer



Add Foreground Bushes

I add little bushes in the foreground, paying attention to the direction of their shadows. All shadows must point towards the sun to maintain consistency.

Create Reflections

I pop a little bit of lighter blue into the scene to indicate the reflection of the sky. This helps to create a more rounded form and enhances the depth of the painting.

Enhance Shimmer

I ensure there's a nice shimmer by contrasting warm colors against cool colors. This combination creates a beautiful effect that adds vibrancy to the painting.

PRO TIP

Always align shadows to point towards the sun for a cohesive look.

32 Final touches and signing



Enhance the Focal Area

I mix a little more white and yellow to brighten the focal area. I ensure my brush is very clean to keep the colors pure.

Signing the Painting

I carefully sign the painting, adding my personal touch to complete the artwork.

PRO TIP

Using a clean brush is crucial for maintaining the purity of colors in the focal area.

Summary & Key Takeaways

As I reflect on our journey through painting 'Sunset Beach,' I am reminded of the magic that comes from capturing the fleeting beauty of a sunset. From the initial toning of the canvas to the final brushstrokes, each step was designed to bring out the warmth and glow of the scene. My goal was to guide you in creating a painting that not only captures the light but also conveys the depth and atmosphere of a tranquil beach at sunset.

Throughout the process, I emphasized the importance of value and color relationships, encouraging you to see beyond the photograph and interpret the scene with your own artistic vision. By focusing on the interplay of light and shadow, and the subtle transitions of color, we were able to create a painting that feels alive and vibrant.

I hope this lesson has inspired you to experiment with your techniques and to trust your instincts as you paint. Remember, each brushstroke is an opportunity to express your unique perspective and to bring a little piece of the sunset into your art.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Toning the canvas can enhance the glowing effect in your painting.
- Use an oily mixture for initial sketches to keep them light and flexible.
- Pay attention to the lines of receding hills to maintain variety and depth.
- Painting light colors first helps maintain their vibrancy in glowing light scenes.
- Using a black and white reference allows focus on value and composition.
- Use the brush sideways to create a natural, clumpy grass effect.
- Lighten the value and cool the color for distant hills to create depth.
- Mixing with a palette knife helps create a large, consistent batch of color for thick applications.
- In the final stages, focus on making your brushwork varied and interesting to enhance the overall impact of your painting.



"Sunset Beach" 15.5 x 20" 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.

"Sunset Beach" by Denis King



"Sunset Beach" 16 x 12" Oil on Canvas by Denis King

Hi Denis, there's a lot working really well in this painting with just a wee adjustment needed to turn it into a real cracker. Your drawing is spot on, your shapes are nicely designed and the values are mostly perfect AND the brushwork is beautifully succinct. However... all that beautiful warmth in the hillside is not apparent enough in the background, which is looking chalky with too much white. When painting the hills back there start with a warm colour first like a light gray yellow ochre, then go from there, injecting warmth into the sky too and reflecting it in the beach and shallow water. THEN you'll have a complete glowing effect.

Beware those light diagonal sand shapes in the foreground that are creating a pattern of similar shapes. I would love to see this painting with those few changes made as I think it'll be outstanding. Great work Denis.

"Sunset Beach" by Marisa Comana Pessina



"Sunset Beach" Oil on canvas 25x30cm by Marisa Comana Pessina

Not too shabby Marisa! Nice glowing effect there. Hey see those purplish shadows on the beach? They're not really fitting in with the warm colours surrounding them. The darker area of brown at the base is not helping either. Take another look at my painting to compare. The hills in the distance are a good colour though you've outlined one a little with purple which spoils the effect.

Beware straight edged hills too! You've achieved a good variety of grass shapes in the foreground which is always tricky since we have a tendency to clone similar shapes in our paintings. The stark edge where the foreground sand meets the dark hill could be softened by breaking the edge with some stray grasses. Hope that helps. Overall you've achieved a nice effect.

"First Glimpse" by Kadee Hughes



"First Glimpse" 16 x 16" Oil on Canvas by Kadee Hughes

Hi Kadee, welcome to the group. Quite a striking painting you've made here with the contrast between the vibrant red and the gray greens in the ocean. I like the way you've compressed the image into a square format which has made the hills appear even steeper. You've grasped the idea of the glowing effect and the next step is to be a little more subtle with the colours. The yellows, oranges and reds could do with a little more gray in them, which you can do by adding the colour's complement, which is opposite it on the colour wheel. In general, our first paintings tend to be very bright and colourful and over time our colour sense develops greater subtlety. We can not only comprehend more subtle colour shifts in nature but we begin to be able to paint them. Yay! Just takes time.

Anyway, your drawing is very good, the grays are pretty good but the lights in your foreground sand could do with some variation. The distant hills should be the same value or darker than the ocean, not lighter. The cast shadow from the yellow section of the hill on the beach should not end with a dark line. Also, just have a look at the resource photo and see how close the colour of the hill is to the colour of the shadow. Very similar really.

Actually a lot of the colour problems in this painting could be solved by more carefully comparing one colour to another. Use the fuzzy one eye to help compare colours. Close one eye and make the other eye go out of focus so all you see is the big blurry shapes. Then compare colours that are similar. Ask yourself is it lighter or darker? Warmer or cooler? Grayer or more vibrant? That should help. Ok good luck and happy painting!

"Maui Morning" by Laurena Beirnes



"Maui Morning" Oil on Canvas 5x7 by Laurena Beirnes

You've got a pretty good glowing effect there Laurena, principally because of the background gradation from warm light to darker cool, and secondly from your effort to make the palm trees in the foreground a little warmer as well. The shadow cutting across the grass and beach is a nice touch too though I would expect the shadow on the beach to drop down slightly lower than shadow on the grass rather than curving upwards. The drawing of this and the curving edge of the distant beach are the two main things holding this painting back.

Compare it with the straight edge of the beach in my painting below.