



Old Timers

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/71-Old-Timers>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we'll dive into the nostalgic charm of painting a classic '53 Chevy truck, nestled against the backdrop of a beautifully weathered barn, with a cat lazily perched on the bonnet. This scene is a treasure trove of character and warmth, making it an irresistible subject for any painter with a sentimental streak. Together, we'll explore the process of bringing this scene to life, starting with the grid transfer method to sketch out our composition. We'll then block in the major dark and light shapes, gradually building up to the crisp details that make this painting pop. Throughout the lesson, I'll share techniques for achieving a consistent light effect, simplifying backgrounds, and mastering lost and found edges. Whether you follow along step by step or use the provided resource photos to craft your own unique design, you'll gain valuable insights into capturing the essence of this classic scene. Let's embark on this creative journey and see how this evocative painting comes together.



"Old Timers" 13 x 13" 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 Palette



Prepare Your Canvas

Tape your canvas securely to a board to ensure it stays in place while you paint.

Select Your Brushes

Choose a variety of brushes including long flats, a synthetic brush, and a few pointy ones for detail work. Consider using a fan brush for texture.

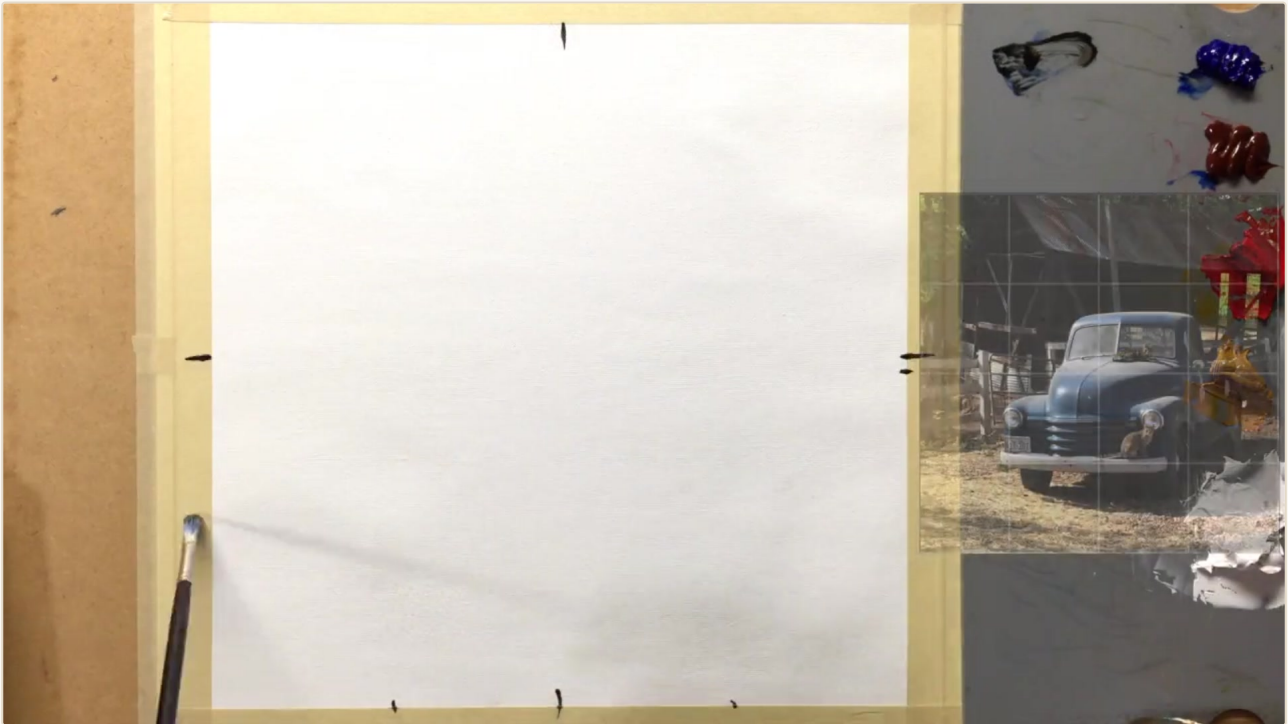
Choose a Simple Palette

Opt for a simple palette of colors that suits the subject. You can simplify further by removing the red if desired.

PRO TIP

Consider simplifying your color palette by removing unnecessary colors to focus on the essentials.

2 Grid Transfer Method



Prepare the Grid

Grid up your reference photo by drawing evenly spaced horizontal and vertical lines over it. Ensure the grid lines are clear and consistent to aid in accurate transfer.

Transfer the Grid to Canvas

Create the same grid on your canvas, matching the dimensions and spacing of the grid on your photo. This will help maintain the proportions of your drawing.

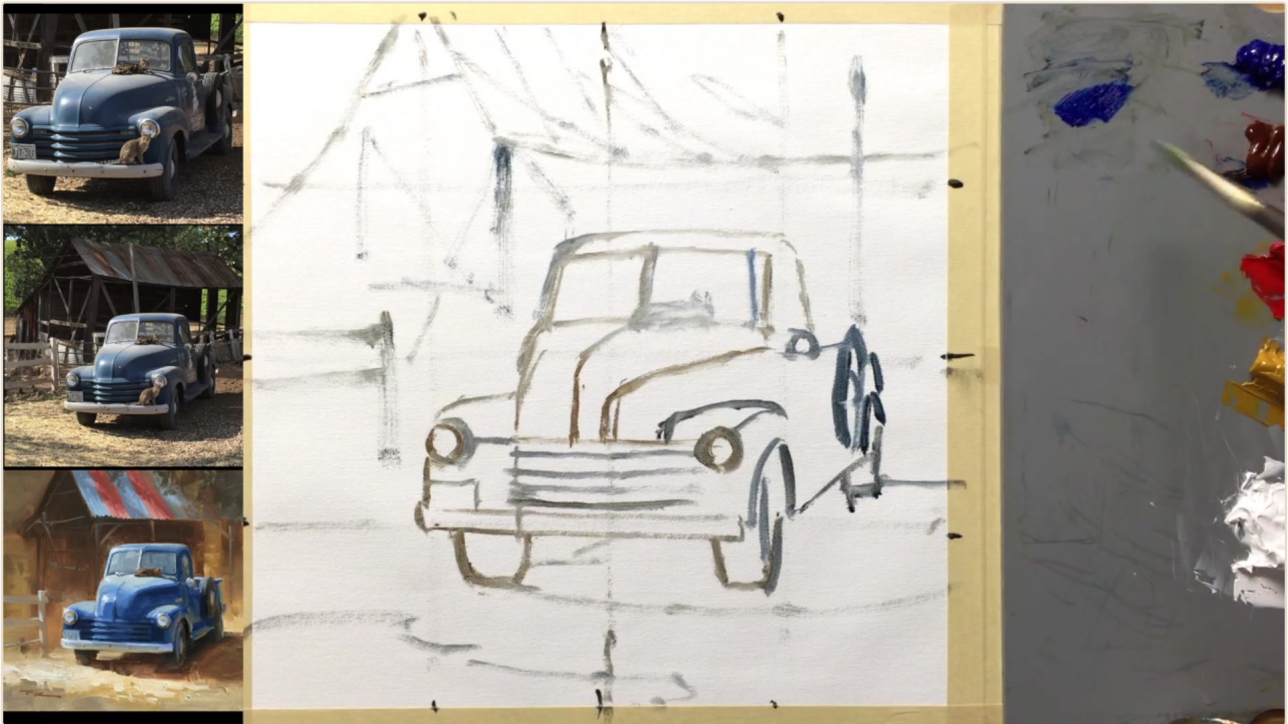
Fill in the Boxes

Use a thin mixture of blue and burnt sienna to lightly paint the outlines within each box on the canvas. Alternatively, use a pencil or piece of charcoal for this step.

PRO TIP

Ensure the grid on your canvas matches the grid on your reference photo to maintain accurate proportions.

3 Mixing and Applying Darkest Darks



Mix the Darkest Dark

Combine ultramarine blue and burnt sienna to create a neutral dark. Add a little walnut oil to the mixture to ensure it is thick enough to cover the canvas. Adjust the warmth or coolness by adding more burnt sienna for warmth or more ultramarine for coolness.

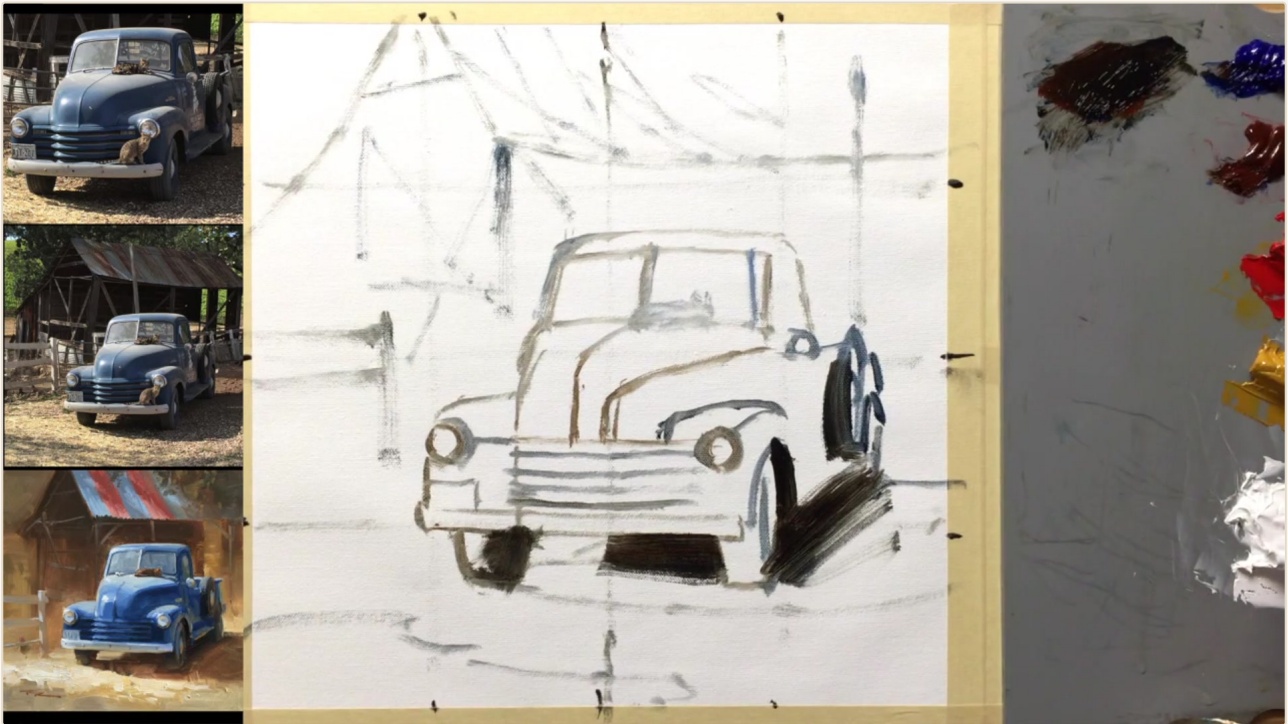
Apply the Darkest Dark

Identify areas on the canvas where the darkest dark will be applied. Use a big number 10 brush to apply the mixture, ensuring that the darks are slightly warmer by incorporating more burnt sienna into the mix.

PRO TIP

Add more burnt sienna to the mix for a warmer dark, or more ultramarine for a cooler dark.

4 Blocking in Background Darks



Mix Background Dark Color

Combine burnt sienna, blue, yellow ochre, and a touch of white to create a dark mixture for the background. Add a fair amount of walnut oil to make the mixture thin enough to cover the canvas smoothly.

Apply the Dark Mixture

Use the mixture to paint a large dark shape in the background. Ensure the paint is just thick enough to cover the canvas, even if it doesn't fully cover it yet. This initial layer will be refined later for more solidity.

PRO TIP

Add walnut oil to your paint mixture to achieve a thin consistency that covers the canvas smoothly.

5 Establishing Lightest Lights



Establish the Lightest Light

Mix yellow ochre with white to create your lightest color. Apply this mixture across the ground in the foreground with a dashing motion. This helps define the limits of your color range, ensuring nothing is darker than your darkest dark or lighter than this lightest light.

PRO TIP

Use the lightest light to establish the boundaries of your color range.

6 Painting the Roof Rust



Mix Vibrant Red Rust

Create a vibrant red rust color for the roof by mixing a strong red hue. Adjust the vibrancy to your preference, making it more or less intense than the photograph. This color will add a dynamic element to your painting, drawing attention and leading the eye down into the truck.

PRO TIP

Enhance the vibrancy of the red rust to add a striking focal point in your painting.

7 Adding Tree Overhang



Prepare Light Spots

Identify and outline the areas on the roof where light spots will be. Avoid painting over these areas for now, as they will be enhanced later.

Mix Dark Green-Brown

Create a darker green-brown mixture. This will serve as the base color for the tree overhang, adding depth and preventing the eye from sliding off the right side of the painting.

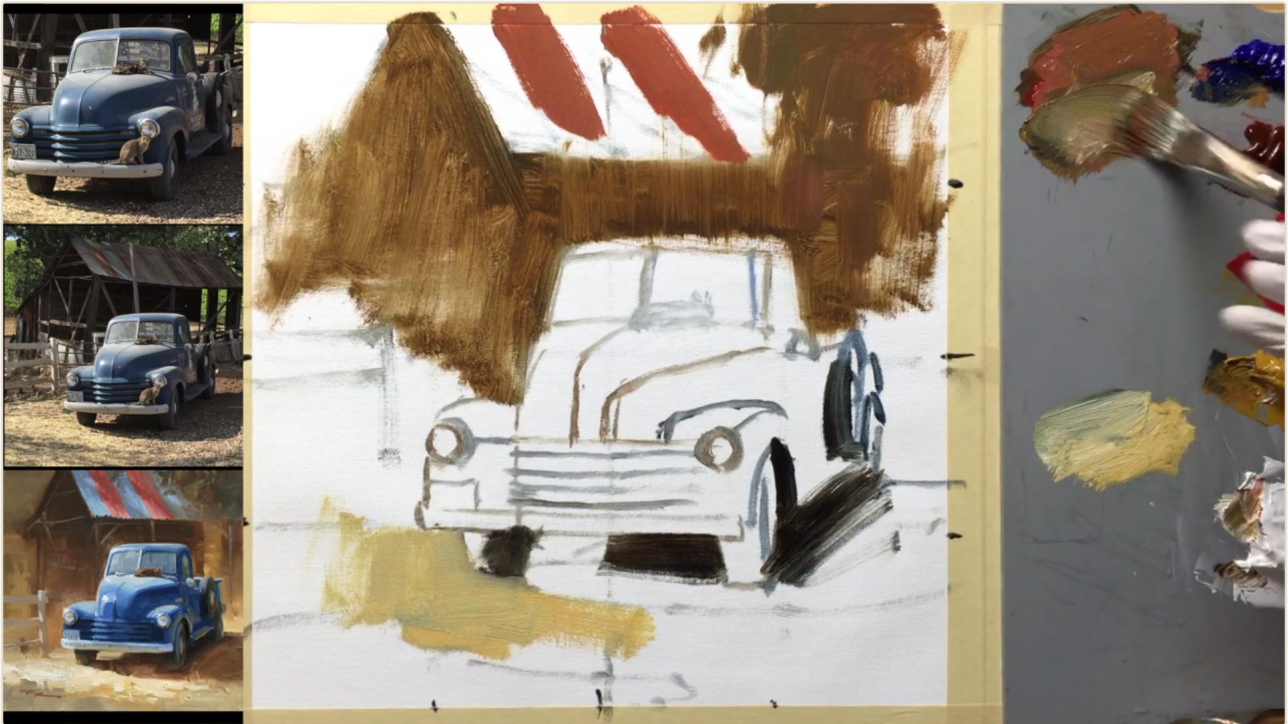
Paint Tree Overhang

Apply the dark green-brown mixture to create the tree overhang above the roof. This will help frame the composition and guide the viewer's eye.

PRO TIP

Outline light spots on the roof first to preserve them for later enhancement.

8 Simplifying the Background



Mix a Muted Green-Brown

Create a slightly lighter greeny brown by mixing your colors to achieve a very muted tone. This will serve as the background color on the left side of your painting.

Simplify the Background

Apply the muted green-brown to the background, ensuring that the colors are very similar throughout. This simplification helps to keep the focus on the truck and the shed.

Soften Edges and Values

Soften all the edges and values in the background. This technique prevents the viewer's eye from lingering in the background, directing attention to your main subjects.

PRO TIP

Use similar colors and softened edges in the background to direct focus to your main subjects.

9 Color Harmony in Background



Choose a Background Color

Select a background color that complements your main subject. Consider using brown for its warmth and complementary nature, as it is essentially a dark orange.

Understand Complementary Colors

Remember that brown, being a dark orange, complements blue. This complementary color scheme can enhance the harmony of your painting.

PRO TIP

Consider using brown in the background for its warm, complementary effect with blue.

10 Gradation and Blending in Background



Lighten the Background

Lighten the background color by mixing a bit of white and yellow ochre. Aim for a gradual transition from dark at the top to lighter and warmer tones in the foreground.

Temper Browns with Blue

Add a tiny touch of blue to the browns in the background to temper them. This creates a subtle grey tone, but you can choose to skip this step for a brighter orangey-brown effect.

Blend and Soften

Blend the dark areas softly into the layers below. Work the area to create a large, dusty, air-filled space effect, enhancing the depth and atmosphere.

PRO TIP

Add a tiny touch of blue to browns to create a subtle grey tone in the background.

11 Painting the Roof and Light Spots



Mix a Blue-Gray for the Roof

Create a blue-gray mixture for the tin roof. Saturate the colors slightly more than what you observe to make the roof appear brighter. This choice enhances the roof's color, but you can opt for a subtler, more gray tone if desired.

Consider Color Balance

Decide if you want the roof to stand out or blend in. A brighter roof draws attention, while a subtler gray shifts focus to the truck, adding interest there. Choose based on the overall balance you want in your painting.

Paint Around Light Spots

Carefully paint around the dappled light spots on the roof. This technique preserves the light spots and adds texture and depth to the roof area.

PRO TIP

Enhance the roof's color by saturating the blue-gray mixture slightly more than observed, unless you prefer a subtler look.

12 Detailing Shadows and Tires



Adjust Shadows Under the Truck

Use a dark brown to paint the shadows under the truck. Ensure the shadows are consistent with the light source and surrounding elements.

Paint the Front of the Tires

Mix a slightly cooler and lighter color for the front of the tires. This helps to differentiate them from the darker shadows beneath the truck.

Darken the Right Tire

Make the tire on the right slightly darker as it is further from the light source. This adds depth and realism to the scene.

Warm Up the Underside of the Left Tire

Add warmth to the underside of the left tire to reflect the light bouncing off the ground. This enhances the reflective quality and realism of the tire.

Minimize Warmth on the Right Tire

Apply less warmth to the underside of the right tire since it is more in shadow. This maintains consistency with the lighting conditions.

PRO TIP

Use colors in multiple places to save time and maintain harmony in your painting.

13 Adding Fine Lines and Cat



Choose the Right Brush

Select a crisp flat synthetic brush to create slim lines. If unavailable, use a thin script liner or a signing brush.

Begin the Cat

Start painting the outline of the cat using the edge of your chosen brush. Focus on creating clean, precise lines to define the shape.

PRO TIP

Use the edge of a crisp flat synthetic brush for fine lines.

14 Painting the Truck: Darks to Lights



Prepare Your Brush

Clean your brush thoroughly to remove any warm colors before starting with cool colors like dark blue. This prevents unwanted color mixing.

Mix and Apply Dark Blue

Mix a dark blue to begin painting the truck. Focus on creating big, simple shapes with this color, covering the darkest areas first.

Work Methodically

Progress from darks to mid values, then to lights. This systematic approach ensures a solid foundation before adding details.

Observe Edges

Pay attention to how shapes join at the edges. Determine if they are soft, turning edges or sharp edges, as these details will enhance the final painting.

PRO TIP

Focus on big, simple shapes initially to avoid getting caught up in details too early.

15 Blending and Curving on the Truck



Test Your Color Mix

If unsure about a mixed color, dab a little on the painting. This helps you see how it looks among neighboring colors and decide if adjustments are needed.

Mix a Grayed Blue

Create a blue mixture for the truck by adding a tiny bit of burnt sienna and possibly a touch of yellow ochre. This grays down the blue, making it more suitable for the truck's surface.

Add Dust Layer

For the dusty layer on the truck, lighten and warm the blue mixture slightly. This creates a neutral gray that represents the dust.

Blend and Curve

Blend the neutral gray into the blue as the bonnet curves over to the right. This area curves away from the sun, moving into shadow.

PRO TIP

Test a color by dabbing it on the painting to see how it interacts with other colors before making adjustments.

16 Reflecting on Mistakes



Darken the Right Side

Make the right side of the bonnet a little darker to better show the curve. This adjustment will enhance the three-dimensionality of the bonnet.

Check the Bonnet Line

Ensure the line of the bonnet is accurate. A precise line will contribute to the overall realism of the painting.

PRO TIP

It's easier to spot mistakes once the painting is finished, so take time to review your work thoroughly.

17 Planning Brushstrokes



Plan Your Brushstrokes

Before applying paint, examine the photograph and determine the shape needed for the area you're working on. Consider the direction, length, and form of the brushstroke to match the desired shape.

Consider Brushstroke Details

As you paint, think about the specific qualities of the brushstroke. Decide if the edge should be sharp or soft, and whether it requires a straight or curved line. These considerations will help create more intentional and effective brushstrokes.

PRO TIP

Always plan your brushstrokes to minimize unnecessary marks and achieve the desired effect efficiently.

18 Windscreen and Window Reflections



Observe Windscreen Differences

Notice that the windscreen has a split screen design, with the right-hand pane slightly darker than the left-hand pane. This difference is due to the angle of the panes.

Add Interior Structure Details

Include subtle accents to suggest the structure of the car's interior visible through the windscreen. These accents should be slightly darker to create depth.

Reflect Tree in Window

Add a green tint to the window to reflect the tree on the right. This will enhance the realism by suggesting the window is catching some of the surrounding environment.

PRO TIP

Use subtle darker accents to suggest interior details visible through the windscreen.

19 Bumper and Light Reflections



Paint the Bumper

Observe the bumper closely. Apply a cool grey on the top to reflect the sky and a warm grey on the bottom to capture the light bouncing off the ground. Start from the left and note the strip of light across the top, but don't paint it yet.

Add the Number Plate

Use a slightly darker grey to paint the number plate. This will help it stand out against the bumper.

Reflect Light on the Lights

For the lights, apply a warm tone on the top inside to reflect the ground's warmth. Use a cooler tone on the bottom to reflect the sky, maintaining the natural light effect.

Reflect Warm Light on the Track

Capture the warm light reflecting on the side of the track. Ensure this warmth is subtly integrated into the shadows.

PRO TIP

Keep reflected lights in the shadows by squinting at your painting to ensure they aren't too bright.

20 Adding Highlights and Details



Add Highlights with a Flat Nylon Brush

Use the very tip of a flat nylon brush to add highlights. Focus on the center line, which starts dark and becomes lighter as it moves up the bonnet into the sunlit area. This placement is crucial for conveying the curve of the object.

Intensify Key Highlights

Revisit a few of the highlights and intensify them slightly. This will enhance the dimensionality and realism of the object.

PRO TIP

Use the tip of a flat nylon brush for precise highlight placement without switching to a smaller brush.

21 Dappled Light and Color Relationships



Paint Dappled Light on the Barn

Focus on capturing the angle and edges of the dappled light. Ensure soft edges where the light transitions into shadow and sharp edges at the object's boundaries.

Maintain Color Relationships

Observe the color relationship between the shadows and lights. Ensure the red is slightly darker than the blue in both shadow and light areas to maintain consistency.

Ensure Consistent Light Relationships

Check that the darks and lights have the same relationship across all objects in your painting. This consistency is crucial for creating a convincing sense of light.

PRO TIP

Keep the relationships between the darks and lights consistent across all objects to enhance the sense of light in your painting.

22 Softening Background Edges



Soften Background Edges

Use a soft brush to gently blur the edges in the background. This creates the effect of dust in the air and adds depth to your painting.

Add Texture to Foreground

Apply paint thickly in the foreground to create a strong contrast with the soft background. Use a textured brushstroke to enhance the sense of depth and focus.

Define Corrugated Iron

Create the edge of the corrugated iron with a slight wriggle of the brush. This technique adds realism and structure to the foreground elements.

Add Structural Details

With a mid-value neutral grey, carefully add a few structural details. Ensure not to overdo it, keeping the focus on the main elements.

PRO TIP

Use a soft brush to blur background edges, enhancing depth and atmosphere.

23 Foreground Details and Cat



Add a Fence

Use a slightly lighter grey to paint a small fence in the foreground. This will add structure and interest to the scene.

Highlight the Fence

Mix a lighter, slightly cooler grey to indicate light hitting the fence. This creates a sense of depth and realism.

Break Up the Foreground Shadow

Introduce a little bit of glowing color to break up the shadow in the foreground. This adds warmth and vibrancy to the painting.

Enhance the Cat

Apply a couple of highlights to the cat to make it more defined and recognizable. This detail helps the cat stand out as a focal point.

PRO TIP

Use a cooler grey to suggest light and add depth to structures like fences.

24 Foliage and Chicken



Create Varied Brushwork

Use a large brush to create a mix of big and small shapes. This variety in brushwork adds interest and texture to the painting.

Add Light to Foliage

Mix a green that leans more towards yellow ochre. Use this color to indicate a few light areas in the foliage, enhancing the depth and vibrancy.

Paint the Chicken

Include a small chicken in the scene to add an element of interest and narrative, giving the cat a reason to wake up.

PRO TIP

Use a large brush to create a mix of big and small shapes for varied texture.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by preparing your canvas and selecting a streamlined palette that emphasizes essential colors. Secure your materials and use the grid transfer method to accurately lay down the foundation of your composition. This meticulous beginning will set the stage for a balanced and proportionate painting.

As you progress, focus on establishing the darkest darks and lightest lights to define the range of your painting. Use a mix of burnt sienna and ultramarine blue for the darks, and yellow ochre with white for the lights. These contrasts will guide your color choices and add depth to your work. Pay attention to the background, using softened edges and harmonious colors to keep the focus on your main subjects.

In the final stages, refine your painting with careful attention to details and highlights. Use precise brushstrokes to enhance features like the truck's roof and the dappled light on surfaces. Consider the interplay of colors and reflections to add realism and vibrancy. With each layer and detail, your painting will come to life, capturing the essence of the scene with depth and harmony.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Tape your canvas securely to prevent movement while painting.
- Ensure your grid on the canvas matches the reference photo for accurate proportions.
- Add burnt sienna for warmth or ultramarine for coolness in your darks.
- Use walnut oil to thin your paint for smooth coverage.
- Establish the boundaries of your color range with the lightest lights and darkest darks.
- Enhance the vibrancy of focal points like the roof rust for dynamic interest.
- Plan your brushstrokes to minimize unnecessary marks and achieve desired effects.
- Use subtle darker accents to suggest interior details visible through the windscreen.



"Old Timers" 13 x 13" 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.

"1953 Chevy" by Walda Juhl



"1953 Chevy" 12x12" Acrylic on Canvas by Walda Juhl

Hi Walda, Before I make a comment about your painting in particular, I should say to all of you folk who have contributed to this particular workshop, that painting this old truck and the sheds and yards behind is not an easy project – in fact, I would consider it quite a difficult subject. Having said that, I think you have all done very well.

Your painting Walda has a number of nice features – (although the yellow in the foreground is a little strident), generally, the colour is good and your overall design has worked out well.

However, there are one or two things that bother me. When we draw symmetrical mechanical devices like this truck, it is really important that we draw it accurately. If you look carefully at the bonnet of your truck, you will find that the far side is bigger it appears than the side that is closest to us. The same is true of the windscreen. I know that when you look at the photo, it does appear to be the case but as they say, it's "a trick of the light" and in this situation, I would compensate so that it would look correct in my painting.

The other point I would make while we are talking about drawing is that if you look at the photo carefully, you will see that we do not see as much of the back of the truck as you have shown. This is a common error often seen when people draw things like cars and boats. It doesn't take much of an error when you're drawing to make the object look seriously wrong! I'm going on a bit here, but if you have a careful look at the roof of your building, you may notice that the striped roof is shouting for attention. Those stripes on the photo are old rust, not nice neat strips of new paint. A very good piece of work despite all that.

“Just Married” by Robert H. Smith



"Just Married" 5x7" Oil on Canvas by Robert H. Smith

This painting I found interesting in two very distinct ways.

The first is a negative and not really of Robert's making – the canvas he has chosen to use is too small and really too grainy for the subject he is painting. Because of this, it has a distinctly soft edge over almost the whole area of the painting. Barely a sharp edge anywhere! If it was me, I would be switching over to a much finer grained canvas and working on a bigger scale. That way, I would then have far greater control over whether I achieve sharp detail or lost focus.

However, having said that, I think the lighting and colour in Robert's painting is amazing. It speaks so beautifully of the heat and brilliance of the sunshine, and the coolness in the shadows. Well done I feel.

“Ready for a Drive!” by Christophe Borrel Ducroz



"Ready for a Drive!" 25x30cm Oil on Canvas by Christophe Borrel Ducroz

Christophe, this is a very nice painting of the truck itself—good drawing skills and nicely placed in the painting although I might have been inclined to allow a little more space in the foreground—the bumper is almost sitting on the frame.

However, I find the background a little less convincing. The detail and design on the left-hand side of the truck could have been almost lost into shadows. They are tending to crowd up on the vehicle and the shapes are confusing.

There is a commonly used term when you get into areas like this—“fudging it” where you barely indicate the detail—Just enough to convince the viewer that it is not a black hole! That is basically what sharp detail and lost focus are about—losing focus on the lesser items in the painting ensures that the focal point draws the eye. All is not lost though. The quality of your truck “saved the day!”

- Many thanks to John Crump for his insightful critiques. You can see John's own paintings and teaching dvds at www.johncrump.co.nz

"Old Blue Truck" by **Stuart J. Gourlay**



"Old Blue Truck" Oil on Canvas by Stuart J. Gourlay

You've made a very nice job of this painting Stuart. Good tone and colour with a nice confident feeling in the brushwork. Although there are a few small drawing errors in the truck itself, you've managed to convey the character of the vehicle so that most people would recognise the model.

One of the difficulties of picking a subject like this is that the drawing needs to be accurate - unless it's in poor, beaten up condition, which your truck obviously isn't! If you study the photo carefully, you'll see that the front bumper is too large and is falling off the left hand side, the left front wheel is too far forward, (it would be scraping the wheel arch), and the side of the tray is sloping down towards the back - the photo shows that it slopes slight up to the back if anything.

I don't want to be 'overboard' about such detail - but I think it matters!! It's a bit like portrait or paintings of animals - accuracy is important. Lastly, I noticed your comment about the shed roof. I think you're quite right - it is too vivid - along with the other sheds behind the truck. Especially the roof above the truck's tailgate. They are all vying for attention. I can't look at your truck without being aware of the shadows on that roof. You can obviously paint well so it's easily fixed on the next one!