



Hay Bales

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/59-Hay-Bales>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, I invite you to explore the vibrant world of hay bales, a scene rich with light, color, and movement. This beautiful provincial landscape offers a perfect opportunity to delve into the art of creating movement with bold brushwork and shimmering broken color. As we paint, we'll focus on capturing the essence of the scene using just two brushes and six colors, keeping our approach simple yet effective. You'll learn how to use impressionistic techniques to infuse your work with dynamic energy, reflecting the interaction of wind with elements like grass and trees. This project is all about enhancing the vibrancy and mood of the landscape by adjusting hues and intensities. I hope you'll find joy in applying these techniques to your own paintings. Remember, the key is to have fun and let your creativity flow. So grab your brushes, dive into the lesson, and don't forget to check the online resource page for additional guidance. Happy painting!



"Hay Bales" 11.5 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 Initial Painting Approach



Capture the Scene

Begin by observing the scene you want to paint. Focus on capturing the overall composition and essential elements that define the landscape.

Express the Color

Revisit your initial painting and enhance the colors. Aim to bring out the vibrancy and mood of the scene by adjusting hues and intensities.

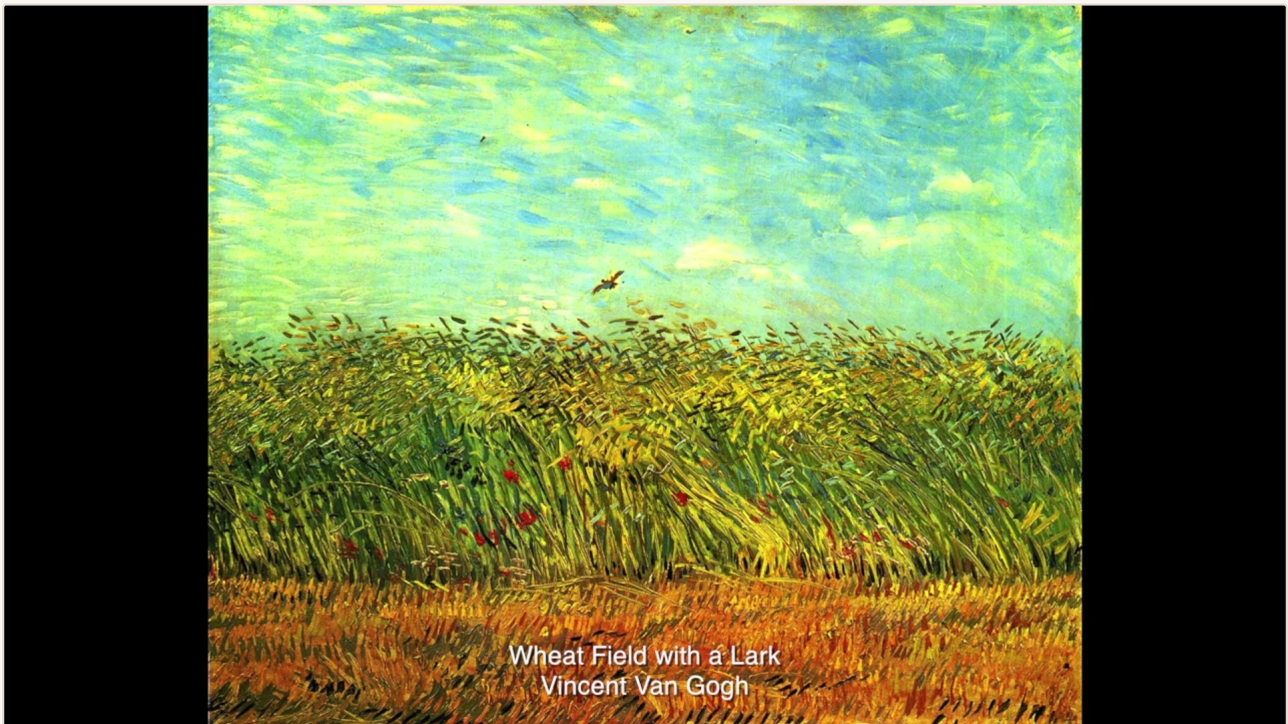
Explore Movement

Use your brushstrokes to convey the movement within the scene. Consider how the wind interacts with elements like grass or trees, and let your brushwork reflect that dynamic energy.

PRO TIP

Use expressive brushstrokes to capture the movement of wind in your landscape.

2 Brushwork and Movement



Wheat Field with a Lark
Vincent Van Gogh

Observe Brushwork in Paintings

Look at paintings by other artists and notice how they use brushwork to create a sense of fluid movement. This technique helps to lead the viewer's eye through the painting.

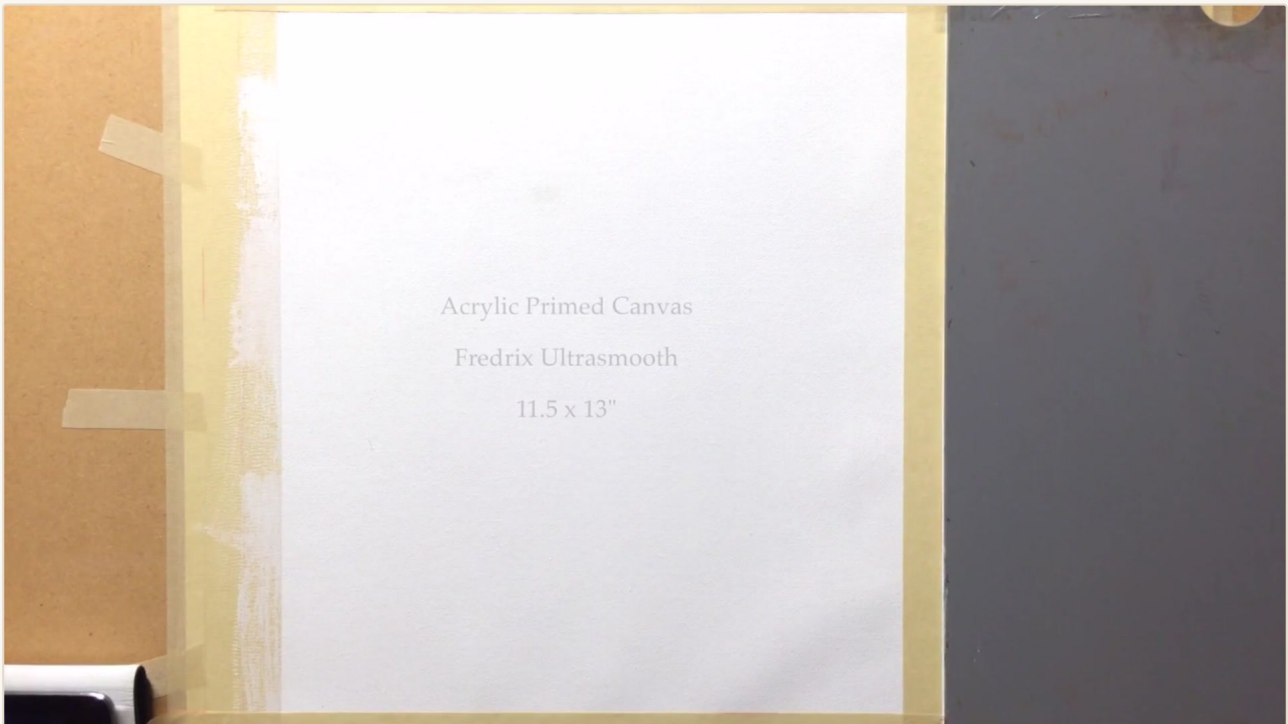
Incorporate Movement with Brushwork

Use your brushwork to add vibrancy and life to your scene. This will enhance the overall dynamism and guide the viewer's gaze effectively.

PRO TIP

Use brushwork to create movement and guide the viewer's eye through the painting.

3 Canvas Preparation



Prepare the Canvas

Cut a piece of canvas from a larger roll to your desired size. Stretch it out flat and secure it to your working surface using masking tape. This will keep the canvas taut and ready for painting.

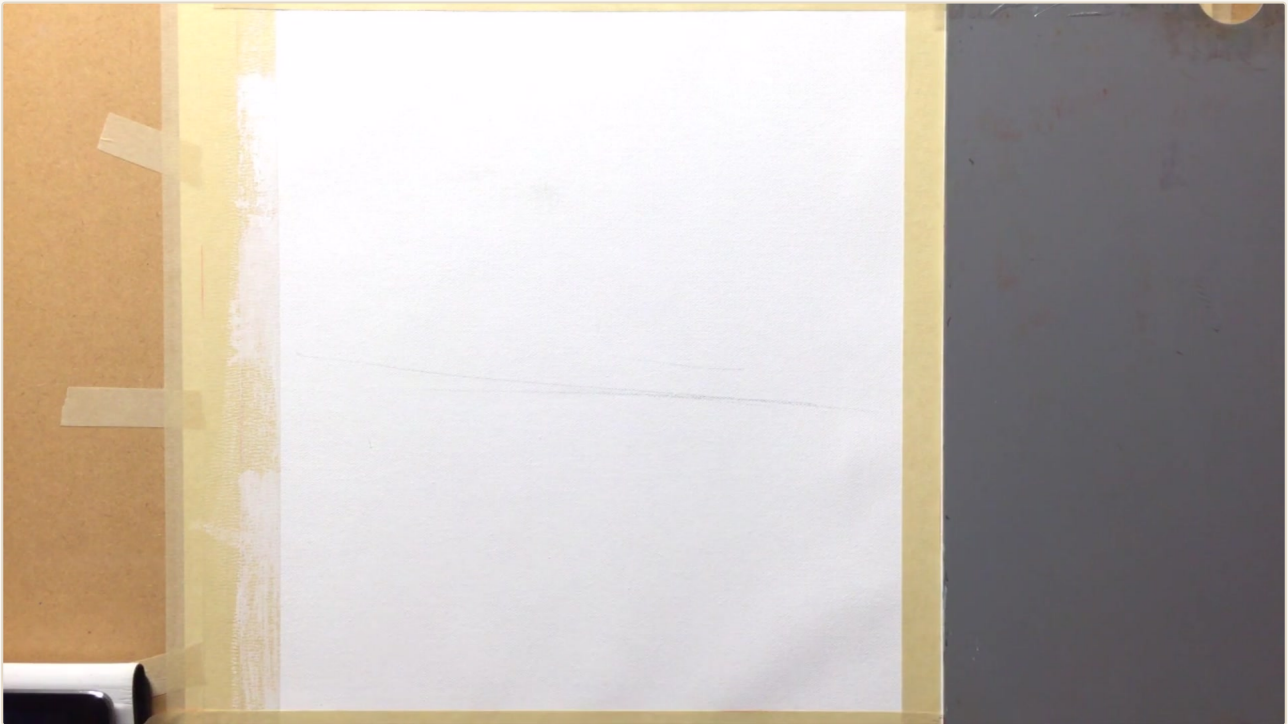
Apply Gesso

Coat the canvas with a layer of gesso. This primer helps the paint adhere better and creates a smoother surface for your painting.

PRO TIP

Always apply gesso to your canvas to enhance paint adhesion and surface quality.

4 Sketching Tips



Prepare Your Sketch

Allow your painting surface to dry overnight before beginning your sketch. Use an HB pencil to lightly sketch your design.

Draw Ellipses Accurately

When sketching ellipses, such as the side of a hay bale, use a center line to help get the ellipse just right. Ensure the ellipse is cut off flat at the bottom to show it sitting in long grass.

Sketch the Tower Correctly

Since you're looking up at the tower, angle the line on the left side down to the left and the line on the right side down to the right. Position the tip of the roof slightly to the left of the building's corner.

Add Distant Elements

If adding a hay bale in the distance, make it very small to maintain the correct scale and prevent the buildings from appearing small.

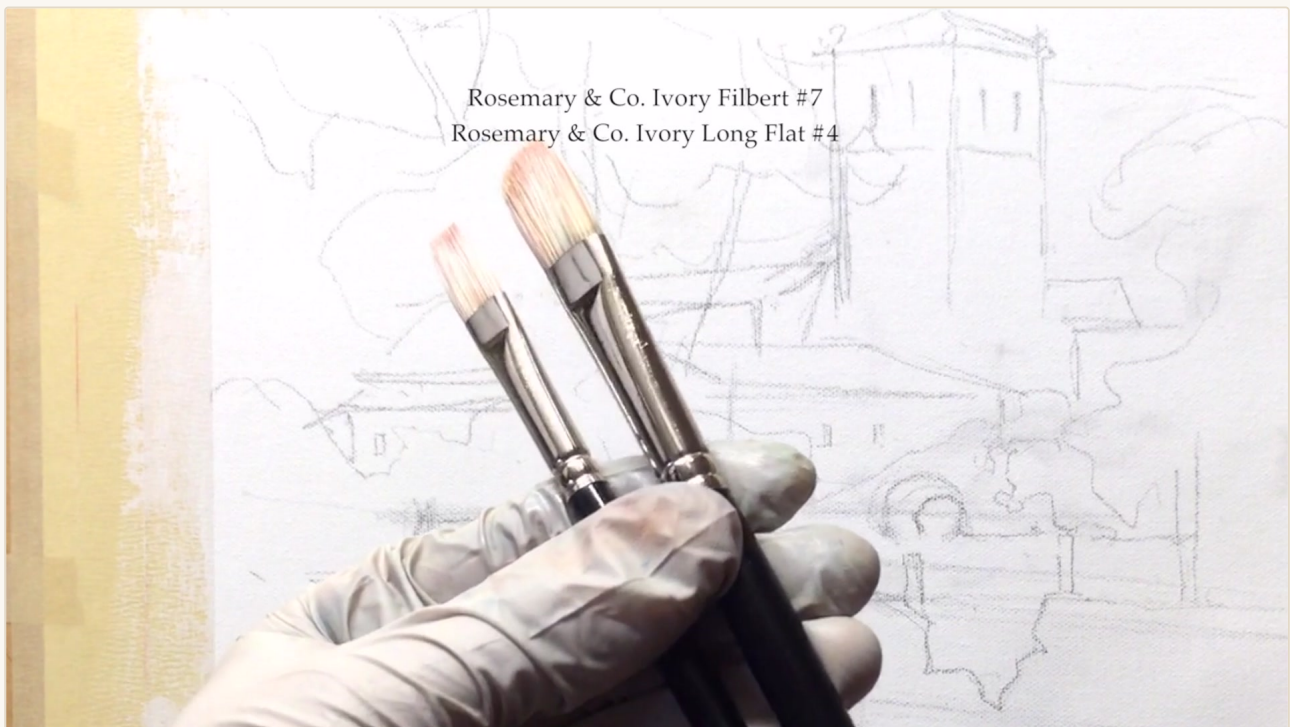
Simplify the Drawing Process

If sketching is challenging, print out the painting at the desired size and trace it onto your canvas. Precise drawing is not critical for this painting.

PRO TIP

Use a center line to help accurately draw ellipses, ensuring they are flat at the bottom for realism.

5 Brushes and Mediums



Select Brushes

Use two long bristled synthetic brushes from Rosemary & Co. These brushes will help create the desired movement in your painting.

Prepare Your Solvent

Have some Gamsol ready in a pot. This will be your only solvent for cleaning brushes, as no painting medium will be used.

Focus on Brushwork

Aim for thick gestural brushwork to guide the viewer's eye around the painting. Avoid using painting mediums to maintain the texture and movement of the brushwork.

PRO TIP

Use only Gamsol and synthetic brushes to maintain thick, expressive brushwork.

6 Blocking in Darks



Prepare Your Brush

Start with a big brush and dip it in your chosen solvent, such as gamsol or otolith thinners. This will help the paint flow smoothly.

Mix the Dark Shade

Mix a dark color for the shadow side of the hay bale. Focus on creating a rich, deep tone that will define the shadow areas.

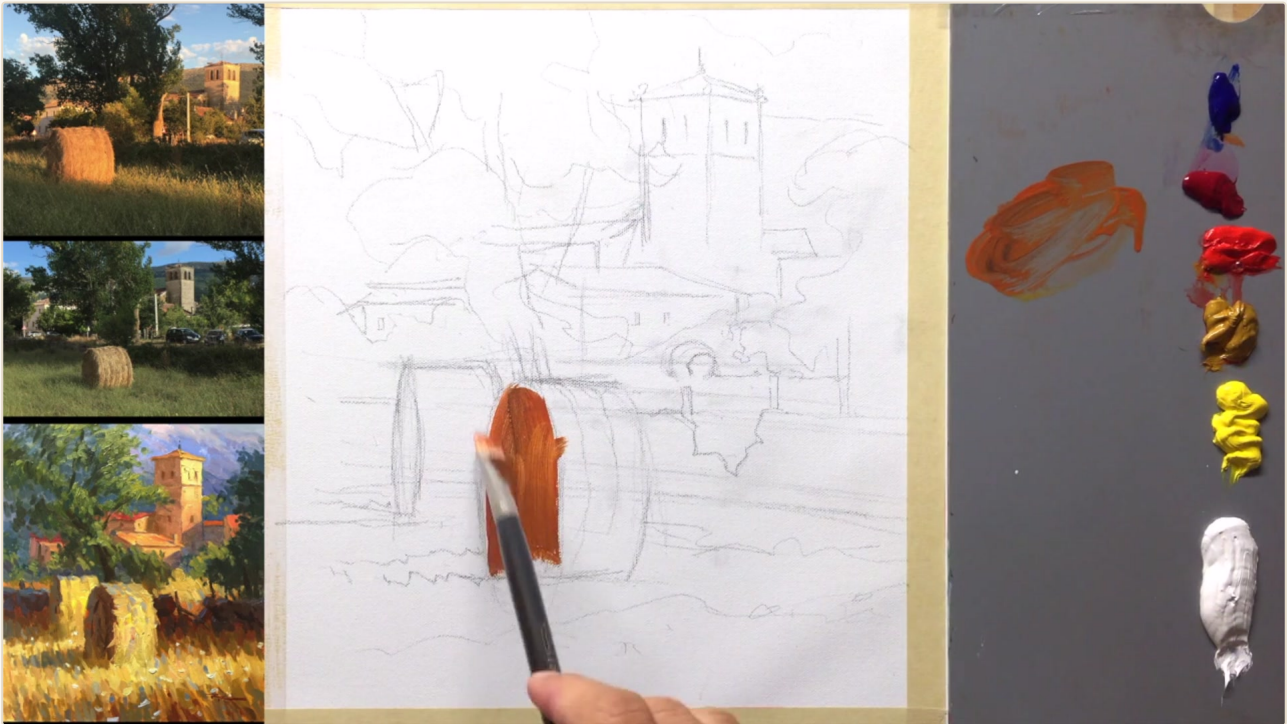
Block in the Darks

Apply the dark mixture to the canvas, blocking in the shadow areas of the hay bale. Use broad, general strokes to cover the dark areas across the whole painting.

PRO TIP

Use a big brush and solvent to help the paint flow smoothly when blocking in large dark areas.

7 Underpainting and Brushwork



Plan Light and Shade

Examine your scene and decide which areas will be in the shade and which will be in the light. This will guide your underpainting and ensure a cohesive composition.

Paint Shadow Areas

Use a smaller brush to apply paint to the shadow areas. Mix in a little yellow ochre to create a vibrant shadow color, particularly in the foreground.

Consider Brushwork Direction

Think about the direction of your brushwork even at this early stage. Although this is the underpainting and the brushwork won't be very visible, planning it now will benefit the later stages.

Customize Grass Color

Decide on the color of your grass. If you prefer a browner tone like in the finished painting, adjust accordingly. Otherwise, choose how green you want it to be.

PRO TIP

Start considering brushwork direction early, as it will influence the later stages of your painting.

8 Mixing and Applying Shadow Colors



Mix Dark Brown for Wall Shadows

Mix a nice dark brown for the shadow side of the wall. This color helps create a gap in the wall, allowing the viewer to walk through the painting and explore further. It also adds shape variation, enhancing the painting's interest.

Mix Dark Green for Tree Shadows

Mix a dark green for the shadow side of the big tree on the left. Ensure this green is not as dark as the accents that will be added later. Prepare a generous amount, as this color will cover a large area of the tree.

PRO TIP

Create gaps in solid objects to guide the viewer's exploration and add shape variation.

9 Foreground and Background Trees



Darken the Right Tree

Add blue and a little red to your green mixture to darken the tree on the right. This will create a stronger contrast and bring the tree into the foreground.

Lighten Distant Trees

Mix blue and white with your green to lighten the color for trees further back. This will help create a sense of depth by pushing these trees into the background.

Paint Tree Shadows

Use the lightened green mixture to paint the shadows of trees in the distant field. This adds dimension and helps define the landscape.

Define Tree Trunks and Branches

With a dark greenish brown, indicate where the trunk and major branches of the tree will be. Make each section thinner as they go up the tree and vary the angles to avoid repetition. Leave gaps to suggest foliage covering some branches.

PRO TIP

Vary the angles of branches and leave gaps to suggest foliage, adding realism to your trees.

10 Painting the Hill and Sky



Mix the Base Color

Mix a fairly dark purplish grey, aiming for a mid-value tone. Ensure it sits halfway between black and white on your palette. This will serve as the base color for the background.

Apply the Background

Use the purplish grey to paint the background, ensuring the brushwork flows around the painting. Keep the background at a mid-value to enhance the contrast with the lighter elements later.

Transition to the Sky

Add a little blue and white to the purplish grey as you move up into the sky area. Maintain a mid-value tone, slightly lighter than the background, to keep the overall sky and background dark.

PRO TIP

Keep the background and sky at a mid-value to make the light on the village and tower stand out.

11 Shadow Side of the Tower



Mix Shadow Color

Mix a mid-value grayish brown for the shadow side of the tower. This will create a subtle contrast with the lighter areas you'll add later.

Preserve Light Areas

Leave some white spots around the trees to reserve space for painting the lights later. This ensures that the light colors remain vibrant and do not get muddled by the dark tones.

PRO TIP

Leave room for the lights to keep colors vibrant and avoid muddiness.

12 Building Shadows and Reflected Light



Apply Shadow Colors

Use the shadow color on the sides of the buildings in the village. This will help create depth and dimension in your painting.

Mix Roof Colors

Mix colors for the roofs, aiming for a nice orange or warm tone. Consider using orangey, reddy, pinky, or terracotta hues to add vibrancy.

Enhance Vibrancy

Push the color in certain areas to make them more vibrant than the scene. Adjust the vibrancy based on your personal taste and comfort with color.

Paint Windows with Warm Colors

Use the warm color to paint the windows. Avoid using very dark black to maintain the light and distance effect.

Add Reflected Light

Take a little orange and cast reflected light into the shadow side of the tower. This simulates light bouncing off unseen surfaces, enhancing realism.

PRO TIP

Use warm colors for windows to maintain light and distance effects.

13 Painting the Tower Lights



Prepare the Brush and Paint

Switch to a smaller brush for more precision. Use straight paint without any thinners to achieve a thicker consistency for the lights.

Apply the Base Layer

Start at the base of the tower with an orangey mixture. This will form the foundation of the light areas.

Lighten the Midsection

As you move up the tower, add white and yellow to the mixture. This creates a gradual transition to a lighter tone.

Finish with the Top Section

At the top of the tower, increase the amount of white and yellow in the mixture. Apply the paint in a thick, impasto style for a chunky texture.

PRO TIP

Use straight paint without thinners to achieve a thicker consistency for the lights.

14 Refining Tower Edges



Refine Tower Edges

Observe the tower and identify areas where the edges appear wobbly. Use a brush to re-establish some of the shadow, which will help straighten the edges. Paint into the light areas to further define and refine the edges, making them sharper or softer as needed. Keep your brush strokes visible and avoid smoothing them out to maintain texture and interest.

PRO TIP

Leave brush strokes visible to add texture and interest to your painting.

15 Color Variation and Hay Bales



Observe Color Variation

Notice the color differences in the roofs: one is orange, another more red, and the top one is a yellower orange. Recognize that color variation is present throughout the scene.

Add Shadows to the Distant Field

Use a dark ochery brown to paint a soft shadow in the distant field. Ensure the edges of the rock wall are sharp, adding small chinks to represent individual rocks.

Paint Light on Distant Hay Bale

Apply a very light yellow to block in the light on the front of the distant hay bale. This helps capture the light catching on the bale.

Enhance Hay Bale Roundedness

Add more yellow ochre to the color on top of the hay bale. This creates a sense of roundedness, emphasizing that the bales are not flat planes.

PRO TIP

Use both photo references to guide your painting, combining the shadow pattern of one with the warmer colors of the other.

16 Grass and Background Simplification



Adjust Color Gradient

Change the color slightly from the top to the bottom of the hay bales. This will help create a sense of depth and curvature.

Prepare Grass Base

Thin out the light color with a bit of Gamsol and apply it to the grass area. This provides a base for the chunkier brushwork that will follow.

Paint Background Trees

Mix a dark greeny brown for the tree behind the hay bales. The darkness of this color will make the illuminated hay bale in the front stand out.

PRO TIP

Thin out the light color with Gamsol to create a smooth base for detailed brushwork.

17 Tree Mid-tones and Form



Add Mid-tones to the Tree

Introduce mid-tones to the tree by selecting a color halfway between the darks and lights. Apply this mid-value to the clumps of the tree to create a sense of form. This transition from darks through mid-tones to lights will give the clumps a rounded appearance.

PRO TIP

Use mid-tones as a bridge between shadows and highlights to enhance the form of tree clumps.

18 Background Trees and Tower Contrast



Adjust Background Trees

Lighten the background trees by mixing a little white and blue into your paint. Aim for a slightly cooler tone, but avoid making it too cool. This will create a subtle contrast with the foreground.

Enhance Tower Contrast

Add a small tree on the right side of the tower, positioning it just behind. This dark object will help push the tower forward, enhancing its prominence in the composition.

PRO TIP

Use lighter and cooler tones for background elements to create depth and contrast.

19 Chunky Brush Strokes Technique



Load the Brush

Load your brush with a generous amount of paint to achieve a thick, textured stroke. Avoid overloading to maintain control.

Apply the Stroke

Apply a single, deliberate stroke with the loaded brush. This creates a bold, chunky effect reminiscent of Van Gogh's style.

Reload Frequently

Reload your brush with fresh paint after each stroke. This ensures each stroke remains distinct and maintains the desired texture.

PRO TIP

Reload your brush after every stroke to keep the texture bold and distinct.

20 Painting Rock Wall Details



Study Rock Wall References

Look at online photos of rock walls to understand the natural placement of rocks. Notice that they are not arranged like a brick wall.

Mix a Dark Warm Color

Prepare a very dark warm color to begin indicating cracks in the rock wall. This will help create depth and texture in your painting.

Paint Rock Wall Details

Use the dark warm color to suggest some of the cracks in the rock wall. Focus on capturing the impression of the wall rather than painting every detail.

PRO TIP

Capture the essence of the rock wall with a few well-placed cracks, embracing the impressionistic style.

21 Strengthening Darks and Movement



Strengthen the Darks

Focus on enhancing the dark areas in the foreground and mid-ground. This will create depth and contrast in your painting.

Re-establish the Lights

After strengthening the darks, go back and re-establish the light areas. This balance between darks and lights will add vibrancy to your work.

Create Movement with Strokes

Leave gaps between your brush strokes to allow the undercolour to show through. This technique helps to create an impression of movement and prevents the painting from looking flat.

PRO TIP

Leave gaps between strokes to let the undercolour show through, creating movement.

22 Hay Bale Details



Indicate Spiral Pattern

Use directional brushwork to suggest the spiral pattern on the ends of the hay bales. This adds texture and realism to your painting.

Enhance Light and Shadow Contrast

Darken the shadow side of the hay bale to make the lighter areas pop out more. This contrast will give your painting depth and make the lights appear much brighter.

Adjust Background Hay Bale Angle

Notice the hay bale in the background is at a slightly different angle. Paint its ellipse thinner to reflect this variation in shape, adding interest to your composition.

PRO TIP

Darken shadows to make light areas pop and add depth to your painting.

23 Grass and Light Contrast



Soften Transitions

Soften the transition between the wall and the grass to create a more natural look. Make the edge irregular to avoid a too-perfect appearance, as if it were mowed.

Darken Foreground Grass

Darken the grass in the foreground. This will enhance the contrast, making the light areas appear even lighter.

PRO TIP

Create irregular edges in your painting to avoid overly regular, artificial appearances.

24 Tree Accents and Sky Holes



Add Dark Accents to the Tree

Use a dark blue-green to add darker accents to the tree. Focus on creating a circular motion with your brushwork to enhance the texture and form of the tree.

Enhance Tree Depth with Blue Variants

Add a blue variant to the top of the tree on the right. This will give the tree more depth and create an infused light effect against the blue sky.

Create Sky Holes

Apply the same blue around the sky holes in the big tree. This technique gives the impression of looking through the tree to the blue light behind it.

PRO TIP

Use circular brushwork to add texture and depth to tree accents.

25 Foreground and Background Color Unity



Mix Dark Bluish Gray

Create a dark bluish gray by mixing your colors on the palette. This will be used to connect the background with the foreground, adding depth to the shadows in the foreground.

Apply Dark Bluish Gray to Shadows

Add the dark bluish gray to the shadows of all elements in the foreground. This step helps to unify the colors throughout the painting, enhancing the overall harmony.

Mix Lighter Bluish Gray

Prepare a lighter version of the bluish gray by adding more white to your mix. This lighter tone will be used for the highlights.

Apply Lighter Bluish Gray to Highlights

Use the lighter bluish gray to add highlights to the foreground elements. This creates a shimmering effect of warm versus cool tones across the painting.

PRO TIP

A neutral mid-gray can appear blue when surrounded by warm tones, enhancing the painting's color unity.

26 Strengthening Wall Darks



Strengthen Wall Darks

Use a darker tone to enhance the shadows in the wall. This will provide a strong contrast before applying the neutral or bluish grey.

Enhance Hay Bale Lines

Apply the same dark color to emphasize the lines on the side of the hay bale. This will add depth and definition to the bale.

Roughen Hay Bale Edge

Rough up the edge of the hay bale slightly to avoid a smooth, tire-like appearance. Use thick paint to achieve a textured effect.

PRO TIP

Use thick paint to add texture and depth to your painting.

27 Applying Broken Color



Apply Mid Value Bluish Gray

Use a mid value bluish gray to add sky shine on the rocks. This color should also be applied to the shadow of the hay bale, making it slightly lighter to fit the shadow area.

Thread Color Through the Painting

Apply the bluish gray in various areas, including the foreground, to create unity throughout the painting. Adjust the value by adding white when applying it to lighter areas.

Use Broken Color Technique

Apply the bluish gray on the top of the hay bales to help them curve away towards the sky. This technique, known as broken color, enhances the dimensionality of the painting.

PRO TIP

Adjust the value of the bluish gray by adding white to ensure it fits seamlessly into lighter areas.

28 Final Highlights and Details



Strengthen the Tree Darks

Reinforce the dark areas in the tree to enhance depth. This multi-stage process involves layering darks, mid values, and lights to create a full range of tones.

Add Wood Detail

Include a small detail of wood in the tree to draw attention to the gap. This adds interest and guides the viewer's eye.

Apply Lighter Highlights

Introduce thicker, slightly lighter highlights to the tree. This adds dimension and contrast to the foliage.

Add Pink to Clouds

Incorporate a touch of pink in the clouds to create a warm, subtle glow. This enhances the sky's vibrancy.

Final Foreground Highlights

Use thick paint to apply final highlights on the tops of weeds or flowers in the foreground. For those in shadow, use a light blue-grey to maintain consistency with the overall lighting.

PRO TIP

Use thick paint for final highlights to add texture and emphasis to key areas.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by carefully observing your scene and capturing its essence through vibrant colors and dynamic brushwork. Begin with a well-prepared canvas, ensuring it is primed with gesso for optimal paint adhesion. Use expressive strokes to convey movement, guiding the viewer's eye across the landscape.

As you progress, focus on the interplay of light and shadow to bring depth and realism to your composition. Carefully block in dark areas and use mid-tones to transition smoothly between shadows and highlights. Pay attention to the details, such as the texture of hay bales and the form of trees, to enhance the overall impact of your painting.

In the final stages, refine your painting by adding precise details and ensuring the edges are well-defined. Use thick, bold brush strokes to add texture and interest, and vary your color palette to create a vibrant and engaging scene. Remember to leave room for light areas to keep colors vivid and avoid muddiness. With these techniques, your painting will capture the beauty and movement of the landscape, inviting viewers to explore its depths.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use expressive brushstrokes to capture movement in your landscape.
- Always apply gesso to your canvas for better paint adhesion.
- Use a center line to accurately draw ellipses, ensuring realism.
- Use only Gamsol and synthetic brushes for thick, expressive brushwork.
- Start considering brushwork direction early for cohesive composition.
- Vary the angles of branches and leave gaps to suggest foliage.
- Keep the background and sky at a mid-value for contrast.
- Reload your brush after every stroke to maintain bold texture.

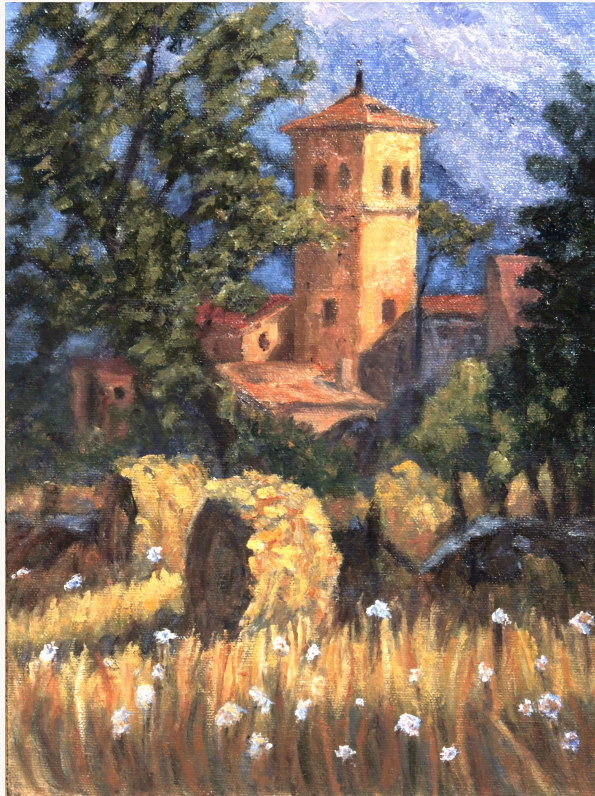


"Hay Bales" 11.5 x 13" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson.

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.

"Spanish Countryside" by Candi Hogan

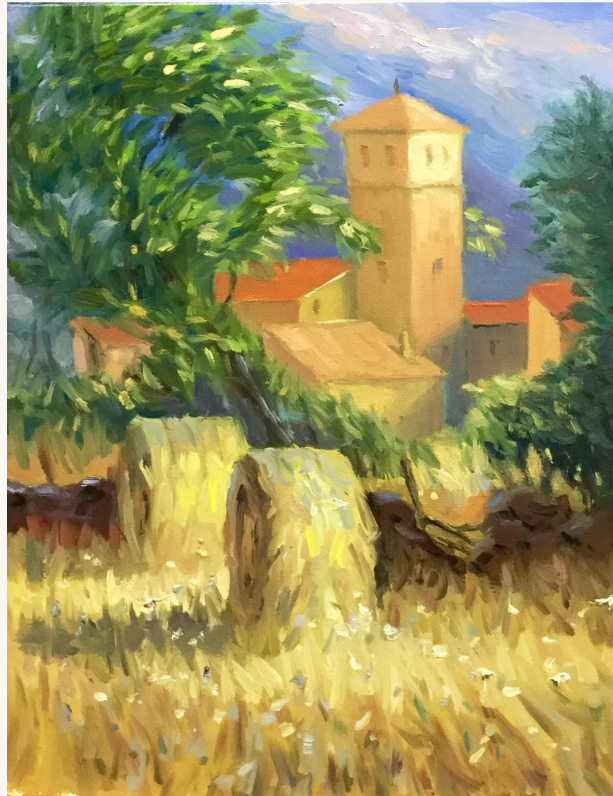


"Spanish Countryside" 12x9" Oil on Canvas by Candi Hogan

Nice work Candi - there's a lot of life in this painting. The drawing is good and you have a strong sense for light and shadow shapes. The brushwork is true to your usual style with a little more movement thrown in. I've noticed a tendency to gray darks in all your paintings. I wonder if that's a particular dark colour on your palette doing that or a result of your dabby brushwork, which tends to make gray if you don't constantly reload your brush and clean it between making strokes where darks and lights have mixed. Maybe you just prefer grayish shadows.

The white flowers could be made a little more subtle by shrinking the ones further away and making the ones in the foreground shadow a blue-gray, and by changing the shape of them more since they wouldn't all be facing you. Overall you've done a very good job.

“Haybales in Matabuena” by Lori Ippolito



"Haybales in Matabuena" Oil on Canvas by Lori Ippolito

Great movement in this painting Lori! You really knocked this out of the park with brushwork. Great to see you putting the cool grays in there with the warms as well. The only thing I can see that would improve this is to straighten up the drawing of the tower a little which is making me think of Pisa. Oh and you mentioned your ochre colours lacking punch in the final painting, but you can easily glaze over some of that with an orange or yellow when it's dry to raise the vibrancy. I suppose that would help it match the vibrancy of the greens in the tree, though if you knocked those down a bit you'd achieve the same thing. Great work!

"Strawbales 2" by Silke Sauritz



"Strawbales 2" 20x20cm Oil on Canvas by Silke Sauritz

Wonderful movement in this piece Silke - a real Van Gogh! It's clear that you had a close look at how Van Gogh builds his subjects with thick brushstrokes, one at a time like bendable bricks. I love how the spiralling forms in the bales are echoed in the clouds. When this happens it's like the whole world is in harmony. Speaking on harmonies (smooth segue) the complementary harmony of yellow/purple and orange/purple is working well. Nice job! Nothing I would change.

“Warm Evening” by **Christophe Borrel Ducroz**



"Warm Evening" 30x25cm Oil on Paper by Christophe Borrel Ducroz

Nice work Christophe. You've done a decent copy of the photograph while simplifying the background and including detail where it was needed in the main elements. The lacey brushwork in the trees works well and it's good to see you experimenting with large gestural brushwork in the foreground. Couple of things to watch out for - you've outlined some elements including the haybale, roofs and the edge of the foreground shadow. Doing that tends to flatten the painting, spoiling the illusion of depth created by overlapping objects.

Darks too dark: photos of high contrast scenes like this usually make the darks too darks, losing colour information there, and you've fallen into the trap of copying that without the knowledge to introduce more colour into the darks. Doing this saps colour from the painting making it look less lively, and using the same dark darks in the background trees as in the foreground also reduces the depth that could be gained by slightly lightening and bluing the darks back there.