



# Lilies

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A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/66-Lilies>

MY PAINTING CLUB

# Introduction

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In this chapter, we're diving into the captivating world of painting lilies, a subject that offers both complexity and beauty, making it a truly rewarding endeavor. As we explore this scene, you'll learn how to set up a still life painting, starting with a monochrome underpainting that lays the groundwork for the vibrant colors to come. We'll focus on matching colors accurately to capture the delicate hues of the lilies, and I'll guide you through techniques to create subtle, glowing effects that bring your painting to life. This lesson builds on the foundational skills from our first lesson, so we'll take our time to really see and understand the subject before we put brush to canvas. By the end of this chapter, you'll not only have a beautiful painting of lilies but also a deeper appreciation for the nuances of floral art. Let's enjoy the process and the learning journey together.



*"Lillies" 7 x 12" 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

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Gather these materials before you start. If you don't have the exact same supplies, use what you have and substitute freely.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- M. Graham & Co. Oil Paints
- Alizarine Crimson
- Phthalo Blue
- Ultramarine Blue
- Burnt Sienna
- Cadmium Red
- Cadmium Orange
- Yellow Ochre
- Cadmium Yellow Light
- Titanium White
- Painting medium
- M. Graham & Co. Walnut Alkyd Medium or Walnut Oil
- Solvent
- Gamsol
- Canvas
- Fredrix ultrasmooth canvas (Giving it a light sanding first helps the paint stick better).
- You could use a canvas panel or anything you prefer.
- Brushes
- [Rosemary & Co. Richard Robinson Brush Set](#)
- Palette Knife
- Paper Towels
- Container for solvent
- Container for painting medium

## 1 Setting Up the Still Life

### Choose Your Background Color

Consider using an analogous color scheme for a peaceful and elegant feel. Avoid overly punchy colors like blue if they don't match the mood of your flowers.

### Create an Orange Background

Wrap an orange t-shirt around a board to create a soft, complementary background for orange flowers. This enhances the natural beauty and elegance of the lilies.

## 2 Monochrome Block-In

### Prepare Your Materials

Use burnt sienna for the monochrome block-in to establish the initial tonal values. This color is ideal for creating a strong foundation for your painting.

### Apply the Block-In

Use a large one-inch brush to apply the burnt sienna. This size helps you cover the canvas quickly and efficiently, setting the stage for your composition.

### Thin the Paint

Mix Gamsol with the burnt sienna to thin the paint. This allows for a smoother application and helps the paint flow easily across the canvas.

### Create Light Areas

Wipe away the paint in the light areas using brushes, q-tips, and paper towels. This technique reveals the lighter parts of the composition, adding depth and contrast.

### 3 Drawing and Wiping Technique

#### Crop the Image

Decide how to crop your image to define the limits of your scene. Consider whether to include or exclude elements like a petal to set the stage for your composition.

#### Sketch with Pencil

If drawing directly on the canvas is challenging, sketch your composition with pencil lines. You can do this either before or after applying the wash to make the process more manageable.

#### Protect Pencil Lines

Apply a light coat of fixative over your pencil lines before using solvent. This prevents the solvent from dissolving the pencil lines and affecting your drawing.

### 4 Drying and Underpainting Options

#### Correct Mistakes

If you make a mistake while starting your painting, brush over it with some burnt sienna. Wait for it to dry before working back into it. This technique allows you to easily correct errors and continue with your painting.

#### Drying Time for Underpainting

Wait about an hour for the underpainting to dry fairly thoroughly before working over it with color. If you let it dry overnight, it might still be a little wet, but you can still work on it if needed.

#### Use Acrylics for Underpainting

You can use acrylics for the underpainting instead of oils. Acrylics will dry thoroughly within half an hour, allowing you to proceed with the next steps more quickly.

### 5 Palette and Brushes

#### Select Warm Colors

Choose a palette composed mostly of warm colors to suit the scene of the lilies, which lacks cool colors.

#### Choose Brushes

Use brushes from the Rosemary Co brush set. Select an 8, a 6, two 4s, and a 2, all long flats made of synthetic materials.



## 6 Observing the Scene

### Observe the Scene

Spend 20 to 30 minutes observing your subject before painting. This helps you simplify complex elements and understand color relationships, which is crucial for deciding where to lose or emphasize edges.

### Blur Your Eyes

Blur your eyes while observing the scene to simplify complex elements. This technique helps you see the scene abstractly, making it easier to identify key color relationships and areas to adjust edges.

### Understand Color Relationships

Notice how colors relate to each other, such as a flower color being similar to the background. Use this understanding to decide where to create crisp or soft edges, enhancing the overall composition.

## 7 Simplifying the Subject

### Simplify the Subject

Close one eye and blur the other to help simplify the subject. Focus on identifying big shapes of similar color to understand the overall composition. This technique allows you to see color relationships without getting distracted by details.

### Identify Color Blends

Look for areas where colors blend into each other. Notice how a central piece might have greener tinges or become more orangey and yellowy. This will help you capture the essence of the subject with simplified color blocks.

## 8 Understanding Light and Shadow

### Observe Light Filtering

Notice how yellow light filters through the petals, turning the shadows a yellow hue. This transmitted light alters the shadow color, creating a beautiful effect.

### Identify Shadow Colors

Look for areas where shadows appear green due to light interaction with petals and the environment. This dynamic quality adds depth and interest to your painting.



## 9 Starting with Large Brushes

### Use a Large Brush

Start with a large brush, like a number eight synthetic, to cover large areas quickly. This helps establish the big color shapes early on, laying down foundational colors and shapes before moving to detailed work.

### Loosen the Brush with Gamsol

Dip the brush in Gamsol to loosen it up, making it easier to apply paint smoothly and evenly. This step is crucial for achieving the desired consistency and flow, especially when working on large areas.

### Mix the Central Color

Create the central color by mixing burnt sienna with a little bit of yellow. Use this combination to establish the main color tone for the central area of the painting, adjusting the hue to match your vision.

### Repeat Colors for Harmony

Look for other areas in the painting where you can use a color once you've applied it. Repeating colors in different areas helps create harmony and balance across the painting, ensuring it feels cohesive.

## 10 Mixing Colors for Halftones

### Create a Cooler Halftone

Add a bit of blue to your mix to create a cooler halftone color for the lily petals. Adjust the tone by including orange, yellow ochre, and cadmium yellow light.

### Lighten the Halftone

If the color becomes too dark, lighten it by adding some white. This helps achieve the desired cooler tone while maintaining the subtlety needed for a natural transition.

### Balance Your Colors

Be mindful of the balance in your color mixing to ensure harmony in your painting. Avoid making the difference too big between tones to maintain a natural look.

## 11 Creating Edges and Blending

### Create Soft Edges

Use your brush carefully to control your strokes and achieve a soft transition between colors. This technique will help blend colors smoothly and create a gentle effect.

### Form Sharp Edges

Utilize the edge of your brush to 'squish' out a defined line. This method is essential for adding detail and contrast, giving your painting a crisp and clear appearance.

### Extend Painting Area

Paint beyond the desired area to have extra paint available for softening edges and blending colors. This technique ensures a smoother transition between layers.

### Add Half Tones

Introduce a half tone between shadow and light to create a more realistic and gradual transition. This adds depth and dimension to your painting.

## 12 Challenges of Painting Flowers

### Understanding Flower Complexity

Recognize that flowers are challenging subjects due to their unique light and shadow dynamics. They involve reflected light and translucency, where light passes through petals, adding complexity to their appearance.

### Capturing Translucency

Focus on how translucency affects the petals by allowing light to pass through, creating a unique visual effect. This is a key aspect that sets flowers apart from other still life subjects.

## 13 Painting Lights and Highlights

### Paint the Lights on the Lilies

Use a number 6 brush to start painting the lights on the lilies. Mix orange with a little yellow and yellow ochre to achieve the desired lightness. Adjust the vibrancy by adding more yellow as needed to create a lively effect.

### Switch to a Smaller Brush for Highlights

Switch to a number 4 brush to retouch the highlights on the lilies. Compare the lightness of the highlights to the lightest part of the painting, such as the white cloth. Squint to accurately gauge the values and mix a color that suits the difference.

### Use Thick Paint for Lights

Apply straight paint for the lights to keep them fairly thick. This will help the lights stand out against the darker areas of the painting.

## 14 Adjusting Edges for Variety

### Create Edge Variety

Decide where to make the edges of your foreground flowers sharp or soft. Sharp edges at the top and on the foreground edge will make the flowers stand out. Soften the trailing edge that turns into the shadow to add depth and interest.

### Soften Edges

Use a light stroke with your brush to blend edges into the background for a softer transition. Add some solvent to your paint for a looser effect, which will help soften the paintwork on the outer edges of your painting.

## 15 Understanding Shadow Colors

### **Vary Shadow Colors**

Observe the shadows in your scene and note the color variations. Shadows can transition from green to warmer, orangey brown, and then into a darker, more neutral tone. Capture these variations to add depth and interest to your painting.

### **Avoid Assumptions About Shadow Colors**

Do not assume all shadows are the same color, such as purple. Pay attention to the subtle variations you see and incorporate them into your work.

### **Consider Shadow Edges**

Be mindful of the edges of shadows, as they can vary in sharpness. Shadows become sharper when the object casting them is closer to the surface, and softer when further away.

### **Maintain Harmony**

Evaluate whether a light patch disrupts the harmony of your painting. If it does, consider omitting it to maintain a cohesive composition.



## 16 Improving Details and Accents

### Define Sharp Edges

Create a sharp edge where the petal contacts the sheet to clearly define its shape and position. This sharpness enhances the boundary and adds clarity to the composition.

### Create Soft Edges

Use a softer edge for petals floating above the cloth to convey depth and space. This diffused edge suggests the petal is not in direct contact with the surface.

### Refine Drawing

Examine your painting for areas where shapes and lines can be refined. Adjust outlines and enhance details to improve accuracy and visual appeal.

### Intensify Dark Areas

Deepen shadows and enhance contrast in dark regions by adding more pigment or using a darker shade. This creates a more dramatic effect.

### Detail the Leaves

Emphasize the natural ridges and textures of the leaves with fine brushstrokes. Vary your brush pressure to achieve the desired effect.

### Enhance Stamens and Pollen

Add fine details and highlights to the stamens and pollen using a smaller brush or fine liner. This captures their delicate structure.

### Add Dark and Light Accents

Identify areas to increase contrast with darker tones or lighter highlights. This adds depth and interest to your painting.

### Extend Orange into Background

Extend the orange color into the background to create a glow around the petal. This adds interest and depth, helping the subject stand out.

### Blend Background Colors

Blend background colors into the petal and vice versa to create a dynamic interaction. This enhances the shape and adds visual appeal.

## 17 Adding Glow and Loosening Edges

### Add a Glowing Effect

Use an orange color and run it along the edge of the petal. This technique creates a soft glow that enhances the petal's appearance.

### Blend Background into Petals

Take the background color and work it back into the shape of the petal. This creates a seamless transition and adds depth to your painting.

### Create Purplish Shadows

Use a warm grey to create the appearance of purplish shadows. The contrast with the surrounding intense warmth helps achieve the desired effect.

### Loosen Edges

Break down some of the edges in your painting. This technique adds a more relaxed and natural feel to your artwork.

## 18 Final Thoughts and Advice

### Start Small

Begin with small paintings to quickly work through problems and gain experience. This method helps you become more efficient and confident before tackling larger pieces.

# Summary & Key Takeaways

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Embark on your painting journey by setting up a harmonious still life using an analogous color scheme. Begin with a monochrome block-in using burnt sienna to establish tonal values, and use large brushes to cover the canvas efficiently. As you progress, focus on drawing and wiping techniques to define your composition, and consider using acrylics for a faster drying underpainting.

Observe your subject closely to understand color relationships and simplify complex elements. Use large brushes initially to establish big color shapes, and gradually mix colors for halftones and highlights. Pay attention to the unique light and shadow dynamics of flowers, and use transmitted light to add depth and interest.

As you refine your painting, focus on creating variety in edges and capturing subtle shadow variations. Enhance details and accents to bring your composition to life, and use techniques like adding glow and loosening edges to achieve a natural feel. Remember, starting with smaller paintings can help you build confidence and refine your skills before tackling larger pieces.

## LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use an analogous color scheme for a harmonious setup.
- Quickly cover the canvas with a large one-inch brush during the block-in.
- Spray a light coat of fixative over pencil lines to protect them from solvent.
- Use acrylics for faster drying underpainting.
- Blur your eyes to simplify the scene and identify key color relationships.
- Pay attention to how light passes through flower petals.
- Squint to compare values when mixing colors for highlights.
- Use sharp edges to make foreground flowers stand out and soft edges to create depth.



*"Lillies" 7 x 12" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson.*

# Student Critiques

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

## **'Lillies' 490x595mm Acrylic on Canvas Paper by Kym West**



*'Lillies' 490x595mm Acrylic on Canvas Paper by Kym West*

Hi Kym, nice work. You've nearly got your own style working great there - just a little more work! What you've done really well is sharp edges versus soft edges and big shapes versus small details. You nearly pulled off rough background versus smooth foreground too, but the muddiness around the cast shadows on the cloth is detracting from that. Doing that in acrylic does seem to be trickier, so I'd suggest premixing big piles of paint before you start that area and using two brushes - one for light and one for dark. Beautiful!



## 'Lillies' 9x12" Alkyd on Canvas by Mike Robles



*'Lillies' 9x12" Alkyd on Canvas by Mike Robles*

Good work Mike. You pretty much nailed the drawing, your layout is probably better than mine (more balanced at any rate), and your colours are strong, although there could be darker shadows in the biggest flower which seems a little flat at present. (Easy to glaze that with the alkyds since they dry so fast). I can see you're started to play with the edges on some of the petals but I'd encourage you to explore that even further to help avoid that 'cut-out' look that's so prevalent in fast drying media. You certainly managed it in the cast shadows on the cloth which look great. Anyway keep looking, keep painting. It's great to see your improvement over time.

**'Lillies' 9x12" Watercolour on Paper by Walda Juhl - Altered**



*'Lillies' 9x12" Watercolour on Paper by Walda Juhl - Altered*

Darks and midtones made darker, lights a little lighter.

**'Canna Lillies' 38x30cm Oil on Canvas by Denis King - Altered**



*'Canna Lillies' 38x30cm Oil on Canvas by Denis King - Altered*

Background made slightly darker and purplish, foreground darks made darker.