



Lilies

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

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

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, I invite you back into the studio to explore the beauty of lilies. Last time, we dabbled with faux roses, but today, we're diving into the real deal with these stunning, sculptural flowers. They might look like they're crafted from silk, but trust me, their intoxicating fragrance is all natural. As we delve into painting these lilies, we'll focus on capturing their essence—those three inner petals, three outer petals, and the six stamens that give them their unique character. This lesson will guide you through setting up a still life, starting with a monochrome underpainting, and then moving on to accurately matching colors to create subtle, glowing effects. It's a bit more complex than our first lesson, so we'll take our time to truly see before we paint. By the end, you'll have a deeper understanding of how to make these lilies come alive on canvas, and perhaps you'll enjoy the process as much as I do.



"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

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 a Background Color

Select a background color that complements your flowers. For an orangey flower, consider a blue background as its complement. However, if the flowers convey a peaceful and elegant feel, an analogous color scheme might be more suitable.

Set Up the Background

Use an orange background for a harmonious look. Wrap an orange t-shirt around a board and place it behind the flowers to see how it enhances the composition.

Add Elements to the Still Life

Include a dark bottle in the setup to provide contrast and depth to the composition.

PRO TIP

Consider the mood you want to convey when choosing your background color.

2 Monochrome Block-In



Prepare the Canvas

Dip a large one-inch brush into some Gamsol or solvent. Brush over the entire canvas with the solvent to create a base layer.

Apply Monochrome Block-In

Use burnt sienna on your palette to start the monochrome block-in. Cover the canvas, focusing on the dark areas like the bottle.

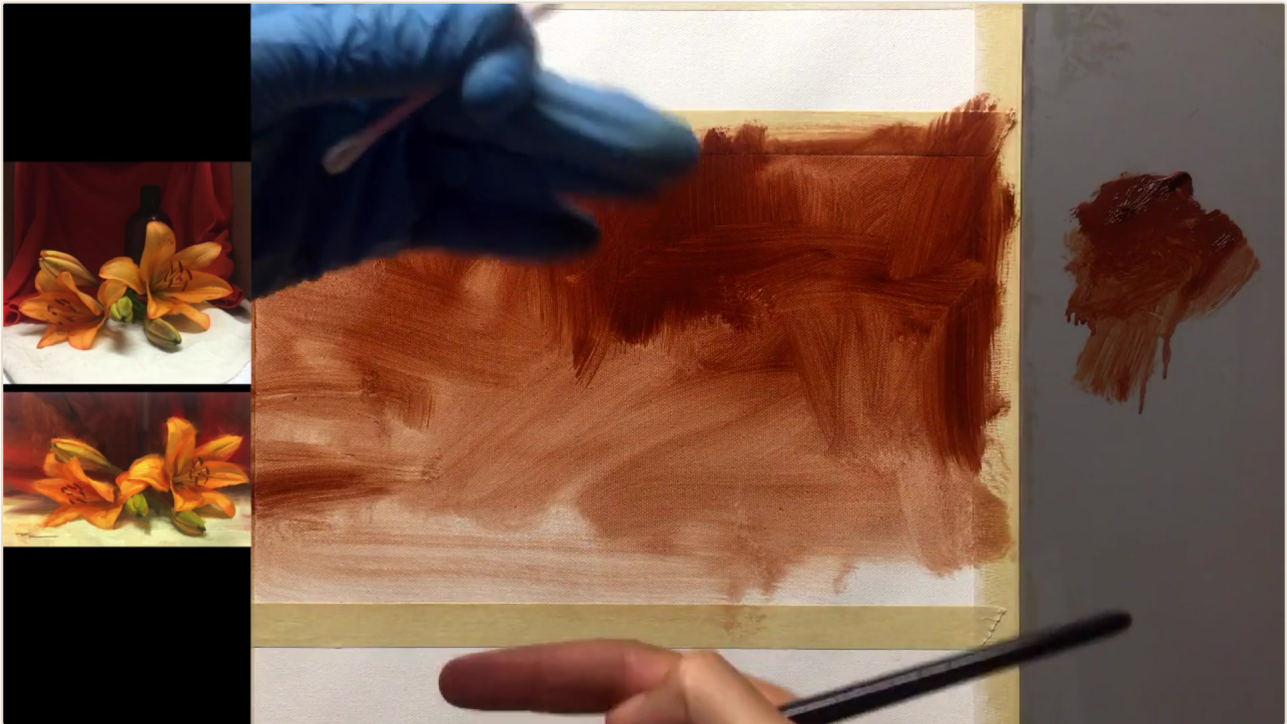
Define Light Areas

Use a brush, q-tips, and paper towels to wipe away paint from the light areas of the flowers and the foreground. This will help define the composition by contrasting the dark and light areas.

PRO TIP

Use q-tips and paper towels to easily remove paint and reveal light areas on your canvas.

3 Drawing and Wiping Technique



Determine the Composition

Crop the image to define the limits of your scene. Decide whether to include or exclude elements, like petals, within the borders.

Choose Your Drawing Method

Select a drawing method that suits your comfort level. You can sketch with lines using a pencil either before or after applying the wash.

Protect Pencil Lines

If drawing with pencil before the wash, apply a light coat of fixative to prevent the solvent from dissolving the lines.

PRO TIP

Use fixative to protect pencil lines from being dissolved by solvent.

4 Drying and Underpainting Options



Correct Mistakes with Burnt Sienna

If you make a mistake, brush over it with some burnt sienna. Allow it to dry thoroughly before working back into it.

Drying Time for Oil Paint

Wait for about an hour for the oil paint to dry fairly thoroughly before applying color over the top. If possible, let it dry overnight for better results.

Consider Acrylics for Underpainting

Use acrylics for the underpainting if desired. They dry thoroughly within half an hour, allowing you to work more quickly.

PRO TIP

Use burnt sienna to easily correct mistakes and let it dry before continuing.

5 Palette and Brushes



Prepare Your Palette

Lay out a palette with mostly warm colors. This selection suits the scene, which lacks cool colors.

Select Your Brushes

Choose brushes from the Rosemary Co brush set. Use an 8, a 6, two 4s, and a 2, all long flats with a mix of synthetic bristles.

PRO TIP

Use mostly warm colors on your palette to match the scene's atmosphere.

6 Observing the Scene



Observe the Scene

Spend 20 to 30 minutes observing your scene before starting to paint. This helps you understand the complexity and plan your approach.

Simplify the View

Blur your eyes slightly to simplify the scene. This helps you focus on the overall shapes and colors rather than getting lost in details.

Analyze Color Relationships

Consider how the colors in your subject relate to each other and the background. Notice areas where colors are similar, as these are opportunities to lose an edge and create depth.

Plan Edges

Decide where to have crisp edges and where to lose them. This will enhance the composition and guide the viewer's eye.

PRO TIP

Blur your eyes to simplify the scene and focus on shapes and colors.

7 Simplifying the Subject



Simplify the Subject

Close one eye and blur your vision with the other to simplify the subject. This technique helps you identify big shapes of similar color in your painting.

Identify Color Variations

Focus on the central piece of your subject and notice the overall color. Observe how it transitions from greener tinges to more orangey and yellowy hues, becoming more vibrant in certain areas.

PRO TIP

Use the 'fuzzy one eye' technique to easily spot large color shapes in your subject.

8 Understanding Light and Shadow



Observe Light and Shadow

Examine how light interacts with the petals. Notice how the yellow light filters through a petal, creating a yellow shadow. This effect adds depth and interest to your painting.

Identify Color Changes

Look for areas where shadows change color due to transmitted light. For example, observe how shadows can turn green in certain areas. This variation enhances the realism of your work.

PRO TIP

Pay attention to how light filtering through petals affects shadow color, creating unique effects.

9 Starting with Large Brushes



Prepare Your Brush

Select the largest brush from your set, such as a number eight synthetic. Dip it in Gamsol to loosen the bristles, ensuring smooth application.

Mix the Base Color

Combine burnt sienna with a little bit of yellow to create a central color for your painting. Test this mix on your canvas to ensure it matches the desired tone.

Identify Big Color Shapes

Blur your eyes slightly to focus on the large color shapes in your composition. Apply the base color to these areas, establishing the main color blocks.

Adjust with Lighter Mix

Create a slightly oranger, lighter mix by adding more orange to your base color. Apply this adjusted color to areas that require a lighter tone, looking for other spots in the painting where this color can be used.

PRO TIP

Blur your eyes to better identify the large color shapes in your composition.

10 Mixing Colors for Halftones



Identify Color Progression

Observe the petals where there is a progression from warm to cooler tones, especially in the halftones where the petals curl into the light.

Mix Cooler Halftone Color

Add a little bit of blue, orange, yellow ochre, and cadmium yellow light to create a cooler tone. Adjust the mixture with white to lighten it if necessary.

Refine the Color Mix

Compare your mixed color to the subject. If the color is too dark or the difference is too big, adjust by adding more blue and yellow to achieve the desired cooler tone.

PRO TIP

Careful color mixing leads to a better end result, so take your time to compare and adjust the colors accurately.

11 Creating Edges and Blending



Adjust Color Balance

Add a little more orange to push the color balance back. This creates a half tone between the shadow and the light, enhancing the depth of your painting.

Create Soft and Sharp Edges

Be mindful of the edges you create with each brush stroke. For a soft edge, use the brush gently to blend the colors. For a sharp edge, use the brush to squish out a precise line.

Extend Paint Beyond Desired Area

Paint further than the area you want to finish in. This allows you to use the extra paint to soften the edge and blend colors in the next layer.

PRO TIP

Extend your paint beyond the desired area to allow for easier blending in the next layer.

12 Challenges of Painting Flowers



Identify Reflected Light

Observe the areas where light is bouncing around within the flower. Notice the big piece of reflected light and smaller ones in various spots. Identifying these will help you capture the complexity of the flower's lighting.

Understand the Complexity of Flowers

Recognize that flowers are challenging still life subjects due to their unique lighting characteristics. They feature standard lights and shadows, reflected light, and translucency, with light passing through the petals. This complexity requires careful observation and technique.

PRO TIP

Pay attention to the translucency of petals, as this is a unique feature in flower painting.

13 Painting Lights and Highlights



Prepare the Light Colors

Switch to a smaller brush, such as a number 6. Mix orange with a little yellow and yellow ochre. Use straight paint for the lights to keep them thick and vibrant.

Apply Orange Highlights

Observe the outer edges of the petals where they appear orangier. Use the mixed orange to achieve this effect on the petals.

Lighten the Highlights

Add a touch of yellow to the orange mix to lighten it. Test the color to ensure it is not too vibrant or too dull.

Refine with Smaller Brush

Switch to a number 4 brush to retouch the highlights. Compare the lightness of your highlights to the lightest part of the painting, such as the white cloth, to ensure the correct value.

PRO TIP

Use straight paint for the lights to keep them thick and vibrant.

14 Adjusting Edges for Variety



Decide Edge Sharpness

Determine where you want the edges of the foreground flowers to be sharp and where to be soft. Aim for variety in edge treatment to create interest.

Soften Trailing Edges

Soften the trailing edge of the flower that is further away and turning into shadow. Use a light stroke to achieve a gentle transition.

Adjust Other Edges

Identify other edges that can be softened for variation, while keeping some edges sharp for contrast.

Use Solvent for Loose Effect

Add solvent to your paint to achieve a looser effect, especially on the outsides of the painting.

PRO TIP

Use a light stroke to soften edges that turn into shadow for a natural transition.

15 Understanding Shadow Colors



Paint Loosely

Apply the paint with a loose touch, ensuring it's not too thick. Adjust the background color slightly as you move to the left to add variation.

Observe Shadow Colors

Notice that shadows on white surfaces are not uniform in color. They can transition from green to warmer orange-brown and then to a darker, more neutral tone.

Avoid Assumptions About Shadows

Don't assume all shadows are purple. Start by observing the subtle differences in shadow colors across different areas.

Manage Shadow Edges

Pay attention to the edges of shadows, as they can vary in softness. The closer an object is to the surface it's casting a shadow on, the sharper the shadow edge will be.

Maintain Image Harmony

Omit light patches that disrupt the harmony of your painting, even if they appear in the reference.

PRO TIP

Observe and differentiate the subtle color changes within shadows to enhance realism.

16 Improving Details and Accents



Identify Sharp and Soft Edges

Examine your painting to identify areas where petals contact the sheet, creating sharp edges. Notice where petals float above the cloth, resulting in soft edges. Adjust these edges accordingly to enhance realism.

Enhance Drawing and Shadows

Look for areas in your painting where the drawing can be improved. Intensify darks in shadow areas to add depth, such as in the shadowed parts of leaves or petals.

Add Detail to Leaves and Stamens

Focus on adding detail to elements like leaf ridges and stamens. Enhance these features to bring more life and interest to your painting.

Apply Dark and Light Accents

Identify places to add dark accents for depth and light accents for highlights. This contrast will enhance the overall composition.

Extend and Blend Colors

Add a glow to petals by extending an orange color into the background. Then, blend the background color back into the petal to create a more interesting shape.

PRO TIP

Enhance realism by adjusting sharp and soft edges based on petal contact with surfaces.

17 Adding Glow and Loosening Edges



Add a Soft Glow to Petals

Take an orange color and gently run it along the edge of a petal to create a soft glow effect. This technique can be applied to any of the petals to enhance their luminosity.

Blend Background into Petal Edges

Use the background color to work back into the petal's edge, softening the transition. This creates a harmonious blend between the petal and its surroundings.

Incorporate Warm Grey Shadows

Mix a warm grey to add purplish shadows, which appear cool due to the surrounding warmth. Introduce more of this color into the background to balance the composition.

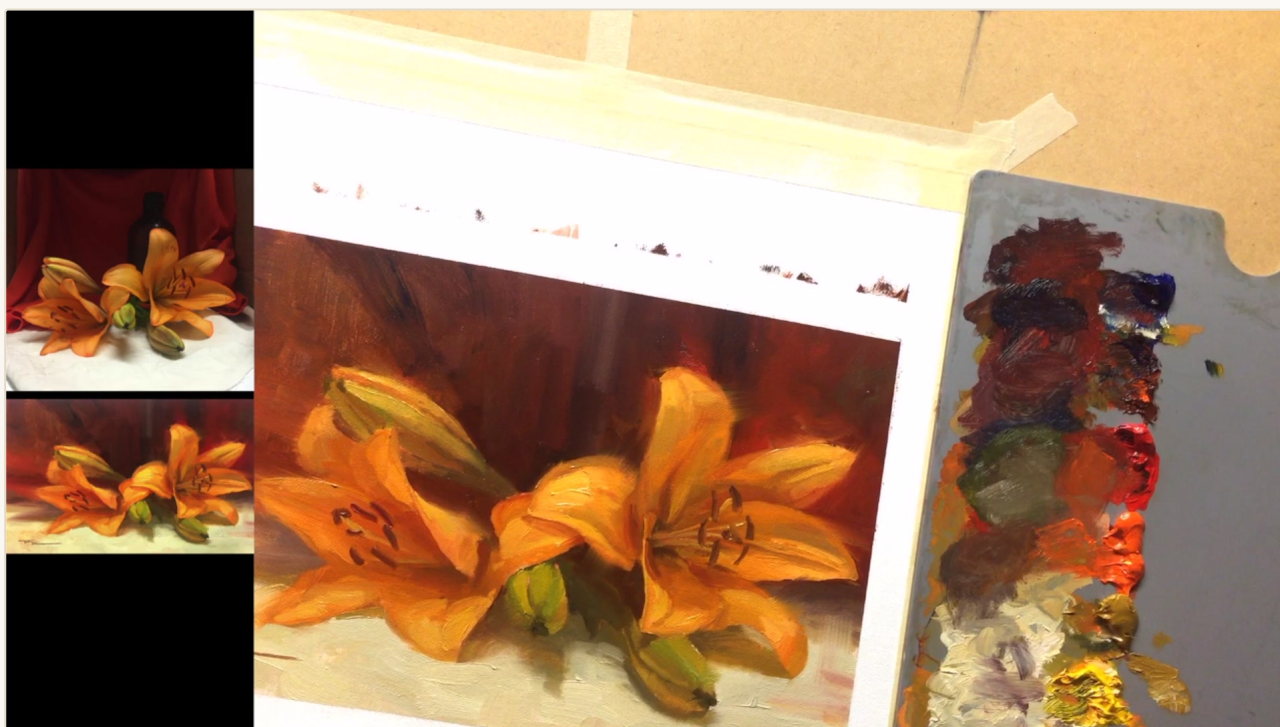
Loosen Edges for a Softer Look

Break down some of the edges to loosen up the painting. This technique adds a relaxed, natural feel to the artwork.

PRO TIP

Use a warm grey to create shadows that appear cool against intense warm colors.

18 Final Thoughts and Advice



Start Small

Focus on creating lots of small paintings initially. This approach helps you quickly work through problems and develop your skills without the pressure of completing a large piece.

Build Confidence

Once you feel comfortable with small paintings, gradually move on to larger works. This progression will make tackling big paintings more manageable and enjoyable.

PRO TIP

Practice with small paintings to improve your skills before attempting larger projects.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by thoughtfully setting up your still life, choosing a background that complements your flowers and enhances the mood you wish to convey. Begin with a monochrome block-in using burnt sienna to establish the composition's dark and light areas, creating a strong foundation for your painting. Use the drawing and wiping technique to refine your composition and protect your initial sketches with a fixative.

As you progress, observe your scene carefully, focusing on the interplay of light and shadow. Simplify the subject by blurring your vision to identify large color shapes and understand the relationship between colors. Use large brushes to block in these shapes, and gradually refine your work with smaller brushes, paying attention to the subtle variations in color and the edges that define your subject.

In the final stages, enhance your painting by adjusting edges for variety and adding glow to the petals. Pay close attention to the details and accents that bring depth and realism to your work. Remember, practice is key—start with small paintings to hone your skills before tackling larger projects. This approach will build your confidence and improve your technique over time.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Choose a background color that complements your flowers and sets the mood.
- Use q-tips and paper towels to reveal light areas on your canvas.
- Apply a fixative to protect pencil lines from solvent.
- Allow underpainting to dry thoroughly before adding color.
- Observe your scene and blur your eyes to simplify shapes and colors.
- Use straight paint for lights to keep them thick and vibrant.
- Adjust edges for variety to enhance the composition.
- Practice with small paintings to improve your skills.



"Lillies" 7 x 12" 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.

'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.