



Fishing Boats

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/15-Fishing-Boats>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

As I stand before my canvas, ready to dive into the vibrant world of painting, I am reminded of the joy that comes from capturing the essence of old boats. In this chapter, we will explore the art of painting a classic boat scene, a subject rich with character and history. With my palette of colors and trusty mediums like M. Graham's Alkyde Walnut Oil and Gamsol, we will embark on a journey to master broad gestural brushwork. You'll learn how to match colors effortlessly and paint with masses, not messes, finishing with calligraphic details that bring your painting to life. We'll start by considering the use of a grid to ensure accuracy, a technique that helps maintain correct angles and proportions. Using Rosemary & Co brushes, we'll focus on capturing the tricky shapes of boats with precision. This scene is a rewarding subject, offering a perfect blend of challenge and satisfaction, and by the end, you'll see how painting like a millionaire can make your artwork shine like a million bucks.



"Sunday Repairs" 14 x 16" 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 Sketching and drawing techniques



Prepare Your Drawing Surface

Consider gridding your drawing to help with accuracy. You can print the reference image and grid it, or use a digital device like an iPad. This technique allows you to check points against each other and maintain the correct angles.

Transfer the Grid to Canvas

If you want precision, draw the same grid onto your canvas using a pencil. Carefully fill in each square to replicate the reference image accurately.

Select Your Brushes

Use Rosemary & Co brushes, specifically two number 10 long flats for most of the painting. These bristle brushes provide a textured finish and hold a lot of paint. Use a synthetic number 6 for detail work and a script liner or rigor brush for finer lines.

Sketch the Composition

Dip your brush into Gamsol and mix with a little blue to sketch in the important points. Focus on key areas like the top of the boat's bow, ensuring you place them correctly. Take your time with tricky shapes like boats to get them right.

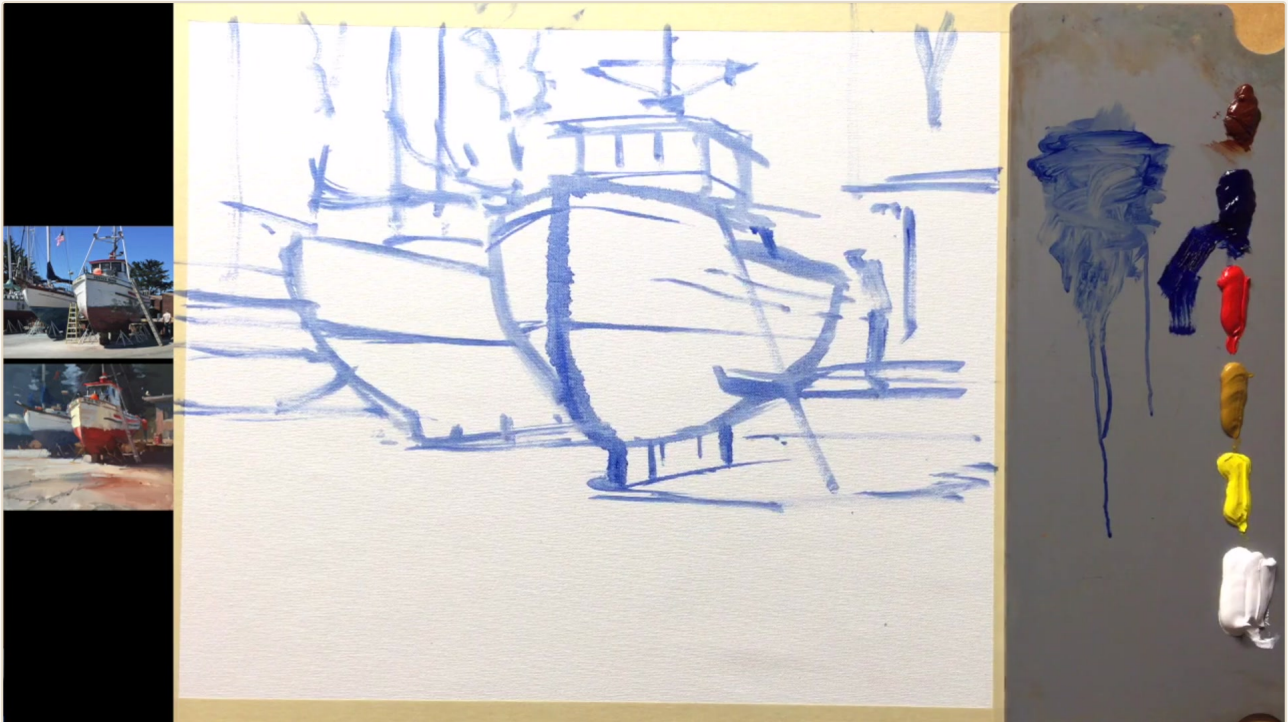
Use Tracing for Accuracy

For an easy method, print the reference image to the correct size, cover the back with pencil or charcoal, place it on your canvas, and trace over it. This will transfer the lines onto your canvas.

PRO TIP

Grid your reference image and canvas to maintain accuracy and correct angles in your drawing.

2 Painting darkest darks



Mix Darkest Darks

Use a big brush to mix burnt sienna with a little blue and a touch of red, dipping into the gamsole. This will create your darkest darks.

Apply Darkest Darks

Identify the areas of your painting that require the darkest darks, such as under the boat. Apply the mixture broadly with big strokes to these areas.

Lighten the Hull

Mix some red with yellow ochre to create a slightly lighter tone. Apply this to the hull where it turns into the light, using broad strokes to capture the large shapes.

Add Lighter Highlights

Gradually add more white and yellow ochre to your mixture to lighten it further. Apply these lighter tones to areas where light hits the shadows, using big strokes to maintain the broad shapes.

PRO TIP

Use big, broad strokes to capture large shapes and transitions in light and shadow.

3 Painting shadows and reflections



Paint the Shadow

Mix blue with a little red to create a purple hue. Add a touch of white and dip your brush into Gamsol. Paint the shadow blocks, working outward from the center.

Add Sky Reflection

Mix more white and blue into your shadow color. Dip the brush into walnut oil and apply it to the shadow, adding a sky reflection effect.

Enhance Shadow with Light

Add more white to the shadow mix to lighten it. Apply this lighter mix to other shadow areas to reflect the light bouncing up from the surroundings.

Paint the Boat's Base

For the boat's base, mix more blue and white to reflect the light. Add a touch of yellow ochre to capture the warm light bouncing from the concrete.

Add Background Darks

Mix a dull, muted green for the background. Start with a dark tone, but not as dark as the foreground, to ensure the foreground pops.

PRO TIP

Add a touch of yellow ochre to reflect warm light bouncing from the surroundings.

4 Painting background and trees



Paint the Dark Tree

Use Gamsol to paint a really dark tree in the background. This will serve as the center of interest, making the foreground pop out.

Lighten the Background

Lighten the background slightly with a dull green using walnut oil. Apply big, loose strokes to encourage a relaxed feel that contrasts with the detailed foreground.

Create Depth with Trees

As the trees recede into the distance, make them lighter and bluer. This simple background enhances the detail in the foreground.

Add Shadows and Warmth

Incorporate some dark areas and cast shadows in the background. Warm up the shadow areas and blocks slightly to add depth and interest.

PRO TIP

Use loose strokes in the background to enhance the contrast with the detailed foreground.

5 Color checking and mixing greys



Identify Shadow Colors

Observe the shadowed sides of the boat, noting that they appear lighter due to reflected light. Use a technique to better see the color by closing one eye and slightly squinting the other, focusing on the foreground while glancing at the background shape.

Compare Colors

Quickly flick your eye between the painted area and the actual boat to spot any major color differences. This helps in identifying the big color shapes and ensures accuracy in your painting.

Determine Grey Tones

If you can't identify a specific color tone, recognize it as a grey. Mix a neutral grey of the correct value, apply a small dab, and adjust its warmth or coolness based on its surroundings.

PRO TIP

Use eye squinting and quick glances to compare colors effectively, especially when painting outdoors.

6 Adjusting greys and adding details



Mix a Neutral Grey

Combine blue and burnt sienna to create a neutral grey. Adjust the mixture by adding white until you achieve the desired value. Test the grey on your painting to ensure it matches the reference photograph.

Adjust Warmth and Coolness

Evaluate the grey's temperature by squinting at your painting and reference photo. If it appears too warm, add blue to cool it down. For areas needing warmth, mix in yellow ochre or bright yellow, then grey it down if necessary.

Incorporate Reflections and Texture

Reflect the blue sky on the boat by adding bluish grey to areas facing the sky. Add subtle texture and broken lines to enhance the boat's character. Use a warm grey where light reflects off the deck.

Refine Distant Elements

For boats further away, start with a cooler grey. Adjust lines to avoid confusion, ensuring they don't overlap or create visual clutter. Add bluish grey to areas facing the sky to maintain consistency.

PRO TIP

Squint at your painting and reference photo to accurately judge the relationship between values and colors.

7 Painting light areas and foreground



Paint Light Areas

Apply the light areas with thicker paint compared to the darks. Use straight paint for the top areas, adding a more neutral light for the top of the deck. Incorporate warm light and use thin directional lines to lead into the boat, adding texture and interest.

Add Background Light

Introduce a light in the background peeking through the trees using a mix of blue, white, and a touch of yellow ochre. Brush it in broadly with a bit of walnut oil to create a soft background light effect.

Enhance Foreground

Fill the foreground with a lot of white paint and a touch of brown. Add a reflection of the boat by brushing in thin layers of red and yellow. Use very thin strokes to avoid interference with the light areas.

Create Contrast and Perspective

Build up the lightest area near the center of interest for strong contrast. Soften and darken the foreground slightly to lead the eye into the bright spotlight area. Use smaller, thinner horizontal strokes and larger directional strokes to create perspective and guide the viewer's eye.

PRO TIP

Use thicker paint for light areas to add texture and interest.

8 Adding highlights and final touches



Re-establish Darks

Add a few more darks in the painting to enhance depth. Be cautious not to make them too dark, as they should not overpower the light areas.

Prepare Highlight Mixture

Clean your brush thoroughly and scrape off an area on your palette for mixing. Combine a generous amount of titanium white with a bit of bright yellow and yellow ochre for a thick, impasto mixture.

Apply Highlights

Use the prepared mixture to add highlights, ensuring they are thick and textured. Tone the highlights with a little blue and brown to prevent them from competing with other elements.

Create Calligraphic Strokes

Roll the brush as you apply the highlight to create a calligraphic stroke. This technique captures the shape of the front of the boat effectively.

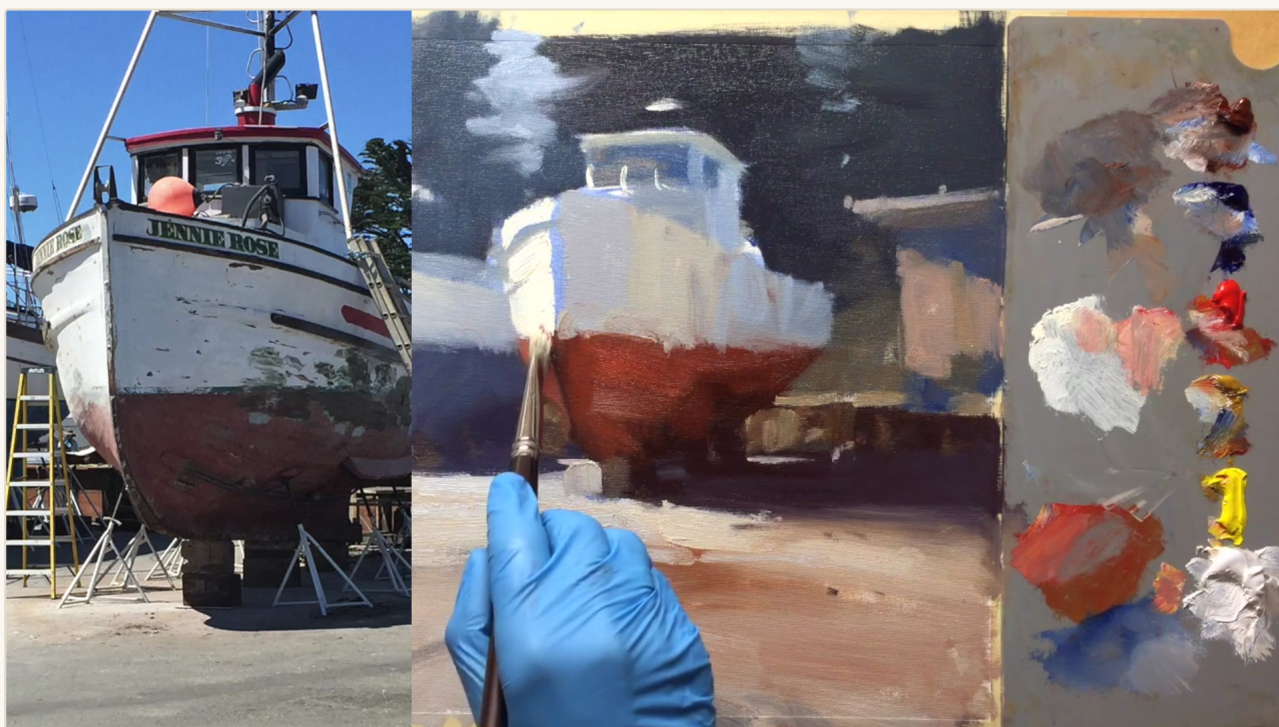
Add Reddish Orange Light

Incorporate some very light reddish orange into the highlighted areas to enhance the light effect.

PRO TIP

Roll the brush while applying highlights to create dynamic, calligraphic strokes that capture shapes effectively.

9 Calligraphic details and finishing touches



Select the Right Brush

Choose a number 6 brush with long hairs for calligraphic strokes. This brush holds a lot of paint, allowing for longer, expressive strokes.

Add Calligraphic Details

Focus on adding calligraphic details without making them look too carefully drawn. If a stroke feels too precise, break it up or scratch it to create a more organic look.

Use Color Variations

In light areas, use light brown strokes, and in darker areas, switch to very dark brown strokes. Adjust the strokes as needed to maintain a natural appearance.

Incorporate Shorthand Elements

Instead of writing out details like the boat's name, use shorthand marks that suggest detail from a distance. This approach keeps the painting from becoming overly detailed.

Add Final Touches

Use a rigger brush for rigging and straight lines, resting your hand on a stick for stability. Add elements like a ladder, shadows, a person, and a seagull to enhance the scene.

PRO TIP

Use shorthand marks to suggest details from a distance, avoiding overly precise lines.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by carefully sketching the fishing boats using a grid technique for accuracy. This foundational step ensures that your drawing is precise and ready for the layers of paint to come. As you block in the darkest darks, use broad strokes to establish the large shapes and transitions in light and shadow, setting the stage for the depth and dimension of your painting.

As you progress, focus on capturing the interplay of shadows and reflections, using a mix of colors to reflect the surrounding environment. The background should be painted with loose strokes, creating a contrast that highlights the detailed foreground. Pay attention to color checking and mixing greys, using quick glances and squinting to ensure color accuracy and harmony throughout your piece.

In the final stages, add highlights and finishing touches with dynamic, calligraphic strokes that bring your painting to life. Use thicker paint for light areas to add texture and interest, and incorporate shorthand marks to suggest details without overwhelming the composition. With these techniques, your painting of fishing boats will capture the essence of the scene with depth and vibrancy.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Grid your reference image and canvas for accurate drawing.
- Use big, broad strokes to capture large shapes and transitions.
- Add a touch of yellow ochre to reflect warm light bouncing from surroundings.
- Use loose strokes in the background to contrast with detailed foreground.
- Squint at your painting and reference photo to judge values and colors.
- Use thicker paint for light areas to add texture and interest.
- Roll the brush while applying highlights for dynamic strokes.
- Use shorthand marks to suggest details from a distance.



"Sunday Repairs" 14 x 16" 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.

'On the Hard' 8x100" Oil on Canvas by Laurena Beirnes



'On the Hard' 8x100" Oil on Canvas by Laurena Beirnes

Love the bold design here Laurena. Good drawing. Great sense of the power, colour and direction of the light. Note that you've mixed your shadows a bit though - a strong light like this would give the boats sharper edged cast shadows on the ground. I'd like to see you try using much thicker paint in the lights - this will help create a more painterly look.

'Dry Dock' 30x40cm Oil on Canvas by Gunther Andree



'Dry Dock' 30x40cm Oil on Canvas by Gunther Andree

Beautiful detailed work here Gunther, especially in the modelling of the form of the hull with light and shadow. Love the sky glinting of the window too. Nice! The drawing of the boat is excellent, but not so for a few other details - the placement of the bases of the stabilisers on the ground, the spacing of the rungs on the ladder and the left most boat. They're letting the team down, but the team is great.

Last thing, the cast shadow on the ground is looking a bit flat and stand-up-ish. To connect this better to the light on the ground you can run a couple of subtle darkish lines from the foreground light, through the shadows and into the background light. The lines should diminish in size darken with the shadow. When you do this with shadow areas it makes them irrefutably connected to the lights. Here's an example:

'Dry Dock' 30x40cm Oil on Canvas by Gunther Andree - Altered



'Dry Dock' 30x40cm Oil on Canvas by Gunther Andree - Altered

Foreground directional lines added to make the shadow areas lie flatter and to help direct the eye.

'Drydock' 8x10" Oil on Panel by Jim Baldoumas



'Drydock' 8x10" Oil on Panel by Jim Baldoumas

Great energy in this Jim, beautiful colours versus subtle greys. Your drawing like many of the paintings submitted needs some tweaking and for that I suggest viewing this reversed in a mirror. As SOON as you do that you'll be able to see the problems in the drawing. Works every time.