



Shark Fin Cove

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/14-Shark-Fin-Cove>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we'll dive into the vibrant and dramatic landscape of Shark Fin Cove, a stunning coastal spot in California. This scene is a painter's delight, offering a dynamic interplay of light and shadow, with bold colors that invite expressive brushwork. As we explore this captivating location, you'll learn to identify and capture the large color movements within the darker areas of the scene. The focus will be on painting with confidence, using big shapes to convey the essence of the landscape without getting caught up in unnecessary details. This approach not only simplifies the painting process but also enhances the overall impact of your work. Whether you choose to follow my step-by-step guidance or use the provided resource photo to create your own interpretation, this lesson is designed to help you paint with freedom and joy. Let's embark on this creative journey together and transform this beautiful coastal vista into a vibrant masterpiece on your canvas.



"Shark Fin Cove" 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.

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 Canvas Preparation

Sand the Canvas

Use a 220 grit sandpaper to sand the canvas. This removes the furriness and makes the surface smoother and less absorbent, allowing the paint to glide more easily. Over time, the sandpaper may become more like a 300 grit, which helps achieve an even smoother surface.

Wipe Off Dust

After sanding, thoroughly wipe off the dust from the canvas. This ensures a clean surface for painting and helps maintain the quality of your artwork.

2 Compositional Planning

Avoid Horizon Overlaps

Ensure that points in your composition do not run into the horizon. This creates a clear overlap, making the painting easier to read from a distance.

Combine Elements for Impact

Bring the shark fin and the headland closer together to form a single unit. This helps the dark area of the shark fin stand out against the light area of the rock, enhancing the composition.

Adjust Object Position

Raise the main object above the horizon if it is nearly touching it in the reference photo. This avoids lines running into each other and makes the shape more interesting, enhancing visual appeal.

Enhance Contrast

Alter the position of the shark fin and headland to create a composition where the dark area of the shark fin contrasts with the light area of the rock. This enhances visual interest and clarity.

Incorporate Narrative Elements

Use land formations to suggest a narrative, such as how the sea has eroded the land, leaving a beautiful island. This adds depth and interest to your composition.

3 Dark to Light Technique

Start with Dark Colors

Begin by applying the darker colors to your canvas. Use Gamsol to thin these paints, allowing them to spread smoothly and create a solid foundation. This will help in building depth and dimension in your painting.

Layer with Lighter Colors

Gradually move to lighter colors, applying them more thickly than the darks. This thickness will help the lighter colors stand out and effectively capture light, enhancing the overall impact of your painting.

4 Painting the Shadows

Determine the Darkest Areas

Use a thin layer of paint just thick enough to cover the canvas. Add a touch of white to avoid a completely black value, aiming for a warm dark. This helps in effectively identifying the darkest areas.

See Colors in Shadows

Close one eye and make the other eye go blurry or squint. This technique helps you identify big color shapes and movements within the dark areas, revealing warmer and cooler reflected lights.

Leave Gaps for Texture

When painting shadows, leave gaps to allow the darker color to act as texture. This represents cracks and fissures, adding depth and detail for a more realistic depiction.

Maintain Reflected Lights

Ensure reflected lights in shadows remain within the darks and do not become too light. Keeping them subtle prevents confusion between lights and shadows, preserving the form.

Use a Mid-Gray Palette

A mid-gray palette helps maintain the value of shadows without transitioning into the lights. This keeps shadows distinct and preserves the overall form and structure.

5 Shark Fin Details

Mix a Dark Base

Mix a dark color to create a strong base for the shark fin. This will provide a foundation for adding details and contrasts effectively.

Enhance with Color

Add more color to the shark fin than what's in the actual scene to enhance visual impact. This personal touch can bring out more details and make the fin stand out.

Create Glowing Shadows

Use cooler and warmer shadows to create a glowing light effect. The contrast between cooler and warmer shadows enhances depth and realism.

Focus on Shadows

Concentrate on establishing shadows to create depth in the shark fin. This prepares the area for adding highlights later.

6 Adding Greens and Distant Blues

Establish Dark Tones

Begin by painting the dark areas first. This helps maintain the vibrancy and clarity of your colors, preventing them from becoming muddy when layered over lighter tones.

Add Distant Blues

Incorporate more blue into the edges of your painting. This will push those areas into the distance, creating a sense of depth and realism in your landscape.

Refine Edges with Sky

If you paint beyond the desired edge, use the sky color to paint back into that area. This will refine and soften the edge, allowing for adjustments and a more polished look.

7 Shadow Details and Foam

Mix Neutral Grey for Shadows

Mix a fairly neutral grey to use as the base for the shadow on the sand. Ensure the value is correct, as this is the most important aspect. Adjust the grey to be warmer or cooler as needed once it is surrounded by other colors.

Apply and Adjust Shadow

Apply the neutral grey to the shadowed areas on the sand. Observe how it interacts with surrounding colors and adjust the temperature to achieve the desired effect.

Create Contrast with Foam

Paint the foam with a lighter, cooler color to create contrast against the shadowed areas. This will help the foam stand out and add depth to the scene.

8 Cave and Foam Details

Darken the Cave Area

Make the cave area slightly darker to enhance depth and realism. Leave a small gap to represent the crack in the rocks, which adds to the natural look of the scene.

Detail the Foam

Paint some of the foam slightly darker to add depth. Use a similar color for foam dribbling down the rocks in shadow, adjusting it to be a little lighter and cooler for a realistic effect.

Create a Splash Effect

Use a slightly lighter and cooler color to depict the start of a splash. This adds dynamic movement to your painting, enhancing the realism of the water effects.

9 Mid Values and Sky

Select a Different Brush

Switch to a different brush when moving into the mid values and lights. This helps in applying these values effectively on the ocean and sky.

Use Walnut Oil

Opt for walnut oil instead of camsol for the mid values. This choice allows for thicker and more substantial paint layers, enhancing texture and application.

Darken the Sea

Make the sea darker to create contrast, allowing lighter elements to pop more effectively. This emphasizes the light parts against the dark sea.

Mix a Grayed Down Blue

Achieve a mid value for the sea by mixing a grayed down blue. This color choice creates the desired contrast with the lighter elements of the painting.

Paint the Sky

Make the sky a little lighter and possibly a bit bluer, but not significantly lighter. Blur the whole edge of the horizon to enhance the sharp edges of the cliff and island, creating depth and focus.

10 Sky and Ocean Details

Level the Horizon Line

Use a zigzag motion with your brush to ensure your horizon line is level. This technique helps to blur the edge and maintain a horizontal and level horizon.

Soften the Horizon Edge

Soften the edge of the horizon with a zigzag motion using a couple of light brush strokes. This creates a more natural transition by blurring the edge.

Add Variation to Cloud Colors

Adjust the warmth or coolness of the paint to add variation to the color of clouds. Adding a little bit of red can make the clouds appear warmer, while cooler tones can create contrast.

Distinguish Fog from the Horizon

Softening the edges of the fog can help distinguish it from the horizon. This is important as fog often sits off the coast and can blend with the horizon line.

11 Ocean and Rock Interaction

Add Color to the Sky

Mix yellow with a little bit of red and some white to create a vibrant and dynamic sky. This combination adds depth and interest to your painting.

Transition from Sky to Ocean

Clean your brush thoroughly before moving from the sky to the ocean section. Paint the ocean a little lighter and greener, adding an extra dash of color to enhance its vibrancy.

Create Rock and Water Interaction

Paint the area where the rock meets the water a little darker and greener. This technique helps create the illusion of depth and interaction between the rock and the water.

Add a Splash for Movement

Leave space for a splash to add dynamic movement and realism to the scene. Use broken paint to give the impression of water crashing against the rocks.

12 Light on Shark Fin

Start with a Neutral Light Base

Begin painting the lights on the shark fin with a neutral, very light color that is slightly warm. This serves as the base for building up to a really light spot.

Adjust Richness with Shadow and Orange

If the color becomes too rich, adjust it by mixing the shadow color and adding some orange. This creates a striation of color that runs through both the light and shadow areas.

Create Variations in Light Areas

Start with the darkest light and gradually make it lighter and warmer. Add a bit of blue to change the color slightly while keeping it light.

Add Striation for Cohesion

Add a striation of color through the shadows to create a cohesive look. This technique adds depth and interest by allowing color to run through both light and shadow areas.

13 Sand and Reflections

Create a Soft Spotlight Effect

Add striations of color to the wet sand to create a soft spotlight effect. Make one area slightly darker and gradually lighten it in steps using different types of grey. This will add depth and interest to the sand.

Simulate Light Reflection

Use a combination of yellow ochre and white to reflect light on the wet sand. Brush these colors downward to simulate the effect of light reflecting on the wet surface, enhancing the realism of your painting.

14 Cliff Lights and Texture

Adjust Sand Color

Ensure the sand color is not too dark by adjusting the darker and lighter areas appropriately. Paint over any mistakes to correct the tones as needed.

Add Sky Reflection

Introduce a hint of mauve to your painting to add a subtle sky reflection. Use the same mauve on the beach to maintain color harmony and enhance realism.

Tone Down Bright Greens

If the greens in your painting appear too bright, tone them down. Use darker green accents to give the darks more power and create a natural look.

Create Cliff Texture

Use very thick paint pushed into the bristles to paint the cliff. This technique helps achieve the desired texture and depth.

15 Foam and Splash Details

Create Broken Foam Effect

Brush the paint lightly across the canvas to create the effect of broken foam. Allow some areas to remain unpainted to indicate broken foam.

Mix Foam and Splash Colors

Use lots of white with a little bit of bright yellow to warm it up, simulating sunlight. This combination helps to create a realistic foam and splash effect.

Soften Foam Details

Use a dry brush or your finger to gently blend the edges of the foam. This softening technique creates a more natural look.

Add Small Foam Ripples

Use the tip of the brush to create small foam ripples by flattening the paint out and pushing it in lightly. This adds delicate details to your painting.

16 Final Touches and Accents

Enhance Shadow Depth

Add more dark accents into the shadow side of the bushes to enhance depth and contrast in your painting.

Apply Blue Reflected Light

Add a little bit of blue reflected light to round off the cave and create a more realistic effect. This technique also helps push certain sections away, enhancing depth.

Create a Glowing Effect

Use blue to push certain sections away and contribute to a glowing effect, making the light appear to burn out the edge of the foreground cliff.

Adjust Shadow Balance

If shadows become too dark, lighten them by adding some white and red to maintain the balance of light and shadow.

Add Definition with Light Green

Use very light green with directional strokes to add texture and detail, enhancing the overall composition.

17 Cracks and Beach Details

Create Natural Cracks

Paint cracks instead of drawing them to achieve a natural look. Avoid uniform lines; instead, use broken lines with varying thickness to add character and a calligraphic touch.

Preserve Light Areas

Keep dark accents out of light areas to maintain their luminosity. This ensures the glowing light effect remains vibrant and impactful in your painting.

Enhance Water with Color

Introduce punchy colors to the water to enhance vibrancy and visual appeal. Experiment with different shades to find the best fit for your painting.

Balance Beach Details

Use colors slightly darker than mid-gray for beach details to avoid them standing out too much. For details further down the beach, opt for lighter colors to maintain balance.

18 Horizon and Pelicans

Correct the Horizon Line

Soften and straighten the horizon line by gently blending the paint. This will remove any unevenness and ensure the horizon appears smooth and level.

Add Pelicans for Authenticity

Include pelicans flying along the coast to enhance the painting's authenticity and beauty. Carefully position them to reflect their natural movement in the Shark Fin Cove area.

Summary & Key Takeaways

In this lesson, you embarked on a journey to capture the essence of Shark Fin Cove, starting with the preparation of your canvas. By sanding it to a smooth finish, you set the stage for your paints to glide effortlessly. As you planned your composition, you ensured that the elements of your painting, like the shark fin and headland, were strategically placed to create a visually appealing narrative. This planning phase was crucial in setting up a dynamic and engaging scene.

As you moved from dark to light, you used Gamsol to thin your darker paints, establishing a solid foundation for depth and dimension. The shadows were carefully crafted, leaving gaps to represent natural textures, while the addition of cooler and warmer tones brought life to the scene. You paid special attention to the details of the shark fin, using contrasting shadows to enhance its presence. The incorporation of greens and blues added depth, pushing distant elements further back.

In the final stages, you focused on the interaction between ocean and rock, using vibrant colors to create a dynamic scene. The careful application of light on the shark fin and the reflections on the sand added realism and depth. With each brushstroke, you brought the scene to life, ensuring that every element, from the foam to the cliff textures, contributed to the overall harmony and balance of your painting. Your attention to detail in the final touches and accents ensured a cohesive and captivating artwork.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use a 220 grit sandpaper to achieve a smooth painting surface.
- Raise main objects above the horizon to enhance visual interest.
- Use Gamsol to thin the dark paint layers for smoother application.
- Leave gaps when painting shadows to add texture and depth.
- Use contrasting cooler and warmer shadows to enhance depth.
- Use blue on edges to create depth and push areas into the distance.
- Ensure the shadow's value is correct before adjusting its temperature.
- Use a zigzag motion to blur and level the horizon line effectively.



"Shark Fin Cove" 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.

'Shark Fin Cove' 30x40cm Acrylic on Canvas by Shoman Mohamed



'Shark Fin Cove' 30x40cm Acrylic on Canvas by Shoman Mohamed

Nice happy colour scheme. Speaks of joy. I think your photo is actually a bit light so I fiddled with it. I also darkened the water around the base of the rocks and tried to darken the shadows in the rocks. These aren't dark enough in your painting so it makes it hard to see what's in the shadow and what's in the light, which flattens the painting. Be clear from the beginning sketch about where your shadows and lights are going to be.

'Shark Fin Cove' 13x13" Oil on Canvas by Robert H. Smith



'Shark Fin Cove' 13x13" Oil on Canvas by Robert H. Smith

Good work Robert. Great to see you using a variety of paint thickness and really plastering it on in the highlights. Good drawing, but do be careful to keep a straight horizon - no one likes a tsunami. If that big bump is a distant land then just avoid running it into the top of the island like that because when we don't overlap objects clearly it tends to flatten that part of the image.

'Shark Fin Cove' 12x12" Acrylic on Canvas by Sharon Repple



'Shark Fin Cove' 12x12" Acrylic on Canvas by Sharon Repple

Beautiful colour Sharon! Very rich. Interesting that you gave the scene more room around the edges which gives a more spacious feeling. Your cast shadows on the sand could do with a touch more red in them to connect them better to the colour of the sand in the light. Beautiful subtle colour shifts you've achieved in the central rock. Nice one!

'Shark Fin Cove' 16x16" Oil on Canvas by Ken McAlice



'Shark Fin Cove' 16x16" Oil on Canvas by Ken McAlice

Good work Ken. Great movement. Suggest you have a closer look at the drawing next time - perhaps grid it out or use some other transfer method. Also squint down and see how your shadow colours in the cliff are poking out a bit like they're actually lights instead of darks? So the cliff in shadow needs to be darker. Also the sea and sky can get darker as it recedes which makes a great backdrop for the brightly lit island.