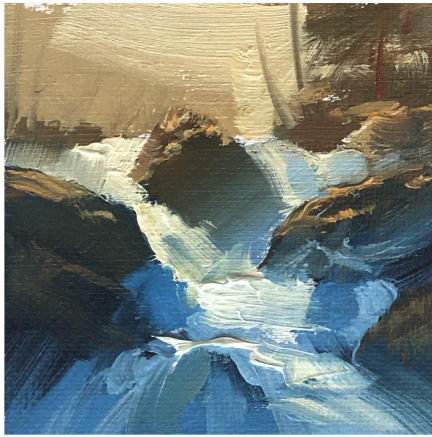




Mastering Waterfalls

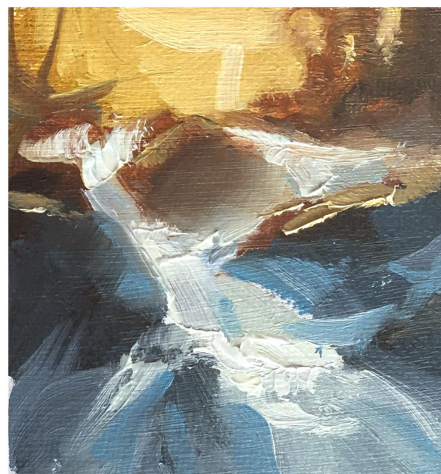
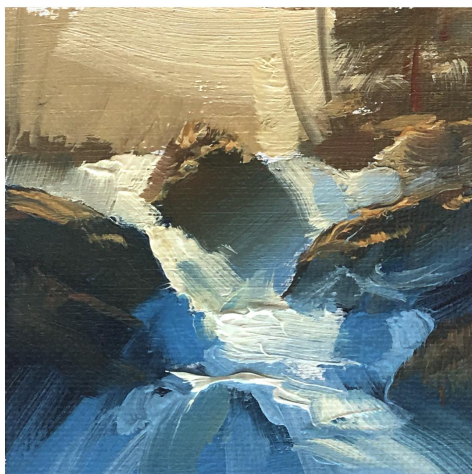
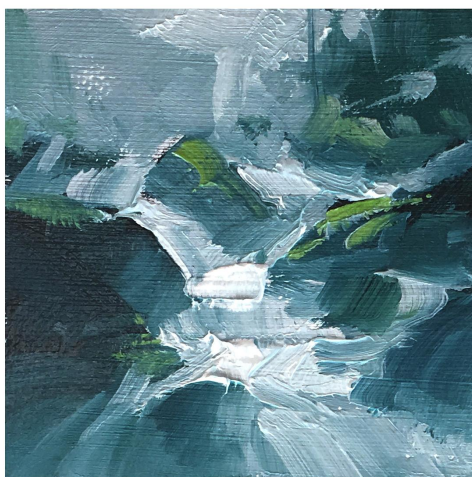
A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/148-Mastering-Waterfalls>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

Waterfalls captivate us with their dynamic energy and serene beauty, making them a rewarding yet challenging subject for any painter. In this chapter, I guide you through the essentials of capturing the essence of waterfalls on canvas. We'll explore how to convey the movement and translucency of water while maintaining the solidity of the surrounding landscape. One of the key skills you'll develop is the ability to adapt and modify the scene before you. Even if a waterfall appears perfectly composed in nature, you have the artistic freedom to alter it, enhancing or simplifying elements to suit your vision. This flexibility is crucial in creating a painting that is not only a representation of the scene but also a unique expression of your personal style. By the end of this lesson, you'll have a deeper understanding of how to balance detail and abstraction, light and shadow, to bring your waterfall paintings to life. Join me as we delve into this inspiring subject and unlock the secrets to painting successful waterfalls.

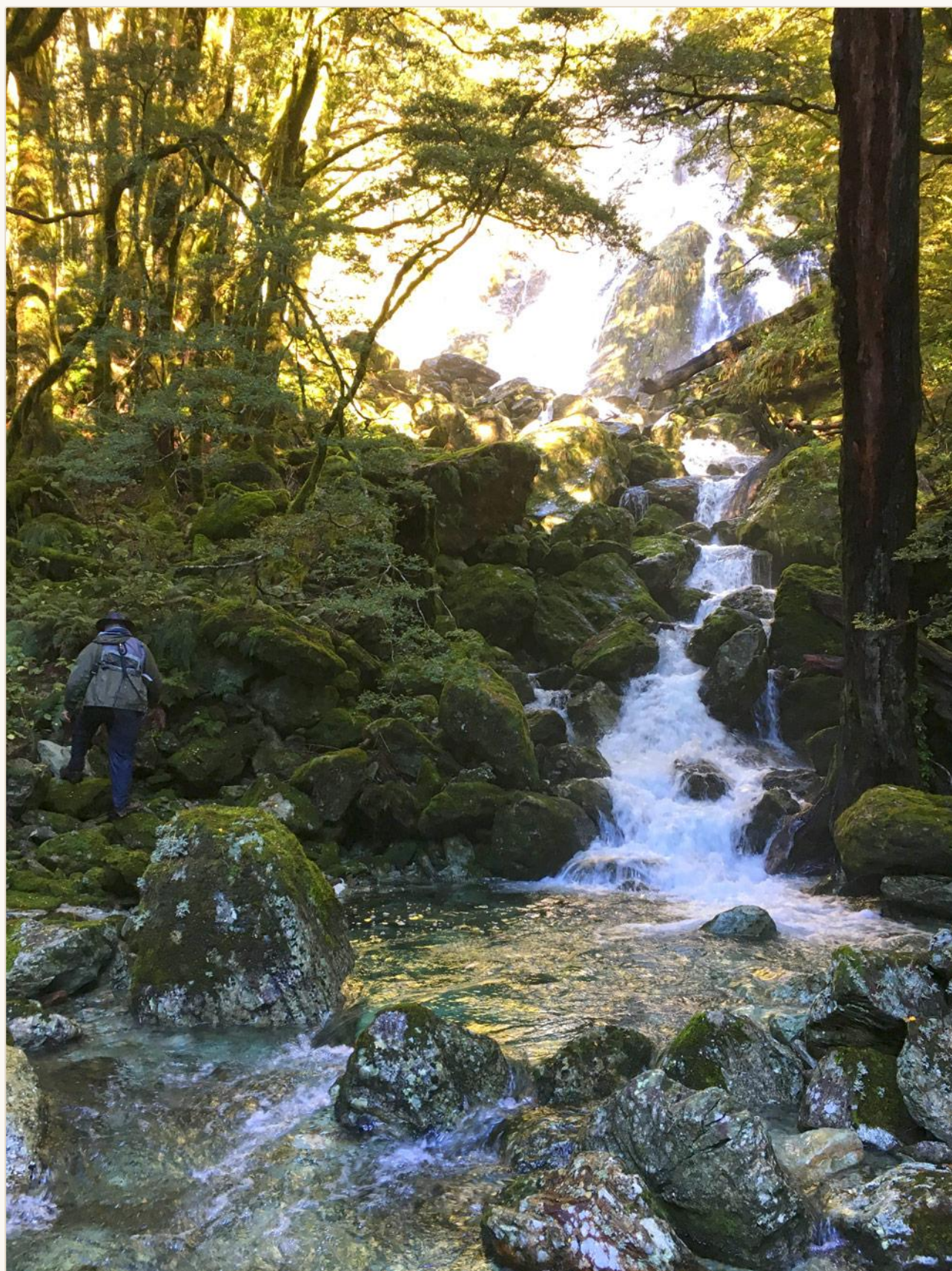


Colour Studies by Richard Robinson



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 Creative License



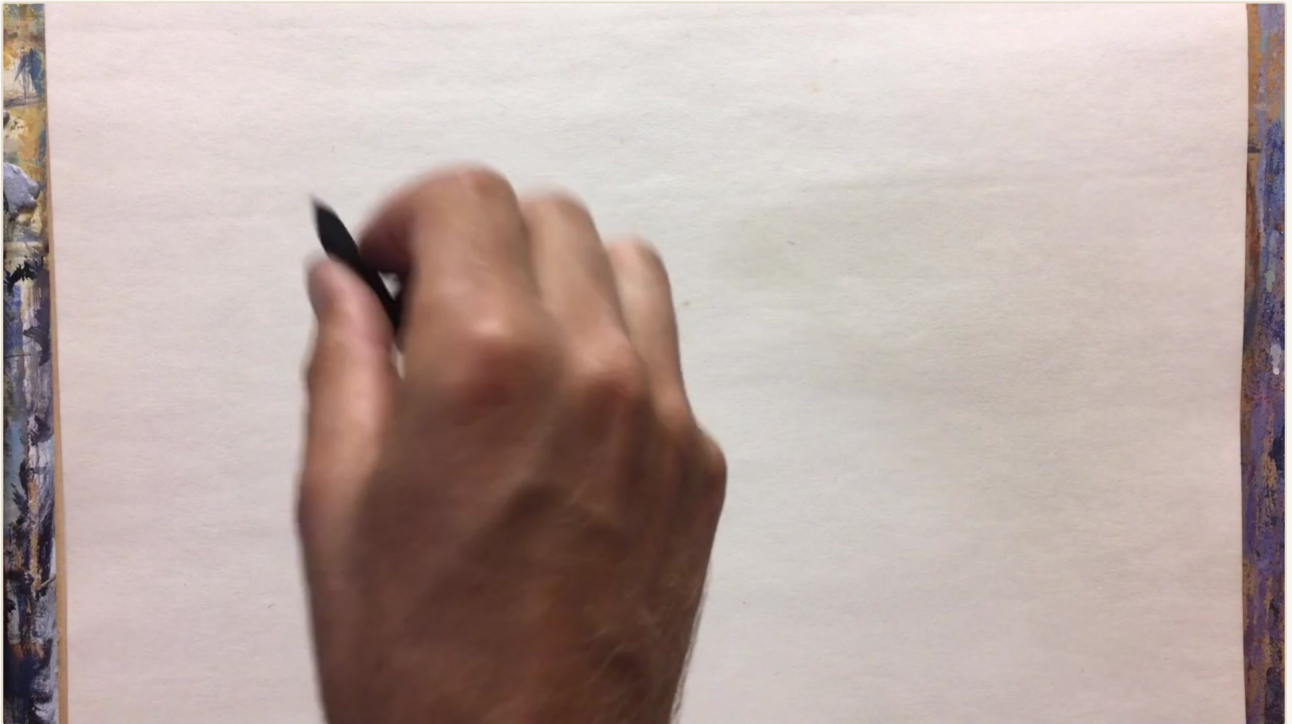
Embrace Creative License

Recognize that even if a scene appears perfectly composed, you have the freedom to alter it. Use your artistic judgment to enhance or modify elements as you see fit. This flexibility allows you to create a unique interpretation of the scene.

PRO TIP

Feel free to adjust the composition of natural scenes to suit your artistic vision.

2 Compositional Opportunities



Explore with Charcoal

Use charcoal to explore the compositional opportunities of waterfalls. Focus on identifying and sketching the biggest shapes first to establish a strong foundation.

Utilize Negative Shapes

Experiment with negative shapes by erasing or using white chalk over charcoal. This technique can help you define and highlight the waterfall's dynamic elements.

Avoid Horizontal Compositions

When designing your waterfall painting, avoid making the composition too horizontal. Horizontal compositions can lead to a static and less engaging image.

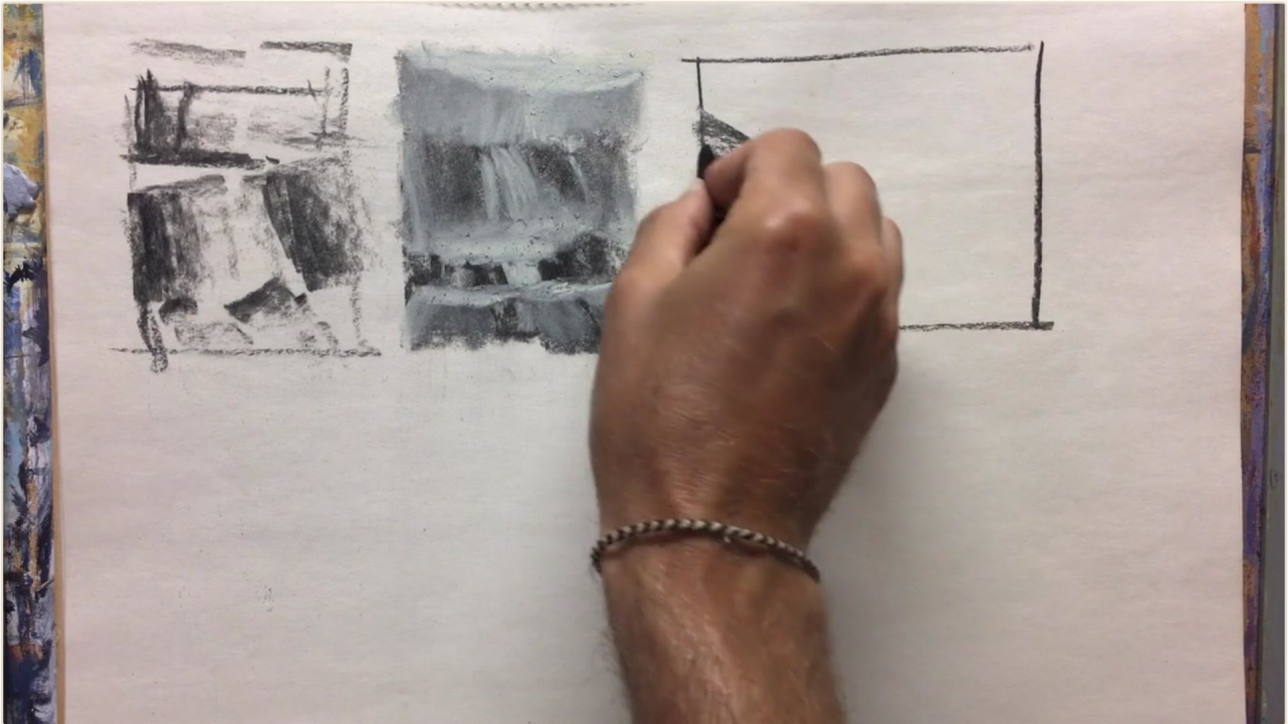
Incorporate Diagonals for Motion

To convey the motion and beauty of waterfalls, incorporate diagonals in your composition. Diagonals suggest movement, unlike stable horizontals and verticals.

PRO TIP

Incorporate diagonals in your composition to convey the motion of waterfalls.

3 Designing with Variation



Create Dynamic Rock Angles

Avoid making rocks with matching angles. Instead, vary the angles to create a more natural and dynamic appearance. This variation adds interest and movement to your composition.

Design with Diagonal Lines

Work upwards with your brush to create a softer impression of water. Use diagonal lines to add movement and avoid static horizontal and vertical designs.

Adjust Composition for Balance

Identify elements that are too similar in size, shape, or angle, like bookends. Consider cropping the image to solve issues with symmetry and central placement, creating a more balanced composition.

PRO TIP

Vary the angles of your rocks to avoid repetitive shapes and create a more dynamic design.

4 Edges and Tonal Studies



Understand Edge Variety

Recognize the importance of combining sharp and soft edges in your waterfall painting. Use the contrast between rocks and water to create these edges.

Incorporate Spray Effects

Add spray effects to obscure the bottom of rocks, especially after large drops of water. This technique enhances the variety in your edges by introducing more soft edges.

Use Charcoal for Tonal Studies

Utilize charcoal to easily create greys and conduct tonal studies. Focus on both shape and tonal design to prepare for painting.

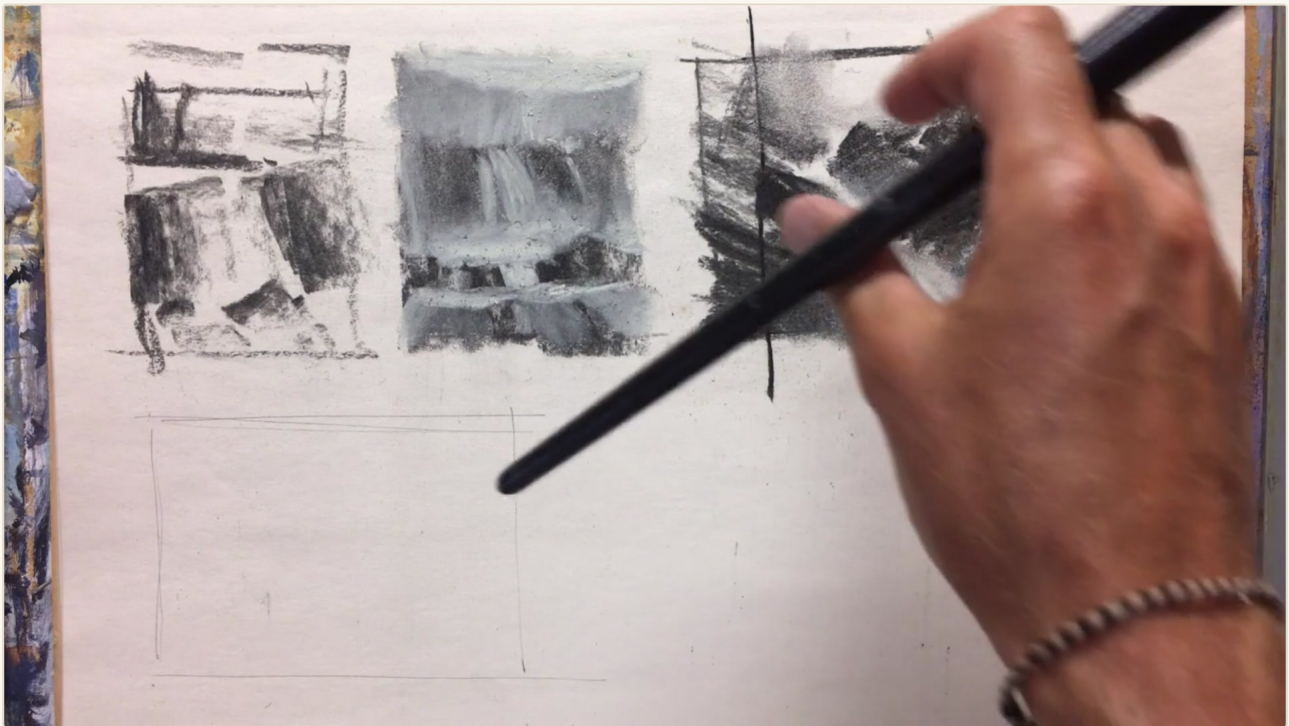
Soften the Background

Soften the edges in the background and make them much lighter. Concentrate your darkest darks, lightest lights, and sharpest edges in the center of interest.

PRO TIP

Use charcoal to explore tonal design and edge variety before starting with paints.

5 Charcoal and Paint Design



Choose Your Medium

Select charcoal and chalk pastel for intense tonal effects and quick edge softening, or use black and white acrylic or oil paint for a similar design approach.

Start with a Big Brush

Begin with a large brush to cover most of your work area. This helps establish the main shapes and values efficiently.

Establish Three Values

Design using three values: darkest dark, middle value, and lightest light. This simple approach creates a bold effect early in the process.

Refine with a Smaller Brush

Once the big shapes are in place, switch to a smaller brush to add smaller shapes and details. Focus on varying shapes, sizes, and angles for interest.

Use Photo References

Find waterfall photos online or use your own. Copy them to practice, then experiment by altering the design to improve it.

PRO TIP

Design using three values to achieve a bold effect early on.

6 Random Design Techniques



Create Random Shapes

Dip a paper towel in some paint and press it onto your canvas to create random shapes. This technique helps in forming natural-looking rock shapes for your waterfall design.

Identify Shapes

Observe the shapes created by the paint splat. Identify potential rock formations or other elements that could be part of your waterfall scene.

Experiment and Play

Continue to splat the paint with the paper towel to add more shapes. Experiment with different angles and pressures to vary the results.

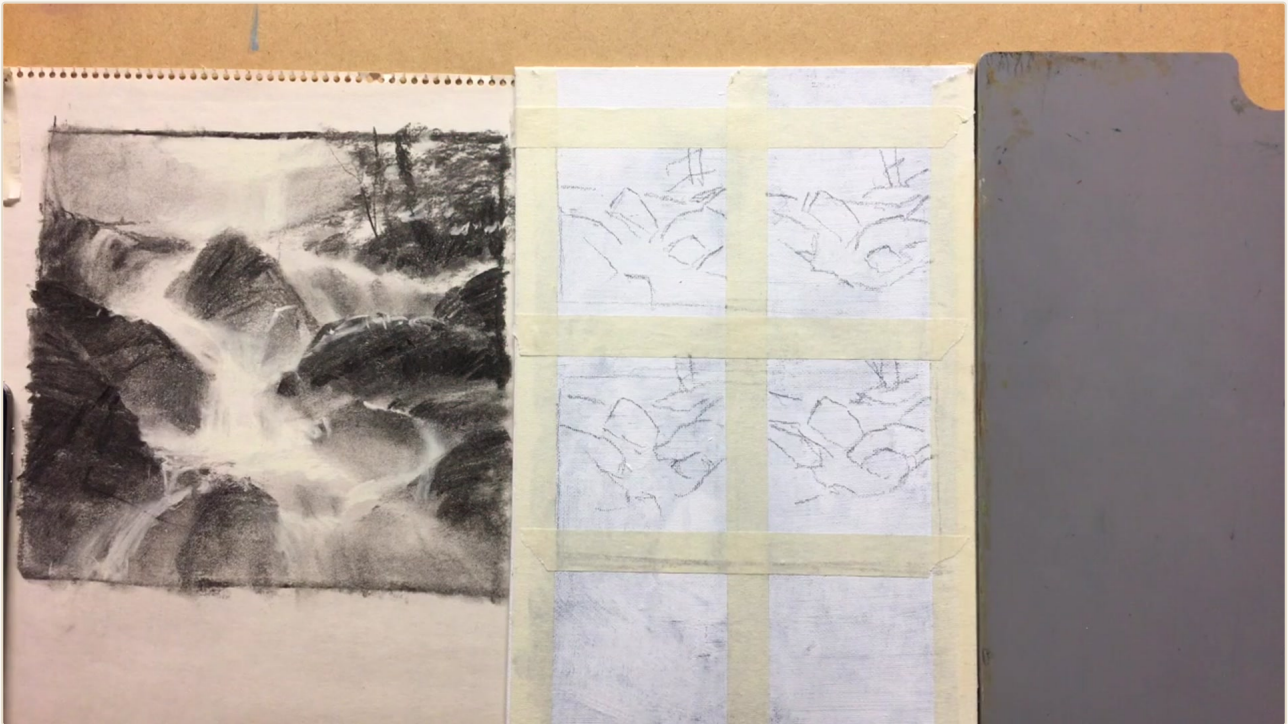
Refine Your Design

Use the random shapes as a base to refine and develop your waterfall design. Adjust and enhance the shapes to create a composition you enjoy.

PRO TIP

Create multiple sketches using this technique to become more comfortable with your subject and improve your design.

7 Approaching Colour



Choose a Monochrome Hue

Select a single hue from the color wheel for a monochrome painting. This approach simplifies your color choices and allows you to focus on tonal variations within that hue. Consider using blue, green, orange, or purple for a unique effect.

Experiment with Complementary Colors

Try using a complementary color scheme, such as orange and blue, to add dynamism to your painting. This combination creates visual excitement and can enhance the mood of the scene.

Manipulate Mood with Color Schemes

Select a color scheme based on the mood you wish to convey. Use analogous colors like blue and green for tranquility, a triadic scheme for liveliness, or a monotone for a subdued feel. Complementary colors can make the painting more dynamic.

Explore with Online Tools

Utilize online tools like the gamut mask to explore various color schemes. This can help you visualize and decide on the best scheme for your painting.

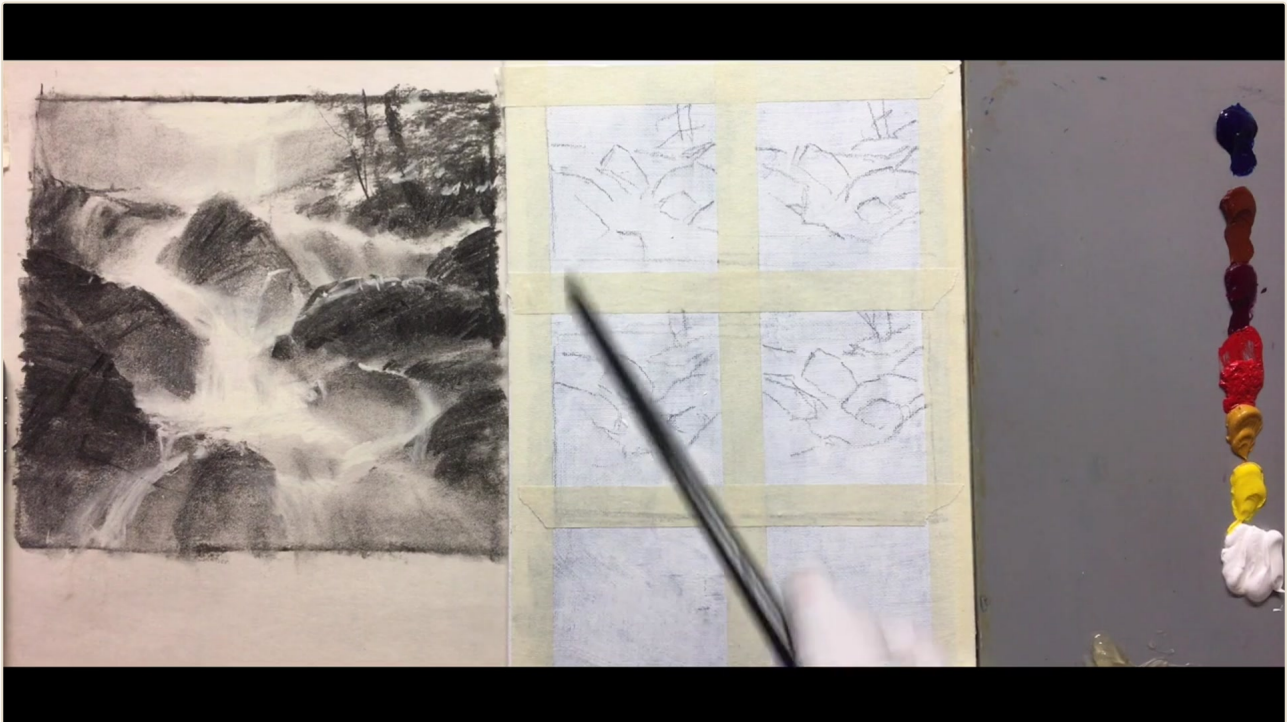
Research and Experiment

Look at photographs or paintings of waterfalls online to identify appealing color schemes. Try applying these schemes in a thumbnail sketch or a larger painting to see how they affect your scene.

PRO TIP

Use a complementary color scheme to add excitement and dynamism to your painting.

8 Colour Scheme Thumbnails



Prepare Your Thumbnails

Lay out your oil colors and prepare four small thumbnails. Use a fairly large brush for these thumbnails, focusing on color rather than detail.

Monochrome Green Scheme

Mix a dark green using blue and yellow ochre. Apply your darkest darks first, then lighten with yellow or white. To subdue the green, add a touch of red to push it towards grey.

Analogous Blue and Green Scheme

Start with blue and add Quinacridone violet to shift the greenish phthalo blue towards red, resembling ultramarine blue. Tone it down with red and yellow for darks, then lighten as needed.

Complementary Orange and Blue Scheme

Create a complementary scheme with intense blue and subdued orange. Use separate brushes for each color to avoid muddiness. Increase the saturation of the orange for a brighter effect.

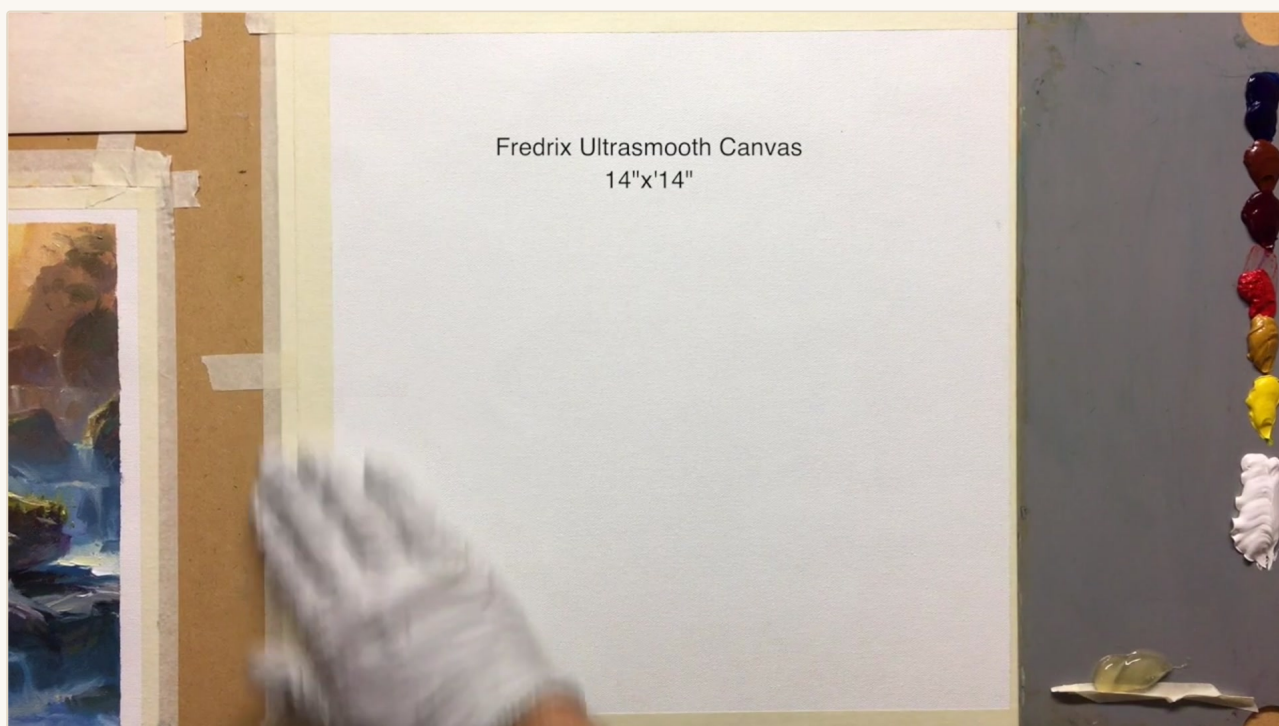
Evaluate and Adjust

Photograph your thumbnails and adjust color levels using photo editing software. Experiment with saturation, contrast, and tint to explore different options.

PRO TIP

Use separate brushes for different colors to prevent muddiness in your complementary color schemes.

9 Starting the Painting



Prepare Your Workspace

Stretch your canvas onto a hardboard using tape to secure it. Arrange your palette with your chosen colors and have Gamblin Solvent Free Gel ready as your painting medium.

Select Your Brushes

Use four Rosemary & Co long flat brushes: two large and two small. Reserve one large and one small brush for light colors, and the other pair for dark colors to maintain clean color application.

Gather Reference Materials

Lay out your previous sketches, drawings, and photos around your workspace for easy reference. If available, set up a looped video or GIF of the waterfall to observe the movement and details.

Begin the Drawing

Start with a small brush to sketch the drawing onto the canvas. Use the grid transfer method, projection, or tracing for accuracy, or draw freehand to make artistic decisions about design and placement.

PRO TIP

Use separate brushes for light and dark colors to keep your palette clean and colors vibrant.

10 Painting the Light Transition



Lay Down the Base Color

Start with yellow ochre to establish a base color in the glowing light area at the top. This sets the foundation for the transition from warm to cool tones.

Create the Glowing Effect

Mix a little burnt sienna with white and a tiny touch of blue. Apply this mixture to the upper areas to begin achieving the glowing effect.

Focus on Gradual Transitions

Work on transitioning from warm to cool tones and from darks to lighter areas. Aim for a gradual transition to capture the light effectively.

Keep It Loose

Start with loose brushwork to avoid tightening the painting too early. A loose start helps maintain flexibility and prevents the painting from becoming too precious.

PRO TIP

Begin with loose brushwork to keep the painting flexible and prevent it from becoming too tight.

11 Painting the Darks



Mixing the Dark Colors

Add more blue to your darks as you move down into the area, but be cautious not to overdo it. Phthalo Blue is powerful, so balance it with warm colors to avoid an overly blue mixture.

Adjusting Values

Consider the recession of value: darks, lighter, lightest. Avoid very dark darks in the midsection by lightening the mixture with white, creating a dark grey.

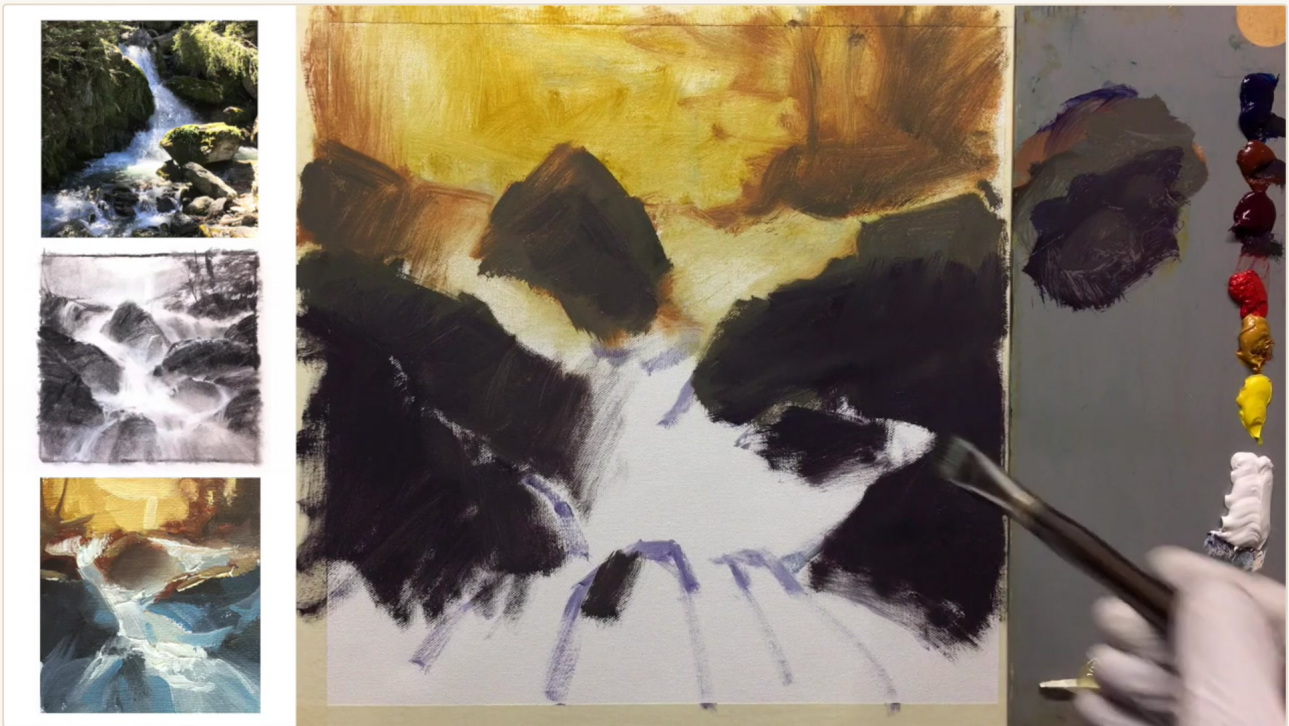
Applying the Paint

Apply the paint thinly, ensuring it covers the canvas without allowing too much of the canvas to show through the darks.

PRO TIP

Balance Phthalo Blue with warm colors to prevent an overly blue mixture.

12 Blue Glow and Softening Edges



Create a Blue Glow

Mix a lighter and bluer shade to represent the foam catching light under the rocks. Apply this color to the underside of the rocks to create a mysterious, beautiful glow. Start at the outside of the dark area and work inward for a smooth transition.

Strengthen the Glow

Add more white to your mix to enhance the blue glow. Use varied brush strokes to achieve a misty, broken look, avoiding uniformity in direction.

Soften Edges

Use a dry brush to gently soften any hard edges, ensuring a gradual transition from dark to light. Be cautious not to overdo the softening to maintain the painting's balance.

PRO TIP

Alternate brush strokes to create a misty, broken look.

13 Reflected Light on Rocks



Add Reflected Light

Mix a warmer, slightly lighter version of the existing dark areas on the rocks. Use warm colors with a touch of white to mimic the light bouncing off the foam and onto the rocks. If phthalo blue feels too strong, opt for ultramarine blue for easier control.

Lighten Specific Areas

Identify the small planes of the rocks angled towards the light source. Lighten these areas slightly, varying the angles and sizes of your brush strokes to avoid uniformity. Consider adding a little yellow and blue for a greenish tint on top planes catching more light.

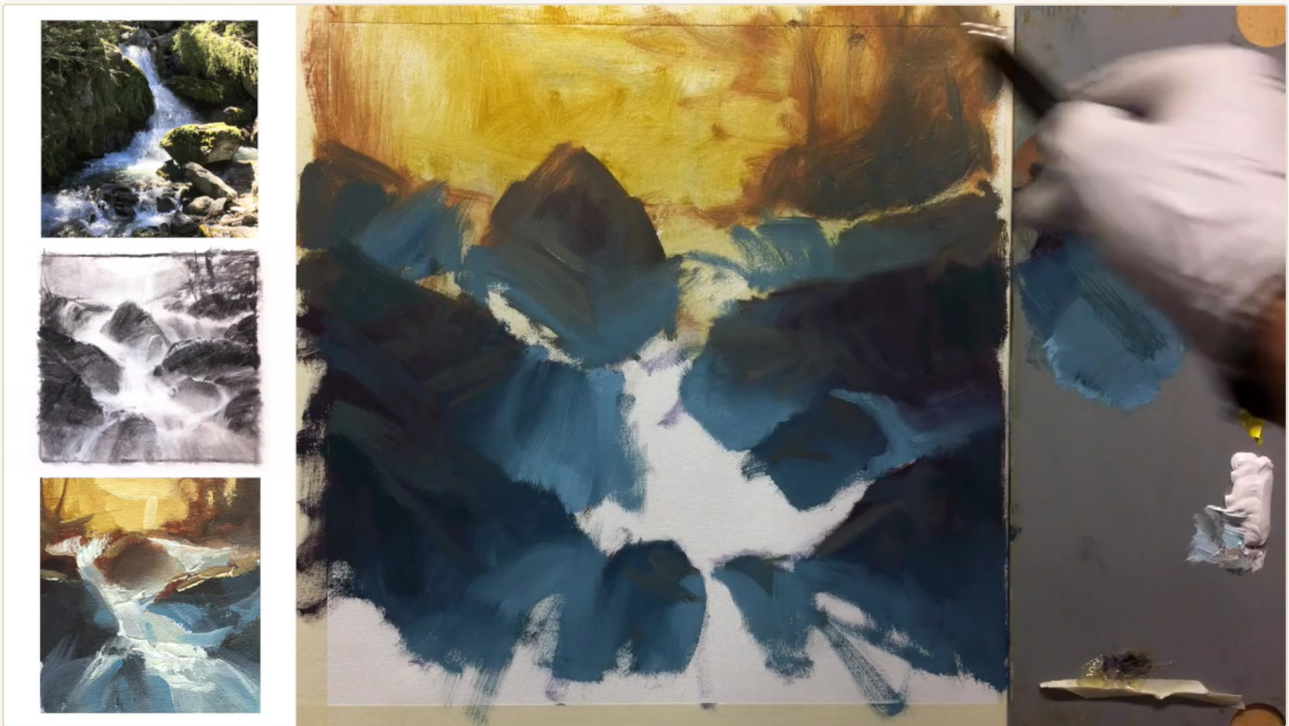
Introduce Color Variation

Add variation to the dark side of the rocks using a mix of phthalo blue and burnt sienna for a dark green hue. Focus on creating subtle differences in color to reflect nature's inherent variation and avoid oversimplification.

PRO TIP

Use ultramarine blue instead of phthalo blue for easier control if you're a beginner.

14 Background and Waterfall Details



Prepare the Background Colors

Mix burnt sienna, yellow ochre, some white, a little red, and a little blue. Adjust with more yellow ochre to achieve the desired tone. Clean your brush before proceeding.

Enhance the Cliff Area

Add more yellow ochre and white to your palette. Introduce a touch of bright yellow to highlight the cliff area, creating a sense of depth and distance.

Define the Waterfall

Mix a little more yellow and red for areas closer to the viewer, making them slightly darker. Use white and yellow to paint the sky, then quickly brush across to add texture to the trees and create sky holes.

Add the Waterfall

Incorporate a little blue into your mixture to define the waterfall. This will help it stand out against the cliff and sky.

PRO TIP

Use quick brush strokes to add texture and create sky holes in the trees.

15 Foam and Water Movement



Create Waterfall Spray

Lighten the area at the bottom of the waterfall to depict spray. The larger the waterfall, the more spray there will be. Soften this area to blend with the surroundings.

Add Light and Shadow

Add a chink of light at the top of the waterfall to suggest sunlight catching it. Mix the light with existing blue to create a warm and cool transition on the shadow side of the foam.

Define Rock and Water Edges

Use a brush stroke to define the top edge of the rock and water simultaneously. Add a bit more blue and a touch of crimson to create a mauve color, keeping the paint close to white for shadowed areas.

Consider Light Direction

Ensure the light source is behind the rocks, meaning water in front of rocks will be in shadow. Avoid light spots at the base of rocks unless they lean away, allowing light to strike.

Paint Foam and Water Movement

Add a bluey-green hue at the pool's edge to show clear water before foam forms. Use thick white paint with a touch of blue and yellow to create foam, smoothing it as it approaches clear water.

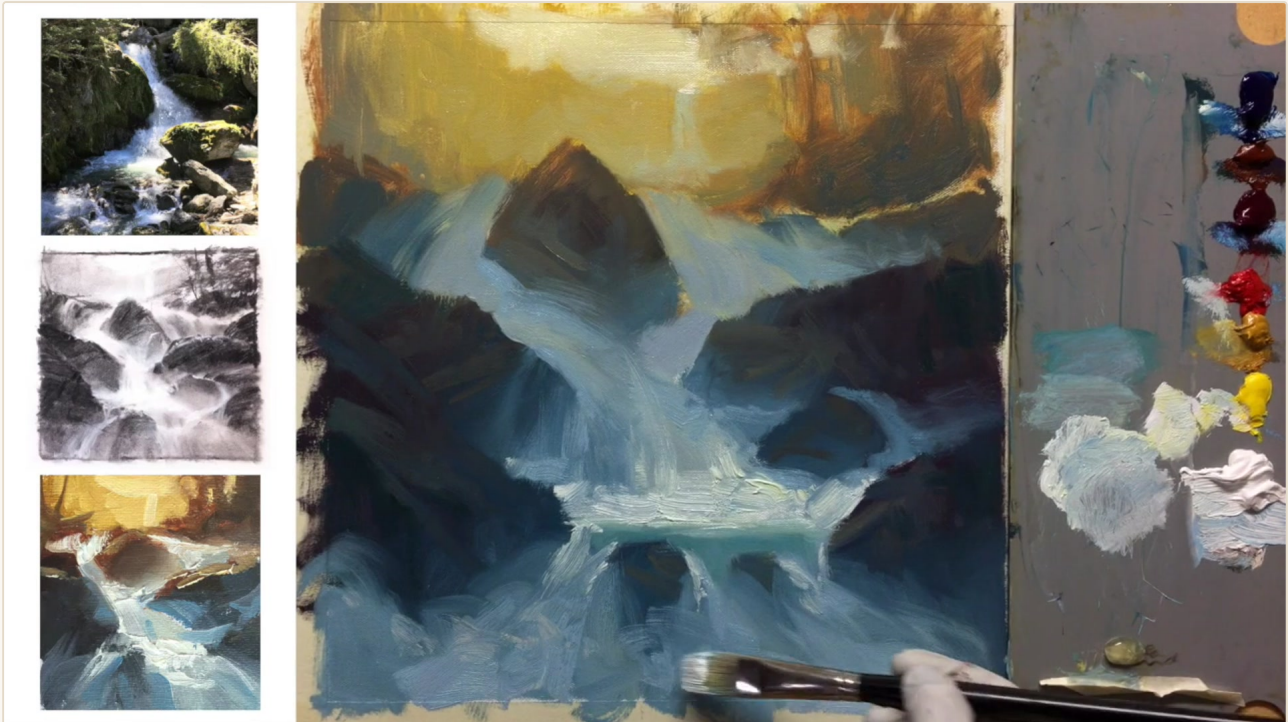
Enhance Foam Texture

Brush up into the foam to create movement and more foam as water breaks over rocks. Add a pinkish tint at the bottom for variation, indicating light further from the sun.

PRO TIP

Use thicker paint for light areas to achieve a broken paint effect, ideal for depicting bubbling water.

16 Wet Rock Reflections



Add Warm Reflected Light

Mix white with a little yellow to create a warm tone. Use the edge of the brush tip to paint long, fine lines on the top of the waterfall. This will mimic the effect of warm light catching the top surfaces.

Create Movement in Water

Decide on your preferred style of waterfall, whether frozen or moving. Add clear structure and crisp details to suggest a frozen waterfall, or keep it mostly fluid with a few crisp details for a more dynamic effect. Use impasto technique at the bottom of the falls to suggest water escaping and bubbling out.

Apply Light Blue Reflections

Switch to a smaller brush and use a light movi blue to highlight the wet faces of the rocks. Apply a light dusting of blue to these areas to reflect the surrounding light. This technique helps to separate the rocks and adds depth to the painting.

PRO TIP

Use a light dusting of blue on wet rock faces to enhance reflections and add depth.

17 Light Effects and Variations



Adjust Water Levels

Consider the physics of the waterfall and adjust the water levels to ensure they appear natural. Lower the water level in front to create a realistic perspective.

Add Light to Rocks

Separate rocks by adding light to the top of one rock to bring it forward. Mix yellow ochre with a touch of blue to create a green for moss, then add bright yellow and white for highlights. Apply this to the rock to simulate light striking the moss.

Create Variation with Light

For variation, apply a browny-grey light to another rock. Start with a slightly darker tone and lighten it to a mid-value. Add lighter spots in line with the light source to enhance the effect.

Highlight the Hero Rock

Apply a golden light to the hero rock. Begin with a darker base and gradually increase to the strongest light. Ensure the light is on the side facing the light source and add a glinting light for effect.

Enhance with Catch Lights

Introduce small catch lights in the dark areas of the rocks, ensuring they are not too dark to maintain the glowing effect. Add wet highlights where the sun reflects off the water.

Create Glowing Effects

Where dark rocks meet light foam, add a slightly lighter blue or orange to the rock for a glowing effect. Adjust the color to be slightly lighter than the rock's value.

Apply Warm Light Effects

Use yellow ochre, bright yellow, and white to create a warm glowing effect on top of the water. Darken the color when transitioning to darker areas to avoid a pasty appearance.

PRO TIP

Adjust the color slightly lighter than the rock's value to create a glowing effect.

18 Light Placement on Rocks



Mix a Warm Grey

Create a warm grey by blending a suitable mix of colors. This will serve as the base for adding light to the rocks.

Decide on Light Placement

Choose specific rocks to highlight with light. Avoid placing light on all rocks to ensure some stand out and appear special.

PRO TIP

Highlight only a few rocks to create focal points and add interest to your painting.

19 Re-establishing Darks



Re-establish Dark Accents

Add dark accents to your painting to bring back detail in the shadowed areas. These darks often get covered when adding mid values and lights, so it's important to reinforce them towards the end of your painting.

Mix and Apply Dark Colors

Mix a greenish dark color first and apply it to the areas where you want to enhance depth. Then, create a more purplish dark color and use it to add variety and richness to the shadows.

Maintain Light and Depth Illusion

Be cautious not to overdo the dark accents in the lighter areas. Applying the same darks in these sections can ruin the illusion of light and depth, so use them sparingly.

PRO TIP

Re-establishing darks towards the end of your painting enhances three-dimensionality and presence.

20 Final Touches and Highlights



Enhance Sunlit Areas

Mix white with bright yellow and lightly touch it on the foam's light areas. This creates an intense warm sunlight effect, adding depth and glow to your painting.

Balance Warmth and Coolness

Combine yellow ochre, crimson, and white to tone down excessive warmth in some areas. Gradually cool down the colors as they move away from the focal point to create subtle variations.

Create Soft Backgrounds

Use soft edges in the background to make the foreground rocks appear sharper. This contrast enhances the painting's overall theme of softness versus sharpness.

Add Foreground Warmth

Introduce warmth to the foreground trees by adding soft highlights. This helps them stand out against the light source.

Highlight Rocks and Trees

Apply stronger highlights on rocks for a pop of color. Lightly brush these areas to integrate them into the scene, avoiding a drawn appearance.

Introduce Color Variation

Add neutral gray and greenish dark spots to areas that seem too warm. This introduces color interest and variation, enhancing the painting's vibrancy.

Final Touches

Add sparkly highlights to the trees for a finishing touch. Ensure to paint right up to the edge for a complete look.

PRO TIP

Use soft edges in the background to enhance the sharpness of foreground elements, creating a dynamic contrast in your painting.

Summary & Key Takeaways

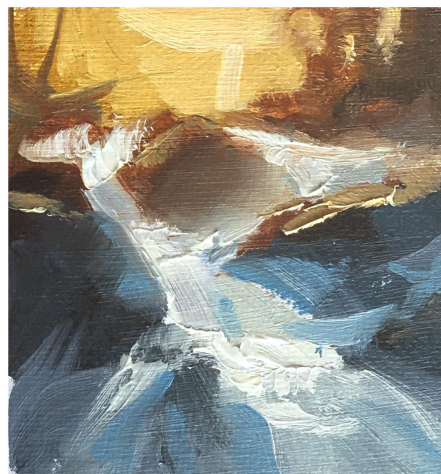
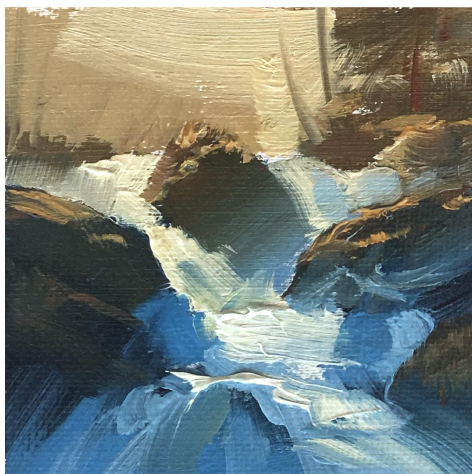
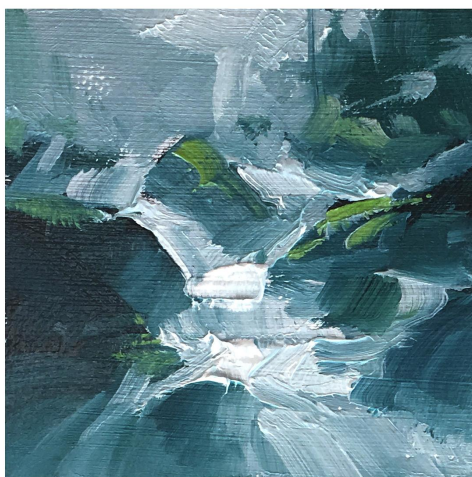
Embark on your waterfall painting journey with the freedom to reshape the scene to suit your artistic vision. Begin by exploring compositional opportunities with charcoal, focusing on dynamic shapes and avoiding static horizontals. Use your creativity to design varied rock angles and incorporate diagonals to convey motion, ensuring your composition is both engaging and balanced.

As you progress, pay attention to edges and tonal studies. Combine sharp and soft edges to create contrast between rocks and water, and use charcoal for tonal exploration. Transition to paint with a focus on three values to establish a bold effect, and experiment with random design techniques to create natural rock formations. Choose a color scheme that enhances the mood of your painting, whether through monochrome simplicity or dynamic complementary colors.

Finally, bring your painting to life by capturing the light transitions and water movement. Use loose brushwork to maintain flexibility, and balance your color palette with warm and cool tones. Add final details like foam and reflected light on rocks, ensuring your painting captures the dynamic beauty of waterfalls. Remember, each brushstroke is an opportunity to express the unique energy and tranquility of the scene.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Feel free to adjust the composition of natural scenes to suit your artistic vision.
- Incorporate diagonals in your composition to convey the motion of waterfalls.
- Vary the angles of your rocks to avoid repetitive shapes and create a more dynamic design.
- Use charcoal to explore tonal design and edge variety before starting with paints.
- Design using three values to achieve a bold effect early on.
- Use a complementary color scheme to add excitement and dynamism to your painting.
- Use separate brushes for different colors to prevent muddiness in your complementary color schemes.
- Begin with loose brushwork to keep the painting flexible and prevent it from becoming too tight.



Colour Studies 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.

Canyon Waterfall 12"x9" by Barbara Haviland



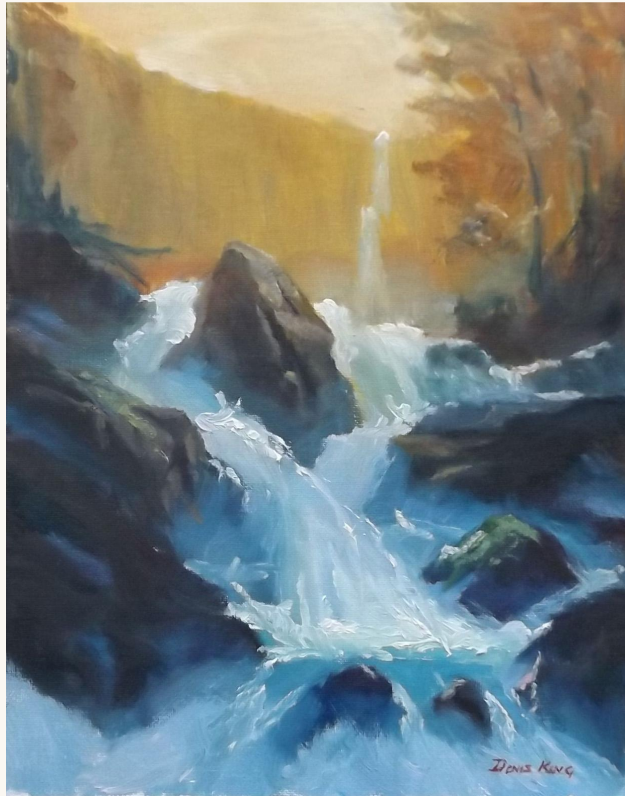
Canyon Waterfall 12"x9" by Barbara Haviland

Lovely painterly work Barbara. I like that you've kept your brushwork bold and focused on the big shapes, but contrasted that with some nice fine detail in the lower trees. Your composition is nicely done, excluding everything that's surplus to requirements.

I would have liked to see a stronger light and atmospheric effect in the sunlit area beyond the top of the falls. All you need to do to achieve that is make all the darks a little lighter and add a little of the colour of the light to every colour in that area. The easiest way to achieve that is to apply a light glaze over that area, maybe two. It can look a little chalky using glaze with white in it so I usually try to achieve the same effect by adjusting each colour as I go. Tricky, but well worth a try.

Notice in the resource photo that the mist rising from the bottom of the falls lightly obscures and simplifies the background behind the foreground trees. It's a great method to create depth and enhance foreground objects. Again, you can achieve that with with glazing or pre-planning.

Waterfall by Denis King

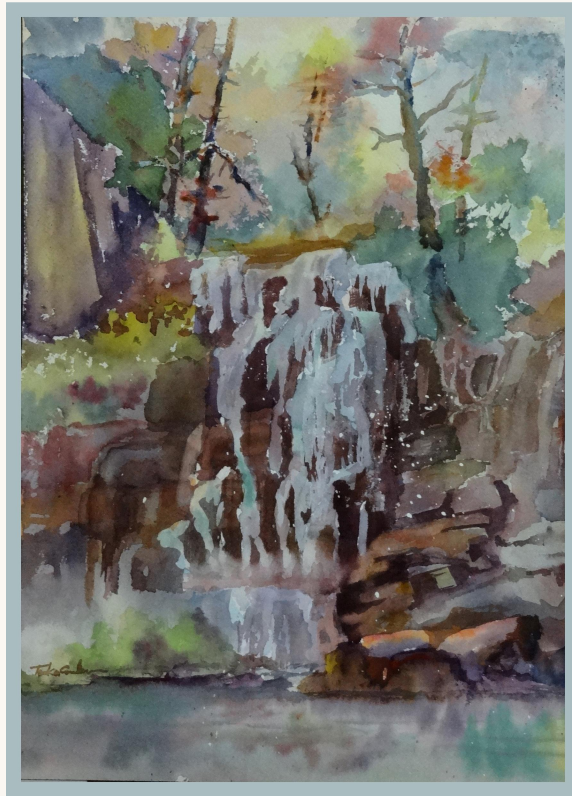


Waterfall by Denis King

Really nice work, Denis. All good except for two small things - the background waterfall is too light against its cliff and the trees on the right are nearly clones and could be a bit less regular on the edge of the foliage - a pattern has formed there presently.

The colour of the sky is too grey for the vibrant yellow of the cliff. If anything the sky would be higher chroma in this situation. That's why it currently looks a bit like a yellow cliff instead of a light-filled space.

Toska Courbron - Waterfall



Toska Courbron - Waterfall

A captivating painting, Toska! Beautiful work making all those interesting colour variations. I guess you used masking fluid to preserve the white of the water itself? That's worked well to allow you to paint the darks in there, but it's left hard edges everywhere which is more indicative of a frozen waterfall rather than the soft edged look of water in motion. If you were to paint this again (because you only get one shot with watercolours!) I'd suggest that you try painting it with masking, all into moist paper to achieve softer edges, which can always be sharpened up in places with subsequent washes. You've already achieved that a little at the base of the waterfall.

I'd also expect to see darker water and reflections in the pool.

Great work!

Falls by Frank Brooks



Falls by Frank Brooks

Really nice design, Frank. A good variety of shapes and sizes. The physics falls apart a bit at the top where the river seems to be all on a single slanted plane towards us.