



Expressive Brushwork

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/179-Expressive-Brushwork>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, I invite you to explore the exhilarating world of expressive brushwork alongside the esteemed New Zealand artist John Crump. As we delve into this workshop, you'll witness three captivating demo paintings that beautifully illustrate John's mastery of a painterly style developed over more than four decades. This lesson is designed for every artist who dreams of painting with a loose, impressionistic flair. We'll focus on selecting the right tools for the job, starting with size 12 brushes that are perfect for most of your painting needs. Opt for brushes with square tips and long bristles that can hold plenty of paint, enabling you to create long, expressive strokes that bring your canvas to life. While small brushes have their place for intricate details like twigs or building features, they can slow you down when covering large areas. By the end of this chapter, you'll gain insights into achieving a sense of freedom and joy in your painting, capturing the essence of your subject with bold, confident strokes.



Wellington Coast



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.

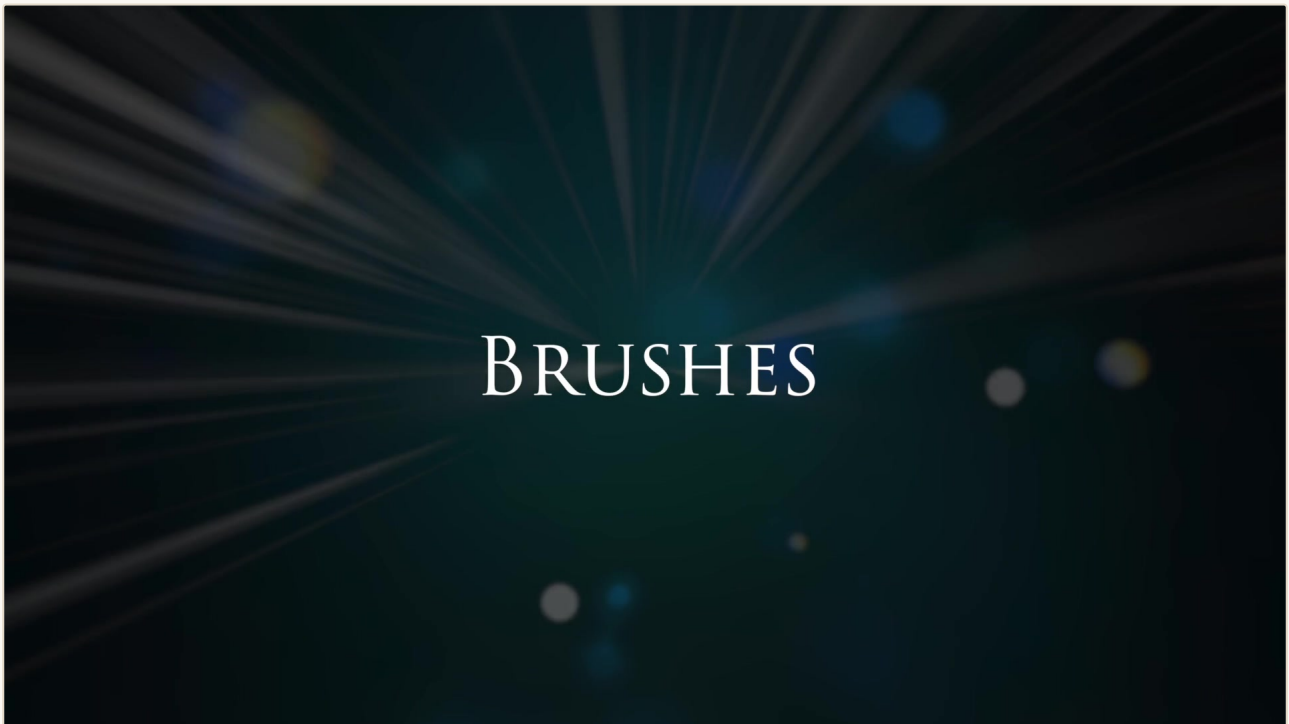
Materials

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

- Winsor and Newton, artist's quality oil paints.
- Winsor blue (red shade)
- Venetian red
- Winsor green
- Titanium white
- Cadmium lemon
- Cadmium yellow pale
- Cadmium orange
- Gold ochre
- Permanent rose
- Cadmium red
- Magenta
- Brushes
- Size 12 chisel tip long bristle.
- Only one small brush, usually an ox /sable rigger type brush – size 1 or 2.
- Medium
- Liquin Original
- for painting medium.
- Canvas
- Fredrix Ultrasmooth Canvas
- , a polyflax, triple primed, fairly smooth surfaced canvas.

1 Brushes and Their Uses



Choose the Right Brush

Select size 12 brushes for most of your painting needs. Look for brushes with square tips for detail and long bristles that can hold a lot of paint, allowing for long, expressive strokes.

Avoid Small Brushes for Large Areas

Avoid using small brushes for covering large areas, as it can become slow and tedious. Reserve small brushes for fine details like twigs, small building details, or signing your work.

Select Quality Brushes

Use hog bristle or taclon fibre brushes from a reliable series like the 1180 series museum brushes. Ensure the bristles do not separate and the edges remain in good shape for optimal performance.

PRO TIP

Use a large brush for most of your painting to maintain speed and expressiveness.

2 Palette and Colors



Choose the Right Palette

Select a proper artist's palette made of ply with a smooth finish. Ensure it is large enough to mix colors effectively and fits comfortably on your arm, allowing your fingers to be free for holding brushes.

Select Quality Colors

Use artist's quality Windsor Newton colors such as Windsor blue (red shade), Venetian red, Windsor green, titanium white, cadmium lemon, cadmium yellow pale, gold ochre, cadmium orange, permanent rose, cadmium red, and magenta. These colors mix well and cover a wide range of needs.

Prepare Your White

Mix alkyd and oil white in a 50-50 ratio for a creamy consistency that dries quicker, especially in colder climates. This mixture helps speed up the drying process of your painting.

Use a Medium

Choose a satisfactory medium that dries quickly but not too fast. Be careful when dipping your brush into the medium to avoid touching the sides or bottom, which can contaminate it with dirty paint.

Acrylics Consideration

If using acrylics, apply a good gloss medium varnish as both a medium and a finish for the painting once it's dry. This ensures a consistent finish and similar principles apply as with oils.

PRO TIP

Avoid touching the sides or bottom of the dipper with your brush to keep the medium clear and uncontaminated.

3 Canvas Selection



Choose the Right Canvas

Select a canvas that complements your painting style. Consider using Frederick's Ultra Smooth Synthetic canvas, which is a polyflex canvas that is triple primed, providing a lovely surface to work on. This type of canvas allows your expressive brush strokes to show beautifully, unlike rougher canvases that can obscure them.

PRO TIP

Opt for a fine canvas to enhance the visibility of your expressive brush strokes.

4 Painting a Rock on the Coast



Prepare Your Canvas

Dip your brush into medium to lubricate the bristles, ensuring smooth paint application. Sketch a rough outline of the rock, placing the horizon high and off-center for interest. Tilt the rock slightly to introduce movement and rhythm into the composition.

Start with Dark Tones

Begin by applying the darkest darks to the canvas, as the white canvas is your lightest light. Mix a dark color without using black, perhaps warming it slightly with a touch of orange. Apply this color thinly to allow for easy adjustments later.

Add Midtones and Highlights

Mix your next darkest dark and add some white and medium to create midtones. Apply these to the spray area and waves, keeping the paint subdued. Maintain clean areas on the canvas for highlights, using a clean brush to blend softly.

Create Dynamic Edges

Use a sawtooth technique with your brush to soften the horizon line, preventing it from dividing the painting. Sweep over the area gently to maintain a level horizon without harsh lines.

Enhance with Light and Color

Introduce a bit of gold ochre or cadmium yellow to the sky to lead the eye towards the rock. Add highlights to the rock's lit sides, ensuring the paint is smoothly mixed and applied with a clean brush.

Finalize Details and Adjustments

Add shadows and foam to the waves, using thin darks and thicker lights for depth. Avoid repetitive shapes in the rock to keep it natural. Soften selected edges and add warmth to bring elements forward.

PRO TIP

Keep darks thin and lights with more body to create depth and allow easy adjustments.

5 Painting a Mountain Landscape



Establish the Focal Point

Decide early on where the main thrust of your painting will be. Consider the composition and adjust the mountains to avoid similar angles that could create imbalance. Steepen or flatten areas as needed to differentiate them clearly.

Add the Darkest Darks

Start with the darkest points in the foreground to establish a reference for color and tone. Use dark tones sparingly to ensure they remain in the foreground. If necessary, invent dark elements like rocks or tussocks to enhance depth.

Mix Colors with Your Brush

Mix your paint directly with your brush for a quicker and easier blend. This method allows you to maintain a clean canvas and adjust colors as needed. Keep the paint thin to allow for easy adjustments later.

Paint the Snow

Apply the snow with clean, sharp edges, even if the reference shows ragged edges. Keep the paint thin to allow for over-painting and adjustments. Focus on the overall idea of the mountains rather than precise details.

Shape the Mountains with the Sky

Use the sky color to define the mountain shapes. Mix a slightly yellowed sky color with minimal blue to create a late-day effect. Paint around the mountains to easily form their tips and shapes.

Add Highlights and Reflections

Introduce highlights on the snow and suggest reflected light in the scene. Use a light touch to add these details without overpowering the painting. Avoid perfect reflections in water to prevent distractions.

Refine the Design

Continuously assess the design of your painting. Adjust elements that may create unwanted parallels or distractions. Ensure every brushstroke has a purpose and contributes to the overall composition.

PRO TIP

Mix paint directly with your brush for a quicker and easier blend, maintaining a clean canvas for adjustments.

6 Painting Trees and Grass



Create a Misty Background

Apply a thin layer of background color to suggest a misty effect. Keep the mixture dry to avoid a thick buildup of paint. This will provide a soft backdrop for your trees without overpowering them.

Shape the Tree

Adjust the tree's shape as you paint, straightening any awkward bends. Use the tree as a model, but feel free to interpret its form to suit your composition. This flexibility allows you to create a more natural and pleasing tree shape.

Add Foliage

Apply foliage with a bit more color on one side to suggest wind effects over time. Feather the edges to create a soft transition and allow some areas to remain sharp for contrast. Lightly suggest gaps to add depth and interest.

Incorporate Light and Shade

Introduce light areas on the tree to enhance its form and visibility. Adjust the misty background if needed to highlight the trunk. This back-and-forth adjustment helps achieve the desired effect.

Paint Grass and Foreground

Start with shadows in the grass, using white and gold ochre for highlights to achieve a straw-like color. Strengthen the color in the foreground for warmth and texture. Keep the strokes broad and simple to convey a natural, unkempt look.

PRO TIP

Keep your paint layers thin to maintain control and avoid overworking the painting.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by selecting the right tools and materials. Choose large brushes with square tips for expressive strokes and a smooth artist's palette for effective color mixing. Opt for a canvas that enhances your brushwork, such as a fine, smooth surface that showcases your expressive style.

As you begin painting, focus on establishing the composition with dark tones and gradually build up to midtones and highlights. Use a variety of techniques, like the sawtooth method, to soften edges and maintain a harmonious balance in your work. Pay attention to the interplay of light and shadow, ensuring depth and movement in your scenes.

Throughout your painting process, remain flexible and open to adjustments. Whether you're painting rocks, mountains, or trees, continually assess the design and make changes to enhance the overall composition. Keep your brushwork purposeful, and remember that each stroke contributes to the expressive quality of your painting.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use large brushes for most of your painting to maintain speed and expressiveness.
- Avoid touching the sides or bottom of the dipper with your brush to keep the medium clear.
- Opt for a fine canvas to enhance the visibility of your expressive brush strokes.
- Keep darks thin and lights with more body to create depth and allow easy adjustments.
- Mix paint directly with your brush for a quicker and easier blend, maintaining a clean canvas.
- Keep your paint layers thin to maintain control and avoid overworking the painting.



Wellington Coast