



A Walk to the Lake

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/191-A-Walk-to-the-Lake>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, I invite you to join me on a virtual walk to Glenorchy, a charming village nestled at the edge of Lake Wakatipu in the South Island of New Zealand. This picturesque spot, located near the popular tourist destination of Queenstown, offers a stunning landscape that is perfect for painting. As we explore this beautiful area, you'll learn to capture the essence of its light-filled scenery in an impressionistic style. We'll focus on the theme of looking through trees to the landscape beyond, a common motif in Glenorchy paintings that adds depth and interest to your work. Using large brushes and generous amounts of paint, I'll guide you step by step through the process of designing an inviting scene and painting with freedom. This lesson is all about embracing the joy of painting outdoors and discovering techniques that bring your canvas to life. Whether you're stuck indoors or simply yearning for a creative escape, this chapter offers a rewarding subject that will enrich your painting journey.



A Walk to the Lake - 14x14" Oil on Canvas

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
- Ultramarine Blue
- Alizarine Crimson
- Cadmium Red
- 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 Composition and Scene Description



Observe Composition Themes

Notice the recurring theme of looking through trees to the landscape beyond in many Glenorchy paintings. Consider incorporating trees as a significant element in your composition to create depth and interest.

Capture the Scene

When painting outdoors, look for scenes that naturally compose themselves well. A stunning scene, like the edge of the Glenorchy township, can be framed beautifully with minimal adjustments.

PRO TIP

Incorporate natural elements like streams or trees to create a lead-in and enhance the composition.

2 Edge Treatment and Contrast



Create Contrast with Edges

Introduce variety in your painting by using both soft and sharp edges. Use soft edges in areas where you want to create a gentle transition, and contrast these with sharp edges to draw attention to specific elements like tree trunks.

Soften Edges Strategically

Where a sharp edge might lead the eye away from the focal point, soften it to blend into the background or surrounding elements. This technique helps maintain focus and adds interest by varying the texture of the painting.

Balance Warm and Cool Tones

Enhance the contrast in your painting by balancing warm and cool tones. Use warm tones to highlight areas like mountains and reflections, contrasting them with cooler, darker areas such as trees to create depth and interest.

PRO TIP

Use soft edges to blend elements into the background, preventing distraction from the main focal points.

3 Brushwork and Time Constraints



Choose Large Brushes

Select large brushes to cover the canvas quickly. This is essential when working on a large canvas, such as 18 by 20 inches, especially outdoors.

Work with Time Constraints

Set a time limit, such as one hour, to complete your painting. This encourages quick, expressive brushwork and helps capture the essence of the scene.

Embrace Vigorous Brushwork

Use lots of paint and apply it quickly to create vigorous and dynamic brushwork. This approach adds energy and excitement to your painting.

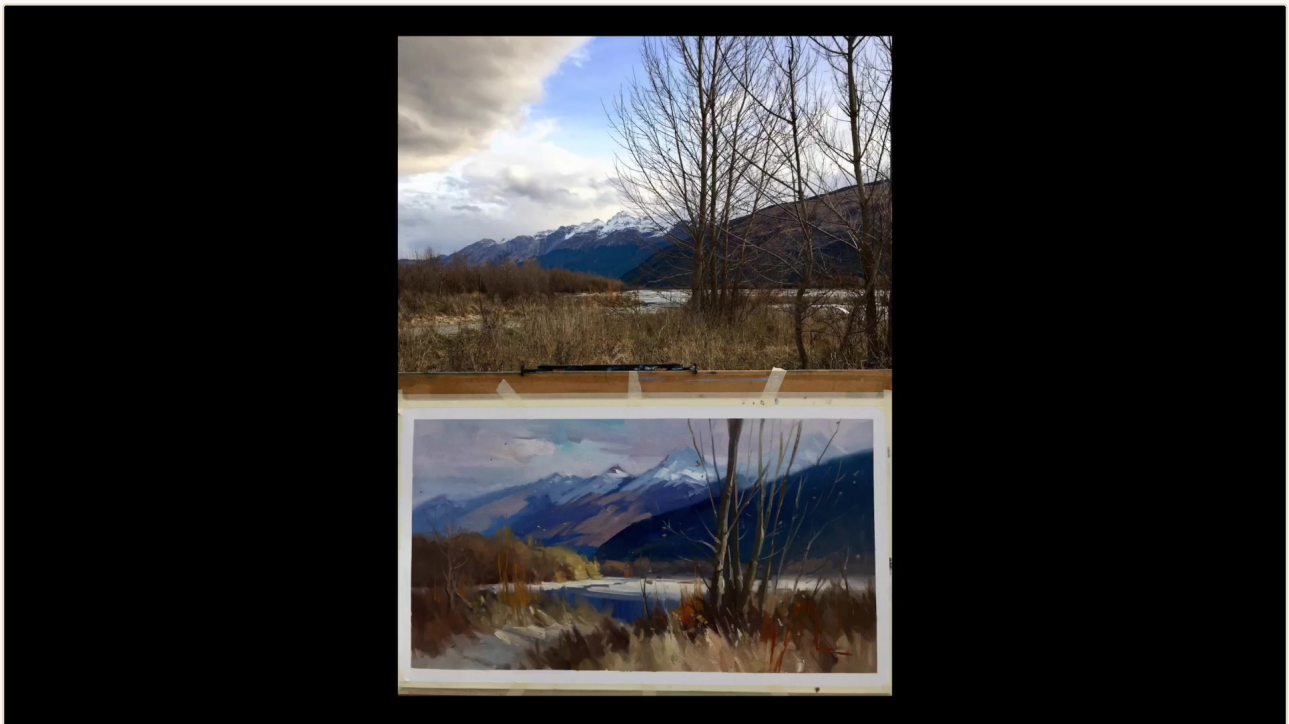
Focus on Light and Contrast

Paint scenes with strong light and dark contrasts to create a dynamic composition. This technique is especially effective when painting at the end of the day, looking into the light.

PRO TIP

Set an alarm to limit your painting time, encouraging quick and expressive brushwork.

4 Framing with Trees



Use Trees as a Frame

Incorporate trees into your painting to act as a natural frame for the scene. This technique adds depth and interest, guiding the viewer's eye into the composition.

Enhance Contrast with Warm and Cool Colors

Exaggerate the contrast between warm and cool colors to create a visually dynamic painting. This contrast will make the scene more engaging and lively.

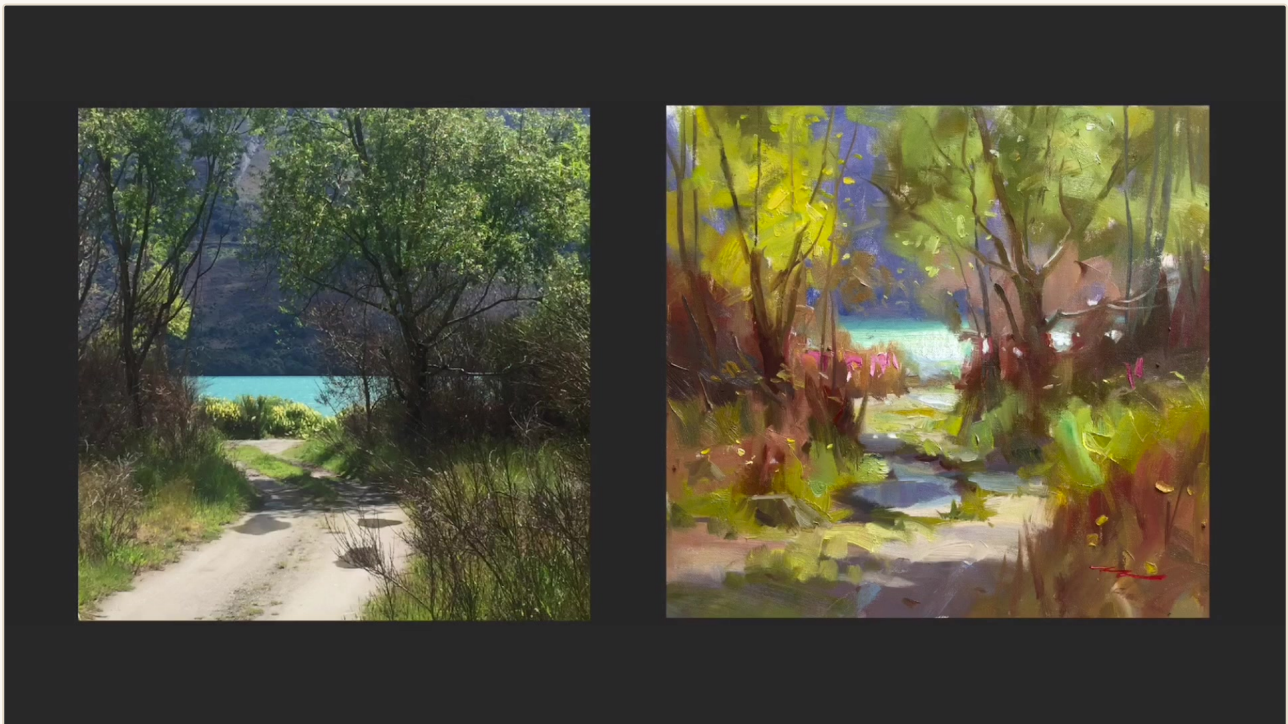
Add Trees for Design Interest

If the scene lacks trees, consider adding them to enhance the design. Find a suitable reference nearby and integrate the trees into your painting to improve its composition.

PRO TIP

Exaggerate warm and cool contrasts to enhance visual dynamics.

5 Color Saturation and Comparison



Compare Painting to Scene

Examine your painting alongside a photo of the actual scene. Notice the differences in color saturation between your painting and the scene.

Increase Color Saturation

Enhance the saturation or chroma of the colors in your painting. Remove some of the gray tones to make the colors more vibrant, especially in areas where the photo may appear underexposed.

Understand Camera Limitations

Recognize that cameras often underexpose dark areas when the scene is mostly in light. Your eyes can perceive more color in these dark areas than the camera can capture.

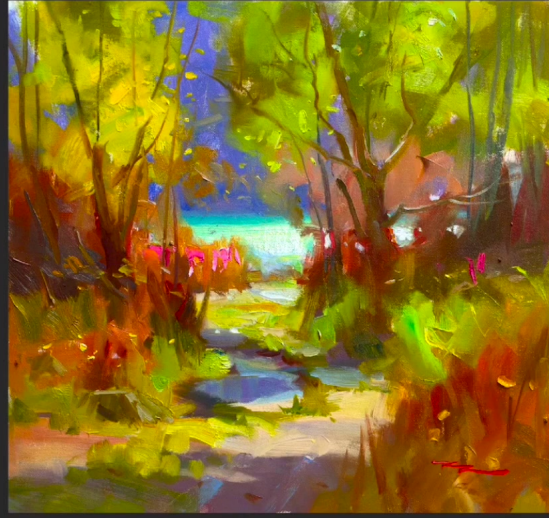
Maintain Color Value

While increasing saturation, keep the value of the colors consistent. This ensures the painting remains true to the scene's light and shadow balance.

PRO TIP

Enhance color saturation to compensate for camera limitations in capturing vibrant colors in dark areas.

6 Color Intensity and Personal Taste



Enhance Color Intensity

Increase the color intensity in your painting to make it more vibrant. Be mindful of your personal taste as you adjust the colors. Aim for a balance that feels right to you without crossing into an overly garish look.

PRO TIP

Find your personal threshold for color intensity to avoid an overwhelming effect.

7 Design Adjustments for Interest



Enhance the Path's Curve

Adjust the curve of the path to create a more pronounced S-shape. This modification adds visual interest and guides the viewer's eye through the painting, making it a path they would want to explore.

Expand the Background Patch

Increase the size of the patch in the background. This alteration draws the viewer into the painting, inviting them to look deeper into the scene.

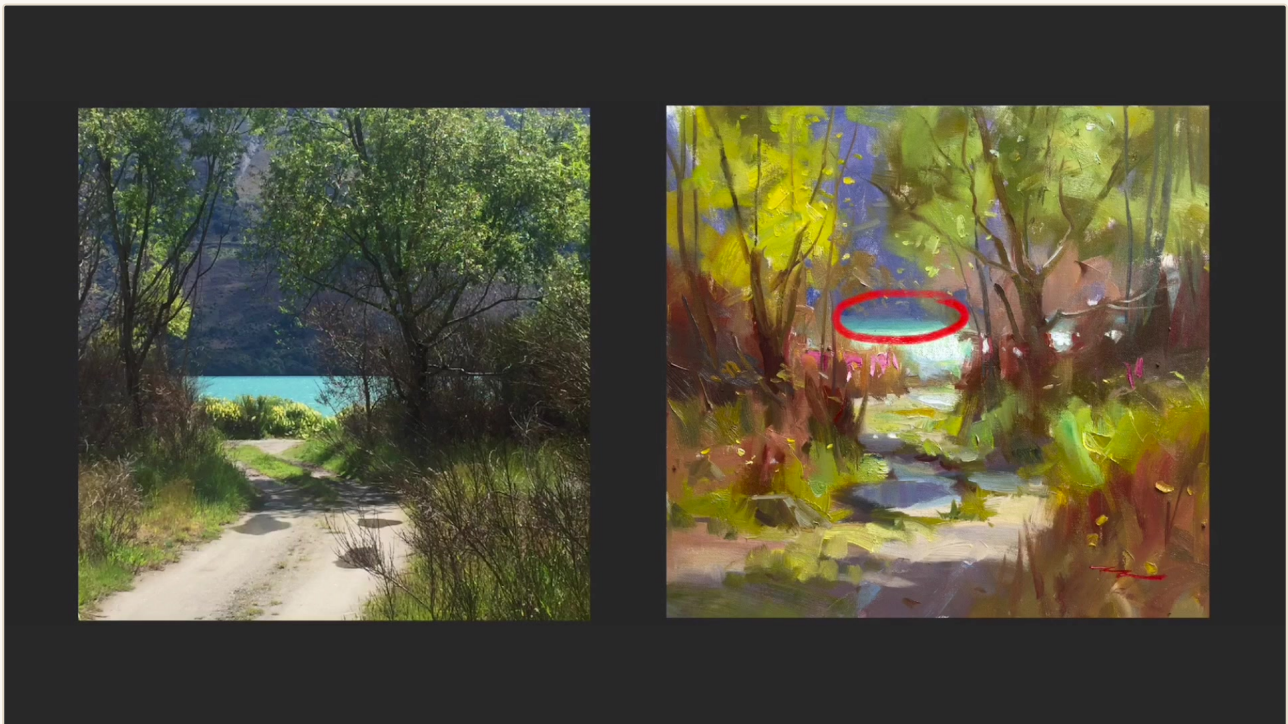
Add a Foreground Shadow

Cast a shadow across the foreground to break up the large bright area. This creates a new shape and directs the viewer's attention towards the light, where details are more visible and engaging.

PRO TIP

Use shadows to guide the viewer's eye towards areas of light and detail.

8 Edge Softening Techniques



Identify Sharp Edges

Examine your painting for any sharp edges that may be drawing too much attention. These are areas where there is a strong contrast between dark and light.

Soften Unwanted Sharp Edges

Use a clean, dry brush to gently blur the sharp edges that are not the focal point of your painting. This will help to reduce their prominence and keep the viewer's attention where you want it.

Enhance Desired Sharp Edges

Make the edges you want to emphasize even sharper by increasing the contrast between the adjoining colors. This will make them stand out more by comparison to the softened edges.

PRO TIP

Use a clean, dry brush to soften edges that are drawing too much attention.

9 Canvas Preparation and Toning



Prepare the Canvas

Tape out a 14-inch square canvas to define your painting area. This will help keep your work neat and focused.

Tone the Canvas

Mix a thin wash of pink using acrylics or oils thinned with turpentine. Apply this wash evenly over the entire canvas. This pink tone will add vibrancy to your painting, especially against the greens, creating a visual shimmer.

Create a Vignette Effect

Use a spray bottle to lightly mist the canvas, then gently remove some of the pink wash from the center. This will create a lighter area in the middle, adding depth and focus to your composition.

Dry the Canvas

Allow the acrylic wash to dry for about 30 minutes. If using oils, ensure the wash is thin and let it dry for about an hour before proceeding with oil paints.

PRO TIP

Use a thin wash of color to tone the canvas, allowing it to dry quickly and add vibrancy to your painting.

10 Initial Sketch and Composition



Prepare Your Brushes and Medium

Use long bristle flats in sizes 10 and 12 for most of the painting. Keep synthetic brushes handy for branches and details later. Have a container with walnut oil ready to thin colors and improve their flow.

Start the Initial Sketch

Mix a little walnut oil with ultramarine blue and a touch of red. Begin sketching the big shapes onto the canvas. Focus on the curving path and the horizon, ensuring they are not placed halfway up the canvas.

Create Variety in Shapes

Consider the variety of shapes in your drawing. Aim for different sizes and angles to avoid repetition. This variety adds interest and makes the scene more inviting.

Avoid Monotonous Composition

Avoid lining up trees or creating a straight path, as this can make the scene look uninviting. Introduce curves and variety to create a scene that feels engaging and worth exploring.

PRO TIP

Ensure your path and horizon are not placed halfway up the canvas to maintain dynamic composition.

11 Variety in Shapes and Shadows



Create Varied Shapes

Ensure that shapes in your painting, such as clumps of trees or sections of the road, have different heights, widths, and starting and ending points. This variety adds interest and prevents monotony in your composition.

Break Up Uninteresting Shapes

If you notice large, uninteresting shapes, break them up into smaller, varied sections. This approach will enhance the visual appeal and complexity of your painting.

Plan for Shadows

Consider the placement of shadowed areas early in your painting process. This planning will help you create depth and interest in the scene.

PRO TIP

Vary the heights and widths of shapes to add interest to your painting.

12 Painting the Darks



Mix and Apply Dark Green

Mix a very dark green using blue, red, and yellow ochre. Apply this mixture to the canvas, focusing on the darkest areas. Aim for variety in the color even within the darks to add interest.

Create Color Transitions

While maintaining the same value, introduce subtle transitions in color and hue. Mix directly on the canvas to achieve more dynamic brushwork and unexpected results.

Add Blue-Grey Shadows

Mix a blue-grey and use it to paint shadows across the path, considering the light source direction. Indicate the start of tree shapes, ensuring they don't divide the space equally or sit right on the edge of the painting.

Paint Purple-Grey Background

Switch to a new brush and mix a purple-grey for the background. Lighten it slightly if needed, and apply it thinly to avoid issues when painting over it later. This will form the base for sky holes through the trees.

Lighten Mountain Tops

As you paint the mountains, lighten the color towards the tops to reflect their distance. This adds variety and depth to the scene. Use the same color to start reflections in a pool of water.

PRO TIP

Mix directly on the canvas to achieve more dynamic brushwork and unexpected results.

13 Mid Values and Color Variation



Prepare the Brush

Select a new brush and dip it in walnut oil to ensure smooth application of paint.

Start with Mid Value Greens

Begin with the greens, applying them in mid values to add depth and richness. Gradually build up to the lighter tones.

Enhance Darks with Mid Values

Introduce some mid values into the dark areas to add variation and interest. This will help to spruce up the darker sections.

Adjust Tree Foliage

Move to the tree foliage, using a slightly lighter green. Compare it to the mid value on your palette to ensure it is halfway between black and white.

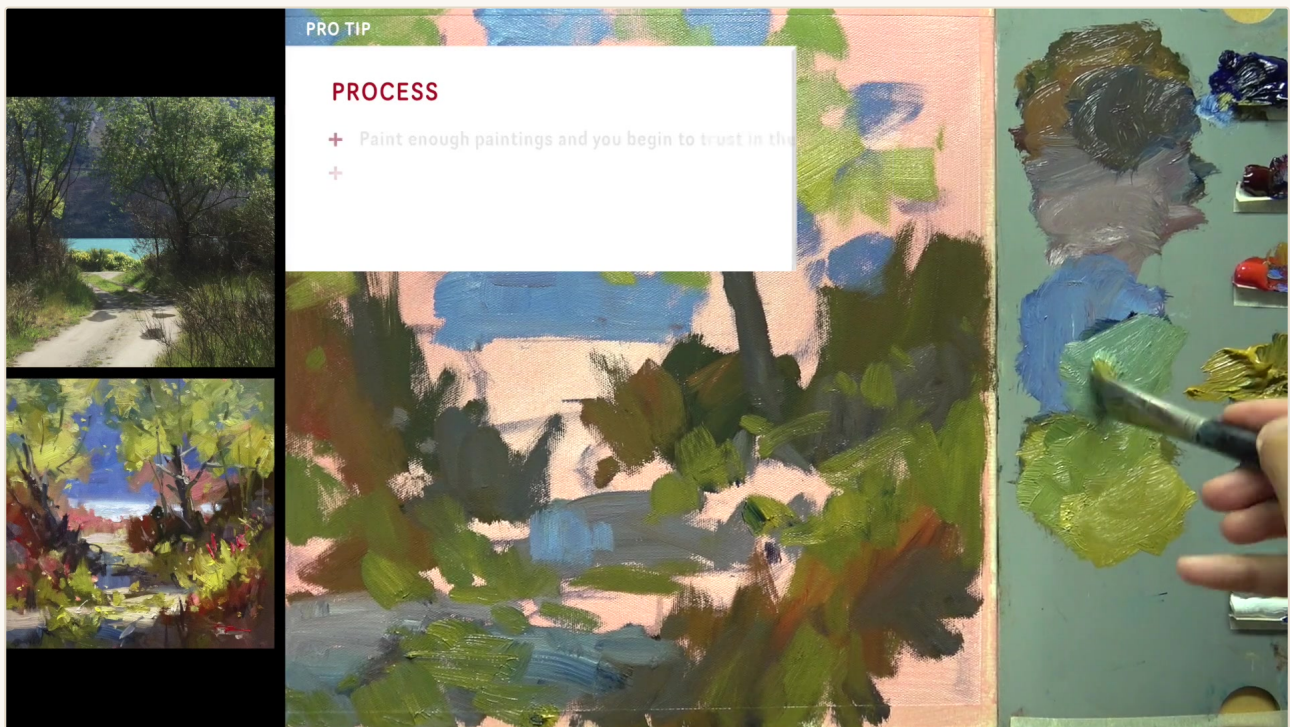
Add Color Variation

Mix in more yellow ochre and a touch of white for variation. Use big, vigorous strokes to create a patchwork of gestural brushwork.

PRO TIP

Maintain a broad approach with big strokes to keep the painting dynamic and full of life.

14 Light Values and Brushwork



Add Warm Notes

Introduce some warm notes behind the tree and at the end of the path where the sunlight hits. This will create a sense of warmth and depth in your painting.

Switch to a New Brush

Use a new brush to apply a brighter and lighter yellow. Make sure the paint is thicker to capture the intensity of the light.

Adjust Green Tones

Add bright green near the light spot and gradually tone it down as it moves away. This will help create a natural transition in the landscape.

Avoid Repetitive Patterns

Resist the temptation to create a 'chicken pox' effect with repetitive dabs. Instead, focus on adding variety by observing and painting the unique shapes of light and shadow in the trees.

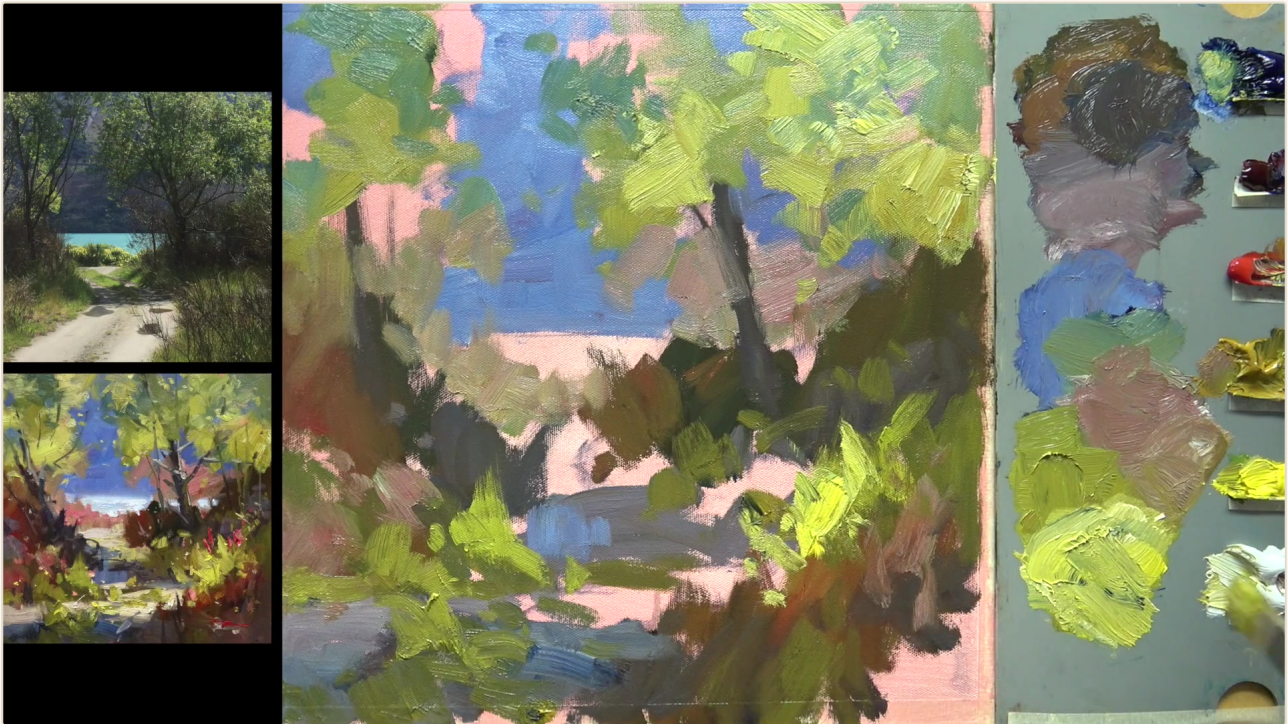
Create Painterly Shapes

Squint to see the big shapes of light in the trees. Paint these shapes with variety in size and color, using thick paint to achieve a rich texture.

PRO TIP

Mix paint directly on the canvas to achieve unique effects and textures.

15 Road and Reflection Details



Prepare the Road Color

Mix a warm grey using white, yellow ochre, a little blue, and a little red. Apply this thickly, as it can be the thickest paint in the entire painting. Darken the color slightly as the road bends away from the light to create a soft edge shadow.

Add Blue-Grey to the Trail

Introduce a little blue-grey as the trail recedes. Use a clean brush with more white, a touch of blue, and a tiny touch of bright yellow. Apply carefully to maintain a clean color, avoiding contamination from other colors.

Create Soft Edges

Ensure the edges are soft and horizontal. Use a zigzag swish technique: zigzag, swish, clean, and repeat. This helps achieve a nice soft edge without picking up unwanted colors.

Add Shimmering Water Effect

Use a palette knife with a bit more blue to drag quickly across the surface. This creates a broken, shimmering effect like light glinting off water. Add mid-blue in some areas for a glowing effect, cleaning the brush between strokes.

Enhance with White Highlights

Add more white in the middle of the blue areas, being careful not to go above the horizon. This enhances the shimmering effect and adds detail. Repair any gaps by adding sky holes to mimic the lacework of tree branches.

PRO TIP

Use a zigzag swish technique to maintain soft, clean edges without picking up unwanted colors.

16 Adding Shadows and Light Flow



Add Cool Shadows

Introduce a very cool shadow in the scene to enhance depth and realism. Use cooler tones to contrast with the warmer areas, creating a natural variety that prevents the scene from looking too artificial.

Incorporate Warmer Greys

Mix warmer greys that are slightly lighter to add more variety to the shadows. This subtle variation helps to create a more dynamic and interesting composition.

Consider Light Flow

Think about how the light flows through the scene and which details or clumps of foliage it will highlight. This will guide where to add highlights and where to leave shadows.

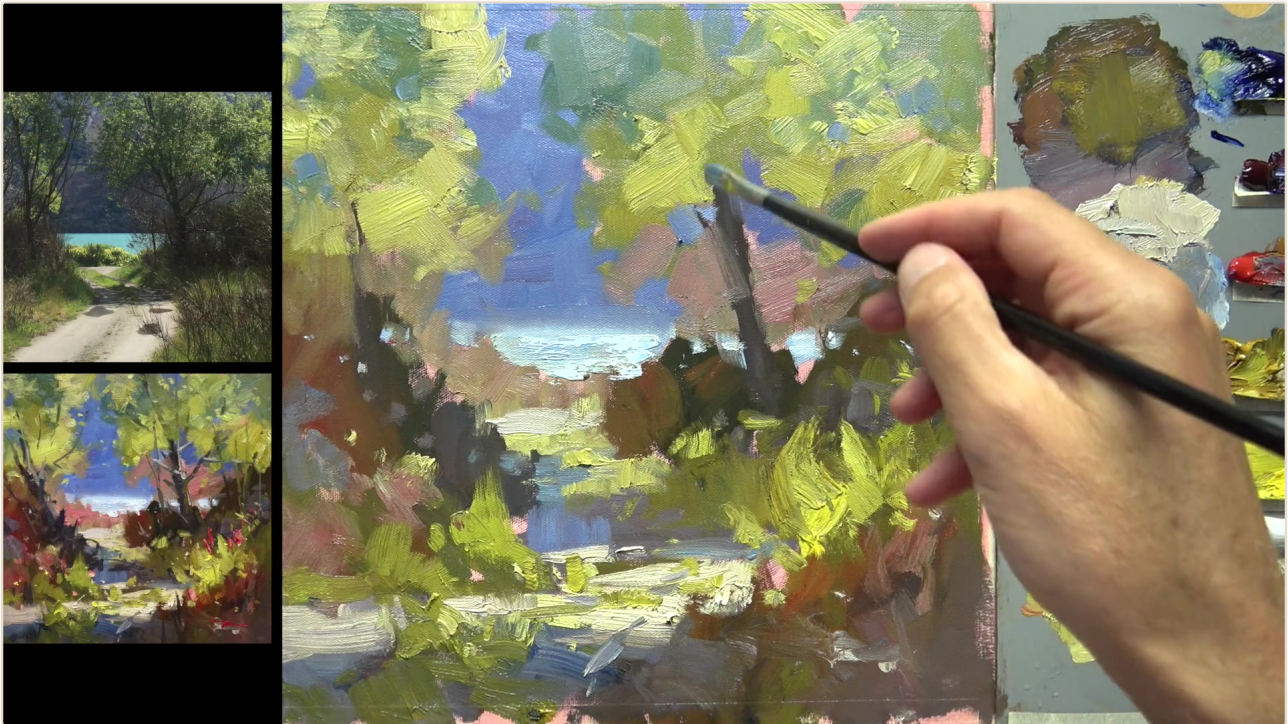
Add Grass Shadows

Remember that the clumps of grass will cast their own shadows. Ensure these shadows are included to maintain consistency in the light and shadow play across the scene.

PRO TIP

Use cooler tones for shadows to create depth and contrast with warmer areas.

17 Tree Branches and Trunk Details



Mix a Cool Grey

Create a cool grey by mixing blue, red, white, and a touch of yellow ochre. This will serve as the base color for your tree branches and trunk.

Load Your Brush

Squish the paint to the end of your brush and pick it up in a thin ridge. This technique allows you to create fine lines for the branches.

Suggest the Tree

Use one or two strokes to paint the branches, refilling the brush as needed. Focus on suggesting the tree rather than drawing every branch exactly as it appears in the photo.

Create Gestural Branches

Paint the branches with a sense of movement, as if they are dancing on the canvas. Allow the strokes to vary in direction, not just following the line of the branch.

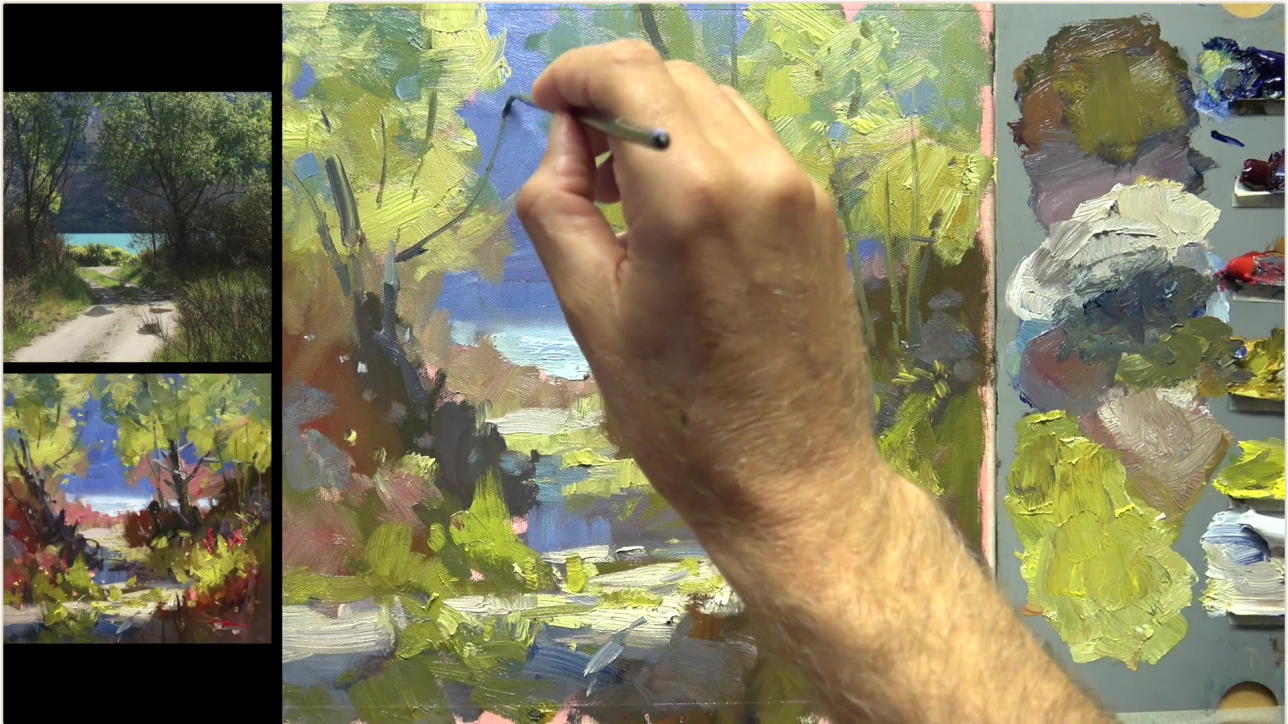
Consider Branch Anatomy

Ensure branches are thicker at the base and get thinner as they extend. Observe the curvature and spread of the branches to capture the essence of the tree.

PRO TIP

Don't aim to paint every branch; focus on capturing the feeling and essence of the tree.

18 Accents and Leaf Details



Add Dark Accents

Introduce little dark accents by adding more reflected light under the branches and on the trunk. This will bring more life to the shadows and create depth in your painting.

Incorporate Light Accents

Mix a warmish light grey with lots of white to create light accents. Apply these to the trunk and other areas to introduce a sparkle and highlight the presence of leaves.

Create Leaf Details

Add small spots of light to suggest flowers and leaves. These little notes help define the large green areas, indicating that they are composed of individual leaves.

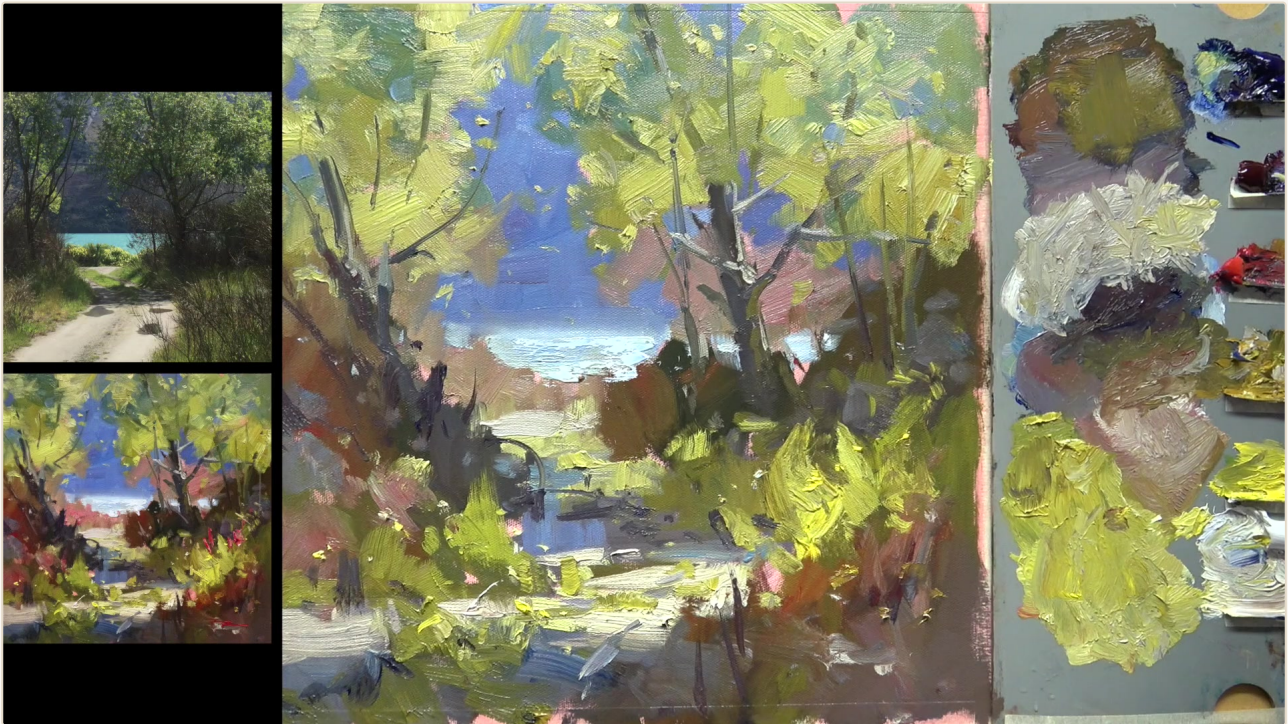
Control Detail Size

As you add these light spots, remember that they should get smaller as they recede into the background. Avoid overdoing it, as too many spots can make the painting look cluttered.

PRO TIP

Use small light spots to suggest leaves, but ensure they decrease in size as they move into the background.

19 Blending and Edge Softening



Add Lupins

Include beautiful lupins in your painting to capture the essence of the South Island during certain times of the year. Use vibrant colors to make them stand out in the landscape.

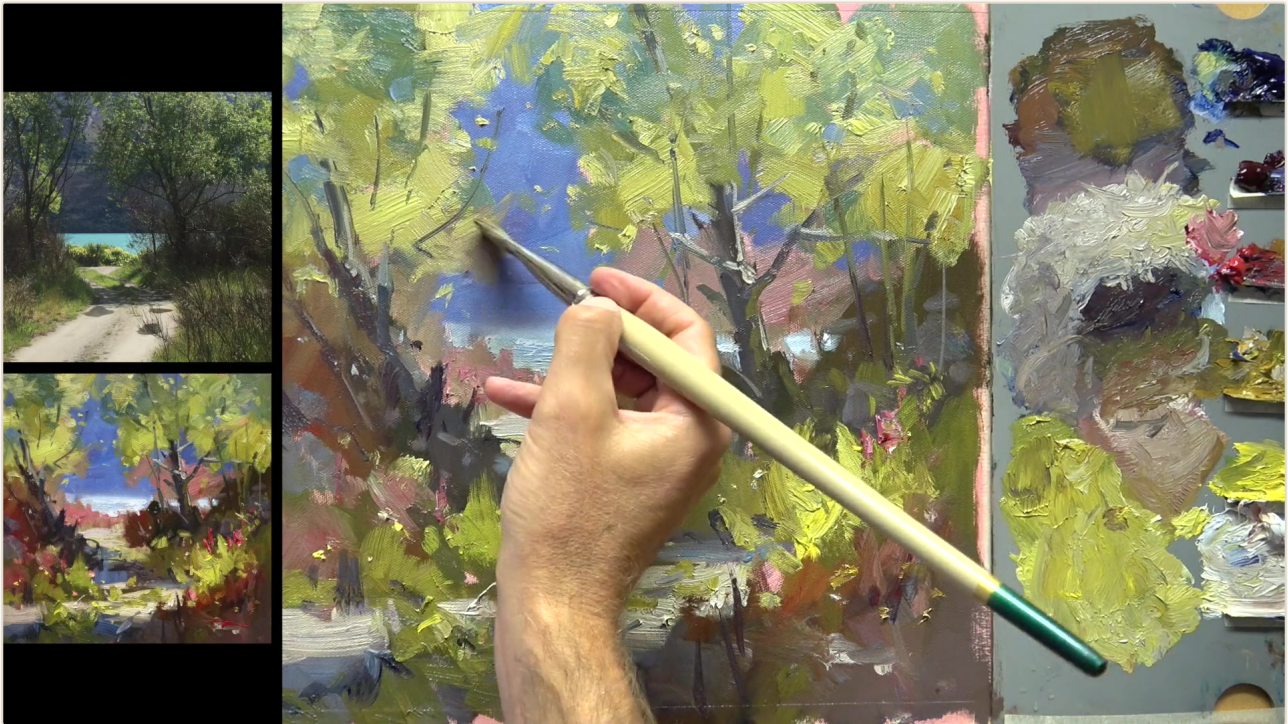
Blend Trunks and Branches

Use a clean, dry brush to gently whisk over parts of the trunks and branches. This technique blurs their edges, helping them blend into the foliage. Apply this effect selectively, only in certain areas, to create a natural look.

PRO TIP

Use a clean, dry brush to soften edges and help elements blend into the background.

20 Final Touches and Signing



Enhance Edges and Textures

Use a palette knife to gently smush some of the edges in your painting. This creates interesting textures and adds depth. Be careful not to overdo it; subtlety is key.

Sign Your Painting

Once satisfied with the textures, sign your painting. This personal touch marks the completion of your artwork.

Remove the Tape

Carefully pull off the tape from the edges of your painting. This will give your artwork a clean, finished look.

PRO TIP

Use a palette knife sparingly to create subtle textures without overwhelming the painting.

21 Canvas Toning Effect



Choose a Canvas Toning Color

Select a canvas toning color that complements the main colors in your painting. For example, use a pink tone to contrast with greens, as they are complementary colors.

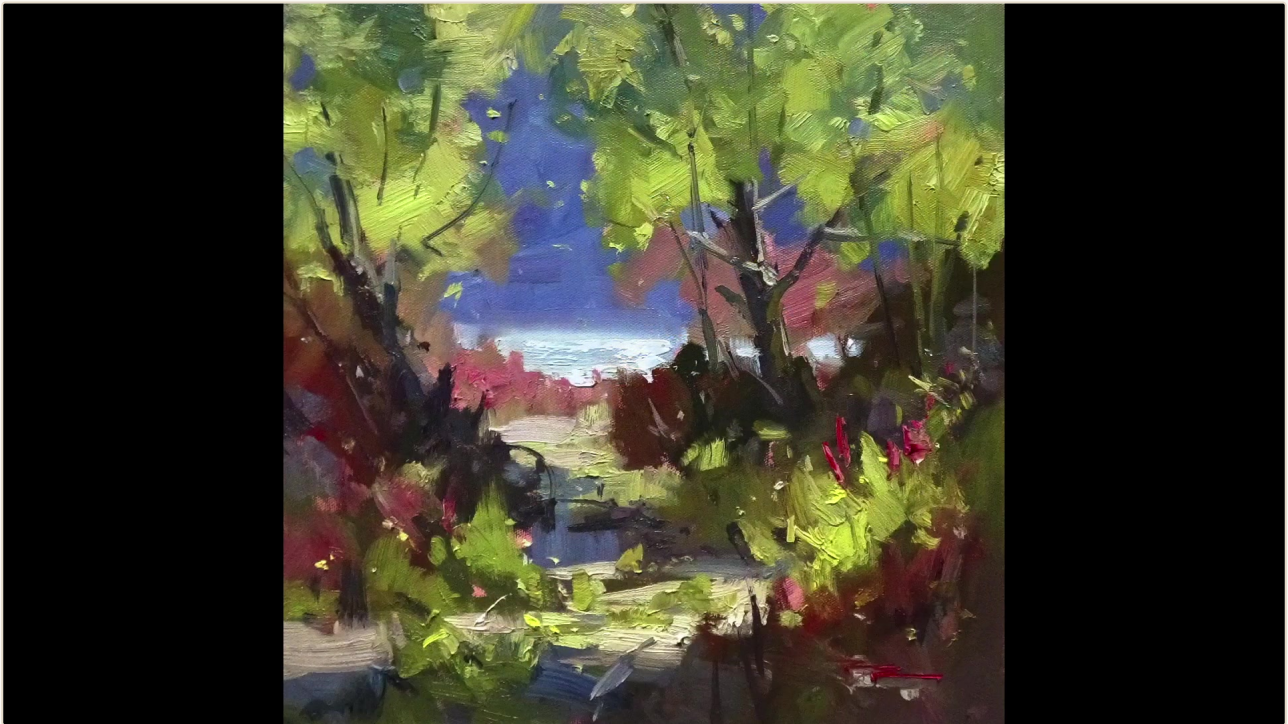
Apply the Toning

Apply the chosen toning color to your canvas. Ensure it's evenly spread to create a consistent base that will peek through your painting, adding a visual shimmer.

PRO TIP

Use complementary colors for canvas toning to enhance the vibrancy and shimmer of your painting.

22 Alternative Painting Approaches



Consider Alternative Color Schemes

Think about changing the greens in your painting to golden browns for an autumnal effect. This can create a pleasing contrast with the purple background, as yellow and purple are complementary colors.

Experiment with Different Techniques

Feel free to experiment with various painting techniques. You could splatter paint for a dynamic effect, smooth out areas for a polished look, or use unconventional tools like a roller or toothbrush. Alternatively, try using tiny brushes to achieve a realistic finish.

PRO TIP

Explore different tools and techniques to find a style that suits your vision.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by thoughtfully composing your scene, drawing inspiration from natural elements like trees and streams to create depth and interest. As you paint, pay attention to the interplay of edges and contrasts, using soft edges to blend elements seamlessly into the background and sharp edges to highlight focal points. Balance warm and cool tones to enhance the vibrancy and depth of your landscape.

Embrace the challenge of painting with time constraints to capture the essence of your scene with dynamic brushwork. Use large brushes to cover your canvas quickly, and don't shy away from vigorous paint application to infuse energy into your work. As you progress, consider the role of trees as natural frames and exaggerate contrasts to create a visually engaging composition.

Refine your painting by adjusting color saturation and intensity to compensate for camera limitations, ensuring your colors remain vibrant yet true to the scene. Pay close attention to the design and placement of elements, using shadows and varied shapes to guide the viewer's eye and maintain interest. Finally, soften any distracting edges and ensure your painting's composition remains dynamic and inviting.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Incorporate trees and natural elements to create depth and interest.
- Use soft edges to blend elements into the background.
- Set a time limit to encourage quick, expressive brushwork.
- Exaggerate warm and cool contrasts to enhance visual dynamics.
- Enhance color saturation to compensate for camera limitations.
- Find your personal threshold for color intensity to avoid an overwhelming effect.
- Vary the heights and widths of shapes to add interest to your painting.
- Use a zigzag swish technique to maintain soft, clean edges.



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