



Capturing the Light

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/193-Capturing-the-Light>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we'll begin in the studio, where I can guide you through the colors I use and how I achieve the vibrant mixes that bring life to outdoor scenes. I've prepared my palette with a limited selection of five colors plus white, which I'll explain in detail. Before diving into mixing, let's clarify some essential terms: 'value' refers to a color's lightness or darkness, akin to where it falls on a grayscale; 'hue' is the name of the color on the color wheel, such as yellow or yellow-green; 'saturation' describes a color's intensity or purity; and 'temperature' indicates a color's warmth or coolness, with warm tones leaning towards yellow and orange, and cool tones towards blue. In the studio, I use a glass palette with a neutral gray surface for optimal mixing, but outdoors, I prefer the practicality of a wooden palette. Using a limited palette is advantageous, especially for plein air painting, as it minimizes the weight of your gear while still allowing for a vast range of color mixes. I'll share the specific colors I carry and how to mix them effectively, starting with titanium white for its opacity and affordability, and moving through a selection of Rembrandt colors that offer flexibility and depth. Let's explore how mastering these elements can enhance your painting experience and help you capture the light beautifully in any scene.



Stanislaus River Resource Photo

Materials

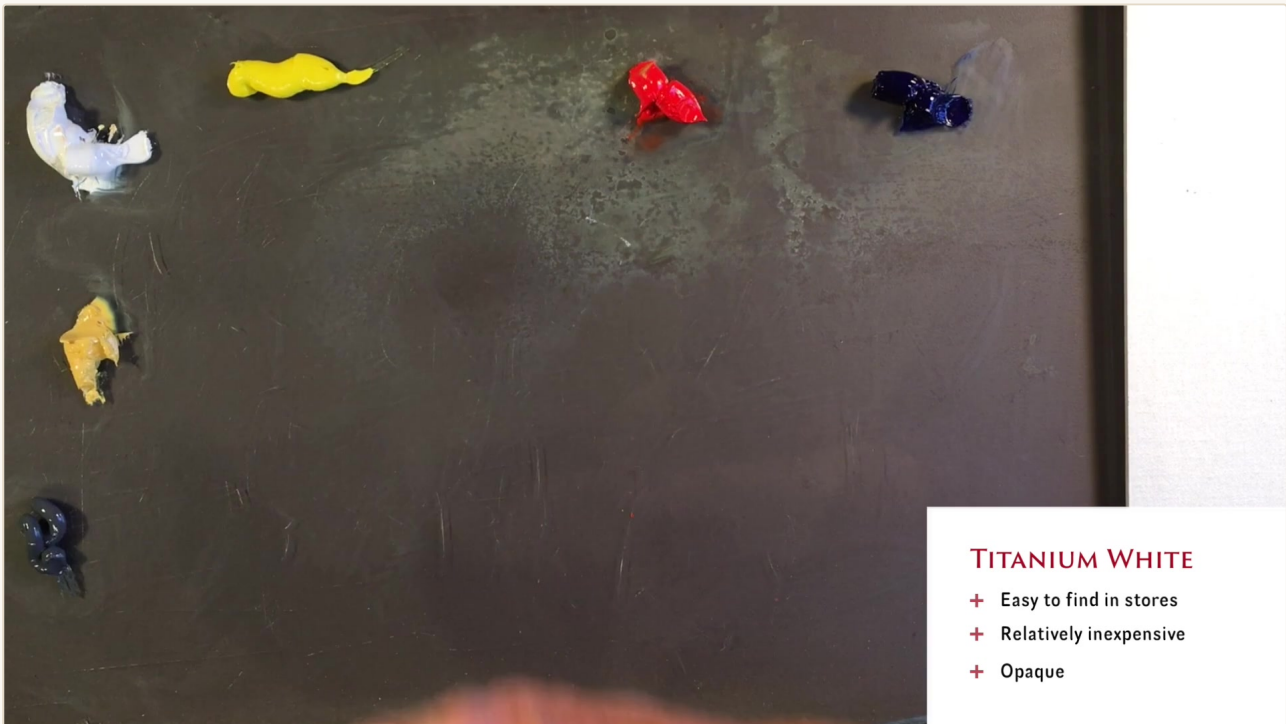
Gather these materials before you start. If you don't have the exact same supplies, use what you have and substitute freely.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Oil Paint
- Titanium White – Rembrandt
- Cadmium Yellow Lemon – Rembrandt
- OR Cadmium Yellow Light – Rembrandt
- Permanent Red Medium – Rembrandt
- Ultramarine Blue Deep – Rembrandt
- Naples Yellow Deep – Rembrandt
- Cold Grey – Rembrandt
- Brushes
- Robert Simmons Signet Bristle Brushes
- Flats, size 8, 10, 12
- Rounds, size 2, 3
- Rosemary & Co. Brushes
- Kathleen Dunphy Brush Set
- Ultimate bristle Long Flat 6,8,19,
- Ultimate bristle Pointed rounds 2,4,6
- Evergreen Rigger 2
- Open Box M portable easel,
- size 11x14
- Palette Knife – 3-4"
- long, tapered blade
- Gamsol Odourless Mineral Spirits
- Winsor and Newton Liquin
- or Natural Pigments Oleogel
- Holbein Brush washer
- Wind River Arts AC14 linen panels
- Easy-L umbrella

- Paper Towels
- Garbage bag
- Small sketch book
- Pencil or marker
- Small mirror
- BONUS:
- "PLEIN ERRORS" printable PDF file
- .

1 Palette Colors Explanation



Choose Titanium White

Select titanium white for its opacity and affordability. It is a reliable choice regardless of brand as they are generally consistent.

Select Cadmium Yellow

Use cadmium yellow from Rembrandt for its cool tone. This cool yellow can be warmed up with red if needed, providing flexibility in your palette.

Pick Permanent Red Medium

Opt for permanent red medium from Rembrandt. It sits in the middle of the temperature scale, allowing it to shift between warm and cool tones without being too extreme.

Use Ultramarine Blue Deep

Choose Rembrandt ultramarine blue deep for its dark, deep hue. This blue is ideal for mixing darker values in your paintings.

PRO TIP

Always carry your primary colors: yellow, red, and blue, along with titanium white for a versatile palette.

2 Cheater Colors



NAPLES YELLOW DEEP

- + Made by Rembrandt
- + Lightens and warms a mixture

Use Naples Yellow Deep

Apply Naples Yellow Deep by Rembrandt as a warm white to increase the value and warmth of a color without drastically altering its hue. This color is not highly saturated, making it ideal for subtle adjustments.

Incorporate Rembrandt Cold Gray

Utilize Rembrandt Cold Gray to tone down overly saturated colors. This color is effective for calming and graying down hues, enhancing certain color combinations.

PRO TIP

Use Naples Yellow Deep to add warmth and lightness without altering the color's saturation significantly.

3 Mixing Darkest Dark



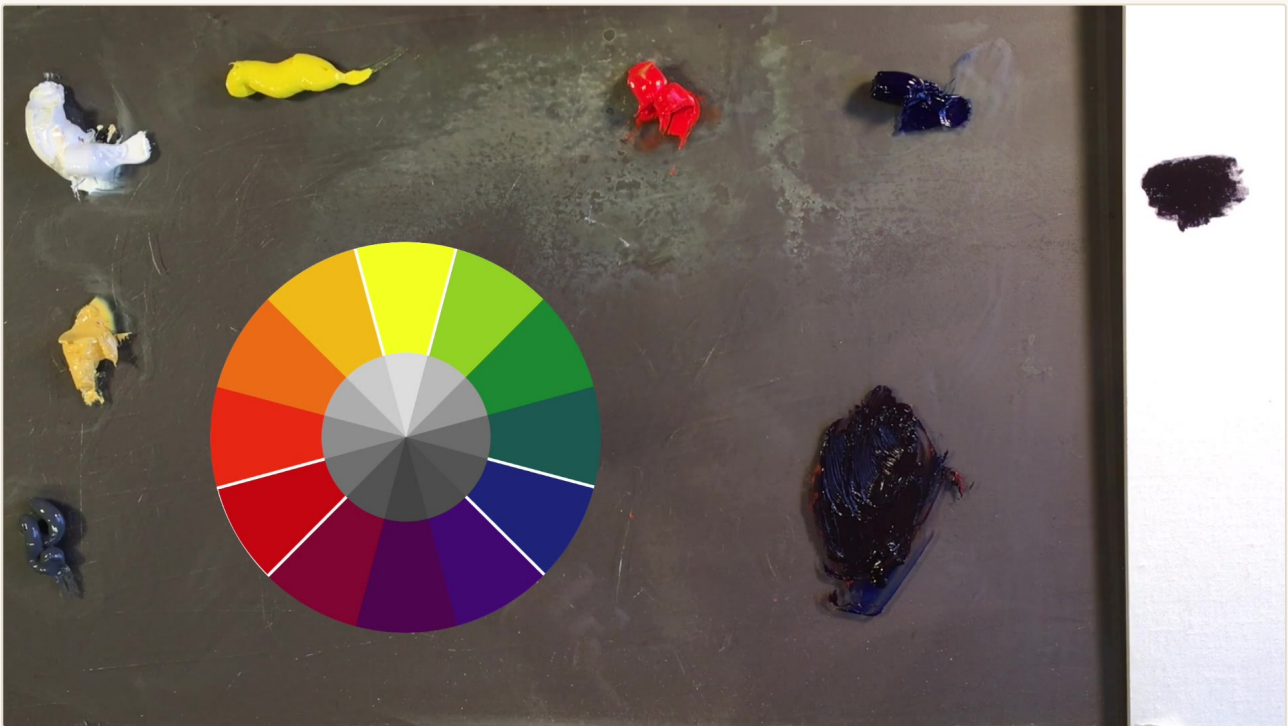
Mix the Darkest Dark

Combine ultramarine blue deep with permanent red medium using a palette knife. This mixture creates the darkest dark possible with this palette, appearing almost black. This rich, deep color is essential for capturing shadows and depth in your painting.

PRO TIP

Use a palette knife for pre-mixing to ensure a smooth, even blend of colors.

4 Mixing Secondary Colors



Mix Purple

Combine red and blue to create a deep hue. Add a tiny bit of white to achieve a nice purple, one of your secondary colors.

Mix Green

Use blue and a little yellow to mix a rich dark green. Adjust by adding a touch more yellow if needed. Ensure to wipe your palette knife clean to keep your colors pure.

Mix Orange

Blend yellow and red to form orange, your final secondary color. Consistency in palette arrangement helps maintain organization.

PRO TIP

Always clean your palette knife between mixes to keep your colors clean and vibrant.

5 Mixing Greens and Adjusting Temperature



Mix a Natural Green

Combine blue and yellow to create a basic green. If the green appears too vibrant or unnatural, add a touch of red, the complement, to tone it down. This will result in a more natural-looking green.

Warm Up the Green

To warm the green, mix yellow and blue again, then add a bit of orange, which is made from red and yellow. This will create a brownish green. Adjust by adding small amounts of red, yellow, or green until you achieve the desired warmth.

Adjust Temperature and Value

Evaluate if your mixed color is too warm or cool. Add blue to cool it down or red/yellow to warm it up. To lighten the color, add white or Naples Yellow Deep. White will cool the color, while Naples Yellow Deep will maintain warmth.

Lighten with Warmth

To lighten a warm green, add Naples Yellow Deep instead of white. Although it requires more Naples Yellow Deep to change the value, it will keep the color warm compared to using white.

PRO TIP

Use the complement color to tone down overly vibrant greens for a more natural appearance.

6 Using White and Naples Yellow Deep



Create a Grayed Green

Mix gray with cadmium yellow to create a pleasing grayed green. This color is versatile and useful for outdoor scenes.

Lighten with White for Cool Tones

Add white to the grayed green mixture to lighten it. This will give the color a cooler appearance, suitable for areas not in direct sunlight.

Lighten with Naples Yellow for Warm Tones

Use Naples Yellow to lighten the grayed green mixture. This creates a warmer tone, ideal for depicting sunlight and warmth in your painting.

PRO TIP

Use Naples Yellow to lighten colors in sunlight for a warm effect.

7 Exploring Limited Palette



Mix a Purplish Gray

Combine permanent red medium with gray to create a beautiful purplish gray color. Adjust the mixture by adding more gray to achieve the desired tone. This color is versatile and can be used effectively in various parts of your painting.

Utilize Cold Gray for Distance

Use cold gray to paint distant mountains or other elements that need to appear cool and unsaturated. This gray helps create a beautiful cool color that enhances depth and atmosphere in your landscape.

Experiment with the Limited Palette

Spend time exploring the limited palette by mixing different color combinations. Try to recreate some of your favorite colors using this palette to understand its potential. This practice will help you achieve color harmony and simplify your painting process.

Understand Color Components

Analyze the colors you see by considering their warmth, coolness, and value. Instead of relying on pre-mixed tubes, determine the components that make up a color. This approach enhances your understanding of color basics and improves your ability to mix any color using a limited palette.

PRO TIP

Experiment with mixing your favorite colors using a limited palette to discover new combinations and achieve color harmony.

8 Mixing Yellow Ochre



Determine the Value

Assess whether yellow ochre is lighter or darker than your cold gray. Since yellow ochre is lighter, squeeze out your cold gray to begin the mixing process.

Lighten with Warmth

Lighten the cold gray with Naples yellow, which acts as a warm white, to match the value of yellow ochre. This step adjusts the lightness while maintaining the warmth characteristic of yellow ochre.

Adjust Saturation

Add yellow to the mixture to increase saturation, but be cautious as this can make the color too green. If it becomes too green, add red, the complement of green, to neutralize it.

Fine-Tune the Hue

If the mixture becomes too red, add more yellow to balance it. Adjust the saturation by adding a bit more gray and Naples yellow until the color resembles yellow ochre.

PRO TIP

Mix the value first using gray and white, then adjust the hue with primary colors to achieve the desired color.

9 Graying Colors and Color Triangle



Mixing Saturated Colors

To achieve a saturated color, start by mixing your primary colors. For a vibrant orange, combine yellow and red. Adjust the saturation as needed by adding complementary colors or gray.

Graying Colors with Gray

If your color is too saturated, use a cold gray to reduce its intensity. This will transform the color into a more muted, brownish tone, making it less intense.

Graying Colors with Complements

Alternatively, use the complementary color to gray down a saturated mix. For example, add blue to a saturated orange to achieve a similar muted effect.

Understanding the Color Triangle

Simplify color mixing by using the color triangle, which includes the three primaries: red, yellow, and blue, and the three secondaries: orange, purple, and green. To gray a color, find its complement directly across the triangle.

Applying the Color Triangle

For a red that's too saturated, use green to gray it. For a purple, use yellow. This method helps maintain natural-looking colors, especially in outdoor scenes.

PRO TIP

Use the color triangle to quickly find complementary colors for graying down overly saturated mixes.

10 Benefits of Mixing Colors



Experiment with Color Mixing

After finishing a painting, save your leftover colors and experiment by mixing them in various combinations. This practice helps you discover new colors and improve your color matching skills.

Practice with a Limited Palette

Select a few tubes of paint and challenge yourself to mix colors that match other hues using only these limited options. This exercise enhances your understanding of color relationships and mixing.

Achieve Unique Color Variations

Instead of using pre-mixed tube colors like sap green, mix your own colors to capture the unique lighting and conditions of your subject. This approach ensures that each color is specific to the scene and moment you are painting.

PRO TIP

Mix colors from a limited palette to improve your understanding of color and create more accurate, scene-specific hues.

11 Outdoor Painting Supplies



Select Brushes

Use Robert Simmons bristle brushes, choosing flats and rounds. Over time, flats will naturally become filberts as their edges round off. Have a variety of sizes on hand, from size 6 to 12, for different painting needs.

Use a Palette Knife

Choose a palette knife with a long, springy blade for mixing paint effectively. A short blade makes it difficult to mix paint thoroughly.

Prepare Gamsol Containers

Have two gamsol containers: one for cleaning brushes and another with clean gamsol for thinning paint. This ensures your paint colors remain clean and vibrant on the canvas.

Use Lightweight Painting Surface

Paint on linen glued to gator foam for a lightweight, portable surface. This allows easy trimming to custom sizes with a razor blade or box cutter after painting.

Tone the Canvas

Tone your acrylic-primed linen with cadmium yellow light acrylic paint. This prevents wiping down to white canvas and adds a sunlit feel to your painting, allowing the canvas to contribute to the artwork.

PRO TIP

Use acrylic paint to tone the canvas to prevent wiping down to the white surface and to add a sunlit glow.

12 Umbrella and Sketchbook Importance



Use an EZL Umbrella

Set up an EZL umbrella to provide shade for both your canvas and palette. This helps protect your eyes and ensures consistent lighting conditions for your painting.

Secure the Umbrella

Anchor the umbrella securely to prevent it from blowing over in a breeze. Attach your pack to the tripod for added stability and to keep your easel safe.

PRO TIP

Always secure your umbrella to prevent your easel from tipping over in windy conditions.

13 Choosing a Scene



Bring Essential Tools

Always carry a sketchbook and a small portable camera or smartphone when you go outside to paint. These tools will help you capture the scene and make decisions about what to paint.

Explore the Area

Walk around the area and take photographs of different views. This helps you gather visual references and identify what part of the scene attracts you the most.

Create Quick Sketches

Use your sketchbook to make quick sketches of the scene. These thumbnails help you slow down and think about the composition and design before you start painting.

PRO TIP

Use thumbnails to explore different compositions and find the most compelling part of the scene before painting.

14 Thumbnail Sketches and Design



Create Multiple Thumbnails

Sketch several thumbnails of the scene to explore different design possibilities. Focus on capturing major shapes and the darkest darks without spending too much time on details. Aim for rough, abbreviated sketches rather than perfect drawings.

Evaluate Design Options

Consider different compositions, such as a square design with rocks in shadow and a central waterfall. Assess whether the design feels static or lacks interest and flow. Experiment with other formats, like a tall vertical, to incorporate more elements like hills and trees.

Choose a Dominant Element

Identify the element that interests you most in the scene, such as a cliff face with varied shades of gray. Make this the dominant part of your design, ensuring it captures the viewer's attention.

Balance and Simplify

Balance the dominant element with other features, like shadows across the water and distant rocks. Simplify the background to keep focus on the foreground, reducing complexity to maintain viewer interest.

Personalize Your Design

Select the scene element that attracts you most and ensure your design highlights it effectively. Whether it's the waterfall or another feature, tailor your composition to emphasize your chosen focal point.

PRO TIP

Simplify complex areas in the background to maintain focus on the foreground elements that interest you most.

15 Notes and Observations



Make Observational Notes

Take a moment to jot down notes about interesting elements in your scene. Focus on unique features like the warm orangish moss cascading over the rocks. Noting these details helps ensure you capture them in your painting.

Identify Color Repetitions

Observe how colors repeat in different parts of the scene. Notice how the orangish color of the moss is echoed in the distant trees. Recognizing these repetitions can add harmony and depth to your work.

Use a Sketchbook

Write these observations in your sketchbook. This practice will help you remember subtle details as you work on your painting, preventing them from being overlooked in the process.

PRO TIP

Use a sketchbook to jot down interesting color repetitions and unique elements to ensure they are included in your painting.

16 Transferring Design to Canvas



Prepare Your Canvas

Place your sketchbook nearby for reference. Position your canvas where you can easily see both the sketch and the canvas.

Mark the Canvas

Make a small mark at the middle of the top, bottom, and each side of your canvas. Repeat this process on your thumbnail sketch to create a guide for aligning your design.

Transfer the Design

Use the marks as a guide to draw the basic elements of your design onto the canvas. Indicate areas of light and dark to help with composition.

PRO TIP

Use the crosshairs to ensure accurate alignment of your design elements on the canvas.

17 Pre-mixing Colors for Outdoor Scene



Mix Darkest Dark

Combine red and blue to create your darkest dark. This will serve as a base for your shadows.

Create Secondary Colors

Mix lavender, orange, and green as your secondary colors. These will help in capturing the variety of hues in the scene.

Mix Warmer Green

Combine blue and yellow with a larger proportion of red to create a warmer green. Lighten this mixture slightly for use in your painting.

Prepare Mid-tone and Highlight Greens

Mix gray with lemon yellow for mid-tone areas of the trees. For highlights, add Naples yellow to the gray and lemon mixture to create a warm, light green.

Establish Cliff Face Value

Determine the average value of the cliff face and mix accordingly. Plan to add variety once the paint sets.

Mix Darker and Lighter Grays

Create a darker gray for deeper areas by adding warmth. For a cooler gray, mix ultramarine blue with gray and white.

Create Grayed Orange

Mix gray with orange for elements like trees and moss. Adjust the saturation and value for lighter areas.

Mix Light Rock Colors

Combine gray, white, Naples yellow, and red for the light areas on rocks. Ensure warmth to avoid making them too light or cool.

Prepare Water and Shadow Colors

Mix blue with gray and white for water in shadow. Add Naples yellow and a touch of orange to gray it down slightly.

Mix Cooler Green

Combine blue and yellow with Naples yellow for a cooler green, suitable for background trees.

PRO TIP

Pre-mixing colors creates approximations that can be adjusted as needed to match the scene more closely.

18 Starting the Painting



Envision the Scene

Take a deep breath and squint at the scene you want to paint. Look at your canvas and visualize the painting as it will appear. This mental preparation helps align your vision with your execution.

Compose Yourself

Spend a few seconds to gather your thoughts and plan your approach. This moment of composure is crucial before you begin applying paint.

Plan Your Painting

Consider your design, process, and colors. Even when the light changes quickly, this planning will enable you to paint more efficiently once you start.

PRO TIP

Visualize the painting on your canvas before you start to align your vision with your execution.

19 Blocking in Shadows



Reinforce Deep Darks

Restate some of the deepest darks in your painting to reinforce your drawing. This helps prevent lighter values from overpowering the darks as you continue painting. Ensure these darks are well-anchored before progressing further.

Simplify by Squinting

Squint your eyes to soften your focus and simplify the scene. This technique helps you see the essential shapes and values without getting lost in details.

Block in Rock Shadows

Anticipate the light change and block in an average value for the shadow side of the rocks. Leave some areas unpainted for when the light hits the top planes of the rocks. This initial block-in will dry slightly and set up for further adjustments.

PRO TIP

Squint frequently to simplify the scene and focus on essential shapes and values.

20 Layering and Simplifying



Prepare the Canvas

Allow the initial paint layer to sink into the canvas and dry slightly. This will enable you to layer on top without smearing or creating mud.

Maintain Loose Brushwork

Keep your brushwork loose and avoid getting too tight or fussy early on. This approach helps maintain the painting's freshness and spontaneity.

Simplify Colors and Values

Focus on simplifying the scene by using basic colors and values. This will help you quickly block in areas before the light changes, preserving the light and dark pattern that initially attracted you to the scene.

PRO TIP

Allow the initial paint layer to dry slightly before layering to avoid smearing and creating mud.

21 Painting Background and Light



Simplify the Background

Squint your eyes to simplify the background areas. Focus on capturing the diagonal raking light across the trees, which gives a beautiful morning feel.

Indicate Rocks and Shadows

Make quick indications of where the rocks are in the scene. Add a shadowy feeling to the background to enhance depth.

Step Back and Evaluate

Regularly step back to view your painting from a distance. This helps maintain perspective and prevents getting lost in small details.

Lightly Indicate Foreground Elements

Consider adding a rock in the bottom corner to guide the viewer's eye back into the scene. Lightly indicate it without developing it fully until the light is resolved.

Focus on Distant Light

Develop the area with distant light first, especially if it's likely to change. This ensures you capture the transient light accurately before it shifts.

PRO TIP

Regularly step back to view your painting from a distance to maintain perspective.

22 Painting Thin Darks



Apply Thin Dark Layers

Ensure you have enough dark areas established before adding lighter tones on top. Paint these darks very thinly to allow for effective layering and to prevent unwanted light reflection. Thick dark paint can catch light, reducing the darkness of the area.

PRO TIP

Paint dark areas thinly to avoid reflections that can lighten the appearance.

23 Adding Light to Trees



Select a Smaller Brush

Switch to a slightly smaller brush to add light to the distant trees. This allows for more precision in capturing the subtle details of light.

Test the Color

Always do a small test to check if the color and value are correct before committing. This ensures that the light effect is accurate and harmonious with the rest of the painting.

Lighten with Naples Yellow

Lighten the color slightly using Naples Yellow to create a warm light effect. This color is ideal for capturing the sunlight on the trees.

Enhance with White and Yellow

Add a touch of white and yellow to punch up the light effect. This adjustment helps achieve the desired brightness and warmth.

Apply Light with a Dancing Motion

Lightly dance the brush across the canvas to indicate where the light hits the trees. Avoid getting too detailed, as distant elements should remain less focused than the foreground.

Add Greenish Color to Pine Trees

Apply a greenish color to the pine trees in the background. Consider the balance of color to avoid drawing the eye away from the main focus of the painting.

Cool Down with Green Blue

If the initial color is too warm, layer a cooler green-blue on top to adjust the temperature. This helps in maintaining the atmospheric perspective.

Simplify and Cool the Background

Simplify and cool down the background area to enhance the sense of depth. This adjustment supports the overall composition and directs focus.

PRO TIP

Always test your colors before applying them to ensure they match the desired effect.

24 Painting Water and Rocks



Establish Dark Areas

Scumble in a little bit of dark paint to define the area with small disparate shapes, like rocks at the top of the waterfall. Use the darker, cooler color to establish the base layer, which will show the motion of the water over the rocks.

Layer Light Over Dark

Apply lighter values of paint over the dark areas to create a pattern and define the negative shapes. This layering will help convey the movement and flow of the water.

Define Lightest Light

Identify the lightest light in the scene, such as a bright spot on the waterfall, and paint it in. This will establish the value range for your painting, from the darkest shadows to the brightest highlights.

Adjust Shadow Areas

Add more dark paint behind the light areas to enhance the value shift. This will create depth and contrast, helping the light areas stand out more effectively.

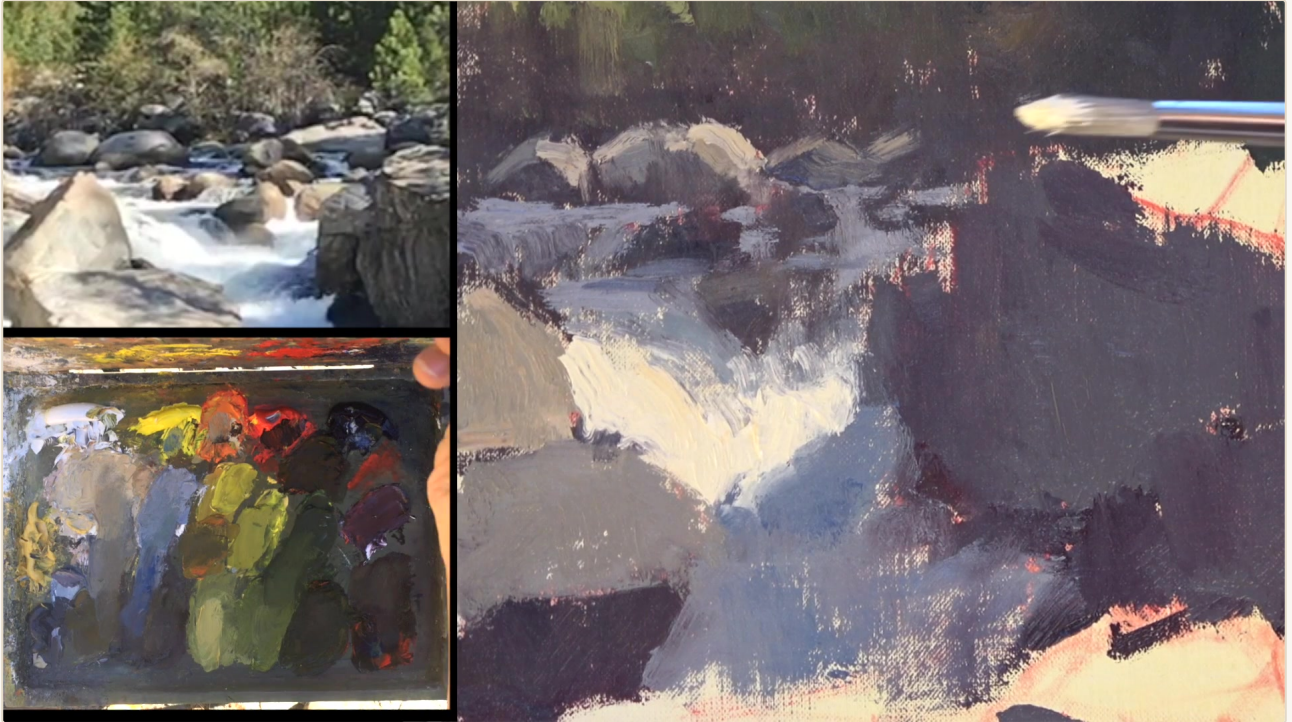
Refine Rock Patterns

Use the shadow color of the water to define the rocks further. Focus on creating a pattern of rocks without being constrained by the exact number or placement in the scene, aiming to convey the overall feeling of the landscape.

PRO TIP

Scumble dark paint thinly to allow for layering and adjustment as the painting progresses.

25 Variety in Temperature



Capture Light on Different Planes

Observe how light strikes each plane differently. Avoid mixing a single color for the light parts of the rocks. Instead, introduce subtle variations to reflect the unique light on each surface.

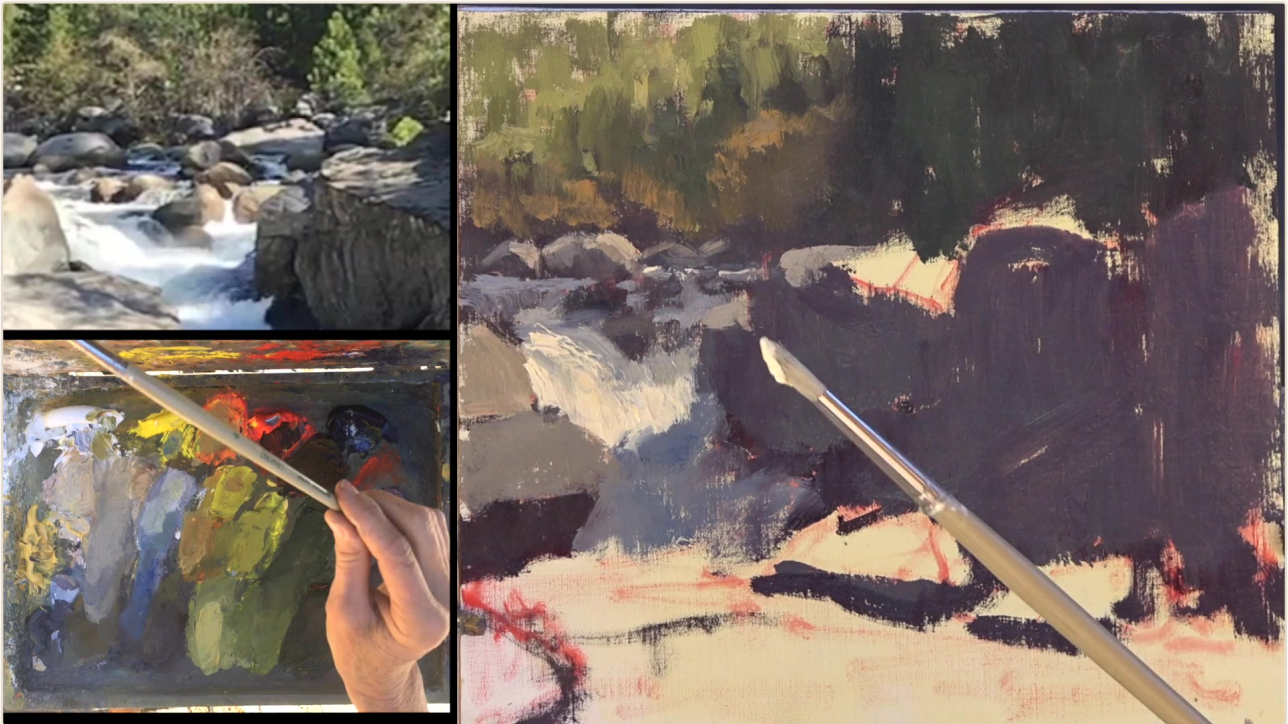
Focus on Temperature Variety

Seek variety in temperature rather than value. This approach maintains the painting's structure while adding interest. Ensure that your values remain consistent to avoid fracturing the basic shapes.

PRO TIP

Introduce temperature variety to add interest without disrupting the painting's structure.

26 Maintaining Motion in Water



Apply Paint with Texture

Get a nice big chunk of paint on your brush, but ensure it's the paint that touches the canvas, not the brush itself. This technique will help you achieve a beautiful texture that adds interest and motion to the water.

Maintain Rock Shapes

Keep the big mass of rocks as one shape within your design. Redraw some of the darker lines within the rock's shape to define its structure.

Define Dark Areas

Observe the deep dark areas beneath prominent rocks, especially those closest to the waterfall. Add these darks to give more information about the shadow mass and enhance the depth.

Initial Dark Layer

Lay down an initial layer of dark values, slightly darker than needed, as you will layer over it. This helps in redefining the drawing and setting the foundation for further color shifts.

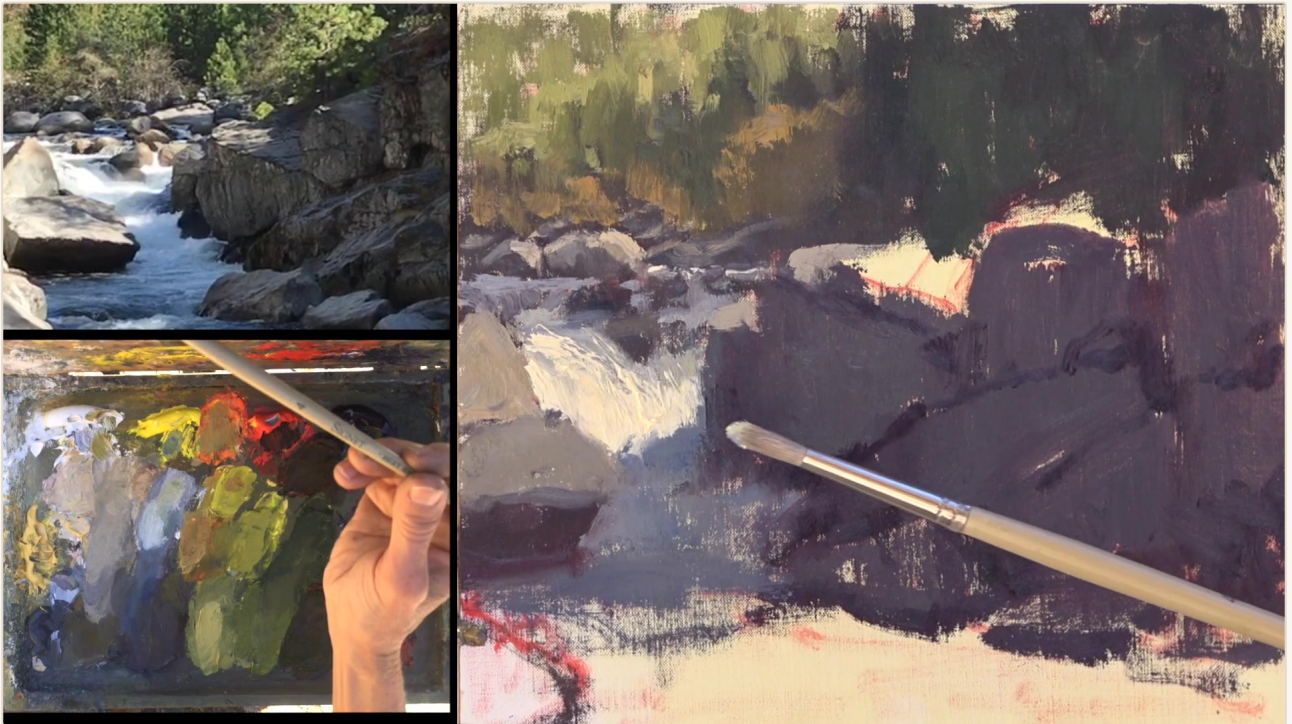
Embrace Water's Motion

Avoid making the water too perfect or rigid. Embrace the natural movement of water to maintain its realistic and magical feeling.

PRO TIP

Avoid making water too perfect; embrace its natural movement for realism.

27 Refining Rock Details



Add Shadow to Waterfall

Apply a darker value to the waterfall section to ensure it remains in shadow compared to the illuminated parts. This will help show how the water cascades over the rocks.

Refine Rock Angles

Adjust the angle of the rocks to be more steep where the light starts to come over. Ensure some areas remain in shadow to maintain depth.

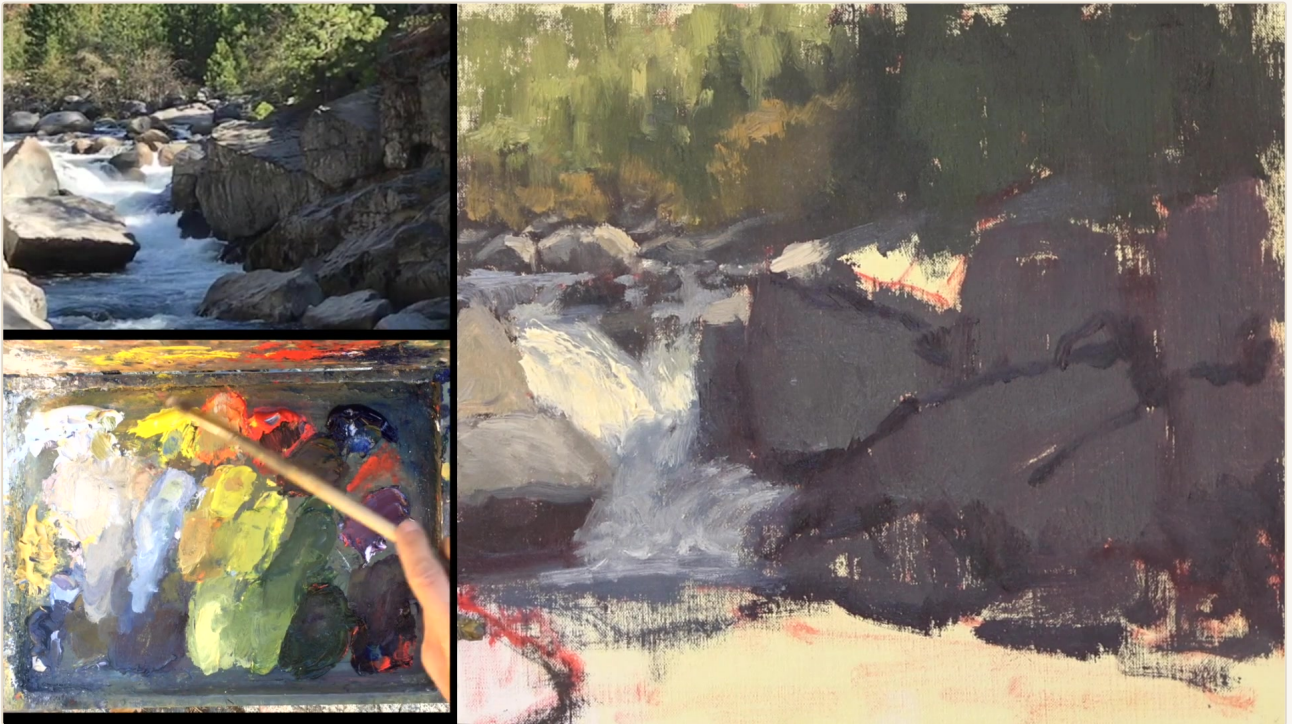
Indicate Light on Rocks

Begin to indicate the light hitting the top and front parts of the rocks. Use a subtle touch to suggest the presence of light without overpowering the shadow areas.

PRO TIP

Keep your values dark enough to maintain the shadow effect on the waterfall.

28 Reflective Light on Rocks



Adjust Light Values

Ensure the value is light enough and warm enough for areas in sunlight. Sunlit areas should have a warm influence.

Paint Top Plane

Paint the top plane that is not in sunlight slightly lighter than the front plane facing you. This helps show the plane receding.

Add Dappled Light

As dappled light comes across the top, keep squinting your eyes to stay on track with your values. This technique helps maintain accuracy.

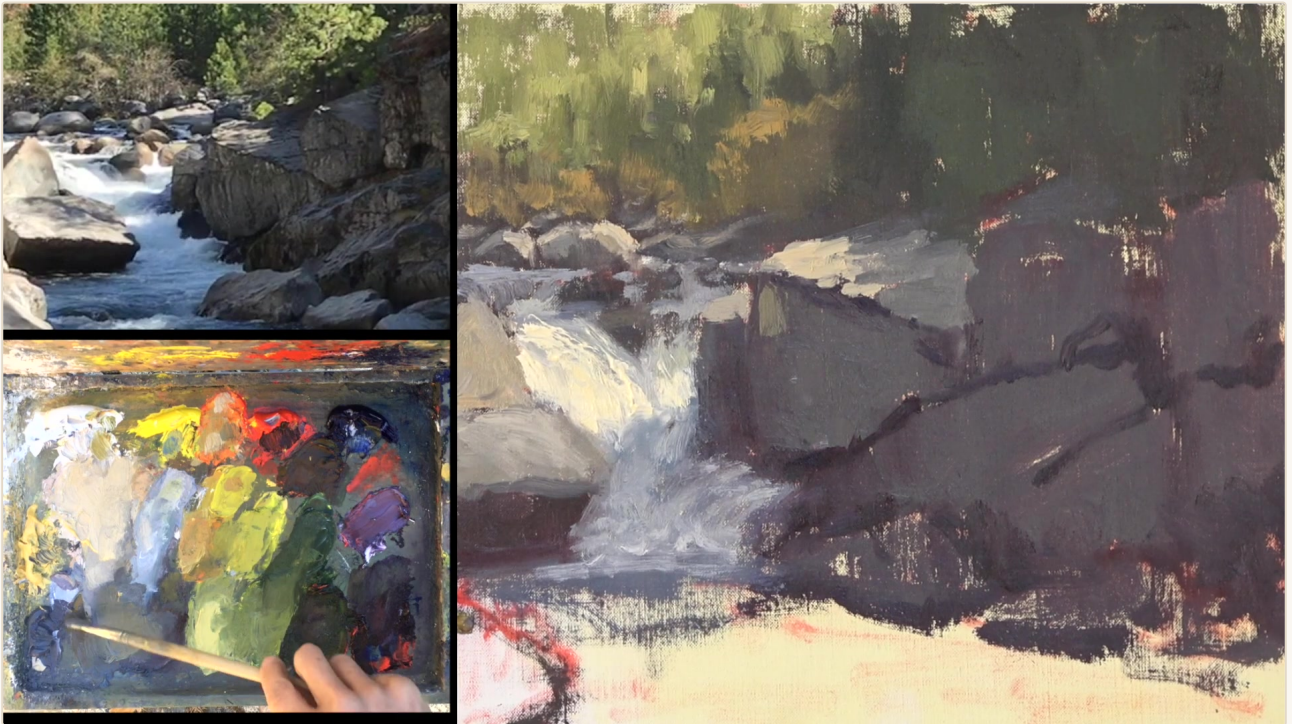
Capture Reflective Light

Observe the reflective light bouncing back into the shadows. Capture this effect later in the painting to better judge values.

PRO TIP

Squint your eyes to accurately judge and maintain values while painting.

29 Waiting for Light Changes



Enhance Shadow Variety

Add subtle variations within the shadow areas to create more interest without losing the overall shadow effect. Be cautious not to make the shadows too light, as this can disrupt the form of the object.

Warm Up and Restate Darks

Introduce warmth to the reflective light areas while restating some of the darker values. This helps maintain the integrity of the shadows and enhances the form.

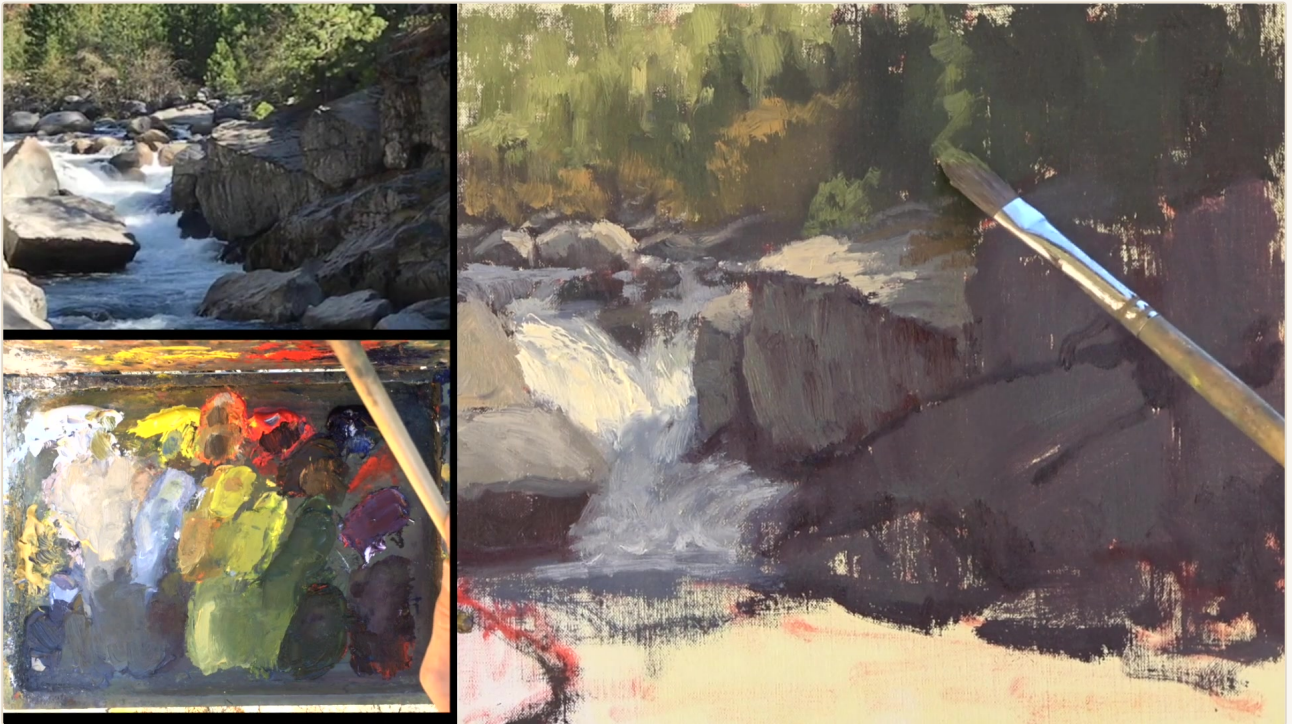
Wait for Natural Light Changes

Hold off on painting areas where the sunlight is expected to change. Allow the sun to illuminate these areas naturally to accurately determine the values instead of guessing.

PRO TIP

Avoid making shadows too light to maintain the form and depth of your painting.

30 Defining Tree Edges



Define Tree Edges

Lighten the side of the tree where the light hits to define its edge. Use a lighter tone to capture the effect of light raking across the tree. Keep the block-in stage simple and add more variety later if needed.

Adjust Upper Plane

Cool down the upper plane of the tree slightly to reflect the light's angle. Ensure this part catches the light effectively by using a cooler tone.

PRO TIP

Squint to better see the light and shadow contrasts on the tree.

31 Paint Thickness Control



Start with Thin Paint

Begin by applying relatively thin layers of paint. This allows for greater control and prevents the painting from becoming messy.

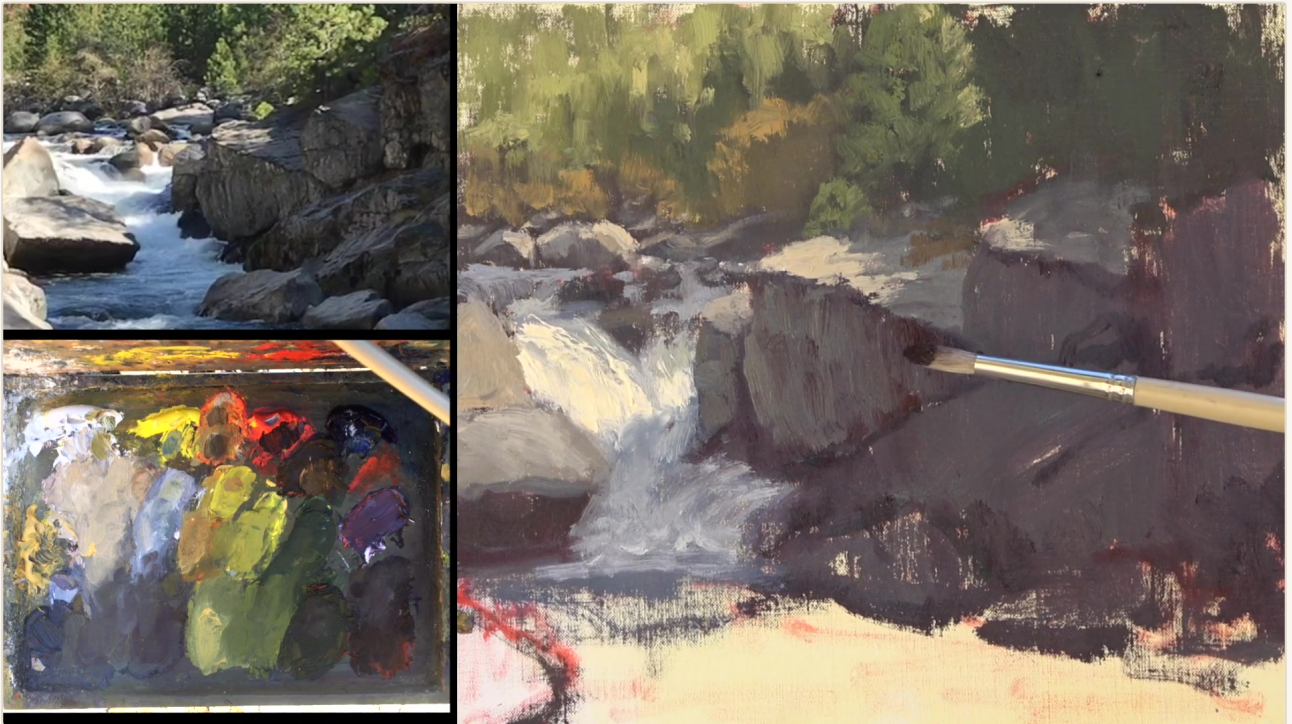
Increase Thickness Gradually

As you introduce more light into your painting, gradually increase the thickness of your paint. This helps to build up the texture and depth without losing control.

PRO TIP

Avoid applying thick paint too quickly to maintain control and prevent a messy outcome.

32 Adding Detail to Boulders



Enhance Boulder Details

Add more darks and lights to the boulders to give them character and depth. Use a mix of darker and lighter tones to break up the flat plane and create a more dynamic appearance.

Create Rust Effects

Apply a rust-like color to the sides of some boulders to mimic natural weathering. This adds realism and interest to the boulders.

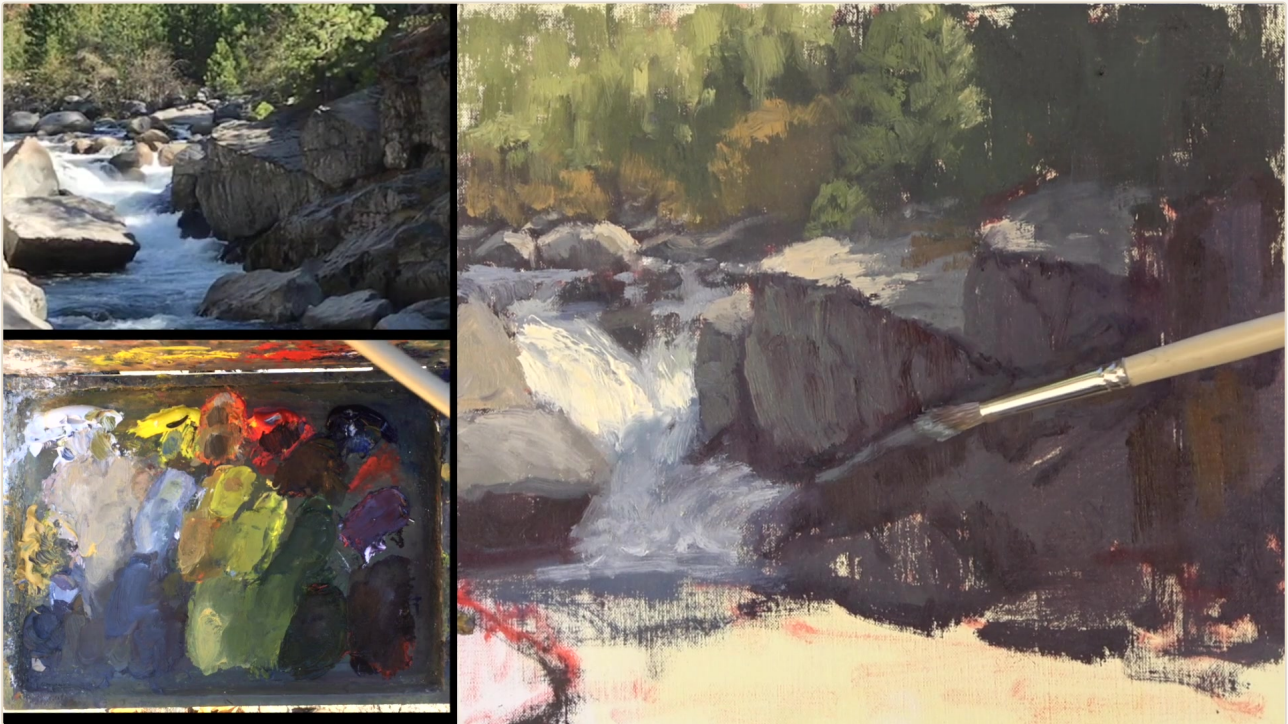
Balance Detail and Simplicity

Work back and forth, adding and removing details as needed. Ensure the painting does not become too busy by simplifying where necessary.

PRO TIP

Use a rust-like color to add natural weathering effects to boulders.

33 Nature's Colors and Grays



Identify Cool Ambient Light

Observe the cool ambient light reflecting from the sky onto the top plane of the boulders. This light is not direct sunlight but helps to define the dimension of the boulders.

Use a Smaller Brush for Refinement

Switch to a smaller brush to add refinements to your painting. This is especially important for an 8x10 painting to make delicate marks that enhance detail.

Apply Paint with a Twisting Motion

Load your brush with paint and apply it with a twisting motion. This technique helps to define the top plane of the boulders more clearly.

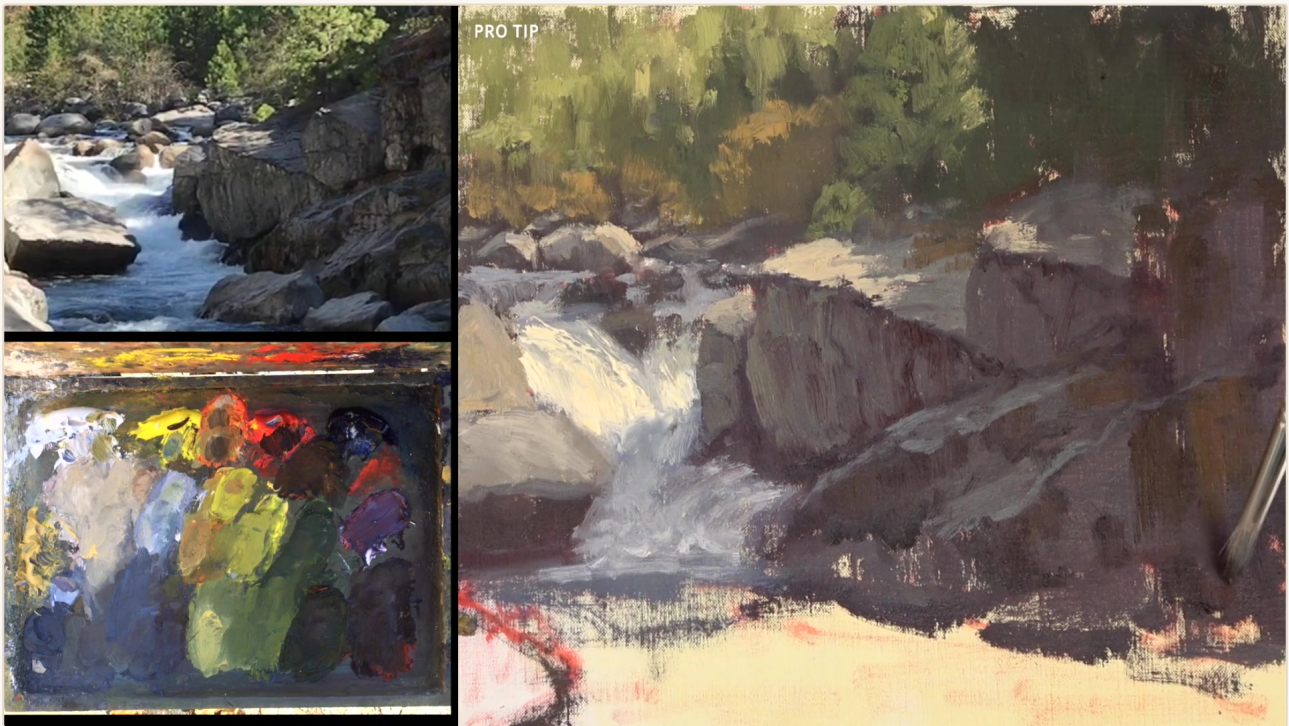
Balance Colors with Grays

Remember that nature is mostly gray with occasional pops of intense color. Resist the temptation to use overly bright colors like cobalt blue or phthalo unless necessary.

PRO TIP

Use a smaller brush to add delicate refinements to your painting.

34 Artistic Decisions



Enhance Brightness with Grays

If you encounter a super bright element, like blue-green water or vibrant autumn leaves, gray down the surrounding areas. This will make the bright color pop and appear more saturated and colorful.

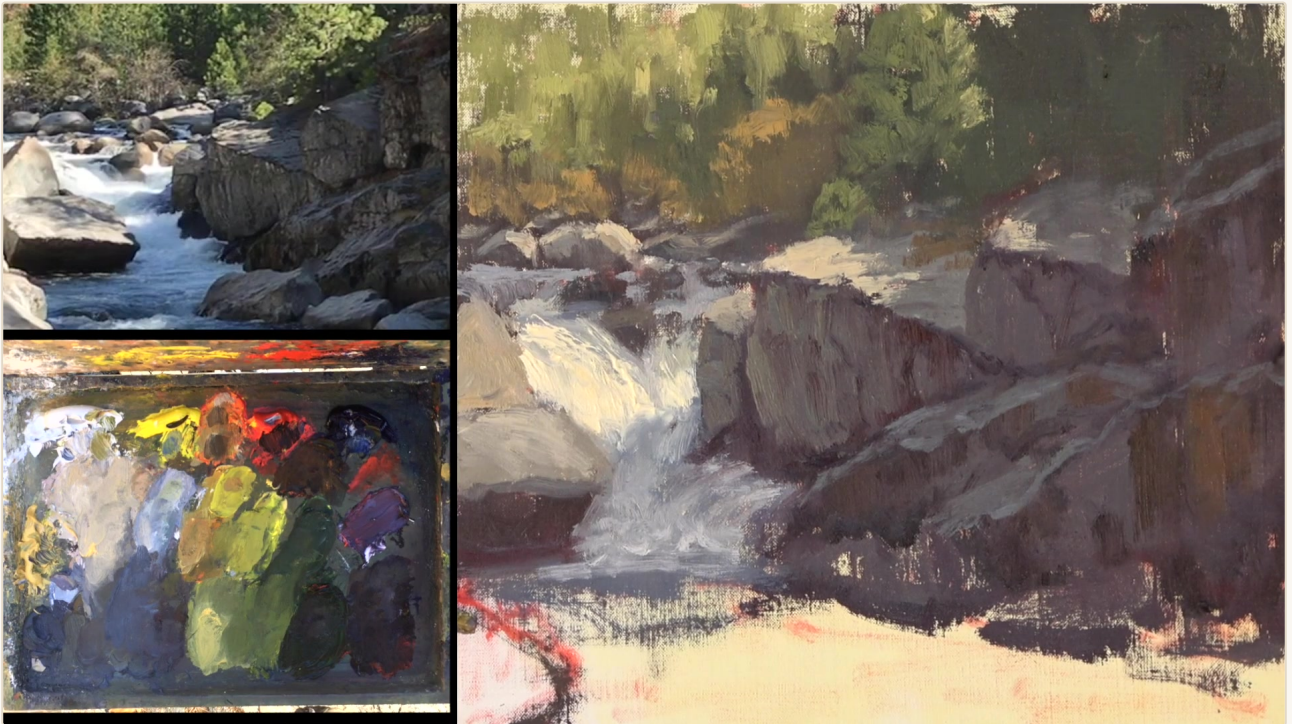
Exercise Artistic Control

Remember, you have the power to make decisions in your painting. Decide what elements to keep or alter to enhance your composition. Use nature as a guide, but don't hesitate to adjust it to suit your artistic vision.

PRO TIP

Gray down surrounding areas to make bright colors appear more vibrant.

35 Color Harmony and Repetition



Exercise Patience with Lighting

Hold off on painting areas that will be affected by sunlight until the light is just right. Waiting for the correct lighting conditions ensures that your painting captures the scene accurately and avoids surprises.

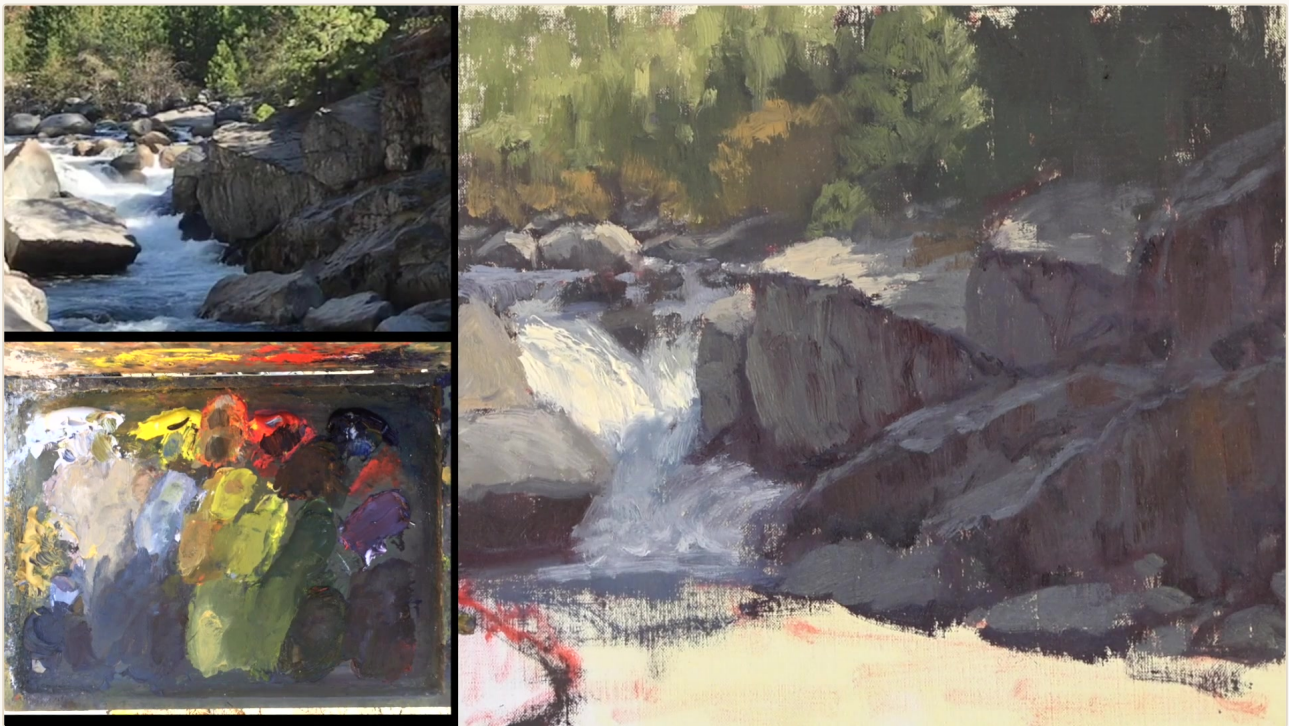
Use Color Harmony

Incorporate the same colors throughout your painting to create harmony and guide the viewer's eye. For example, use a warm color on the rocks that relates to the color in the shadows of the willows or aspens to connect different parts of the painting visually.

PRO TIP

Be patient and wait for the right lighting conditions before painting key areas.

36 Balancing Warm and Cool Colors



Enhance Light with Warm and Cool Colors

Add pieces of light on the tops of areas to create more definition. Place a warm color right next to a cool color to achieve a vibrant effect. For example, use a cool blue next to a warm orangey gray to create an exciting temperature vibration.

Maintain Quiet Areas

Keep certain areas quiet by avoiding too much value shift. This helps guide the viewer's eye to the focal point of the painting.

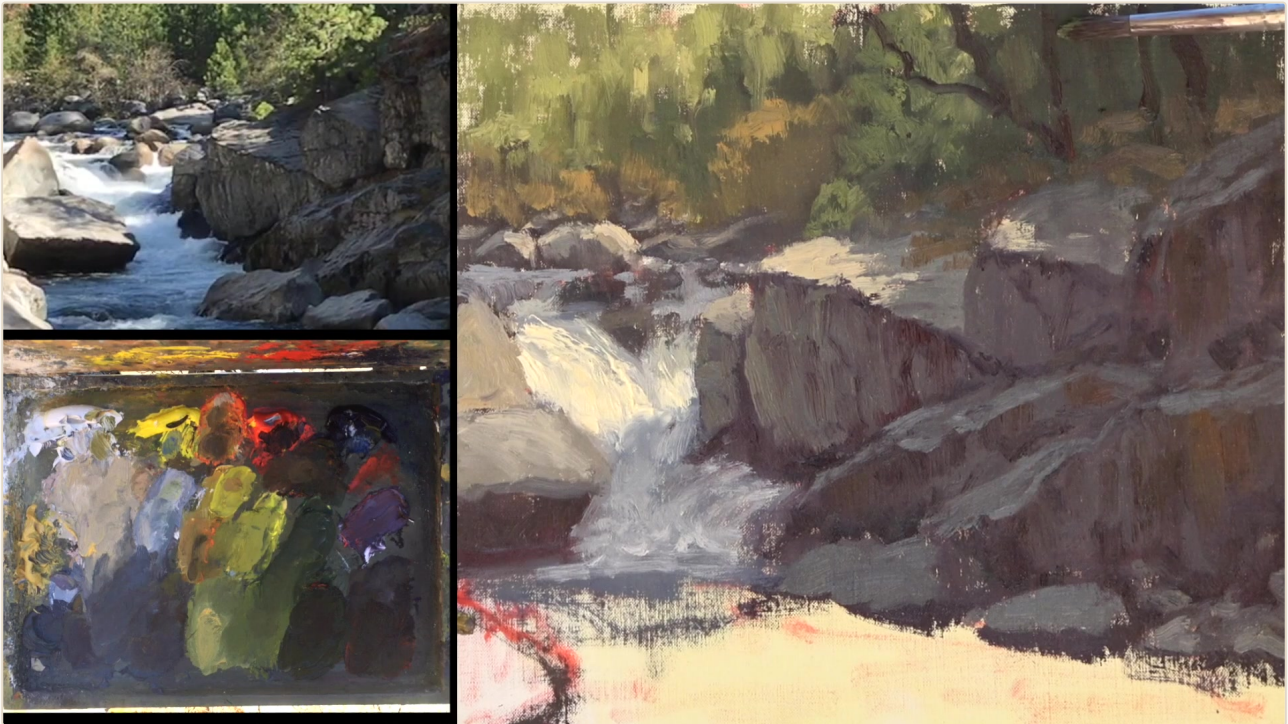
Create Subtle Background Elements

Mix a dark color and thin it out to test its temperature. Use calligraphic mark making to suggest elements like trees without creating too much value shift or fuss.

PRO TIP

Place warm colors next to cool colors to create a vibrant and interesting effect in your painting.

37 Avoiding Geometric Shapes



Interweave Tree Branches

Paint out a few sections of the branches to interweave them into the trees. This will help create a natural feel and prevent the trees from dominating the painting.

Lighten the Rock Area

Lighten the area of the rock to reduce its geometric appearance. This will help it blend more naturally into the landscape and draw less attention.

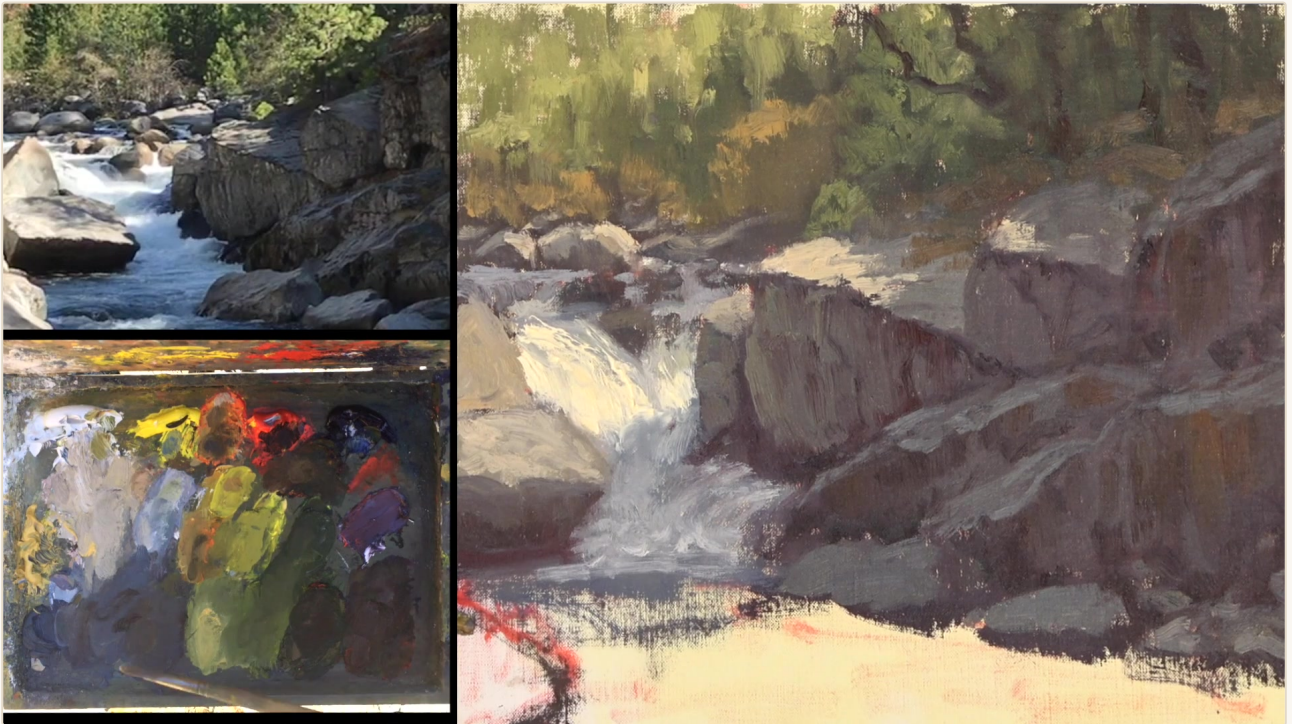
Avoid Geometric Shapes

Be cautious with geometric shapes in landscapes, as nature rarely features straight lines. Add variety to the shapes to ensure they don't appear man-made.

PRO TIP

Nature rarely features straight lines, so add variety to avoid man-made appearances.

38 Foreground Boulder



Add Foreground Boulder

Include a small piece of another boulder in the foreground to enhance depth and draw the viewer into the scene. Develop the boulder by adding details like a crack and some dark areas to create interest and texture.

Focus on Foreground Water

Begin painting the water in the foreground by starting with the darkest tones. This approach, similar to painting the waterfall, allows you to build up the lighter tones and highlights effectively.

PRO TIP

Start with the darkest tones when painting water to effectively build up highlights.

39 Painting Water in Foreground



Prepare the Brush

Select a larger brush to create bold marks, which will help in capturing the dynamic nature of water.

Mix the Shadow Color

Mix a darker greenish-blue color by adding a tiny bit of ultramarine and a tiny bit of white to your palette. Adjust by adding more green if necessary to achieve the desired tone.

Apply the Shadow Layer

Apply this darker color to the shadowed areas of the water. Focus on keeping it simple and consistent, as this will form the base layer of your water.

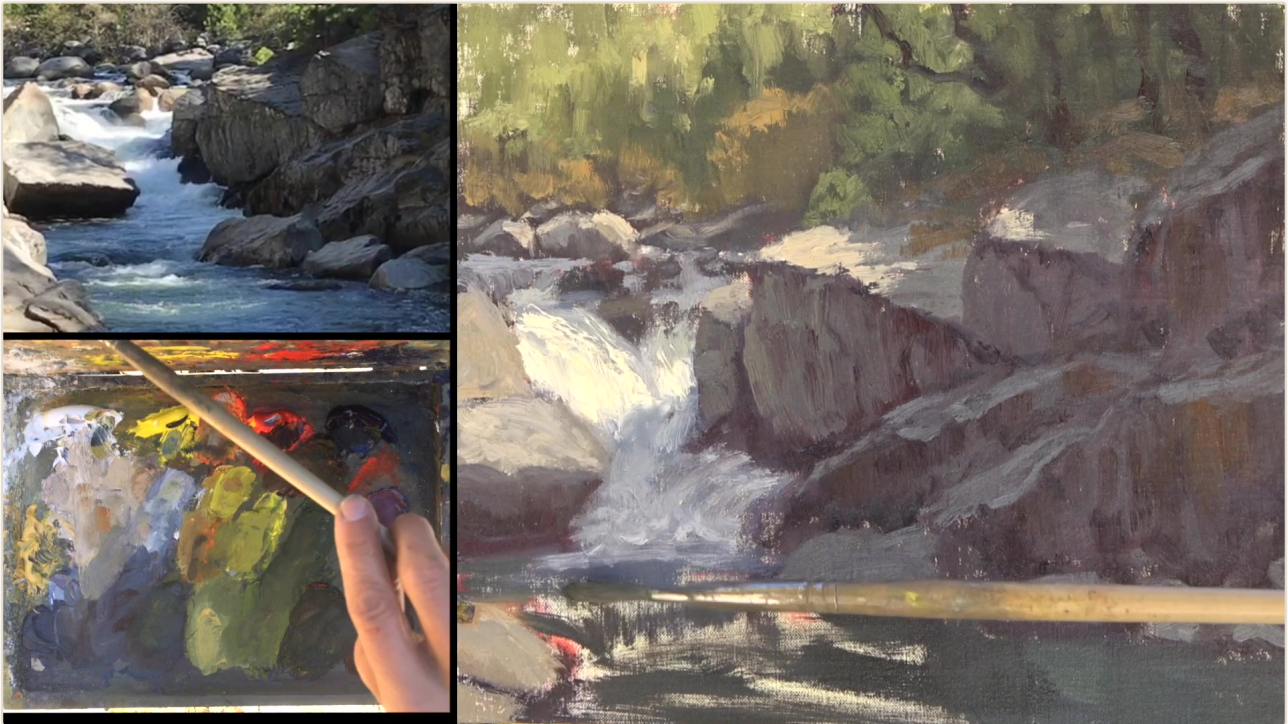
Remember to Squint

Squint your eyes to simplify the scene and focus on the tonal values, ensuring you capture the essence of the shadowed areas accurately.

PRO TIP

Squint your eyes to simplify the scene and focus on tonal values.

40 Adding Color to Water



Mix Blue-Green

Combine ultramarine blue with a touch of cadmium lemon to create a lovely blue-green color. This mixture captures the essence of the Sierra's water color.

Add Blue-Green to Water

Apply the blue-green mixture to the water area, focusing on creating a darker tone. This will enhance the depth and natural look of the water.

Lighten and Cool the Tone

Mix white with blue and a hint of Naples yellow deep to create a lighter, cooler tone. Use this mixture to add variation and interest to the water.

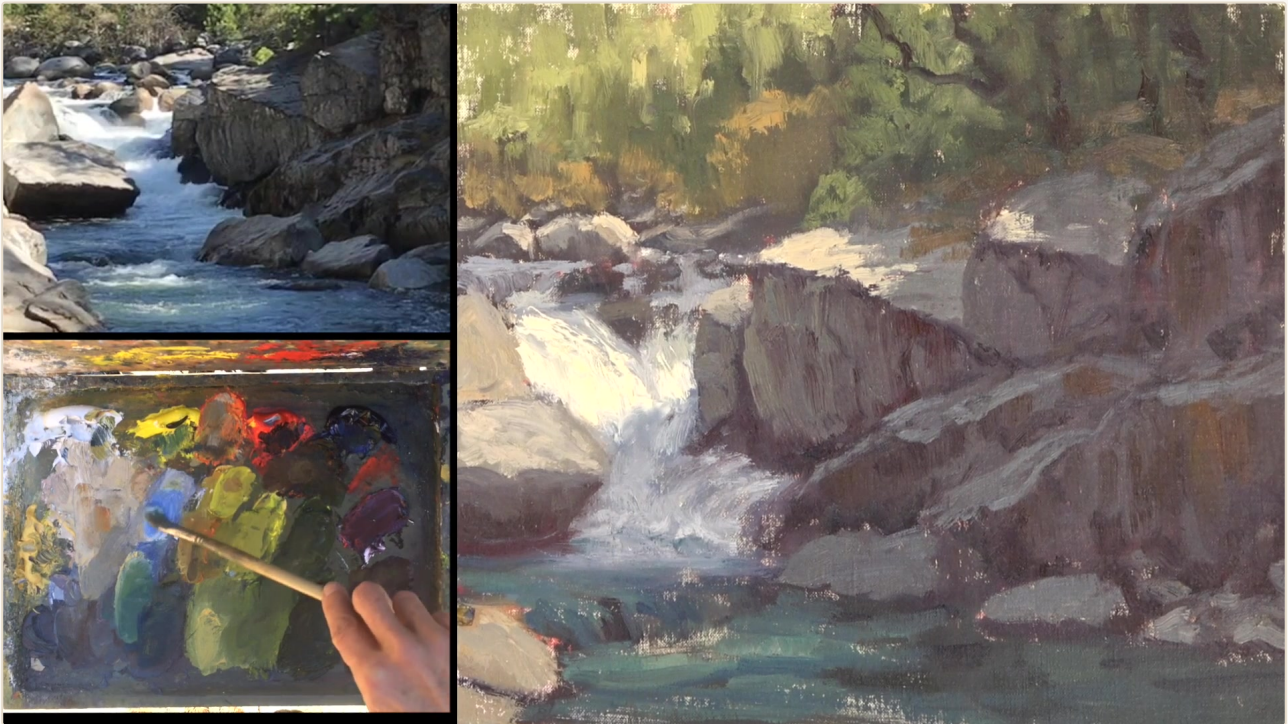
Enhance Saturation

Identify areas in the water where you can add more saturation. This will bring out the beauty of the scene and balance the colors throughout the painting.

PRO TIP

Use ultramarine blue with cadmium lemon to achieve a beautiful blue-green indicative of Sierra waters.

41 Capturing Water Movement



Mix Foam Colors

Combine white and blue with a touch of yellow and gray to create the foam color. Adjust the value slightly higher to achieve the desired effect.

Scumble the Foam

Allow your brush to scumble lightly across the canvas. This will create a natural, imperfect look that suggests the movement of water.

Indicate Water Direction

Use the direction of your brush strokes to show the flow of the water. This helps convey the movement and energy of the scene.

Add Detail with a Smaller Brush

Use a smaller brush to add a few marks where the water pulls across the boulders. These details enhance the realism of the water's movement.

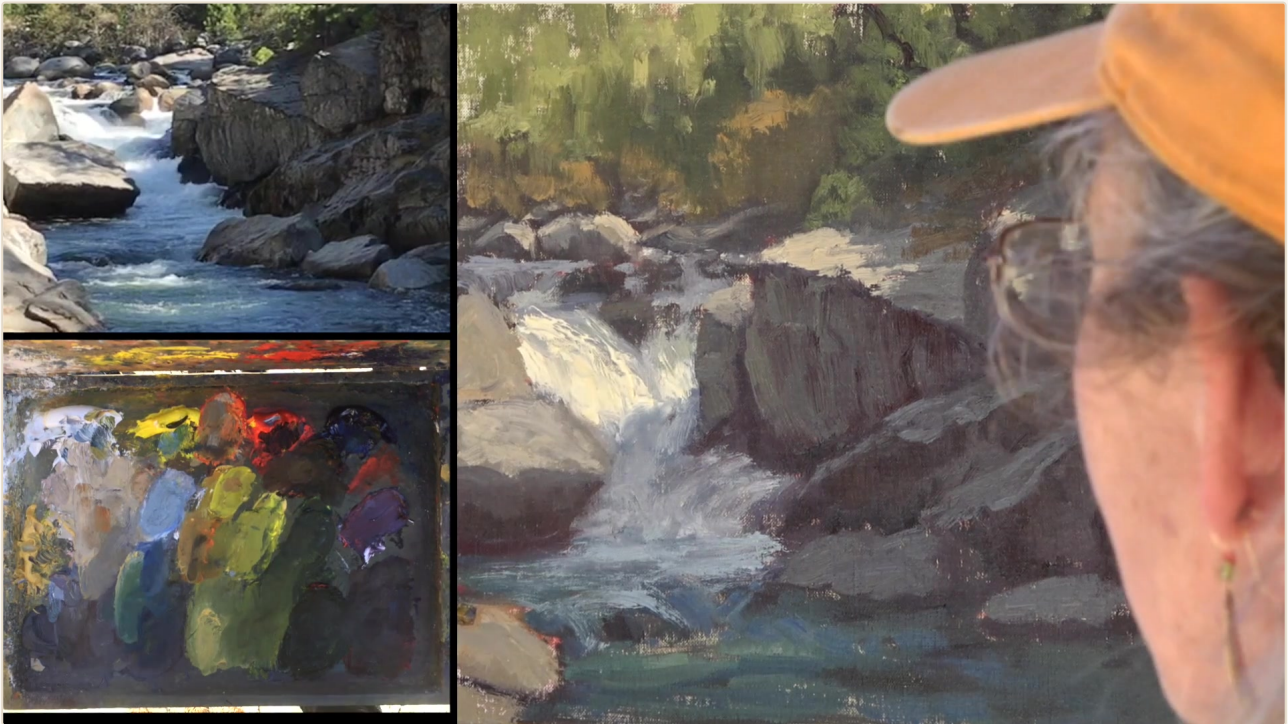
Capture Sky Reflections

Mix a lighter ultramarine to depict where the water reflects the sky. This adds a beautiful touch and captures the natural colors in the scene.

PRO TIP

Use brush strokes to indicate the direction of water flow, enhancing the sense of movement.

42 Final Adjustments and Assessment



Add a Lighter Layer

Apply a slightly lighter layer of paint, focusing on areas that have a greenish-yellow hue. These areas are partially in shadow but are beginning to catch some sunlight. Keep this layer a bit darker than the final highlights to maintain depth.

Highlight the Foreground

Use a mixture of Naples yellow and white to create your lightest light. Gently apply this to the part of the foreground that catches the light. Be cautious not to extend this highlight too far down the painting to maintain balance.

Assess Your Work

Step back and evaluate the overall effect of the added highlights. Ensure that the light placement enhances the composition without overpowering other elements.

PRO TIP

Be patient and avoid adding highlights too early to maintain depth and contrast.

43 Taking a Break and Using a Mirror



Take a Break

When you reach the end of your painting session, put your brush down and take a break. This pause allows you to return with fresh eyes and a new perspective.

Use a Mirror for Fresh Perspective

Stand with your back to the painting and use a small pocket mirror to view your work. Close one eye and look at the painting in the mirror to see it as a new image. This can reveal aspects you hadn't noticed before.

Compare Scene and Painting

Position the mirror to capture both the scene and your painting in the same frame. Bounce your gaze between the two to identify areas needing adjustment, such as shapes that are too similar.

PRO TIP

Use a mirror to view your painting as a new image, revealing unnoticed details.

44 Final Outdoor Touches



Adjust Rock Angles

Change the angle of the rock so it doesn't point in the same direction as the other rock. This variation adds interest and avoids uniformity.

Enhance Waterfall Light

Load your brush with warm white and Naples yellow. Pull the sunlight further down the waterfall to show more action and vibrancy.

Squint for Clarity

Remember to squint at your painting, especially towards the end. This helps you see the values and contrasts more clearly, preventing fatigue from affecting your judgment.

Know When to Stop

Resist the urge to overwork your painting. Recognize when it's time to stop to preserve the freshness and spontaneity of your work.

PRO TIP

Squint at your painting to better judge values and contrasts, especially when you're tired.

45 Back in the Studio



Assess Your Painting Away from the Scene

Take your painting back to the studio to evaluate it without the influence of the original scene. This helps you judge the painting as a standalone work of art, free from the emotions and distractions of the outdoor environment.

Critique and Improve

Look at your painting critically and identify areas that could be improved. Remember, the goal is to make the painting work as a piece of art on its own, not just as a representation of the scene.

Alter and Enhance

Make necessary changes to enhance the painting. Use the elements of nature to your advantage and adjust them to create a compelling artwork that stands independently.

PRO TIP

Evaluate your painting in the studio to ensure it works as a standalone piece of art.

46 Critiquing and Improving Paintings

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

DESIGN



Wait for the Painting to Dry

Allow your painting to dry completely before making any changes. Working on a wet painting can lead to irreversible mistakes and loss of valuable information from your original work.

Oil Up the Painting

Apply a coat of Liquin or Oleo Gel over the dry painting. This creates a barrier between the original paint and any new changes, allowing you to work directly into the wet medium.

Make Changes with Confidence

Use the oiled surface to make changes to your painting. If a change doesn't work, simply wipe it off to return to the original state. This approach encourages experimentation and improvement.

Learn from Every Painting

Even if a painting seems like a failure, use it as an opportunity to learn and improve. Attempt changes and see if you can transform it into something satisfactory.

PRO TIP

Always oil up a dry painting before making changes to ensure you can easily revert any unwanted adjustments.

47 Taking Chances with Paintings



Critique Your Painting

Evaluate your painting by examining each category such as design and values. This helps identify areas for improvement and enhances your learning process.

Assess the Design

Check the design of your painting for balance and flow. Ensure there is a lead-in that guides the viewer's eye through the painting, and maintain an imbalance of light and dark to avoid a 50-50 split.

Adjust the Values

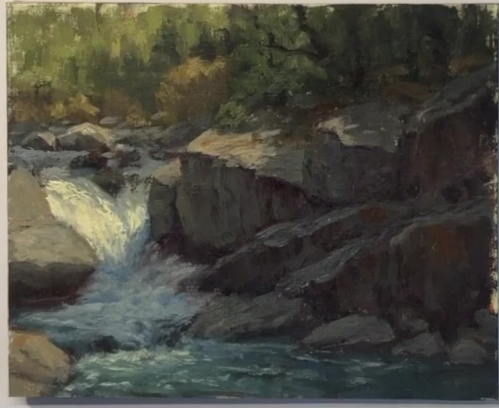
Identify areas that may be too dark, especially if painted outdoors in bright sunlight. Add a little more light to these areas, like the side of cliffs, to provide more definition while keeping them within the shadow family.

PRO TIP

Avoid a 50-50 balance of light and shadow in your painting for a more dynamic composition.

48 Critique Criteria and Changes

VALUES



Adjust Tree Edges

Lighten the edges of the trees in the background slightly. Experiment to see if the painting can handle this change without losing its balance.

Enhance Aspen Colors

Increase the saturation of the orange in the distant aspens. This will help connect the light areas and enhance the overall vibrancy of the painting.

Highlight Cliff Faces

Push the orange color on the cliff faces to make it more apparent. Be careful not to fracture the cliff face too much, but aim to distribute the orange throughout the painting for visual interest.

Add Foreground Color

Consider adding more color saturation in the foreground. Be cautious not to place too much interest near the edges or corners to avoid creating tension.

Evaluate Edges

Review the balance between hard and soft edges. If the balance is satisfactory, no further adjustments are needed.

Assess Paint Quality

Check the balance of thick and thin paint textures. If the current texture is pleasing, maintain it, but expect some texture changes when adding light.

Capture the Day's Feel

Reflect on whether the painting captures the essence of the day. Aim for the painting to transport you back to the scene with its atmosphere and mood.

PRO TIP

Avoid placing elements of high interest near the edges or corners to prevent visual tension.

49 Adjusting Shadows and Edges



Adjust Shadow Areas

Mix the color previously used for the cliff face. Add a touch of your darkest dark, combining red and blue, with a hint of yellow to reduce the purple hue. Lightly scumble this mix over the shadow areas to enhance definition.

Refine Edges

Clean up the edges of the painting, especially where clips may have left marks. Ensure the edges of the rock are defined without losing their form.

Bounce Light into Dark Areas

Add a bit of light to areas that appear too dark to suggest form. Use a slightly lighter color to prevent these areas from feeling lost.

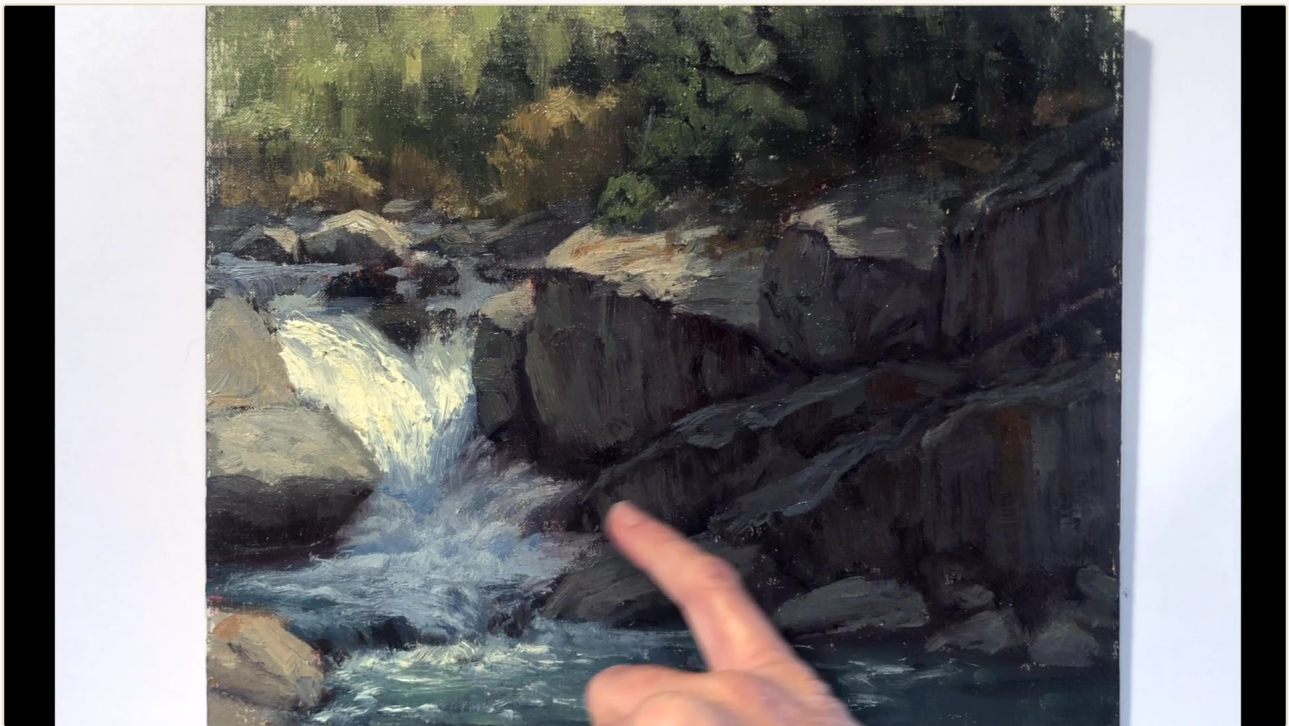
Use a Softer Brush for Subtle Adjustments

Switch to a slightly softer brush, like a Rosemary long flat, for subtle scumbling. This allows for gentle adjustments without picking up too much paint.

PRO TIP

Scumbling involves lightly dragging your brush over existing paint to allow some of the underlying color to show through.

50 Subtle Adjustments



Soften Edges

Gently soften an edge if it appears too harsh. Be careful not to overwork the area, as subtlety is key to maintaining the painting's balance.

Assess from a Distance

Step back from your painting and assess it from a distance. This perspective helps identify any distracting elements, such as continuous lines that need breaking up.

Make Subtle Adjustments

Consider making small, subtle adjustments to your painting. These tiny changes can sometimes have a significant impact, so experiment with adding light or small details to see how they alter the composition.

Evaluate Changes

After making a subtle change, evaluate its effect on the painting. If a change is too drastic, like adding too much light, it can disrupt the intended shadow or balance.

PRO TIP

Step back frequently to assess your painting from a distance, ensuring subtle adjustments enhance rather than detract from the composition.

51 Enhancing Color Saturation



Saturate with Orange and Gray

Mix a little orange with some gray to saturate the color in the area. Add more gray to prevent the color from becoming too intense. This combination will help enhance the color without overwhelming it.

Adjust Value with Naples

Introduce some Naples yellow to the mix to bring the value higher. This will help create a more vibrant and lively appearance in the painting.

Create an Intermediate Tone

Mix the orange with the light orange and add more gray to create an intermediate tone. This step helps to add form and depth to the trees by bridging the light and dark areas.

Refine with Gamsol

Apply a tiny bit of Gamsol to lift and refine the area. This technique allows for subtle adjustments and helps achieve the desired effect.

Define with Gray and Naples

Use gray mixed with Naples yellow to add more definition to the trees in the background. Ensure the mix is slightly lighter to maintain balance and let the canvas tone contribute to the sunlight effect.

PRO TIP

Mix gray into your colors to control saturation and prevent them from becoming too intense.

52 Refining Foreground and Details



Refine Foreground Details

Focus on defining the foreground with more precision. Use a slightly darker tone to add depth and correct any areas that feel too light. Be patient and make subtle changes to enhance the painting's overall impact.

Adjust Color Balance

Remove any excess blue if it dominates the composition. Introduce a tiny bit more orange to balance the colors and add warmth. Layer darker tones if needed to achieve the desired contrast.

Create Random Patterns

Barely touch the surface with your brush to leave small amounts of paint. Move the brush back and forth to create a random pattern, allowing the brush to naturally distribute the paint.

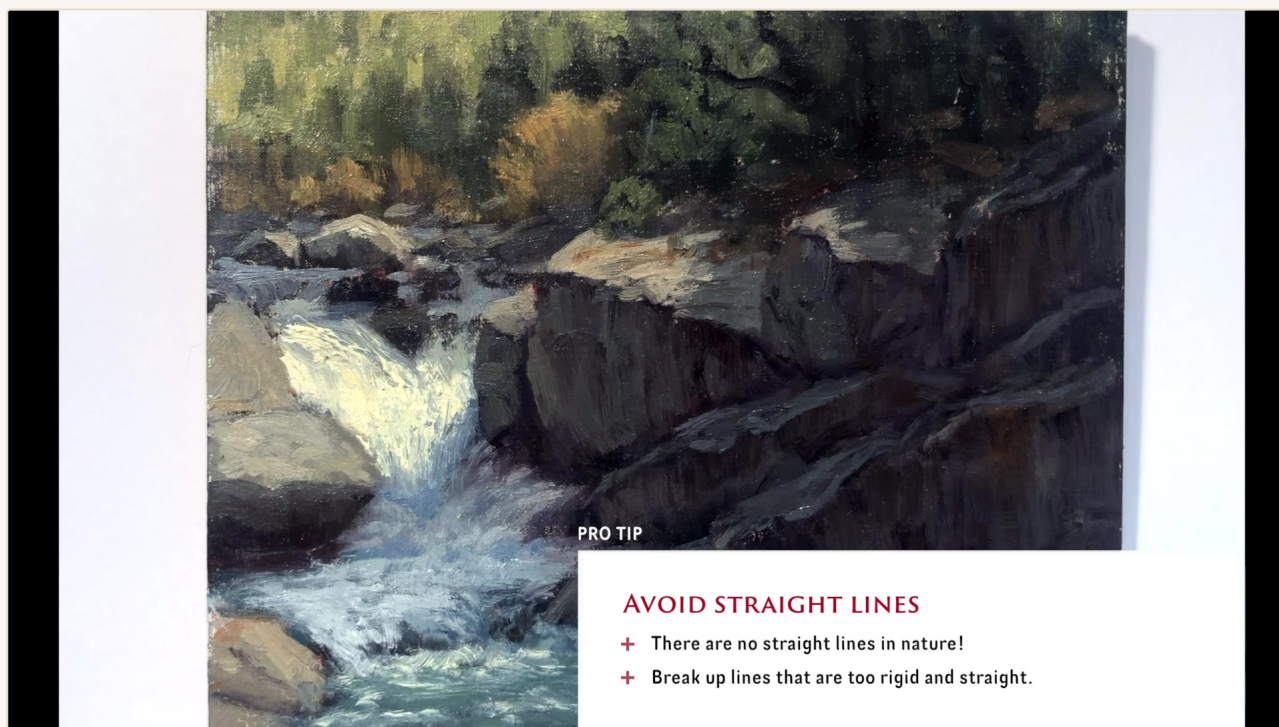
Correct Distracting Lines

Identify any straight or distracting lines that disrupt the composition. Gently cover these lines to integrate them into the painting, ensuring they don't draw unnecessary attention.

PRO TIP

Barely touch the surface with your brush to create random patterns and let the brush naturally distribute the paint.

53 Final Touches and Mirror Check



Enhance Foreground Colors

Add brighter and slightly more saturated colors to the foreground. Mix blue and white with cadmium lemon and a touch of Naples yellow to achieve this effect. This will add vibrancy and depth to the scene.

Adjust Distracting Dark Areas

Identify any dark areas that draw too much attention. Bring the values closer together by smoothing transitions and softening edges. This will help maintain focus on the intended focal points.

Add Shine to the Water

Apply a tiny bit of paint to add shine and action to the water. Drag your brush lightly to let small pieces of paint come off, enhancing the dynamic quality of the scene.

Refine Bottom Right Corner

Focus on the bottom right corner, adding a bit of blue and white to suggest foam. Keep it in shadow with a bluer, darker tone compared to the rest of the water.

Perform a Mirror Check

Step back and look at your painting in a mirror. This will help you spot areas that need adjustment, such as overly dark rocks. Make necessary corrections to balance the composition.

PRO TIP

Use a mirror to view your painting from a fresh perspective and identify areas that may need adjustment.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by carefully selecting your palette colors. Start with the primary colors—yellow, red, and blue—along with titanium white for versatility. Enhance your palette with cheater colors like Naples Yellow Deep and Cold Gray to subtly adjust warmth and saturation. As you mix your darkest darks and secondary colors, remember to keep your palette organized and clean for vibrant results.

As you progress, explore the nuances of color mixing by adjusting temperature and value. Use complementary colors to tone down overly vibrant hues and experiment with a limited palette to discover new color combinations. This practice not only simplifies your process but also enhances your understanding of color harmony. When painting outdoors, ensure you have the right tools and setup, including a toned canvas and a stable umbrella, to create a conducive painting environment.

Finally, capture the essence of your chosen scene by sketching thumbnails and making detailed observations. Use these sketches to refine your composition and focus on the elements that captivate you most. By transferring your design thoughtfully onto the canvas, you ensure that your painting reflects the unique beauty of the scene. Remember, each step in this journey is an opportunity to deepen your skills and express your artistic vision.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Always carry your primary colors and titanium white for a versatile palette.
- Use Naples Yellow Deep to add warmth and lightness without altering saturation.
- Clean your palette knife between mixes to keep colors vibrant.
- Use the complement color to tone down overly vibrant greens.
- Experiment with a limited palette to discover new color combinations.
- Tone your canvas with acrylic paint to prevent wiping down to white.
- Secure your umbrella to prevent your easel from tipping over.
- Use thumbnails to explore different compositions before painting.



Stanislaus River Resource Photo