



Pa Beach

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/126-Pa-Beach>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we'll embark on an exciting journey to capture the serene beauty of Pa Beach. This scene is a perfect introduction to landscape painting, offering a delightful mix of elements that will challenge and inspire you. As we begin, you'll learn to block in the dark areas, which is crucial for establishing the composition and guiding the placement of other elements. Our focus will be on painting the water and beach areas first, as these are the heart of the scene. The glowing quality of the beach is a key feature that adds vibrancy and life to your painting, and I'll guide you step by step to capture that essence. Whether you follow along closely or use the resource photo to infuse your own creativity, this lesson will help you develop your skills and confidence. The tranquil charm of Pa Beach makes it a rewarding subject, and by the end of this chapter, you'll have a stunning piece of art that reflects both the scene's beauty and your personal touch.



Studio Painting 30x40" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson



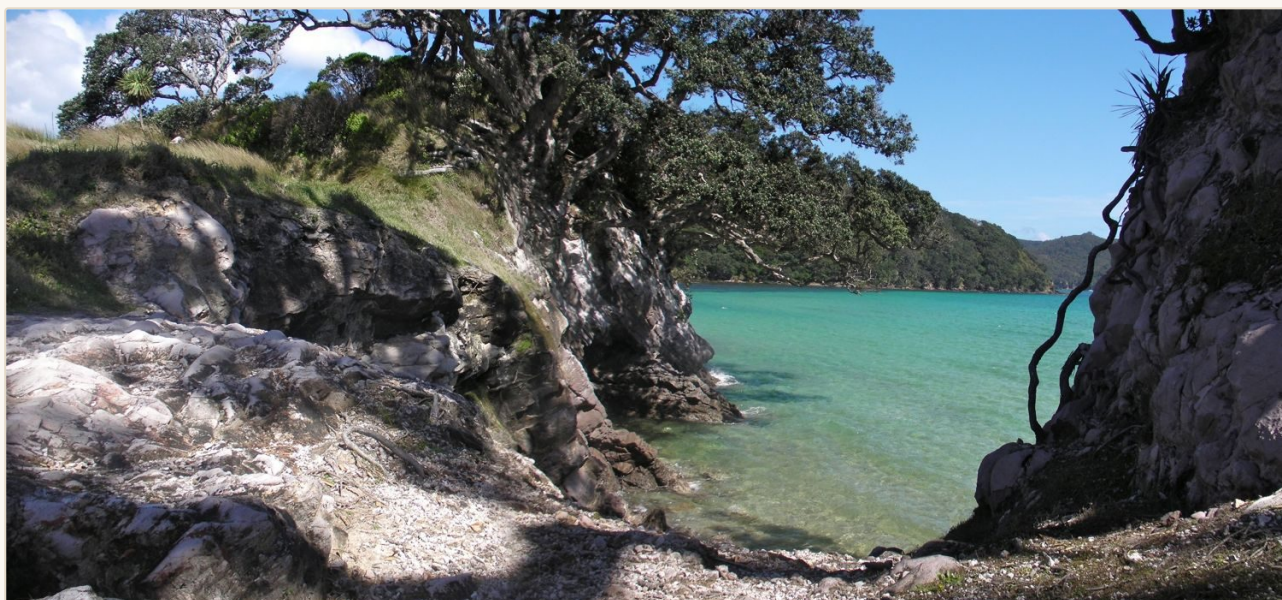
REFERENCE PHOTO 1

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.

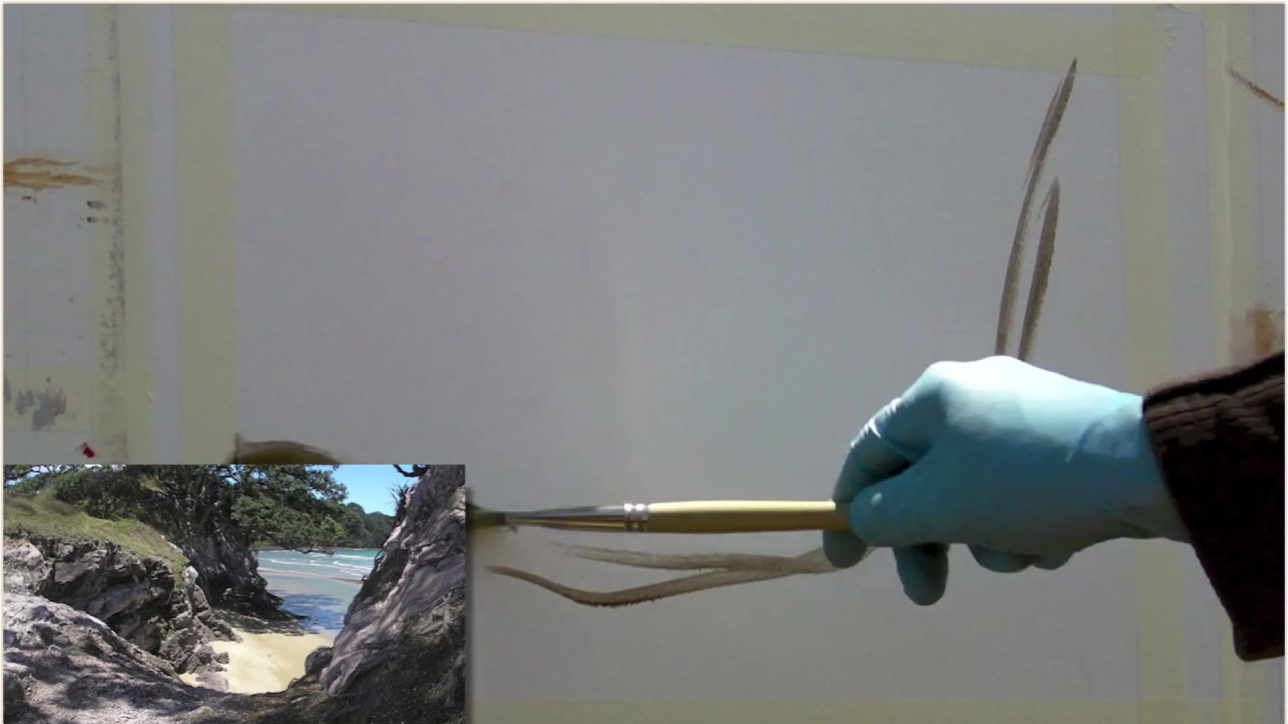
Materials

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 Blocking in Main Elements



Block in Dark Areas

Begin by lightly blocking in the dark areas of the scene. This will help you establish the composition and guide the placement of other elements.

Paint Water and Beach First

Focus on painting the water and beach areas first. Capture the glowing quality of the beach, as it is a key feature of the scene and adds vibrancy to your painting.

PRO TIP

Start with the dark areas to establish the composition before adding other elements.

2 Painting the Water and Beach



Create the Water Gradient

Begin by mixing a green-blue color for the shallow water. Apply this at the top of the water area on your canvas. Gradually blend this into sand colors as you move downward, transitioning smoothly to the dry beach color.

Add Details

Once the gradient is established, add details on top of it. Focus on capturing the subtle variations and textures that give the water and beach their character.

PRO TIP

Ensure a smooth transition from the green-blue water to the sand colors for a realistic gradient effect.

3 Plein Air Painting Strategy



Focus on Big Shapes

Concentrate on capturing the big shapes and color blocks first. This approach helps manage time effectively and ensures the painting's foundation is strong.

Add Details Later

If time permits, add details after establishing the main shapes. This strategy allows for flexibility under challenging conditions.

PRO TIP

Prioritize large color shapes over details to maintain focus and efficiency in plein air painting.

4 Artistic Decision on Distant Hills



Enhance Distant Hills

Lighten and add a touch of blue to the distant hills. This will push them further back into space, creating a greater sense of depth in your painting. By doing so, the foreground tree will stand out more prominently, capturing the viewer's attention.

PRO TIP

Lighten and cool distant hills to enhance depth and foreground focus.

5 Mixing Colors and Covering Canvas



Assess Color Temperature

Consider whether the color you're mixing should be warmer or cooler than the adjacent color area. This will help create a harmonious transition between colors.

Determine Lightness or Darkness

Decide if the color should be lighter or darker than the surrounding colors. This contrast will add depth and interest to your painting.

Cover the Canvas Quickly

Focus on covering the entire canvas with color as quickly as possible. This base layer will make it easier to adjust and match colors later on.

PRO TIP

Cover the whole canvas with color first to simplify matching colors.

6 Avoiding Detail Early On



Focus on Large Areas First

Prioritize applying color to large areas before getting caught up in details. This helps establish the overall composition and balance of the painting.

Avoid Early Detailing

Resist the temptation to add details too soon. Concentrate on broad strokes and color blocks to maintain a cohesive look.

PRO TIP

Concentrate on large color areas to set the foundation before adding details.

7 Dealing with Reflected Light and Shadows



Observe the Scene

Keep your eyes unfocused or blurred when observing the scene. This helps you see the overall light and shadow patterns without being misled by the bright light.

Take Color Notes

Look at the entire scene in one glance to take accurate color notes. This approach prevents incorrect color perception caused by focusing too closely on the shadows.

PRO TIP

Avoid peering directly into shadows to maintain accurate color perception.

8 Challenges with Cast Shadows on Rocks



Understand the Challenge

Recognize that painting cast shadows on rocks can be complex due to the organic forms of the rocks. The shadows can distort the perception of the rock's shape, making it a challenging subject.

Plan Your Approach

Prepare to tackle this challenge by pre-mixing the colors you will use for the rocks. This preparation helps maintain consistency and clarity in your painting.

PRO TIP

Pre-mix your rock colors to simplify the process of painting cast shadows on them.

9 Excluding Distracting Light



Exclude Distracting Light

Identify the light in the top left corner that distracts from the center of interest. Block it out by painting over it with a darker color. Make sure to keep it less distinct to maintain focus on the main subject.

PRO TIP

Darken distracting areas to keep the viewer's attention on the center of interest.

10 Reflected Light and Glowing Effect



Consider Reflected Light

Observe the reflected light from the sky on the rocks. Notice how the shadow changes color where less sky is reflected, resulting in a darker, warmer grey.

Create a Glowing Effect

Lighten the edge of the hill and the distant hill behind it. This helps push the hills further back into space and enhances the glowing effect from the sky. Keep the edges soft to aid in receding the hills visually.

PRO TIP

Lighten edges and keep them soft to enhance the glowing effect and create depth.

11 Adding Greenery and Color Notes



Add Greenery to the Hill

Enhance the hill's surface by adding greenery. Focus on the top left corner, using varied green tones to create depth and interest. Remember that each color note you add should harmonize with the existing colors, much like a symphony.

PRO TIP

Think of your painting as a symphony, where each color note complements and enhances the others.

12 Painting Dark and Light Accents



Paint Dark Accents

Apply a dark paint over the previous layers, which should be fairly thin. Reload the brush every three or four strokes to maintain the dark intensity.

Clean the Brush

Clean the brush thoroughly before reloading it with dark paint to avoid mixing with the previous layers. This prevents creating a mid-grey mess.

Paint Light Accents

Apply light paint over dark areas carefully. Avoid excessive brushwork to prevent the colors from mixing into a grey tone.

PRO TIP

Always clean your brush before reloading with new paint to maintain color purity.

13 Struggles with Detail Due to Wind



Embrace Natural Movement

Allow the wind to guide your brushwork, embracing the natural movement it creates. This can add a dynamic and lively quality to your painting, especially when capturing elements like the wriggly branches of the behutakawa trees.

Focus on General Forms

Concentrate on capturing the general forms and shapes rather than fine details. This approach will help you adapt to the challenges posed by the wind and still achieve a cohesive composition.

PRO TIP

Use the wind to your advantage by letting it create natural, dynamic brushstrokes.

14 Separating Rock Faces with Color



Add Reflected Skylight

Apply reflected skylight on the top of the rocks in shadow. This will create a natural light effect and enhance the realism of the scene.

Separate Rock Faces with Color Temperature

Make the foreground rock face cooler in color. Use warmer tones for the mid-ground rock face to create a sense of depth and separation between the two areas.

Use Light Accents for Delineation

Add a light accent with a sharp edge between the rock faces. This will help clearly delineate and define the spaces, enhancing the overall composition.

PRO TIP

Use color temperature to create depth and separation between elements.

15 Strengthening Colors and Brush Technique



Strengthen Water Colors

Enhance the colors in the water to balance the strong colors in the grasses on the left. Use more vibrant hues to achieve this effect.

Steady Your Hand

Use the palette to steady your hand when you need a crisp edge on the rock. This technique helps maintain precision and control.

Apply Chunky Paint

Apply chunky paint where you want the viewer's eye to focus. This creates a focal point with texture and interest.

Mix Paint with Texture

When mixing paint on the palette, avoid over-mixing to leave streaks of color. These streaks add interest and variety to your brushstrokes on the canvas.

PRO TIP

Use the palette to steady your hand for precise edges.

16 Final Details and Finishing Touches



Add Dark Accents

Use dark accents to separate the middle cliff from the distant cliff. Simplify the scene to make it easier for the viewer to understand the composition.

Apply Final Details

Use a palette knife to add a few crisp details to the painting. Steady your hand to ensure precision and clarity in these final touches.

Remove the Tape

Carefully remove the tape from the edges of the painting. This will frame the artwork neatly and enhance its presentation.

PRO TIP

Use a palette knife for crisp, precise details in the final stages of your painting.

17 Plein Air Painting Reflection



Evaluate Your Finished Painting

Examine your completed painting and assess whether you have captured the powerful colors you aimed for. Consider the effects of environmental factors, like wind, on your brushwork. Reflect on the overall outcome and identify aspects you are pleased with.

PRO TIP

Assess how environmental conditions, such as wind, may affect your brushwork and adjust your technique accordingly.

18 Studio Painting Preparation



Gather Reference Materials

Collect all your plein air paintings, photos, and videos of the scene you wish to paint. These materials will serve as your reference for the larger studio painting.

Import and Compare

Import your plein air paintings and photographs into Photoshop. Compare them to evaluate colors and compositions, ensuring you have a comprehensive view of the scene.

Make Adjustments

Use Photoshop to make any necessary color corrections or adjustments. Experiment with different ideas to refine your vision for the larger painting.

PRO TIP

Use digital tools to explore and refine your ideas before starting the larger painting.

19 Studio Painting Process and Adjustments



Prepare the Canvas

Tone the canvas with acrylic to create a uniform base. Carefully sketch your composition with pencil, ensuring the layout is just right.

Establish Values

Identify and paint the darkest darks and lightest lights on your canvas. This will help you set the tonal range for the rest of the painting.

Fill Large Areas

Begin filling in the large areas of color across the canvas. Cover the entire surface to establish the overall color scheme.

Adjust the Cliff

If a part of your painting, like the cliff, appears too dominant, consider subduing it. Use a glowing light effect from the sky to tone down the dark area, balancing the composition.

PRO TIP

Use a glowing light effect to subdue overly dominant dark areas in your painting.

20 Achieving Glowing Light Effect



Create a Glowing Sky

Paint the sky with a glowing blue area to suggest it as a light source. Use a soft blending technique to ensure the glow appears natural and diffused.

Infuse Warm Yellow Light

Apply a warm yellow light to the objects around the beach. This will give the impression that they are illuminated by the sun, enhancing the overall warmth of the scene.

Add a Golden Glow to the Hill

Use golden tones to paint the grassy hill, making it appear as though it emits a soft, warm glow. This will add depth and richness to the landscape.

PRO TIP

Present large sunlit areas as light sources to create a cohesive and luminous effect in your painting.

21 Improving Foreground Rocks



Pre-Mix Your Colors

Prepare your palette by pre-mixing the colors needed for the rocks. Consider the direction each plane of the rock is facing to determine if it should be warm or cool, light or dark.

Identify Warm Planes

Identify the planes of the rock that are directly hit by warm sunlight. Use warm colors for these areas, and apply darker warm tones in shadows where they are tilted towards sunlit areas or sand reflecting warm colors.

Identify Cool Planes

For planes turned away from the sun or towards the sky, use cool dark colors. These areas reflect the blue sky, adding a cooler tone to the shadows.

PRO TIP

Pre-mix your colors based on the direction of light and shadow to effectively capture the rock's planes.

22 Final Adjustments and Water Effects



Add Grasses for Variation

Introduce some grasses into the foreground to create variations in the grey area. This will help link the foreground with the midground, enhancing depth and interest.

Tidy Up Details

Refine any areas that need attention to ensure a cohesive composition. Focus on smoothing transitions and correcting any distracting elements.

Paint Shallow Water Effects

Create a gradual color change from the horizon to the shore. This transition reflects the sky near the horizon and reveals the sandy bottom near the shore.

Consider Water Elements

Incorporate land reflections, wind lines, swells, waves, and foam into the water. Also, add the cast shadow of the tree and the glow from the beach to enrich the scene.

PRO TIP

Ensure a gradual color change in the water to reflect both the sky and the sandy bottom.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by establishing the composition with a focus on the main elements, such as the glowing beach and vibrant water. Begin with broad strokes and large color areas to set a strong foundation. This approach will guide you through the complexities of plein air painting, helping you capture the essence of the scene efficiently.

As you progress, pay attention to the interplay of light and shadow, using color temperature to create depth and separation between elements like distant hills and foreground rocks. Embrace the natural elements, such as wind, to add dynamic movement to your brushwork, and use pre-mixed colors to maintain consistency and clarity.

In the final stages, refine your painting by adding precise details and enhancing the overall composition. Use digital tools to explore and refine your ideas for studio work, ensuring a cohesive and luminous effect. Remember to let each color note harmonize like a symphony, bringing your painting to life with depth and vibrancy.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Start with dark areas to establish composition.
- Ensure smooth transitions from water to sand colors.
- Prioritize large color shapes over details in plein air.
- Lighten and cool distant hills to enhance depth.
- Cover the whole canvas with color first.
- Avoid peering directly into shadows for accurate color perception.
- Pre-mix rock colors for consistent shadow painting.
- Use a palette knife for crisp, precise details.



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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.

"Pa Bay Great Barrier Island" by Barbara Stucki



"Pa Bay Great Barrier Island" Water Soluble Oil on Stretch Canvas 18x24 by Barbara Stucki

Design

I like the design which is quite close to my own studio painting design except that with mine I was careful to add colour interest into all that gray foreground - something that you haven't managed to do which makes the whole foreground look a bit like a desolate moonscape. So the grayscale design itself is good and strong but it would work better with more colour interest in the foreground.

Colour

That foreground gray would look better with more variation thrown in - like a good salad, lots of colour is yummy. You've tentatively added some warms in there but before you go adding colour in there willy nilly you need to understand where and why the colour variations occur. In my own painting I was concentrating on warm planes and cool planes. Warm planes occur where the warm sunlight hits them directly. Darker warm planes occur where they are tilted towards sunlit areas of rock or sand which are reflecting their own warm colours into the shadows. Cool dark planes occur where they are turned to the sky or away from the sun, reflecting the blue of the sky. The tree could do with some light thrown on it and the hill behind could have been pushed further back in space by lightening and adding gray/blue to help separate the tree from the background.

Brushwork

You've used a variety of large and small brushes which is good to see and you've created some interesting texture in the rocks. The water seems to be a little overworked as does the sky and furthest hill, removing

most evidence of brushstrokes which takes a bit of the interest out of it. Some waves or wind lines in the water would have helped to add interest there and softening the edges of your distant hill and clouds would have helped push them even further back into space.

Realism

Except for the few things I've mentioned the realism is pretty good in this piece. The dappled light over the rocks is such a complex subject you've done well to try to paint that at all whereas some people avoided it altogether. You haven't quite managed to convey the effect of a tree casting a shadow - the shadows need to be linked together the same way a tree is linked together. Good try though, and hey, I didn't manage it even in my studio painting either which I spent a week on. The cast shadow on the water is a bit conspicuous too - it should be bluer and the shape larger, because it looks like it's not quite sure if it should be there, and the white foam isn't helping either because it should be a blue grey in the shadow there. Those are pretty minor things though. Good work.

"The Kiwi Christmas Tree" by Bob Mitchener



"The Kiwi Christmas Tree" Acrylic on canvas panel. 12x16" by Bob Mitchener

Design

Really nice design here Bob - I love the lead in you've created with the large rocks, the positioning of the sun and even the curving wave echoing the other major movements. Couple of minor things I would personally have changed would be the tree kissing the top of the painting and the flax plant cut in half at the right edge. I like to make sure major elements are purposefully in or out of the picture edge - not kissing it which draws the eye to the edge of the painting. You've achieved a nice balance with plenty of movement which is the main thing with this scene.

Colour

The high key approach you've taken here has added to the sense of peace which is enhanced by the glowing light effect you've added into the sky and tree. Although you've pushed the colour in some areas you've managed to balance those with large areas of grays so the painting hasn't become gaudy, so good work there too. In the water you've achieved a good subtle colour gradation towards the sky but it seems there's a little colour information missing in the foreground water that would account for reflections of the cliffs and transparency through to the sand beneath the shallows. Missing those small colour hints results in the water looking a little plastic. On the whole it's very pleasing colour work.

Brushwork

Your brushwork is strong and deliberate which is a pleasure to see with a rich variety of marks and textures. I particularly like your use of dry brush and will make a note to explore that more in my own work.

Realism

You've really made this scene your own and it's clear you've been painting for a good long time and have developed techniques and symbols for dealing with different subjects. There are only a couple of things really hindering the realism here that I can see and those are the somewhat symbolic drawing of the tree and the lack of a strong shadow concept. By that I mean that yes you have creating a clear position for the sun but it's not backed up consistently by the placement of your shadows. For instance there should be a deep shadow area under the tree and also a shadow cast upon the water. Some of the rock groupings seem to be too light for their position, so you've achieved a high key painting by doing that and an interesting surface but sacrificed a powerful sense of solidity. Concentrating more on your shadow areas will also help unite your masses and strengthen your overall notan design (dark/light design) which is currently a bit fragmented. On the whole it's a great painting though and I hope my comments have been more helpful than critical.

"NZ Beach" by Catherine Spencer-Whitehead



"NZ Beach" 14x11" Acrylic on Canvas by Catherine Spencer-Whitehead

Design

I like how you have simplified this scene Catherine and made a somewhat symbolic or iconic artwork. The path to the beach is a bold addition which gives the painting some narrative. The top of the cliff on the right was somewhat problematic in the photo but you have solved that nicely with a tree which also helps to balance the main tree. I think that a shadow across the foreground would have helped to unite the two patches of foreground grass and also would have helped to shape and lend perspective to the somewhat flat path.

Colour

As with the drawing, you have simplified the colour which gives it a sort of naive charm but also reduces the amount of time it might hold a viewer's interest. If you do wish to begin adding more colour into your work you'll need to spend more time analysing the subtle colour differences found in every object and the way light is reflected from one object to another. There is not one speck of the universe which displays flat colour so let that be your guide.

Brushwork

Part of your trend to simplify has been to remove evidence of brushstrokes which again removes interest from an artwork unless other factors like detail or colour step in to take its place. What does hold my interest is the detail you've put into the tiny rocks and pebbles in the pathway which is really a delight for the eye.

Realism

There is no strong sense of light direction here - something that can be remedied with cast shadows, and again the simplified forms lead this piece away from realism, but perhaps that's not your goal. It really reminds me of Giotto's fresco work if you care to google his name. Sometimes by simplifying objects we make them grander - they become symbols of themselves.

"Pa Beach 2" by Leif Jensen



"Pa Beach 2" Acrylic on canvasboard, 65 cm x 54 cm by Leif Jensen

Design

The overall arrangement of lights and darks in this painting is interesting and organic but the colour design is what really needs looking at here.

Colour

I have actually been on a pink beach in Western Australia made up of billions of little pink shells, but it still didn't look this pink. :-) That's really pink! Perhaps you were trying to paint the foreground rocky path which leads down to the beach and yes there are some pinky tones in there, but... mmm. If you want to subdue (gray down) a colour you need to look at adding its complement (green in this case) or add a gray to it.

To get that transparent look of shallow water you need to think about changing the colour as it approaches the shore - it becomes more like the colour of the sandy bottom the closer it gets. You will see that in action in the demo video. Your greens look very much the same all round like you used a tube of green without mixing it. I can see you lightened the green a little bit in the distant headland but it's still far too green for that distance and needs to be toned down with a blue gray.

Brushwork

Good to see you trying some different paint application techniques there like spattering, thin washes, impasto and scumbling - good work! As you gain experience you'll gain confidence and that will show

through in your brushwork. I suggest you try a few simple small still life studies with a larger brush because once you get the hang of a particular subject it frees your brain to be more confident and expressive with your brushwork.

Realism

The spacing of your waves are too close together and it's making it look like a long stretch of beach is trying to squeeze itself into a small area which throws the size of everything else into question. The straight regular edge to your rock grouping on the left makes it look more like a garden wall or a damn rather than a natural scattering of rocks. Have a close look at your tree and the tree in the photo and see where your drawing differs. It's all there in front of you but when you're painting it's a case of how many balls can you juggle at once so it often helps to segment your studies into specific areas like drawing, colour, texture, form etc. Depends on your level of self discipline too of course and everyone's different thank goodness.