



Atmospheric Perspective

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/121-Atmospheric-Perspective>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we delve into the captivating world of atmospheric perspective, a crucial technique for infusing your landscape paintings with genuine depth. Join me at the breathtaking Teal Bay in Northland, New Zealand, where the natural beauty of the scene provides the perfect backdrop for our exploration. Over the course of this lesson, you'll learn how to effectively convey distance and softness, transforming your paintings into immersive experiences. We'll focus on how atmospheric perspective can make elements like distant hills appear far away and bathed in light, enhancing the overall realism and mood of your work. This rewarding subject not only challenges your skills but also enriches your understanding of how light and air interact in a landscape. With over three hours of painting instruction distilled into a concentrated 30-minute session, accompanied by comprehensive lesson notes, you'll have all the tools you need to master this technique. Let's embark on this artistic journey together and unlock the secrets of creating paintings that truly resonate with depth and atmosphere.



"Atmospheric Perspective" by Richard Robinson.



REFERENCE PHOTO

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 Importance of Atmospheric Perspective



Understand Atmospheric Perspective

Recognize that atmospheric perspective is essential for creating depth in landscape painting. It helps convey distance and softness, making elements like hills appear far away and filled with light.

PRO TIP

Use atmospheric perspective to create depth and softness in your landscape paintings.

2 Understanding Atmospheric Perspective



Recognize Atmospheric Perspective

Observe how distant objects, like hills, appear lighter and more like the color of the sky. This is due to atmospheric perspective, where distant objects seem less distinct and bluer.

Understand Light Filtering

Acknowledge that sunlight contains all colors of the spectrum. As it travels through the atmosphere, it filters out some yellow and red colors, leaving more blue and purple hues.

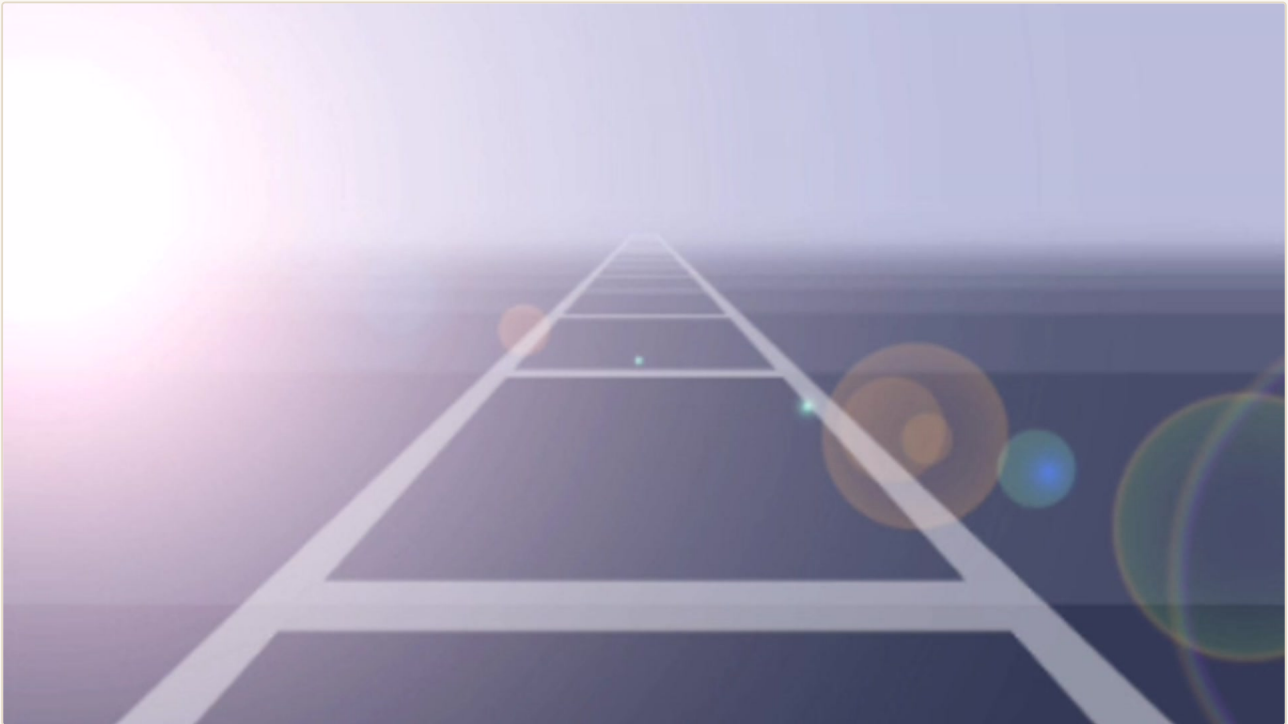
Visualize Atmospheric Layers

Imagine layers of atmosphere like veils or a series of railway tracks extending to the horizon. These layers increase in number towards the horizon, making distant objects appear lighter and less distinct.

PRO TIP

Consider the increasing atmospheric layers as you paint distant landscapes to achieve realistic depth.

3 Effect of Sun Position



Observe Sun Position

Identify the position of the sun in your scene. Notice how the light and color shift as you move your gaze away from the sun and around behind you.

Understand Atmospheric Changes

When looking towards the sun, observe that the atmospheric color becomes lighter and warmer closer to the sun. This effect influences everything in your scene, including hills, water, clouds, and birds.

Apply Atmospheric Perspective

Incorporate the lighter and warmer tones near the sun into your painting. Use this understanding to create a sense of depth and atmosphere in your work.

PRO TIP

Everything gets lighter and warmer the closer it gets to the sun in your scene.

4 Techniques for Observing Values



Use Blurred Vision

To better observe the major colors, values, and shapes in a scene, slightly cross your eyes to blur your vision. This technique helps reduce the scene to its essential elements, making it easier to understand for painting.

Understand Value Relationships

Recognize that a color's value refers to how light or dark it appears, similar to a black and white photograph. This understanding is crucial for judging value relationships in your painting.

Utilize a Value Chart

Use a value chart to train your eye to see values more accurately. This tool helps counteract the tendency of your eyes to misjudge the lightness or darkness of colors.

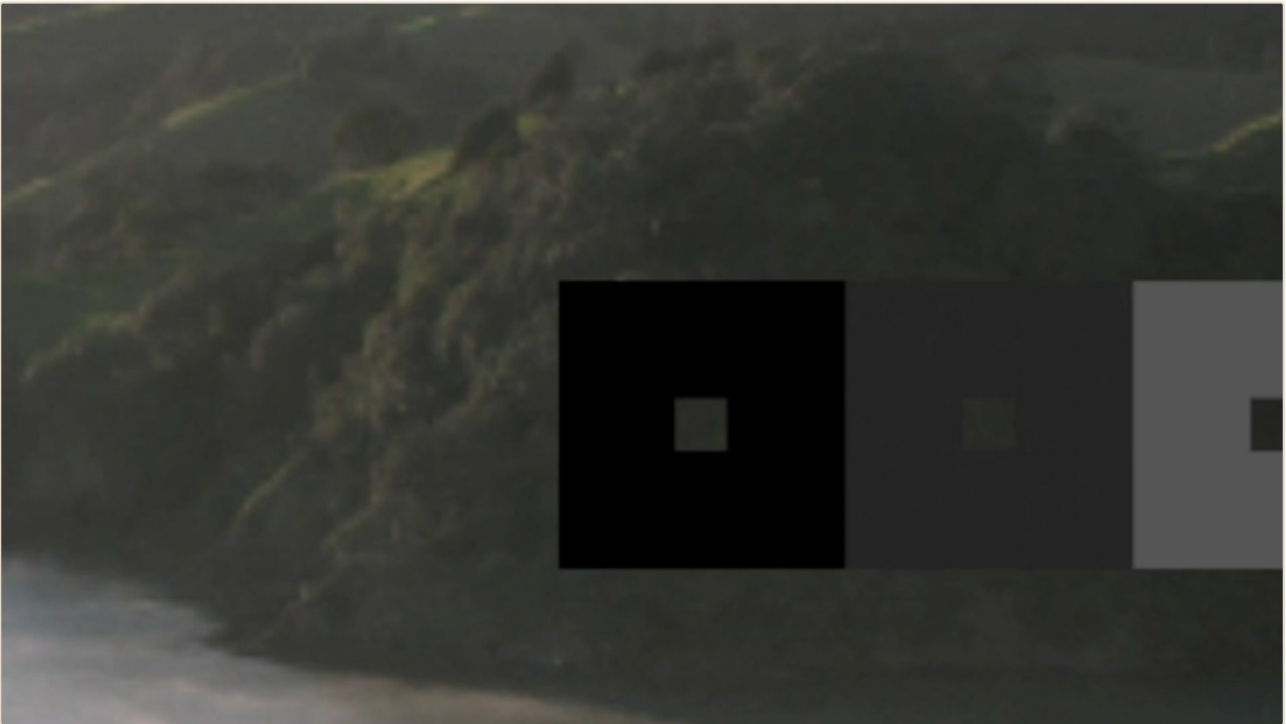
Paint On Site

Whenever possible, paint on site to gain a better understanding of light. Photography can exaggerate contrasts, making lights appear lighter and darks darker, which can lose the scene's subtleties.

PRO TIP

Use a value chart to improve your ability to judge the lightness or darkness of colors accurately.

5 Using a Value Scale



Assess Shadow Value

Use a cutout value scale to evaluate the shadowed side of the front hill. Although it may initially appear almost black, the scale will help you see it is closer to the second value. This technique enhances your ability to accurately judge values in your painting.

PRO TIP

Use a value scale to accurately assess and compare the darkness of shadowed areas in your painting.

6 Mixing Colors for Distance



Mix Colors for the First Hill

Identify the colors needed for the closest hill. Mix these colors accurately to capture the hill's natural tones.

Add Atmospheric Color for Distance

To create the effect of distance, add some atmospheric color to the mixture of the first hill. This will help simulate the appearance of the hill as it recedes into the distance.

Repeat for Further Hills

Continue adding more atmospheric color to the previous mixture for each subsequent hill. This gradual increase in atmospheric color will enhance the sense of depth and distance in your painting.

PRO TIP

Add more atmospheric color to your mixture for each hill further in the distance to create a sense of depth.

7 Preparing the Palette



Set Up Your Palette

Use a simple palette to avoid confusion and encourage color harmony. Include ultramarine blue, cadmium red medium, cadmium orange, cadmium yellow medium, and titanium white.

Mix Atmospheric Color

Create a large pile of atmospheric color, which represents the sky just above the horizon. Mix mainly white with a bit of blue and a touch of red to achieve this effect.

PRO TIP

A simple palette helps maintain color harmony in your painting.

8 Mixing Colors for the First Hill



Mix Darkest Shadow Color

Mix the darkest shadow color for the trees where no light penetrates. Ensure you prepare a larger quantity than needed, as this will be the base for subsequent colors.

Check Tone with Value Scale

Hold up your value scale to the scene to verify that the tone of your mixed color is correct. Adjust as necessary to match the scene accurately.

Mix Tree Highlight Color

Create the highlight color for the trees where the sun hits the tops. Compare this new color against the shadow color to ensure the relative tone and color are correct.

Mix Grass Colors

Mix the shadow color for the grass, followed by the highlight color. Use only two tones for the grass: one for shadow and one for highlight.

Mix Rock Colors

Prepare the shadow and highlight colors for the rock at the base of the hill. These will complete the color palette for the first hill.

PRO TIP

Use only two tones for each object outdoors: a shadow color and a highlight color, due to rapidly changing light conditions.

9 Applying Atmospheric Color



Establish the Horizon Line

Place your horizon line as a point of reference to guide the placement and size of the hills. This helps create the illusion of distance in your painting.

Mix Atmospheric Colors

Use atmospheric colors to create the colors for the next hill. Ensure these colors are slightly lighter as they recede into the distance to enhance the sense of depth.

Adjust Relative Tones

Ensure the highlight color of the grass is slightly lighter than the shadow color. This contrast is crucial for maintaining the correct tonal relationships and depth in your painting.

PRO TIP

Always start with the horizon line to maintain accurate perspective and depth.

10 Setting Up the Painting



Prepare Your Colors

Ensure you have your colors mixed and ready before starting the painting. This preparation allows you to focus on the painting process without frequent interruptions for remixing colors.

Focus on Hill Distances

Pay close attention to the distances between the bases of the hills and between the tops of the hills and the horizon. These distances are crucial for achieving a sense of depth and atmospheric perspective in your painting.

PRO TIP

Prepare your colors in advance to maintain focus and flow during the painting process.

11 Laying Down Initial Colors



Mix Atmospheric Color

Create a new pile of atmospheric color that is lighter and warmer than your initial mix. This will help your distant hills blend into the background, creating a sense of depth.

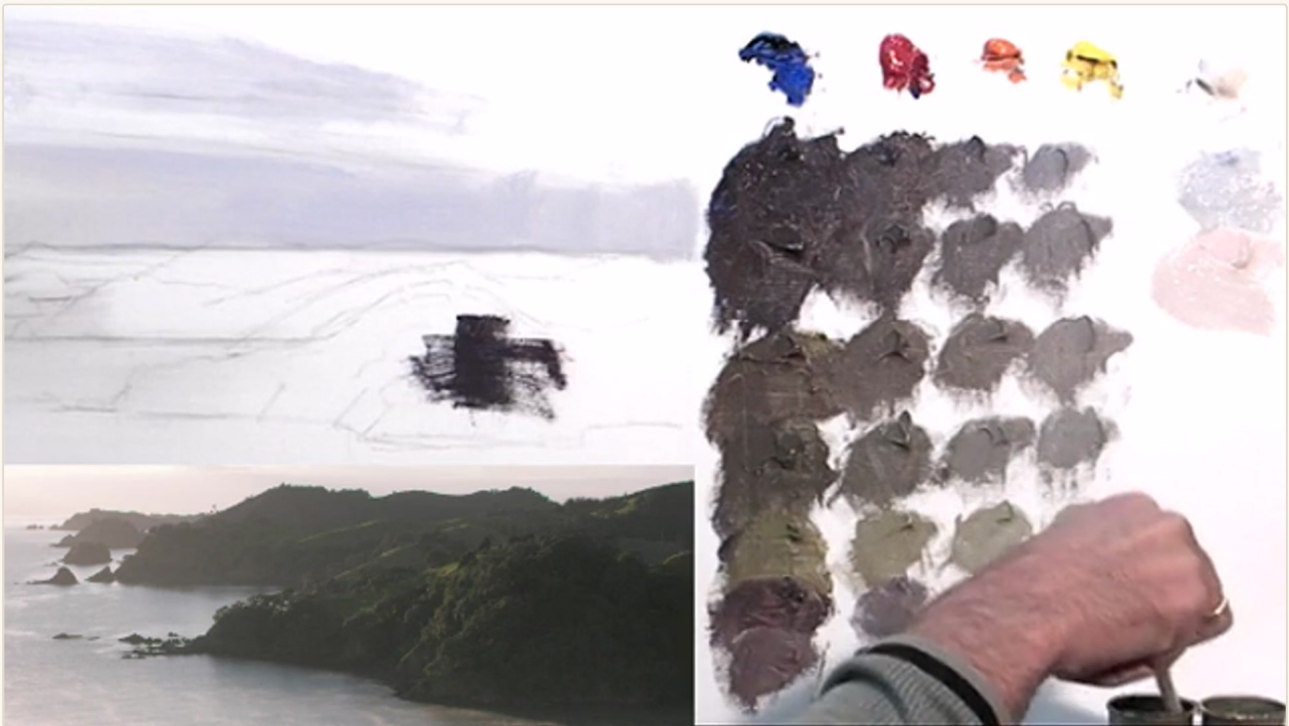
Use Archival Medium

Mix your paints with an archival classic medium, which has a drying time of about 24 hours. This medium is ideal for outdoor painting, allowing you to work with the paint for a longer period.

PRO TIP

Use a lighter and warmer atmospheric color to help distant elements blend into the background.

12 Painting Technique and Brushwork



Lay Darkest Values

Begin by applying your darkest values first. This establishes a strong foundation for your painting.

Create Smooth Transitions

Paint slightly beyond the intended area to allow the next layer to blend smoothly. This technique helps in achieving a seamless transition between colors.

Add Warmth to Hills

Observe how the hills in the photo lighten and warm towards the sun. Mix a bit of orange and warm atmospheric color into the hill color on the left to replicate this effect.

Apply Light Colors on Trees

After placing the dark shadow colors, apply the light colors on top of the trees. Use a thicker application to add depth and warmth as they approach the sun.

Clean Brush for Next Color

Dip your brush in the medium and wipe it on a rag to prepare it for the next color. This ensures clean and vibrant color application.

Paint Grass Shadow Color

Introduce the shadow color for the grass, painting it into the existing paint and between the trees. This adds dimension to the landscape.

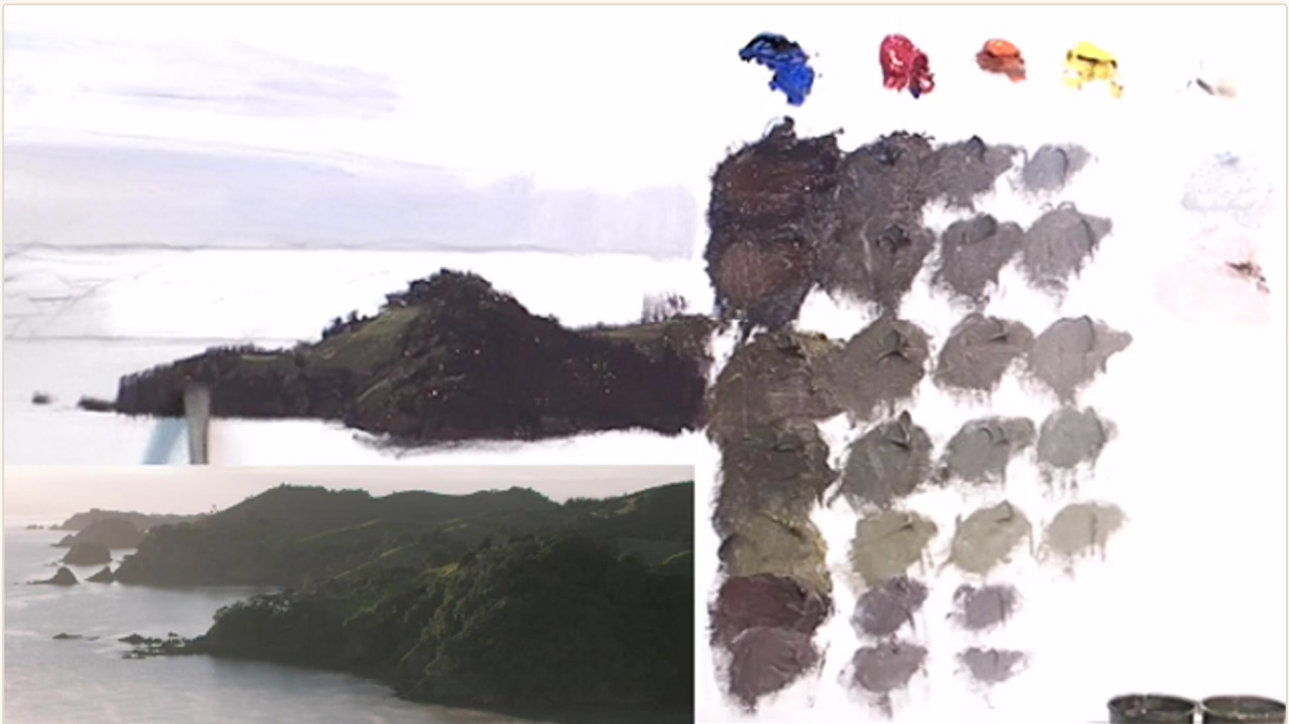
Apply Lightest Colors

For the lightest colors, load your brush with a thick ridge of paint by pressing it into the paint pile. Drag it lightly across the canvas without pressing hard to maintain texture.

PRO TIP

Always paint slightly beyond the intended area to ensure smooth transitions between layers.

13 Capturing the Essence of a Scene



Capture the Essence

Focus on capturing the essence of the scene rather than every minute detail. This approach allows for a more expressive and atmospheric painting.

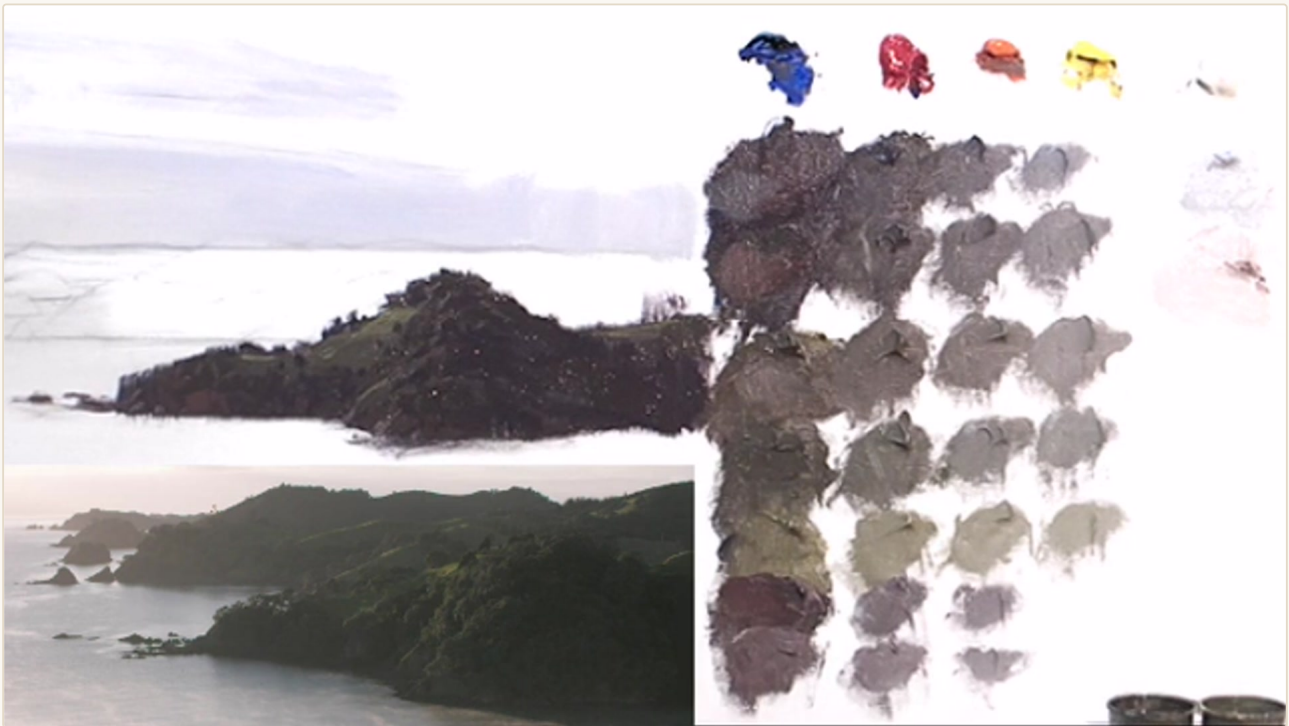
Enhance Tree Shadows

Mix a tiny bit of the atmosphere color into the tree color. Use this mixture to create a sky shine color for the shadowed areas of the trees. This technique reflects the sky on the top of the shadowed trees, adding three-dimensionality to your painting.

PRO TIP

Mix atmosphere color into tree shadows to reflect the sky and add depth.

14 Painting the Second Hill



Paint the Second Hill

Begin by painting the second hill, focusing on its shape and position. Use a slightly cooler and lighter color than the first hill to create depth and atmospheric perspective. This will help the hill recede into the background.

Redefine the Ridge Line

As you paint the second hill, carefully redefine the ridge line of the hill in front of it. Ensure the lines are clear and distinct to maintain separation between the two hills.

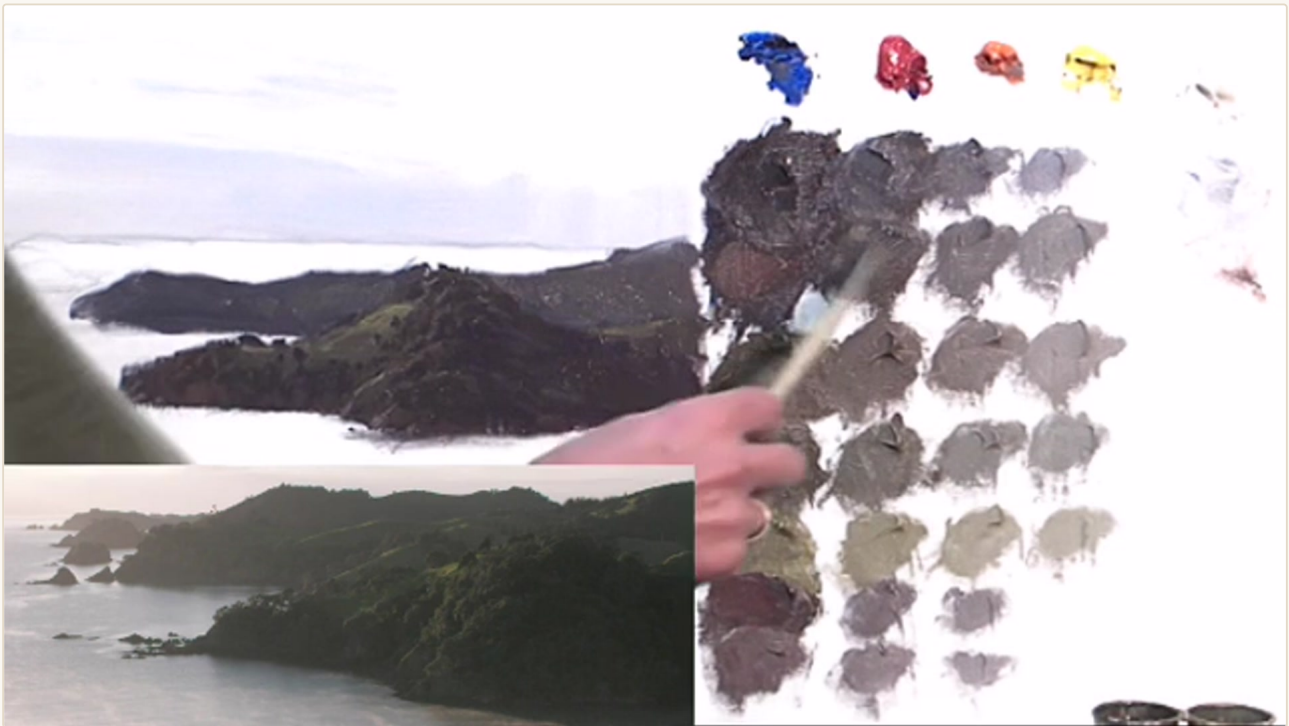
Add Foreground Trees

Once the second hill is complete, return to the foreground and paint some trees back in. Use a darker, warmer color to bring these elements forward and enhance the sense of depth in the scene.

PRO TIP

Use cooler, lighter colors for distant hills to create atmospheric perspective.

15 Adding Warmth and Light



Add Warm Atmosphere Colors

Introduce orange and warm colors to areas near the sun. This enhances the atmospheric perspective and adds depth to your painting.

Apply Light Colors

Use light colors to highlight and bring excitement to your painting. These final strokes help unify the scene and add a sense of completion.

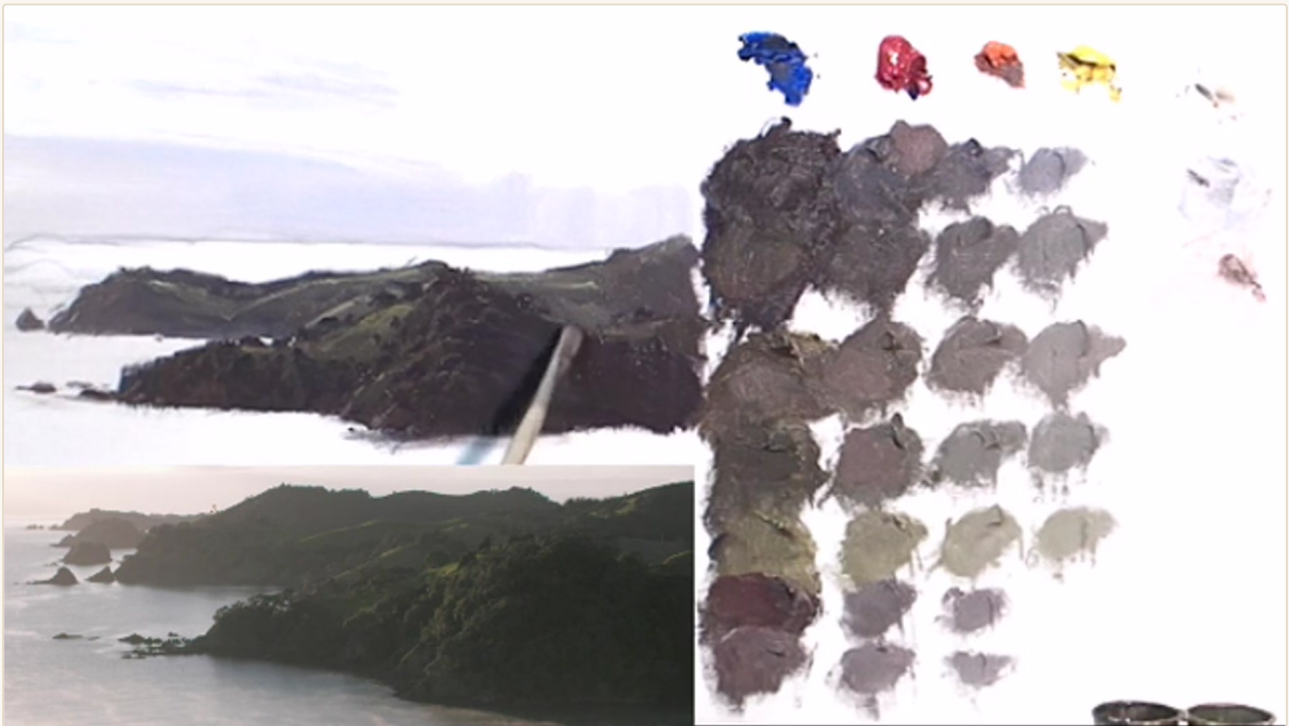
Paint Back Lost Trees

Reintroduce trees on the ridge line that were lost when painting the second hill. Use a thick glob of paint on the brush to softly lay down the trees, adding texture and depth.

PRO TIP

Use a thick glob of paint to softly lay down details, adding texture and depth to your painting.

16 Atmospheric and Linear Perspective



Understand Atmospheric Perspective

Observe how atmospheric perspective causes values to converge as objects recede into the distance. This effect makes distant objects appear lighter and less distinct.

Incorporate Linear Perspective

Ensure your drawing reflects linear perspective by accurately sizing objects smaller as they move away. Use thinner brush strokes and depict smaller trees to enhance the sense of depth.

PRO TIP

Use thinner brush strokes to depict objects that are further away, enhancing the sense of depth.

17 Mixing and Painting Water



Mix Dark Green for Water Shadows

Mix a darker green color for the shadowed areas of the water. Use this to represent the deeper, less reflective parts of the water. Ensure the green is rich and deep to capture the shadow effect accurately.

Mix Light Blue for Sky Reflection

Create a lighter blue color to reflect the sky on the water's surface. This should be lighter and bluer as it recedes into the distance, capturing the atmospheric perspective.

Adjust Colors for Atmospheric Perspective

As the water extends away, make the colors lighter and bluer to reflect atmospheric perspective. Near the sun, introduce warmer and oranger tones to the water to capture the sun's influence.

PRO TIP

Adjust the water's color to become lighter and bluer as it recedes, and warmer near the sun.

18 Handling Light and Dark Areas



Identify Light and Dark Areas

Examine your reference photo and identify where light and dark areas meet. This is often the most challenging part of the painting and requires careful attention.

Adjust Colors for Accuracy

Remember that photo colors can differ from reality. Adjust your paint colors to better match the actual scene rather than relying solely on the photo.

PRO TIP

Pay special attention to the junctions of light and dark areas, as they often need extra work to achieve the desired effect.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Atmospheric perspective is a powerful tool in landscape painting, allowing you to create depth and convey the illusion of distance. Begin by understanding how distant objects appear lighter and more like the sky due to the layers of atmosphere. Recognize the effect of the sun's position on light and color, and use this knowledge to add warmth and depth to your scene.

As you progress, focus on observing values and mixing colors accurately. Use a value chart and scale to train your eye and ensure your colors reflect the natural tones of your subject. Prepare your palette with a simple selection of colors to maintain harmony, and always mix atmospheric colors to enhance the sense of distance.

When applying paint, start with the darkest values and gradually build up lighter tones. Use brushwork to create smooth transitions and capture the essence of the scene rather than every detail. By incorporating atmospheric and linear perspective, you can achieve a painting that feels both realistic and expressive, with a strong sense of depth and atmosphere.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use atmospheric perspective to create depth and softness in landscapes.
- Consider increasing atmospheric layers for realistic depth in distant landscapes.
- Everything gets lighter and warmer the closer it gets to the sun.
- Use a value chart to improve your ability to judge lightness or darkness accurately.
- Add more atmospheric color for each hill further in the distance.
- Start with the horizon line to maintain accurate perspective and depth.
- Use a simple palette to maintain color harmony.
- Mix atmosphere color into tree shadows to reflect the sky and add depth.



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