



Ruakaka Beach

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/120-Ruakaka-Beach>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

Join me as we embark on a creative journey at Ruakaka Beach, a stunning stretch of coastline in Northland, New Zealand. In this chapter, we'll explore the art of capturing the serene beauty of a simple beach scene. You'll learn how to thoughtfully compose your painting by deciding which elements to include, focusing on the vast expanse of the beach and the dynamic sky above. Using a square canvas, we'll balance these elements to create a harmonious composition. By positioning the horizon line just above halfway, we give prominence to the beach, allowing its tranquil essence to shine through. This scene offers a rewarding subject, inviting us to immerse ourselves in the soothing interplay of land, sea, and sky. Over the course of this lesson, compressed into an intense 30-minute session, you'll gain valuable insights into painting techniques that bring this coastal landscape to life. Whether you're a seasoned painter or just starting out, this chapter promises to enrich your artistic skills and deepen your appreciation for the natural world.



"Ruakaka Beach" 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.

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 Canvas and Composition Planning



Choose Your Subject

Decide on the elements you want to include in your painting. Consider the vast expanse of the beach and a significant portion of the sky and clouds.

Plan Your Composition

Use a square canvas to balance the elements. Since the beach is your main focus, allocate more space to it on the canvas.

Set the Horizon Line

Position the horizon line just above halfway on the canvas to give the beach more prominence than the sky.

PRO TIP

Position the horizon line slightly above halfway to emphasize the beach over the sky.

2 Artistic License and Design Choices



Enhance the Sky's Depth

Darken the sky slightly to create a stronger contrast with the bright beach. This will enhance the overall design by emphasizing the simple yet effective contrast between the darker sky and the lighter beach.

Highlight the Beach's Brightness

By darkening the sky, allow the beach to appear brighter and more pristine. This contrast will give your painting a more dynamic and engaging composition.

PRO TIP

Use contrast to enhance the design by darkening the sky, making the beach appear brighter.

3 Analyzing the Scene with Blurred Vision



Use Blurred Vision

Slightly cross your eyes to blur your vision and simplify the scene into major colors, values, and shapes. This technique helps you focus on the essentials of the scene without getting lost in details.

Avoid Detailed Focus

Refrain from focusing on specific areas when analyzing the scene. Blurred vision prevents your eyes from compensating for shadows or highlights, which can mislead your perception of colors and values.

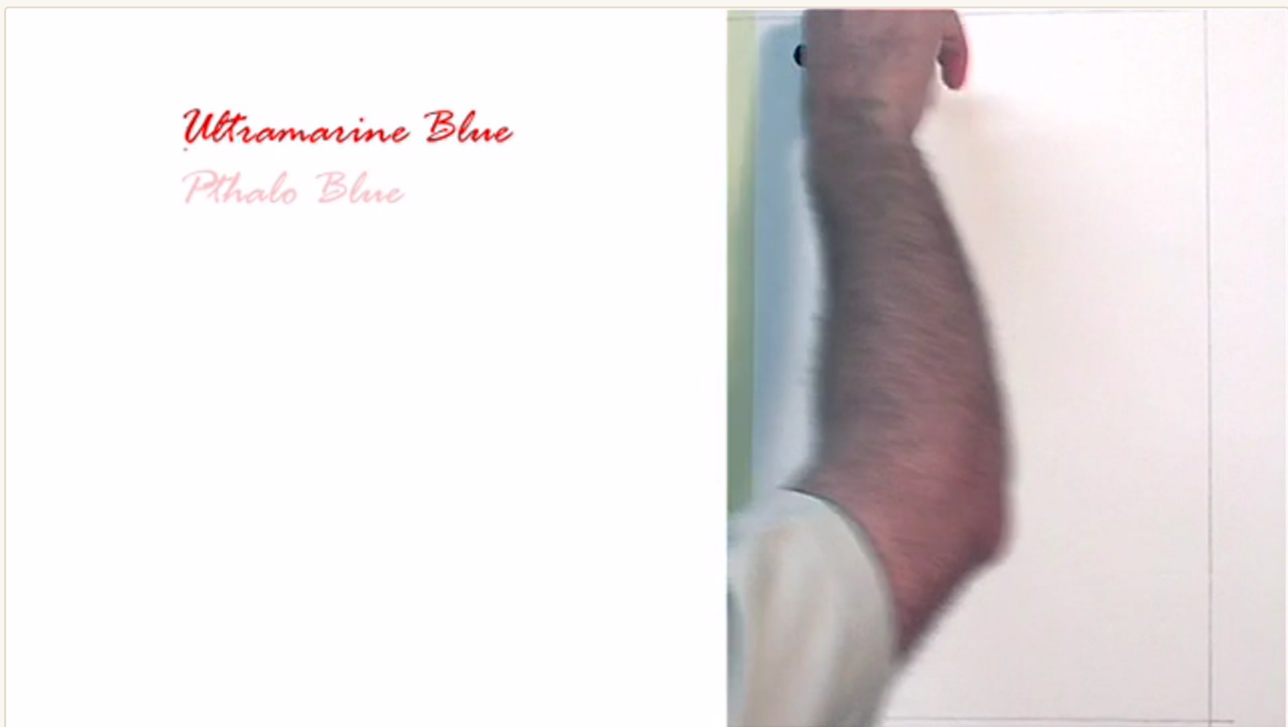
Understand Relationships

Concentrate on the relationship of elements within the scene rather than individual details. This approach helps you capture the essence of the scene in your painting.

PRO TIP

Use blurred vision to simplify the scene into major colors, values, and shapes, focusing on the essentials.

4 Palette and Color Mixing Strategy



Organize Your Palette

Keep your palette simple by using a warm and a cool version of the three primary colors, along with plenty of white. This minimizes confusion and helps maintain focus.

Mix Colors Methodically

Mix your colors from darkest to lightest. This systematic approach ensures consistency and helps you maintain control over your color relationships.

Prepare All Colors Before Painting

If possible, mix all the colors you'll need before you begin painting. This allows you to focus on painting without interruptions to remix colors.

Break Down the Scene

Divide the scene into its components such as sky, clouds, hills, water, sand, and dune grass. Mix colors for each part individually, from darkest to lightest.

Set the Color Palette

Choose your first color carefully, as it will set the tone for the entire painting. All subsequent colors will be measured against this initial choice, emphasizing the relationship between colors.

PRO TIP

Mix all your colors before starting to paint to maintain focus and flow.

5 Using a Value Scale for Color Accuracy



Understand Value in Color

Recognize that value refers to how light or dark a color appears, similar to a black and white photograph. It's crucial to get the value of your colors right for accuracy.

Use a Value Scale Tool

Utilize a value scale tool to compare the values of your colors against your subject. This helps in making accurate judgments about the lightness or darkness of colors.

Judge the Darkest Values First

Hold the value scale against your subject and look through the holes to find where the value matches your scale. Identify the darkest values first to set a reference point.

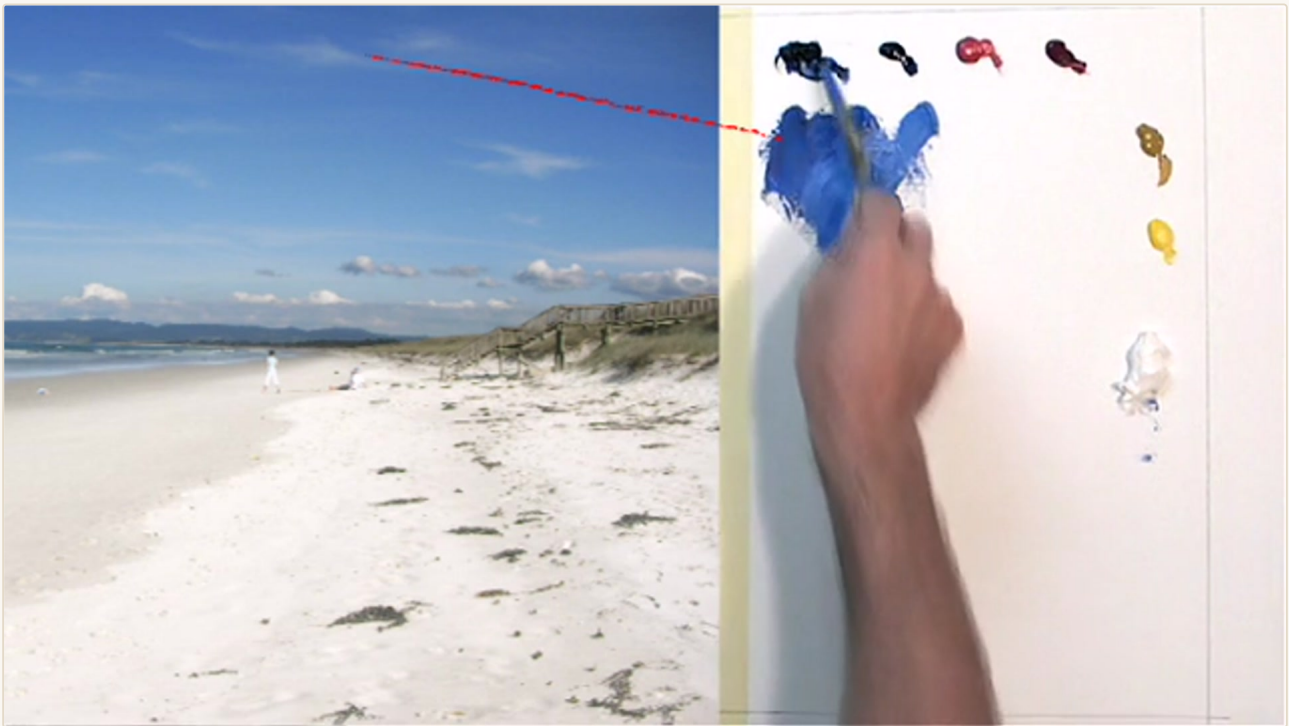
Adjust Sky Value

Decide to make the sky slightly darker than it appears. If the sky matches a middle value, adjust your color to a darker value, such as number three on the scale.

PRO TIP

Use a value scale tool to accurately judge and adjust the lightness or darkness of your colors.

6 Mixing Sky Colors



Mix the First Sky Color

Start by mixing the darkest color for the sky. Add white to this color until you achieve the desired value. Test it against your sky to ensure accuracy.

Adjust the Mid Sky Color

If the mid sky color appears too warm, add a touch of phthalo blue to cool it down. This may darken the value, so add more white to lighten it back up.

Experiment with Color Adjustments

Try adding yellow to the mixture, but be cautious as it may turn too green. If this happens, learn from the mistake and adjust accordingly.

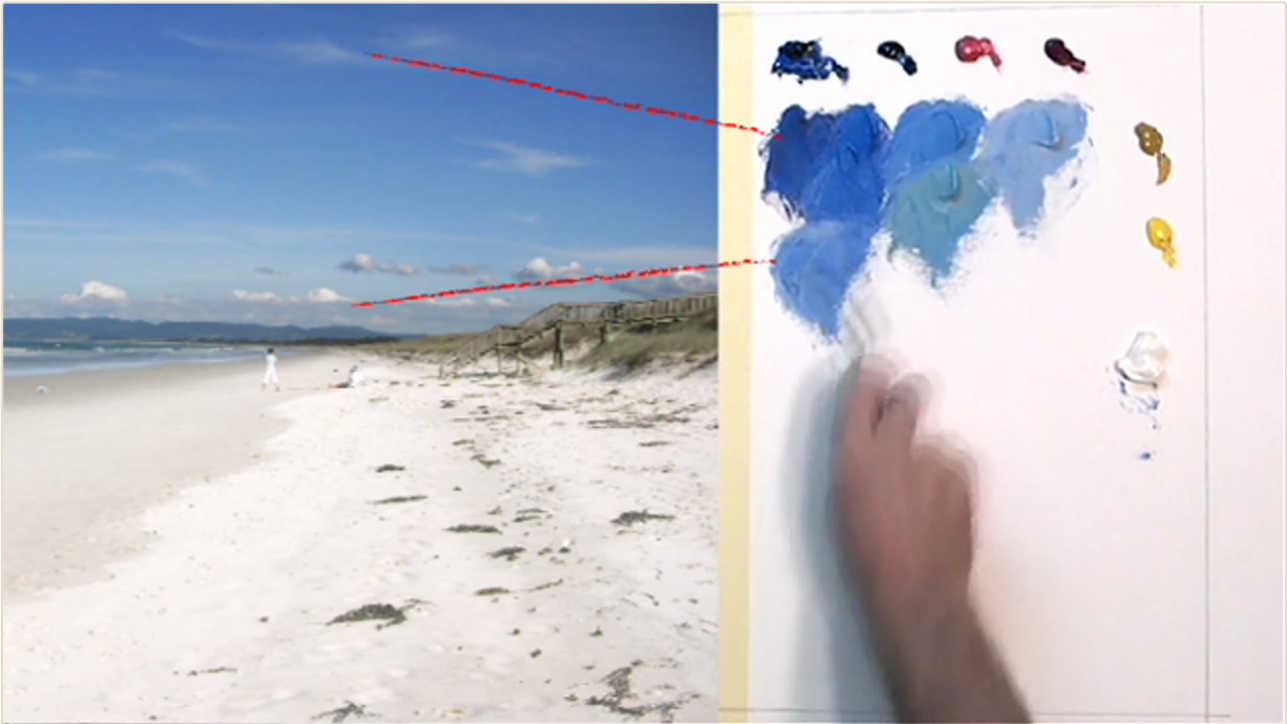
Mix the Lightest Sky Color

For the lightest sky color near the horizon, take from the second pile and add more white to achieve the correct value. Add a touch of alizarin to warm it slightly if needed.

PRO TIP

Always start with the darkest color and adjust by adding white to achieve the correct value before fine-tuning the hue.

7 Mixing Cloud Colors



Mix Dark Cloud Color

Mix the dark color for the underside of the clouds. This will serve as the base for the cloud shadows.

Create Second Value

Scoop up a bit of the dark cloud color and move it to a new area on your palette. Add white to lighten it, creating a second value for the clouds.

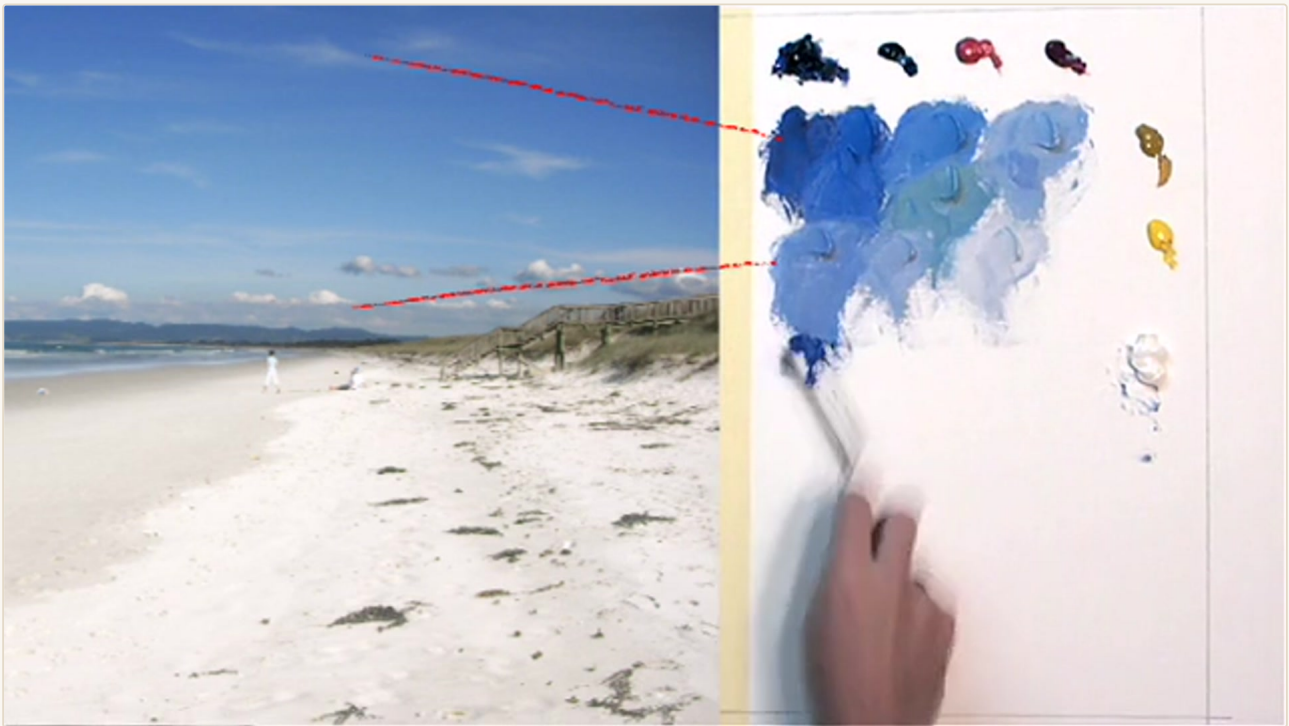
Mix Lightest Cloud Value

Repeat the process to create the lightest value for the clouds. Although you might expect this to be pure white, remember it is not due to the atmospheric tint.

PRO TIP

Observe the atmosphere color above the horizon to understand how it tints the clouds.

8 Color Comparison and Adjustment Techniques



Compare Colors Accurately

Hold your paint-smeared palette knife up to the color in the scene, ensuring it is at the same angle and light each time you compare. If using a photo, make sure both the photo and your painting are in the same light and angle, then compare the color on your palette knife to the photo at the same angle.

Prime Your Canvas

Prime your canvas with a mid-tone to prevent new colors from appearing darker due to the surrounding white. This helps achieve a more accurate color perception when you first apply paint.

Adjust for Outdoor Painting

When painting outdoors, remember that the strong light can make your painting appear lighter than it will indoors. Compensate by lightening all your values by a half step.

Mix Colors Effectively

Begin by mixing the main components of your target color. For a light blue, use blue and white. Once the value is correct, decide if your color needs more yellow or red to adjust its hue on the color wheel.

Darken Colors Without Black

If your color needs to be darker than the tube color, such as a blue darker than ultramarine, consider adding a dark color like red or alizarin instead of black.

PRO TIP

Prime your canvas with a mid-tone to help achieve accurate color perception.

9 Sketching the Composition



Sketch the Horizon

Measure and sketch the horizon line to ensure it is horizontal and straight. This will serve as the foundation for your composition.

Plan the Composition

Decide where the main features of your painting will be placed. Lightly sketch these elements, checking their relative size and shape against each other to maintain balance.

PRO TIP

Ensure the horizon line is straight to provide a stable base for your composition.

10 Painting the Sky



Start with Dark Values

Begin by applying the darkest colors of the sky. Paint beyond the area where the color is needed to ensure a smooth transition with the next color. Vary your brush strokes to create an interesting surface texture.

Use Painting Medium

Dip your brush into your painting medium between strokes. This helps maintain a fluid application and enhances the blending of colors.

Transition to Lighter Values

Gradually move to lighter values, using less painting medium as you go. This allows the lighter colors to sit on top of the darker ones, creating a sparkling effect by catching the light.

Paint the Clouds

Add the big shapes of the clouds, focusing on capturing their form and placement in the sky.

PRO TIP

Use less painting medium with lighter values to make them stand out and catch the light.

11 Painting the Clouds



Observe the Clouds

Frequently check your subject while painting to ensure accuracy. Refresh the image in your mind by looking up every few strokes. Identify interesting cloud shapes to make them appear more realistic.

Use a Large Brush Creatively

Continue using a large brush for dynamic brushwork. Paint small smidges of clouds to indicate the scale of the major clouds. This technique adds depth and interest to your painting.

Adjust Cloud Values

Revisit the cloud values, adding back some dark and mid values that may have become muddled. This step enhances the depth and dimension of the clouds.

Incorporate Beach Colors

For a unified painting, blend some beach colors into the mid values of the clouds. This reflects the interconnectedness of the environment and adds harmony to your work.

PRO TIP

Use a large brush creatively to achieve dynamic cloud shapes and depth.

12 Painting the Distant Hills



Paint the Distant Hills

Begin by painting the distant hills using a range of values from darkest to lightest. This will create depth and dimension in your landscape. Pay attention to the edges of the hills, making them softer as they recede into the distance. This mimics the natural blurring effect that occurs when your focus is on the foreground or middle ground.

PRO TIP

Soften the edges of distant objects to enhance the sense of depth in your painting.

13 Painting the Sea



Load the Brush

Push the brush firmly into the pile of paint to get a good thick covering on the end. This ensures you have enough paint to create a vibrant effect.

Apply Lighter Values

Lay on your lighter values with a slightly thicker application than previous layers. This technique helps catch the light and adds a sparkling effect to the painting.

Detail the Distant Trees

Use the very tip of a large brush to paint the trees far down the beach. This approach maintains a sense of scale and distance in the scene.

PRO TIP

Apply lighter values with a thicker layer to make them catch the light and sparkle.

14 Painting the Sand



Paint the Sea

Ensure the horizon is straight and horizontal. Use lighter values and paint beyond where the paint needs to finish, allowing the next layer to push back into it.

Capture the Sand's Subtleties

Create a smooth expanse of sand by observing the subtleties of tone and color. Blur your vision and look at the distant hills to see the sand's true color and value through your peripheral vision. This technique helps to avoid exaggerating value changes caused by the glare of the bright sand.

PRO TIP

Blur your vision to accurately perceive the sand's true color and value.

15 Painting the June Grasses



Create Depth in Distant Areas

Paint the details down the beach smaller than those closer to you. This will enhance the sense of depth in your painting. Avoid clumsy strokes in these distant areas to maintain the illusion of distance.

PRO TIP

Make distant details smaller to enhance depth.

16 Adding Details: Waves and Seagulls



Create Waves

Use the light color of the clouds to create waves. Lay the paint thinly with the edge of your palette knife to achieve a delicate effect.

Mark the Boardwalk

Use the back of a small brush to mark where the boardwalk will go. Scrape into the wet paint to suggest the shape and pattern without detailing every piece of wood.

Add Grass Details

Use a big brush to add details with the colors of the June grass. Apply a few lighter accents to enhance the texture and depth.

Suggest Seagulls

Use the edge of the palette knife to create very thin lines. Add little flicks of light-colored paint to suggest seagulls hovering on the tops of the dunes.

PRO TIP

Use the edge of your palette knife to create thin lines for delicate details like waves and seagulls.

17 Painting Seaweed and Texture



Paint Seaweed Clumps

Avoid making seaweed clumps too uniform in size and shape. If they start to look too patterned, scrape some out to maintain a natural appearance. Use varied brush strokes to create an organic look.

Add Depth to Seaweed

Lighten the color of the seaweed as it recedes down the beach. This helps create a sense of depth and distance, making the scene more realistic.

Enhance Three-Dimensionality

Apply a slightly lighter value on top of the seaweed to give it a three-dimensional effect. This adds depth and texture to the painting.

Create Texture in Sand

Include dark and light sides for tire tracks and footprints in the sand. This adds three-dimensionality and breaks up the uniformity of the sand, enhancing the overall texture.

PRO TIP

If seaweed looks too patterned, scrape it off and repaint the sand to maintain a natural look.

18 Adding Shells for Detail



Add Sparkly Shells

Use the thickest paint in your palette to add small, sparkly shells to your painting. This will create a striking effect as the thick paint catches and reflects light, adding detail and interest to your beach scene.

PRO TIP

Use the thickest paint to create highlights that catch the light.

19 Painting Seagulls with Brush Techniques



Paint Seagull Shapes

Use a large brush to paint the seagulls. Tilt the brush to create the perfect shape for the wings or head with just a few strokes.

Add Legs and Shadows

Switch to a small brush, like a rigger, to paint the legs and shadows. Mix mid or dark sky color with a little red and a touch more white for the shadows.

PRO TIP

Use a mahl stick to support your hand while painting fine details.

20 Finishing Touches and Detail Work



Add Foreground Details

Use small brushes to add a few more details in the foreground. These details will help hold the entire painting together. Be mindful not to overwork the area; sometimes it's best to know when to stop.

Paint a Figure

Place a small figure at the end of the boardwalk to draw the viewer's eye down the beach. Measure the figure's height to ensure it fits well with the boardwalk's structure. This addition will add interest and depth to your composition.

Incorporate Red Highlights

Add a touch of red to your painting to create a bit of sparkle and interest. These subtle red highlights can be a delightful discovery for viewers, reminiscent of Constable's technique.

Paint a Bird in Flight

Use a photo reference to paint a bird in flight. Employ a large brush for most of the work to maintain a loose and natural feel. This approach helps avoid unnecessary detail and keeps the painting lively.

Maintain Focus in Final Details

As you slow down to add finishing details, maintain the focus and energy you had at the start. This ensures that the details, which hold the painting together, retain their integrity and enhance the overall composition.

PRO TIP

Use a large brush for most of the work, even in detailed areas, to keep the painting lively and avoid over-detailing.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your Ruakaka Beach painting by thoughtfully planning your composition and considering the balance between the vast beach and the expansive sky. Use a square canvas to give prominence to the beach, positioning the horizon line slightly above halfway. As you progress, employ artistic license to enhance contrast, darkening the sky to make the beach appear brighter and more inviting.

Simplify your scene by analyzing it with blurred vision, focusing on major colors, values, and shapes. This technique will help you capture the essence of the landscape without getting lost in details. Prepare your palette with a strategic mix of warm and cool primary colors, ensuring you have all the necessary hues ready before you start painting. Use a value scale to achieve accurate color values, adjusting as needed to reflect the dynamic interplay of light and shadow.

As you add layers to your painting, begin with the sky and clouds, using varied brushwork to create texture and depth. Gradually build up the landscape, from distant hills to the sparkling sea and sandy beach, ensuring each element is in harmony with the others. Pay attention to details like waves, seagulls, and seaweed, using techniques like palette knife lines and varied brush strokes to add realism and interest. Finally, add highlights and finishing touches with thick paint to capture the light, bringing your beach scene to life.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Position the horizon line slightly above halfway to emphasize the beach.
- Darken the sky to create contrast and make the beach appear brighter.
- Use blurred vision to focus on major colors, values, and shapes.
- Mix all your colors before starting to paint to maintain focus and flow.
- Use a value scale tool to accurately judge and adjust color values.
- Start with the darkest color and adjust by adding white for correct value.
- Prime your canvas with a mid-tone for accurate color perception.
- Use the edge of your palette knife for delicate details like waves and seagulls.



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