



Mastering Color

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/123-Mastering-Color>

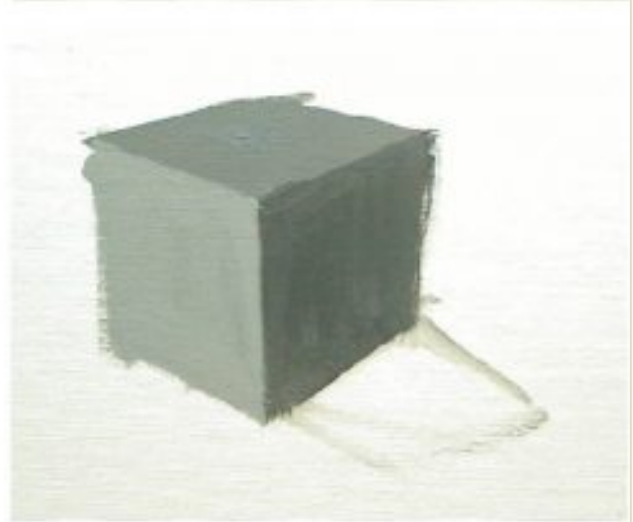
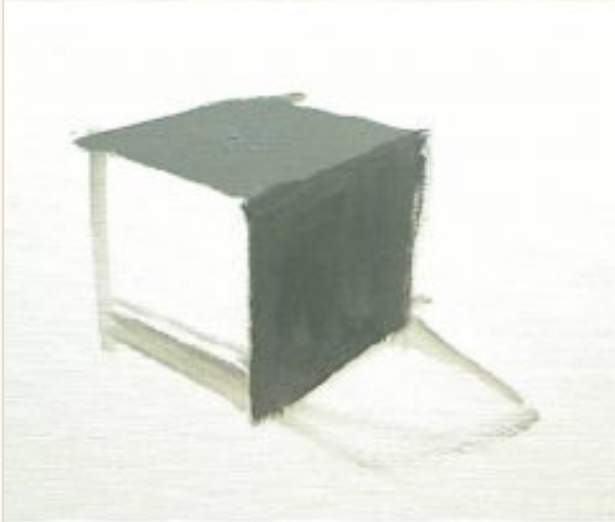
MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

Light is the reason I became a painter. It's not just that without light there would be nothing to see; it's the sheer power of light to take your breath away, while simultaneously being so subtle that it makes you wish for better eyes to truly capture its beauty. It's no wonder that ancient civilizations worshipped the sun as a deity, for it not only sustains life on our planet but also reveals it in all its splendor. In this chapter, we'll delve into the fascinating world of light effects, exploring common phenomena like reflected light and the breathtaking luminosity of a sunset, alongside more nuanced effects such as glowing color, color banding, and the way color shifts around a form. These effects manifest as color gradations, and mastering the art of painting these transitions is essential to capturing the essence of light in your work. As we embark on this journey, you'll learn to observe nature closely, recognizing the subtle gradations that are omnipresent, and using textured brush strokes to infuse your paintings with interest and character. Let your brush strokes become your signature, adding a personal touch to your art and bringing the magic of light to life on your canvas.

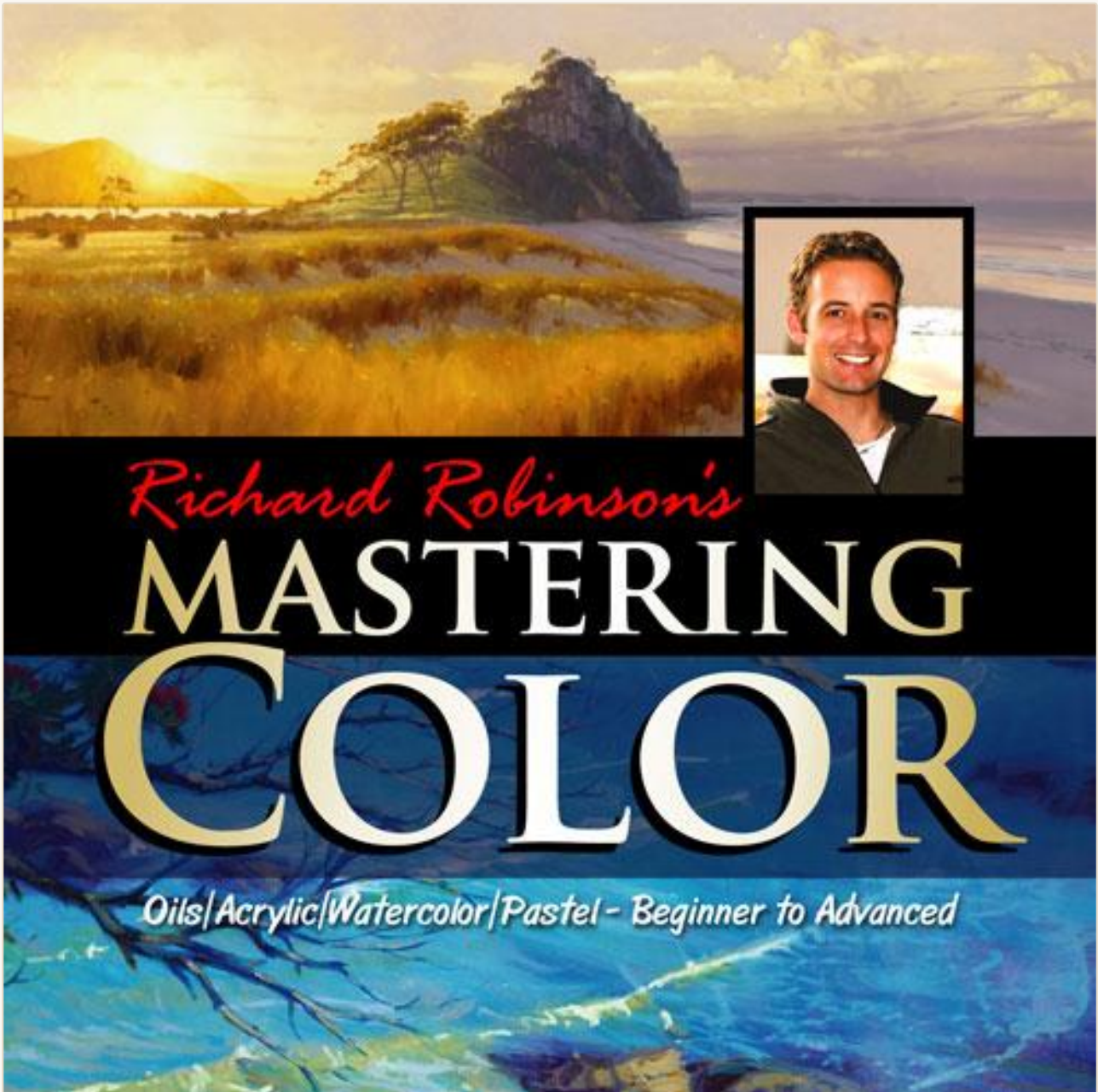


"Mastering Color" by Richard Robinson.



REFERENCE PHOTO 1

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 2

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.

INTRODUCTION

- Download it here
- - 159 pages.
- Also available in
- Web View
- .

MANIPULATING COLOR

- Oil Paints
- Large palette – larger than A3 size is good. An A2 sized glass palette is ideal.
- Brushes of any size.
- Painting medium for oils like Liquin or Chroma Archival Classic Medium or Walnut Oil.
- Palette Knife
- Colors as recommended throughout the lesson.
- Canvas, board, or whatever painting surface you choose. Make sure it's not too absorbent otherwise it'll be a struggle to paint on. I'd suggest Fredrix canvas panels or something similar.
- Acrylic Paints
- Large stay-wet palette – A3 or bigger is good.
- Brushes of any size.
- Retarding Medium to slow the drying of your paints.
- Water spray bottle for keeping your paints wet.
- Colors as recommended throughout the lesson.
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- Read the exercises in the Notes
- Recommended Brushes
- [Rosemary & Co. Richard Robinson Brush Set](#)

COLOR HARMONY

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LIGHT EFFECTS

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1 Gradations in Nature



Observe Natural Gradations

Look closely in nature to see how colors transition from one to another. Recognize that these gradations are everywhere, even if they are subtle.

Embrace Textured Gradations

Avoid painting perfectly smooth gradations. Instead, use textured brush strokes to create more interest and character in your work.

Value Your Unique Brush Strokes

Remember that your brush strokes are your signature. Embrace them and let them add a personal touch to your painting.

PRO TIP

Avoid perfectly smooth gradations; use textured brush strokes to add interest.

2 Creating Gradations with Brush Techniques



Prepare Your Palette

Mix your colors on the palette before applying them to the canvas. This helps maintain control over the chroma and prevents muddiness.

Apply the Dark Layer

Use a thin layer of dark paint mixed with a painting medium. Apply it first to establish the base of your gradation.

Introduce the Light Color

Switch to a clean brush and apply the lighter color slightly thicker, blending it into the dark area. Vary your brush strokes and lighten the pressure as you move into the dark.

Blend Back into the Light

Return to the first brush and use slightly thicker paint to blend the dark color back into the light area. This creates a smooth transition.

Create Texture

Alternate between brushes, working the light and dark colors into each other with varied strokes to achieve an interesting textured effect.

PRO TIP

Use separate brushes for each color to maintain clarity and prevent muddiness.

3 Glazing Technique



Prepare the Surface

Apply a thin wash of painting medium over the surface to wet it. This helps prevent hard edges in the glaze and ensures a smooth application.

Choose the Right Brush

Use a fine haired brush for glazing. This type of brush works better than a bristle brush for achieving a smooth, even glaze.

Apply the Glaze

Glaze with a darker color over a lighter color to maintain high chroma. Avoid glazing light colors over dark as it can result in a chalky appearance.

PRO TIP

Use a fine haired brush for smoother glaze application.

4 Layering Glazes



Apply a Thin Glaze

Use a very thin mix of paint and work it over the top of your painting surface. This will create a smooth, subtle layer of color.

Smooth the Edges

Gently wipe away excess paint to smooth the edges of the glaze. This helps blend the glaze seamlessly into the underlying layers.

Layer Additional Glazes

Allow the first glaze to dry completely. Then, apply another glaze over the top. This technique builds up rich, vibrant colors in your painting.

PRO TIP

Let each glaze layer dry before applying the next to achieve depth and richness in color.

5 Scumbling Technique



Prepare the Scumbling Paint

Use paint straight out of the tube without mixing in any painting media. This ensures the paint is thick and dry, ideal for scumbling.

Apply the Scumbling Technique

Lightly drag the thick, dry paint over the surface of a previously dry layer. This creates a broken texture, allowing the bottom layer to show through.

PRO TIP

Use paint directly from the tube for scumbling to achieve a dry, textured effect.

6 Rubbing Back Technique



Prepare for Rubbing Back

Ensure the previous layer of paint is completely dry before starting the rubbing back technique. This prevents smudging and maintains the integrity of your painting.

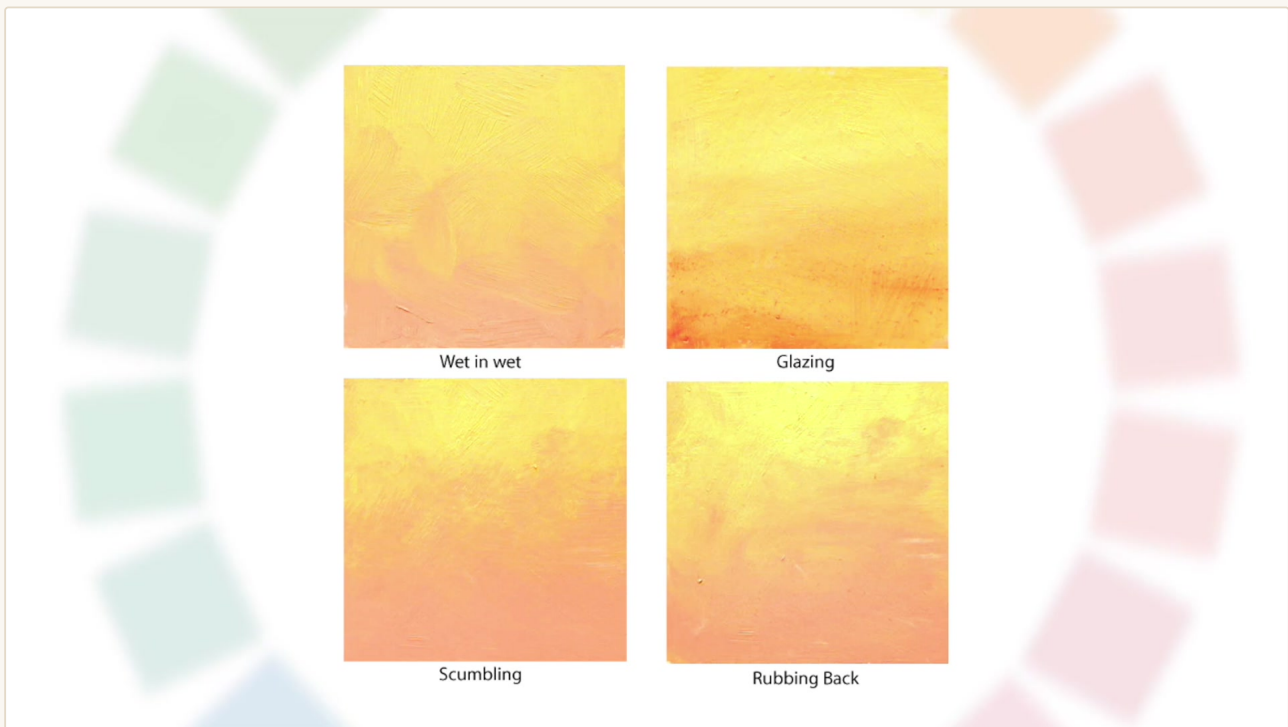
Apply the Rubbing Back Technique

Gently rub the surface of the painting with a clean, soft cloth or a paper towel. This will remove some of the top layer of paint, revealing the colors beneath and creating depth and texture.

PRO TIP

Always check that the underlying paint layer is dry to avoid unwanted smudging when rubbing back.

7 Importance of Gradations in Light



Understand Gradation Techniques

Recognize that creating smooth gradations of color is crucial for portraying convincing light in your painting. Familiarize yourself with techniques such as stippling, crosshatching, and broken color to achieve these effects.

PRO TIP

Mastering color gradients enhances the portrayal of light in your painting.

8 Using Interactive Acrylics for Gradations



Prepare Your Surface

Start with a very dry layer of interactive acrylic paint on your canvas. This will be the base for your gradation work.

Rehydrate the Paint

Use a water bottle to give the dry acrylic layer a couple of squirts. This reactivates the paint, making it workable again.

Create the Gradation

Apply new wet paint and blend it into the rehydrated layer. This allows you to achieve smooth gradations similar to those possible with oil paints.

Rework as Needed

After a few minutes, the paint will be touch dry. If further blending is needed, use the water sprayer again to rehydrate and continue working.

PRO TIP

Use a water sprayer to reactivate dry interactive acrylics, allowing for smooth gradations similar to oil paints.

9 Color Change Around a Form



Understand Color Change Around a Form

Recognize that the local color of an object is the primary factor influencing the color you see. The color of the light is the second biggest factor. As an object turns away from the light and moves into shadow, its color shifts around the color wheel, from warm to cool.

Observe Light Effects on a White Ball

Notice how a white ball under yellow evening light shows a hue shift as it moves into shadow. The warm light on the front contrasts with the cool light on the back, caused by blue sky reflection.

Experiment with Light in a Controlled Environment

Place the ball inside a black box to absorb reflected light. Observe how the hue moves into shadow, following the same path through light areas but dipping straight into black without moving towards greens or blues.

Introduce a Reflective Surface

Add a white base to the setup to introduce reflected light into the shadow side. Notice how the shadow side doesn't get as dark and the hue remains the same as the light, only darker, due to reflection.

Understand the Warm Light, Cool Shadow Rule

Acknowledge that the warm light, cool shadow rule is a guideline. In indoor setups, shadows may appear cooler compared to warm light areas, but this is due to visual comparison rather than actual hue change.

PRO TIP

Remember that shadow color depends on reflected light; without it, there's no color.

10 Reflected Light and Its Effects



Understand Reflected Light

Recognize that reflected light is crucial for showing the form of objects and adding interesting color notes to your painting. Observe how a red card reflects light back into a ball, demonstrating the power of reflected light.

Assess Light Values

Remember that reflected light is never as bright as the light side of an object. It belongs to the shadow planes. Use squinting and comparing techniques to accurately judge the value of reflected light.

Observe Color Gradations

Notice the color gradation in the glow reflecting off the ball onto the table, transitioning from yellow through orange and red to warm grey. This gradation helps in understanding the interaction of light and color.

PRO TIP

Use squinting and comparing techniques to accurately judge the value of reflected light, ensuring it remains part of the shadow planes.

11 Painting Objects That Glow



Observe Light Reflection

Notice how strong light on an object affects its surroundings. The light reflecting off the object will influence nearby surfaces and the atmosphere.

Enhance the Glow

Paint the subtle color reflections from the object onto nearby surfaces. This enhances the glowing effect, as seen with the Mandarin reflecting on the teapot and tabletop.

Push Color into the Atmosphere

Extend the object's color into the surrounding atmosphere to amplify the glow. This can be done even if it's not visible, as it adds to the overall effect.

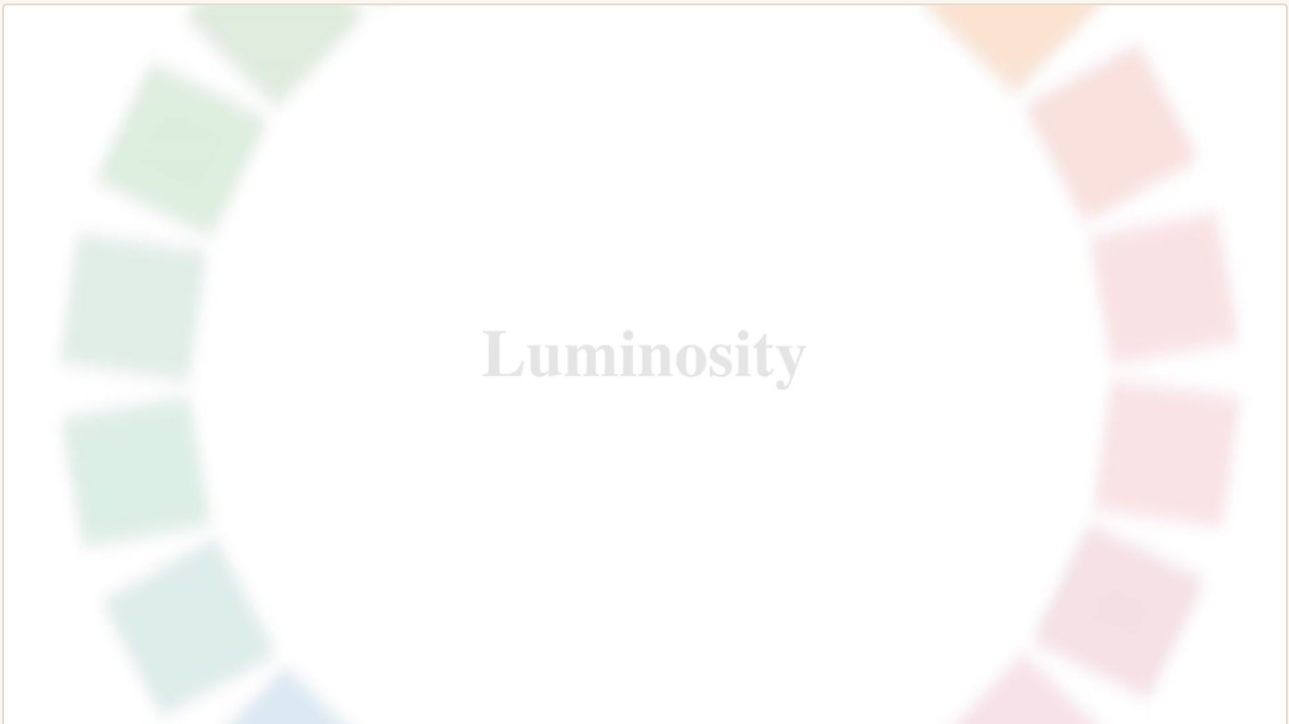
Adjust Surrounding Tones

Consider darkening or greying the surrounding areas to make the light source appear brighter by contrast. This technique can make the object seem to emit its own colored light.

PRO TIP

Brightly lit objects can be treated as light sources, emitting their own colored light into the scene.

12 Creating Luminosity in Paintings



Understand Luminosity

Recognize that luminosity in a painting makes it appear as if it's emitting light. Study the works of Turner and Asher Durand to see how they achieve this effect.

Focus on Values

Examine how values contribute to luminosity. Notice how everything gets lighter towards the light source, creating a glowing effect even without color.

Analyze Color Influence

Observe how the color of the light tints all surrounding colors. Notice how green trees and bluish hills take on the color of the light, enhancing the luminous effect.

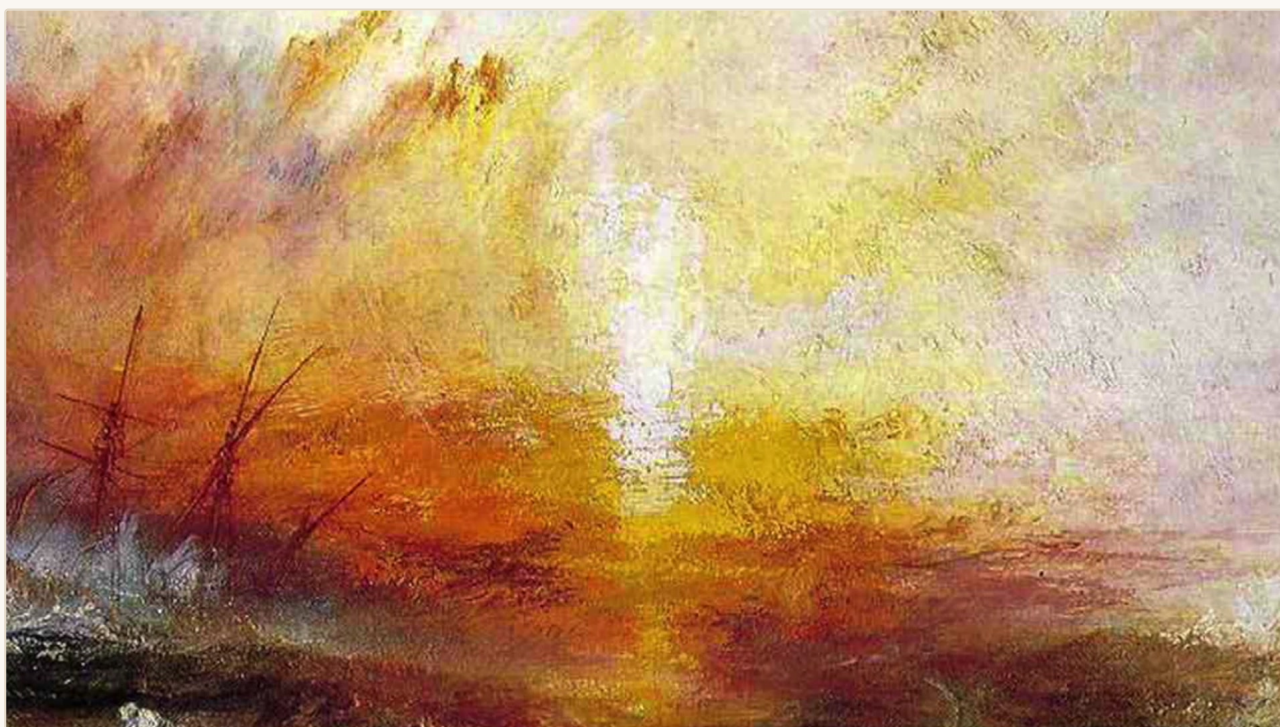
Identify Chroma Distribution

Identify that the highest chroma is found in the glowing area of the painting. Keep the rest of the painting duller to emphasize the light effect.

PRO TIP

Ensure the highest chroma is in the glowing area to create a powerful light effect.

13 Sunset Color Banding



Understand Color Banding

Observe how hues transition from yellow to orange to red as you move away from the light source. This is crucial for capturing sunset color banding, where the sun's lower position filters out blue wavelengths, enhancing orange and red hues.

Observe the Sky and Clouds

Look towards the sun to see dramatic color shifts across the spectrum. Don't forget to turn around and observe the colors behind you. Notice how clouds transition from yellow to orange, red, and then into violets as they fall into the earth's shadow.

PRO TIP

Remember to observe the colors behind you during a sunset for a full symphony of hues.

14 Other Light Effects to Explore



Explore Reflections in Water

Study how light reflects off water surfaces. Notice the way colors and shapes are distorted and softened by the movement of water.

Investigate Infused Light

Observe how light passes through translucent objects, creating a glow. Experiment with painting objects like glass or leaves to capture this effect.

Understand Caustic Lighting

Look at how light bends and focuses through transparent materials, creating patterns of light and shadow. Try painting these patterns to add depth to your work.

Experiment with Colour Corona

Notice the halo of color that appears around light sources. Use soft blending techniques to replicate this effect in your paintings.

Capture Glare and Shimmer

Observe how bright light can create a glare or shimmer on surfaces. Use highlights and sharp contrasts to depict these effects.

PRO TIP

Experiment with different light effects to add depth and interest to your paintings.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by embracing the natural gradations you observe in the world around you. These transitions are subtle yet powerful, and by using textured brush strokes, you can add depth and character to your work. Your brush strokes are your signature, so let them express your unique style and vision.

As you develop your painting, master the art of creating smooth yet interesting gradations through various techniques. Whether you're blending colors with alternate brushes, applying glazes for vibrant layers, or using scumbling for texture, each method contributes to a richer, more dynamic painting. Remember, the interplay of light and shadow is crucial, and understanding how colors shift in different lighting conditions will enhance the realism and luminosity of your work.

Finally, explore the effects of light on your compositions. From capturing the glow of a sunset to depicting the reflections on water, these elements bring your paintings to life. By experimenting with light and color interactions, you can create paintings that not only depict reality but also evoke emotion and wonder.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use textured brush strokes to add interest instead of smooth gradations.
- Mix colors on the palette first to maintain control and clarity.
- Use separate brushes for light and dark colors to prevent muddiness.
- Let each glaze layer dry before applying the next for depth.
- Use paint directly from the tube for scumbling to achieve texture.
- Ensure the underlying paint layer is dry before rubbing back.
- Use a water sprayer to reactivate dry interactive acrylics.
- Observe and incorporate reflected light to enhance form and color.



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