



Rees Valley

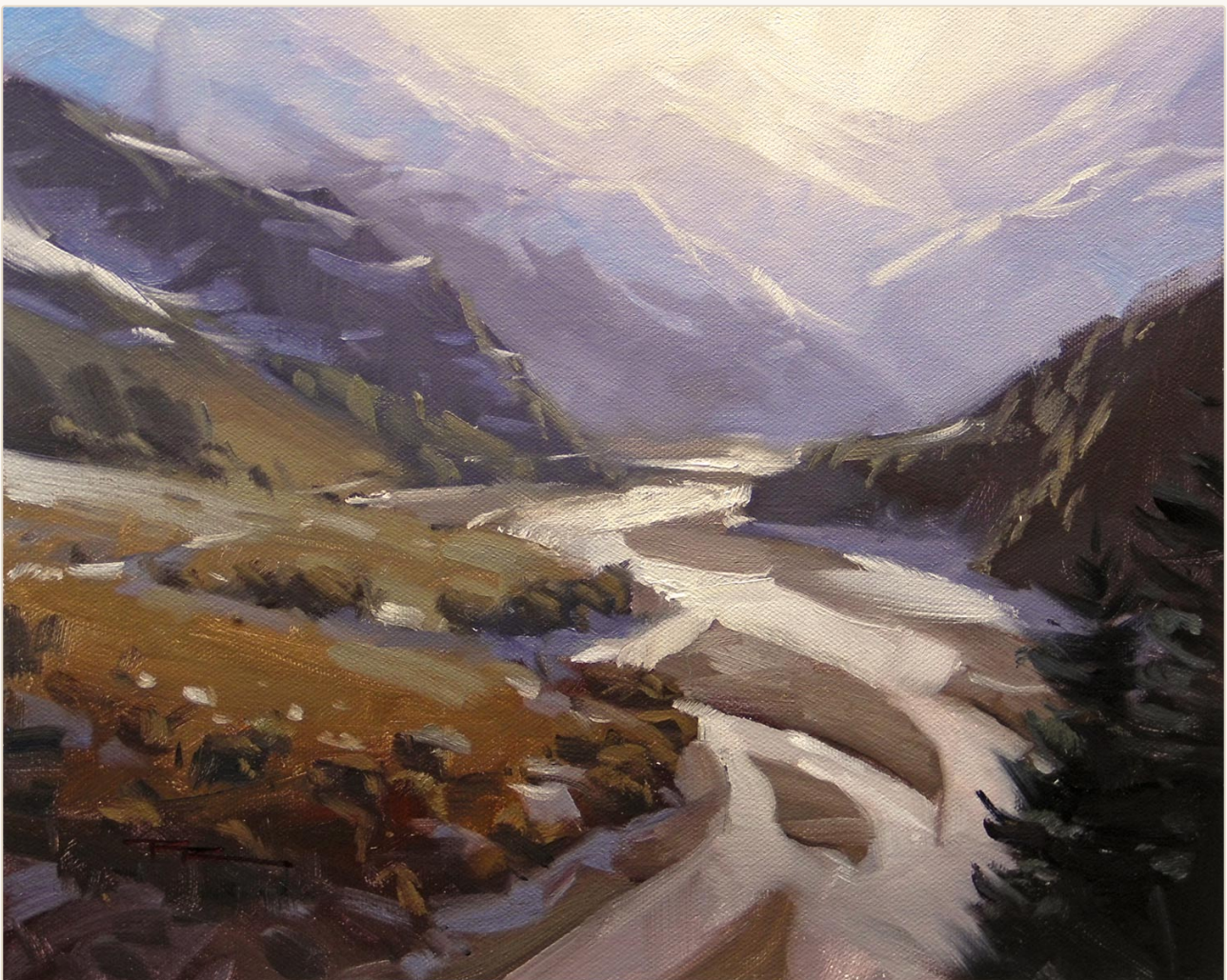
A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/114-Rees-Valley>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we delve into the captivating landscape of the Rees Valley, a scene that offers both challenge and reward for the aspiring painter. On location, time was of the essence as the sun swiftly disappeared behind the mountains, but that fleeting moment inspired a smaller plein air piece that I later developed into a 20-inch square studio painting. This approach allows us to capture the essence of the scene while refining our vision in the studio. You'll start by using the provided photo as inspiration, applying your artistic license to create something uniquely yours. Begin with notan designs to simplify the composition and focus on the interplay of light and dark. Limited value studies will help you understand the tonal range, guiding you in creating depth and contrast. Incorporating atmospheric perspective is key to conveying the vastness of the valley. Finally, explore the glowing light effect to imbue your painting with a magical quality. This lesson is an opportunity to explore techniques that will enhance your ability to capture the beauty and grandeur of nature in your art.



"Rees Valley" 11x14" Oil on Canvas 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.

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 Workshop challenge and resources



Workshop Challenge

Use the provided photo from the Rees Valley as your inspiration. Apply your artistic license to create a unique and beautiful work of art.

Start with Notan Designs

Begin with notan designs to establish the composition. This will help you simplify the scene and focus on the balance of light and dark areas.

Conduct Limited Value Studies

Perform limited value studies to understand the tonal range of your painting. This will guide you in creating depth and contrast.

Consider Atmospheric Perspective

Incorporate atmospheric perspective to add depth to your painting. This technique is crucial for capturing the vastness of the Rees Valley scene.

Explore the Glowing Light Effect

Watch the short video on the glowing light effect and try to incorporate it into your painting. This effect can add a magical quality to your work.

PRO TIP

Use atmospheric perspective to create depth and enhance the sense of distance in your painting.

2 Materials and painting preview



Prepare Your Palette

Set up your palette with your chosen colors. Include a small pot of Walnut Alkyde Medium in the bottom right corner to thin the paint and improve its flow on the canvas.

Select Your Brushes

Choose the brushes you will use for this painting. Ensure they are suitable for the techniques and effects you plan to achieve.

Visualize the Finished Painting

Take a moment to look at the finished painting. This will give you a clear idea of the composition and colors you will be working towards.

PRO TIP

Use Walnut Alkyde Medium to thin your paint and enhance its flow on the canvas.

3 Critiquing previous paintings



Evaluate Previous Work

Take a moment to review your previous paintings of the scene. Consider what elements you liked initially, such as exciting colors and brushwork, and what aspects you might want to change now.

Identify Areas for Improvement

Look at the color intensity in specific areas, like the bottom left and distant mountains. If the colors are too punchy or intense, plan to subdue them in your next painting.

Consider Composition Adjustments

Examine the composition and determine if any sections can be trimmed without losing impact. For instance, cutting off the bottom 20-25% might enhance the overall balance of the painting.

PRO TIP

Review your work after some time has passed to gain a fresh perspective on what can be improved.

4 Self-critique technique



Critique your painting as if it were created by your harshest critic. This approach encourages you to identify areas for improvement more effectively. By evaluating your work with a critical eye, you can enhance your skills and produce better paintings in the future.

PRO TIP

Critique your painting as if it were created by your harshest critic to identify areas for improvement.

5 Composition adjustments



Add a Dark Mass

Introduce a dark mass into the bottom right corner of your painting. This will help prevent the river from leading the viewer's eye off the canvas, creating a more contained composition.

Lighten the Painting

Lighten the overall painting to introduce more glowing light effects. Focus on enhancing the distant mountains to create a sense of depth and atmosphere.

PRO TIP

Use dark masses strategically to guide the viewer's eye and enhance composition.

6 Sketching and shape variety



Create the Sketch

Use a very thin mixture of blue and red to lay in the sketch. Focus on achieving a variety of shapes to avoid uniformity.

Vary Shape and Angle

Ensure the spaces between your construction lines are different. Vary the angles of the lines so they don't parallel each other, which helps maintain a natural look.

PRO TIP

Avoid making shapes too similar to prevent a man-made appearance in your painting.

7 Painting darkest darks



Mix the Darkest Darks

Combine your darkest cool colors with your darkest warm colors. Add a little bit of white to lighten the mixture slightly, aiming for a tone lighter than a previous plein air study.

Test the Color

Use a sheet of acetate over your canvas. Paint your mixed color directly on the acetate in the area you want to test, allowing for easy comparison and adjustment.

Apply the First Darks

Apply the darkest darks thinly using a fair amount of painting medium. Ensure the paint is not too thick, allowing for easier manipulation and layering.

Adjust Darks for Depth

As the darks recede into the distance, lighten them slightly by adding more white and cool them down by incorporating blue. This creates a sense of depth and atmospheric perspective.

PRO TIP

Use a sheet of acetate to test your color directly on the painting area for easy comparison and adjustment.

8 Glowing light effect



Lighten and Warm the Glowing Area

Identify the glowing area in your painting. Lighten this area slightly and add a touch of warmth to enhance the glowing light effect.

Adjust Cool Greys in Distant Mountains

While working with cool greys, lighten these areas and apply them to the distant mountains. This helps create depth and variation in the landscape.

Test Colors Before Committing

Always test your color choice with a small spot on the canvas before applying it broadly. This ensures the color works well with the existing palette.

Balance Light and Color Variations

Observe the photo reference to note areas that become cooler and lighter, especially towards the right. Ensure the glowing area in the center remains slightly lighter and warmer.

PRO TIP

Test your color choice with a small spot on the canvas before applying it broadly.

9 Foreground color recession



Add Foreground Color

Use a browny green color to fill in the foreground bushes. This establishes the base tone for the foreground area.

Create Depth with Color Recession

As the bushes recede into the distance, gradually lighten and cool the color by mixing in a slightly lighter blue-grey. This subtle shift helps create the illusion of space and distance.

PRO TIP

Lightening and cooling colors as they recede can enhance the sense of depth in your painting.

10 Negative space and water flow



Mix and Test Color

Mix a color similar to the existing one on your palette. Test it on the painting to ensure it matches the desired tone.

Paint Specific Shapes

Focus on getting the shapes just right. Although they appear abstract, they have a specific structure formed by the river's flow and perspective.

Use Negative Space

Concentrate on painting the negative spaces to define the shapes. This technique will also help you depict the flow of the water in the river.

Adjust for Distance

As the river recedes into the background, lighten and cool the colors to create a sense of depth and distance.

PRO TIP

Pay attention to the negative spaces to accurately capture the flow and perspective of the river.

11 Water color and sky relationship



Add Cool Grey to Distance

Apply the same cool grey mixture to the color as it recedes into the distance. This will help create depth in your painting.

Start Painting the Water

Begin with a mid-grey, purplish color for the water. Avoid the temptation to use a bright blue, as the low contrast will draw the eye towards the high contrast areas of the painting.

Adjust Water Color for Light Source

Lighten and warm the color of the water as it travels upstream to reflect the warm glow of the light source. This creates a harmonious relationship between the water and the sky.

PRO TIP

Ensure the color of the water relates closely to the color of the sky to maintain harmony in the painting.

12 Light grey and mid grey relationship



Establish Light Grey Area

Apply a light grey color to the designated area, focusing on creating a glowing effect. This area should be quite light to capture the desired luminosity.

Balance with Mid Grey

Adjust the surrounding areas with a mid grey tone. Ensure the transition between the light grey and mid grey is smooth, maintaining a natural gradient.

Cool and Darken Edges

On either side of the glowing area, introduce cooler and slightly darker tones. This contrast will enhance the light grey's brightness and create depth.

PRO TIP

Ensure a smooth transition between light grey and mid grey for a natural gradient.

13 Design correction



Identify Design Issues

Examine your painting for any elements that mirror each other too closely, as this can create an undesirable design.

Correct the Design

If you spot a mirrored design flaw, consider wiping out one of the elements to break the symmetry and improve the composition.

Add Shadows in the Snow

While working with blue-gray, use it to add shadows in the snow, enhancing depth and contrast in your painting.

PRO TIP

Wiping out is often the best way to fix mirrored design issues.

14 Sky and water reflections



Clean Your Brush

Ensure your brush is thoroughly cleaned before moving on to painting the sky. This prevents any unwanted color mixing.

Paint the Sky

Mix a warm light grey for the center of the glowing area in the sky. Gradually transition to a slightly darker and cooler grey as you move outward from the center.

Enhance the Peak

Lighten the peak area to intensify the glowing effect in the sky. Use thick paint to achieve a strong contrast.

Add Water Reflections

With the light grey still on your brush, apply the paint to create light reflections in the water. This ties the sky and water together harmoniously.

PRO TIP

Use thick paint for the light areas to create a strong glowing effect.

15 Detailing and edge softening



Modify Large Color Areas

Focus on modifying the large color areas on your canvas by adding more detail. Start with the line of trees on the left, incorporating elements like snow and shadow to create depth.

Add Snow and Shadow

Consider how snow lingers in shadowed areas while it melts where the sun strikes. Apply this concept to your scene by placing snow and shadow in the lower areas to enhance realism.

Re-establish Dark Values

Re-establish some of the dark values that may have been lost when adding mid values. Ensure these darks are the right size to maintain the scale of the scene.

Add Light and Soften Edges

Add a little bit of light on top of the dark areas to create contrast. Use a mostly dry brush to softly brush over edges that should not draw attention, ensuring they remain soft.

Reflect Sky Glow

Paint the wet sandy areas a little lighter to reflect the intense glow from the sky. This reflection adds a sense of realism and enhances the overall composition.

PRO TIP

Use a mostly dry brush to soften edges that should not draw attention.

16 Snow highlights and mist



Mix Snow Highlights

Create a very light, warm grey mixture to represent the highlights in the snow. This will capture the shimmering light effect on the snow.

Apply Highlights with Palette Knife

Load a palette knife with thick paint and apply it to the snow areas. This technique will help create a sparkling, shimmering light effect.

Add Mist to Background

Introduce a little bit of mist to the background to lighten it. This will enhance the depth by pushing the foreground hill forward.

PRO TIP

Use a palette knife with thick paint to achieve a sparkling light effect on snow.

17 Final touches and signing



Refine Shapes

Tidy up the painting by redefining shapes. Add a couple of sparkles and small details to enhance the composition.

Enhance Foreground Tree

Apply the darkest darks to the foreground tree to create depth. Add a touch of edge lighting to highlight its form.

Sign Your Painting

Complete your artwork by signing it. This personal touch marks the painting as your own.

Remove Tape

Carefully rip off the tape to reveal clean edges and a finished look.

PRO TIP

Use the darkest darks in the foreground to create depth and contrast.

Summary & Key Takeaways

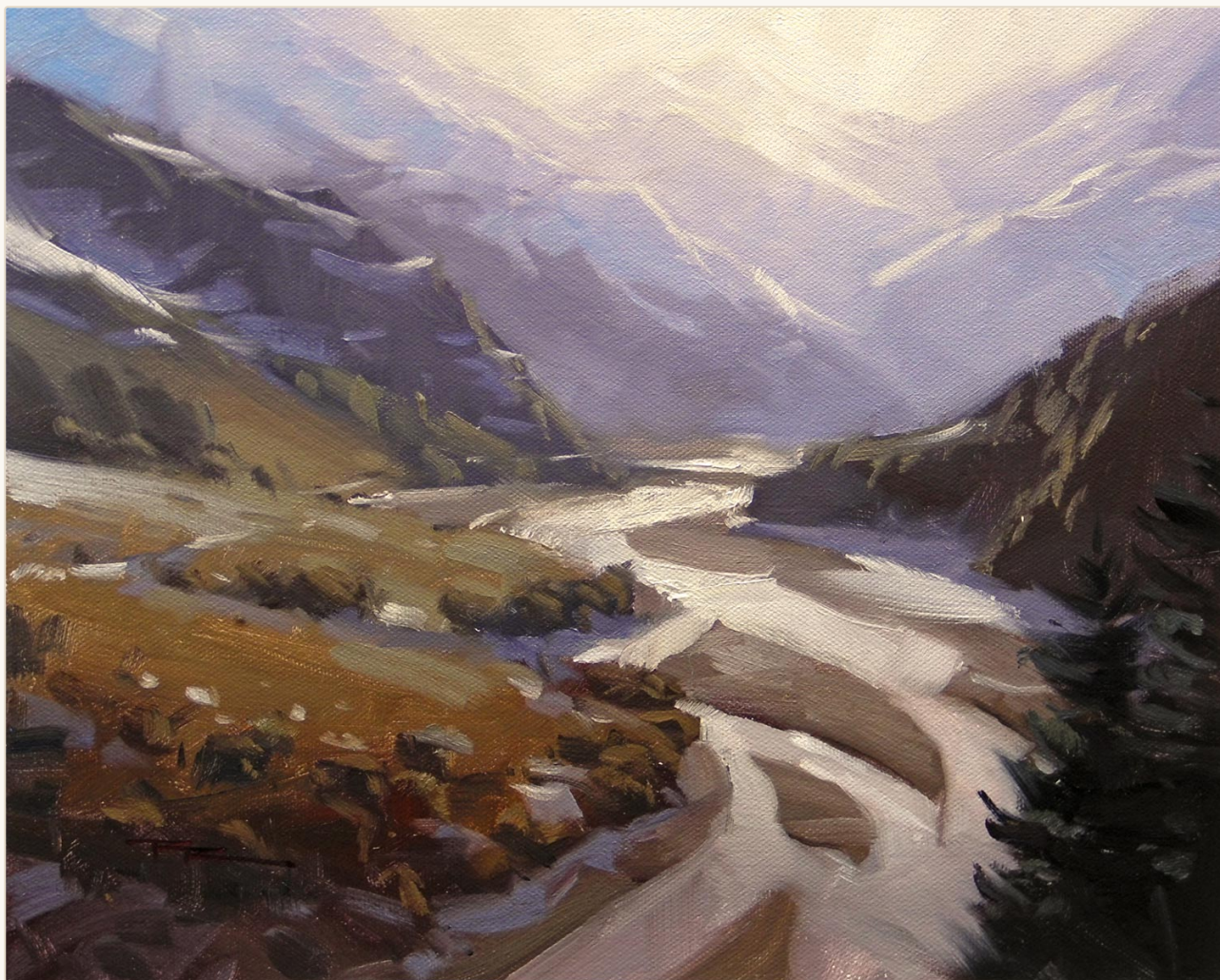
Embark on your painting journey by drawing inspiration from the Rees Valley. Begin with notan designs to establish a strong composition, focusing on the balance of light and dark areas. Use limited value studies to understand the tonal range and incorporate atmospheric perspective to add depth, capturing the vastness of the scene. As you progress, remember to critique your work with a fresh perspective, identifying areas for improvement to enhance your skills.

Set up your materials thoughtfully, ensuring your palette and brushes are suited to the techniques you plan to employ. As you paint, focus on creating a harmonious relationship between the elements, such as the sky and water, and use strategic composition adjustments to guide the viewer's eye. Pay attention to the glowing light effects and the subtle shifts in color as they recede into the distance, enhancing the sense of depth and atmosphere.

As you refine your painting, focus on detailing and edge softening to add realism and depth. Use a palette knife to create sparkling highlights on the snow and introduce mist to push the background further back. With the final touches and signing, complete your artwork, ensuring it reflects your unique artistic vision. Remember, each painting is a step in your artistic journey, and with each critique and adjustment, you grow as an artist.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use atmospheric perspective to create depth and enhance the sense of distance.
- Review your work after some time has passed to gain a fresh perspective.
- Critique your painting as if it were created by your harshest critic.
- Use dark masses strategically to guide the viewer's eye and enhance composition.
- Avoid making shapes too similar to prevent a man-made appearance.
- Test your color choice with a small spot on the canvas before applying it broadly.
- Ensure the color of the water relates closely to the color of the sky.
- Use a mostly dry brush to soften edges that should not draw attention.



"Rees Valley" 11x14" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson

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.

“Ribbons of Nature Mark 2” by Diane Boucher



"Ribbons of Nature Mark 2" Oil on Canvas by Diane Boucher

Design

I always find it instructive to compare the painting side by side with the resource photo when I'm critiquing it, but I also often view the painting by itself because that's how a painting is seen by everyone else and it must stand on its own. In this case the design is very similar to the photo which was quite strong to begin with so I don't see any problems there - it's a very interesting dynamic design. You have made the bottom left quarter more diverse in its shapes and colorings which is a nice idea but its rendering isn't quite as convincing as the rest of the painting so I feel it becomes a bit of a blindspot - somewhere I don't really want to look for very long because it doesn't stand up to scrutiny, despite it being the main colour interest in the painting. Yes you have used interesting colour, brushwork and shape design there, but it looks to me like you weren't exactly sure what features you were painting some of the time (is it a tree, a shadow, a bush, a different species of grass, etc?) The result of indecision in painting is muddled colour and a lack of clear object definition. To be fair this corner is a very tricky area to contend with because there is so much detail it's hard to decide what to leave in and what to leave out.

Color

I'm immediately attracted to your subtle grayed colour scheme. We see hardly any pure spectrum colour in nature so for me I like to see this emulated well in a painting (at times). I like the way you've put your highest chroma yellow in the foreground and then grayed it leading into the midground. I also like the warmth you've introduced into the sky (although you could have reflected some of that in the river too). Two things I would have changed would be to introduce some more light into the shaft of darkness coming

from the top left because it seems too dark to be that far away due to atmospheric perspective. I would have also pushed the distant mountains on the right further away by lightening and graying that green there. Another small thing is the yellow colour in the tree at bottom right doesn't make sense for that type of tree although compositionally I like that colour there but the rendering of that area could have been more convincing too. So much to think about!

Brushwork

I think your brushwork is really interesting in this piece - you've used a large brush, and small brush for just a few important details like the shadowed edge of the riverbed, and a palette knife in a few places to add more texture and even that nice shimmering light effect in the water - nice job! I encourage you to keep at it with this combo of mark makers - they make for a very interesting paint surface.

Realism

Overall it's a pretty convincing scene, especially from a distance. There are the few areas I've already mentioned detracting from that realism a little, plus a couple other things worth mentioning: You've drawn the base of the midground dark hill on the left incorrectly where it meets the river plain - it should be lower and separated from the base of the distant mountains. The very straight diagonal line within that same hillside could also be broken a little to make it look less man made.

It's a very pleasing painting to spend time looking at with plenty to interest the eye and spirit, so I commend you for a good painting and hope this critique has helped a little.

"Rees Valley" by Dania Bree



"Rees Valley" 12x16" Oil on Canvas Panel by Dania Bree

Design

I really like this design. You've decided to crop out the plain on the left and make the river a bigger player. The remaining dark shapes balance each other in a bold simple fashion making this painting read really well from a distance. Bravo!

Color

It's all going quite well until we hit the green in the left hand mountains - and aaaargh! The chroma is too high (not enough gray) which brings this colour right into the foreground, spoiling the illusion of distance. The problem is that your brain knows all those trees are green so it tries to make you paint them vibrant green. If you blur your vision at the resource photo you will see the green there is actually very close to the blue/gray base colour of those mountains. Your other colours in that area (the other mountains and the river plain) are suffering from the same problem - not enough blue/gray in them. Easily fixed though. Same goes for the slashes of green in the hill on the right - just knock it back a little. Love the colour work in your sky and the same warm/cool idea being applied to the snow - very nice. I'm also enjoying the slight glowing light effect you've managed to work into the top edge of the mountain on the right - it makes sense of the light reflecting of the river too - good work!

Brushwork

In some areas like the foreground tree, the riverbanks and some of the river itself your brushwork is looking great with the appearance of being effortlessly brushed on which is a joy to look at. Some other

areas have been labored over a little - areas where you haven't got the colour right first hit by the looks of it. Often with oils it's better to scrape an area and redo it from scratch rather than adding good paint to bad - one less ball to juggle.

Realism

Nearly there! Just those high chroma colours in the distance are spoiling the realism here, and the drawing of the mountains could be a little more precise - they look a bit muddled (tricky things aren't they!?) There's a curious problem with the structure of the base of the far left green mountain too - it seems to be arching over into the middle-ground somehow. Have a closer look at the resource photo to see what's going wrong there.

Overall I think it's a very nice painting displaying some considerable skill with just that colour issue knocking some points off. Good work!

"Rees Valley" by Debbie Piro



"Rees Valley" 20x14" Acrylic on Canvas by Debbie Piro

"...I couldn't print off the photo as i had no ink, so i got my canvas, drew an outline of the hills, river etc and then while it was in my mind i went to another room and painted it."

- Debbie Piro

This is what some of the great old masters of Chinese painting did - except without cameras they would journey through the wilderness, absorbing what they could, then return to their studio and painted their impressions. Google: "Shan shui" (http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Shan_shui)

Their work, like yours in this case Debbie, was very symbolic - not a realistic representation of the landscape. It's interesting that your exaggerated steep mountains are reminiscent of those works and your design is simplified as is your colour scheme - all based on your current understanding (symbols) and the amount of information that your mind can currently hold from one room to the next as you go between your resource photo on screen and your canvas.

So that's what happens when you paint more from your self than from your resource - you end up with more of yourself on the canvas than of your subject. It depends on your goal of course, but now that you have experienced painting in this manner you are more empowered with that knowledge to decide how you want to paint your next painting. For me I find if I spend more time looking at my subject than at my painting I come out with a better painting (in my eyes).

"Rees River" by Harald Skog



"Rees River" Acrylic on Canvasboard by Harald Skog

Design

I always look at the design in terms of dark and light first and then in terms of colour. Is it interesting? Is it varied? Is it natural or too contrived? Those are the sorts of questions I ask myself. Looking at the 2 value breakdown of your design which is really the bones of the painting I think you've achieved an interesting balance of organic shapes. I would have personally preferred to make the left hand bank of the river more sinuous - you've straightened it out a lot which takes away some of the interest it might have had, and I don't see that it adds anything to the design making it straighter.

Colour

In terms of colour design it's nice to see you playing warms off against cools like that which certainly adds interest to the painting. Having green on one side of the river and orange on the other sets up a tension in the painting and has my eyes flicking back and forth trying to figure out why there's this battle of colour across the river.

It's nice to see the warms and cools both on the large scale and in the individual brush strokes helping one another. I think it's a shame you missed the opportunity to gray these colours progressively as they move back into the scene - at the moment it's very much strong foreground colours and then straight to gray background colours, skipping the transition between the two. I would prefer to see some more colour interest in the sky too, which you can do by adding clouds or mist etc, but perhaps with all that painterly

work in the rest of the painting it's good to have a quiet area like this for the eye to rest, but hey, it's all personal taste.

Brushwork

It looks to me like you have a freedom with paint that will allow you to create some really beautiful juicy work if you can knuckle down a bit and learn some more about drawing. Many painters are afraid to lay thick paint on so it's nice to see you're not afraid - the paint should be afraid though. (Uh oh, here comes Harald!). Jokes. Beware of building up too much texture where you want the paint to sit back though, like in dark areas and in the far-ground. I usually prefer to see a thin vs thick relationship happening throughout the painting rather than all thick or all thin. Variation is key.

Realism

I'd rate this about a 5/10 for realism. From a distance the scene is quite easily readable but pretty soon I start to question what's going on in the foreground which says to me that you weren't sure yourself and that basically comes down to drawing. By drawing I mean the learned skill of seeing something, understanding it's form and capturing that in paint. Like I said, that takes some knuckling down - the discipline to look at the subject for a good half an hour and figuring out what's going on before you pick up the brush. Although a good painting may look as though the painter has just slapped the paint on, most of those beautiful daubs of paint have been well considered before each stroke. John Singer Sargent (one of my favorites) was known to step back 10 feet after every single brush stroke, measuring its worth and scraping it off if it wasn't perfectly eloquent. That's a bit daunting isn't it? But inspiring too I think.