

Oranges

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/110-Oranges

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

Welcome to Workshop 7, aptly named 'Oranges.' In this chapter, we dive deeper into the art of still life painting, focusing on the vibrant and inviting subject of oranges. While we've set aside the pear and grapes from our previous lesson, feel free to incorporate them if you wish. I've kept the white vessel in our composition, as it presents a wonderful opportunity to refine our skills in capturing those elusive subtle greys—something we all found challenging last time. To elevate the complexity and interest of our setup, I've added leaves, stems, and a white tablecloth, creating a more intricate scene to explore. This lesson is all about capturing the luminous quality of the oranges, particularly the way light interacts with their vivid flesh. By positioning the light source strategically, we aim to achieve a stained glass window effect, enhancing the high-chroma colors and bringing a sense of life and vibrancy to our painting. Join me as we tackle this rewarding subject, honing our skills and deepening our appreciation for the beauty of still life art.



"Oranges" - Oil on Canvas 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
- 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 Orange Color and Lighting



Enhance the Orange Color

Focus on capturing the vibrant orange color of the cut oranges. Position the light source above and slightly behind the oranges to allow light to pass through them.

Create a Stained Glass Effect

Use the light to create a stained glass window effect. This will highlight the powerful, high-chroma color of the orange flesh, making it appear more luminous and vivid.

> **PRO TIP**
>
> *Position the light source to shine through the oranges for a vibrant, stained glass effect.*

2 Light Effects and Composition



Capture Light Effects

Focus on the powerful light in the center of the still life. Notice how the white tablecloth reflects light onto the objects, creating interesting light effects. Observe how the light bounces from one object to another, enhancing the colors.

Create a Central Explosion of Color

Position the central light source to make the center of the still life vibrant with color and light. Allow this area to be the focal point, with colors radiating outward and gradually darkening.

Shift Composition for Dynamic Effect

Shift the composition slightly to the left. This positioning allows the right side to appear as if the light and color are exploding outward, drawing the viewer's eye into the central area.

> **PRO TIP**
>
> *Use the white tablecloth to enhance light reflection and create dynamic color interactions.*

3 Color Progression and Unity



Incorporate Color Progression

Include a red nectarine in your still life to create a progression of color. Arrange colors to move through a spectrum, such as from red to orange to yellow. This approach can help achieve color unity in your composition.

> **PRO TIP**
>
> *Experiment with color progression to enhance unity in your still life paintings.*

4 Palette and Initial Canvas Preparation



Set Up Your Palette

Arrange your palette with a mid-grey mixed from burnt sienna, ultramarine blue, and white. Include blue, cad red light, and cad yellow light as your primary colors, and alizarin and cadmium orange as your secondary colors. Omit green, as it is not needed for this painting.

Prepare Your Brushes

Select a variety of brushes, both bristle and synthetic, to suit different painting techniques and textures.

Use a Value Scale

Place a value scale under your canvas to help judge values accurately, especially under harsh lighting conditions.

Tone the Canvas

Mix walnut oil with warm colors to create a thin wash. Apply this wash to tone the canvas, enhancing the wet-on-wet effects and adding richness to your painting.

> **PRO TIP**
>
> *Use a value scale to maintain accurate values under varying lighting conditions.*

5 Setting Limits with Drawing and Color



Set the Limits with Drawing

Begin by establishing the top and bottom limits of the vessel. For symmetrically shaped objects, draw a center line first to help judge the angles accurately. This will serve as a guide for placing other elements.

Indicate Shadows

Add indications of where the shadows will fall. This helps in visualizing the depth and form of the object.

Set the Limits with Color

Identify and apply the darkest dark at the bottom of the nectarine and the lightest light. This establishes the range of values, ensuring no darks are darker and no lights are lighter than these set points.

> **PRO TIP**
>
> *Always start with a center line for symmetrical objects to accurately judge angles and proportions.*

6 Painting the Orange and Reflected Light



Paint the Base of the Nectarine

Start with a dark red at the base of the nectarine. Use large brush strokes and soften the edges as you move up through orange and yellow towards the light.

Apply Translucent Color to the Orange

Use a pure cadmium orange with a touch of yellow to capture the powerful translucent color of the orange. Look for other areas in the painting where this color can be applied to maintain harmony.

Adjust Color Temperature

Consider the color on your brush and think about its temperature. Determine if it needs to be warmer or cooler as you apply it to different areas.

Paint the Shadow Area

Use a brown color to represent the dark orange in the shadow area of the orange. Pay attention to the reflected light bouncing off the tablecloth and nearby orange slice.

> **PRO TIP**
>
> *Use the same color in multiple areas to maintain harmony, adjusting its temperature as needed.*

7 Painting Dark Leaves



Mix Dark Green for Leaves

Combine ultramarine blue with cadmium orange to create a warm, dark green. This mixture will help the dark leaves accentuate the brightness of the orange.

Add Light to Leaves

As the leaf moves into the light, add some yellow to the dark green mixture. This will create a natural transition and enhance the realism of the leaves.

> PRO TIP
>
> *Use ultramarine blue with cadmium orange to create a warm, dark green for the leaves.*

8 Background and Light Contrast



Create a Dark Background

Mix burnt sienna and ultramarine blue to achieve a dark tone for the background. Apply this dark mixture to the area behind the central part of the still life. This contrast will make the central colors appear more vibrant and emphasize the light source.

Add Gradient to Background

Avoid a flat black background by incorporating a gradient. Transition from dark on the left to light on the right to add depth and interest. This technique enhances the perception of light in the composition.

> **PRO TIP**
>
> *A darker background will make the foreground lights appear brighter and more striking.*

9 Shadow Colors and Ambient Light



Identify the Occlusion Shadow

Observe the shadow area on the orange. Notice the slightly cooler tinge, indicating ambient light influence.

Understand Ambient Light Influence

Recognize that the cooler tinge in the shadow is due to ambient light, such as a window letting in cooler light.

Block in Shadow Areas

Use a pre-mixed mid-gray to block in large areas of shadow. Allow a little warmth to remain in the brush from painting the warmer shadow under the orange.

> **PRO TIP**
>
> *Use a pre-mixed mid-gray for shadow areas to capture ambient light effects.*

10 Table Corner Shadows



Add Darker Corner

Paint the darker corner of the table to create a nice accent. Soften the edge as much as possible to avoid drawing attention to it.

Create Sharper Shadow

On the opposite side, add a sharper shadow. This will help balance out the interest on the left side of the painting.

> PRO TIP
>
> *Soften edges in less important areas to keep the focus on the main subject.*

11 Painting the White Vessel



Paint the Shadow

Begin by painting the shadow on the white vessel. Pay close attention to how the shadow color relates to the dark background color behind it. Squint to better see the difference between the background and the shadow side of the vessel.

Adjust the Shadow Value

Ensure the value of the shadow is correct, as it may appear darker in photos than in real life. Aim for a dark grey that accurately represents the shadow.

Add Reflected Oranges

Introduce oranges into the shadow area to depict the reflection on the shiny surface. Be cautious not to lighten the value too much with these reflected colors, as this can disrupt the unity of the shadows and affect the form's solidity.

> PRO TIP
>
> *Squint to better distinguish between the background and shadow values.*

12 Color Comparison Questions



Ask Key Color Questions

When painting subtle colors, consistently ask yourself two questions: Is the color lighter or darker than the one next to it? Is it warmer or cooler? These questions will help you maintain color accuracy and balance.

> **PRO TIP**
>
> *Regularly compare colors by asking if they are lighter or darker, warmer or cooler than adjacent colors.*

13 Drawing Handles and Gradients



Draw the Handles

Ensure the handles are symmetrical by carefully measuring and comparing their shapes. This precision is crucial for achieving a balanced composition.

Add the Cast Shadow

Use a darker shade to paint the cast shadow on the top of the handles. This will help create depth and realism in your painting.

Create a Subtle Gradient

Apply a subtle gradient from left to right across the top area, making it slightly darker on the left. This gradient adds a gentle transition and enhances the three-dimensional effect.

> PRO TIP
>
> *Use the dark paint on your brush to soften the shadow edges for a more natural look.*

14 Half Tone and Gradation



Create a Subtle Gradient

Paint a very subtle gradient from left to right across your canvas. This will form the basis for the light transitioning into shadow.

Add the Half Tone

Introduce the half tone or mid tone where the light transitions into the shadow. This is a tricky area, so take care to get it right.

Soften the Edges

Soften the edges of the half tone to achieve a smooth gradation. This will ensure a seamless transition from light to shadow.

> PRO TIP
>
> *Use the color on your brush efficiently to speed up the painting process.*

15 Lighting and Warmth in Painting



Understand the Light Source

Use a standard incandescent 100 watt light bulb to illuminate your scene. This light source emits a very yellow light, which influences the colors in your painting.

Observe Light and Shadow

Notice how the light affects the colors in your painting. The shadows are not just gray; they are warm and light due to the yellow light source. This contributes to the glowing effect in your painting.

> **PRO TIP**
>
> *Incorporate the color of the light source into the light areas of your painting to enhance the glowing effect.*

16 Brush Stroke Considerations



Consider Each Brush Stroke

Before applying a brush stroke, decide on the color and shape it needs to be. Think about the exact placement and the edges required for the stroke. Determine if the stroke should trail off, be soft, or have a sharp edge on one side.

Achieve Pure Bright Colors

By carefully considering each brush stroke, you can achieve pure, bright colors more easily. This method allows for greater control and precision in your painting.

> **PRO TIP**
>
> *Plan each brush stroke to control color purity and edge quality.*

17 Adding Warmth and Avoiding Ad-libbing



Add Warmth to Highlights

Introduce more yellow into the highlights of the cloth to create warmth. This will give the sensation of the oranges glowing and casting their light onto the white tablecloth.

Balance the Painting

Add a bit more color and a slightly sharper edge to balance the painting. This will enhance the overall composition and bring harmony to the scene.

Avoid Thick Over Thick

If there's thick paint from before, wipe it out and redo the area instead of painting thick over thick. This ensures a cleaner and more refined finish.

Focus on Realism

Concentrate on painting what you see rather than improvising. Avoid making up elements, as this can detract from the realism of your still life.

> PRO TIP
>
> *Introduce more yellow into the highlights to create warmth and enhance the glow of the oranges.*

18 Reflections and Juiciness



Add Reflected Light

Include a touch of light on the edge of the orange to represent the reflection from the sugar pot. This helps the orange appear more rounded and realistic.

Enhance Juiciness with Shadows

Observe the slight shadow on the inside edge of the orange. Adding this shadow will enhance the juicy appearance of the fruit.

> PRO TIP
>
> *Use reflections and shadows to give your fruit a more realistic and juicy look.*

19 Fine Details and Realism



Add Fine Details

Use the very edge of your brush loaded with a thin line of paint to define the edges of the leaves. Add a few darker accents to enhance depth and realism.

Create Warm Shadows

Prepare a warm shadow for the stick to sit on top of. This will help integrate the stick into the composition and add dimension.

Use a Sable Brush for Detail

Utilize a sable brush, typically for watercolor, to add fine details. Ensure to wash out the oil paint thoroughly after use to maintain the brush's quality.

Add Metallic Details

Employ a fine synthetic brush, like a short rigger, to create thin strips of metallic detail. This brush is excellent for achieving precise, delicate strokes.

Paint Reflections

Paint two tiny reflections: one long reflection for the large orange and a smaller one for the sliced piece on the tablecloth. Adjust these lines to suit your viewing angle, even if they differ from the reference photograph.

> **PRO TIP**
>
> *Use a short rigger brush for precise, thin strokes to add metallic details.*

20 Finishing Touches



Add Highlights

Apply a few small spots of light to the orange to give it a wet and juicy appearance. Use a bright, light color to create these highlights, enhancing the realism of the fruit.

Add Your Signature

Use a red color similar to the nectarine in the background to sign your painting. Position your signature subtly, ensuring it complements the composition without drawing too much attention.

> PRO TIP
>
> *Use small, bright spots of light to make fruit appear wet and juicy.*

21 Vibrant Color and Neutral Surroundings



Use Pure Cadmium Orange

Apply pure cadmium orange for the bright sections of the oranges. Add a tiny bit of cadmium yellow light for a touch of variation, but avoid adding white to maintain vibrancy.

Surround with Neutral Colors

Paint the surrounding areas with more neutral colors to make the orange stand out. Ensure these areas are lower in chroma and greyer than the orange.

Mix Colors for Natural Greying

Allow the greying down of colors to happen naturally by mixing one color with another. This is especially effective in oil paints.

> **PRO TIP**
>
> *Apply the vibrant orange first, then adjust surrounding colors to be more neutral to enhance contrast.*

Summary & Key Takeaways

In this lesson on painting oranges, you begin by focusing on capturing the vibrant hues and lighting effects that make the fruit appear luminous and vivid. Position your light source strategically to create a stained glass effect, enhancing the high-chroma colors of the orange flesh. As you progress, pay attention to the composition and how light interacts with the objects, using a white tablecloth to reflect light and create dynamic color interactions.

As you build your painting, consider the progression and unity of colors by incorporating elements like a red nectarine to create a spectrum from red to orange to yellow. Prepare your palette with a mid-grey and a selection of primary and secondary colors, and use a value scale to maintain accurate values. Establish the structure of your still life by setting limits with drawing and color, and pay close attention to the interplay of light and shadow.

Finally, refine your painting with attention to detail, using precise brush strokes to add realism and depth. Incorporate reflections and highlights to enhance the juicy appearance of the fruit, and use neutral tones in the background to make the vibrant oranges stand out. With these techniques, you'll achieve a harmonious and striking still life that captures the essence of the oranges.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Position the light source to shine through the oranges for a vibrant, stained glass effect.
- Use the white tablecloth to enhance light reflection and create dynamic color interactions.
- Experiment with color progression to enhance unity in your still life paintings.
- Use a value scale to maintain accurate values under varying lighting conditions.
- Always start with a center line for symmetrical objects to accurately judge angles and proportions.
- Use ultramarine blue with cadmium orange to create a warm, dark green for the leaves.
- Incorporate the color of the light source into the light areas of your painting to enhance the glowing effect.
- Introduce more yellow into the highlights to create warmth and enhance the glow of the oranges.



"Oranges" - 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.

'Orange with White Jug' Oil on Canvas, 30.5 x 40.5 cm (12 x 16") by Annie Cullen



'Orange with White Jug' Oil on Canvas, 30.5 x 40.5 cm (12 x 16") by Annie Cullen

Design

Looks like a good strong design to me Annie - you've tied everything together in a circular fashion and the overall dark/light construction is very strong. I might have tried adding a leaf or two behind the jug on the right, but that's all.

Colour

Good bold colour nicely arranged. The strong red in the background might be stealing a little of the orange's thunder, but on the other hand it helps bring the greens to life. You have noted some subtle colour variations like the cloth getting cooler on the left (although it could have gone a bit darker too) but have missed a few key ones like the difference in value between the light and dark sides of the oranges. For instance look at the two on the right. It is not very obvious that the piece behind is in light and the other in shadow. The colours are too similar. Also, look at the rind in shadow in the full orange. Squint at it and it does not blend in with the other shadow colour there. It should. The value is too light. Also your reflection of that orange in the jug is mostly darker in value than the jug's shadow which it is actually supposed to be lightening, so the value of the orange there is too dark or the shadow is too light, or both. The gradation of colour across the jug could have been smoother to give the effect of glazed pottery, but that's more about brushwork. Hope that helps. The more you look the more you see.

Brushwork

Some of your brushwork is is fluid and bold and beautiful, while other parts are overworked - you know where, because you felt it when you did it. I see beautiful brushwork as an art in itself, but when you can describe something with a few luscious strokes it's a double-whammy - a perfect harmony of form and function. Something to aspire to. I'm always asking myself, 'how many brush strokes does this really need?' How can I use the brush in a clever way to paint a Haiku rather than an Encyclopaedia? But that's me. Depends on your goals. One note that might be useful to you is to be careful that your quest for exciting brushwork does not ruin your value structure. At the moment I'm seeing that happen in most of your surfaces, most noticeably in the jug where slight changes in value because of left over paint in the brush or moving from one area to another are causing streaks of different values and confusing the form.

Realism

There are the few things I've mentioned detracting from the realism, but also the drawing in some places which is very easy to see when you place the finished painting next to the photo. Just compare individual shapes and it's easy to spot small errors to watch out for next time. It's much harder to do while you're actually painting of course but hey it wouldn't be exciting if it wasn't challenging right!? Reading this again it seems I've really picked this painting to death but that's because I want to encourage you to do even better next time. Overall I think it's a very pleasing painting which leaves a lasting impression because for the most part it's been boldly and elegantly done. Good work!

'Light on Oranges' Acrylic on canvas, 16 x 12", by Karen Sheppard



'Light on Oranges' Acrylic on canvas, 16 x 12", by Karen Sheppard

Design

I love your design Karen, it's lovely to have the grapes flowing over the plate and leading the eye to the glowing orange segment. Good use of dramatic lighting - it's almost ethereal and perhaps you could have brought a little more light into the shadowed area on the left by rotating the orange segment there clockwise so that its right side was catching the light. As it is at the moment your two segments are very much the same shape where you had an opportunity to add a little more variety. That's being pretty picky but same shapes are something I try to avoid in my own arrangements.

Colour

You're getting somewhere now. Nice contrast between warm and cool overall, and you've noted some subtle difference within those too. A few things you could look at are the value of the pith in both the orange segments - it's too light which is destroying the illusion of shadow there. Squint squint! In the teapot you have a nice subtle cool to warm transition but perhaps the light is not quite light enough? It's great to see you casting reflected light from the orange segment on the right and that's something I encourage you to keep playing with. In the teapot you may have missed the opportunity to reflect the red grapes into the shadow side which would have made a nice counterpoint to the grey blue there.

The orange light in the background fabric is striking from a distance but you've lost a little realism there by excluding some cooler grays in there, and the orange colour is so strong there it really takes the eye away

from the subject of the painting. Similarly it looks to be a little too cool in the shadowed backdrop on the left and might have been more balanced including some slightly warmer notes in there.

Brushwork

Your brushwork has a nice feminine fluidity about it in some parts, however a lot of it is overworked - many brush strokes where one would suffice, flattening the paint and muddying the colour. That's only going to improve with brush miles and you're already doing so well so keep it up! Consider using a larger brush, more paint and be aware of painting value planes as described in the first still life workshop.

Realism

Well you can see yourself you're getting there. The grapes look pretty convincing as do several other portions of the painting, and your drawing is not too shabby. One thing you might try next time is losing some edges. For instance you could lose all that detail under the plate where it joins the table - just blur it together. Similarly in the photo the left side of the big orange is nearly the same value as the background so there's another opportunity to lose an edge. Same story in the big shadow area of the grapes - you've delineated every single grape which is not strictly necessary. Some things to think about. Hope that helps.

'Oranges & Tea Cup with Blue Leaves' Oil on Canvas, by Justine Wardle



'Oranges & Tea Cup with Blue Leaves' Oil on Canvas, by Justine Wardle

Design

Justine I like your design and arrangement of colours - quite similar to my own setup so I guess I'm biased there. It's got plenty to interest the eye and keep it moving around the canvas. I would perhaps have given a tad more room on the left of the big orange and maybe a teaspoon in the cup leaning to the left would help with that empty area there.

Colour

Your colour is very rich and vibrant - a joy to look at, made more so by the contrast with the gray background. You have lightened the reflected light in many of the shadow areas more than what is natural which does add to the vibrant colour as a whole but tends to flatten the form as it confuses the distinction between shadow and light areas. If you want to avoid that just be sure to squint down on those shadows and compare the areas of strong reflected light with the surrounding shadow areas. Areas of reflected light still belong to the shadow family and should not be as light as the same object in the light.

Nice to see the warm/cool variations in the cloth although there too the form is a little confused due to incorrect value relationships. The orange in the teacup is a little overstated and detracts from the form, as do the sharp edges within the face of the cup. You've really just got to look at the major colours and shapes that are happening, get those right and then add subtler variations.

Brushwork

A lot of your brushwork is bold and beautifully done - laid down once and left there. I can see you're battling like I am to paint the big shapes in a simple fashion but then add some fine detail to hold the whole painting together. I can only encourage you to keep going because you're well on your way there. The next thing to consider might be the possible relationship between thin washes and thick impasto brushwork. I think there's real beauty to be found there. You could also afford to loose some edges here and there in the shadows and glowing parts.

Realism

You're very close to some crisp realism here, especially in that orange on the left - beautiful! It's mainly just the incorrect values that are letting you down and the drawing could be a bit better too. Getting there, getting there! I haven't mentioned the light blue marks in the background as you said you have now painted over those, which is good. You've got a bit of glare happening on the left of this photo so just be aware of that when you're taking your next shot. Try to get a large dark background behind you (like an open garage). Great work Justine - keep it up!

'Heaven's Scents' Acrylic on Canvas by Stephanie Burgess



'Heaven's Scents' Acrylic on Canvas by Stephanie Burgess

Design

This is one of the most interesting designs we've had I believe, using the candle is a really nice idea. Makes me think of a little village. So yes you've got good elements in there but I do feel the design itself is not quite working. It's such a subjective thing though. If it was me I would have taken one of the big oranges out or have one behind the candle, or add another one. It's so hard to balance two of the same objects in a still life and you did try to hide one a bit but they're both similarly placed on each side of the canvas so it creates a division.

Colour

Good strong colour throughout and with a few subtle variations noted here and there. You handled the glowing candle light particularly well. Here are a few things you could look at: you might have grayed the purple in the background to avoid it jumping forward, the cloth appears to be too light, as does the ceramic holder which lessens the effect of the candle light. The fold in shadow on the right of the big orange on the left is much too cool as it should be picking up that reflected orange light and getting darker closer to the orange.

Brushwork

Looks like you have a tendency to try and smooth everything out which is easily overcome by cutting one finger off every time you do this. Jokes! No, it's hard to stop yourself doing this. One good exercise is to do a small simple painting of a pear for instance and limit your painting to say, 30 brush strokes. That's 30

times the brush can touch the canvas. You'd be surprised what a bold dynamic pear you can paint with 30 brush strokes. You've tentatively started softening some edges there and I encourage you to continue pushing forward with that.

Realism

Some of this rates very high for realism, which is really just a measure if how well you have seen your subject, so it encompasses everything. I love the way you have handled the candle and think that's the crowning achievement of this painting because it's a very tricky thing to do well. Your oranges are beautifully round and edible (and I don't say that to everyone I meet) but your drawing is a bit wonky in places like the tilted ellipse of the half orange and the symmetry of the candle holder. Some good work here though. Keep it up!