



Old Friends

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/116-Old-Friends>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

Join me on a painting adventure right here at One Tree Point, just down the road from my home. I initially set out to paint a different tree, but as I explored, I stumbled upon these magnificent old trees leaning together, their stark shapes beautifully contrasting against a dark backdrop and a glowing field of golden grass. The scene captivated me instantly, and I felt an overwhelming urge to capture it on canvas. In this chapter, I'll guide you through the process of painting this dynamic scene on a 10 x 8 panel, which took me about an hour and 20 minutes. You'll see how using large brushes can help you swiftly capture the essence of a scene without getting bogged down in details. The key is to focus on what you love most about the subject, and this lesson will show you how to do just that. I hope it inspires you to venture outdoors and create your own masterpieces, embracing the spontaneity and joy of plein air painting.



"Old Friends" - 10x8" - Oil on Board



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

- Chroma Archival Oils
- Ultramarine Blue
- Alizarine Crimson
- Burnt Sienna
- Cadmium Orange
- Cadmium Yellow Light
- Titanium White
- Painting medium
- Chroma Archival Classic Medium
- 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 Palette and Materials



Set Up Your Palette

Arrange your palette with the following colors from left to right: Ultramarine Blue, Alizarin Crimson, Burnt Sienna, Cadmium Orange, Cadmium Yellow Light, and Titanium White. This order helps you easily access and mix colors as you paint.

Prepare Your Medium

Use a painting medium similar to Liquin, such as the one made by Chroma for their archival oils range. This medium aids in the flow and drying time of your paints.

PRO TIP

Use archival oils from Chroma for long-lasting and vibrant results.

2 Canvas Preparation



Prepare the Canvas

Use a canvas that has previously had a painting on it and been scrubbed off with tips and a rag. This creates a more inviting surface than a blank white canvas and helps the oil paint slide easily over it. The embedded oil in the canvas prevents excessive absorption, making painting smoother and more enjoyable.

PRO TIP

Use a pre-painted and scrubbed canvas to help oil paint glide smoothly and avoid excessive absorption.

3 Sketching the Composition



Prepare the Sketch Mixture

Mix a watery solution using mainly alizarin crimson with a little ultramarine blue. This mixture will help you sketch in the composition without committing to any specific color.

Sketch the Major Lines and Shapes

Use the mixture to sketch the major lines and shapes of your composition. Focus on capturing the essence of the scene rather than the details.

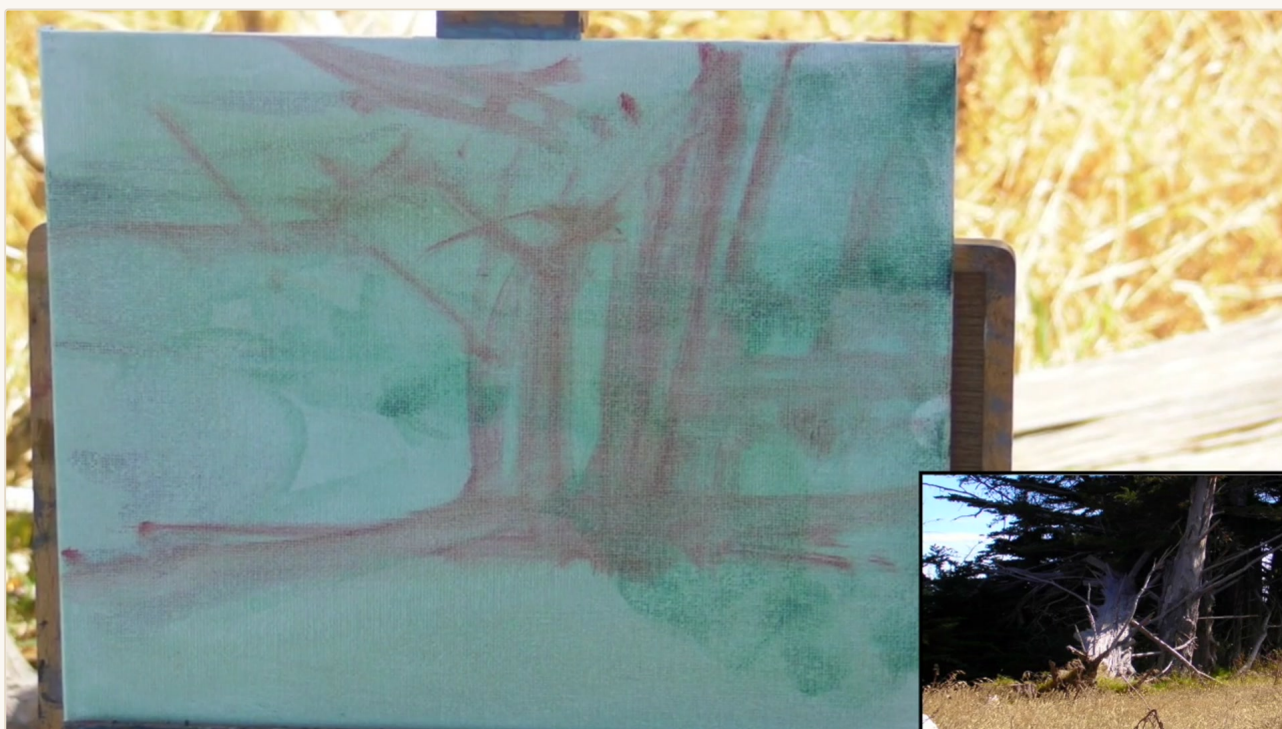
Position the Subject

Place your subject slightly off-center to the right. This creates a slightly unbalanced and more interesting composition.

PRO TIP

Positioning your subject off-center can add interest and dynamism to your composition.

4 Motivation and Painting Process



Gather Inspiration

Seek out sources of inspiration that motivate you to paint. This could be a video, a book, or a visit to an art gallery. Let this inspiration drive you to start your painting process.

Prepare Your Materials

Once inspired, gather all your painting materials. Ensure you have everything you need, including brushes, paints, and a canvas, so you're ready to start painting without interruption.

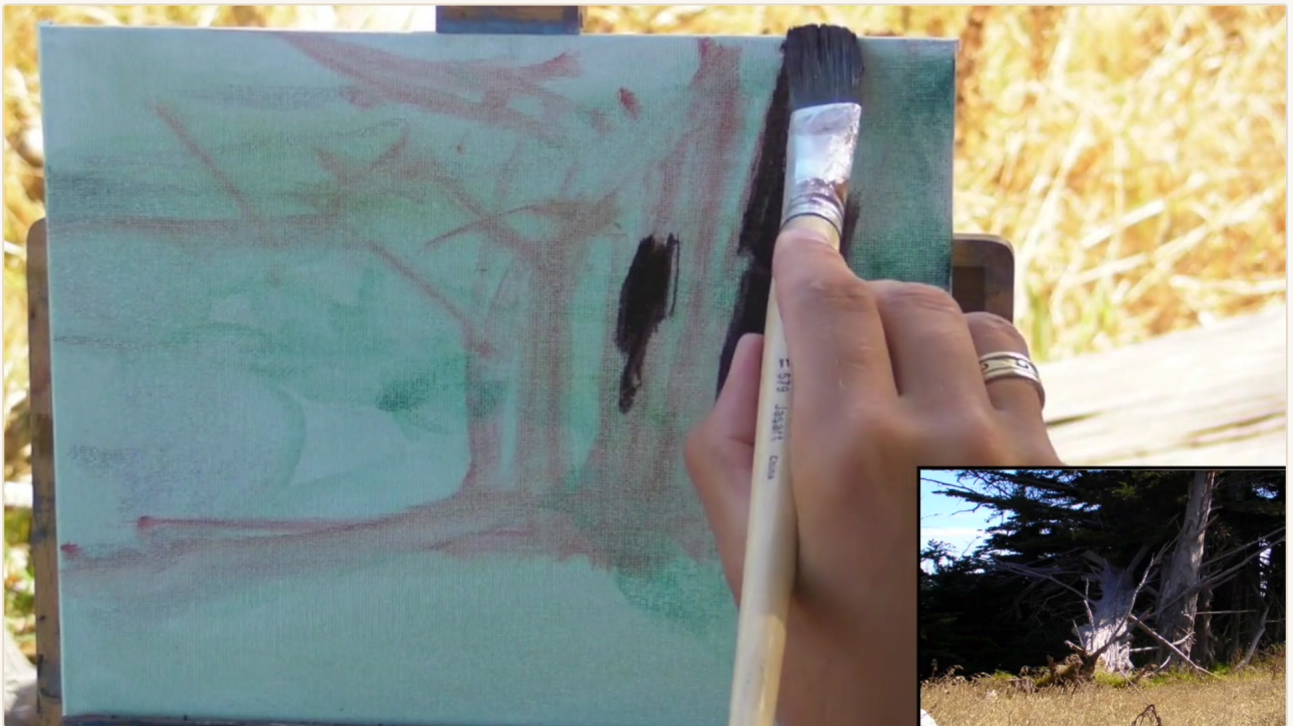
Embrace the Painting Process

Focus on the painting process itself, looking for new techniques and insights. Use this time to experiment and learn, whether you're painting outdoors or in the studio.

PRO TIP

Let inspiration guide you to start painting, and use the process as an opportunity to learn and grow.

5 Laying in the Darks



Thin the Darks

Use odourless thinners to lay in your darks very thinly. Aim to thin them as much as possible without allowing the canvas weave to show through excessively. This approach helps create a subtle base layer for your painting.

PRO TIP

Use odourless thinners to achieve a very thin application of darks, avoiding the canvas weave showing through too much.

6 Mixing and Planning Colors



Mix a Dark Background Color

Combine ultramarine blue and alizarin crimson to create a purple hue. Add a tiny touch of yellow to the mix to prevent it from being too purple. This will create a slightly greyer tone, perfect for a dark background.

Focus on Essential Elements

Trim down your composition to its essence, focusing on the main subject. In this case, emphasize the portrait of the trees against the dark background. Exclude any elements that do not support this focus to maintain clarity in your painting.

Prepare for Glowing Effects

Add some orange to the bottom of the dark area to prepare for the golden grass. This will create a glowing effect when the grass is painted over it. Doing this beforehand avoids muddying colors by trying to paint dark over light later.

PRO TIP

Plan your composition by focusing on the main subject and excluding unnecessary elements.

7 Painting the Tree Trunk



Apply Dark Base Colors

Start by applying all your darks first. This approach ensures a cleaner color range in your painting. Use loose brushstrokes to lay in the foliage at the top.

Add Grayed Tones

Mix a little white and blue to create a grayed tone for the upper foliage. Apply this color thinly to suggest shadows and depth in the tree trunk.

Create Textural Effects

Work with thin layers of paint, similar to a watercolor or acrylic wash. This technique allows for beautiful light textural effects that are difficult to achieve with thicker paint.

Adjust Trunk Color

For the tree trunk in the background, begin with a dark color. If it appears too red, add some blue to balance it while maintaining the dark tones.

PRO TIP

Work with thin paint layers to achieve light textural effects.

8 Tree Size Variation Concept



Visualize Trees as a Family

Imagine your trees as a family to create size variation. The father tree is the largest, followed by the mother tree, which is slightly smaller and close to the father. The smaller trees represent the children, positioned around the parents, sometimes close to them.

Avoid Uniform Patterns

Be mindful not to create uniform patterns when painting groups of trees. This approach helps prevent your trees from looking like evenly spaced fence posts, adding a natural, dynamic feel to your composition.

PRO TIP

Think of trees as a family to naturally vary their sizes and positions.

9 Foreground and Background Colors



Prepare the Green Base

Mix a dark color with a touch of yellow to create a subtle green. This mixture will lighten the color and push it towards green, setting the stage for lighter greens in the foreground.

Apply the Green Shadow

Lay in this green mixture to represent the shadow of the grass in the foreground. This foundational layer will support the lighter greens to come.

Extend Beyond the Edges

Paint beyond the intended area to ensure there are no gaps or white canvas showing. This technique allows for adjustments and ensures complete coverage.

PRO TIP

Mix a dark color with a touch of yellow to create a subtle green for foundational layers.

10 Balancing Detail and Abstraction



Embrace Freedom with the Brush

Use broad strokes to cover large areas with color. This stage is about enjoying the freedom of abstraction while maintaining a hint of realism. Let the painting evolve naturally, capturing the essence of the scene.

Balance Detail and Abstraction

Add some details to highlight the elements that inspired you to paint the scene. Be careful not to overdo it, as the goal is to maintain a balance between detailed realism and expressive abstraction.

PRO TIP

Enjoy the freedom of abstraction while maintaining a hint of realism.

11 Sky and Sky Holes



Prepare the Foreground

Apply a very thin, loose wash of pure arilamide yellow to the foreground. This will serve as a base for thicker paint layers later.

Mix Sky Color

Create a light mixture for the sky using mainly titanium white, with some ultramarine blue, a tiny bit of alizarin crimson, and a touch of yellow. This combination will give you a balanced sky tone.

Add Sky Holes

Introduce sky holes by using a slightly darker, richer blue than the sky color. This will suggest depth and variation in the sky.

PRO TIP

Cover the canvas quickly to make more informed decisions on color and value later.

12 Avoiding Patterns in Sky Holes



Understand Sky Holes

Recognize that smaller sky holes tend to appear darker and more vibrant in color. This is a natural effect that should be considered when painting.

Avoid Repetitive Patterns

Be mindful of the placement and size of sky holes. Avoid creating sky holes that are the same size or evenly spaced, as this can make them look artificial and man-made.

Practice Patience

Take your time to carefully vary the size and placement of sky holes. This will help create a more natural and realistic appearance in your painting.

PRO TIP

Vary the size and placement of sky holes to avoid creating artificial patterns.

13 Painting Process Insight



Understand the Process

Recognize that painting on location, or plein air painting, captures the raw and immediate essence of a scene. This approach allows you to respond directly to the environment and light conditions.

Embrace Spontaneity

Allow yourself to paint freely and embrace the spontaneity of the moment. This can lead to fresh and authentic results that convey the energy of the scene.

PRO TIP

Capture the essence of the scene by painting directly from life, allowing for a more genuine and immediate representation.

14 Shadow and Light on the Tree



Mix Shadow Color

Create a light shadow color for the tree by mixing a slightly darker version of the sky color. Adjust the mixture to include variations, such as warmer tones near the bottom where light reflects off the grass.

Add Green Reflections

Incorporate some green into the shadow color as you paint higher up the tree to mimic the natural reflections seen in the foliage.

Use Primary and Secondary Colors

Mix the shadow color using either a combination of blue and orange or the primary colors blue, red, and yellow. This will help create a gray tone that is suitable for the tree's shadow.

Darken Upper Shadows

As you paint the tree's shadow higher up, gradually darken the color to reflect the deeper shadows found in the foliage.

PRO TIP

Subtle variations in color and value enhance realism in your tree's shadow.

15 Simplifying Shapes



Identify Major Shapes

Squint at the scene to help identify the major shapes. Focus on capturing these shapes with the fewest possible brush strokes.

Capture the Essence

Concentrate on painting the essence of the scene rather than the fiddly details. This will help maintain a simplified and impactful composition.

PRO TIP

Squinting helps to see major shapes and simplify the scene.

16 Reflected Light Concept



Differentiate Tree Colors

Adjust the color of the second tree to be slightly browner than the first tree. This variation helps to delineate the trees, giving each a unique character and preventing them from appearing as one.

Add Blue to Background Tree

Incorporate a bit more blue into the grey mixture for the tree in the background. This suggests that the tree is reflecting the blue sky, enhancing the sense of depth and realism.

Enhance Reflected Light

Apply subtle touches of blue to the shadowed side of the tree, where the sky's light is bouncing off. This reflected light adds solidity and dimension to the object.

Visualize Objects as Mirrors

Imagine the tree as a cylindrical mirror to determine what it reflects. Consider what the tree would reflect if it were a mirror, such as the sky and surrounding bushes, to guide your color choices.

PRO TIP

Think of objects as mirrors to determine what colors they might reflect from their surroundings.

17 Preparing for Highlights



Reflective Color Consideration

Understand that the tree's color is influenced by its surroundings. Although the tree is not a mirror, it reflects the sky and nearby elements. Focus on painting the local color of the tree, considering both its natural color and the reflected light from the environment.

Add Sky Reflections

Identify areas of the tree that reflect the sky. These areas should be painted with a lighter blue to mimic the sky's reflection. This helps to create a realistic interaction between the tree and its environment.

Incorporate Ground Reflections

Notice the golden grass in the foreground and its light bouncing onto the tree. Add a touch of orange and yellow to the grey of the tree to represent this reflected light. This subtle warmth lays the groundwork for future highlights.

Prepare for Future Highlights

Focus on maintaining the darks and shadows for now. This preparation will make the eventual highlights on the branches more striking. Exercise self-control to resist the urge to add highlights too soon.

PRO TIP

Add orange and yellow to grey areas of the tree to reflect light from golden grass.

18 Building Up Green Tones



Apply Mid-Green

Use a vibrant mid-green to paint the base of the tree. This color should not be grayed down much, as it will serve as the foundation for glowing green highlights.

Create a Three-Stage Color Area

Begin with a darker, grayer green as the base layer. Smoothly blend this into the golden grass area. Then, apply the mid-green over this base to prepare for the final highlights.

Enhance with Light Green Highlights

Once the mid-green is in place, add very light, powerful green highlights over the top. This will create a glowing effect, making the highlights stand out vibrantly.

PRO TIP

Use a vibrant mid-green as a foundation to make the highlights sing and create a glowing effect.

19 Design and Intuition



Create Dark Foliage

Indicate green foliage on the left with a dark tone. Keep this area dark to serve as a counterpoint to the lightness of the tree trunks. Use swishy brush marks to draw attention to the trees.

Add Motion to Foliage

Make the surrounding foliage appear swishy, like a motion blur. This technique focuses the viewer's eye back to the center of interest, which is the trees.

Highlight with Intense Green

Lighten a green by adding cadmium yellow lemon or yellow pale, avoiding too much white to maintain high saturation. Apply this intense green as a highlight in the foliage at the top.

Balance Intense Colors

Balance the intense green highlights with the strong color in the grass at the bottom. This creates harmony and prevents the eye from leaving the top of the painting.

PRO TIP

Use intuitive design and color placement to guide the viewer's eye through the painting.

20 Conversing with the Painting



Engage with Your Painting

Initiate a conversation with your painting, either internally or out loud. This interaction can unlock your creative side, allowing the painting to guide you in what it needs next. If you find yourself stuck, ask your painting what it requires and listen for the response.

PRO TIP

Start a conversation with your painting to tap into your creativity and let the painting guide you.

21 Adding Highlights and Corrections



Add Green Highlights

Apply bright green highlights at the base of the tree to create a glowing effect. This will enhance the light and draw attention to the foreground.

Darken the Background

Introduce a darker green into the background to push it back visually. This contrast helps keep the viewer's focus on the foreground elements.

Correct Tree Trunk Shape

Use a dark color to redefine the tree trunk where the drawing was inaccurate. This will help shape the trunk more effectively and improve the overall composition.

PRO TIP

Use darker tones to push background elements back and enhance depth.

22 Maintaining Loose Brushwork



Add Dark Foliage

Lay in some more dark foliage to give the painting more shape. Focus on maintaining a loose and swishy brushwork style to avoid getting finicky with details. This approach helps keep the painting lively and expressive.

PRO TIP

Avoid getting caught up in small details; maintain a loose and swishy brushwork style for a more dynamic painting.

23 Editing and Mixing Colors



Mix Colors Thoughtfully

Spend time mixing colors on your palette to achieve the right shades. This process is crucial and can take a significant portion of your painting time. Aim for precision in your color choices to enhance the overall quality of your painting.

Use Deliberate Brush Movements

Move your brush around the canvas thoughtfully, even if it means making multiple movements before committing to a stroke. This helps you decide what the painting needs without overloading it with unnecessary brushstrokes.

PRO TIP

Take your time mixing colors to ensure accuracy and harmony in your painting.

24 Final Highlights and Details



Plan Your Brushstrokes

Take the time to plan your brushstrokes carefully before applying them. This ensures precision and enhances the overall effect of the highlights.

Apply Sparkling Highlights

Add sparkling highlights to the tree, focusing on the center of interest. Use a very light grey-blue or blue-grey, adjusting the warmth with a touch of yellow and orange as needed.

Use Thick Paint

Apply the paint thickly without any medium, using simple strokes. This allows the paint to stand up and catch the light, creating a sparkling effect.

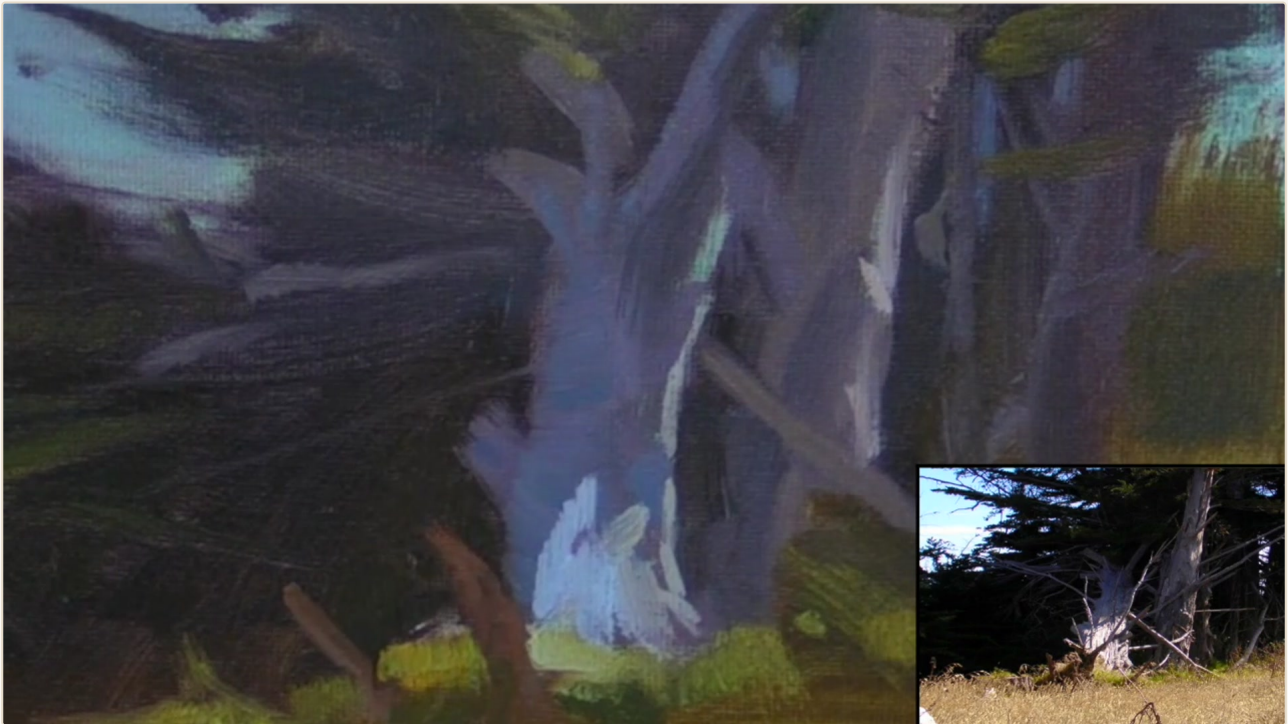
Modify Color for Second Tree

As you move to the second tree, modify the color slightly to make it warmer, similar to the warmer shadows.

PRO TIP

Use thick, pure paint without medium to make highlights stand out and catch the light.

25 Adding Fence Post and Foreground Details



Create Crisp Highlights

Use a large brush turned on its side to create crisp highlights. This technique helps define the edges and adds contrast to the painting.

Add Finer Branches

Switch to a number 6 brush to draw finer branches using a mid-value blue-grey color. This adds delicate detail and depth to the scene.

Enhance Shadowed Branches

Mix a slightly darker blue-grey and use it to indicate detail in the shadowed branches. This creates a sense of depth and realism in the background.

Highlight Forward Branch

Apply a fine line of light to the thin forward branch to bring it forward of the trunk. This technique enhances the three-dimensional effect.

Add Branch Details

Spend time adding crisp details to branches that cross between the trees. These details create a sense of connection and add interest to the composition.

Include Tree Stump Shadow

Add the shadow for the tree stump in the foreground to balance the composition. This element adds grounding and realism to the scene.

Introduce Fence Post

Plan to add an old weathered fence post on the left to further balance the composition. This adds character and historical context to the painting.

PRO TIP

Use the edge of a large brush to create crisp highlights for defining edges and adding contrast.

26 Foreground and Background Adjustments



Enhance Tree Details

Add small details to the tree, balancing between too much and too little. These details help convey the scale and size of the tree.

Apply Rich Foreground Color

Mix irilamide yellow deep with a little bit of white to create a rich foreground color. Apply it thickly to add texture, but avoid overdoing the detail.

Soften Background Edges

Use a pure mixture of aromillide yellow, similar to cadmium yellow deep, for the glowing area at the base of the tree. Soften the edges with your finger to allow sharp elements to stand out.

Introduce Foreground Color Variation

Add alizarin crimson to the yellow in the foreground to introduce a more interesting color. This change adds interest to the large area of color, moving beyond just shadowing the golden grass.

Maintain Soft Foreground Edges

Keep the edges in the foreground very soft to avoid drawing attention away from the center of interest.

PRO TIP

Use your finger to soften edges for a more natural transition between elements.

27 Infused Light Technique



Prepare the Glowing Area

Apply a lighter color over the darker areas to create a glowing effect. This will make it appear as if the light is emanating from behind the foreground object.

Infuse Blue Light

Brush lightly over the dark areas with a soft, synthetic brush to infuse the edges with blue light from the background. Keep your strokes loose and avoid picking up too much dark paint.

Soften the Edges

Use a dry brush or your finger to soften any hard edges. Apply one or two strokes, then clean the brush to prevent muddying the colors.

Apply Light Sky Color

Mix titanium white, blue, and a touch of yellow to create a light green. Apply this color where it meets the dark areas, using one stroke before reloading the brush to maintain clean colors.

PRO TIP

Keep your brush clean and reload frequently to avoid muddying the colors when working with light and dark areas.

28 Final Adjustments and Reflections



Adjust Fence Post Colors

Add a little brown to the blue areas to balance the color. Focus on the shadow side of the fence post, incorporating reflected skylight to create depth.

Soften Edges

Soften the bottom edge of the fence post to blend it into the long grass. Use soft brush strokes to create detail without over-defining it.

Add Distant Fence Post

Include a small, dark fence post in the distance to add depth without drawing too much attention.

Enhance Foreground Details

Add small flowers and details to the foreground for interest. Use the grass color mixed with white, but avoid using pure white to keep the focus on the tree.

Soften Foreground Elements

If the foreground elements appear too prominent, soften them with a dry brush to blend them subtly into the scene.

Lighten the Field

Add light to the field as it recedes into the distance, softening the edges with a dry brush for a seamless transition.

Darken Tree Surroundings

Enhance the contrast around the tree by darkening areas between the branches. This will push the tree forward and emphasize it as the center of interest.

PRO TIP

Use a dry brush to blend and soften edges for a more natural transition.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by thoughtfully arranging your palette and preparing your canvas. Begin with a pre-painted and scrubbed canvas to facilitate smooth paint application, and sketch your composition using a loose, watery mixture of alizarin crimson and ultramarine blue. Position your subject slightly off-center to create a dynamic and engaging composition.

As you lay in the darks, use odourless thinners for a subtle base layer, and plan your color palette to emphasize the main subject. Focus on the painting process as a learning opportunity, experimenting with thin layers to achieve light textural effects. Imagine your trees as a family to naturally vary their sizes and positions, avoiding uniform patterns.

Balance detail and abstraction by using broad strokes and adding selective details to highlight key elements. Pay attention to the interaction of light and shadow, using reflected light to enhance realism. Build up green tones with vibrant mid-greens and apply intuitive design choices to guide the viewer's eye, creating a harmonious and lively composition.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Arrange your palette for easy access and mixing.
- Use a pre-painted canvas for smoother paint application.
- Position your subject off-center for dynamic compositions.
- Use odourless thinners for laying in darks.
- Plan your composition by focusing on the main subject.
- Work with thin paint layers for light textural effects.
- Vary the size and placement of sky holes to avoid patterns.
- Think of objects as mirrors to determine reflected colors.



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