



The Old Mill House

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/117-The-Old-Mill-House>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

Welcome to the enchanting Glen Orkey, nestled in the Dark River Valley, where the old mill house stands as a testament to time. Today, I have the pleasure of painting this captivating scene, complete with an old truck partially buried in gravel and grass, under the warm embrace of the sun. This setting offers a rich tapestry of textures and colors, making it an ideal subject for our painting journey. I am thrilled to be here with John Crump, a renowned painter whose expertise has been invaluable during my stay. Using all of John's equipment, from his fine Belgian linen canvas to his palette of colors and brushes, I aim to immerse myself in his painting technique. This chapter captures my learning experience, as John guides me with insightful feedback, helping me refine my skills. As we explore this scene together, you'll discover how to adapt and enhance a landscape to create a compelling composition. Let's embark on this creative adventure and see what we can achieve under the brilliant Glen Orkey sun.



"The Old Mill House" - 15x15" - Oil on Linen



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

- Winsor & Newton Oils
- Winsor Blue
- Venetian Red
- Winsor Green
- Cadmium Lemon
- Cadmium Yellow Pale
- Gold Ochre
- Cadmium Orange
- Permanent Rose
- Cadmium Red
- Magenta
- Titanium White
- Painting medium
- Liquin by Winsor & Newton
- 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 Using Liquin Medium



Prepare the Liquin Medium

Use Winsor & Newton Liquin, which comes in a litre or half litre bottle. If it's too thick, add a tiny bit of turpentine to make it more fluid. This will help you shake it in the bottle and make it easier to use.

Dispense and Mix the Medium

If the Liquin is very thick, use a brush handle to push into it and displace some out of the bottle. Once you have some Liquin, add a small amount of turpentine and shake the bottle to mix it well.

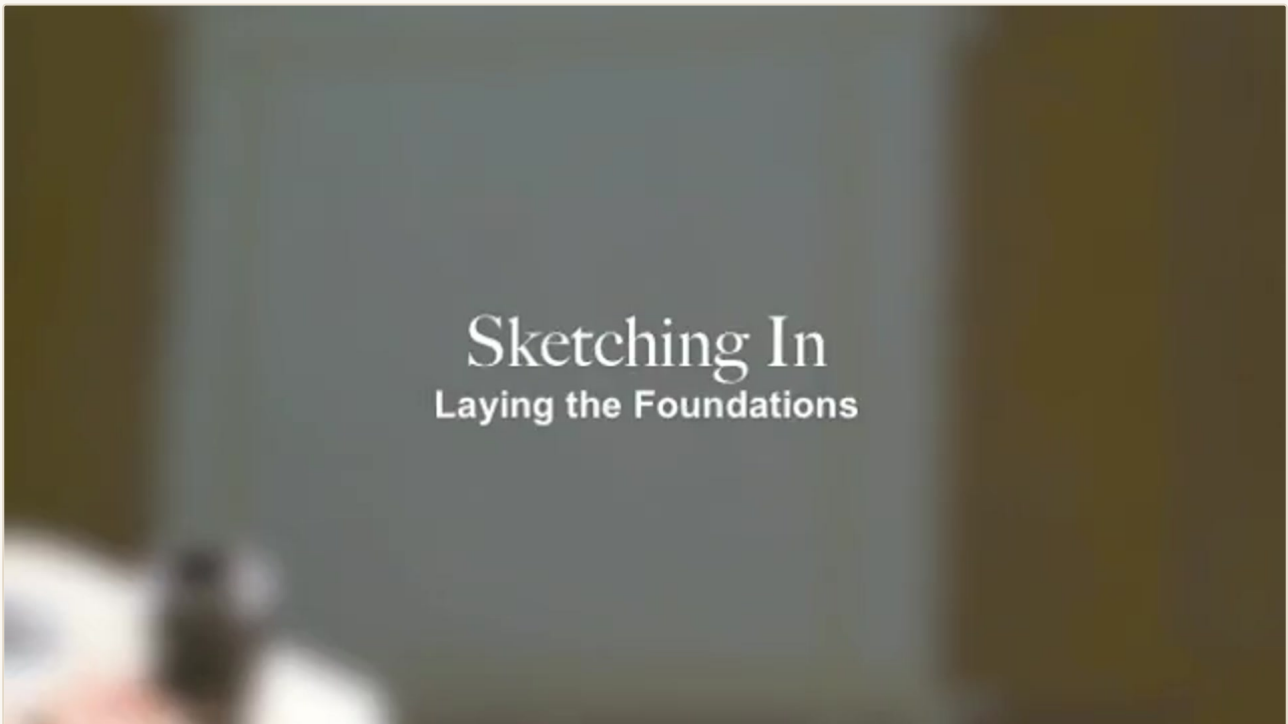
Use Liquin to Lubricate the Brush

Dip your brush into the Liquin before adding paint. This lubrication helps the paint release from the brush and adhere to the canvas more effectively.

PRO TIP

Always dip your brush into Liquin before adding paint to ensure smooth application on the canvas.

2 Sketching the Composition



Prepare the Sketching Paint

Use a bit of liquid mixed with a very thin blue and red. Ensure the mixture is extremely thin to prevent it from showing through the final layers of paint.

Establish the Horizon Line

On your square canvas, lay in the horizon line. This will be the base of the house, which should be slightly angled to reflect the perspective.

Sketch the House Outline

Determine where you want the top of the house to be. Sketch lightly, as this is just a guide and can be adjusted if needed.

Check and Adjust Angles

Use your brush to check the angles and ensure the perspective is correct. The house is leaning slightly, which adds character to the structure.

Add the Chimney

Sketch the strong chimney, making sure it extends out of the top of the house. Avoid placing it directly on the horizon line to prevent viewer confusion.

PRO TIP

Keep your initial sketch very thin to avoid it showing through the final paint layers.

3 Center of Focus



Identify the Center of Focus

Determine the main subjects of your painting. In this scene, focus on the house and the truck as the primary subjects, not the tree, hill, or grass.

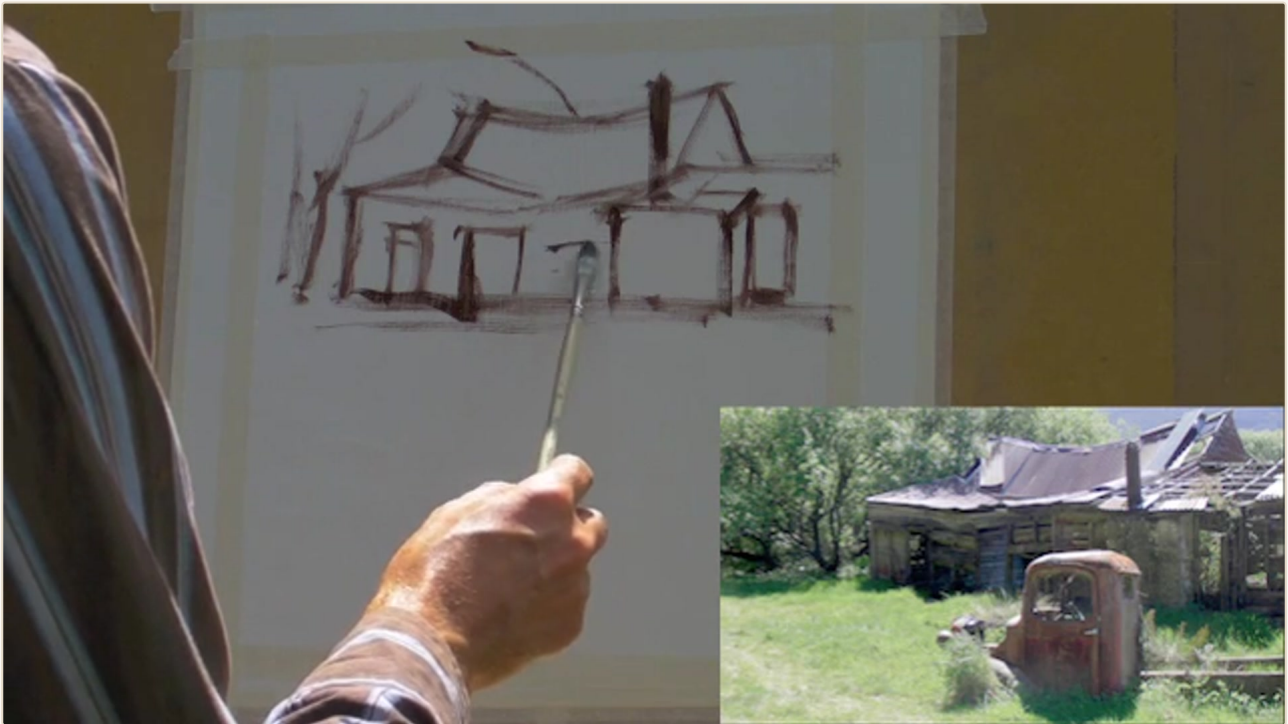
Minimize Background Elements

Reduce the detail and color intensity in elements that are not the main focus. This will help draw attention to the house and the truck, enhancing their prominence in the painting.

PRO TIP

Keep the background elements subdued to emphasize the main subjects of your painting.

4 Truck and Composition Details



Position the Truck

Sketch the top of the truck, ensuring it has a beautiful rounded shape typical of old Bedford trucks. Position it so that it appears buried past its axles, as if gravel from a stream has settled around it.

Simplify the Composition

Create a simple composition by placing dark areas around the truck and using light grass in the surrounding areas. This contrast will help the truck stand out.

Adjust Overlapping Shapes

Move the truck door slightly to prevent its line from competing with the doorway behind it. Ensure overlapping shapes bring the truck forward in the composition.

Avoid Object 'Kissing'

Ensure objects do not 'kiss' the edges of other elements. For example, avoid placing a tree or building peak right at the edge of another object, like the truck, to maintain a clear and simplified scene.

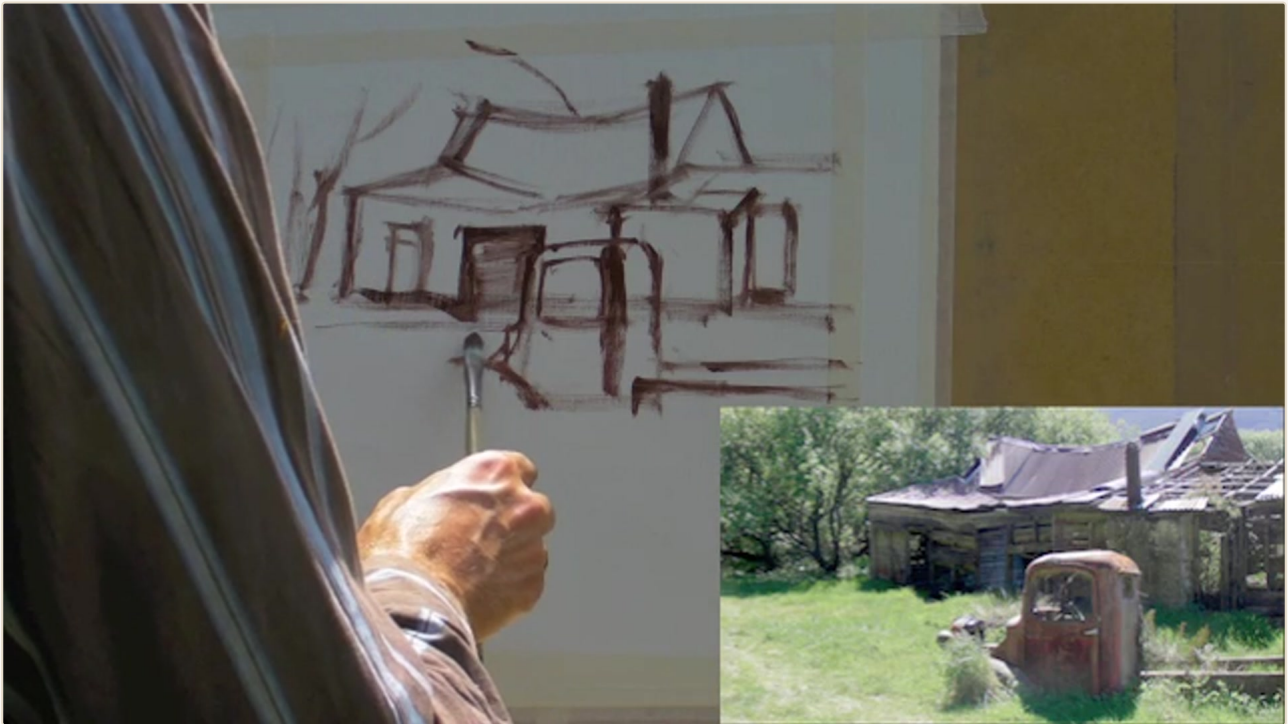
Highlight the Bumper

Reduce the prominence of the grass in front of the truck's bumper to reveal its beautiful shape. This will make the bumper a more noticeable feature in the painting.

PRO TIP

Ensure overlapping shapes bring the truck forward in the composition.

5 Simplifying the Scene



Avoid Central Construction Lines

Ensure that major construction lines are not placed in the center of the composition. This helps maintain balance and avoids distracting from the focal points.

Adjust the Truck's Position

If necessary, widen the truck slightly to improve composition. This adjustment can help balance the scene and prevent any element from appearing awkwardly centered.

Emphasize Shadows

Focus on creating shadow areas, especially as the sun moves to highlight details. These shadows will add depth and contrast to the scene, enhancing the overall mood.

Maintain Light and Dark Concept

Stick to the original idea of having light on the top areas and shadows below. Avoid adding too many light details in the shadow areas to preserve the intended contrast between light and dark.

PRO TIP

Avoid placing major construction lines in the center to maintain a balanced composition.

6 Mixing and Applying Dark Colors



Select a Larger Brush

Switch to a larger brush to begin painting the dark areas of your composition. This will allow you to cover more area quickly and achieve a gestural effect.

Mix the Darkest Dark

Combine the darkest colors on your palette to create your darkest dark. Consider whether this dark should be warm or cool by comparing it to your subject.

Adjust the Color Temperature

If your dark mix appears too blue, add some brown or alizarin crimson to warm it up. This adjustment helps balance the color to match your subject more closely.

Apply the Dark Colors

Use the large brush to apply the dark colors, focusing on areas that require depth. Avoid overdoing the darks; you can always make adjustments later.

PRO TIP

Use the edge of the large brush for fine lines while maintaining the ability to cover large areas quickly.

7 Painting the Building



Add Gold Ochre to the Tree

Introduce a little bit of gold ochre to the tree area. This color is more powerful than yellow ochre and will help lighten the area slightly. Use a big brush with lots of paint to quickly cover the area.

Work Around Tree Trunks

Consider the placement of dark tree trunks and work around them. Leave space for the trunks to maintain their presence in the composition.

Illuminate the Building

Apply gold ochre to the building to enhance the light effect on its side. Avoid using white initially to keep the chroma or saturation high, allowing the shadows to glow.

Adjust with White

Add a little bit of white to the mix if the glow is too intense. Remember, adding white will lighten and desaturate the color, pushing it towards grey.

Modulate Shadow Colors

Keep the shadow areas thin and patchy with various colors. Modulate the color by making it slightly warmer or cooler, maintaining the same value. This will add depth and interest to the shadows.

PRO TIP

Avoid using white initially to keep the chroma or saturation high, allowing the shadows to glow.

8 Soft Shadows



Identify the Soft Shadow

Observe the soft shadow under the edge of the roof that protrudes. Notice that this shadow is softer compared to the hard shadows on the sunlit side of the roof.

Understand the Shadow's Nature

Recognize that the soft shadow is due to less reflected light bouncing into that area. A sharp shadow would suggest direct light, which is not the case here.

Apply Soft Shadows

When painting, ensure the shadow under the roof's lip is soft to accurately represent the lighting conditions. This subtlety adds realism to your work.

PRO TIP

Use soft edges for shadows in areas with less direct light to maintain the painting's realism.

9 Color Planning



Plan Color Changes

Decide to alter the color of the grass on the shadow side from green to a tussocky brown golden color. This change will add warmth and reduce the dominance of green, which many artists prefer to avoid.

Adjust Reflected Light

Where green light is reflected on the side of the shed, plan to change it to an orangey golden color. This will harmonize with the new grass color and create a cohesive look.

PRO TIP

Consider planning color changes in advance to achieve the desired mood and harmony in your painting.

10 Feedback on Dark Tones



Add Darkest Tones

Identify the areas in your painting that require the next darkest tones, such as windows or shadowed holes. Apply these darkest tones to create depth and contrast. This approach helps in building up the painting from dark to light, allowing you to see the progress across the entire piece.

PRO TIP

Start with your darkest darks and work up towards your lightest lights to effectively build contrast and depth.

11 Working in the Darks



Add Green to the Dark Mixture

Mix straight yellow into your dark mixture to create a green hue. Apply this green to the designated area through the gap. Adjust the intensity to ensure it's not too vibrant, keeping it subtle and harmonious with the darks.

Focus on the Dark Areas

Continue working in the dark areas of your painting. Exercise discipline to resist the temptation to move into the light areas too soon. This focus will help maintain the contrast that makes the light areas more striking later.

PRO TIP

Maintain self-control to stay in the darks before moving to the lights, enhancing the overall contrast in your painting.

12 Quality of Paints



Understand Paint Quality

Recognize that using different palettes can affect your color mixing results. The strength and behavior of paints vary, especially when mixing.

Choose Quality Paints

Invest in high-quality paints if possible. Cheaper paints often result in dull, grey colors that can be difficult to work with.

Select Cadmium Colors

Opt for cadmium colors when selecting yellows, oranges, and reds. These paints, though expensive, offer bright, clear, and strong colors.

PRO TIP

Invest in high-quality cadmium colors for vibrant and strong hues.

13 Reflected Light



Add Reflected Light

Mix a bit of blue with a touch of purple and a little white to lighten the color. Apply this mixture to the side of the building to capture the reflected light and enhance the texture of the broken paint surface.

Use Background for Contrast

Use the background to define the shape of the building by applying a dark tone. This helps you avoid comparing colors against white, which can be challenging. Instead, compare your colors against the dark blue-gray background for a more accurate color match.

PRO TIP

Use a dark background to make color comparisons easier and more accurate.

14 Canvas Preparation



Eliminate the White Canvas

Prepare your canvas by getting rid of the white surface as quickly as possible. This helps to avoid the starkness of the white and allows for a more harmonious color application.

PRO TIP

Consider staining the canvas to eliminate the white, creating a more balanced starting point for your painting.

15 Background and Broken Color



Mix Background Color

Create a grey-blue-purple-green mix for the background. Adjust the colors by mixing small amounts until you achieve the desired hue. This will serve as the base for your distant landscape.

Apply Background Color

Paint the background with the mixed color, ensuring it's nice and juicy. Focus on softening the edges where needed to prevent them from standing out too much.

Create Distant Hills

Add white and yellow to your background color to lighten the value and push it a bit greener. Use this adjusted color to paint the distant hills with one or two strokes, adding depth and interest.

Blend into Foreground

Allow the distant hills to blend into the golden grass color you'll add later. This creates a seamless transition from background to foreground.

PRO TIP

Soften the edges of your background to keep them from standing out too much, focusing attention on the main subject.

16 Easel Design



Understand the Easel Design

Observe the homemade easel design, which is robust and reliable. Despite its basic appearance with surface stretchers, it has proven effective over the years.

Easel Structure

Notice how the lid transforms into the top of the easel to support your panel. The tripod legs are strong and can withstand windy conditions.

Stabilize the Easel

In extremely windy situations, place a heavy object like a rock behind your painting panel to secure the easel.

PRO TIP

Use tripod legs for stability and add weight behind the easel in windy conditions to prevent it from tipping over.

17 Learning from Other Artists



Seek Inspiration from Other Artists

Identify artists whose style you admire and learn from their techniques. This can accelerate your growth as a painter.

Utilize Available Resources

If you can't connect with artists directly, use DVDs or online resources to learn from experienced painters. These tools can provide valuable insights and techniques.

PRO TIP

Build relationships with artists to gain insights into their techniques and styles.

18 Painting the Tree



Use a Big Brush for Foreground

Select a large pastry brush to suggest the foreground. These brushes are inexpensive but effective for creating broad strokes. Focus on adding a few shadows without overdoing it, maintaining the light in the area.

Paint the Tree from Dark to Light

Begin by applying dark tones to establish the tree's base. Ensure the darks have a flowering of color to add depth. Gradually layer lighter values over the top to depict foliage illuminated by light.

PRO TIP

Work from dark to light to create depth and dimension in your tree.

19 Mixing Simple Colors



Mix Simple Colors

Combine red, green, and white to create a simple color mix. This combination is easy to replicate if you run out, as it only involves two colors plus white.

Maintain Dark Accents

Avoid painting over any dark accents you want to keep. These accents add depth and interest to your painting.

Use a Big Brush

Utilize a big brush for a chunky paintwork effect. This approach results in a pleasing simplicity in your painting.

Add Color to the Roof

Introduce a little streak of rust or another color to the roof for added interest. This touch can enhance the overall look of the painting.

PRO TIP

Use a simple color mix of red, green, and white for easy replication.

20 Adding Details to the Roof



Highlight the Lightest Areas

Apply the paint thickest in the lightest areas to create a highlight effect. Ensure the paint is light enough to stand out as a highlight.

Add Wooden Beams

Faintly paint little beams of wood to bring out their texture and structure. Use a subtle touch to keep them from overpowering the scene.

Paint the Light Strip

Mix a neutral grey, neither cool nor warm, to paint the light strip into the shadowed areas. Apply this grey to the designated strip and extend it to similar areas as needed.

PRO TIP

Apply the paint thickest in the lightest areas to enhance highlights.

21 Feedback and Adjustments



Enhance Chroma

Increase the chroma in the area that appears too low by adding more vibrant colors. Focus on the spot lit area in the middle, using yellow instead of white to maintain high chroma. This will help the area stand out as if the sun is hitting it.

Adjust Reflections

Observe the reflections on the surface and adjust the colors to reflect the sky more accurately. This will create a realistic effect of the sky reflecting off the surface, enhancing the overall composition.

Increase Value

Raise the value in certain areas to make them appear as if they are catching more light. Add a touch more white to areas that need to be lighter, ensuring the light effect is believable and consistent.

Rework the Roof

Make slight adjustments to the roof area to improve its appearance. Ensure the changes complement the overall lighting and color scheme of the painting.

PRO TIP

Use yellow instead of white to maintain high chroma in sunlit areas.

22 Painting the Truck



Mix the Base Color

Use Venetian red and tone it back with green for the truck's base color. Adjust the mixture by adding white until you achieve a nondescript grey. This will serve as the foundation for the truck's body.

Add Light and Shadow

Warm the grey slightly at the bottom to reflect light. As you move up towards the sky, incorporate more blue and white to create a lighter tone. Work around existing dark areas to maintain shadow depth.

Create Soft Shadows

Brush down into the shadow areas to soften them, ensuring they appear in shade. Extend the shadow lines for a longer, softer effect, which enhances the truck's dimensionality.

Define the Bumper and Edges

Use grey on the bumper, brushing grass up into it to soften the edge. Add a lighter tone on the front to highlight the truck's form and separate it from the background.

Highlight with Care

Apply a bright highlight to the top of the truck to bring it forward and distinguish it from the old house. Use thick paint for a strong effect, but avoid too many shiny highlights to maintain the truck's aged appearance.

PRO TIP

Apply highlights sparingly to suggest an aged, rather than new, vehicle.

23 Foreground and Grass



Create Mild Shadow in Grass

Mix a gentle blue into your paint to create a mild shadow color. Apply this to the grasses in front of the truck to add depth and dimension. Use sharp edges in some areas to enhance the foreground effect.

Revive Dry Paint

If the paint is drying out, dip a clean brush into a medium like wind gel or liquid. Brush it over the dry area to dissolve the paint, making it workable again. This technique is especially useful in warm, dry conditions.

Adjust Brightness of Grass

Mix cadmium yellow pale with cadmium lemon to achieve a bright, cool yellow. Avoid overly red tones by ensuring your mix is balanced. Apply this brighter color to the grass for a lively, sunlit effect.

Achieve Soft Edges

For soft edges, use a completely dry brush with no medium. Gently work over the painted area to blend and soften the edges. This technique provides control and creates a smooth transition in the paint.

PRO TIP

Use a dry brush to soften edges and blend colors smoothly without adding more paint.

24 Blending Techniques



Blend with Dry Brush

Work back over the dry brush to soften the edges. This technique can whisk colors into a soft edge, creating a more cohesive look.

Add Purple for Depth

Add a little more purple to grey the area, knocking it back to create a flat area of ground. This adds depth and interest to the painting.

Clean Brush Regularly

Clean your brush between each stroke to maintain clarity in your colors. This prevents muddiness and keeps your painting fresh.

PRO TIP

Use a dry brush to soften edges and blend colors subtly without overworking the paint.

25 Staying Loose



Create a Flat Ground Area

Add a little more purple to your mix to grey it down and create a flat area of ground. Introduce some white to add interest and break up the composition. Use a brush to apply this mixture, aiming for a flat, even surface.

Maintain a Loose Style

Focus on keeping your brushwork loose, especially in the final stages of the painting. Avoid the temptation to tighten up your strokes, which can happen easily at this point. Stay relaxed and let your brush move freely to maintain a lively, dynamic feel.

PRO TIP

Add white to your mix to create interest and break up the composition.

26 Knowing When to Stop



Recognize When to Stop

Avoid the temptation to tighten up and fiddle endlessly with your painting. When the painting communicates your intended message and lacks obvious issues, consider it complete.

Maintain Simplicity

A painting without excessive detail is more restful to the eye. Keep the focal point detailed and sharp, while allowing areas away from it to remain simple.

PRO TIP

Focus detail and sharpness around the focal point to draw attention, keeping other areas simple.

27 Simplifying Details



Adjust Grass Height

If the grass appears too high, brush it up slightly and then back down. This will help integrate it better with the surrounding elements.

Blend the Grill Area

If the area behind the grill looks too light and sudden, bridge the color across the top of the grill. This will connect it more naturally with the body of the truck, avoiding a cut-out appearance.

Simplify Roof Details

For sections of the roof with excessive detail, simplify by brushing over with a dark area. Then, add a few strokes of lighter gray on top to suggest the panels without overwhelming detail.

PRO TIP

Use a paper towel to clean your hands before touching the painting to avoid unwanted marks.

28 Lessons Learned



Embrace New Techniques

Experiment with using a different palette of colors and try painting on a large canvas outdoors. This can open new avenues and help overcome the fear of changing your usual painting methods.

See Potential in Every Scene

Train your eye to see the potential for a painting in every scene, even on uninspiring days. Focus on the center of interest by quietening areas outside of it using quieter colors, softer edges, broader brush strokes, and less contrast.

Find the Best Painting Angle

Take time to assess a scene for the best painting angle. Avoid spending too long searching for the perfect scene, as modifications are often needed to enhance a painting.

Embrace Criticism and Dedication

Be willing to paint over works you are not satisfied with. Understand that dedication to perfection can lead to masterpieces, and being overly content with every painting can hinder improvement.

Connect with Other Painters

Join a painter's group or connect with painters online to share the joy of painting. Engaging with others who share your passion can be a fantastic and enriching experience.

PRO TIP

Focus on the center of interest by using quieter colors and softer edges in surrounding areas.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey with the Old Mill House by first preparing your materials. Use Liquin medium to ensure smooth paint application and sketch your composition lightly, focusing on the perspective and placement of your main subjects. As you lay down the initial lines, remember to keep them thin to avoid interference with subsequent layers.

As you progress, emphasize the focal points of your painting, such as the house and the truck, by reducing detail in the background. Carefully plan your composition, ensuring elements like the truck stand out through strategic use of light and shadow. Simplify your scene by avoiding central placement of major lines and maintaining a balance between light and dark areas.

Finish your painting by refining colors and adding details. Use high-quality paints for vibrant hues and consider the effects of reflected light to enhance realism. Prepare your canvas to avoid stark white areas, and use soft edges in the background to keep the focus on your main subjects. Learn from other artists and continuously refine your technique to grow as a painter.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Always dip your brush into Liquin before adding paint for smooth application.
- Keep your initial sketch very thin to avoid it showing through final layers.
- Emphasize main subjects by keeping background elements subdued.
- Ensure overlapping shapes bring the truck forward in the composition.
- Avoid placing major construction lines in the center to maintain balance.
- Use soft edges for shadows in areas with less direct light.
- Invest in high-quality cadmium colors for vibrant and strong hues.
- Prepare your canvas by staining it to eliminate the white surface.



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