



Mood and Light

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/208-Mood-and-Light>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, I invite you to join me at the stunning Taupo Bay, where we'll delve into the captivating world of mood and light in painting. These elements are what often inspire us to pick up a brush, yet achieving a convincing atmospheric effect can be a challenge. With the guidance of New Zealand artist John Crump, who brings 50 years of painting experience, you'll learn how to infuse your work with drama and emotion. We'll explore techniques to manipulate light and shadow, creating a sense of depth and atmosphere that draws the viewer in. One of the first steps is ensuring your paint flows easily, which is crucial for blending and achieving the desired effects. By adjusting the consistency of your paint with a medium like Winsor & Newton Liquin Original, you'll find it more flexible and easier to apply. This simple adjustment can transform your painting experience, allowing you to focus on capturing the essence of the scene. Together, we'll unlock the secrets of mood and light, enriching your paintings with a new level of expression.

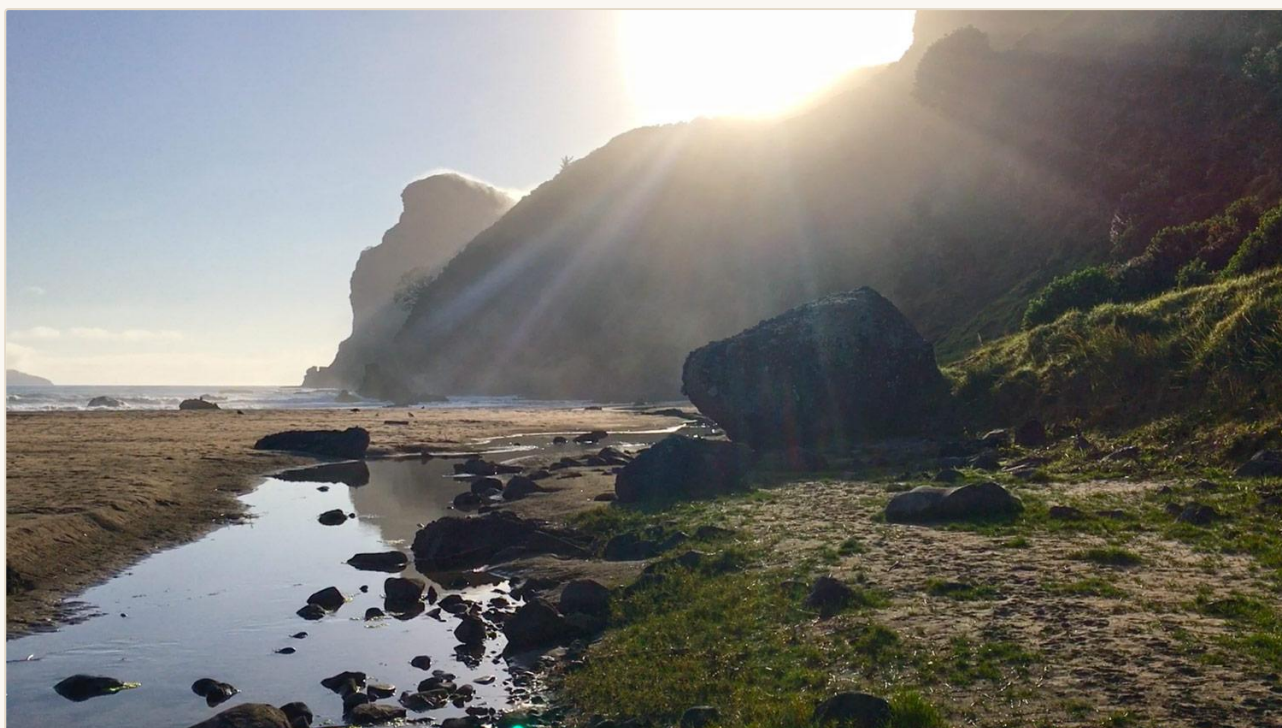


Taupo Bay by John Crump



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

- Winsor and Newton, artist's quality oil paints.
- Winsor blue (red shade)
- Venetian red
- Winsor green
- Titanium white
- Cadmium lemon
- Cadmium yellow pale
- Cadmium orange
- Gold ochre
- Permanent rose
- Cadmium red
- Magenta
- Brushes
- Size 12 chisel tip long bristle.
- Only one small brush, usually an ox /sable rigger type brush – size 1 or 2.
- Medium
- Liquin Original
- for painting medium.
- Canvas
- Fredrix Ultrasmooth Canvas
- , a polyflax, triple primed, fairly smooth surfaced canvas.

1 Paint consistency and medium



Adjust Paint Consistency

Ensure your paint flows easily by adjusting its consistency. If your white paint is too thick, it can be difficult to work with and mix into other colors.

Use Medium to Thin Paint

Incorporate a medium like Winsor & Newton Liquin Original to thin the paint. This will make the paint more flexible and easier to apply, improving your painting experience.

PRO TIP

If your paint feels too thick, add a medium to improve its flow and ease of application.

2 Initial sketch and composition



Prepare Your Canvas

Wet your brush slightly to create a smooth, pudding-like consistency with your paint. This allows you to think and observe your subject before starting the sketch.

Sketch the Foreground

Focus on the foreground elements, like the stream and rocks. Simplify the rocks to avoid overwhelming the viewer's eye. Position the horizon high to emphasize the foreground.

Define Key Elements

Sketch the main rock formations and the beach, considering their shapes and shadows. Indicate areas of light to maintain focus on these elements.

Establish the Focal Point

Decide on the focal point, which is the area around the main rock and the water. Use the shapes and shadows to guide the viewer's eye towards this focal area.

Incorporate Atmospheric Elements

Add mist and atmospheric effects to enhance the mood. Use the mist to draw the eye into the composition and create depth.

Link Elements with Shadows

Use shadows to connect different elements in the painting. Ensure the shadows guide the viewer's eye and contribute to the overall design.

PRO TIP

Use shadows and darks strategically to lead the viewer's eye into the painting, enhancing the atmosphere and composition.

3 Dark tones and reflected light



Apply Strong Dark Tones

Begin by applying your strongest dark tones under the main elements of your scene. This sets a dramatic foundation and adds depth to your painting. Avoid using pure black; instead, incorporate subtle color variations to prevent the shadows from appearing as flat black holes.

Add Reflected Light

Introduce hints of reflected light onto the surfaces, such as rocks, to enhance realism. This light should be subtle and blend naturally with the existing tones, adding dimension and interest.

Adjust Tones for Distance

To convey a sense of distance, lighten the shadows as they recede into the background. Incorporate a touch of blue to push these elements back, creating depth in the scene.

Incorporate Color Variations

Add a touch of permanent rose or other colors to specific areas, like rocks, to create visual interest and break the monotony of similar tones. This adds vibrancy and keeps the viewer engaged.

Use a Light Touch

Apply paint with a light touch to avoid mixing colors into mud. Layer colors gently to maintain clarity and prevent overworking the paint.

PRO TIP

Use a light touch when applying paint to avoid mixing colors into mud and maintain clarity.

4 Cliff and mist details



Paint the Cliff

Apply a mid-tone color to the cliff, considering the salt in the air that lightens it. Mix in a bit of permanent rose to avoid the cliff becoming too blue or purple. Aim for a rough shape without worrying about exactness, as you can adjust it later when adding the sky.

Adjust for Sea Mist

Lighten the bottom of the cliff to reflect the sea mist, using less blue and adding a touch of gold ochre to slightly gray the tone. This will help convey the misty atmosphere without making the colors dirty.

Introduce Light and Mist

Lightly paint the area where the sun catches the tops of the trees, but avoid chasing the changing light. Use a dry brush to softly blend the mist upwards, darkening the area slightly as it comes closer to the viewer.

Enhance with Subtle Colors

Add hints of purple to the bush areas without making them look dirty. Consider using reds or pinks in the bush to avoid too much green, creating a harmonious and subdued effect.

PRO TIP

Avoid chasing the light as it changes; decide on a lighting condition and stick with it to prevent a hodgepodge of colors.

5 Light changes and painting strategy



Understand Light Changes

Recognize that light changes quickly at both ends of the day. Early morning or late afternoon light provides more exciting and colorful scenes compared to midday.

Maintain Consistency in Light

Stick with the initial light setup you started with, even if the natural light changes. This helps maintain consistency and focus in your painting.

Adjust Reflections

Remember that reflections are rarely exact. Dark reflections appear slightly lighter, and light reflections appear slightly darker. Adjust the tones accordingly to reflect this natural variation.

Progress from Dark to Light

Begin with dark tones and gradually work towards lighter tones. This approach helps you judge the tones more accurately against the white canvas.

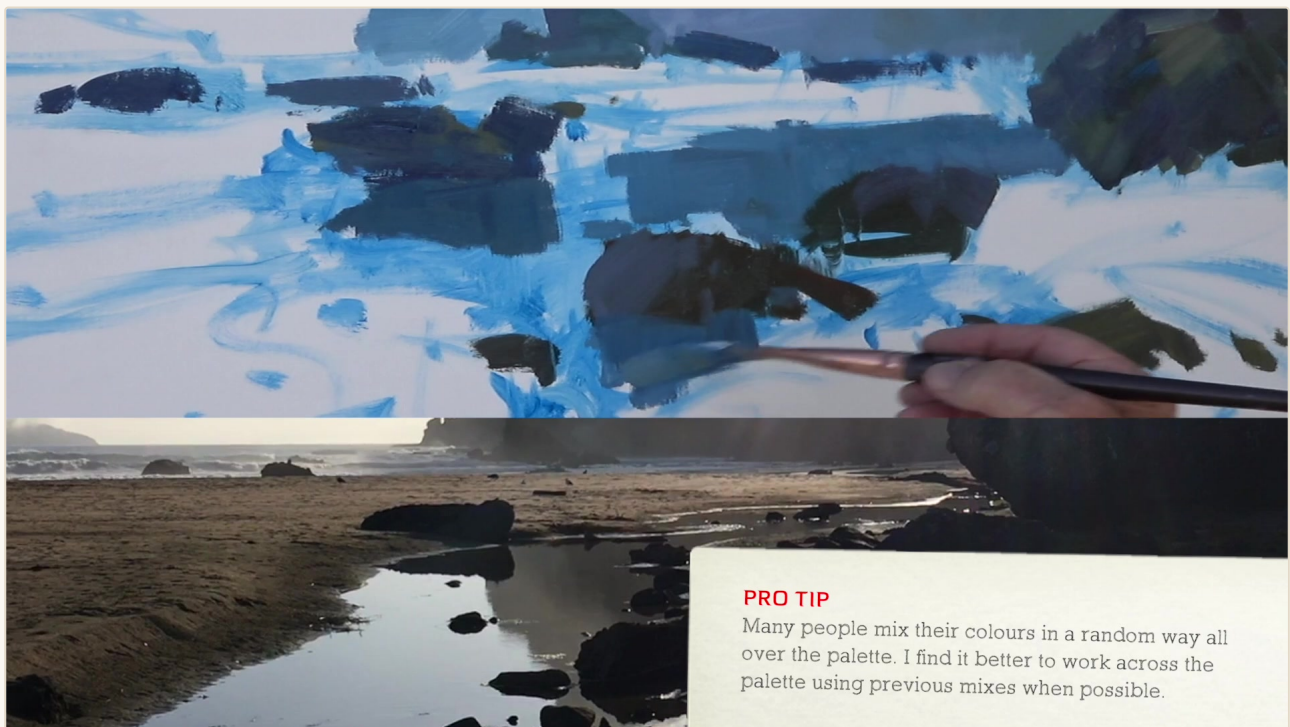
Avoid Starting at the Top

Avoid starting your painting from the top and working down. This can lead to misjudging tones and ending up with a painting that is too dark.

PRO TIP

Begin with dark tones to help judge the overall tone against the white canvas.

6 Water reflections and tone adjustments



Create Water Reflections

Add a few vertical stripes in the water to simulate reflective areas. This technique helps convey the wet appearance of the water. Be careful not to overdo it, as too much can create an unintended pattern.

Connect Sand and Shadows

Introduce some shadow or elements to create a connecting point through the sand. This helps unify the composition without making the connections too obvious.

Enhance Sky and Mist

Add a hint of misty cloud using a touch of gold ochre and a bit of cadmium lemon. This adds a nice color and sense of early light, but avoid making the scene too yellowish. Lighten and blend the sky into the back hill for a cohesive look.

Adjust Tones and Capture Atmosphere

Knock back any areas that feel too prominent to capture the early morning feel with salt in the air. Remove any darker smudges that seem like mistakes and add wispieness to suggest a broken edge to the atmosphere.

Add Highlights

Introduce light areas to gauge how bright the highlights will be. Since the paint isn't too thick yet, you can add highlights without disturbing the underlying layers. Adjust any areas that appear too dark to maintain balance.

PRO TIP

Add vertical stripes in water to simulate reflections and enhance the wet appearance.

7 Beach and mist adjustments



Adjust the Beach Area

Lighten the beach area to suggest mistiness. Use subtle colors to create a softer, less detailed look. This will give the scene a flatter, more serene appearance.

Simplify the Scene

Allow the beach to disappear into the salty mist. This simplification enhances the beauty of the scene by reducing unnecessary details and focusing on the mood.

PRO TIP

Lighten areas to suggest mistiness and create a softer, serene appearance.

8 Rock repositioning



Evaluate the Rock's Position

Take a careful look at the rock's current position. Consider how it aligns with the surrounding elements, particularly the junction of the two cliffs. If it interrupts the flow, prepare to reposition it.

Scrape Back the Rock

Use a scraping tool to gently remove some of the paint from the rock. This will allow you to adjust its position without leaving unwanted marks. Be careful not to scrape too much, just enough to allow for repositioning.

Reposition the Rock

Shift the rock slightly to a more harmonious position within the composition. Ensure it no longer coincides awkwardly with the cliffs and enhances the overall flow of the painting.

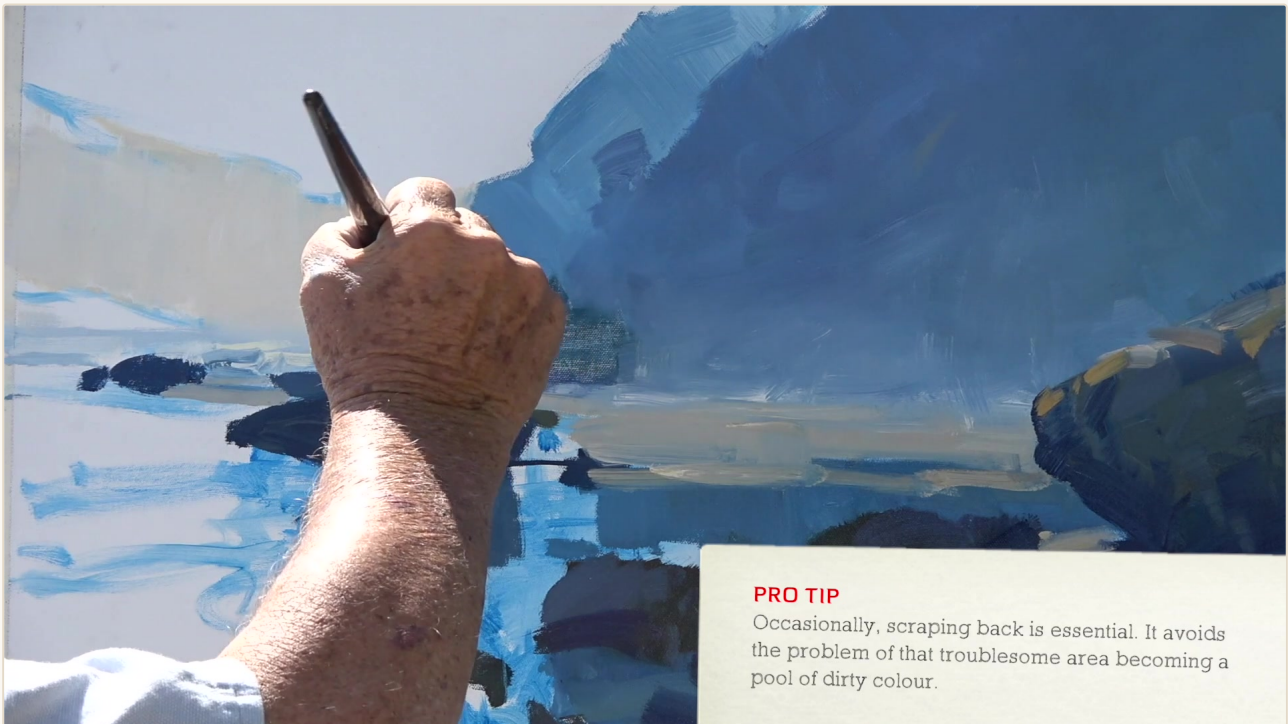
Enhance Light and Dark Areas

Add more light to the top of the rock to bring out its character. Extend the rock slightly if needed. Underneath, apply a darker tone to create depth and contrast, enhancing the rock's presence.

PRO TIP

If you want to soften an area, apply the paint and let it start to dry before making adjustments.

9 Sand and tone adjustments



Adjust Rock Size and Position

Push the rocks further away by reducing their size to make them less dominant in the composition. This will help emphasize the distance of the cliffs and create a more balanced scene.

Introduce Sand Color

Bring the sand color into the painting, ensuring it remains light to maintain the overall brightness. Be cautious not to let the tone become too dark, as this can affect the mood and light of the scene.

Mix the Sand Tone

Mix a very light grey with a touch of cadmium orange and a little gold ochre to achieve a warm sand tone. Be careful not to add too much warmth, as it can make the color too prominent.

Work Over Existing Layers

If the area becomes murky or dirty, scrape back the paint and work over the top without needing to wash it off. This allows for adjustments without starting over completely.

Enhance the Bluff

Identify and enhance the sloping bluff that extends into the distance. Ensure it blends into the murk to maintain depth and interest in the landscape.

PRO TIP

Mix a very light grey with a touch of cadmium orange and gold ochre for a warm sand tone without overpowering the scene.

10 Sky and colour considerations



Sympathetic Sky Color

Choose a color that complements the cliffs' quiet blue-grey character. Avoid using too much cadmium lemon in your mix with white, as it is very strong. Use Winsor blue for the sky, adding a touch of permanent rose for a slight purple hint if desired.

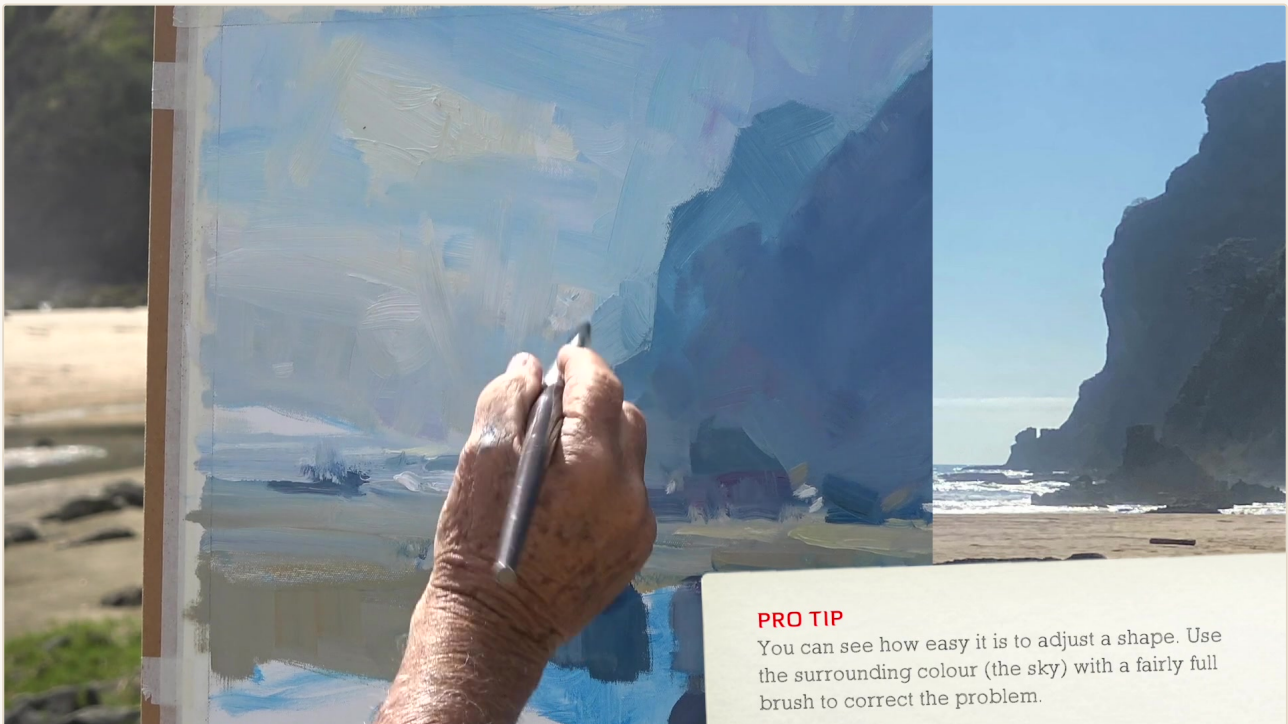
Understanding Blue Tones

Recognize that the blue tones in the rocks and hills reflect the morning light conditions with mist and salt in the air. These conditions create a bluer appearance, influenced by the atmospheric effects similar to those seen in snowy or mountainous scenes.

PRO TIP

Use Winsor blue for skies and add a touch of permanent rose for a subtle purple hint.

11 Light changes and painting progress



Capture Initial Colors Quickly

Fix an image in your mind and apply some color quickly to capture the initial light and mood of the scene. This helps you record the changing light conditions throughout the day.

Adjust the Beach and Mountain Shapes

Observe the beach and mountain shapes. If the beach appears to slope too much, adjust it to create a more balanced composition. Ensure the mountain retains its shape against the sky.

Paint Water and Rocks

Mix a slightly greyer version of the sky color with a hint of permanent rose for the water. Use vertical or horizontal strokes to convey calm water and carve out rock shapes. It's easier to paint the water around the rocks than to paint rocks over water.

Depict Foreground Water

In the foreground, show more transparency in the water by revealing the sand beneath. This reflects the closer view and the influence of sand color on the water's appearance.

Simplify and Lead the Viewer

Keep large areas simple to guide the viewer's eye without cluttering the scene. Allow viewers to imagine details and feel the surf and sand.

Enhance Light and Shadows

As the light changes, add more twinkle and light on the edges of rocks and hills. Use dark shadows as indicators of rocks, adding reflected light later as needed.

PRO TIP

Use vertical or horizontal strokes to convey the impression of calm water.

12 Grass and detail considerations



Simplify the Sandy Area

Decide to keep the sandy area simple without adding grass. This helps maintain focus and clarity in the painting, allowing the viewer to see into the scene more easily.

Observe Light and Detail on Cliffs

Notice how changing light reveals more details on the cliffs, such as bushes and boulders. These elements add texture and shape, but avoid overworking them to maintain a natural look.

Avoid Unnecessary Texture

Use texture sparingly, especially in areas like the sky, to prevent it from coming forward unnaturally. Reserve texture for areas where detail and emphasis are needed.

Add Grasses Sparingly

Consider adding grasses for detail, but not in a way that resembles lawn grass. Keep the paint thin to allow for subtle additions that enhance without overwhelming.

Minimize Highlights

Be cautious with highlights and lighter points. Too many can confuse the viewer and clutter the painting. Focus on letting larger areas convey the scene, with minimal detailed highlights.

PRO TIP

Use texture selectively to enhance detail without overwhelming the painting.

13 Signature and final touches



Add Final Details

Add small details where necessary, but avoid overworking minor elements like a coke hammer. Remember, these are not the main focus of the piece. Maintain the atmospheric haziness to give distance and mood to your painting.

Use Small Brushes Wisely

Be cautious with small brushes; they can be tempting but may lead to over-detailing. Use them only when necessary, such as for adding small elements like seagulls or your signature.

Sign Your Painting

Use a smaller brush to sign your painting while the paint is still wet. This embeds the signature into the paint, making it feel more integrated and allowing for easy correction if needed.

PRO TIP

Sign your painting while it's wet to embed the signature into the paint and allow for easy corrections.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by ensuring your paint flows smoothly, using mediums to achieve the right consistency. Begin with a thoughtful sketch, focusing on composition and the placement of key elements. Use shadows and atmospheric effects to guide the viewer's eye and set the mood. As you build your painting, start with dark tones to establish depth, then gradually introduce lighter tones, reflecting the natural play of light and shadow.

As you progress, pay attention to the subtleties of light and color. Use mid-tones and reflected light to add dimension and realism, while maintaining a consistent lighting condition to unify your work. Emphasize the mood by capturing the misty atmosphere and the interplay of light on different surfaces. Adjust elements like rocks and sand to enhance the composition, ensuring each piece contributes to the overall harmony of the scene.

In the final stages, focus on refining details and adding the finishing touches. Use texture and highlights sparingly to maintain clarity and avoid clutter. Sign your painting while the paint is still wet to seamlessly integrate your signature into the artwork. Remember, each stroke and adjustment is a step towards capturing the essence of mood and light in your painting.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Ensure paint flows easily by adjusting consistency with a medium.
- Use shadows strategically to lead the viewer's eye and enhance atmosphere.
- Start with dark tones to accurately judge overall tone against the canvas.
- Avoid chasing changing light; stick with your initial lighting setup.
- Lighten areas to suggest mistiness and create a serene appearance.
- Use vertical stripes in water to simulate reflections.
- Mix a warm sand tone with light grey, cadmium orange, and gold ochre.
- Sign your painting while it's wet to embed the signature into the paint.



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