



Laniakea

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/101-Laniakea>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we dive into the vibrant world of Laniakea, a breathtaking tropical beach that offers a rich tapestry of color and contrast. As we embark on this painting journey, I'll guide you through the process of capturing the essence of this stunning scene on an 11-inch square canvas board. With my no tans at the ready for easy reference, and a selection of flat bristle brushes and softer ones for blending and detail, we'll explore the dynamic interplay of light and shadow. My trusty palette knife and walnut oil medium will help us achieve the desired texture and depth. You'll learn how to create richly colored shadows and discover my latest technique for infusing your brushwork with more dynamism. By pausing the video at moments where the waves captivate you, and utilizing additional reference photos, you'll be equipped to capture the movement and intricate details of the waves. This scene is a rewarding subject that will enhance your skills and bring the beauty of Laniakea to life on your canvas.



"Laniakea" 11x11" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson



REFERENCE PHOTO 1

The scene as Richard found it.

Dynamic Shapes, Rich Colour



REFERENCE PHOTO 2

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 3

The scene as Richard found it.

Materials

Gather these materials before you start. If you don't have the exact same supplies, use what you have and substitute freely.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- M. Graham & Co. Oil Paints
- Alizarine Crimson
- Phthalo Blue
- Ultramarine Blue
- Burnt Sienna
- Cadmium Red
- Cadmium Orange
- Yellow Ochre
- Cadmium Yellow Light
- Titanium White
- Painting medium
- M. Graham & Co. Walnut Alkyd Medium or Walnut Oil
- Solvent
- Gamsol
- Canvas
- Fredrix ultrasmooth canvas (Giving it a light sanding first helps the paint stick better).
- You could use a canvas panel or anything you prefer.
- Brushes
- [Rosemary & Co. Richard Robinson Brush Set](#)
- Palette Knife
- Paper Towels
- Container for solvent
- Container for painting medium

1 Using reference materials



Pause Video for Reference

Pause the video at a spot where the waves look particularly appealing to you. This will help you capture the movement and details of the waves in your painting.

Utilize Online Photos

Access the online resource page to find additional photos. These images can provide valuable reference material for your painting.

PRO TIP

Use reference materials to capture realistic details in your painting.

2 Color perception outdoors



Understand Color Perception Outdoors

Recognize that colors in a painting may differ from those in a photograph. This is because painting outdoors allows you to capture colors as they truly appear in natural light, which can be more accurate than a photo.

PRO TIP

Painting from life outdoors helps capture true colors more accurately than a photograph.

3 Drawing the composition



Block in Major Shapes

Use a very thin purple mixture to block in the major shapes of your composition. Focus on capturing the essential forms without getting bogged down in details.

Ensure a Straight Horizon Line

Pay close attention to making the horizon line straight and level. This is crucial for creating a balanced and realistic scene.

Correct Beach Shape

Carefully draw the shape of the beach, particularly where the water meets the sand. Getting these angles right is essential, as they are common areas where beginners make mistakes in beach paintings.

PRO TIP

Take the time to accurately capture the angles where the water touches the sand for a more realistic beach scene.

4 Blocking in dark areas



Block in Dark Areas

Identify and block in all the dark areas of the painting. This will help you clearly distinguish between light and dark from the beginning.

Paint the Darkest Dark

Focus on the rocks in the foreground as your darkest dark. Make this area a step lighter than you might instinctively choose to leave room for dark accents later.

Maintain Vibrant Shadows

By keeping your darkest dark slightly lighter, you allow the colors in the shadows to remain vibrant. This approach also sets the stage for adding beautiful calligraphic dark accents at the end.

Add Green Shadows

Mix a little yellow into your dark mixture to push it towards green. Apply this to create green shadows on the left side of the painting.

PRO TIP

Keep your darkest dark slightly lighter to maintain vibrant shadow colors and allow room for final dark accents.

5 Blocking in light areas



Mix Sunlit Sand Color

Create the sunlit sand color by combining mostly white with a little bit of yellow ochre and hansa yellow. Add a tiny touch of ultramarine blue to achieve the desired hue.

Apply Lightest Light

Carefully block in the lightest light areas using the sunlit sand color. Avoid letting this color touch the cool darks to prevent it from turning muddy.

Maintain Clean Brush

Refresh and clean your brush frequently, ideally after every couple of strokes, to maintain the purity of the light color.

PRO TIP

Keep the sunlit sand color away from cool darks to prevent it from turning muddy.

6 Foliage shadow colors



Create Greener Shadow Color

Mix a greener shadow color for the foliage on the left, keeping it fairly dark. Squint at the scene to observe the broad shapes and transfer those organic shapes onto the canvas.

Add Variation with Yellow Ochre

Move to a different clump of foliage behind the first one. Bend the color by adding yellow ochre to keep it varied. This change helps the foliage read as a separate element.

PRO TIP

Squint at the scene to better observe the broad shapes and transfer them to your canvas.

7 Sand and shadow colors



Mix Base Color for Sand and Shadow

Use a different brush to mix a base color for the sand and shadow in the foreground. Start with a combination of red, yellow ochre, a little bit of blue, and some white. Apply this mixture thinly with plenty of oil to create a dark, warm grey color.

Adjust and Bend the Color

Add a touch of crimson red to the base color to introduce variation. Experiment with the color to achieve the right tone, aiming for a dark, warm grey. Incorporate subtle violet blues to capture the reflected colors from the sky and surrounding elements.

PRO TIP

Apply the base coat thinly with a lot of oil to allow for easy adjustments and color variations.

8 Foreground water and distant hills



Paint Foreground Water

Use a bristle number 8 flat brush to paint the blues in the foreground water. Mix ultramarine blue with a little bit of white to achieve the right value. Add a touch of crimson to adjust the color, keeping the paint thin with a fair amount of oil.

Add Yellow Wash

Apply a very thin yellow wash over the area to prepare for the aquamarine color. This wash will enhance the vibrant colors in the thin water.

Enhance Water Reflection

Include a bit of phthalo blue where the sky reflects in the water. This will create an intense color in the flat water, capturing the vivid hues typical of Hawaii.

Adjust Distant Hills

Increase the size of the distant hill to break up the space with a larger shape. This adjustment compensates for the camera's tendency to shrink distant land when using a 35mm lens.

PRO TIP

Keep initial block-in colors fairly thin with a fair amount of oil to allow for vibrant layering.

9 Sky and color variation



Vary the Color

Add warmer tones to sections of light to create variation and indicate changes in the angle of the plane. This makes the painting more interesting than using a uniform color.

Build Up Light

Use thicker paint to build up the lights in your painting. This adds depth and dimension to the scene.

Enhance Palm Tops

Paint the tops of the palms with a very blue-green color. This allows the intense blue of the sky to appear as if it's pushing through the fronds and foliage.

Control Sky Intensity

Incorporate phthalo blue sparingly in the sky to avoid a tacky appearance. A less intense sky color helps maintain focus on the central elements of the painting.

PRO TIP

Use warmer tones to create variation and indicate changes in the angle of the plane.

10 Avoiding muddy colors



Avoid Mixing Darks with Sky

Leave a small gap between the sky and the dark areas to prevent them from mixing. Mixing these can result in a muddy appearance, so maintain separation until you're ready to define the shapes of the leaves.

Create Clouds with Cool Grey

Use a cool grey to invent clouds, focusing on creating soft edges. This will add depth and interest to your sky without overpowering it.

PRO TIP

Maintain a gap between sky and dark areas to avoid muddy colors.

11 Painting clouds



Create Cloud Shapes

Invent some clouds using a cool grey color. Focus on creating soft edges to give the clouds a natural appearance.

Add Warmth to Halftones

Warm up the color slightly as you move into the halftones of the cloud. This adds depth and dimension to the cloud structure.

Use a Three-Value Structure

Keep the clouds simple and blocky by using a three-value structure. Start with a cool gray for the shadow side, a slightly warmer mid-value, and a much lighter and warmer light value.

Manage Edges

Pay attention to the sharp and soft edges of the clouds. This will enhance the realism and softness of the cloud forms.

PRO TIP

Use a three-value structure to keep clouds simple and blocky, enhancing their dimensionality.

12 Softening edges



Assess Edge Sharpness

Evaluate your painting to determine where you want sharp edges and where you want soft edges. Consider exaggerating these distinctions to enhance the composition.

Use a Palette Knife for Texture

Add interesting textural effects by applying a palette knife to the areas where you want more texture. This will help create a dynamic contrast between different parts of the painting.

Soften Edges with a Soft Brush

Take a really soft brush and gently soften the edges where needed. Focus on areas where a shadow meets another shadow, as this is an ideal place to create softer transitions.

Clean Your Brush Regularly

Clean your brush after every couple of strokes to prevent muddled colors. Keeping your brush clean ensures that the colors remain vibrant and distinct.

PRO TIP

A great place to soften edges is where a shadow meets another shadow.

13 Adding variation and details



Soften Shadow Edges

Soften the edges where a shadow meets another shadow. This creates a smoother transition and enhances the overall depth of the painting.

Add Warm Reflected Light

Introduce warm reflected light to the underside of the bushes. This simulates light reflecting off the sand and adds realism to the foliage.

Enhance Sand Shadows

Add a slightly more vibrant orange to the shadows of the sand. This variation suggests the warmth and depth of the shadows.

Introduce Violet Grey

Apply a violet grey to the shadows, suggesting the sky's reflection. Ensure these modulating colors match the existing value to maintain harmony.

PRO TIP

Soften edges where shadows meet to create smoother transitions.

14 Foliage and palm tree details



Add Algae Details

Apply a slightly lighter tone to represent the algae on the rocks. This detail is important as it adds interest and realism, considering turtles love to eat this algae.

Define Clouds

Introduce some warmer mid-values and slightly darker darks to add more definition to the clouds. This will create depth and contrast in the sky.

Enhance Rock and Sand Shadows

Mix some grays for the rocks and a slightly warmer mid-value to blend the shadow of the sand with the light. This will create a seamless transition between light and shadow areas.

Paint Palm Trees

Use a stiffer synthetic brush for the palm trees to achieve crisper lines. Work backwards and forwards between your lights and darks to manage the contrast where dark meets light.

Clean Up the Sky

After working with the palm fronds, clean up the sky with some thicker paint to avoid a dirty appearance. This final touch ensures a clean and vibrant sky.

Straighten Distant Lines

Ensure distant lines are straight and level, as they often appear much straighter than expected. This accuracy enhances the painting's realism.

Add Lights to Foliage

Apply thicker paint to introduce lights in the foliage. This will add dimension and highlight the foliage effectively.

PRO TIP

Use a stiffer synthetic brush for crisper lines when painting palm trees.

15 Final touches on rocks and foam



Add Texture to Foliage

Use thicker paint to add lights in the foliage. Drag it across the surface to create texture and enhance the form.

Enhance Distant Hills

Apply a touch of light on the distant hills. Ensure this light is slightly lighter than the existing base blue-grey to create depth.

Define Rocks with Dark Accents

Add final dark accents to the rocks to bring them to life. Vary each rock slightly and avoid equal spacing to achieve a natural, random scattering.

Reflect Sky on Rocks

Use a slightly darker violet grey than the sand to indicate the sky reflecting off the top planes of the rocks.

Add Foam Texture

Brush a very light cool grey quickly to add texture for the foam. Use a slightly warmer lighter grey for the foam line, and go lighter and warmer where the sun touches the splash.

PRO TIP

Vary the appearance and spacing of rocks to avoid a uniform, unnatural look.

16 Finishing touches and signing



Enhance Sunlit Areas

Add a warmer tone to the areas where the sun touches the splash and a few foam lines further down the beach. This will enhance the sunlight effect and add vibrancy to the scene.

Shape the Beach

Refine the shape of the beach to emphasize the dynamic swoosh that leads the viewer's eye down the beach and into the painting. This will create a more engaging composition.

Adjust Foliage

Separate the foliated section by pushing the back sections further back into space. This will reduce the clumpy, heavy appearance and add a sense of airiness.

Add Finishing Touches

Include a few small details to give the painting a sense of scale. For example, add yellow shorts to the little figure to make it stand out and feel more complete.

PRO TIP

Use warmer tones to enhance areas where sunlight touches, adding vibrancy and depth.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by selecting reference materials that capture the essence of the scene you wish to portray. Whether it's the mesmerizing movement of waves or the vibrant colors of nature, these references will guide you in capturing realistic details. As you paint, remember that working outdoors allows you to perceive colors more accurately than photographs, offering a true representation of natural light.

Begin your composition by blocking in major shapes with a thin purple mixture, ensuring a balanced scene with a straight horizon and accurately drawn beach angles. As you progress, distinguish between light and dark areas, keeping your darkest darks slightly lighter to maintain vibrant shadow colors. Use a variety of colors and brush techniques to create depth and dimension, from the sunlit sands to the lush foliage and reflective waters.

In the final stages, focus on adding variation and details that bring your painting to life. Soften edges where needed, introduce warm reflected lights, and ensure your clouds and foliage have depth and realism. Pay attention to the finer details, such as the texture of rocks and the dynamic movement of foam, to create a cohesive and engaging composition. Finish with thoughtful touches that enhance the vibrancy and scale of your scene, and don't forget to sign your masterpiece.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use reference materials to capture realistic details.
- Painting outdoors helps capture true colors more accurately.
- Accurately capture angles where water meets sand.
- Keep darkest darks slightly lighter for vibrant shadows.
- Keep sunlit sand color away from cool darks to prevent muddiness.
- Squint to observe broad shapes and transfer them to canvas.
- Maintain a gap between sky and dark areas to avoid muddy colors.
- Use a three-value structure for clouds to enhance dimensionality.

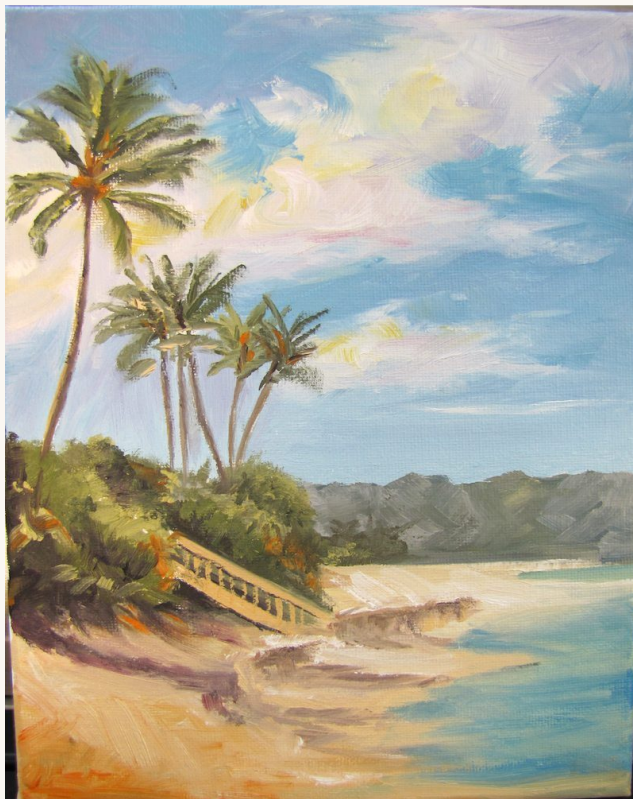


"Laniakea" 11x11" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson

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.

"The Entrance" by Caroline Lee King



"The Entrance" Oil on Canvas by Caroline Lee King.

Design

I like the vertical design Caroline - nice to see the whole palm tree and that sense of freedom given to a scene by adding more sky and I love the shapes of your clouds too. I like the way you've made the stairway a focal point but the final drawing of that does let it down a bit as it is not clear what's happening at the end of it. I was hugely impressed to see that you made 5 separate paintings of this scene - way to go!

Colour

The colour in this is really pretty good. You could add a little more depth of colour to the water, try to avoid mixing your lights with your darks in the sand (it goes muddy) and darken the shadows in your clouds slightly to give them more form. Your hills could have some more blue in them too - they're quite a flat gray at the moment. Nice to see you playing with throwing some orange around to spice things up.

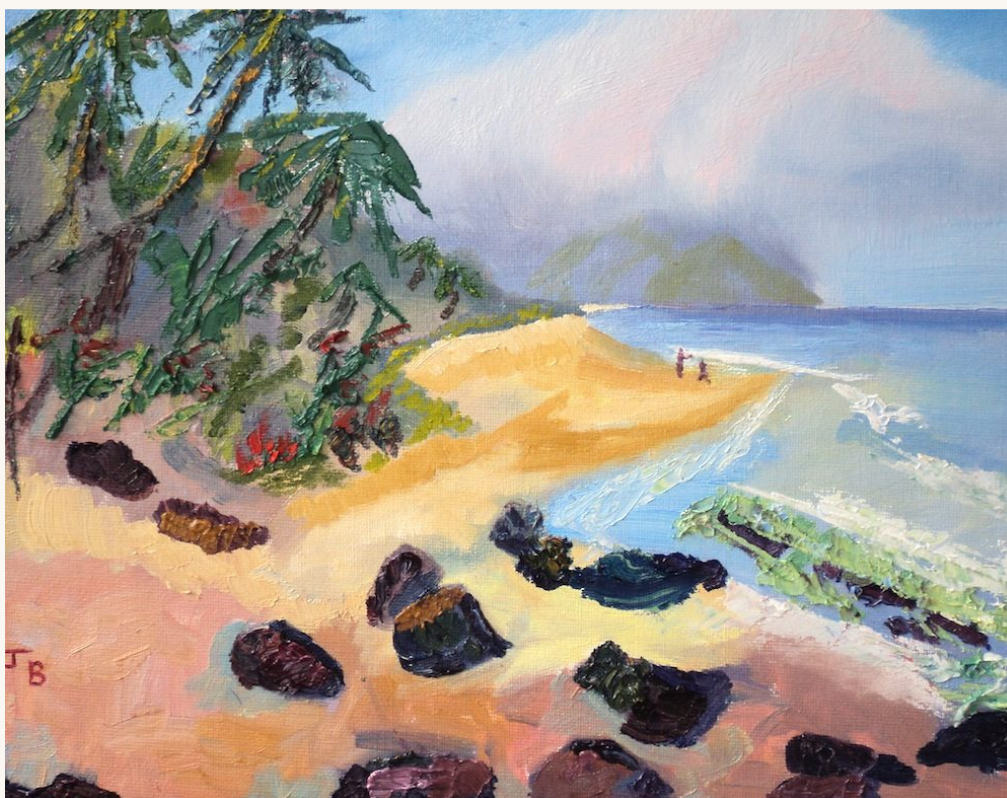
Brushwork

I'm liking your vigorous brushwork Caroline. Beware of crossing the line between bravura and sloppy though. Some of the shapes in your palm fronds could have been handled with more care and the stairs are quite clunky. My goal is always to try to make things read well from a distant but to look beautiful up close too. You're getting there.

Realism

There are a few things need touching up to raise the realism on this. The shadows across the sand could be more definite and continuous, the drawing of the stairs could be more refined and there are the other few things I've already mentioned. The overall drawing is good though and that's usually what makes for convincing realism. Hope that helps.

"Turtle Beach" by Jim Baldourmas



"Turtle Beach" Oil on Canvas by Jim Baldourmas.

Design

Jim you've got a real cheery painting here - what it lacks in realism it makes up for with charm. You may not have captured the scene itself but the spirit of it is certainly there. The rocks seem to be the main feature because they are so dark against the sand so it's a shame the drawing of them wasn't a bit more informed. Their bases need to be flatter and more so as they move down the beach and they all need to be casting shadows onto the sand. Making them lighter gray will help them settle down too. Looks like at the top end of the far sand dune you're not quite sure what's going on in regards to how it meets with the flora there. If you're not sure the viewer won't be sure.

Colour

Nice to see you varying the hues in your beach shadows and your clouds which look great. In the foliage the base dark that you laid down was a mid value which is too light and is making the plants float on top of it spoiling the illusion of depth. Making that darker will solve the problem there.

Brushwork

You've got a great variation in brushwork there from soft clouds to chunky rocks and turbulent whitewash so it looks like you've had some fun with the palette knife but you've also discovered its limitations in that it's not very good at curved lines as in the palm fronds which look pretty clunky because of that.

Realism

This one's got a fair way to go on realism and much of that is down to drawing and values so I would recommend the best way for you to improve those things quickly is to do a few dozen paintings in grayscale and get some drawing training under your belt so you can really understand what it is you are seeing. If that's going to stop you having fun, don't worry and just paint!

"Turtle Beach" by Ngaire Lincoln



"Turtle Beach" 12 x 18" Acrylic on Canvas by Ngaire Lincoln.

Design

Hi Ngaire you've simplified the design somewhat and lost the drama of the dark shadows across the sand, which is actually in keeping with the overcast looking sky but does lose some of that warm tropical feeling. There is a problem with the comparison of scale between the rocks and the trees and the people. I think it's that the people and trees are too small. Having those dark rocks tucked away in the bottom left corner is not the best design idea - better to remove them altogether.

Colour

Having decreased the contrast between the shadows and the lights on the beach has taken some of the sparkle out of the colours there but all the same it's good to see you playing with adding some variety into the colours that are there with some oranges, mauves and greens. The same could be said for the ocean although it does look a little patchy with stripes placed here and there without a thorough understanding of what's going on.

Brushwork

Nice to see you enjoying your brush and those are some great looking palm trees there! Love that lost edge you've given the mountain under the cloud and the splash of foam on the shore. I can recommend pushing your lights further by using much thicker paint there - lots of fun.

Realism

Might want to measure that horizon and level it up. Which direction is the light coming from? Have you applied shadows consistently throughout the painting? Should the water darken as it gets closer to you and you see more through the surface? Answering questions like these all add up to a convincing painting. The highlight of this painting for me is the convincing structure of the mountain and the way you've worked the cloud over it - nice! Keep up the good work Ngaire.

"Turtle Beach" by Jennifer Beaudet



"Turtle Beach" 8x10" Oil on Canvas by Jennifer Beaudet.

Design

Hi Jennifer, the design looks all good to me. You did great reducing the size of the palms which was a problem with my painting. The curve of the beach is really well done as is the treatment of the foreground shadow. You mentioned you weren't quite happy with the sky and perhaps that could use a little fiddling - extending one of the clouds out the top of the picture might help as running an object that close to the edge always gives the appearance that you were trying to squeeze it in (like your foremost rock). Also since the light is coming from top left the light area on the far right end of your cloud is defying the light source - it might read better as a shadow plane there.

Colour

It was a nice decision to gray down the background a little as they has helped the colour in the foreground pop a little more. The addition of the red flowers was also a nice idea that you executed well although you could have grayed down the distant flowers a little because they're poking out a bit there. Some of the shadows on the beach seem to have turned a bit muddy which in my experience comes from fudging your cools and warms together on the canvas instead of laying down your cools over the top stroke by stroke, keeping the brush clean.

Brushwork

You brushwork is good and varied, following the forms of objects well. Nice to see some impasto stuff going on there - quite impressionistic. Your palm trees are working from a distance but up close the

brushwork looks a bit uncertain and that's led to a little muddiness in the sky there. Great shapes though. Good variety of soft and sharp edges too.

Realism

The overall realism is great and that owes much to your careful drawing. You mentioned that it has sold already - barely even dry! That's fantastic and a good testament to a painting well done. Congratulations.