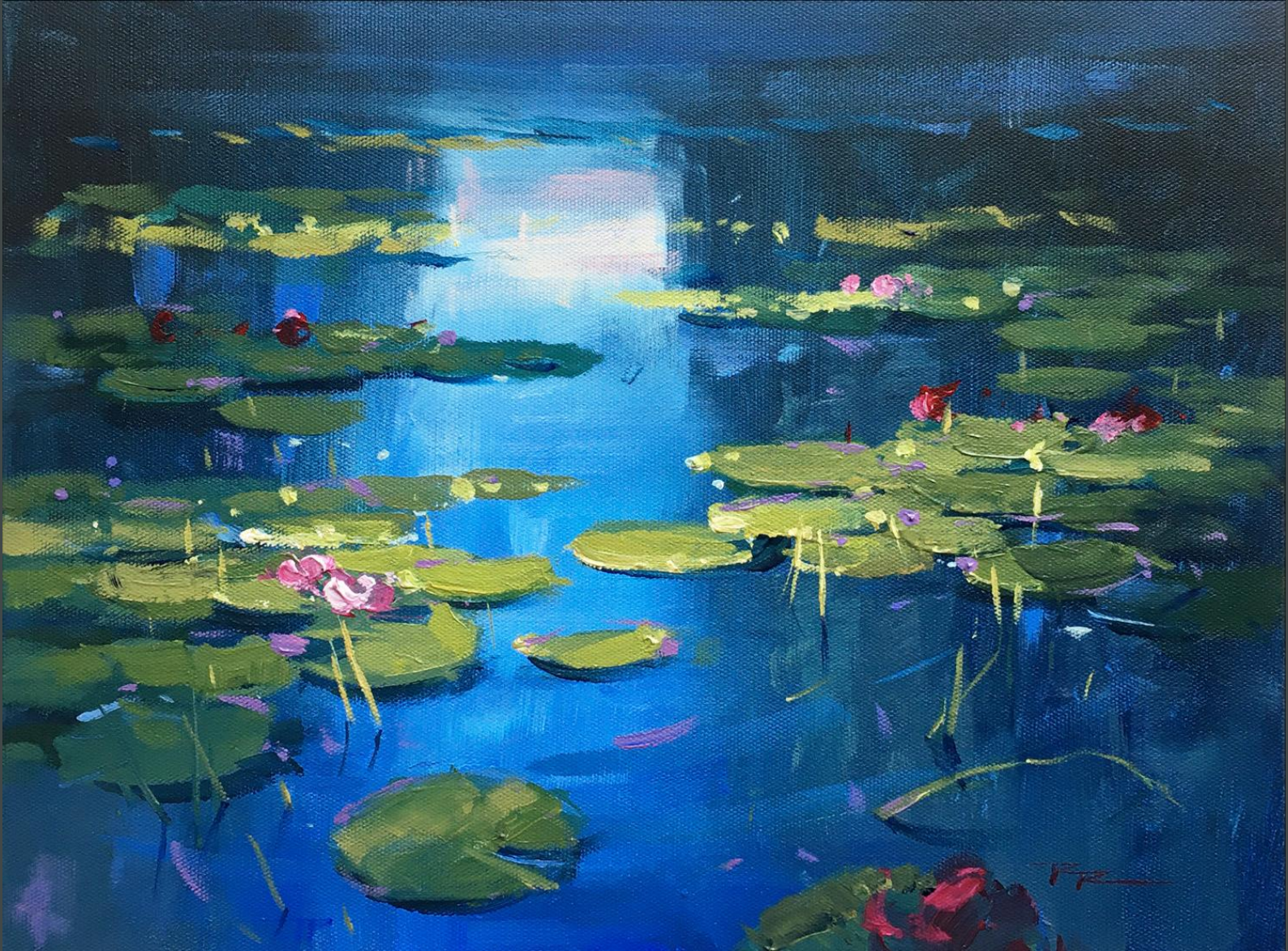




Water Lilies

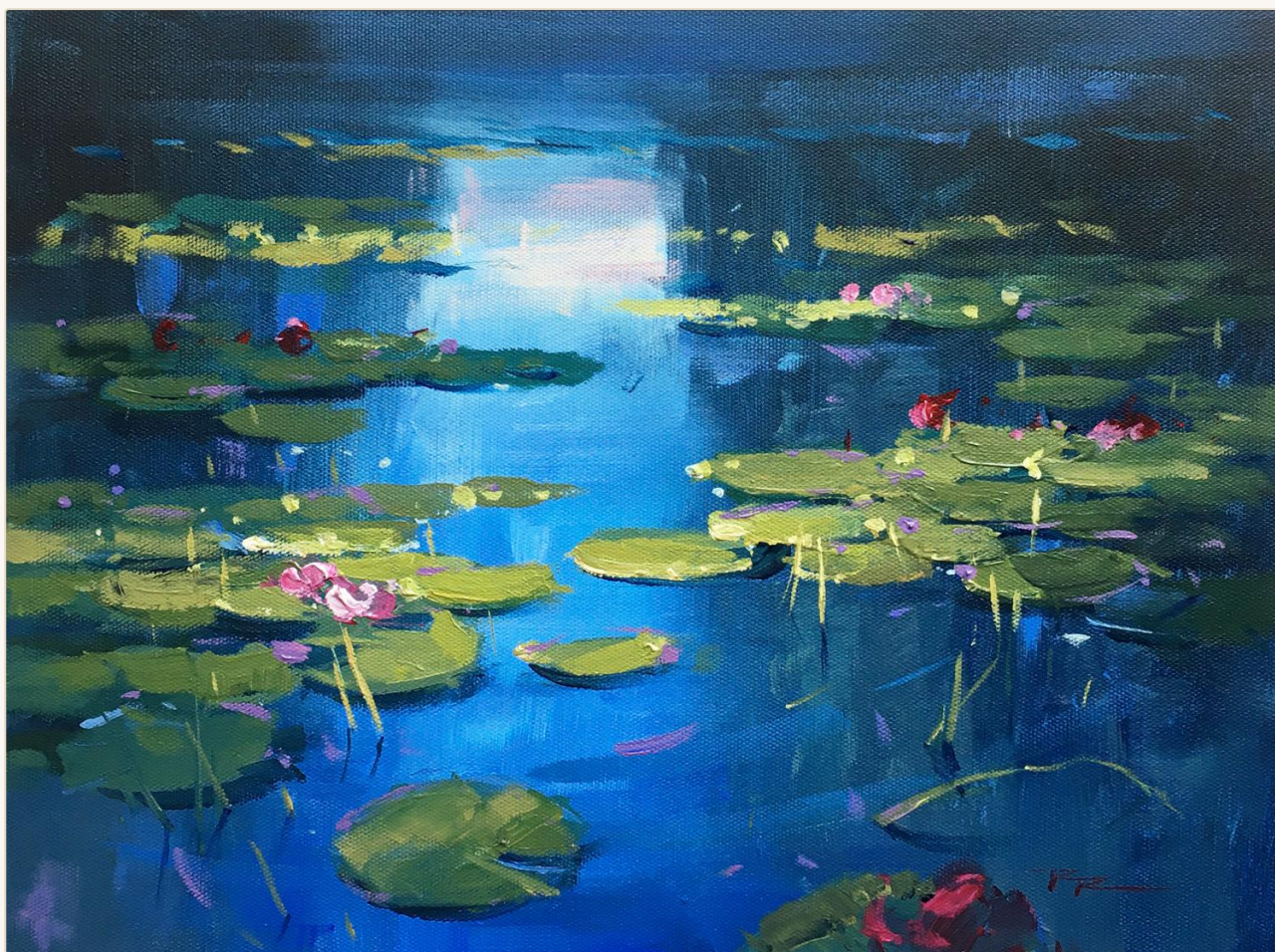
A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/217-Water-Lilies>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, I invite you to immerse yourself in the serene beauty of water lilies, drawing inspiration from the timeless works of Monet. We'll be working on a 12 by 14 inch canvas using acrylics, specifically the Italia Interactive colors, which offer the flexibility of a longer drying time, allowing for painterly wet-into-wet effects that are typically associated with oils. This makes them perfect for capturing the delicate gradations and soft edges of our subject. The colors we'll be using include ultramarine blue, phthalo blue, Bordeaux or alizarin, yellow ochre, arilamide yellow light, and titanium white. These choices will help us achieve the vibrant yet subtle hues of the water lilies and their surroundings. As we progress, you'll learn to create sparkling impasto highlights and explore various brush techniques with long flats, synthetic brushes, and a palette knife. We'll also use a spray bottle for keeping the paints workable and for adding unique effects. This lesson is designed to enhance your skills in good design, accurate drawing, and passionate brushwork, applicable across all mediums. Whether you're using acrylics, oils, or another medium, this scene offers a rewarding exploration of color, light, and reflection.

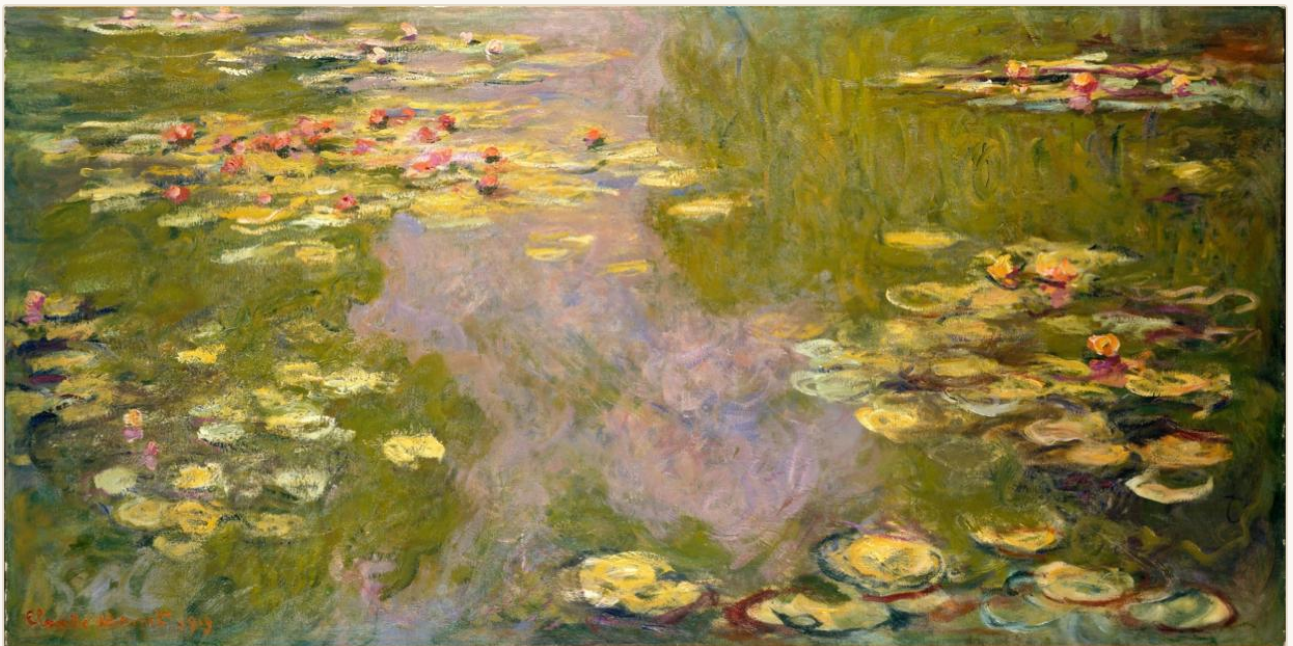


Water Lilies



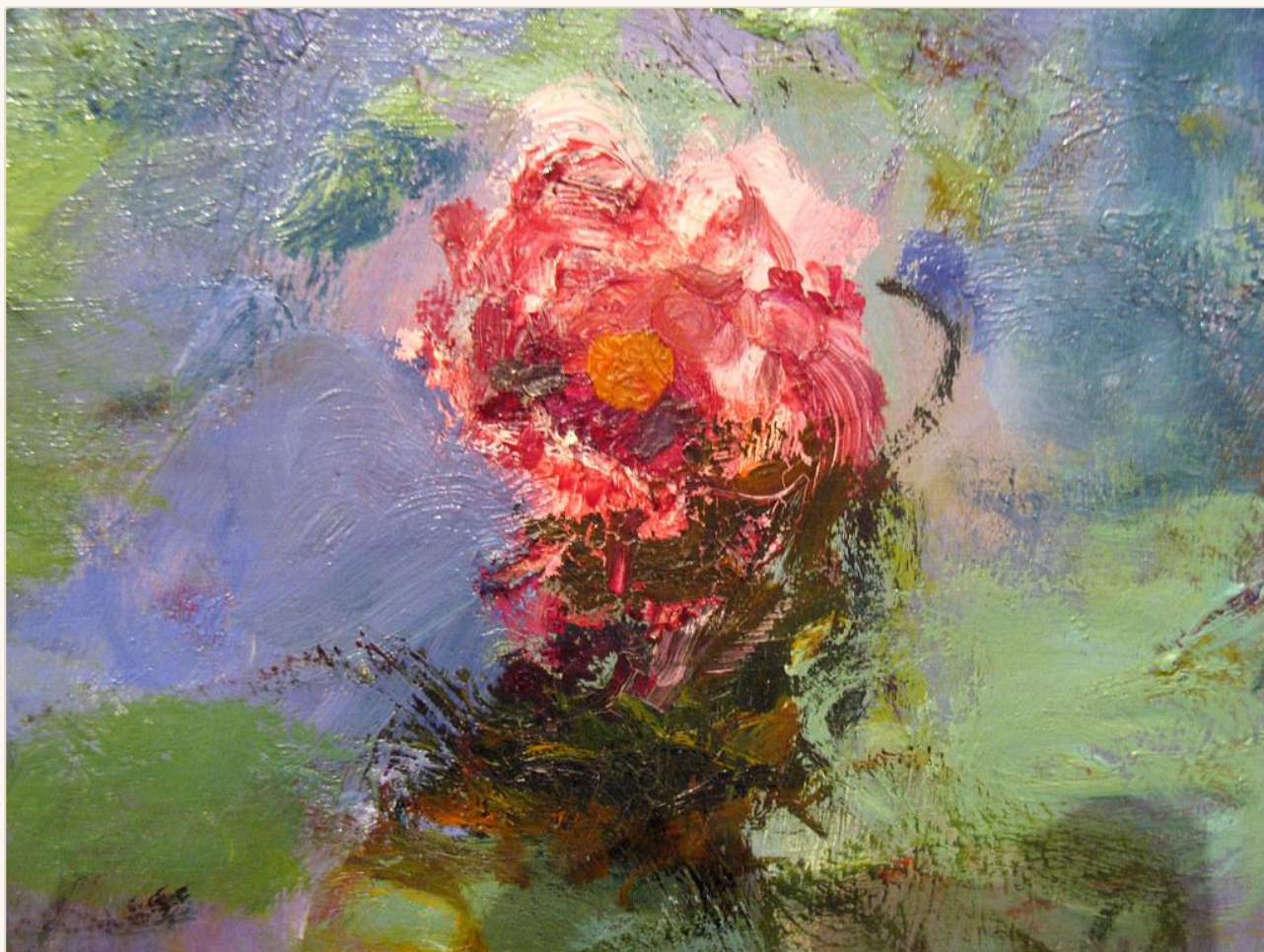
REFERENCE PHOTO 1

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 2

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 3

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 4

The scene as Richard found it.

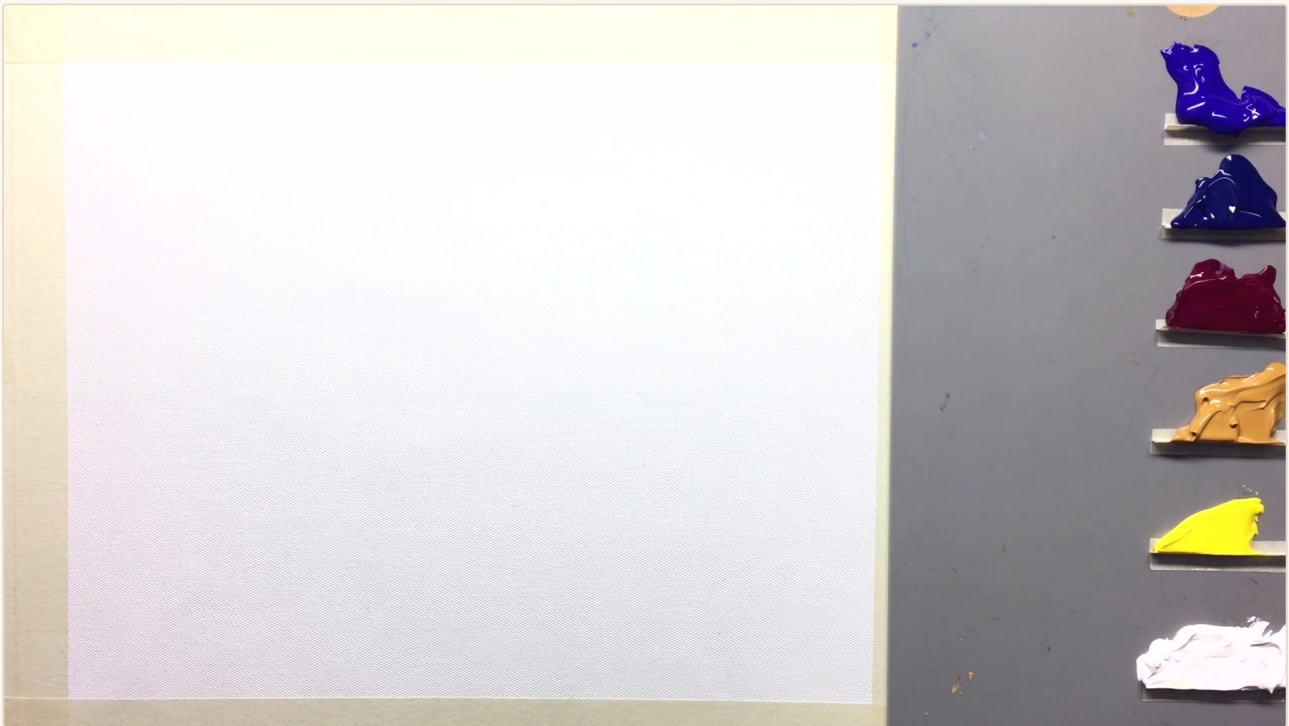
Materials

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 Atelier Interactive Acrylics
- Ultramarine Blue
- Phthalo Blue
- Alizarine Crimson
- Yellow Ochre
- Lemon Yellow
- Titanium White
- Canvas
- Fredrix ultrasmooth canvas.
- You could use a canvas panel or anything you prefer.
- Brushes
- [Rosemary & Co. Richard Robinson Brush Set](#)
- Palette knife
- Paper towels
- Bucket of water

1 Painting the Background



Prepare to Paint the Background

Focus on painting the background first, which is the water in the water lily scene. This approach keeps your colors cleaner and is especially useful with acrylics due to their fast drying time.

Consider Drying Time

If using acrylics, paint the background first and let it dry slightly before adding the water lilies. With oils, you can do the same, but be prepared to wait longer for drying.

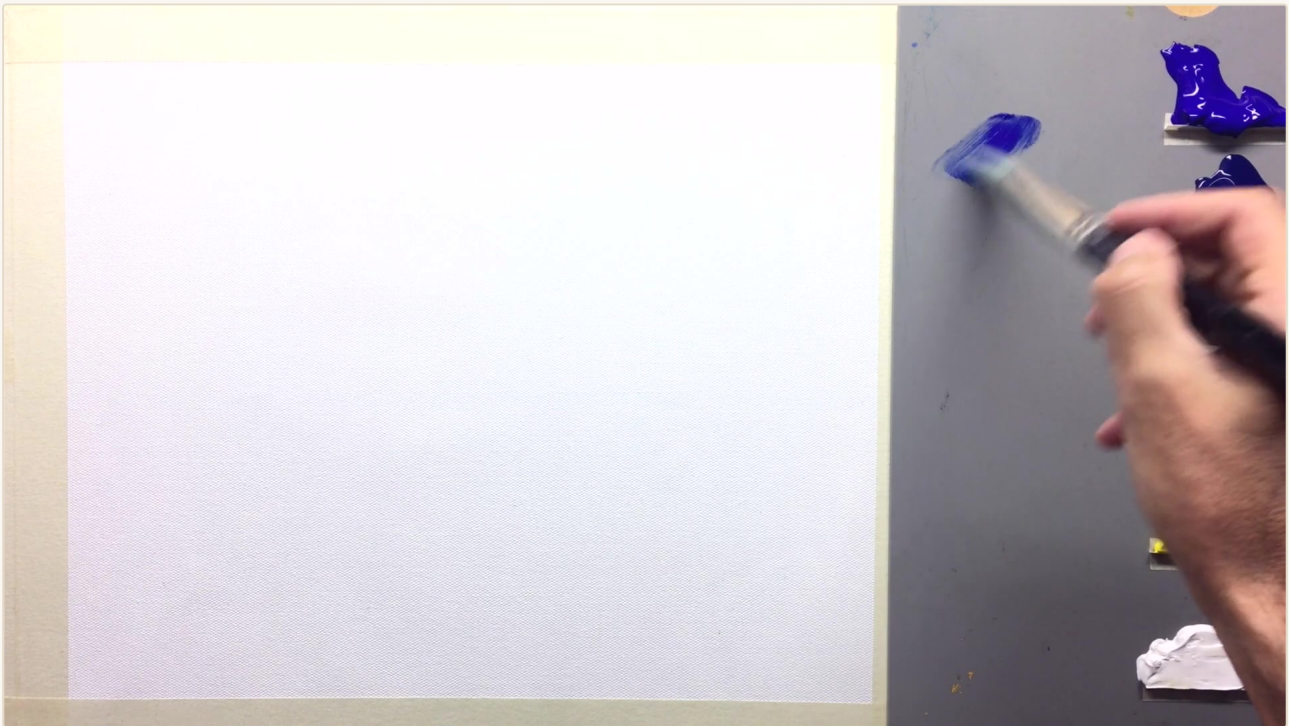
Paint Upside Down

Paint the background upside down to capture the reflections of trees, sky, and clouds. This technique is inspired by Monet's water lily paintings and helps achieve a natural reflection effect.

PRO TIP

Paint the background first to keep your colors cleaner and simplify the process.

2 Creating the Couch and Initial Layers



Create the Couch

Use a big brush to mix Ultramarine blue with a little bit of white. Apply this mixture as a thin layer across the canvas to create a 'couch', a wet surface to paint into. This will help achieve soft edges and a reflective water effect.

Mix Dark Green

Combine both blues with magenta and yellow ochre to form a very dark green. This mixture is almost neutral but retains a lot of green, perfect for creating depth in the painting.

Apply Dark Green

Start applying the dark green from the bottom of the canvas. Use plenty of paint, as an absorbent canvas requires more to achieve the desired effect. Ensure your strokes are vertical or horizontal to mimic a reflective surface.

Vary Brush Strokes

Avoid using only one direction for your strokes. Mix vertical and horizontal strokes to add variety and a painterly quality to your work. This prevents the painting from looking too uniform and adds interest.

Cover the Canvas

Continue working into the blue areas with a slightly bluer or more purple mix. Use a large brush to cover the canvas efficiently, especially if using acrylics, to maintain the wet-on-wet effect.

PRO TIP

Use vertical and horizontal strokes to create the effect of a reflective surface.

3 Adding Light and Sky Reflections



Lighten the Canvas

Add white to your palette and mix it with a touch of yellow ochre to create a light grayish green. This color should be lighter and slightly greener than the dark base on your canvas. Consider the direction of the sunlight and apply this mixture to the side of the trees that would be lit up, using varied vertical and horizontal brushstrokes to create texture and interest.

Add Sky Reflections

Switch to a clean, wet brush to prevent paint from drying in the ferrule. Begin adding lighter blue to the sky area, starting with a darker shade at the top and gradually adding more white as you move downward to create a gradient effect. Incorporate soft, vertical strokes to suggest sky holes in the trees, imagining where they might naturally appear.

Enhance Sky and Water

Use more phthalo blue than ultramarine to keep the sky vibrant and blend while the paint is still wet. Avoid overblending to maintain visible brushstrokes. Add a touch of bright yellow to warm up the sky, and then dip back into darker blue for contrast. Lightly whisk this across the water to create a sheen of light, suggesting distant water reflections.

Refine Tree Reflections

Add a little more light to the reflection of the tree on the lit side, using soft brushstrokes to maintain gentle edges. Consider adding a touch of light to the top of the tree as well, ensuring the reflections are consistent with the light source.

PRO TIP

Wet your brush before use to prevent paint from drying in the ferrule, ensuring smoother application and easier cleaning.

4 Preparing for Water Lilies



Invert the Canvas

Turn your canvas upside down to prepare for the next stage. This inversion helps create the illusion of reflection, enhancing the depth of the scene.

Moisten the Palette

Give your palette a light squirt of water to keep the paints workable. This is especially helpful for maintaining the fluidity of acrylics.

Assess the Foreground Darkness

Notice how the darker tones in the foreground contribute to the water's depth. This mimics the natural darkening effect when looking down into water near your feet.

Decide on Drying Time

Choose whether to let the painting dry or continue working. Acrylics dry quickly, allowing you to paint over them soon, while oils may take several days to dry.

PRO TIP

Turn your canvas upside down to enhance the reflection effect and create depth.

5 Placing Water Lilies



Plan Water Lily Placement

Examine resource photos to find interesting shapes and patterns for your water lilies. Avoid creating uniform patterns like polka dots, as the brain tends to do. For a more organic layout, try tossing coins onto a tray and photographing them from different angles to inspire natural movements.

Darken Water Areas

Use a brush to darken areas in the water, working from dark to light. Mix a dark grey-green by adding red to your green to gray it down. Consider the patterns you want, such as a clump here or an S curve through the scene, to sketch where the water lilies will go.

Consider Perspective

Remember that water lilies get smaller and flatter as they recede into the distance. The degree of change is influenced by your height and viewing angle above the water, so adjust accordingly.

Explore Background Variations

Although this background is dark, explore different backgrounds like Monet's paintings, which feature various skies, clouds, and color moods. This can provide inspiration for your own water lily painting.

PRO TIP

Avoid creating uniform patterns by using natural references like photos or coin arrangements for organic water lily placement.

6 Painting Water Lily Pads



Create Darker Lily Pads

Mix phthalo blue and yellow ochre to create a dark green. Use light pressure, then heavy pressure, and back to light pressure to form an oval shape for the lily pad. Apply the paint thickly to make it stand out from the surface, creating a three-dimensional effect.

Consider Perspective

Think about the orientation of the lily pads. The central axis of the ovals should change as they move across the canvas, simulating a natural perspective. Adjust the angle of the ovals to reflect this perspective shift.

Add Lighter Lily Pads

Gradually lighten the lily pads by adding white and bright yellow to your mix. Keep the paint thick and maintain the oval shapes, making them slightly larger and rounder as they approach the foreground. Allow for some overlapping pads to enhance depth.

Maintain Painterly Feel

Use a large brush to avoid getting too detailed, preserving a painterly quality. Vary the size and shape of the lily pads slightly to reflect natural variation, and introduce some dappled light to create secondary areas of focus.

PRO TIP

Use thick, impasto paint to create a three-dimensional effect on the lily pads.

7 Adding Details and Highlights



Add Dark Accents

Use a small brush to add dark shadows to the water lilies, considering the light source and how it casts shadows. Focus on the calligraphic feel of your brush strokes, allowing for artistic expression even with a small brush. Add a few more dark accents to enhance the sense of depth and recession.

Apply Thick Impasto Paint

Take inspiration from Monet and apply thick impasto paint for the water lilies. Scoop up a generous amount of paint, swirl it onto the canvas in the right place, and use the right color compared to the surrounding area. This technique helps create a realistic appearance when viewed from a distance.

Add Lighter Highlights

Mix white with yellow ochre and a touch of blue to create highlights where the light hits the water lilies. Apply this mixture to create a spotlight effect, enhancing the three-dimensional look of the lilies.

Create Cool Light Reflections

Use a cooler blue tone to add subtle reflections of the sky on the water lilies. Apply the paint with a clump on the end of your brush and let it sit on the canvas without overworking it. Place these reflections sparingly to maintain a natural look.

Add Vertical Reflections and Ripples

Use thin vertical strokes to suggest reeds, making them larger as they approach the foreground. Add darker reflections of these reeds, ensuring they lean in the opposite direction from the actual reeds. Use a medium blue to add ripples, enhancing the water's texture.

Enhance with Thick Impasto Flowers

Apply thick impasto paint for flowers in the shade, using calligraphic brushwork to create a sense of movement. Choose a light pink for flowers in the sun, making them chunky to cast shadows and stand out from the water surface. Add one or two more in the sun to create a cohesive flow through the painting.

PRO TIP

Apply thick impasto paint for water lilies to create depth and realism, ensuring the placement and color are accurate for a convincing effect.

8 Re-evaluating Light and Composition



Evaluate Light Balance

Assess the current light and dark balance in your painting. Aim for a composition that leans more towards light to enhance the peaceful and calm atmosphere.

Lighten Lily Pads

Focus on lightening the lily pads to introduce more light into the painting. This will help shift the balance towards a brighter composition.

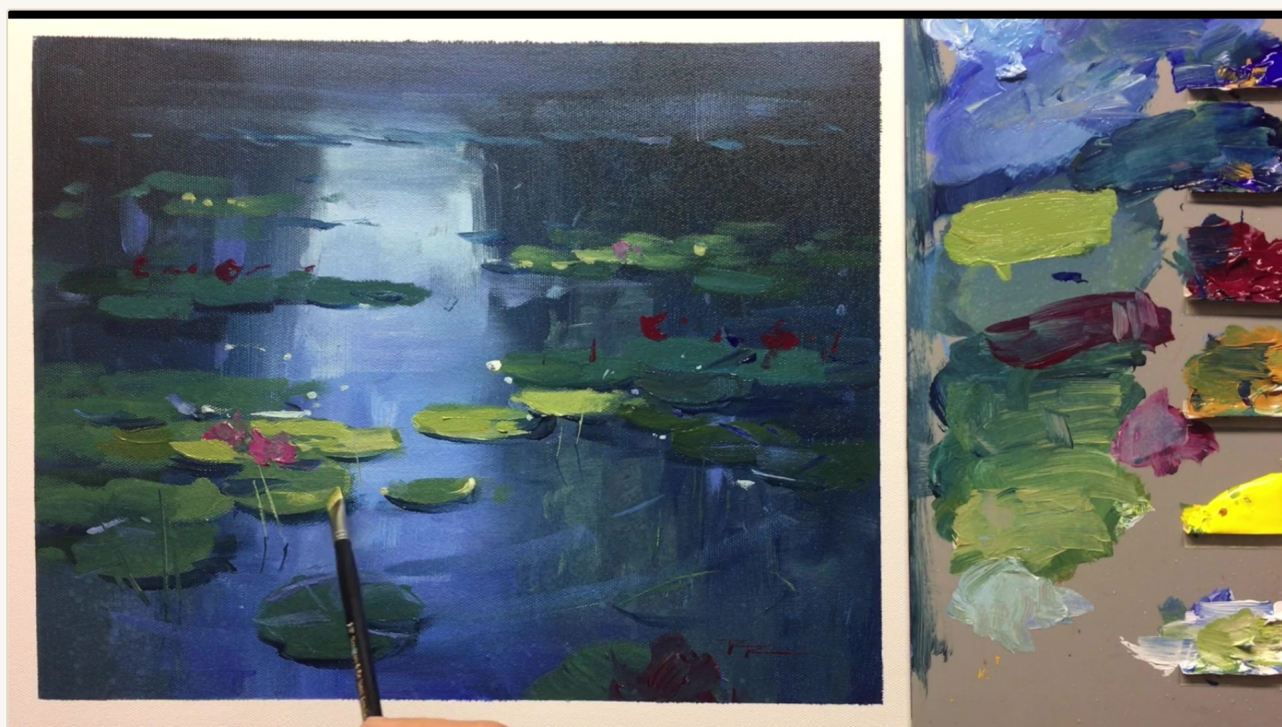
Experiment with Background

Consider trying different background colors, such as a pink cloudy or greenish tone. This can reflect various moods and enhance the overall feel of the painting.

PRO TIP

Lighten areas of the painting to achieve a more peaceful and calm atmosphere.

9 Exploring Different Styles and Techniques



Vary Your Brush Strokes

Be aware of the natural tendency for your brush strokes to have a certain direction, especially if you're right-handed. Change up your strokes frequently to avoid a uniform look. This will add variety and interest to your painting.

Create Light Gradation

Add more light to your painting, but ensure there is a gradation from light to dark. Avoid making the entire area the same brightness to maintain depth and interest.

Experiment with Texture

Apply paint with varying thickness to create texture. Use impasto techniques to make elements like water lilies stand out against a smooth background. This contrast in texture adds visual interest.

Explore Different Techniques

Try various methods to achieve a painterly look, inspired by artists like Monet. Experiment with layering and different paint consistencies to discover what resonates with you. This exploration will help you develop your own unique style.

PRO TIP

Change up your brush strokes frequently to avoid a uniform look and add variety to your painting.

10 Adjusting for Acrylic Drying



Account for Acrylic Drying

Acrylics tend to dry darker and duller than they appear when wet. To counteract this, mix your colors slightly lighter and more vibrant than your intended final result. This adjustment will ensure that once the paint dries, it achieves the desired look.

PRO TIP

Mix colors lighter and more vibrant to counteract acrylics drying darker and duller.

Summary & Key Takeaways

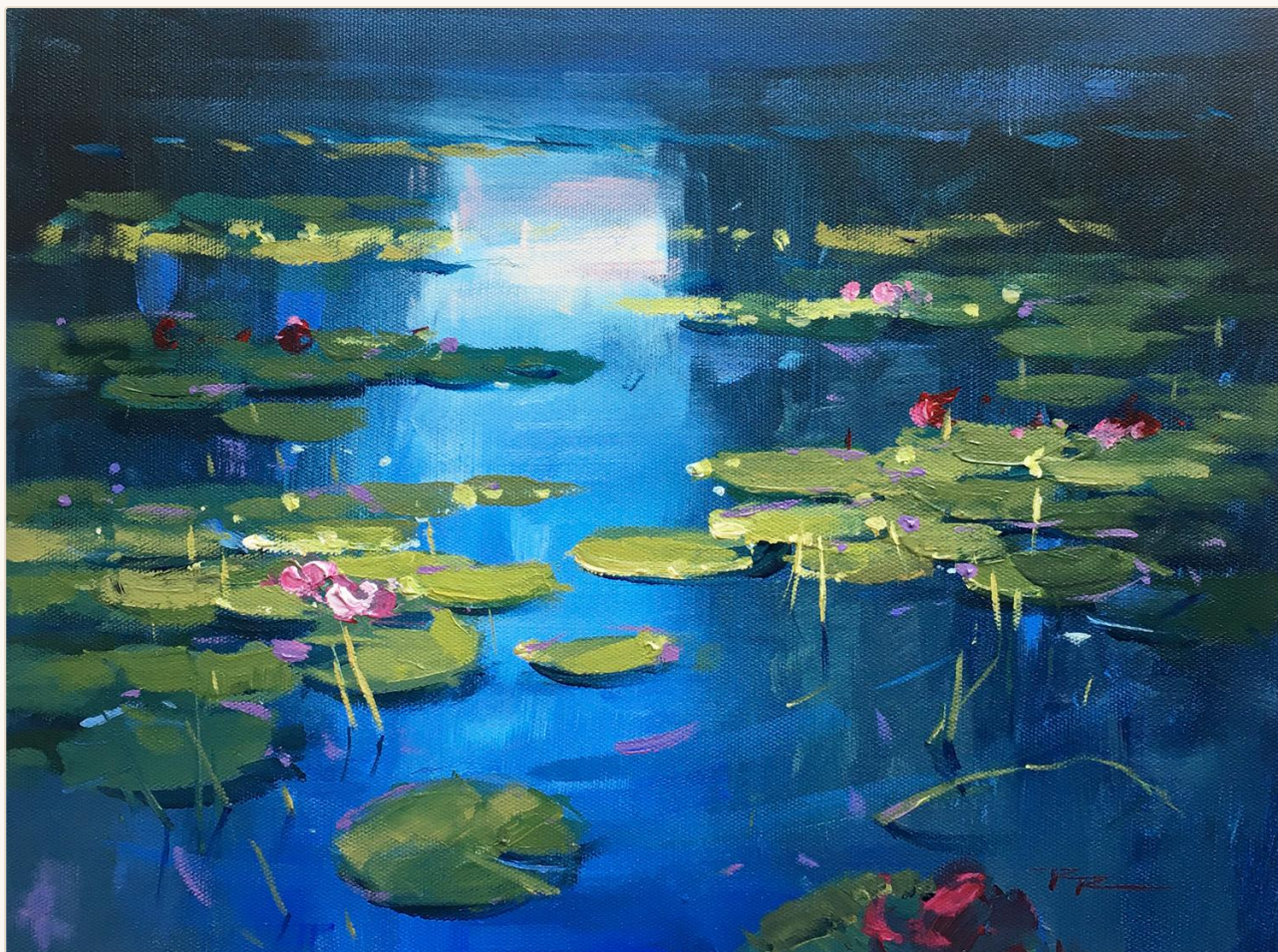
Embark on your water lily painting journey by first establishing a clean and vibrant background. This sets the stage for your composition and allows you to capture the natural reflections of trees and sky in the water. Utilize techniques like painting upside down to achieve realistic reflections, inspired by the works of Monet.

As you progress, focus on layering and creating depth with varied brushstrokes and color mixes. Use a combination of vertical and horizontal strokes to mimic the reflective qualities of water, and gradually introduce lighter tones to highlight the effects of sunlight. This will add texture and interest to your painting.

Finally, bring your water lilies to life with thoughtful placement and attention to detail. Use impasto techniques to add dimension to the lily pads and flowers, and ensure your composition maintains a balance of light and dark to evoke a serene atmosphere. Experiment with different styles and techniques to develop your unique artistic voice.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Paint the background first to keep colors clean and simplify the process.
- Use vertical and horizontal strokes to create a reflective surface.
- Wet your brush before use to prevent paint from drying in the ferrule.
- Turn your canvas upside down to enhance the reflection effect.
- Avoid creating uniform patterns by using natural references for water lily placement.
- Use thick, impasto paint to create a three-dimensional effect on the lily pads.
- Apply thick impasto paint for water lilies to create depth and realism.
- Mix colors lighter and more vibrant to counteract acrylics drying darker and duller.

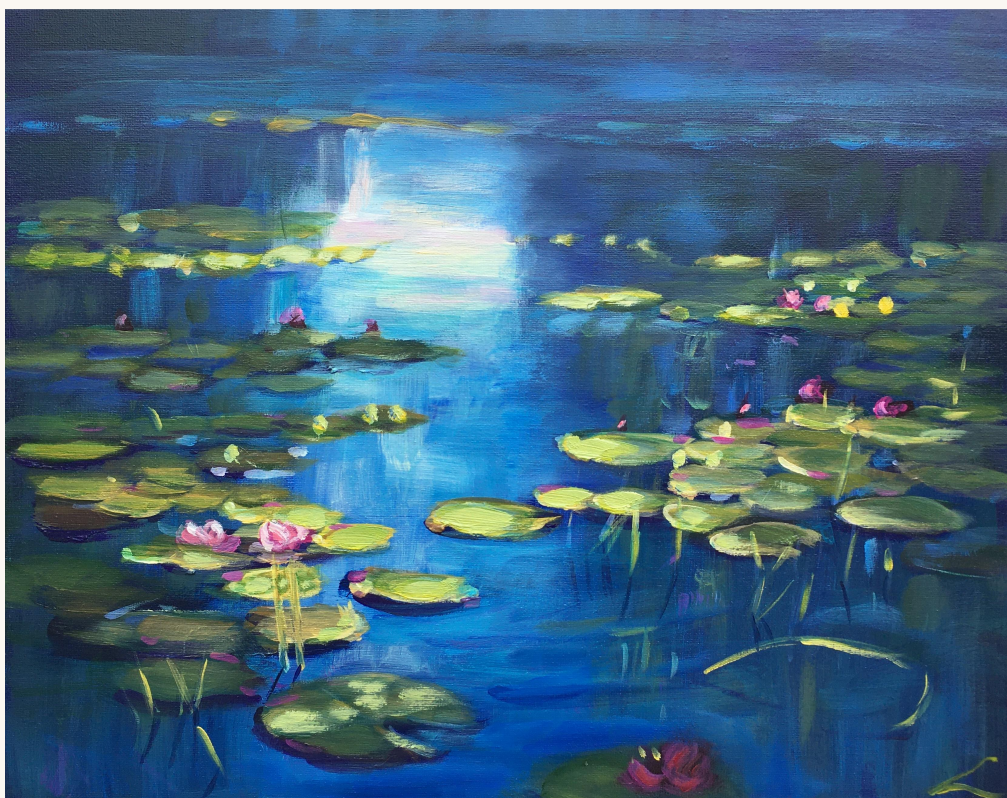


Water Lilies

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.

Water lilies, acrylic with oil glazing, canvas, 40 cm x 50 cm



Water lilies, acrylic with oil glazing, canvas, 40 cm x 50 cm

Hi Elena, what a serene, luminous piece—you've really captured that cool, tranquil pond light, and the soft glazes give the water a lovely sense of depth and movement. I especially enjoy the lost-and-found edges on the lily pads and the delicate pinks sitting against those deep blues!

I'd like to see you use a finer rigger or long dagger brush for those thin details in the stalks, the key skill there to get the paint just thin enough (and to load the brush smoothly) so that it can glide off the brush in a single crisp stroke.

Beautiful work - keep exploring those subtle temperature shifts and edge variety!

“Water Lilies” by Eric Hillmer, Toronto, ON, Canada



"Water Lilies" Watercolour & Gouache by Eric Hillmer, Toronto, ON, Canada

Hi Eric, this has a lovely, tranquil mood and a strong sense of light—those warm reds popping against the cool violets and blues are doing great focal-point work!

To push this further, try broadening the value structure: deepen a few of the darkest darks in the water (particularly around the outside of the scene) to increase depth and make the lit pads feel brighter. Consider softening more of the pad edges in the distance and reserving your crispest, hardest edges for the main red bloom and its nearest pads—right now many edges compete equally.

You could also glaze a subtle, cooler note into the background pads to help them recede, and introduce a touch of reflected red into adjacent pads to harmonize the focal colour. Your most distant pads need flattening out to help create more depth.

Lovely work—just a bit more edge control and value contrast will make this sing!

Water Lilies oil on canvas 12x14



Water Lilies oil on canvas 12x14

Lovely mood here, Nancy—the cool, velvety blues and that luminous vertical reflection create a serene pathway of light, and your soft edges in the water feel spot on.

Your lily pad ellipses are well drawn for their positions, and you have a good amount of variety, thoughtfully done. Very succinct brushwork without over-working it - nice.

Beautiful work - keep leaning into that poetic light!

Monet's lily pond



Monet's lily pond

Hi Ian, lovely job capturing the serenity of the pond - the soft willows, the dappled reflections, and those delicate pinks on the lilies all sing, and Monet's turquoise bridge makes a strong, cheerful focal point. I think Monet would approve!

To deepen the space, consider pushing the shadows under the background trees a touch cooler in contrast to the warmth in the foreground water.

Your lily pad ellipses are working well, but I'd like to see those further back flattening out a little more. The effects of distance on shapes and colours in a landscape get exponentially more pronounced the closer it is to the horizon - it's not a linear progression. Said another way, there's more distance contained within one inch down from the horizon than there is from the bottom of that inch to your feet. It helps me to remember that when painting landscapes.

Beautiful work - I can feel the sunlight!