



Dune Impressions

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/219-Dune- Impressions>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we embark on an exciting journey into the world of impressionistic painting, capturing the mesmerizing beauty of sunset dunes. Using a 16 by 18 inch Frederick's Ultra Smooth canvas, I guide you through the process with M. Graham oils, including a vibrant palette of phthalo blue, ultramarine blue, quinacridone magenta, cadmium red, yellow ochre, cadmium yellow light, and titanium white. With walnut oil as our medium, we'll explore how it enhances the flow of paint on the canvas. I favor a range of flat brushes, mostly natural bristles, with a few synthetic ones for finer details. These tools are essential for achieving the expressive brushwork that defines this style. Together, we'll delve into creating large movements of light, convincing depth, and the sparkling impasto highlights that bring the scene to life. By learning to alter the composition, such as removing dark elements and introducing light to harmonize the foreground with the sunset's warmth, you'll discover the joy of painting with passion and precision. This scene offers a rewarding subject, allowing you to expressively capture the serene yet dynamic interplay of light and shadow on the dunes. Whether you choose oils or acrylics, this lesson promises to enhance your skills and ignite your creative spirit.



Dune Impressions



REFERENCE PHOTO

The scene as Richard found it.

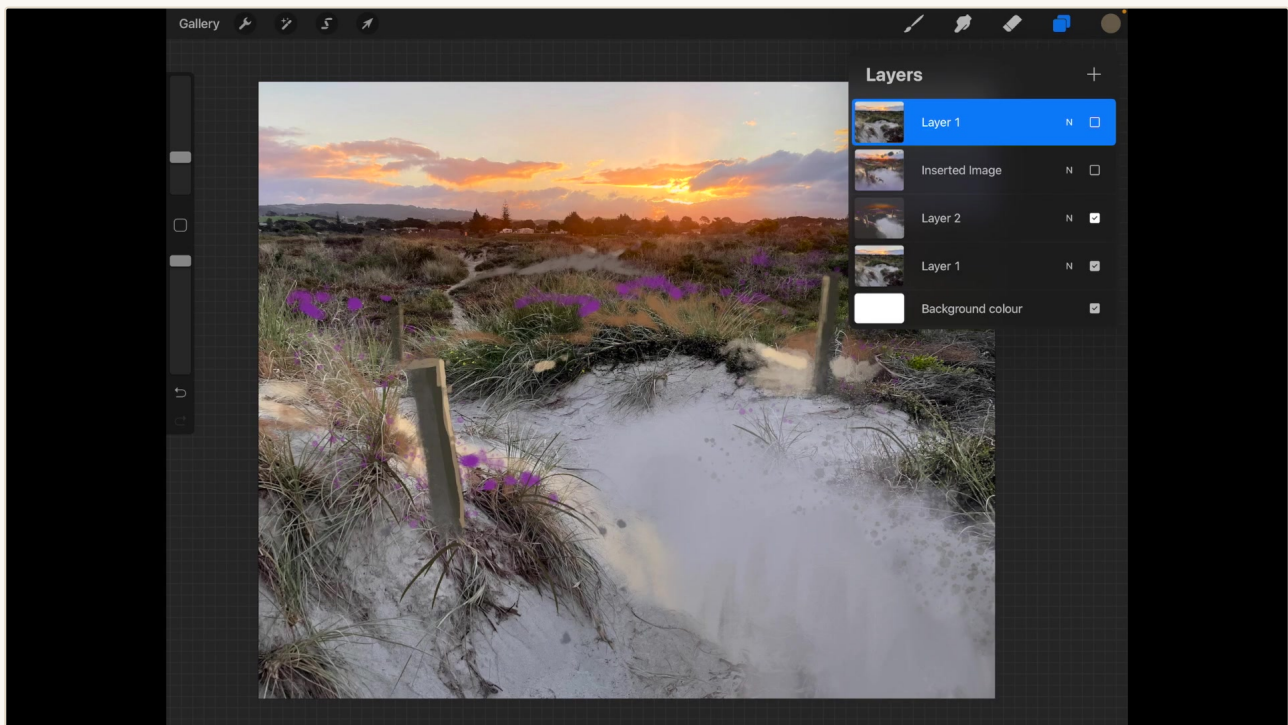
Materials

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

- M. Graham & Co. Oil Paints
- Phthalo Blue
- Ultramarine Blue
- Quinacridone Violet
- Cadmium Red
- Yellow Ochre
- Cadmium Yellow Light
- Titanium White
- Painting medium
- M. Graham & Co. Walnut Alkyd Medium or Walnut Oil
- Solvent
- Gamsol
- 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
- Container for solvent
- Container for painting medium

1 Digital Sketch Modifications



Modify the Foreground

Remove the dark elements in the bottom right-hand corner of the foreground. Introduce some light into this area to relieve the coolness and harmonize it with the warmth from the sunset.

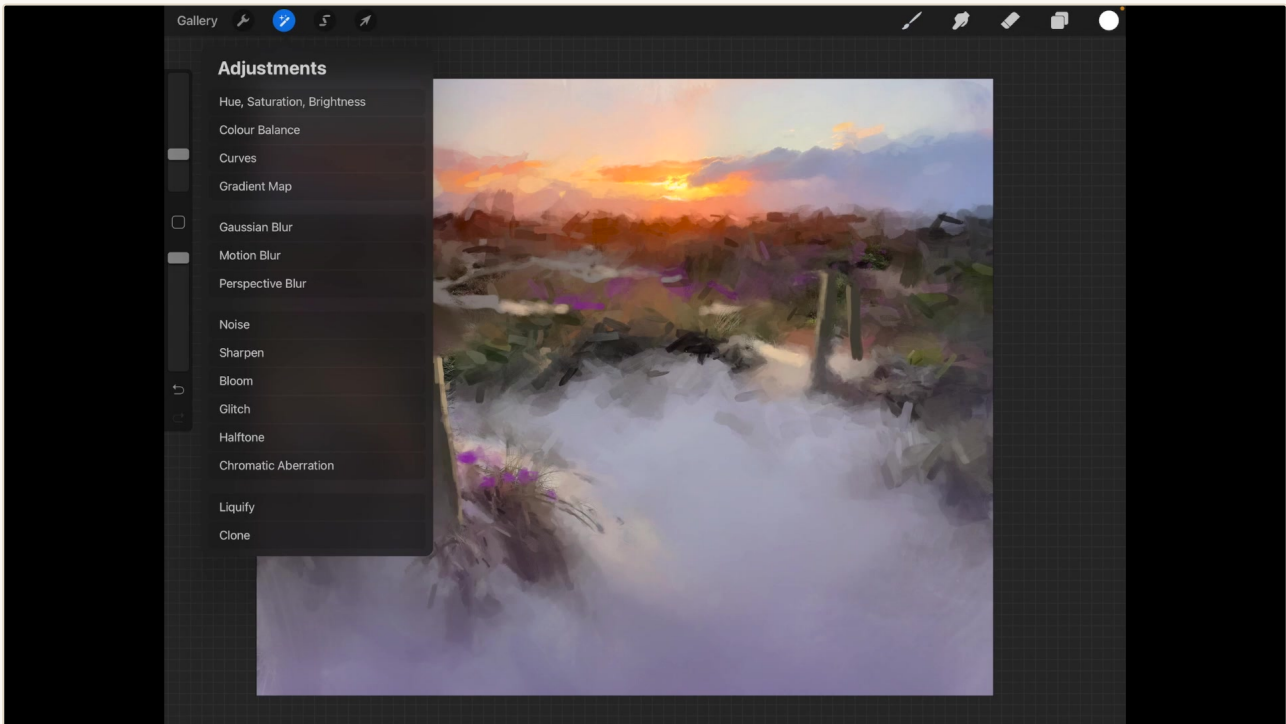
Adjust the Paths

Alter the paths so they wind off into the distance, enhancing the composition. Add a few additional paths to reveal themselves in the distance, creating a sense of depth.

PRO TIP

Introduce light into cool areas to harmonize them with warmer elements in the composition.

2 Procreate to Paint Can Process



Introduce Sun Glow Effect

Add a sun glow effect in the distance to enhance the warmth of the scene. This will create a more inviting atmosphere in your painting.

Warm the Foreground

Introduce warmth into the foreground by removing dark elements that create too much contrast. This helps to balance the composition and guide the viewer's eye.

Add Magenta Flowers

Incorporate magenta ice plant flowers, which are characteristic of the area in some seasons. This adds a touch of local color and interest to your painting.

Modify Paths and Grasses

Change the paths and add vertical elements like poles to create dynamic shapes. Enhance the dune grasses in the foreground with more light to add depth and movement.

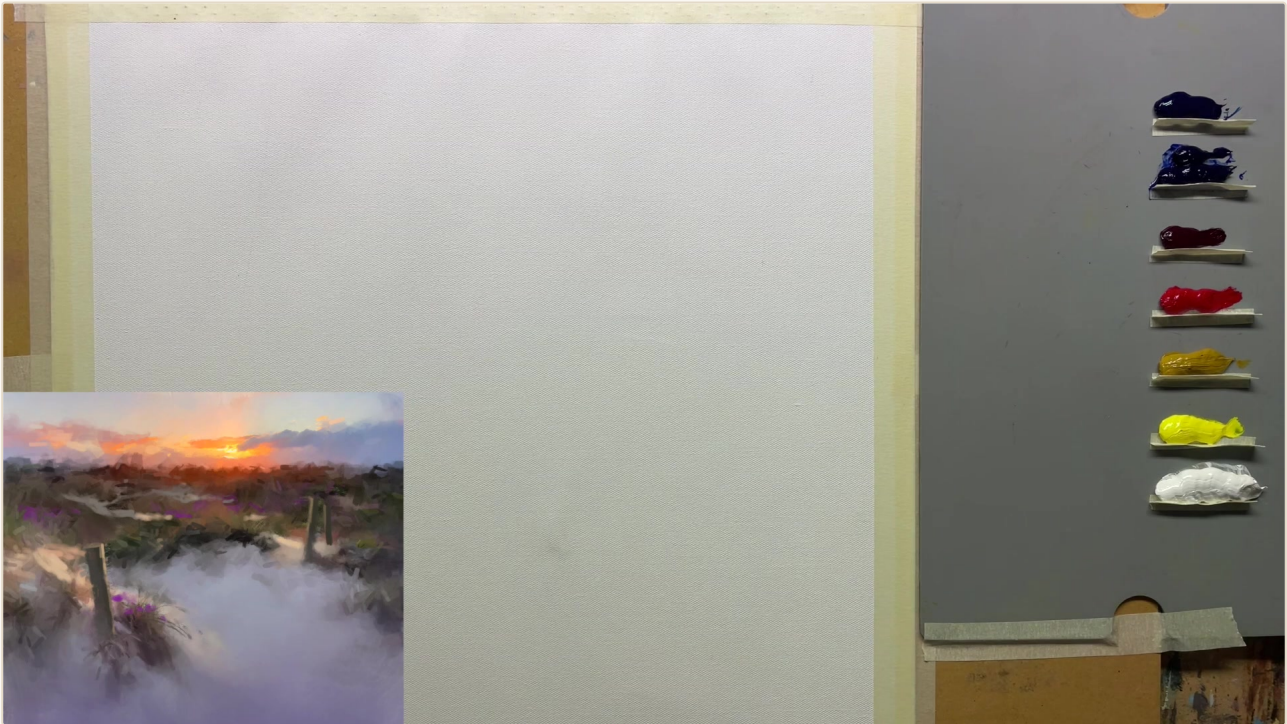
Export to Paint Can

Export your Procreate image and import it into Paint Can. Use the coarse brush option to paint broadly over the image, then zoom in to add detail where needed. This process helps visualize the painting in broad and detailed strokes.

PRO TIP

Use broad brushstrokes for the outer edges and zoom in for detail in focal areas to create depth and interest.

3 Painting the Sunset Glow



Prepare the Canvas

Dip your brush in walnut oil and apply a thin layer onto the canvas. This is called painting into a couch, which helps create a glowing effect for the sun.

Mix and Apply the Base Color

Mix some yellows with a little bit of white and apply it near the horizon line. Keep the layer thin to make it easier to paint additional layers on top.

Add Warmth to the Landscape

As you move down into the landscape, add a little bit of red to your mixture. This will enhance the sunset glow effect, keeping in mind that the sun is slightly off-center.

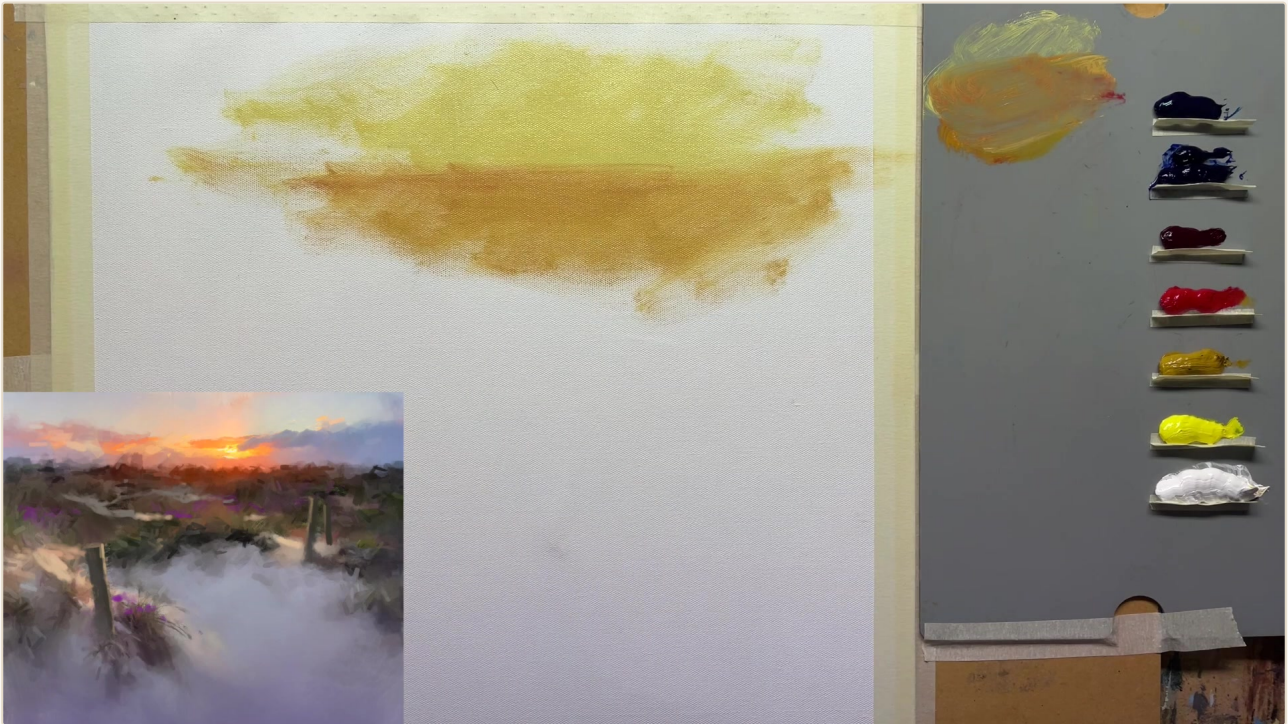
Adjust the Horizon

Make the horizon line more interesting by slightly altering its shape. This adds character to the composition.

PRO TIP

Keep the initial layer thin to make it easier to paint additional layers on top.

4 Adjusting the Horizon Line



Adjust the Horizon Line

Alter the horizon line to add interest to your painting. Introduce a small hill on one side to break the flatness. Consider raising the horizon slightly in another area for variation.

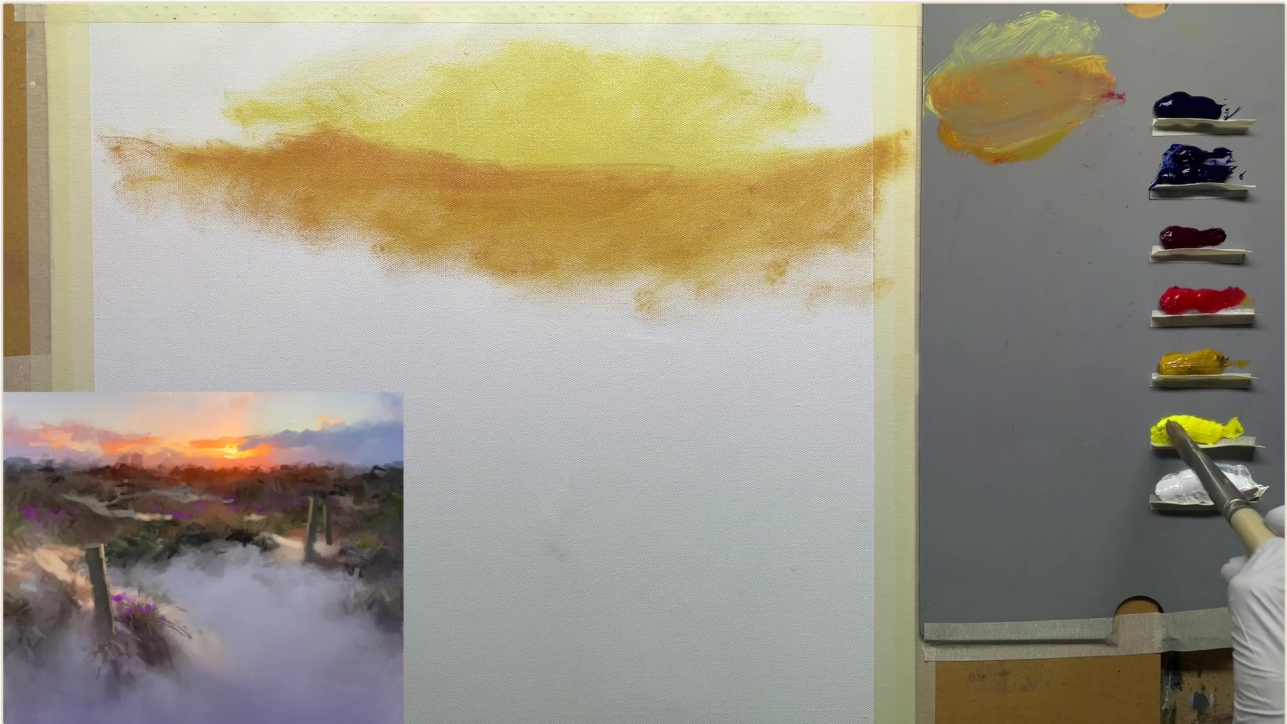
Work Outwards from the Center

Begin at the glowing area in the middle of your painting. Gradually work outwards, maintaining balance and harmony in the composition.

PRO TIP

Introduce subtle variations in the horizon line to create a more dynamic and engaging landscape.

5 Center Color and Contrast



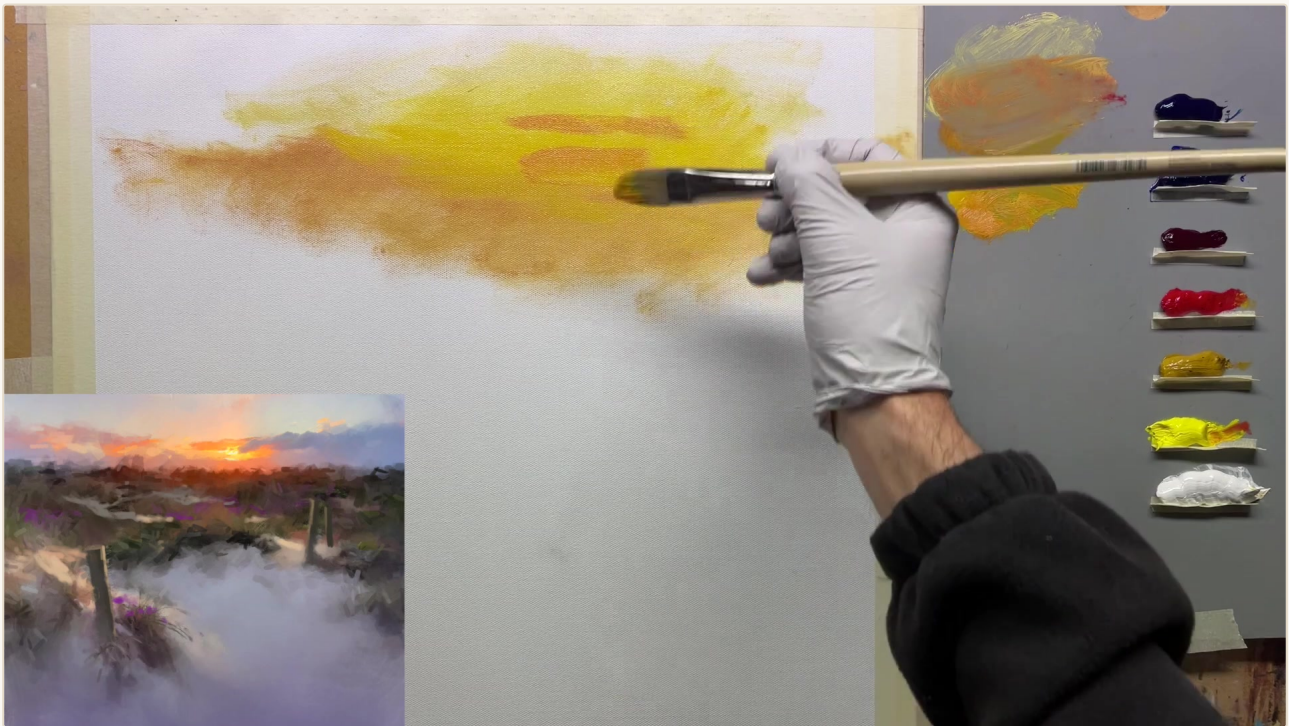
Apply Punchy Center Color

Begin in the middle of your painting. Use a vibrant color like cadmium orange for a strong impact. Be cautious, as blending with blues later can lead to muddiness.

PRO TIP

Start with a vibrant color in the center to create a focal point.

6 Color Mixing and Brush Technique



Observe and Plan

Examine the photograph or digital sketch closely. Notice the contrast between the strong colors and the muted grays. Decide to stick closely to the photo for color accuracy.

Brighten Colors

Consider pushing the colors up slightly to brighten them, enhancing the vibrancy compared to the reference.

Use a Palette Knife

Apply chunky, light paint with a palette knife where the sun hits. This creates texture and highlights the sunlit areas.

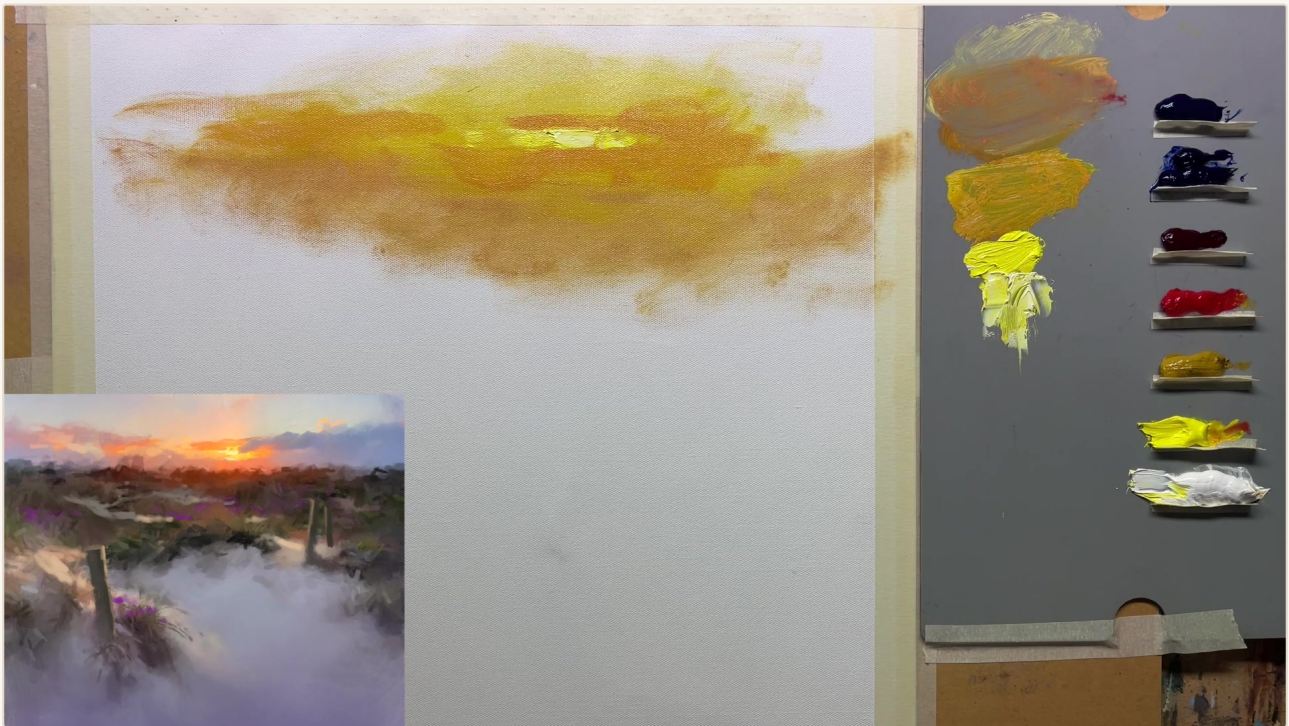
Maintain Color Vibrancy

Remember that screens emit light, making colors appear more vibrant than pigments. Aim for clean, methodical mixing and brush cleaning to maintain color vibrancy.

PRO TIP

Keep your brush clean and avoid excessive dabbing to maintain vibrant colors.

7 Sky and Color Transitions



Prepare the Brush and Sky

Switch to a clean brush to work on the sky at the top. Use a tiny speck of phthalo blue, applying it fairly thickly to avoid blending too soon. Phthalo is potent and can quickly alter your mixture, so handle it carefully.

Add Yellow and Work Broad Strokes

Introduce a little yellow to the phthalo blue and work it into the sky with broad strokes. Embrace your brushstrokes as they are unique to you, and allow them to remain bold and expressive.

Mix White, Yellow, and Red

Add some white, yellow, and red to your mixture. Keep these mixes away from the central area to maintain its purity and vibrancy. This will ensure the central area remains the focal point.

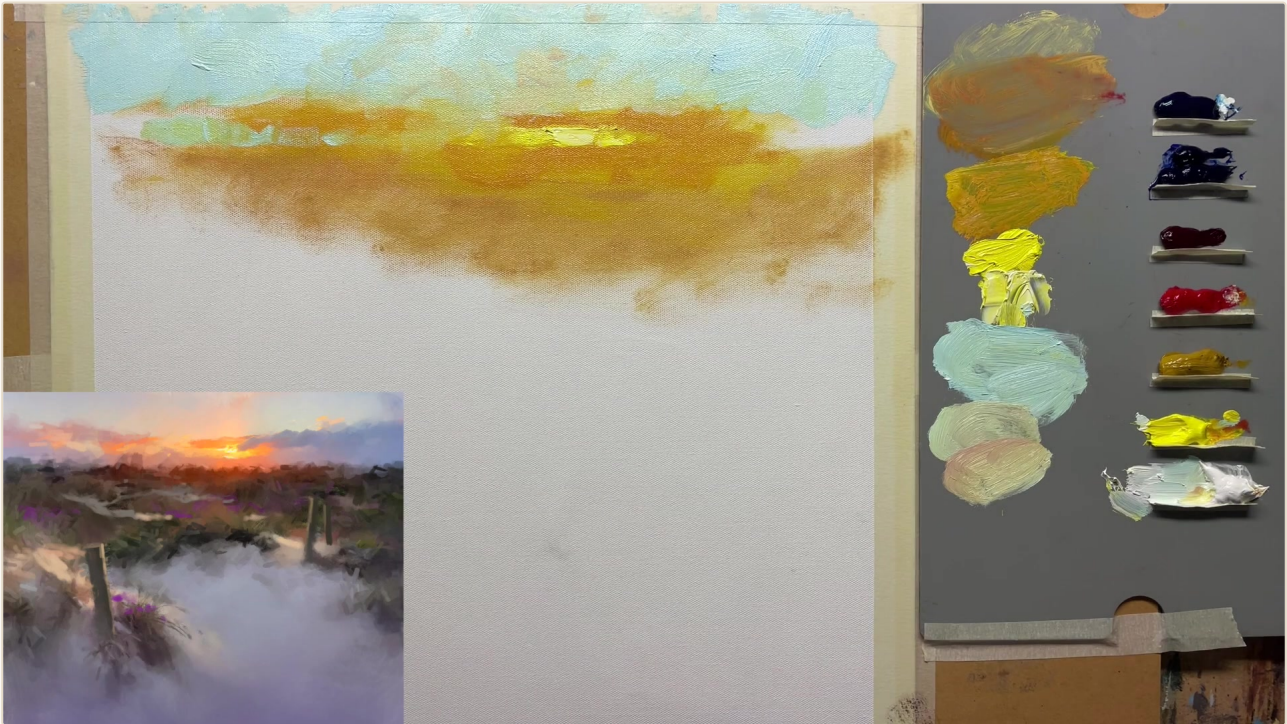
Extend the Orangey Glow

Increase the orangey glow by adding more red to the mixture. Extend this glow further into the sky to enhance the overall warmth and depth.

PRO TIP

Use phthalo blue sparingly, as it can quickly dominate your color mixtures.

8 Working with Mauve and Ultramarine



Mix Mauve with Ultramarine

Add a little more red to your mixture to achieve a nice tone. Then switch to a different brush and begin working with mauve by mixing ultramarine with quinacridone violet. Magenta can be used as an alternative for this section.

Blend with Orange

As you work across into the orange, be mindful of the orange paint being picked up on your brush. Wipe the brush frequently to remove excess orange and continue applying fresh mauve paint. This creates a vibrant contrast with the orange.

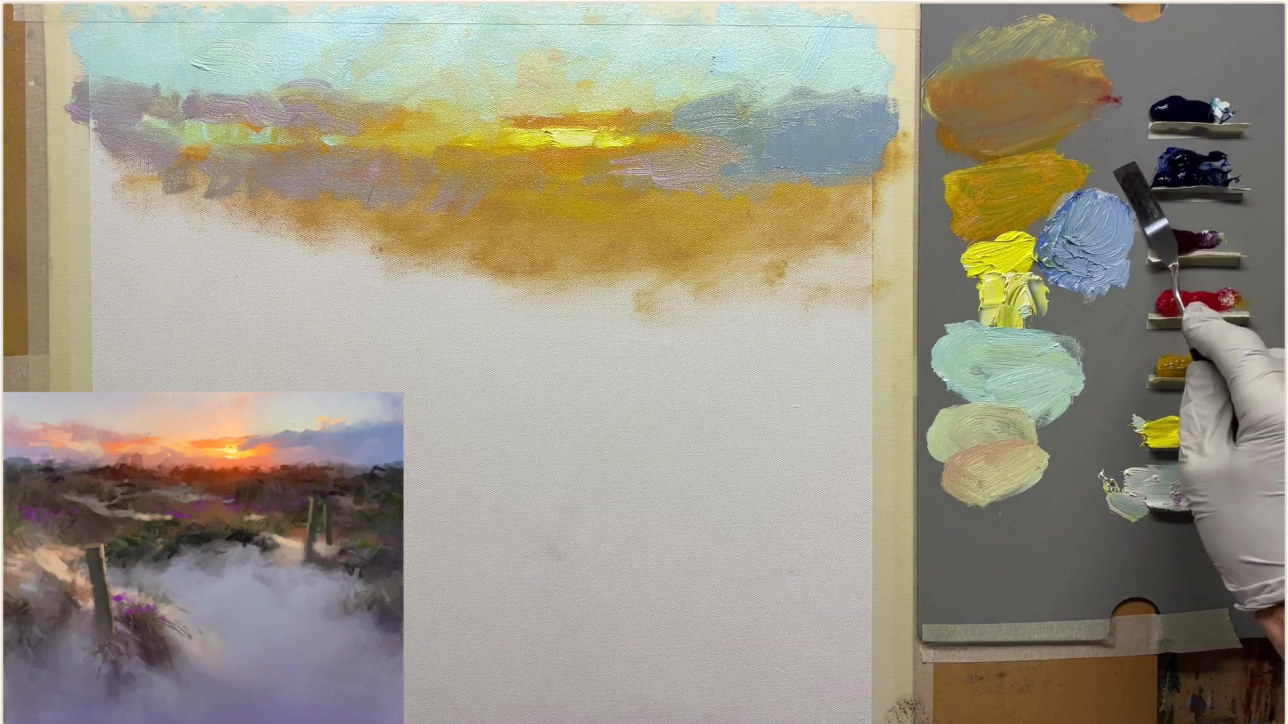
Adjust with Ultramarine

As you move further, incorporate more ultramarine into the mixture. Be cautious not to add too much, as it can darken the tone excessively. Aim for a balanced, harmonious blend.

PRO TIP

Frequently wipe your brush to prevent unwanted color mixing and maintain vibrant contrasts.

9 Building Landscape Sections



Prepare the Palette

Clean off your palette to make space for new colors. Discard any leftover paint that isn't useful for the current section.

Mix a Dark Warm Grey

Use more warm colors than cool colors to create a dark, warmish grey. This will serve as an intermediate color for the landscape.

Apply Warm Colors

Work in warmer colors in the section closest to the light source. This will make the area appear lighter and warmer.

Transition to Cooler Colors

As you move away from the light source, gradually introduce cooler colors. This will create a natural gradient and enhance the effect of light.

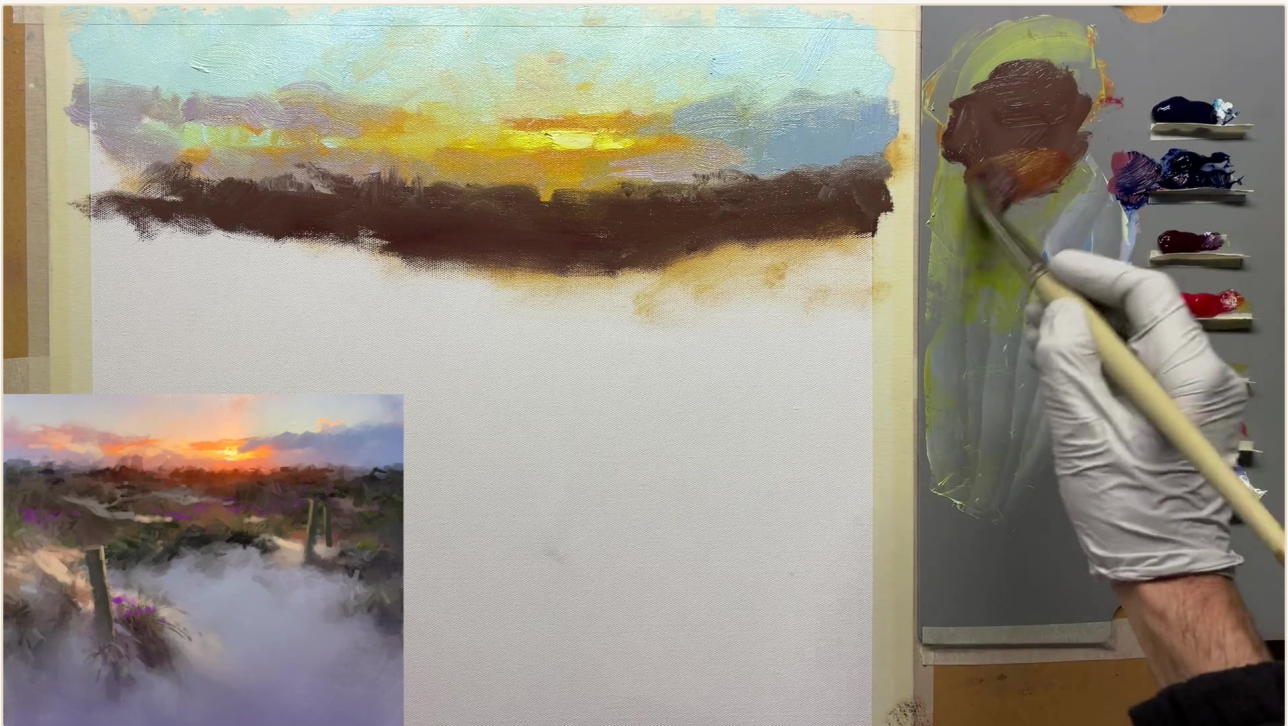
Increase Contrast in the Foreground

In the front section, increase the contrast between lights and darks. This will add depth and make the landscape more dynamic.

PRO TIP

Divide the landscape into three sections to simplify the process and enhance the effect of light across the scene.

10 Adding Warmth and Bush Shapes



Add Warm Orange Glow

Mix a slightly dirty, slightly browned orange to create a warm glow effect. Apply this color to the area to enhance the glowing light effect, then fade it out gently.

Create Bush Shapes

Think about forming bush shapes by painting the negative space around them. This technique will help define the shapes more clearly.

Increase Vibrancy Near the Sun

Add a bit more vibrancy to the colors closer to the sun to enhance the warmth and intensity of the scene.

Introduce Cooler Tones

Wipe your brush slightly and mix a cooler version of the brown, incorporating a purplish hue. Apply this to areas moving away from the sun to create contrast.

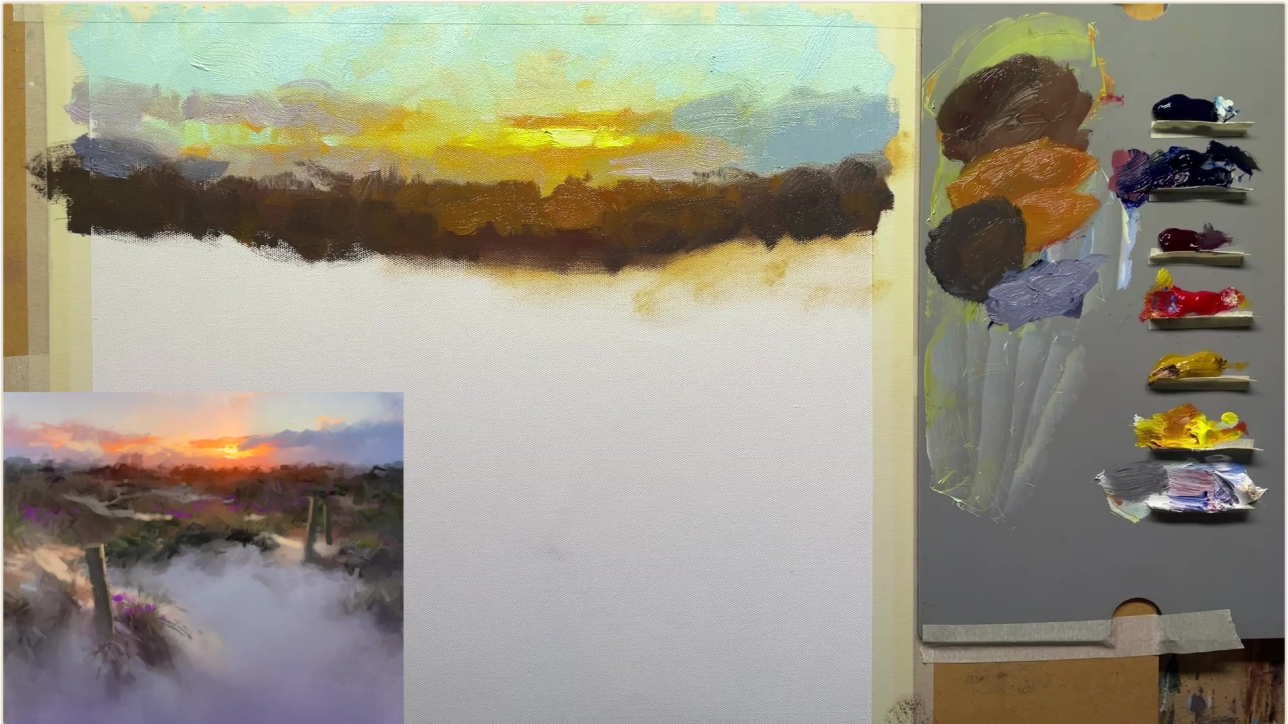
Soften Edges with Intermediary Color

Mix a mid-value purpley gray to soften edges and push some areas back into space. This intermediary color helps create depth and balance in the painting.

PRO TIP

Use negative space to define bush shapes clearly by painting around them.

11 Creating Depth with Color



Enhance the Transition Area

Add a punchier red to the transition area to create a vibrant contrast. This will help define the hill and add depth to the scene.

Soften Edges with Transition Color

Mix a bright orange to use as a transition color between the two areas. Apply this to soften the edge and create a smooth gradient.

Define the Second Section

Use a dark brush to outline the second section, focusing on the shape of the dune grasses and poles. Ensure the design flows nicely without placing elements too centrally.

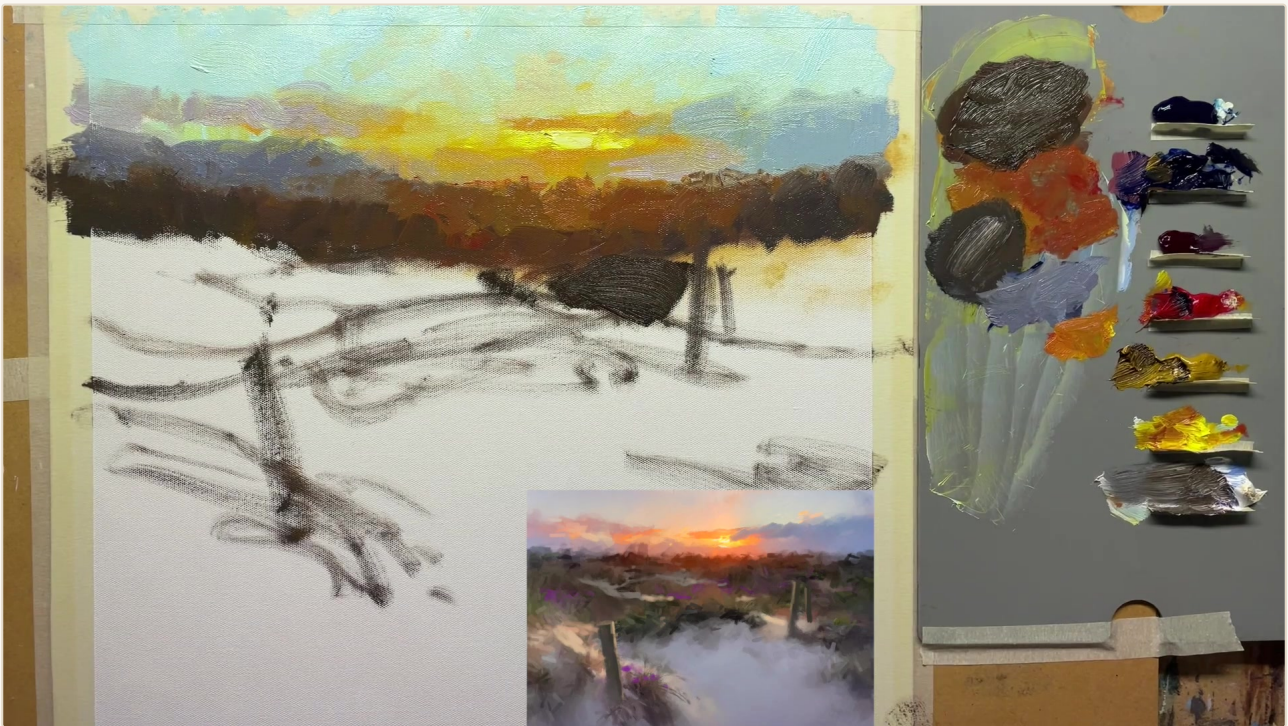
Create a Base Color for the Second Section

Mix a slightly cooler base color by adding yellow ochre and a touch of white to adjust the darkness. This cooler tone will help distinguish the section from the foreground.

PRO TIP

Use a bright orange transition color to soften edges and create smooth gradients.

12 Foreground Details and Ice Plants



Establish Foreground Paths

Use a smaller brush to block in where the paths will go. This will help determine the layout of your painting and give you areas to work around.

Add Cooler Greens

Mix phthalo blue with your green to create a cooler green tone. Apply this cooler green to areas on the side to suggest depth and variation in the landscape.

Paint Ice Plant Patches

Create patches of color to represent ice plants without detailing individual plants. Remember, these patches should become thinner and less distinct as they recede into the distance.

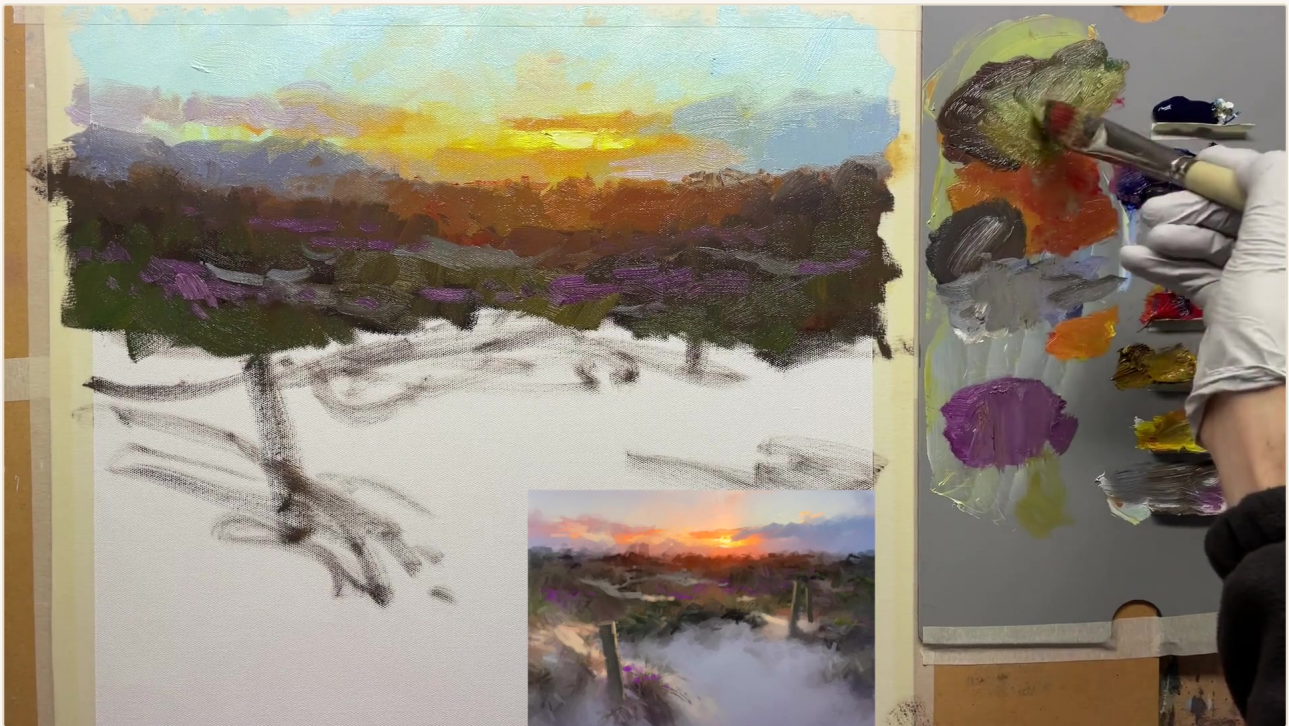
Highlight Light Spots

Switch back to a darker brush to add spots of light where necessary. This will enhance the contrast and draw attention to specific areas.

PRO TIP

Use phthalo blue to create cooler greens that suggest depth in your landscape.

13 Highlighting Grasses and Posts



Prepare the Dark Base

Mix ultramarine, red, and a bit of yellow ochre to create the darkest darks in the painting. Add a little walnut oil to thin the mixture. Apply this base layer with a scumbly, light touch, extending the darks slightly beyond where you want them to finish.

Add Green and Lighten

Mix in some green to the dark base and lighten it up slightly. Apply this thicker paint to the areas where you want to create a transition from dark to light, focusing on the clump of grasses and posts.

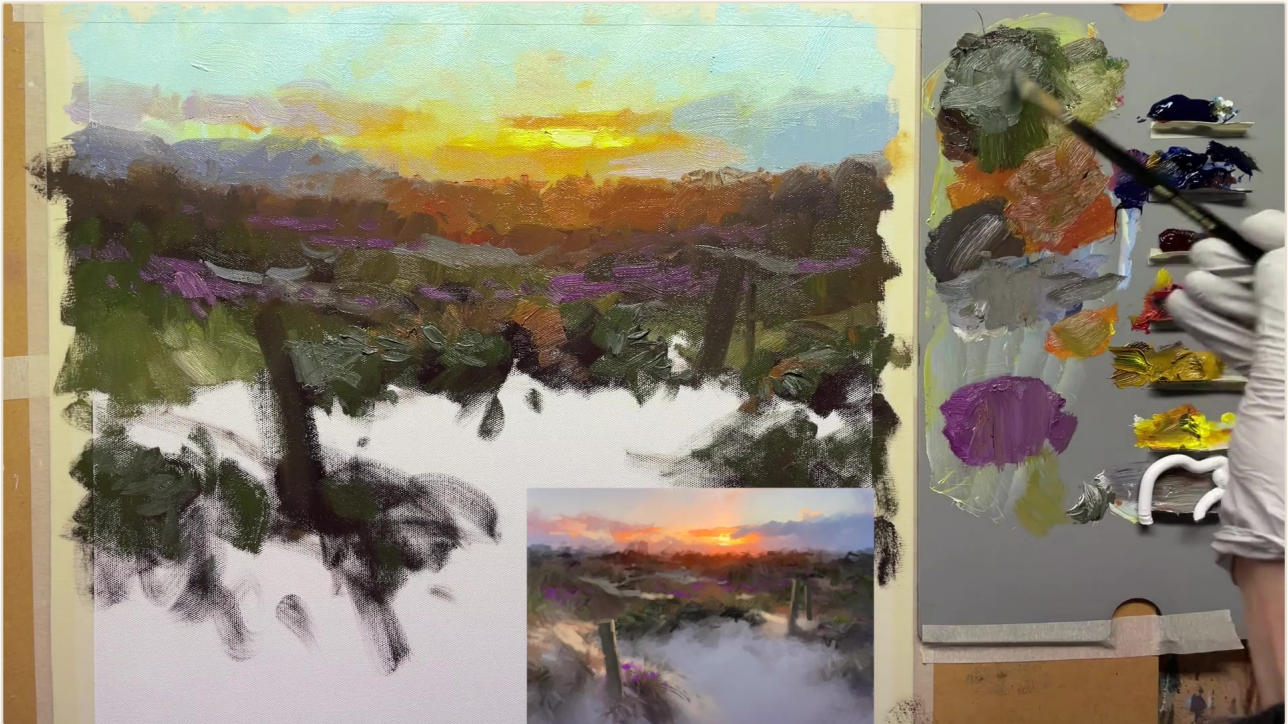
Highlight the Grasses

Switch to a smaller brush and prepare a highlight color by mixing the same green with additional white and a touch of yellow. Apply this lighter, warmer color to the grasses, using thick impasto strokes to create glistening highlights that catch the light.

PRO TIP

Use impasto strokes to make highlights catch the light and add a 3D effect.

14 Shadow and Light Transitions



Enhance the Posts

Add more of the existing color to the posts, incorporating a little red to enrich the hue.

Mix Shadow Color

Create a purple-grey mixture by combining blue, red, and some of the existing green. Add a touch of white to lighten it.

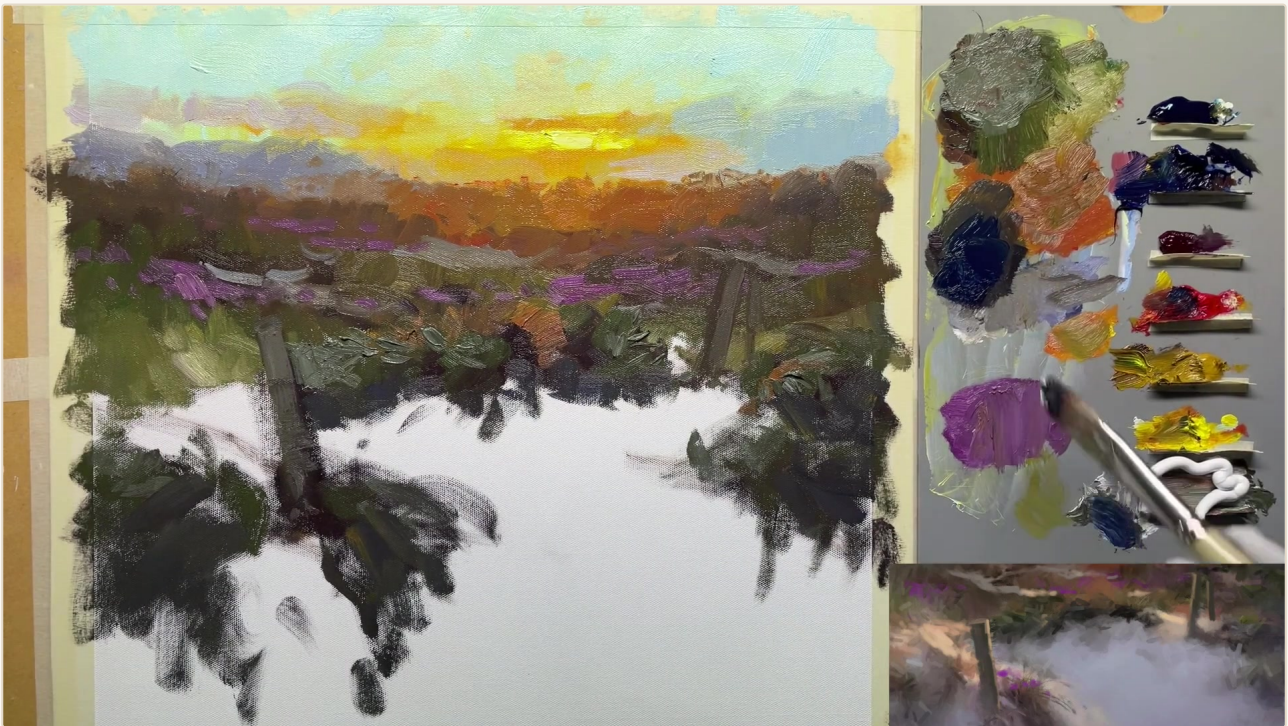
Apply Shadow to Dunes

Use the purple-grey mixture to depict the shadow on the dunes cast by the plants. Ensure the transition from shadow to light is slightly lighter and bluer or purpler than the initial color.

PRO TIP

Build up shadow and light transitions slowly for an impressionistic effect.

15 Foreground and Background Contrast



Create Soft Edges

Transition further from the shadow, softening most edges but keeping a few hard ones for variety. Edge variety is crucial for a dynamic painting.

Mix a Lighter Blue-Grey

Add more white to create a lighter blue-grey, aiming for a mid-value similar to your palette. This will help in creating depth and contrast.

Adjust Paint Consistency

If your white paint is too thick, mix in some walnut oil or another medium to make it more fluid. This ensures smooth application and easier blending.

Block in with a Big Brush

Using a big brush, block in the area with the lighter blue-grey, keeping transitions soft between light and dark shadows. Vary your brush pressure and speed to create different textures.

Add Color Variations

Introduce a little more blue and quinacridone violet to the mix. Focus on big shapes, avoiding details like grass strands for now. Aim for an intense, zingy color in the foreground.

PRO TIP

Use a big brush to block in large areas, keeping transitions soft and varied for a dynamic effect.

16 Warm Sand and Light Effects



Embrace Bold Brushstrokes

Use thick paint and strong brushstrokes to create a sense of energy in your painting. Avoid getting caught up in details that can lead to overworking your brushstrokes.

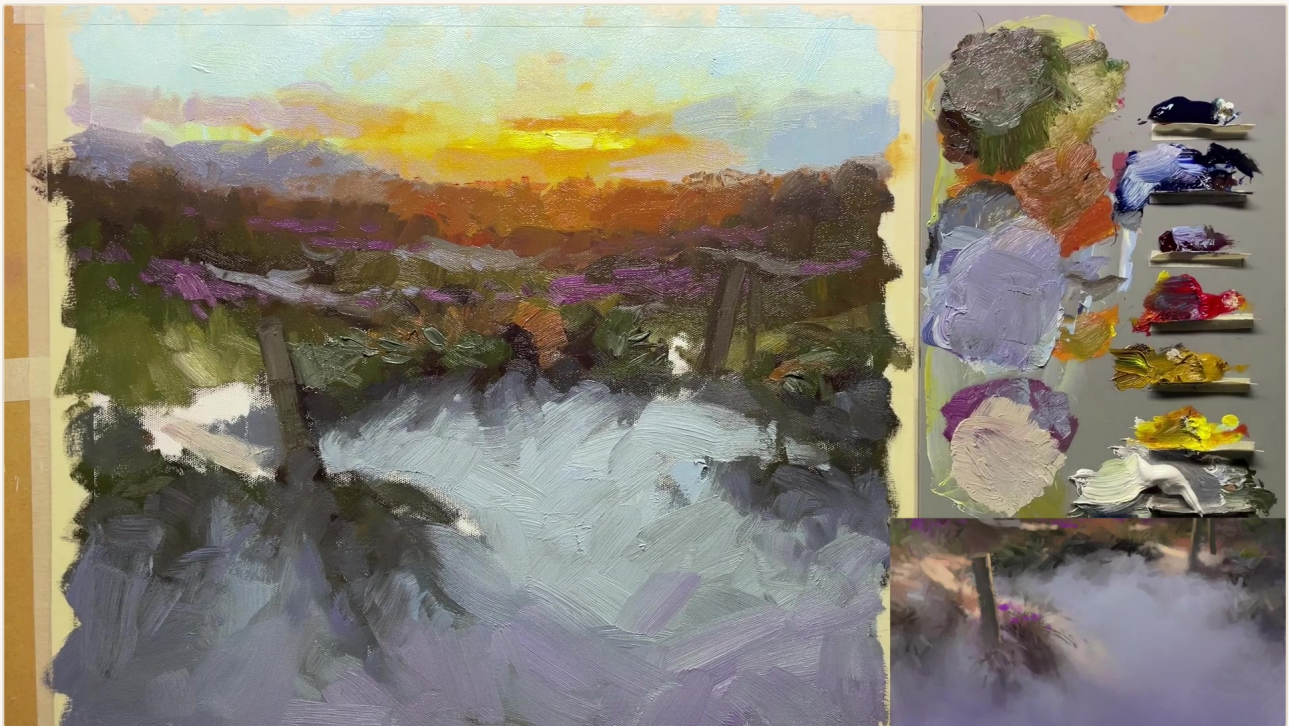
Add Warm Tones to the Sand

Introduce warm colors to the sand area, reflecting the subtle light of the sunset. Ensure these colors are not as bright as the main focal areas to maintain balance and prevent them from drawing too much attention.

PRO TIP

Use thick paint and strong brushstrokes to convey energy and avoid overworking details.

17 Post Details and Light Connection



Tone Down the Color

Create a warm grey by toning down the initial color. Avoid starting with the lightest light; instead, build up to it gradually to achieve a more natural effect.

Add Light and Warmth

Apply a slightly lighter and warmer color to specific areas, such as the top of the dune. Gradually ease off the intensity to blend it smoothly into the surrounding areas.

Introduce Green

Add a touch of green to the mix for the side of the post. Use the edge of your brush to apply the paint, creating a ridge effect without needing a small brush.

Enhance Light and Warmth

At the top of the post, introduce more light and warmth with a thicker application of paint. This will help connect the light elements across the painting.

Fill in Canvas Gaps

Fill in any small holes where the white canvas is showing through to ensure a cohesive look across the painting.

PRO TIP

Use the edge of your brush to create a ridge of paint for a textured effect without needing a small brush.

18 Adding Ice Plant Flowers



Prepare Thick Paint for Flowers

Use a brush suitable for applying thick paint. Create a big blob of paint to ensure the flowers stand out with texture.

Paint Shaded Flowers

Start with the flowers in the shade by using a darker version of your chosen color. Apply the paint thickly to give depth and dimension.

Add Sunlit Flowers

Mix in some white to your paint for the flowers in the light. Consider adding a touch of yellow to warm up the color. Apply the paint thickly to capture the sunlight's effect.

Create Long Plant Elements

Add long, thin strokes to represent the plant's elongated parts. Use the same brush and paint thickness to maintain consistency with the flowers.

PRO TIP

Apply the paint thickly to make the ice plant flowers stand out with texture and dimension.

19 Calligraphic Brush Strokes



Prepare the Brush

Use a rigger brush if you're concerned about making marks that are too thick. Cover the entire brush with a dark bluey green paint for a bold effect.

Apply Calligraphic Strokes

Focus on creating calligraphic strokes with the brush. These strokes should add dynamic texture to your painting.

Adjust Texture

If the paint looks too thick or intimidating, gently scrape some off. This will contribute to the overall texture of the piece.

PRO TIP

Use a rigger brush for finer, more controlled calligraphic strokes.

20 Foreground Warmth



Add Foreground Warmth

Observe the digital sketch and notice the warmth in the foreground. Apply a similar warm tone to your painting to bring the foreground elements forward. Use a thick application of paint to enhance the texture and depth in this area.

PRO TIP

Use thick paint to create texture and emphasize warmth in the foreground.

21 Final Adjustments and Highlights



Refine Transition

Observe the transition area that seems too heavy or dark. Lighten it by mixing yellow, red, and white, then brush lightly to create a more realistic transition.

Add Pink and Blue Accents

Introduce a touch of pink to enhance the transition. Add a little blue to create depth and place it in strategic areas to balance the composition.

Separate Sections with Grey Mauve

Mix a grey mauve and apply it to separate the foreground from the background. This will help define the sections and add depth.

Enhance with Orangey Red Highlights

Apply a few orangey red highlights to the foreground. This will help bring the area forward and connect it visually with the background.

PRO TIP

Use grey mauve to effectively separate foreground and background sections, enhancing depth and clarity.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by transforming your digital sketch into a vibrant canvas. Begin by modifying your initial sketch to harmonize cool and warm areas, creating a balanced composition. As you transition from digital to traditional painting, focus on broad strokes to establish depth and detail, enhancing the warmth of your scene with sun glow effects and local color elements like magenta ice plant flowers.

As you develop your painting, pay attention to the interplay of light and shadow. Use thin layers to build a glowing sunset effect, and adjust the horizon line to add interest and variation. Introduce vibrant colors like cadmium orange in the center to create a focal point, and carefully mix colors to maintain vibrancy and avoid muddiness. Embrace your unique brushstrokes as you work on the sky and color transitions, ensuring the central area remains pure and vibrant.

In the final stages, focus on creating depth and contrast within your landscape. Divide your painting into sections, using warm colors to highlight areas closest to the light source and cooler tones as you move away. Use impasto strokes to highlight grasses and posts, and build up shadow and light transitions slowly for an impressionistic effect. Finish by adding details and ensuring smooth transitions to convey energy and maintain a dynamic composition.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Introduce light into cool areas to harmonize them with warmer elements.
- Use broad brushstrokes for outer edges and zoom in for detail in focal areas.
- Keep the initial layer thin to make it easier to paint additional layers on top.
- Introduce subtle variations in the horizon line for a dynamic landscape.
- Start with a vibrant color in the center to create a focal point.
- Keep your brush clean and avoid excessive dabbing to maintain vibrant colors.
- Use phthalo blue sparingly, as it can quickly dominate your color mixtures.
- Use impasto strokes to make highlights catch the light and add a 3D effect.



Dune Impressions

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.

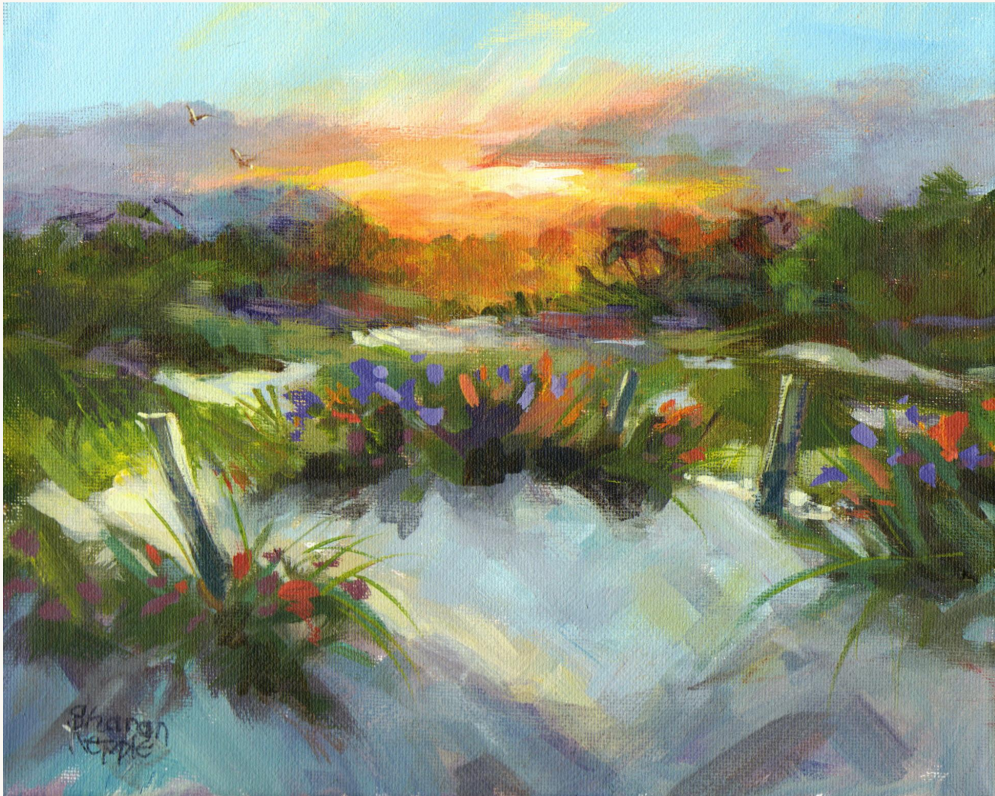
Dunes at dusk, oils, 16 x 16 by Marie-France L'Ecuyer



Dunes at dusk, oils, 16 x 16 by Marie-France L'Ecuyer

Really nice gestural brushwork Marie-France. Good work.

Dunes by Sharon Repple



Dunes by Sharon Repple

Very colourful, Sharon! Nicely done. Loving all the little colour variations you've achieved and the careful use of soft vs hard edges.

Dunes Impression by Nancy Newton



Dunes Impression by Nancy Newton

Great work Nancy! Lovely colour work and bold brushwork. Great to see.

"Dune Impressions" with Atelier Interactive Acrylics, Eric Hillmer, Toronto, ON, Canada.



"Dune Impressions" with Atelier Interactive Acrylics, Eric Hillmer, Toronto, ON, Canada.

Hi Eric, that's a really interesting take on it. I like all the different textures you've achieved, adding variety which is the key to interesting paintings. I'd just like to see a little more red-orange sun glow pushing into the landscape around the sun. That would help clarify the lighting condition. A little more colour in the mid ground too would add more variety.