



Mount Earnslaw

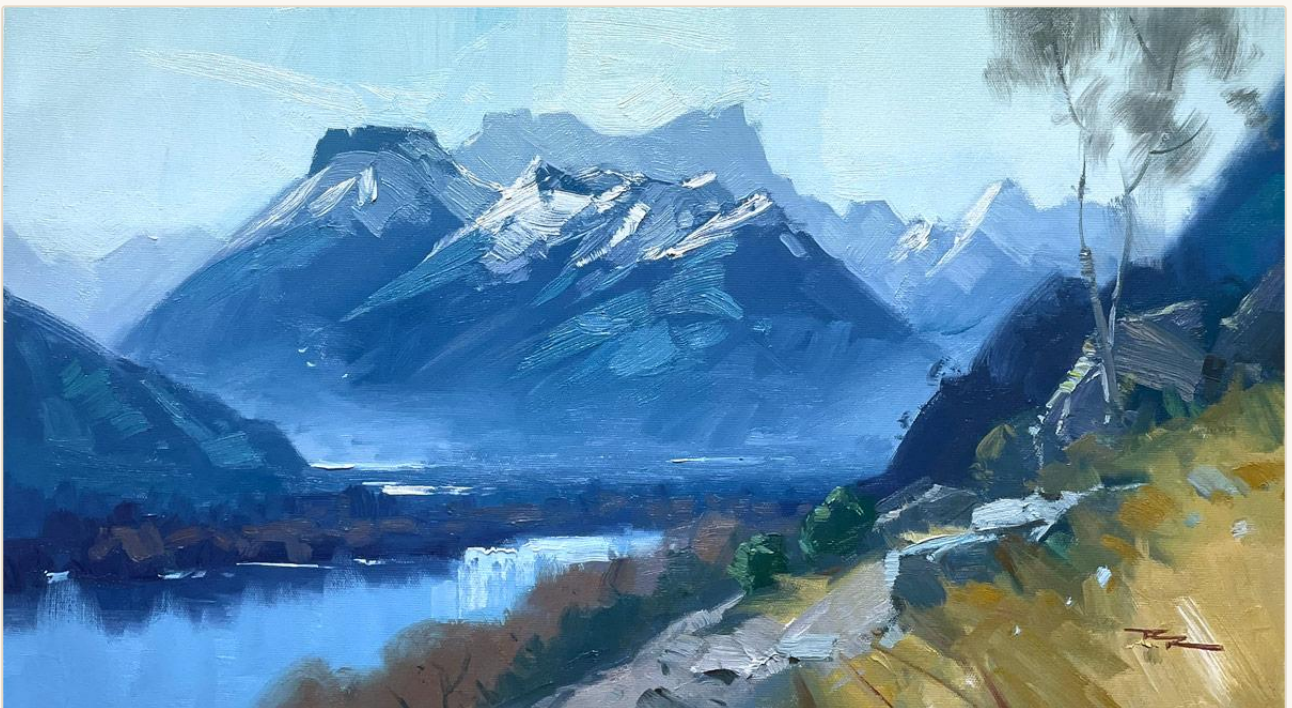
A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/221-Mount-Earnslaw>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

As we embark on this painting journey together, I'm excited to guide you through capturing the majestic beauty of Mount Earnslaw, a stunning alpine scene from New Zealand. With a 12 by 24 inch Fredericks ultra smooth canvas secured, we'll dive into the process using M. Graham oils and a selection of Rosemary & Co long flats, synthetics, and bristles from my painting brush set. To enhance the flow of our paint, I'll incorporate walnut oil as our medium. This chapter will teach you how to create dynamic movements of light and depth, achieve soft-edged brushwork, and add sparkling impasto highlights that bring the scene to life. We'll focus on good design, accurate drawing, and passionate brushwork, employing a variety of enjoyable techniques. Starting with sketching the horizon line, you'll learn to arrange the big shapes that form the main elements of your composition, ensuring a harmonious balance with additional details like trees. Whether you're using oils or acrylics, this lesson promises to be a rewarding exploration of both technique and creativity.



"Mount Earnslaw" 12x24" Oil on Canvas



REFERENCE PHOTO 1

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 2

The scene as Richard found it.

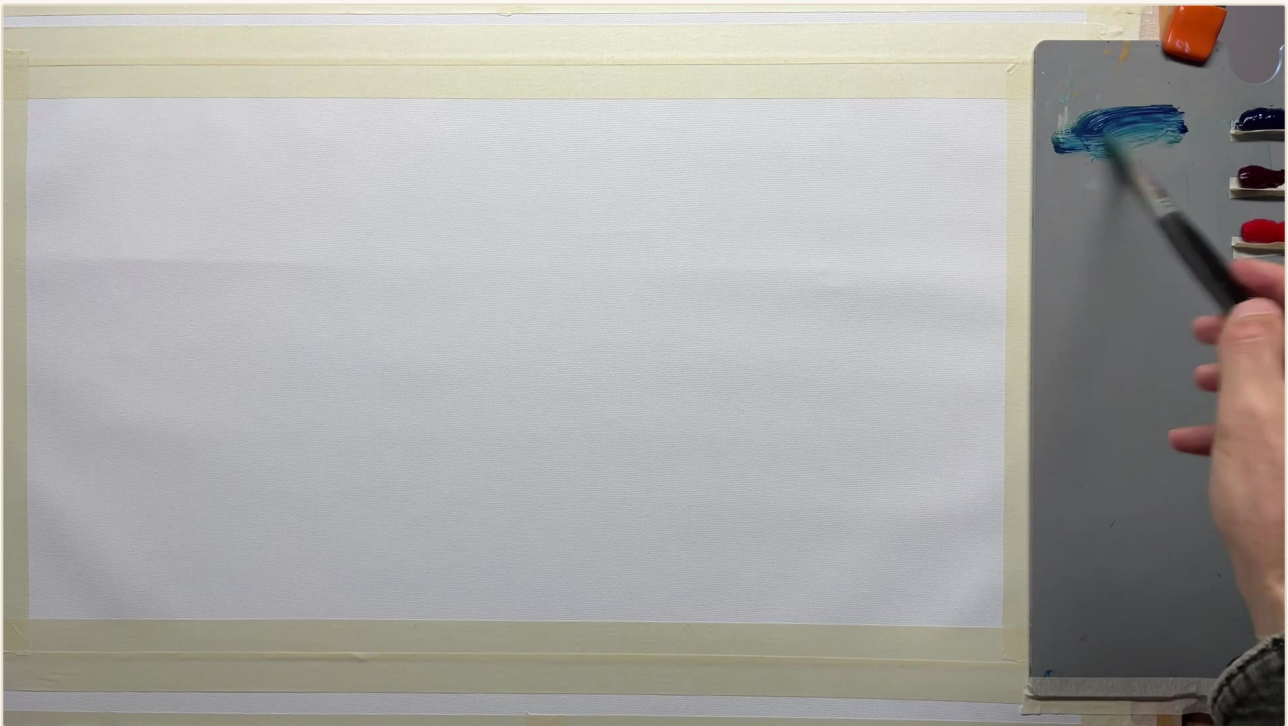
Materials

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

- M. Graham & Co. Oil Paints
- Phthalo Blue
- Quinacridone Crimson
- 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 Sketching the Composition



Sketch the Horizon Line

Begin by sketching the horizon line on your canvas. This will help you establish the placement of all other elements in your composition.

Outline the Big Shapes

Draw the big shapes that make up the main elements of your scene. Consider how these shapes fit together to create a balanced composition.

Add Details

Include additional elements like trees to complete the sketch. Ensure these details are in harmony with the overall composition.

PRO TIP

Start with the horizon line to anchor your composition before adding other elements.

2 Blocking in the Mountains



Mix the Base Color

Use phthalo, violet, or alizarin, whichever you have available. Mix a fair amount with some white and a little bit of red to create a bluey-gray color. Ensure this mix is slightly darker than the half tone on your palette.

Thin the Paint

Add walnut oil to the mixture to thin it down. This will make it easier to spread over the canvas.

Block in the Mountains

Start at the top ridge of the mountains, applying the bluey-gray color. Focus on the big shapes rather than the details, as you will refine them later with the sky and background mountains.

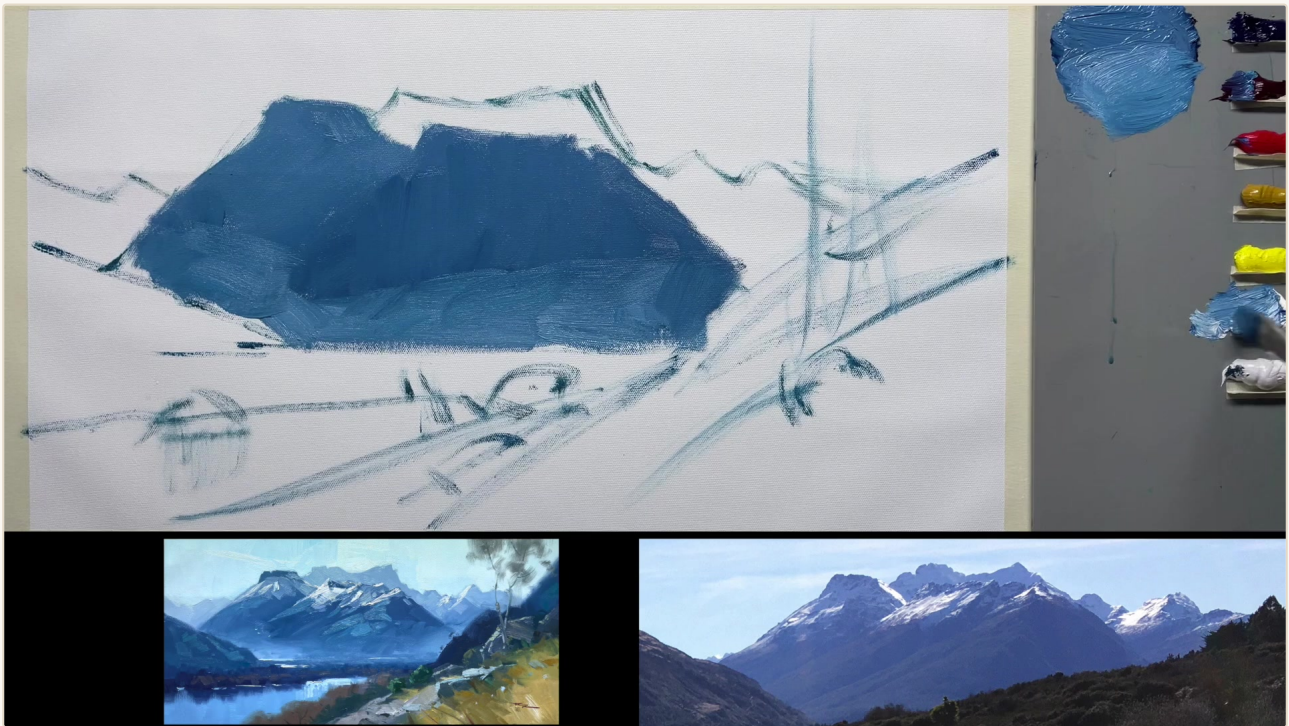
Create a Smooth Transition

Add more white to your mix and paint the bottom area to represent dust and mist. Work from the bottom upwards into the darker areas, aiming for a smooth transition.

PRO TIP

Focus on blocking in big shapes first; details can be refined later.

3 Adding Reflected Light and Snow



Shape the Mountain

Add white and a little crimson to your palette. Use this mixture to start shaping the mountain in front of the one in the background. Be conscious of painting both the mountain in the back and the ridge in front.

Adjust the Distant Mountain

Add more white to your mixture to create a color very close to the sky. Apply this to the mountain way back in the distance to enhance its atmospheric perspective.

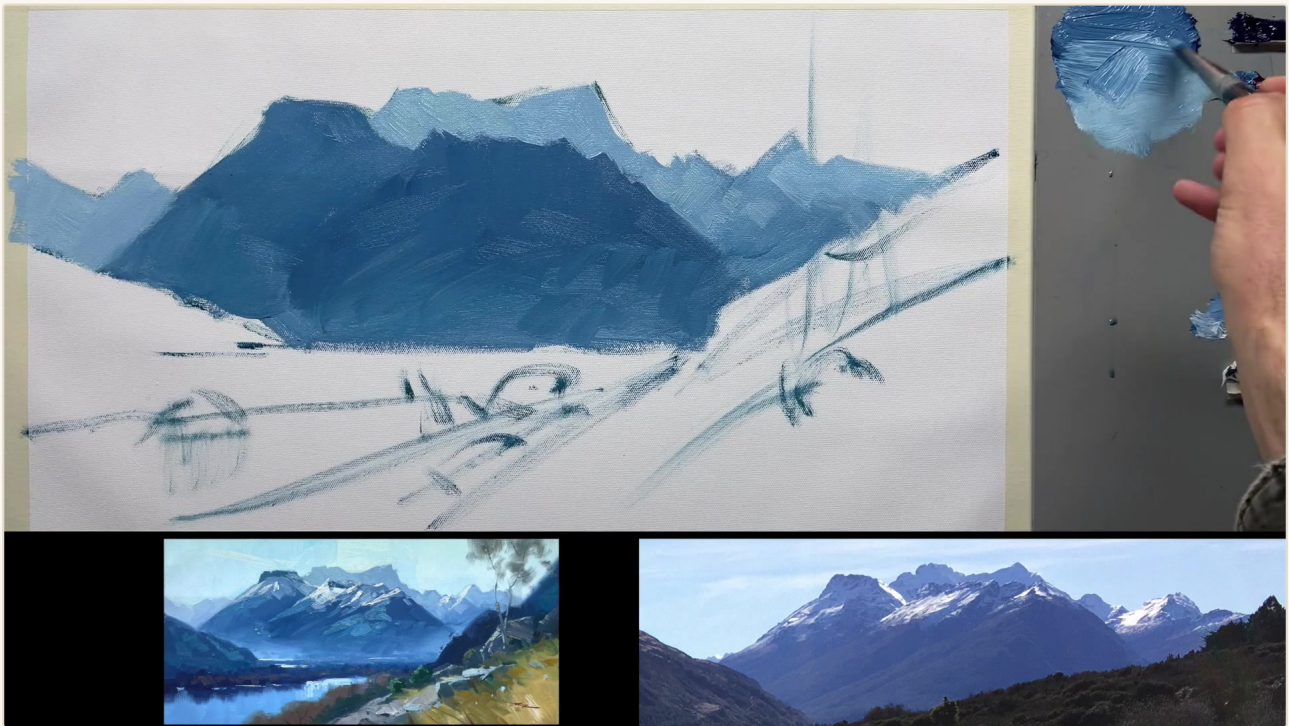
Add Reflected Light

Introduce a tiny fleck of yellow into your mixture. Apply this to areas where light bounces off snow faces, creating subtle reflected light on the mountain. These small differences can significantly enhance the realism of your painting.

PRO TIP

Use a color very close to the sky for distant mountains to create atmospheric perspective.

4 Snow and Shadow Details



Add Violet to Shadows

Mix a little more violet into the middle of the shadow areas. Use calculated single strokes rather than dabbing to maintain control and precision.

Enhance Snow Highlights

Mix white with a tiny touch of yellow for the snow highlights. Apply this mix sparingly to areas where light bounces back into shadowed snow faces.

Apply Snow with Clean Brush

Use a different, clean brush to apply snow. Mix white with a tiny touch of blue, avoiding the purest white initially. Carefully apply one or two strokes and avoid overworking to prevent picking up dark paint.

Maintain Brush Cleanliness

Be meticulous about keeping your brush clean to maintain the purity of your sunlit snow colors. Wipe off any dark paint picked up and reload with fresh paint as needed.

PRO TIP

Use a clean brush for snow to avoid contaminating the white with underlying dark colors.

5 Understanding Mountain Shapes



Create Snow Shapes

Avoid using your brush in only one direction. Aim for one large field of snow with smaller supporting pieces to create a family of shapes. This approach will make the snow appear more impressive.

Identify Lightest Snow Spot

Locate the lightest spot on the mountain where you used the most yellow and white with the least blue. This area should stand out as a bright chunk of snow.

Mix Sky Color

Prepare a sky color by mixing white with a tiny bit of phthalo blue and a speck of yellow. Be cautious with phthalo blue as it is very potent.

Sculpt Mountain Edges

As you paint the mountains in the background, pay attention to the edges you create. Vary between soft and hard edges to avoid a paper cutout appearance, which is not suitable for mountains.

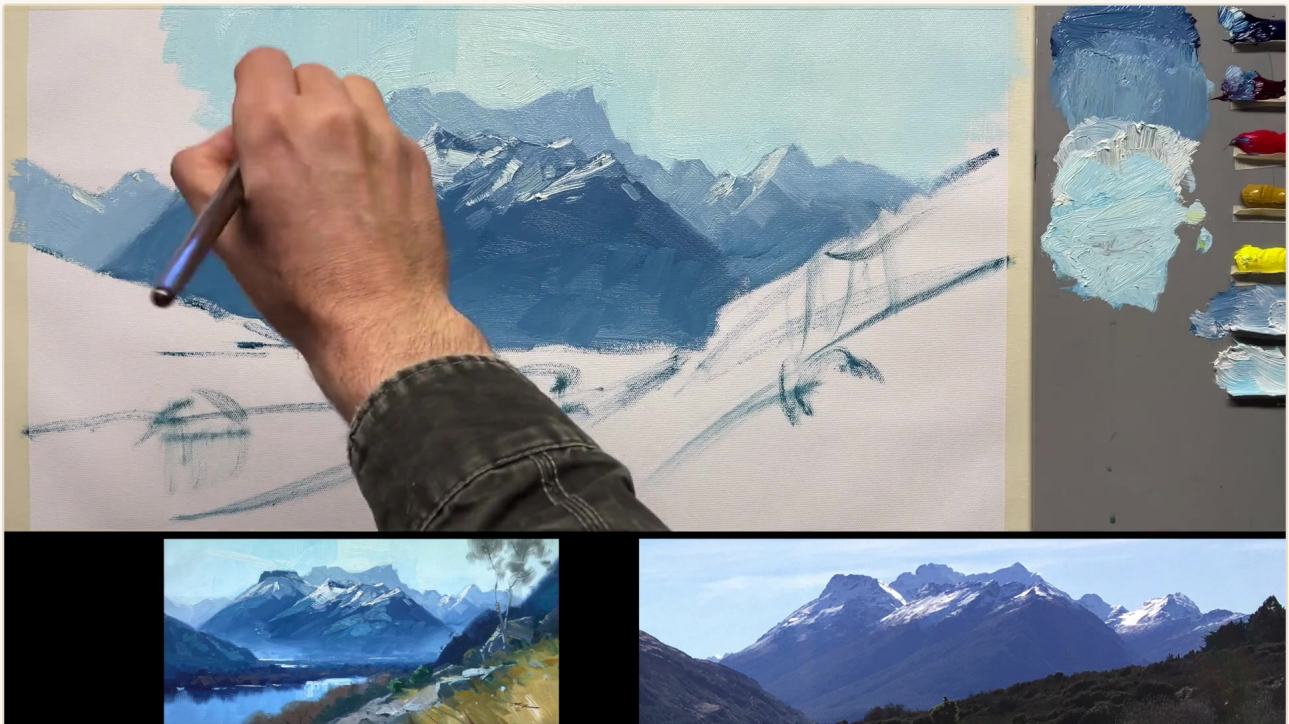
Be Inspired by the Scene

Use the scene as inspiration rather than a strict guide. Focus on understanding the shapes and structures that convey the essence of a mountain.

PRO TIP

Vary the edges of the mountains to avoid a paper cutout look.

6 Adding Mist and Mountain Edges



Add Mist to the Scene

Introduce mist by applying a soft layer in the lower areas of the mountain. This creates a sense of depth and atmosphere, making the mountain appear to disappear around the corner.

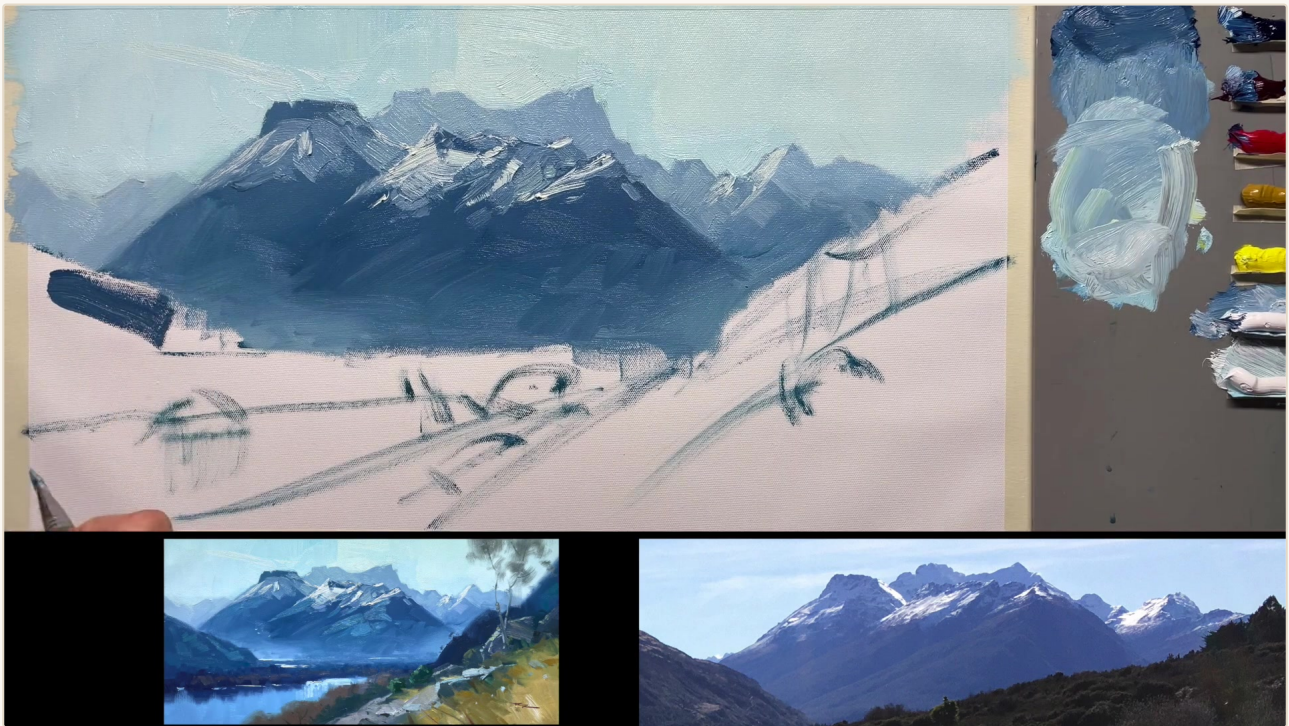
Enhance Mountain Edges

Darken the mist slightly compared to the mountain to define the edges. This contrast helps the mountain stand out and adds dimension to the landscape.

PRO TIP

Use a slightly darker tone for mist to enhance mountain edges and add depth.

7 Foreground and Background Integration



Mix Mountain Highlight Color

Start with the mountain color by mixing blue, red, and a little crimson. Add white and a touch of yellow ochre to lighten it. Be cautious with yellow, as too much will create a green hue that brings the mountain forward.

Adjust and Apply Color

Test the color on the mountain. If it's too dark, add more white and a little red to tone it down. Aim for a soft integration of light from the snow into the foliage.

Refine Mountain Shapes

Work softly into the mist, considering the large shapes you're creating. Ensure the light flows naturally from the snow to the foliage. Break any lines that appear too straight or man-made to maintain a natural look.

PRO TIP

Be mindful of adding too much yellow ochre, as it can make the mountain color appear too green and push it into the foreground.

8 Creating Depth with Light and Shade



Mix Valley Floor Color

Mix the color that will flow down onto the floor of the valley. This section should be in shade, creating a contrast with the areas in light.

Create Light and Shade Contrast

Focus on the big idea of alternating light and shade: light, shade, light. This will help to create depth and highlight the natural beauty of the scene.

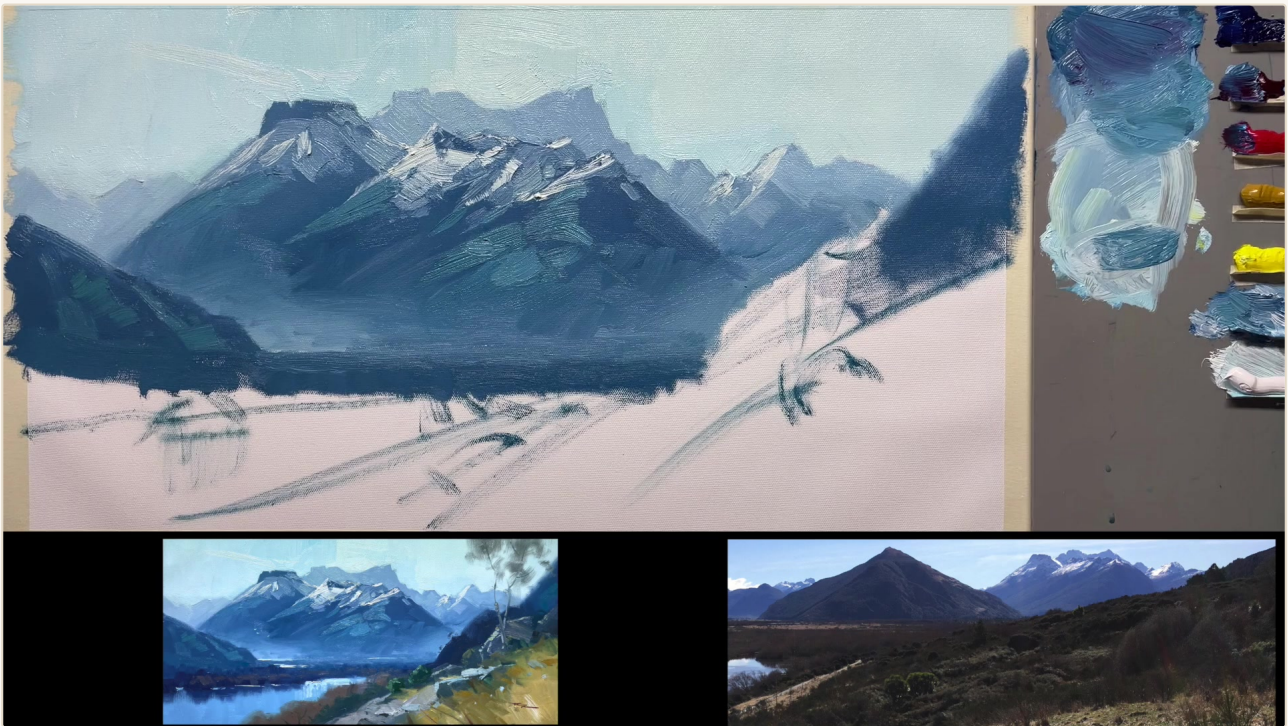
Blend Soft Transitions

Use a soft brush to create a gentle transition between the colors in the misty background. Soft edges will enhance the sense of depth and atmosphere in your painting.

PRO TIP

Use soft brushwork to create gentle transitions and enhance depth in the painting.

9 Adding Trees and Reflections



Add Tree Details

Use small upward flicks with a brush to suggest the presence of large trees in the shadowed area. Keep the strokes soft to maintain the shadow effect.

Create Reflections

Brush downward from the tree area to create reflections in the water. This will add depth and realism to the scene.

Adjust Tree Size

Ensure the size of the trees is proportionate to the mountains by working closer to the canvas. This helps maintain the correct scale in your painting.

Enhance with Color

Mix a little green and yellow ochre to add variety to the trees and surrounding area. This will create a more natural look.

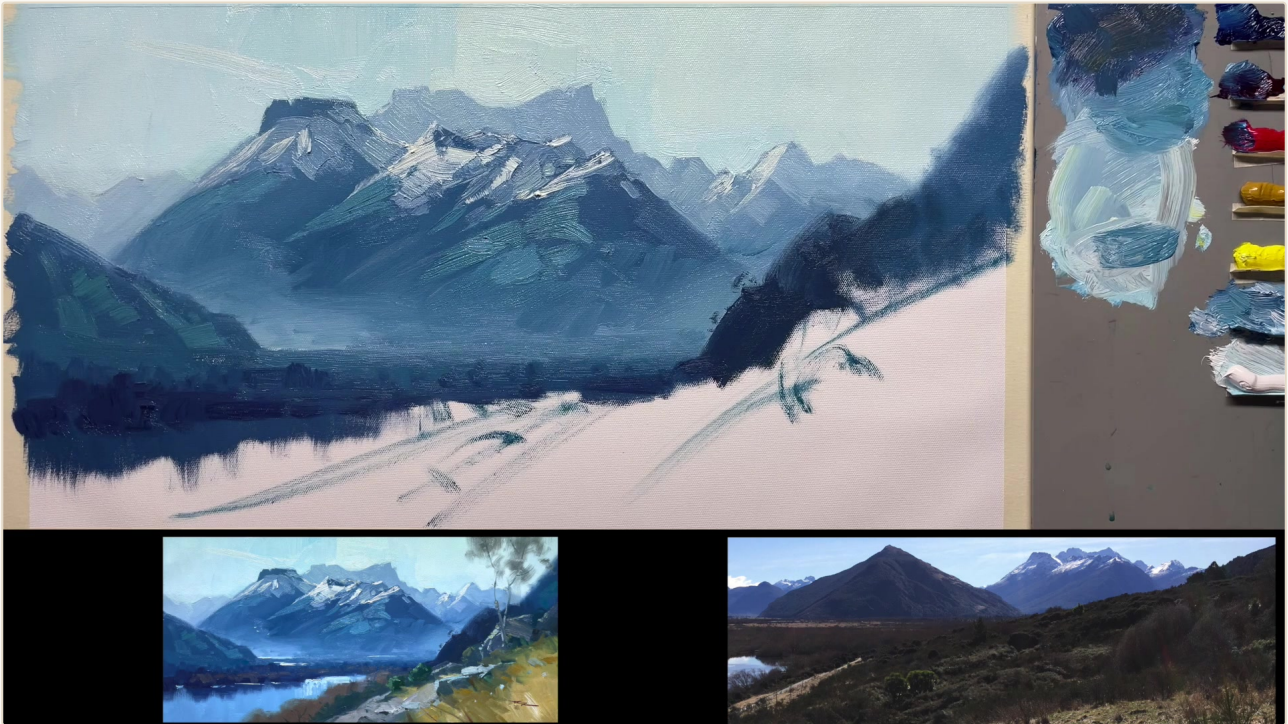
Invent a Cliff Backdrop

Add a cliff in the background using a combination of hard and soft edges. This will provide a backdrop for the trees and rocks in the foreground.

PRO TIP

Use a combination of hard and soft edges to create depth and interest in your landscape.

10 Refining Water Reflections



Add Sky Reflections

Mix a color slightly darker than the sky for the water reflections. Apply this color from the bottom of the water area, getting close to the dark reflections without touching them. Brush upwards into the dark reflections to create a soft edge.

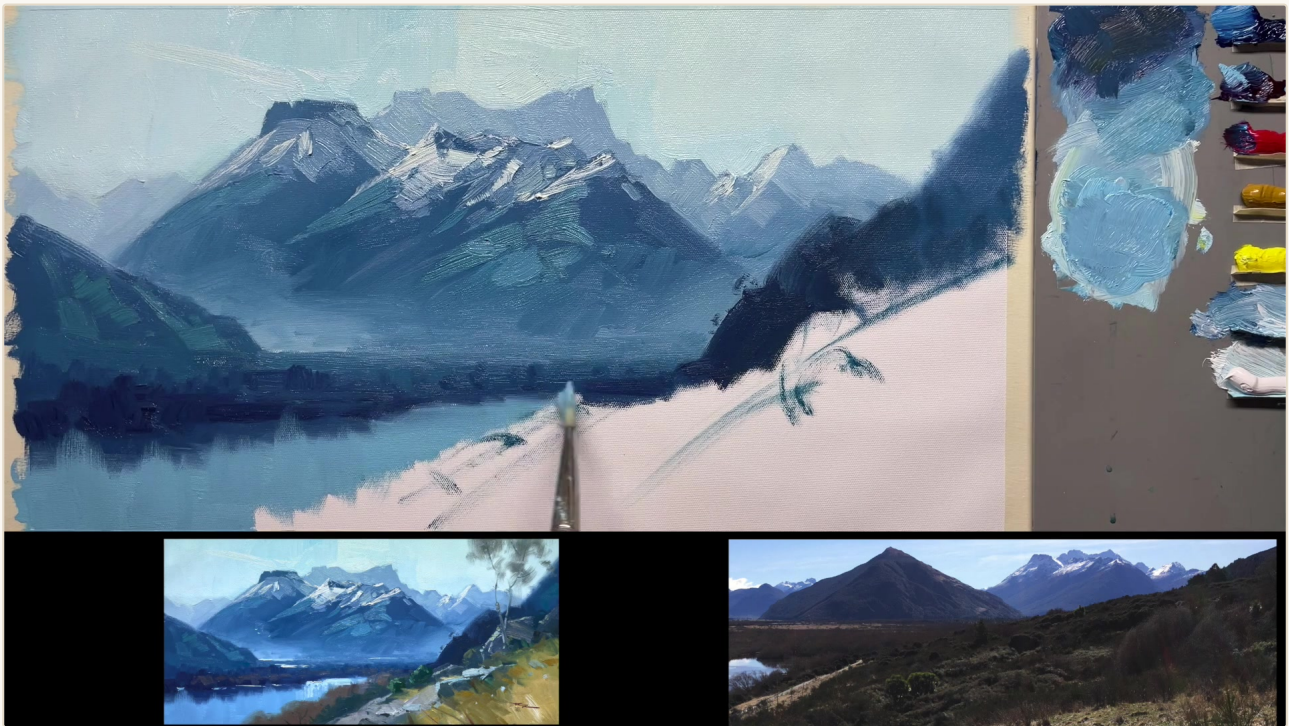
Create Tree Reflections

Think about the position of the big tree and where its reflection would be. Brush upwards in between those areas to form the shape of the tree reflection. Ensure your brush strokes are directly vertical to maintain the correct plane of the water.

PRO TIP

Avoid diagonal brush strokes in the water reflections to prevent the appearance of a tilted water plane.

11 Foliage and Color Variations



Create Dark Warm Grey

Mix a dark warm grey for the foliage in the shaded areas. Keep the colors subtle to emphasize the contrast between light and shade.

Add Subtle Color Shifts

Introduce a subtle color shift from cool to warm in the foliage. Use a little more red and yellow ochre as you move into the foreground to enhance the depth.

Enhance with Soft Edges

Apply very soft edges to the foliage to represent willow trees. This will create a natural and gentle transition in the painting.

Intensify Foreground Colors

Increase the intensity of color in the foreground, closer to the spotlight effect. Make it slightly lighter to draw attention.

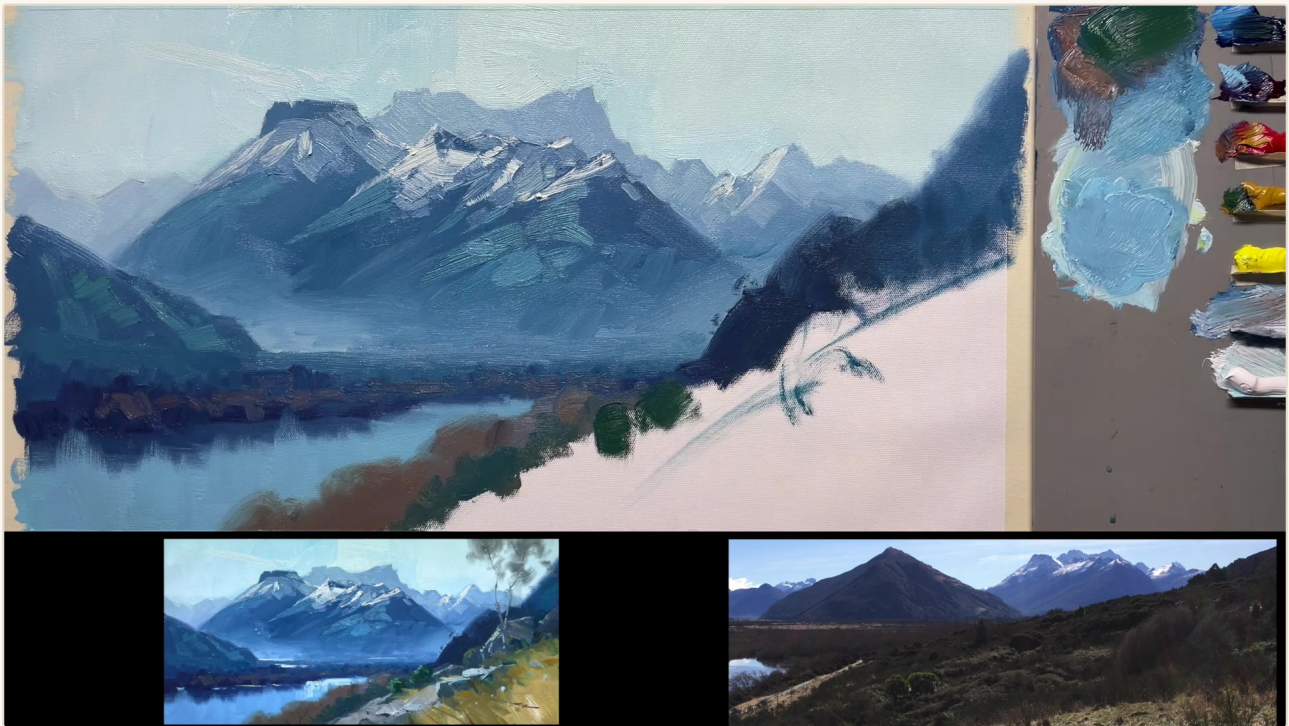
Introduce Dark Green

Mix blue and yellow ochre to create a dark green. Use this to provide a layer of foliage that contrasts with the warm tones, adding depth and interest.

PRO TIP

Use soft edges to depict willow trees, creating a natural transition in the foliage.

12 Grass and Rock Details



Add Blue-Grey Shadows

Mix a little blue-grey and apply it to the shadows on the side of the hill. This will help define the shape and depth of the landscape.

Paint Grass and Rocks

Use a mix of grey and a touch of red to tone down yellow ochre. Work this mixture into the dark areas of the rocks to create the appearance of grass clumps.

Highlight Green Bushes

Take some green paint, add yellow and a little white, and maybe some ochre. Apply it on top of the green bushes, rolling the brush to create interesting textures.

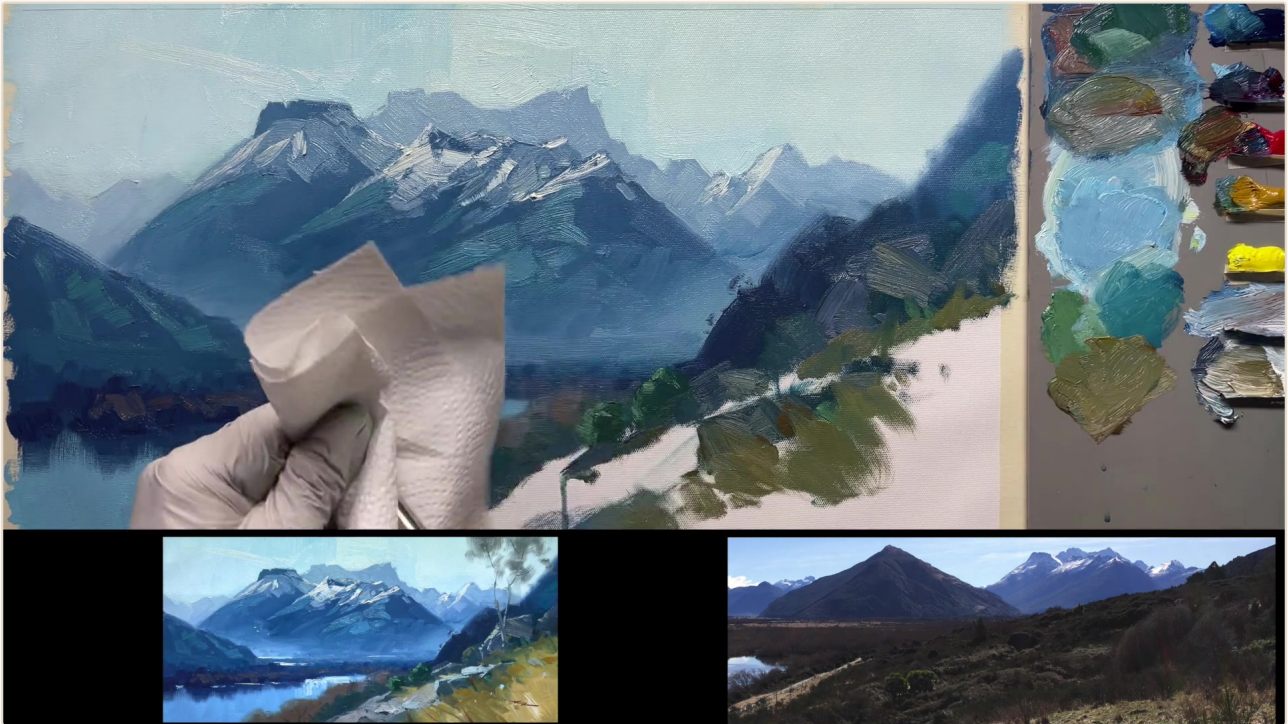
Enhance Green Areas

Add a bit more green to areas that need it, boosting the vibrancy where necessary. This adds life and variation to the landscape.

PRO TIP

Roll the brush when applying highlights to create interesting textual effects.

13 Final Touches on Rocks and Greenery



Add Highlights to the Foreground

Mix a lot more white with bright yellow and some yellow ochre. Start applying this mixture at the bottom of the area so the color remains pure. Avoid over-mixing to allow for some natural variations in the paint.

Create Grass Effect

Add a little more yellow ochre to the mixture and apply it to the designated area. From a distance, this will resemble grass without needing to paint every blade. Aim for a painterly effect with free, expressive strokes.

Apply Light Grey to Rocks

Mix a lighter grey and apply it to the rocks. Use a similar grey, perhaps slightly cooler, to add dimension and detail to the rock surfaces.

Add Moss to Large Rock

Apply a touch of green on top of the big rock to suggest moss. This adds a natural element and enhances the realism of the scene.

PRO TIP

Avoid over-mixing colors to allow for natural variations and happy accidents in your painting.

14 Tree and Branch Details



Create Misty Foliage

Mix a warm grey and lightly brush it onto the canvas to form a diaphanous, misty foliage. Focus on capturing the general impression of large foliage shapes with soft edges, rather than detailing every leaf.

Paint the Tree Trunk

Use a small synthetic brush with a fine edge to paint the tree trunk. Carefully load the brush to avoid unwanted clumps of paint, aiming for a natural, joyful placement rather than a drawn-on look.

Add Branch Details

Switch to a finer brush, such as a rigor brush, for adding branches. Use small sideways strokes to suggest branches without detailing each one, and add highlights for interest.

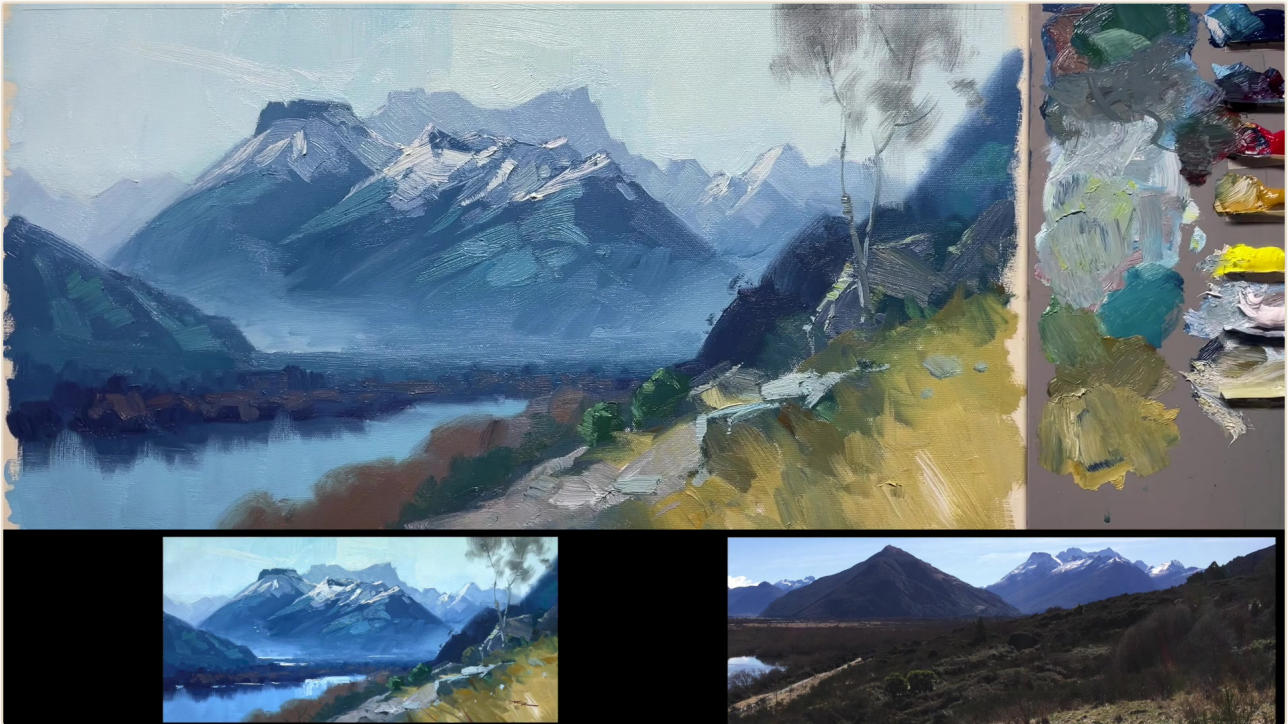
Soften Branch Lines

Use the sky brush to gently brush over the branch lines, softening them to blend better with the background. This will give the painting an elegant feel.

PRO TIP

Use a sky brush to gently soften branch lines, integrating them with the background for a more natural look.

15 Final Details and Accents



Prepare Your Palette

Use a larger palette to keep your mixtures separate and prevent them from becoming muddy. This will help maintain clarity in your colors.

Create Textural Reflections

Mix white with a little blue and a touch of crimson. Use this mixture to create textural reflections by scooping up paint on the edge of your brush and dragging it straight down.

Add Variety to Reflections

Ensure the reflections vary in size, distance, and shape to avoid creating patterns. Keep the marks horizontal and hold your breath for precision.

Enhance the Scene with Accents

Add dark accents for trees and branches to give depth. Include small warm accents and a few tiny birds to add interest to the vast scene.

Finalize Your Painting

Sign your painting in the corner to complete your work.

PRO TIP

Use a larger palette to keep your mixtures separate and prevent them from becoming muddy.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by establishing a strong foundation with a well-thought-out composition. Begin with a clear horizon line and sketch the major shapes that will define your scene. As you block in the mountains, focus on capturing the essence of their forms with broad strokes, leaving the finer details for later. This approach allows you to build a cohesive and balanced landscape.

As you progress, pay attention to the interplay of light and shadow to create depth and realism. Use a variety of colors to depict atmospheric perspective, and carefully layer your paints to capture the subtle nuances of reflected light and snow. Remember to keep your brush clean and your colors pure, especially when working on snow and highlights, to maintain the vibrancy and clarity of your painting.

In the final stages, integrate foreground and background elements seamlessly, using soft transitions and varied edges to enhance the natural look of your scene. Add the finishing touches with careful attention to detail in foliage, water reflections, and rock textures. These final accents will bring your landscape to life, capturing the majestic beauty of Mount Earnslaw.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Start with the horizon line to anchor your composition.
- Focus on blocking in big shapes first; details can be refined later.
- Use a color very close to the sky for distant mountains to create atmospheric perspective.
- Use a clean brush for snow to avoid contaminating the white with underlying dark colors.
- Vary the edges of the mountains to avoid a paper cutout look.
- Avoid diagonal brush strokes in the water reflections to prevent the appearance of a tilted water plane.
- Use soft edges to depict willow trees, creating a natural transition in the foliage.
- Avoid over-mixing colors to allow for natural variations and happy accidents in your painting.



"Mount Earnslaw" 12x24" Oil on Canvas

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.

Mt Earnslaw by Polly Becker



Mt Earnslaw by Polly Becker

Beautifully done little painting here Polly - like a jewel. Very rich colour, great variety of lost and found edges and superb drawing and elegant brushwork. Great!

Mount Earnslaw - Oil on canvas by Greg Dorosh



Mount Earnslaw - Oil on canvas by Greg Dorosh

Really nice fluid brushwork Greg, not over-painted at all. Solid colour work too. I would only comment that you've lost some opportunities for variety and interest by oversimplifying the foreground grasses and mid ground bushes. By breaking that up a little with more shape and colour variety you'll be giving people more to enjoy in the painting.

Final by Jay Sullivan



Final by Jay Sullivan

Hi Jay, you mentioned you struggled with this one after stage 3. The colouring and brushwork are great. I'd just draw your attention to a few things:

1. Try to avoid repeating shapes side by side. It lacks variety and a natural feel. You've repeated shapes in the trees on the right and in the mountains.
2. Consider distance and atmospheric perspective throughout the various depths of the painting. Note that your line of green trees in the centre are the same green as the trees in the mid ground, whereas they should be more blue grey because of the distance.
3. Lead the eye. The central area is a barrier to travelling to the mountains. By laying thin strips of water here you'll lead the eye into the background.
4. I would add more shadow to the left side of the large tree to give it more depth and prune that thick long branch.

Hope that helps!

Mountain landscape, oil, canvas, 30 cm x 60 cm by Elena Sokolova



Mountain landscape, oil, canvas, 30 cm x 60 cm by Elena Sokolova

Good job Elena. Great colour work, variety of edges and eloquent brushwork. Beautiful!