



The Dinghy

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/96-The-Dinghy>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we're diving into a painting technique that marries the best of both worlds—loose and tight brushwork. Inspired by a beautiful scene at One Tree Point in Whangarei Harbour, I found myself captivated not by the mountains I initially intended to paint, but by a simple dinghy bathed in the last light of the day. This lesson is about creating a 'portrait' of your subject, where you focus on tight, crisp details at the center of interest, while allowing the background to flow freely with expressive, loose strokes. This approach is reminiscent of classical portraiture, where a single focal point draws the eye, supported by a softer, more abstract backdrop. You'll learn how to balance these elements, using careful color choices and value placement to enhance the composition. Whether you choose to paint a boat, a seagull, or even an apple, the key is to select a subject that captivates both you and your viewer. The main goal is to enjoy the process and have fun exploring this dynamic interplay of detail and freedom in your artwork.



"The Dinghy" 11x11" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson



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.

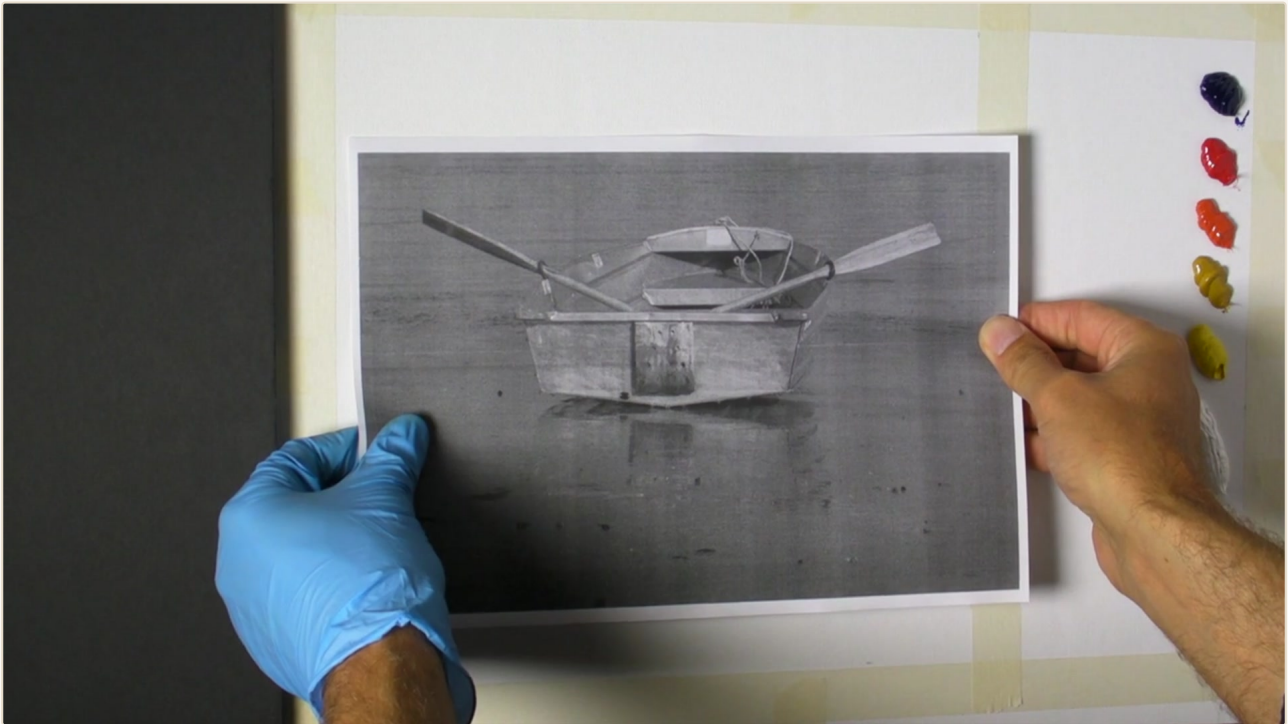
Materials

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

- M. Graham & Co. Oil Paints
- Alizarine Crimson
- 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 Drawing Techniques



Prepare the Canvas

Use a large bristle brush soaked in walnut oil to apply a thin wash of pure color across the canvas. This will serve as a base for your drawing.

Transfer the Drawing

Print the image to the correct size for your canvas. Cover the back with graphite, then tape it onto the canvas. Press firmly with a pen to trace the image, ensuring the lines transfer. Reinforce the lines with a pencil if needed.

Draw Freehand

Visualize the boat inside a box to simplify drawing it in perspective. Start with the center line from bow to stern to ensure symmetry. Use markers like oar holes to align features across the boat.

Consider Reflections

Remember that reflections must also be drawn in perspective. Avoid simply mirroring the boat upside down on the water, as this won't look accurate.

PRO TIP

Visualize the boat inside a box to simplify drawing it in perspective.

2 Painting the Background



Mix the Base Color

Mix a mid-value purplish bluish color. Use this to start working on the background, aiming for a large gradation from dark to light.

Apply the Base Layer

Use a big brush to apply the color from the top to the bottom of the canvas. Don't worry about going over the edges; focus on having fun and covering the area.

Transition to a Lighter Color

Mix a slightly lighter and bluer color. Work this down the canvas, gradually transitioning from the initial color.

Add More Light and Texture

Add a little more white and a tiny touch of yellow to the mix. Cover the canvas, then wipe it back slightly with a cloth to create an interesting texture.

Experiment with Effects

Spray water onto the canvas if using water mixable oils or acrylics, or use turps with standard oils to thin the paint. Consider placing the painting on the floor and splattering paint for a random effect.

Soften the Edges

Use a big, clean, soft brush to gently soften some of the edges, enhancing the background texture.

PRO TIP

Use a big brush and don't worry about going over the edges to enjoy the process and create a dynamic background.

3 Color Mixing and Application



Select the Right Brush

Use a crisp, flat, synthetic brush to achieve hard edges, ideal for painting man-made objects like the dinghy.

Mix a Warm Base Color

Combine yellow ochre with a little bit of white and a touch of blue to tone it down. This mixture will serve as the warm base color for the boat.

Apply the Warm Base Color

Apply the yellow ochre mixture to all the warm areas of the boat first. This sets the foundation for color relationships and helps in assessing shadow colors.

Assess and Relate Colors

Consider how the warm base color relates to your shadow colors. Determine the darkness and temperature, whether warmer or cooler, to enhance color mixing skills.

Reuse Similar Colors

After applying a color, think about where else you can use it or a similar shade in your painting. This approach saves time and maintains color harmony.

PRO TIP

After applying a color, consider where else it can be used to save time and maintain color harmony.

4 Mixing Darks and Reflections



Mix Dark Colors

Mix a dark gray by combining black and white. Adjust the hue by adding complementary colors. For instance, if the gray appears too blue, add a touch of orange to balance it. Continue adjusting until the color looks right to your eye.

Paint Reflections

Remember that reflections are generally a bit darker and duller than the original objects. Aim for a subtle difference between the object and its reflection to achieve a realistic effect.

PRO TIP

Use complementary colors to adjust the hue of your darks for a more balanced appearance.

5 Detailing the Boat



Add Reflection Details

Mix yellow ochre with bright yellow. Use a sharp brush to apply a thin strip of this mixture onto the oar, capturing the subtle difference between the object and its reflection.

Enhance Color Contrast

Apply intense colors under the boat to create contrast between warm and cool tones. Use the blue reflections from the water and sky to enhance this effect.

Adjust Cast Shadow

Observe the cast shadow on the left of the boat in the photograph. Adjust the value of the shadow if necessary, ensuring it adds interesting color to the composition.

Focus on Nuances

With the bulk of the boat blocked in, concentrate on painting the finer details. Pay attention to the small nuances to bring the scene to life.

PRO TIP

Use a maul stick to steady your hand when working on small details.

6 Story and Marketing Tip



Add a Personal Touch

Consider adding elements to your painting that resonate with the subject's owner. A small detail, like a bird, can create a personal connection and enhance the painting's appeal.

Engage with Potential Buyers

After completing a painting, leave a business card with a personal note for the subject's owner. This simple gesture can lead to sales and build relationships with potential buyers.

PRO TIP

Leave a business card with a personal note on the subject to engage potential buyers.

7 Subject Choice and Humor



Embrace Subject Choice

Choose a subject that excites you, even if it has been painted many times before. A good subject remains valuable regardless of its popularity. Your unique perspective will bring freshness to the painting.

Ignore Criticism

Do not be discouraged by others' opinions about common subjects. Focus on your own interest and enthusiasm for the subject matter. Your passion will translate into your artwork, making it unique and engaging.

PRO TIP

Choose subjects that excite you, regardless of how often they've been painted before.

8 Final Touches and Details



Adjust the Blue

Soften the blue at the top by mixing in a slightly greyer blue. Apply this to reduce the richness and create a more balanced tone.

Keep Brushwork Loose

Maintain loose brushwork while adjusting colors. Avoid smoothing out previous layers to preserve the painting's dynamic quality.

Add Poles for Interest

Introduce a couple of small poles in the composition. This adds visual interest and enhances the scene's realism.

Sprinkle Rocks and Shells

Scatter a few rocks and shells in the foreground. These details provide texture and depth to the painting.

PRO TIP

When adding crisp details over loose paintwork, focus on the details to make the underlying layers appear more believable.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by establishing a solid foundation with a thin wash of color and a well-transferred drawing. Visualize complex shapes, like the dinghy, within simple geometric forms to maintain perspective and symmetry. As you draw, remember that reflections need careful consideration to appear realistic.

Dive into painting the background with a sense of freedom and creativity. Use large brushes and bold strokes to create a dynamic backdrop, allowing the colors to transition smoothly from dark to light. Experiment with textures by wiping back paint and adding splatters for an engaging visual effect.

As you bring the dinghy to life, focus on color relationships and harmony. Start with a warm base color and thoughtfully mix your shadows and reflections to enhance depth and realism. Pay attention to the details, using sharp brushes for precision, and let your passion for the subject guide your unique artistic expression. Finally, add personal touches and details to make the scene resonate with viewers.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Visualize the boat inside a box to simplify drawing it in perspective.
- Use a big brush and don't worry about going over the edges to enjoy the process and create a dynamic background.
- After applying a color, consider where else it can be used to save time and maintain color harmony.
- Use complementary colors to adjust the hue of your darks for a more balanced appearance.
- Use a maul stick to steady your hand when working on small details.
- Leave a business card with a personal note on the subject to engage potential buyers.
- Choose subjects that excite you, regardless of how often they've been painted before.
- When adding crisp details over loose paintwork, focus on the details to make the underlying layers appear more believable.



"The Dinghy" 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.

"Not Another Dinghy!" by **Pauline Le Merle**



"Not Another Dinghy!" Acrylic on Canvas Board' by Pauline Le Merle

A very striking piece Pauline and very graphic with its inky darks and vibrant colours. I love the diffused background contrasting the sharp as steel details in the boat - very punchy, and you haven't let the drawing lapse at all there although the bird has been rendered a little more roughly. Similarly for those stones to sit right you'd need to pay more attention to the shape of their bases and reflections.

Design wise it might have been nice to extend the darkness in the water horizontally across behind the gull's head to give him even more pop and if you had added the soft halftone between the light and shadow on his neck he would have looked more rounded, less flat. Actually you've done such a dramatic job of the rest of the painting you could probably take out the seagull altogether without much trouble. Very bold work! Thanks Pauline.

"Dinghy" by Martha Lever



"Dinghy" by Martha Lever

Wow just look at the energy in this! Your brushwork has really caught my eye - the whole canvas is alive and vibrating with it. Great to see you've even mixed your colours on the canvas sometimes giving us some truly juicy paintwork to revel in - something that looks easy but can be a real challenge if you're used to mixing colours thoroughly on the palette before applying them.

Some of the accuracy of the drawing was unfortunately sacrificed for your vivid brushwork, particularly in the oars and the shape of the back of the boat where the right side is longer than the left and their reflections have gone astray as well, but other than that the interior of the boat is sound and your seagull looks pretty healthy too. With brushwork like this you could consider foregoing accurate rendering altogether and allowing the forms to attain a playful expressive quality all their own. I look forward to seeing what you make out of the next workshop which pushes the expressive qualities of paint even further. Great work Martha.

"Dundy Lighthouse" by **ÁžorgrÁmur Andri Einarsson**



"Dundy Lighthouse" Oil on linen, 14 x 18" by ÁžorgrÁmur Andri Einarsson

The mood of this painting is the first thing that strikes me ÁžorgrÁmur, because you haven't just painted a scene, you've captured a feeling, or at least you've reduced the gamut of feelings this painting might elicit in a viewer, narrowed it down and pushed us in one direction. Thanks for reminding us again of the power of a limited palette, or a colour 'gamut'.

I love the contrast of the crisp detail in the ladders and fixings compared with the big soft gradation in the background, and that's really what this workshop was all about so congratulations on fulfilling the brief to the letter. Great to see the subtle vertical shift in hue that you managed in the background from reds to blues to yellows as you lightened it at the same time - good control of colour there. The way you softened the edges of the foreground ripples is pretty masterful too as it pushes us back into the focal area - great!

The only thing I might look at changing in this painting is to add the faintest hint of a boat in the distant mist on the right to add to the narrative. Good stuff.

"Dinghy..." by Silvana M Albano



"Dinghy..." Acrylic on Paper, 13 x 9" by Silvana M Albano

Good work Silvana - great to see you've really explored the idea of tight vs loose painting with all your crisp detail in the boat contrasted with the almost abstract background. Your colours are strong but with enough grays to lend them subtlety and I have to congratulate you on slightly toning down the reflected boat colours which is something I failed to do in my demo painting as I mentioned in the video.

It looks like you played with the idea of adding ripples on the water with a fine brush but wasn't too sure about it and fudged them a bit on the left which seems to flatten out the illusion of space there. Using a large brush with its bristles spread could achieve a similarly detailed effect but without the struggle. You can do that by loading the brush with paint and then pinching the bristles near the ferrul and splaying them a little, similar to the interesting effects you've achieved at the top of your painting. Speaking of which I think it's a nice touch to have balanced that empty space with a little darker interest as you have done along the top. Nice splatters too! Keep up the good work.