



Roberton Island

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/95-Roberton-Island>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we're embarking on an exciting journey to Roberton Island in the Bay of Islands, New Zealand, a place that holds a special spot in my heart. It's a location filled with cherished memories from my childhood, and now I get to share it with my own kids. This stunning setting is the perfect backdrop for our lesson in expressionism, where we'll challenge ourselves to paint more loosely and break free from the confines of 'little brush syndrome.' We'll be using just one large brush and a credit card to create our masterpiece. This approach encourages us to embrace the texture of the paint, allowing it to suggest detail rather than meticulously applying it with a small brush. The magic happens when a viewer sees a beautifully intricate scene from afar, only to discover a captivating abstract when they step closer. It's a rewarding experience that transforms our perception of painting. Feel free to use your own photos if you prefer, as the goal is to explore these new tools and techniques. Let's dive in, have fun, and see what we can create together in this breathtaking location.



"Roberton Island" 11x16" Oil in Canvas by Richard Robinson



REFERENCE PHOTO 1

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 2

The scene as Richard found it.

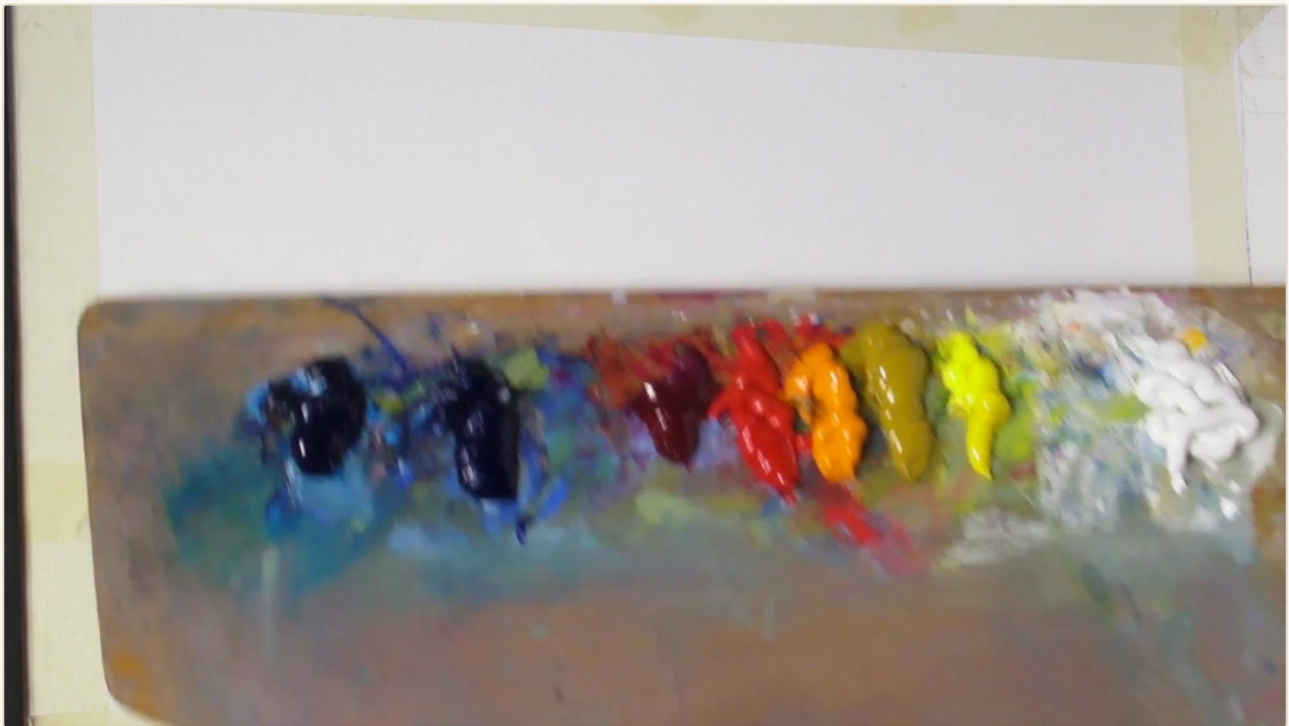
Materials

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
- 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 Canvas Preparation and Initial Sketch



Prepare Your Canvas

Tape up a 9 by 16 inch canvas to ensure clean edges and a professional finish. Have your palette of colors ready and use walnut oil as your painting medium.

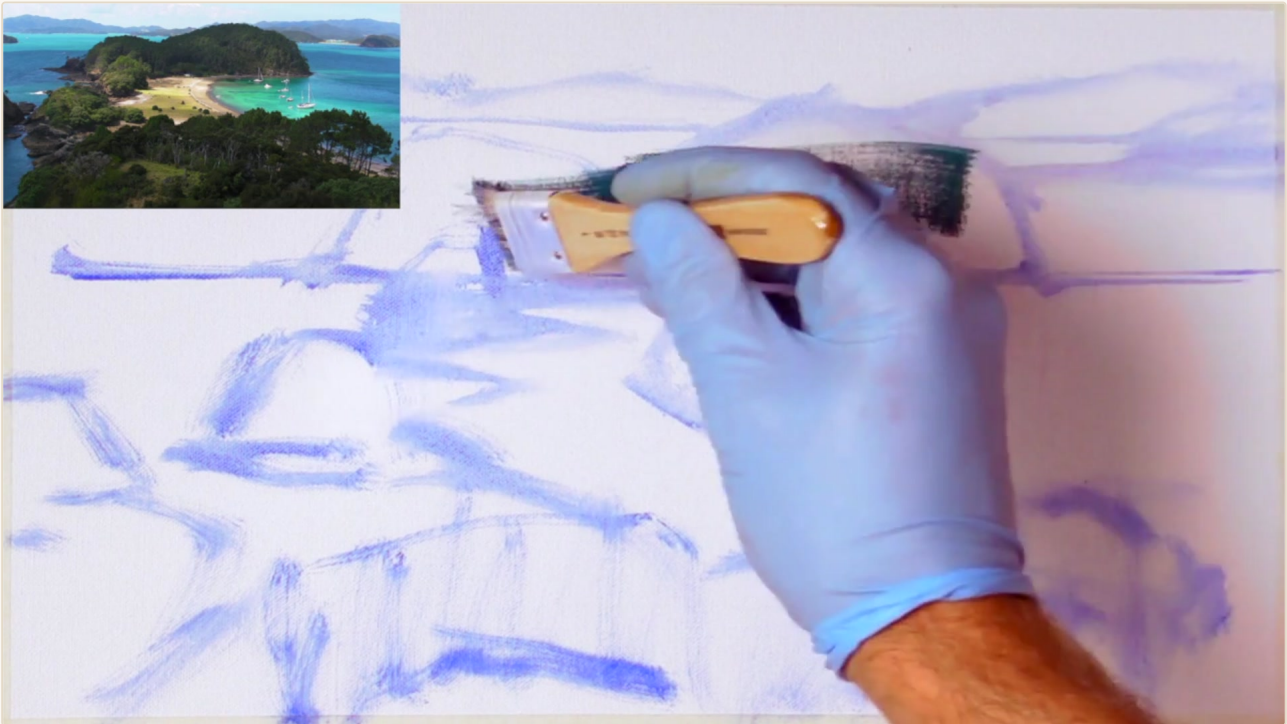
Sketch the Major Shapes

Begin by sketching in the major shapes on the canvas. Pay special attention to the angle of the beach, as it's crucial to get this right. Spend time ensuring accuracy in this step.

PRO TIP

Focus on getting the angle of the beach correct during the initial sketch.

2 Applying Atmospheric Perspective



Apply Mid-Value Blue-Green

Start with a mid-value blue-green and brush it broadly onto the main section of the landscape. This will serve as the base color for the distant land.

Darken Towards Foreground

As you move closer to the foreground, darken the color by adding more blue and a little bit of orange. This creates a gradient effect, making each piece of land slightly darker as it approaches the viewer.

Use Atmospheric Perspective

Alternatively, you can start with a darker color in the foreground and gradually lighten and cool the colors as you move into the distance. This technique enhances the depth of your painting through atmospheric perspective.

PRO TIP

Darken the colors as you move towards the foreground to create depth using atmospheric perspective.

3 Experimenting with Brush Texture



Experiment with Brush Texture

Use a large brush to apply paint slightly lighter than the background color. Experiment with the brush to discover different textures you can create. Press the brush down onto the surface to achieve a delicate, lacery texture that adds interest to your painting.

Apply Thicker Paint Layer

Mix a thicker, juicier paint with less walnut oil or painting medium. Apply this layer over the first to create texture that sits up off the surface. This will catch the light and add a sparkling effect to your work.

PRO TIP

Press the brush down onto the surface to create a delicate, lacery texture.

4 Variables Affecting Texture



Experiment with Paint Thickness

Adjust the thickness of the paint on your brush to see how it affects the texture. Thicker paint will create more pronounced textures, while thinner paint will result in smoother surfaces.

Vary Your Application Speed

Change the speed at which you apply the paint to the canvas. Faster strokes can create dynamic, energetic textures, while slower strokes allow for more control and detail.

Drag and Lift the Brush

Experiment with dragging the brush slightly as you lift it off the canvas. This technique can create interesting textures and add depth to your painting.

PRO TIP

Play with different brush techniques to discover unique textures and effects.

5 Foreground and Midground Contrast



Create Foreground Shadow

Use a darkened, bluer green to paint the foreground. This will suggest that the area is in shadow, enhancing depth in your painting.

Enhance Midground Focus

Ensure the midground, particularly the beach, has a spotlight effect. This contrast will draw the viewer's eye from the shadowed foreground to the illuminated midground.

PRO TIP

Use a darker, bluer green in the foreground to create a shadow effect and enhance depth.

6 Using a Credit Card for Texture



Prepare the Base Color

Establish a base or shadow color for the rocks. Ensure the values of the colors in this area are similar to create a cohesive foundation.

Apply Texture with a Credit Card

Use a credit card or similar tool to apply the paint thickly. Drag the card across the surface to create sharp edges and texture. This method offers more control and less wobble than a palette knife, though visibility behind the card may be limited.

PRO TIP

Use a credit card to apply thick paint and create sharp edges and texture.

7 Inspiration from Other Artists



Explore Techniques

Look into the work of Herman Peckle, an Australian artist known for his innovative use of a credit card in painting. Observe his transition from watercolour to acrylics and oils, and how he effectively uses a big brush.

Study Expressionistic Styles

Examine the expressionistic work of Ken Knight, another Australian artist. Note his use of a big paint scraper, which has become razor sharp over years of use, to create dynamic textures in his paintings.

PRO TIP

Explore the works of artists like Herman Peckle and Ken Knight to discover unique tools and techniques that can enhance your painting style.

8 Central Focal Point and Shadows



Add Shadows to the Hill

Work back in some shadows into the hill. This area is the central focal point of the painting, so take the time to get it right. Observe the play of light and shadow across the hill to convey its scale.

Extend Shadows into the Water

Continue the shadow from the hill into the water. Use a darker blue on either side of the hill to maintain consistency and enhance the overall composition.

PRO TIP

Observe how light and shadow play across large masses to convey scale.

9 Adjusting Sky and Light Effects



Deepen Sky Color

Add more depth of color to the sky in your painting to counteract the overexposed look of the photo. Use richer tones to create a more dynamic and engaging backdrop.

Create Light Variation

Introduce variation in the sky by lightening the area right over the highest point of the hill. This contrast between light and dark at the horizon creates a focal point and adds interest to the composition.

PRO TIP

Lighten the sky just above the hill's peak to create a focal point with contrasting light and dark.

10 Drawing Considerations



Avoid Confusing Ridge Lines

Ensure that ridge lines do not join up with the horizon or other distant hills. This prevents visual confusion and maintains clarity in your composition.

Strengthen Shadowed Water

If the shadowed water appears chalky, deepen the tone to add more strength and contrast. This adjustment enhances the overall depth of the scene.

Define Hill Base Curve

Pay attention to the curve at the base of the hill. Avoid a flat line across the bottom, as it can make the hill appear like a paper cutout. A well-defined curve adds realism and dimension.

PRO TIP

Ensure ridge lines do not intersect with the horizon to avoid visual confusion.

11 Painting Grass and Spotlight Area



Paint Grass in Shadow

Apply a soft shadow to the grass by using muted, darker tones. This will create depth and contrast in the painting.

Enhance Spotlight Area

As you move into the spotlight area, use more vibrant and lighter colors. This will emphasize the brightness and draw attention to this part of the painting.

PRO TIP

Use muted tones for shadowed grass to create depth and contrast.

12 Handling Light and Dark Transitions



Handle Light and Dark Transitions

When working where light meets dark, keep your brush clean. Make one or two strokes, then clean the brush before refilling it. This prevents the paint around the dark area from becoming muddled.

Refine the Transition

Return later with a dark color to work back into the light area. This allows you to finish the transition without needing to complete it all at once.

Create Texture

Pat the brush down with thick paint to achieve a unique texture. This technique provides a texture that cannot be achieved in any other way.

PRO TIP

Keep your brush clean to prevent muddled colors when transitioning between light and dark areas.

13 Final Touches and Details



Soften the Edge

Use your fingernail to gently soften the edge of the hill. This will help push the hill into the distance and make the sharp edge stand out more by comparison.

Add a Mast

Use a tiny brush to apply a thin strip of paint right on the edge. This technique can create the appearance of a little mast, adding detail to your painting.

PRO TIP

Use your fingernail to soften edges and create depth by pushing elements into the distance.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by carefully preparing your canvas and sketching the major shapes. Pay close attention to the angles and proportions, especially the beach, as this sets the foundation for your entire composition. As you lay down your initial colors, use atmospheric perspective to create depth, transitioning from cooler, lighter tones in the distance to darker, warmer hues in the foreground.

Experiment with texture by varying brush techniques and paint thickness. Use large brushes and even unconventional tools like a credit card to add dynamic textures and sharp edges. These techniques will help bring your landscape to life, adding interest and dimension to your work.

As you refine your painting, focus on contrasts and focal points. Use shadows to enhance depth and ensure your composition remains clear by avoiding intersecting lines. Pay attention to light transitions, keeping your brush clean to maintain vibrant colors. Finally, add delicate details and soften edges to create a sense of distance and realism, completing your masterpiece with finesse.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Focus on getting the angle of the beach correct during the initial sketch.
- Darken the colors as you move towards the foreground to create depth using atmospheric perspective.
- Press the brush down onto the surface to create a delicate, lacy texture.
- Play with different brush techniques to discover unique textures and effects.
- Use a darker, bluer green in the foreground to create a shadow effect and enhance depth.
- Use a credit card to apply thick paint and create sharp edges and texture.
- Lighten the sky just above the hill's peak to create a focal point with contrasting light and dark.
- Keep your brush clean to prevent muddled colors when transitioning between light and dark areas.



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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.

“Roberton Island” by Elena Sokolova



"Roberton Island" 30 x 60cm Oil on Canvas by Elena Sokolova

Elena it looks like you've really followed the demo video here and had a good time with the big brush and the credit card which is great to see - looks like fun to me. Maybe too much fun If there is such a thing, as the drawing seems to be pretty loose, whereas what I was aiming to instill is loose brushwork with solid drawing at its foundation. The painting works well from a distance but close up there's not enough attention to subtlety which I've seen you're capable of.

Good to see you've played with soft and sharp edges, especially in the distant hills which helps push them way back in space and creates an air of mystery. The blue in the hill is a little too blue compared to the greens and browns you've placed on top of it. I remember doing that too in my painting and I then had to darken the blue with a little red and yellow which also grayed it down. All of your blues could do with a little graying down in my eyes, even though they do make for a punchy painting I'm reminded of Clyde Aspevig suggesting that "taste equals restraint". You can gray a blue with a redish orange and white or a gray of equal value. Looks like you were painting with emotion Elena and that's rare, so I commend you for that. Keep it up!

"Roberton Island" by Montalvo



"Roberton Island" Oil on Canvas by Montalvo

Hi Montalvo, although I am charmed by the simplified solid feel of this painting, I don't know if that's what you were trying to achieve, but I don't believe it is, so I'll assess it on the basis that you were trying to achieve something similar to the demo painting. In that case it seems you have over simplified the subject because of a loss of detailed texture due to overpainting, which means painting over an area again and again until all the brushstrokes become indistinct and any fine surface detail is lost in a blur.

Saying that, you have managed to retain a good sense of light and shade which leads to solid forms and the feeling that you are certain of the position of the sun and that your subject exists solidly in space. That's largely thanks to your values, which you can see in the grayscale version below, although the light on your hill has been pushed too light - you can see it merges with the water beyond.

You might want to take another look at your horizon too as it doesn't continue believably through from the left to the right, and beware making boats look all the same! It looks like an armada of hobby cats down there. Your foreground trees could do with some more variation too. Overall it has a nice playfull rhythm to it that I find very appealing despite the shortcomings of realism I've mentioned which leads me to believe you've got a good artistic eye on you just requiring some more brush miles. Happy painting!

"Roberton Island" by Jess Paskel



"Roberton Island" Oil on Canvas by Jess Paskel

Nice design Jess including a bit more of the foreground than I did and what an interesting paint texture you've achieved with the credit card and large brush! The whole surface is shimmering with life - beautiful! I love the thin little trunks you've put in which provide just enough detail to hold the foreground back from the brink of abstraction. I also like the subtle detail of the shadows under the boats although I think it's a small shame the masts weren't painted with a little more crisp exactness.

I love the play of edges you have orchestrated - very soft vs sharp. Perhaps there could have been a few more sharp edges and clearer definition in the mid ground beach and hillocks which is really the focal centre. Overall, very nicely done and I look forward to seeing if you follow through with this style and develop it further.

"All I Desire V2" by Jon Main



"All I Desire V2" 55 x 60cm Oil on Canvas by Jon Main

Hi Jon you've got a good strong design here - I like how you've taken the trees out to the right. I would have liked to have seen the straight row of trees in the midground be curved a little more to continue the great S-curve you've got going here.

Great solid brushwork in the trees which remind me of Cezanne in the way he would carve chunky forms out with the brush. The overbrushing of light gray in the foreground however looks a little confused and the yellow poking through the trees isn't varied enough to make me believe I'm seeing through the trees to the beach and grasses below. The streaks and colour in the water on the harbour are lacking the same realism you've managed in your trees and a few of the boats look like the hulls are upside down because they curve down instead of up.

With all that flat land in the middle you could have dug out a beautiful big lagoon there which would have added much more interest and because I know the island well the lagoons seem conspicuously absent to me. I like the fact that the sky is a collection of big bold brushstrokes and it's good to see you've reigned yourself in enough to make the little details on the island which give the whole scene a sense of scale. Great work Jon!