



Smugglers Bay

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/224-Smugglers-Bay>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

Welcome to my studio here in New Zealand, where today we'll embark on a creative journey to transform an average photo into a captivating painting of Smuggler's Bay. I know how frustrating it can be to sift through countless photos without finding that spark of inspiration. In this chapter, we'll overcome that hurdle by learning how to infuse life and interest into a seemingly mundane image. We'll begin by using Procreate on the iPad to explore various design options, painting directly over the photo until we discover a composition that truly resonates. Then, we'll transition to the canvas, where I'll guide you through essential techniques such as drawing, color mixing, and creating variety and texture. Our primary focus will be on the magic of light—how to invent and manipulate it to highlight the best features of your subject. By the end of this lesson, you'll have the skills to turn any photo into a masterpiece, capturing the essence of Smuggler's Bay with your unique artistic touch. Let's dive in and bring this beautiful scene to life together.



Smugglers Bay 12x12" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson



REFERENCE PHOTO

The scene as Richard found it.

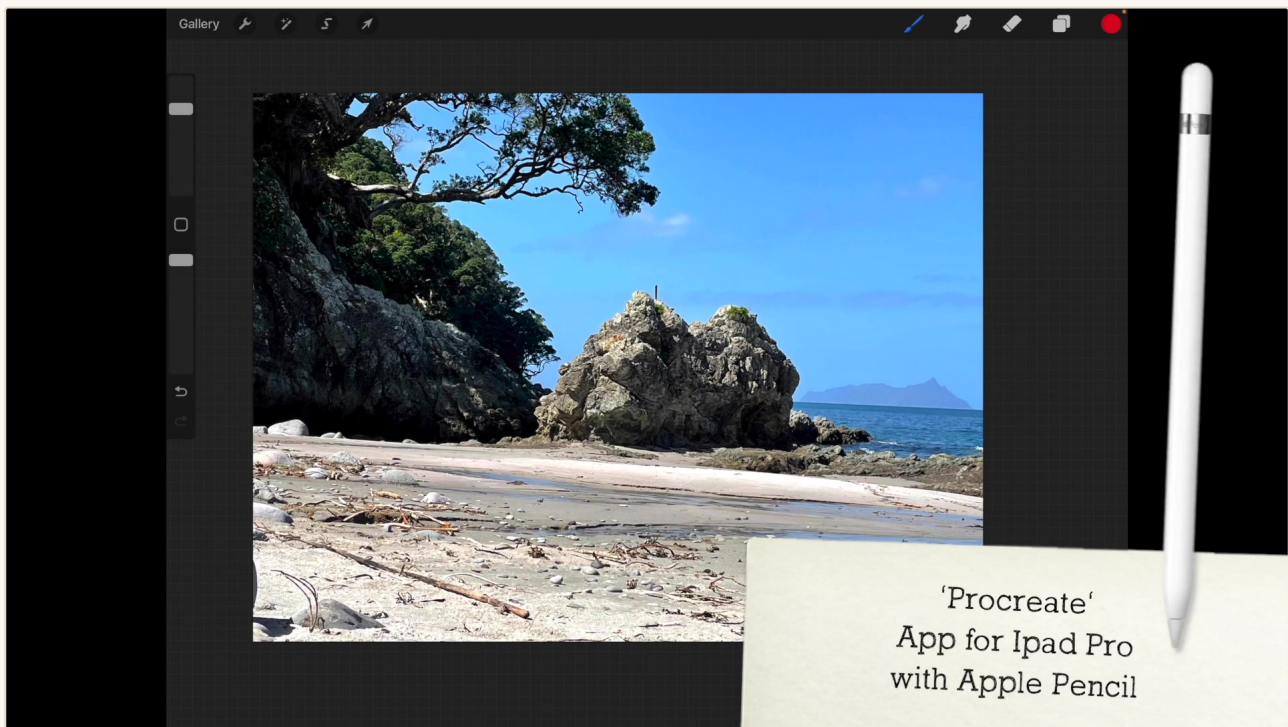
Materials

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
- Burnt Sienna
- Cadmium Red
- Alizarine Crimson/Quinacridone Magenta
- 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 Procreate Design Planning



Import and Analyze the Scene

Import the scene into Procreate on your iPad. Use an Apple Pencil to draw over the image, focusing on the beautiful rock formation. Notice the symmetry and consider altering it for a more dynamic composition.

Enhance Light and Shadow

Observe the areas in shadow and where the light is hitting. Enhance the sense of light direction by emphasizing these areas. Consider adding a splash of a wave to create movement and interest.

Adjust Horizon and Foreground

Level the horizon by tilting the photo slightly to the left. Highlight the foreground streams to capture the reflective quality of the sky and rock, adding depth to the scene.

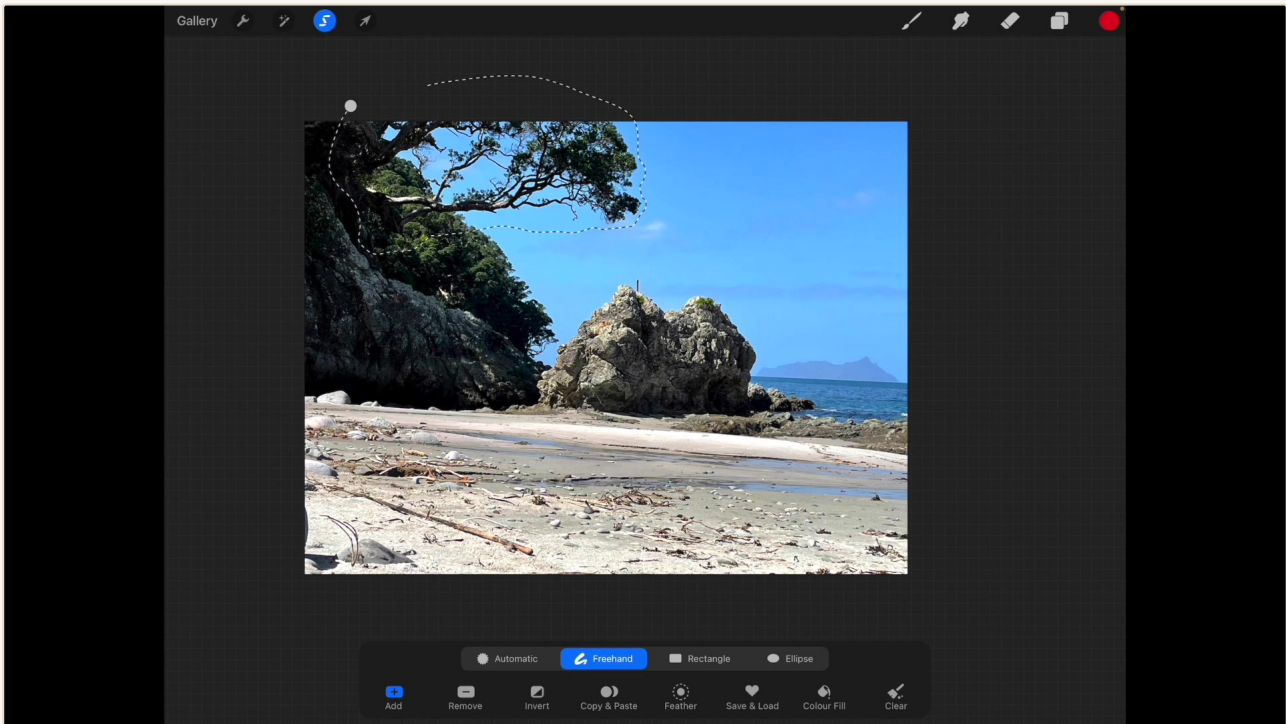
Focus on Foreground and Rocks

Reduce the amount of sky to focus more on the foreground and rocks. Extend the rocks for asymmetry and consider adding directional clouds or a soft shadow to guide the viewer's eye from shadow into light.

PRO TIP

Level the horizon by tilting the photo slightly to the left for a balanced composition.

2 Adjusting Composition in Procreate



Duplicate and Adjust Tree

Duplicate the tree by copying and pasting it. Move the duplicated tree lower to allow cropping of the sky without losing the tree.

Level the Horizon

Straighten the horizon in the drawing to achieve a balanced composition. Consider tilting the beach slightly for added dynamism.

Re-crop the Image

Re-crop the image to give it a little more space, ensuring the composition feels balanced and dynamic.

Add Shadow and Diagonals

Use a roller brush to add a shadow color, ensuring it aligns with the light source. Adjust the diagonals to lead towards the rock and spray, enhancing the dynamic shape.

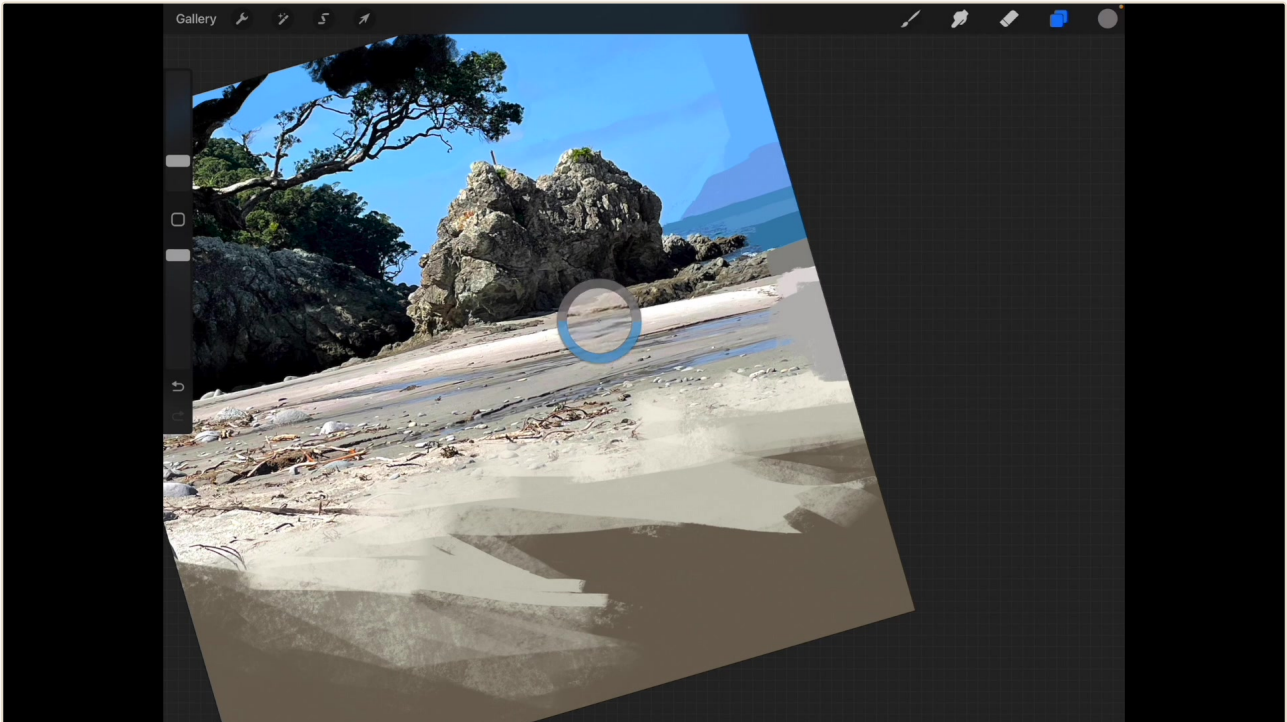
Extend Sky and Ocean

Extend the sky and ocean to create a more expansive view. Make the island slightly larger to improve the overall composition.

PRO TIP

Tilt the beach slightly to add dynamism to the composition.

3 Color Adjustments and Atmospheric Perspective



Adjust Color Saturation

Lighten the darks and mid-tones slightly to balance the overall composition. Boost the saturation to achieve a punchy color, but ensure it remains natural and not overly vibrant.

Add Waves and Spray

Introduce small waves and sprays in the water by adding a touch of green to suggest movement. Remember that the rock will cast a shadow on the spray, so the light should start beyond the shadow.

Enhance Atmospheric Perspective

Push the background further back to create a clear separation between the background and mid-ground. This adds depth and atmosphere to the scene.

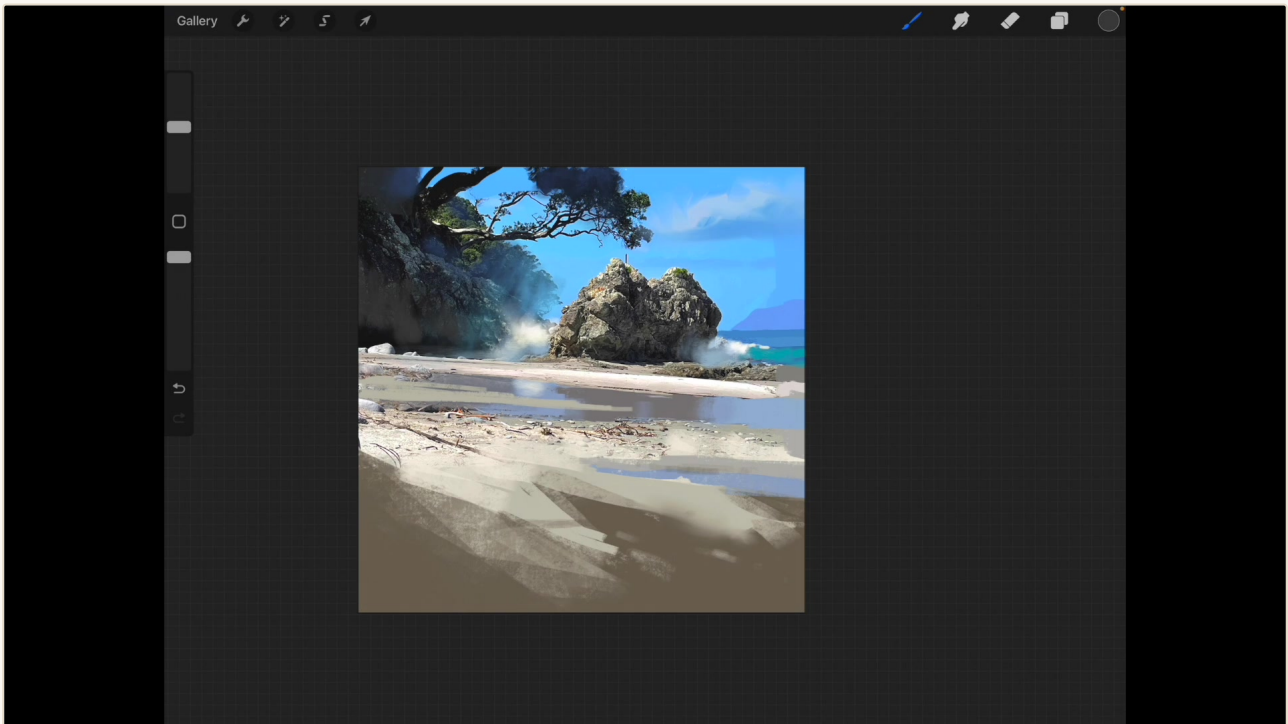
Introduce Warmer Colors

Reflect warmer colors from the beach into the space above to simulate light bouncing off the sand. This will enhance the warmth and vibrancy of the painting.

PRO TIP

Viewing your painting from a distance or at a smaller size can help identify necessary overall changes.

4 Finalizing Digital Sketch



Evaluate Overall Changes

Look at your painting in a smaller view to determine if any overall changes are needed. This perspective helps you see the composition and balance more clearly.

Darken the Sky

Merge your layers and create a new one to darken the sky at the top. Experiment with making it grayer to achieve a more subtle color and enhance the contrast with the rock.

Extend the Rock

Use a squarish brush to extend the rock, aiming for an asymmetrical shape. Pick colors from the photograph to ensure accuracy and merge this layer down once satisfied.

Darken the Foreground

Create a new layer to darken the foreground, adjusting the blend mode for different color effects. This adds depth and contrast to the scene.

Add Seagulls and Flip the Image

Consider adding a few seagulls for interest. Flip the image as if viewing it in a mirror to spot any compositional issues. This fresh perspective can reveal areas that need adjustment.

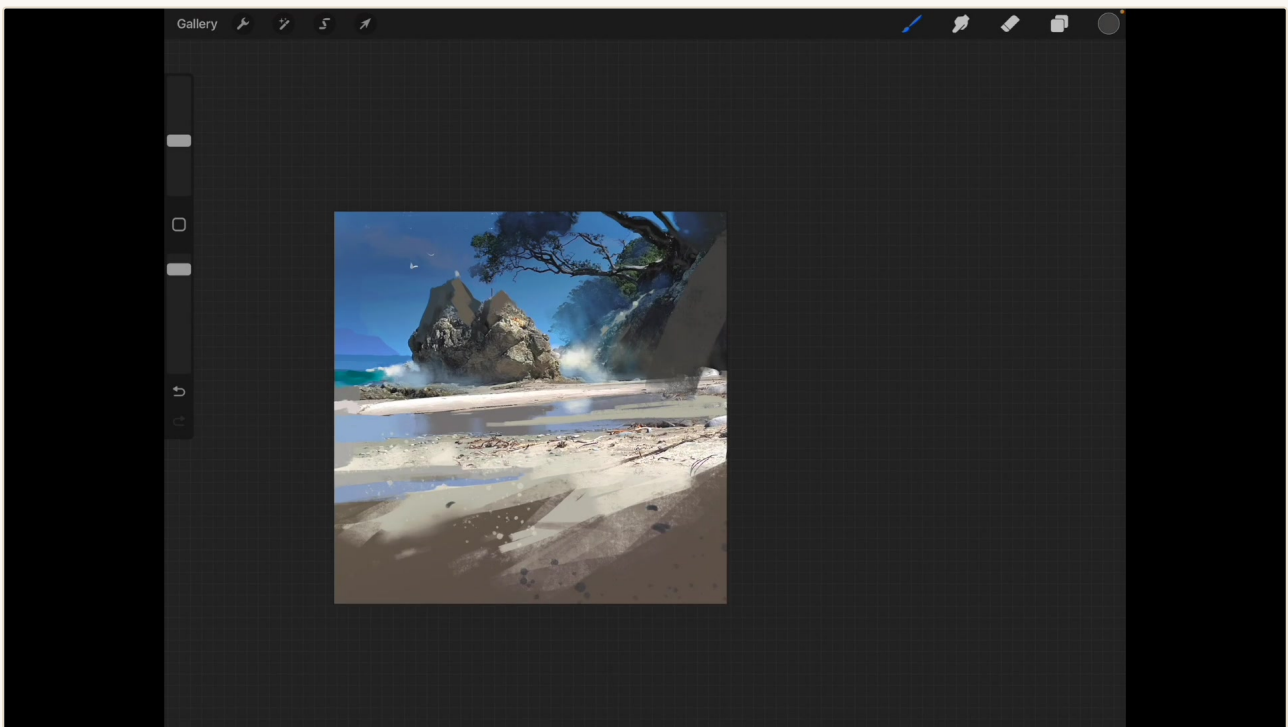
Enhance Color and Light

Boost saturation in areas that appear too gray to add color interest. Add dark and light accents to the foreground and under the rocks to create a dynamic warm versus cool contrast.

PRO TIP

Use a squarish brush for painting rocks to achieve a more natural, asymmetrical shape.

5 Digital Sketch Refinements



Refine Rock Shapes

Adjust the shapes of the rocks to make them appear more natural and varied. Avoid having rocks that look too similar to each other.

Enhance Atmosphere

Add more atmosphere to the scene by darkening the foreground. This will create depth and contrast in your painting.

Modify Waves

Increase the size of the waves to add dynamism and movement to the water. This will make the scene more engaging.

Simplify Foreground

Simplify the details in the foreground to focus attention on the main elements of the scene. This helps in creating a more cohesive composition.

Add Punchy Colors

Introduce more vibrant colors to the scene to enhance its visual impact. This will make the painting more lively and appealing.

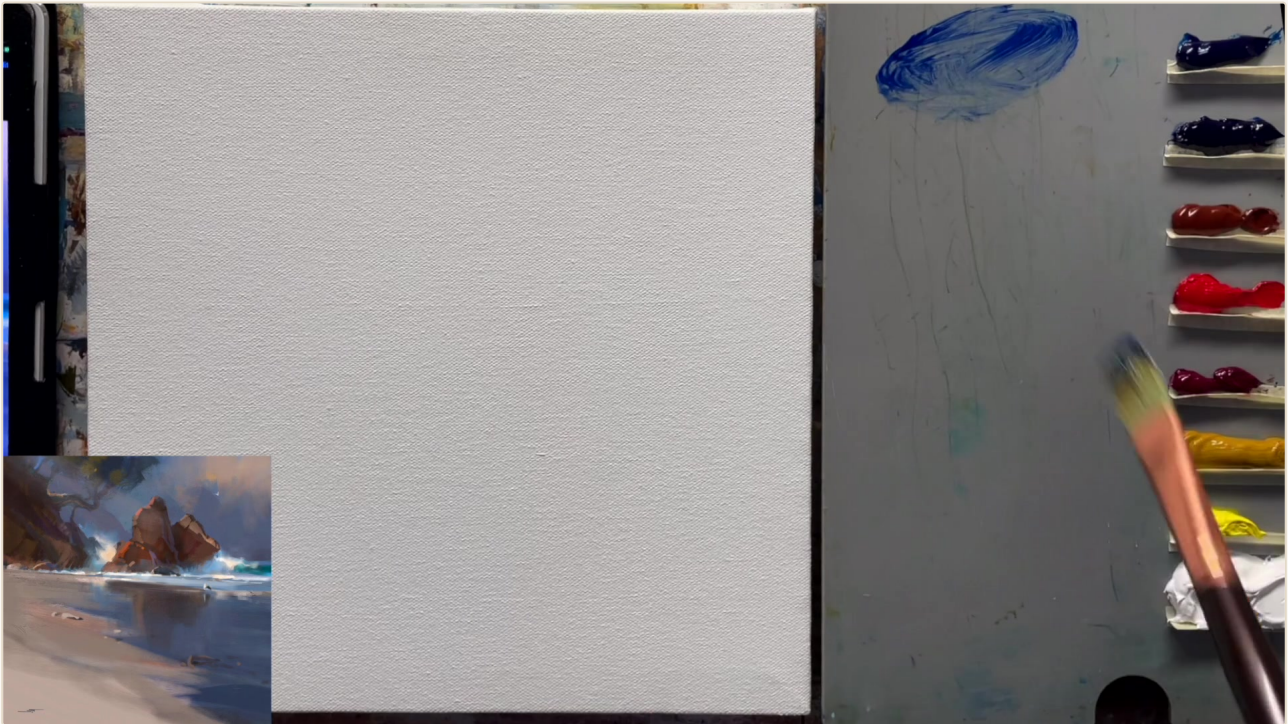
Introduce Light Ray

Add a ray of light coming from the top left corner to create a focal point and add drama to the scene.

PRO TIP

Continuously refine and adjust elements until you are satisfied with the composition before taking it to the canvas.

6 Initial Sketch on Canvas



Sketch the Surf Line

Use a little bit of blue to sketch the line of the front edge of the surf. This will help define the boundary between the water and the sand.

Position the Main Rock

Determine the placement of the main rock, focusing on its height and position. Avoid placing it dead center to create a more dynamic composition.

Add the Background Rock

Sketch the other rock behind the main rock. This will add depth to your scene.

Outline the Waves

Lightly sketch the waves, which will be enjoyable to paint later. Keep them soft and flowing.

Mark the Wet Sand Line

Draw the line of the wet sand to establish the shoreline and add interest to the foreground.

PRO TIP

Avoid placing the main rock dead center to create a more dynamic composition.

7 Painting Darkest Darks



Identify Darkest Darks

Determine the areas of your painting that will have the darkest darks. Establishing these areas first will help you maintain the correct value range throughout your painting.

Mix Dark Paint

Mix a dark color with a lot of walnut oil to create a thin consistency. Ensure the paint is just thick enough to cover the canvas effectively.

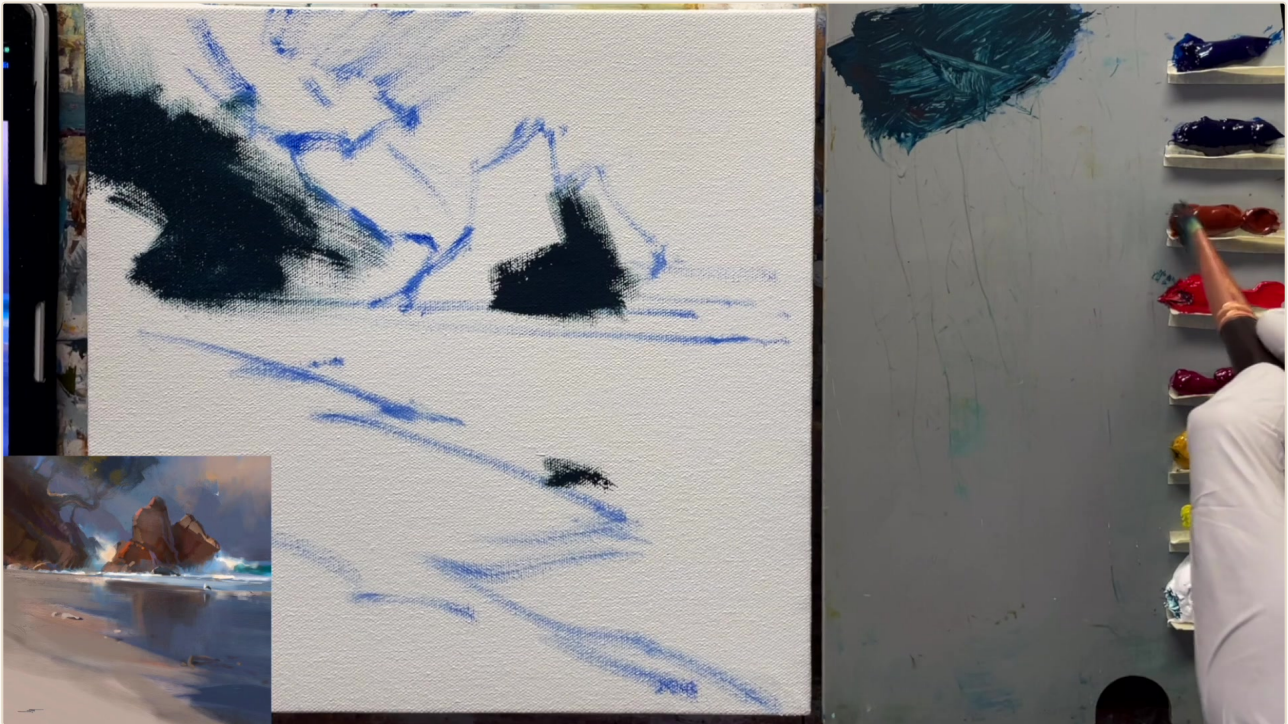
Apply Darkest Darks

Paint the identified darkest dark areas on your canvas. Extend these areas slightly beyond their intended boundaries to allow for blending with subsequent layers.

PRO TIP

Extend the darkest dark areas slightly to facilitate blending with future layers.

8 Building Up Dark Values



Mix the Next Lightest Dark

Combine brown, red, and yellow ochre to create the next lightest dark value. Ensure this mixture is slightly lighter than your darkest darks, but still maintains a rich, deep tone.

Apply the Mixture

Apply this mixture broadly and thinly, leaving some areas of the darkest darks visible. This layering will help build depth in your painting.

Vary the Hue

Adjust the hue of your darks by adding more red or yellow ochre, and perhaps a touch of white. This variation prevents monotony and adds interest, reflecting the natural diversity found in nature.

PRO TIP

Maintain variety in your darks by slightly altering the hue with each mixture.

9 Painting Sunlight Beam



Mix Warm Yellow Light

Add more yellow and red to your mix, focusing on creating a warm yellow ochre tone. Use your digital sketch as a guide to ensure each patch of color is slightly different from its neighbor.

Paint the Sunlight Beam

Move to the area with the sunlight beam. This beam lightens all the colors and makes them similar to the warm yellow light. Start by guessing the color and compare it to your digital sketch.

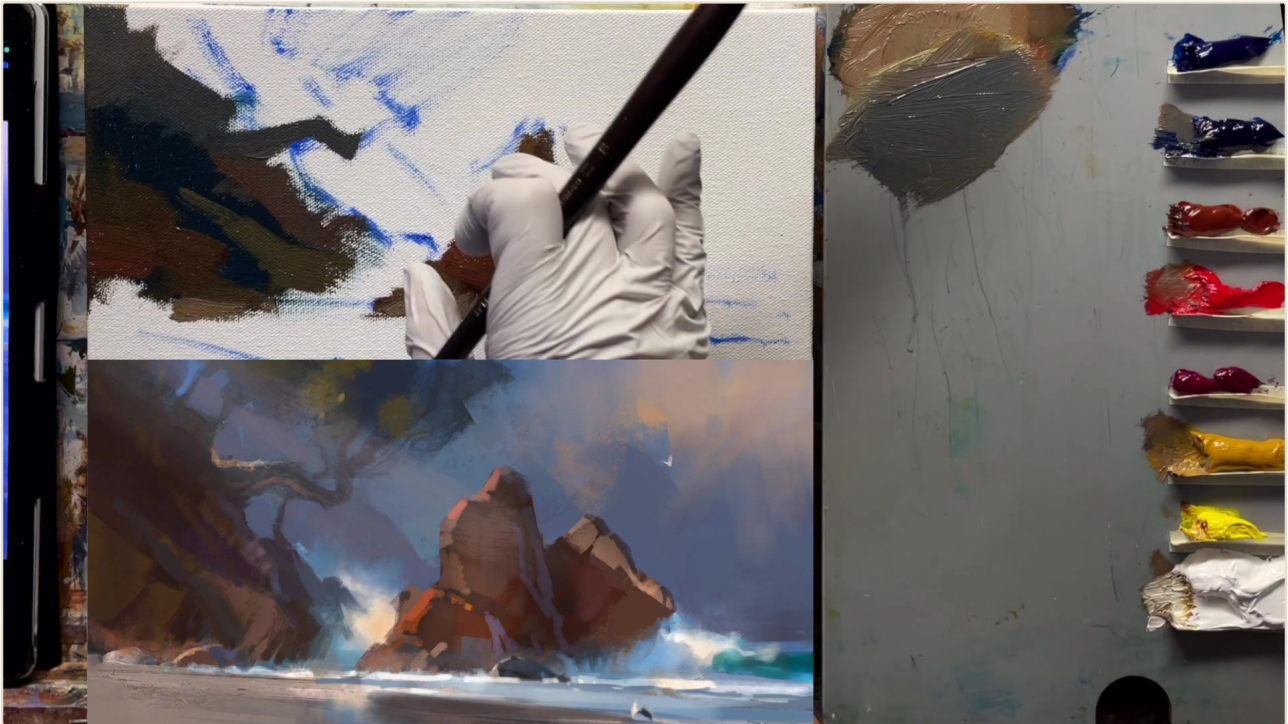
Adjust with Gray

If the exact color is unclear, mix a gray that matches the desired value. Place it down, then adjust the hue to make it cooler or warmer as needed.

PRO TIP

When unsure about a color, mix a gray that matches the value and adjust the hue to achieve the desired effect.

10 Atmospheric Background



Create Atmospheric Rocks

Mix blue, white, and a little magenta to create a soft atmospheric color. Use this mixture to make the rocks blend into the background, giving them a distant, misty appearance.

Clean and Adjust Brush

Clean your brush on a rag to prepare for a color change. This ensures that the new color will be pure and not muddled by the previous paint.

Mix and Thin Paint

Add more white and both blues to your palette, with a touch of magenta. Thin the paint with walnut oil to maintain a smooth, flowing consistency.

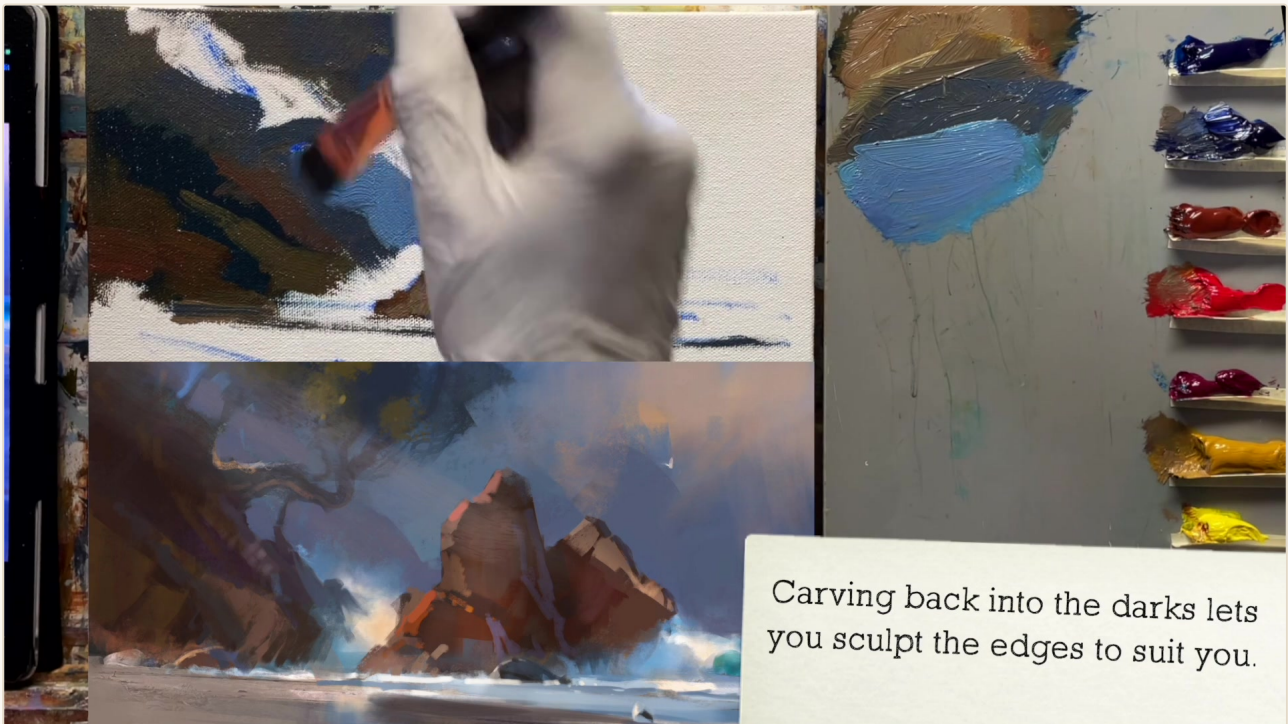
Paint Background Hill

Use the thinned paint mixture to paint the background hill. As you paint, carve out the shape of the foreground, ensuring a clear distinction between the two areas.

PRO TIP

Thin your paint with walnut oil to achieve a smooth, flowing consistency for atmospheric effects.

11 Sky and Water Blending



Prepare the Dark Base

Ensure your palette is set to a mid value, halfway between white and black. Keep your mixtures darker than this mid value, as you're working in the darks. Use thin paint for the dark areas to allow the lights to stand out later.

Warm the Upper Sky

As you move further up, add warmth by mixing orange using red, yellow, and a little white. This creates the effect of light rays affecting the sky. Clean your brush before adding more white to maintain the warmth.

Create Atmospheric Background

Transition into the background with a cool color at a mid value, matching the palette's value. Use thin paint to maintain the darks, allowing future highlights to pop.

Blend Sky and Clouds

Add more phthalo and white as you move into the sky, suggesting a cloud bank. Blend this with a light touch into the previous layer, keeping your brush clean to avoid muddy grays.

Maintain Clean Blending

Leave a small gap for the warm light on the clouds. Brush upwards to blend, keeping the brush clean to prevent picking up unwanted colors. Avoid blending light cool colors with dark warm areas to prevent muddiness.

PRO TIP

Keep your brush clean to avoid creating muddy colors when blending different temperature areas.

12 Water and Sand Reflections



Adjust the Water Colors

Add more orange to the water area to reflect the warm light. Be cautious with yellow as it can quickly turn the mixture green. Adjust by adding other colors to balance it back to a lighter, warmer tone.

Paint the Inside of the Wave

Mix phthalo and ultramarine blue with a touch of yellow ochre and white to create a dark greeny blue. Gradually add more white and a tiny bit of yellow to lighten and warm the mixture. Apply this to the inside of the wave.

Create Rock Reflections

Use a different brush and warm colors to paint the rock reflections. Remember that reflections are not the same color as the objects; lights are darker and darks are lighter. Start with the darkest dark and adjust if needed to ensure it's not too similar to the rock itself.

Tilt Reflections for Beach Slope

Paint reflections with slightly tilted strokes to indicate the beach's slope. This subtle tilt helps convey the angle of the beach to the viewer.

Add Light to Reflections

Use straight down strokes to start the reflections, then add hints of light to suggest highlights. These will be refined with additional strokes later.

Transition to Sand

With brownish colors on the brush, begin moving into the sand area. Focus on painting the water first with vertical strokes, then use horizontal strokes for the sand to define the water's edge.

PRO TIP

Reflections in water are not the same color as the object; lights are darker and darks are lighter, making colors more similar.

13 Wet Sand Reflection Technique



Mix the Reflection Color

Combine ultramarine, white, a touch of magenta, and a little yellow ochre to create a mid-gray tone. This color should match the mid-value tones found in the sky.

Apply the Reflection

Use vertical strokes to blend this color into the reflection of the rock. Aim for a soft edge by brushing lightly upwards with the tip of the brush.

Adjust and Refine

Ensure the strokes remain at a slight angle to maintain the natural look of the reflection. Don't worry if the paint extends beyond the sand area, as it will be covered later.

PRO TIP

Use light, upward brush strokes to achieve a soft reflection effect.

14 Layering Sand Colors



Mix Darker Water Colors

Add a little bit of phthalo blue and a little bit of white to your palette. This will create a darker shade, similar to what you observe when looking closer into the water at the beach.

Organize Your Brushes

Keep your brown brushes, warm brushes, cool brushes, light brushes, and dark brushes separate. This organization helps maintain clean colors and effective painting techniques.

Paint the Sand

Use a lighter value warm grey for the sand, lighter than the mid-value. Apply nice big gestural strokes to create an interesting textural effect. Ensure your brush is well-loaded with paint for these strokes.

Adjust Stroke Direction

As you move down the beach, make your strokes thinner and more horizontal. This change in stroke direction helps convey the perspective and texture of the sand.

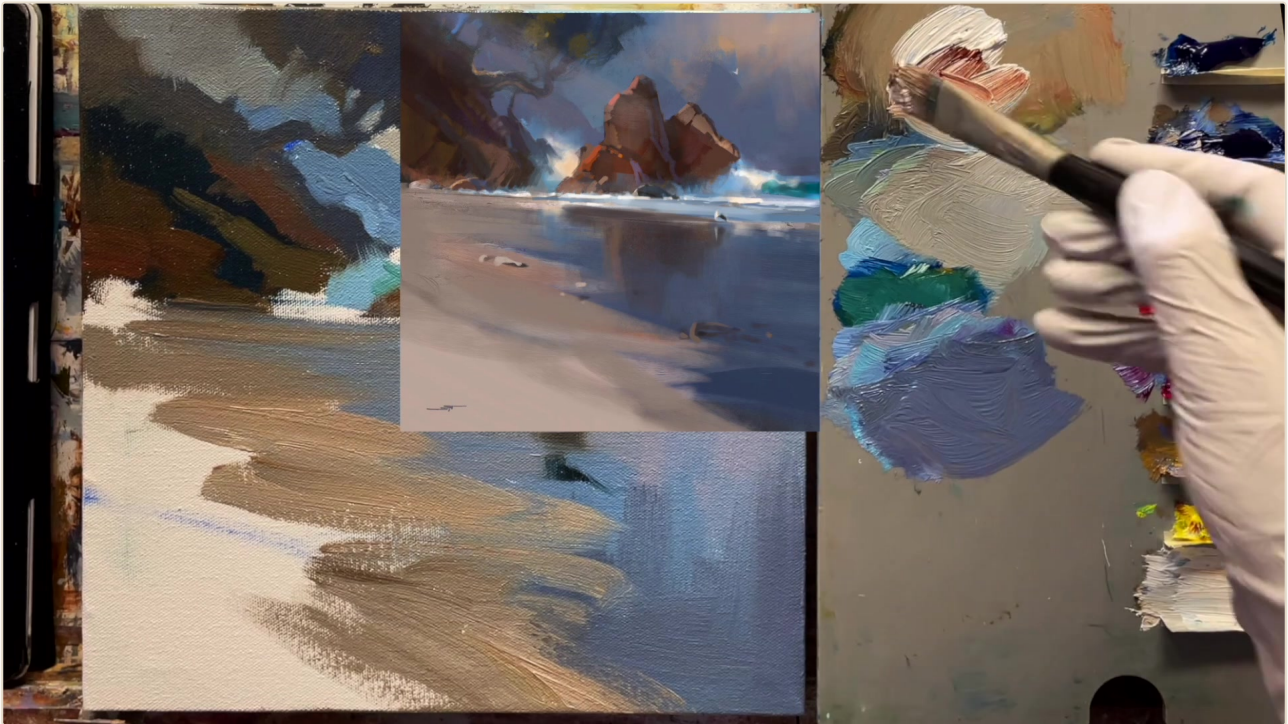
Layer Sand Colors

Begin by painting the darkest part of the sand first. Gradually layer with slightly lighter shades to build depth and dimension.

PRO TIP

Keep brushes organized by color and value to maintain clean and effective painting techniques.

15 Mid Values and Light Preparation



Adjust Mid Values

Lighten the color slightly by adding more white and a touch of blue. Ensure each change is noticeable but not too drastic to maintain variety.

Add Details with Blue

Use the blue brush to add a small stream or rivulet. Include a few details and edges to enhance the composition.

Maintain Subtle Slopes

Add more blue to emphasize the subtle downhill slope of the line. This is an important aspect to keep in mind as you progress.

PRO TIP

Remember to build up from darks to mid values before moving on to the lights.

16 Sky Highlights



Prepare the Brush

Select a new brush and wet it slightly to prepare for adding warmth to the sky.

Mix Warm Sky Color

Create a mixture with white, a little yellow, and a touch of red. Ensure the edges are very soft to maintain the gentle feel of the sky.

Apply the Warm Color

Gently apply the warm color to the sky, focusing on soft transitions. If too much blue is picked up, clean the brush and remix the color as needed.

Enhance Sky Highlights

Add a little more white to the top area of the sky to enhance the highlights and create a sense of light.

Highlight the Rocks

While the warm color is still on your brush, use it to add highlights to the rocks, connecting the warmth of the sky to the landscape.

PRO TIP

Ensure the edges of the sky highlights are very soft to maintain a gentle and cohesive look.

17 Rock Highlights



Mix a Light Warm Grey

Combine some red and bright yellow to create a lightish warm grey. Ensure the mixture is thick enough to stand out on the canvas.

Switch to a Smaller Brush

Change to a smaller brush for more finesse with your brush strokes. This will help you apply the paint more precisely.

Apply Thick Paint

Load your brush with a generous amount of the mixed paint. Drag the paint onto the canvas, ensuring it is applied thickly to make it stand out.

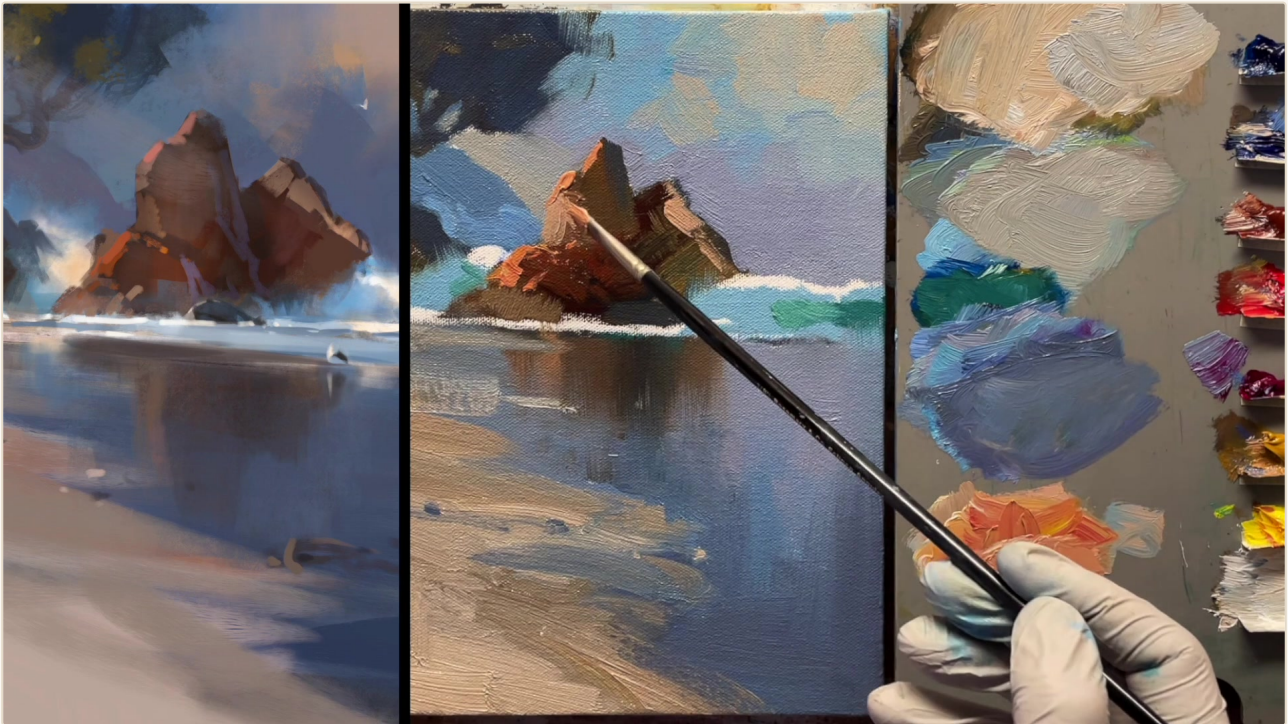
Adjust the Color

Add more white to the mixture to slightly change the color. Load the brush with this adjusted color and apply it to the canvas with a good-sized glob of paint.

PRO TIP

Use a smaller brush for more precise and controlled brush strokes.

18 Detailing Rock Textures



Clean Your Brush

Thoroughly clean your brush with walnut oil to remove any previous color. This ensures a fresh start for the next color application.

Mix a Cool Tone

Mix a cool color with a bit of magenta to create a sky reflection effect on the shadow side of the rock. This adds a nice cool accent within the dark warm areas.

Add Light Grey Highlights

Apply a light grey on the front of a small rock to indicate where the light is hitting. Consider the light source direction to create realistic highlights.

Vary Light and Dark Colors

Introduce a little brown for subtle lights lower down on the rock. Remember, not all lights and darks are the same color or value; vary them for a more dynamic painting.

PRO TIP

Always consider the direction of the light source when adding highlights to enhance realism.

19 Wave and Foam Highlights



Prepare the Brush

Use a new brush, wet it with walnut oil, and load it with white and a little ultramarine. This will help you paint the flat foam with the right consistency.

Paint the Foam

Apply the mixture to depict the flat foam, ensuring the angle is slightly sloped down to capture the natural perspective.

Add Shadows

Introduce a touch of darker color under the foam to create shadows. This adds depth and gives the foam a sense of bulk.

Highlight the Foam

Switch to another new brush and mix lots of white with a tiny touch of bright yellow. Use this to paint the light hitting the foam on top of the wave, capturing the warmth of the light.

PRO TIP

Add a touch of darker color under the foam to create shadows and enhance the sense of depth.

20 Final Touches on Canvas



Add Soft Highlights

Very lightly add highlights to your painting. Use a soft brush to gently brush out the edges, creating a soft, misty effect. Keep your brush clean to avoid picking up too much of the background color.

Create Soft Edges

Add some highlights in other areas as well, brushing them out to achieve a soft edge that blends into the background. Aim for a misty spray effect.

Define with a Palette Knife

Use a palette knife to create a clean line along the front. Ensure the paint is flat on the knife and push into the edge for a crisp line. Wipe off any excess paint and replenish as needed.

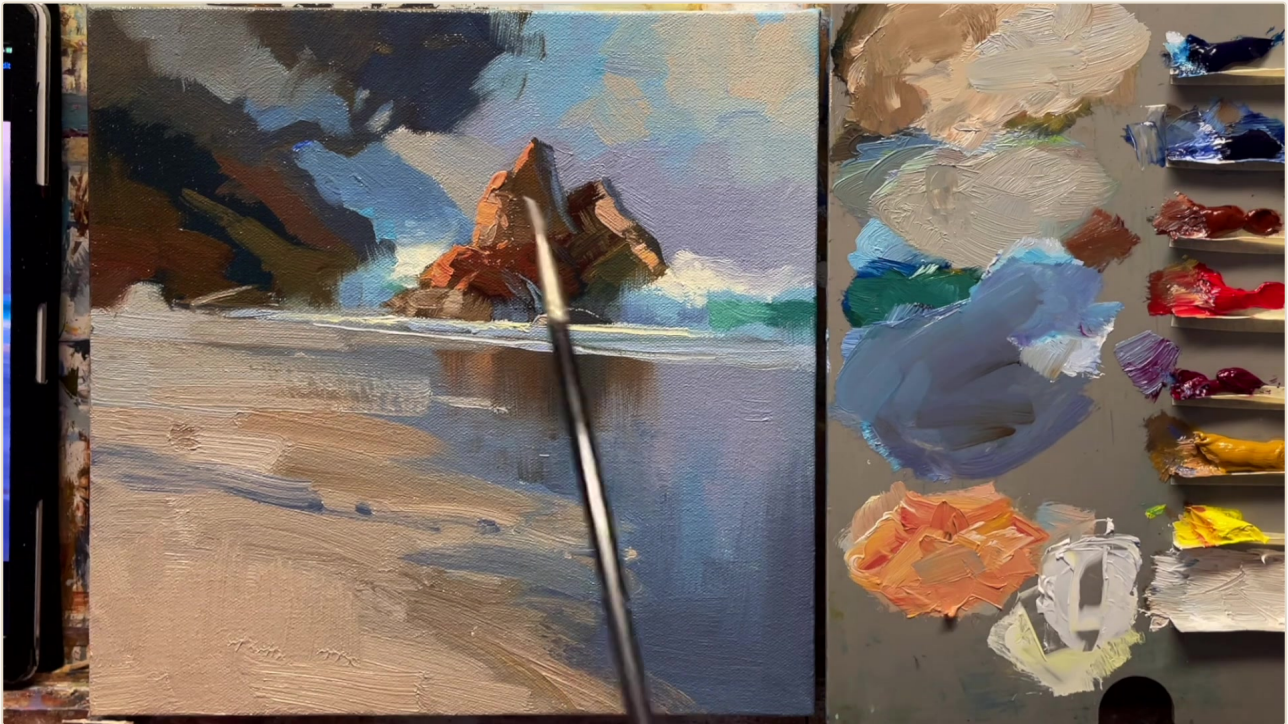
Cool Down the Painting

Cool down certain areas of the painting by adding a touch of cooler tones. This will help balance the overall warmth and add depth.

PRO TIP

Keep your brush clean to prevent unwanted color mixing and maintain the desired effect.

21 Detailing and Adjustments



Add Sky Reflections

Paint the sky reflection on the backside of the rocks to suggest water running off from the previous wave. Use a lighter color to create lines of light in the water in front of the rocks, reflecting the wave.

Enhance Wave Details

Add foam details being whipped up into the wave using a lighter color. Apply dark accents to represent occlusion shadows where light is limited.

Add Foliage Texture

Mix yellow ochre with a touch of phthalo, white, and red to create a warm foliage color. Dab with the tip of a dagger brush to create a textured foliage effect.

Adjust Colors and Shadows

Use a soft brush to adjust colors, adding yellow ochre and red for warmth. Reapply darks to restate shadows and cut lines into rock shapes for depth.

Define Tree Edges

Add blue to paint the outer edges of the Pahutakawa tree, creating soft edges to suggest wind movement through the tree.

Detail the Gull

Use blue-grey for the underside of the gull and a light blue-grey for highlights. Add a white with a touch of yellow for the body, and a speck of red for added detail.

PRO TIP

When adding dark colors to a mixture, lighten it with white unless a darker tone is desired.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by thoughtfully planning your composition in Procreate. Begin by analyzing the scene's symmetry, shadows, and light. Adjust the horizon and foreground elements to create a dynamic and balanced composition. Use digital tools to experiment with different arrangements, ensuring your scene captures movement and depth.

As you transition to the canvas, focus on establishing the darkest darks to set the foundation for your painting's value range. Gradually build up layers, adjusting hues to reflect the natural diversity of the scene. Pay attention to atmospheric perspective, using color and value to create depth and separation between elements.

In the final stages, refine your painting by enhancing the details and colors. Use clean, deliberate strokes to blend and layer colors, maintaining the vibrancy and contrast of your scene. Remember to step back and view your work from a distance to ensure overall balance and cohesion. With each layer, your painting will come to life, capturing the essence of Smugglers Bay.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Level the horizon by tilting the photo slightly to the left for a balanced composition.
- Tilt the beach slightly to add dynamism to the composition.
- View your painting from a distance or at a smaller size to identify necessary overall changes.
- Use a squarish brush for painting rocks to achieve a more natural, asymmetrical shape.
- Avoid placing the main rock dead center to create a more dynamic composition.
- Extend the darkest dark areas slightly to facilitate blending with future layers.
- When unsure about a color, mix a gray that matches the value and adjust the hue to achieve the desired effect.
- Keep your brush clean to avoid creating muddy colors when blending different temperature 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.

Smugglers Bay by JOSE FELIX



Smugglers Bay by JOSE FELIX

Some really nice work in here Jose. Particularly nice colours with a warm feel to the whole thing. The main rock and the waves look great. The section that the tree grows upon could be a little darker. Beautiful sky with billowing cloud. Great stuff!

Smugglers Bay by Nancy Newton



Smugglers Bay by Nancy Newton

Hi Nancy, nice work. Good colour, drawing and brushwork. Tree looks a little odd stuck onto a rock of lighter value - the rock there should be the same value as the trunk. Also be mindful of those little white spots of canvas showing through. Looks like it might be the result of a canvas that's a little too absorbent. A coat of gesso should fix that for the next painting, or simply be more aware of it and use more paint.

Scott Dyer 12" x 12" Done in Oil.



Scott Dyer 12" x 12" Done in Oil.

Hi Scott, strong painting! For some reason this strongly reminds me of Goya's "The Third of May 1808". I guess it's a combination of your brushwork, the spotlight effect and the colours and the powerful angles. Very nice. I'd just like to see a few dark accents in the rocks on the left and a few bits of flotsam on the beach for more interest.

February workshop- Smugglers Bay 10"x 10" Acrylic on canvas by Karen Woodhouse (South Australia)



February workshop- Smugglers Bay 10"x 10" Acrylic on canvas by Karen Woodhouse (South Australia)

Really nicely done, Karen. Love the way you've rounded some of the rocks going from light to dark, contrasted with other edges that you've made sharp. The waves and the beach look great too. Just haven't quite achieved the hazy light effect from the top left, simply because you didn't add enough white and orange into those mixtures there so they turned out a little too dark to convey light. You could glaze that in now that it's dry if you wanted to. Check out my video on glazing with acrylics: <https://mypaintingclub.com/blog/post/109-Glazing-with-Acrylics>