



The Red Boat

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/227-The-Red-Boat>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we'll embark on an exciting journey of transformation as I guide you through the process of reimagining an older painting into something fresh and captivating. We'll begin by exploring the initial design on my iPad, where I'll share my thought process for enhancing the composition to make it more intriguing. This lesson is a wonderful opportunity to loosen up your painting style, embracing a colorful and impressionistic approach with large brushes and generous amounts of paint. We'll draw inspiration from the works of Joaquín Sorolla, a master of capturing the essence of boats at the seaside, to enrich our understanding of handling similar subjects. As we move from digital design to canvas, you'll learn to infuse your painting with variety and expressiveness, making it not only visually appealing but also deeply engaging. Whether you're working with oils or acrylics, this lesson promises to be a rewarding exploration of light, color, and creativity. Let's dive in and discover the joy of painting this beautiful scene together.



"The Red Boat" Oil on Canvas 15x15"



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
- Ultramarine Blue
- Cadmium Red
- Yellow Ochre
- 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 Lesson Goals



Explore Expressive Painting

Take the design to the canvas and learn how to produce the painting in a beautiful, painterly, expressive manner.

Study Joachim Saroya

Examine the work of Joachim Saroya, a Spanish painter known for his depiction of boats at the seaside, to gain insights into handling similar subjects.

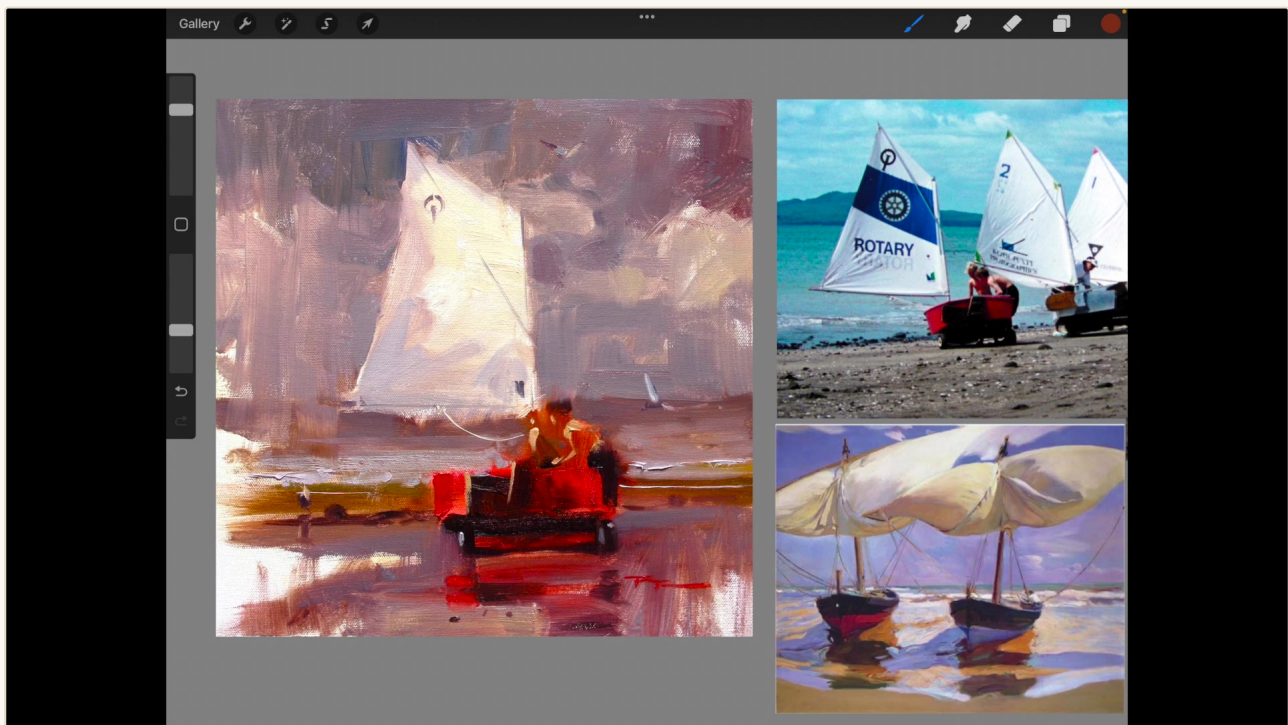
Introduce Variety

Focus on introducing more variety into your work to make your painting more interesting and engaging.

PRO TIP

Variety is the spice of your painting; it keeps viewers engaged and interested.

2 Inspiration from Sorolla



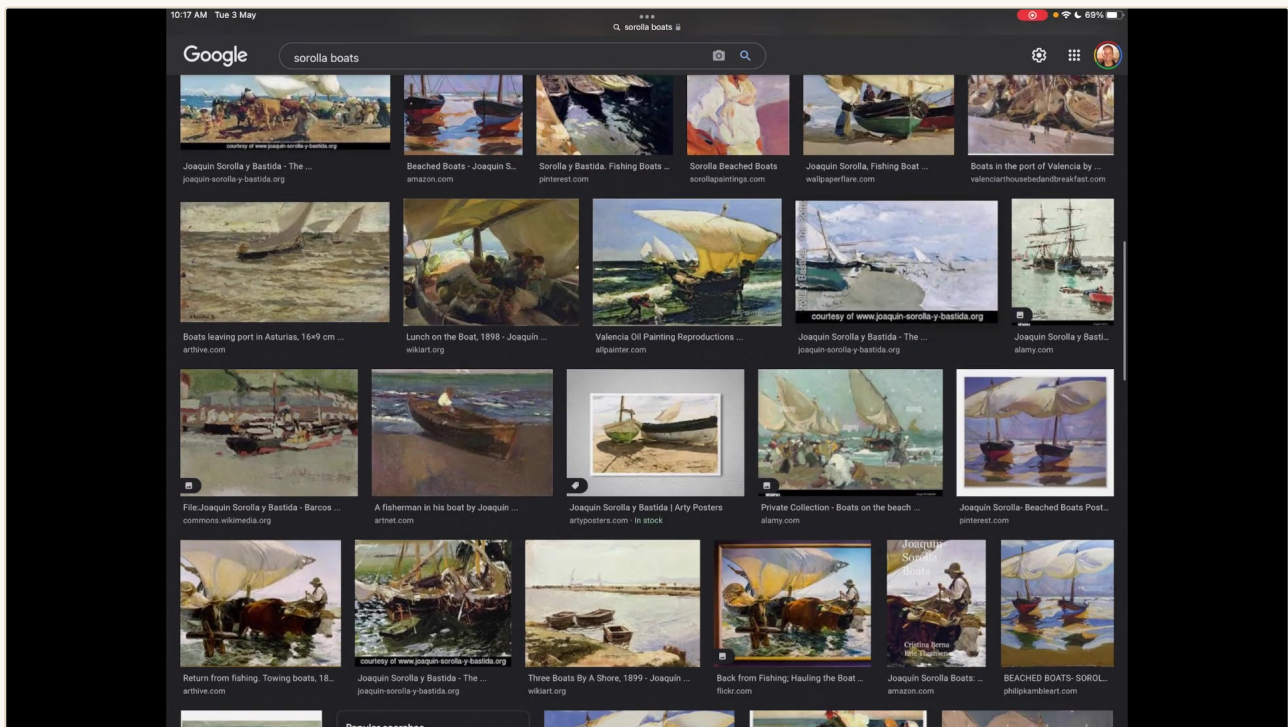
Explore Sorolla's Work

Search for images of Sorolla's boat paintings online. Observe how he commonly crops the sails out of the paintings. Notice how this technique creates a snapshot effect, capturing a moment in life rather than a fully composed scene.

PRO TIP

Consider cropping elements like sails to create a dynamic, snapshot-like composition.

3 Analyzing Sorolla's Paintings



Study Sorolla's Paintings

Examine Sorolla's paintings closely, focusing on the fluidity and movement in his brushstrokes. Notice the beautiful shapes of the sails and how they contribute to the overall sense of motion in the water.

Observe Contrast and Light

Pay attention to how Sorolla uses contrast by setting brightly lit sails against dark backgrounds. This creates a dynamic image. Notice how the sails cast shadows on themselves, leaving light triangles that add interest.

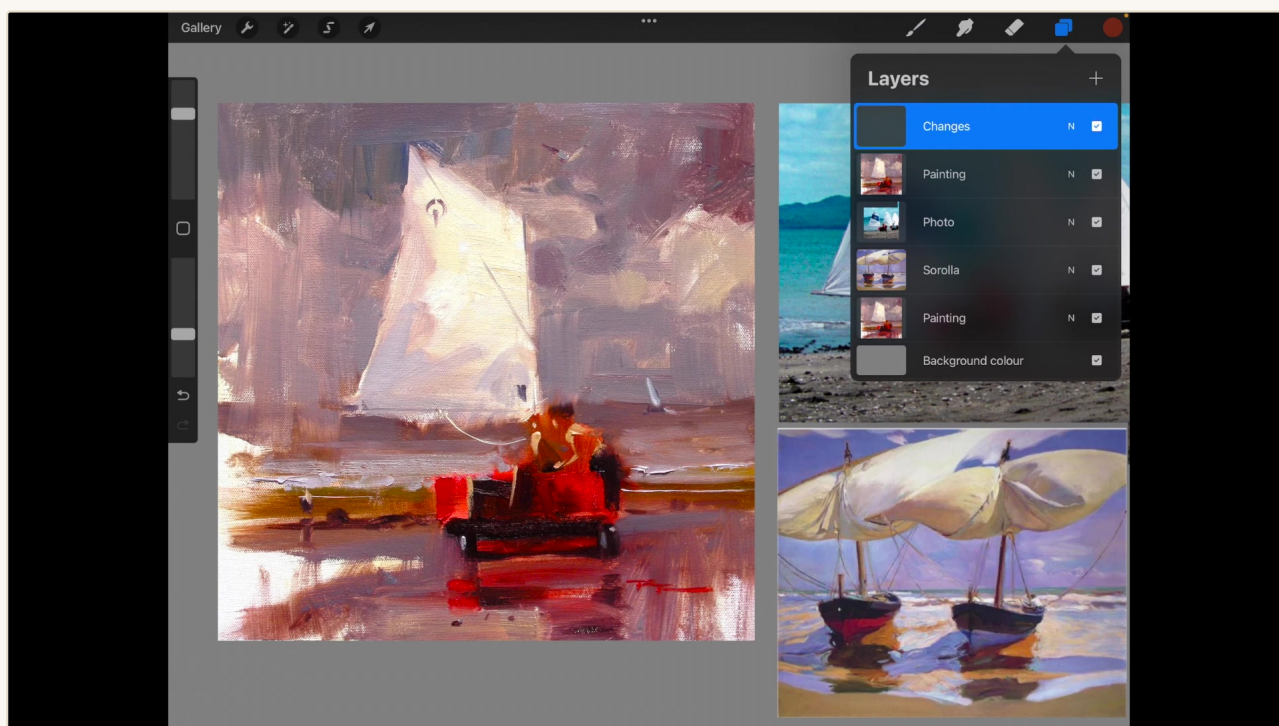
Analyze Color Reflections

Observe how the sails reflect colors from their surroundings. When the sail turns towards the sky, it reflects more blue, adding depth and realism to the painting.

PRO TIP

Focus on the contrast between light and dark to create dynamic compositions.

4 Digital Design Adjustments



Adjust the Boat Position

Duplicate the boat and move it slightly to the side. This adjustment allows room for additional elements like another sail.

Add a New Sail

Create a new sail with a slightly different shape, perhaps leaning more. Use colors from the painting to quickly insert it, adding a slice of light for interest.

Modify the Beach Angle

Change the angle of the beach to introduce more diagonals. This enhances the sense of motion in the painting, complementing the diagonals from the sails and rigging.

Enhance the Background

Consider adding more vibrant colors to the background, such as a touch of purple. This helps draw attention to the sails while maintaining a plain backdrop.

Reflect Light and Shadows

Add a drop shadow to indicate light direction and enhance the sensation of warm light. Ensure reflections on wet sand are darker and adjust the horizon line if needed.

Highlight Foam and Waves

Introduce cooler bits of foam and small waves to set off dark shapes against the light background. Keep foam in shadow to let the sails stand out.

Refine the Sail Reflection

Reflect the sail slightly in the sand due to its strong light source. Add a glowing effect in the sky from the sail to enhance the overall warmth.

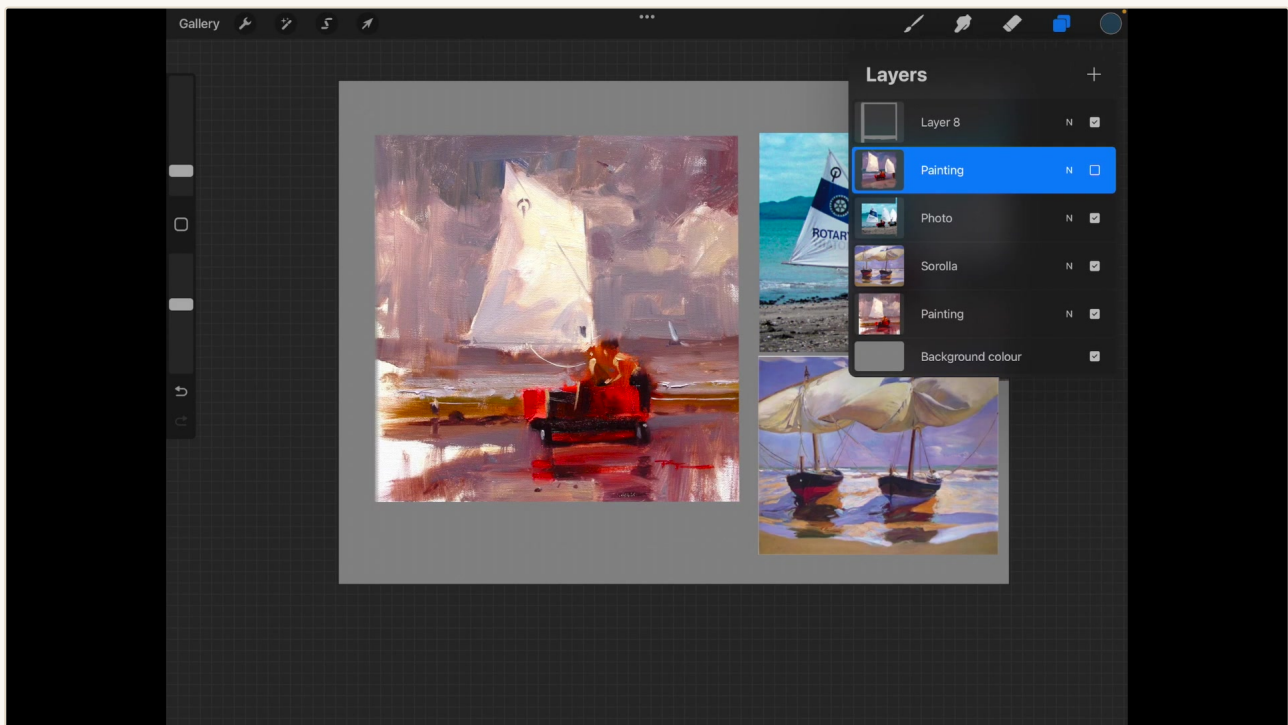
Adjust the Sail Size and Position

Duplicate and tilt the sail for more angle and interest. Ensure the sail casts a drop shadow and aligns with the boat's front.

PRO TIP

Use diagonals in the composition to enhance the sense of motion and balance the painting's elements.

5 Exploring Design Variations



Add a Sailboat

Consider adding a small sailboat in the shadow of the ocean. Include some spray and little waves crashing into it for dynamic movement. Ensure the sailboat is in the soft shade to maintain harmony with the ocean's tone.

Experiment with Clouds

Try making the clouds more evocative of movement. Let the clouds blend with the light of the sail to create a large light shape. This can add interest and depth to your composition.

Adjust the Sail's Light

Change the light on the edge of the sail slightly to create an interesting cropping shape. This adjustment can help mimic the style of Sorolla, adding complexity to your painting.

Enhance the Sky with Green

Introduce a dark, dull green to the sky to contrast with the red boat. This will make the red pop and soften the horizon, creating a balanced composition.

Add Intense Blue

Consider adding more intense blue to the sky for a punchy effect. This can suggest a sunny day while maintaining a dark sky, adding drama to your scene.

Incorporate Beach Details

Add tracks in the sand to lead the eye towards the boat. Ensure they are lighter on the right-hand sides where indented. Include footsteps, shells, and possibly a longer shadow to connect dark areas.

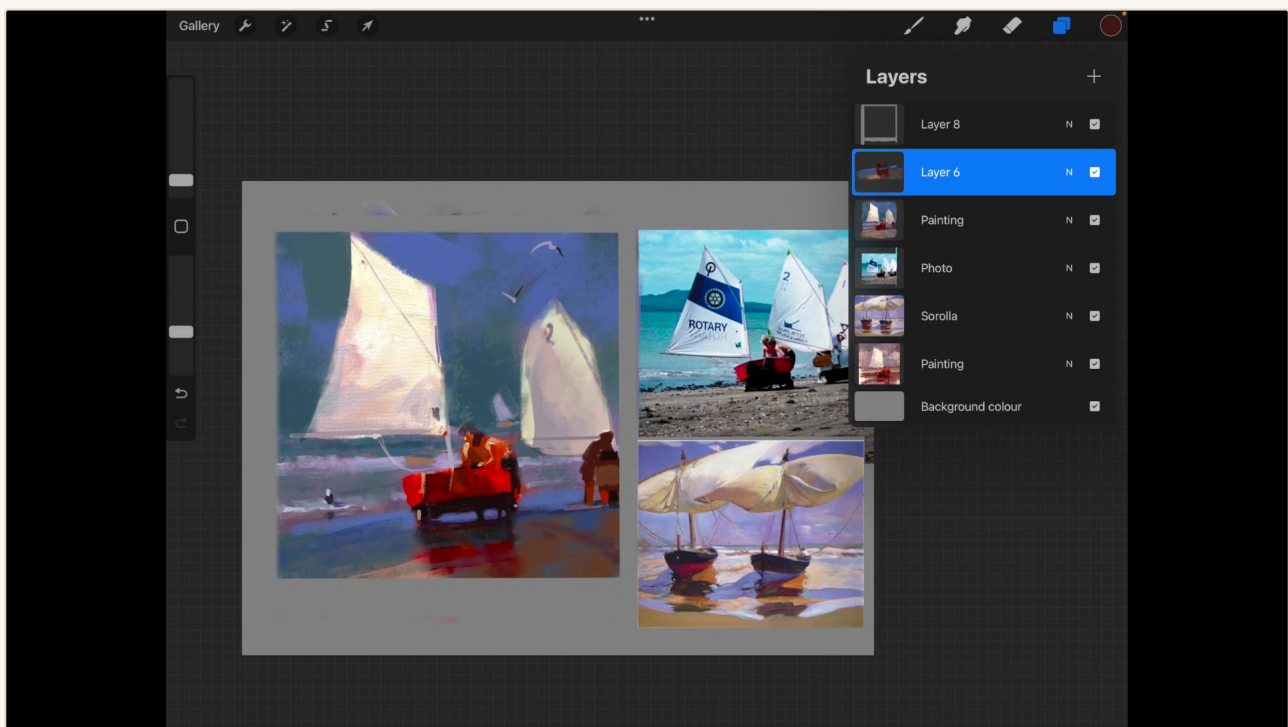
Reflect the Scene

Create reflections of the boat and sail on the wet sand. Use a slightly darker red for the boat's reflection and incorporate some blue and brown as it gets closer to the viewer.

PRO TIP

Add tracks in the sand to guide the viewer's eye towards the focal point, enhancing the composition's flow.

6 Finalizing Digital Design



Enhance the Sand Reflection

Add a touch of red to the sand to reflect the boat's color. This creates a more dynamic and visually interesting composition. Compare the effect by toggling between before and after to see the difference.

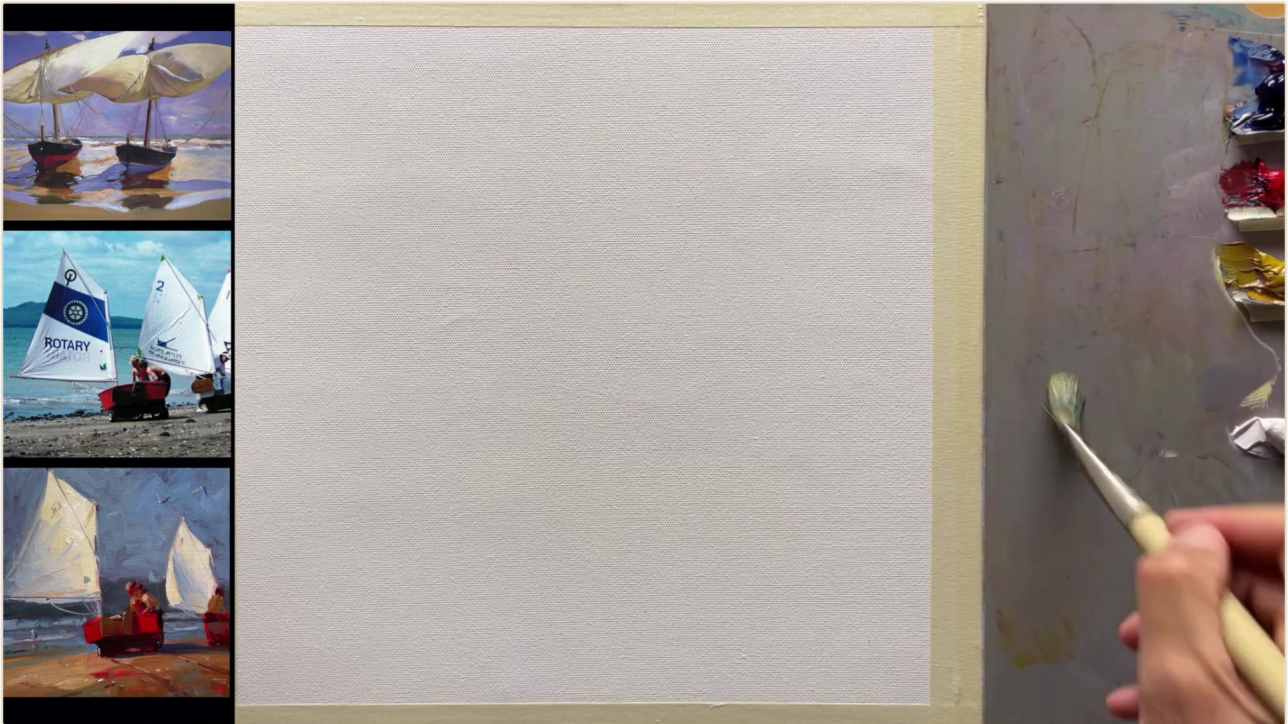
Adjust Background Saturation

Experiment with reducing the saturation of the background to make it greyer. This can create a different mood, such as a more subdued or atmospheric scene. Evaluate the changes and decide if the original or adjusted version suits your vision better.

PRO TIP

Toggle between before and after views to evaluate the impact of your adjustments on the overall composition.

7 Initial Color Wash



Prepare the Base Color

Use a big brush and dip it in Gamsol. Apply a base of warm yellow ochre across the canvas. This will help create color harmony throughout the painting and support fluid, loose brushwork.

Adjust Thickness

If the paint is applied too thickly and starts to run, gently wipe it off with a cloth. Ensure the surface is just damp, not overly wet, to maintain control over the paint.

PRO TIP

Use Gamsol sparingly to keep the paint layer damp, not wet, for better control.

8 Basic Composition Layout



Create a Loose Composition

Dip your brush in walnut oil to achieve a loose, painterly effect. Apply your punchiest color slightly off to the right from the middle of your canvas, representing the figures and the boat. Add a little of this color in other areas to maintain a cohesive look.

Position the Mast

Using the same brush, place the mast slightly off-center and off-vertical to create visual interest. Ensure it goes up to a point and extends downwards. Adjust the angle slightly to avoid having it parallel to other elements, creating a dynamic composition.

PRO TIP

Start with a loose composition to maintain a painterly effect throughout your painting.

9 Blocking in Main Shapes



Mix the Darkest Color

Add blue to your existing color mix to create the darkest shade possible with your limited palette. This limited palette simplifies color mixing and enhances color harmony in your painting.

Block in Main Shapes

Carefully draw the main shapes, paying attention to angles and placements. Note the slight differences in angles and the positioning of elements like the wheels and the boat's back. The beach's slope affects these angles.

Add Details with Big Brushes

Use big brushes to paint in a painterly style, allowing viewers to interpret details like hairstyles. This approach engages the viewer's imagination and adds interest to the painting.

Align Boat and Tire Levels

Ensure the bottom of the boat aligns with the bottom of the tires. Add the shadow underneath, connecting the elements for cohesion.

Mark the Boat's Center and Add Rudder

Use a little more red to mark the center of the boat's back. Add the rudder with two or three strokes, incorporating yellow ochre for variation.

PRO TIP

Use a limited palette to simplify color mixing and enhance color harmony in your painting.

10 Background and Ocean



Prepare the Background

Mix a grey-purple color using your palette. Apply it thinly across the background to create a contrast with the vibrant foreground. Use walnut oil to thin the paint for a smooth application, leaving intentional gaps for texture.

Add a Second Layer

Mix a lighter blue-green-grey and apply it over the purple layer. Allow some of the first layer to show through for interesting painterly effects. Maintain a loose style, with a mix of sharp and soft edges for visual interest.

Paint the Ocean

Mix a darker grey-green for the ocean area. Add yellow, blue, and a touch of red to grey it down. Use big strokes to apply the paint, and adjust the horizon line higher to avoid intersecting with the bottom of the boom. Soften the horizon line slightly.

PRO TIP

Use walnut oil to thin your paint for smoother application and to achieve a loose, painterly effect.

11 Painting the Sails



Mix the Base Color for the Sails

Start with white and add small amounts of color to create a very light, pastel, slightly gray orange. This approach prevents ending up with more paint than needed. Aim for a mid-value color that transitions from a cool dark to a slightly orange mid-value.

Apply the Mid-Value Color

Brush the mid-value color onto the sails, ensuring a smooth transition from the cooler dark areas. Allow the colors to blend naturally, creating a gradient effect.

Add Highlights

Mix a lot of white with a little yellow ochre and oil for a thicker consistency. Apply this lighter, yellower warm color to the areas that catch more light, using under-mixed paint for natural streaky effects.

Define the Lightest Spot

Use a palette knife to apply the lightest color to the brightest spot on the sail. This technique enhances the texture and highlights the sail's shape.

Paint the Shadow Areas

Mix white with more blue than red to create a shadow color. Apply it to the sail's stress lines and shadow areas, adding depth and dimension.

PRO TIP

Use under-mixed paint to achieve natural streaky effects that add texture and interest.

12 Adding Variety and Texture



Create Soft and Sharp Edges

Identify areas with sharp edges and soften them to create movement. Use subtle curves to echo one another, enhancing the painterly quality of the piece.

Mix and Apply Beach Colors

Use yellow ochre as the base color for the beach, adding red to push it towards orange. Apply this color broadly, focusing on capturing the big shapes by squinting at your subject to simplify it.

Add Depth with Dark and Light Values

Introduce blue to the orange mix to create a brown, thinning it with walnut oil. Apply this color from dark to light towards the light source, allowing some red to show through for texture.

Enhance with Variety

Incorporate a range of edges, colors, and textures. Use both soft and sharp edges, cool and warm colors, and vary paint thickness. Experiment with different brushstroke sizes to add interest and movement.

PRO TIP

Squint at your subject to simplify it into big shapes, making it easier to paint effectively.

13 Sky and Clouds



Mix the Sky Color

Switch to a clean brush and mix a slightly greenish dull blue-grey. Start with blue and white, then add a touch of yellow ochre to push it towards green. Ensure the mixture is slightly lighter than the previous layer, aiming for a mid-grey tone.

Apply the Sky Color

Paint over the existing layer with the new sky color, keeping your brushwork loose and painterly. Avoid covering the entire previous layer to maintain depth and interest.

Vary the Sky Hue

As you move across the sky, add more blue to the mix for variety. This change in hue, rather than value, adds interest and depth to the sky.

Create Soft and Sharp Edges

When painting the edges, alternate between sharp and soft edges. This contrast helps the sharp edges and details stand out against the softer background.

Enhance Texture with a Palette Knife

Optionally, use a palette knife to add texture, suggesting clouds and adding dimension to the sky.

PRO TIP

Maintain a soft edge at the horizon to make the foreground elements stand out more prominently.

14 Details and Reflections



Enhance Shadow Depth

Add a little white to your existing color to give more depth to the shadows. This will create a more dynamic and interesting contrast.

Add Warm Light to the Sail

Mix white, yellow ochre, and a touch of orange. Apply this mixture to the folds and ripples of the sail to represent warm light bouncing off the beach.

Create Painterly Waves

Use big brushes to paint directional lines for waves, keeping the strokes varied and painterly. Ensure the lines are angled, not level, to suggest movement and depth.

Highlight Foam and Ripples

Lightly add a lighter color to suggest foam on the water's surface. Add a ripple at the front edge for added realism.

Define Boat and Wheel

Darken the area beneath the boat to define its bottom and the side of the wheel. This contrast is crucial for clarity.

Add Wet Sand Reflection

Introduce a slightly darker orange to the sand area to suggest wetness and reflect the sky's color. This adds interest and ties the scene together.

Paint Tracks and Footsteps

Use a darker, duller orange to paint slightly curved tracks and footsteps beside the boat. These details add realism and narrative to the scene.

PRO TIP

Use varied brushwork to keep the painting interesting and dynamic, avoiding solid stripes.

15 Adding Figures and Seagulls



Prepare the Brush and Colors

Use a small dagger brush and clean it thoroughly. Mix mainly white with a little yellow ochre and a touch of red to create a mid-value color. This will be used for the figures.

Paint the Figures

Consider the direction of the light and apply the paint with as few brushstrokes as possible. Focus on the planes of the body that are tilted towards the sun, as these will catch the light. Use impasto technique without any painting medium for a textured effect.

Add Highlights

Lighten the mix slightly to add highlights. Ensure variety by having one or two strong highlights and others less bright to avoid uniformity. This adds depth and interest to the painting.

Block in Additional Details

Use some brown to block in areas like the backboard. Clean the brush thoroughly between colors using walnut oil and a rag to maintain color purity.

Add Shadows and Avoid Over-detailing

Add shadows to the boat, keeping the figures simple without too much detail. Focus on correct shapes and placements rather than intricate features like noses and eyes.

Paint the Seagull

Add a seagull in shadow, using a color similar to the foam since it's not in direct light. Avoid using bright white to maintain the shadow effect.

PRO TIP

Use impasto technique without any painting medium for textured highlights.

16 Final Touches



Add Reflections and Seagulls

Lighten the reflection slightly to create a subtle effect. Add more seagulls in the sky using a similar color to the reflections. These small details enhance the scene's realism.

Paint Shells on the Beach

Use a similar color to the reflections for painting small shells on the beach. Add lighter and warmer tones to some shells to show them catching the light.

Incorporate a Distant Boat

Include a boat already sailing in the distance. Refer to your sketch to ensure its placement is accurate.

Add Sky Reflection on the Tire

Check the reference photo to locate the tire. Add a sky reflection using a slightly greyed red. Use a broken line for a more natural look.

Lighten the Light Spot

Avoid cutting across the light spot with dark colors. Lighten the area with white and yellow ochre to maintain the illusion of brightness.

Use a Maulstick for Precision

Use a maulstick to steady your hand for precise details. This tool helps maintain control, especially in light areas.

Paint Ropes with a Light Touch

Load the brush with a small amount of paint on the tip. Use a very light touch to paint the ropes, practicing on your palette first to ensure a natural curve.

Add Final Details

Include small doohickeys and other tiny details to enhance realism. These finishing touches hold the painting together, so take your time with them.

PRO TIP

Practice painting ropes on your palette before applying them to the canvas to ensure a natural curve.

17 Signing and Finishing



Add Painterly Details

For the small sign, use a calligraphic approach rather than drawing it tightly. Keep it loose and painterly to maintain the overall feel of the painting.

Enhance Light Effects

Add a subtle light effect where the light might catch the edge of the dip created by the wheel. Be careful not to make it too strong; just a hint of light is enough.

Refine Edges and Details

Check your edges to ensure a good balance of crisp and soft lines. Adjust any areas that need more definition or softness, such as the seagull or the boy's legs.

Final Touches

Look for any additional small details or highlights that could enhance the painting. Once satisfied, prepare to sign your work.

PRO TIP

Use a calligraphic approach for small details to keep the painting loose and painterly.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by embracing the expressive and painterly style inspired by the works of Joachim Sorolla. Begin by examining his dynamic compositions and the way he captures the essence of boats at sea. As you translate these elements onto your canvas, focus on introducing variety and interest to keep your viewers engaged. Remember, the key to a captivating painting lies in its ability to tell a story through movement and contrast.

As you progress, consider the impact of composition adjustments and color harmony. Use digital tools to experiment with design variations, such as adjusting the angle of the beach or adding vibrant colors to the background. These changes can enhance the sense of motion and balance within your painting. Pay attention to the interplay of light and shadow, and how they contribute to the overall mood and depth of your work.

In the final stages, focus on the details that bring your painting to life. Use a limited palette to simplify color mixing and maintain harmony. Incorporate textures and varied brushwork to add interest and realism. Whether you're painting sails, reflections, or figures, aim for a balance between sharp and soft edges to create a dynamic and engaging composition. Let your creativity flow, and enjoy the process of bringing your vision to the canvas.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Introduce variety to keep your painting engaging.
- Consider cropping elements for a dynamic composition.
- Focus on the contrast between light and dark.
- Use diagonals to enhance motion and balance.
- Add tracks in the sand to guide the viewer's eye.
- Toggle between before and after views to evaluate adjustments.
- Use a limited palette for color harmony.
- Squint at your subject to simplify it into big shapes.



"The Red Boat" Oil on Canvas 15x15"

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.

""Red Boat" oil on panel 25x22" by **JOSE FELIX**



"Red Boat" oil on panel 25x22

Wow, you've achieved some great expressive brushwork here Jose, palette knife included. The beach is a little more orange than I'd expect, taking a little of the colour glory away from the boats, but it's certainly a punchy look against all that grey background. The light on the torso of the closest figure is not reading quite right yet - always think about the direction of the light and how that will play out across a form. Also the angles of the boat are a little off. Keep a close eye on the drawing in the centre of attention, even in expressive paintings like this one. Good job.

“May workshop- 10” x 10” Acrylic on canvas by Karen Woodhouse (South Australia)” by Karen Woodhouse



May workshop- 10” x 10” Acrylic on canvas by Karen Woodhouse (South Australia)

Interesting take on this painting Karen. You've got great strong colour in here and decent drawing. The goal I'd encouraged was looseness and I don't know if you were trying for that particularly, but you've achieved it to a certain degree in some areas like the brushwork in the sand and some scumbling in the sky, but in most areas you've kept it pretty tight. If you are trying for a looser feel you'll find more success in more consciously losing some of those sharp edges to the background. REALLY losing them. It is more difficult with acrylics because of the fast drying time. The solution is to use loads more paint, paint faster, and keep spraying your palette and painting lightly with water every 5 minutes. A stay-wet acrylic palette helps as does re-wettable acrylics and adding a little retarder medium to your paint. (You can also move to a cold damp country.)

On the other hand, if you're not trying for a looser feel, keep up the good work!

“The red boat, oil, canvas, 40 cm x 40 cm” by Elena Sokolova



The red boat, oil, canvas, 40 cm x 40 cm

Nice painterly work Elena. Love the colour variety you've got in there! It's really vibrating with colour harmonies. I don't feel you've nailed the drawing on this quite as well as some of your recent work, which is understandable since the goal of this painting was looseness, but I caution you to spend a little more time getting the key drawing elements correct even in a very loose painting. I've seen you do it well before. The angles of the boat, the details in the figures and the tracks in the sand could all do with a few minutes extra care. Looks like you had fun with this and I know it'll look fantastic on the wall at this larger size.

“The Red Boat by Nancy Murray” by Nancy Murray



The Red Boat by Nancy Murray

Enjoyed this immensely, definitely loosened me up.

Great work Nancy! Beautiful clean colour and bold brushwork. I particularly like the brushwork in the beach and big sail. The sky and small sail are a little smoother and controlled. Tallest figure could do with a little work - that little light stroke on his head has flattened it too much. The light line under the other figure's arm isn't right either - just confusing. I'd darken that off. Also check the height of the right wheel as it should match the other one. Those are tiny details. As a whole this works beautifully.