



Garrapata

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/91-Garrapata>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, I invite you to explore the captivating beauty of Garrapata, a stunning stretch of the Californian coastline near Point Lobos. Each section of this coastline offers its own unique charm, making it a challenging yet rewarding subject to capture on canvas. In this lesson, we focus on the art of premixing greys, a technique that can significantly speed up your painting process. As landscape painters, we often find that the colors we observe are subtly greyed, and mastering this can transform your work. By premixing a set of greys before you begin, you'll find that the often time-consuming task of color mixing becomes much more efficient. This approach not only saves time but also allows you to focus more on the creative aspects of painting. Follow along with my step-by-step guide or use the resource photo to infuse your own style into the scene. Embrace the challenge and joy of painting this remarkable landscape, and discover how these techniques can enhance your artistic journey.



"Garrapata" 12x12" 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.

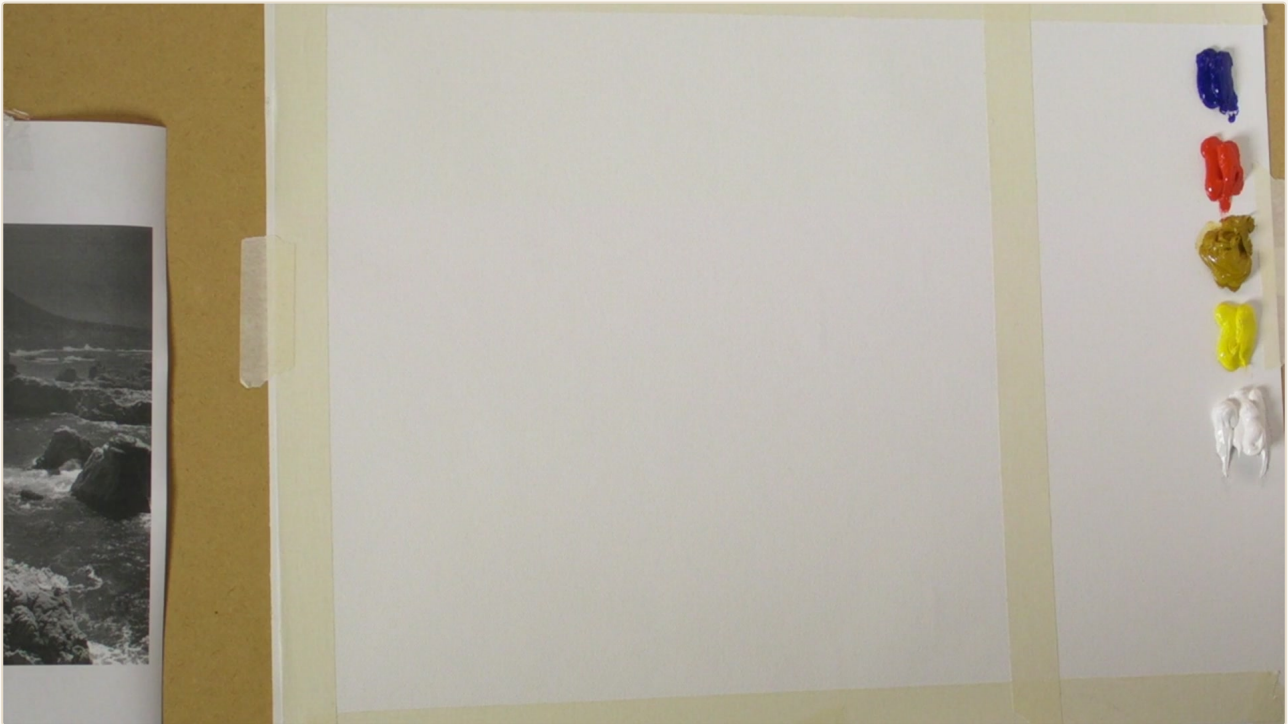
Materials

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
- 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 Mixing warm and cool grays



Mix a Dark Cool Gray

Start with a blob of blue, then add some red and yellow ochre, and a little bit of white. Mix these colors together to create a very dark neutral gray that leans slightly towards blue.

Create a Mid-Gray

Take a small portion of the dark cool gray and add white to it. Aim to mix a mid-gray that is halfway between black and white.

Mix a Light Gray

Take a very small piece of the mid-gray and add a lot of white. Create a very light value, just one or two steps away from white.

Mix a Dark Warm Gray

Mix a dark warm gray similar to the first value, but adjust it to lean towards red on the color wheel.

Create Warm Gray Values

Add white to the dark warm gray to achieve the same range of values as before, ensuring you have distinct differences between each value.

PRO TIP

Experiment with the warmth and coolness of your grays by adjusting the amount of red or blue in your mix.

2 Experimentation encouragement



Experiment with Techniques

Try something different from your usual painting techniques and observe the results. This experimentation can lead to unexpected and exciting outcomes in your artwork.

PRO TIP

Embrace experimentation to discover new artistic possibilities.

3 Sketching major shapes



Prepare Your Sketching Medium

Use a very thin mixture with a lot of walnut oil or water if you're using water mixable oils. This will help you sketch lightly and make adjustments easily.

Sketch Major Shapes

Focus on sketching the major shapes from your reference image. Keep the lines light and fluid to capture the overall composition.

Mark Shadow Areas

Lightly mark in all the shadow areas to establish the contrast and depth in your painting. This will guide your painting process later.

PRO TIP

Use a thin mixture to sketch lightly, allowing for easy adjustments.

4 Blocking in the cliff and rocks



Start with the Cliff

Grab some warm mid-value color and add warmer tones to it. Use grays to adjust if the color becomes too vibrant, ensuring subtle color variation in the shadows.

Add Light Warm Gray

Introduce a little light warm gray and mix in some yellow ochre. Maintain the same value, modulating the color or hue without changing the darkness.

Consider Light and Shadow

On the left side, add warm light reflecting from the beach. On the right, use darker and cooler tones as the beach light diminishes.

Block in the Rocks

Apply similar colors to the rocks in the bay, focusing on the base color. This is the first coat, laying the foundation for detailed color work later.

PRO TIP

Use grays to adjust overly vibrant colors, maintaining subtle variations in shadow areas.

5 Foreground and depth creation



Block in Major Color Areas

Cover the entire canvas, blocking in all the major color areas broadly. Focus on the foreground, adding more warmth than in other areas to create depth.

Mix Dark Green for Foreground

Combine the darkest cool grey with a tiny bit of bright yellow to create a dark green. This will serve as the base for the light green that will be added later.

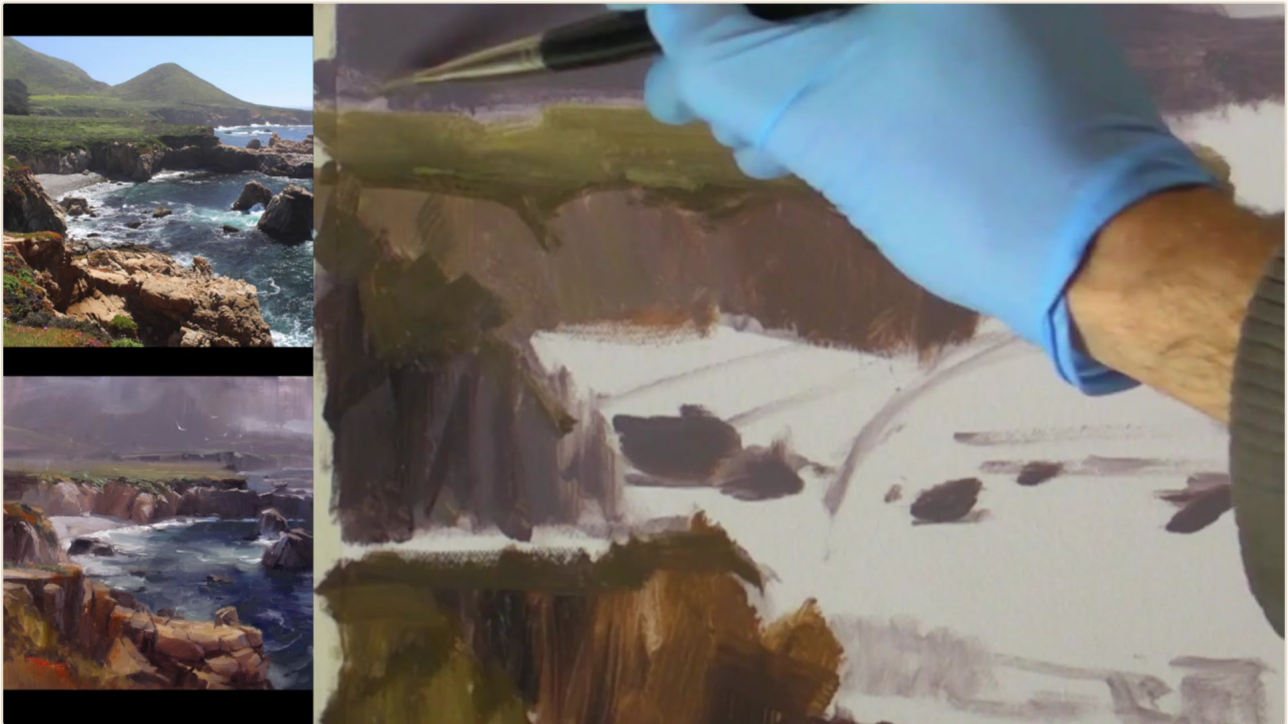
Vary Edge Sharpness

Use the light cool grey mixed with yellow to make a light green. Apply this while varying the edges, creating some soft and some sharp edges to add interest.

PRO TIP

Use more warmth in the foreground to enhance depth and bring it closer.

6 Water and color harmony



Add Dark Details to the Cliff Face

Use a mid warm grey to add dark details to the cliff face. Incorporate a darker tone by mixing blue and cool dark grey to create depth and shadow.

Create Water Shadows

Mix blue and cool dark grey to form a really dark color for the water under the rock. This represents the reflection or shadow of the rock.

Thin and Layer the Water

Thin the dark water color with walnut oil and apply a thin layer. Lighten it slightly and add a touch of green to work over the top, paving the way for the rest of the water.

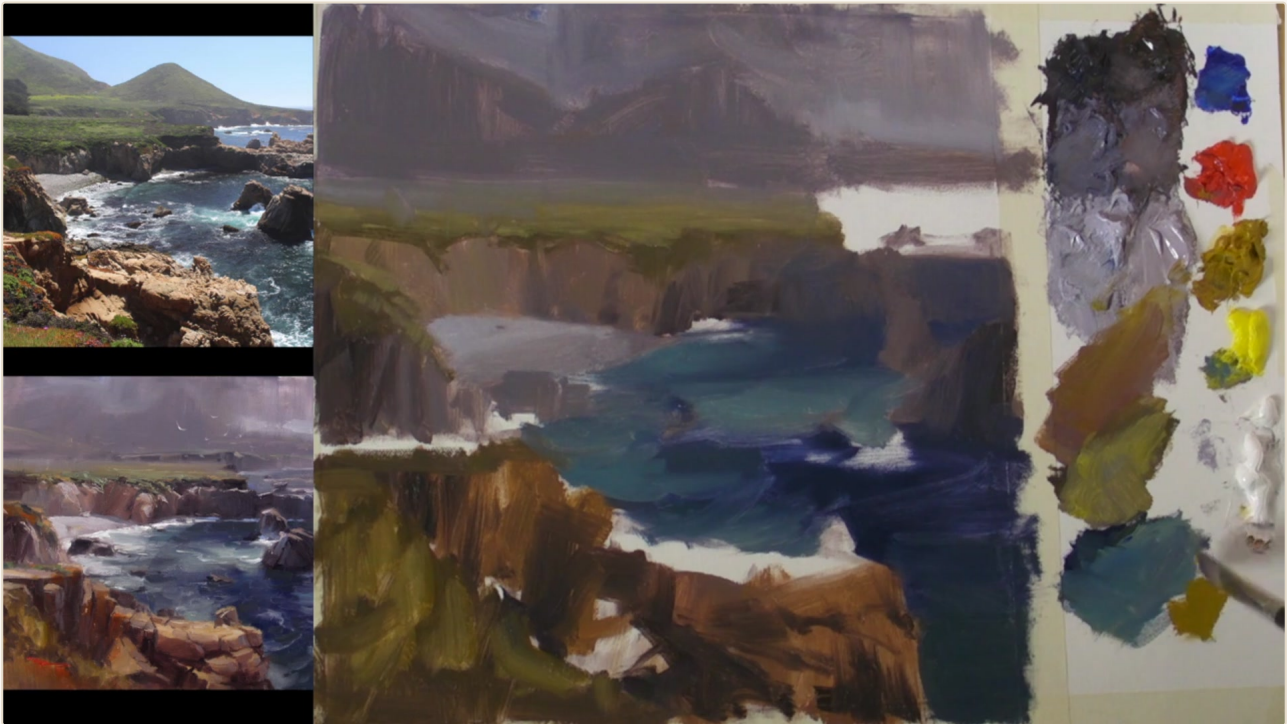
Mix Light Green for Foam

Combine white, yellow, and blue to mix a light green, resembling turquoise. Use this to create the light section of foam in the middle and at the front where the waves break.

PRO TIP

Maintain color harmony by using a reduced palette, avoiding the introduction of powerful colors like phthalo blue that can disrupt the balance.

7 Sunlight on rocks



Mix Sunlight Color

Mix a warm orange for the sunlight on the top of the rock in the foreground. Use grays to tone down the orange, ensuring it doesn't become too bright and overpower the painting.

PRO TIP

Use grays to keep bright colors toned down and harmonious with the rest of the painting.

8 Painting ice plant



Create Rock Shapes

Paint the rocks with a mix of sharp and soft edges to capture their natural form. Focus on creating a variety of shapes to keep the composition interesting. Use sharp edges for the prominent parts of the rocks and softer edges where they roll into shadow.

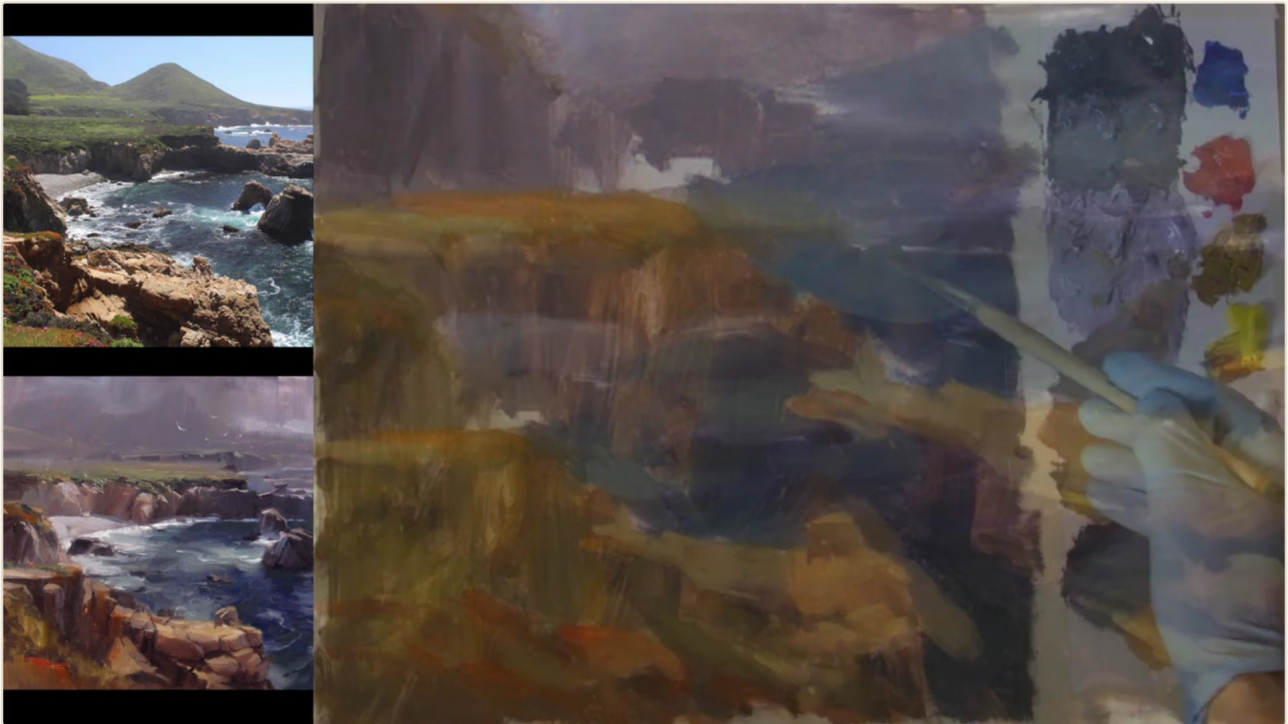
Add Punchy Orange

Introduce a vibrant orange color in the foreground to represent the ice plant. This will add a lively and dynamic element to your painting, enhancing the overall visual appeal.

PRO TIP

Use a mix of sharp and soft edges to create natural-looking rock formations.

9 Softening edges with fan brush



Apply Highlights

Use both warm and cool light greys to add highlights along the tops of the rocks. This will enhance the texture and form of the rocks.

Soften Edges with Fan Brush

Use a fan brush to gently soften the edges of the painted areas. This technique will create a more atmospheric feel in your painting.

Clean the Fan Brush

Regularly clean the fan brush on a paper towel when moving between different color groups. This prevents the colors from becoming muddy and keeps the brush effective.

PRO TIP

Keep the fan brush clean to avoid muddy colors and maintain its effectiveness.

10 Adding texture and detail



Control Softening

Use a soft brush to gently soften the dark areas of your painting. Avoid over-softening to prevent the painting from looking mushy. Focus on maintaining the integrity of the light areas by leaving them sharp.

Add Dynamic Sharp Edges

Switch to a firmer brush to cut into the softened edges with sharp, dynamic strokes. This contrast between soft and sharp edges will add texture and interest to your painting.

PRO TIP

Only soften the dark areas while keeping the light areas sharp to maintain contrast and interest.

11 Using grays for foam and background



Reserve Pure White for Highlights

Use straight white only for the foam areas where you want the sun to shine, creating a spotlight effect. This will make those areas stand out and give a sense of light hitting the foam.

Use Light Grey for Foam

Apply light grey to the foam areas that are not in direct sunlight. This will create a more natural look and help the foam blend into the scene without overpowering the highlights.

Blend Mid Grey into Dark Areas

As you move into the darker areas of the painting, use mid grey. This will integrate well with the dark background, maintaining the overall harmony of the piece.

Keep Background Colors Subdued

To ensure the background stays atmospheric and recedes, use very similar and close values of grey. Mix grey into your background colors to keep them subdued and consistent.

PRO TIP

Use grey to keep background colors subdued and atmospheric.

12 Painting rock details



Paint Rock Cracks

Paint the cracks in the rocks carefully, ensuring they don't appear as if simply drawn on top. Work back into the cracks with the surrounding color to blend them naturally into the rock surface.

Apply Cool Grey

Apply a cool grey to the right-hand planes of some rocks. This simulates the reflection of a bluer or lighter sky, adding depth and realism to the scene.

Adjust Rock Shape

Evaluate the shape of your rocks and make adjustments if necessary. If a rock intersects awkwardly with the cliff line behind it, paint it out to provide a sense of space and balance.

PRO TIP

Blend the cracks into the surrounding color to avoid a uniform, drawn appearance.

13 Final touches and signing



Add Seagulls

Use a very fine rigger brush to paint a few seagulls in the sky. Keep the strokes light and delicate to suggest distant birds.

Sign Your Painting

Carefully sign your painting with the same fine brush. Choose a subtle color that complements your painting without drawing too much attention.

Make Final Adjustments

Look over your painting for any small areas that need fixing. Make any necessary adjustments to ensure the composition feels balanced.

Remove the Tape

Gently pull off the tape from the edges of your painting. This will reveal clean borders and complete the presentation of your artwork.

PRO TIP

Use a fine rigger brush for delicate details like seagulls and signatures.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by mastering the art of mixing warm and cool grays. This foundational step sets the tone for your entire piece, allowing you to create a dynamic range of values that will bring depth and contrast to your work. As you progress, remember to embrace experimentation, as trying new techniques can lead to unexpected and exciting results.

As you sketch the major shapes and block in the cliffs and rocks, focus on capturing the essence of your reference image. Use a thin mixture for sketching to allow easy adjustments, and layer your colors thoughtfully to build a solid foundation. Pay attention to the foreground, using warmth to create a sense of depth and draw the viewer's eye into the scene.

In the final stages, refine your painting by adding texture and detail. Use a combination of soft and sharp edges to create interest and maintain contrast. Keep your palette harmonious by using grays to tone down bright colors, ensuring a balanced composition. Finish with delicate touches like seagulls and a subtle signature to complete your artwork with finesse.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Experiment with the warmth and coolness of your grays.
- Use a thin mixture to sketch lightly, allowing for easy adjustments.
- Use grays to adjust overly vibrant colors, maintaining subtle variations.
- Use more warmth in the foreground to enhance depth.
- Maintain color harmony by using a reduced palette.
- Use grays to keep bright colors toned down and harmonious.
- Keep the fan brush clean to avoid muddy colors.
- Only soften the dark areas while keeping the light areas sharp.



"Garrapata" 12x12" 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.

"Workshop 24" by Linda L. Kano



"Workshop 24" 9x12" Oil on Canvas by Linda L. Kano

Linda it's great to see you achieving this level of painting. Looking back over your work I can see a steady improvement but as often happens with enough brush time this one has taken a leap ahead. Sometimes it all comes together for a few blissful hours and everything seems to fall into place nicely, and that seems to have happened here.

I'm impressed with the motion in this painting and the fluid brushwork and the subtlety of your colour work against the greys, but most of all, after comparing your previous work I'm delighted with the simple variety of your rock forms - you've made a tricky thing look easy, especially in the foreground where you've managed to juggle all those slightly different hues and at the same time built a convincingly simplified rock structure, seemingly with little effort. If I have to pick something I'd change it would only be the 1,2,3 spacing of your small rocks strung across the water, probably by removing one, and to clear up the slight muddiness obscuring the distant coast.

"Brittany" by Suzanne Louise Andrew



"Brittany" 50x40cm Oil on Canvas by Suzanne Louise Andrew

Suzanne it's great to see the extent to which you've changed the original scene to create this painting. You've made it more exciting than the photo which is always a good goal when painting from a photo. There's something so dramatic about a spotlight landscape against a dark grey background that just gets me every time and you've certainly achieved that here. You might also have tried casting the whole foreground into a soft shadow (which could still be done with glazing) to add to the lighting effect. The cliff face itself could do with a little more obvious structure - the lighter yellowish shape on top adds a dash of colour interest but the form of it is detracting from the shape of the hill rather than adding credence to it. Specifically, the large yellow shape is mostly the same colour and value which suggests flatness rather than a rounded hillside or even a broken rocky face. You've invented it yourself which is great but I feel like you've stretched beyond your understanding and need some photo resource to plan that hill a bit better.

I love the energy of your brushwork in the sea foam and the rich texture you've built up in the hillsides and the whole of the background has a beautiful mystery about it. Good work Suzanne.

"Garrapata Study 2" by Xiao Li



"Garrapata Study 2" 11x14" Oil on Canvas by Xiao Li

Hi Xiao, this is a good painting with a few things I'd change. First of all the good points though... nice fluid brushwork, subtle light and shadow on the water, interesting composition. Here's what I'd change - I read your comments about your battle to lighten the landscape and push it back in space and you're right you haven't quite achieved it, but being aware of the problem is the first step to fixing it.

Check out the painting of point lobos I did below. There's a bigger value difference between the foreground and the mid ground than in your painting and I've especially lightened the background behind the tree which is my centre of interest. In your painting, to establish the more distinct value difference I would have first of all laid down the darkest dark in the foreground and then the darkest dark in the midground. That makes it easy to make value choices from there on in. Behind your tree I would have lightened the background even more, thinking of light through seaspray. Otherwise it's all good and the only other thing I would change is the shape of the branches in the top left because they're too similar.

“Lighthouse Beacons” by Lori Ippolito



"Lighthouse Beacons" Oil on Board by Lori Ippolito

Hi Lori that's a great glowing spotlight effect you've achieved - very striking! You've taken the grey vs colour concept and used it to good advantage. You chose a very difficult photo to work from which has relatively flat lighting on a very complex collection of non descript rocks so I applaud you for taking the challenge where you've had to change and imagine so much of the scene to distill a decent painting from it. The biggest challenge here was describing the form of the landscape while playing that big spotlight over it and you've done a good job of that, although I can see it was a real labour in the foreground and all that thick muddy grey there could do with scraping and rethinking. I try to keep my darks fairly thin and loose and save the impasto for the lights because light sparkling off impasto darks spoils the illusion of shadow.

Your softening and greying of the distant hills has helped hugely with adding depth to the painting. The gulls are a nice touch but I wouldn't have them cloned and flying in formation - I'd change their size and angle and placement. The one big thing I'd like to see changed in the landscape is the repeating shapes of the main spotlit rocks and the green covered rocks directly beneath it. It's less obvious because the two shapes are different colours but once you see the duplication it it's hard to ignore it.