



Paradise Valley

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/236-Paradise-Valley>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, we embark on an artistic journey through the breathtaking Paradise Valley in New Zealand, a scene that offers a wealth of inspiration for any painter. As we explore this majestic landscape, I'll guide you through five essential techniques to master the art of painting mountains. We'll start by focusing on the unique shapes of each mountain, moving away from the common mistake of repetitive triangles, and instead, capturing their distinct character. You'll learn to exaggerate the steepness and height for dramatic effect, a technique employed by many great mountain painters. We'll delve into the subtleties of atmospheric perspective, where distant mountains blend with the sky, and I'll show you how to achieve the perfect balance of warm and cool colors to create depth. Adding mist at the mountain bases will enhance this depth, introducing a touch of mystery and romance. Our brushwork will be crucial, with flat strokes in the distance and bolder ones in the foreground to amplify scale. Finally, we'll use spotlights to highlight key areas, adding drama and interest. This lesson is suitable for oils or acrylics and designed for intermediate to advanced painters. Let's paint together, one brushstroke at a time, and unlock the expressive potential of this stunning landscape.



"Paradise Valley" 19x20" Oil on Linen by Richard Robinson



REFERENCE PHOTO

The scene as Richard found it.

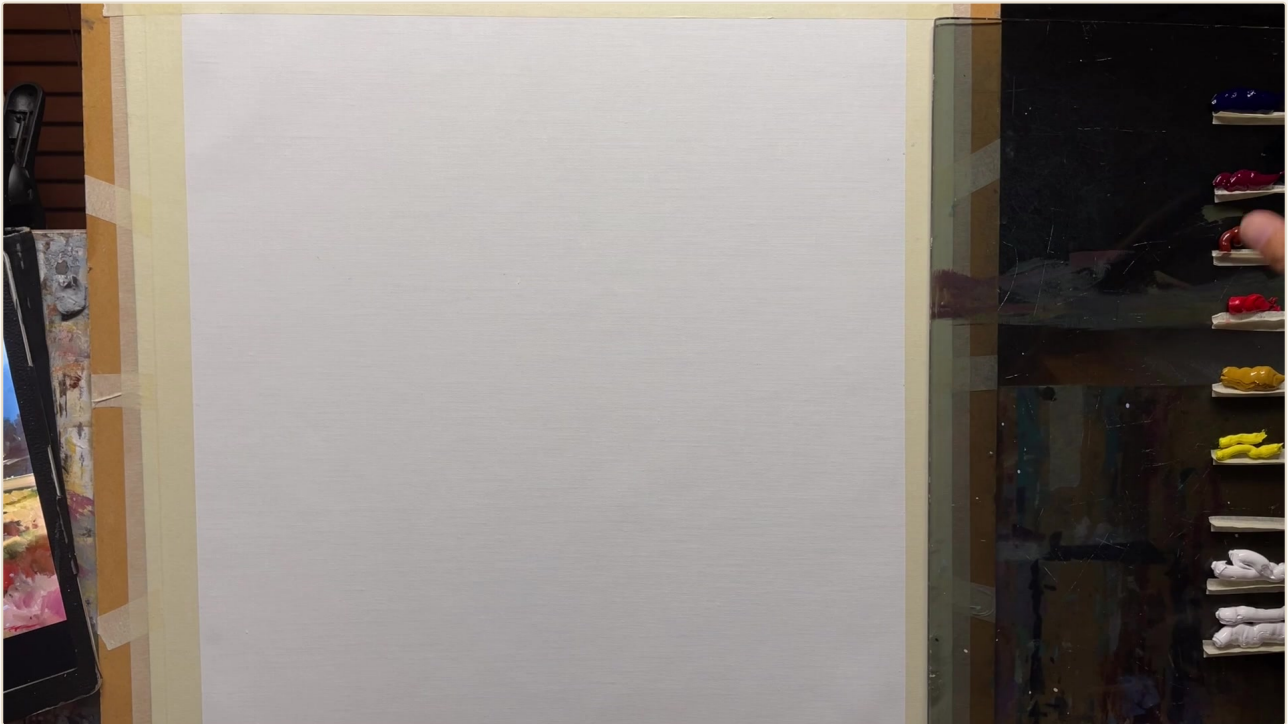
Materials

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
- Quinacridone Magenta
- Burnt Sienna
- Cad Red Mid
- Yellow Ochre
- Cadmium Yellow Light
- Titanium White
- Painting medium
- M. Graham & Co. Walnut Alkyd Medium or Walnut Oil
- Solvent
- Gamsol
- Canvas
- Phoenix Linen 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 Mixing a Neutral Gray



Prepare Your Palette

Set up your glass palette with the following colors: phthalo blue, quinacridone magenta, burnt sienna, cadmium red, mid yellow ochre, cadmium red light, and titanium white.

Mix a Neutral Gray

Start by taking some titanium white and add a small amount of phthalo blue. Be cautious with phthalo blue as it is very strong. Add a touch of burnt sienna to the mix. Adjust the color by adding more burnt sienna if it appears too blue, aiming for a neutral gray.

Adjust the Gray

If the gray is still too blue, incorporate a bit more burnt sienna, which acts as a dark gray-orange, to neutralize it. Aim for a mid-value gray, or lighten it by adding more white.

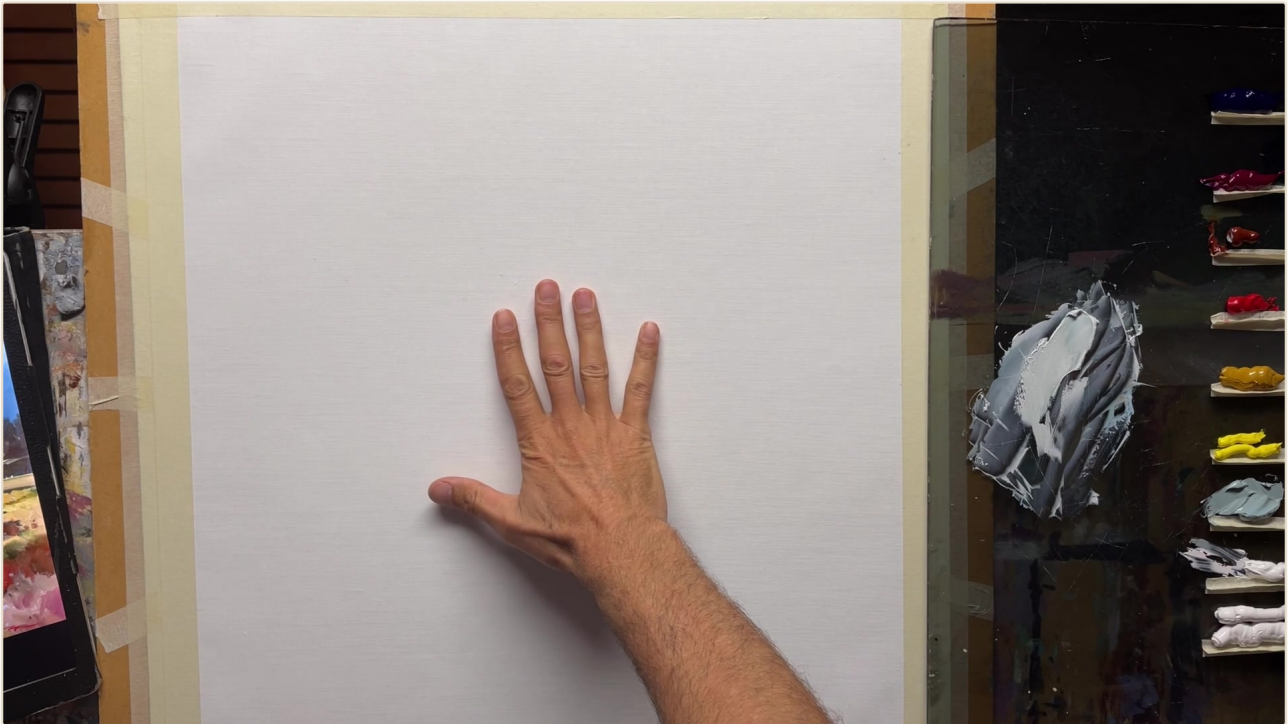
Prepare the Paint Consistency

If your white paint is too thick, mix in some painting medium to achieve a workable consistency. This will save time later by ensuring your paint is ready to use without constant adjustments.

PRO TIP

Start with small amounts of color and gradually adjust to reach the desired neutral gray, avoiding the need to use excessive white to correct over-saturation.

2 Canvas and Painting Mediums



Choose Your Canvas

Select a smooth, fine-grade linen canvas if you want your brushstrokes to maintain their individuality. A smoother canvas reveals brushstrokes, while a rougher one tends to hide them. Choose based on your preference.

Consider Painting Mediums

Decide whether to use oils or acrylics for your painting. Both mediums work well, but they require different approaches.

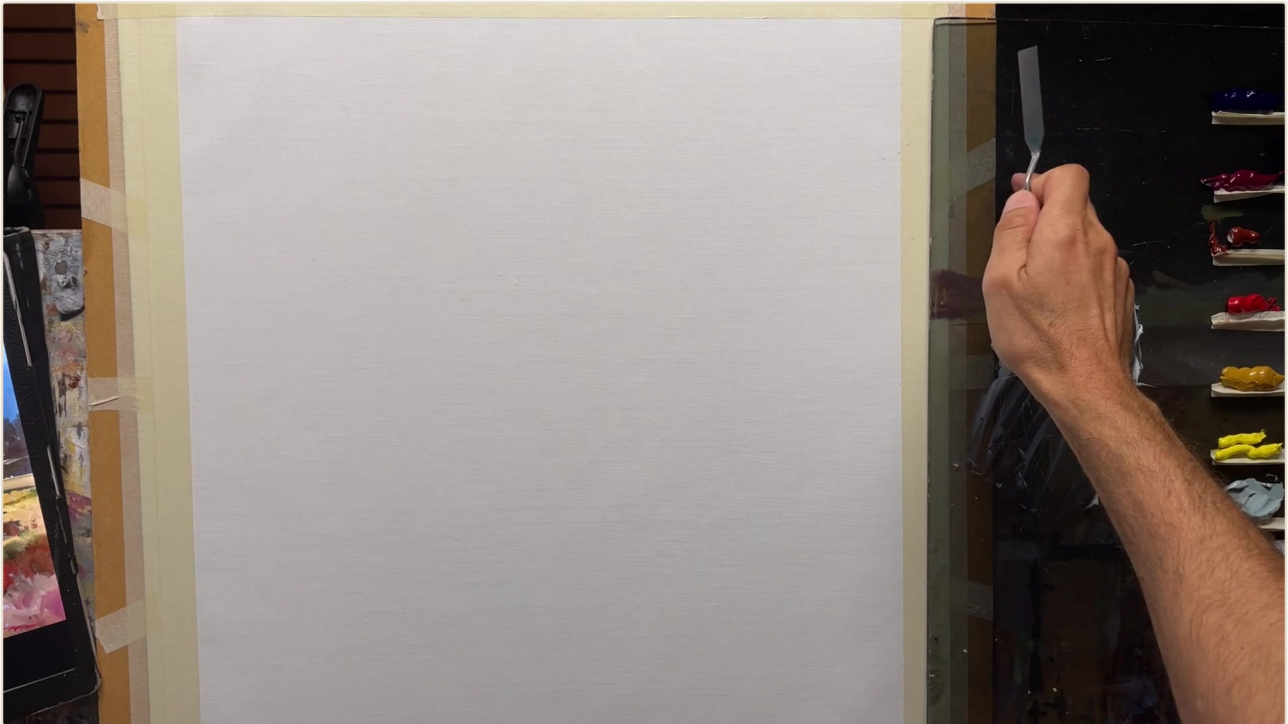
Acrylic Painting Approach

If using acrylics, adopt a top-down approach. Start with the sky, then move to the mountains, mid-ground, and foreground. This method allows you to create wet-on-wet effects within each area.

PRO TIP

Use a stay-wet palette when painting with acrylics to keep your paint workable for longer.

3 Acrylics vs Oils



Use More Paint

Apply a bit more paint when working with oils to take advantage of their longer drying time. This allows for more blending and manipulation on the canvas.

Stay Wet Palette

Consider using a stay wet palette to keep your acrylic paints moist and workable. Search online for simple instructions on how to create one.

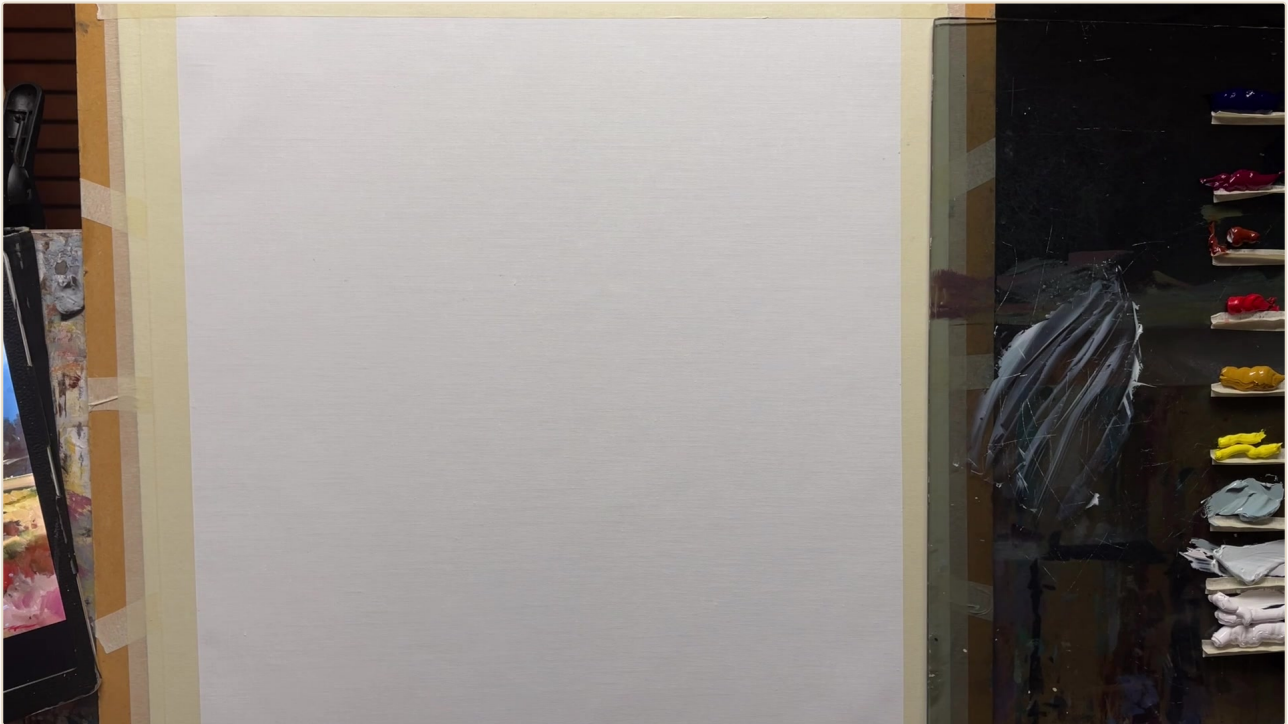
Keep Acrylics Wet

Use a spray bottle with water to mist the canvas and paints every few minutes. This helps maintain the moisture and workability of acrylics.

PRO TIP

Use slow drying acrylics to extend workability time similar to oils.

4 Brushes and Initial Sketch



Prepare Your Palette

Consider pre-mixing your grays, especially for a subdued color scheme. This can be helpful when working on a larger canvas to ensure consistency in major colors throughout the painting.

Choose Your Medium

Use walnut oil or another preferred painting medium, but avoid using turpentine as it is only a thinner. A small amount of Gamsol can be used to thin the sketch paint at the start for blocking in.

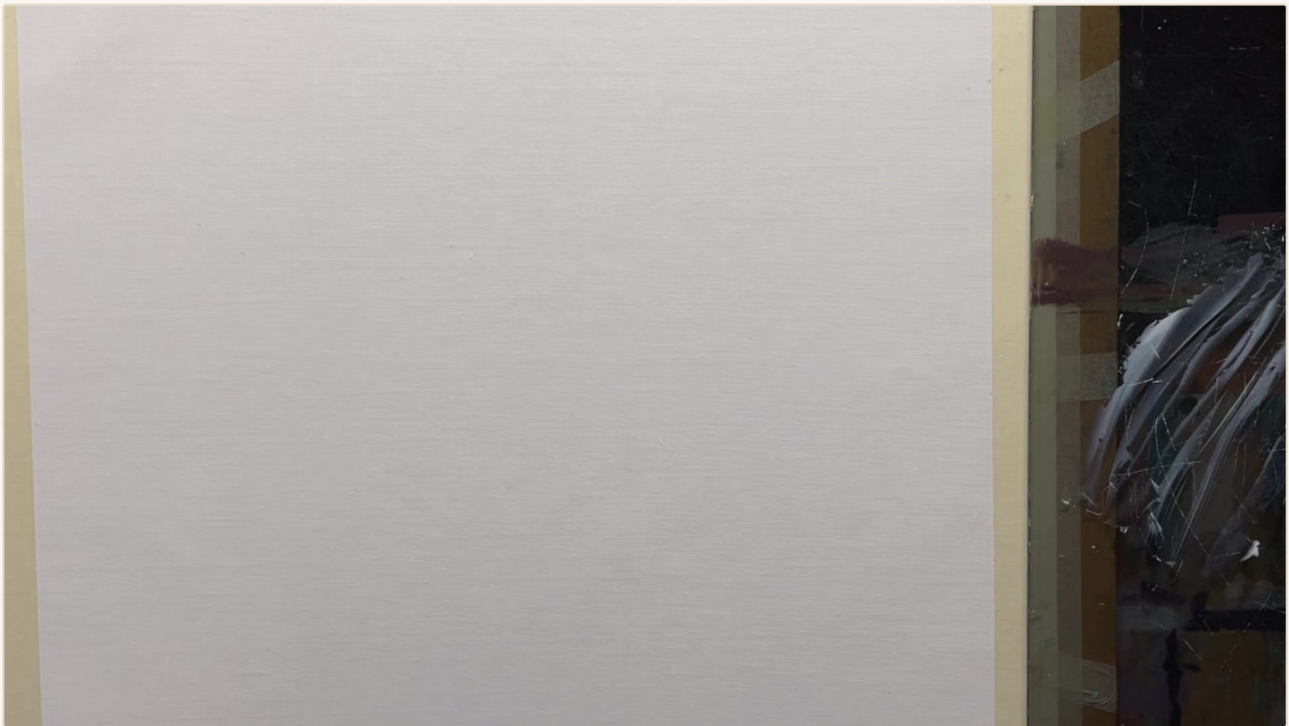
Select Your Brushes

Use mainly bristle long flats, size 12 or similar, and a couple of smaller synthetic brushes. Include a dagger, a long filbert, and a long rigger. Keep a trusty palette knife on hand for later use.

PRO TIP

Pre-mix major colors when working on a larger canvas to maintain color consistency.

5 Designing the Composition



Sketch the Big Shapes

Dip a long rigger brush into some Gamsol and mix a little phthalo blue with magenta. Sketch the big shapes, placing the horizon slightly above center to allow space for the mountains and an interesting foreground. Avoid placing the horizon dead center.

Design with Variety

Focus on creating variety in your shapes and angles. Avoid making any shapes or angles identical, especially with mountains. Ensure the spacing between peaks and distances from one peak to another are varied to prevent a mirrored or pyramidal effect.

Pay Attention to Details

Notice small details like cutaways in the landscape that indicate distance. These details add depth and interest to your composition. Be mindful of how lines slope gradually as they recede into the distance.

Plan Dynamic Shapes

Decide early on how your shapes will flow. Create dynamic diagonal shapes and avoid placing elements directly in the middle. Adjust elements to create interesting countering curves and reflections.

Focus on Light and Shadow

Plan for the foreground to be in shadow, with light filtering through and illuminating the mountains. Concentrate the most intense light and color in the section leading to the distant elements.

PRO TIP

Ensure variety in shapes and angles to avoid a repetitive or mirrored effect in your composition.

6 Painting the Mist



Prepare the Mist Base

Use a big brush to apply a light grey mixture to the area at the bottom of the mountains. Mix some grey with a little walnut oil painting medium, blue, magenta, and possibly some other grey to achieve a light tone. This will serve as the basis for the mist, creating separation between the mountains and the hills.

PRO TIP

Use a big brush for broad, light applications to create a soft mist effect.

7 Distant Mountains Base Layer



Mix Base Color for Distant Mountains

Start with a gray base and add some phthalo blue. Lighten the mixture slightly with a touch of magenta. If it becomes too gray, add more phthalo blue and incorporate white to achieve a nice balance. Aim for a color slightly darker than the initial gray layer.

Apply Thin Paint Layer

Apply the mixed color in a thin layer on the canvas. This thin application allows for thicker, brighter paint layers to be added on top later, making them stand out more.

Adjust and Blend

Add more white to the mixture as needed to adjust the tone. Keep the paint thin for easy changes. Gradually introduce more blue to darken the color, but be cautious not to overdo it. Soften the edges slightly to maintain a painterly effect without losing brushwork.

PRO TIP

Keep the initial paint layer thin to allow for easy adjustments and to make subsequent layers stand out.

8 Avoiding Overblending



Avoid Overblending

Resist the urge to overblend your brushstrokes. Avoid using a fan brush to blend everything together if you desire a painterly look. Allow some texture and distinct brushwork to remain visible for a more dynamic and lively painting.

PRO TIP

Leave some areas unblended to maintain a painterly texture.

9 Adding Highlights to Mountains



Prepare Highlight Color

Use a dagger brush with a soft head to mix a highlight color. Add a little white to the base color along with some sienna to create a shade that is slightly lighter and either greener or browner than the base color.

Apply Varied Brushstrokes

Think of each brushstroke as a unique shape and avoid repeating the same shapes. Vary the direction and size of your brushstrokes to create a textured feel. This prevents the painting from looking unnatural, like buildings.

Observe and Adapt

Refer to the photograph for guidance on shapes, but don't copy them exactly. Let the shapes in the photo inspire your own variations in the painting.

Add Color Variety

For a browner feel near the top, add a touch of sienna and light gray to your mix. This introduces color variety and enhances the natural look of the mountains.

Indicate Waterfalls

Add small highlights to suggest waterfalls or wet rocks reflecting light. Use these highlights sparingly to avoid overpowering the scene.

PRO TIP

Vary brushstroke direction and size to create a natural, textured feel in your mountain highlights.

10 Color Variety and Atmospheric Perspective



Mix a Lighter Green

Add a little yellow ochre and a touch of white or light grey to your base blue-grey mixture. Aim for a slightly greener and lighter tone than the original color.

Observe the Subject

Take a close look at the shapes in your subject, especially the mountains. Notice the chiseled look of the mountain and prepare to replicate it with your brushwork.

Create Crisp Marks

Use a brush with a crisp end to make sharp, chiseled marks that suit the mountain's appearance. This technique helps capture the mountain's distinct shape.

Apply Minimal Color Changes

Add a little light grey, sienna, and possibly more white to your mixture. Keep the color changes minimal to maintain atmospheric perspective, as drastic color changes suggest a light source or other significant elements.

PRO TIP

Use a brush with a crisp end to create sharp, chiseled marks that enhance the mountain's appearance.

11 Spotlight Effect on Mountain Peaks



Create a Spotlight Effect

Lighten the top of the mountain by adding a touch of yellow ochre to your mix. Apply this lighter color to the peak, allowing the paint to be slightly thicker for emphasis. Be cautious not to overdo it, as too much detail can detract from the effect.

PRO TIP

Use a thicker application of paint to emphasize the spotlight effect on the mountain peak.

12 Enhancing Mist and Light Effects



Lighten and Cool the Background

Use a light grey and add a touch of phthalo blue to it. Apply this mixture to the background areas to create a cooler, lighter effect. This helps to push the background further back into space, enhancing depth.

Enhance Snow in Shadow

Apply the light grey and phthalo mixture to the snow areas in shadow. This will make the snow appear more natural and integrated into the scene. Add highlights on top to enhance the effect.

Add Subtle Highlights

Mix white with a tiny touch of yellow ochre and a little oil to thin it slightly. Carefully place these light shapes on the snow areas, as they draw attention and should be thoughtfully positioned.

Create Mist and Light Effects

Use a big brush with a very light touch to add mist. Vary the angle and pressure to achieve a soft, blended feel. This technique helps to create a sense of distance and atmosphere.

PRO TIP

Twist the brush to achieve calligraphic strokes for snow highlights, ensuring they stand out effectively.

13 Adding Clouds and Sky Details



Add Warmer Grey to the Sky

Mix a slightly warmer grey with a touch of aquedine magenta. Apply it to the upper part of the sky, ensuring a soft edge. You can lose the edge entirely if you prefer a softer look.

Paint Diagonal Clouds

Create diagonal clouds pointing back to the center of interest using mainly white with a little phthalo blue. Be cautious not to add too much phthalo.

Introduce Green Tints

As you move into the next area, add a hint of green by mixing a tiny touch of phthalo blue with a tiny speck of bright yellow and mainly white. Keep the color clean and avoid overdoing the yellow.

PRO TIP

Use a clean brush for adding green tints to maintain clean color.

14 Sky and Mountain Edge Techniques



Block in Mountain Shapes

Paint the dark areas of the mountain shapes, being careful to block in these areas without touching the edges. This helps prevent the dark paint from mixing with the lighter sky, which can cause issues.

Maintain Clean Edges

Avoid letting the dark paint mix with the light sky by keeping the edges separate. Be careful and deliberate when painting these edges to maintain clarity between the mountain and sky.

Clean Brush Regularly

After working on the edges, clean your brush to remove any dark paint. Pick up fresh paint before continuing to ensure clean application and avoid muddying the sky.

PRO TIP

Keep the edges between the mountain and sky clean to prevent unwanted mixing of dark and light paints.

15 Cloud and Sky Color Adjustments



Add Detail to Clouds

Avoid painting clouds as straight lines. Introduce small variations and chinks to create a sense of detail and realism.

Soften Cloud Edges

Gently soften the edges of the cloud shapes to integrate them smoothly into the sky.

Warm Up Cloud Edges

Mix a little white with yellow ochre and apply it to the edges of the clouds. This will simulate sunlight touching them and add warmth.

Enhance Scale with Details

Incorporate small cloud details to enhance the sense of scale in the painting. This adds depth and interest to the sky.

Support the Main Peak

Ensure the soft edges and almost monotone colors of the clouds support the main peak. This contrast directs attention to the sharp edges and high contrast of the peak.

PRO TIP

Use small cloud details to enhance the sense of scale and depth in your painting.

16 Shadow Color Adjustments



LEADING THE EYE

Our eyes are attracted to high contrast, strong colour and sharp edges. Do the opposite wherever you **don't** want the eye to linger.

Enhance Shadow Colors

Add a little more color interest into the shadows on that side. Use the base color and mix in a touch of yellow ochre. Apply this mixture to see how it enhances the shadow areas.

PRO TIP

Mix a touch of yellow ochre into the base color to add interest to shadow areas.

17 Foreground Mountain Details



Mix the Foreground Mountain Color

Combine grey with a touch of blue and magenta to create a color slightly darker and warmer than the base color. This will help the mountain stand out with depth and warmth.

Paint Interesting Shapes

Apply the mixed color to the mountain, focusing on creating interesting and varied shapes rather than a single smooth form. This adds visual interest and realism.

Add Blue for Color Variation

Introduce a bit more blue to one side of the mountain to enhance color variation and richness. Extend the paint slightly beyond the desired edge to allow for later refinement.

Lighten and Warm the Highlights

Add a lighter and warmer tone to areas needing highlights. Test the color on your canvas to ensure it complements the existing tones and adjust as necessary.

PRO TIP

Focus on creating varied and interesting shapes for a more dynamic and realistic mountain.

18 Midground and Foreground Layers



Darken and Warm the Midground

Go a little darker and warmer with your colors for the next layer. If the colors become too vibrant, use greys to tone them down. This will help create depth and recession in your painting.

Introduce Green Tones

Add a touch of yellow ochre to introduce some green into the mix. Ensure it's just a little darker than the previous layer to maintain the sense of depth.

Define Tree Shapes

Use a wriggling motion with your brush to create small tree shapes. This will add definition and detail to the trees at this range.

Add Mist for Atmosphere

With a different brush, add a lighter blue to the bottom of the shapes. This simulates mist and enhances the atmosphere, separating the mountains and adding variety.

PRO TIP

Use greys to tone down colors if they become too vibrant, maintaining depth and atmosphere.

19 Spotlight Effects on Foreground



Add Mist to Mountains

Introduce mist to the mountain shapes to create depth. Ensure the mist does not echo the shapes underneath it to maintain a natural look.

Mix and Apply Light Grey

Mix a light grey with a touch of yellow ochre. Avoid making the mix too green to prevent the hill from coming forward too much.

Create Spotlight Effects

Add a spotlight effect on the trees by highlighting their right-hand sides where the light hits. Use little curved shapes to represent the light's impact.

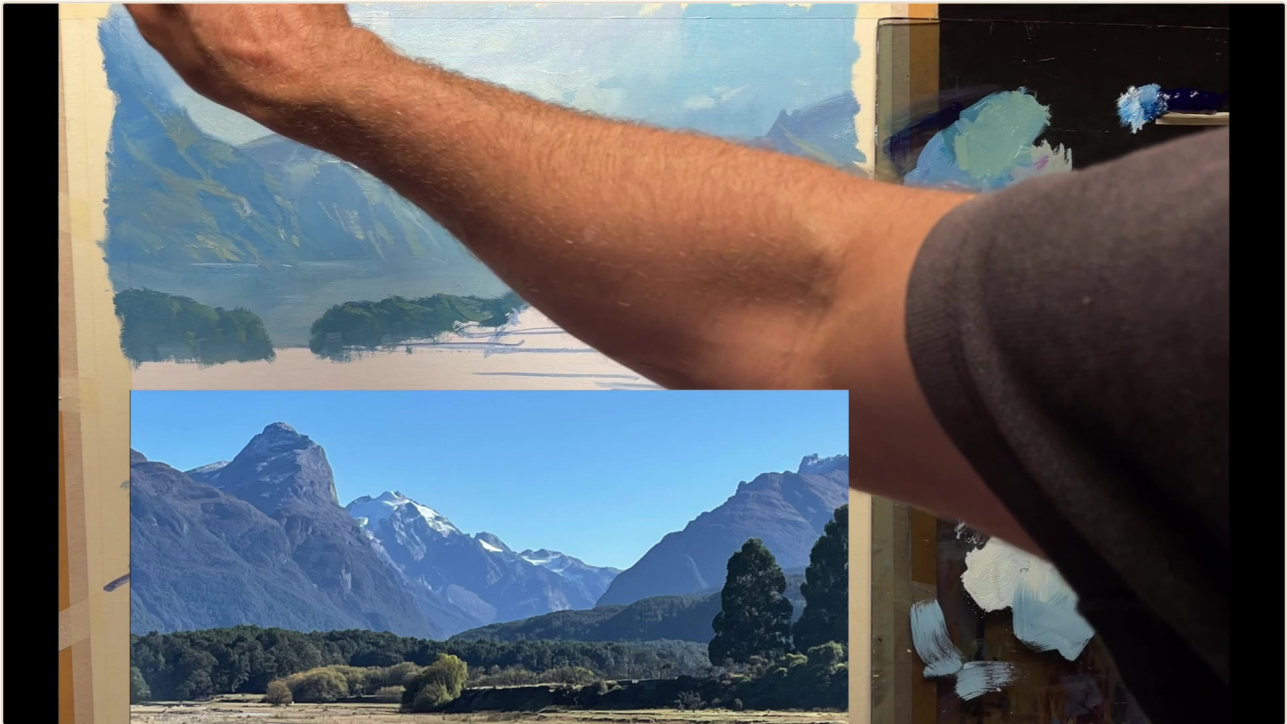
Fade Out Spotlight Effects

Ensure each spotlight effect has a single strong area that fades out gradually. Apply this technique to various objects and the sky to create a cohesive look.

PRO TIP

Avoid using too much green in the mix to prevent the hill from appearing too prominent.

20 Painting Water Reflections



Start with a Thin Dark Base

Begin by applying a thin layer of dark color to the water area. This creates a nice base to start with and allows for adding light later. Ensure the paint is not too thick, as you'll need to paint grasses into it.

Add Light and Yellow

Introduce some light color and a touch of yellow to the water. This will help reflect the sky and create a spotlight effect, with the lightest area in the middle and gradually getting darker towards the edges.

Create Depth with Warm Tones

Add a bit of warmth to the water to reflect the mountain and enhance the depth of color. This makes the water more interesting and visually appealing.

Use Vertical Strokes

Apply vertical strokes straight up and down to maintain the reflective quality of the water. You can add some horizontal strokes, but avoid diagonals as they disrupt the reflection.

PRO TIP

For wet-on-wet blending between grasses and water, ensure both areas remain wet while painting.

21 Foreground Shadows and Darks



Prepare the Foreground

Wet your brush slightly and add some darker gray mixed with a touch of yellow ochre. Lightly brush this mixture into the area, softening it into the existing paint. Avoid muddying the colors to maintain the glowing effect of light.

Create Darker Blue-Gray

Mix the gray with a bit of blue and sienna to create a darker, warmer blue-gray. This shade should be slightly darker than the previous area to bring it forward in the composition. Brush this color into the designated triangular area, keeping the spatial drawing in mind.

Add Bushy Shapes

Create small gaps at the base of the shape to suggest bushes. Add bushy shapes on top, breaking into the main shape slightly. Ensure the trees are broad and avoid forming repetitive patterns.

Enhance Dark Shapes

Gently brush the darker color throughout the space, letting it fade out. Connect dark shapes to create an organic form, brushing down and up to achieve shadows and reflections. This connection helps the darks read better from a distance.

Refine and Adjust

Lightly add warmth to the dark shapes without overwhelming them. Extend the dark shape slightly and ensure soft edges into the water. Avoid creating a plain shape by adding variety and maintaining soft edges.

PRO TIP

Connect your dark shapes to create a large, cohesive form that reads well from a distance.

22 Tree Shadows and Highlights



Paint Tree Shadows

Use a warm grey to brush in the shadow side of the trees. Focus on creating a mid-value tone, which will serve as the base for the shadows. This step helps define the trees and sets the stage for adding highlights later.

Add Impasto Highlights

Apply impasto highlights to the trees to enhance the center of interest. These highlights will make the trees appear sparkly and emphasize the light source. Ensure the highlights stand out against the mid-value and shadow tones.

Introduce Color Variation

Add color variation to the bottom of the trees where the light from the field bounces up. This will create a more dynamic and realistic shadow effect, enhancing the overall depth of the scene.

PRO TIP

Use impasto highlights to make the center of interest stand out with a sparkly effect.

23 Building Up Paint Layers



Start with Dark Layers

Work from dark to light and thin to thick. Begin by applying your dark colors in thin layers, using just enough paint to cover the canvas. Add a small amount of painting medium to help the paint glide smoothly onto the surface.

Build Mid-Value Layers

As you move to mid-values, apply these colors thicker than the darks. Use less painting medium to create a slightly denser layer that builds on top of and into your dark shapes.

Apply Highlights

For the highlights, use straight paint without any medium. Apply these colors as thickly and texturally as possible to create a sense of depth and interest in the lighter areas.

PRO TIP

Ensure dark layers are smooth and mysterious with minimal detail, focusing on color variation.

24 Grass and Midground Details



Maintain Shadow Areas

Ensure that areas meant to be in shadow remain mid-values and darker. Avoid adding highlights to these sections to preserve the intended lighting effect.

Balance Powerful Colors

Mix phthalo blue with quinacridone magenta carefully, as both have strong tinting strength. Use just a tiny bit to warm up the foreground dark shapes.

Focus on Interesting Shapes

Consider the shapes you create with your brushstrokes. Adjust them if they aren't interesting or don't connect well with other dark areas.

Enhance Clumps of Reeds

Make clumps of reeds more pronounced and higher than in real life to add shape and interest to the composition.

Add Punchier Colors in Light

As you move into areas with more light, introduce punchier colors and move away from grays. Mid-values often reveal the local color of objects.

Create Organic Grass Texture

Leave small areas of canvas showing through when painting grasses. This creates a mottled, organic feel and avoids a flat appearance.

PRO TIP

Leave small areas of canvas visible when painting grasses to achieve a more organic texture.

25 Preparing for Final Highlights



Mix Warm and Cool Greys

Prepare a palette with a range of warm and cool greys. These will be used to fill in the shadow areas of your painting. Focus on achieving a balanced mix to ensure the shadows have depth and interest.

PRO TIP

Leave the light area for later to focus on building depth in the shadows first.

26 Midground Color Transitions



Choose Midground Colors

Select a grey or any mid-value to dark color for the midground. Ensure the color does not stand out too much by keeping it subdued.

Transition Colors

Create a smooth transition from brown to orange to grey within a single shape. This adds depth and interest to the painting.

Vary Brushstrokes

Avoid making all brushstrokes in the same direction. Introduce variety to maintain a dynamic and engaging composition.

Add Color Gradation

As you move into the mid values, incorporate more color. This creates a pleasing gradation and enhances the painting's visual appeal.

PRO TIP

Introduce ultramarine or cobalt blue gradually if phthalo feels too intense.

27 Atmospheric Perspective in Foreground



Adjust Foreground Colors

Add punchy colors to the foreground to create interest and vibrancy. Be cautious as it might be too intense; you may need to tone it down later.

Introduce Atmospheric Perspective

Lighten the colors as you move further into the distance. Add a touch of blue-gray to these lighter colors to simulate the atmospheric effects and create depth.

PRO TIP

Use blue-gray tones to suggest distance and atmospheric perspective in your painting.

28 Foreground Blocking and Details



Create Depth with Fine Brushstrokes

Use fine, very thin brushstrokes to create depth in the painting. As you move closer to the foreground, make the brushstrokes less horizontal and less fine. This technique will help enhance the atmospheric perspective.

Mix and Apply Neutral Grey

Take another brush and mix a neutral grey with a bit of warmth for the riverbed. Apply this grey to the riverbed area, noting the subtle difference between the warm and cooler greys. This variation adds depth and interest to the painting.

Paint Horizontal Lines

For horizontal lines at the base, set your brush, shoulder, and arm in one location. Rotate at the hips to create straight, horizontal lines. This technique ensures clean and consistent lines in your painting.

Enhance Light and Dark Accents

Focus on the central area of the painting to enhance the light. Add more dark and light accents to bring out the details and create a dynamic composition.

PRO TIP

Set your brush, shoulder, and arm in one location, then rotate at the hips for clean horizontal lines.

29 Palette Knife Techniques



Add Textural Interest with Palette Knife

Use a palette knife to create more textural interest and thinner lines in the foreground. This technique helps to build up the paint in this area, adding depth and dimension.

Create Broken Colour Effect

Mix your paint on the palette without fully blending it to achieve a broken colour effect. This technique provides a unique texture and variation that can't be achieved with a brush alone.

Switch Between Brush and Palette Knife

Alternate between using a brush and a palette knife to create a variety of marks. This combination results in a more interesting and dynamic surface than using just one tool.

Add Darker Marks for Depth

Dip into slightly darker paint and make thin, darker marks to suggest clumps of grass. This adds depth and enhances the natural look of the landscape.

PRO TIP

Mix paint partially on the palette to achieve a broken colour effect with the palette knife.

30 Adding Dark Accents



Prepare Dark Accent Color

Switch to a new brush and mix a dark accent color by combining blue, red, and a little bit of gray. Aim for a color that is nearly black but not completely black.

Apply Dark Accents

Use a light touch to apply the dark accents. This will add depth and a bit of punch to your painting.

Create Varied Lines

Avoid creating straight lines by allowing some accents to extend further down. Break up the lines to prevent them from looking like a super highway.

Brush for Grass Effect

When painting grass, brush out to create the shape, then brush back down to form the negative spaces of the grass.

PRO TIP

Use a light touch when applying dark accents to add depth without overpowering the painting.

31 Reflections and Water Details



Enhance Color with Purple

Add a touch of purple to your palette to create a punchier color effect. This will help in capturing the vibrancy of the scene.

Mix Dark Grey-Green for Reflections

Mix a dark grey-green color to represent the reflections in the water. This color should incorporate some of the sky's reflection, so ensure it has a hint of blue or grey.

Apply Paint with Vertical and Horizontal Strokes

Use a fair amount of paint to work into the reflection area properly. Apply the paint using horizontal and vertical strokes to mimic the water's surface.

Follow the Form of Reflections

When painting reflections, follow the form of the objects being reflected. Remember to paint them upside down to accurately depict their mirrored appearance.

PRO TIP

Use horizontal and vertical strokes to effectively capture the water's reflective surface.

32 Softening Water Edges



Brush Blue-Grey into Water

Mix a blue-grey color and gently brush it back into the water area. Use a light touch to maintain a smooth transition without breaking it too much.

Soften with Green

Pick up some green paint and brush it downwards over the blue-grey. This will help create soft edges and a cohesive look in the water.

PRO TIP

Use gentle brushstrokes to maintain soft transitions in the water.

33 Final Water Adjustments



Deepen the Water Colour

Add a deeper colour to the water to enhance the shadow effect. This will help complete the shadow across the entire area, giving it a more cohesive look.

Refine Water Shapes

Adjust the shapes in the water to make them appear smarter and more defined. Avoid using too many hard edges to maintain a natural and fluid appearance.

PRO TIP

Avoid using too many hard edges in the water to keep it looking natural.

34 Water Surface Highlights



Add Water Surface Highlights

Use a rigger brush to apply the bluish white mixture onto the canvas. Carefully mark a few highlights on the water surface to indicate where elements like reeds meet the water. Avoid overdoing it; just enough to suggest the interaction between water and surrounding elements.

PRO TIP

Use a rigger brush for precise, delicate highlights on the water surface.

35 Preparing for Final Highlights



Clean Your Brush

Ensure your brush is clean before proceeding to the next step. This will prevent unwanted color mixing and keep your highlights bright and clear.

Apply Blue-Gray Tone

With a touch of blue-gray on your brush, run it through the areas that need a subtle tone. This adds depth and prepares the surface for brighter highlights.

Prepare for Water Highlights

Put down your brushes and clean your palette knife. A clean tool is essential for applying crisp highlights in the water.

PRO TIP

Always clean your tools before adding highlights to maintain the purity of your colors.

36 Palette Knife Water Highlights



Mix Sky Color

Mix a bit of white with a tiny touch of phthalo blue and a tiny touch of yellow to create the sky color. This will be used for the water highlights.

Apply with Palette Knife

Ensure your palette knife is clean before applying the paint. Pull the knife down and across the canvas to create highlights on the water.

Maintain Clean Edges

The palette knife will pick up paint as you work, so clean it regularly to maintain clean and vibrant highlights. This will keep the highlights looking punchy and distinct.

PRO TIP

Always clean your palette knife between applications to avoid muddying the colors.

37 Adding Punchy Colors



Add Lighter, Less Grey Paint

Use a loose dagger brush to apply thick paint that is lighter and less grey than the existing colors. Avoid using pure yellow, as it will stand out too much on the canvas.

Enhance with a Palette Knife

Use a palette knife to apply a thicker layer of paint. This will add texture and depth to your painting.

Introduce Color Variation

Mix a little red and more yellow into your paint to create a slightly different color. This variation is important for adding interest and realism to your trees.

PRO TIP

Avoid using pure yellow to prevent it from overpowering the canvas.

38 Recap of Key Mountain Painting Tips



Create Interesting Mountain Shapes

Avoid repetitive shapes like simple triangles. Each mountain should have its own unique character and shape. Exaggerate the scale and steepness to add drama and interest.

Use Homogenous Color for Atmospheric Perspective

As mountains recede into the distance, their colors should become closer to the color of the sky. This means losing warmth and contrast, creating cooler and more similar color relationships.

Add Mist for Separation and Interest

Incorporate mist at the base of the mountains to separate layers and make the painting easier to read from a distance. This adds romance, mystery, and color variety, enhancing visual interest.

Vary Brushwork for Depth

Use smaller, flatter, and finer brushwork in the distance. As you move forward, increase the size and thickness of the brushwork to enhance the sense of depth through contrast.

Spotlight Key Areas

Highlight certain areas of the mountains with spotlights, allowing light and detail to fade out from these central areas. This technique applies to all parts of the painting, including the sky and water, creating variety and interest.

PRO TIP

Variety is the key to creating an interesting painting. Use different shapes, colors, and brushwork to keep the viewer engaged.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by carefully mixing a neutral gray, setting the foundation for your Paradise Valley masterpiece. Choose your canvas and painting medium wisely, as these decisions will influence the texture and technique of your work. Whether you opt for oils or acrylics, remember to maintain the workability of your paints and embrace the unique qualities each medium offers.

As you progress, focus on the composition and the dynamic flow of shapes and angles. Use your brushes to sketch and block in the major elements, ensuring variety and avoiding repetitive patterns. Pay attention to atmospheric perspective and color variety to create depth and interest in your landscape. Allow the mist and light effects to enhance the mood and distance within your painting.

In the final stages, refine your work with highlights and details that bring the scene to life. Use careful brushwork to add texture and dimension, and apply color adjustments to emphasize the natural beauty of the mountains and sky. Remember, the key to a successful painting lies in the balance between detail and simplicity, allowing the viewer's imagination to fill in the gaps.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Start with small amounts of color to mix a neutral gray.
- Choose a smooth canvas for visible brushstrokes.
- Use a stay-wet palette for acrylics to keep paint workable.
- Pre-mix major colors for consistency on large canvases.
- Ensure variety in shapes and angles to avoid repetition.
- Keep initial paint layers thin for easy adjustments.
- Leave some areas unblended for a painterly texture.
- Use a clean brush for adding green tints to maintain clean color.



"Paradise Valley" 19x20" Oil on Linen 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.

“19x20” oil on canvas panel by **Mark Price**



19x20" oil on canvas panel

Wow that's nice work, Mark. Your colours are good, creating a nice recession in the mountains, strong warms in the foreground and a good subtle gradation through the sky. I like the extra detail you put into the trees on the right which really helps with the sense of scale and the same goes for the little details and textures you have built-up in the foreground. My only suggestion would be that some of the clumps of grass in the foreground seem to lack form, meaning they just need a stronger shadow side to offset their light side, with the light coming from the upper right. Great job.

-Richard

“Paradise Valley” by Lisa Shanahan



Paradise Valley

Ooh that's really beautiful painterly work there, Lisa. Your thick brushwork has a real flow and lyricism about it. Juicy! Perhaps you could push that even further in your next painting? Good to see you throwing in a little bit of pallet knife work in there as well to get a variety of texture.

Your colour work is very good - strong warms in the foreground contrasted by cool greys in the background. My one concern is that the greens on the mountains are a touch too dark, making them seem out of place. If you convert the photo of your painting into greyscale in your phone or computer you will see that the greens are a little darker than the cool grey they are painted on. In fact they should be a little lighter than that base grey colour they are on since they are in the light. Hope that helps. Beautiful painting!

-Richard

“Paradise Valley - oil on canvas - this subject never gets old.” by Nancy Murray



Paradise Valley - oil on canvas - this subject never gets old.

That's some lovely work there Nancy! Great to see you really paying attention to shape design but still managing to have interesting colour variety within the large shapes. Looks like you really pushed the red in the foreground which is quite enticing to look at and really contrasts well with your strong blues in the background.

It's also great to see you contrasting soft and lost inches with sharp edges and also large simple shapes with some quite fine detail. That kind of variety in a painting makes it a joy to look at.

You're just missing a few reflections of the grasses in the middle along the left-hand bank, which seem to be tall enough to warrant a reflection. You could also have deepened the colour in the water in the foreground to add more contrast there against the warms. Great work.

- Richard

“Paradise in Oils” by Geoffrey Geeson



Paradise in Oils

Well that's a little cracker, Geoffrey! Nice to see it done so well on a small scale and horizontal format. Some really nice brushwork in here – quite fluid and not overworked. I like that you added a little more diagonal in the centre plane

because it plays off well against the diagonal stream in the foreground – the whole thing is a big zigzag and quite dynamic.

Your colours are great too – quite punchy, and I especially like the intense blue you have in the distant hills and mountains on the right hand side, although I would've trim that mountain down or run it right off the top of the canvas rather than left it as a point up there that directs the eye to that corner.

Oh and the green reflections you have of the grasses seem to be a little too green. Probably be better a little browner than that. Beautiful painting. Sign it and frame it!

- Richard