



Painting Landscapes 1

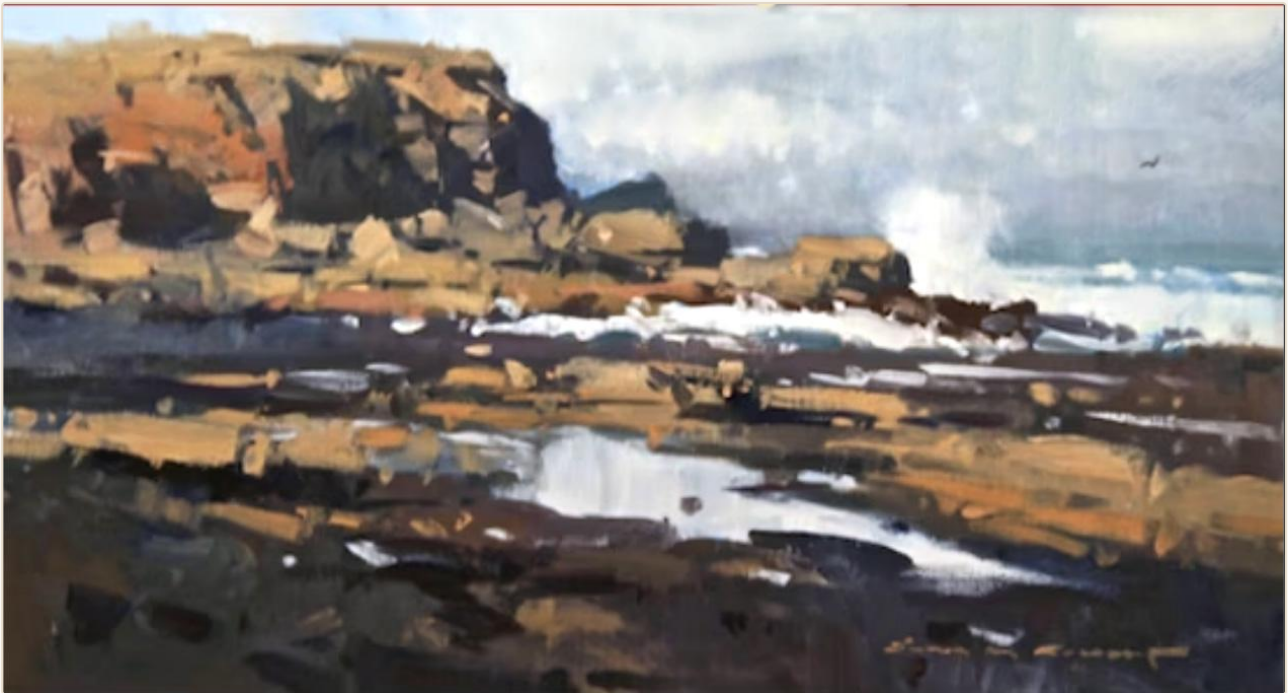
A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/247-Painting-Landscapes-1>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, I invite you to join me on a journey through the breathtaking winter landscapes of New Zealand's Southern Alps and along its rugged coastline. As we explore these stunning scenes, we'll delve into the art of plein air painting, where the natural world becomes both our studio and our muse. Together, we'll tackle the challenges that every landscape painter faces, from capturing the elusive play of light to maintaining a loose, painterly style that breathes life into our work. You'll learn how to make critical decisions that can transform a good painting into a great one, and I'll share candid insights into my methods and materials. It's a rewarding subject because these landscapes offer a dynamic interplay of colors and forms, demanding our full attention and creativity. Remember to position your canvas away from direct sunlight to avoid glare and see the true colors as you paint. Let's embrace the elements and let the beauty of nature inspire our artistic journey.



Curio Bay 2 by John Crump



REFERENCE PHOTO 1

The scene as Richard found it.



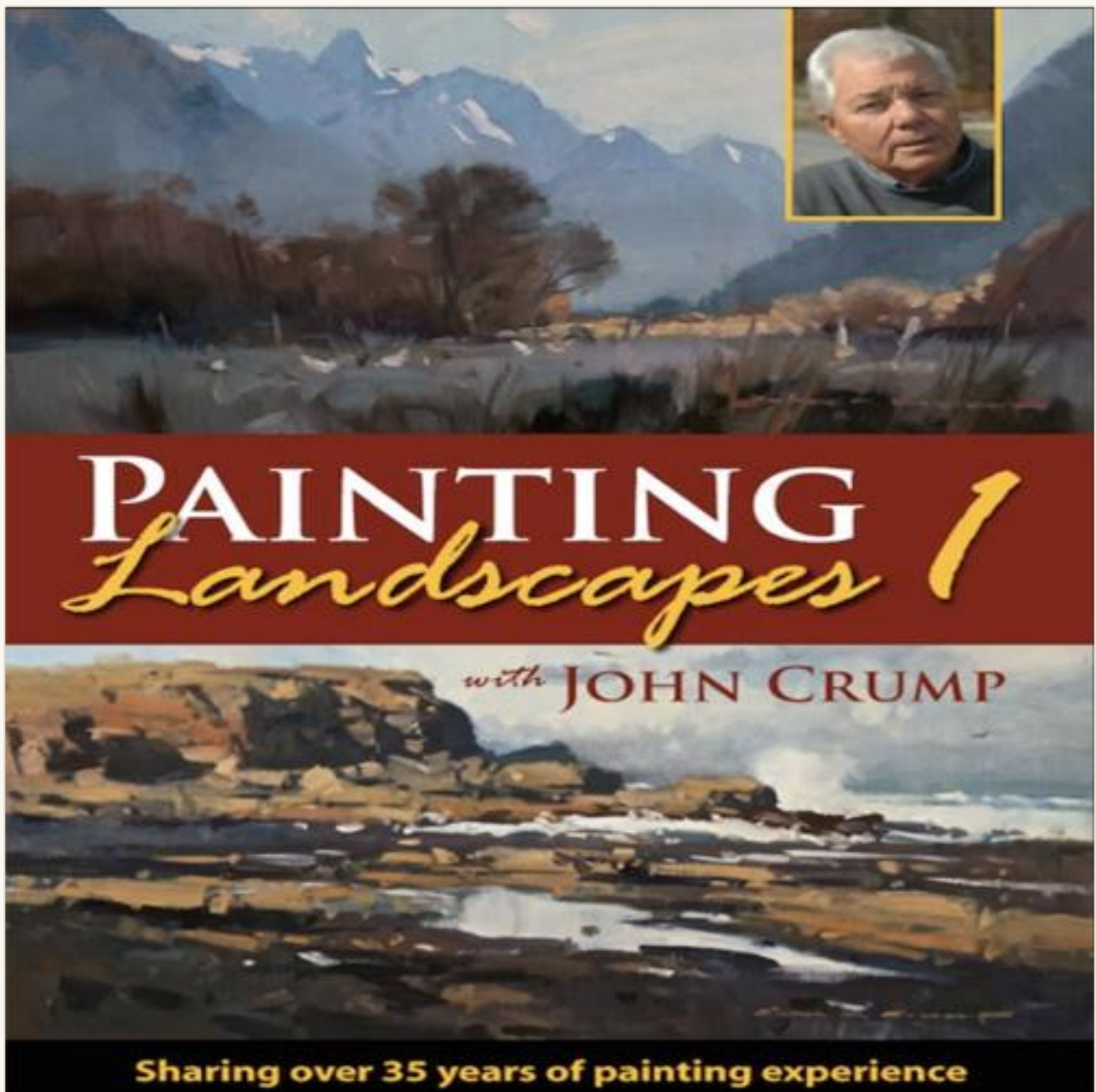
REFERENCE PHOTO 2

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.

IN THE SHADOW OF ALFRED

- Winsor and Newton, artist's quality oil paints.
- Winsor blue (red shade)
- Venetian red
- Winsor green
- Titanium white
- Cadmium lemon
- Cadmium yellow pale
- Cadmium orange
- Gold ochre
- Permanent rose
- Cadmium red
- Magenta
- Brushes
- Size 12 chisel tip long bristle.
- Only one small brush, usually an ox /sable rigger type brush “ size 1 or 2.
- Medium
- Liquin Original
- for painting medium.
- Canvas
- Fredrix Ultrasmooth Canvas
- , a polyflax, triple primed, fairly smooth surfaced canvas.Â
- Â

CURIO BAY

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1 Outdoor painting tip



Avoid Direct Sunlight on Canvas

Position your canvas so it is not exposed to direct sunlight. This prevents glare and ensures you see the true colors as you paint.

PRO TIP

Keep your canvas shaded from direct sunlight to avoid glare and maintain accurate color perception.

2 Horizon placement advice



Consider Horizon Placement

When placing the horizon in your landscape, avoid dividing the picture into two equal halves. Aim for a degree of imbalance to create a more dynamic composition.

PRO TIP

Avoid splitting the painting into two equal halves with the horizon line.

3 Starting with the darkest darks



Identify the Darkest Darks

Examine the scene and identify the areas with the darkest darks. These will serve as the foundation for your painting.

Apply the Darkest Darks

Start painting by applying the darkest darks to your canvas. Keep the tones fairly warm, but be aware of any cool undertones present in the scene.

PRO TIP

Begin your painting by establishing the darkest darks to set the tonal foundation.

4 Initial color application



Apply Initial Color to Cliffs

Use a thin layer of paint to apply the initial color to the cliffs. Avoid heavy color application at this stage to allow for adjustments later. Brush the paint out well, aiming for a consistency that is not quite a wash but still thin enough to manipulate easily.

PRO TIP

Use a thin layer of paint initially to allow for easier adjustments later.

5 Capturing shadows and light patterns



Capture Shadow Patterns

Quickly paint the shadows of the rocks to capture their shapes and sizes. This will help you freeze the light and maintain the design of the scene despite changing lighting conditions. Focus on the patterns and rhythms created by the light and shade to enhance the composition.

PRO TIP

Quickly capturing shadows helps freeze the light, allowing you to maintain the scene's design even as lighting changes.

6 Detailing shadowed areas



Add Shadowed Area

Mix a combination of ochre and tones of orange to create a base for the shadowed area. Apply this mixture to the designated shadowed section to establish depth.

Break Up the Color

Introduce lighter tones into the shadowed area to break up the color. Use these lighter tones sparingly to suggest the roughness and texture of the rocks.

PRO TIP

Use lighter tones sparingly to suggest texture in shadowed areas.

7 Avoiding clutter in the foreground



Simplify Foreground Shapes

Focus on creating a balance of lights and shades in the foreground. Avoid adding too many small shapes that can clutter the composition. Keep the shapes simple to prevent distracting the viewer.

PRO TIP

Simplify the foreground by reducing the number of small shapes to maintain focus and clarity in the painting.

8 Painting rocks and cliff details



Enhance Light on Rocks

Identify the large rocks under the cliffs that need more light. Use a lighter shade to gently lift the light on these rocks, enhancing their form and presence.

Add Red and Orange Highlights

Observe the cliffs above the rocks for areas with beautiful reds and oranges. Mix these colors and apply them to the cliff areas to capture the vibrant hues.

Paint White Tops on Rocks

Notice the white tops on some rocks, likely from bird droppings. Use a clean brush to apply a soft white to these areas, adding texture and realism.

PRO TIP

Use a lighter shade to lift the light on rocks, enhancing their form and presence.

9 Techniques for painting lines and edges



Use Thin Layers

Apply your paint in thin layers to make it easier to overpaint and adjust tones. This approach allows for more flexibility and subtlety in your work.

Suggest Lines with Various Tools

Use a fine brush, palette knife, or any tool that helps you suggest lines without making them look drawn. This keeps the landscape looking natural and not overly constructed.

Maintain a Free Style

Brush in lines and edges in a relaxed, off-hand manner. This technique helps preserve the painting's sense of reality and avoids a stiff, artificial appearance.

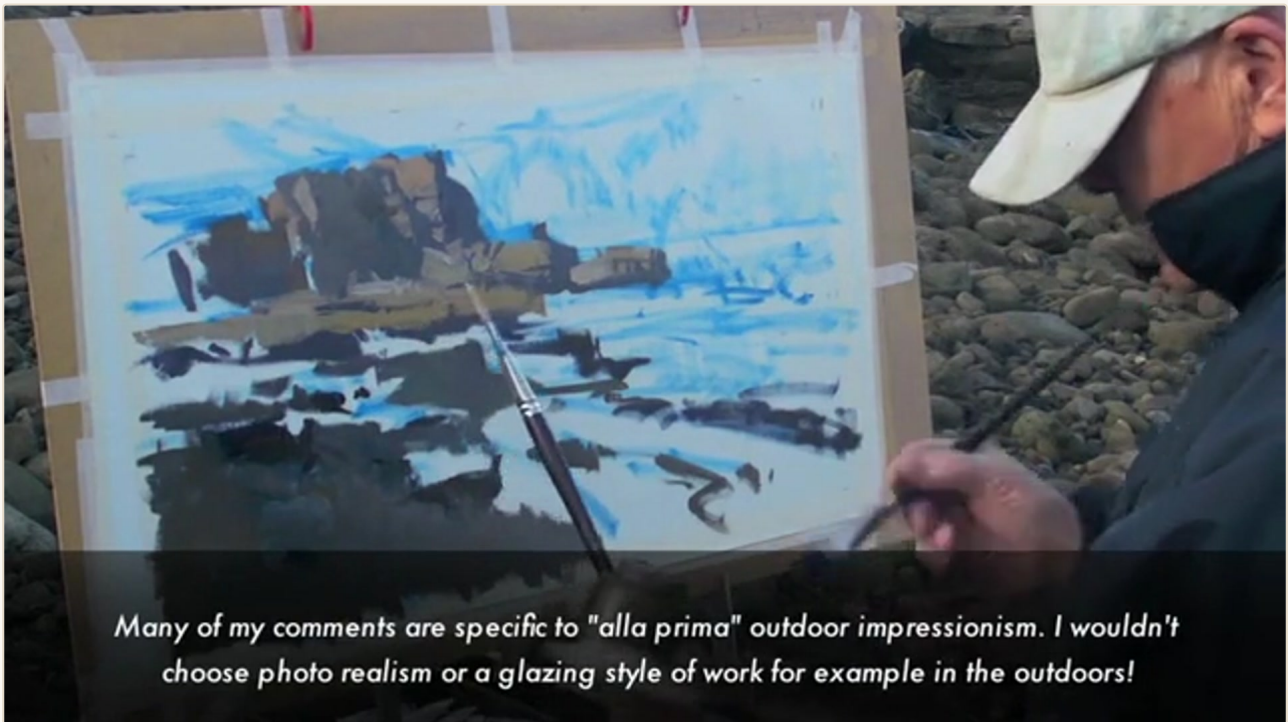
Introduce Strong Colors

In areas where strong colors are needed, apply them confidently to enhance the vibrancy and depth of the landscape.

PRO TIP

Keep your brushwork simple and free to maintain the painting's natural feel.

10 Adding strong colors and textures



Add Strong Colors

Introduce strong colors in the area by incorporating deep reds. These colors represent the seaweed and rocks, adding depth and interest to the landscape.

Incorporate Pink Hues

Blend in some pink tones in certain areas to capture the lovely variations found in nature. This adds a softer contrast to the deeper reds.

Use Orangey Flames

Apply slightly more orangey tones to represent the vibrant flames of color. This enhances the dynamic quality of the scene.

Transition to Ochre

Gradually transition the colors down to a more ochre hue. This creates a natural flow and connects the elements within the landscape.

PRO TIP

Blend pink tones with deep reds to capture natural variations and add softness.

11 Maintaining clean colors



Switch Brushes for Clean Colors

When changing color or tone significantly, use a different, clean brush. This ensures that your colors remain vibrant and do not become muddy. Avoid letting one color contaminate the next, which can lead to murky results.

PRO TIP

Always use a clean brush when switching to a new color to maintain vibrant and clear colors.

12 Color theory and distance effects



Understand Dirty Colour

Recognize that dirty colour is a common issue for oil painters. Be mindful of how colours can become muddy if not handled carefully.

Manage Yellow in Your Painting

Remember that yellow can be very strong and tends to stand out in a painting. Be cautious when using it to ensure it doesn't overpower other elements.

Consider Distance Effects on Colour

Understand that yellow is the first colour to fade with distance. As objects recede, their colours become grayer and less vibrant. Apply this knowledge to create depth in your landscape.

Observe Light on the Cliff Face

Notice the band of lighter colour running through the cliff face. Use this to add interest and dimension to your landscape.

PRO TIP

Yellow fades quickly with distance, so use it sparingly in distant elements to maintain depth.

13 Detailing cliff strata



Identify the Strata

Observe the cliff face and identify the slight band of lighter color that represents the strata. This band adds interest and leads the viewer's eye through the painting.

Paint the Strata

Use a lighter color to paint the strata, ensuring it stands out against the rest of the cliff face. Be careful not to over-detail this area to maintain a natural look.

PRO TIP

Use a lighter color to highlight the strata and guide the viewer's eye.

14 Foreground light and wet effects



Add Brighter Light to Rocks

Notice the brighter light where the sun catches the front edge of the rocks. Apply this light to the front edge of the terrace of rock to capture the effect of sunlight.

Create a Wet Area Feel

Keep the paint application thin in this area. This will help to convey the feeling of a wet surface on the rocks.

PRO TIP

Apply thin layers of paint to suggest wetness on surfaces.

15 Capturing surf and weather changes



Create Wet Area Feel

Add patterns of light water to reflect the sky. Use gentle strokes to capture the wet area feel, enhancing the atmosphere of the scene.

Add Surf Details

Mix a small touch of yellow into white to capture the surf. Apply this mixture to depict bursts of surf in the painting, focusing on areas where the surf is most active.

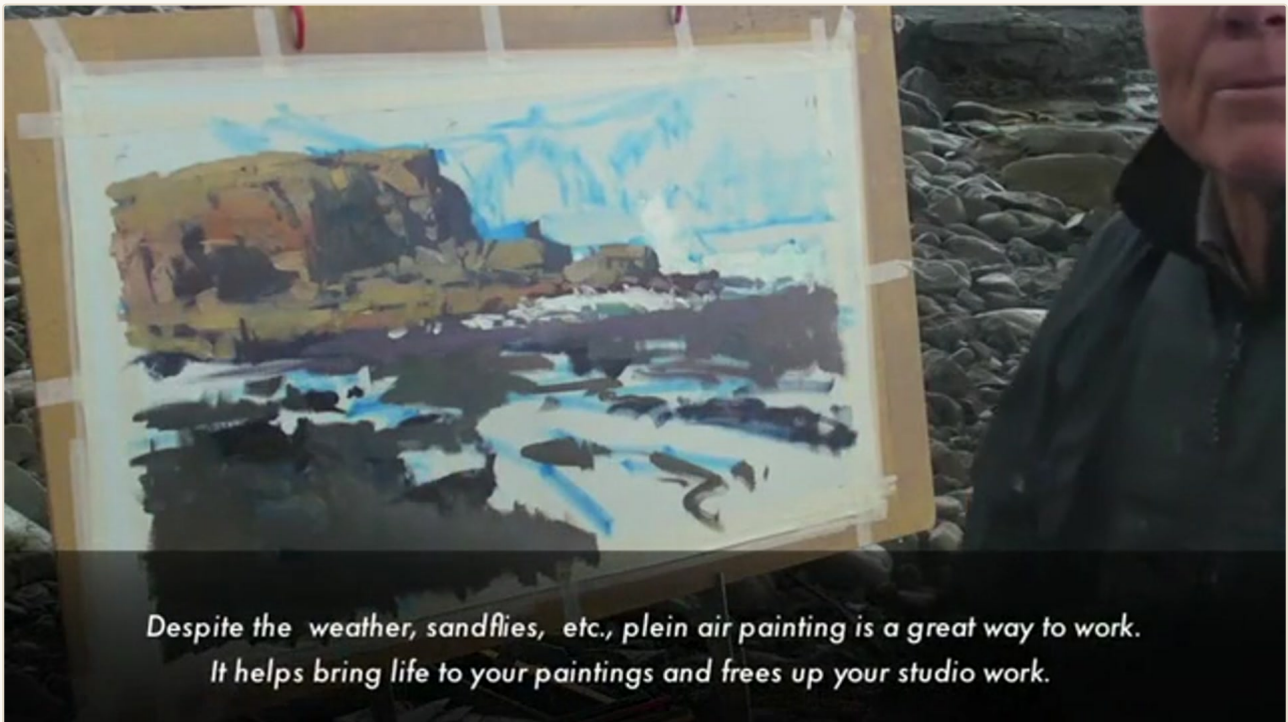
Depict Weather Changes

Observe the sky and include elements like rain or a rainbow to show weather changes. This adds dynamism and realism to your landscape.

PRO TIP

Use a small touch of yellow mixed with white to capture the energy and brightness of surf.

16 Painting in adverse weather conditions



Despite the weather, sandflies, etc., plein air painting is a great way to work. It helps bring life to your paintings and frees up your studio work.

Adjust the Color

Add a bit of permanent rose to your palette to lift the color slightly. This will help brighten the scene despite the adverse weather conditions.

Manage Wet Conditions

Cover your equipment with plastic to protect it from the rain. This will help keep your tools functional and prevent water from interfering with your painting process.

Mix Paints Carefully

Be aware that water on the palette can make mixing oils challenging. Stir the paints gently to achieve the desired consistency, even if it takes a bit more effort.

Soften the Horizon

Avoid creating a hard horizon line, especially when painting a big, threatening grey sky. A softer horizon will blend better with the dramatic sky and enhance the overall composition.

PRO TIP

Cover your equipment with plastic to protect it from the rain.

17 Simplifying the sky



Simplify the Sky

Identify the complex areas in the sky that are difficult to paint. Use darker colors to cover up any whites that are not working well. Focus on creating a simplified version of the sky with fewer layers and details.

Soften the Edges

When painting near the edge of the canvas, soften the edges of the clouds. This prevents hard edges that can draw the viewer's eye out of the painting.

PRO TIP

Use darker colors to simplify complex sky areas and cover unwanted whites.

18 Persevering through challenging conditions



Persevere Through Challenging Conditions

When painting in difficult weather, persist to complete your work. Even if conditions are less than ideal, staying committed can lead to a successful painting.

Assess Your Colors

If your colors feel underwhelming, consider adding more intensity. Sometimes wet conditions can dilute the vibrancy, so adjust accordingly to maintain the painting's strength.

Observe Reflections

Notice how water and light interact in your scene. Reflections can add depth and interest, so capture how light reflects off surfaces like water or cliffs.

Add Light Relief

In shadowed areas, introduce hints of light and texture. Suggest rocks or other elements to break up large shadowed spaces and add visual interest.

PRO TIP

Persist through challenging conditions to complete your painting; the effort can lead to rewarding results.

Summary & Key Takeaways

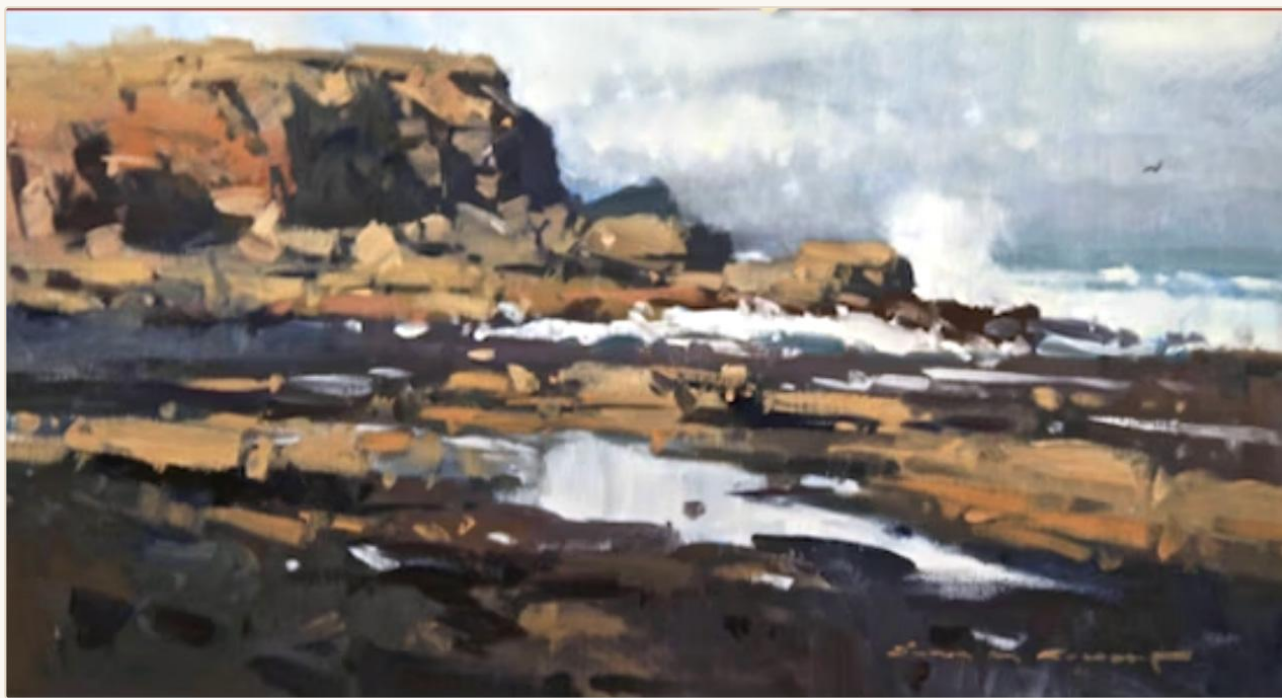
Embark on your landscape painting journey by setting up your canvas in a shaded area to avoid glare and ensure true color perception. Begin by placing the horizon thoughtfully to create a dynamic composition, and establish your darkest darks as the foundation of your painting. Use thin layers of paint initially, allowing for adjustments as you capture the shadows and light patterns that define the scene.

As you progress, focus on maintaining simplicity in the foreground and enhancing the form of rocks and cliffs with careful use of light and color. Pay attention to the natural variations in color, using clean brushes to maintain vibrancy and avoid muddiness. Capture the essence of the landscape by blending strong colors and textures, and use color theory to create depth and interest.

Finally, adapt to changing weather conditions by protecting your equipment and adjusting your palette. Simplify complex areas like the sky, and persevere through challenging conditions to complete your painting. By observing the interplay of light and shadow, and adding texture and detail where needed, you can create a compelling and realistic landscape.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Keep your canvas shaded from direct sunlight to avoid glare.
- Avoid splitting the painting into two equal halves with the horizon line.
- Begin your painting by establishing the darkest darks to set the tonal foundation.
- Use a thin layer of paint initially to allow for easier adjustments later.
- Quickly capturing shadows helps freeze the light, allowing you to maintain the scene's design even as lighting changes.
- Use lighter tones sparingly to suggest texture in shadowed areas.
- Always use a clean brush when switching to a new color to maintain vibrant and clear colors.
- Persist through challenging conditions to complete your painting; the effort can lead to rewarding results.



Curio Bay 2 by John Crump

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.

“Roosters at Mt. Alfred” in acrylics by Eric Hillmer, Toronto, ON, Canada.” by Eric Hillmer



"Roosters at Mt. Alfred" in acrylics by Eric Hillmer, Toronto, ON, Canada.

Nice interpretation there Eric! Focusing on the chickens has turned this into something more of a farmyard scene. You did a great job of the detail there.

The colours overall are a little more vibrant, with a nice contrast between orange and blue - always a winner. The grey in the hill on the right doesn't make sense within this scheme though - it should be a darker value than the mountains in the background which are many kilometres further away.

The dark branches in the trees look 'painted on top' rather than being within the foliage. That could have been avoided by adding some of that foliage colour to the dark mixture, or by painting some of the foliage lightly back over the branches.

The hard edge all across the top of the chicken field has an unnatural feel. Take a good look at how John has been careful to break and soften that edge in his painting.

Lots of interesting things to learn in this simple scene!

“In The Shadow of Alfred Oil on Canvas” by Nancy Newton



In The Shadow of Alfred Oil on Canvas

Hi Nancy, a nice feeling of light through this painting with good distance achieved. I like the fluid painterly brushwork as well, especially in the grasses.

Some of your patches of light in the snowy mountains seemed to spread into larger shapes which looks a little confusing. I've spent many hours watching John apply these finishing touches in the snow and while they look effortless, there is of course a lot of care and forethought in them, and often some scraping or reshaping till he's got them just right.

Looks to me like there was a fair amount of reworking that went on for you too, and you got it to the point where John would have scraped it a bit and repainted the base colours and then tried those highlights just one more time. You're nearly there!

The central tree ended up a little on the broccoli side because of the too-regular shape and the density of the foliage. Painting some of the background grey softly into those clumps will help with that.

I like the fact that you've made somewhere to park the campervan, but I do feel having what looks like a parking area there detracts from the overall nature of the scene. Could use some roughing up.

Keep up the good work!

“In the Shadow of Alfred (modified) 12 x 16 oil on linen canvas board” by Louise Villegas

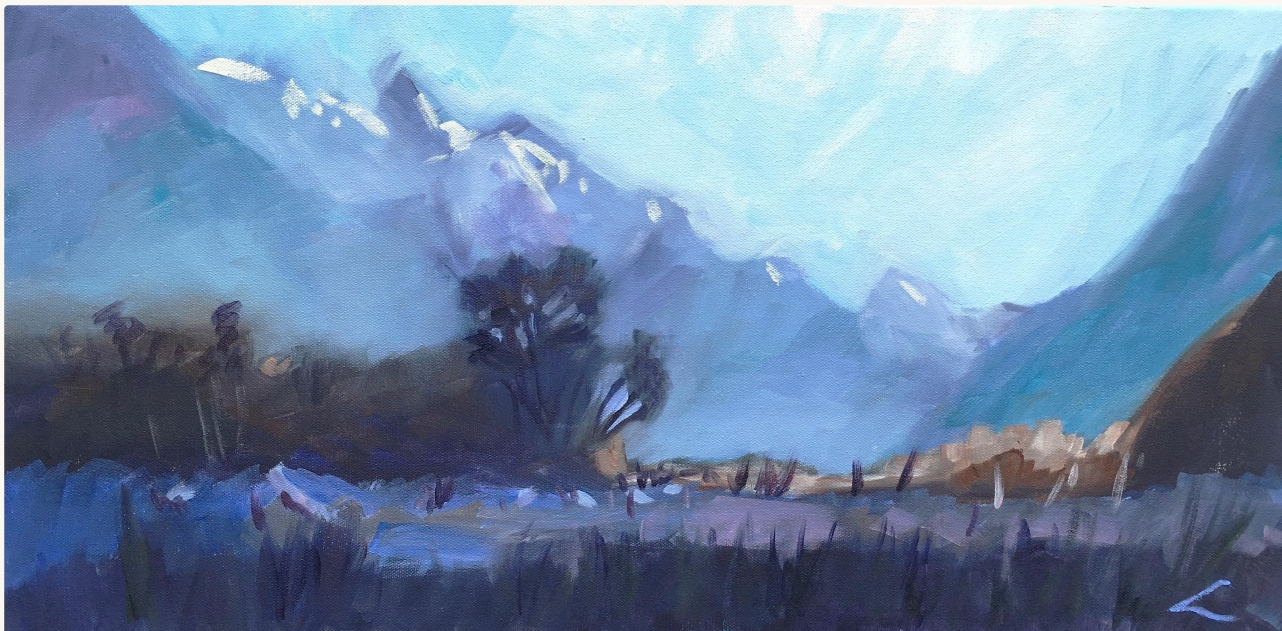


In the Shadow of Alfred (modified) 12 x 16 oil on linen canvas board

Looks like you have a taste for vibrant colour like I do, Louise. With that you've certainly achieved a sunnier aspect so it's been successful in that respect if that was a goal you had to change the lighting condition.

You'll find of course that the more you have to invent, the less realistic the painting becomes. That's the trade off.

“In the shadow of a mountain, oil, canvas, 30 cm x 60 cm” by Elena Sokolova



In the shadow of a mountain, oil, canvas, 30 cm x 60 cm

Good effort here, Elena. Your greyed colours are very homogenous and so there's a sense of light through atmosphere. You've also modulated these colours subtly across large areas which was one of the key take-aways from this lesson. There are three things I'd like you to look at again:

1. The edge of the mountains against the sky needs sharpening by painting back in the the sky.
2. The branches in the central tree have been drawn in rather than 'dashed in', making them look man-made and stiff. It's worth try this several times to get the hang of it. Using the right brush with thin enough paint is the key.
3. You've lost the nice browns in the trees and the foreground scrub, and the dark band of the foreground is a barrier to entering the painting.

I hope that helps.