



Last to Fall

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/87-Last-to-Fall>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, I invite you to join me in capturing the enchanting beauty of an autumn scene, where warm hues dance against the cool backdrop of majestic mountains. This lesson is all about embracing the vibrant colors of fall and translating them onto a 12-inch square canvas using Cobra water mixable oils from Royal Talens. With my palette of colors ready and a selection of brushes, including a synthetic flat wash brush and Rosemary & Co. bristle brushes, we'll embark on this creative journey together. I'll guide you through the process of painting en plein air, sharing my techniques and insights along the way. We'll start by sketching the large shapes of the painting, focusing on creating varied and interesting forms while planning the composition's light and dark areas. This scene is a rewarding subject, offering a rich tapestry of colors and textures to explore. Whether you follow along step by step or use the resource photo to craft something uniquely your own, I hope you'll find joy and inspiration in the process. Let's dive in and bring this autumn landscape to life on canvas.



"Last to Fall" 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.

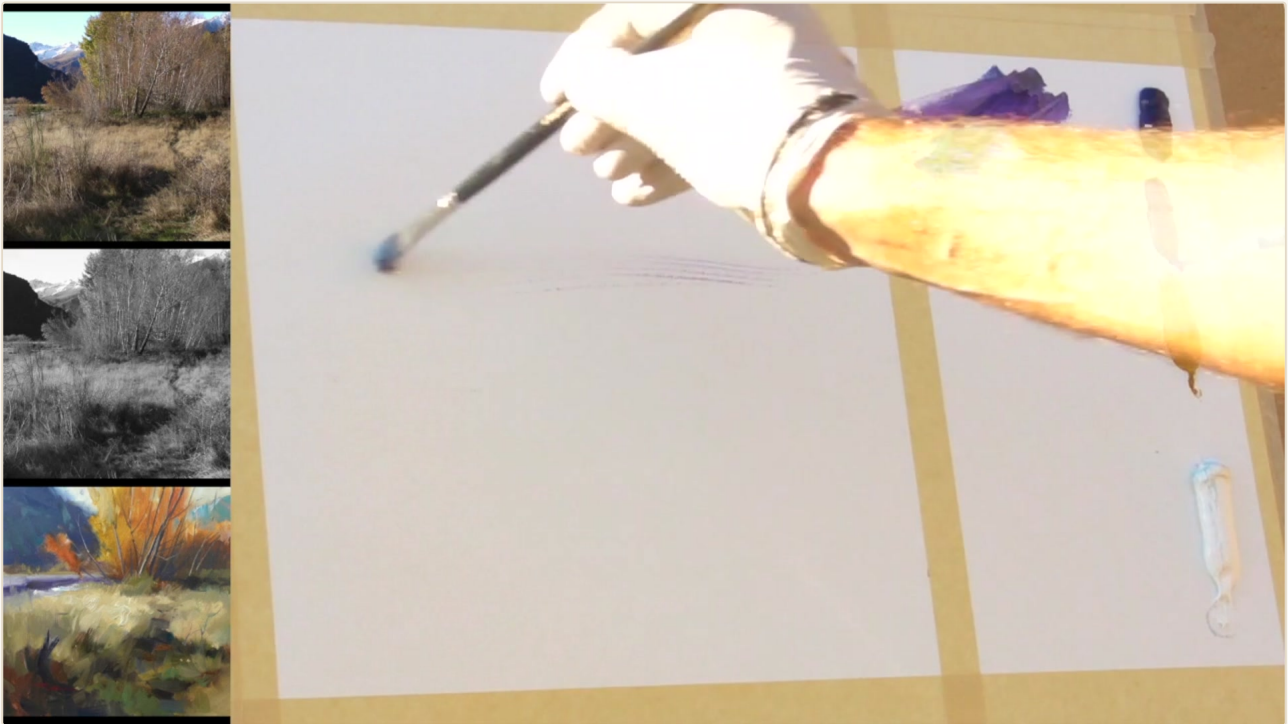
Materials

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 Sketching the Big Shapes



Sketch the Big Shapes

Use a brush to sketch the large shapes of the painting. Focus on creating large, interesting shapes that vary from each other. Plan the dark and light areas as you sketch to establish the composition.

PRO TIP

Use a brush for sketching when the drawing isn't critical, allowing for more fluid and varied shapes.

2 Focusing on Autumn Colors



Enhance Autumn Colors

Focus on the beautiful autumn colors in the trees as the central element of your painting. Ensure that all other elements in the painting support and enhance this focal point.

Intensify Color and Detail

Apply the most powerful colors to the trees to make them stand out. Use sharp edges and add the most detail in this area to draw attention.

Direct Lines Toward Focal Point

Arrange the lines in your painting so they converge on the area with the autumn colors. This will guide the viewer's eye to the focal point.

PRO TIP

Use the sharpest edges and most detail in the area with the autumn colors to make it the focal point.

3 Applying Yellow Ochre Wash



Apply Yellow Ochre Wash

Mix yellow ochre with a generous amount of walnut oil to create a wash. Apply this wash thinly across the canvas, observing how the thinner application results in a lighter and more vibrant color compared to a thick application.

Enhance Color Variation

Adjust the color slightly to the left and right of the main glowing piece of the tree. Make these areas slightly warmer and darker to add more interest and depth to the painting.

PRO TIP

Use a thinner application of paint to achieve a lighter and more vibrant color.

4 Foreground Dark Greens



Apply Dark Dull Green

Use a very dark dull green for the darkest areas in the foreground. Apply it quickly with big brush strokes and thin paint, ensuring just enough to cover the canvas.

Add Warmth to the Green

Introduce more variety by warming up the green slightly. Maintain the same value while making it just a bit warmer than the original green.

PRO TIP

Use big brush strokes to quickly cover the canvas with dark colors.

5 Understanding Broken and Bent Color



Mix a Dark Blue-Grey

Mix a dark blue-grey color to add depth and interest to your painting. This will help create a more dynamic and engaging color field.

PRO TIP

Avoid using the same color repeatedly to maintain interest in your painting.

6 Mixing Dark Bluey Grey



Mix Dark Bluey Grey

Use a restricted palette of phthalo blue and magenta to mix a dark bluey grey. Be cautious with these colors as they have high tinting strength. Add small amounts gradually to control the mixture and avoid overpowering the grey.

PRO TIP

Phthalo blue and magenta have high tinting strength, so add them sparingly to mixtures.

7 Riverbed Shadows and Color Transitions



Enhance Riverbed Shadows

Use the same color with a bit more magenta for the shadow in the riverbed. This creates a directional line leading to the tree, adding depth and interest.

Mix a Gloopy Paint Pile

Mix a generous amount of paint with walnut oil to create a thick, gloopy consistency. This is ideal for the impressionistic style needed for the soft edge tussock grass.

Warm and Darken Foreground Grass

Adjust the color of the grass as it comes into the foreground to be slightly warmer and darker. This subtle change adds depth and draws the viewer's eye.

Create a Color Transition on Palette

Develop a transition of color on your palette to easily access the needed hues for subtle variations. A larger palette is beneficial for managing multiple colors.

Add Foreground Color Interest

Introduce a touch of green in the foreground to add color interest and enhance the overall composition.

PRO TIP

Use a larger palette to manage color transitions and subtle variations effectively.

8 Foreground and Sky Details



Enhance Foreground Color

Add a touch of green to the foreground to create color interest. This will help draw the viewer's eye and add depth to your painting.

Soften Hill Edge

In the sky area, ensure the edge of the hill is very soft. This softness will create a sense of distance and atmospheric perspective.

Prepare for Light

Apply a greyish brown to the area where you plan to add light later. This base layer will help the lights stand out more effectively.

Highlight Grass

Paint a thin strip of grass being highlighted by the sun. Keep it less vibrant than the foreground tree to ensure it sits back in space.

PRO TIP

Ensure the edge of the hill is very soft to create a sense of distance.

9 Riverbed and Foreground Shadows



Paint Riverbed Stones

Use a light mid-gray to paint the stones of the riverbed. Apply the paint with a slightly thicker consistency to create texture and depth.

Add Water Shimmer

Apply almost white paint in thick strokes to add a shimmer effect on the water. This will create a sense of light reflecting off the surface.

Position Tree Bases

Ensure the base of the trees is accurately placed in relation to the distant horizon. This will help maintain the correct perspective in your painting.

Enhance Foreground Shadows

Mix a dark blue-grey and apply it to the foreground to enhance the shadows. This will help tie the foreground to the blue-grays in the top of the painting.

Add Dark Accents

Add dark accents to the old tree stump in the foreground. This will provide contrast and draw attention to the details in the foreground.

PRO TIP

Use thick, almost white paint to create a shimmering effect on the water, enhancing the sense of light.

10 Tree Stump and Background Details



Add Dark Accents to Tree Stump

Apply dark accents to the tree stump in the foreground using thin paint. This helps to downplay the stump, allowing for potential adjustments or removal later.

Mix and Apply Blue-Green for Tree Tops

Mix a blue-green color that is slightly lighter than the background base. Use this to indicate the tops of some trees, adding depth and interest to the scene.

Lighten Blue-Green for Added Interest

Lighten the blue-green mix further to enhance the visual interest in the background. This subtle variation helps to create a more dynamic landscape.

Enhance Cliff Face with Rock Falls

Identify areas on the cliff face where rock falls can be added. Use these elements to break up the large dark shape and add texture and interest.

Add Stronger Blue for Sparkle

Introduce a slightly stronger blue in the corner of the painting. This will create a vibrant contrast against the orange, adding sparkle to the composition.

PRO TIP

Use a slightly stronger blue to create a vibrant contrast against orange, adding sparkle to your painting.

11 Tussock Grass Light Area



Enhance Tussock Grass Light Area

Add more form to the light areas in the tussock grasses. Use light tones to maintain the glowing quality of the area. Avoid adding dark accents, as they can diminish the vibrancy of the light.

PRO TIP

Keep details in the central light area of grass fairly light to preserve its glow.

12 Painting Tree Branches



Choose the Right Brush

Select a long rigger or liner brush, or use the edge of a very sharp synthetic brush. These brushes hold enough paint to create long, elegant lines for the branches.

Paint Elegant Branches

Draw thin, elegant branches with confident, flowing strokes. Aim for a natural, effortless appearance, as if the branches are joyously brushed onto the canvas.

Create Variety

Ensure the branches vary in shape and placement to mimic the randomness of nature. Avoid repeating patterns, such as two branches forming a tuning fork shape at the same level.

PRO TIP

Use a brush that holds enough paint to create long, continuous lines for natural-looking branches.

13 Foreground Randomness and Structure



Create Foreground Randomness

Aim to balance randomness with structure in the foreground. Focus on light and shadow to maintain a sense of order. Step back frequently to assess if the painting reads well from a distance.

PRO TIP

Regularly step back from the canvas to ensure the painting is easily readable from 10 feet away.

14 Distance and Foreground Highlights



Add Distant Trees

Paint a few trees in the distance to give the mountain a sense of scale. Use a small brush to create subtle shapes that suggest trees without too much detail.

Highlight the Foreground

Add a few sharp, sparkly highlights in the foreground. Be careful not to overdo it; a few well-placed highlights will add interest without overwhelming the scene.

PRO TIP

Use restraint with highlights to maintain balance and avoid overwhelming the painting.

15 Adding Texture to Tussock Grass



Add Texture to Tussock Grass

Mix a generous amount of paint to create a thick consistency. Apply the paint to the central light area of the tussock grass with one or two bold strokes. Ensure the paint is laid down thickly to create textural interest and then leave it as is.

PRO TIP

Use thick paint to add texture and interest to the central light area of the tussock grass.

16 Final Touches and Signing



Refine the Double Branch

Enhance the appearance of the double branch by adding small details. Use a fine brush to apply a few specks, suggesting individual leaves for a more natural look.

Sign Your Painting

Once satisfied with the final touches, sign your painting in a corner. Use a small brush and a contrasting color to ensure your signature is visible but not overpowering.

Remove the Tape

Carefully peel off the tape surrounding your painting. This will reveal clean edges and give your artwork a polished finish.

PRO TIP

Use a fine brush to add small specks for individual leaves, enhancing realism.

17 Post-Painting Reflections



Enhance Foreground Light

Strengthen the light in the foreground to create a clearer distinction between light and shade. This will make the shapes more distinct and easier to read from a distance.

Remove Distracting Elements

Eliminate the old stump with its sharp edge, as it distracts from the center of interest. This will help maintain focus on the main subject of the painting.

Refine Foliage Shape

Soften the candy floss appearance of the foliage by incorporating some background color. This will reduce its distinct form and integrate it better into the scene.

Intensify Center Darks

Deepen the darks in the center of interest with a slightly stronger, warmer hue. This will enhance the focal point and add depth to the painting.

PRO TIP

Strengthen the light in the foreground to create a clearer distinction between light and shade.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Begin your painting journey by sketching the large, interesting shapes that will form the backbone of your composition. Use a brush to plan out the dark and light areas, focusing on the autumn colors in the trees as your central element. These vibrant hues will guide the viewer's eye and set the tone for the rest of your painting.

As you progress, apply washes and layers to build depth and interest. Use a yellow ochre wash to create a vibrant base, and introduce dark greens and blue-greys to add contrast and dimension. Pay attention to the transitions and variations in color, especially in the foreground and riverbed, to maintain a dynamic and engaging scene.

In the final stages, focus on the details that bring your painting to life. Add texture to the tussock grass, refine the branches with confident strokes, and introduce highlights sparingly to enhance the composition. Remember to step back frequently to ensure your painting reads well from a distance, and make any necessary adjustments to balance light and shadow. Once satisfied, add your signature to complete your artwork.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Use a brush for sketching large shapes to allow for fluidity.
- Focus on autumn colors as the focal point with sharp edges and detail.
- Apply a thin yellow ochre wash for a vibrant color base.
- Use big brush strokes for dark foreground areas to cover quickly.
- Mix colors sparingly to maintain control and avoid overpowering hues.
- Ensure the hill's edge is soft to create distance.
- Use thick, almost white paint for a shimmering water effect.
- Step back regularly to check the painting's readability from a distance.



"Last to Fall" 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.

"Morning on the River" by Robin Sage



"Morning on the River" 7.5" x 11.5" WS oil on canvas textured paper by Robin Sage

You showed great courage in tackling a difficult subject Robin. The figure, the rafts, the water and the beach are beautifully done with great colour and tone. One of the things I try to make sure I do when nearing the end of a painting is to look away and then flick the eye back to the painting. Somehow, it helps me to notice things that are troublesome — out of keeping with the rest of the picture. Your cliff on the right and the reflections at the bottom of the cliff trouble me. They are too busy — especially the reflections. The other thing — less of a bother — is the line of cliffs in the background. They are far too blue for the distance. The colour is imposing itself on the rest of the painting. A quieter shade of blueish grey would have worked better. A very good effort nevertheless.

- John Crump

"Boat" by Olivia O'Carra



"Boat" 11"x10" Oil by Olivia O'Carra

You have done very well with a complex subject Olivia. The wharf, the dinghies, the boat sheds, (apart from a slight perspective problem with the front of the nearest shed), and the yacht obviously resting on the bottom, are all complicated shapes to manage. You have achieved the effect of glittering water in the foreground very well.

The only area I have a problem with is the highlight colour on the background hills. If you look at the blue you have used for the shadows on those hills, they are obviously a long way away. However, the colour you have used for the highlights is not very far at all. This is a very common problem for many painters – the colours they use on the shadows and highlights of distant objects argue with each other, whether they are mountains, foothills, or even relatively close objects. Just remember that yellows in the landscape disappear quite quickly with distance.

- John Crump

“We'll Get Her There” by Denis King



"We'll Get Her There" 20 x 16 inches Oil on Canvas by Denis King

An unusual and challenging subject Denis. I suspect you enjoy painting boats and water as you have handled them very well in this painting. Beautiful colour – especially around the bow of the boat that works so well to draw the eye to the focal point. You have handled the water well too.

Perhaps my only hesitation is the land and sky behind the boats. If you had used a slightly darker blue/grey on the hills, made them a little taller, and softened the top edge slightly – almost blurred them into the sky, they would have added to the feeling of early morning haze and would have resolved a slight loss of definition around the back of the ship and the superstructure of the rear tug.

Sweeping the front edge of the cirrus cloud up and out of the top right edge would have given an added dimension to the sky and would also have helped direct the viewer to the focal point.

But I don't want to sound too 'picky' – it is a very nice piece of work.

- John Crump

“Autumn Colours” by Fay Thomson



"Autumn Colours" 8" x 10" Oil on Canvas by Fay Thomson

I would agree with Michael's comments Fay but would want to add a couple of extra thoughts. The subject of your painting (obviously the trees in autumn colour) have dictated a strong autumn gold. However, the mountains to each side of the trees and the shadowy path into the painting are almost the complementary of those trees. Therefore, there is no particular colour theme to the painting – in fact the colours are almost at odds with one another. If you look at your painting dispassionately, you will see that the trees feel divorced or ostracised from the rest of the painting.

Most of us would like to achieve a sparkle in our work and we can achieve that better I believe, if we let one colour be dominant and the bulk of the rest of the painting be in more neutral colours, perhaps even analogous colours with only small amounts of the complementary to bring that sparkle that we are after.

In that way, the painting has a theme and 'holds together' better.

The other thought is just a small one – the trunks of your trees feel as if they are drawn on top of the trees rather than a part of the group amongst the foliage. After you have drawn as loosely as possible the trunks and branches, try taking a large clean dry brush and lightly whisking across them. They will immediately become soft-edged and feel as if they are within the tree, not drawn on later.

- John Crump

Thanks John for all your insightful comments - hugely appreciated!

- Richard Robinson