



Paradise

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/86-Paradise>

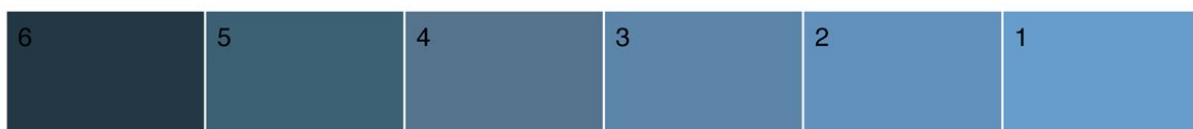
MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

Welcome to one of my favorite painting spots on the planet—Paradise. In this chapter, you'll embark on a journey to capture the breathtaking beauty of this scene, learning to paint receding mountains, the interplay of light and shadow on snow, and the delicate wisps of autumnal willow trees. We'll start with a 13 by 10 and a half inch canvas, but feel free to adjust to a size that suits you. Using Cobra Water Mixable Oils by Royal Talens and a selection of Rosemary & Co brushes, I'll guide you through each step, from sketching the horizon line to adding those final touches with a palette knife and a detail brush. This lesson will help you master the art of creating depth and interest in your landscape by varying shapes and avoiding repetition. By the end, you'll not only have a stunning piece of art but also a deeper understanding of how to bring such a rewarding subject to life on canvas. Enjoy the process and the beauty of Paradise as you paint along with me.

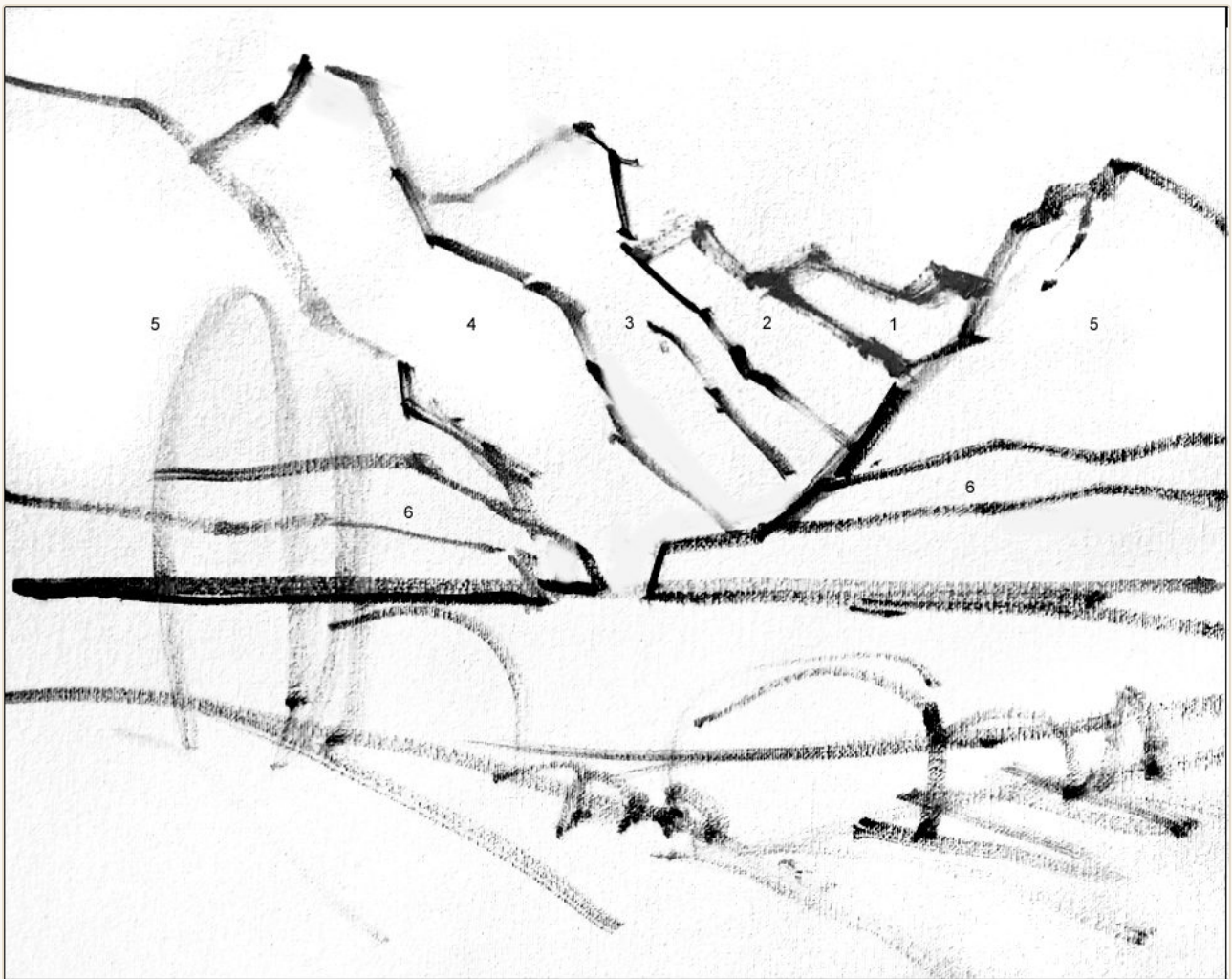


"Paradise" 13x10.5" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson.



REFERENCE PHOTO 1

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 2

The scene as Richard found it.

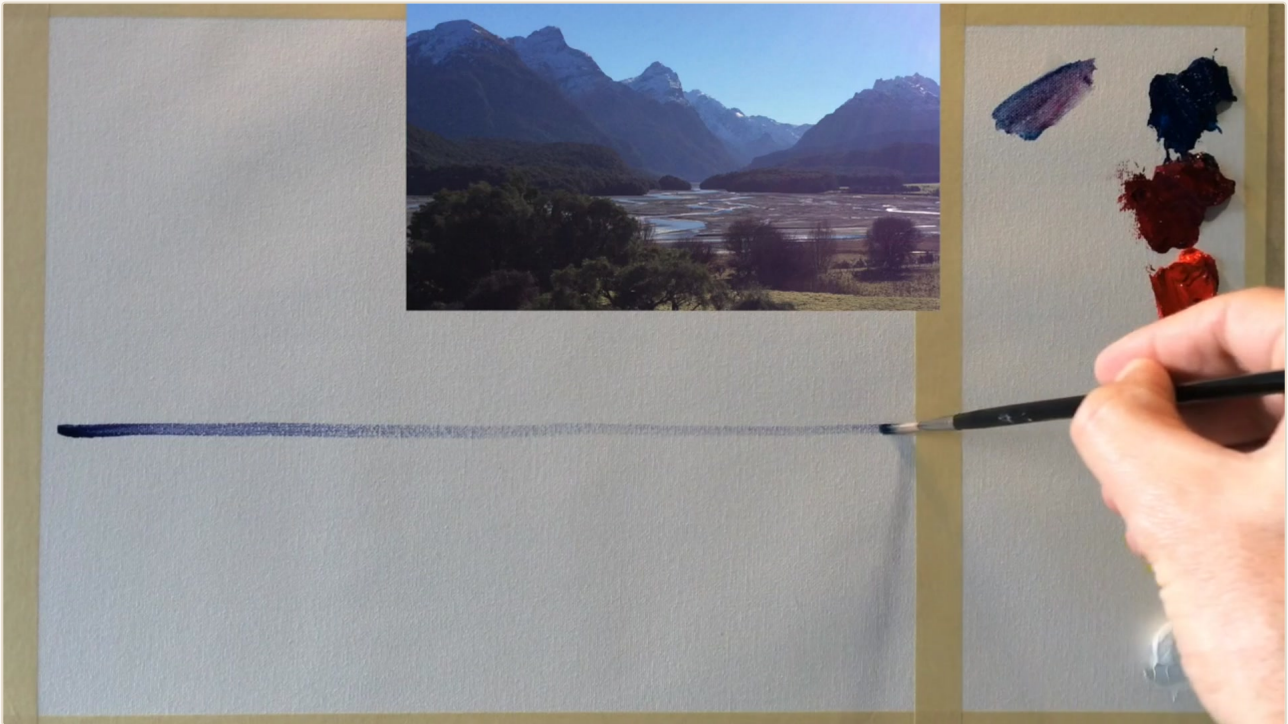
Materials

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 composition



Establish the Horizon

Begin by sketching the horizon line lower than halfway down the canvas. This placement ensures that the mountains dominate the composition, emphasizing their grandeur over the foreground.

Position the Mountain Peaks

Carefully place the tops of the two main mountains, considering the angle of the slope between them. This helps create a dynamic and accurate depiction, compensating for any distortion from wide-angle lens photography.

Create Variation in Shapes

Focus on achieving variation in your drawing. Ensure that each mountain and shape is distinct, avoiding repetition to add interest and uniqueness to the composition.

PRO TIP

Position the horizon lower to emphasize the mountains in your composition.

2 Mixing chromatic black



Mix Chromatic Black

Combine equal amounts of phthalo blue and pyrrole red, or cadmium red if you prefer. Add a touch of yellow ochre to the mixture to reduce the purple tone. This adjustment pulls the color towards the center of the color wheel, creating a more neutral black. Chromatic black is more vibrant than tube black, preventing your colors from becoming too dull.

PRO TIP

Use chromatic black to maintain vibrancy in your painting, avoiding the dulling effect of tube black.

3 Mixing colors for distant mountains



Mix Distant Mountain Color

Mix a large amount of white with a tiny touch of phthalo blue and an even smaller touch of chromatic black. This will create the color for the most distant mountain.

Paint the Distant Mountain

Fill in the space for the most distant mountain with this mixture. It may appear too dark initially due to the surrounding white canvas.

Mix Next Mountain Color

Add a little more chromatic black to the previous mixture to create the color for the next closest mountain. Use this to block in the next mountain area.

PRO TIP

If unsure about the color mix, paint it directly onto your printed swatch to compare.

4 Mixing colors for closer mountains



Mix Color for Closer Mountains

Add a little more chromatic black to your mix, along with a tiny touch of red. Ensure the paint is not too thick by adding walnut oil or a painting medium for even coverage.

Adjust Color for Depth

For the next layer, add more black, a little red, and a tiny touch of orange to the mix. This combination will give a slightly greener hue, which is suitable as the mountains appear closer.

Enhance Foreground Foothills

Mix in more black and orange for the foreground foothills. Make these slightly darker than the mountains behind them to create depth.

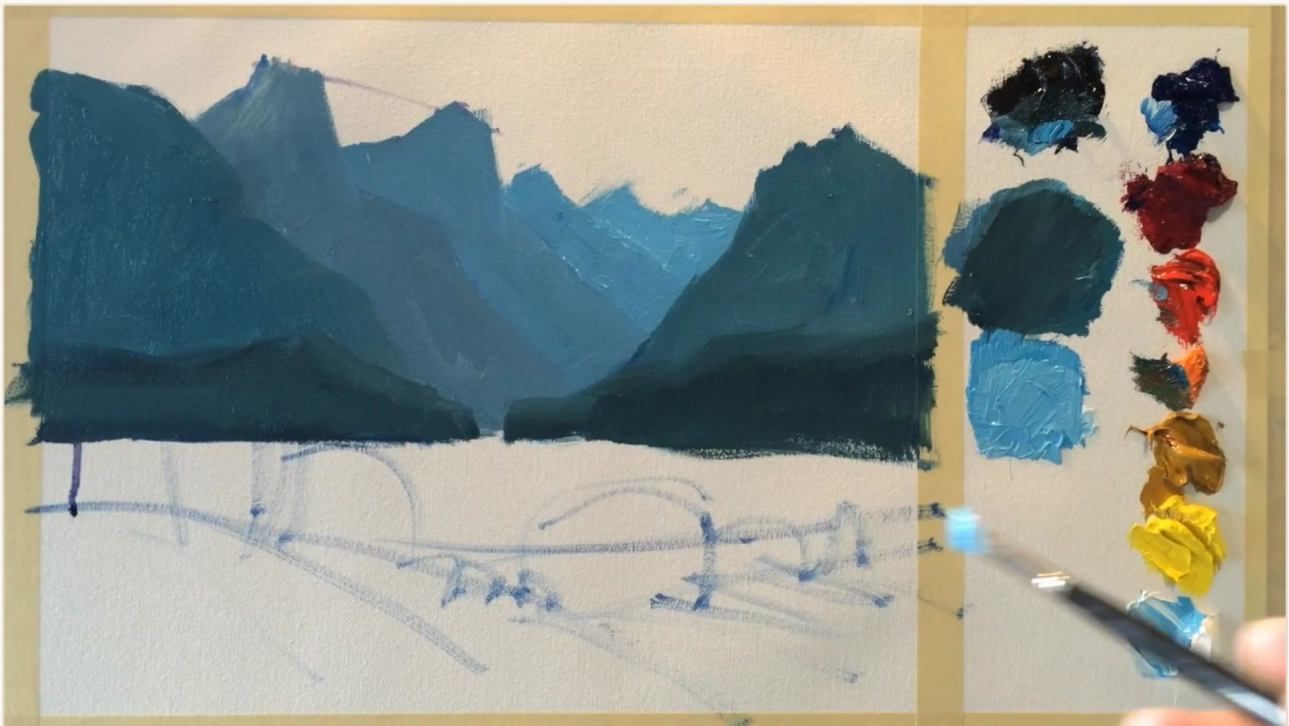
Prepare Shadow Color for Snow

Mix the color again to use for the shadow side of the snow on the mountains.

PRO TIP

Thin your paint with walnut oil to ensure even coverage when layering.

5 Painting snow and shadows on mountains



Mix Snow Color

Combine mainly white with a little bit of blue and a tiny bit of chromatic black. Ensure the paint is slightly thicker than the layer beneath by using less painting medium.

Apply Snow Strokes

Use brush strokes that echo the angle of the rock formations. Leave gaps between strokes to suggest rocks, varying the thickness to avoid a patterned look.

Maintain Clean Brushwork

Keep your brush clean and frequently renew the paint to prevent blending with the underlying layer, which can cause muddiness.

Consider Snow Line

Observe how far down the mountain the snow should go. Avoid running it all the way to the bottom to maintain color variation and depth.

Use Direct Brushwork

Apply brush strokes directly and avoid overworking them. Place a stroke, maybe cross it with another, but resist the urge to fiddle, as this can muddy the paint.

PRO TIP

Keep your brush clean and renew the paint frequently to prevent muddying the colors.

6 Adding mist to mountains



Add Mist to Mountains

Use the same color to create mist at the base of the mountains. Start at the bottom and gradually work your way up. Allow the mist to blend softly into the darker paint above.

Highlight the Bush

Add some light onto the bush located on the mountains. This will enhance the depth and detail of your painting.

PRO TIP

Begin the mist at the base and blend upwards for a natural transition.

7 Adding light and color to mountains



Add Light to Foreground Bushes

Mix bright yellow and titanium white into the existing grey. Use a light touch to dash this mixture onto the bushes in the foreground. Angle the brush sideways and drag the paint gently to avoid blending with the wet layer underneath.

Lighten and Blue the Green for Distant Mountains

As you move back into the mountains, lighten the green by adding white and a touch of blue. Be cautious not to overstate the green; keep it subtle as it should almost disappear when you squint at the reference.

Enhance Atmospheric Perspective

Continue to lighten and blue the colors as you step back into the distance. Notice how the contrast between colors decreases, creating a sense of depth and atmospheric perspective.

Observe and Paint Shape Characteristics

Focus on the character of the shapes on the mountain. The right side of the brush strokes should be sharper, while the left side should be softer as the bush rolls out of the light. Vary your brush strokes to avoid creating a pattern.

Add Vibrancy to Create a Spotlight Effect

Increase the vibrancy of colors in the middle area to create a spotlight effect. This will add punch and draw attention to that part of the mountains.

PRO TIP

Use a light touch with the brush to prevent blending and maintain clean, vibrant colors.

8 Painting the sky



Mix the Sky Color

Mix a color using white, a touch of blue, and a touch of black. Ensure this mixture is slightly lighter than the number one swatch. This will help define the tops of the mountains and create a subtle spotlight effect in the sky.

Apply the Sky Color

Apply the mixed sky color to the left and right areas of the sky. Use this opportunity to decide whether you want soft or sharp edges for the mountain tops. The lighter sky color will make the mountains in the background just visible.

Create a Bright Light Effect

Mix a lighter color with white and a touch of yellow, allowing it to blend slightly with the initial blue. Use a clean brush to apply this color thickly without any painting medium, creating a bright light effect in the central sky area.

Paint Soft-Edged Clouds

Focus on creating clouds with mainly soft edges, allowing a few hard edges here and there. Reserve the hard edges for defining the mountains.

Add Sky Color to Mountains

Add a little of the sky color to the back of the mountains to integrate them with the sky and enhance the overall composition.

PRO TIP

Use a clean brush to apply the lighter sky color thickly for a bright light effect.

9 Adding light to snow



Add Light to Snow

Use a clean brush with white and a touch of yellow to apply light to the snow. Drag the paint gently across the surface. The paint will pick up some blue from underneath, creating a natural blend.

Maintain Pure Color

Clean your brush after each stroke and reload it with fresh paint to maintain a sparkling pure color. This prevents the blue from dulling the white too much.

Create Depth with Duller Tones

In areas where you don't want a sparkling white, use a second stroke without cleaning the brush. This will mix some blue into the white, creating a softer, less vibrant tone.

Control Contrast in Distance

Use several strokes without cleaning the brush in the distant areas to reduce contrast. This helps create a sense of depth and distance.

Focus Brightness

Reserve the brightest whites for the center of the painting. In the top left corner and distant areas, dull down the whites to avoid drawing too much attention.

PRO TIP

Clean your brush after each stroke to maintain pure, sparkling whites in the snow.

10 Painting the midground and river plain



Mix Warm Grey for Midground

Create a warm grey by combining white, red, a little blue, and black. Apply this mixture to the river plain and bushes on the right, ensuring the lines are very horizontal and straight to maintain perspective. Keep the trees small to provide scale to the scene.

Paint Grasses with Light Color

Mix a lighter, brighter color for the grasses using yellow ochre, white, a touch of blue, and black. Scoop the paint onto the end of your brush to create a crisp edge and lightly drag it onto the canvas.

Create Stony River Basin

Mix a light warm grey with white, black, a little red, and yellow ochre. Apply in long horizontal strokes, leaving gaps for the shiny river. Soften the edge slightly to indicate the cast shadow from the hill.

Add Light to Water

Use a smaller brush to mix the light snow color with white and a touch of yellow. Apply thickly in thin horizontal lines, avoiding steep diagonals to maintain perspective. Add a little blue to the water's edges for reflectiveness.

Paint Backlit Trees

Mix a warm rust-colored grey using white, black, red, and yellow ochre. Use a big soft brush for soft edges and gestural strokes in the foreground. Brush lightly to avoid hard edges, creating the effect of wintering or autumnal willow trees.

PRO TIP

Ensure lines are horizontal and straight to maintain perspective.

11 Painting trees and foliage



Prepare the Background

Wipe some of the background paint off the area for the big tree to prevent muddiness. This will give you a cleaner surface to work on.

Create a Dark Center

Mix a slightly darker version of your tree color by adding black and more red. Brush upwards into the trees to create a darker center, simulating a backlit effect with rim lighting on the thinner edges.

Vary Tree Characteristics

Ensure each tree has its own character by varying their colors, sizes, and shapes. Avoid making them all the same to add interest and realism.

Add Cast Shadows

Use yellow ochre and dark grey to add a long cast shadow to the taller poplar tree. Include a few dark accents to enhance the foreground's interest.

Mix and Apply Cast Shadows

Mix a purplish dark grey with more blue and red for the tree cast shadows on the bottom plane. Ensure these shadows point towards the sun in a radial fashion, avoiding parallel shadows.

Paint the Lights

Mix white and yellow ochre for the lights. Brush upwards into the dark areas to achieve a soft edge, adding more yellow ochre as the foreground rolls towards you to darken it slightly.

PRO TIP

Ensure all cast shadows point towards the sun in a radial fashion to maintain a natural look.

12 Enhancing foreground with color and shadows



Correct Shadow Direction

Adjust the shadows so they point towards the sun, which is just above the central peaks. This will create a more realistic and cohesive lighting effect.

Deepen Foreground Darks

Add darker darks to the foreground to enhance contrast and make it stand out against the background. This will give the painting more depth and interest.

Strengthen Foreground Colors

Mix a slightly more red version of the tree color and brush it lightly on top. Ensure variations by adding more yellow ochre to some areas and creating slightly harder edges.

Enhance Poplar Tree Texture

Use a stronger color on the side of the poplar tree. Drag the side of the brush to create interesting soft textural effects.

PRO TIP

Create variations in color and texture by mixing different hues and using different brush techniques.

13 Adding sheep to the landscape



Add Shadows for Sheep

Use a mid-grey to paint small shadow shapes for the sheep at the bottom of the landscape. Position them slightly further up the hill to make them appear larger.

Highlight the Sheep

Mix a lot of white with a spot of yellow ochre to create highlights. Apply these highlights on the backs of the sheep to give them dimension.

Vary Sheep Shapes

Ensure each sheep has a different shape to add variety and realism to the scene.

Blend Sheep into Grass

Soften the edges of the sheep and gently work the grass up into the base of the sheep to make them appear as if they are standing in long grass.

PRO TIP

Use a mid-grey for shadows and a mix of white and yellow ochre for highlights to add depth to the sheep.

14 Final touches and signing



Add Dark Accents

Apply very thin dark accents to the tree trunks to enhance their definition. Use a fine brush to ensure precision and avoid making the branches too thick.

Light Accents

Introduce a few light accents using a lighter grey to add dimension and contrast to the tree.

Correct Thick Branches

If branches become too thick, thin them down with your finger or a brush using the surrounding foliage color.

Sign Your Painting

Once satisfied with the final touches, sign your painting to complete it.

PRO TIP

Use a fine brush for thin accents to maintain precision and avoid overly thick branches.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by setting a strong foundation with a well-planned composition. Begin with a lower horizon line to let the mountains take center stage, and sketch with attention to variation and dynamic angles. As you progress, mix vibrant chromatic blacks to maintain color richness and avoid dullness in your work.

Layer your colors thoughtfully, starting with distant mountains and gradually moving to the foreground. Use a combination of blues, reds, and yellows to create depth and atmospheric perspective. Pay attention to the thickness of your paint and the cleanliness of your brush to keep your colors vibrant and avoid muddiness.

As you add final details, focus on the interplay of light and shadow to bring your landscape to life. Use subtle variations in color and texture to enhance realism, and ensure your shadows align with the light source for a cohesive look. With the addition of small elements like sheep, your scene will gain character and charm. Finish with precise accents and your signature to complete your masterpiece.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Position the horizon lower to emphasize the mountains.
- Use chromatic black to maintain vibrancy in your painting.
- Thin your paint with walnut oil for even coverage.
- Keep your brush clean and renew the paint frequently.
- Begin the mist at the base and blend upwards for a natural transition.
- Use a light touch with the brush to prevent blending.
- Ensure lines are horizontal and straight to maintain perspective.
- Ensure all cast shadows point towards the sun in a radial fashion.



"Paradise" 13x10.5" 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.

"Workshop33" by Janet Buckton



"Workshop33" Oil on Canvas, 12"x16" by Janet Buckton

Good drawing skills shown here Janet - you've been pretty accurate with your shapes while showing a fair amount of expressive brushwork - never an easy combo to get right but you've done it well. Your colours are mostly working well together, especially the atmospheric recession in the mountains. You've made a fairly tidy hedgerow of the foreground trees with similar sizes and colours and missed an opportunity for variation. As a general 'rule' I tend to try to avoid repeating shapes and sizes anywhere in a painting - it's like a monotonous drum beat compared to a lyrical melody. There's a little confusion as to how the ground is lying the front left coming up to the big trees. I think it's the sheep doing the damage there actually because you've painted little shadows under them, as if viewed from a height whereas the shape of the hill is trying to tell us something different. Have another look at the sheep in my painting. Overall though, a very good job.

"Autumn Paradise" by Elena Sokolova



"Autumn Paradise" 40x40cm Oil on Canvas by Elena Sokolova

You've got great colour in this painting Elena. By raising the saturation of the warm in the foreground you've made a much stronger colour statement than I did in my demo painting. The cool in the mountains look all the more cool by comparison. If you had lightened the darks in the mountains by just one step you could have created a little more distance between it and the foreground, but the main thing that's causing your mountains to pop forward is the brushwork back there which you've unfortunately made a pattern of - like fence palings - without enough variation in them to simulate reality. Give it a few more goes and you'll get the hang of it - it's not easy at first.

"Paradise Estuary" by Suzanne Louise Andrew



"Paradise Estuary" oil on canvas 45 x 35cm by Suzanne Louise Andrew

This is certainly a different take on the scene Suzanne - much more sombre. Great to see you playing with it like that. The mountains are receding nicely and with subtle value steps and you've achieved that spotlight effect there too - nice job. You've made a pattern of the mountain shapes - they're starting to look mass produced rather than individual sculptures. It's all too easy to do this painting mountains and it really begins at the sketching in stage where you need to focus hard on the angles of each mountain so that they don't copy each other. Nice too see you've had fun with the palette knife in the river. I feel as though the river gets a little bitsy or fragmented there in places. I be looking to simplify some of that so it reads a little easier. Even cropping some off the bottom might do. You've made the strip of land closest to us on the left too similar in size, shape and colour to the land directly behind it for my eye and their edges are resting on each other rather than being separate or clearly overlapping. It might look better trimming the left side of it off and making an island of it. I hope those few pointers help out.

"Ian's Interpretation of Paradise" by Ian Given



"Ian's Interpretation of Paradise" 15"x10" Water Soluble Oil on Canvas by Ian Given

Hi Ian, not too shabby brother - lots of things going right, a few things to look at again. Overall it's a very pleasing image - the values and colours are working well together and your drawing and brushwork is sound. I'd take another look at the similarity of values between the darks in the background and foreground. Making the mountains slightly lighter will give you more depth and variation. To achieve that it often pays to place your darkest dark in the foreground right at the beginning to give yourself a value baseline to measure off. You could add more variation into the yellow ochre grasses in the foreground because without that they're looking a little flat. The greens on the mountains in the mountains seem to be a little too dark and too vibrant - if they were a little lighter and grayer they would sit there better. Cameras often lighten the blues in our paintings though. (The camera does lie.)