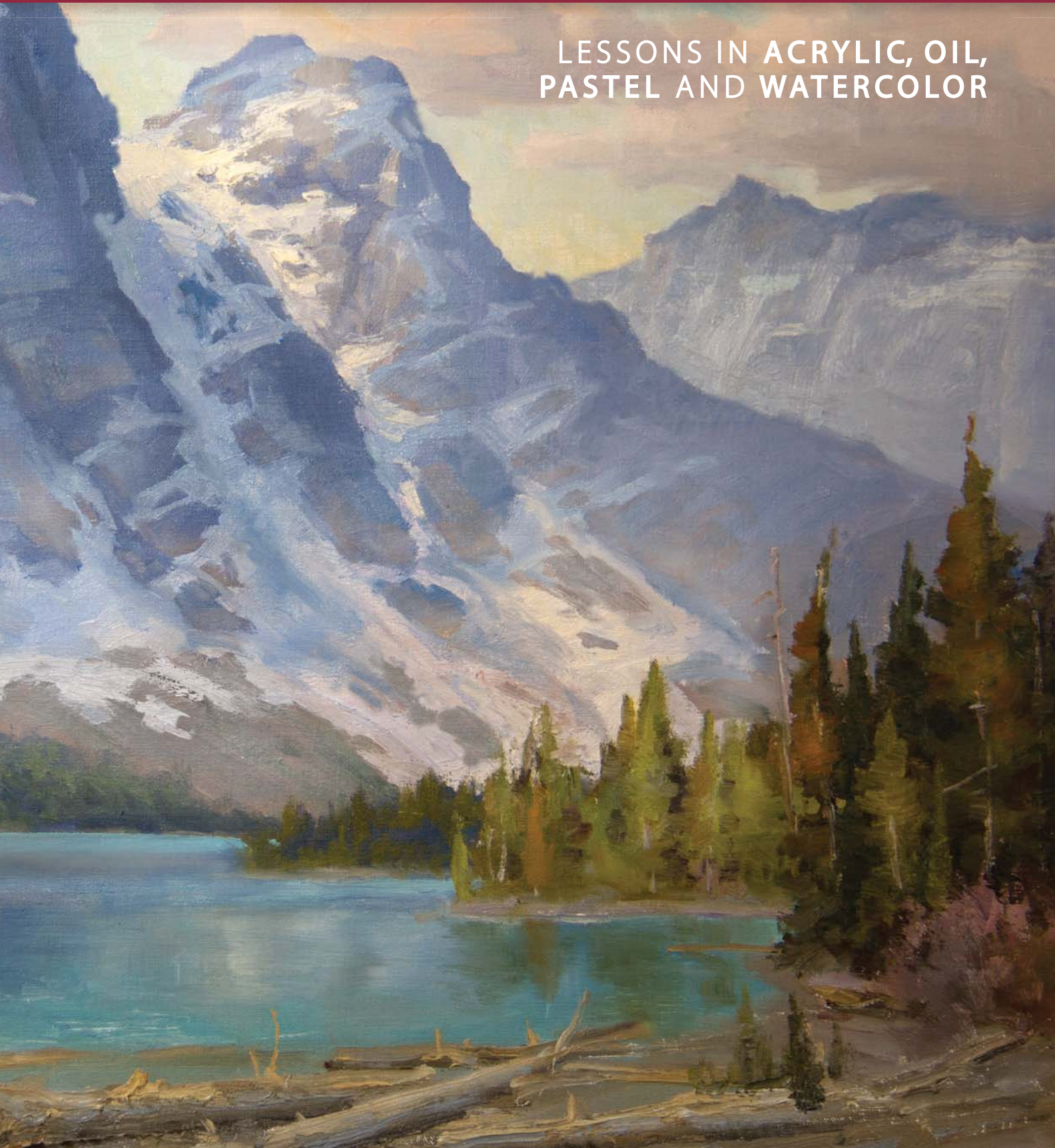


# LANDSCAPE PAINTING ESSENTIALS *with* Johannes Vloothuis

LESSONS IN ACRYLIC, OIL,  
PASTEL AND WATERCOLOR



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PASTEL AND WATERCOLOR

*with* Johannes Vloothuis



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# INTRODUCTION

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I fell in love with landscape painting when I was in my thirties. I was thrilled with the idea that I could create my own worlds. As happens with all artists, my early attempts were to copy photographs exactly. I erroneously thought that if I could copy nature from a good photo, I would end up with a successful painting. I chose the most outstanding scenes, set my studio up and started to paint... but it just was not working. I said to myself, "This doesn't look right. I don't like what I am painting."

For years, I battled to get the answers to what it took to paint successful landscapes. I went to several instructors, got a few tips here and there, but nothing that could really make a big enough impact in my artwork. I remember promising myself, "If I ever get good at this, I will share everything so others won't have to go through the same frustration".

After reading countless books and carefully observing top artists' work, I started to see patterns that they all repeated in their artwork. So I back engineered their paintings and figured out the commonality in their compositions.

This is when I began to apply a science to my process, and my paintings started to click. I won the top award in a nationwide contest in Mexico and began to sell many paintings.

A few years later, I joined WetCanvas, an art focused social network where people share their paintings and tips. I remembered my promise and offered help and advice to other artists seeking answers. Eventually, I was recognized by the publishers of this book, who named me a Master Painter. They approached me to teach live online classes and workshops that would reach out to even more artists.

Since then, I have taught over 15,000 artists, including professionals. These classes enabled me to verbalize in simple understandable terms the science of beauty in landscape painting, and much of it is now being revealed in this book. I part with this notion, *I don't believe in ugly paintings because it is a human expression, but I do believe one should pursue venues to make them more beautiful.*



**THE TETON**

Open acrylics on linen glued to masonite board,  
8" x 10" (20cm x 25cm)

# MATERIALS

There are entire books devoted to the topic of how to choose the best supplies and tools for creating your artwork. Here is a brief overview of the materials I prefer to use when creating my paintings. Experiment with different brands and mediums to find the products that work best for you.



## EASELS

I use a Soltek easel. This is the diamond of all easels. Set up is fast and easy. There are no wing nuts to turn. It is all metal and light weight compared to many other easels. I have done over 500 plein air paintings with it.



## BRUSHES

I prefer brights for all my mediums. The square heads help me design abstract shapes. Rigger brushes work well for thin lines. I use a pastry brush for grass in watercolor.



## SPONGE TOOLS

These PanPastel washable applicators are made with a special sponge to apply the paint in a thin film.



### PALETTES

This homemade palette has a glass panel with a mid-value gray sheet under it. The surface makes scraping off unwanted paint a breeze.



### OIL PAINTS

I prefer Winsor and Newton Artist's Oil Paints. They cooperate very well without the need of a medium.



### ACRYLIC PAINTS

Atelier acrylics are buttery and feel like oil paints.



### PASTELS

PanPastel is a marvelous pastel medium that is applied like paint. It feels like a cross between oils and watercolors, with the advantage that you can erase unwanted areas. You can also add stick pastels to it.



### WATERCOLORS

Winsor and Newton Artist's Watercolors are much better to work with than the lesser-quality pigments.



CROWFOOT GLACIER, BANFF  
Oil on linen, 24" x 20" (61cm x 51cm)



# PAINT HOW THE EYE SEES

One of the most common phrases art instructors use is, "Paint what you see!" This needs some clarification however, because many artists assume this means to copy what they see literally, rather than designing their paintings to be compatible with how the eye anatomically sees. This applies to both plein air and painting from reference photos. Once you understand the way the human eye perceives reality, you will be able to tailor your paintings to look the way the scene would appear as the information is processed in the brain.

Try this: Look at the first word in this paragraph. Without moving your eyes from that word, read as many adjacent words as you can. You'll notice that you can only bring a few words into focus and will not be able to read the rest of the sentence unless you move your eyes. The same applies to nature scenes—as long as you are looking at one specific area, definition elsewhere becomes lost. You will get better results if you keep this concept in mind: Paint how the eye sees, not what you see!

In this chapter you will learn:

- How to avoid distractions in the peripheral areas of a landscape scene.
- How to blur edges in the distance.
- How to simplify foregrounds.



# VISUAL PERCEPTION VS. PHOTOGRAPHIC PERCEPTION

One of the most common mistakes beginning artists make is attempting to recreate exactly what appears in their reference photos—everything in sharp focus, everything in detail—but this is not the way the eye actually sees a given scene. The eyes have only a narrow range of sharp visual perception, and the camera does not capture an image in the same way that the eye sees it. In images captured by a camera, everything is in equal focus and all edges are well defined because all the light sensors are equally

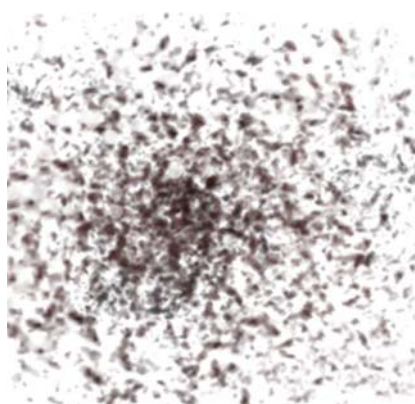
dispersed in the camera chip. So if an artist copies that photo exactly, the painting will seem "off" to viewers.

To illustrate this, imagine you are playing a game of pool. When focusing on the white cue ball several feet away from you, your eye will bring only that specific ball into sharp focus. All the surrounding balls, even the ones that are actually closer to you will appear to become blurred round objects with undefined edges. This is an important concept to keep in mind with your paintings.



## HOW CAMERAS WORK

A digital camera has millions of pixels. This picture shows the way they appear evenly spaced. Each pixel works like a sensor cell in our eyes, but in this case the cells don't become more dispersed towards the outer regions of the eye. That's why everything in a photo is in sharp focus, but with the human eye it is not.



## PERIPHERAL VISION

This is the way sensor cells in the human eye look under a microscope. There is a much higher concentration of cells in the center of the eye. These cells become more spaced out the further away they get from the middle. This is why our peripheral vision is blurry and cannot see detail outside of the parameter we are looking at directly. Every cell receives visual input much like camera sensors. The closer the cells are together, the sharper the image becomes. The more space between the cells the blurrier the image becomes.

## Real Life Scenes Are Not Cropped



Because of the format of a canvas, paintings become cropped, which results in unnatural and abrupt interruption to eye flow and contradicts how we perceive the world. Therefore, we must rely on artistic techniques to offset this.

In the eye's peripheral vision:

- **Darks become lighter.**
- **Color saturation is less pronounced.**
- **Details become blurrier.**

# REFERENCE PHOTOS: FRIEND OR FOE?

The answer is both! Photographs can help or hinder us as artists. They can trick us into copying them exactly, yet provide excellent visual information to tell a story. When I first began painting, I relied heavily on photos. I copied exactly the values, colors, edges and every detail. Yet, no matter how good a reference photo I had, I could not produce a solid painting. I kept asking myself what I was missing. Finally it dawned on me—you can rely on reference photos for details and shapes, but colors and values cannot be trusted.

Photos will show outdoor mid-dark objects as a colorless black. This will contradict daylight ambience. To make matters worse, once you print out a digital photo there is even further deterioration of colors, which end up being muddy. After this revelation, my artwork surged to a new level.

To understand this, it helps to understand a bit about how a camera works. The shutter opens and closes in a fraction of a second. The amount of time the shutter stays open relates to the degree of light allowed in, which results in more light in the photo. The auto setting of the light meter of the camera measures a specific area and shoots with a predetermined shutter speed. If the sensor sees a bright light such as in the sky, the values in the photo will be accurate only in that specific area. Everything outside of that center point will get darker. If the light meter registers a dark area such as a group of evergreen trees, the sky will appear overexposed. This is how it's possible to end up with two completely different photos of the same scene.



## CAMERA EXPOSURE

The photo on the left is under exposed because the center of the camera was aimed at the bright waterfall. The photo on the right is overexposed because the camera measured the dark evergreen trees. The naked eye would never see masses of evergreen trees that dark during the daytime like in the second photo. Likewise, you wouldn't see a bleached out waterfall such as in the first photo. There were also far more colors in the rocks than could be seen in either photo.

You don't want your painting to end up with dull, flat dark or over-exposed areas—so which photo should be used as reference? The answer is: both. The best thing to do is take several pictures of the same scene with variances in shutter speed. Even if the real scene does not have color variances, you as an artist should enhance monotonous colors to make the painting more interesting. Proficient artists basically use photos only for ideas and details, much like a movie director bases a film on a storyboard.

# THE PERIPHERAL AREA

Do you remember the notebook paper you used in school that had blue lines and a red margin on the left? When I was a kid I constantly got scolded for writing in the margins because that was a forbidden area that was supposed to remain blank. You can apply this same principle to all four sides of your paintings—the "margins" being in proportion to the scale of your painting surface. This area is also known as the peripheral area.

Inside the peripheral area, it's best to avoid:

- obvious value contrasts
- hard edges
- saturated colors
- intricate or outstanding details

The peripheral area will simulate how detail fades in the peripheral vision of the eye. Applying this will help the eye agree with how things are naturally seen. The objective is to encourage your viewers to visually wander within the center portion of your painting so they do not exit it easily and will not get distracted by too much interest being created near the edges.



## REDUCE INTEREST IN THE PERIPHERAL AREA

In this painting of a small fishing town in Nova Scotia, distractions have been reduced in the section marked as peripheral area. There was a choice of placing the window where it was originally, on the right edge of the canvas. After applying these principles, the window was moved to a better location in the painting.

## Conveying the Illusion of Daylight

In most art instruction, there is usually reference to a ten-value scale, but this would only apply if the artwork is inside a room. Outdoors in nature, you can see hundreds of values because of the sun's intensity. Trying to replicate this light in a painting is an impossible task. So here, *paint what you see*, goes out the window. Again we need to implement ways to mimic reality.

Before the Cadmium pigments were invented to add a glow to colors, the Old Masters had real problems depicting sunlit areas. They had to purposely exaggerate the dark areas to compensate. This practice contradicted nature... until the Impressionists started using Cadmiums and became successful at mimicking sunlight.



## DON'T USHER THE VIEWER OUT OF THE PAINTING

The white building is not in a suitable place. It should be removed or darkened in value. If painted as is, it will become an eye magnet luring the viewer to exit the painting at the right side.

# SIMPLIFYING FOREGROUNDS

When painting the way the eye anatomically sees, it is a good policy to generally leave the foreground alone. Remove obstacles and details so your viewers look past this area and deep into the painting. You might be inclined to think that the things closest to you should have the most detail, but the reality is that nobody looks directly at the ground unless they're looking for something they dropped.

Likewise, a painting should resemble how the eye sees in accordance to where it is looking under normal

circumstances. The logic of where things are situated in the various planes, even if they are closer, does not apply. By keeping your foreground simple, that area will not compete for attention.

The general practice by most accomplished landscape artists is to compile the most attractive visual information in the middle ground, where the head would be level and the eyes looking straight ahead. Details and objects in sharp focus should appear where the eye is looking, even if they are further into the distance.



## EXAMPLE OF A SIMPLIFIED FOREGROUND

The immediate foreground in this photo was altered to be used as an analogy of how to handle foregrounds. You cannot clearly distinguish the wooden ties and grass. The steel rails are not sharp either. The area that comes into focus is about fifteen feet ahead. This is how the eye would function if you were walking down those train tracks. Apply this principle to your paintings, and your viewers will feel more encouraged to "walk in."

## INVITE YOUR VIEWERS IN FROM THE FOREGROUND

The immediate foreground should have no strong value contrasts, no strong color saturation and no outstanding detail. The foreground just serves the purpose of inviting you in.

Also note that the other three borders of the painting do not have eye-catching visual information. The intent is to invite the eye to see the arbor and the flowers and hold the attention there.





### **REDUCE CLUTTER IN FOREGROUNDS**

Merge stones in the immediate foreground or avoid them altogether. If you must have objects in those areas, match their values so they don't stand out. The original scene was cluttered with rocks. They were removed from the painting.



### **FOREGROUND GRASS**

It is not necessary to indicate grass strands at the very bottom margin. Take a step into the painting then add grass strands, rocks, flowers, etc., if this is what you wish to do. Like many professional artists, leave out grass strands entirely in paintings smaller than 16" x 20" (41 cm x 51 cm).

### **Plan Your Mid-Values to Convey Daylight**

To convey the illusion of broad daylight, plan your paintings to have predominant mid-values in most areas.

**AVOID  
VERTICAL  
OBJECTS IN  
THE BOTTOM  
OF A FRAME**

Compare these two versions of the same plein air painting. The distraction from the foreground was removed in the bottom painting so that you are looking into the distance without the vertical objects pulling your eye.



**Try This**

If your painting has a focal point, stare at it without moving your eye. See if anything else in the painting attracts your eye like a magnet. If it does, remove it or conceal it by matching its value with its surroundings. Try this with the top painting on this page. Stare at the glacier. See how the small evergreens in the foreground seem to be waving at you? That's how I determined they needed to be removed.

# BLURRED EDGES

In reality, both background and foreground objects in a scene have hard edges on their contours. The background objects won't get any softer, no matter how far away they are. We never give this any thought because the brain has its own mechanism of determining that something is further back in comparison to another object. The field depth is never questioned. Three-dimensional perception in reality is never compromised.

However, if you paint those contours exactly as they are in reality (with hard edges), this can result in flat, hard edges all over the painting and a scene that looks two-dimensional. The trick here is to convey a three-dimensional scene on a two-dimensional surface.

Blurring edges, also known as softening edges, is an efficient method you can use to fool the viewer's brain into seeing background objects as further away, creating depth and the illusion of three dimensions in a painting.

Another advantage of softening edges is that it simulates the eye's peripheral vision, as well as detaching viewers from getting "stuck" in certain areas of a painting.

Remember—the secret is to paint *the way the eye anatomically sees*, not how the reference photo looks!



## SOFTEN EDGES IN BACKGROUNDS

The blurred edges in the furthest plane convey the illusion of depth. As a general recommendation, blur as many edges as you can in backgrounds, especially if they appear behind buildings.

In this piece, I decided that adding too many bulrushes in the foreground would be distracting, so I just indicated a few as visual pointers.



## PHOTOS ALWAYS HAVE SHARP EDGES

In reality, you could easily distinguish which parts of a tree recede and which parts are closer to you. As soon as a photo is taken, however, the three-dimensional perception is nullified because all the foliage ends up looking hard edged. If painted this way, the foliage will look pasted on. Instead, render trees like portraits, softening edges of leaves and branches the same way you would do when painting hair at the back of a subject's head.



## PHOTOS FLATTEN PLANES

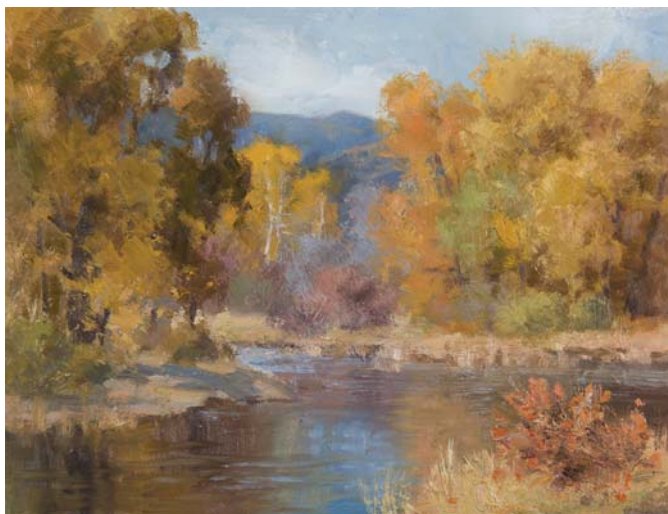
Can you distinguish the different planes of those trees? Truthfully, the tree on the left is in front of the other trees, separated by at least fifty yards. If you just paint what you see, you will lose field depth.



## LOST-AND-FOUND EDGES

Because of the play of soft edges vs. hard edges, the tree looks round and you can tell which parts are closer to you. This is referred to as *lost-and-found edges*. The foliage against the sky has soft edges as well as hard edges. The soft areas convey the leaves in that cluster are more distant, while the harder edged leaves indicate they are closer.





### STAY AWAY FROM TREE TOPS

Avoid unnecessary branches that are too distracting, especially at the top of trees. Your viewers are supposed to look in the middle area without feeling somebody is waving at them from another part of the painting. This helps to agree with the out-of-focus peripheral portion of the eye. The tree on the right has just enough tree trunks to avoid a “cotton ball” aspect.



### MANIPULATE EDGES TO RECEDE FOLIAGE

The hard-edged tree conveys the idea it is closer than the soft-edged tree, which is situated in a more distant plane. Wet-on-wet watercolor application allows for great edge diffusion.



### WALLS, BRICKS AND ROOF TOPS

The back wall has fewer grooves than the front portion. The roof tiles are reduced at the far top corner. (The naked eye would not see all the tiles at the same time.) The indentations in the adobe bricks become less distinct higher up.

## Pros and Cons of Plein Air Painting

### Pros of Plein Air Painting

- Strong emotional response instills motivation to paint the scene.
- Atmospheric perspective is more evident.
- Subtle variations in color are more easily picked up.
- 3D reality is true and can be depicted better in a painting than working from photos.

### Cons of Plein Air Painting

- Many colors are too garish, monotonous and monochromatic.
- The sky colors in an average blue sky don't work in a painting.
- Values are broken and scattered.
- Many shapes in nature are too symmetrical.
- The blue hue of mountains is too cool.
- There are hard edges everywhere.
- There are many cloned shapes.
- Capturing sunlight and translating it into pigment is challenging.

## Creating the Illusion of Motion

Making people, animals and other landscape subjects appear as though they are moving in a painting and not just posing can be one of the greatest challenges for beginning artists. How do you create the illusion that water is falling, or that a horse is trotting?

Try this experiment: Wave your hand in front of your face. Do you see that the crevices at the back of your hand are no longer noticeable? The same concept applies for creating the look of motion in a painting.

For example, when a photo is taken of falling water, the shutter stays open for a fraction of a second. This ends up “freezing” the water, making it appear it is suspended in

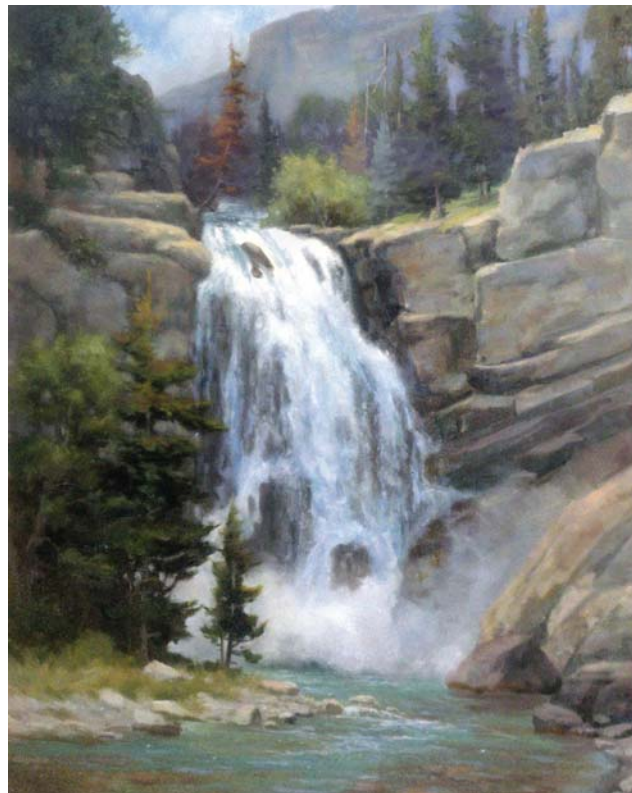
midair. However, the brain does not take still photos, so water would never appear this way. It would be blurred. If an artist copied a waterfall exactly from a photo, then the viewer would sense something isn't right.

The best way to convey a sense of movement is to blur things like moving water so they lose definition. Likewise, smudge the legs of animals and people that are in motion. In the latter case, don't add any facial features and place the subjects well within the middle ground. Merge the bottom part of their figures into the wet paint more than the rest of the body. Just allow for a silhouette of the legs. Create the “V” shape of distant birds, then smudge their forms.



### REFERENCE PHOTO

The camera shutter opened and closed in a fraction of a second. The water appears frozen in time. This is not a natural way we see water moving.



### PAINTING WATER IN MOTION

Do you get the impression the water is toppling over the cliff? The soft edges give the appearance of movement. Blurring foam in seascapes works great as well.

### Can These Concepts Be Applied to Portraits and Still Lifes?

Yes! Edge manipulation tactics come in handy with all kinds of subjects. Do not rely solely on diminishing the size of objects that are further back, but manipulate their edges to create depth as well. If a piece of fruit is behind another piece of fruit, soften the edge of the background fruit where the forms intersect. Also try to avoid distracting colors and strong edges in the peripheral area.

Many artists cast shadows into these regions and only highlight a limited area in still lifes.

You can make the rump areas of animals recede by placing them at a  $\frac{3}{4}$  position and painting the back part with softer edges. Merging fur into the background is also effective. If you want your viewers to notice the animal's finer details, design the background so everything is out of focus.

In portraits, hard edges will be evident everywhere in photos as well as with real life subjects. If you do not manipulate these edges in a painting, the back part of the head

and the ears will not recede. Instead of the portrait appearing 3D, it will look like a wall poster. Hyperrealism will not offset this. One solution is to take advantage of the subject's hair and clothes, blending and merging them into the background and allowing only a few defined edges. Ears should be depicted conceptually, not in detail. The lost-and-found edge technique works great for this.

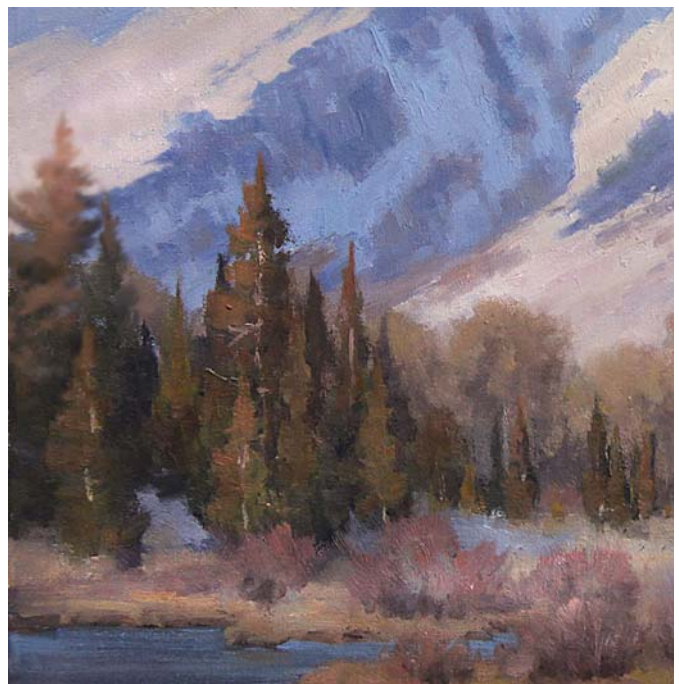
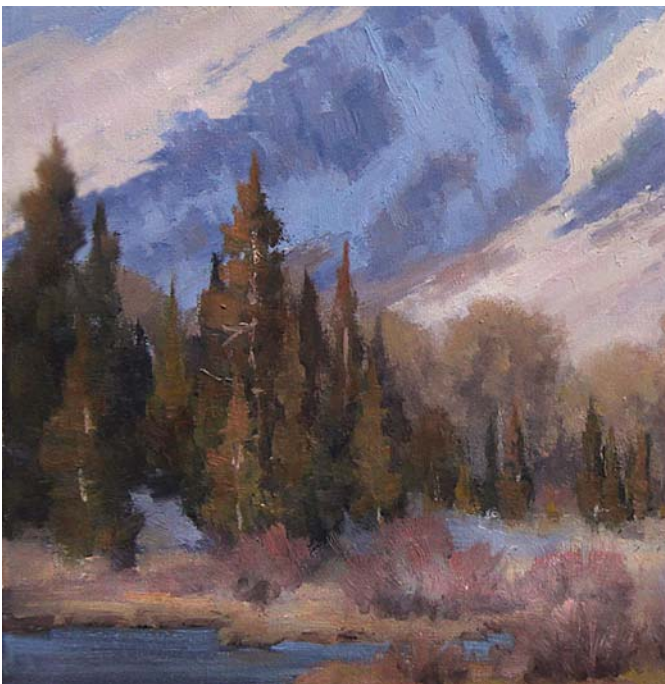
## Optical Hard Edges

In nature, hard edges are non-existent in objects that are motionless. If you can get away without diffusing edges and distorting a certain sense of reality, all the better. You can have a soft-edged shape in your painting that will still appear to be hard-edged, especially when seen from a distance, as long as there is a strong value shift between that shape and the area around it. This is referred to as an *optical hard edge*.

On the other hand, you may have a shape with hard edges within an area that has little to no value contrast. That shape will not appear hard edged anyhow, so it would be useless to soften it.

A good rule of thumb is: Hard edges attract the eye, and blurred edges dissuade the eye from staring at an area for too long. Remember—too many hard edges will make things look pasted on in paintings. Trick the eye into perceiving depth by:

- Purposely blurring edges in backgrounds. (Don't do this with rocky mountains or they lose their character.)
- Adding details such as individual leaves and tree branches to only the middle ground of a painting.
- Keeping foregrounds simple with the least visual information of all areas in the painting.
- Softening or blurring edges by blending some of the foliage into the sky or background.



### OPTICAL HARD EDGES VS. PHYSICAL HARD EDGES

Compare the tall evergreen tree on the left that appears in front of the white snow with the other tall evergreen in front of the blue area of the mountain. The left one appears more defined, even though it has been blurred. Yet that tree is optically hard edged due to its value contrast. The other trees are physically hard edged, but optically soft edged, because the value contrast is not outstanding.

### THE ADJUSTED PAINTING

The sharpness of the evergreen tree has been corrected. The value contrast is reduced. Now we have a physical and an optical soft edge.

#### Helpful Hints

- Blur everything except rocky mountains behind buildings. Allow for lost-and-found edges for variances.
- Don't paint under a very bright light source if this kind of light will not be present where the painting will hang.
- Placing mist where water is agitated helps create the illusion of movement.

## Demonstration

# PAINT A LANDSCAPE WITH A SIMPLIFIED FOREGROUND

Follow the steps to create blurred edges and a simplified foreground in a landscape painting.



REFERENCE PHOTO

## 1 Sketch the Composition and Lay In the Sky

Sketch the composition with an HB pencil. (Watercolor paintings need a good base drawing in order to create soft edges in the background.) Soak the paper up to the roofs of the buildings. You can never over-wet watercolor paper.

Lay in the sky wet-on-wet to create undefined edges while keeping the general forms distinguishable. Use Cobalt Blue for the sky and a mixture of Cobalt Blue and Indian Red for the clouds. The clouds at the top should be darker than the clouds at the bottom.

Add a hint of red for flavor and darken the corner to keep the viewer's eye in the painting a little longer. Allow time to dry.



## MATERIALS

### Surface

Arches 300-lb. (640gsm) cold-pressed watercolor paper

### Brushes

¼", ½" and ¾" synthetic brights

### Watercolor Pigments

Burnt Sienna, Cobalt Blue, Hooker's Green, Indian Red, Payne's Gray, Permanent Rose, Raw Sienna, Ultramarine Blue

### Other

HB pencil



## 2 Begin the Middle Ground

Rewet from the top of the roofs upward. Paint the background trees. Use Payne's Gray, Indian Red and Ultramarine Blue. Paint the brick house with a mix of Indian Red and Burnt Sienna and a hint of blue to gray down the brick colors. Indicate only a few bricks. Concentrate them around the window to offset the symmetrical shape and to stay away from the edges. Use the same colors for the bricks as for the house, but a darker value. Negative paint out the form of the bougainvillea. Use Permanent Rose for the flowers. Paint the uneven stone wall. Use Cobalt Blue, Burnt Sienna and a touch of Raw Sienna. Place some shadows under the stones. Reduce the stones near the edge. Define the bottom part of the flowers and leave highlights at the top.

Drybrush the fishing shack wall to create texture. Use warm colors to indicate sunlit wood. For the shingles, start dark in the closest corner and get lighter at the top. Make the roof line irregular and protruding, like some shingles are broken. Create an irregular pattern for the shadows. Make the wood look weathered by indicating a few hairline cracks in the boards.



## 3 Paint the Remaining Buildings and the Grass

Paint the remaining buildings, modifying the colors of each for interest. Lift out some individual boards with a thirsty brush. Tap in some broken boards, vertically, so they're opposite to the adjacent building. Use a drybrush technique when painting the tin roof, and skip the paint to indicate rust with Burnt Sienna. Hold back on texture closer to edges of painting.

Drybrush in the grass with a mixture of Hooker's Green, Burnt Sienna and Raw Sienna. Leave room for the flat rocks that lay on the grass. Skip the brush to indicate stones and. Allow the grass to bleed right against the rocks. Vary the colors within each four square inches or so.



## 4 Paint the Water and Finish with Details

Wet the entire water area. Lay in color from bottom up with Payne's Gray. While still wet, reflect the objects on dry land by dragging the brush vertically. Then at the end of the reflections, use choppy strokes. This will give the illusion that the water is moving lazily. Indicate the warm yellowish glow of the clouds in the furthest part of the water and the darker part in the foreground.



### OUT FISHING IN GLOUSTER

Watercolor on Arches 300-lb. (640gsm) cold-pressed watercolor paper, 9" x 12" (23cm x 30cm)



**THE STORM IS BREAKING**

Watercolor and PanPastel on Fabriano  
cold-pressed watercolor paper,  
12" x 16" (30cm x 41cm)



# DESIGN WITH ABSTRACT SHAPES

Abstract shapes are beautifully designed asymmetrical symbols. Understanding and applying abstract designs to your paintings will give you the backbone of successful renditions whether they be landscapes, portraits, figures or still lifes. The application of this concept is the most important key to all hand-painted works.

In this chapter you will learn:

- How to think in terms of pictorial symbols and then design them.
- How to see and paint not just forms, but the spaces surrounding those forms.
- How to prioritize when massing shapes.
- How to avoid problematic shapes.
- How to build a pictorial of attractive landscape symbols that will represent real objects so you can avoid directly copying them.



# SYMMETRICAL BRAIN VS. ARTISTIC BRAIN

In the previous chapter you learned about the ways paintings cannot compare with the real macro scene as far as size and the three-dimensional aspects of nature.

There are many unattractive shapes present in natural settings. Artists can design objects in paintings to look better than they do in reality. Nature's canvas is much bigger than you could ever paint, but as an artist you have the ability to produce more beautiful shapes and lines than nature does, even if the forms are much smaller in scale.

The macro world will provide you with an abundance of visual information, and the left side of your brain (the symmetrical brain) will naturally want to document visual information in close detail for the viewer. This is one of the most common challenges beginning artists face, because many operate under the belief that the closer they get to realism the better the painting will be.

The real landscape world has little to do with the painting landscape world, and the right side of the brain (the artistic brain) prefers the poetic license aspect of artwork. Instead of imitating exact forms, you will depict symbols that represent trees, rocks, bushes, etc.

Contrary to photography, as a painter, you have the freedom and ability to relocate and resize the diverse landscape elements. A tree in your painting may be the size of a mere few inches, but that tiny size can be very attractive due to its abstract design, which should outdo its equivalent in a photo.

We won't go into right brain/left brain theories in depth in this chapter, but rather focus on techniques to help you tap into your artistic brain in a more functional way so it becomes a useful tool to strengthen your landscape symbol designs.

From the time we are babies and first open our eyes to the world, the first thing we see is the symmetrical interior of our homes. These images get imprinted into the subconscious mind and stored forever. From then on every time we produce a shape, we tap into our subconscious mind and feel compelled to create circles, ovals, squares, straight lines etc. We practiced these shapes in our early elementary school drawings. We kept reinforcing by repetition the symmetry of these and developed habits. So when we paint or



## SYMMETRICAL SHAPES IN NATURE ARE NOT PLEASING

Nature produces many symmetrical shapes. They may look good outdoors but once scaled to mini sizes in your artwork they become painfully obvious. This takes a toll on the artistic beauty. Note the symmetrical triangle shapes of the pine trees to the left and the obvious round and almost perfect oval shapes in the foliage pictured above.

draw, the subconscious mind wants to continue on with the childish practice of drawing triangular Christmas trees and round trees that makes the abstract designs so much more difficult to depict. To make matters worse, nature has a strong tendency to produce visually implied symmetrical shapes, and we feel compelled to copy these because they are in sync with our symmetrical brain.

We will always war against symmetry from nature and symmetrical brain influence. Even artists with decades of experience still struggle from overstating details and depicting geometrical designs. The good news is you don't have to train the artistic brain. With the proper approach you will automatically tap into it more thoroughly by implementing certain techniques. You can double your artistic IQ!

Now that you are aware of what may put the brakes on your paintings from escalating to new levels, you can overcome your own symmetrical brain's interference.

### Switching Between Your Artistic and Symmetrical Brains

Years ago Betty Edwards, author of *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, did ground breaking research and proved that the opponent to producing attractive shapes is our own symmetrical brain, which fulfills the function in the level of logic to scientifically process and register data. In this hemisphere of the brain we store symmetrical shapes. On the other hand, the artistic brain is the area that functions for the production of artistic beauty. Edwards demonstrated that when novice artists focused on the surrounding air and the empty space between the legs of a chair instead of the object per se, they produced more accurate drawings. Your consciousness can switch back and forth between the two brain hemispheres and from that you can increase your artistic ability.



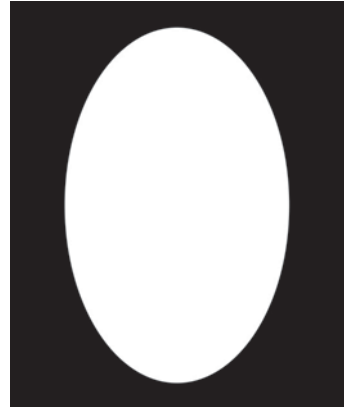
### SYMMETRICAL ISN'T ALWAYS AESTHETICALLY PLEASING

The tree trunk has a cylindrical shape and the tree branches protrude like a fork equally on opposite sides. Frankly, this is an ugly tree.

# LANDSCAPE SHAPES

Nature will also give us very pleasing shapes. But these do not appear very commonly. Just like with a crowd of people—you see the occasional impressive good looking human. In the same manner a modeling agency keeps files on beautiful people, an artist should be a shape collector

and keep reference photos in a file from which to derive various landscape symbols. With time and practice, these will be stored in your mind. But first, let's identify the criteria a shape needs to meet to be part of your pictorial language.



## WHICH SHAPES ARE MOST APPEALING?

You probably voted for the oval because it has a different height than width. If a tree shape fits inside a circle, no matter how realistically you render it, the shape will not be attractive. Tree shapes look better if their foliage is oval in shape rather than circular.

The same applies to a square format vs. a rectangular format. If a waterfall or a rock fits inside a square, the abstract

design is compromised. You would want to change the anatomy of a waterfall and stretch it to fit in a rectangle rather than in a square.

It's not what you do inside the shape that makes the symbol look good. It is the shape itself. The key is to make the overall shape appealing. Details within the boundaries of the shape are less important.

## Determining Symmetrical and Abstract Shapes

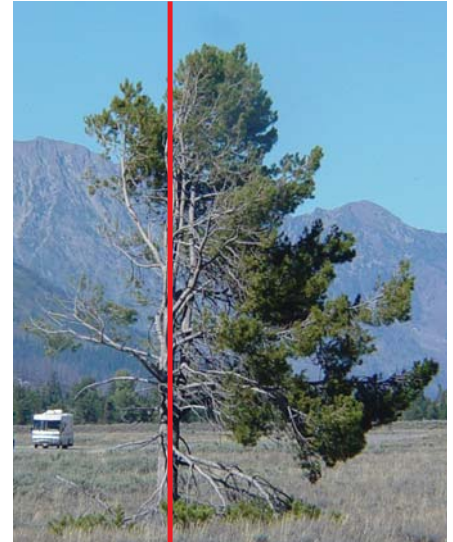
A handy method for determining whether a shape is abstract or not is to draw an imaginary line through the middle of it and compare both sides. If the two sides are similar, chances

are you have a visually implied symmetrical shape. Redesign the shape to show different sides. Also make sure your symbol does not resemble a geometrical shape.



### SYMMETRICAL SHAPE

This foliage is equally balanced on both sides, meaning it is a symmetrical shape and not ideal for painting in landscapes.



### ABSTRACT SHAPE

Much better! Both sides of the tree are very different. This is an example of a nice shape seen in nature. Store these oddities in your landscape pictiography. You can use this shape in several paintings.



1. Non abstract shape. It looks like a loaf of bread. Try not to paint rocks such as these.

2. Abstract shape. All four contour lines are different.

### Depicting Rocks

Avoid concave semi-circles when depicting rocks. This weakens their character. A good way to practice rock shapes is to get some stones that have interesting shapes from a gardening center. Place them in alternate positions, even some grouped together and draw their shapes with a Sharpie marker.

## Visualize Landscape Forms as Silhouettes

The black pictorial silhouettes resemble portions of the photos but they are not identical. They have been designed to be more appealing symbols. The drawings were done with a Sharpie Magnum marker, which is a

great tool because it has a large blunt edge just like a brush. It is a crossover between a pen and a brush, so you will feel comfortable drawing with it. As a discipline and for practice, draw all kinds of abstract silhouettes.



The secret is to ensure each gap in between the trees is visually different from the others. Not one tree shape is repeated.



The waterfall in the photo is a visually implied rectangle. The two sides are not visually different. The silhouette shows a correction.



The mountain peak in the photo is too close to a triangle and the protrusions on both sides are cloned. The silhouette is an improvement.



Even though the shape of the tree in the photo is not scientifically symmetrical, from an artistic standpoint it is implied to be symmetrical. The black tree silhouette is quite



different on both sides and its contour is very interesting. The artistic version resembles the tree in the photo. It is not a copy.



The photo is displaying a rare case in which the rocks are abstract by themselves and needed very little tweaking. The silhouette was done almost to face value. Sometimes



nature will cooperate with you. (This photo got added to my pictiary.)



The parallel sides are gone. The cylindrical shape is no longer present. The smaller branches are different from each other.



This artistically designed tree trunk shape by far is better looking than what we see on that front lawn.

# TECHNIQUES FOR PROMOTING THE ARTISTIC BRAIN

Keeping aware that your strongest opponent to producing beautiful artistic designs is your own symmetrical brain will make you pay more attention during your painting process and break the spell of producing shapes that visually fall into implied triangles, squares, circles, rectangles and ovals. Here are some scenarios to help you identify the symmetrical brain interference more clearly.

**1. Think in pictorial symbols instead of real objects.** Avoid speaking to yourself in terms of painting trees, rocks, etc. Instead of saying, “Now it’s time to paint the evergreen trees,” tell yourself, “Now it’s time to paint the shapes that symbolize evergreen trees.” This awareness will keep you on track. Keep in mind that the landscape painting language is composed of symbols that *represent* the real object, like than the word *orange* represents the fruit. When I give workshops and someone asks me how to paint a green tree, I will reply jokingly, “Buy a can of spray paint and spray graffiti on it.” A skilled landscape artist will use attractive

symbols that have been practiced many times, even repeating some of these in different paintings, just like using the same words in different sentences.

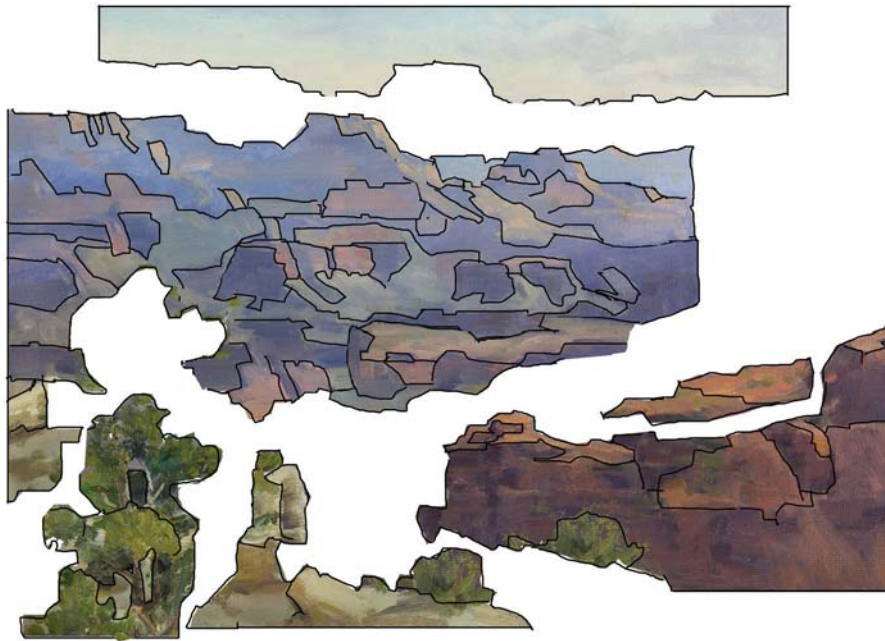
- 2. Double your artistic intelligence by negative painting.** In the case of pastel, acrylics or oil painting, you can put the sky in afterwards and paint in a reverse format to carve out the contour of a tree from the sky point of view. The artistic brain will acknowledge how valuable this approach is.
- 3. Draw an imaginary line down the middle of a shape.** Compare both sides. If they are visually mirrored, the attractiveness of the design is probably compromised.
- 4. Pretend you are designing a puzzle.** This reduces the complexity of shapes when translating the pictorial information onto your painting surface. Imagine you shrink wrap things. The resulting contour is what you draw.
- 5. Build your own personal pictiory.**

## Symmetrical Brain Intentions

- Build tree shapes with leaves.
- Indicate many separate rocks when grouped together.
- Single out deciduous or evergreen trees in a group.
- Painstakingly indicate many unnecessary branches.
- Make boxes out of rocks.
- Depict grass with strands rather than large clumps.

## Artistic Brain Intentions

- Build trees in designed clusters with a few brushstrokes that indicate thousands of leaves at once.
- Group rocks into one unit and only suggest a few.
- Join foliage together to read as one unit.
- Indicate the main tree branches and suggest just enough smaller branches to make the point.
- Ensure rocks appear unequal with each other in their shapes and look carved out.
- Only indicate a few grass strands to hint at the idea of grass, or leave them out completely.
- Group evergreens together into a mass.
- Think in landscape silhouettes instead of landscape objects.



### THINK IN PUZZLE PIECES

This scene is quite complicated. If you apply a puzzle-piece technique to break things down and assemble those pieces to form the entire painting, it will not be too overwhelming to represent on the canvas. First decide on the major masses when you are doing the drawing outline. Next visualize the smaller portions inside those larger masses and convert them into your own version of mini abstract shapes until you assemble the entire puzzle. The painting should end up with a pleasing abstract design. By thinking in terms of puzzle pieces, you will require less effort from the artistic brain to construct this scene.



### SIMPLIFY COMPLEX DETAILS

There is a widespread movement in the art world called *Representational Landscape Painting*. Most professional landscape artists who are not hyperrealists apply this concept. As the name states, you represent scenes by reinterpreting everything into pleasing abstract-designed puzzle pieces that, when snapped together, make up the whole painting.





### **SIMPLIFY CONTOURS**

These rocks have many bumpy protrusions which weakens the abstract shapes of the rocks. By putting these into a mental shrink wrap we will ignore all these unnecessary small protrusions. Once we file off those protrusions the design will improve.

From this visualization technique we can derive the thumbnail sketch. The abstract designs are very clear now.



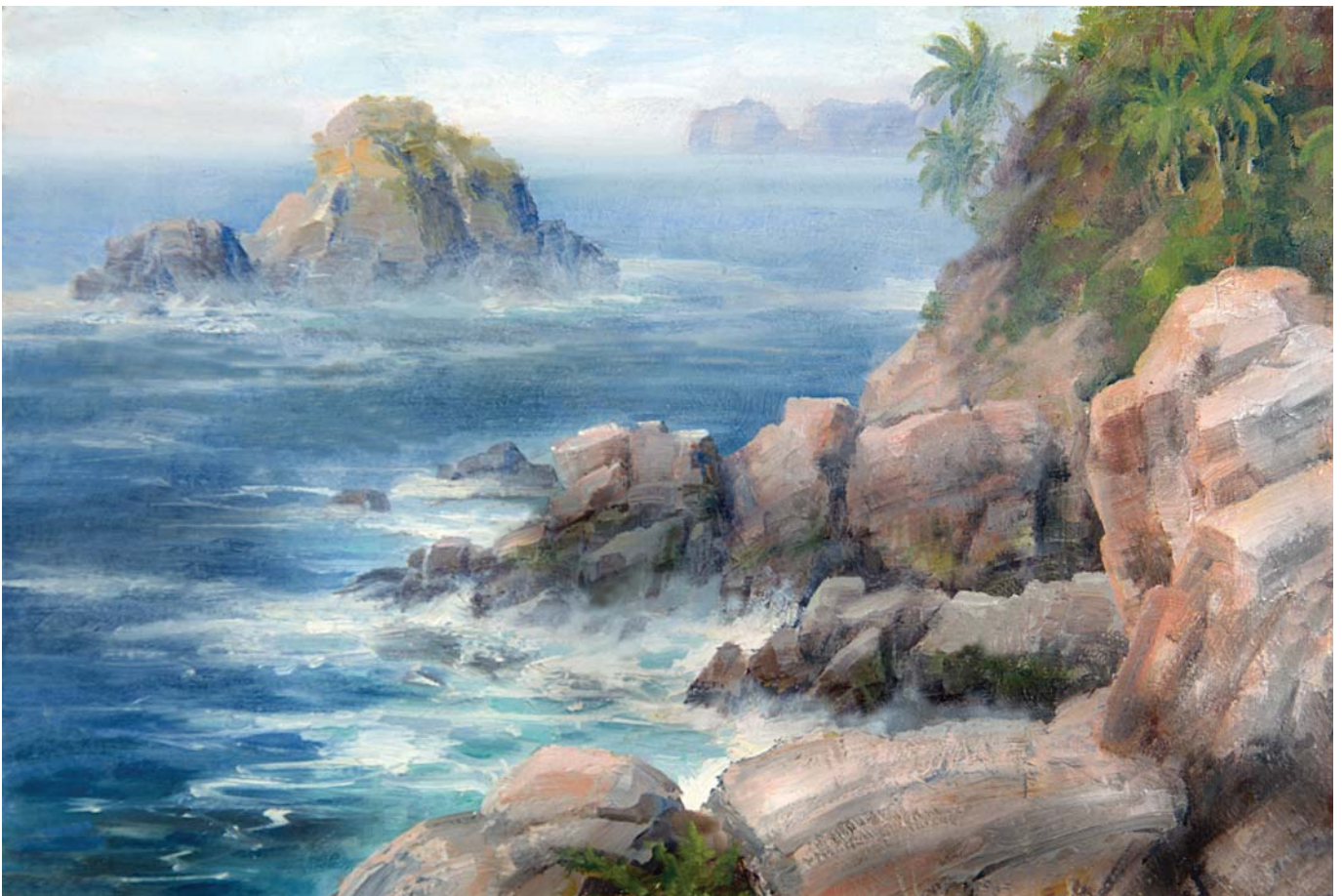
### **IMAGINE THINGS ARE SHRINK WRAPPED**

Drawing nature's very complex contours onto your painting surface can be time consuming. To make it easier, pretend you shrink wrap the objects. Wherever the plastic molds itself around the form will be your contour drawing. This will enable you to catch deficiencies in shapes and find cloned objects. Simplify these contours to end up with the overall abstract design.



### REFERENCE PHOTO

The rocks in this seascape have a vast amount of crevices. In the painting many protrusions were dramatically simplified and the whole painting was reduced to basic abstract designs. The left rock in the distance in the photo was visually symmetrical. In the painting it is edited so it would be asymmetrical. The technique mentioned earlier about dividing that shape in the middle with an imaginary line and comparing both sides was applied.



### FOCUS ON SHAPE CONTOURS, NOT INSIDE DETAILS

The more you work a painting, the more the viewer will have to work to put the visual information together. The viewer should be able to understand simple shapes effortlessly.

# NEGATIVE PAINTING

Negative painting is extremely important. It will become one of your most valuable assets. If you want to grow as an artist, you must acquire this tool.

Simply defined, the negative space is the surrounding space or the air that is adjacent to an object as well as the in-between space. In the case of a portrait or still life, it will be the background. In landscapes, it is the sky when a tree shape is added. For objects such as chairs, it is the space between the legs. For any painting to hold together in a pleasing way, both the negative space and the positive space have to be abstract. For example, if your tree shape

resembles an egg, you will have a poor positive shape. The deficiency will be doubled in the adjacent negative shape.

Every advanced artist works from his artistic right side of the brain as much as possible. In all the previous silhouettes, the white space was given as much importance as the black silhouette. Reverse painting will help you work from your abstract brain to correct unpleasant shapes. Let's get a better understanding about this before we see the direct application of negative painting.

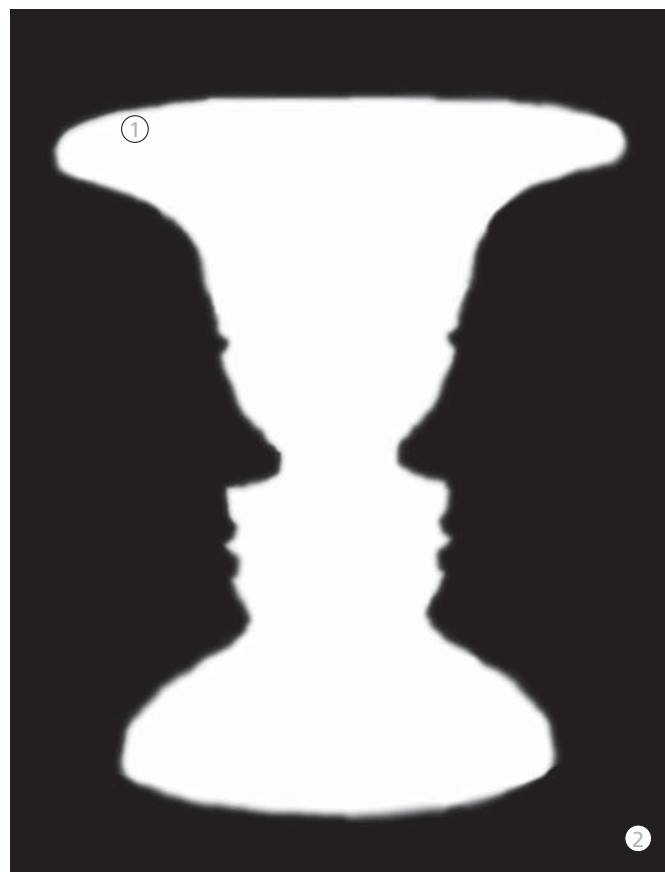
## POSITIVE VS. NEGATIVE SPACE

Rubin's vase will appear as a vase or as two faces in profile. When you see the vase you are connected to the symmetrical brain. When you see the two profiles you are using the artistic brain. Do you feel how your brain switches back and forth between the forms? This will happen to you automatically when you learn to focus on the surrounding space when painting by the same token as you depict the positive shape. If you were to draw the object while solely looking at the positive (white) space, you would have a harder time replicating the form. If you only paid attention to the negative (black) space, then you would end up with a much better result. You would bypass the stored symmetrical influence coming from your left part of the brain. Try it!

### What Makes a Master?

Andrew Loomis was a master at abstract shape design. To avoid symmetrical round heads in his portraits he depicted bumps on the hairlines to make them a bit wavy. Other expert portrait artists such as Anders Zorn will put hats and bandanas on their subjects to offset the helmet-head effect.

Still life artists will change round fruits into attractive carved out angled forms as if the round convex protrusions were sliced with a knife, and both sides would be altered slightly. That way they don't end up being too circular or oval.



1. Positive Space in White

2. Negative Space in Black

## Demonstration

# USE NEGATIVE PAINTING TO CREATE ABSTRACT SHAPES

Follow the steps to use negative painting to create abstract forms derived from symmetrical shapes. Remember to check your negative and positive space simultaneously while painting.

## MATERIALS

permanent marker  
liquid corrector  
with foam applicator



**1** Draw a black oval about 6" x 4" (15cm x 10cm).



**2** Using a liquid corrector applicator, "carve out" by reverse painting a tree shape. Use only the white liquid for the first stage. Work randomly to avoid cloning. Keep comparing both sides of your form. Pay equal attention to the white space, not just the black form.



**3** Do as much as you can only using the white liquid. Then you can go in with a black permanent marker and refine the shape from the positive point of view. If necessary, resort back to the corrector fluid to make further corrections until you are content with the tree symbol. Go back and forth from positive to negative painting. If you have not done this before, your brain has no preconceived stored input of this procedure, so you may feel confused and uncomfortable when starting. That is normal. After several attempts your artistic brain will kick in and you will probably come to enjoy this technique. (If you were to depict a tree in your painting, you could use the blue sky color and carve into the tree shape.)



**4** Apply the same process with other shapes.

# COMPOSITION WITH ABSTRACT MASSES

Chapter 1 discussed how nature scenes never get abruptly cropped, but rather gradually fade into blurry forms in the peripheral vision of the human eye. Due to the limited space in a rectangular canvas format, we need to budget the space of pictorial areas, so whatever fits in the constricted area must be well planned.

When approaching a subject, the best thing is to first decide what the painting's main setting will be. Just like with movies, they are categorized into action, drama, suspense, etc., and the movie director emphasizes one of those to be the general theme.

Landscapes can be sorted into the following categories:

- Sky
- Mountain or cliffs
- Lake, river or waterfalls
- Terrain
- Foliage

To simplify even more, you must determine whether the sky, the vertical plane or the horizontal plane takes up the most space. They should not be similar in size to each other. A well planned composition will show one of these areas (here on referred to as a mass) to be the predominant one in size, and the masses will be designed into abstract masses. When possible that mass should take up roughly two-thirds of the space in your painting. A common mistaken procedure is to try to show

several masses competing in sizes in one painting, which will result in those areas competing for attention. For example, if your theme is a skyscape, then everything else should shrink in size. The mountain peak should not be higher than one-third of the way up from the bottom.

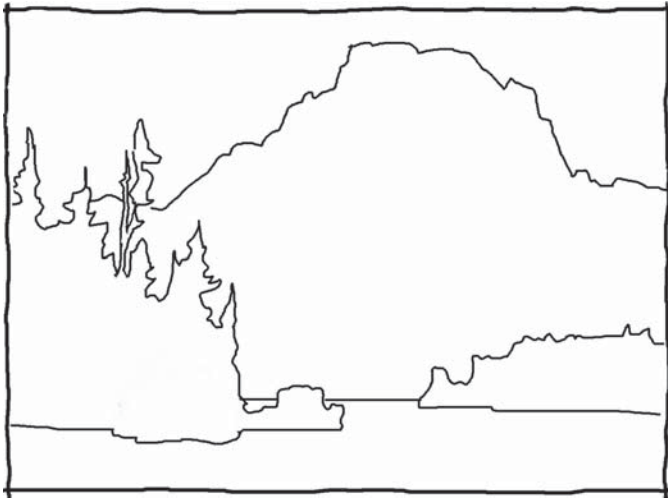
If you decide to make your main theme about a rocky mountain, then the peak of that mountain should be close to the top of the painting in order to stretch its mass as far as possible to gain square inches and reduce the sky. The surrounding trees should get a "haircut" and diminish in size. The horizon line of the lake should be just a few inches up from the bottom.

When you decide which mass will be predominant in size, there should be sufficient interest to make it attractive for the viewer. For example, if you have a clear blue sky and decide to make the painting about the sky showing it to be the largest mass, you will end up with lots of dead square inches because you won't have enough variances. On the other hand, a sunset or a cloudy sky with weather effects may merit dedicating a large percentage to that mass and make everything subordinate to that. The same will apply to a lake mass. If there are no reflections or boats to fill the void, a lake mass can be quite boring if most square inches are just showing flat water. If a lake does have reflections and boats, however, then it may merit being the main mass of your composition and dominate in size.



## REFERENCE PHOTO

This is a good reference photo to work from for creating a thumbnail sketch (about the size of a playing card) to plan the sizes of the masses and make them abstract. If the masses were painted as they are in the photo, the mountain would be minimized.



### THUMBNAIL SKETCH—BUDGET YOUR SPACE

Thumbnail sketches will help you catch weak lines and shapes. They do not have to be detailed. They are great for working out the bugs in your composition so you don't hit obstacles during the painting process and can anticipate them early in your painting strategy. It is not necessary to indicate the smaller shapes within the masses. The purpose is to visualize the masses as abstract puzzle pieces and check the predominance or subordination of the surrounding masses.

In the reference photo, all the masses are competing for attention. The lake is void of visual richness because too many square inches are equal and take up most of the space. This will work better as a mountain scene. The evergreen trees can be reduced in height. The sky does not need to take up so much space either.



### THE FINISHED PAINTING

Your eye is now wandering around the mountain and it appears to be large and majestic due to its predominant mass. The lake, trees and sky are just supporting actors.

## Cropping

It is very easy to fall into the trap of taking a photo at face value. However, if you apply the concepts of mass planning, you will be able to crop out the other competing masses.

### POOR



#### IMPROVING ON THE REFERENCE IMAGE

An example of a poor cropping and mass design is the photo on the left. The terrain and sky are both demanding the same attention. One of the two masses should be obviously smaller. This photo on the right will make an interesting skyscape. There are interesting lines and forms because of the rain clouds. You may even want to add rain pouring down. The sky mass takes up about 70% of the space which definitely establishes predominance.

### BETTER



#### Helpful Hints

- Avoid boughs that protrude equally on both sides of evergreen trees. They take on an airplane wing effect. Make sure evergreens vary in width and height from each other.
- Avoid equal slants on rocks even if they are opposite.
- Make round rocks more angular with straight lines with some convex protrusions for variety.
- When trees are adjacent to each other, paint them together as one unit by merging the foliage into one mass. The highlights can somewhat show their individuality.
- To help search and destroy implied symmetrical shapes, turn the photo upside down before working out the drawing.
- Vary negative space gaps between trees.
- Check the negative space between your bare tree branches and mountains for negative-shaped triangles.
- Another effective way to determine if a shape is well designed is to pretend you cut it out of context with a utility knife.



## **FOCUS ON ONE MASS**

Avoid the temptation to say everything in one image. It may be better to do two or three paintings of the same reference, each emphasizing a different mass.

## **PHOTO EDITING**

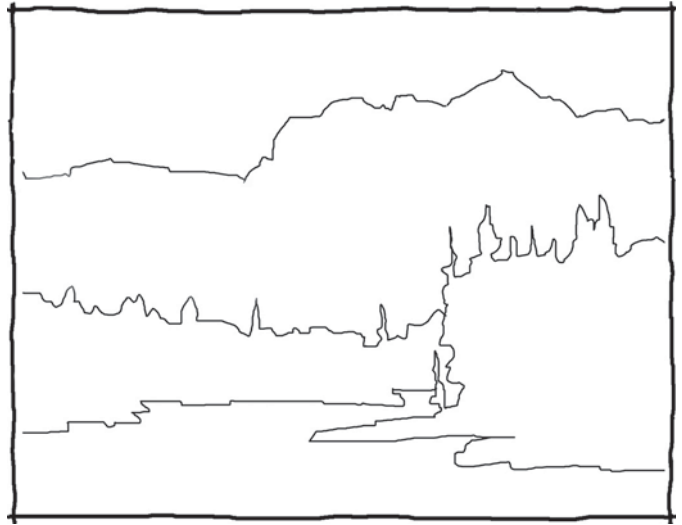
You can use a graphics program to edit your photo to get a better idea how it will look. In this example, the mountain was trimmed and the sky was reduced as much as possible without suffocating the painting. After the cropping, do a thumbnail sketch to correct things. The most important mass would be the river in this case.



## **ALTERNATE VIEW**

Here is an alternate take on the same photo. The mountain becomes the main mass and this time the river is subordinate in size. A painting based on either of the last two photos would work.



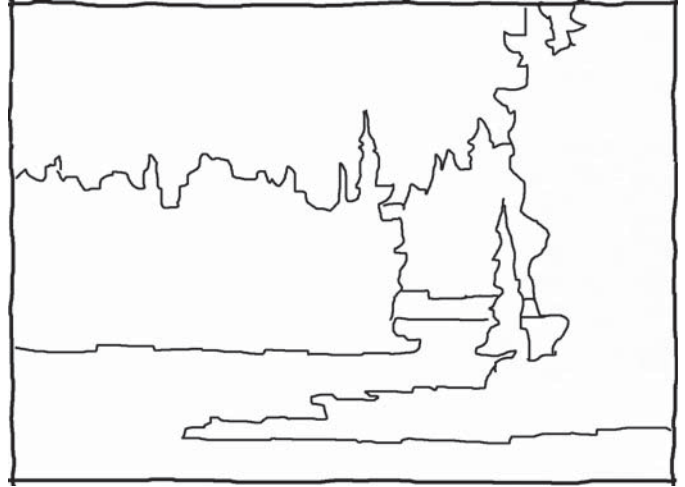


### STRETCH MASSES

To favor the composition, you will often need to stretch or reduce the size of masses. This is a good reference photo but even if we crop out some of the water, the mountain will still seem tiny because of the sky mass and the size of the evergreens. This gets solved in the thumbnail sketch.



**BOW RIVER**  
Oil on canvas, 24" x 30"  
(61cm x 76cm)

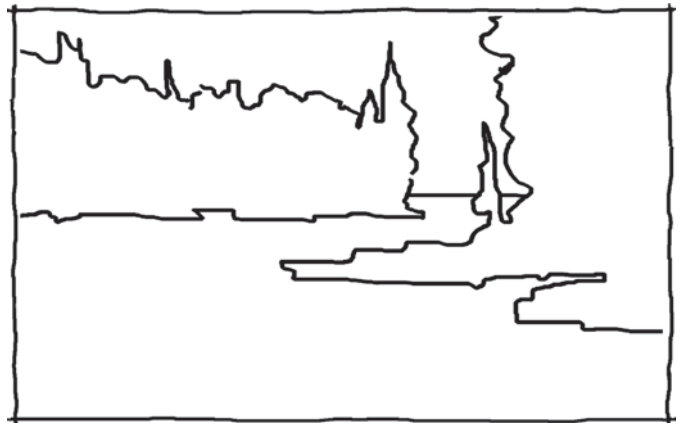


### ALTERNATE VERSION 1

You can completely ignore the mountain and make the evergreen trees the main actors in a foliage scene.



**BOW RIVER (ALTERNATE 1)**  
Oil on canvas, 24" x 30"  
(61cm x 76cm)



### ALTERNATE VERSION 2

You can completely ignore the mountain, downplay the sizes of the trees and make the river the main mass.



### BOW RIVER (ALTERNATE 2)

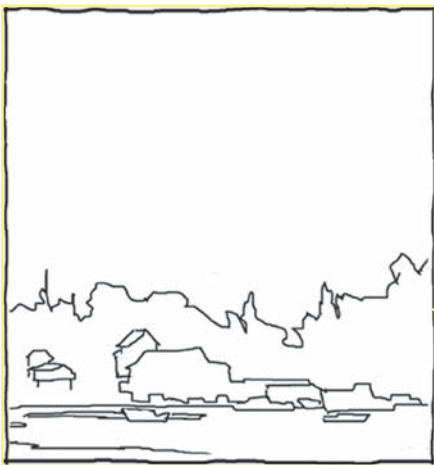
Oil on canvas, 24" x 30"  
(61cm x 76cm)

## One Scene, Several Compositions

How many paintings can you make out of this scene? I have travelled all over North America in my RV and when I hit a gold mine like this, I tend to stay in that one spot and do several paintings from the same location.

You could do three different successful paintings derived from this photo, and they would all give a different yet effective message. The point is to try not to say too much in one painting and to focus on just one important mass. Feel free to alter your landscapes even if they are

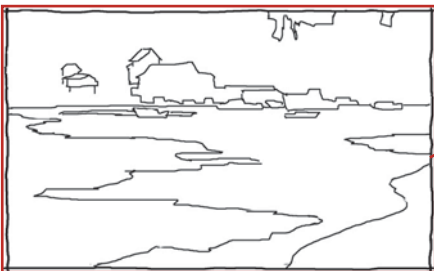
well known areas. Viewers do not memorize how things look in real life. The beauty of your painting with its shapes should always trump the precise anatomy of mountains, buildings and trees. There are resident artists that live in the Teton National Park area. They know all too well that the Teton peaks are very symmetrical and will alter them to end up with a better design. Buyers of these scenes do not return paintings because they are not exact copies of the mountains.



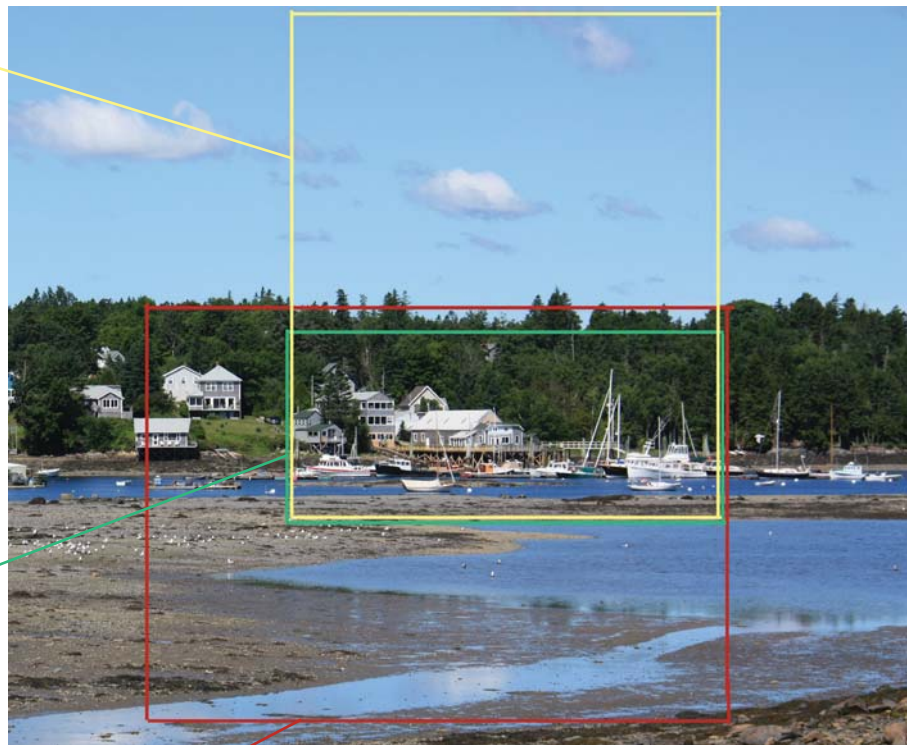
SKYSCAPE



BUILDINGS SCENE



WATER SCENE



All three thumbnails emphasize a different mass and all the paintings derived will work. The water, the foliage, the sky and the buildings do not compete with each other in the different settings.

## Demonstration

# PAINT WITH ABSTRACT SHAPES

I selected this scene because rocks and cliffs tend to create their own beautiful abstract designs. I was also drawn to the beautiful warm colors of the rocks in Acadia National Park.



REFERENCE PHOTO

## **I** Sketch the Composition and Lay In the Sky

Sketch the composition with an HB pencil. Wet the sky past the distant evergreen trees and past the horizon line, where the ocean meets the sky. Use Yellow Ochre Pale, Winsor Violet and Indian Red to paint the clouds. Fill in the sky with Cobalt Blue and Hooker's Green. Make a swooping motion with the brush. Take care not to create an exact balance between the blue sky and clouds—you want them to compete with each other. The sky should be darker tone at the top.



## MATERIALS

### Surface

Arches 300-lb. (640gsm) cold-pressed watercolor paper

### Brushes

¼", ½" and ¾" synthetic brights

### Watercolor Pigments

Burnt Sienna, Cobalt Blue, Hooker's Green, Indian Red, Payne's Gray, Raw Sienna, Ultramarine Blue, Winsor Violet, Yellow Ochre Pale

### Other

HB pencil, pastel chalks, sandpaper



## 2 Paint the Trees

Rewet the sky and go past the distant cliff area. Carefully avoid wetting the rock/cliff area— wet only the evergreen trees. Using the wet-on-wet technique, begin to paint the first row of trees using Payne's Gray, Hooker's Green and a touch of Burnt Sienna. Move the brush in a zigzag motion to create the distant trees. Try to avoid too many zigzag areas though—just indicate a few and allow the rest near the top to bleed into the sky. Keep the greens cool. Paint the second row of trees in a slightly darker tone. Negative paint out the silhouettes of the brighter trees. Do not heavily define any of them at this point— show only hints of the trees within that grouping. Glaze on top of the sunlit trees to bring them into the sunlight.



## 3 Paint the Distant Cliffs

Paint the farthest cliff Cobalt Blue with touches of Burnt Sienna and a touch of Winsor Violet. Leave a tiny white spot at top for highlights. Apply Burnt Sienna at the bottom of the cliffs to pick up reflected light from the water. Gradually get darker as the planes get closer.



## 4 **Paint the Foreground Rocks and Water**

Begin to define some of the flatter foreground rocks using Raw Sienna, Burnt Sienna, Winsor Violet and Cobalt Blue. Avoid subdividing too many times and avoid cloning the subdivisions. Think in terms of abstract designs. Do not darken the vertical planes too much. Feel free to exaggerate the warm color on the rocks. Then add the water with Ultramarine Blue allowing it to be hazier at the horizon. Gradually get darker in the middle ground. Add Hooker's Green to your water mixture as you get closer to the rocks. Drybrush the foam in the middle ground.

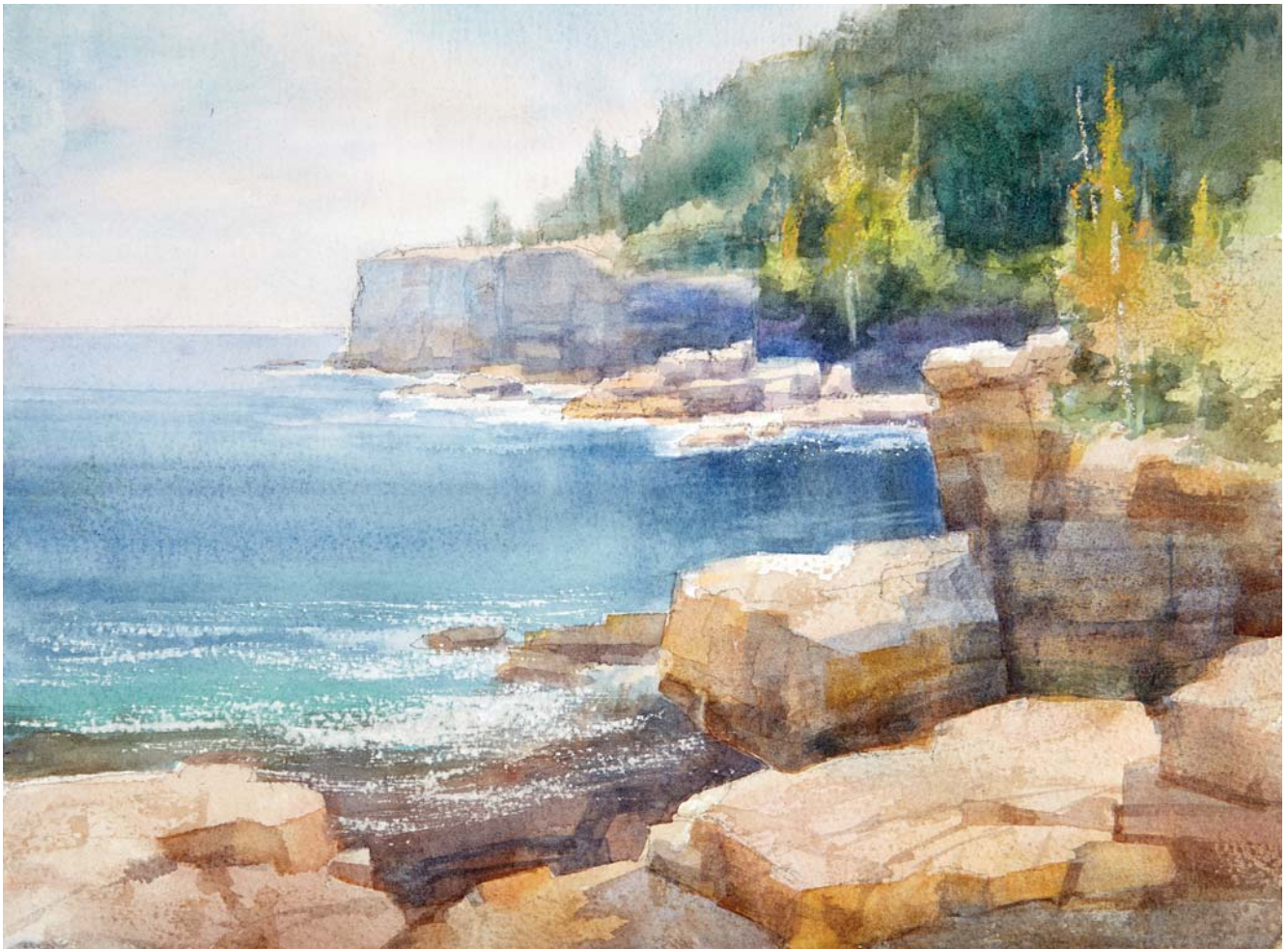


## 5 **Build Up and Define the Rocks and Cliffs**

Add more definition to the vertical planes of the rocks by suggesting indentations. Add thin lines to suggest cracks. Using Cobalt Blue, glaze over the rocks where the cast shadow is. Create a darker flat rock where the water has made it wet.



**6 Add Details to Finish**  
Carve out the rock indentations. Lightly drybrush on the rocks to add texture. Use a medium-coarse sandpaper to indicate the foam in the foreground. Negative paint into the sunlit evergreens to establish depth and roundness. If necessary, you can make corrections with pastels.



OTTER CLIFFS, ACADIA NATIONAL PARK  
Watercolor on Arches 300-lb. (640gsm) cold-pressed  
watercolor paper, 9" x 12" (23cm x 30cm)





**SUNRISE OVER ROCKPORT**  
Oil on linen, 12" x 16" (30cm x 41cm)



# VARY AND ENRICH COLORS

You have probably noticed by now that I keep comparing nature against landscape paintings. This is because most artists believe they can use nature as a foundation for their paintings. While this is true for ideas and inspiration, we need to compensate where nature falls short.

In the previous chapter, you learned that one of the flaws of nature is the symmetrical, and in many instances unattractive, shapes it produces. Another drawback of nature is that much of the color you see is monochromatic, meaning it consists of various tones of only one color. It is our ability to vary and enhance colors that gives us artists the upper hand. Color variety is the flavor of your painting.

In this chapter you will learn:

- How to avoid the common pitfalls of monochromatic color schemes.
- How to establish color harmony.
- How to simplify the value scale.
- How to attain more pictorial beauty through subtle color variance.

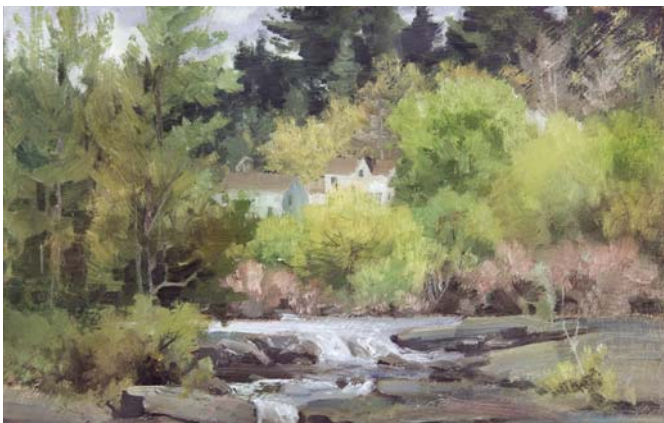
# CONTROLLING MONOCHROMATIC COLOR SCHEMES

Directly copying the colors you see outdoors or in photos will only result in a flat dull painting. You may ask, "Why can't I just mirror the colors I see in nature? They work just fine!" The reason is the macro world compensates for the monochromatic colors with intense sunlight that dramatically increases the range of values. (Value is the degree of how dark or light something is.)

In addition, the enormous size of real landscapes creates a huge impression of beauty. These conditions can never be replicated in a studio, especially because the value range you can work with in the studio is

very reduced. However, once you become aware of the pitfalls of the monochromatic color schemes found in nature, half of your problems will already be solved.

The key to making monochromatic color schemes work is to add touches and hints of other colors, even though they are not present in the real scene or the reference photo. For example, in a scene with monochromatic greens, you would add yellow-oranges such as Yellow Ochre Pale and Burnt Sienna, with the purpose of variegating the greens with other hues to break the monotony.



## SUMMER GREENS

The scene that inspired this plein air painting was all green. Hints of Yellow Ochre Pale and Burnt Sienna were added to those greens to add light and break the monotony. The red-orange bushes also give relief.

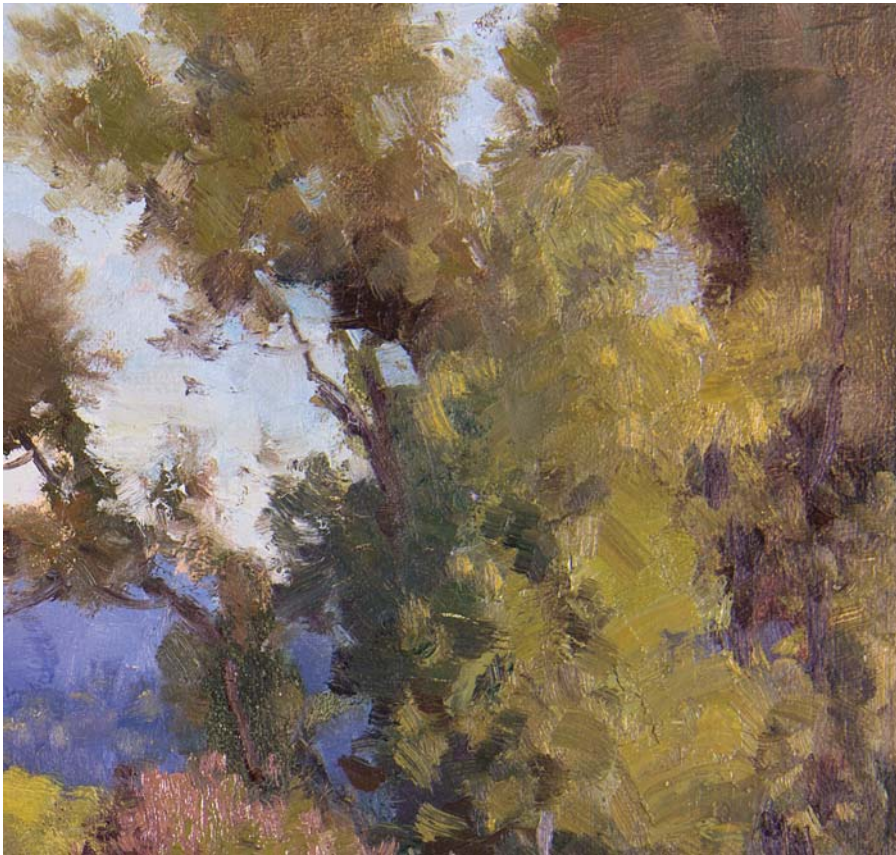


## EXAMPLE OF MONOCHROMATIC GREENS IN NATURE



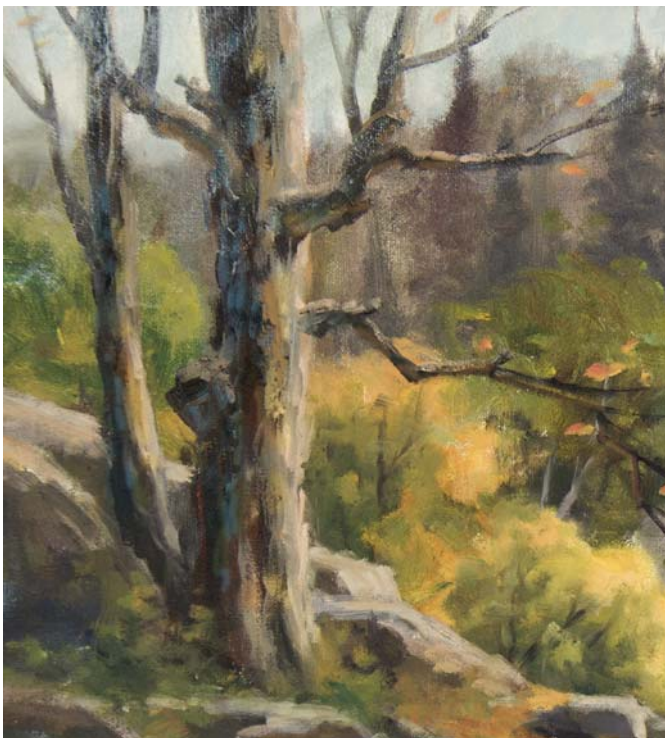
## CONSIDER ELIMINATING GREENS

This pastel painting has no green in it. Leaving green out of paintings completely will result in instant color harmony.



### **VARIEGATE, VARIEGATE, VARIEGATE!**

This zoomed in version shows subtle variations of greens. Many artists mute the “neon” greens we see in nature and add more of a red-orange hue. If your foliage ends up being the same color as a martini olive, your greens will be quite pleasing.



### **DON'T PAINT SOLID GRAY TREE TRUNKS**

In reality, you would never see this many colors in a tree trunk. You can justify the presence of the blue light on the shadow side of the tree as reflected sky light. Artists look for justifiable reasons to exaggerate color variegation.



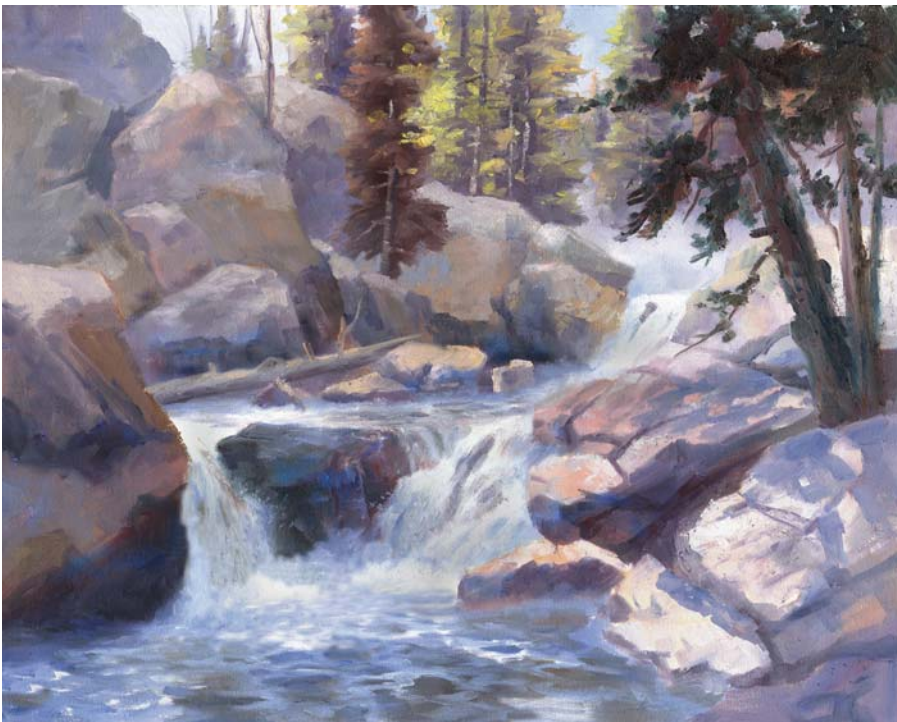
### **EXAMPLE OF MONOCHROMATIC GRAYS IN NATURE**



## **PAINT LIKE A HOLLYWOOD ANIMATOR**

The painting below has so much more life than the photo. There are more variations of color. If your painting ends up with a somewhat cartoonish aspect, you are on the right track. Because you need to reduce real life objects to just a mere few inches, the best thing to do is design shapes in an abstract way and liven them with variegation of color inside those shapes to compensate for the micro size, then convince the viewers to accept them as a representation of a real landscape objects.

The point is not to be concerned to make things look real in a painting, rather make them look good. The secret is to improve nature by enhancing colors where they would be otherwise dull.



### **Advantages of Pre-Toned Canvas**

Many artists pre-tone their canvases with Burnt Sienna. They scumble the darks very thinly and allow some of the undertone to glow through. This can bring relief to greens and add warmth to snow scenes.



## HANDLING WHITES

For anything white in a painting, such as snow, water foam or clouds, do not use white right out of the tube. Always warm it with a touch of yellow-orange, or orange or pink.

White water can be a problem when there is too much of it because it is a note of silence due to lack of color. It's like a pause in a song. If you limit white in waterfalls, snow scenes and seascapes the smaller portion of it will stand out more. An analogy to remember is that three candles on a table look romantic. One hundred candles will make it look like a funeral. Too much white and your painting will die!



## SNOW IN SHADOWS

I never paint blue skies, blue lakes, blue mountains or blue snow as far as hue is concerned. Why? Blue is considered the coolest hue in the color wheel. As such, it is unpleasant for the viewer so we artists find ways around it. Snow or water in shadows does not have color of its own. The snow in shadow in this photo will seem just blue at first glance, but a careful look will show it has more colors. It will be a compilation of the surrounding colors from the rest of the painting. In the zoomed-in version, you can see hints of red, green and violet in mainly a blue overall setting, which picks up the sky color.



## DETAIL VIEW

## Demonstration

# COLOR MATCHING

There are already countless books on the color wheel and color mixing, so we won't cover that in great detail in this book. However, I will share an easy color-matching method with you. Once you learn to match your colors with this system, you will not need to resort to color recipes with pigment names. (Keep in mind that all those names that appear on paint tubes are the result of intermixing the three primaries.) Now, instead of the color wheel, imagine a clock—with each hour on the clock representing a different hue. (To differentiate the terms hue and color: Hue is the raw blue, red or yellow and the combination of any two of the latter. Color is the result of adding a third hue to the mixture.)



**1 Identify the Hues You Want to Match**  
Identify which of the twelve hues corresponds to the one you want to match. The twelve hues are derived from only three: yellow, red and blue, known as primaries. Pinpointing a hue is done by elimination process. Ignore how dark or grayed it is for the first stage. Just locate the raw hue. The minutes on the clock would represent all the in-between color mixtures.



**2 Determine Value**  
Determine how dark or how light a color is on a gray value scale. You can guess the value easier if you squint your eyes. (This scale does not show white.)

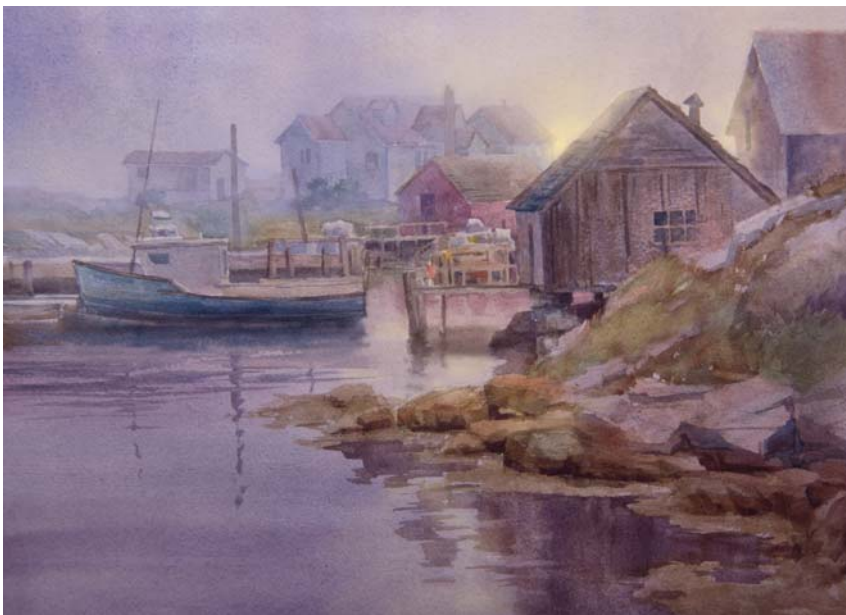
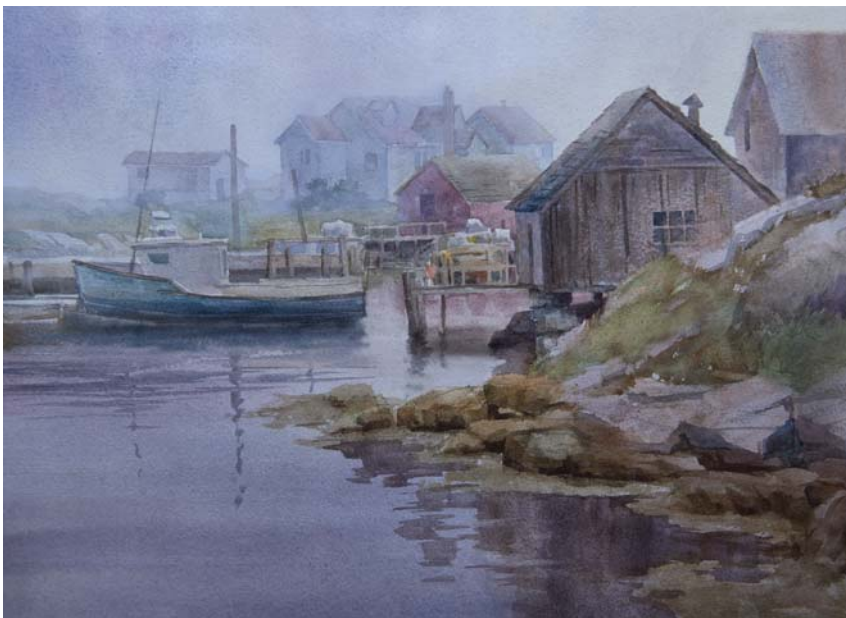
**3 Judge the Hue Saturation**  
If you do not add a third primary you will have pure color by only mixing two hues. Once a third hue is added to a mixture, you have desaturation as well as a tendency to gray down. When you add the direct opposite of a hue, it becomes desaturated. For example, when you add blue (4 o'clock) to orange (10 o'clock) the color intensity diminishes until you end up with gray.

# COLOR TEMPERATURE

Most people prefer warm hues like yellow-orange over cooler palettes of greens or blues. I never paint an absolute blue sky, a blue mountain or a blue lake that would be at 4 o'clock on the color clock. Instead, I would add Viridian to a Cobalt Blue mixture for my sky. For a lake, I would lean towards a gray-blue violet so the hue increases slightly in color temperature because of the addition of red. The viewer would still see it is blue though. When it comes to mountains, I will bend the color temperature towards a blue-violet. The red in the violet helps offset the garish

primary blue and warm it up a bit. Even if a mountain in a plain air setting is a neutral blue, I will not match its color.

It may surprise you to learn then that winter scene paintings, if handled skillfully, can end up being warmer as far as color temperature than a summer painting with greens. This is where your artistic instinct will help balance this out. It is commonly understood that all hues from green to blue-violet on the color wheel are considered cool colors, the rest are warm.



## COOL VS. WARM PAINTING

Which do you prefer? Most people prefer warm hues like yellow-orange to cooler palettes of greens or blues.





### **AVOID AN EQUAL BALANCE OF WARM AND COOL COLORS**

This winter scene predominantly has orange and yellow-orange. As such, it is classified as a warm painting, which is pleasing to the majority of people. As a word of caution: Paintings can be too warm or too cool. The cool gray-blue water and shadows on the snow help soothe the hot oranges. Pictorial temperature balance includes the correct ratio of warm vs. cool temperature. Only one should predominate.

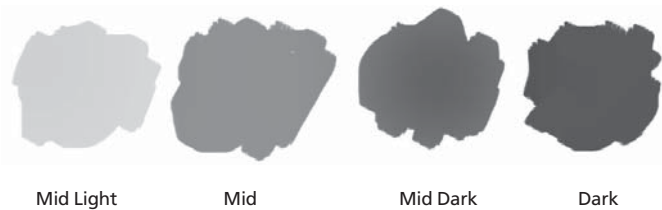


### **DON'T GIVE YOUR PAINTINGS THE BLUES**

I did this plein air painting at the Teton National Park. The mountains were much bluer, but I had to distort reality and turned them more towards a blue-violet. The sky is a turquoise blue. Adding green, because it has yellow, warms the blue. Even the left cloud has some Ochre in it to avoid a cool gray.

#### **Judging Local Color**

Judging a precise color can be difficult when it is in context with surrounding colors. If you close your hand and leave just a small tunnel to peek thru, the local color will be more faithful.



### REDUCE VALUE RANGES

When dealing with mixing color, it is easiest to reduce the ten main values on the gray scale down to only four grays. (In this specified scale, we leave out most white and black since they are easy to determine.) An almost white would only be used for clouds, water foam, buildings and sunlit snow. The key is to distinguish each value between those four grays only when mixing and applying color by thinking how they would appear if you took a black-and-white photo.



### GENERAL VALUES

When it comes to the major shapes, simplify by thinking in light, mid-light, mid-dark and dark when mixing paint for daylight scenes. Make a clear separation between them. After all the mixing, the final painting will inadvertently end up with the ten values anyway. On a side note, I tend to stay away from the dark value if I can help it and work with only three main gray values and will resort to the darker gray if only needed to separate planes. The idea is to work with predominately mid values for daylight scenes. In most cases, skies tend to be a mid-light value, horizontal planes will be a mid value and vertical planes will be mid-dark values. The general values are:

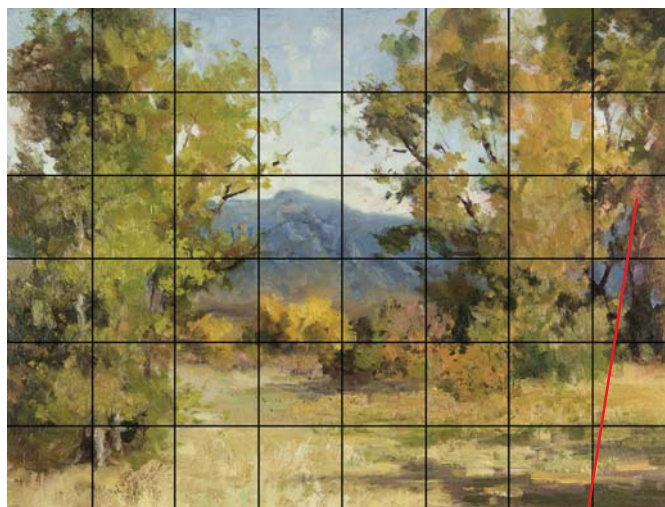
- almost white
- sky and grass highlight - mid light
- ground plane - mid
- mountains and trees - mid dark
- evergreen foliage - dark

### VISUALIZE THE PAINTING AS A CHESS BOARD TO VARIEGATE COLORS

To avoid replicating the monochromatic colors of nature, a great technique to keep in mind while painting is to imagine your painting is subdivided, like a chessboard, into eight squares in width and eight squares in height. In each square there should be a subtle color shift, and when possible a value shift.

The application of this concept will help you make skies become more exciting. While you are painting, if there is one square with a blue color only, you will feel compelled to add some hints of clouds. You will detect the moment your summer trees are becoming boring and will feel the need to add a variance of color. You will notice when your grass is too monotonous and add more green or yellow as needed. It will pressure you to echo the surrounding color in your snow shadows.

After a while, this will become second nature. Because of this chessboard visualization tactic, you will sense something is missing when you leave out the color variegation. When the viewers scan your painting, they will appreciate the interesting shifts. Be careful not to over variegate or your painting will become busy.



# ESTABLISHING COLOR HARMONY

Many books have also been written on this subject, so I will just put my two cents in for what I consider a simple solution for making colors harmonize in landscape paintings. Use an analogous color scheme. This means keep your main colors close together where they appear on the color clock, only using opposite colors for graying and cooling. The best policy is to make sure as many colors as possible in your artwork share the same common

mother hue. This applies to everything where color is involved, even interior decorating in which the walls, rugs and furniture have similar colors. When doing autumn scenes, avoid the red hue and green hue as isolated colors. They don't share enough of the common yellow-orange denominator. I tend to use green just as a spice in autumn scenes in small amounts, leaving the yellow-orange, orange and red-orange as the predominant hues.



## ELIMINATING COLORS

In this color scheme, I eliminated yellow because it rarely appears in landscapes. Yellow Ochre Pale and/or Burnt Sienna can be added to green to make it more agreeable with the other pigments. All the colors will share yellow-orange. For over-the-counter pigments, a working palette for autumn foliage can be Yellow Ochre Pale, Cadmium Orange, Burnt Sienna, Permanent Rose and Viridian.



## ADD RED TO GREENS TO UNIFY

Spice up your color mixtures with touches of red. With the exception of the mountain, most of the areas share a yellow-orange hue. There was a risk that the evergreen trees ended up being too green. To offset this, adding Burnt Sienna that contains the influence of the red-orange hue pulled them together with the yellow-orange trees. To keep them from looking isolated or out of place in autumn scenes, I tend to avoid showing any summer green colors that would not contain some red mixed in. They would at least be similar to a martini olive.



### ECHO SURROUNDING COLORS

Another way to establish color harmony is by repeating surrounding colors all around your painting. Snow, waterfalls and white walls will sing if you echo colors in a subtle way that appear elsewhere. This concept is known as reflected light.

In real life, when you look into cast shadows on snow, rocks, waterfalls and white water, they will take on a gray-blue appearance. You won't see the echoed colors. Nature has its own way of harmonizing color. With pigment, we don't have that luxury so we have to go the extra mile to end up with color unity. This means we will need to borrow

colors from different areas of the painting, add them to other areas, and find pretexts to repeat these colors. In this painting, the cast shadow is picking the pinks from the flowers and the orange from the walls. The sky is the primary source of influential color. This is another example of why you can't paint what just as you see in nature. Not only are we to echo colors in shadows, we must also weave surrounding colors into main areas. There are touches of green in the pink wall on the right. You can justify this green addition as mold on an old wall.

### Helpful Hints

- Avoid any primary hue by itself in a landscape painting. Ignoring the rare exceptions, they don't exist in nature.
- Greens tend to be quite garish. If you match the color of an olive, the amount of red present in the mixture will tone it down.
- Cool your greens in distant planes.
- Exaggerate the red hue in many mixtures. Rain clouds look much better with touches of Indian Red in the blues. Adding Burnt Sienna to greens helps decrease saturation.
- Consider working from a black-and-white photo so you can invent your own colors, especially if it's a summer scene.
- If you have dry grass on the ground, you can echo that at the bottom of clouds by adding Yellow Ochre Pale.
- Rich color shows up the best in mid values. As the value gets closer to black, color fades. If you cannot make out the color of area by standing back ten feet, then you know that value is too dark. The closer you get to white, the colors become bleached out and chalky, so plan your paintings to show as much mid value as you can in broad daylight scenes.
- When reloading your brush with paint, pick up a variation from the previous color you just applied.
- If you have problems varying color, try using chalk pastels until you get the hang of it.
- Greens take on a strong neon color in sunlight. Consider painting greens on overcast days.

## Demonstration

# VARIEGATE COLOR IN A PAINTING

Follow the steps to variegate your colors in a painting and learn how to get monochromatic greens under control.



## MATERIALS

### Surface

Canson Mi-Tientes paper

### Pastels

PanPastels and pastel sticks in assorted colors

### Other

foam sponge blending tool, gum arabic eraser, pastel pencil, PanPastel applicator

## REFERENCE PHOTO

### **I** Sketch the Composition and Lay In the Background

Very lightly sketch the composition with a pastel pencil—just enough to see a hint of the drawing or it will show through the paint later.

Lay in the sky using a foam sponge tool and light blue PanPastel. Skip over some parts of the sky to allow the paper to show through in areas—these will become the cloud forms.

Continue working from the background forward. Indicate the hill with blue-violet.





## 2 Lay In the Trees

The dark values of the trees must get cooler and lighter as they recede into the distance. Lay in the darkest greens first. Then build highlights on top of that. Try to avoid creating an equal balance of darks and highlights—one should predominate. If some of the paper shows through, that's okay. Vary the greens to help break up the monochromatic color scheme.

Paint shorter trees in front of the more distant trees to create depth. Use cool blues for areas of foliage in shade in the background. Warm up with violets in the middle ground. Each time you load the applicator, use a slight variation of the color you used previously. Double-loading it also helps. This will help you avoid making your painting too monochromatic.



## 3 Build Up Layers and Texture

Now that the base is down, switch to stick pastels to indicate a few individual leaves. Try to have them touch each other. Negative paint the dark indentations for depth. Add the sky holes, but be careful—you don't want too many—just enough so the trees look airy.



## 4 Add the Tree Branches and Build Up Details

Paint the tree branches. In nature, branches are quite dark. Keep the values close and try to hide them within the foliage so they won't stand out too starkly. Continue adding detail at the eye level and reduce the amount of detail in the top portion of the painting.

Negative paint out a silhouette from the front tree to make it abstract. Use purple to carve out more indentations in the foliage and create depth. Don't go past one-third of the coverage of the total shape from the bottom up. Most of the time, artists place the sun at either 2 o'clock or 10 o'clock in order to have the light source come in at a ninety-degree angle. These areas should receive the most light.



## 5 Lay In the Water and Grass

You can differentiate the horizontal plane from vertical plane by dramatically changing colors or values. Lay in the water in a curving "S" shape with gray-blue and blue-green hues. Lay in the grass with yellow-green. However, this will be too similar to the color of the trees on the left side of the painting, so it will have to be adjusted.

Likewise, adjust the trees on the left to make them contrast more with the right-side trees and grass. Work some darker greens into the trees to take down the bright yellow glow.



## 6 Define the Foreground and Add Details to Finish

Continue building up the foreground layers and adding texture to the grass. Indicate just a few details like clumps in the grass and individual grass strands with Ochre hues using the stick pastels. Add the river bank, making it darker near the edges of the water to suggest erosion. This will also create a three-dimensional effect. Darken the corner to give a slope to the grass. Darken one side of the water and keep the other side lighter. Because of the overwhelming warm colors, add soothing grays at the bottom of the trees to represent dead branches and leaves. This will help subdue and unify the painting.



### SUMMER HEAT

Pastel on Canson Mi-Tientes paper,  
9" x 12" (23cm x 30cm)





**MISTY SUNSET**

Oil on linen, 11" x 14" (28cm x 36cm)



# CREATE MELODIC MOVEMENT

Each chapter so far has focused on the different virtues and defects of the macro world from an artistic perspective. In this chapter, we will address the concepts of visual lines and how important they are in relation to your paintings.

A scientific study concluded that when subjects listened to music, their brains released endorphins. This is the reason they interpreted the music as pleasurable. This may very well be the case when viewers “read” paintings, so we artists must strive to produce melodic visual movement in our work. This is achieved by creating very interesting visual lines. Think of the lines in a painting as being sort of like the rhythm of a song.

In this chapter you will learn:

- How to handle problematic implied lines in creative ways.
- How to capitalize on desirable implied lines.
- How to move viewers through a painting in a slow and pleasing way.

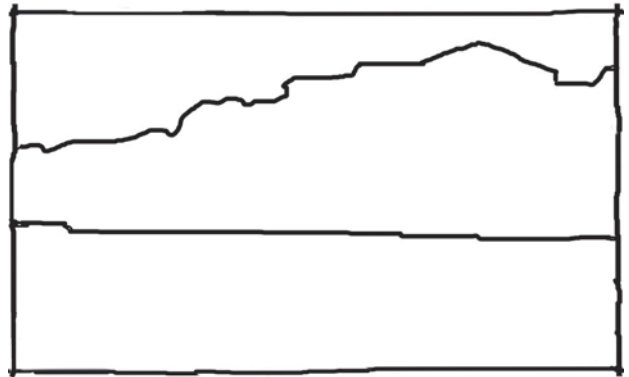
# PROBLEMATIC IMPLIED LINES

In Chapter 2, we explored the concept of our subconscious mind influencing us to repeat undesirable non-abstract shapes. The same applies to lines. When people look at paintings, they will unconsciously follow implied visual lines to help them process the information they're seeing. Because of this, you will want to create implied lines that are pleasing to viewers.

Every time you create a shape adjacent to another shape, it will have a contour. This contour becomes

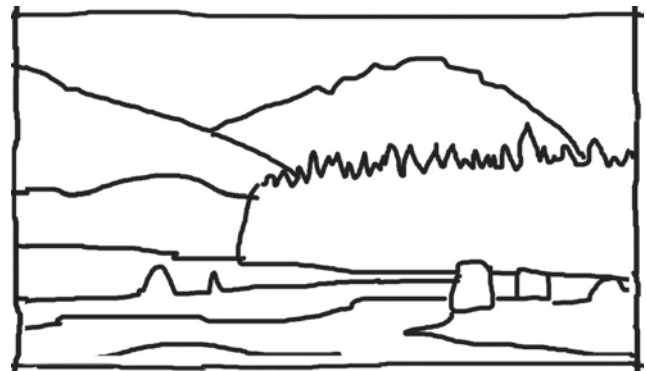
an implied line, hence, you have visual movement, which can be pleasant or unpleasant to the viewer. It stands to reason that if a shape is well designed, its contour line will also be pleasing. The key is to design implied visual lines that move the viewer's eye at the right pace in a graceful and melodic way.

Once you understand where nature is deficient, it will be easier for you to redesign deficient lines and become a good "visual musician." Let's look at some examples.



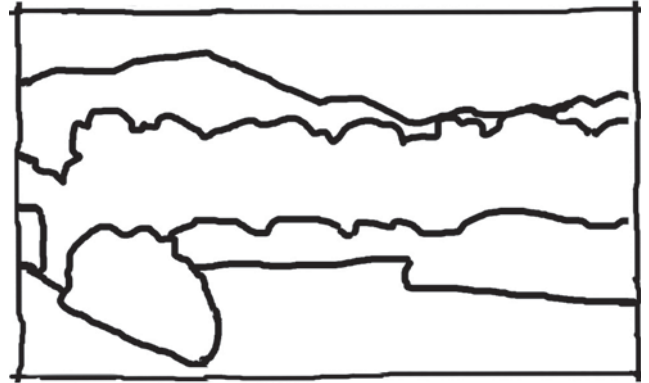
## IMPLIED STRAIGHT LINES

These are very abundant in nature. You will see them at shorelines and at the bottom of trees against grass, hill tops, distant trees, roads, tree trunks, horizon lines on seascapes, and on man made structures, of course. The implied straight lines move the viewer's eye too quickly. In general, it is best to avoid straight lines or adjust them to slow the pace.



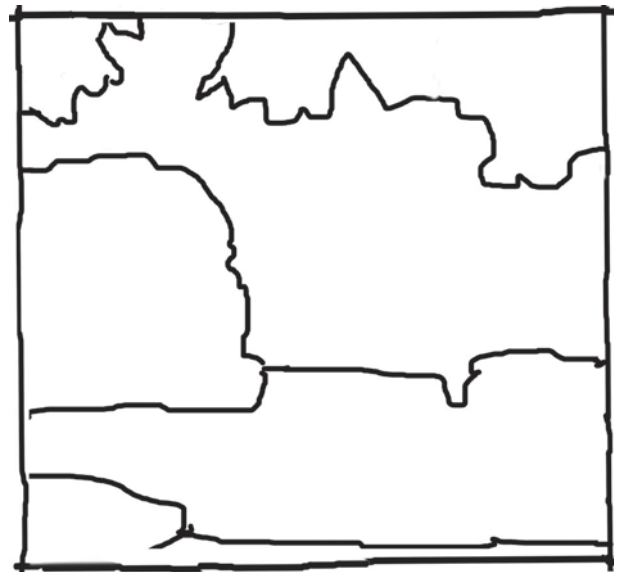
## IMPLIED ZIGZAG LINES

Think of lines as musical notes on a scale. These would have pleasant variations. If the same note plays over and over again, it would be boring and monotonous. Evergreen trees tend to grow in such a pattern that they end up looking like a print out of an electrocardiogram. Zigzag lines are very unpleasant to viewers and should be kept to a minimum.



### IMPLIED REPETITIVE LINES

These are normally found on contours of rolling hills, tree tops and clouds. When these lines form concave and convex lines with shallow indentations and protrusions that repeat across a contour, they are monotonous and should be redesigned. In the linear drawing, you can easily see that the wavy line is repetitive. This is because several trees are at the same height. It would be like hearing a flat song with no high and low pitches. The mountain also falls into a boring wavy line, so that would have to be cropped or substituted by a mountain that has more jagged edges. An untrained artist would just copy the layout as is.

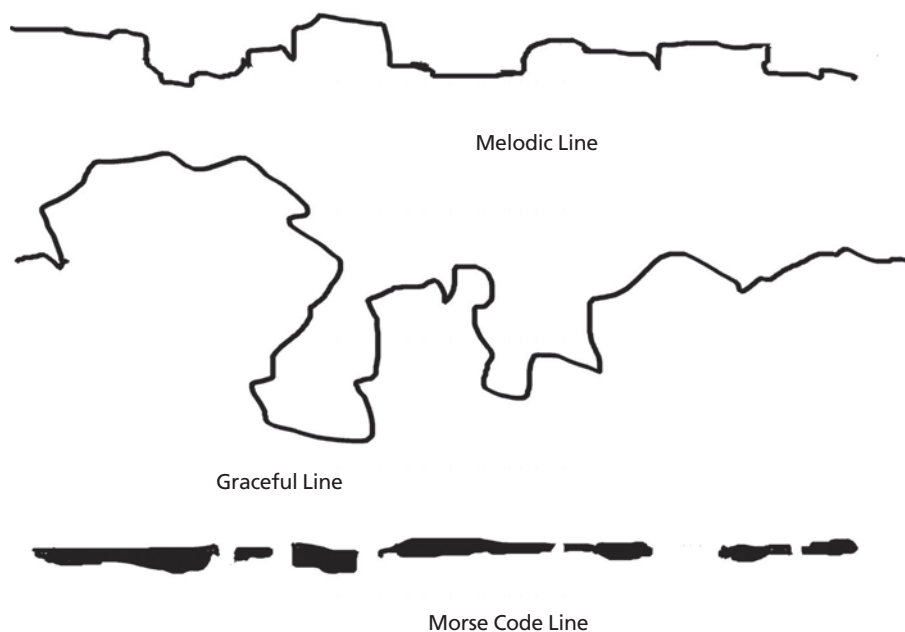


### IMPLIED ROUND, CONCAVE OR CONVEX LINES

This goes hand in hand with symmetrical shapes. Obviously if we have a shape that is too oval or round, the "C" contour of that shape would form a boring and swift linear movement.

# VALUABLE IMPLIED LINES

Whenever possible, any problematic implied lines should be reworked into melodic lines, graceful lines or interrupted lines, and should be exploited to the utmost. They are vital compositional tools. These lines will result in pleasing eye movement.



## THE MOST VALUABLE COMPOSITIONAL LINES

This image illustrates the three most attractive ways to move the viewer's eye through a painting. Think of an orchestra director when he is waving his baton. This will be moved in a graceful way. You can substitute the fast moving lines for these slower ones that are more pleasing to viewers. With this, you create your visual melody. A melodic line has a staircase effect to it, whereas a graceful line has a roller coaster effect with prominent protrusions and deep entrances. An interrupted line is a line that would otherwise be straight but is broken up into shorter segments. Its purpose is to slow down the visual pace. The gaps would be the speed bumps. (You could also call it a Morse-Code line or a connect-the-dots line.)

## Where to Place Lines

So where do we create all these compositional lines?

### Melodic Lines

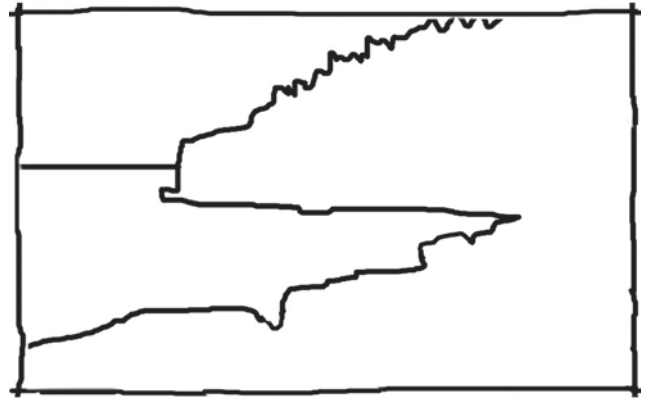
- where water meets land, rocks, grass, clumps and floating tree trunks are handy tools
- where trees meet grass
- the bottom of cumulous clouds
- contours of rocks and rocky mountains
- contours of artistically designed evergreens
- to offset straight lines on buildings and tree trunks

### Graceful Lines

- contours of cumulous clouds
- contours of crashing waves and waterfalls
- deciduous trees (in a group or singular)
- visual paths, such as streams or rivers

### Interrupted Lines

- portions of roads peeking through the snow
- accents on bushes, grass, trees and under rocks
- cracks in stone walls
- to connect the dots for stones, bushes and wild flowers near each other
- rocks peeking through snow



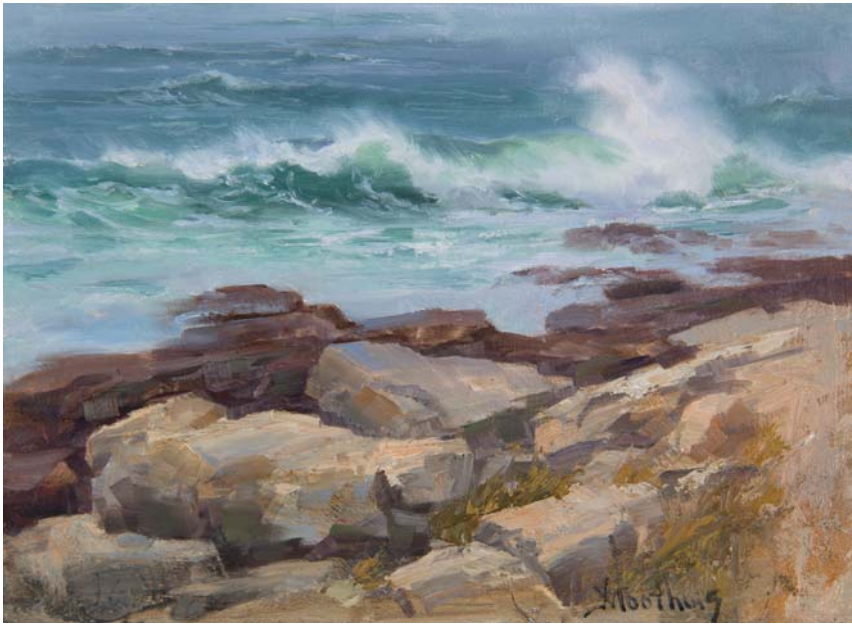
### MELODIC LINES

You can identify melodic lines by their "staircase" look. The reference photo shows an exquisite melodic line formed by the rocks against the water. Melodic lines are key to a successful landscape painting.



### GRACEFUL LINES

I would say there are deep enough dips in the contour of the autumn trees in this photo to classify this as a roller-coaster graceful line. Also the tops of the trees vary in height. When you see lines like these in nature, by all means—exploit them.



### **MELODIC LINE SHORELINE**

This is a good example of a designed melodic line. The eye enjoys “reading” the visual sentence until it reaches the crashing wave.

### **GRACEFUL LINE STREAM**

The stream forms a pleasant graceful line that ushers the viewer to the sunlit area.



### **INTERRUPTED LINE WITH STONES**

The stones peeking through the snow form a Morse-Code pattern that slows down the visual speed.



## SEASCAPES

Seascapes are very attractive because the contour of a wave can be designed into a graceful line. The rocks against the water form a melodic line.

Melodic Lines

Graceful Lines



Here you can see the application of all the concepts you've just learned in one painting.

Graceful Lines

Interrupted Lines (bushes)



# LOST-AND-FOUND LINES

Once we have established which of the aforementioned lines is the most suitable in our composition, we will need to determine if the visual line should be well defined—meaning hard edged, blurred, or a lost-and-found line, which is a combination of both.



## DIFFUSED CONTOUR GRACEFUL LINE

This is a graceful visual line whose entire contour is diffused.



## LOST-AND-FOUND GRACEFUL LINE

This is a lost-and-found graceful line. This is the most exquisite and entertaining visual line. The diffused edge would read as foliage that is more distant. The hard edge would seem like the foliage is closer. The blurred-edged graceful line works well for waterfalls, foliage and clouds.



## RAIN CLOUDS

The bottom of clouds that have shadows underneath make excellent melodic, lost-and-found implied lines. The fluffy part of the clouds forms a graceful line. The viewer's eye will travel along this line like reading a book, enjoying the process.





### SNOW SCENES

Snow scenes help offset the rigid lines of man made structures. I strategically placed the snow so that it would appear bumpy along the fence railings and roof lines. Be creative to slow the pace of the viewer's visual reading.



### LOST-AND-FOUND EDGES

In this detail view of the above painting, note the lost-and-found edges on the contour of the trees against the sky. The hit-and-miss eye movement is well accepted by the viewer.

**Blur Portions of a Painting**

To achieve blurred portions in watercolor, you can spot wet the paper, leaving some dry areas. To get blurred portions in other mediums, smudge randomly.

# SOLVING PROBLEMATIC IMPLIED LINES

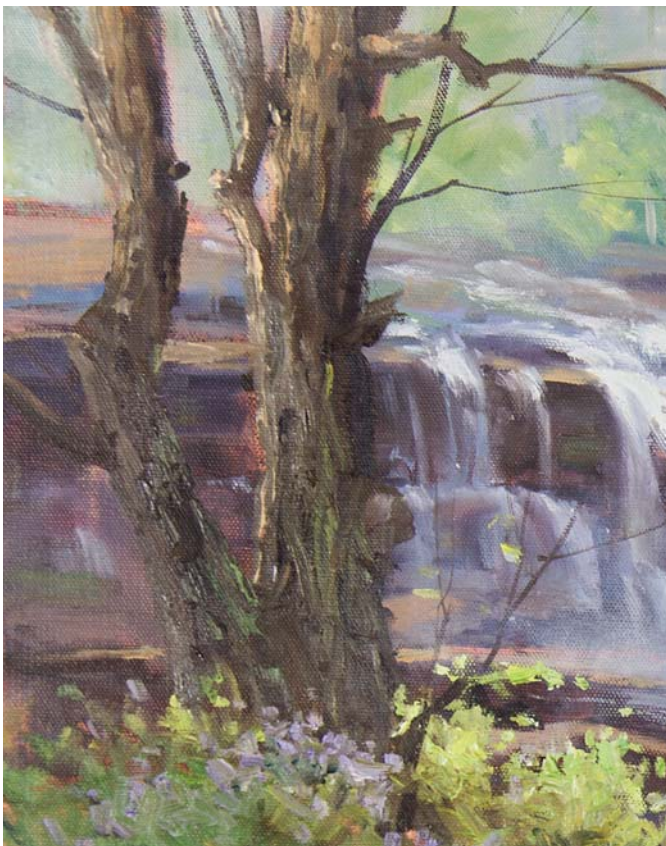
You will find many implied straight, zigzag, wavy and curved lines in nature. Here are some solutions:

## Solving Implied Straight Lines

Implied straight lines are most commonly found where water meets land, at the base of distant trees, distant hills, man made structures and roads, just to mention a few.



REFERENCE PHOTO



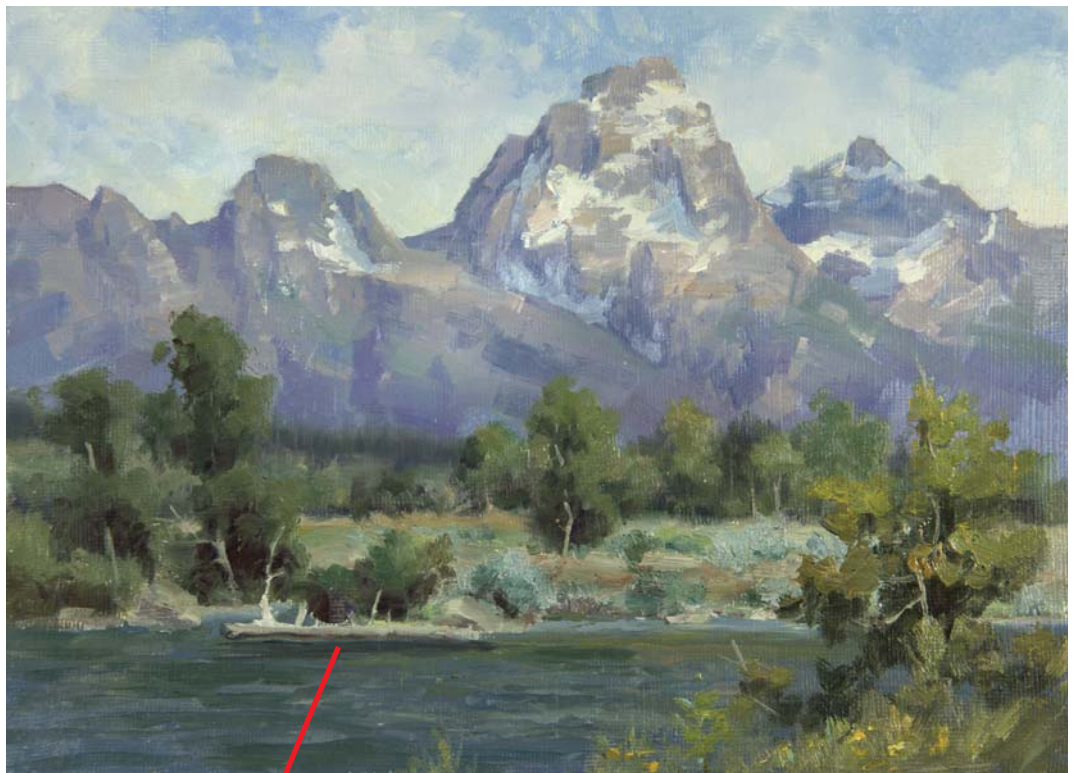
## IMPLIED STRAIGHT LINES IN TREE TRUNKS

The bark peeling off the broken branches was all strategically made into melodic lines to avoid having the tree trunk show straight lines, as seen in the reference photo above.

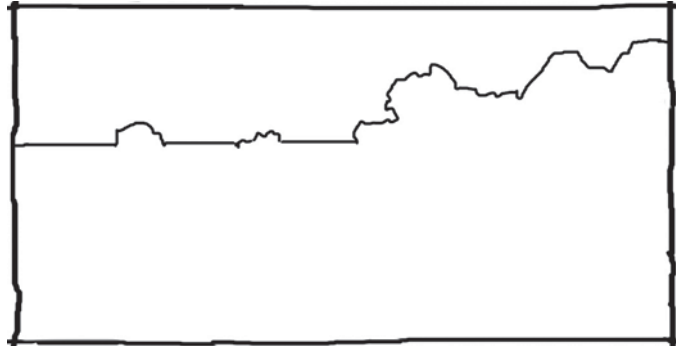


## IMPLIED STRAIGHT LINES AT SHORELINES

Where the river meets the land, we see a straight line. The visual movement is too fast. This also results in the river having a rectangle shape, which is not an abstract shape.

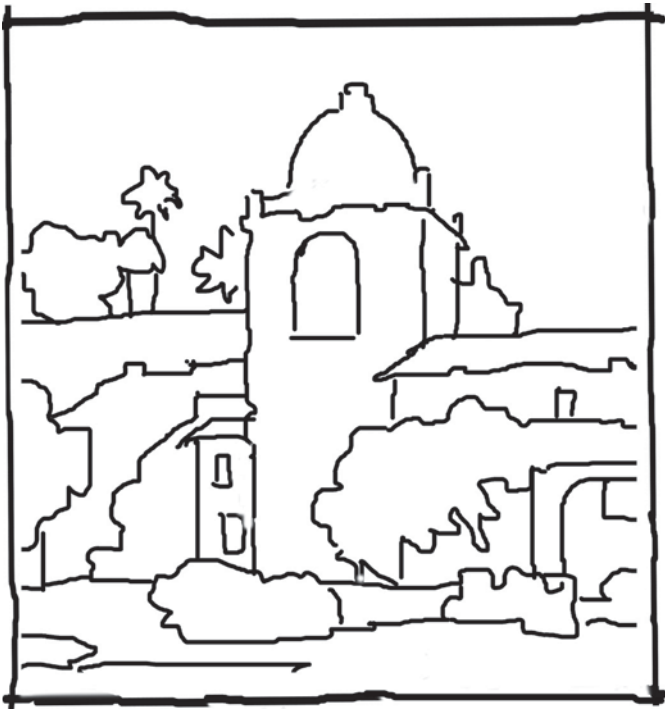


By adding a fallen tree trunk, some rocks and small coves, I was able to offset the straight line and slow down the visual thrust converting it to a melodic line. The tree in the foreground helped offset the rectangular shape of the water. On a side note, the mountain peak in the painting is now less triangular than in the reference photo. It is now an abstract shape.



### IMPLIED STRAIGHT HORIZON LINES

Seascapes tend to have straight lines at the horizon. This can be counteracted by blurring that line, by adding fog, or by allowing waves and rocks to interrupt the line.

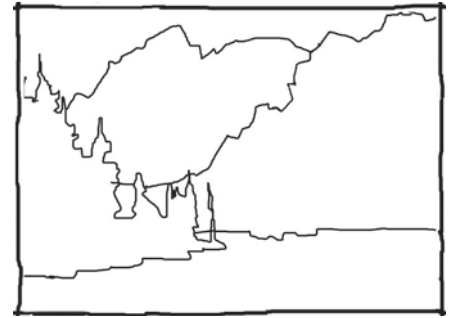


### NEUTRALIZE STRAIGHT LINES IN MAN MADE STRUCTURES

To avoid rigid straight lines, subtle indentations were added to the edge of the stone wall that were not in the original scene. The tile roof looks damaged, but in paintings this adds character. Adding flowers to cover long straight lines is an excellent strategy. Many artists have made a living by applying this sole principle.

## Solving Implied Zigzag Lines

Implied zigzag lines are common when evergreen trees are grouped together.



### PESTY ZIGZAG CONTOURS

When the negative space between evergreens becomes repetitive and the widths of the evergreens are cloned, the result will be a zigzag eye movement. The solution to this is to open large gaps between some of the trees that are to be unequal and to vary the width and heights of these evergreens to the degree that the repetitive zigzag is gone. The contours of the mountains were designed into melodic lines.



### ADVANTAGES OF SMUDGING

Smudging to blend the distant forest into the background or sky will remove a zigzag contour line. Just leave a hint of some evergreens to let the viewers know what they are. Take into account that zigzag lines will be barely noticeable if their value is very close to the background, so they may not need to be smudged. The contour would be physically hard edged but not optically hard edged.

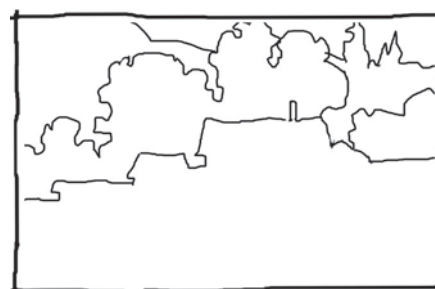
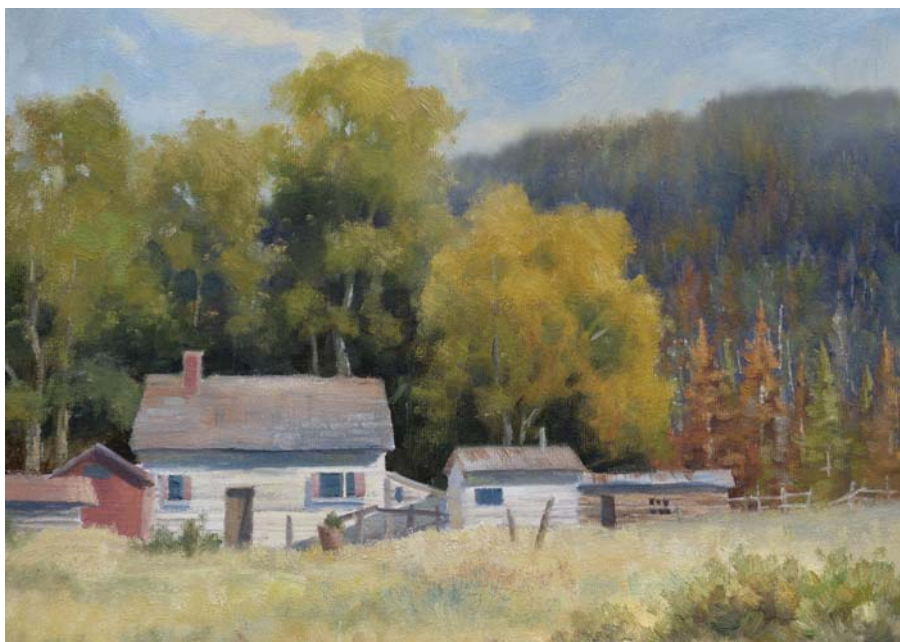
## Solving Implied Wavy Lines

Implied wavy lines are commonly found on tree tops and hills.



### CROPPING

Obvious lines become strong attractions in paintings. Ask yourself if the line is leading the eye with a compositional purpose. If it isn't, take it out. Many times by cropping out or covering up a shape with an unnecessary line, you can avoid having the eye run like a subway back and forth. The long diagonal line on the background hill was not necessary so it was cropped.



### CREATE DEEP INDENTATIONS

In the original scene, the tree top had very shallow negative shape indentations. By applying artistic license, I added some deep dips in some of the areas. Follow the contour of all the green deciduous trees. You will feel there is a roller coaster movement to the line. This now becomes a graceful line. The last tree does not need to be an obvious "C" line, due to the concave indentations.

## Solving Implied Round and Curved Lines

These are slightly better than a straight line. Just like when a car approaches a curve, it needs to slow down but not enough to slow the pace to a

comfortable visual movement. You can find curved lines in cloud formations, roads, rivers, streams, symmetrical trees and the contour of round rocks.

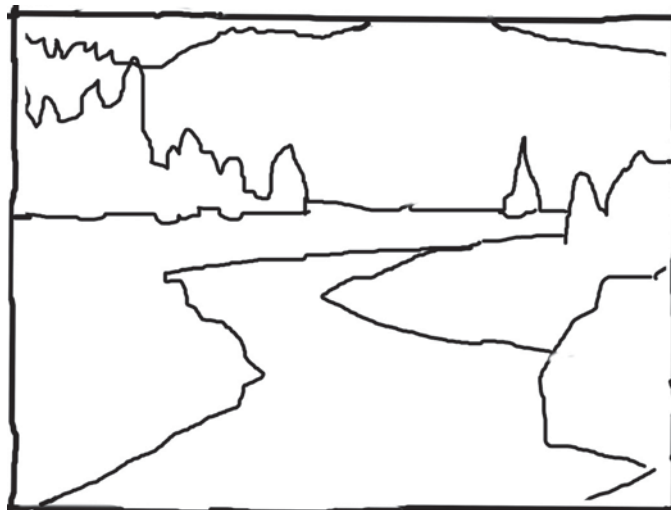


## ADD VISUAL SPEED BUMPS

The "C" shaped line was solved by creating areas that protrude more, such as ice and rocks.







The "C" shape on the left side of the river is symmetrical. If left as is, it will rush the viewer.



### INTERRUPT THE C LINE

Add protruding bushes to convert a fast-moving "C" line into a graceful line.





### OTHER VISUAL PATHS

There are other ways to create linear paths that are not as obvious as roads or rivers. In this painting, I lined the sagebrushes up in such a way that it would lead the eye. First you follow the bushes, then your eye follows the dirt area, then connects to the darker trees until your eye goes to the very back. Landscape paintings do not need focal points as long as you can move the eye throughout the painting well into the background.



The bales and the tall grass are organized in a way that they lead the eye to the background.



### **AVOID THE TRAIN-TRACK EFFECT**

The dirt road had two parallel lines. I offset one of them by overlapping it with the sage brushes. The grass against the dirt road forms a melodic line. The wild flowers are designed to grab the attention and subtly take the viewer to the distant cabin.



The logs are cleverly placed like toothpicks to help the viewer make the transition from the foreground to the mountain range. The protruding branches on the logs keep the eye from running over a straight line.



### CREATING A VISUAL LEAD-IN

Occasionally you will encounter reference photos in which the scene in its natural state does not provide a lead-in. Rather the eye will be rushed from side to side, and the viewer will feel compelled to exit the painting. This eye movement is inevitable when shorelines are placed in a certain way. In this painting, I had to create a melodic line with the shoreline to slow down the eye. I also applied artistic license and added waves to form the visual path from the foreground. The highlights on these waves form an interrupted line where the viewer connects the dots.



### LEFT-TO-RIGHT VISUAL MOVEMENT

In Western culture, we read from left to right. You will find that placing the visual movement from the left to right in most cases is preferable than the other way around. This painting has several melodic lines that the viewer will read in a pleasing way.

#### Tip

Flip your reference in a mirror before you draw it on the canvas. You may get a better feel for it. Which version do you prefer from these two?





### STOP VISUAL PATHS FROM EXITING AT THE SIDES

If copied as is, the viewer will follow the contour of the cliff all the way to the right edge of the composition and go right out of the painting. It is better not to allow the viewer to exit on the side unless you provide a way back in near that exit.



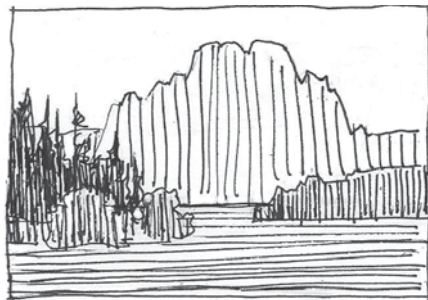
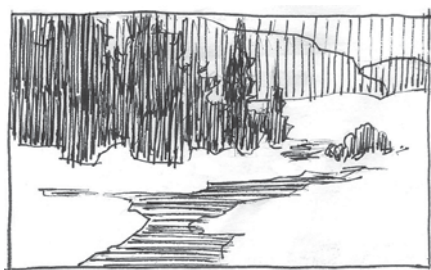
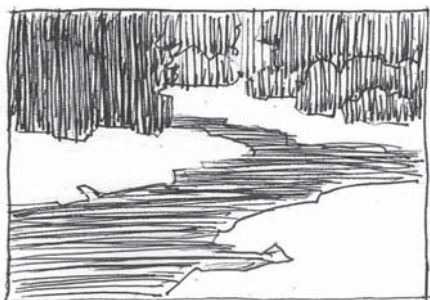
### SOLUTIONS

This issue can be solved in two ways: Place fog to make the line and the area ambiguous, or put a "stop sign" before the edge. In this case, the protruding evergreen stops the line from inviting viewers to exit.

## How To Indicate Rivers, Streams and Lakes

It is a common practice for artists to allow the bank of a river to exit at one of the sides as long as there is a reentry point an inch or so from that exit. The eye will make

the connection at the short distance. This anchors the shape nicely and helps to avoid the feeling that the river is being fitted into the rectangle like socks in a drawer.



### RIVERS

When one part of the body of water originates from the side and the other from the bottom, it will give the impression it is a wider body of water such as a river. Make sure the two measurements from the corners are not the same.

### STREAMS

When both sides of a body of water originate from the bottom, it will give the impression it is a narrow body of water, such as a stream.

### LAKES

When both sides of the body of water come out from opposite sides, it will convey the impression that it is a lake or an ocean.



### LEARNING BY CONNECTING THE DOTS

In a sense, this is an interrupted line. You can move a viewer visually by placing rocks, bushes, flowers or other things that would form a "Hop Scotch" pattern. The grass strands were placed strategically to invite the viewer in from the foreground and by connecting them, the eye goes to the cabins. There are narrow gaps that separate the grass but the eye still bridges them and moves forward.



### LEADING THE VIEWER FROM THE TOP

So far I have only addressed visual paths that originate in foregrounds. You can also provoke eye movement coming from the top, much like the way we read newspapers. You can set it up where clouds, hills or the round tree foliage will give the viewer a sliding-board effect, so the eye slides into the painting. This can be done in conjunction with a visual path that would also originate from the foreground at the bottom.



The tree top guides the viewer in.





## LEADING IN FROM THE BOTTOM

There is no question the steps are inviting. Note also that there are no distracting details in the immediate foreground.

### Bridge the Darks to Help Eye Flow

Visually connect the dark elements. Either have them touch each other, or be close enough for the eye to make the leap without large gaps. Avoid the scattered billiard-ball effect. This way, the eye flows instead of jumping. If you cannot bridge dark spots, then slightly lighten the value. This would apply to accents in bushes, trees and rocks. Notice the pattern of darks in the negative painting and how close they are to one another.

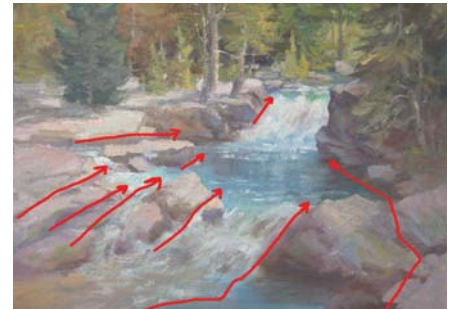


## VISUAL POINTERS

These are handy tools to direct the viewer to a certain area. These are normally tree branches, logs, leaves, long grass stands, etc. Think of visual pointers like a traffic policeman pointing towards the street so you can continue. In this painting, the tree has a couple of branches that direct the viewer past the gate. The semi-exposed concrete walkway is functioning as a visual path.

# ESTABLISHING RHYTHM

Once you design the major visual directional, it is a good idea to have everything else follow the rhythm. Avoid lines that will contradict the eye's flow. In a subtle way, keep all your lines moving towards the same direction.



## FOLLOW NATURAL LINES

Follow the sides of the rocks, their crevices and the flow of the water. You can feel there is an overall eye flow towards the waterfall where those lines converge.

## POOR



## BETTER



## VEHICLES, PEOPLE AND ANIMALS SHOULD NOT FACE EDGES

In the first picture, the viewer will unconsciously exit the painting. Turn vehicles, people and animals around to face inwardly. If people or animals are walking, make sure they are walking towards the center of your painting.

## Demonstration

# CREATE MELODIC MOVEMENT IN A PAINTING

Follow the steps to invite the viewer into your painting from the foreground into the background. You will learn to work with a mixed palette of acrylics and oils.



REFERENCE PHOTO

## **1** Prepare the Surface, Sketch the Composition and Lay In the Sky

Tone the surface with Burnt Sienna acrylic paint. Sketch the composition with a neutral violet pastel pencil. This will blend into the paint later on. Lay in the background sky with a salmon-colored acrylic mixture with Cadmium Orange, Permanent Rose and white. This will imply a late sunset sky. Subdue the color intensity towards the peripheral area. Be more intense with the color where the sun will be placed.



## MATERIALS

### Surface

linen glued to panel

### Brushes

nos. 4, 6, 8 and 10 brights, thin rigger, thin watercolor brush

### Acrylics

Burnt Sienna, Cadmium Orange, Cadmium Yellow, Permanent Rose, Ultramarine Blue, Violet

### Oil Paints

Burnt Sienna, Cobalt Blue, Indian Red, Permanent Rose, Ultramarine Blue, Winsor Violet

### Other

neutral violet pastel pencil, Liquin, palette knife, Liquitex super heavy gesso (for underpainting white)



**2 Finish Laying In the Sky**  
Scumble on some Winsor Violet at the top, away from where the sun will appear. (Placing cool colors next to warmer colors will make the overall scene appear even warmer.) Use Cadmium Yellow to create the sun, twisting your brush in circles like a drill. Scumble softly around the edge.

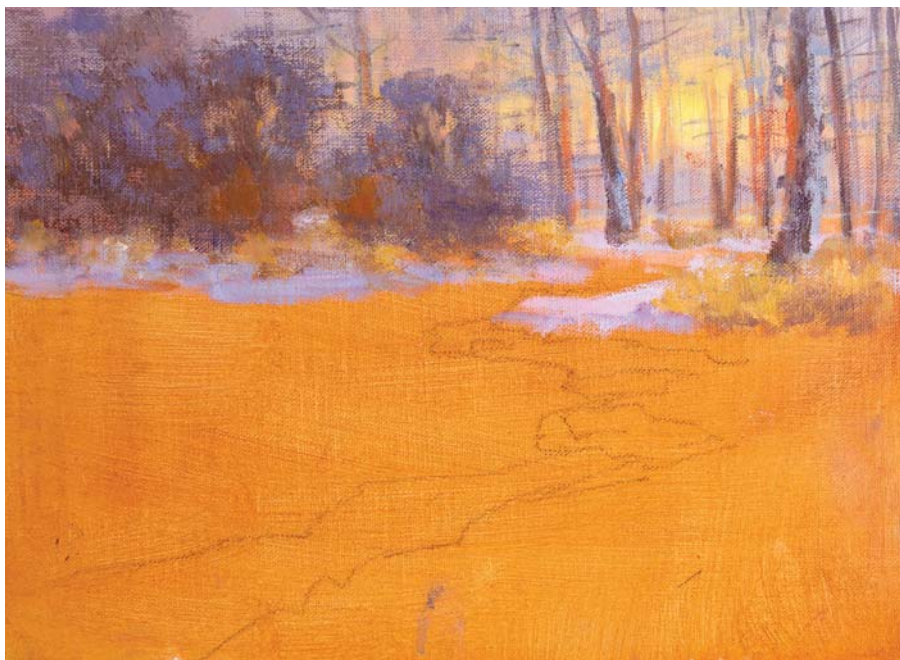


**3 Paint the Winter Trees**  
Drybrush to indicate twigs. With a thin watercolor brush, paint the tree branches in Winsor Violet. Start lighter with the ones farther back and get darker as you come forward. Vary some of the lines. The tree trunks in the distance should have thinner lines and get thicker as you move forward.

Avoid repeating gaps so the negative spaces aren't repetitive. Vary the slants. Make the trunks irregular by drybrushing. Keep them from looking too similar by putting tree knots in.

With a no. 4 bright, add in some orange right where the trees cross over the sun and scumble the paint on with a light feathery touch.

Paint some snow stuck to the trees by randomly breaking the paint. Paint in between the branches making sure to keep the gaps different.



#### 4 Add Bushes and Snow

Paint some bushes in the left area so that you have two different sides to the painting. Use drybrushing for this and get darker as you come forward.

Create a melodic line at the bottom of the bushes. Add grass at the bottom of the bushes by pulling your brush upward from the bottom. Add snow to the bushes and to the ground around the bushes.



#### 5 Paint the Water and River Bank

Paint the water using cool purple tones. Drybrush the bushes in with Burnt Sienna, Indian Red and Ultramarine Blue. Create visual movement by painting snow along the bank, creating a melodic line between the snow and the water. Vary the blue and red tones on the snow, showing more red in the distance.

Paint grasses in the foreground, using a portion of that to draw the viewer's eye in. (This way you aren't relying solely on the snow to do that.) Allow some of the orange underpaint to bleed through. Use a rigger brush to indicate a few individual grass strands with a quick flip of your wrist while holding the very tip of the brush. Work very fast so they look spontaneous.



## 6 Finish with Details

Time to switch to oils! Apply Liquin thinly over the whole painting. Paint in some ice, making it lighter than the water but darker than the snow bank. Add reflections from the bushes across the pond. Start at the ridge where the water meets the land and pull down in vertical strokes. Carve out some ice shapes to create the melodic line. Ice will not have any reflections.

Create small choppy strokes across the vertical reflections to create movement in the water. Keep those strokes as horizontal as possible. Add more snow to the frosted trees. Indicate tree branches with a palette knife. Indicate a few dark accents under the snow to lift it off the water using an interrupted line. Echo the sunlight onto the grass and snow. Keep it very subtle. Think in terms of romantic candle light—less is more.



### SEEKING FOR WARMTH

Oil and acrylic on linen glued to panel,  
9" x 12" (23cm x 30cm)



**CARMEL MISSION**

Watercolor on Fabriano cold-pressed  
watercolor paper, 12" x 16" (30cm x 41cm)

# SIMPLIFY

Every time a new student asks me how I know when a painting is finished, my answer is, "It is never finished. You just stop working on it in time." A painting is not ready to be framed until you have taken out everything that a viewer who has not seen your reference photo will not miss. Remember, you are taking a large scene from the real world and scaling it down to mere inches. Instead of the eye moving between objects that are several yards apart, those details in a painting are much closer together. Unless the painting is quite large, too much detail can cause it to feel cluttered and displeasing to the eye.

There will come a point in time that you mature past the concern of *how* to depict things and will be more interested in *why* a certain shape should be present. Does it serve a compositional purpose? If you can justify its presence from a design aspect, include it. If the answer is simply because it's in your reference, there may be no justification for it. For the sake of simplifying, you may want to exclude it.

Just like with poetry, a simplified painting will stimulate the viewer to mentally wander into your artistic story, rather than having to visually process unnecessary information. The purpose of simplification is to reduce the viewer's need to mentally process too much visual information. It's a similar concept to editing a story, where unnecessary words are left out. In painting, the brushstrokes are your words, and a few masses and shapes are all you need. You can say more with less.

In this chapter you will learn:

- How to crop a scene in order to simplify its composition.
- How to reduce the amount of unnecessary detail in a painting.
- How to simplify natural and architectural elements found in reference.





# ZOOM IN AND CUT OUT

One easy way to not try to say too much in one painting is to crop out what is not essential to tell the story. This allows the viewers to focus on only a few elements. Successful still life artists know this all too well. Too many objects will make the painting busy. Nothing changes in this regard to landscapes.

Think of your rectangular canvas format like the square feet of your home. You want to make the best out of that

limited space but not clutter things. I recommend you try to crop your photo several ways until you feel you have the right version. Most of the time, I find that zooming in ends up being the best policy as long as you don't suffocate the scene. Here you will need to rely on artistic aesthetics and just follow your instincts on what to include or leave out.



## COMPETING OBJECTS

In the top photo, there are two boats and several houses competing for attention. There is too much water and the stones with the bushes on the left will not add this to composition at all. After cropping and trying several alternatives, I ended up with the second picture that had enough of the information I needed to tell the story.



# SIMPLIFYING NATURE

We already know that the left side of the brain attempts to record and document literally, and this can cause artists to feel compelled to add unnecessary details to their work. The more detail you document, the less the viewer daydreams by adding his own ideas, because his brain will be too focused on interpreting the visual information. I believe a painting is successful when the viewer starts adding his own “mental brushstrokes.” When I create a lake scene and someone tells me that they can see themselves rowing and relaxing in a boat there, that’s when I clap my hands and say, “Eureka! I succeeded!”

Of all the paintings I have admired over the years, I have yet to see one that has been oversimplified. In nature, we will find an overwhelming abundance of details. There will be lots of individual stones by river banks, many tree branches on bare trees, countless sagebrushes squeezing

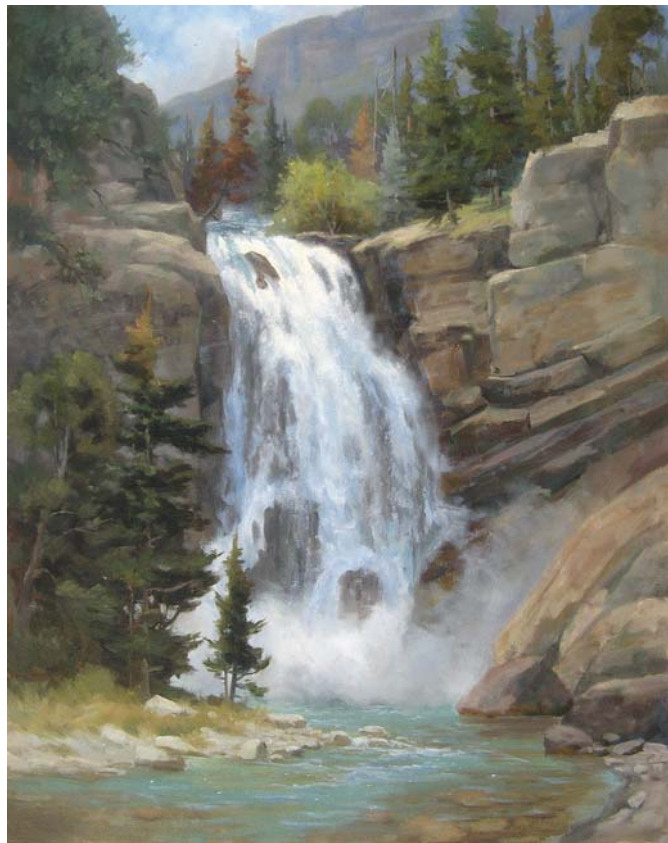
themselves together in a field, and so on. The secret to making your artwork appealing is to reduce details. You can reduce the amount of detail to simplify a painting if you do *not*:

- Indicate separate grass strands.
- Add too many branches to trees.
- Include unnecessary rocks and stones.
- Show too many white snow patches on mountains.
- Indicate too many cracks and indentations in cliffs or mountains.
- Depict too many separate leaves on trees.
- Show too many boughs on evergreen trees.
- Subdivide rock crevices too many times.
- Depict too many small clouds in a sky.
- Add too many wavelets to choppy water.



## REMOVE WHAT IS UNNECESSARY

The cliff had too many crevices. Reducing them to the bare minimum helps calm the mental overload so viewers can instantly determine they are looking at a cliff. You will always find yourself battling the two different sides of your brain. Ultimately, if a photo doesn't need to be improved, then why paint a scene from it at all? You might as well just frame the photo and call it a day. Improving photos means removing unnecessary visual clutter to tell the same story.





### **SIMPLIFY THE PERIPHERY**

Can this painting be more simplified? Yes! The cactus plant is distracting in the peripheral area and the stones are not adding to the scene. Out they go! Remember a painting is not done until you go back and remove what is not necessary with a giant mental broom.

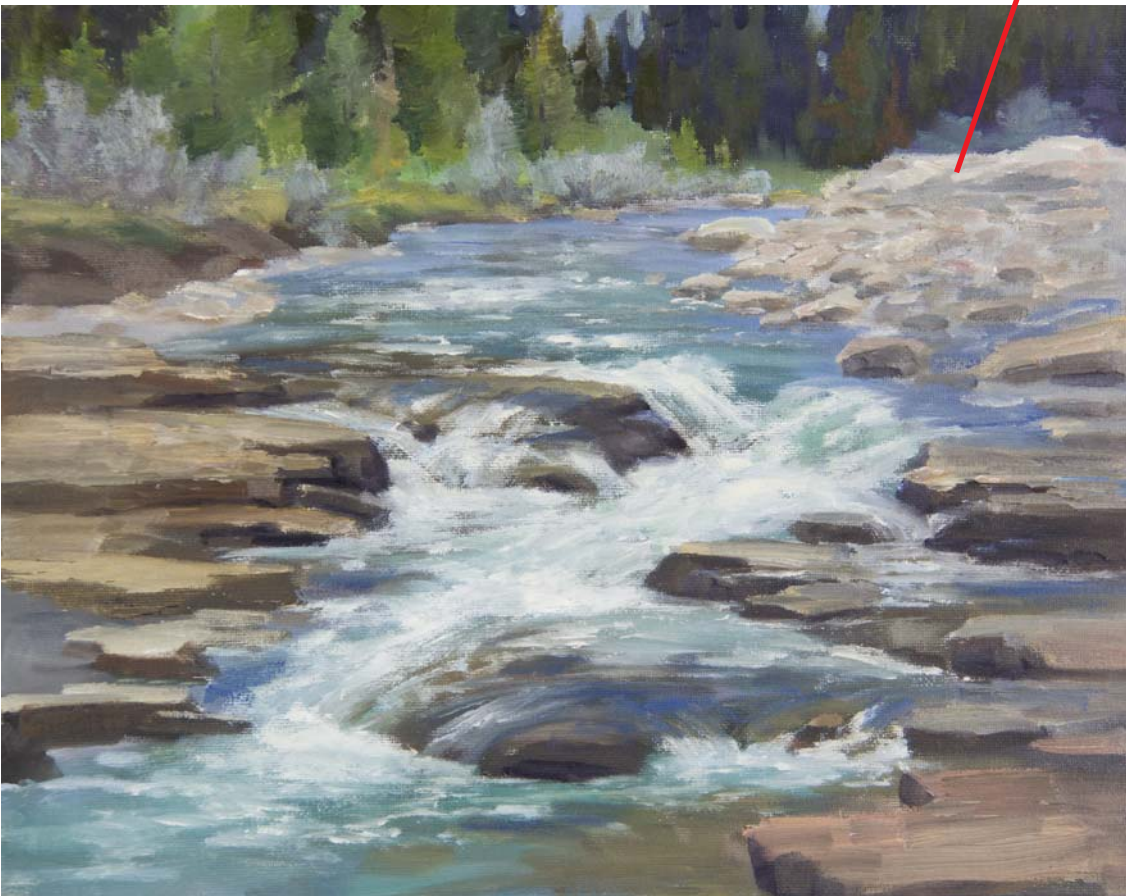




REFERENCE PHOTO



DETAIL VIEW



**LIMIT INDIVIDUAL STONES**

Just a few stones are defined in the artistic interpretation of the photo, but your mind is putting many more in there like an optical illusion. Think of melting smaller things together. Also many of the subdivisions in the rocks in the foreground were merged into large forms.



REFERENCE PHOTO

### Visualizing Foliage

An effective way to visualize how to paint foliage is to depict it just like it appears on a non-high-definition television. The blurry television image simplifies trees, and leaves are fused into large clusters.



### LIMIT INDIVIDUAL LEAVES

How many leaves can you count? This plein air painting was done on a 9" x 12" (23cm x 30cm) canvas. Because of the small size, I refrained from indicating individual

leaves. I merged all the single leaves into large clusters. If the painting were larger, then it would look over simplified with no individual leaves showing, even when working at a larger scale, such as 18" x 24" (46cm x 61cm).



### REDUCE SMALL SKY HOLES

This is one more example where you cannot apply how things appear in real life into your paintings. Trees in nature tend to have an overwhelming amount of small sky holes. You want to avoid this polka-dot effect, which will just tire the viewer. I prefer to indicate somewhat large sky gaps, mainly at eye level. This creates a see-through tunnel view, which is easily accepted by the viewer and still gives the tree an airy look.



### CREATE LARGER GAPS

Viewers like to visually explore what is behind another plane by looking in between foliage. This tunnel effect enhances depth. The rest of the tree is quite solid with just a few sky gaps at the top third.

#### Reduce Sky Value to Blend With Foliage

Reduce the value of the sky in the gaps so they blend in better with the foliage, especially if the tree is dark. The value contrast will make them stand out too much otherwise.



### **MERGE ADJACENT TREES AND BUSHES TOGETHER**

Imagine your trees are made of plastic like the artificial plants you buy at a craft store. Pretend you heat the foliage with a blow torch. The moment they start to melt, you take away the heat. The way they end up looking melted together equates to how you would do foliage-related symbols with paint. Think of your foliage and grass in terms of metaphors.



### **SWEEP AWAY THE CLUTTER**

When I did this plein air painting, I confess, I felt compelled to paint the fence into the scene simply because it was there. Once back in my studio, I applied the concept of sweeping



away the clutter in order to simplify. I asked myself, "What can I take out that would not be missed?" I decided to remove the fence. If you had never seen the reference photo or the setting itself, you would not even know the fence was absent.



### **CREATE REST AREAS**

It's a good policy to have a patch that is void of detail right before the center of interest to bring relief. You can compare this to a carpet in a living room. The white snow void on information right before the house serves as the rest area in this painting.



### **NO NEED TO PAINT INDIVIDUAL GRASS STRANDS**

Think of your painting as the background for an animated movie. The viewers don't need details to put the story together. The mind will add grass strands. I drybrushed some texture in to create the illusion of clumps of grass.



# SIMPLIFYING ARCHITECTURE

Because buildings are man made structures that we can really associate with because of their symmetry, they become a strong attraction for an artist to depict at face value. The intellectual symmetrical brain will want to

indicate all the details. The skill is to resist this and end up with just an impression of the scene, even a cartoonish look if possible.



## DO NOT EMPHASIZE WINDOWS

This alley scene would be overwhelming to paint in detail. This was done in about three hours. The windows away from where the eye normally looks were down played so they would not be distracting. It's amazing how

the mind adds to a simplified painting. The goal of this painting was to end up with only a simplified impression. As a result, you feel the place rather than seeing it.

## Helpful Hints

- If you have a small portion of sky you may not need to add clouds.
- The use of fog is an excellent agent for simplifying.
- When your paintings look like the background of an animation studio-produced movie, then you know you are on the right track.
- If you can count the brushstrokes in a shape you know it is not overworked.
- If you end up with a disastrously busy painting, try putting the entire scene into heavy fog by scumbling. You may end up loving it!
- Reduce the amount of white snow, white water on waterfalls, rapids and seascapes to a minimum.
- When facing a scene with clutter during plein air, pretend you are a well known movie director and you have a whole crew with cranes that can remove objects until you leave only the characters necessary for your story.



### **SIMPLIFY ROOFS AND REDUCE STONES AND BRICKS**

Refrain from indicating all the shingles and tiles on roofs. Suggest just a few bricks and shingles placed well within the boundaries of the painting while respecting the peripheral area. Remember, let the viewer's imagination do the rest. Make them larger than scale so they can be easily distinguished from a distance. There is no need to do architectural renderings.



### **MERGE LEAVES**

For flowers and foliage, merge all the smaller flowers together in large clusters. The same applies to deciduous tree leaves. The presence of bushes and flowers also helps offset rigid straight lines in buildings. Notice the diffused edges of the flowers where they meet the walls.

## Demonstration

# SIMPLIFY YOUR PAINTING COMPOSITION

Use acrylics for this painting in order to keep the hard edges of the mountain. As you work, use a fine-mist spray bottle to spray the pigments with water every fifteen minutes or so to keep them from drying out on you.



REFERENCE PHOTO

## 1 Sketch the Composition and Lay In the Sky and Mountain

Sketch the composition with a neutral violet pastel pencil. (This will go muddy and blend in with the paint later on.) Lay in the clouds with Yellow Ochre and a hint of Dioxazine Purple. Lay in the sky with Cobalt Blue and a bit of Yellow Ochre. Plan for the sky to be a lighter value than what the river will be, since water is always darker than sky. Position the sun on the left side so that the sky will be darker on one side than the other—this creates a gradient plane. The two sides of the mountain look identical, so offset the symmetry by placing more clouds to one side. Paint the clouds with Liquitex super heavy gesso—it performs more like oil paint and will give you a good heavy texture, and increase the drying time.

Use a blue-violet mixture for the mountain. (Keep in mind that acrylic paint dries a touch darker.) Variegate the hues slightly, adding more red in some areas and more blue in others. Do not simplify the ridges of the mountain or it will lose its character.



## MATERIALS

### Surface

linen glued to masonite board

### Brushes

nos. 6, 8 and 10 brights (stiff from previous use with oils)

### Open Acrylics

Burnt Sienna, Cobalt Blue, Dioxazine Purple, Permanent Deep Green, Transparent Red Oxide, Yellow Ochre

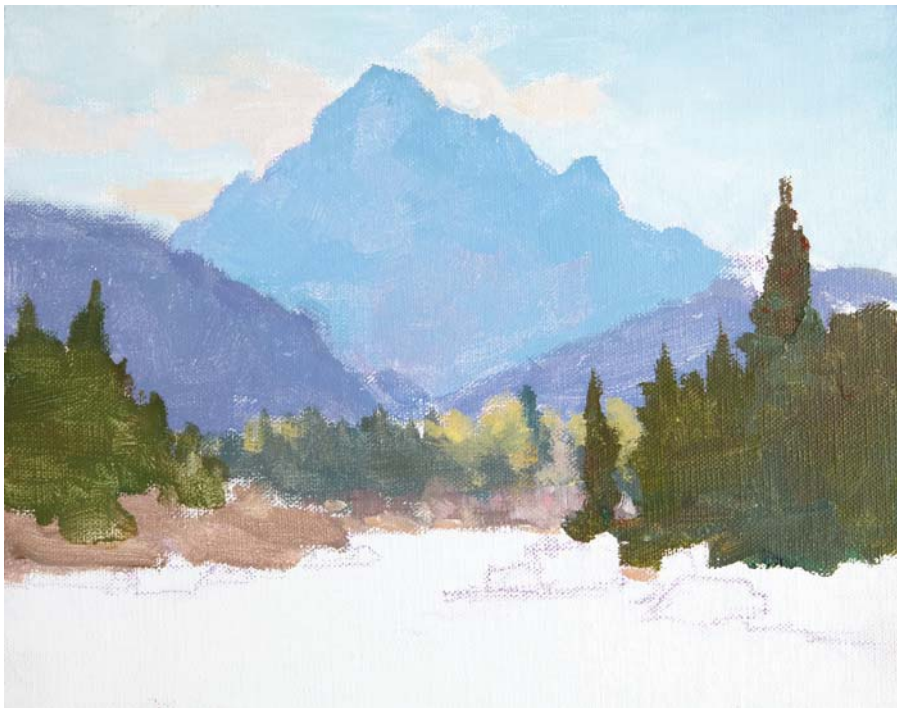
### Other

fine-mist spray bottle, gel retarder, Liquitex super heavy gesso, neutral violet pastel pencil



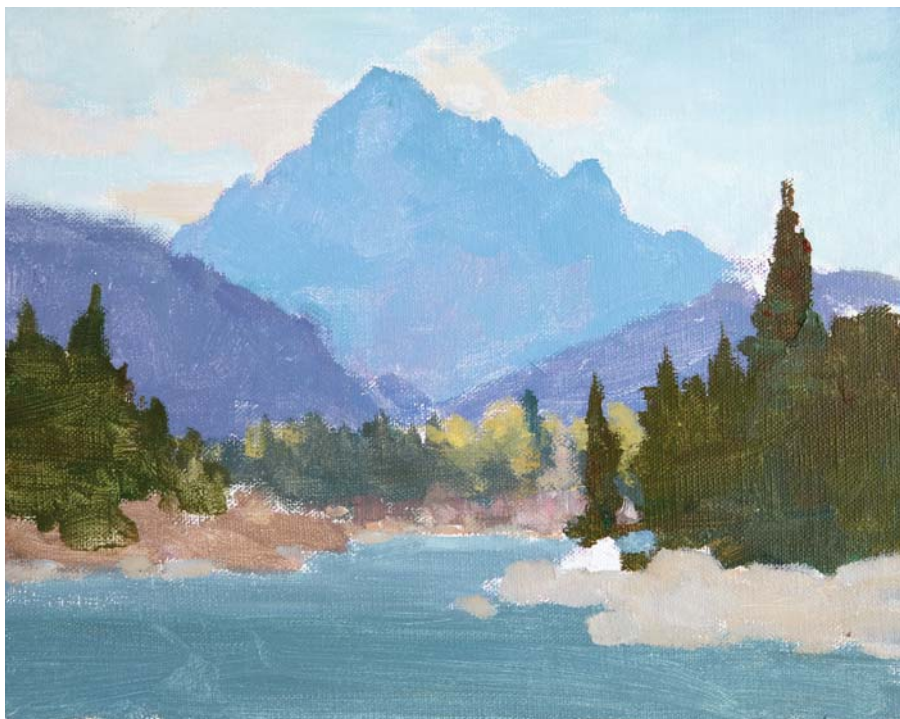
## 2 Lay In the Hills and Begin Painting the Trees

For the distant hills, get darker and warmer as you begin to move closer to the foreground. Add more red into your blue-violet mixture. To keep the hill edge on the left from competing with the mountain edge, scumble and feather in the paint along the area to soften the edge where the hill meets the sky. Block in the evergreen trees with a muted green. Think of them as one unit when massing in. Do not repeat the gaps between the boughs, rather, simplify by reducing the number of boughs.



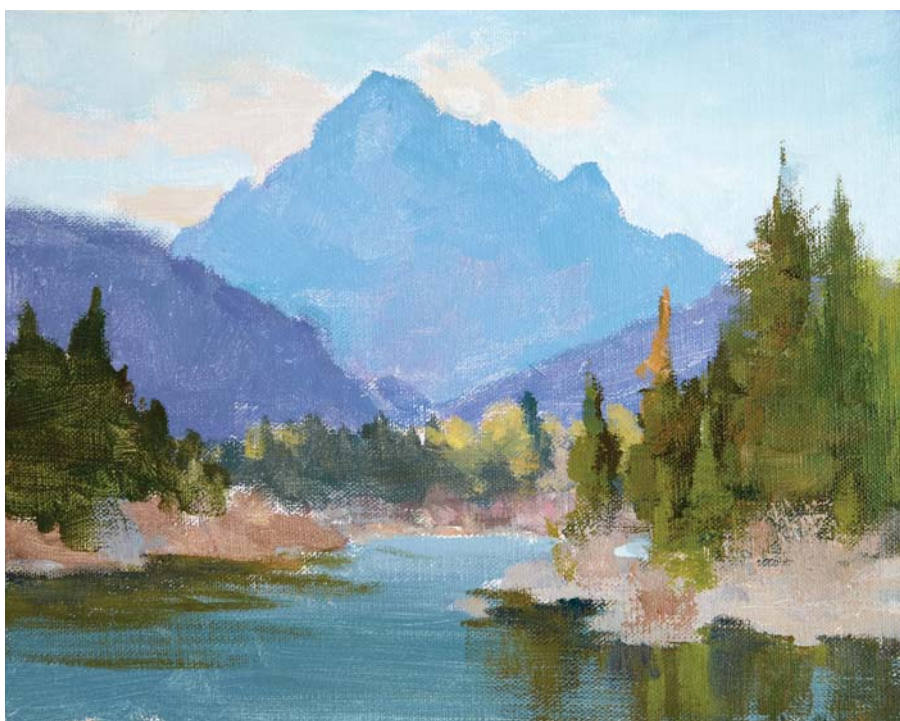
## 3 Continue Painting the Trees and Lay In the Mid-Ground Rocks

Continue painting the trees, varying the hues between the closest and receding trees, adding in Burnt Sienna to the closer ones. Keep the distant trees cooler. Ideally, no tree should be the same width or height, and the gaps between them should differ as well. Use a yellow-green mixture for the mid-ground cotton wood trees. Negative paint in the rocks with light gray-brown.



#### 4 Lay In the Water and Foreground Rocks

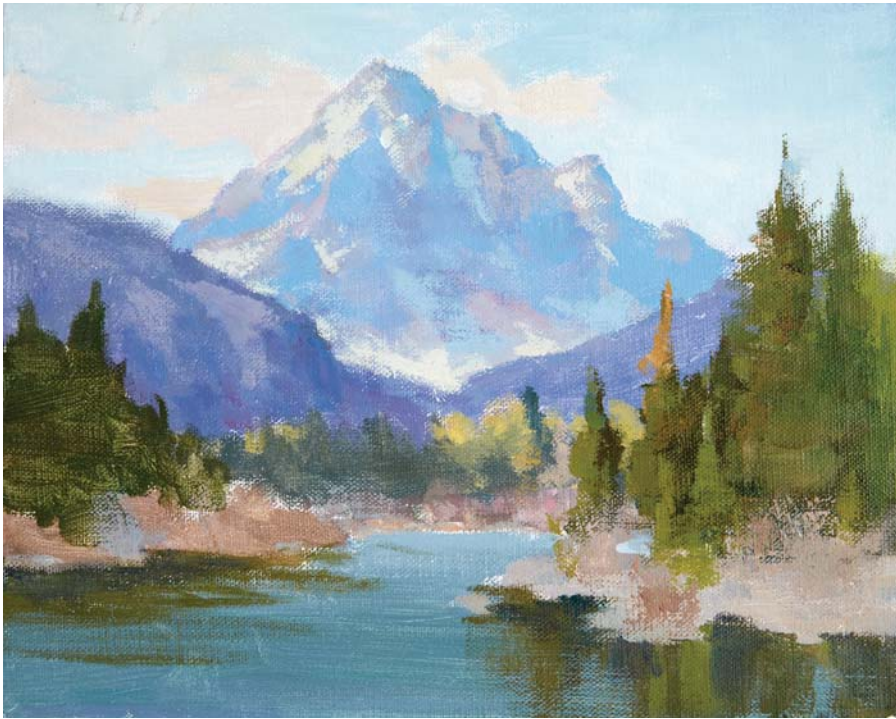
Lay in the water with a blue-green mixture. (Never use straight blue for water—there is no way to harmonize it!) Make sure it's darker and more gray than the sky color. Paint around the rocks, trying to get lighter as the water recedes. This helps keep it from looking flat. Keep your brushstrokes straight and horizontal. Lay in the foreground rocks, focusing on the abstract shape of them rather than trying to copy them exactly. Create a melodic line at the bottom of the rocks where they meet the water. Eliminate the fallen trunks from the reference photo.



#### 5 Refine the Trees and Paint Reflections

Add highlights to the evergreens. Keep them darker than the mountain. Add some smaller trees in front and some taller trees in the back to avoid having them look like one big wall. Scumble the edges of the trees against the sky to break up the paint and create soft edges.

Add retarder to the water before you begin the reflections. They should be more subdued than what is on dry land. Keep all reflections about the same value. Negative paint around the rocks. Don't paint any reflections farther back, just in the foreground. Use vertical strokes for the reflections on the right and horizontal strokes for reflections on the left so they don't compete with each other.



**6 Add Details to Finish** Highlight the mountain with white and a warm gray mixture. Think of the highlights as abstract shapes. Don't try to copy them directly from the photo. Use a mixture of white and a touch of yellow-orange for the snow caps. Make sure there is no confusion between what are clouds and what is snow. The cloud value should be darker. Lightly drybrush over the snow to break it up. Add blue shadows to the snow, but keep them slightly darker and more gray than the sky. Square off the rocks. Exaggerate the presence of brown in the trees to add interest.



**THE TETON**  
Open acrylics on linen glued to masonite board,  
8" x 10" (20cm x 25cm)



**GRANDMA'S FLOWER GARDEN**  
Oil on canvas, 16" x 20" (41cm x 51cm)

# AVOIDING CLONES

A painting can be technically perfect in terms of technique, but still turn out to look boring if the visual information you have on one side of the painting is quite similar to what is on the other side, or if one shape is similar to another. This creates what is known as *cloning*, or a mirror-like effect. It is the artistic equivalent of telling the same story twice. The interest in your painting will dramatically increase if you ensure both sides are completely different.

In this chapter you will learn:

- How to identify the most commonly found implied clone shapes in nature.
- How to use artistic license to vary the size, shape and color of objects in a landscape to avoid cloning.
- How to plan your composition to avoid a mirror effect in your painting.





# IDENTIFYING CLONES

I have done many field studies and I am still in awe of how so many nature scenes contain clones. Mother Nature once again throws curve balls at us artists. When I refer to cloned shapes, I mean that they are visually implied from an artistic point of view. Shapes can differ in height or width, yet still appear similar. It will not benefit the painting to have repeating forms demanding equal attention and competing with each other.

During your artistic endeavors, you will find yourself recognizing and changing all forms that appear to be alike. When determining clones, take into account the negative space, not just the positive shape. Triangular shapes in the negative space between evergreens, mountain peaks and bare trees are common and can be repeated several times.



## WATCH FOR REPEATING SHAPES

The trees in the first photo are cloned several times. Such a degree of repetition of forms is rare but it can happen. The three trees in the bottom image are somewhat different in size but close enough together in likeness to still be considered visually implied clones.

Artistically speaking however, it is better for the shapes in a painting to be dramatically different from one another.





### STONES

Stones tend to appear like coins scattered on the ground.

**MOUNTAIN PEAKS**  
Mountain peaks end up looking alike in a triangular fashion.



### EVERGREENS

Clones are easily found in evergreens. They tend to be about the same height and width as the adjacent ones.

# OFFSETTING CLONES

Once you know how to identify clones, there are several tricks you can employ to offset them and improve the harmony of your paintings.



## DEPICT EVERGREENS IN A CLUMP

This avoids the singled-out aspect. The viewer will see this as a mass, which makes it easier to process the visual information.



## CHANGE COLORS

Constant repetition of color is also cloning. The brown-orange tree is only stated once.



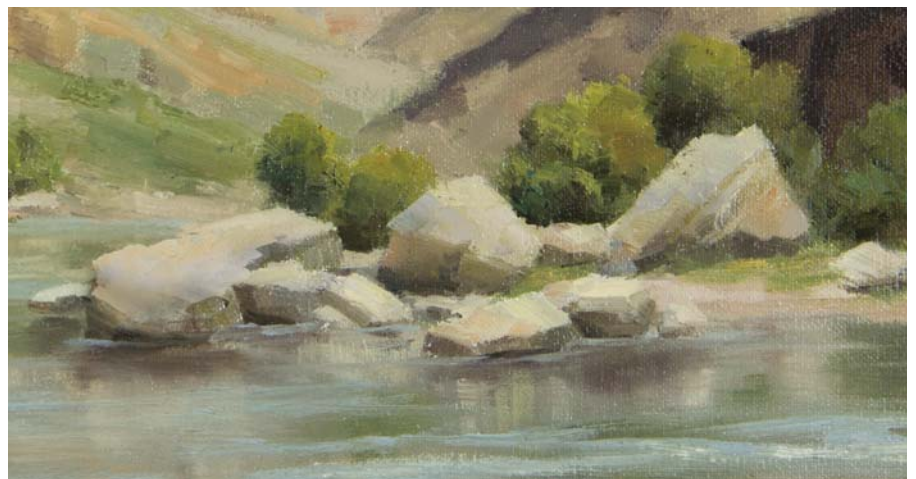
## VARY HEIGHT AND WIDTH OF OBJECTS

Careful consideration was given to vary the size and width of each tree in this painting. There are variations with their colors as well. The two right trees are somewhat fused together to appear larger than the adjacent trees. The negative space between the evergreens is abstractly designed. None of the gaps are duplicated.



### **MERGE ROCKS INTO LARGER UNITS**

Some rocks on the left are too close in size. This becomes a common problem when they appear in groups. By combing three smaller rocks into one, there is better diversity. While you are painting, think of the analogy of Goldilocks: Father, Mother and Baby Bear, with each representing a variation in size.



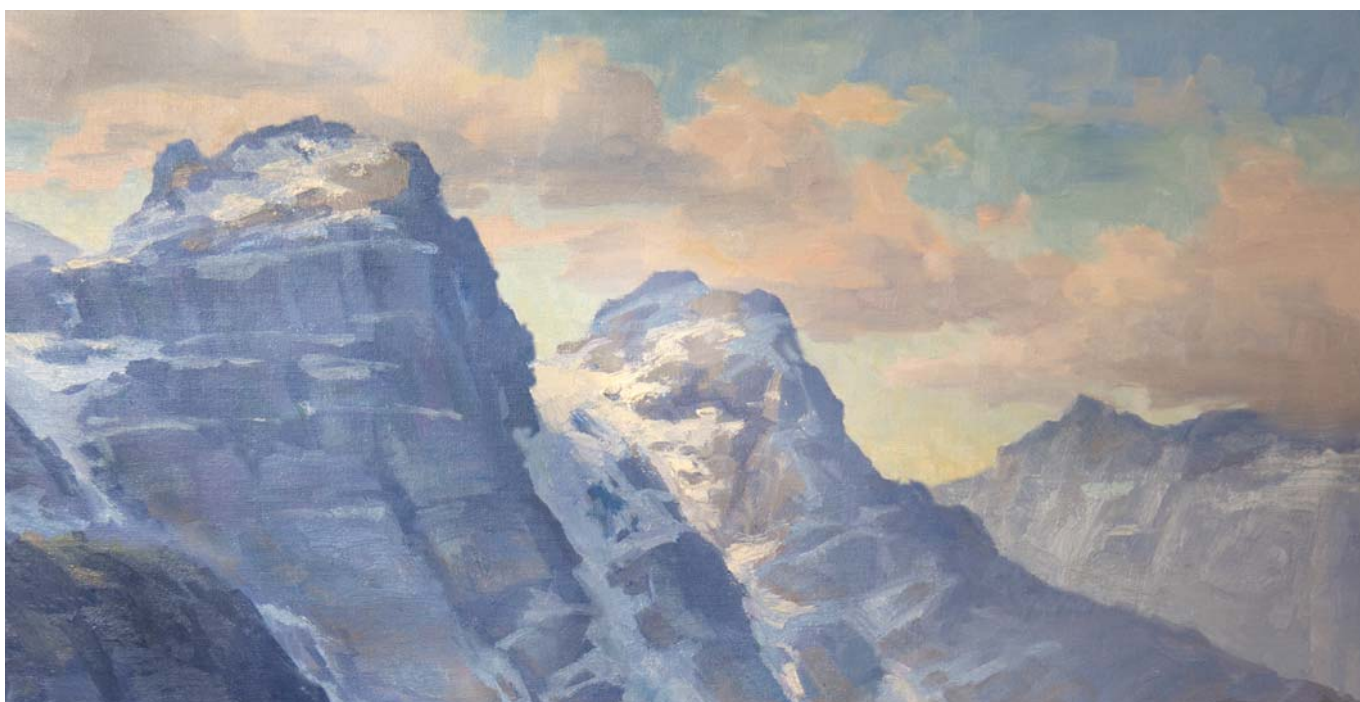
### **DEPICTING WINTER TREES**

When depicting trees in winter settings, offset any possible cloning by painting each tree so that it leans differently and all diameters are unequal.



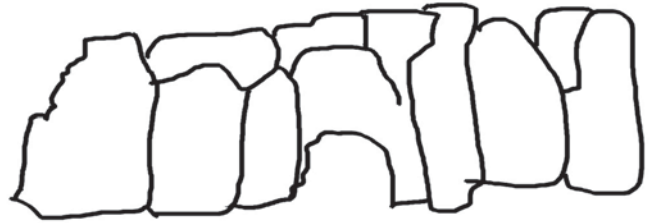
### REFERENCE PHOTO

The furthest mountain peaks are too similar. If copied at face value, they would be considered clones. What makes matters worse is that the negative white space between the peaks is too triangular.



### MANIPULATE NEGATIVE SPACE

Quite a bit of artistic license was taken with the detail of this painting, which was based on the reference photo above. I modified the peaks by resizing them. The symmetrical triangular space in the blue sky is much less obvious. The last mountain peak is now blocked by an overpassing cloud to avoid creating a clone.



### REFERENCE PHOTO

The erosion of water running over the wall of this mountain has formed some natural crevices. Painting these would section the areas into similar puzzle-piece sizes and make them appear too identical. They are so similar that they look like teeth.



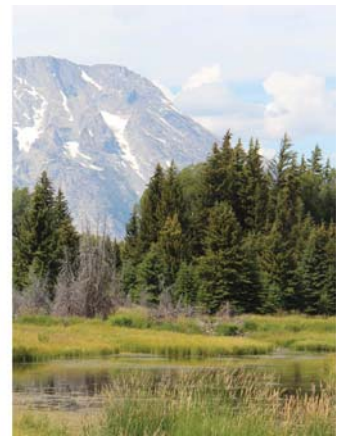
### AVOID CREVICES IN CLIFFS

In this close up section of a painting inspired by the photo above, just a few crevices are indicated. Each section is quite different from the next, and the divisions are simplified. All the puzzle pieces are different and abstract.

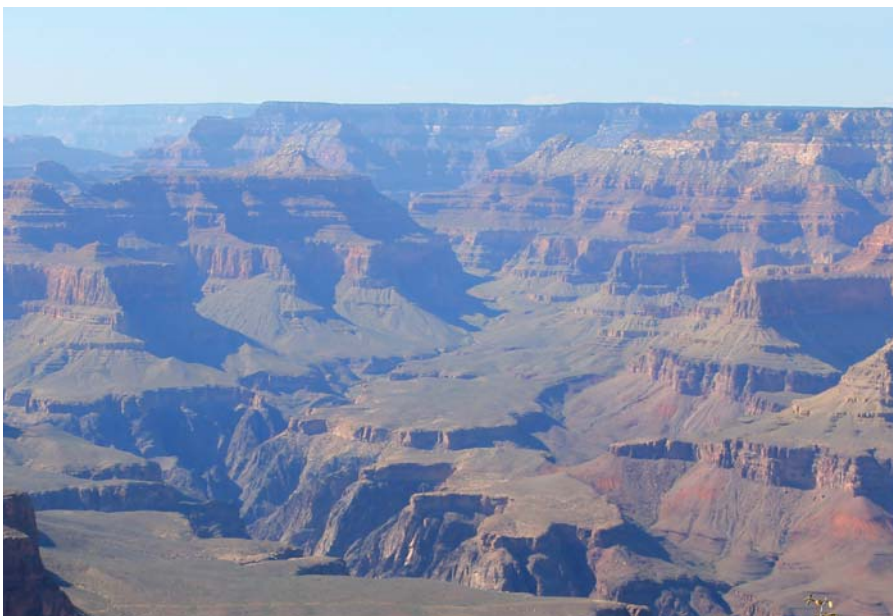
# AVOID A MIRROR EFFECT

When you are out on the field or when selecting reference photos, draw an imaginary line down the middle and compare both sides to see if they are quite diverse in the information. The mountain range below looks asymmetrical, but the weight of the trees, the pond and the grass is about the same on both sides. If we put this photo in front of a mirror and reverse the image,

it won't change much. It is doubtful this photo, without dramatically changing one of the sides, would make a successful painting. You will encounter many situations like this. Another key to being a successful artist is to know which elements will work in a painting and which ones won't. Some photos would make great posters, but good paintings will not necessarily result from them.



Try to avoid having competing visual information on both sides of the image.



## TOO MUCH BALANCE

If you looked at this Grand Canyon scene in real life, it would be breathtaking. If you put this in front of a mirror, both sides are too similar. As soon as you crop it, the visual information ends suddenly and does not gradually fade out in the peripheral vision. The duplicate sides will become very noticeable. Therefore we have to make the scene very entertaining to hold the viewer's attention.



### **USE SEVERAL REFERENCE PHOTOS**

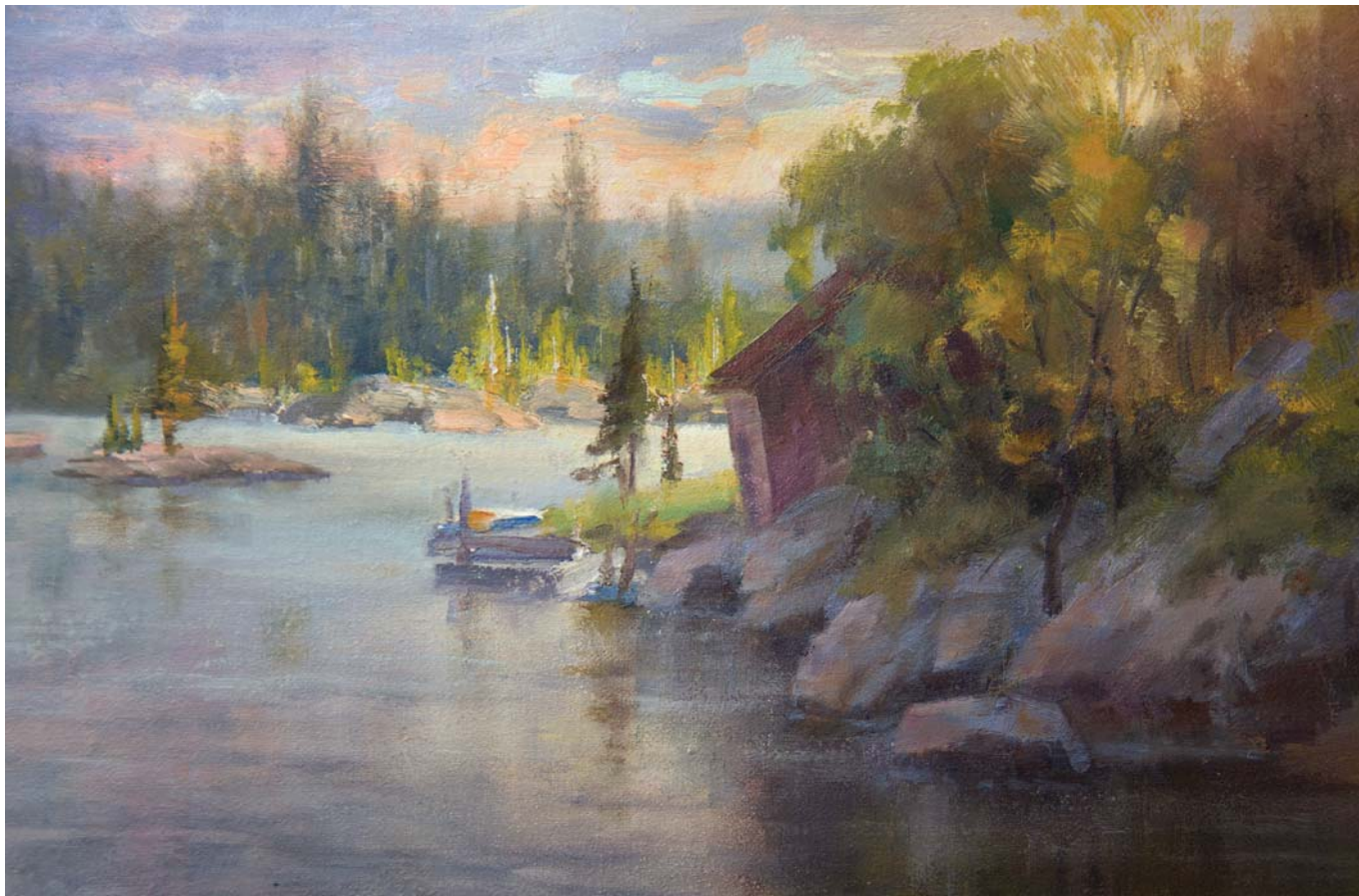
This is from the same scene in the reference photo on the previous page. The group of rocks in the foreground was not in the original photo. Because two different views on each side was a priority, the vertical rocks were imported from a different photo. Think of your artwork like a movie script. Incorporate several photos to form a story board. You can literally move mountains with your artistic license. There are now two visually different sides to the painting.



### **OFFSET PARALLEL SIDES**

The cactus plants in the foreground of this painting serve the purpose of offsetting parallel sides.





### AVOID REPEATING CORNERS

Normally when we paint blue skies or grass it is very easy to provide the viewer with the same visual information on both sides. This can lead to a boring outcome, and both corners will become rivals. Being aware of this will help you design your

skies or foregrounds better. You can have a blue sky showing in one corner and a cloud on the other. The trees were purposely brought to the top to offset similar corners in the sky. The values of the water in the bottom corners are different.

#### Helpful Hints

- Take a picture of your painting. Look at it as a thumbnail in a graphic editing program. You will spot discrepancies easier. Flip the image horizontally for a fresh view. Turn it upside down as well. You will notice things you may have missed in the original format.
- Because the symmetrical brain wants to participate in the activity, clones can creep into your painting when you least expect it. Be on guard!
- Turn your artwork upside down. You may be able to detect clones and symmetrical shapes easier because of the fresh view.



### **VARY CORNERS WITH CLOUDS**

This plein air painting shows a blue sky in the left corner and white clouds in the right corner. When I painted this outdoors, there was no blue sky. Skies will have blue areas, white clouds

and clouds with shadows when they accumulate moisture for rain. Take advantage of these weather variances to offset equal corners on opposite sides. If you don't see them, then invent them or use an additional reference photo.



### **DEPICTING OUTDOOR STONES, BRICKS AND WALLS**

Careful consideration was given to just indicate a few individual bricks. The viewer will fill in the missing information.

## Demonstration

# OFFSET CLONES IN A LANDSCAPE PAINTING

Use acrylic for this painting to easily overlay the taller evergreen trees. As you work, use a fine-mist spray bottle to spray the pigments with water every fifteen minutes or so to keep them from drying out on you.



REFERENCE PHOTO

## 1 Sketch the Composition and Lay In the Sky and Distant Hill

Sketch in the drawing with a neutral violet pastel pencil. (This will blend in with the paint later on). On the right side of the sky, lay in the clouds with Yellow Ochre and Liquitex super heavy gesso. It performs more like oil paint (allowing for texture) and it takes longer to dry. In this sense, white gesso is better than ordinary Titanium White. This will be your white from here on. For the left side of the sky, use Cobalt Blue with a touch of Permanent Deep Green. Plan for the sky to be lighter in value than what the river will be. Bodies of water are usually darker than the sky. Use Cobalt Blue with a touch of purple and Burnt Sienna to indicate the very distant hill in a mid-value. Take into account that acrylics dry darker than when first applied. Soften the edges.



## MATERIALS

### Surface

canvas on masonite board

### Brushes

nos. 6, 8 and 10 brights (stiff from previous use with oils)

### Oil Paints

Burnt Sienna, Cobalt Blue, Dioxazine Purple, Permanent Deep Green, Yellow Ochre

### Other

fine-mist spray bottle, gel retarder, Liquitex super heavy gesso (for underpainting white), neutral violet pastel pencil



## 2 Lay In the Hills and Begin Painting the Trees

Mix your colors until you achieve a blue violet in a mid-dark value. Block in the middle ground hill with that mixture. On top add the evergreen trees slightly varying the greens to about the color of an olive. Indicate some evergreen trees with Burnt Sienna. Add touches of light to the closer ones.



## 3 Continue Painting the Trees and Lay In the Mid-Ground Rocks

Lay in the hill on the right side in the same manner as the last hill. Be careful to vary the gaps where the evergreen trees meet the sky to avoid cloning the trees. Indicate the rocky area with Cobalt Blue and Burnt Sienna. For the taller evergreens, make a mixture of a muted green (about the same color as an olive) with Permanent Deep Green, Burnt Sienna and purple. Make sure none of the evergreens repeat their width and their heights. Indicate the tree between the rocks using Burnt Sienna as the predominant color.



## 4 Paint the Water and Foreground Rocks

Use Cobalt Blue, Permanent Deep Green, purple and some Burnt Sienna (to gray the color a bit) to paint in the river. Lay in the water with a blue-green mixture. Do not use straight blue for water. It is difficult to harmonize the color. Keep your brushstrokes as horizontal as possible. Get lighter as the water recedes. Add the rocks with a mixture of Cobalt Blue, Burnt Sienna and Yellow Ochre. Make sure it gets pretty close to gray. The highlights on the rocks are done with the same mixture but with more Burnt Sienna and white. Apply what you have already learned and design those rocks into abstract shapes. Ignore the shapes in the photo.



## 5 Refine the Trees and Paint Reflections

Add retarder over the river and immediately paint in the reflections with vertical strokes. Then break up the reflections close to where they end with horizontal strokes. Add just a few fallen tree trunks.



**6 Add Details to Finish**  
Drybrush on top of the river with white and a touch of Yellow Ochre to indicate the white choppy water. Indicate some water ripples in the foreground only. Add the grass patch, but keep it simple. Be careful not to place the orange bush in the middle.



YELLOWSTONE RIVER,  
YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK  
Oil on canvas glued to masonite board,  
8" x 10" (20cm x 25cm)



**WELCOME IN**  
Oil on canvas, 24" x 30" (61cm x 76cm)



# ACCENTUATE DEPTH

By now you know that the three-dimensional field of depth is something that cannot be replicated on a two-dimensional surface. But we can convey the illusion of depth. Unfortunately, this aspect of painting is often ignored.

The ability to indicate depth was the skill that took longest for me to acquire. To make things appear as if they are receding requires skill and planning. For many years, I was more concerned with depicting shapes to be abstract rather than trying to make them appear three-dimensional. As a result, areas of my artwork ended up looking flat. The problem was the reference photos—the field depth is totally lost the moment a photo of a scene is taken. This deficiency carried over into my paintings. I noticed my paintings dramatically improved when I began emphasizing and exaggerating the illusion of depth in my work.

The same applies when interpreting a scene done in plein air onto a flat canvas. Without proper application of techniques and deliberate intent to accentuate depth there may not be enough field depth simulation.

In this chapter you will learn how to use the following methods for accentuating depth in a painting:

- **Overlapping**
- **Atmospheric Perspective**
- **Edge Manipulation**
- **Creating Multiple Planes**
- **Value Shifts**
- **Texture**
- **Foliage Indentation**
- **Gradient Planes**
- **Color Desaturation**



# METHODS FOR ACCENTUATING DEPTH

As artists we must go out of our way to create visual recession in the most convincing way possible by manipulating edges and forms. Use the following methods to convey a sense of depth in your landscape paintings.



## OVERLAPPING

By placing one item in front of another, we send a message to the viewer that something is in front and something is behind. The fountain placed in front of the building helps convey a sense of depth. Take into account that the more we overlap something, we remove importance from the object when it is being partially blocked. Careful consideration is to be given how much you want something to overlap a center of interest, or you may minimize it.



## ATMOSPHERIC PERSPECTIVE

You can see miles of depth in this painting. The closer cliffs take on a warm violet, shifting to blue-violet in the mid ground, and then blue in the furthest plane.

Unless it is a foggy day, the obvious effect of atmospheric perspective is unnoticeable for planes that are just hundreds of feet away. In a normal day, you will start to see things getting bluer and lighter at about one mile away from you. You can really exploit this to create the illusion of depth.



## FOG

Nothing can beat this wonderful and handy tool to convey a sense of depth. It is great for separating planes. Otherwise they would all be the same value. In the forest area, it would be very difficult to convey the sense of recession without the fog. Solely overlapping the trees will not deliver a good enough sense of depth. Objects will always get lighter when they are yards apart and more simplified the deeper they recede into the fog. The fog also helps to keep the house from appearing as though it is sitting on top of the boat.



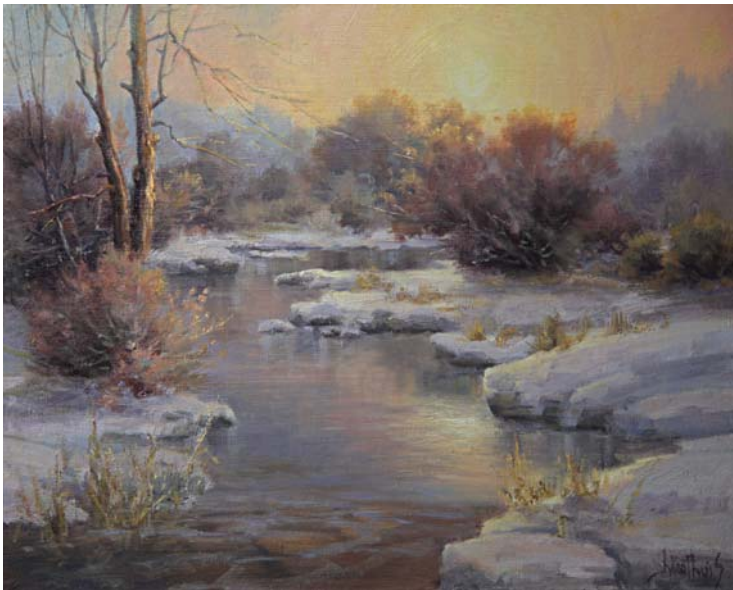
## REFERENCE PHOTO

### USE FOG TO SEPARATE BUILDINGS

If those fishing shacks were to be painted as they appear in the photo, the end result would be a sense of crowding them together. Logically we can measure the space in between each building, but visually we cannot. Because



the photo flattened the scene, some buildings in this scene appear to be on top of each other. When there is nothing between the buildings, the sense of field depth is gone. This is why grass and fog were added between the houses.



### EXPLOIT THICK AIR FOR MOODS

When air molecules are thick because of high humidity, the atmosphere will absorb the warm rays of the late evening sunlight and give off a warm glowing light. This creates a mood which is very pleasant in paintings. Viewers tend to be drawn to paintings with moods.

### GROUND FOG

Ground fog can give the viewer an out-of-the-ordinary view. Depicting ground fog in this painting is what got me Mexico's top award in watercolor media. This was done on a watercolor sheet called *Elephant Ear*, which measured 60" x 44" (152cm x 112cm). I had to lie on the floor to do certain areas.



### FOG AS A COOLING AGENT

A painting can be too cool or too warm. The trick is to find the correct balance between the two and to use colors of both temperatures to compensate each other. Autumn scenes can be disturbing because of all the warm colors that would look too garish. Fog can soothe this overwhelming color temperature. Also by not depicting sunlight, the oranges end up being toned down.



### EDGE MANIPULATION

Contrasting blurry and sharp edges against each other is very effective for showing depth. Anything solid and static does not have diffused edges in the real world. Only things that contain water, such as foam or clouds will appear blurred. You will need to rely on blurring edges even though you cannot see them on solid objects. This becomes another tool to give the illusion that things are far away.

This house portrait shows overlapping from the lamp posts and the birch tree. The biggest asset for recession in this watercolor is the wet-on-wet technique in the background. When contrasted against the sharp edges of the house, it makes the foliage appear to recede several planes. Soft bleeding edges should always be present in watercolors. Watercolor allows for wonderful diffused edges, but lacks the ability to add thick impasto as texture.



### DIFFUSED EDGES

Backgrounds will appear to be in a distant plane when the edges are diffused. In real life, a background is not soft. In this detail view, the house appears to come forward.



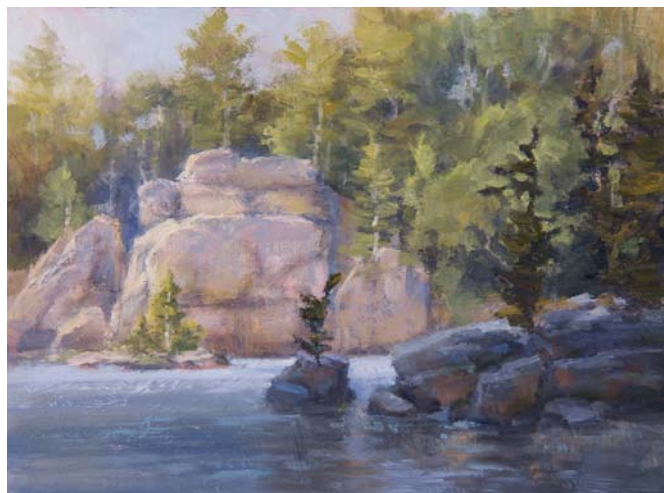
### BLURRED EDGES

The planes behind man made structures should be out of focus when it comes to foliage and hills. An exception to this would be rocky mountains. The angular structure which gives them character would become weakened.



### CREATE AT LEAST THREE PLANES

The more planes a painting has, the more depth that is perceived. You can have sub planes within the three main planes (background, mid ground and foreground). Always create a minimum of three planes in your composition—more if possible. In this painting, the idea was to make viewers feel like they could walk through the forest by creating layers of foliage as the forest gradually gets deeper. This painting gives a very convincing sense of depth in the background, which is nonexistent in the real life scene because the evergreens line up like birds on a wire and block anything behind them.



### ASSIGN VALUES PER PLANE

The principles of atmospheric perspective apply as long as all planes get the equal degree of light. All bets are off when a rain cloud casts a shadow over one plane and the sun is allowed to shed light on another plane. When this is the case, a background that is in shadow will not be lighter than a closer plane, such as the middle ground or foreground if the sun is peeking through the clouds only in those areas. When an overall plane is in a different value than another, the separation of these planes will be quite obvious as seen in this painting. Viewers will feel more invited when you darken a foreground plane and lighten the middle ground or background plane.



### SHIFT VALUES

In the first image, the closest plane of evergreens is lighter than the ones behind them. The value pattern was reversed in the second picture. The overall value of the planes can be interchanged and the sense of depth



will still apply. If both planes of evergreens forests are in the same value, then our sense of field depth will be compromised and we would only rely on atmospheric perspective and size perspective to indicate depth.



### TEXTURE

Heavy impasto (thick paint) will convey that foreground objects are closer. You can reduce the thickness of paint for shapes in the mid ground. In the background avoid heavy paint—use just enough to show the brushstrokes. Oil paint and acrylics have this advantage over other mediums.



### BUILDING TEXTURE

The surface was prepared with Liquitex super heavy gesso to build the texture before adding the colored pigment. The red-orange bush in the foreground was done with a drybrush technique and very thick paint. By applying a light touch, like tickling, the pigment peeled off of the brush leaving the broken paint. Watercolor paper also works well for the drybrush technique. Hot-pressed (rough) paper leaves more gaps in between than cold-pressed (smooth) paper does.



### FOLIAGE INDENTATIONS

Negative painting creates visual orifices. Think of it as engraving an insignia in a ring. We can apply this same principle with foliage. Negative painting was used in this winter scene to bring out the positive shapes of the tree branches. This is a great way to create visual indentations for depth as well as establish the intent of design. This also forces you to work from your artistic brain, because as a child, you never did

this so there is no preconceived memory of the process. No childhood habits will interfere. If there are no visual orifices in foliage, it will appear like a flat wall. There would be no place where a bird can protect itself from pouring rain and strong wind. The branches of the frosted trees were brought out by painting the dark spots into the lighter values. This reverse painting method brings out abstract negative shapes as well.



### THINK FRONT-TO-BACK WHILE PAINTING

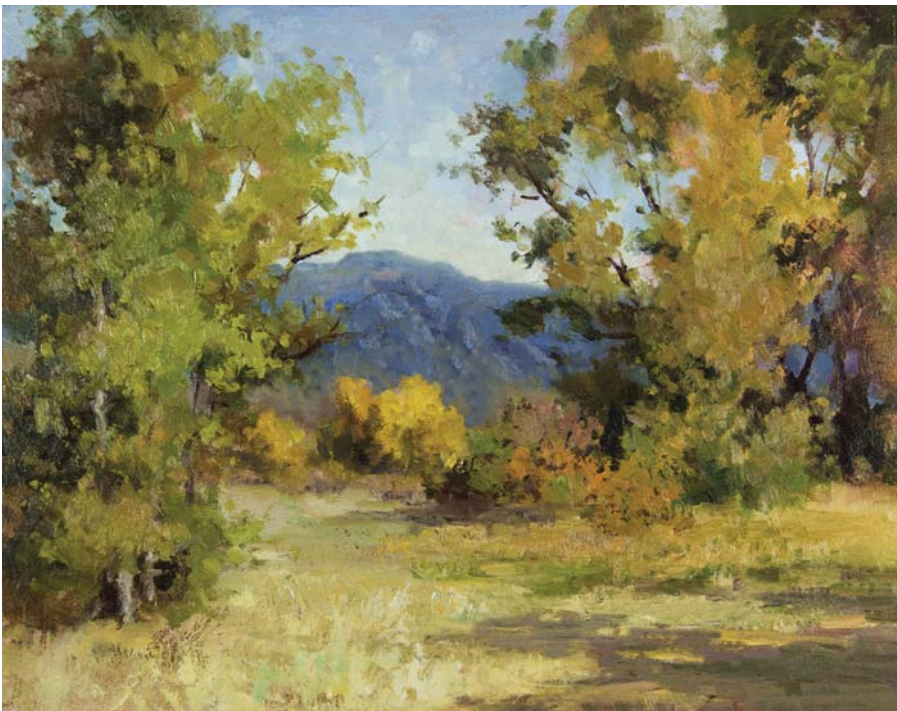
It is very common when foliage is about the length of a football field away from you that the bushes and trees seem to line up in a straight line like a wall. This will result in a visual pace

that is too fast from side to side, and a rectangle will form from the horizontal grass planes. The sense of some trees being in front of other trees vanishes. Equate this to a chess game that has not begun. The trees and bushes in the picture line up like the chess pieces.



### Move Objects Like Chess Pieces

We all have the habit of writing from left to right in the Western world. We place words adjacent to each other. When we paint, we tend to repeat this habit with our landscape symbols like placing houses next to each other on a street. To break this habit, consciously position landscape objects unevenly in front of each other so there is recession from front to back. This is much more important than thinking side to side. Visualize a chess board and pretend you are moving trees, bushes, rocks, etc., like chess pieces coming forward. In the painting the large left tree was brought forward three squares. Some bushes were placed unevenly in front of the right tree, so the pawns were moved one and two squares. The straight line where the foliage meets the grass in the photo, the rectangular portion of the grass, and the absence of field depth have all been corrected. Checkmate! I beat the photo!



### PLACE OBJECTS AT ¾ POSITION

Think of a box. If we only show one side, it will look like a square, but as soon as we turn it we have a cube as long as

both sides have different values. This concept applies to still lifes, portraits, wildlife and especially to buildings.

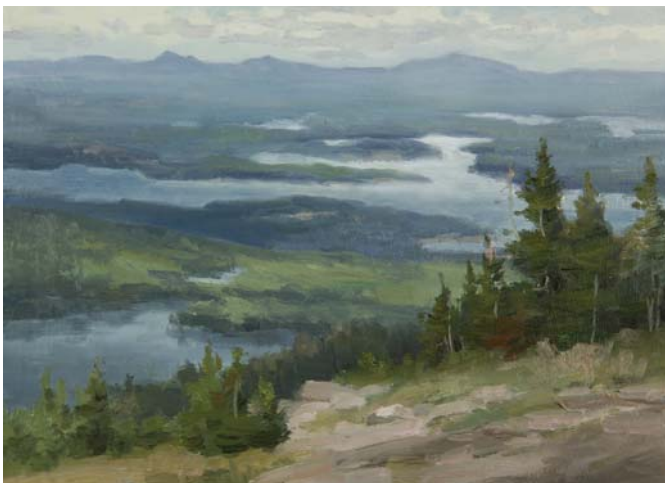


### RECESSION USING GRADIENT PLANES

This approach is used by animation illustrators and it is very effective. In a gradient plane, a value can become gradually darker or lighter in the distance or a color temperature can become warmer or cooler as it recedes. Gradient planes give a very good impression that horizontal planes are receding. Vertical planes seem to have more height and length when gradiated.

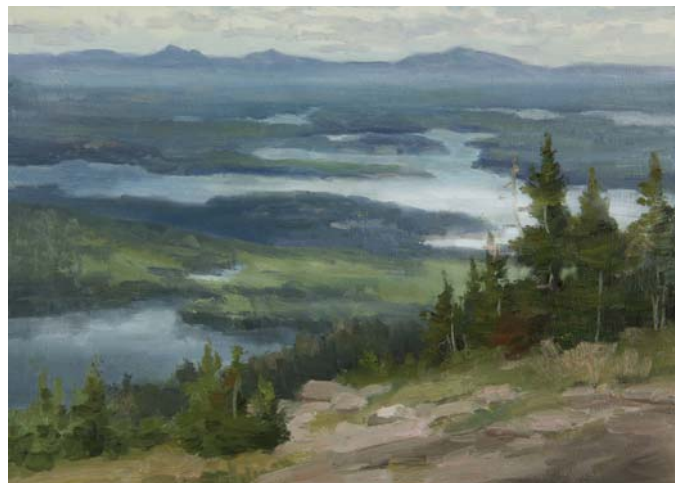


This foreground in the first picture is very flat. Since there is no river or stream to indicate a visual path, we can cast a shadow over the foreground to draw the viewer in. There is a convincing impression of depth in the second painting now. The value gradually gets lighter as it goes deeper in, hence the name, *gradient plane*.



### AVOID FLAT BODIES OF WATER

This field study was done during an overcast day. I saw the same value of blue-gray in the entire body of water. Had I not lightened areas of that water, the painting would lack a convincing sense of depth. Lakes, seascapes and rivers give us great opportunities for gradient planes because they reflect the sky that can have so many variances of values.



### GRADIENT PLANES CAN BE REVERSED

This alternative view is showing a gradient plane, light to dark instead of dark to light like the picture above. The recession is still conveyed. It is just another version. This spot-lighting technique is an effective way to control where you want light. The rocks at the very bottom are darker than the ones further out into the distance. This also becomes a gradient plane. The grass in the middle ground gets darker towards the left edge as well. The ground becomes bluer and lighter near the far mountain range showing atmospheric perspective.





### GRADIENT PLANES IN SKIES

Skies can be boring and flat if the same value appears all the way across. In this painting, the right side is lighter indicating that the sun is just out of the picture. This is a great excuse to show a gradient plane in the sky for more interest.

The warm areas near the bottom of the mountains are reflected light off the lake, which would act like a mirror casting bounced sunlight near the bottom. This also is labeled a gradient plane. Some evergreens also have a warm glow and are gradient. This adds interest to that section. Again the transition from light to dark, warm to cool will achieve that.



### GRADIENT PLANES ON VERTICAL WALLS

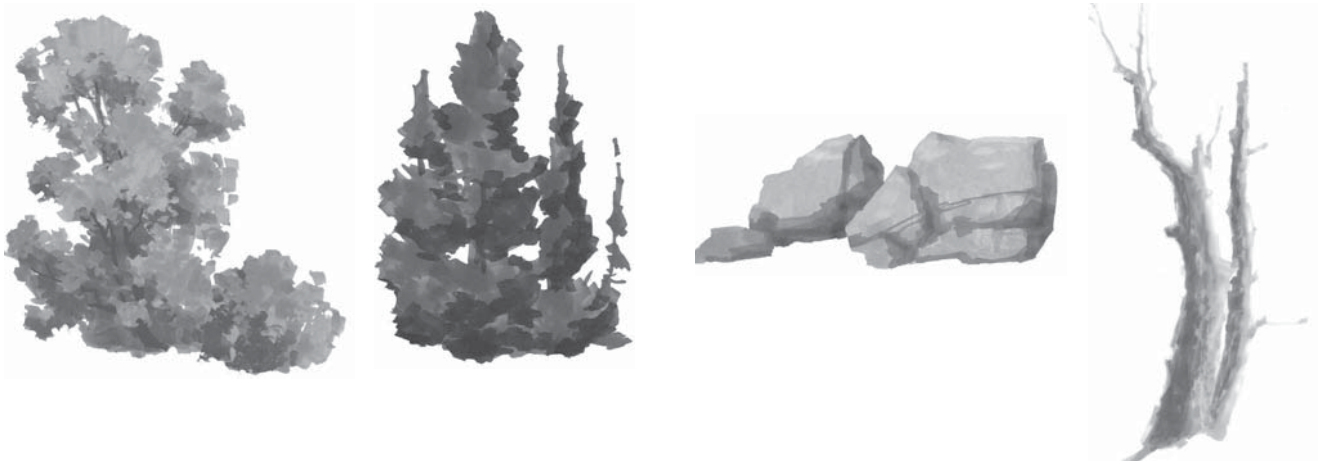
This scene has several subtle gradient planes. The wall with the arch is lighter and warmer at the bottom. The gray building is warmer near the bottom. The yellow arch is showing a lighter value right next to the wall. All this can be justified as reflective light bouncing off the adjacent planes. The cobble stone road is darker in the immediate foreground and gradually gets lighter as it recedes.



### MAKE WALLS RECEDE

Reflective Light will bounce off adjacent planes. In the stone building, the wall appears to recede much better than if it was a flat value all the way across. In real life, you probably would not see the wall progressively getting lighter. The roof starts with a cool blue and gradually fades into pink. This characterizes the house as being part of an

animated movie. Under the eaves it is darker where the two sections of the roof form a "V". The bottom of the chimney is lighter than the top. Take into account that indicating gradient planes is an artificial technique, but very effective in paintings. Make sure the lightest value in the shadow side of a plane is darker than any area in the sunlit façade. The  $\frac{3}{4}$  position of the building allows for these effects.



### RENDER OBJECTS INTO 3D FORMS

Depending on how the sun is positioned, many trees in photos do not show 3D volume, just height and width. If painted as they appear in real life or photos, they will have a flat two-dimensional look. These simple drawings show simplified versions of landscape shapes showing volume because of the shadow side. As you are painting, think of trees as spheres, tree trunks as cylinders, rocks and

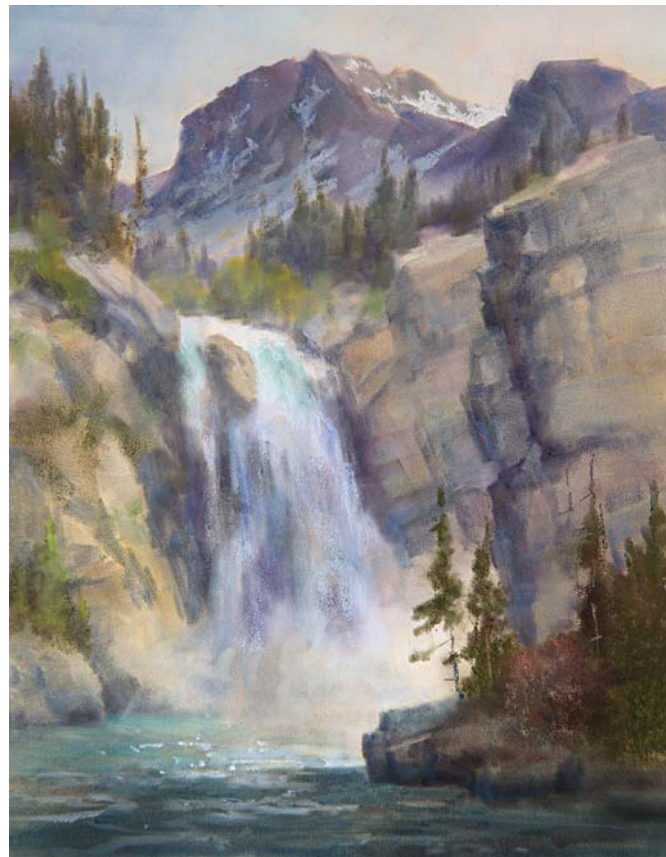
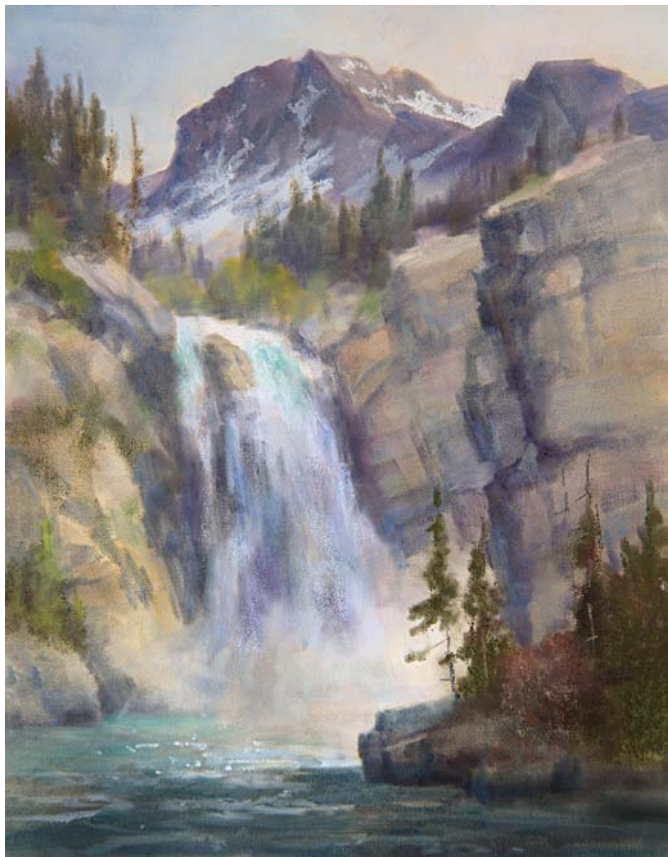
mountains as cubes, and evergreen trees as cones. Plan your light to come from the side so that the opposite side ends up with a darker side. Make sure that when you include animals, vehicles, people and buildings, you place them at a  $\frac{3}{4}$  position and have two different sides in two different values. All these factors accentuate to nullify the flatness.



### DESATURATE COLORS IN THE DISTANCE IN GRASS FIELDS

In real life, the eye will see equal color intensity in a field of grass in the foreground compared to hundreds of yards away. Unless it is a muggy day, atmospheric perspective takes effect and becomes noticeable, not hundreds of yards away, but almost a mile away. We know the brain has its own mechanism to sense depth. Painted exactly as it

appears, the grass will not recede enough in a painting. To achieve recession, reduce color intensity at the end of the field in case the colors of trees and grass are the same up front and in the distance. The color intensity in the bush was pumped up a bit to bring it closer compared to the one behind it. The furthest grass has been grayed down by adding Violet to the same mixture used in the foreground.



### AVOID STACKING LIGHT AND DARK VALUES

When areas of equal color and value are placed somewhere else and are disjointed, the top portion seems to hover above instead of receding.

In the first version of the painting, the snow patch in the distant mountain is the same value and color as the waterfall.

It seems like two white poker chips on top of each other in the same stack separated by other colors.

In the corrected version, the snow was darkened. Now it seems that area recedes at least one mile. There is a better sense of field depth.

### Helpful Hints

- Liquitex super heavy gesso can be applied after your preliminary drawing where shapes of trees, rocks, fallen tree trunks, etc., are present before you apply the paint. This medium has quite a heavy body for texture.
- PanPastel, a relatively new medium that uses non compressed pastel powder, works very well in watercolors to indicate fog and add veils of atmosphere.
- Zinc White is a semi-transparent pigment that is very effective for depicting fog when scumbled over an area in oils or acrylics.
- Avoid placing a hard edge from one plane behind a hard edge from another plane. Where there is a plane shift, the closer plane should show a hard edge. Also avoid placing a soft edge behind another soft edge.
- Darken the bottom corner to make it more inviting to step in.
- Covert your artwork into a gray scale. You can spot flat looking areas more easily.
- Avoid two hard edges that intersect in two different planes. The further one should be softer.

## Demonstration

# ACCENTUATE DEPTH IN A BACKGROUND

Use oils for this painting so the water foam can easily blend and create soft misty edges where the water meets the rocks.



REFERENCE PHOTO

## MATERIALS

### Surface

stretched canvas or canvas board

### Brushes

nos. 6, 8 and 10 brights

### Oils

Burnt Sienna, Cobalt Blue, Indian Red, Underpainting White, Viridian, Winsor Violet, Yellow Ochre Pale

### Other

neutral violet pastel pencil



**I Sketch the Composition and Lay In the Water** Sketch in the drawing with a neutral violet pastel pencil. (This will blend with the paint later on.) Lay in the blue-green water using Cobalt Blue, Winsor Violet and Viridian. Show variances of each of these colors. Place the brush strokes in the same direction that the water would be running. Use thin paint so a second layer of paint can be added easily.



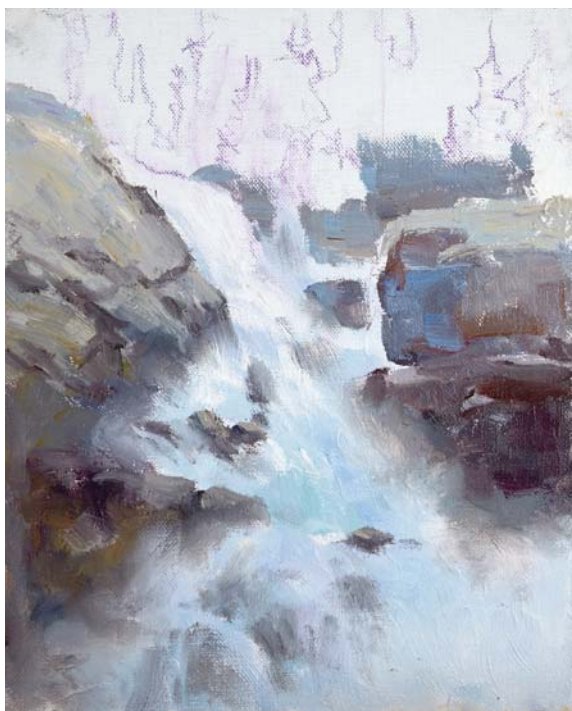
## 2 Add the Rocks

Premix Burnt Sienna, Cobalt Blue and a touch of Indian Red and white to a mid dark value. Don't over mix. Just allow the colors to mingle to kill the intensity. The colors should remain marbled on your palette. Paint in the rocks using abstract shapes. Add touches of Cobalt Blue with white to indicate the sky reflections on the wet rocks.



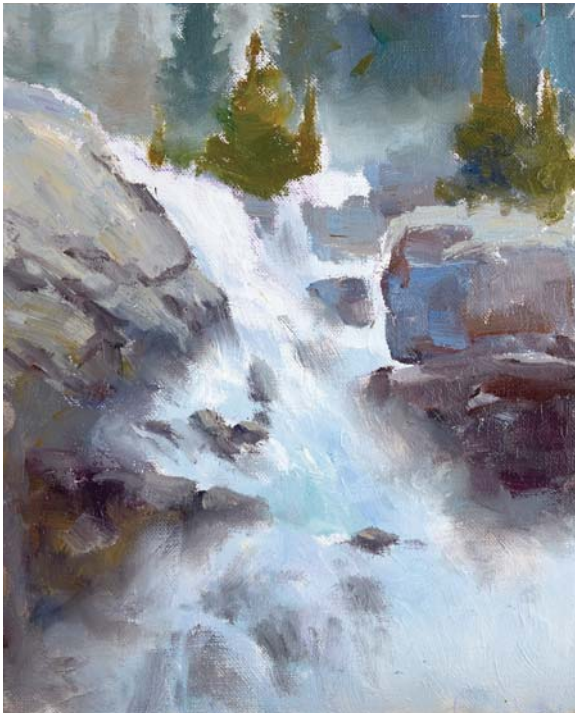
## 3 Vary the Sides of the Waterfall

Continue to indicate the rocks, but this time build, a larger rock and add Yellow Ochre Pale to it for variance so that left side has something different than the right side. Check that the water lines on both sides are quite different to avoid cloning. Add a few smaller rocks into the waterfall to give it a sense of belonging in the context of the scene.



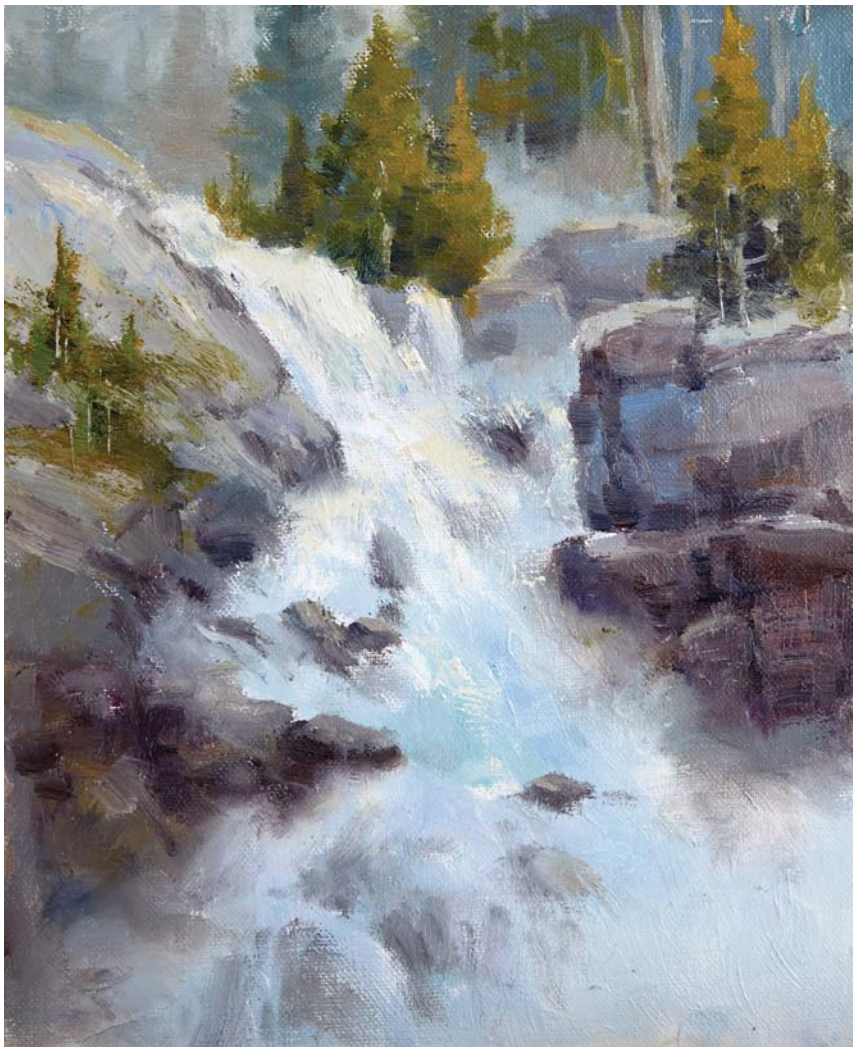
## 4 Create a Semi-Transparent Effect on the Water

Add more rocks into the waterfall, but this time make them semi-transparent to indicate that shallow water is running over them. Think of them as a bridal veil. Add the white water with a touch of Yellow Ochre Pale and white to the top third of the waterfall, only with thick paint. Keep it from mixing in with the darker blue. However, allow some the white to mix in with the blue foundation at the lower two thirds. You should be able to see two distinct values. Twirl your brush where the water meets the rocks until they form misty patterns.



## 5 Add the Foliage

The front evergreens are done with a mixture of Viridian, Winsor Violet, Burnt Sienna and white. They should also be a mid-dark value. Add a gray mist behind the evergreen trees.



## 6 Create Rows of Trees to Finish

Finally, add two more rows of evergreens behind the front row. Use the same mixture but add more Cobalt Blue, Burnt Sienna (to gray down the color) and white. Get progressively cooler and lighter as the forest recedes. Add mist behind the first row to enhance the sense of depth. Your painting should end up with three levels in the background. Add some bare tree trunks as seen in the finished version.

HIDDEN FALLS, TETON NATIONAL PARK  
Oil on canvas, 8" x 10" (20cm x 25cm)

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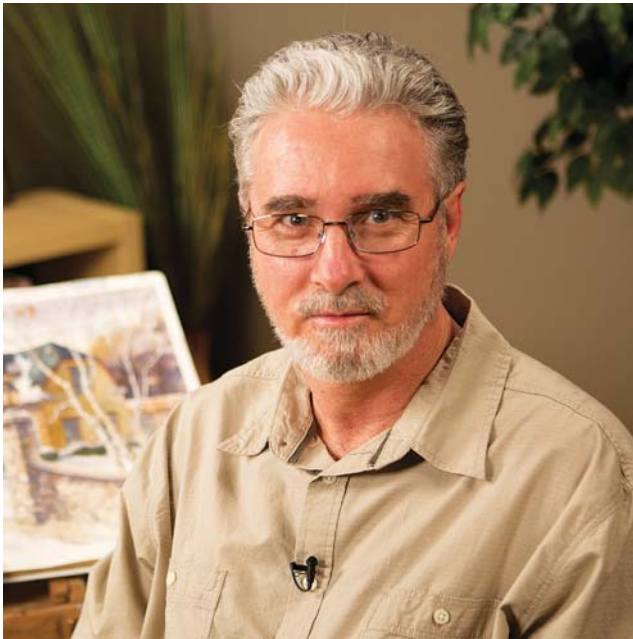
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Johannes Vloothuis is a full-time professional artist and renowned art instructor with experience in all the main painting mediums. A frequent workshop instructor for WetCanvas, he has traveled all over North America giving painting workshops and demonstrations and has taught over 15,000 classes online to artists all over the world. Johannes finds his true passion lies in sharing compositional secrets and seeing his students grow into better artists.

North Light has labeled Johannes a Master Painter. He has won awards from the Mexican Society of Watercolor Artists, and his work has appeared in newspapers, magazines and galleries worldwide.

To view more of Johannes' artwork and obtain more information about his classes, visit his website at [improvemypaintings.com](http://improvemypaintings.com).

# DEDICATION

To my wife, Patty, who always supported me in my painting ventures and to my sons, Johannathan, Christopher and especially Kenny, who is also an artist and contributed some of his knowledge to this book.

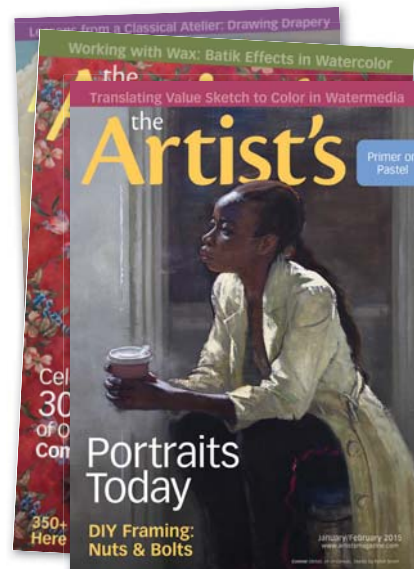
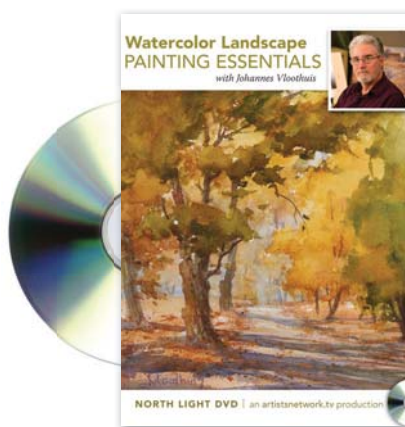
## Metric Conversion Chart

To convert	to	multiply by
Inches	Centimeters	2.54
Centimeters	Inches	0.4
Feet	Centimeters	30.5
Centimeters	Feet	0.03
Yards	Meters	0.9
Meters	Yards	1.1



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