RICHARD ROBINSON'S
Master Class

LESSON NOTES *Ruakaka Beach*

REQUIRED MATERIALS

You can use either oils or acrylics in this lesson, though with acrylics I recommend mixing and using one color family at a time due to the faster drying time.

Oils

Large palette - larger than A3 size is good. An A2 sized glass palette is ideal. Palette Knife.

The Palette

'Archival Oils' by Chroma
Classic Archival Medium
Ultramarine Blue
Pthalo Blue
Cadmium Red Mid
Alizarine Crimson
Yellow Ochre
Cadmium Yellow Mid
Titanium White

Canvas

Any canvas or board suitable for your chosen medium up to 20x20".

Acrylics

Large stay-wet palette - A3 or bigger is good.
Retarding Medium to slow the drying of your paints.
Water spray bottle for keeping your paints wet.
Palette Knife.
I recommend using 'Atelier Interactive Acrylic' which is most similar to oil paint. Learn more at the yellow web link below.

Brushes

1" Flat Hog Bristle
#8 Signet Robert Simmons Flat
#4 Signet Robert Simmons Filbert
#0 Rigger

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http://www.livepaintinglessons.com/art-supplies

Welcome to Northland, New Zealand! New Zealand is a painter's paradise. In the South Island we have snowcapped mountains, lakes and plains, and in the North we have rolling hills, vast native forests and amazing beaches like this one. Hiya, I'm Richard Robinson, Welcome to Ruakaka Beach. My home is just 5 minutes over that way. I love painting this beach, so let's get into it.

What are we seeing?

A vast beach like this is a great place to see the effects of changing light, the effects of atmospheric perspective and sea spray in the air, and perhaps most notably the effect of linear perspective - how receding objects get smaller and parallel lines converge to a point.

Where to Start?

First things first, we need to figure out what it is that we want to paint. I've got a square canvas today and I'm interested in seeing both the vast expanse of the beach as well as a good sized piece of the sky and clouds. I'm a little more interested in the beach so I'm going to give that a bit more room on my canvas than the sky. This means that my horizon line will be just above half way. Now here's where I use my artistic licence. Just as it is it's a nice scene but somehow lacking a little in strength. I like the contrast between the bright beach and the darker sky and that simple design of a darker rectangle over a lighter rectangle is something I can exaggerate in order to make a stronger design. So I've decided to make the sky slightly darker to achieve a bolder design and I know that in doing this the beach will look brighter too - making it feel more 'pristine'. So now I've got a basic plan I can start analysing what I'm seeing.

How to See...

A technique I use all the time to make it easier to see the major colors, values and shapes, is blurred vision. I do this by going very slightly cross-eyed - throwing my eyes out of focus and reducing the scene before me to it's bare essentials. This is critical to understanding a scene for a painting. Don't do this when looking at your painting though - sure it makes it look better but you can't ask everyone else to look at your paintings cross eyed.

When you look into shadow areas your eyes compensate for the darkness, making the shadows appear lighter than they normally are and allowing you to see more detail. The same thing occurs when looking into light areas - they appear darker than normal, making details clearer. To avoid this confusion simply look at things 'broadly', with blurry eyes, and try not to peer into areas when you're assessing them. Remember it's the **relationship** of a thing **compared with its surroundings** that defines it.

Mixing colors

I keep my palette to a minimum to save confusion. I basically have a warm and a cool version of the 3 primaries, and of course, lots of white.

When I mix my colors I go about it very methodically, mixing darkest to lightest colors. If I can fit them all on my palette I mix all the colors at once. Doing this means that when I finally start painting I can concentrate on doing just that, not having to stop and remix colors.

First I break the scene down into it's parts, for this one: Sky, Clouds, Hills, Water, Sand and Dune Grass. Then I mix the colors for these parts one at a time, darkest to lightest. My first color is really going to set the color palette for the whole painting because everything that follows is measured against this. Again, it's all about the relationship of one thing to another. Remember though that I've decided to make the sky slightly darker than it actually appears. I need to get the value of my colors right - that's very important. The value is how light or dark a color is as if it were a black and white photograph. It's very hard to judge that straight away without some kind of concrete reference for comparison. That's why it's good to use a value scale like the one in the lesson notes. Judging the darkest value first we can hold up the value scale against our subject and look through the holes to see where the value matches our scale. So here it's matches the middle value or number 4 if you count black as number 1. I want to make the sky a bit darker than that so I'll make the decision to mix my darkest sky color to about a number 3 value.

I'll mix 3 values for the sky, not including the clouds. I'll just take some of this first color and add white

till I get the next value right. Testing that against my sky though I can see that the color is not right. My mid sky color needs to be a bit cooler so I add a touch of Pthalo blue to the mix because it's a cooler blue than Ultramarine. Adding this dark color has darkened the value though, so I add more white to make it lighter. Now the third and last sky color is the lightest because it's closest to the horizon where I'm looking through more layers of light refracting atmosphere. So I take from my second pile and add more white until I get the relative value right. Seems like it needs to be a bit warmer too, so I add just a touch of alizarine.

In this way we mix the colors for all our objects - with the darkest color first, then using *that* color to mix the rest of the colors for that object by adding white to get the *value* right first, then adjusting the color to suit.

Now I'll mix the cloud colors - darkest first. We expect the lightest value of the clouds to be white - but it's not. That's because we're seeing it through the atmosphere. You can find the atmosphere color just above the horizon. In this scene it's a light blue and it's tinting everything in the scene - more so as it recedes from us.

I'm constantly comparing values and hues to what I'm seeing by holding up my paint-smeared palette knife to the color in the scene, making sure I hold the knife in the exact same angle and light each time I check it. If you are comparing colors to a photo, make sure the photo and your painting are in the same light at the same angle, then hold the color on your palette knife close to the photo, at the same angle as the photo.

Note that when you first paint on the canvas the color will always appear wrong because the color is surrounded by white, making it appear darker. Priming your canvas with a midtone can help resolve this problem.

For the advanced painter working outdoors it's good to note that because of all the strong light outside you will be seeing your painting lighter than it will appear when you finally bring it inside. You should try to lighten all your values by a half step to compensate for this. For beginners, to mix a color, first use your goal color's main components. If it's light blue, use blue and white. Once the value is right (the darkness or lightness of the color), then ask yourself, does my color need more yellow, or red? That is, which way should my color move on the colorwheel from blue - towards yellow or towards red? If your color needs to be darker than your main component color - for example a blue which is darker than ultramarine blue from the tube, think about adding a dark color which is not black to darken it - try red or alizarine.

* If your color needs to be less vivid (more grey), add the color's complement - which is opposite it on the colorwheel. For example the complement of blue is orange, so if I want to subdue the intensity of a blue (making it a bit more 'grey') I would just add a bit of orange.

Sky:
Dark -> ultramarine blue + alizarine + white
Medium -> Dark with more blue and white + a touch of pthalo
Light -> Medium with more white + a touch of yellow

Clouds:
Dark -> ultramarine blue + red + white
Medium -> Dark with more blue and white
Light -> Medium with more blue and white + a touch of yellow

Hills:
Dark -> ultramarine blue + red + white
Medium -> Dark with more blue and white
Light -> Medium with more blue and white + yellow

Water:
Dark -> ultramarine blue + yellow + white
Medium -> Dark + pthalo blue+ white
Light -> Medium with more white + a touch of alizarine

Sand:
Dark -> red + yellow + white + a touch of ultramarine
Medium -> Dark + white + yellow
Light -> Medium + white + yellow

Dune Grass:
yellow + red + white + a touch of ultramarine

Painting!

It's quite a relief to get through all that mixing, so now it's on to the good stuff! First I'll sketch in the horizon, measuring so that I get it horizontal and straight. Then I decide where the other features of my painting are going to go and lightly sketch those in, checking each against the other for relative size and shape.

Now, I'm going to approach this systematically so I don't get confused. I'm going to start with one area and paint it completely from it's darkest color to it's lightest. Then I'll paint it's adjoining area, and so on. I'll start with the sky.

Watch here in fast motion as I put in the dark values first, making sure to always paint beyond where that color is needed so that the next color will work into it smoothly, covering the canvas. Notice how much I vary my brushstrokes, to make the painting surface more interesting.

In between brushstrokes I'm dipping my brush into my painting medium which is in a little pot on my easel. As I move through my paint group to the lighter and lighter values I'm using less and less painting medium. This helps the lighter values sit better on top of the darker values and instead of just blending into them the brushstrokes stick out a little bit from the painting surface, thereby catching the light and helping the painting sparkle a little bit when it's finished. I'm using 'Classic' painting medium from the Archival Range which is made by Chroma in Australia. It has a drying time of about 24 hours which is great for outdoor painting.

Now for the clouds, putting in the big shapes that I see and then refining those. I'm always checking my subject before I paint an area, looking up about every 5 strokes to make sure I'm getting it right, continually refreshing the image in my head with new information. Once I've gone through the values of the clouds see how I go back over them adding back in some of the dark and mid values which can get muddled. I'm always looking for little nuances or interesting cloud shapes which will make it look more like a cloud and less like cotton wool. Instead of using a small brush here I'm still using a large one, but in a creative way. That helps to create more dynamic brushwork. Painting little smidges of clouds here and there help to show the scale of the major clouds. Once I've gone through the values of the clouds, see how I go back over them adding some of the dark and middle values, which can get a bit muddled.

For the more advanced painter, I'll now add some of the beach color into the mid values of the clouds to help unify the painting. Everything we see is reflecting everything else we see to some degree, depending on the reflective qualities of that object. Imagine if this cloud were made out of mirrors - which faces of the cloud would you see reflecting the sky, and which faces would reflect the beach? At the same time the sky and the beach are reflecting the cloud, only not as well as a mirrored surface, so we don't notice it until we really look.

The distant hills come next, from darkest to lightest values as always. Consider here the edges of your objects getting softer as they recede. But isn't even the horizon a crisp edge you say? Well yes it is, when you're looking at it and your eyes are focused on it. But what happens when you're focusing on the foreground or the middle ground? That's right, the horizon goes blurry, out of focus. So in most paintings where the centre of interest is in the fore or mid-ground, it makes sense to make the edges of things beyond that focus area a little softer, more so as they recede from you. This makes the centre of focus 'pop' just that little bit more.

Now watch here as I really push the brush into the pile of paint. That's to get a good thick covering on the end of the brush. As I lay on my lighter values I'm being careful to put the paint on slightly thicker than the previous layers in order to catch the light and make it sparkle. I'm still using a large brush here,

just using the very tip of it to paint these trees way down the beach.

Next comes the sea, and I'm very careful to get my horizon straight and horizontal. Then the lighter values, and again, I'm painting beyond where I need the paint to finish, so that the next layer will push back into it.

Finally some waves using the light color of the clouds laid thinly with the edge of my palette knife.

Now for the dune grasses, which I add a bit of mid sky color to as they recede down the beach. Be sure to make the details down the beach that much smaller than those closer to you. A clumsy stroke in these distant areas can break the illusion of depth.

Now the sand, which can be tricky because we need to make this smooth expanse of similar color look interesting but still retain it's realism. It's being able to see the subtleties of tone and color which will make this work, but it's made difficult by the glare of such a light subject. Looking directly at the bright sand our pupils will contract, protecting our eyes but making the sand appear darker than it should do. To combat this I'm blurring my vision and looking at the distant hills while seeing the beach with my peripheral vision. This allows me to see the sand's true color and value and their true relationship to each other.

The more you peer at an area of value change the more exaggerated the change will appear to be. If you blur your vision more in these cases it will help you to see the true relationship.

Using the back of a small brush I mark where the boardwalk will go, scraping into the wet paint. Notice how a big brush can be used to create detail where you might expect to only use a small brush. The colors used are those of the dune grass, adding a few lighter accents here and there. You don't have to paint every piece of wood on this boardwalk. You're really just suggesting the shape and the pattern of it. and it's the mind of the viewer that will really fill in the blanks.
Here again I'm using the edge of the palette knife to create the very thin line of the receding beach. Little flicks of light coloured paint suggesting the seagulls hovering on the tops of the dunes.

Now for some seaweed on the beach and to me I think this is the trickiest part of the painting getting these clumps of seaweed to look right. Our natural tendency is to make a pattern of everything - to make every clump of seaweed to look the same - same size, same shape, and you always have to make a conscious effort NOT to do that. If it does start to look too patterned or regular, just scrape some of them out - do whatever you have to do to make it look natural. Notice that the strokes as they get down the beach get thinner and shorter, and I've also lightened the color to really ensure that they do recede like they should. Just adding a slightly lighter value there on top of the seaweed, just to give it a little bit of three dimensionality.

Notice the tyre tracks and the footprints in the sand there also have a dark side and a lighter side. This really just helps to add a bit of three dimensionality to the sand and helps to break up the somewhat bland sand in the foreground. Of course it's up to you whether you want to add seaweed to your beach or not - you might prefer a more pristine beach. I just thought it added a bit more character and it helps to lead your eye down the beach so I included it. As I said before, if one bit of seaweed is making your beach look too patterned, too much like a rug or a quilt then just scrape it off, repaint in the sand and away you go. Just adding in a few little sparkley shells here, and that's with the thickest paint that you will use in the painting - it really catches the light.

Now here's an interesting part - how to paint seagulls with just a few strokes. Notice that I'm still using quite a large brush and it's just a matter of how I tilt the brush in order to achieve the perfect shaped brushstroke for a wing or a head. I'm only using the very little brush to do the wings and the shadows

there. Just putting on the little shadows here, and I'm just using the mid sky color with a little bit of red and a touch more white in it. This little brush I use here is called a rigger and it was originally used to help with the painting of rigging in ships. This is a good place to use a mahl stick if you've got one to support your hand. This is kind of typical of my painting style where I start with a rush and a bang with the big brushes and finish off quite slowly with the smaller brushes putting in the detail which really holds the whole painting together.

Just thought it needed a few more little details in the foreground. You really can just keep tutuing and doing this forever but someone said a great painting needs two people to paint it - one to paint it and one to tell them when to stop. ...and that should just about do it for the foreground.

I'm just going to put a little figure in here just at the end of that boardwalk, and it's really going to help draw the eye down the beach. I'm just measuring before I do, exactly how tall that figure needs to be to fit in with the structure of the boardwalk. A little touch of red just adds some interest - a little bit of sparkle. I remember hearing when I was a kid that Constable would do this, that he'd put these little bits of red in his paintings that you sort of had to find. We had a set of table placemats which I must have spent hours looking at trying to find the little spots of red in these prints of constables paintings.

Painting a bird in flight here, which you really need photo reference for - obviously they're not going to stay there for you. I just wanted to show you again how I'm using a large brush to do the majority of the work on this bird. You really don't have to resort to a small brush very often. The fact that you have to slow down at the end of the painting like this when you're painting the details is kind of nice because it sort of suits your energy level. You've been painting for a few hours now so it's good to slow down, but the key is to be able to maintain the degree of focus that you started out with, so your finishing detail which holds the painting together doesn't lose any integrity.

Now sign it, and you're done! Congratulations on a finished painting!

Photo reference

The Finished Painting - 42x42cm (16.5x16.5")

http://www.livepaintinglessons.com

Value Scale - cut on the dotted lines. View your subject through the holes to gauge the relative values.

RICHARD ROBINSON'S
MasterClass

LESSON NOTES *Atmospheric Perspective*

REQUIRED MATERIALS

You can use either oils or acrylics in this lesson, though with acrylics I recommend mixing and using one color family at a time due to the faster drying time.

Oils

Large palette - larger than A3 size is good. An A2 sized glass palette is ideal. Palette Knife.

The Palette

'Archival Oils' by Chroma
Classic Archival Medium
Ultramarine Blue
Pthalo Blue
Cadmium Red Mid
Alizarine Crimson
Yellow Ochre
Cadmium Yellow Mid
Titanium White

Canvas

Any canvas or board suitable for your chosen medium up to 20x20".

Acrylics

Large stay-wet palette - A3 or bigger is good. Retarding Medium to slow the drying of your paints.
Water spray bottle for keeping your paints wet. Palette Knife.
I recommend using 'Atelier Interactive Acrylic' which is most similar to oil paint. Learn more at the yellow web link below.

Brushes

1" Flat Hog Bristle
#6 Signet Robert Simmons Filbert
#0 Rigger

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Welcome to Teal Bay, Northland, New Zealand! My name is Richard Robinson. I'm going to take you through a lesson about atmospheric perspective. Here's the perfect place to do it. Let's get started.

It's very easy to be inspired to paint in a place like this, but to express any place well, we need to have some basic painting knowledge. This lesson covers a crucial part of landscape painting and one which is often misunderstood. I'm often asked, how do you make those hills seem so far away, and how do you make your painting look so soft, like it's got light in it? Well, here's the key, understanding atmospheric perspective. Let's get into it.

What are we seeing?

As things get further away from you in daylight they seem to become more like the color of the sky, getting lighter and less distinct from each other. For instance, far away hills seem to look blue, when we know they're actually covered with green grass and trees.

What's Happening?

White light from the sun, containing all the colors of the spectrum, bounces off objects around us and travels to our eyes through an atmosphere of air, water vapour and dust. Our atmosphere filters out some of the yellow and red colors of that spectrum like a sieve, leaving more blue and purple colors. As there is more atmosphere between your eyes and a distant hill than between your eyes and a close hill, the light from the distant hill looks bluer, and illuminated atmospheric particles make the hill appear lighter as well. I find it easier to imagine dozens of veils of atmosphere filing away into the distance, tinting and lightening the landscape behind it. Imagine these veils equally spaced on a railway track to the horizon. See how there appear to be more and more veils closer to the horizon? That means we're looking through much more atmosphere in the distance than in the fore or midground, making things right on the horizon nearly disappear altogether. When standing at sea level the horizon appears about 5 km (3 miles) away. It's good to keep in mind this increasing nature of atmospheric perspective. If we were to give it a name it could be the 'atmospheric density gradient'.

It's important to note where the sun is in your scene and to notice how the light changes in the atmosphere as you turn your gaze slowly away from the sun and around behind you. Note too when looking towards the sun like this the atmospheric color gets lighter and warmer the closer it is to the sun - this means everything gets lighter and warmer the closer it gets to the sun - hills, water, clouds, birds… everything. Think about how you can achieve that in a painting. It may seem confusing at first, but as you'll soon see, a methodical approach can make it fairly straightforward. First though, we need to know how too look at this scene…

How to See…

A technique which I use all the time to make it easier to see the major colors, values and shapes, is blurred vision. I do this by going very slightly cross-eyed - throwing my eyes out of focus and reducing the scene before me to it's bare essentials. I find this essential for understanding a scene for a painting. Don't do this when looking at your painting though - sure it makes it look better but you can't ask everyone else to look at your paintings cross eyed.

Being able to judge value relationships is a key skill for any good painter. A color's value is how light or dark it is, as if it were turned into a black and white photograph. It's amazing how easily your eyes can fool you into believing something is lighter or darker than it actually is. A handy thing to have is a value chart which looks like this and is included in your lesson notes. It's a great way to train yourself to see values better.

Unfortunately photography has it's limitations and in this example the lights are lighter than they really were and the darks are darker - tending to look more dramatic, but losing the subtleties of the actual scene. That's why painting on site is so much better for your understanding of light. You can see though how at first this front hill's shadowed side looks almost black, but using the cutout value scale reveals it is closer to the second value on the scale. *Print out the attached value chart and cut the middle holes out or buy one at your local art supply store.*

Where to Start?

Like most of painting, this is a skill that can be learned and is much easier than it first appears. All we have to do is approach the problem systematically and methodically. Now we understand basically what is happening - receding objects take on more and more of the atmospheric color. We just apply that concept to our color mixing. If we have a midground object like a hill which repeats in the distance, all we have to do is mix the colors for the first hill, then add to these colors some of the

atmospheric color to achieve the colors of the distant hill. We then take this new set of colors and add more atmospheric color, making the colors for the next most distance hill, and so on for the next.

Mixing colors

A simple palette avoids confusion and encourages color harmony. I'm using Ultramarine Blue, Cadmium Red Medium, Cadmium Orange, Cadmium Yellow Medium and Titanium White.

First I mix a big pile of atmospheric color. This is the color of the sky just above the horizon. I've used mainly white, with a bit of blue and a touch of red. Note the difference between the color in the photograph and the color I'm actually seeing.

Now I'll mix all the colors for the first hill. This is the darkest shadow color between the trees where no light penetrates. With this first set of colors I need to make a lot more than I actually need because I'll be taking from these piles to make the next set of colors. While I'm mixing I'm holding up my value scale to the scene and checking that the tone is correct. This color here is the shadow color of the trees. Now I don't want it there so I just scoop it up and move it down. This next color is the highlight color of the trees where the sun is hitting the tops of them. As I mix new colors I'm checking these against the previous color on my palette to make sure the relative tone and color is correct too.

Next is the shadow color of the grass. After that is the highlight color of the grass. I'm only using two tones for each object - a shadow color and a highlight color. Back in the studio where I have more time to do a larger painting from this outdoor sketch I'd probably use 3 or 4 tones; shadow, reflected light, local color and highlight. But the light changes so fast outdoors you'd be doing pretty well to mix and paint all those colors. These last two colors are the shadow and highlight colors for the rock at the base of the hill.

Now all I have to do is use these colors, adding atmosphere color, to make the colors for my next hill… and so on. The only tricky part now is just making sure that the relative tones are correct. For example the highlight color of the grass has to be slightly lighter than the shadow color of the grass.

The Drawing

Sometimes you can start straight in with the painting, but the illusion of distance in this painting really requires getting the placement and relative size of these hills just right. I always put in my horizon line first as my point of reference and then work from there. The really important things in this scene are the distances between the bases of the hills and also the distances between the tops of the hills and the horizon.

Painting!

So now I've got my colors ready and my drawing sorted I can get into the painting without having to stop and remix colors so much. I'm just going to lay down a little bit of atmospheric color first for reference and so that my distant hills will fade into this a bit when I paint those. I'm mixing a new pile of atmospheric color which is lighter and warmer than the first due to being closer to the sun.

The medium I'm using to mix with my paints in my little pots down there is Archival Classic Medium which has a drying time of about 24hrs and is really good for painting outdoors. It's from Chroma in Australia. My paints are all from them as well.

Now, I lay in my darkest values first, followed by the next lightest and then the next. Always paint a bit further than you have to so that the next layer of paint will work back into it, creating a smooth transition and covering the canvas. I'm using a big brush to speed things up, plus I had 16 cups of coffee - no just kidding.

See in the photo how the hills get a bit lighter and warmer towards the sun? Well that's what I'm doing here, adding a bit of orange and warm atmosphere color to the hill color on the left, and I'll need to do that to all my colors as they get closer to the sun. So now I've put the two dark shadow color on it's time to put on the light colors on top of the trees, which I put on a bit thicker. Again, adding a bit more orange and warm atmosphere color as it gets closer to the sun. Here I'm just dipping my brush in the medium and wiping it off with a rag to clean it and get it ready for the next color.

The next color is the shadow color for the grass and I'm just going to paint that into the paint I've already got there, and in between the trees. I put the lightest colors on thicker still, creating a thick ridge of paint on my brush by pushing it into the paint pile, then dragging it lightly off onto the canvas, not squashing it into the canvas.

I'm not really interested in capturing every minute detail in a scene - I figure that's what we've got cameras for. To me it's more about capturing the essence of a place.

Now I'm painting back some of the trees that were wiped out by the grass. Here I'm mixing a tiny bit of the atmosphere color into the tree color to make a sky-shine color for the shadow of the trees which is where the sky is reflected on the top of the shadowed trees. That just adds a little bit more three dimensionality to it.

Now I'm starting work on the second hill. When I'm painting this in I'm also redefining the ridge line of the hill in front of it. But I will go back in afterwards and paint some of those foreground trees back in. Again, adding orange and warm atmosphere color into the colors that are getting closer to the sun…and this gets more pronounced as we travel further back into that atmosphere color.

Putting on these light colors is really the most exciting part of the painting for me. It's like you've done the groundwork and set the scene just waiting for these final brushstrokes to make sense of the whole thing. Like smoothing the pillow for the crown jewels to sit on.

Here's where I paint back in some of the trees on the ridge line that were lost when we painted in the second hill. You can really see here how I'm pushing the paintbrush into that pile of paint to get a thick glob of paint on the end, that I can just lay down quite softly on top of the trees. Another thing to observe is that atmosphere brings the values closer and closer together as things get further away from you. Also, you need to remember that it's not just atmospheric perspective that's making this object seem further away, it's also linear perspective, which means getting your drawing right, and making things smaller as the recede - making thinner brushstrokes and smaller trees.

So I'm finished with the hills, now I'm going to mix up the colors for the water and put that in. Again, the photo colors are a lot different to the colors that are actually there. Where a light and a dark area join is usually the trickiest part of a painting and usually requires a lot of work. Now just a little dot for the fishing boat that was down there, and it's reflection…and a hint of sand…a few other finishing touches… and there you have it. And here's a finished painting I did of the same scene.

Well, that's it for today. Thankyou for taking part in my lesson... and remember, practice does make perfect. There are more lessons available online on my website www.newzealandartist.com . Thanks.

Richard Robinson's
Master Class

Lesson Notes

Photo reference

The Finished Painting - (16.5x16.5")

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LESSON NOTES *Mount Manaia*

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#0 Royal White Taklon Script
#1 Hayden 800 Series Synthetic

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Hi, welcome to Masterclass. I'm Richard Robinson. I'll be taking you through the lesson today which is based on this photo which I have taken off Mount Manaia in Whangarei harbour in Northland, New Zealand, which is where I live. Mt Manaia is a dormant volcano - or at least we hope it is. I've painted it a number of times because it just draws me to it and it's so iconic of the region. I don't yet feel like I've done it justice, but I'm still working on it.

Studio Painting from Photography

Now for this one we'll be working in the studio, not outdoors, and from photography. Photography has a number of advantages over outdoor painting, but a number of disadvantages as well. Some of the

advantages of painting in the studio would be constant light. When you're painting outdoors the light is going to change on you all the time, if not just from the sun then from clouds and other factors. Whereas when you're in the studio you have the advantage of being able to change the lighting to suit yourself so that for instance you are not getting glare off the sky or the sun reflecting off your painting. But more importantly the light on your subject is not going to change when you're in the studio. The photograph is going to capture that and freeze-frame it for you. Although a camera can't capture the light exactly is it was outdoors so you're stuck with a fairly poor representation of the lighting conditions.

As you'll see in this photograph, and this is what generally happens with photographs from outdoors, the darts have gone far too dark and the lights have gone far too light. Now when you get good enough you can compensate for that, but that takes a great deal of training and painting on site outdoors to be able to understand how much photography changes things.

Another advantage of painting outdoors is that you don't have to contend with the weather. This is a disadvantage in some ways as well because you'll find that changing weather conditions outdoors will give you the opportunity to see a different side of a subject that is which you might not see if you just have the one photo of a place. One of my favorite things which happens with cloudy weather is that you'll get a little break in the clouds where the sun will just shine through and Spotlight a certain area and it may only last for a second but it just seems as if God is pointing his finger at this one little space in comparison with the rest of the landscape which is all grayed out. It's just a fantastic thing to be able to paint Another thing about painting and the studio was that you have time to plan your work better, to do small sketches and figure things out, to do small paintings before the big one. But the downside of that is that you are going to lose the spontaneity and the expressive brushwork which the speed of the outdoor painting necessitates.

One of the major disadvantages of painting indoors which is often Overlooked is that you miss out on a whole spirit of the place, everything that combines to make the experience of the place when you're standing there. And while you can't include a lot of those things in a painting, but I believe that a good painter can bring out the spirit of a place in a painting. That's something quite grand aim for, but let's just see what we can do in the studio today.

I tend to start any painting with a little compositional sketch like this one here. You can see the size of it there compared to my thumb. It's really very small. I'll start out by sketching in the basic shape of the canvas that I have and now just very quickly put in the basic tonal shapes of the image in front of me. Now you can see with this one that I have already pulled out my artistic licence and waved it around liberally. I've added a waterfall and the tree in the foreground, and that's really just to add more interest, depth and drama to the work. Now you can see that the basic idea was just to separate this into planes that are divided by a tone, so I've got the darkest tone in the foreground and those planes lighten as they go into the distance.

All up I've got five planes of depth here. We've got the tree in the foreground and on the right we've got a little headland poking out which is next darkest and then there's the plane off the large hill in the mid-ground which has a waterfall over the front of it. And then the very grand Mt Manaia in the background and the final layer is the sky behind it all. Now that's just a very simple technique to simplify a painting in order that it becomes easier for you to paint and also for the finished painting to be read by the viewer.

One of the major goals of doing these little drawings is to see where the major masses are going to go first of all, but also to create a pleasing abstract pattern with them. It's quite hard to see it as an

abstract pattern until we turn it over on its side or turn it upside down, and that way you start seeing it as the symbols of the things you have drawn and see them just as interesting shapes.

Another thing I'm trying to do with these little sketches is really simplify the values so that I'm using as few values as possible in order to build a very strong tonal base for the painting. So a good way to make really strong composition is to limit the number of values that you are going to use from 5, 4, 3 or even 2 values which would just be black and white. It is quite tricky to do that with a pencil because as you vary the pressure on the pencil the tone obviously changes so an easier way to define your values is to either use paint or felt tip markers.

If you were to use paint you would just mix up say 4 individual values and when you apply those to the canvas just make sure you're not mixing those together and creating a fifth or a sixth value. So probably the easiest way would be to get a range of about seven market pens from black to almost wiped and you can get these now with foamy brush type heads which are very nice to use as well.

Color Mixing

Okay, on the color mixing. I'm going to keep the color mixing very simple by just using a reduced color palette, from left to right, ultramarine blue, cadmium red mid, yellow ochre, cadmium yellow mid and titanium white. I like to mix of color groups or color families. Each item or each object in a painting will have its own color family. Each family will start with its darkest color and each color thereafter will be based on that first parent color. I also like to mix the darkest color for the whole painting first and move on from there. So on this one mixing with base shadow color of the foreground plane first. Then using that same color mixture I move back to the mid-ground which is a waterfall hills.

Now what I could have done, or probably should have done is mix a really big pile of that first dark color and then take some of that to start the second pile with. Instead, I remembered the color I used for the first pile, recreated that and then tweaked that with some other colors. In the tweaking of the color is basically just a lighten it and to push it more towards blue which is the background atmospheric sky color. So that's pretty simple, you just add white and blue to that and then I just do the same to the next pile as well. So the style here is the background color for Mount Manaia itself. I'm mixing all these piles much larger than they to be because they're going to be appearing colors for their own color families. That just means that these are the background colors and for all the colors they go on top of these particular backgrounds are just going to take a piece out of these piles, move it over and then adjust those colors to get the color that I'm after. So that's the reason behind calling it a parent because all of the children colors come out of that parent.

Now if you remember in the drawing I did say that they were five planes of depth in this painting. The foreground, the headland the waterfall hills, Mount Manaia and the sky. So really I should mix up five piles of color to start with. But I'm not going to, I'm going to skip out the headland because it is such a small painting and I can do this on a fly and you will see how that is done later.

So now I'm going for the sky color which basically just blue and white. So that's how I start out but then I start really looking and thinking what kind of blue is that? Is it warm or is it cool? I find out that it's a bit cooler and so I had some Pthalo blue to my palette and just add a tiny touch of that to my mixture. Okay, so that's my base colors ready to go and now I'm just going to build off that and build my color families. So again I start with the darkest in this case it's the foreground. I just take a little bit of the pile and I'm wanting to mix about two or three colors to go on top of this dark one and they are going to indicate grasses and rocks. So I'm starting off by adding yellow ochre there which is going to push this

bluey mixture towards green.

Then I want something more brown for the rock so I just, again, grab from that first pile and I'm adding just a yellow and red which is an orange mixture and then lighten that a bit to get a basic rock color. This is a very simplistic way of doing things. I'm not actually measuring off anything in front of me - the scene or the photograph - I'm just using my knowledge of what I know will work in order to get these colors working right together. So basically I'm taking a bit of the background color and adding to it to make whatever I want. But it's going to be the top of a green tree, I know that my background color has a lot of blue in it so that I had yellow to that bluey background color that is going to make a green.

I need the color to be lighter in value than the background as well. Adding a light color like yellow is going to do that for me, but if that doesn't make it quite light enough then I'm going to add some white to it as well. If I just keep adding yellow in some cases the green will turn into an unnatural sickly green. Adding white to any color mixture pushes it back towards the blue end of the spectrum. Now the color goes to light you just add back in its dark constituent colors. In this case you could just grab a little bit of the base color and add that into it. You are just mixing the two greens which are going to sit on top of the mid-ground cover on the hills which the waterfall is running down. The first green on the left of this pile is basically the shadow side of the trees where the light is striking directly so that just needs to be a green which is slightly lighter than its base color. The mixture on the right is a much brighter and lighter value green and densely green at the tops of the trees where the light is striking it.

Now I just do the same thing for Mount Manaia itself we are just taken a bit of its base color and moved it across, adding yellow to make green in the first place and then I will probably add some white to lighten it. The key to getting these relationships right between the colors in the families is to constantly check them. See how I'm going to check this pile's value against its parent. I've smoothed it out on the palette knife and then I holed up at the same angle just above the large pile and check the value. When you are checking a value like that a really handy thing to do is squint through your eyelashes. That tends to take a lot of the color out of what you are seeing. So if you do that you can they compare those two values fairly accurately. If you see that the two colors blend together then obviously they are the same value, but if you do their and one pops out then they are a different value.

Another way to check the values would be to look at the palette reflected in a black mirror which takes all the color out of it, or simply look at the palette through a digital camera and convert the image to black and white, which most digital cameras can do.

The color that I'm mixing here is the shadow color for the clouds in the sky and when I get into that I find that I need a light color for the clouds and so a mix that later on. So that's enough color mixing to begin with as we get in to the painting we'll just modify some of those colors to suit us.

Drawing

Now I'm just going to transfer my initial sketch onto the canvas using a raw to get in a nice straight horizon. Sometimes I use a paint brush to do the sketch but in this case its pencil - it doesn't really matter - just so long as you put the pencil on very lightly so doesn't show through any light layers of paint. One of the things I'm very careful to get correct is the placement and levelness of that first line which is a false horizon, being the bottom of the hill. The real horizon will be at eye level which will be about halfway between that straight line and the top of the waterfall.

Another thing I'm very careful to get right is the placement and angle of these reflections in this very

still water. They are just a tiny bit shorter than the hills which they are reflecting. That's because a few I was at water level those reflections would be exactly the same height as those hills but because your eye is not - it's about 10 feet above water level here - those reflections become shorter. As to elevate your eye level into the sky of those reflections should become shorter and shorter still until if you imagine you are right over the top with a bird's eye view you would be seeing no reflection at all.

I start to put in a little jetty here which in actual fact I paint over later. It's just a bit too fiddly for such a small painting and I replace it with a little strip of land. Now I'm just going to mark in the major rock formations on the front of Mount Manaia. Just keeping it very very simple. This is all going to get painted over so it's just a guide for me to begin painting with.

I normally draw quite a lot lighter with the pencil than this but for the sake of the video so that you can see it properly on the screen I've drawn it in quite dark which may result in the pencil showing through in the finished painting.

Painting!

Finally on to the painting! You can see that I've skipped a little bit ahead in the color mixing here and that for the sky here I have mixed a slightly warm sky color. That's in order to be able to paint over the top of that with the cooler sky color and just have a bit of variation in the sky which will make it shimmer and give it a bit more interest. All I did to mix the warm color was just mix a blue without using any pthalo blue because pthalo tends towards the green which is a cool blue and ultramarine which is a warm blue tends towards the red so I used the ultramarine to make that mixture.

I'm getting the paint on there as fast as I can with this 1 inch pastry brush and I'm also making this paint layer quite thin by adding a lot of painting medium into it. I'm using Chroma Archival Classic medium which has a drying time of about 24 hours. My basic painting method is thick over thin, fat over lean, and also light over dark. Thick over thin just means I use less painting medium and I use thicker painted as I paint over these thin base layers.

See how I'm leaving a space here between the blue of the sky and the shadow of the clouds leaving a space for the light color of the cloud to go in there. And that's just ensuring that this area will be very light and bright. Leaving that space allows the paint to do that rather than if I had painted over that and then had to paint over with the light cloud color it would have just mixed in a lot more and dulled down my highlight there.

Note the way I'm using the brush in a number of ways to create interesting textural effects. I'm using it straight on as you'd expect but then also flooding it over in using the edges. It would be very easy to want to blend these colors to much together but I'm just concentrating on leaving the brush strokes as visible as I can without making a too chunky. I believe that your brushstroke is your signature and if you hide that you are hiding one of your best assets.

I want the clouds to wrap around Mount Manaia somewhat and separate it from the mid-ground hill - to have it almost emerging from that mist or that cloud so I'm just painting in the cloud color there so that when I do paint in the background color next it will blend in really nicely with that cloud color. You can already see how that has started to pay off in the forming of that mist in front of Mount Manaia. Just moving to a smaller brush here for the details in the profile of that mountain. I find out here that the green color that I have mixed is not quite right - it's too dark, so it's too close in value to its base layer. It's also too vibrant so I just move over to the next layer and I'm just going to add some blue and

white to lighten that to tone it all back and see how that goes.

Just watch how I push the brush into the paint pile here. That just gets a wad of paint on the end of it which I can lay off onto the canvas. Now what I want to do is mix up a highlight color for the green there. It's really easy to overdo it with the highlights. I try to restrain myself from going overboard and just have one large highlight in one area.

Now what I'm going to do is mix at the sky shine color for the side of the mountain. As the mountain turns away from me the plans of the mountain become less and less perpendicular to my eye, so flatter and flatter to my eye and more apt to reflecting what's behind it.

Now I'll mix up the color for the rocks. Again, it's very close to the background color but it's just pushed one way or the other and in this case it is pushed towards brown or orange. I'm doing a little bit backwards here and I'm doing a light color of the rocks first. Now I'm just testing out that shadow color of the rocks. It could have a bit more blue in it, be a bit duller.

But again the real key to getting this color mixing right is getting the values is correct. I want the shadows of my rocks to be about the same value as the shadow of my trees. They highlight color of the rocks is very slightly lighter than highlight color of the trees. Because I've decided that my sunlight is coming from my upper right these rocks on the left will be in shadow. However, they will be reflecting the sky so that's why I've added some lighter blue into the left-hand side there. At the same time that's applying the concept that if you have a warm light source the shadows are going to be cool. Alternatively if you have a cool light source the shadows will be warm.

I'm going to do the highlight of the rocks here. See how I'm just pushing into that paint layer - getting a blob on the end, just laying off a couple of strokes just where I need it. Again, not overdoing it with the highlights - one major highlight and then a couple of supporting highlights. I'm just going to apply the major highlight with a palette knife so it goes on really thick and sharp and sparkles in a light. So that's pretty much it for that background. Now other than to the background and lay the dark parent color down first.

Noticed that I've left a white space for the white color of the waterfall and also that I'm using the same color for the reflections of the hill as the hill itself. That's not always the case - sometimes a reflection will be lighter and sometimes it will be darker depending on a lot of variables. In this case I just chose to keep the same, keep it simple. Here I'm just working on the dark color for the background of the headland. If you remember from before I said that I should have mixed the color along with the other bases but I didn't because in such a small painting in those colors are so close that I just left it to paint on the fly. So basically I just grabbed a little bit of the dark color from the foreground and applied it to that area.

Now I'm applying a lighter value for the mist coming off the waterfall and I'll do this in a couple of stages so that as it gets closer to the waterfall I add more and more light value. That's going to create a real glow surrounding that waterfall. Of course that glow gets reflected in the water as well. You can really see how versatile a large brush can be when you use it in a creative way. You really don't have to resort to smaller brushes until much later on. What I thought I would try and do here is give the appearance of light falling on that mist. It's a warm light that I've got in the painting so I'm just going to mix a light orange and then mix that up with my light waterfall color and see how that look son the painting. Now it's time to put some more detail into that waterfall. Normally by now I would have reloaded my brush with paint to keep the light color pure, but because I want the light value here to disappear in the mist as it travels down the waterfall I just keep painting into it and it naturally blends

into the colors behind it creating a nice gradation. No I'm going to start in on the mid-ground hill on the left. What I'm doing is just establishing the tops of the trees first before I go in and start painting the green on top of those. You'll notice that it's a very slightly lighter and bluer color that I'm using and that's to give the impression of light coming over the top of the hill. That's different to light touching the hill, or light shining on the top of the hill - this is more about light pushing past the edge of this hill. So if you get a light that is pushing past the edge of dark object in front of it that light and the color of that light tends to infuse the edge of that dark object.

Now it's time to put the light on the top of these hills in the mid-ground. I just have to bare in mind when I'm doing this that over the area on the left there I'm going to have the tree sitting on top of that in the foreground so I really want to keep this area subdues so that the tree can stand out and do its thing. To do that I'm just not going to have any big contrasts of value or color in that area. For the greenery for this headland I've just gone through a value which is very similar to what I was using in the hill just behind it but the saturation of the color has been bumped up slightly - it's got a tiny bit more yellow in it - and that will give the impression of it being less shrouded by the waterfall mist.

See how you can just roll the paint off the brush to create around top of a tree? Just putting in a few simple reflections now using pretty much the same color, just slightly darker and making sure that these vertical strokes are exactly vertically beneath the object which is being reflected. Now although the mid-ground isn't entirely finished I'm going to go ahead and start the foreground. Here I'm just laying in a very warm mixture right in the foreground which is going to be the basis of the rocks. Here's that little palette knife coming handy again to get some texture on the rocks.

Just trying to indicate some rocks here on the headland but as you'll see it doesn't really work out so I have to work over that later. So I'll start to draw in the tree now with that very dark mixture. I don't want to get this dark mixture mixed in to much with the wet paint that's in the background and lose the power of it's dark value so using a big brush here is a really good way to avoid that because using a large brush you are forced to do a minimum number of strokes which means that the potential for blending with the background is much less.

I'm back in the foreground here again with a very warm mixture which I'll apply to the foreground grasses. This is just to add warmth and interest there. See how often I reload my brush with color and how I'm just using upwards strokes to indicate the grass. As with all the previous layers of greenery I start with the dark tone of the shadowed foliage first and then apply the lighter tone on top of that. Finally resorting to a fine brush here to do some of the thinner branches. Here I've had the idea that the light on the rocks in the foreground should be reflected up underneath the bow of this tree. I just taken a fairly dark orangey green color and am applying that on the underside of the branches. Now I'm just applying a little more drama to the foreground here to support the idea that there is a sort of spot lit effect on this foreground area. I want some sharp little accents of grass in the foreground to bring interest here. I could have painted those in with a small brush but it seems to work fine just scratching those out with the back of a brush. What I'm going to do now is just simplify some of the area behind the tree so that it reads better so I'm just mixing up some of the color for the mid-ground hill again. Here I'm just adding a bit more of the waterfall mist into this hill here and what that's going to do is just help push out that headland a little bit and define it from it's background.

It's all looking pretty good now but let's just finish off the water in the foreground and add a bit of interest there as well. You'll notice that when I'm doing this I'm only either using vertical strokes or horizontal strokes in the water. Now for some highlights on the top of the branches. I'm using basically a warm grey mixture here and the value is at least a couple of steps lighter than the dark background which it is on. You can see over on the right there in front of the headland I've put in a quick jetty type

of thing but it really hasn't worked very well so I'll replace that later with a little strip of land. Meanwhile I'm using a very small brush here to mark in some highlights and see there how I just take a little lump off the top of a splodge of paint that I've collected onto the small palette knife. That's so I can get a very fine ridge of paint onto the brush which just drags off onto the weave of the canvas.

I just skipped ahead a wee bit there. All I've done is paint in a couple of little rocks in the water in the foreground as well as their reflections and a tiny bit of light play on top of the water as well. And now it's signing time! So there we go - the finished painting. It's quite a nice result for such a simply technique and it's quite rewarding to do a little painting in this style because it's such a fast thing to do and now that you know this technique you can apply that to any painting that you like which is in this style. Here's two other small paintings that I've done using exactly the same technique.

Summing Up

Just before we finish up I want to just go over what we've learned in the lesson today and that's just going to help you remember these things when it comes to applying them to your own painting.

Here's what we covered:

Studio Painting from Photography
- The pros and cons of studio painting
- Knowing the limitations of photography
- The importance of tonal preparatory sketches
- Limiting values for strong compositions
- Designing with plains of depth

color mixing
- using a reduced palette effectively
- mixing most of your colors first
- mixing color families
- modifying colors - warm and cool
- 3 ways to check values

Drawing
- finding the real horizon
- how reflections work

Painting
- creating vibrancy with warm and cool colors
- versatility of large brushes
- paint layering - thick over thin, light over dark
- paving the way for highlights
- painting soft mist/clouds
- effective brush technique
- restraining your highlights
- how a mountain can reflect the sky
- warm light, cool shadows
- using the palette knife for major highlights
- making an area glow with light
- how light infuses the edges of a foreground object
- subduing a background in preparation for a foreground object
- rolling the brush to make treetops
- painting realistic reflections
- creating texture with the palette knife
- avoiding muddy colors by using a large brush
- painting grass easily
- painting reflected light
- scratching fine detail
- using only vertical and horizontal strokes for still water

It's been my pleasure to share with you today and I wish you the best of luck with your painting.
So till next time, happy painting.

To get the best value out of these lessons I really encourage you to post a photo of your finished painting on the forum on my blog where you can compare results with other artists and discuss your other work, get critiques and encouragement - basically being part of a fun bunch of people who are keen on painting better and better. Find the blog on http://www.thecompleteartist.ning.com.
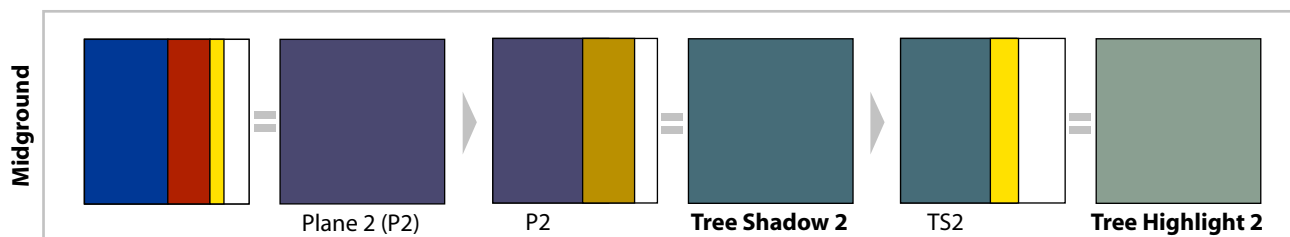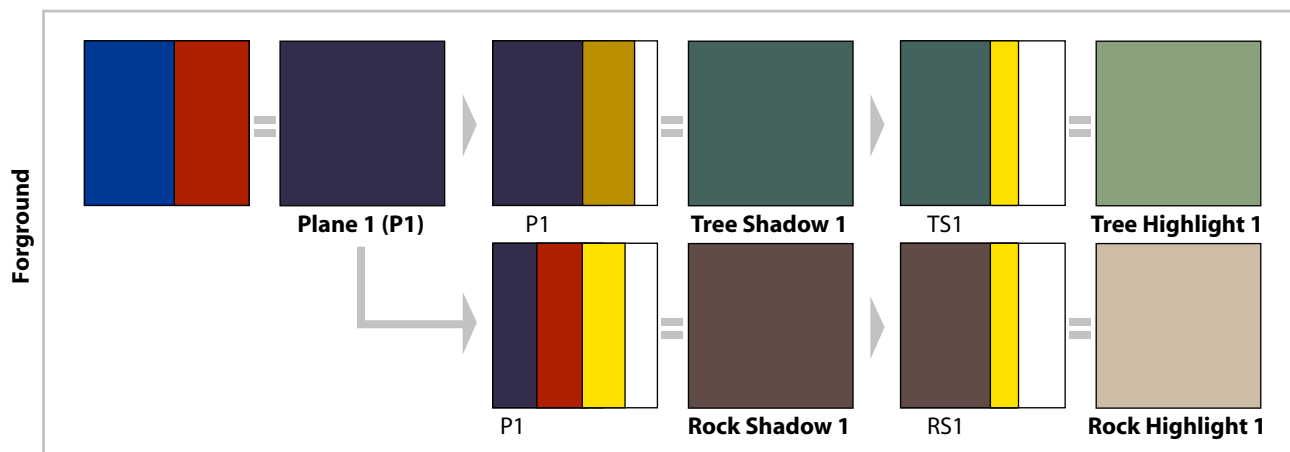If you do join the blog I will see you there.

Kind Regards,
Richard

Photo reference

The Finished Painting -   (10x10")

RICHARD ROBINSON'S Master Class

Mount Manaia
COLOR MIXING CHART

| Ultramarine Blue | Phtalo Blue | Cadmium Red Mid | Yellow Ochre | Cadmium Yellow Mid | Titanium White |

Forground

Plane 1 (P1) > P1 = Tree Shadow 1 > TS1 = Tree Highlight 1

P1 = Rock Shadow 1 > RS1 = Rock Highlight 1

Midground

Plane 2 (P2) > P2 = Tree Shadow 2 > TS2 = Tree Highlight 2

Farground

Plane 3 (P3) > P3 = Tree Shadow 3 > TS3 = Tree Highlight 3

P3 = Rock Shadow 3 > RS3 = Rock Highlight 3

Sky

Warm Sky

Cool Sky

Cloud Shadow
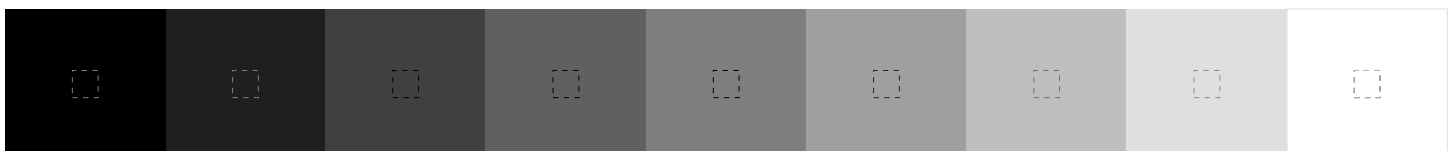
Cloud Highlight

http://www.livepaintinglessons.com

Value Scale - cut on the dotted lines. View your subject through the holes to gauge the relative values.