

A simple five step painting process.



There are many benefits in having a set painting procedure to follow.

- A set process, gives confidence, direction and more consistent results.
- Nothing important gets forgotten and mistakes can be avoided.
- Because of repetition, key principles and techniques are likely to be mastered more quickly.

The strength of this five step approach is it solves one set of problems at a time, instead doing everything at once. It also an approach that works for all types of subjects: landscape, still life, and portraits.

The five steps are-

- Preparation;
- Composition;
- Tonal relationships;
- Colour
- Detail.

1. Preparation – Pre-painting decisions.

Preparation solves problems before a painting is even begun. Make it part of the plan.

It includes choosing what you are going to paint, what you are painting on, deciding what you want to say about the subject and planning the composition.

Thumbnail sketches are an excellent tool to use to encourage close observation of the subject, to clarify thoughts about composition and plan the tonal pattern of the painting.

Thumbnails are not detailed drawings, They need be no bigger than a credit card, and should only take a few minutes to do.

Questions to ask when planning are –

- What shall I paint?
- Why do I want to paint this subject? What do I want this painting to convey?
- What format will best suit the painting - Horizontal, vertical or square?
- What should be included and what should be left out?

2. Composition / Drawing The second step is a line drawing to establish the composition.

This can be done with chalk or with thinned paint and a brush. The drawing does not have to be detailed; it need only establish the position and shape of major elements within the painting and any direction lines.

3. Tone. The third step is a monochromatic underpainting, a map to establish the tonal relationships. Almost any dark or mid tone colour can be used for this step, Relatively neutral colours, like Paynes Grey, Raw Sienna or Burnt Sienna are particularly suitable, as they are likely to fit with whatever other colours are used.

A simple way to judge relative tones is to squint. Looking at a reference or subject through half closed eyes causes details to disappear as they merge into larger tonal shapes. Without worrying about the detail or even what the subject is, by painting the shape and tone the subject will be captured.

4. Colour

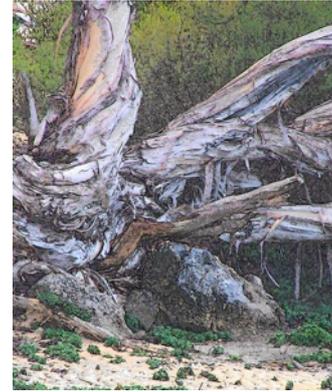
In the fourth step, colour is added on top of the dry monochromatic underpainting, carefully matching the tonal pattern already established.

The colours can be true to the subject, or artistic licence used and alternatives chosen. The choice of colours is nowhere near as important as matching the tones.

5. Detail / Finishing off

In the last step final details are added and any needed refinements or adjustments are made. Detail is the icing on the cake, best left until everything else is finished. More is not necessarily better. What is left out of a painting is just as important as what is included.

Demonstration - Five Step Approach



Step 1. - Preparation

Pre painting decisions:

The reference is cropped, a vertical format chosen and the composition and basic tonal pattern worked out with a thumbnail sketch.



Step 2 – Composition

The composition is established with a line drawing using paint thinned with water.



Stage 3 – Tone

A single colour, Raw Sienna, is used to map the tonal relationships of the various shapes that make up the composition: thin, transparent washes for the lightest tones; thick paint for the dark tones.



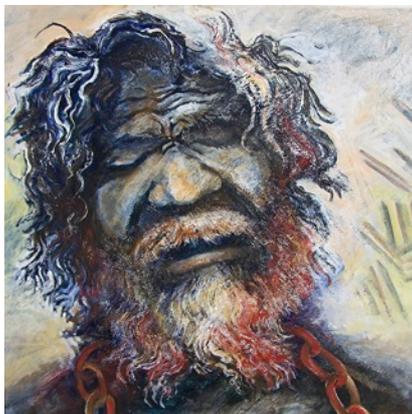
Stage 3 - Colour

Colour is added, aiming to match the tones already established. The underpainting is not covered completely. Some of the Raw Sienna is allowed to remain visible, which creates variety and unifies the painting.



Stage Five – Detail/Finishing Off

In the final stage the liner brush is used for detail. Some of the dark areas are strengthened and highlights are added, increasing contrast and helping to create a focal area.



As can be seen from the examples, these same five steps can be used for painting any sort of subject.

When working on a dark canvas use white to establish tonal relationships.