

Painting in Layers Process by Marie Massey



Process: Painting in Layers, Oil over Acrylic

1. Find a place to paint and pick your subject. Then identify your **focal point**. Take a photo to capture the light and shadows when you start.
2. **Give yourself up to 15 minutes to do a Small Sketch:** start with a small sketch in your drawing sketch pad. Use your view finder and adjust it to match the proportions of your canvas. Draw a sketch starting from your focal point first. Place your focal point according to the golden mean. Concurrently decide where your horizon line will be. Your horizon line is where the land or water meet the sky. In the case of a still – life, the horizon is where the vertical plane meets the horizontal plane. Place it one third the way from the top of your canvas or one third the way up from the bottom of your canvas. Squint to see the main dark and light masses that make up your composition.
3. **First two layers in Acrylic:** Set up your acrylics: White, pink, medium pink and Alizarin crimson, yellow, orange, deep red, light blue, medium blue and dark blue, light green, medium green and viridian. Use a round brush and dark red and sketch your composition onto the canvas using your sketch and the actual scene as reference.
4. Paint in your values – dark, medium and light. Start with your darks. Squint to see them. Use your dark red paint and an open stroke, like an M. Vary the direction of your M stroke. Go through your sketch lines.
5. The first and second layers will be in acrylic in the complementary colors to the final colors. Landscapes are mostly green and blue unless you are painting flowers or warm earth or rocks. So if your final colors will be cool – either blue, green or purple- you will underpaint them with warm colors but in the same value. Move on to your medium values using your orange where your ultimate color will be a medium value cool. Your sky will in

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most cases be the lightest value. Move to your yellow underpainting the sky and light greens and blues. Now move to underpaint what will ultimately be your warms like redish earth, warm colored grasses or boulders, maybe an adobe structure. You will use your cool acrylics to underpaint these ultimate warms. Start with your darks, move to mediums and then lightest values.

6. **RESKETCH, REMEASURE, ADJUST** – use your brush to check angles and relative sizes, move things around and do a new sketch in a color that you can see.

7. Now go in with your next layer of underpainting in complementary colors. Use your open M stroke and go through the lines of your sketch. In this layer you will use your dark red, medium red or pink and light pink under what will ultimately your cool colors and your light green, medium green and viridian under what will ultimately be your warm colors. At this point your entire canvas should be covered.

8. **Last layer in oils:** Now it is time to start painting in oils! Be sure to use your open M stroke! You want that beautiful acrylic color to come through. Set up your palette: lemon yellow, medium yellow, cad orange, light red, medium red, deep red, alizarin crimson, cerulean blue, cobalt blue, ultramarine blue, thalo yellow green, cad green, permanent green light, sap green and viridian, burnt umber, yellow ochre and white. I use and recommend Galkyd Painting Medium from Gamblin. It speeds drying and adds flow to your paints. You can also make your own medium with 1/3 damar varnish, 1/3 turpentine and 1/3 linseed oil premixed. You can also mix greens instead of having a tube for each variant.

9. Put in your darks - make a black using burnt umber and ultramarine blue. (if you ad white to this it also make a beautiful gray) Use your open M stroke to put in your darks.

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10. Now follow with your medium and light value cools.

11. Take this opportunity to re-evaluate your painting and adjust and resketch. Now follow with your dark medium and light value warms.

12. DETAIL! – the fun part, draw in those leaves, grasses in the foreground, do your descriptive strokes and play with your edges. In general your edges should be sharper in the foreground and softer in the back ground. Colors should be higher chroma (pure color) in the foreground and lighter value and grayer as you go back.

Remember that it is never too late to make an adjustment and change things with a sketch or wipe out. Sometimes wiping out and then repainting can add to the beauty of your final product.