

# Marie Massey Plein Air Painting Workshops



Marie Massey Fine Art  
*painting the beauty of everyday*

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## Tips: Painting in Layers, Oil Landscape

1. **Dress for success.** Plein air painting is like a sport. You have to be prepared to deal with all the elements: wind, sun, bugs, cold, hot so: Dress in layers, light colors are good and bring a hat, comfortable supportive shoes and sunscreen and bug spray.
2. **Keep your canvas and palette in the shade if possible,** not direct sunlight. If the sun is shining on your palette, it is difficult to see the colors of your paint and if the sun is shining on your canvas, the tendency is to gray down your color too much.
3. **Squint!** at your painting and at the scene that you are painting. Squinting will help you see the main changes in value and primary shapes. Squinting will help you visually eliminate the details and simplify.
4. **Get Your Darks In First** or you will lose them. In plein air painting with oils, you are painting wet into wet and it is near impossible to paint in a dark value over a wet lighter value. Dark values create the structure or composition of the painting.
5. **Distance:** Use the concepts of Atmospheric and Linear Perspective to create a sense of distance and space. Atmospheric Perspective is the

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understanding that in a landscape things get grayer and lighter in value as they get further away, so if you want something to "go back", lighten up the value and gray it down. A critical Linear Perspective concept is the idea that subjects decrease in relative size as they get further away.

6. **Shadows** can make a painting. There are Form Shadows and Cast shadows. Good shadows are found in the morning and afternoon. As the sun moves across the sky so cast shadows lengthen and shorten. Form shadows are also more apparent as there is a clear light side and dark side to the subjects in your painting. In order to keep true to your first impressions, shadows included, make a small sketch in a sketch pad. Use it as reference throughout your plein air painting session. Like other masses, cast shadows get lighter in value, less crisp, and less colorful or more blue as they go further into the distance. Shadows are warmest and darkest toward the base of the tree that is casting them, for example, and get cooler and lighter in value as they extend out.
7. **Values:** Everything has a dark side and a light side. Think about this as you put in your large masses.
8. **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.
9. **Color Unity:** When you mix and use a certain color, resist the urge to immediately wipe off your brush and go for the next color. See where else in your painting you can use this particular color. This will help with color harmony in your painting.
10. **Reflections:** When painting water, remember to paint your reflections especially in still water like a lake or pond. Paint your ground, flora and fauna and then paint with the same colors in the water. In order to give the impression of water, add horizontal stress lines on the surface of the water. If your water is dark in value, use light value stress lines, If your water is light in value you can use dark value stress lines.

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Reflections are the inverted image of the subject you are painting. They are the same distance from the surface as the subject so their proportions are the same. Reflections of light colored masses may have the same tones but they are darker in value and dark shapes have a lighter reflection in the water.

- 11. Edges:** In nature, there are almost no hard edges or sharp lines. What you see around natural shapes are the boundaries between the object and the space around it. If you define it with a distinctive line, it looks harsh.

The best approach is to mix up your edges. A hard edge will bring the eye's attention to it, a soft edge will recede from the eye.

- 12. Painting the sky:** With the exception of clouds, the sky is almost always the lightest value in your scene. It graduates from lightest value and warmer in temperature at the horizon and gradually gets deeper in value as it gets further up from the horizon. Even at it's deepest value, it is still lighter in value than the ground plane and anything that stands on the ground like trees or structures.

- 13.** Remember to treat the landscape or seascape as your inspiration. Allow it to teach you things, but do not be a slave to it. Take artistic license.