

# Introduction

*The beauty and versatility of oil painting have captivated artists for centuries. Today the high-quality oil paints available are a result of extensive research and practical experimentation.*

Now anyone can go to an art store and purchase ready-made oil colours, but a long time ago artists had to find pigments from nature, such as clay, roots, and berries, and grind them into powder. The powdered colour was then combined with a drying vegetable oil and used as finished oil paint. It wasn't until 15th-century Europe that the use of oil-based colour became increasingly popular with artists such as Raphael and Titian. Over the years, many improvements have been made, and oil paint has continued to be an incredibly popular medium.

Modern oil paints have evolved into powdered pigments combined with a drying oil, such as linseed, safflower, or nut. This oil additive has a number of functions: (1) it protects the pigment from moisture and harmful particles, (2) it allows the pigment to flow evenly, (3) it adheres the pigment to the surface yet keeps it pliant, (4) it enhances the depth and tone of the colour and (5) it helps prevent the pigment from becoming brittle with age.

Although there are many approaches to oil painting, the most common approach is to sketch the drawing on the painting surface first. This initial sketch can be done with

thinned oil paint, water colour, or a drawing tool such as charcoal, carbon, or pencil. After blocking in the subject, some artists apply a thin undercolour over the drawing to set the colour scheme.

Once all the preliminary work is done, the actual painting begins. Oil paint is well-suited to a variety of painting styles, from extremely detailed, photorealistic work to loose, colourful impressionistic paintings. And oil is an incredibly forgiving and versatile medium—its slow drying time and rich colours make it a perfect medium for beginning artists.

You'll find lessons in the book from two artists who each use a distinctive approach to oil painting. The differences in their approaches demonstrate some of the various methods and processes of creating an oil painting from start to finish. Follow along with each exercise closely, and then experiment with the approaches and techniques you've learned on your own. We hope you will enjoy this book and find it a source of guidance and inspiration as you explore the art of oil painting.



# Tools and Materials

## Oil Paints

You don't need to purchase every colour you see; you can mix just about any colour you wish from just a few basic colours. In the Step-by-Step guide, the project was painted with a limited palette of nine colours. (See next page for more on working with a limited palette.) Reeves packages oil colours in convenient sets that provide all the colours you will need.

## Mediums

Oil mediums are used to alter the consistency of oil paints—to thin the paint when it gets dry and stiff and for glazing and underpainting. A variety of mediums are available to oil painters; some help speed the drying time, while others add a glossier finish to the paint or help preserve the pigment and keep it from cracking with age. Linseed oil is a popular choice; it helps create a buttery consistency in your paint, and it is helpful for thinning out paint when building up layers of colour.

## Brushes

Oil painting brushes can vary greatly in size, shape, and texture; Reeves manufactures a variety of brushes to choose from. Soft-hair flats can be used to create soft, blended strokes. Soft-hair rounds hold a point, and they allow you to vary the widths of your strokes. Brights have shorter bristles, making them good for more aggressive brushwork. Stiff, bristle-hair filberts are flat brushes with slightly rounded tips and are good for applying a lot of paint and for creating texture. Small liner brushes are well-suited to fine detail work, and a fan brush is designed for glazing with thin paint or creating soft blends.

## Brush Care

It's important to clean your brushes thoroughly after each painting session. If the paint sits in the brushes for an extended period of time, the bristles become damaged and cannot be restored to their original condition. First clean your brushes with thinner (such as turpentine or mineral spirits). Then squeeze the brushes dry with a cloth rag or paper towels; when no more colour runs from the brushes, wash them several times with soap and lukewarm water. Then reshape the bristles with your fingers and lay the brushes flat to dry; store them bristle-side up.

## Palettes and Palette Knives

Palettes are used for laying out paint and mixing colours. They're available in various shapes, sizes, and materials—from ceramic and plastic to metal and glass. Whatever palette you choose, just make sure it's easy to clean and large enough for mixing colours. Palette and painting knives can be used either to mix paint on your palette or as tools for applying paint to your canvas. Painting knives have a smaller, diamond-shaped head, while palette (mixing) knives have longer, more rectangular blades.



**SUPPLIES** Since 1766, Reeves has been manufacturing excellent-quality paints and brushes and has long been established around the world as a wonderful source of art material for beginner s.

## Painting Surfaces

The surface you paint on is called the “support.” Canvas is probably the most common surface for oil paints. You can stretch canvas yourself, but it's simpler to purchase pre-stretched, preprimed canvas (stapled to a frame) or canvas board (canvas glued to a cardboard) in standard sizes. The texture of canvas—called the “tooth”—can range from a smooth, dense weave to a rougher, loose weave. But you don't need to limit yourself to painting on canvas. Other materials can be used as supports, but some may need some preparation (see “Priming Your Support” on next pages).

# Using a Limited Palette

A limited palette is one that contains a simple, uncomplicated combination of paints. With a basic palette, you can learn to mix a variety of colours without muddying the entire mix. Although you can add other colours to your palette, using too many colours can make your mixtures confusing, jarring, or dulled. Before starting the exercises in this book, test the suggested colours on a separate sheet of paper to become acquainted with their characteristics. Keep the mixes simple and try not to overblend. When colours are overblended, they lose their lively look and appear less chromatic. When blending or mixing a small amount of colour with a brush, always use the tip and do not press down hard into the mix. This prevents the colour from riding up into the brush and losing the mix. If you need to mix a larger pile of paint, use a palette knife.

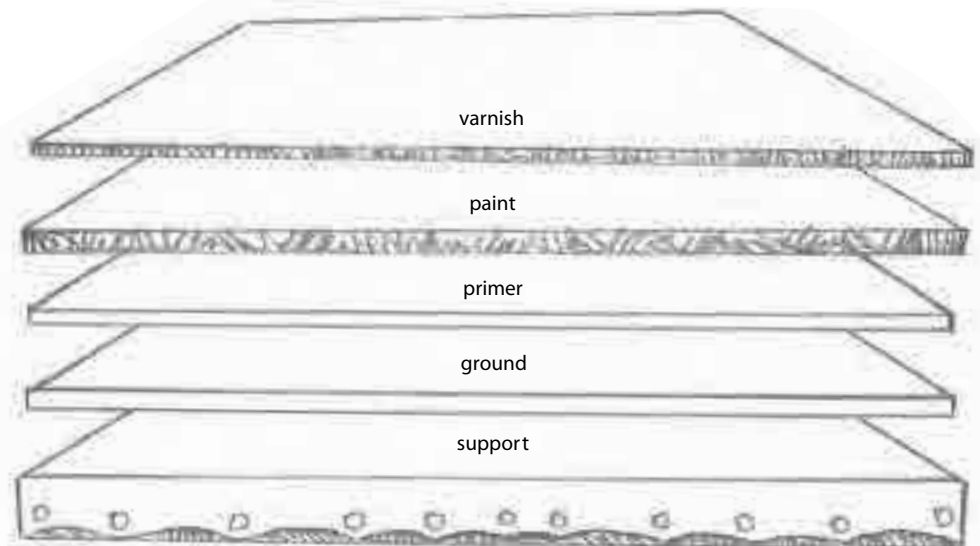


**BASIC PALETTE** The suggested paints for the projects in this book are burnt umber, crimson, lemon yellow, phthalocyanine (phthalo) blue, ultramarine blue, and titanium white.

## *Priming Your Support*

You can apply oil paint to just about any kind of support—canvas, glass, wood, cardboard, paper, even metal. You just need to apply a primer to give the oils something to stick to and to prevent the paint from shrinking, peeling, or cracking. Most oil painting supports are preprimed and ready to use, but it is easy to prime your own supports. Gesso—a polymer product with the same base ingredients as acrylic paint—is a great coating material because it primes and seals at once. It's also fast-drying and is available at any art supply store. Use a standard 1/8" pressed-wood panel from the lumber store, and sandpaper its surface until the shine is gone. Then apply two or three coats of gesso, sanding the surface in between coats and using both horizontal and vertical strokes for even coverage and to give the surface some texture.

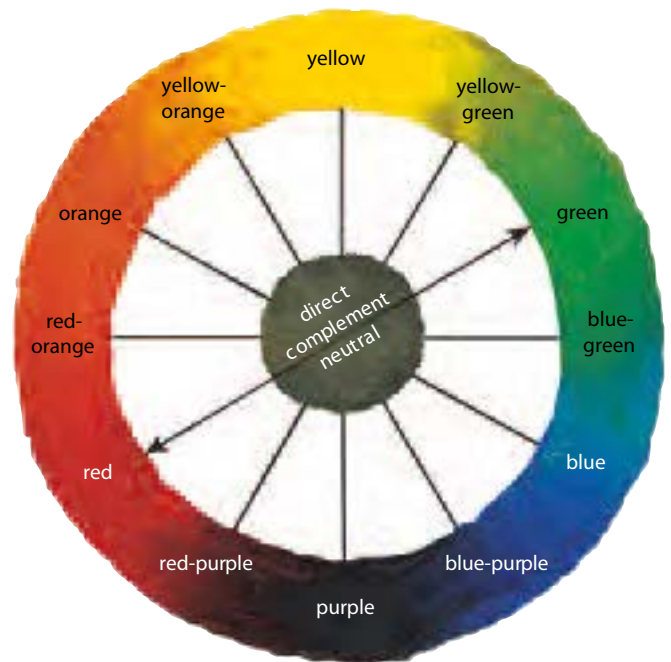
**BUILDING AN OIL PAINTING** There are several basic elements—or layers—to creating an oil painting. The layers include: (1) the support—the actual material that the painting is made on; (2) the ground—an enhancer between the paint and the support to ensure the paint adheres well; (3) the primer—a thin layer of paint that is applied to assist the bonding of the actual painting to the support and the ground; (4) the actual layers of paint; and (5) the protective coating of varnish.





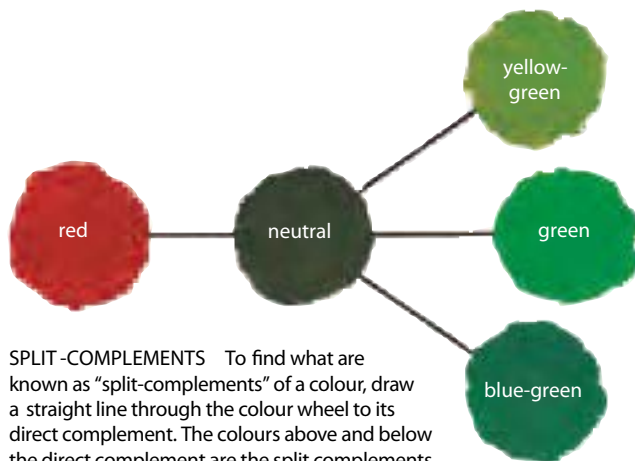
# Using Colour

Knowing a little about colour theory will help you tremendously in mixing colours. All colours are derived from just three *primary* colours—red, yellow, and blue. (The primaries can't be created by mixing other colours.) *Secondary* colours (orange, green, purple) are each a combination of two primaries, and *tertiary* colours (red-orange, red-purple, yellow-orange, yellow-green, blue-green, blue-purple) are the results of mixing a primary with a secondary. *Hue* refers to the colour itself, such as red or green, and *intensity* means the strength of a colour, from its pure state (straight from the tube) to one that is *grayed* or diluted. *Value* refers to the relative lightness or darkness of a colour. (By varying the values of your colours, you can create depth and form in your paintings.) *Complementary* colours are any two colours directly across from each other on the colour wheel (such as purple and yellow or orange and green). When placed next to each another in a painting, complementary colours create lively, exciting contrasts.



**MIXING NEUTRALS** There aren't many pure colours in nature, so you have to learn how to neutralize your oil colours. Direct complements can "gray" each other better than any other colours; mixing equal amounts of two complements results in a natural, neutral gray. But there are so many neutrals that you'll need to go beyond using only complements. The chart below shows how to create a range of grays and browns.

**COLOUR WHEEL** A colour wheel (or pigment wheel) is a useful reference tool for understanding colour relationships. Knowing where each colour lies on the wheel makes it easy to understand how colours relate to and react with one another. Whether they're opposite one another or next to one another will determine how they react in a painting—which is an important part of evoking mood in your paintings.



**SPLIT-COMPLEMENTS** To find what are known as "split-complements" of a colour, draw a straight line through the colour wheel to its direct complement. The colours above and below the direct complement are the split complements. Split complements "gray" each other in a slightly different way than direct complements do; they are used to create subtle colour changes and allow for a wider range of colour planning and mixing.

**ANALOGOUS COLOURS** Any three colours adjacent to one another on the colour wheel (for example, yellow-orange, yellow, and yellow-green, as shown at right) are analogous. And because analogous colours are similar, they create a sense of unity or colour harmony when used together in a painting.



# Colour Creates Mood

Colours are often discussed in terms of “temperature,” but that doesn’t refer to actual heat. An easy way to understand colour temperature is to think of the colour wheel as divided into two halves: The colours on the red side are considered *warm*, while the colours on the blue side are considered *cool*. As such, colours with red or yellow in them appear warmer. For example, if a normally cool colour (like green) has more yellow added to it,

it will appear warmer; and if a warm colour (like red) has a little more blue, it will seem cooler. Temperature also affects the feelings colours arouse: Warm colours generally convey energy and excitement, whereas cooler colours usually evoke peace and calm. This explains why bright reds and yellows are used in many children’s play areas and greens and blues are used in schools and hospitals.



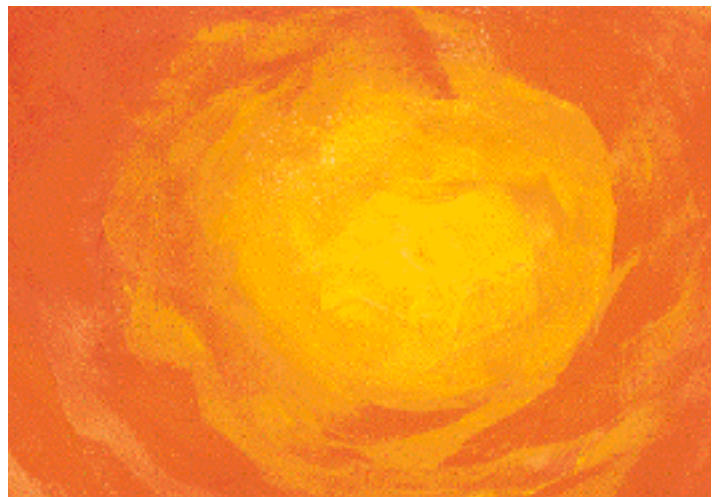
**NOISE** When pure complementary colours are used next to one another, they are loud and unsettling.



**MYSTERY** Purples and blues can create a mystical, mysterious feeling.



**COOLNESS** Light, cool colours elicit a calm, serene feeling.



**WARMTH** Yellows, reds, and oranges suggest warmth.



# Painting Techniques

Although a brush is a standard tool for artists, there are many other tools you can use and special effects possible in oil painting. A palette knife, a rag, a sponge, and even your finger can be used to create texture and highlights in a painting.



**DEPTH** You can create the illusion of atmosphere and depth by adding sky colour into the green values of the distant trees. Use loose, softened brush strokes to paint them. For the foreground trees, apply darker mixtures, establishing the general forms first. Then paint details over them, simulating leaf and foliage shapes.



**DARK OVER LIGHT** This example and the one at right show the same colours on different backgrounds. Colours seem darker on the light background because there is more contrast.



**LIGHT OVER DARK** Here the same colours used on the left are painted on a darker background. Notice that these colours appear lighter than those in the previous example.

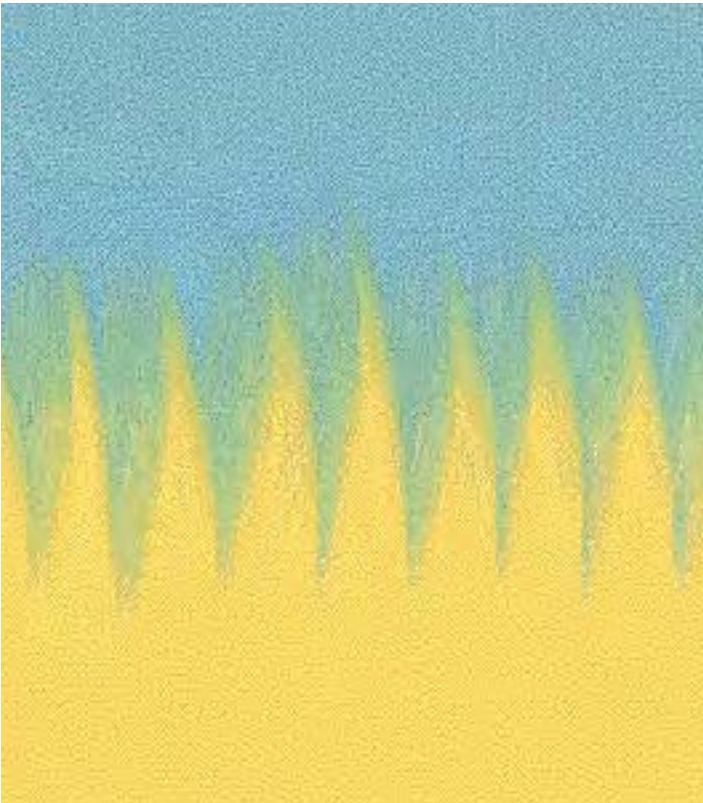




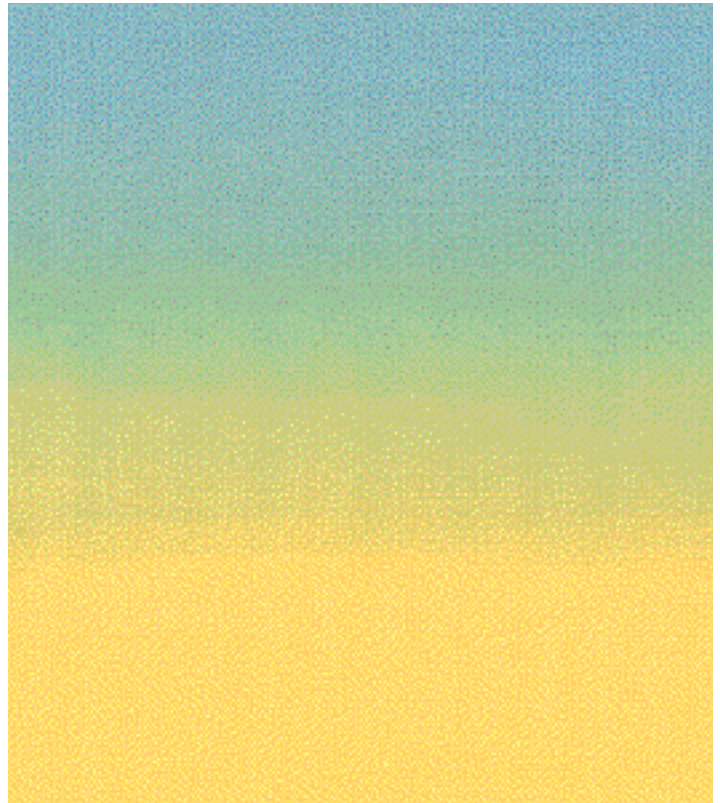
**DRY BRUSH** This woodgrain effect was created with a dry brush technique. Load a dry brush with thick paint (no paint thinner) and lightly drag it across the canvas to create broken, textured strokes.



**THICK PAINT** To make this loose blend, load the paint onto the brush and apply it fairly thickly, continuously changing colour mixtures and stroke directions. This is a good technique for painting backgrounds.

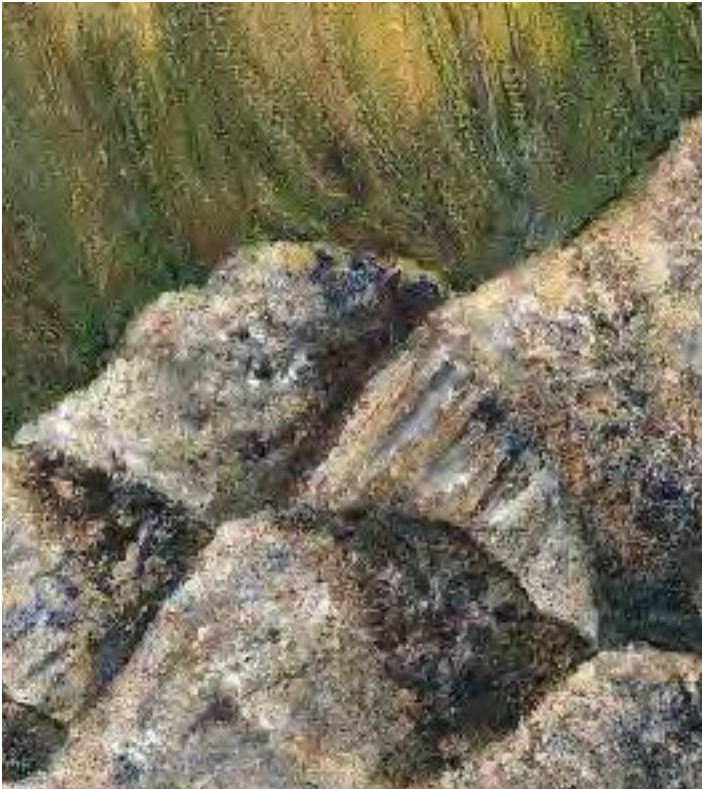


**SAWTOOTH BLEND—STEP ONE** For a smooth, even blend, paint two colours next to each other; then use a flat brush to pull the two colour together in a zigzag motion.



**SAWTOOTH BLEND—STEP TWO** After making the sawtooth pattern, move the brush horizontally back and forth to blend the colours evenly. Use this blending technique for large sky and water areas.





**SPONGE** Use a sponge to render a rough, mottled texture; here a variety of different colours are sponged on in layers, creating the illusion of granite.



**STIPPLE** Stippling is useful for rendering shimmering reflections or masses of flowers. Hold a stiff bristle brush very straight, bristle side down. Then dab the colour on quickly, creating a series of small dots.



**SPATTER** Spattering is great for rendering sand or stone. Use a thin, soupy mixture of paint and thinner and an old brush or toothbrush. Load the brush with the mixture; then tap the brush or use your thumb to spray the desired area with spattered paint.

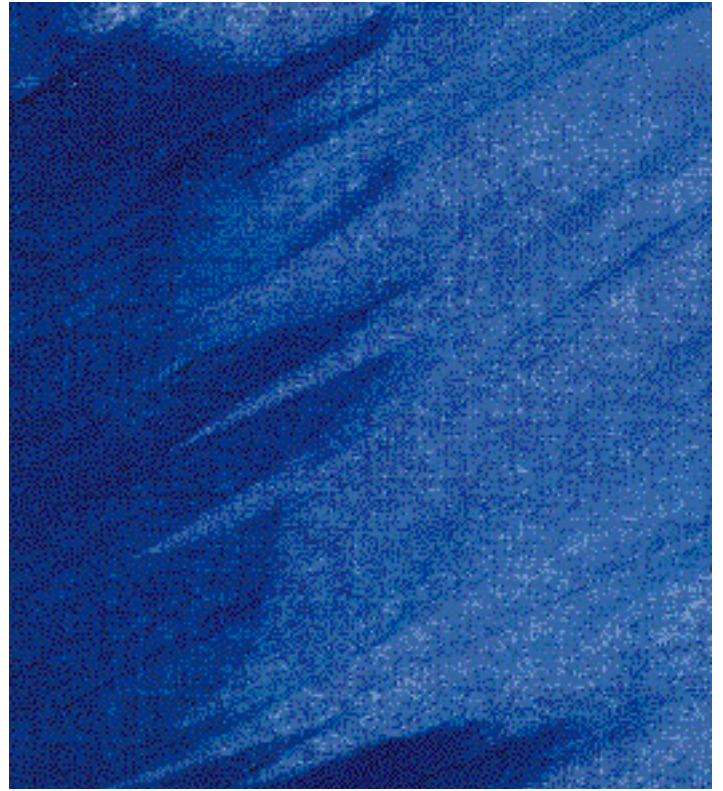


**SCUMBLE** You can add texture resembling earth to an area by scumbling, or lightly dragging a brush with a little paint on it over an area that's already dry. Don't overdo it; the underlying layer should show through to create a believable texture.





**THIN WASH** Mixing paint with a little turpentine creates a soupy mixture that you can use to quickly block in large shapes and background areas.



**WIPING OUT** To lighten a colour or to remove excess paint, use a rag, a clean brush, or even your finger to “wipe out” colour while the paint is still wet.



**SCRAPE** Use the side or edge of a palette knife to scrape colour away. This will reveal the colour underneath, and it is a simple way to depict grains and grasses.



**HIGHLIGHTS** To create highlights and shadows on mounds of snow, first lay in the blue and purple shadow areas. Then, with the edge of the flat brush, paint the highlights with more pastel mixtures of colour.





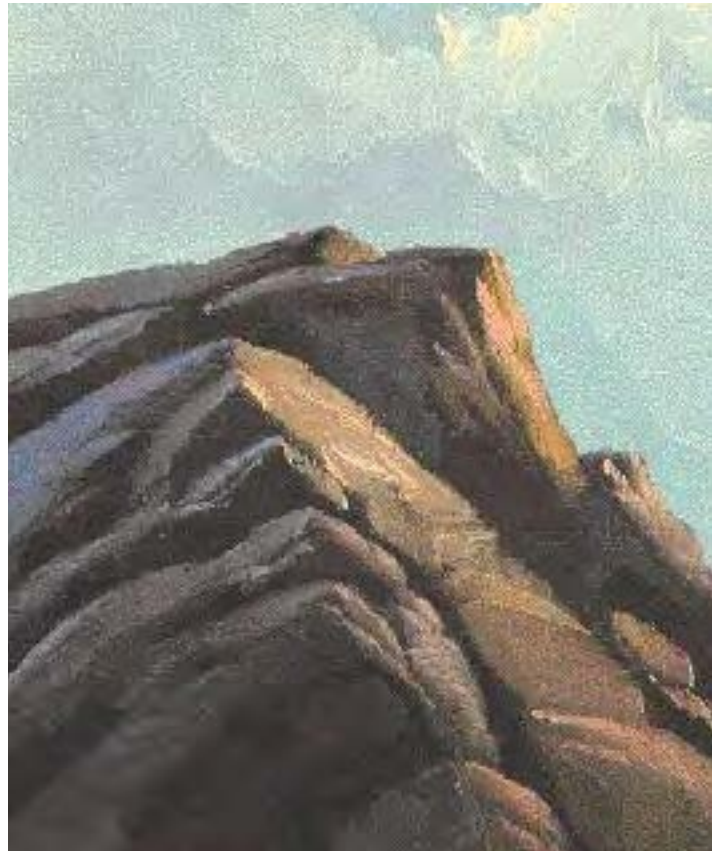
**FOLIAGE** To create the appearance of bushes and foliage, load a flat brush with paint and gently push it repeatedly in an upward motion. Paint the darker values first; then add the lighter colours.



**PUDDLES** Puddles in a road or pathway are excellent landscape elements.



**BARK** To imitate bark texture, paint the tree trunk with dark brown. Then use white, yellow, and crimson in short, vertical strokes to add the illusion of dappled sunlight.



**MOUNTAINS** To paint this rock formation, use a dark brown to lay in the overall masses. Mix white, yellow, and crimson to create the rough texture and add highlights.





**CLOUDS** To paint cloud forms, allow some of the background sky colour to mix into the shadow areas to create depth.



**DETAILS** The point of a round brush can be used to draw details such as leaves, branches, and grasses. For a bushy texture, lay the brush on its side, and use a stamping motion.



**GLAZING** This is an example of glazing, or stroking over a dry layer of paint with a thinner layer to build up colour. Thin your paint with medium, and drag a soft brush lightly over the area.