

# A Focus On Reflections

## North Wyong June 2014

### Workshop Notes

#### Day 1:

#### Introduction:

We discussed what we know about reflections:

- Reflections are all about the light!
- Almost everything reflects light.
- Exemptions are - things that absorb light (not many things!)

Most of the time people aren't aware of the nuance and all-pervading aspects of reflections. Uncovering and painting reflections will make your paintings amazing.

Your job is not necessarily to recreate nature, but to give people access to the discoveries you've made. You get to exaggerate what's really there, and play and dance.

We discussed how our brains work. That is, we can leave out information (think "the cat sat on on the mat x"), and still create a convincing painting. You can represent things without putting in every tiny detail and nuance - people's brains will do the rest.

We don't fully process all the information. We stop looking, because we think we already know. Forget that you know - look at everything like you're a brand new person, with a sense of wonder.

Everywhere you go now, you'll see reflections. Keep asking questions, peeling back the layers. When you've found all the information, then you can decide what information to include (or not).

**TIP: Your job is to go and look carefully at everything!**

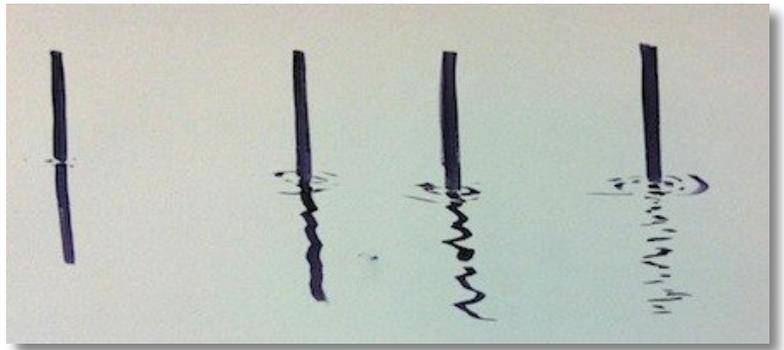
**TIP: When painting from photos, try and observe the same scene in real life as well, at the same time of day. You will notice many things that when represented in your painting will give it real life, zest and pop.**

We talked about painting reflections in the context of water - and that because water is highly reflective it is easier to find reflections, but sometimes harder to paint them.

We talked about the two elements of water that affect the “reflectivity” of water

- The Surface
- The Light

The angle of your eye relative to the surface of the water, and to the light will affect the appearance of these two things.



The wind or the surface of the water affects the reflections, let's investigate that.

Glassy - no wind = mirror

When you think about the shape of the surface of the water, you will understand reflections on water. The surface of the water relative to your eye will determine how much reflection you see.

**TIP: Water is made up of windows and mirrors!**

**TIP: Generally, shadows will point towards (or away from) the light, reflections will point towards you (or the viewer).**

Imagine a bendy mirror, what will happen if you fold the corners in? The image will be distorted vertically. When you understand how the mirror has been shaped, then you can understand what it's going to do to the reflection.



Windy = lots of little concaves. We investigated the concaves, and how light hits them. We discussed that towards the bottom of the concave, light would be reflected from the higher part of the sky. Towards the top and flattest parts relative to your eye, the lower part of the sky would be reflected. We used French Ultramarine Blue and White as our “default settings” for the lower (warmer) sky reflection, and added a touch of Pthalo to reflect the higher (cooler) sky.



To demonstrate this Mark painted a water scene with very little wind, and smooth undulating waves. To highlight this, he added to the top of the wave, the reflection of trees in the background.

Mark then introduced his concept of “default settings” or “paint recipes”.

### Default Settings - Paint Recipes:

#### Tropical Water:

Cadmium Yellow Light  
Pthalo Blue  
Titanium White

#### Warm Summer Skies:

French Ultramarine Blue  
Titanium White  
Pthalo Blue (add a little as you get higher in the sky)

#### Trees & Foliage:

Dioxazine Purple  
Cadmium Yellow Medium  
Forest Green  
Titanium White

#### Sand:

Cadmium Yellow Medium  
Dioxazine Purple  
Titanium White

### Now - to paint!

Your palette is your workspace, and your canvas is where the magic happens. Take the time to do your working out on the palette before you make a mark on your canvas. Your palette is almost as important as your painting. Keep your workspace free and this will increase your confidence level when painting, and decrease your paranoia about making an error - making you a “freer” painter. Yay!

We started tomorrow’s painting, and blocked in our canvas.



Mark introduced his theory of painting, that is the bow and arrow approach. Fire your first shot, and make adjustments. Fire your second shot, and make adjustments. You can trick yourself that your entire painting is just a blocking in process, and before you know it you'll be painting with freedom.

This part of the process is designed to give you somewhere to go. Is the colour that you mixed for the water right? Are the shapes of the trees ok? Are you happy with the way the leaves are bending? Great. Continue. If not, use the colours and shapes as a reference to make changes. Having that first colour down, means at least you won't do that next time. One step closer.



### **Refraction technique:**

The refraction process is what happens when the light hits the surface of the water and creates shapes of patterned light on the substrate. Refraction is affected by the depth of the water. Hold your small brush on the side and from the front, parallel to the canvas, and loosely between your thumb and forefinger (or fingers) roll it back and forth, and up and down to create a series of loose diamond - irregular flat rectangles.

With the surface of the water relatively glassy, the refraction pattern will be more subtle. So use the tropical water colours you mixed previously (Pthalo Blue, Cadmium Yellow Medium & White) to create broken flecks and lines here and there.

**TIP: This is a great technique to “get out of jail free” if you mess up the surface. You can then go and re-establish the surface afterwards.**

**TIP: When using this technique, try to turn your brain (mostly!) off. This exercise is more difficult than it looks! When you master this technique it can be used for a number of different things including representing spinifex grass on the beach, or highlights under clouds on the horizon. Random chaos!**

### **Wave Practise:**

We used a very dry brush and created long flattish scoopish shapes to create the illusion of gentle curves. We practised being considerate of the transition of colour within these reflections and used soft lines to represent gradual transition, and harder lines for a sharper transition.

We softened the back of each shape. Think that there will be more sky reflected in the upper part of the wave. This is the first part of the building up process. The waves will become wider and further apart as you come down.

### Reflection Demo:

We looked at reflections and used an example of a champagne glass to understand what light does on shiny, transparent surfaces. We looked at how the shape of the glass elongated and sharpened the highlights.



We looked at how the highlights created volume, and we looked at how light from different places reflected on the surface of the glass. The thing that made this particularly complicated is that the glass also has an internal surface which also reflects light. Go and look at wine glasses!

### Another Exercise:

We painted some dark blobs on our canvas and let them dry. We selected three colours, plus White.

Mark went through the theories of “how to create a sunset” with the blue, red and yellow ovals overlapping. The further from the light source, the cooler the colours. The closer to the light source, the warmer the colours. (For more info on this concept, see the link to our Youtube clip **Sunset Painting - Gradation Warm Through Cools** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNJkgJROfpQ>)

Mark painted to the left, the source of light, White. Then gradually added Cadmium Yellow Light and Alizarin, eventually adding Pthalo and backing off the Cadmium Yellow Light as he painted. This created a transition from the light source. We repeated this process to re-create trees close to the light source. We applied the same transition, warm to cool, as we moved away from the light source. We then painted the grasses. This also represented a transition from warm to cool. We then used the same colour to paint the “gaps” in the darker, already painted shapes, to create the illusion of holes/gaps in the trees.



We mixed some warm greens using Cadmium Yellow Light, Alizaren and the barest hint of Pthalo Blue, and White. We added this colour to the tree closest to the light source to create the illusion of volume. To build on this, we reduced the Pthalo Blue, and added more White and Cadmium Yellow Light, with the barest hint of Alizaren.

We then mixed White, with a touch of Cadmium Yellow Light and Alizaren, and with the edge of our brush, painted highlights on the branches, and highlights on the leaves closest to the light source.

This is starting to give volume, and represents the reflections caused by light source. This is only part of the picture (excuse the pun).

We now have to represent the light coming from other directions. That is, the sky behind. Blue light will be bouncing around in the shadows. Here's where reflections can really make your painting pop! Flicking flecks of colour into your shadows gives life and light, and diminishes the "Black Hole Of Doooooom". You'll be surprised what you can get away with.

## Day 2:

### Let's Paint!:

We talked about what happens to waves in detail. And also that a big wave is made up of lots of small waves. We discovered it is almost impossible to paint waves without showing the surface.

### Creating the waves:

We re-paint our canvas from yesterday around our trees. Graduating from deeper water to shallower water. This time though, the colour is better than the one we mixed yesterday. Remember the bow and arrow. We used clean cool colours for clean cool water! Pthalo Blue, Cadmium Yellow Light and White.

We now, using the same colours on the palette, paint the refractions. Lots of squiggly lines, and remembering that there's another process.

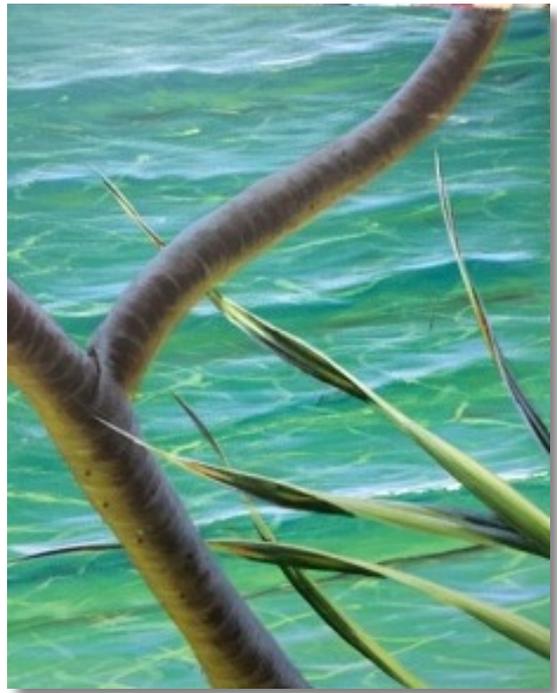
We discussed the differences between steeper waves and gentler waves, harder, sharper lines means steeper, more powerful waves.

We represented the reflections on the surface of the water using the higher, warm sky colours of Ultramarine Blue, Pthalo Blue + White. This colour represents the troughs of the waves and is reflecting the high, cooler part of the sky. The water in this case is going to be calm and reasonably glassy. We then add French Ultramarine and White to that to shape the crests of the waves.

Waves are lumps of water. How do we create a lump of water? We add more water colour. In this case, you can come back with neat Pthalo Blue, thinned and painted softly with a dry brush to lift up some of the waves. Voila, lumps o' water.

### Re-establish Trees:

Now, we re-establish our trees and leaves. Burnt Umber makes up the branches. We add White and French Ultramarine Blue to this and paint it sensitive to the shape and marks in the tree. This is a reflection of the sky. Note: More blue on the branches leaning away from you. We add Cadmium Yellow Medium to our Burnt Umber, and repeat the above process on the undersides of the branches (more on the ones leaning towards and above you). This is a reflection of the sand or shallow water beneath.



### Now the Leaves:

We mix Forest Green, Dioxazine Purple and a touch of Cadmium Yellow Medium. This is for the darker, shadowed area in and on the leaves. Remember the way pandanus trees leaves twist and turn. Think ribbons. Now we reflect the light on the upper sides of the leaves. We start this process by adding White, Forest Green and a tiny touch of Dioxazine Purple and Cadmium Yellow Light. This gives us our base area to paint our highlights on. (These of course are reflections of the light).



We build up these highlights by adding more White and hints of Cadmium Yellow Light, and apply them strategically to the highest parts of the leaves to create volume and shape. This will require close observation to understand the conceptual part of it. And practise the physical part.

Mark discussed the 3 concepts of:

- Perception - ability to find the information.
- Physical - this is your ability to manipulate the paint.
- Conceptual - this is what makes the painting unique to you.

Keep looking at whatever it is you are reproducing, and remember the subtleties, they make the difference!

Look in the shadows. Which way are the leaves facing? Will they be reflecting the sky? Are they facing down? Will they be reflecting the sand? The process has begun. Your job now is to continue looking.

### Locking Layers - tip:

Mark uses a process with the Atelier Interactive paints where he “locks in” a layer once happy with it, so as to not re-activate the layer underneath, and also to add more dimension to his painting. He tends to use Atelier Heavy Gel Gloss (impasto gel) for this (sorry, I couldn’t even find this product on the Chroma website! This is linked to the softer version of it, the “Regular Gel”), or a mix of the Heavy Gel plus a little Atelier Gloss Medium & Varnish.



For the full Chroma medium product guide, [click here](#).

## Thanks to everyone for a wonderful weekend!

**For support material about what you learnt on the weekend, check out these pages:**

[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/ocean-landscapes.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/ocean-landscapes.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/color-mixing-guide.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/color-mixing-guide.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/perspective-in-painting.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/perspective-in-painting.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/how-to-paint-water.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/how-to-paint-water.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/painting-waves.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/painting-waves.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/gradation.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/gradation.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/brush-technique.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/brush-technique.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/acrylic-glazing.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/acrylic-glazing.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/how-to-paint-clouds.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/how-to-paint-clouds.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/landscape-painting.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/landscape-painting.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/shadow-painting.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/shadow-painting.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/sunset-painting.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/sunset-painting.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/skyscapes.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/skyscapes.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/how-to-paint-trees.html](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/how-to-paint-trees.html)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/support-files/aa013defaultsettingtropicalwater.pdf](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/support-files/aa013defaultsettingtropicalwater.pdf)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/support-files/AA007SSDefaultSettings.pdf](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/support-files/AA007SSDefaultSettings.pdf)  
[www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/support-files/default-settings-trees.pdf](http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/support-files/default-settings-trees.pdf)

Please subscribe to [Acrylics Anonymous](#) if you haven't already done so!!!

and check out these video clips! (subscribe to our [Youtube channel](#) for all the latest clips):

**Acrylic Painting Techniques - Shadows in Waves:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfIAtF-0UoM>

**Painting Waves - Perspective in Whitewash:**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDvlwo\\_e9Jl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDvlwo_e9Jl)

**Acrylic Painting Techniques - Reflections in Whitewash:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUDJHY9h9fA>

**Brush Technique:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icWYYJHJFVc>

**How to Paint Water - Refraction:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzCGPAUXJOg>

**Acrylic Painting Techniques - Glazing:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spJETxwJsdK>

**How To Paint Shadows:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDut2Tma1QU>

**Painting Waves - Perspective in Whitewash:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDvlwo\\_e9Jl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDvlwo_e9Jl)

**Acrylic Painting Techniques - Glazing - How to Paint Water:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spJETxwJsdK>

**How To Paint Landscapes - Light Effects:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2\\_JSb9iJVY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2_JSb9iJVY)

**Sunset Painting:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51fpxO\\_dIOY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51fpxO_dIOY)

**Sunset Painting - Gradation Warm Through Cools:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNJkgJROfpQ>

