"Tropical Hideaway"

12th & 13th August 2023
Esk, QLD

Workshop Notes

Day 1.

In the Solomon Islands there is such a saturation of colour that it almost doesn't seem real. In this workshop we're going to try and capture that saturation. We're going to play around with some foliage, and create the illusion of depth, luminosity and brightness. We're going to weave a little path through the coral, and up through the dense foliage to a small hut.

Someone in the Solomons has said that being over there is like "meditation in motion". You're woken up with the birds, the hornbill wings flapping overhead. Just so in tune with the rhythms of nature.

So in this picture, there's a layer that Mark is going to add that you haven't necessarily experienced. That meditation in motion.

At this point Mark introduced these three fundamental skills you need to make a painting:

• Conceptual Skills
• Physical Ability
• Perception Skills

Conceptual Skills:

This is your spin on the image, this is unique to you. Is the concept (of the image you want to paint) compelling to you? If it is, that's great! You're not painting for anyone else! Having said that we want to make a piece that is evocative in some way. Your conceptual skills can modify an image (perhaps something as simple as cropping) and make it somehow "something else". And yours. This skill is not AS important in the early days, until your physical ability and perception skills are honed. When these are developed you will eventually feel more confident in your storytelling ability, and developing your conceptual skills.

Physical Ability:

This is the ability to move your paint around. If you practise your physical skills this will eventually also enhance your perception and conceptual skill areas. To develop your physical skills this is time on the brushes, but TARGETED time on the brushes. Take a corner out of a magazine and try and match the colour. A great idea is to draw up a series of different shaped squares and rectangles, and practise your

gradations, first with one colour in all these different shapes and sizes, and then try adding another colour.

Perception Skills:

As artists and humans, we notice when things don't look right. (For example the sunlight shining through a bushfire, instantly looks strange). As artists we should take this further and go beyond this, to see what is wrong, or find the nuance, and investigate.

Our brains don't tend to see everything - we stop noticing the minutiae in the world. As artists it's useful to look at everything like it's the first time we've noticed it. These nuances are the things you can exaggerate and share with the world.

Painting is a lot about creating illusion - knowing some tricks to help create these illusions is very useful!!

Your perception skills don't only relate to seeing information in the world, it's also a way to see your own process up close. You need to be able to quiet your noisy mind and actually, truly look.

As humans I don't think we're truly realise how important - and limited - our perception skills are. There are so many ways of experiencing the world. For example mosquitos apparently can see in infra red. Dogs can smell a scent that was there years ago. However we think our 5 senses are the only way to experience the world.

One of the reasons we don't experience everything there is to experience, (apart from our physical limitations) is because our brains are too busy, to truly see that glint of light on the tree trunk; that backlit spray in the ocean, or the lovely wobble of refracted light in wind ruffled water, for example.

This weekend I want you to look at the world with laser like vision, and really stop and notice things. And then notice if this changes your perception, and also, going forward, your paintings.

When you really start looking, you'll start to see patterns in colour and in foliage. As a painter you need that skill if you want to tell a story. You also need to be discerning also, and avoid the unconscious pull to make patterns, but we'll go into that as we go.

These three concepts (Physical Ability, Conceptual Skills and Perception Skills) can be used as a problem solving tool when you are making paintings. Use these tools to refine your own arts practise.

Next time you're at an arts show, look at the paintings - holding these three concepts in your mind - and really evaluate the paintings. For example you might love a particular concept, but notice that the artist lacked the painting technique. **You can learn a lot about your own painting practise by looking at others' paintings in this way.** Keep asking the questions! "Don't upset people's BS alarms!" (unless of course you're intending to do this :)

See the Youtube link at the end of these notes for a bit more info on these concepts "3 Skills to Make a Painting".

In the Solomon Islands you'll find channels that are 30 metres deep at the edge of the mangroves, then coral, then jungle. The mangroves in the foreground of the jungle can be really lime coloured, with rust coloured roots. Then, the wall of the jungle is more of a forest green - but when you really look in there there are loads of colours everywhere.

We're going to start with establishing the mangroves first. This is the transition between ocean and land and is therefore an important structural element.

> **TIP: Use chalk to draw in your elements first.**

Set Up Your Workspace:

Set yourself up properly to remove "obstacles". Your palette is for working stuff out on! Not your "real" canvas! It is your workspace. Dish up more paint than you think you'll need. There is nothing worse than trying to match colours halfway through a painting because not enough paint was dished up at the beginning. **These strategies will free your brain for painting.** Your palette, and your workspace should support your practise. Mark dishes paints up along the top edge of the palette and mixes paints down the palette.

So let's put some paint out, we're going to start with the mangrove foliage colours of Forest Green and Cadmium Yellow Medium, and we're going to make a "mid-tone" lime green. Using a small brush, we're going to establish the edges and highlights of the mangroves by painting just about all the leaves ! :D

You'll see areas in your already painted background of light and dark. Use these areas to create highlights and shadows in your foliage clumps.

Mark added more Cadmium Yellow Medium to this colour to create the highlights on the mangroves, and also added more Forest Green to create the illusion of leaves in the shadows.

> **TIP: You are going to do this a LOT of times this weekend - so settle in!**

The background we will leave fairly indistinct.

> **TIP: Don't worry about making it the "exact" colour, as there will be many shifts in colour with this part of the painting.**

TIP: Change the direction of your brushstrokes, let's not make patterns. Jungle is natural carnage.

TIP: To create the impression of the jungle being dense, you can add highlights on the upper edge of the canopy that are painted with tight brushstrokes, and hard edges. To create the impression of the jungle opening up a bit, add flecks of light throughout which gives the impression of the light filtering through.

Mangrove leaves tend to not go any lower than the high tide mark. Interestingly this can create a really straight line along the bottom edge of the mangroves. This is how you can tell if there is a hut in there sometimes, that hard edge will be cut.

Mark's job as he sees it this weekend is to provide two things - motivation and teaching you how to really look. The goal is to improve all your paintings going forward, not to slavishly re-create this image.

Mark dished up some White and some French Ultramarine Blue and a little bit of Burnt Umber, and using these colours mixed up a mid-tone bluey grey colour, leaning more into the brown than the blues. Using the edge of the brush, Mark added some mangrove branch highlights. While he had that colour, he added some trunks and branches in the background as well, in the darker areas. He used a fairly dry, small brush, not much paint on the brush.

To that colour he added some White and Burnt Umber, and added some highlights to those mangrove branches and the trunks in the background too. Those tree trunk lines should in theory create the impression of light coming through the trees and hitting it here and there.

We'll leave the coconut trees for now as we can use them later if we need to fix the light and dark areas.

TIP: Don't bring your mangrove trunks all the way to the water - keep them up in the shadows a little bit.

Don't be scared to go in with your darks again and eliminate some of your highlights. This is a little bit like a dance. Add some more - take some away, keep staying with the process.

An aside:

Our brains are hardwired to learn something, then think we know that thing, and then we tend to stop looking. For example, "the cat sat on the ….". Our jobs as artists is to put enough information in our paintings to convince the viewer to connect the dots. We want to regurgitate the information in a powerful way that generates a connection with our viewer. And to do this we need to KEEP LOOKING.

We do need to approach what we're doing as if it's the first time we are looking at it - we need to really observe the information, and keep looking at the world with wonder. Your job is to be a storyteller.

After lunch:

Mark mixed up a mid-tone darkish colour using Forest Green, Cadmium Yellow Medium, a tiny bit of Dioxazine Purple, and White, and taking the edge of a smallish brush (a quite dry brush) and while twisting the brush, create the outlines on some of the clumps of jungle - suggesting the tops of trees. Scrubbing it in and pushing fairly hard to create this.

Mark added Cadmium Yellow Medium and White to that colour, creating a lighter colour and following roughly the shape from before painted this on top of that so there is a transition from darker, mid-tone, to lighter.

TIP: The jungle is chaotic and crazy, so don't get too stressed about what you're painting!

Mark added Cadmium Yellow Light and White to the previous colour to create the lighter highlights on top, letting the side of the brush create those crazy broken kind of shapes.

At this point it's not a bad idea to have a look back at your picture critically and see if any areas need to be broken up. Mark is breaking his up using a mix of Dioxazine Purple and Forest Green, and repeating the same technique as before, paint that in the shadows - your trees will start to pop out and you'll see that depth straight away.

TIP: One of the things about creating depth is that if you start with a mid-tone, you have more scope to make the darks darker and the lights lighter.

As an aside, some of you will have varying bits of darkness and lightness. If you mix Permanent Alizarine and Pthalo Blue, you can create a glorious shadow line under the mangroves. If you break up your brushstrokes a little it looks more realistic, as if the shadows are coming up through the mangroves. This area now becomes our darkest part of the painting. You can then repeat this here and there in the jungle randomly, creating even more depth.

There's a certain percent of control required with this, so you need to be aware of what you're doing, however it's probably 70% letting the brush do it's own thing.

We want the illusion and suggestion of crazy jungle here - not too much detail.

While Mark has that darkest dark colour, he started adding it into the water in front of the mangroves as a few little ripples here and there. In this image the ripples were quite flat near the mangroves, and then at the bottom right hand corner were more coming in on an angle. Compositionally, if you leave the coconut trees til last, you can create the juxtaposition you want in relation to the ripples.

(Incidentally, if you're interested in seeing the crazy Aussie guy who made the Youtube video about the coconut crabs, here it is :D *shudder*)

Mark mixed up Forest Green and Cadmium Yellow Light and a tiny bit of white, and added this highlight colour here and there in the jungle. At this point you don't need to put highlights on every tree. If you don't add them to every tree, you're bringing some trees further out of the jungle, and some further back.

TIP: General rule, Pthalo Blue in the water, French Ultramarine Blue out of the water. GENERALLY!

If you're not being strategic about where you put your highlights, that's ok - later on we can come back with some glazes and go over any overly light or prominent trees to push them back.

Mark finished off the day with a demonstration using a colour he mixed earlier, of Burnt Umber, French Ultramarine Blue and White, leaning more toward the brown than the blue. He painted more trunk and branch lines in to give more structure to the jungle. By putting those lines in, especially ones that start at the top of the canvas, it creates the perception of a hill in the background. This breaks up the shadows and puts some depths into the trees, and also turns those pillows of greens into actual trees. The painter only needs to portray enough information for the viewer to connect the dots and make sense of it. This is just enough information all together to make a painting.

While he had that colour he went in under the mangroves and created trunks and roots under there too.

While he had that colour he also added some suggestions of mud banks underneath the mangrove trees. In under the mangroves is just a mess. A tangle of leaves and trees and branches etc. Jungle chaos! While he had this colour he also added a few reflections of the mangrove trunks in the dark shadow areas of the water closest to the mangroves.

Day 2.

We started the day with a bit of a weird hippy exercise. Mark asked if everyone was conscious. Are you conscious, of your hands, your head, your chest etc. Are you conscious of the space in which all of us occur? Are you conscious of this hall and if everyone else is conscious of this hall, who's consciousness is it? While you're aware of this consciousness, where is your identity? When you become aware of consciousness, identity falls away. Notice how quiet your brain gets when you are

aware of consciousness. Identity often gets in the way of the creativity process ("I'm not good enough", "I can't draw", etc etc).

We got a bit philosophical at this point. We're alive. That's amazing. We're conscious. And that is a miracle. Never lose your sense of wonder. You do your best work when "you" get out of the way.

So what we're going to do now is paint the coconut trees and the water.

Mark demonstrated how to paint a coconut tree on a spare piece of paper.

Using a fan brush, Mark just used thinned Forest Green to create a tree trunk leaning on an angle. He then used the edge of the brush to create the "spines" of the leaves. Then using the corner of the fan brush, he painted the palm fronds in down the "spines" of the leaves, roughly realising the frond direction how gravity might pull them down.

Mark also painted a couple of single fronds with a different flat brush just to show the difference.

This is probably a good time to go into this theory:

BRUSHES 101

Decide what mark you want to make BEFORE you make it. How are you going to make it? Which paintbrush? Which pressure? Which area of the bristles do I need to use to achieve that effect?

There is a mistaken belief that if you buy a different brush it'll solve all of your problems. Your brush is like a swiss army knife - you need to know all the different strokes it will create. You need to know what mark you want to make and how you can make it BEFORE you start.

There are 3 main functions of your paintbrush which affect the mark you make. These are:

• The amount of pressure you apply
• The amount of paint on your brush
• The medium you use

Then there is also HOW you hold your brush.

Within each of these areas there are lots of variations (if you think of each area having a scale of 1-10, for example), resulting in potentially thousands of different marks you can make with just one brush!

So, before you make a mark, ask yourself questions. Get really educated about this. Is this the mark I want to make? Is this the brush I need? What do I need to do to get the mark that I need? KNOW YOUR BRUSHES. Make as many different marks as you can with just one paintbrush. Experiment with how you hold your brush too. You'll be absolutely amazed at the stories you can tell with just one paintbrush!

TIP: Just play for 5-10 minutes at the beginning of your painting session, doing this! This can often just take the pressure off enough to enjoy your painting process.

Another great tip is to make a mark on something else first, before you touch your brush to your "real" painting, ie nearby easel or spare canvas etc.

As you get confident with the brush, this confidence will spill out into your paintings.

Use your practise canvas to practise painting any elements you don't feel entirely confident about going straight to the "real" canvas with.

Using a mix of Burnt Umber, French Ultramarine blue and White, Mark painted in a few coconut tree trunks into his painting. While he had that colour, he also added the "spines" of the fronds.

Now there is a rough idea of where the coconut trees are, at this point (when the paint is dry), you can remove your chalk outlines with a clean damp brush (or cloth).

Using a mix of Forest Green and Free Flow White and a tiny bit of Cadmium Yellow Medium, Mark painted in the fronds onto these spines. This is where you get to decide where the light might be hitting the fronds. Don't worry too much if it's not exactly the right shape straight away, as you can paint over it a few times until it's right.

It was at this point Mark mixed Cadmium Yellow Medium and Permanent Alizarine and added this colour to the middle of the fronds to create coconuts here and there.

Painting the water:

Whatever happens behind the water, will also happen in the water in some ways. So Mark mixed Pthalo Blue, Cadmium Yellow Light and a little bit of Forest Green (because there's loads of this in the background) making a darkish mid-range colour.

Using a flat brush on it's edge, and short strokes (like flattish smiley shapes) in the foreground of the water Mark painted waves (ripples). You need to imagine the wind behind the viewer pushing a little bit of chop into that bay. We're following a line - as it gets closer to the beach (further away from the viewer) the chop lines get smaller and closer together.

Don't stress too much about this as there is always another process, another layer you can go to to cover things up if needed.

Mark added White and some French Ultramarine Blue to the previous colour, and then added this colour to the other side of the wave, pushing up into the opposite corner, as this colour and stroke represents the light being reflected on the front of the wave. In doing this, the face of the wave AND the trough in between is being created in this process.

At this point you can assess if you need to go lighter by adding more White or more French Ultramarine Blue.

Be mindful that the waves don't usually march along in exactly straight lines, some will overlap. Water is in constant motion.

As you get closer to the jungle, there will be more jungle reflections happening. Mark added Cadmium Yellow Medium to the previous sky reflection colour to loosely reflect the mangrove bushes in the water. Use a choppy, short, broken stroke to represent this. That kaleidoscopic mishmash of colours helps to create the illusion of realistic water.

So here's a bit of theory about how to paint water. For ease of understanding, we break this down into 4 elements:

- **Substrate** - can be lots of different colours ie pebbles, sand, rocks, kelp etc.
- **Colour of water** - can also be lots of different colours.
- **Surface** - probably the most important element - from underneath and above.
- **Light**

Observe. Think of painting water and waves as a series of mirrors and windows. The flatter to your eye the water is - the more will be reflected on its surface. When you are looking at water at a flat angle, the water becomes very reflective like a mirror.

When you want to paint a water scene, ask yourself a series of questions so you can work it out:

- **What is the substrate?**
- **What is the colour of the water?**
- **How much of the light is reflected on the surface?**

Then paint it in that order, first the substrate, then the colour of the water, then the surface (and the light).

The wind will affect the appearance of the surface of the water, and if water is sitting above sand (really shallow water), the water is also affected by the shape of the substrate.

TIP: If you want to make it appear calm, make the strokes close together. If they're further apart, the waves appear bigger.

To re-establish your reef or coral, you can come back with a mix of Dioxazine Purple, Cadmium Yellow Medium and a tiny bit of Pthalo Blue. This really is a push and pull, a dance of going backwards and forwards to re-establish or eliminate parts you want and don't want. As mentioned before, there is always a process to go over things!

After lunch:

We're only going to faff around with the water for a little while longer, and then we're going to go back into the jungle, into the coconut trees.

Mark demonstrated mixing thinned French Ultramarine Blue + White, and painting this colour to the front edges of those waves on top of the previous highlights, here and there, just to show how you can keep going with the process, enhance areas and hide some mistakes.

Then in under the mangroves, he used the same colour here and there using short, sharpish flat strokes as flashes of reflected sky on the surface of the water. As you come down into the waves you can make these strokes a bit longer. You can add this colour right underneath the mangroves too here and there to create little areas of whitewash that may be hitting the sand here and there.

Repeat this process, bumping it up or backing it off where needed.

Because it's important to be efficient, while he had this colour, Mark used a very dry brush to add a smoke trail from the hut (which we haven't painted yet).

Mark then added more White to that colour and added some highlight reflections on the backs of the waves (front??), creating the impression of the chop coming into a protected bay where there's no wind. This creates the illusion of glassier water.

TIP: When you put White over another colour it tends to go a little bit blue.

Using a mix of Pthalo Blue, Cadmium Yellow Light and a little bit of White, Mark went in between the highlight areas with some refracted light, using the rolly-brush technique.

The rolly-brush technique is:

Grab a small flat brush and hold it at the end of the brush between your thumb and forefinger. Hold the brush lightly and loosely so that it is parallel to the canvas, and moving from your elbow, rolling the brush back and forth between finger and thumb at the same time, make a broken kind of a shape.

As you come up the canvas, you can add more Cadmium Yellow Light to that colour and add more refraction flecks as you head toward the jungle.

To refract the light on the coral, mix Dioxazine Purple, Cadmium Yellow Medium and a little bit of White added to the other colour, and paint that colour over the top of the coral using the same rolly-brush technique.

He added White and a touch of Cadmium Yellow Medium to that colour and painted more refraction.

To enhance the waves and the luminosity of the water, you can paint in a glaze using VERY thinned, neat Pthalo Blue in between the waves in the foreground where the water appears deeper, moving up the canvas as the paint diminishes. This is a subtle technique that gives the water even more luminosity. This is a technique you'd normally do when the painting is dry.

So, back to our coconut trees:

Using neat, thinned Dioxazine Purple, Mark painted some shadows under the coconuts.

Adding Forest Green to that colour, nice and dark, Mark took most of the paint off the brush and started painting parts of the fronds that would be in shadow. They are scraggly looking things, so you don't have to worry about too much detail. All he has done here is bust up the shape of the head a little bit, make it look a little more chaotic.

Mixing Forest Green, Cadmium Yellow Medium + White, Mark painted some transition areas in the fronds to soften that transition and create an intermediate colour. While they do reflect a lot of light, they do actually have quite a lot of nuance too. You have to have a bit of a think about it before you paint, for example, make some decisions about which leaf/frond is in shadow etc.

Using White Free Flow, Mark then added Cadmium Yellow Light to create the brightest highlight area on the fronds, and he went through and painted any areas

of fronds that would have direct sunlight showing on them. Don't do this on every leaf, or indeed the full length of the leaf, just do it on some of them. You'll be surprised by how much white they reflect.

TIP: Pretend a tree is right in the shade so that you don't have to put as many highlights on :)

Burnt Umber makes an excellent "dead coconut tree frond in shadow" colour. Using it neat, but thinned, Mark painted these dead leaves hanging down underneath. Right on the ends of the fronds the leaves can often look dead as well, you can add this colour to some of the ends of the leaves too. As they're dying they tend to turn a lovely colour, an excellent colour for that is a mix of Dioxazine Purple and Cadmium Yellow Medium to create a beautiful gold colour to represent that if you want to.

So we want the sunlight to be super bright. Clean your brush at this point. Bright sunlight, middle of the day, Mark mixed a colour using mainly White, with a tiny bit of Burnt Umber to warm it up. He painted this colour on the trunks and branches that will be catching the light in the jungle, to create dappled light. Even in the mangrove area there will be a little bit of light here and there filtering through - small flashes of light (not as prominent as the light that is hitting the coconut tree trunks). Use that colour to tie in some of the fronds with the trunk as well, and have all the colours sitting nicely together.

Now, onto the hut: Mark mixed Burnt Umber and White, and added a hut poking out from behind the mangroves. He added some detail adding some more Burnt Umber to that previous colour.
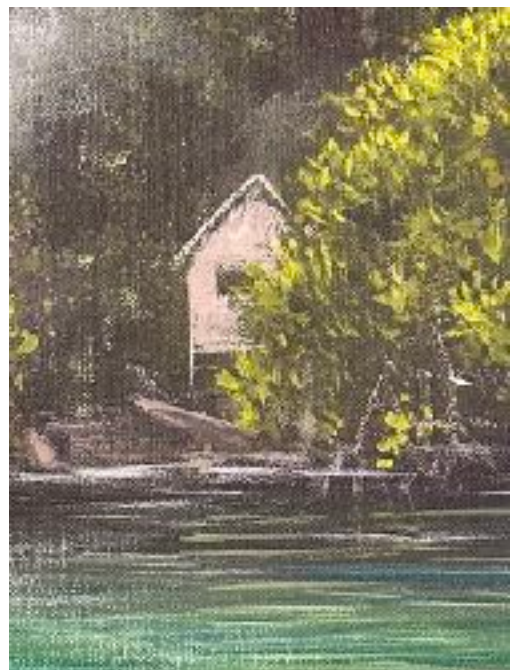
You can add a reflection of the hut into the water as well if you like.

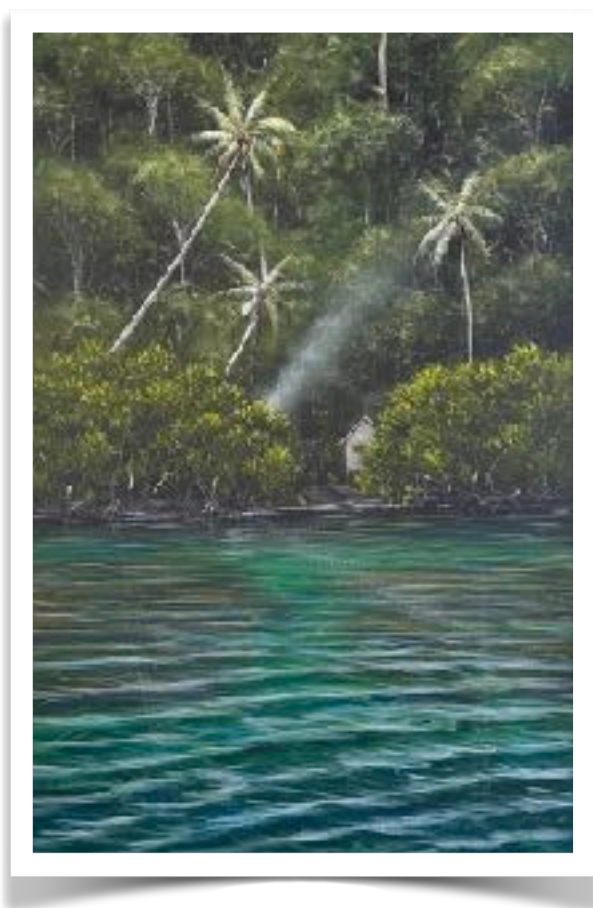Thanks so much everyone, for a lovely weekend in Esk!

Overheard in Class:
"So many of you already competing to be troublemakers, and it's not even morning tea time!"
"The difference between a good painter and a bad painter is the good painter has a bunch of strategies to hide their sins".
"Your ominous green blobs!"
"I know what you think you're saying".

For support material about what you learnt over the weekend, check out these pages from our website:

Have a look at this page first to do some of your own exploring!

http://www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/sitemap.html

www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/color-mixing-guide.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/how-to-paint-water.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/how-to-paint-trees.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/gradation.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/brush-technique.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/paintbrushes.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/atelier-interactive.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/acrylic-sealer.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/atelier-unlocking-formula.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/create-unique-paintings.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/painting-tropical-landscapes.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/workshops-past.html (to access previous workshop notes)

and these video clips (make sure you <u>subscribe</u> to our Youtube channel for all the latest clips):

Beachscapes Paint Recipes Playlist:

Atelier Free Flow demonstration

Painting The Right Light

Painting Coastal Foliage

Know Your Brushes!

Creating Distance In Your Paintings | Atmospheric Perspective

Brush Technique

Learn How To Paint - Gradation

Acrylic Painting Tips - Colour Matching

3 Skills to Make a Painting
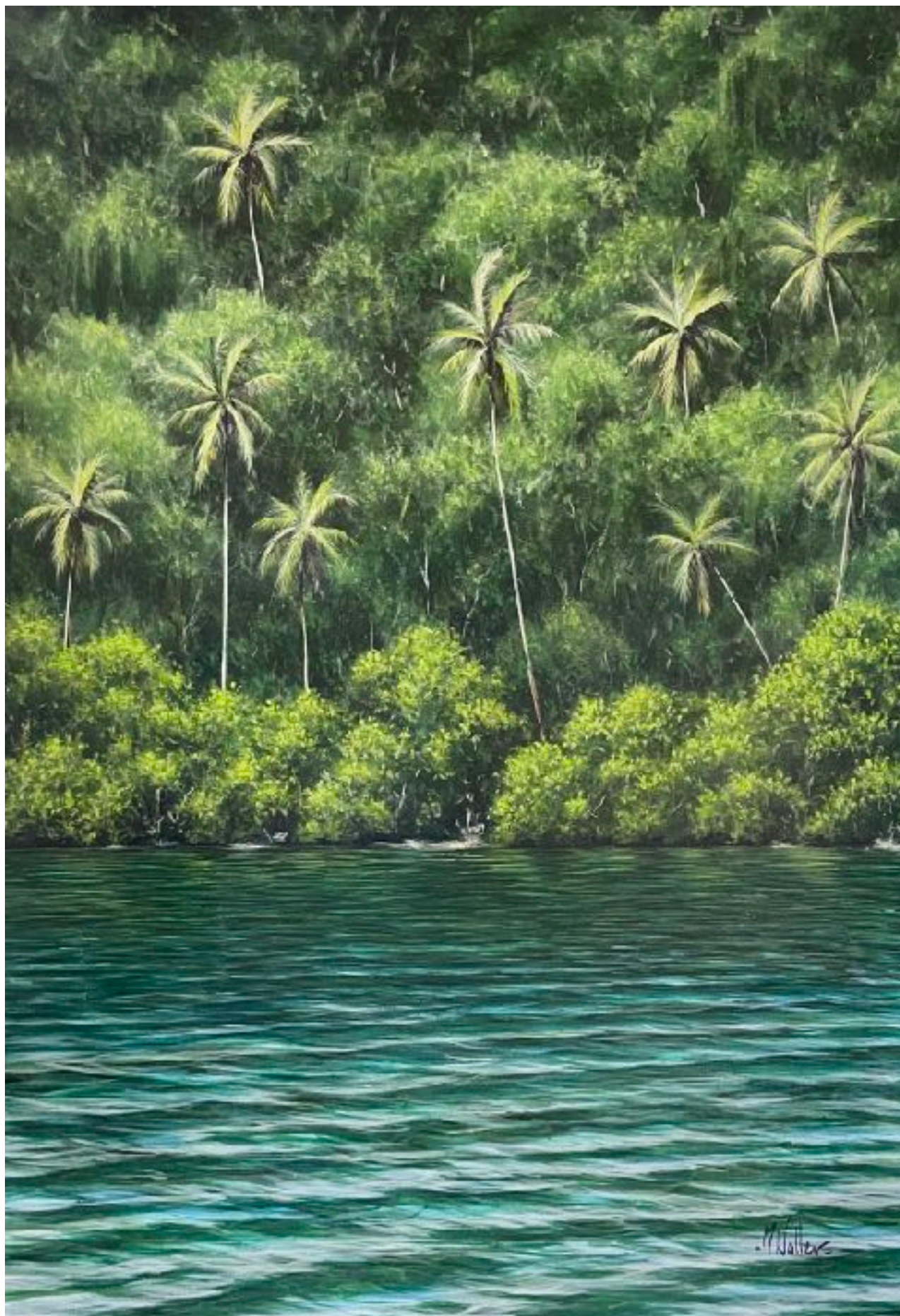
Atelier Interactive demonstration

Unlocking Formula demonstration

Paint Water - Sparkles and Light

If you'd like to order Mark's book "It's All About the Light", click here!

If you'd like to stream the doco "Meet The Wallers", click here . Use code: EXPLORE for 25% off ($5.25 instead of $7.00).

And here is the painting that inspired this workshop:

chocolate slice

ingredients

150g butter, melted
200g brown sugar
1 egg lightly beaten
1 tspn vanilla extract
60g plain flour
45g SR flour
1/3 cup cocoa
30g cocoa powder
40g dessicated coconut

200g icing sugar
30g cocoa powder
20g butter, finely chopped
2 tblspn hot water
2 tblspn extra dessicated coconut for sprinkling

make it

Pre-heat oven to 160°C (fan-forced). Grease and line with baking paper a 20cm x 20cm square tin.

Place butter, sugar, egg and vanilla in a bowl, stir until combined.

Sift flour and cocoa into bowl, add the coconut. Stire until mixture has combined.

Spread mixture evenly into pan. Bake for 25-30 minutes or until just firm.

To make the icing, sift icing sugar and cocoa into bowl.

Add butter and boiling water, stir together.

Spread warm slice with icing.

Sprinkle remaining coconut over slice.

Cut when cooled.

enjoy!