A Focus On Reflections
Sydney 17-18th May 2014

Workshop Notes

Day 1:
Introduction:

We introduced 3 concepts, and 3 skill levels that we'll be discussing today:

• Perception - we'll be focussing most on this skill today.
• Physical - these are your ability to manipulate the paint.
• Conceptual - this is what makes the painting unique to you.

We talked about how athletes get their mind right as well as their equipment before they do their racing. It's the same for us. In order to get your mind right you need to set up your workspace right.

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 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 sat 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).

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

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.

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

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.

In conjunction with this idea Mark 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

Exercise – Hills and Trees:

We created the illusion of a summer sky using a mix of White and French Ultramarine Blue and starting near the horizon painted a band of this colour above and below the horizon (leaving a gap for a row of trees/hills etc).

At this point Mark introduced another concept - Shovel, Rake & Broom. That is, apply your paint firstly in a shovel-like manner (ie getting it from A to B). Then spread it around using a rake-like motion, and finally use a lighter touch (broom) to blend and pull the colours together.

Add more French Ultramarine Blue to this mix as you come up and down the canvas (creating a mirror image below the horizon).

Finally add some Pthalo Blue (cooler in the higher part of the sky) as you come up to the top of the canvas, and repeat this mirror image in the bottom as well.

Then we moved into some tropical water coming down the canvas, adding Cadmium Yellow Light to Pthalo Blue and White, and adding more Cadmium Yellow Light and White as you come into the shallows.

Then add a band of the "low sky" colour (White & French Ultramarine Blue) representing the sky reflecting in the wet sand.

Finally create your wet through to dry sand using a mix of Cadmium Yellow Medium, White and Dioxazine Purple, gradating lighter to pure White at the bottom edge of the canvas, representing your driest sand.

TIP: If you're having trouble blending these areas nicely, come back with a large dampish brush to blend.
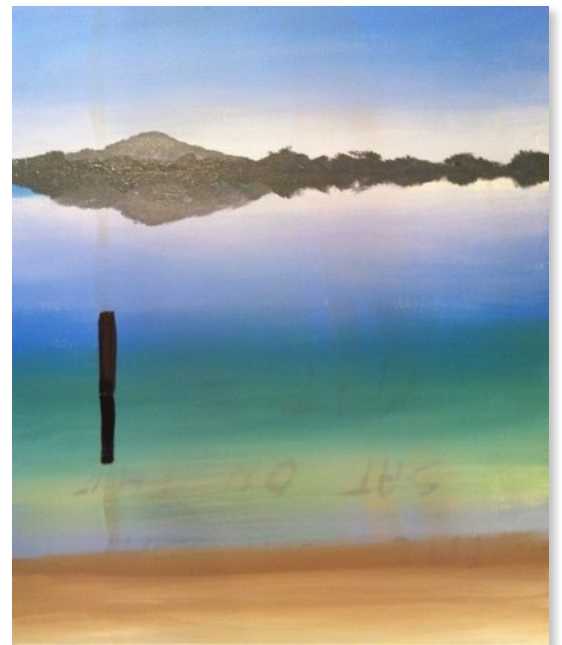
TIP: Keep your brushes clean to avoid contaminating the colours.

Then we blocked in some trees along the horizon - as well as some large hills using a mix of Cadmium Yellow Medium, Forest Green and Dioxazine Purple.

We talked about atmospheric perspective, (that is, how air close to the horizon has lots more dust and "stuff" in it) and how you can easily "push things backwards" in a painting by adding the sky colour to your tree or hill colour for example. Sky-ify it!

Whatever is happening in the sky also happens in the water, so we mirrored the hill lines and tree line in the water below.

We added some poles in the foreground using Burnt Umber neat, and reflected a glassy, no wind day and an example of a bit more wind too.

Before we paint a reflection - what do we consider? The light!

We painted in a sandbank along the horizon using the sand colour of Cadmium Yellow Medium, Dioxazine Purple and White.

How to turn it into a day that's not calm? Reflect more sky. Break it up into lots of little lines. Use your chisel horizontally, add some ripples (breeze).

You can create the illusion of the surface of water with only a few lines. We added some Pthalo Blue lines to represent the faces of the waves, and added a few sky colour (French Ultramarine Blue and White) lines to represent the backs of the waves.

Add more chop - use the sky colour to add horizontal chop, using short sharp strokes. How to add even more chop? Add more sky colour.

We added some boats as an experiment to highlight the movement you can create with reflections in the surface of the water.

Add some clouds using a small brush and a random cross-hatch motion. Start with your darks with a mix of Burnt Umber, French Ultramarine Blue and White. Then reflect the clouds vertically in the surface of the water using a dry brush down, use a damp brush horizontally. The choppier the water, the more broken the reflection.

We talked a little bit about Vanishing Point theory, that is that two level and parallel lines will meet at some point on the horizon. This is also true of clouds to some extent. Clouds will flatten and become smaller into the distance. This is the same with your waves, they'll flatten and become parallel with the horizon.

Create the illusion of your clouds diminishing into the distance by adding your sky colour to them (French Ultramarine Blue and White). Then use this "receded clouds" colour as the highlights on your "closer and higher" clouds. Continue to build up the highlights on these clouds adding more sky colour and white, and finally pure white on the "closest and highest" clouds.

TIP: Remember whatever happens in the sky, generally happens in the water.

TIP: Use this brush technique for painting clouds, tree foliage and whitewash.

TIP: If you want to push them back even further, use a dry brush with sky colour and drag it over them.

Remember to add each stage of the reflections of these clouds on the surface of the water.

TIP: Dry brush down, damp brush across for reflections in water

Are there any reflections in the clouds? Yes, fundamentally they are made of water particles, and water is highly reflective. We tried mixing a tiny bit of Cadmium Yellow Medium to the cloud colour and applied to the undersides of the clouds to create these reflections.

This exercise is building dimension in a few different ways all at the same time.

Remember your clouds will reflect in any patches of wet sand as well.

Exercise – Calm Wavelets:

We talked about what happens to waves in minute detail. And also that a big wave is made up of lots of small waves.

We discovered that in the deep ocean the only thing you can see is the colour of the water and the sky. It is almost impossible to paint a wave without showing the surface.

In this exercise we're going to look at the dynamics of little waves.

We prepared a canvas with a cool, tropical water gradation using Pthalo Blue, Cadmium Yellow Light and White, adding more White and Cadmium Yellow Light as we painted down the canvas, coming into shallower water.

Creating the waves:

We're going to create the illusion of cool water and warm air. We'll represent reflections on the surface of the water using the 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.

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

Soften the back of each wave. There will be more sky reflected in the upper part of the painting (further away from the angle of your eye). This is the first part of the building up process. The waves will become wider and further apart as you come

down. Repeat this process, adding more White and French Ultramarine Blue to represent the top of the back of the waves (this colour gradates through to the Pthalo mix you painted earlier to represent the troughs).

You can come back with neat Pthalo Blue, thinned and paint softly with a dry brush to paint in the faces of some of the waves to lift up some of the waves.

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!**

Re-establishing Further:

Then - establish more of the surface of the water with the shallow concave technique (reflections) with the sky colour - using paler colours.

Pools of Reflection:

Mix a "darkish dirty tree green" colour and create some small shapes on the backs of the steepest waves to represent concentrated areas of background reflection on the tops of the waves.

Make them really pop by outlining them
with a thin mix of White and the barest hint of French Ultramarine Blue (low sky colour).

> **TIP: Struggling?? Trust that there is a process. Relax and let yourself be aware that there is always always another process you can use to hide mistakes.**

Sunrise, rocks on the beach and wet sand. The first thing we need to establish is "what does the light look like?"

The concept of warm through cool was introduced. That is, anything close to the light source will appear warmer. These elements (sky, headlands, etc) will gradate through to cool colours.

We'll use a limited palette for this exercise, cool primaries of Alizaren, Pthalo Blue and Cadmium Yellow Light (and White). It's harder to mess up your colours when only using three. This is going to be a moody scene.

The light is coming from the right.

The sky and the sand:

Mix Pthalo Blue, Alizaren & White and create a moody purple. Start at the top of the canvas on the left, and paint! Remember whatever happens in the sky is going to be reflected on the wet sand. Wet sand can be treated the same way as water in a lot of ways.

We did a quick overview of the elements of water:

• The substrate
• The colour of the water
• The surface of the water
• The light

When painting wet sand in low light, you can eliminate a couple of these elements (the colour of the water, and often the substrate as well).

Add Alizaren and White and start coming across the sky to the right (closer to the light source). Remember the wet sand!

TIP: Know your brushes. Ask yourself "will it do the job I want it to do?" Know them! Can't say it enough.

Add more Alizaren with some Cadmium Yellow Light and White and continue to paint towards the light source, mirroring this on the wet sand below.

Add more White and Cadmium Yellow Light (and back off the Alizaren now). Don't be AS concerned with your colours on the sand - you'll be doing lots of dry brush work on the sand. Blend your colours in the sand using a horizontal and parrallel motion.

Use pure White blended outwards right at the light source.

The rocks:

Use Alizaren & Pthalo Blue with a touch of Cadmium Yellow Light and a tiny bit of White, and block in your rocks.

Being mindful of the "warm to cool" concept, and keeping in mind that your reflections are ALSO a light source, block in your rocks.

Use that colour and add more Alizaren & Cadmium Yellow Light and paint those ones closer to the light source, and further into the foreground.

Dampen your brush and add the rock reflection vertically down from the rocks, and horizontally across the sand.

TIP: Bear in mind - your shadows will point towards the light source (or away from) and your reflections will point towards you.

TIP: The roughing in process is important. It opens up the possibilities and opportunities within your painting to add or accentuate elements that may already be there from this process. You could add a cloud bank for example.

Add a headland:

Mix Pthalo Blue, Alizaren & Cadmium Yellow Light and paint in your headland being mindful of the warm to cool principle. Start on the left (cooler side of the painting) using more Pthalo Blue, and add more Alizaren coming towards the middle, and add more Cadmium Yellow Light and less Pthalo Blue as you come closer to the light source.

You can add other elements onto the headland in this way, as long as your mindful of the warm to cool principal, AND remember to mirror them onto the wet sand (reflections).

Come back with just water on your brush, and brush horizontally to create the impression of reflections on the sand.

Now, re-establish your rocks.

Establish Whitewash lines:

Your whitewash lines near the headland will be reflecting the sky unseen behind. Mix Pthalo Blue, a TINY amount of Alizaren and White and add directional whitewash lines in front of your headland. Keep them close together remembering perspective, and start opening them up as you come into the foreground.

Establishing Waves:

Shape your waves with the highlights - create flat spots between the waves using the sky colour and being mindful of the transition in the sky being mirrored with those highlights on the backs of the waves.

Create the faces of your waves to show the light behind shining THROUGH the water using a lovely lime colour, mix of Cadmium Yellow Light, small amount of Pthalo Blue and White.

Build up your reflection highlights on the same using White, Cadmium Yellow Light and a touch of Alizaren.

Rocks:

So, the light is coming from the right and casting a shadow onto the wet sand.

Establish your rock reflections using a dirty mix of Pthalo Blue + White. Use a mixture of horizontal and vertical lines.

Mix a high sky coolish purple mix, and drag this colour horizontally for the reflections - this will go OVER the shadow as well.

To give the shadow more dimension you can darken the edge closest to you (gradation within the shadow).

Then add a rock highlight on the light side of the rock using that part of the sky colour (whichever part of the sky you choose).

Add a cool blue high sky colour to the shadow area facing away from the light source.

Then add white highlights to the edge of the rock facing the light source, and blend across the rock being mindful of the warm to cool principle.

You may have to then re-establish your shadow - you want a sharp edge where your rock meets the sand.

Little Waves in Foreground:

Establish some tiny waves in the foreground (wavelets) using the sky colours as your shadow line, and remembering the warm to cool principle. There will be a point where the shadow line changes from the warm sky colour to the unseen cooler higher sky colour.

Add some whitewash trails using the edge of your chisel and tiny, flattish ellipses. Use a mix of a TINY amount of Alizaren, Cadmium Yellow Light and White. Make loose patterns that suggest the direction the wave is travelling in.

 TIP: When you load the brush, paint the leading edge of your wave first, and as the paint diminishes, paint the whitewash towards the background.

Your whitewash reflections - use a dry brush down and damp brush across to reflect the whitewash.
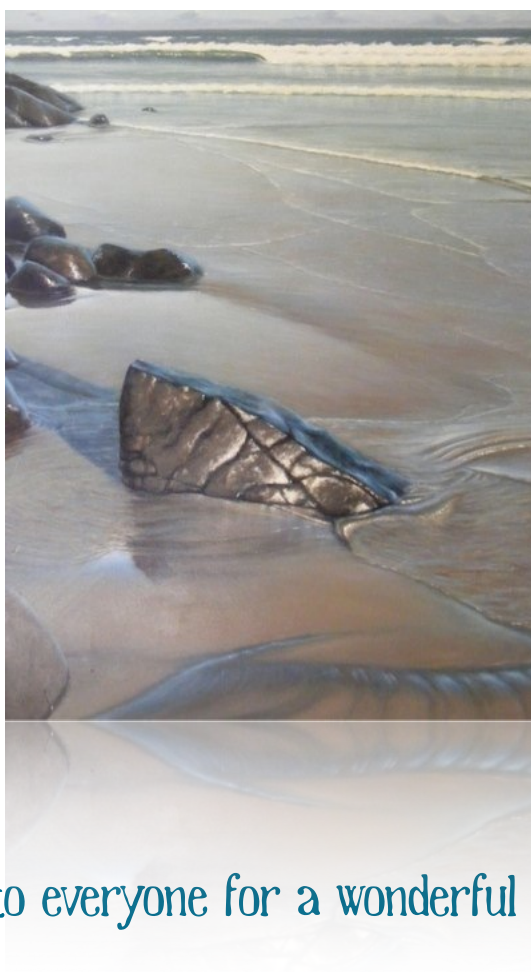
Glazing:

Glazing is one of the best things you can do to create zing in your acrylic paintings. You can glaze using water, or a dedicated medium like Atelier Glazing Liquid. Using a dedicated medium is a great idea as it suspends the paint pigments in a layer of plastic, meaning you get great luminosity from your painting as the light shines through the "plastic layer" (once dry) and bounces back to your eye.

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!

And remember - you MUST go to the beach with a glass of wine and OBSERVE!

Overheard in class:

"I just want to paint exactly the same as you......in one lesson"
"We need to avoid hovering blobs. Except in alien abduction movies"
"I'm just happy to get mine to look like.....not the apocalypse"
"I've just done the landscape version of The Scream"

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

www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/ocean-landscapes.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/color-mixing-guide.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/perspective-in-painting.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/how-to-paint-water.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/painting-waves.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/gradation.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/brush-technique.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/acrylic-glazing.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/how-to-paint-clouds.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/landscape-painting.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/shadow-painting.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/sunset-painting.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/skyscapes.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/how-to-paint-trees.html
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/support-files/aa013defaultsettingtropicalwater.pdf
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/support-files/AA007SSDefaultSettings.pdf
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/support-files/default-settings-trees.pdf
www.explore-acrylic-painting.com/Acrylics_Anonymous-acrylics-anonymous-019.html

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_e9JI

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=lDut2Tma1QU

Painting Waves - Perspective in Whitewash:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDvlwo_e9JI

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

Sunset Painting:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51fpxO_dlOY

Sunset Painting - Gradation Warm Through Cools:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNJkgJROfpQ