

Acrylic: Fall Foliage

by Kim Fjordbotten

Materials

Canvas board, 8"x16"
Rheotech acrylic colours: Bright Red, Primary Yellow, Phthalo Blue, Violet, Titanium White
Stevenson gloss acrylic medium
Brushes: ½" bright and #4 round

Goal

Students experiment using acrylics in two ways to create a landscape featuring water, trees and sky. The first layer will be a loose, splattered background, using thinner paint much like a watercolour. Subsequent layers are painted with thicker impasto strokes over top.

Preparation

Make a diluting medium by mixing together water and acrylic medium, equal measures of each, into a small container. This medium is used to thin the paint while adding strength and gloss to the colour. Add it to a small blob of yellow acrylic; stir until well mixed. The consistency should be milky. Repeat the mixing procedure for the red paint.



Figure 1

Procedure

Lay canvas board flat on the table.

See Figure 1: Apply the yellow paint to your canvas board by pouring. Use a brush to spread it around loosely. Covering the whole canvas is unnecessary. While the yellow paint is still wet, add the red paint in drips, drops, dabs and swishes. Blend a little red into the sky and a little into the water.

Leave your canvas board to dry.

Figure 2



Figure 3

See Figure 2: In this project, we do not draw with a pencil but rather sketch directly with a brush. Use a medium-size, ½" paint brush loaded with a mixture of phthalo blue and yellow. Carefully place marks to create dark green tree shapes. Consider how one brush stroke may represent the shape of the green tree and also define the yellow/red cluster of trees that the green tree is hiding behind. Positive and negative shapes are painted in one brush stroke.

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NOTE: Students may photograph their own source materials or work from the reference photos provided at left. If each student takes details from different photos and combines them, each composition will be a little different.

See Figure 3: Once the trees along the horizon are sketched in, paint the sky. Add a lot of white to a very small dab of blue. Do not paint the sky a solid blue. Keep it slightly darker at the top and lighter near the horizon. Notice how very thin applications of light blue might appear greenish, which is perfect for a cool autumn sky. The hints of yellow peeking through in some spots appear like sparkly sunlight. Add a couple of painterly marks of white to hint at clouds, but do not be too cartoony.

Keep the shoreline quite flat. When painting the water, remember less is more. A couple of horizontal scuffs with a dry brush of the sky colour and one more of the dark green, the colour of the dark patches of trees, is all that is needed to simulate a ripple along a smooth surface of water.

Other things to note:

- Avoid too much repetition in the placement of your marks.
- No two trees are alike, so keep the tree tops different and interesting.
- Imagine clusters of trees not individual trees.
- Mix up the shapes and sizes of each grouping a little.
- Remember that bright colours come forward and dull colours recede.
- Keep the small, darkest details for the clusters of trees in the foreground.
- Look at the example to the right: try not to cover everything. Let some of the splashy details of the underpainting peek-through, adding interest to your final artwork.

