PLEIN AIR: A GUIDED TOUR

MATERIALS:

- Blick Artists' Acrylic Matte Medium (Pint)
- Utrecht Natural Chungking Pure Bristle Round Brush, Size 2
- Utrecht Natural Chungking Pure Bristle Bristle Brush, Flat, Size 8
- Utrecht Natural Chungking Pure Bristle Bristle Brush, Filbert, Size 6
- Utrecht Artists Acrylic Colors
  - Titanium White
  - Yellow Ochre
  - Burnt Sienna
  - Ivory Black
  - Cadmium Yellow Light Pure
  - Ultramarine Blue
  - Cadmium Red Medium Pure
  - Unbleached Titanium
- Line Art (download)

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:

- Carbon paper
- Drawing board and painters tape
- Water and medium cups
- Paper towels
- Hair dryer (as needed)

STEPS FOR PLEIN AIR PAINTING:

STEP 1 – SKETCHING

If using provided line art, be sure to trace printout with carbon paper onto a heavyweight cotton rag paper OR canvas. Lightweight printer paper will not work as a substrate for painting! If painting on paper, you may wish to prime the surface with gesso or matte medium prior to beginning your artwork.

When painting en plein air, it is important to begin with a simple, loose sketch of the scene in front of you. Establishing the basic forms of objects and working in a gestural fashion will give your piece a more organic feeling and allow you to practice using key steps for plein air painting.

1. Mix a grey or brown using your chosen palette and thin with a bit of water.
2. Using a small round brush, trace the general forms of the scene with quick, sweeping gestural strokes. It is not necessary to perfectly match the scene. If using provided line art, you may wish to trace over top of the lines with your own sketch.
   a. **Tip – keep your brush moving at all times and try not to lift it – this will allow your "gesture" drawing to remain fluid and connect the shapes in the scene.**
   b. Include cast shadows as shapes in your scene.
3. Once the overall layout is complete, proceed to Step 2.

STEP 2 – BLOCKING IN

1. Begin laying in the largest blocks of darks and lights in your image. Remember that shadows count as shapes!
2. Keep your paint light and introduce edges with a linear quality. You'll be able to go back in and add detail as you proceed. Establish form before increasing detail.
3. Shadow areas should be filled in with cool tones; Light, warm tones should be reserved for areas of light.
4. As large areas of shadow and light are filled in, start to introduce midtones. Remember that you should keep your colors somewhat pure at this stage, with very simple two tone mixes.
5. As you paint, consider taking color from one portion of the painting and introducing small bits of it in other areas to establish harmony. E.g. light blue or orange in a sunset can be incorporated into other objects in the scene that might reflect that color.
6. The goal at this stage should be to lay in form and overall areas of color temperature.

STEP 3 – CONSIDERING COLOR TEMPERATURE AND SCUMBLING

1. Once your forms are laid in, the next step is to work on your painting with a technique called "scumbling".
   a. Scumbling refers to a method in which thin or "broken" coats of opaque paint are laid in short, choppy strokes to soften hard edges and further harmonize a painting. Scumbling allows underlying layers of color to show through, visually weaving the painting together.
2. As you proceed in the painting, be sure to continue to define forms, remembering contrast and intensity of color.
3. Continue to enhance color, noting where it is most intense and where a compliment or a gray can dull it back.
4. Soften edges where necessary to enhance the focal point.

STEP 4 – ADD DETAIL, HIGHLIGHTS

1. Finish off the painting by adding detail to the forms. Consider rendered texture and actual texture of your painting surface.
2. Test different effects, such as drybrushing color or scraping back into the wet surface, where appropriate.
3. Add all the brightest highlights as a last step.

ABOUT THE DEMO

In this activity, you will learn some techniques for Plein Air painting that will build depth while keeping your painting simple and focused. We will work with two possible palettes – Earth tones and Primaries. These limited palettes are ideal for painting outdoors, where minimal materials are essential to not become overwhelmed with the scene. Additionally, multiple mixes can be made from the pigments provided, mimicking a full palette.

WHAT IS PLEIN AIR? THE TERM "PLEIN AIR" REFERS TO...

EARTH TONE PALETTE:

This palette will provide a full spectrum of warm tones for outdoor landscape painting, with tints of Ivory Black standing in for blue and mixes of Yellow Ochre and Ivory Black making a greenish/grey hue.

- Yellow Ochre
- Burnt Sienna
- Ivory Black
- Titanium White

PRIMARY PALETTE:

This palette allows for high chroma mixing with intense colors, which can be toned down by adding complements. Unbleached Titanium adds an optional warm white that can be used in place of Titanium White in mixes.
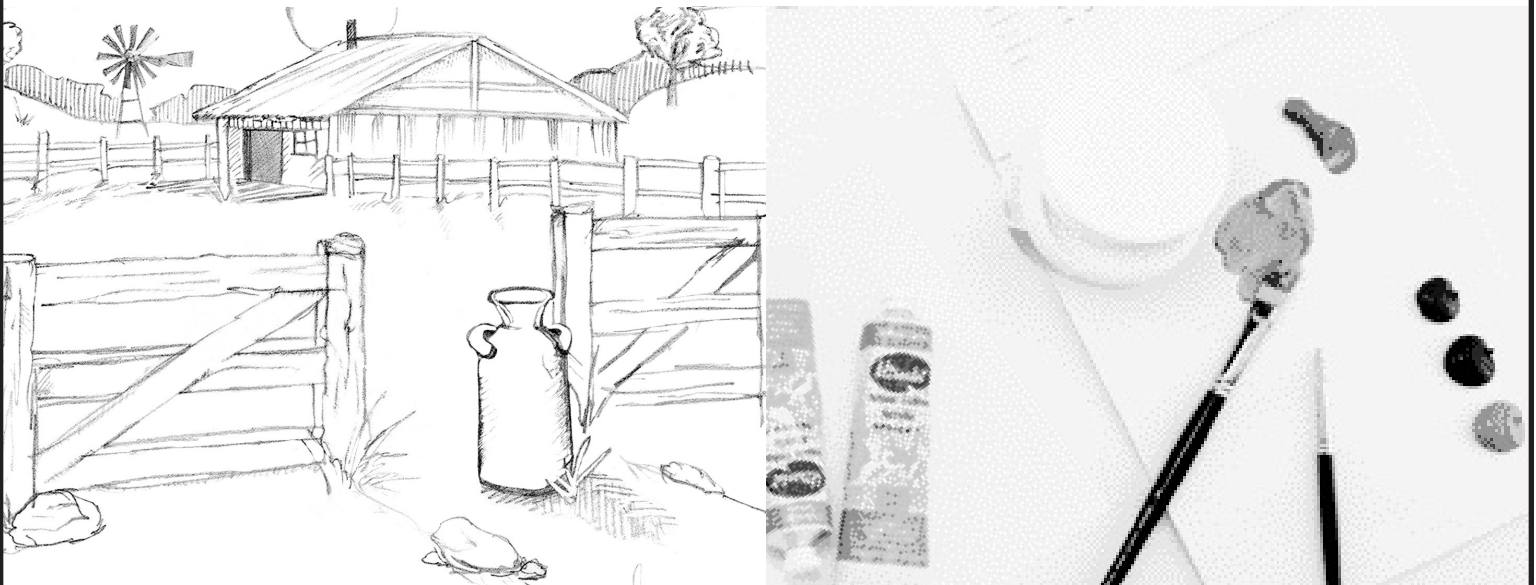
- Cadmium Yellow Lemon
- Cadmium Red Medium
- Ultramarine Blue
- Titanium White
- Unbleached Titanium

Don't hesitate to explore mixes as you move along in the painting. No two artworks look the same, and you should not worry too much if your artwork is not identical to the scene in front of you. Remember, the goal is to create a harmonious painting rather than a perfect representation of the outside world.

Additionally, remember color wheel relationships when creating this piece. Basic mixing will be key, but don't get hung up on the names of colors, particularly with the earth tone palette. For example, orange is easily made with a mix of Cadmium Red and Cadmium Lemon, but a more subtle orange can be created with a tint of Burnt Sienna or Burnt Sienna and Yellow Ochre. Blue is fine from the tube and can be pushed or pulled with a little red, but a tint of Ivory Black will read as a blue or green when cool tones are present.

Finally, note that colors in a painting can always be dulled by using their counterparts on the color wheel. Orange and Blue mixed together will create a dull tan/grey, and adding either compliment to the other in varying degrees pushes the mix in the direction of that chromatic neutral, reducing intensity. The same rule applies for other compliments to varying effects. Test and don't be afraid to explore color relationships!

SEE REVERSE FOR DEMO INSTRUCTIONS