

build layers for luminous color

Kalvåg, Norway, is a beautiful place, and a paradise for artists and photographers. I have been lucky to paint this location several times.

As I evaluated this particular scene, I decided to include most of the elements in my reference photo. The atmosphere of the boat, buildings, rocks and water may present a challenge, but why not go for it? Using a grid will help you accurately portray perspective in this complex scene.



Reference Photo
Spend some time looking at your reference photo and decide on your interest area and how to tie the elements together. The white boats moored next to the red building create a nice contrast perfect for a center of interest.



1 Create a Grid on the Reference Photo
Photocopy (and enlarge, if needed) the photograph. Divide the photocopy into sixteen sections with the same proportions as the paper.

materials list

PIGMENTS

Antwerp Blue, Cadmium Orange, Cobalt Blue, Permanent Magenta, Scarlet Lake, Winsor Yellow

SURFACE

140-lb. (300gsm) cold-pressed watercolor paper

BRUSHES

2-inch (51mm) hake, no. 4 rigger, no. 16 or 18 round

OTHER

Eraser, masking fluid, painting knife, pencil, ruler, spray bottle filled with clean water



2 Sketch the Subject on Your Watercolor Paper
Pencil in the grid on your surface to help you sketch the composition on your watercolor paper. Create more detail on the boats, which will be the interest area. Erase the grid lines after you finish drawing.

flip your drawing to focus on shapes

To help you focus more on the shapes of your subject, turn your black-and-white grid upside down and sketch your subject upside down as well.



3 Create a Vibrant Basecoat
The basecoat will form the basis of the sky and water. Wet the entire paper with clean water using the 2-inch (51mm) hake. Load the no. 16 or 18 round with juicy Winsor Yellow and apply a layer above and below the center of interest and a bit on the right side. While this is wet, clean your brush and load it with a diluted Scarlet Lake and apply it next to the Winsor Yellow. Clean your brush again and load it with Cobalt Blue and place this next to the Scarlet Lake, going all the way to the upper and lower edge of the paper. Spray lightly any area where the paint appears to lose its shine, then tip the paper so the colors will run together.



4 Develop the Shadows
Use the no. 4 rigger to apply masking fluid over the boats and their reflections. Use the edge of your painting knife to apply mask to the mast and the seagulls. Mask the ladders, the top of the rocky edge of the retaining wall and the white trim of the buildings. Let this dry.
Create the dramatic shapes of the buildings and their reflections in the water with Cobalt Blue and a no. 16 or 18 round. Note how the creation of these blue shapes ties the painting together. Apply Cobalt Blue to the shadowed side of the rocks and their reflections. For the reflected shapes, create a slightly wavy edge to suggest the water's movement. Notice the mountains are not reflected in the water because they are too far away.



5 Establish the Buildings' Basecoat

Apply diluted Cadmium Orange in the sunlit areas of the buildings, retaining wall and their reflections, saving the whites for the brightest lights. Apply another layer of Cadmium Orange for the darker areas. Remember to suggest the movement of the water by creating slightly wavy and broken lines in the reflection area of the houses. Create the basecoat of the midground rocks with Cadmium Orange, varying the intensity of color to create lights and shadows.



6 Continue Developing the Buildings

With the no. 16 or 18 round, place Scarlet Lake next to the orange areas and occasionally apply the Scarlet Lake over the Cadmium Orange to create a brilliant red on the buildings. Keep the colors thin for the center building. Continue the red into the water to develop the reflections of the houses. The slightly wavy edge of the shape needs to be broken up occasionally in a horizontal movement of the wave, so avoid filling in the reflection completely. Daub some Scarlet Lake into the retaining wall.



7 Darken the Buildings' Shadows

Use the no. 16 or 18 round to apply Permanent Magenta over some of the blue shadows including the right side of the buildings or where one building casts a shadow on another. For the darkest darks in the windows and doorways of the buildings and their reflections, apply a mixture of Permanent Magenta and Antwerp Blue.



Repeat the Colors in the Surroundings

Use the colors of the buildings to refine their surroundings, including the foreground rocks, the water, mountains and trees. Keeping the palette simple helps you maintain color harmony.

FJORD COUNTRY - 22" x 30" (56cm x 76cm)



painting water

Reflections are often darker than the object they're reflecting. When the wind hits the water, it moves and the ripples reflect a refracted light. This broken light is actually the color of the sky. As the reflections come closer to you, the movement of the water becomes larger.