

# THE #1 WAY To Improve Your Artwork

# Pastels

## TRANSFORM YOUR PASTEL PAINTINGS

by discovering the single, most common  
mistake made by struggling artists.



**ArtTutor.com**

by *Bob Davies* and  
*Michael Howley*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### Bob Davies

Bob has been teaching drawing and painting for more than 20 years. He passionately believes that anyone can create pleasing artwork when they're shown certain fundamental techniques – something that the schooling system sadly fails to do.



Bob is the creator of what is now the number one selling watercolour instruction DVD series in the world, *Watercolour Secrets*, and the accompanying e-book has been downloaded by more than a quarter of a million people worldwide. He's also the co-founder of ArtTutor.com.

You can see an outline of Bob's Watercolour Video course here:  
[www.arttutor.com/watercolour-painting-foundation-course](http://www.arttutor.com/watercolour-painting-foundation-course)

### Michael Howley

Michael is Burnley-born artist. Over the years he has developed a unique style of pastel painting that reflects his love and fascination for those atmospheric moments in landscape that pass so quickly yet leave a lasting impression.

Michael now runs a studio and gallery dedicated to helping both beginners and experienced artists to explore their creative potential, and runs regular workshops in drawing and painting.



[You can see Michael's Soft Pastels Foundation Course here](http://www.michaelhowleyartist.co.uk)

You can find out more about Michael at  
[www.michaelhowleyartist.co.uk](http://www.michaelhowleyartist.co.uk)

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## INTRODUCTION

Over many years, I've seen students looking ruefully at their latest painting, wondering why it hasn't turned out as they expected. They've mixed nice colours (not muddy), the perspective has been pretty good and there may have been very little wrong with the composition.

Yet invariably there follows a comment along the lines of:

*"...Well, it's OK, but something's missing and I don't know what is or even if I did, how I go about fixing it..."*

Now lots of skills and techniques go into making a good painting but there is one that stands out. Most of our art tutors and experienced artists agree it's the number one reason why a piece of art looks poor.

This e-book outlines what that is. More importantly, it shows you how to overcome the problem so you'll never be trapped by it again.

You've probably heard of it already but I'd be willing to suggest that you don't have a real **practical** understanding of how it can affect your paintings and drawings.

Don't under-estimate or dismiss the simplicity of what it is. Without it, your pictures will always remain a tantalizing step away from being the minor masterpieces you strive to achieve.

Read and apply the techniques and exercises in this e-book and you will get to understand:

- Why your pictures lack depth
- Why they look flat, dull and lifeless
- Why an otherwise good composition doesn't seem to work
- Why just using brighter colours seems to have no great effect

And you'll discover:

- How to give your picture punch, vibrancy and impact
- How to create depth and that 3D look that jumps off the page
- Simple ways to plan your picture to avoid problems in the future

This e-book will teach you not just techniques but a state of mind. So what is this number one mistake?

### **It's something called tonal or value contrast.**

And if your artwork doesn't make proper use of it, it will have no life, no real form or shape, no punch, and certainly no oomph that's going to make you want to eagerly show it off to family and friends.

You can read this e-book from cover-to-cover in under an hour. A lot of people will do just that... and then never actually work through the exercises. Please don't be one of those people! Follow along. Get your pencils and brushes out and work with these techniques. You'll be delighted with the results!



Image 1

This painting has punch! You might think it's the vibrant use of colour and that helps. But more important are the contrasting values and where they've been placed – something you're about to learn all about!

## SECTION 1 – IT’S ABOUT CREATING VALUE

### 1.1 What is value?

You’ll often hear professional artists and art tutors use various terms when they talk about producing a painting, terms like: hues, tone, value, shades, tints, chroma. All of these relate to the wider subject of colour theory.

Don’t worry, the purpose of this e-book *isn’t* to convert you into an expert in colour theory! The goal is to have you producing much more pleasing and impactful artwork by fully understanding a few key principles on a practical level.

Yep, we need to cover a little bit of theory but it won’t be heavy going and we’ll use plenty of real-world examples and exercises so that it really sinks in.

So let’s begin with one of the terms above – ‘**value**’...

**Value refers to the lightness or darkness of a colour.** So a dark blue has greater value than a light blue. If you imagine a scale of value, black would be at one end of the extreme and white at the other.

### 1.2 And what is value contrast?

As you know, artists work on a flat 2-dimensional piece of paper or canvas. They have to use *illusion* in order to make objects in their pictures look 3-dimensional and jump off the surface.

They achieve this, to a large extent, through **value contrast**.

We already know that value refers to how light or dark a colour is, so let’s get clear on what ‘contrast’ means...

Contrast, in the wider sense, simply refers to the difference or similarity between two or more things we compare. High contrast means there’s a lot of difference. Low contrast means there’s very little difference.

If you’ve ever played around with the contrast button on your TV set, you’ll know the sort of effect it can have...

Image 2 – the effect of changing the contrast control on your TV from low, to normal, to high contrast



In your artwork, all that value contrast refers to is the difference in lightness and darkness between various parts of the picture. Look at the two boxes I've drawn below:



Image 3

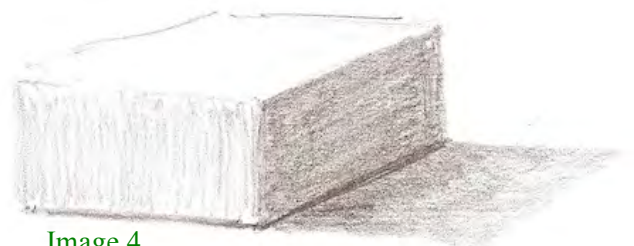


Image 4

The top and sides of the box in Image 3 are similar in value (they're about the same darkness or lightness as each other). So we can say that Image 3 has low value contrast overall.

In Image 4, the sides of the box are obviously very different in their value. We can say that this box has high value contrast.

It probably doesn't need me to point it out, but can you see how Image 4 looks much more 3-dimensional and solid? It jumps off the page.

The number one reason why poor-looking artwork looks, well, less than inspiring is because it makes poor use of value contrast. Poor use of value contrast will make an image look flat and 2-dimensional instead of punchy and solid.

### 1.3 Value contrast applies to colour too

Most newcomers can grasp this concept of value contrast when producing a black and white picture - such as a pencil or charcoal drawing for example. It's obvious that using lighter and darker values is the only way to separate different shapes in a picture that has no colour.

However, in my experience, struggling artists aren't nearly bold enough in the *range* of values they use – their darkest darks aren't dark enough and their lightest lights aren't light enough. The result is often a flat-looking pencil sketch.

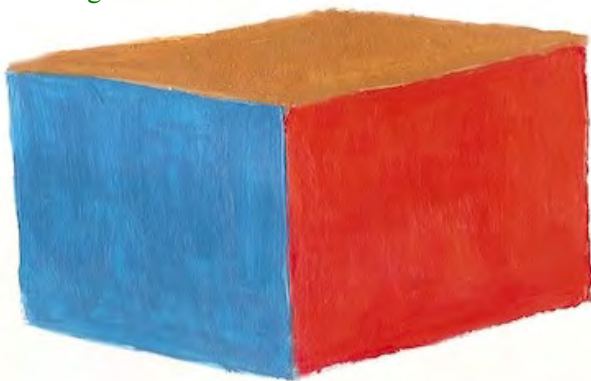
We'll address this problem with practical examples and exercises in Section 3 so that it's never an issue in your artwork again.

But to finish this section, I want to briefly address what happens when you add colour into the mix – because that's when I think problems really start to occur.

By now you know that a dark blue has greater value than, say, a light yellow. But (and this is crucial) did you know that two completely different colours that you might *think* will clearly stand out from each other could actually have the same value?

Let's look at an example...

Image 5

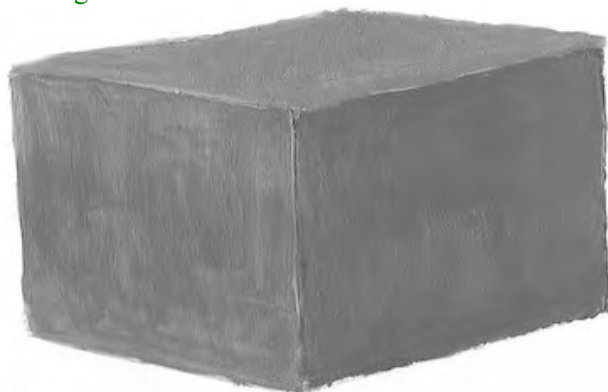


In terms of value, you would say blue is usually darker than red, and red is certainly darker than yellow. The sides of this box in Image 5 are obviously easily distinguishable from one another.

But there seems to be something not quite right here. The colours are bold but despite that, it seems a bit dull and lifeless.

In Image 6, let's strip away the colour to reveal the value in greyscale...

Image 6



Straight away, you can see the value of the three colours – Cadmium Red, Cerulean Blue and Yellow Ochre in this case – are identical.

The eye can be fooled by a variety of colours being the same, or a very similar, value. Sure, a Pthalo or Ultramarine

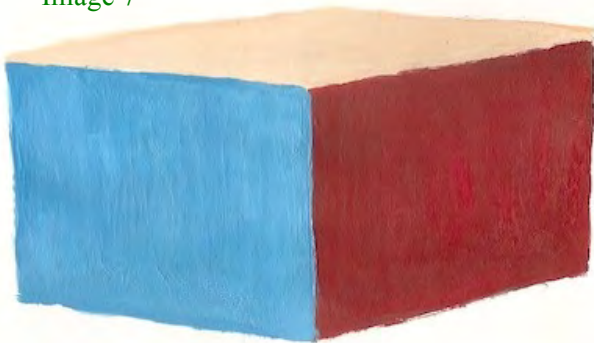


Blue is going to be stronger and darker than a Lemon Yellow, no matter how strong you paint the latter...

*But when you start mixing your colours on the palette to create new ones or to make them lighter or darker, this is when you need to take into account how their value will fit into the overall picture, rather than merely concentrating on what sort of colour you create.*

Let's have another go at our coloured box and the same three colours in Image 7...

Image 7



This time I've darkened the red, slightly lightened the blue and significantly lightened the yellow.

Now the shapes look like a box, with form and light and shade, even without any shadow being cast.

You get the impression that strong light is falling on the top, with a bit less light on the blue side and the red side being in deep shadow. This happens irrespective of the colours I've used because I've adjusted their value to 'create' the shape of the box. To confirm this, look at the new box in greyscale in Image 8...

Image 8



Notice how this box looks much more 3-dimensional?

If you don't understand or check the value of the colours you place on your painting (and where you're placing them), the result is likely to be a flat, lifeless image that you won't be inspired to show off to friends

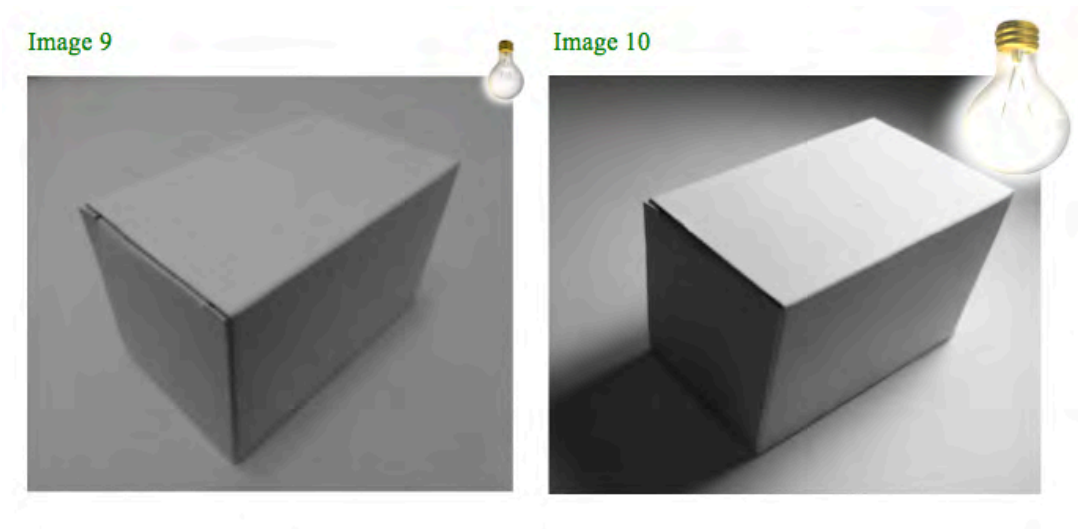
or family.

## 1.4 Form and viewing distance

In our example of a box with high value contrast above, the different values we used for the three sides of the box reflect the light source -

the way light strikes one side of the box and puts the others in relative shadow.

The stronger the light source, the starker the contrast will be between the lights and darks. Compare these two photos (Images 9 & 10) of a simple white box...



In this sense, we are using value contrast to create form and give an object on a flat piece of paper a 3-dimensional look. Incidentally, a really wide range between the lightest lights and darkest darks, gives the impression of a stronger light source – something we'll look at later on.

Aside from creating form, we also use contrasting values to give an image a sense of **depth and distance**. Landscapes illustrate this point really well...

As an object moves farther into the distance it will have increasingly less value, in other words it becomes lighter. Even a very dark element (like a slate roof on a cottage) will appear relatively light when it's far enough away.

You can show this in a representational form by looking at the following two photos (Images 11 & 12)...



Image 11



Image 12

If you painted a landscape, you'd probably have these three elements of sky, middle distance and foreground. In this case they're represented by streaks of blue, green and brown.

However, they're all a pretty similar value (look at the greyscale version next to it).

Now let's adjust them, in Images 13 and 14, to better represent distant sky, middle distance trees and a foreground field...



Image 13



Image 14

See how the adjustment of the sky and the tree colours has given, even in this abstract example, a much greater degree of depth and distance. It's even more apparent when you compare the two black and white versions.

Moving on to something more realistic, take a look at the two sketch paintings below in Images 15 and 16...



Image 15



Image 16

**Image 15** - The values of the near hills are actually lighter compared to the distant hills. It's hard to distinguish between the middle distance hills because they are the same value.

**Image 16** - The values become progressively lighter into the distance. The edges of the middle distance hills are darker than the hills behind them to create contrast and separation.

With that bit of theory under our hat, let's look at 3 simple tools you can use to help you see values within a painting much more easily...

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 YouTube - [www.youtube.com/user/ArtTutorOnline](http://www.youtube.com/user/ArtTutorOnline)

## SECTION 2 – TOOLS TO CHECK VALUE

### 2.1 Squint and defocus your eyes

People often squint slightly when they struggle to read something because it's slightly out of focus for them. Subtle squinting reduces the extraneous light and can make a point of focus sharper and clearer.

However, if you squint a bit harder and let your eyes defocus slightly, you'll notice that your picture of the world becomes less detailed. Stripping out the detail allows you to see masses of colour and value (those light and dark areas) much more easily.

Here's what squinting and defocusing your eyes should make things look like...

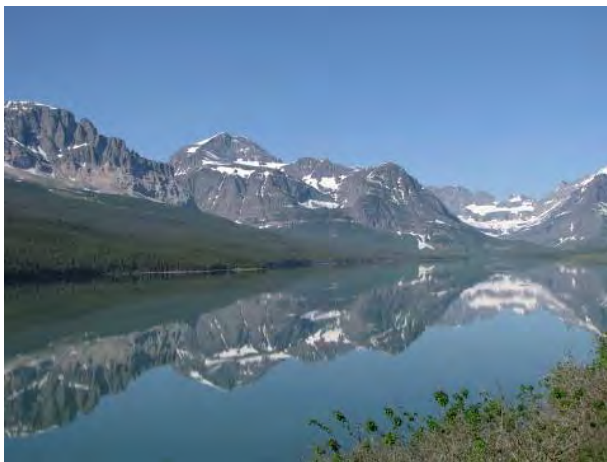


Image 17 – before squinting



Image 18 – after squinting (less detail, darks are darker, lights are lighter)

Squinting and checking for values (both in your own artwork as it progresses and your reference material) is something you should make a habit of. You really can't do too much of it during the painting process.

Let's move on to tool number 2...

## 2.2 Use a grey scale



If you find squinting / defocusing your eyes doesn't make the various values of an image clear enough for you, you should try using a grey scale.

In fact, even if squinting works well for you, a grey scale is so easy to make and so useful it's well worth having one by your side whenever you paint.

What is a grey scale?

For our purposes, it's simply a strip of card or paper with 5-7 values of grey that range from very light grey to a very dark grey.

I created the one on the left with acrylic paint but you can use any paint medium or a graphite pencil using varying degrees of pressure. It's roughly 8" x 1.5".

We're going to use this grey scale to examine a reference photo of Stalker Castle (Image 19) in Scotland and then create a small sketch of the castle itself.

Image 19



We're not going to work from colour just yet, but I want to draw your attention to a couple of things in the colour photo to the left...

Notice the distant hills, how pale they appear. This occurs quite naturally with

dust particles in the atmosphere and makes features paler and less distinct the further away they are.

Notice also how you can clearly see one side of the roof is lighter than the other because of the way the light is hitting the castle.

## Exercise: How To Use A Grey Scale

*Print this page out and cut out the grey scale. Use a 'good' or 'best' quality print settings rather than 'draft'.*

Image 20

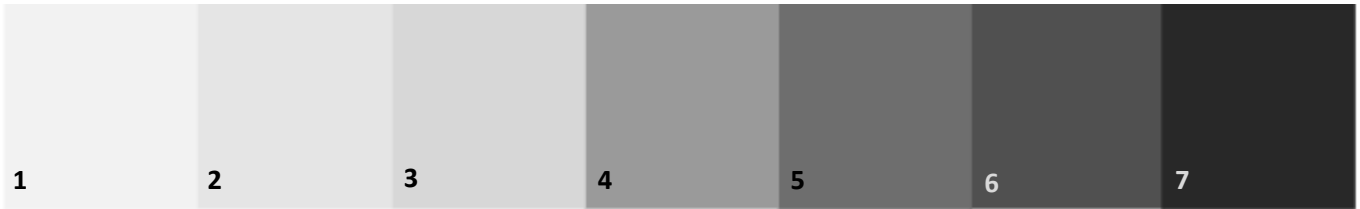


Image 21

### Instructions

Place your grey scale (Image 20) at the side of the black and white print out of the castle (Image 21). You're not allowed to pick it up yet though.

Look at the black and white photograph, screwing up your eyes to defocus them, and try to gauge which value on your grey scale most closely matches the following parts of the picture:

- The blue patch of sky above the castle
- The distant hills
- The promontory (darker land mass just below the distant hills)
- The main castle walls (both sides)
- The water by the canoeist

- The grassy area to the bottom left of the castle
- The castle doors and windows
- The floating seaweed

You won't get perfect matches – just choose the number on the scale you think looks about right. There are probably about 20 or 30 subtly different values even in this photo but you can simplify them down to the seven on the grey scale.

Once you've tried to gauge the value by eye, pick up your grey scale and hold it next the various elements of the image. Here's my attempt...

Image 22



Image 23



Image 24

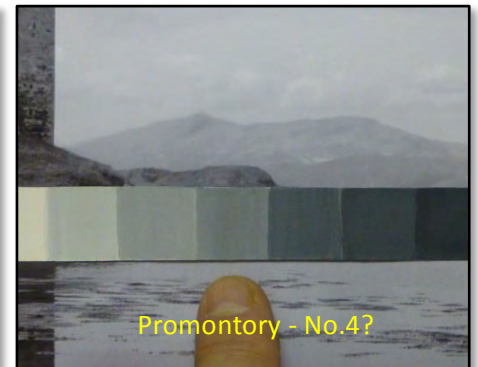


Image 25

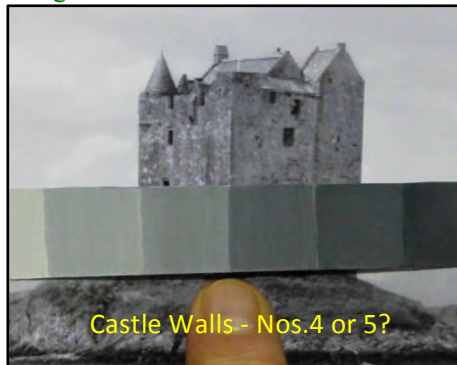


Image 26

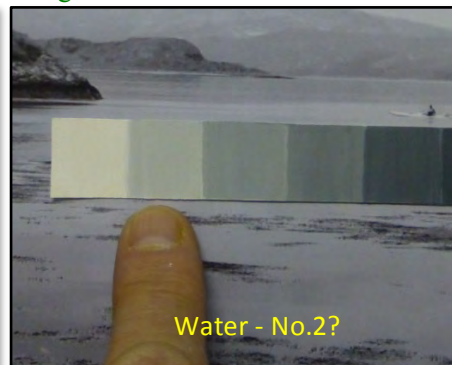


Image 27

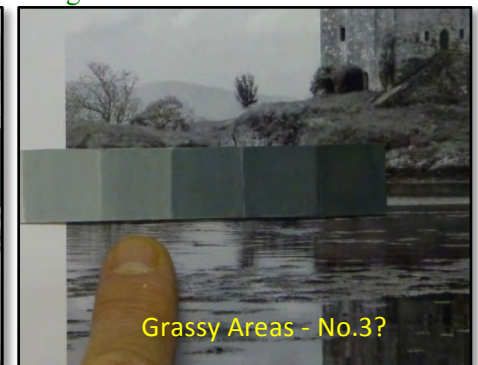


Image 28



Image 29

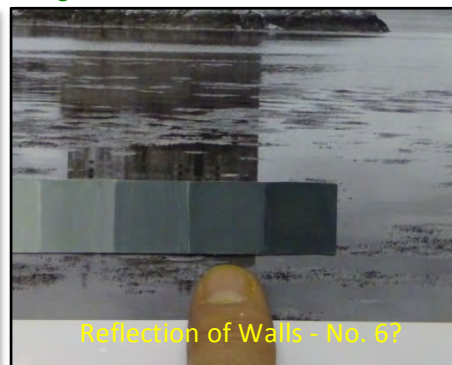


Image 30





So how did you fare? Were there elements of the picture that you found difficult to gauge until you used the scale? Here's one thing you may have noticed...

### Note the castle walls

The two main aspects of the castle walls are quite similar in tone (Image 31). Even when you screw your eyes up, there doesn't appear to be a great deal of difference.

This is where you, as an artist, have a big advantage over a photographer. You have the opportunity to strengthen or lighten one aspect of the castle to create a greater sense of dimension (Image 32).

If it's a bright, summer's scene you want to recreate, you can go to town on this and literally turn on the sunlight. If you're capturing a moodier, more overcast atmosphere you can be more subtle.

Image 31

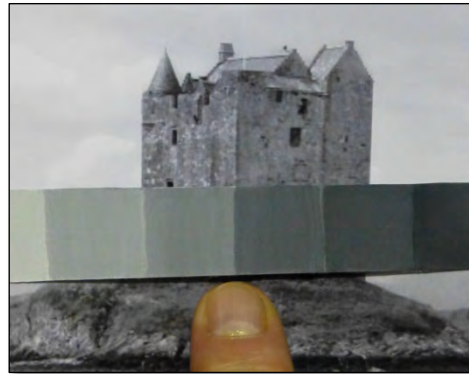


Image 32



A grey scale is a very handy little tool to have by your side – whether it's in your studio or out in the field. Keep several of them handy. Use one at every opportunity. Very soon, you'll hone an expert eye for picking out subtle (and stark) differences in value that give your artwork that master quality.

## 2.3 Make your own 'redeye' filter

Even if you find that squinting and the grey scale allows you to easily see blocks of value, I highly recommend you out try this low-tech tool. I call it my 'redeye filter'.

### What you need

A piece of red cellophane - the sort of thing you find in a florist or a sheet of red acetate or even a clear, red file cover. You only need a few square inches.

If it's quite sturdy (like a sheet of acetate) it will work as it is. If it's flimsy like cellophane, make a simple frame out of card and tape the red plastic sheet to it.

If you struggle to find anything local, do a Google or Amazon search for 'red cellophane' or 'red acetate'. You'll be able to pick up something for next to nothing.

### How it works

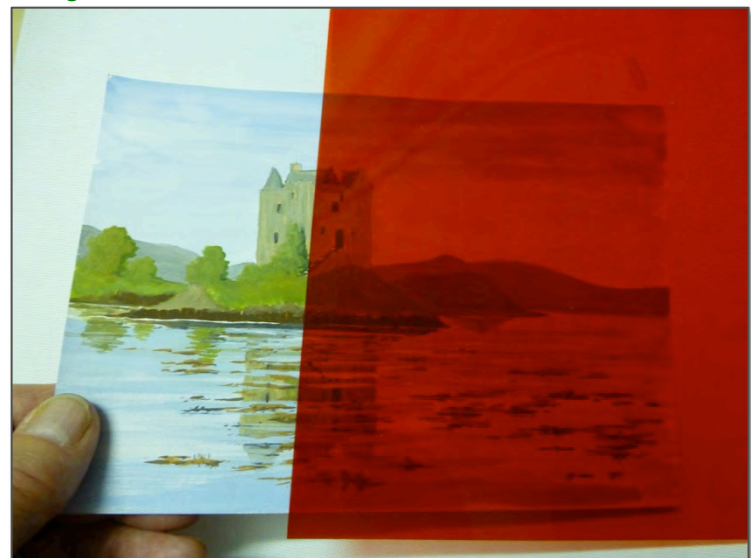
Hold your Redeye Checker over various parts of a painting or reference photograph. The transparent red will 'lose' most of the colour but will immediately highlight contrast values. Adjacent parts of the picture with similar values will blend into one mass.

This is the equivalent of screwing up your eyes but is easier to check specific parts of your picture. Try it on your existing artwork. If you still have a reference photo you used for a particular piece of art, try it on that too. Is there a difference between the photo and your rendition?

Image 33



Image 34



## SECTION 3 – MONOCHROME EXERCISES

### 3.1 Exercise 1 – Castle drawing

In this first exercise, you're going to produce a pencil drawing of the castle photograph we examined earlier.

What we are NOT aiming for is a detailed, life-like drawing. The entire purpose of this exercise is to get you to 'look past' the details and see overall values.

You're going to make meticulous use of both the grey scale and squinting or defocusing your eyes. If you don't I can almost guarantee what will happen (answer at the end of this exercise!).

You won't have to be this meticulous with your grey scale for future drawings or paintings, but I strongly encourage you to take lots of time checking the strength of light and dark areas for this one. Doing so will really help this habit and skill to sink in.

I'll be creating the drawing along with you and I'll provide plenty of guidance along the way. So grab yourself a beverage of choice and let's make a start...

#### What you'll need:

- A sheet of drawing paper, A5 is big enough. Printer paper is okay, but a heavier weight, smooth drawing paper is better.
- An HB, B and 3B or 4B pencil.
- A putty eraser. Nothing like being optimistic hey!
- A print-out of the next page of this e-book, which contains the line drawing and reference photo.

#### Line drawing, reference photograph and grey scale

You'll find these on the next page. The line drawing will print on to half a sheet of A4 printer paper. Trace your printed line drawing on to your drawing paper (see my [Drawing Foundation Course](#) at ArtTutor for a video lesson on this).

You'll want to then cut out the grey scale strip.

And you're good to go!

1

2

3

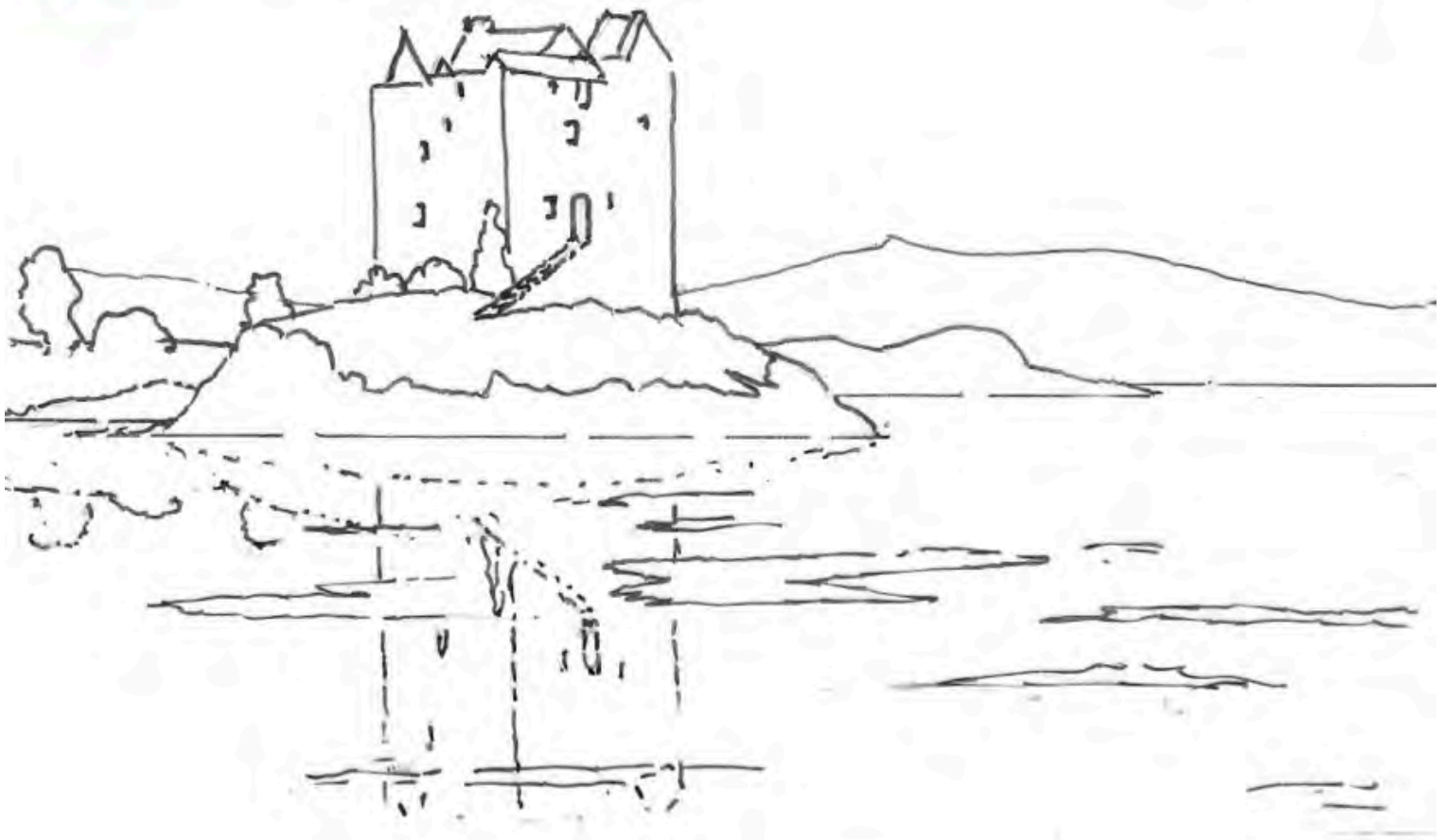
4

5

6

7

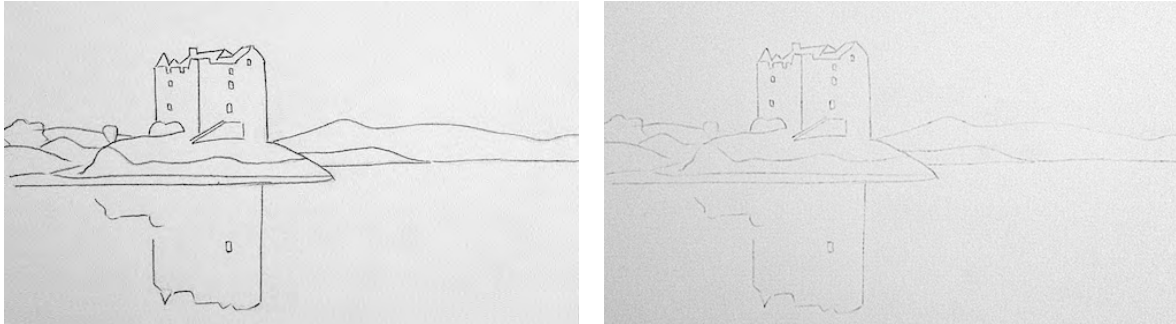
Image 35



## Preparation

The first thing I've done is lightened off my line drawing using a putty eraser. It probably won't matter for the castle walls, but the distant mountains will look like they have an outline and this can distort your judgement of the correct value in this area. You'll want to do this whenever you trace a line drawing for a watercolour painting.

Image 36



## Sky & Water Area

Look at your reference photo and really defocus / squint your eyes. What value on our grey scale would you say the sky is **overall**?

Overall is the key word here – yes there are patches of cloud and darker areas but if you squint enough and step back from the photo, you should be able to choose a single value that roughly represents the entire area.

I'm going to choose a value #2 and using my HB pencil. I'm holding the pencil almost parallel to the paper and using the side edge of the graphite with the lightest of diagonal strokes to lay down the minimum amount of tone I can. I'll do the same for the water using horizontal strokes.

Image 37

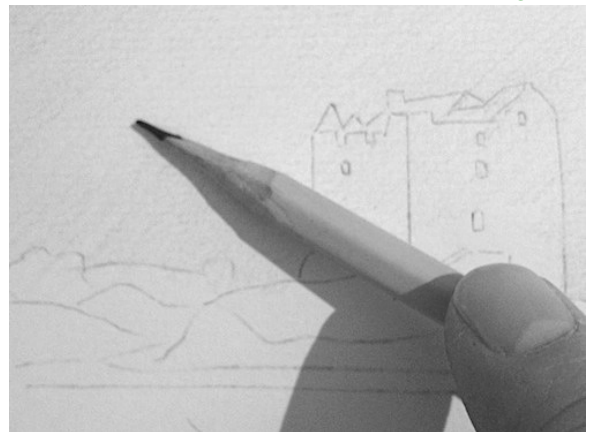
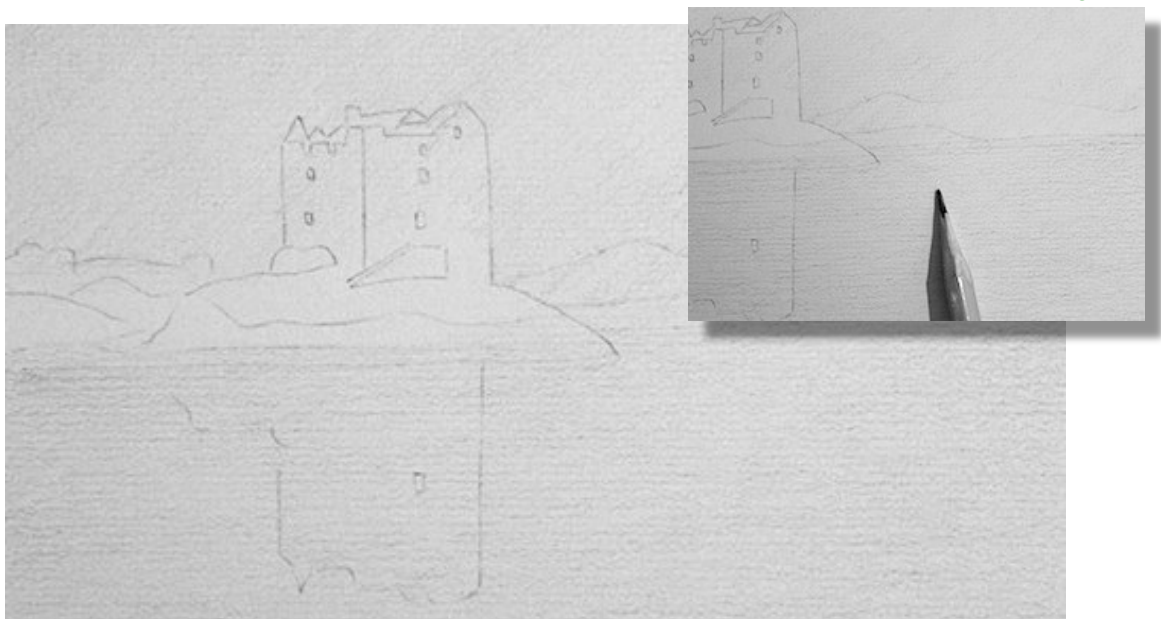


Image 38

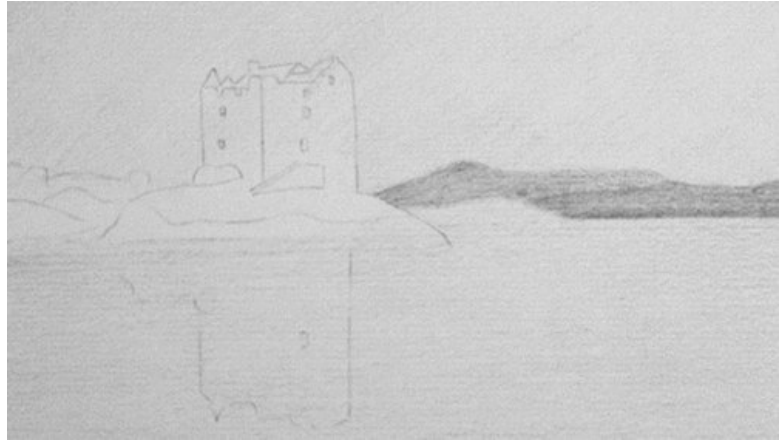


Notice how the water is a slightly darker value than the sky? Again, ignore the details of the seaweed and ripples and cloud reflections. Stand back from the photo, defocus your eyes and compare the area by the canoeist to the sky above her.

## Distant Hills and Promontory

Image 39

What value would you choose for the distant hills as a whole? They are slightly darker to the right but I'm going for #3 with my HB.



Place your grey scale on a bit of scrap paper and shade a small swatch of graphite directly below the value #3 square. Learn how much pressure and how much graphite you need to apply to create value #3.

Now add this to your distant hills.

For the smaller promontory I'm using value #4. Again, ignore any rocky undulations and details. Just block the area in with your HB. Oh, and while you're doing that make a mental note of whether the promontory is a stronger or weaker value than the grassy bank of the castle.

Image 40



## Castle Walls

This is where almost everyone (in fact, everyone) makes the same mistake. Here's what I'd like you to do (and please don't cheat!)...

On a scrap of paper, WITHOUT using your grey scale or squinting your eyes, lay down a block of tone with your pencil that you think is about the correct value for the left hand castle wall.



Image 41

Blur your eyes. Look at the right hand edge of the castle wall in particular. Look at the contrast with the sky. My castle drawing on the top needs to be at least a value darker.

Again, ignore the details of brickwork and weathering and just lay down an overall value on your paper.

Now measure both the wall in the photo and your block of tone with your grey scale (and squint your eyes). Literally everyone sees the wall much lighter than it is. Why?

Because you can't help but seeing the details – the light bricks in particular. But details come later. The overall value for the castle walls is about a #4.5 on my scale.

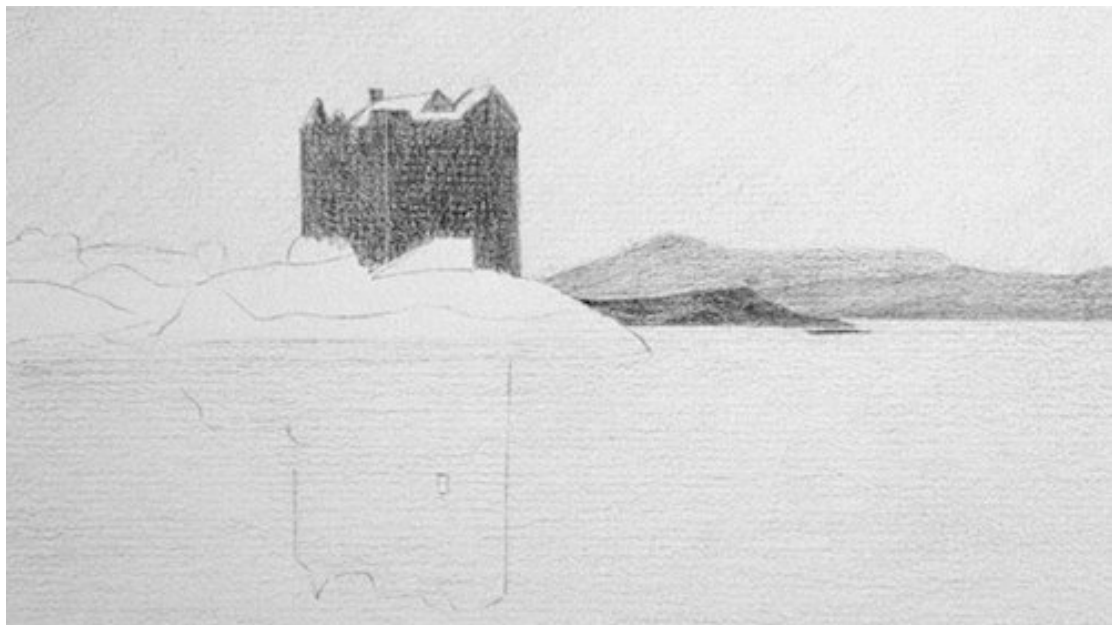


Image 42

Do my walls in Image 42 look too dark to you? I think most people would say so...



Image 43

You can clearly see here they're not! I used a B pencil for this.

### Grassy Banks, Rocky Area and Reflection

By now you should be getting the idea, so I'll move quickly through the next few sections...

The grassy banks are slightly darker than the castle. Let's go with a value #5 using the B pencil. What about the white rocky area just above the water?

This is another area I can see where my students *assume* rather than *observe*. You know they're a chalky white colour in real life so the temptation is to keep them quite light.

Blur your eyes to meld the lights and darks of the rocks into more of a single value. Darker than the sky? Absolutely. Darker than the water beneath the canoeist? Maybe about the same so let's go with value #3. Just block in the area for now – we can pick out lights with our eraser and add in some shadow detail later.



Image 44



For dark area at the bottom of the rocks, I'm pressing very firmly with a B pencil.

The castle reflection is an interesting one. I hope you can see it's a noticeably darker value than the castle itself. Reflections tend to mute value contrast – in other words there is less distinction between lights and darks.

You can see a clear example of this by comparing the very dark doorway. See how it's less distinguishable in the reflection? It's slightly lighter and the brick wall is slightly darker.

## Windows & Other Darks

Using the 4B pencil we can now add the darkest darks – value #7.

I actually erased back some of the graphite I'd laid down previously over the window and doorway areas because this allows me to achieve a darker dark with a bit more of a tooth underneath.

Image 45



At this stage the exercise is complete. Not a particularly impressive piece of artwork but it's given me plenty of practice looking for and gauging values.

I'm happy that the values are reasonably accurate and now it's time to have a bit of fun...

**Finishing Touches (optional)**

Using my putty eraser and moulding it to a point, I'm going to pick out some subtle lights on the distant hills, grassy bank, rocks and castle walls. I'll accentuate these and bring back the overall value by adding some darks.

I'll also knead the eraser into a fine 'strip' (Image 46) and pull out some ripples on the water. Again, I'll define these with some darks and add a few more bits and pieces of interest.



Image 46

And here's the finished drawing in Image 47.



Image 47

**One last thing**

I chose this photograph because unless you really do squint your eyes and use your grey scale, it will catch you out. However, from an artistic point of view we can improve on the photo...

The two aspects of the castle walls are very similar in value. By adjusting one side darker or lighter we can create greater form and a bit more interest (something that would be difficult for the photographer to do).

Let's see what difference creating some contrast between the two walls makes in Image 48...



Image 48

Please do have a go at this exercise. Remember, it's not about producing a highly refined drawing - it's a practical way for you to train your eye to see values relative to one another.

### Follow ArtTutor on social media

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### 3.2 Exercise 2 – Monochrome painting: Lake Garda

Using graphite pencil is a great way to start honing your eye to really see the various values in an image. All you need to do is increase or decrease the pressure you apply and you have an infinite number of values at your disposal.

Now, let's progress to the next stage and begin to apply this to pastel painting...

Image 49



In the next exercise, you're going to produce a monochrome painting of Lake Garda in Italy (Image 49), demonstrated by one of our ArtTutor instructors, Michael Howley. You'll be using just one colour family, in this case, blue.

Now invariably, students think of monochrome as black and white with various shades of grey in between. However, you could use red, blue, purple, brown, green or any colour, as long as it is capable of giving you several variations of value from dark to light.

The beauty of this process is that, with a little practice, it becomes second nature to select or adjust the values in monochrome and mentally translate them into colours.

In fact, many professional artists will produce a monochromatic painting and use it as a reference when producing their final piece. The painting below (Images 50 & 51) are from one of our ArtTutor video lessons and you can see how instructor [Joanne Thomas](#) has used her monochromatic study to great effect!

Image 50



Image 51



### What you'll need:

- A sheet of light grey pastel paper, approximately A4  
I will be using a light grey pastel paper from the Fabriano Tiziano range and will be working on the slightly smoother side.
- Six tints/tones of one colour plus white (see my tonal scale)  
I've used the following from the Daler-Rowney Soft Pastel range:  
Silver White  
French Ultramarine tints 0,1,2,3 and 6  
Indigo tint 6 (for a darker blue which has sufficient tone)  
You may be able to adapt to your range of pastels by using slightly different blues (or whichever colour you choose). The important thing is to create a colour tonal value scale and check the values against your own greyscale, or the one on page 20, to make sure that the colours you select will create the right range of tonal values.  
I also tend to break my pastels into smaller pieces of less than an inch long so that I can use sidestrokes as well as the end of the pastel.
- A very soft pencil (3b – 6b) for sketching or transferring the image
- A printout of the 2 pages of this ebook which contain the line drawing and reference photo

### Line drawing, reference photograph

The line drawing will print on to a sheet of A4 printer paper. Shade over the back of this line drawing with a very soft pencil and then trace down on to your pastel paper. There's a video in Bob's [Drawing Foundation Course](#) on how to do this.

If your pastel paper is darker in tone than mine, the pencil might not show up and so you could draw a grid over the printed image and draw the same grid on your A4 pastel paper and then copy the drawing section by section.

### Monochrome Scale

Here's the monochromatic scale that I used. Do NOT print this out. It's important that you create your own scale in the tones/tints you're going to be using.

Create your own scale on a strip of the light grey pastel paper, beginning with white, as I have. Notice on my scale that value 2 is a very similar tone to the paper. If your paper is slightly darker, the tones will look a little different when compared to it – this is why it's really important that you make a monochrome scale using your own paper and pastels.



Image 52

### A note about the paper

In the photographs as the painting develops, the paper looks a little warmer in colour than it is. This is because of the way the camera reacts to the relative colour temperature of pastels and paper under artificial light. In reality, it is a slightly cooler, bluer grey.

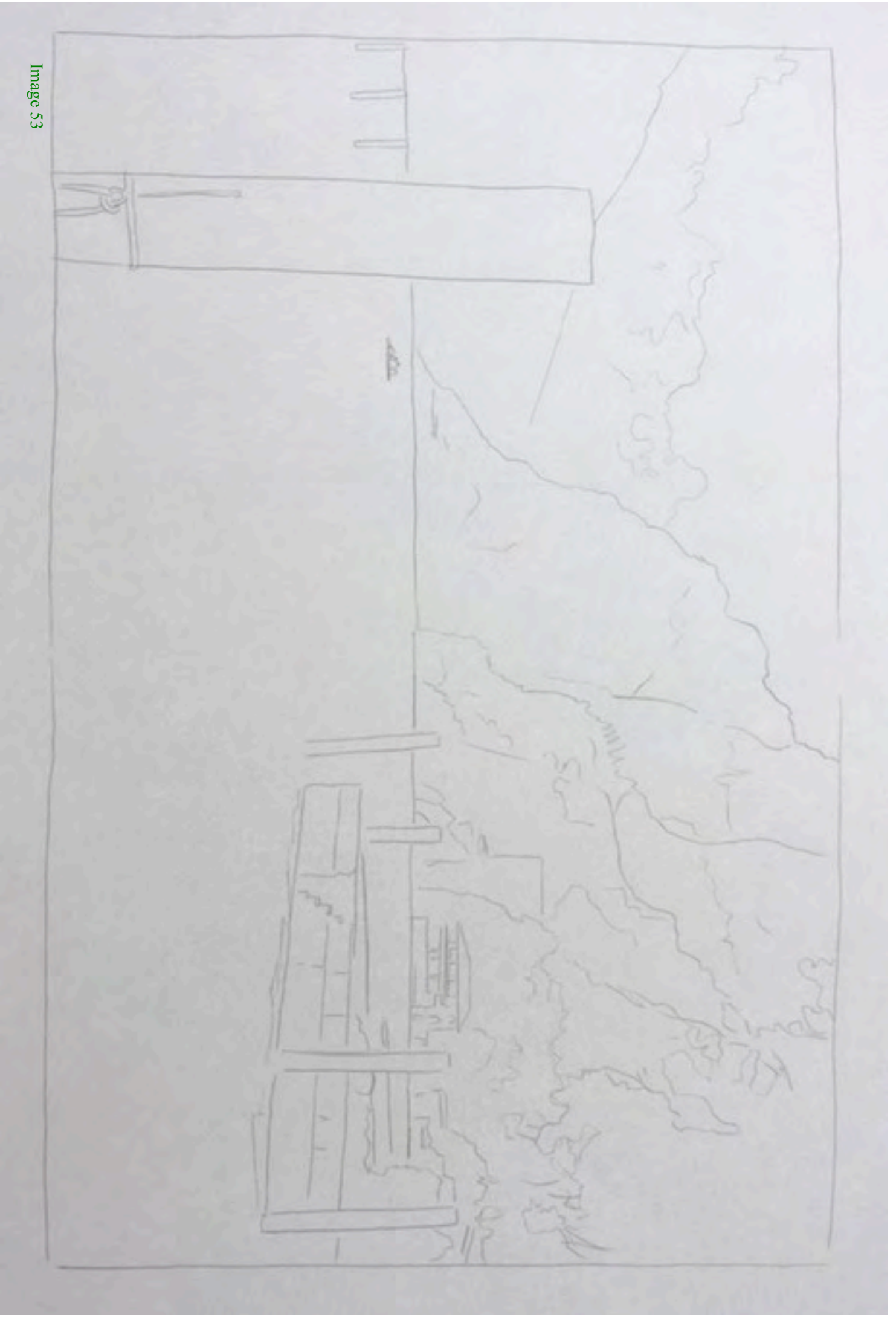


Image 53



Image 54

Riva del Garda. Used with kind permission from Geomangio.

[www.ArtTutor.com](http://www.ArtTutor.com)

## 1. Beginning the painting

### *Adding values 1 and 2*

Let's start our painting! We'll begin, not with value 1 (white) as you would with watercolour, but with value 2. This is because I want some of my highlights to mix a little with other values and others to 'sit on top' of them. So we'll actually be applying highlights at different stages of the painting.

Let's take our French Ultramarine tint 0 (value 2) and apply downward strokes with the side of the pastel to cover the sky and the distant range of hills. For the water, use broken strokes in a horizontal direction.

It's important to vary the size of your marks here – use both the side and the end of the pastel to create marks that will suggest waves. Perhaps use finer marks in the distance becoming larger as you move towards the foreground.



The lightest values in my painting will be the clouds and sparkles on the water. Using the Silver White (value 1) and a circular motion (alternating between the side and end of the pastel), gently introduce the cloud shapes.

Notice that there was hardly any pencil line here because I didn't want it to show through the pastel layer.



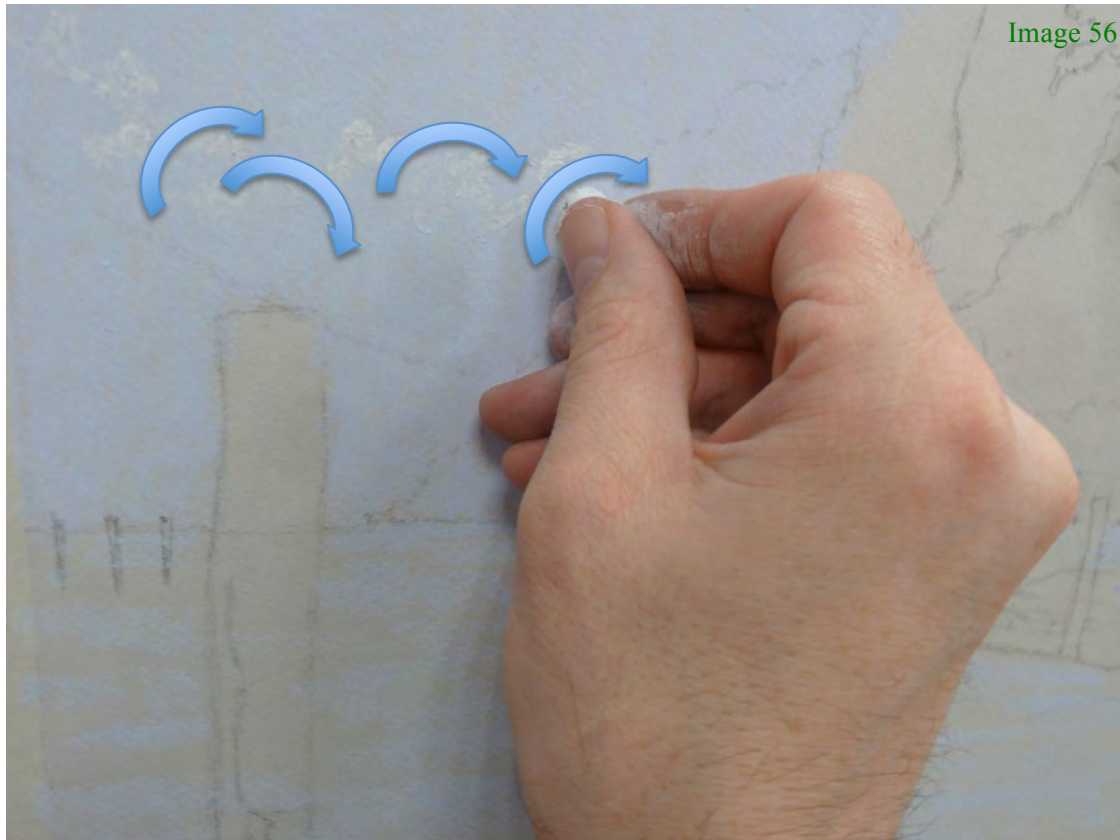


Image 56

Continue to add a few broken horizontal strokes with the end of the pastel to suggest some of the sparkle on the water and the roof of the distant building.



Image 57

## 2. Adding Value 3

Using French Ultramarine tint 1 (value 3), we'll apply some downward strokes in the sky above the cloud and and, as the pastel reaches the clouds, work into and around the shapes.

As you use the pastel, allow some of the previous layer to show through, as I have. Continue by working the pastel up into the cloud shapes and leave some of the area below them uncovered so that value 2 shows through down towards the distant hills.

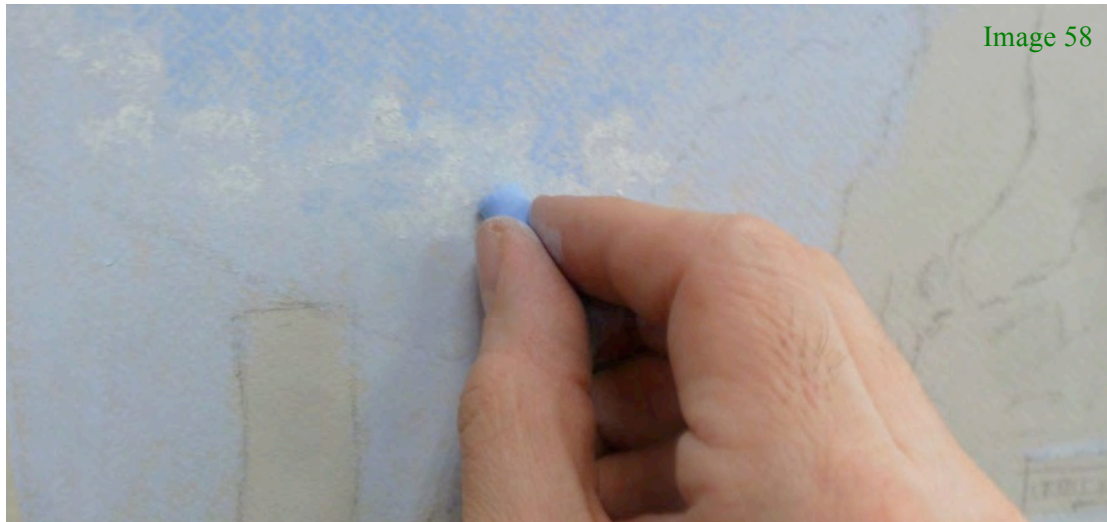


Image 58

Using crisp sidestrokes with the pastel, pick out the shape of the distant hills. Again, let the previous layer show through in areas of this range of hills to suggest the misty effect. To do this just ease up the pressure and also leave some areas uncovered with this value.

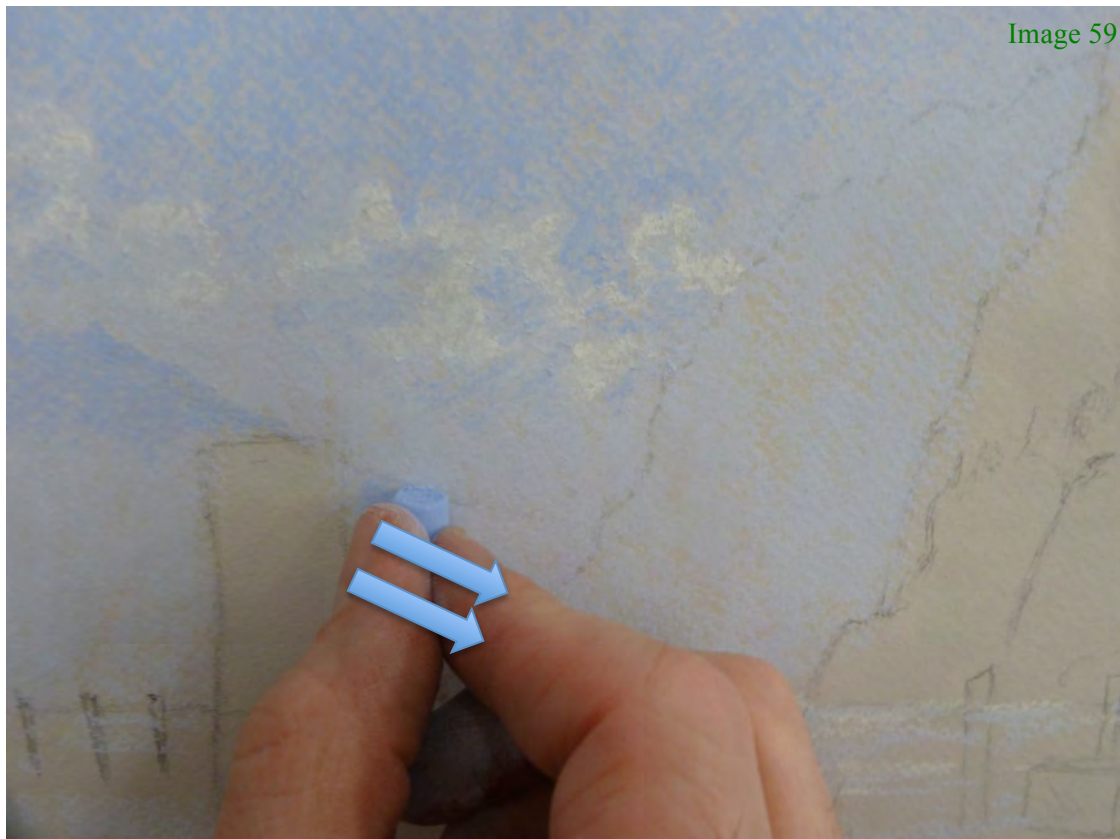
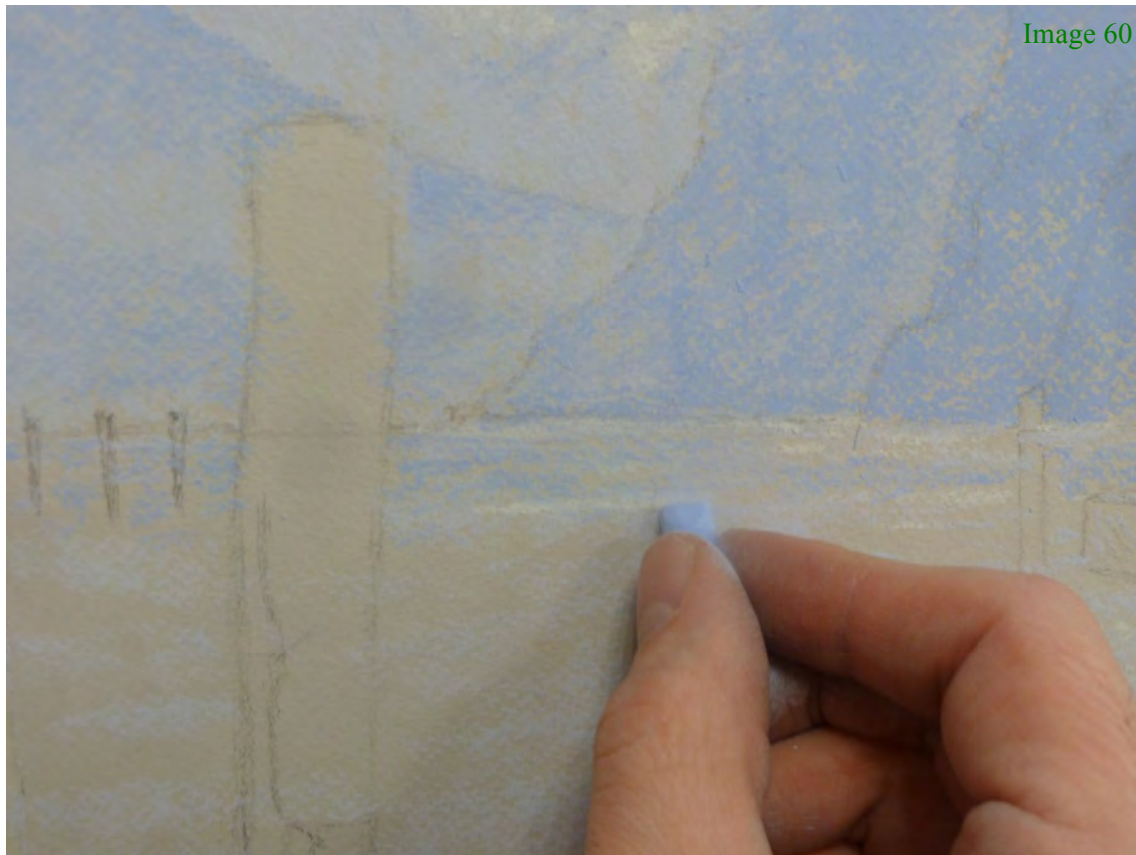


Image 59

We'll apply some more French Ultramarine tint 1 to the distant range of hills to the right. By now you should be starting to see how using different pastel strokes will help us suggest texture; it will also allow some of the previous layer to show through and we'll end up with a harmonious picture instead of blocks of colour.

Continue to apply pastel to the remaining hills to the right, covering the paper more solidly as you move closer to the foreground.



In the water, once again use horizontal strokes, and make them a little larger as they come closer to the foreground.

To find out more about using different strokes and layering have a look at my [Soft Pastels Foundation Course](#) on ArtTutor.com.

To suggest the reflections of the poles, we can use short 'squiggly' horizontal strokes moving downwards at the same time to create a broken vertical shape.

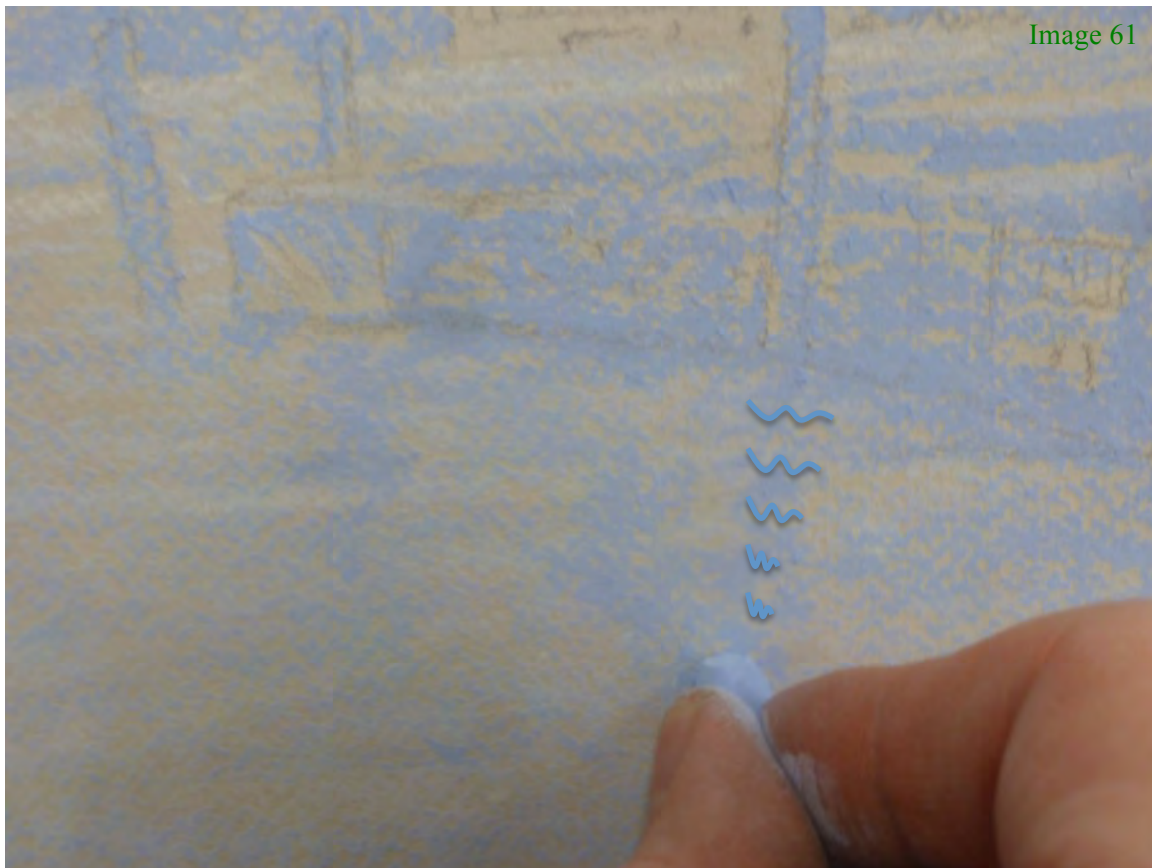


Image 61

Continue to apply the same value to the posts and the jetty, again using strokes to suggest the stonework.



Image 62

At this point, the painting is established but lacking in depth and contrast. This will come as we continue to add further tonal values to it throughout the next stages.

Image 63



So far, I have not blended the pastels at all, but at this point I feel the texture is a little dominant and perhaps a bit too much of the paper colour is evident. So next, I suggest you blend *very* lightly over areas with your little finger to *ease* the pastel into the paper.

You don't want to lose your suggested textures so try and be light handed and selective with this. In the water, for example, blend in the direction of the strokes and try not to touch your highlights.

The overall effect is to cover the surface a little more and soften the image in preparation for successive layers. Compare Image 64 with the previously shown unblended Image 62.

Image 64



### 3. Adding Value 4

We can now move onto our next value and add French Ultramarine tint 2 (value 4) to the hills on the right, again applying the pastel in a broken way in order to suggest the texture of foliage/rocks, and to allow the previous layer to show through.



Image 65

Continue to add this value to parts of the distant building, the poles, the jetty and the water, applying different strokes to suggest different textures throughout.



Image 66

Again blend gently in areas to settle the pastel into the paper (see Images 67 and 68). When trying to blend fine detail, I sometimes use my little finger and pinch it against my thumb for a little more control. You could also use a blending tool (either paper or rubber-tipped) as shown in my [Pastels Foundation Course](#).



Image 67

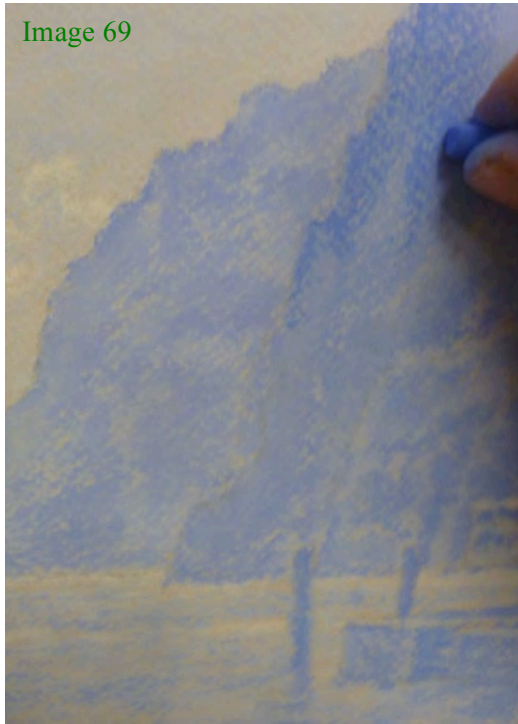
Notice in Image 68 how I have blended the middle range of hills on the right more solidly and in a downward direction to capture what I see in the source photograph.



Image 68

#### 4. Adding Value 5

Image 69



Using a downward motion add French Ultramarine tint 3 (value 5) now to the second range of hills on the right.

Blend this area in the same direction as the strokes (see Image 69) and continue to add value 5 to the closest range of hills and the other areas of the painting as shown, varying the marks as you go.

Notice how I have used more specific shapes for waves, reflections and stonework in the foreground areas and have begun to pick out the detail on the large post to the left. Again, you might want to blend areas lightly to quieten down the textures and contrasts.

Image 70





### 5. Adding Value 6

We'll start to apply French Ultramarine tint 6 (value 6) now, beginning with the closest range of hills on the right and again allowing previous layers to show through.

Image 71



Continue to apply it to the other areas shown below, taking your time with the marks you make and the shapes you draw.

This layer in particular, brings the painting and the detail into focus. Once you have done this, use the same level of care to blend areas of the hillside, the posts, areas of the jetty and reflections, etc. At this stage of the painting there is a nice sense of depth, contrast and texture.

Image 72



### 6. Adding value 7

Using Indigo tint 6 (value 7), add the tree foliage in the right hand foreground area.

Image 73



I was using a small piece of pastel here and used the end and side alternately to block in and suggest detail at the same time.

Again, carefully add selected areas of this value to the distant buildings, the jetty, the reflections, and the posts.

This is a stage for really tightening up the details: observe carefully the shifts in light, mid and dark tones across these areas, and try to refine them as you apply this darker value – notice the modelling of light on and around the 2 posts to the right of the picture, for example.



The painting is almost finished now but just requires a few finishing touches to bring it alive. Once again using a variety of strokes including broken lines, dots, short dashes etc., add some more highlights to the water with Silver White. It's easy to overdo this, so refer to the photograph for where these should be and how many to put in.



At this point it's good practice to stand back and spend some time away from your painting – this means you can come back and assess it more objectively.

I've done this with my painting and I think it would be good to add a few darker wave and reflection shapes into the foreground area.



And finally, a few more sparkling touches of highlight in the foreground.



And there you have it – one monochrome pastel painting of Lake Garda with depth, contrast and vitality!

I hope you enjoyed creating it as much as I did.

Image 79



*Lake Garda by Michael Howley*

If you've completed this monochrome study by Michael and my Stalker Castle exercise from earlier, you should start to feel really comfortable identifying and reproducing solid value contrast. Just as importantly...

Actually *doing* these exercises will help the concept sink in and become second nature. Reading about it isn't enough; I really encourage you to go through these two exercises before moving on to colour. Which is what we'll look at next...

## SECTION 4 – COLOUR EXERCISES

Look at this image of a red and yellow square next to each other...

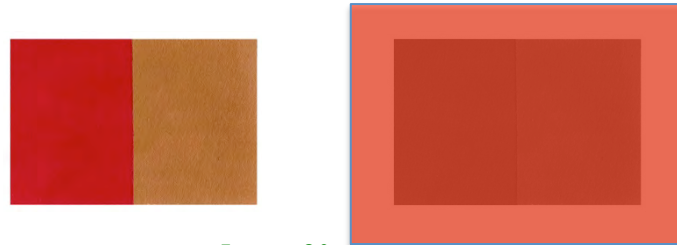


Image 80

In colour, these two squares are easily distinguished from one another. However, if I hold a red piece of acetate over them (my redevye filter) you can see how they merge into one solid block almost.

You might ask the question “*when would I ever view a painting through a red piece of plastic*” and you wouldn’t. But even though an observer’s eye might be able to distinguish between the various shapes in your picture, it will look flat and anaemic.

Moreover, standing at even a moderate distance from a painting has an effect of muting the colours and I’ll guarantee that a picture made up of similar values will look uninspiring at best, from any sort of viewing distance!

### 4.1 Exercise 1 – Value match real objects

This is a simple and fun exercise and also very useful at training your eye to see the tonal value in colour.

#### What you’ll need:

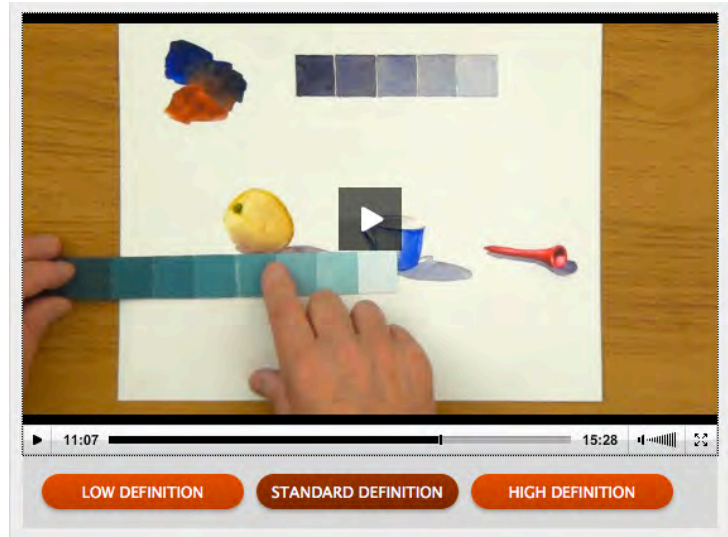
- 3 everyday objects. Anything small that you can place on the desk in front of you. In my example I’m using a lemon, a tea cup and a golf tee peg.
- Your chosen painting surface, paints and brush of choice.
- A grey or monochrome scale (a colour scale will provide more of a challenge than a grey scale, so give that a go!)

Image 81



## Step 1

- Place one of the objects in front of you.
- Look at the object and squint / defocus your eyes.
- Notice the values of various parts of the object – the shadow areas, any creases or folds, highlights, indentations, details etc.
- Identify in your mind the darkest value and the lightest value.
- Hold your grey / monochrome scale against various parts of the object to confirm the values.
- Repeat this for each of your 3 objects.



## Step 2

- Pick the darkest part of one of the objects. For example, I'm looking at the pith at the end of the lemon.
- Mix a colour that you think is the correct value for this darkest area. Don't worry about getting a perfect colour match; your aim is to get an accurate value match.
- Add a swatch of your mixed colour to your paper or canvas (if you're using watercolours, allows this to dry fully).
- Now use your grey / monochrome scale to see how accurate you were.
- Repeat this for the lightest part of the object.
- Repeat a third time for a mid value.
- Finally, repeat the process for the remaining two objects.

### Image 82

You can see a video version of this exercise in my [Watercolour, Acrylics and Oils Foundation courses on ArtTutor.com](#)

This is a great exercise for quickly honing your eye to see the strength of value in various colours. Don't paint the objects in full - there's a danger you'll get caught up in the detail and it's time consuming. Just paint 3-4 patches of colour on your painting surface for each object, and measure. This way, you get cram in lots of learning experiences in a short period of time!

## 4.2 Exercise 2 – Full colour painting: Changing Light over the Fields

It's time to move on to a full colour pastel painting!

If you've diligently followed the exercises so far, this could be one of the most vibrant, striking images you've ever painted.



Image 83

For this exercise, Michael Howley has chosen an image that uses the full range of tonal values to dramatic effect. The landscape, typical of Michael's native Northern England, captures the shifts in light and dark across the sky and fields as clouds sweep overhead. The challenge in this one will be to effectively use your tonal range of colours to reflect the drama!

So let me hand you over once again to Michael who'll take you through this painting step-by-step.

### What you'll need

- A sheet of light grey pastel paper (A3 size). Once again, I'm using a light grey from the Fabriano Tiziano range and the slightly smoother side.
- A range of pastel colours and values similar to my selection in Image 84. Again, I tend to break my pastels into smaller pieces of less than an inch long so that I can use sidestrokes as well as the end of the pastel.
- A printout of the next 3 pages of this book that contains the outline drawing, split over two pages, and the reference photograph
- A monochrome scale

## Colour/Value Range

Here are the colours I'm going to use in this exercise. You can see their tonal values in the colour chart in Image 84.

Once again I am using Daler-Rowney soft pastels. Yours may not match exactly but for the purposes of following the exercise, it would help if you put together a similar range of colours and values.

The numbers in brackets below relate to the tint number of each pastel.

- Silver White
- Cobalt Blue (0); Cerulean (0); Cadmium Red Orange (0); Sap Green (0)
- Indigo (1); Sap Green (2); Burnt Sienna (2); Cerulean (2)
- Blue Grey (4); Cerulean (3); French Ultramarine (2); Burnt Sienna (4); Autumn Brown (4)
- Indigo (3); Terre Verte (6)
- Purple Grey (4); Blue Grey (6)
- Indigo (6)



## Outline Sketch

The outline sketch is split over 2 pages and will fit onto an A3 piece of pastel paper. You can trace this onto your paper or create a grid as with the previous monochrome study. Alternatively, as it is a fairly minimal sketch why not have a go at freehand copying.

## Monochrome Scale

If you have created a monochrome scale for the Lake Garda exercise, you could use this to compare your colour values against. Alternatively, you could create one by mixing black and white on your pastel paper in different proportions.

Create a range of 7 tones, including white and refer to the black and white tonal scale from page 20 for the range of values.

To see pastel colours being mixed on the surface you could visit my [Pastel Foundation Course](https://www.arttutor.com/courses/pastel-foundation-course) at ArtTutor.com.





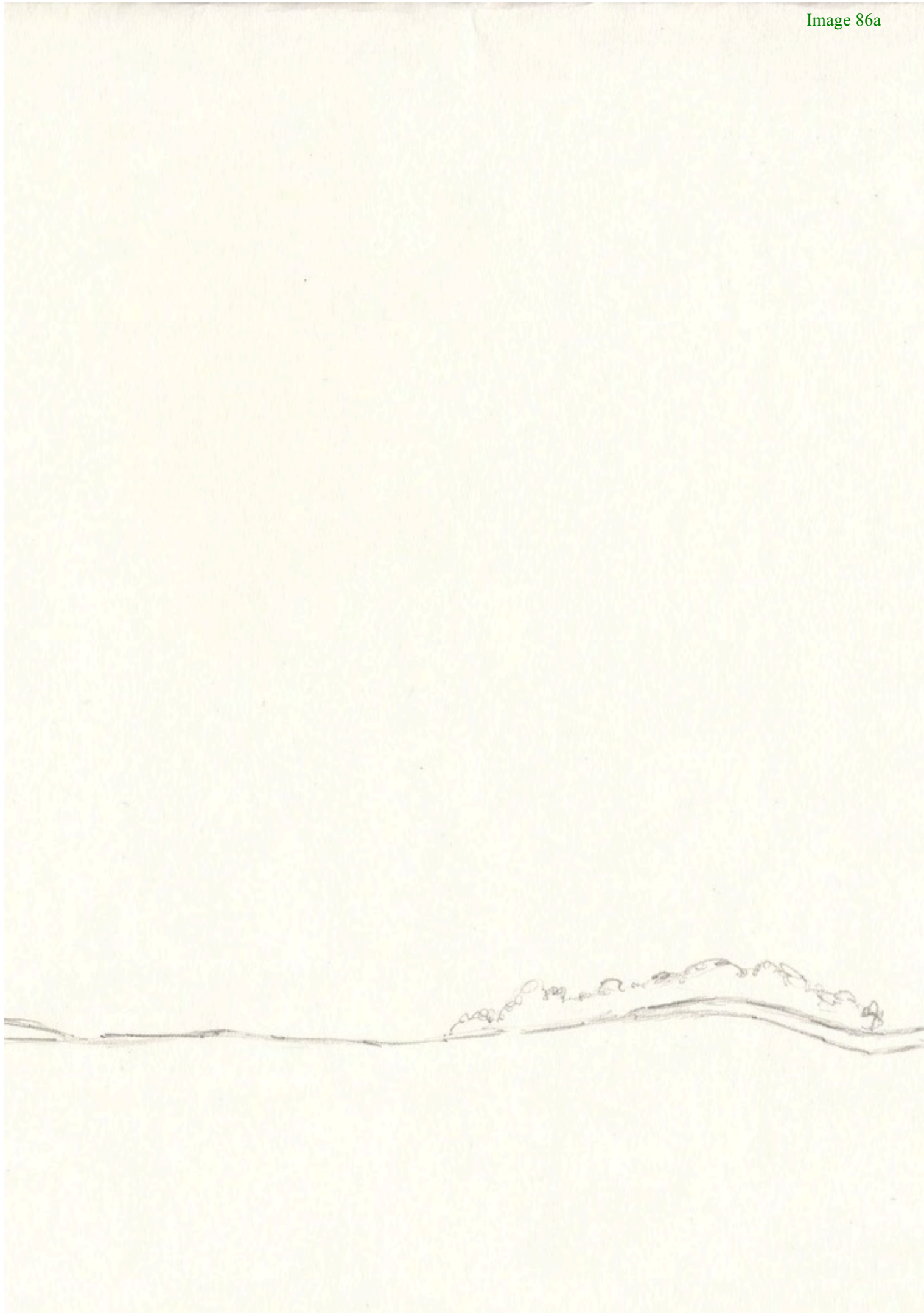
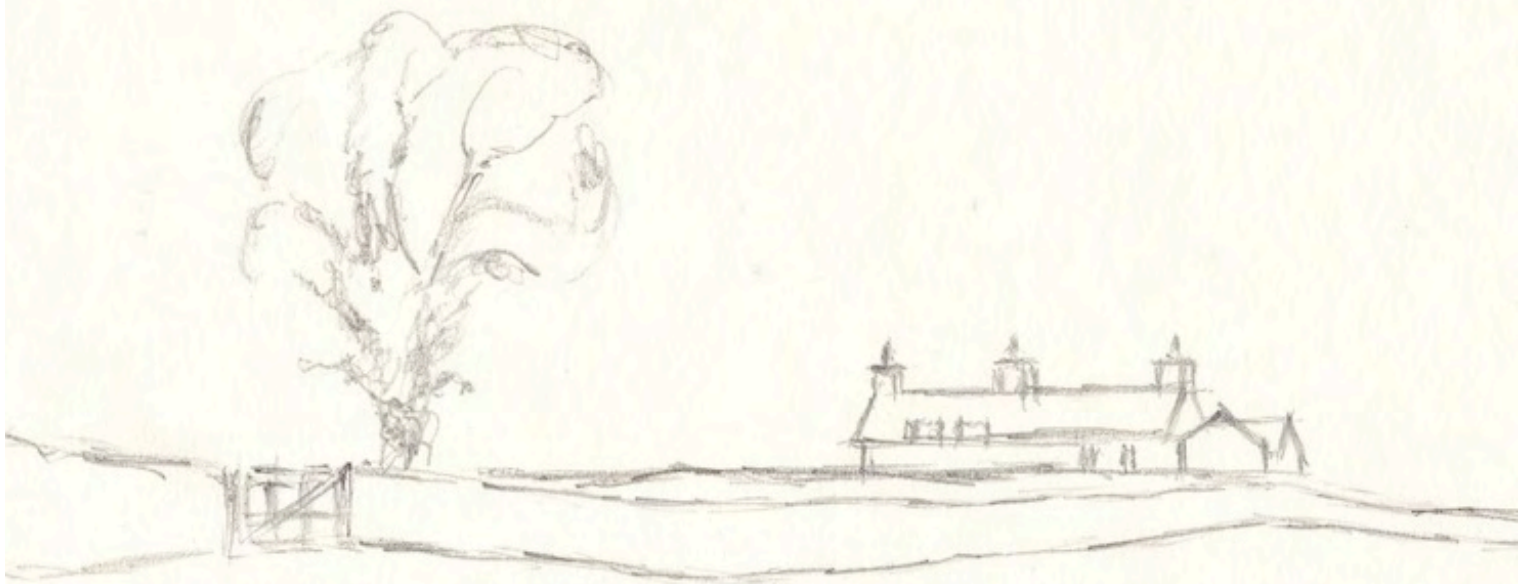


Image 86b



## Beginning the Painting

### Adding Values 1 & 2

Image 87



Having sketched or traced your image onto the pastel paper, begin by adding Cobalt Blue tint 0 (value 2) and Cerulean tint 0 (value 2) to the lower sky area.

I put Cobalt down first and then 'floated' (so very lightly touching the surface) Cerulean gently over some of the area, leaving some of the Cobalt uncovered as well.

Continue to add Silver White (value 1) for the clouds in this area as shown, rolling the pastel a little as you go.

Now we'll introduce a little Cadmium Red Orange tint 0 (value 2) to mix with the inner edges of the white clouds and beyond – into the larger mass of cloud to come. This adds a touch of warmth and depth to these smaller cloud details. You could then blend these areas *very* gently using your little finger.

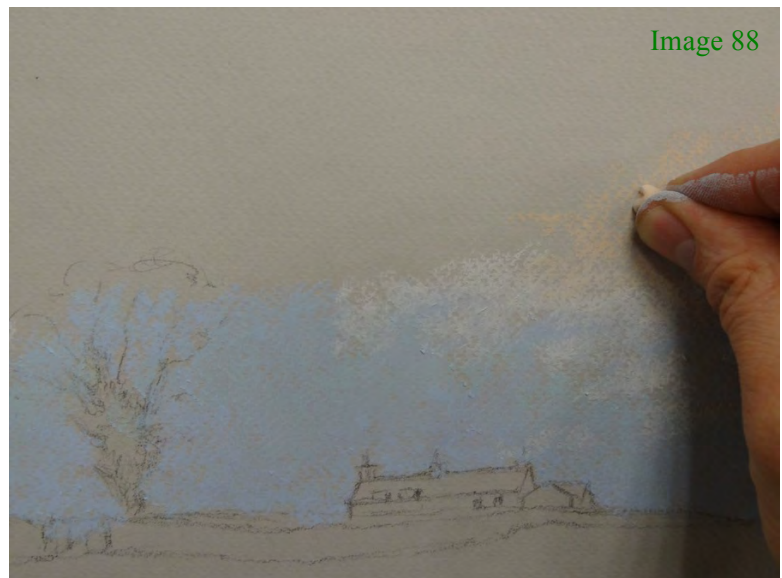


Image 88

Using slightly wavering horizontal strokes add some Sap Green tint 0 (value 2) to the field. Follow the contours of the landscape a little and create broken strokes involving narrower bands in some areas and

blocking in for other areas.



Image 89

Image 90



At this stage, there is still plenty of the paper showing through especially in the shadow area.

Now add a thin band of Cadmium Red Orange tint 0 (value 2) to pick out the wall in front of the distant trees.

### Building the Tones

#### *Adding Value 3*

Next, block in the large area of the sky using Indigo tint 1 (value 3). We'll use the side of the pastel to create broad strokes.



Image 91

I used diagonal strokes to give a sense of movement to the clouds, even when blended.



Image 92

Draw more controlled shapes at the bottom edge of the grey clouds, working some in and around the White/Cadmium Orange cloud details for a bit of shadow contrast.



At this stage we can pick out the details of the farmhouse now in the same colour/value and try using sloping strokes to indicate the slope of the roof and flatter, downward strokes to suggest the walls, etc.

You can see that we're starting to build the tones, but the overall effect is still quite flat.

Next gently blend the pastel, easing it into the surface for a more even effect with a little less of the colour and texture of the paper showing.



Add a few touches of Burnt Sienna tint 2 (value 3) to add tonal depth and texture to the distant wall.



Image 97



Then apply horizontal bands of Sap Green tint 2 (value 3) to the field, varying in thickness as shown. In the foreground, I moved the pastel up and down a little more to suggest the texture of grass.

You can see how to capture different textures through mark-making in my [Elements of Landscapes](#) tutorials at ArtTutor.com

There is now more balance between the tonal value of the sky and that of the landscape...



Image 98



Image 99

As with the sky, gently blend this layer into the surface but this time leave some areas a bit less blended in order to emphasise the texture of the field.

## Creating Depth

### *Adding Value 4*

It's time to create that three-dimensional effect!

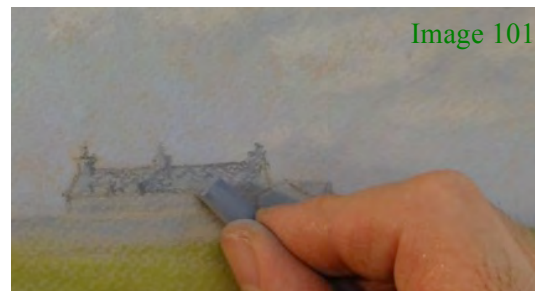


Look carefully at the photograph and begin to create the darker areas that you see within the clouds.

Take your time with this layer, trying to draw with your pastels the separate shapes that you see.

I used both the side and the end to block in and capture slightly more detailed shapes at the same time.

Once again add some slightly darker touches into the details of the farmhouse using the end of the pastel. For fine detail, you might need to break your pastel to create a sharp edge, or sand the end flatly on sandpaper to sharpen it.



Now blend this layer in gently with your little finger. Take care to keep the detailed shapes you have drawn in by blending over the edges of the shapes very carefully. If it looks a little too busy once you have done this, then you can blend over the edges a bit more to bring areas together.



Also, carefully blend details in the farmhouse to quieten the texture, using a blending tool if necessary.



At this point, the clouds are beginning to look more 3 dimensional – you can see how much of a difference adding value 4 has made.

Image 103

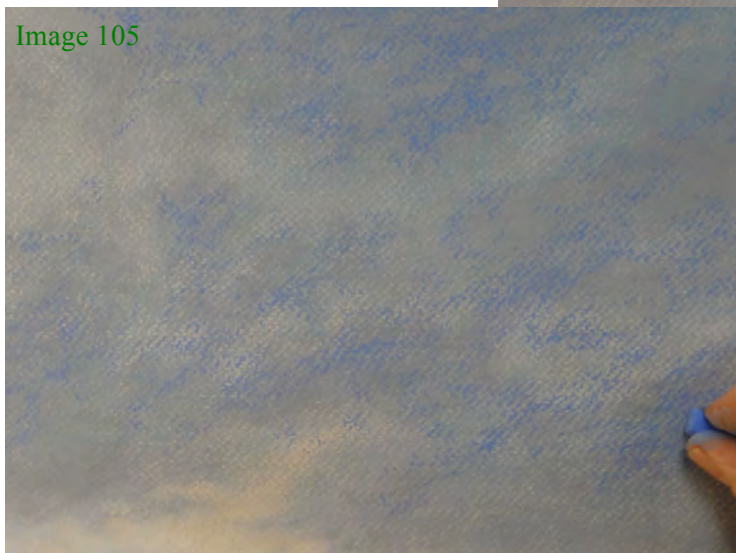


Continue by floating broken areas of Cerulean tint 3 (value 4) and French Ultramarine tint 2 (value 4) over areas of the sky. This will add a colour influence other than grey and enliven the area.

Image 104

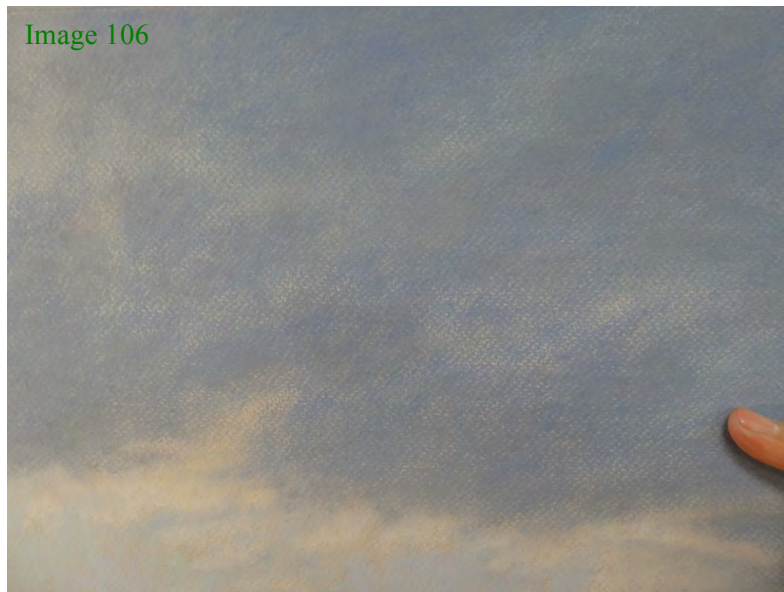


Image 105



Try and observe this in the photograph and apply it in the areas where you notice it especially.

Again, blend these gently into the surface, taking care not to lose the shapes of the cloud underneath.



### Building Contrast and Texture *Adding Value 5*



To add weight to your clouds, we'll now work with Indigo tint 3 (value 5) creating deeper areas of tone. Again, observe these areas in the photograph and then try and apply the pastel where you see them.

As you work you will be tightening up details and emphasising contrasts.

Carefully tighten up some suggestions of detail in the farmhouse using a sharp edge of the pastel.

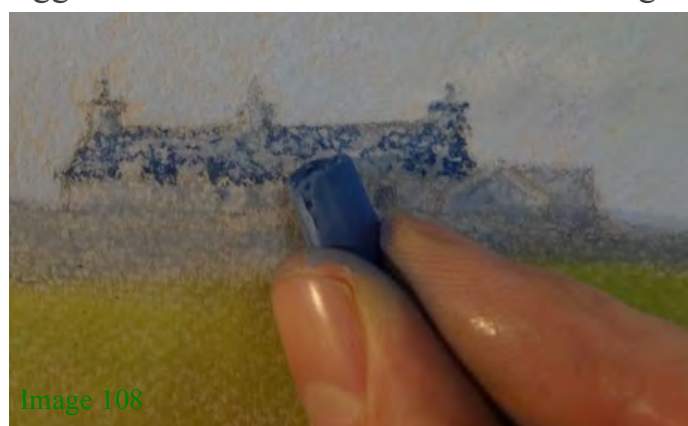
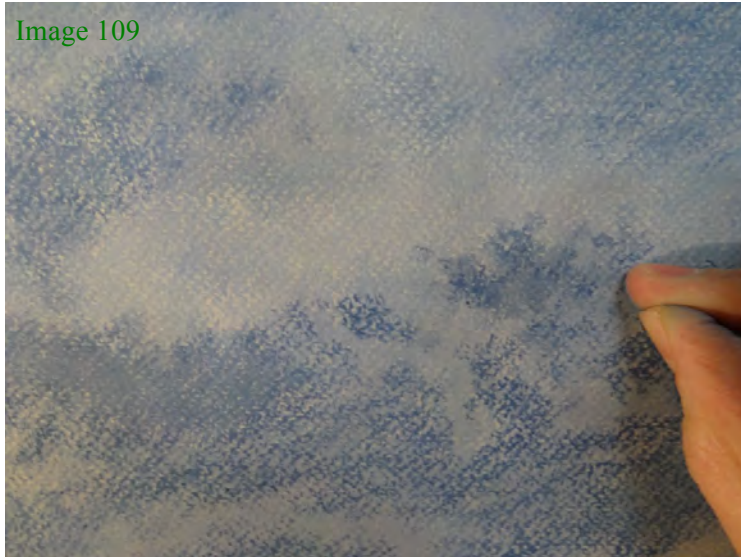


Image 109



Now blend this layer in, pinching your little finger together with your thumb for finer blending control in detailed areas (as I described in the study of Lake Garda). Alternatively you could use a blending tool.

Create further contrast and texture now in the field, by adding the shadow to the left. For this, use Terre Verte tint 6 (value 5).

Use your strokes to suggest the contours of the landscape and apply them in a broken way to allow some of the previous layer to show through.

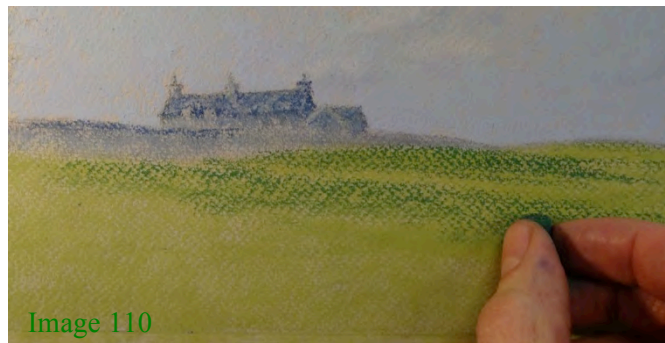


Image 110

I also used light touches of the same colour in other areas of the field to heighten texture and contrast. Again at this stage there is a balance between the tones in the landscape and those in the sky. The darker shadow tones appear to brighten the highlight areas of the field because of the contrast between the two.

Image 111



Quieten down the texture slightly now by gently blending some areas of the field as shown.



Image 112



Image 113

Using a light rolling motion with Indigo tint 3, introduce the distant trees to the right, leaving gaps to allow the sky to show through in places.

Image 114



## Deepening Tones and Refining Details

### *Adding Value 6*

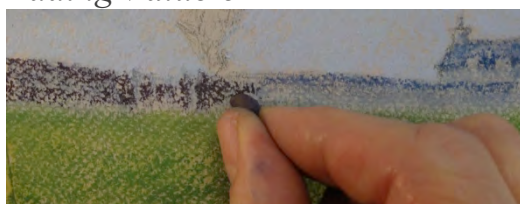


Image 115

Now develop the tones and detail in the stone wall using Purple Grey tint 4 (value 6) and then soften this a little, overlaying with Indigo tint 3.



Image 116

Image 117



Continue using indigo tint 3 to draw in the main shape of the tree to the left and the fine branches.

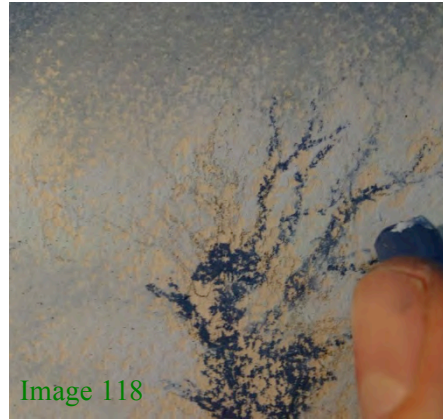


Image 118

Add further depth and detail to the tree and walls using Blue Grey tint 6 (value 6).

Image 119

At this stage, all areas of the picture are covered and there is a good sense of tone, contrast and detail.



Image 120

Using Indigo tint 3, lay another layer over the shadow to the left of the fields, once again allowing it to break over the surface and to suggest varying textures.

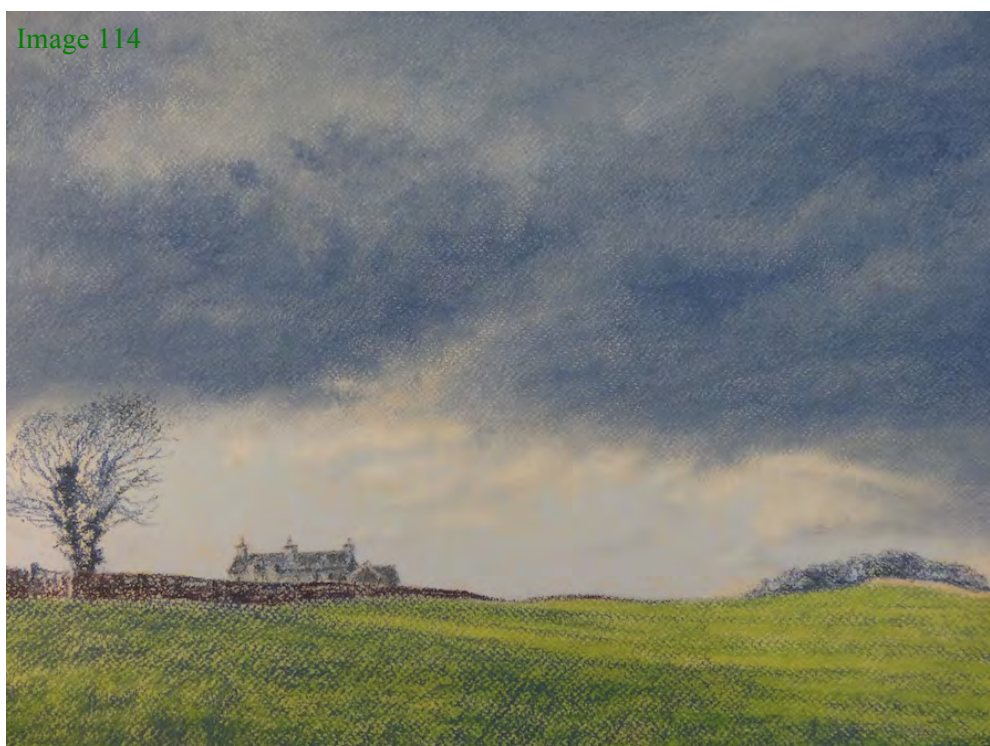


**Darkening and Strengthening Detail**  
*Adding Value 7*



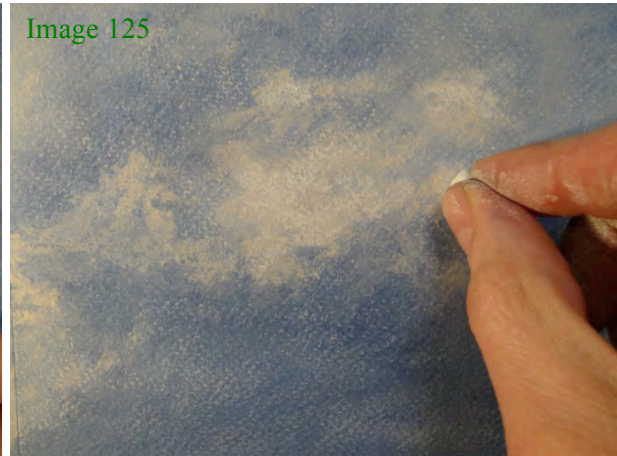
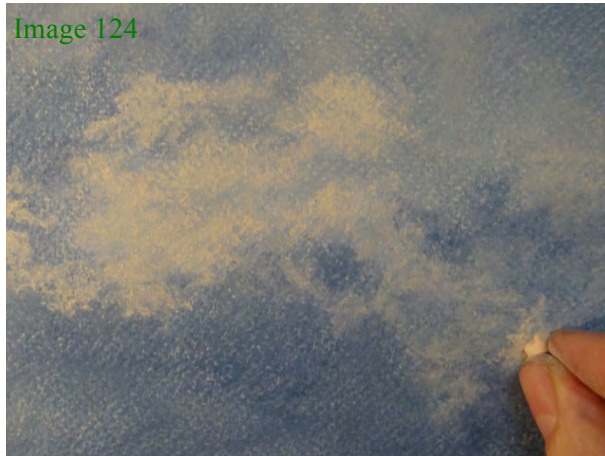
We're up to the stage where we can add our darkest value – number 7. We're going to use it initially to darken details in the tree trunk and farmhouse. We can use our Indigo tint 7.

At this stage, the painting has more depth and atmosphere.



### Refining Lighter and Darker Areas

We're going to look at creating some highlights now. We'll use firstly Cadmium Red Orange and then Silver White pastels. Roll your pastel across the clouds to get a hit-and-miss sparkle.



This stage really heightens the sense of contrast and drama in the painting. We're establishing our lightest lights and darkest darks and this strong contrast gives us a real a punch to our painting!



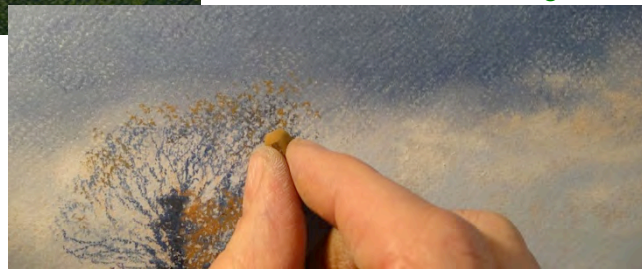
Image 127



Now using Burnt Sienna tint 4 (value 4) add in some autumnal foliage to the body of the tree.

Follow this by dotting in some touches of Autumn Brown for the sparse tree foliage.

Image 128



Notice the *counterchange* in the trees here (that's placing lights against darks, but you can read more about that in Section 5).

The lower branches create contrast because they're dark against the light area of sky; we've reversed this at the top of the tree because the sky is darker in tone so we need to lighten the branches to make them stand out.

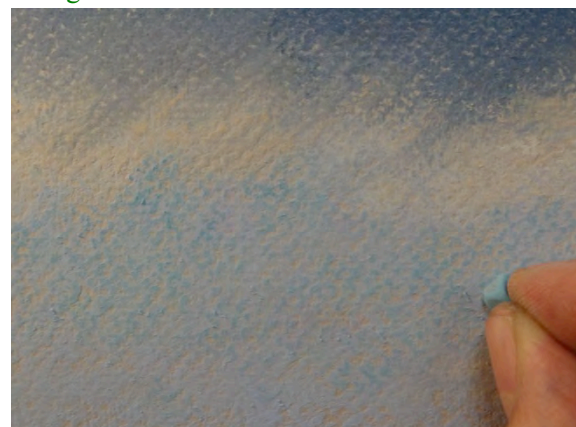
See how much more dominant the tree is for doing this...

Any refining at this stage is personal preference. It's important to stand back and take some time away from your painting. When you come back to it, you should see more clearly what bits don't look right and may need lightening or darkening.

I'm nearly there with this painting. There are just a couple more things still to add...

I'm going to put a little Cobalt tint 2 to the sky areas just below the clouds to suggest more depth...

Image 129



...And create a few light contrasts to suggest grassy textures using Sap Green tint 0.

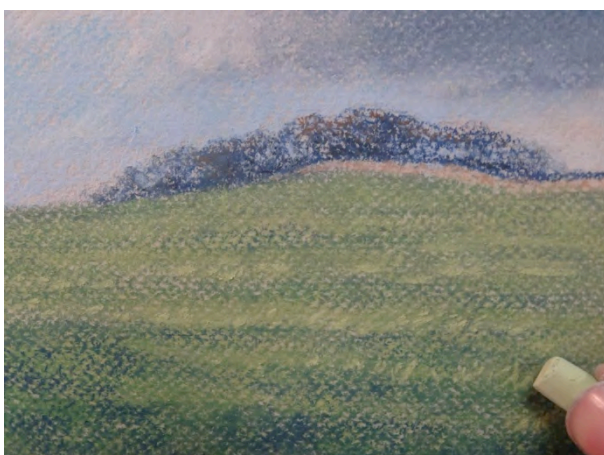


Image 130



Image 131



Finally, I'm going to add a few more specific dark toned touches to the foreground to refine detail and texture using Purple Grey tint 6 (value 6) and Indigo tint 6 (value 7).

There you have it. A full colour pastel landscape that effectively uses tonal values and contrasts to capture a sense of mood and drama!

Once again, I hope you've enjoyed creating it.

Image 132



*Changing Light Over the Fields by Michael Howley*

Please do give this painting by Michael a go. If you're a member of ArtTutor.com, why not add your attempt to the pastels forum? We'd love to see it and you'll be sure to get plenty of encouraging feedback from like-minded artists who've followed this e-book like you.

## SECTION 5 – BONUS VALUE TIPS

If you've read this far (and followed along), you'll have a greater practical understanding of tonal value than 99% of all leisure artists!

There are just a couple of principles remaining that I'd like to cover, to complete your understanding.

### 5.1 Abrupt and transitional value contrast

Let's go back to our grey scale for a moment...

The range of values is wide – one end is white, the other end is almost black. If we take a square close to one end and place it next to a square close to the other end, the contrast between those two is very strong and abrupt (Image 133). In other words, one value finishes and the other starts.



Image 133

This abrupt value contrast is useful for describing angular shapes, with definite sides and strong lines - like a box for example. Stalker Castle in our earlier exercise is a good example.

But not all objects are so angular. Take the obvious example of a ball or sphere.

We still need to make good use of contrasting values to make the sphere look 3-dimensional and solid. The underside of the sphere and cast shadow will be quite a strong value, whilst the highlight will be a very light value.

However, you can see that there needs to be a subtle transition from darks to mid-tones to lights. If any of the steps up or down in value are obvious to the eye or abrupt (as they are with a grey scale for example), the effect of a smooth, round object will be lost.

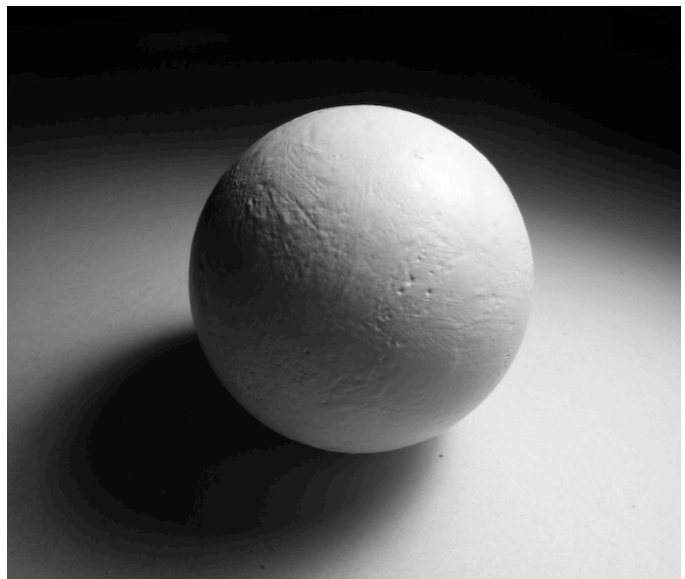


Image 134

Don't mistake this soft transition for a narrow range of values. The range from darkest dark to lightest light still needs to be adequate to make the object look solid.

Image 135



Spheres aren't the only objects that require a soft transition of values. One of the everyday items I see a lot of hobby artists struggle with is clothing and fabric...

### Rendering Fabric

When I see a pencil drawing of fabric that a student isn't happy with, it's either because the folds in the material don't have strong enough lights and darks (good value contrast), or the transition (blending) isn't gradual and subtle enough – it looks like a series of shapes rather than soft folds.

Look at this photo of a coat sleeve (Image 136). Note the subtle transition from lights to darks and how the shadows and the lights in the folds - especially next to the stitching – help to tell the viewer that the material is soft and undulating.



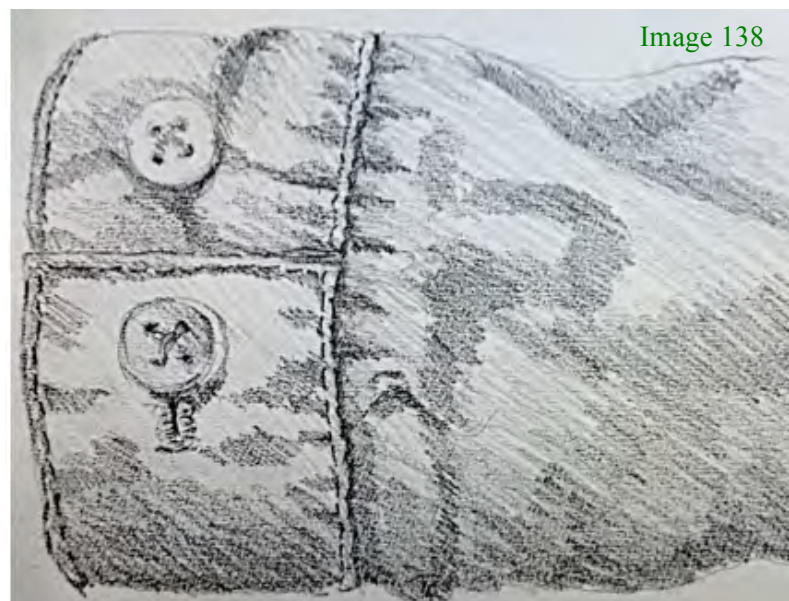
Image 136

Now look at Image 137 of this sleeve. Yes, the general shape and perspective is fine and some lights and darks exist, but limited use of value contrast means the image is insipid and flat looking. The weak attempt at shadows actually looks more like abstract shapes printed on the material than folds in the cloth.



Now in Image 138 we have made more use of value contrast with some better light and shade, especially around the cuff and the stitching.

However, we're still left with those abstract, meaningless shapes that are supposed to represent folds in the material, defined by light and shadows. To make the folds and creases in the cloth look believable, the trick is to create a much more subtle and gradual transition from light to dark, which will immediately suggest soft cloth.



In Image 139, I've started to blend those light and dark areas on the top left of the sleeve to achieve the **gentle transitions**, using a putty eraser and a torchon. See how the initial blending of shades and lifting out of highlights has already improved things considerably?

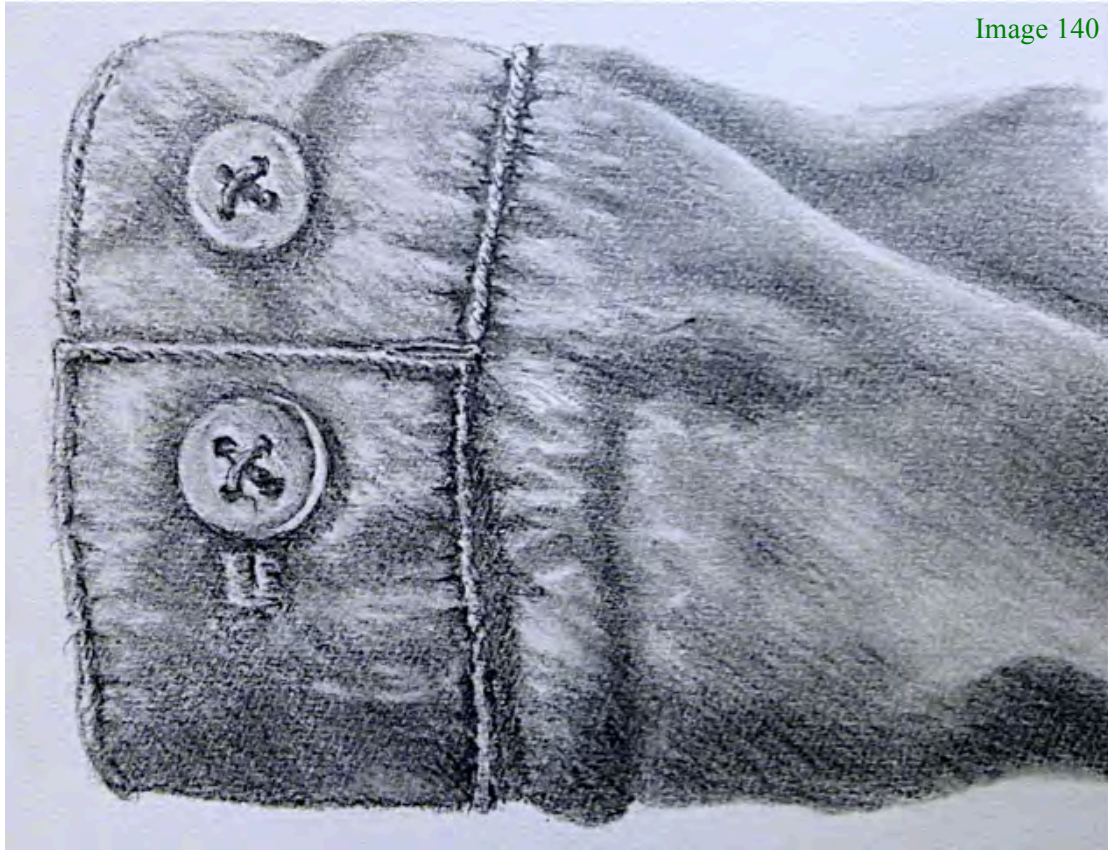


If you haven't got a torchon, use a cotton bud or the corner of a folded tissue. You can use any sort of eraser but the putty version allows you to tear small pieces from it and shape them into fine wedges or points.

Remember, the simple rule with value contrast is that, normally, soft transitions mean round and/or soft material. Sharp, well-defined changes from light to dark generally mean angular and/or hard surfaces.

Finally, in Image 140 we've completed this exercise and even though it's a relatively quick example, you can see the difference compared to Images 137 and 138.

Image 140



At first it'll probably take you time to create a pleasing blend of lights and darks as you develop the skill in getting these transitions just right. However, do keep going. It's enormously satisfying re-creating even a simple subject like this with all the subtle value changes.

So whatever your chosen medium, think about how either abrupt or transitional value contrast will help to create a believable rendition of the object you're capturing.

Within the vaults of [ArtTutor.com](http://ArtTutor.com) we have a number of video lessons on shading and blending using various painting and drawing mediums, which will help you achieve nice transitional values.

## 5.2 Counter change

Understanding what counterchange is and then how to use it in your picture, really is a significant key to a successful painting or drawing.

Simply put, counterchange in art means placing a dark value object or area next to a lighter one, or vice versa, so that they both stand out against each other.

Look at these photos of Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland, England...

Image 141



In Image 141 above we have a very stark example of counterchange – or dark against light – with the castle in silhouette against a bright evening sky. There's no doubt where the castle ends and the sky starts, is there?

Now look at the Image 142 (below) of the same scene. Still pretty good counterchange between the castle and sky because the light stone is still darker than the sky area.

However, look at the walls and grassy slopes on the left of the castle. Because they're all in shadow, their definition is much less clear and if you screw your eyes up, it's not as easy to see where the walls finish and the slopes begin. This is because the tonal strength of these areas is quite similar, even though they're different colours.

Image 142

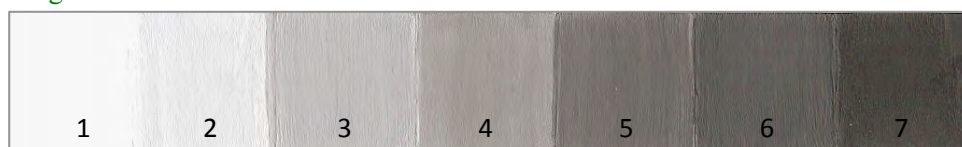


If you were painting this picture you may want to adjust the values to the left of the castle, to make sure that the relevant areas stand out where necessary. Or, perhaps not...

You could leave the value strength as it is, if you decide that you want this area of the picture to be less obvious - quieter if you like - to put the focus on the main part of the castle. And that's so important.

Of course, you'll want to paint more than just silhouettes of castles and inevitably, most parts of any picture do not want or need a high contrast throughout. So counterchange needs to be thought of rather like the grey scale. It's light against dark, sure, but it can be subtle or fierce.

Image 143



Remember, strong counterchange, i.e. the darkest dark next to the lightest light (say Value 1 next to Value 7 on our grey scale) will immediately draw the viewer's eye to that area and artists over the centuries have used this knowledge to create their focal points with this high contrast technique.

Gentler counterchange (say a Value 2 next to a Value 4) still defines adjacent shapes but might be used near the edge of a picture or anywhere where you don't want high contrast.



Think of a picture as the cast in a theatre. You have the leading man and lady as the focal point and the supporting cast who, whilst not the centre of attention, play a vital role by their relative anonymity, in highlighting the main players. Important as the leading actors are, without that supporting cast, they would make no impact at all.

So in a painting, the high value counterchange (the star of the show) is going to give you a strong focal point with real impact – but only if the supporting cast, i.e. the more mundane, quieter areas of the picture are thought through and in their proper place as well.



Image 144

In Image 144 of a bi-plane, we have both strong and gentle counterchange. The strong, red colour of the plane, broken by the white stripes, gives us intense counterchange - the darkest dark against lightest light - and leaves us in no doubt that it is the star of the show. However, the light but varied colours in the clouds provide a much gentler counterchange, especially when set against the slightly stronger blue sky behind the plane.

Let's look at one or two more examples of simple counterchange...

In Image 145 below, a monochrome watercolour of Cockley Beck in the English Lake District, notice how the tree *trunk* is quite light against the dark background immediately above the bridge...



Image 145

Yet the upper branches have been painted quite dark so they stand out against the moonlit sky. You wouldn't see a tree in nature that has a light bottom half and a dark top half! But until it's pointed out, most viewers won't even notice the change – it *looks* natural. As with the tree, you can do exactly the same with fence posts, telegraph poles, ships masts and so on.

Other areas in this picture worth noting are the snow-covered roof against the darker hillside, the snowy area helping the two walkers to stand out, and the dark stone bridge against the snowy banks. It's also interesting to point out that the bridge, though dark underneath, has a snow covering along the top layer of stones to help define it against the dark trees in the background.

Now what happens when you have adjacent areas where two or more of them are the same value? How do you define them without it looking contrived?

Well, this is where the benefit of being an artist as opposed to a photographer kicks in! As the artist you have the freedom to adjust things to make the picture work, where a photographer might have to resort to filters and other devices to create counterchange.

Image 146



In Image 146 of a stag in the Scottish Highlands, you can see if you screw up your eyes that his coat is, tonally, a similar value to the background hills, especially around the centre of his body. However, I've 'invented' a muted light from the left as an excuse to lighten off the rear end and top of his body, thus making it considerably paler against the distant Glen.

At the same time I've added shadow to his chest so now the front of his body is much darker than the hills, not only defining him against the background, but pushing the hills into their proper place in the distance. More importantly it gives him a foreground impact and clearly, the focal point of the picture.

But do you see that even though the rear, middle and front of his body are very different values, he 'looks' right and the light and shade have given him that vital three-dimensional form.

However, let me re-emphasise the really important bit here...

***Using value contrast and counterchange shouldn't be regarded as merely a technique. It's as important to apply value judgments to all areas of your pictures as it is to know what the subject of your painting is going to be before you start.***

Applying value judgments to every part of your picture must become second nature to you. Ideally, you will plan this before you pick up the brush, but more often than not, you need to adjust value and counterchange slightly as you progress through the painting.

Without developing this state of mind, your pictures will always lack that impact, that ‘punch’, that certain ‘something’ that lifts it from ‘OK’ to a minor masterpiece you can justifiably be proud of.

Remember, you’re the artist. It’s your picture and you decide how much emphasis you put on each part of the picture, using as much or as little counterchange - value judgment - light against dark - call it what you will - as you want or need.

It doesn’t matter *how* you do it – as long as you do!

If you’d like to learn about a vast range of other techniques that can help you with your artwork, take a look through some of our [courses at ArtTutor](#).

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## ABOUT ARTTUTOR.COM

[ArtTutor.com](http://ArtTutor.com) was built on the back of my passion to help more people take more enjoyment and more satisfaction from art...

It gives you 24/7 access to hundreds of TV-quality video tutorials from more than 35 professional art instructors. We cover everything from watercolour landscapes to pastel portraits... and we add new lessons every single week.



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*Bob Davies*

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Our courses don't run to a fixed schedule – all the lessons are there permanently for you to dip in and out of whenever it's convenient. Here are a few that might be of interest you...

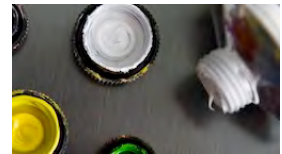
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We asked all our members for a fair and honest appraisal of how they feel about ArtTutor... and then posted every single response (good and bad) [here on the website](#). **They are 100% unedited.**

As of writing, there are more than 150 appraisals, 3 of which you could consider negative. Here's a small selection from leisure artists like you:



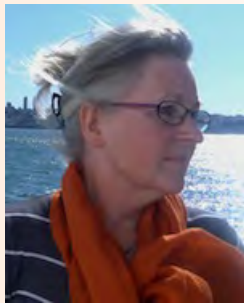
### Jane, Tampa

Art Tutor is my favorite website, bar none.

I visit it routinely for the excellent tutorials and never fail to learn a new technique. But, perhaps the best thing is that I've met so many like-minded people from around the world through their galleries, their comments on my gallery, and questions asked, answered, and information shared.

The feedback is invaluable and the support and encouragement keep me visiting Art Tutor daily. When I think of all the money I've spent over the years buying books, and taking classes and workshops, membership in Art Tutor is a real bargain.

I've told all my painting buddies about it. I love it!



### Christina - Stockholm, Sweden.

ArtTutor is the best ever social site for artists and artists-to-be. That is my experience. I get inspiration and the know-how from the tutorial videos, I upload my paintings and get advice and constructive critique from my fellow artists, I am challenged by the monthly challenges.

But for me the cheers from other members have been the most important part. I am so glad I found ArtTutor; it has meant a lot for my own artistic development.



### Johnny Olausson

ArtTutor have added another dimension to my life.

I have long been interested in art and had a desire to paint, but found it difficult to spend the time required to take a course. With ArtTutor I can always log in and get started with good leadership, if only for a few hours.

I am interested in watercolor and special landscapes. ArtTutor have amazing artists who share their skills at the appropriate level for me. I subscribe on a yearly basis but it will be several years.

I travel as part of the job and ArtTutor follow me.