THE ECR METHOD

A How-To Guide:

PAINT GOUACHE LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS IN YOUR SKETCHBOOK

By Sergio Lopez

INTRODUCTION

In this PDF, I will be using my ECR Method of painting to create a painting in my sketchbook of a landscape subject from a photo.

If you are not yet familiar with the ECR Method, it is a method of painting broken into 3 distinct phases.

- **ESTABLISH**
- **COMPARE**
- **REFINE**

We will first establish the totality of the image, then compare each shape until we feel that each color is accurate, then we will refine and add any detail to finish the painting.

I will also give a quick overview of my materials.

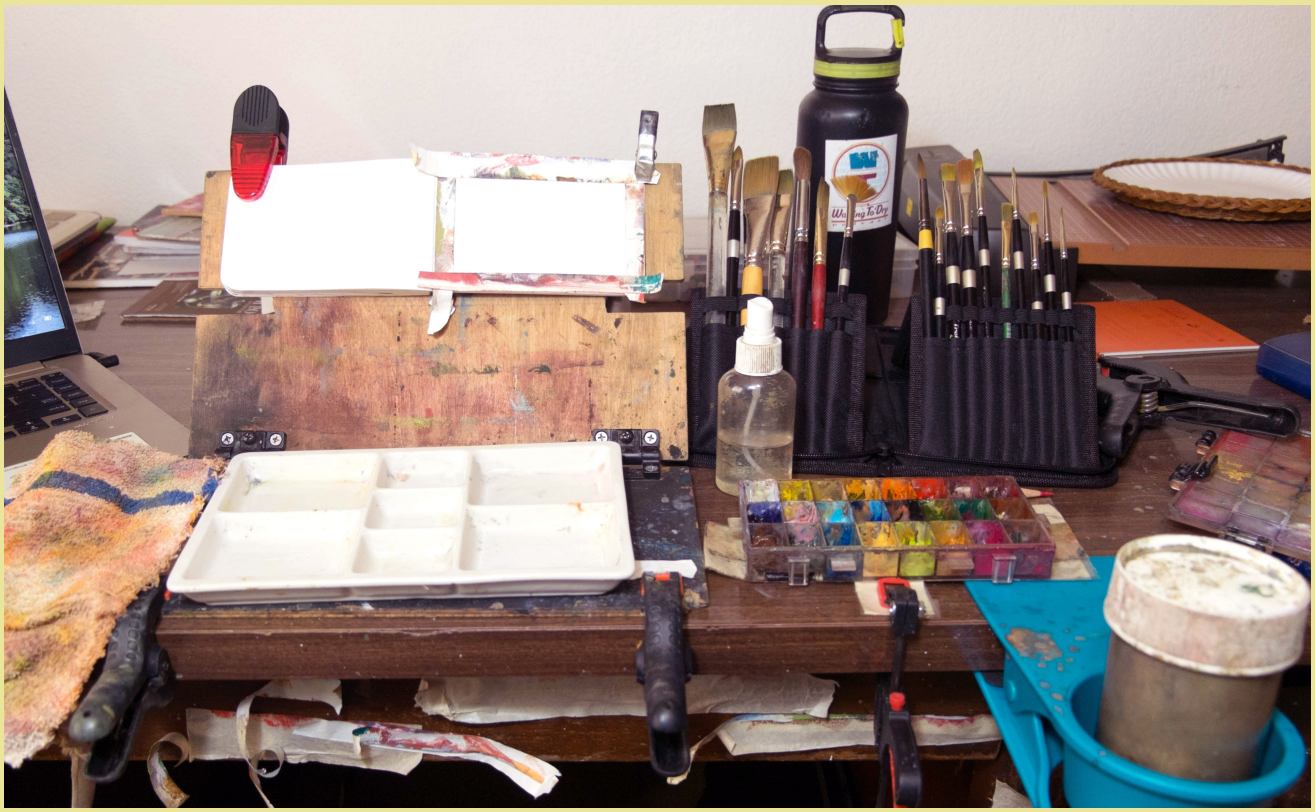
SUPPLIES

Brushes:
1” Wash golden Taklon brushes (flat)
¾” Wash golden Taklon Brush (flat)
½” Princeton Stroke synthetic sable brush (flat)
⅜” #10 Trekell golden Taklon cat tongue brush
⅜” #10 round synthetic sable brush1 ½”
#2 golden Taklon brush (fan)¼”
#8 Robert Simmons round synthetic brush¼”
#6 Trekell golden Taklon cat tongue brush⅜”
#10 Trekell golden Taklon flat brush5/16”
#10 Trekell golden Taklon flat brush¼”
#10 Princeton Stroke flat brush
3/16” Trekell golden Taklon flat brush
¼” #6 Trekell golden Taklon flat brush
⅛” #4 Trekell golden Taklon round brush
3/32” #2 Trekell golden Taklon flat brush

Paints (I prefer M. Graham, but Winsor&Newton, Holbein and Turner are also good popular brands):
Alizarin Crimson
Burnt Sienna
Burnt Umber
Cadmium Red Light
Cadmium Yellow Light
Dioxazine Purple
Paynes Gray
Permanent Green Light
Sap Green
Titanium White
Ultramarine Blue
Viridian
Yellow Ochre

Sketchbooks:
Stillman And Birn Nova Beige toned paper
Stillman And Birn Beta series
9-well ceramic palette
Nalgene 8oz. Kitchen storage jar as a water container
Fine mist spray bottle
Graphite drawing tools
Low-tack artist tape
Spring clamps of various sizes, small ratcheting bar clamps
Empty lipstick airtight palette for a paint container
Cotton rags for cleaning and wiping brushes

SETUP



This is my at-home setup. I like to clamp down whatever I can.

The water container is inside of a clamp-on cup holder I found on Amazon.

My sketchbook is clamped on to a sketch easel that I built based on James Gurney's tutorial. I then clamped it on to my desk.

STEP 1

Tape off the page if you like. I prefer to put tape over the edges because it gives a nice clean look to the sketch and it creates a sort of frame around the composition. This will help you compose the sketch before you start to sketch it.

If you are painting a scene that has different dimensions to your sketchbook, it will also help you create a window to the correct dimensions you want to work inside of.

STEP 2 (ESTABLISH)

Sketch your scene using a nice sharp drawing pencil. Remember to keep the shapes simple and work large to small. Use as simple of shapes as possible. Reduce complex shapes to “name-able” shapes (Trees become ovals or triangles, buildings become boxes, etc.) and use straight lines as much as possible.

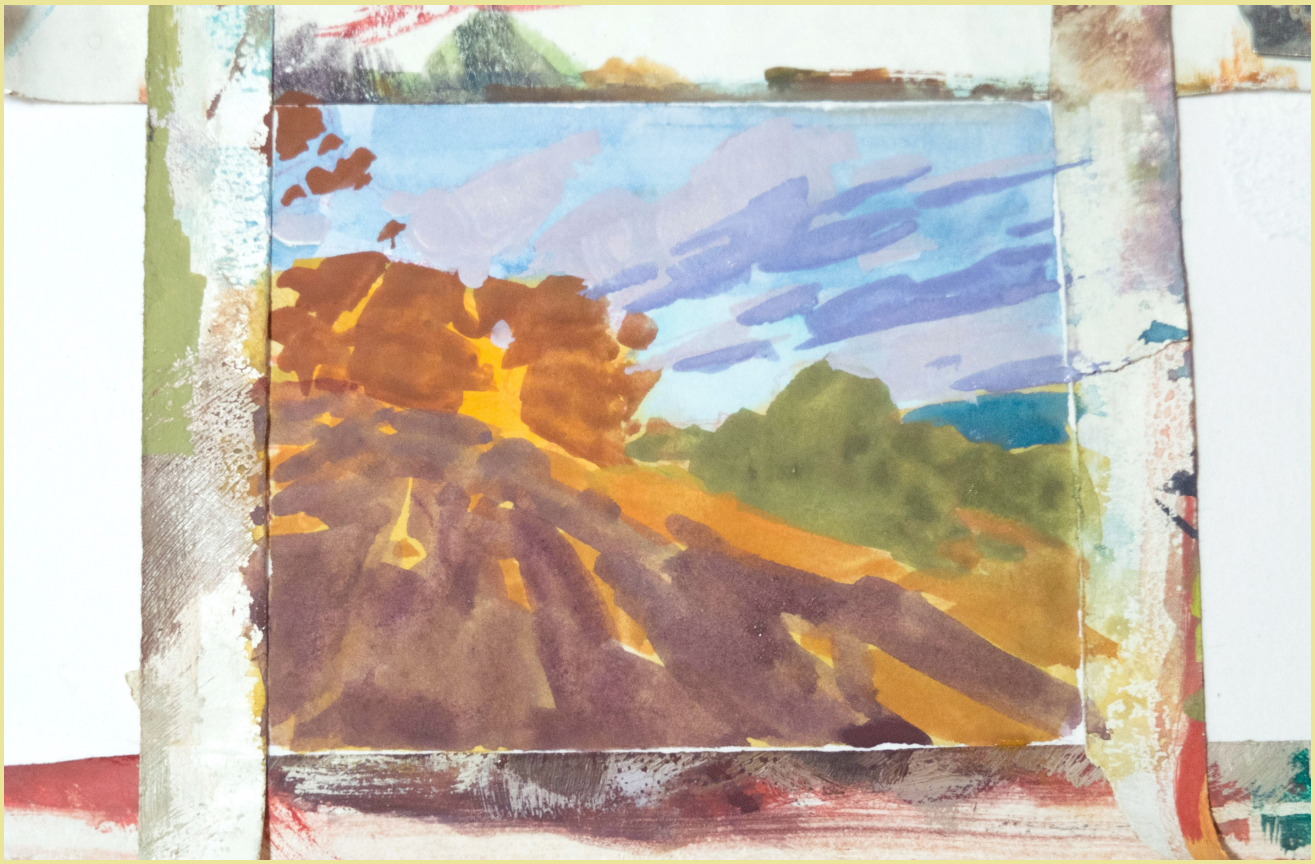
When you are drawing your composition, keep in mind where your main landmarks are in the scene. Also, note where shapes meet the edge of the page. This will help you with plotting out the overall scene accurately.

STEP 3 (ESTABLISH)

If you are using a white paper, you may want to tone the paper using a thin layer of gouache. Treat it like a watercolor wash, and apply evenly. Don't go too thick. You just want to stain the paper with a desired base color. The paint can have the consistency of a green tea.

If you are using a toned paper, you can still paint a wash on to the paper if you want to, but the tone of the paper would otherwise serve as the wash.

STEP 4 (ESTABLISH)



Next, fill in the overall big shapes with an average tone of the color you're observing. Don't worry too much if it's too light or dark yet. You just want sort of the overall hue with an average mixture between the light and dark. Paint it thicker than a wash, but not too thick yet. You want the consistency to be something like a well-steeped tea.

Once all the big shapes are filled in with a base color, work your way down until you have all the shapes filled in. Sometimes it even works to leave the tone of the paper showing through!

STEP 5 (ESTABLISH)

Next you want to paint the dark side of each large shape. Even if your are painting a scene with diffuse light, like a cloudy day for example, there will be light and dark shapes within the overall shape. But with most sunny days this will be the shadow side of the subject, and any cast shadows. Treat these all like simple shapes as well. Draw the edge of the shadow with your brush, then fill in the shape with your paint.

Here we can start to go thicker with our paint. Dip the tip of your brush into water, pat it down on your paper towel once or twice to knock off excess water. You want your paint to have the consistency of partly-melted ice cream.

STEP 6 (ESTABLISH)

The next part will be painting the light side of the shapes. Same as the dark shapes, but resist putting highlights in at this stage. We are only defining the light side of each shape at this point. Make your paint a little thicker than in the shadows. The consistency of your paint will be like heavy cream. You want your gouache to have just enough paint to move around your paper without a lot of resistance. Don't add too much water to your brush. Moisten your brush just enough to have a droplet or two to mix into your paint. No more than that or else you will thin your gouache too much.

There is a really delicate balance with gouache where the opacity can be really affected by the amount of water in your paint. You really only want enough water to make the paint move a little easier on your palette and paper. Any more really affects the opacity of the paint.

STEP 7 (COMPARE)

At this point you can start to look for smaller light and dark shapes. Follow the same steps as you did for the larger shapes. Find the more important intermediate shapes. Look for the ones that will really help define the scene better.

STEP 8 (COMPARE)

Once you've broken each large shape down into smaller parts, come in and paint in any reflected light into your shadows. Carefully observe any color you can discern in the shadows of your reference and mix the colors that you can make out. A lot of times it will be the color of the sky, but you will run into other scenarios where the ambient light will be some other color.

STEP 9 (COMPARE)

Next, find variations of color in the light planes. Be careful not to vary the value too much. Focus on color temperature variations, which will often be very subtle. You usually want to use thick gouache to build up the opacity of your paint as you apply it, but you can also do some light glazing with a thinned-out mixture of color. Be careful not to use too much water even then!

STEP 10 (REFINE)

Now we can add any sort of fine detail in the scene. The great thing about gouache is that you can paint fine detail on freshly applied paint at any time as long as it's dry. These types of details are probably going to be thin lines such as poles, fences, branches and any similar subject.

STEP 11 (REFINE)

Finally, add your highlights! Grab the thickest from-the-tube paint, lightly mix your color with from-the-tube white, and apply it as purely opaque as possible. The formula for highlights is the color of the surface + the color of the light + white. If the surface is less reflective, the color of the surface will dominate more, and inversely, the more reflective the surface, the more of the color of the light it takes on.Be careful not to add too many highlights. Concentrate them near the areas of focus.

STEP 12 (REFINE)

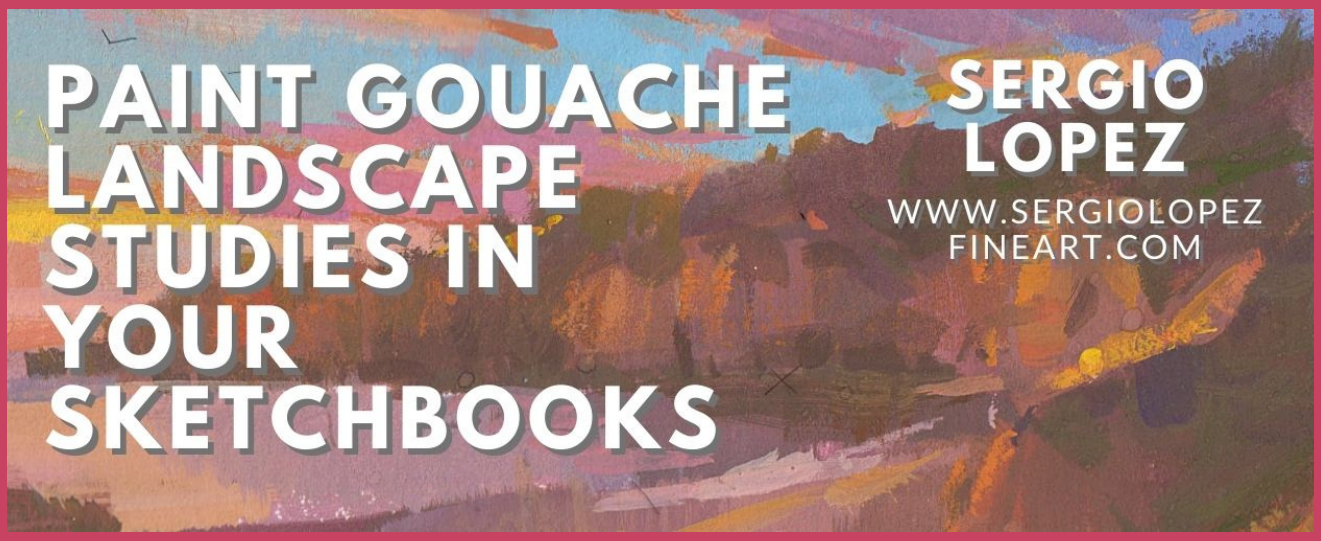
Once you're done with the highlights, peel off your tape! Even with low-tack tape there is a danger of tearing the paper. Peel it off slowly and tug from near where the paper is separating from the tape; don't pull from the end of tape. That's it! Now you have a sketch to use as a study for a larger painting.

CONCLUSION

Let's run through the steps one more time:

1. Tape off the edges of the paper.
2. Sketch your scene using a pencil.
3. Tone your page with a light wash.
4. Paint in the large mass tones with an average color of the shape.
5. Paint the dark side of each shape.
6. Paint the light side of each shape.
7. Break down the large shapes into smaller sub-shapes by painting the lights and darks of each shape.
8. Paint any variations in the shadows such as reflected lights.
9. Paint any variations in the light planes.
10. Add any extra small details.
11. Add any final highlights still remaining
12. Peel off your tape, and sign your sketch if you like!

With enough practice, you will be able to run through these steps quite quickly, and will have a nice little sketch done in 20-45 minutes!



If you would like to see these steps painted real-time in a workshop setting, I would like to invite you to join me this November 12, 2020 at 1PM-4PM for my exclusive online workshop, “Paint Gouache Landscape Studies In Your Sketchbooks.”

I will demonstrate in real-time all of these steps and more! There will be a demonstration section, and then a Q-and-A section where you can ask any questions you might have about my techniques. The best part about it is that it’s only $99 for 3 hours of instruction!

Follow this link to join in and register today:

https://bit.ly/SergioGouacheWorkshop2020

Thanks for downloading! I hope you enjoy more successful paintings as a result of reading this PDF.

-Sergio Lopez
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