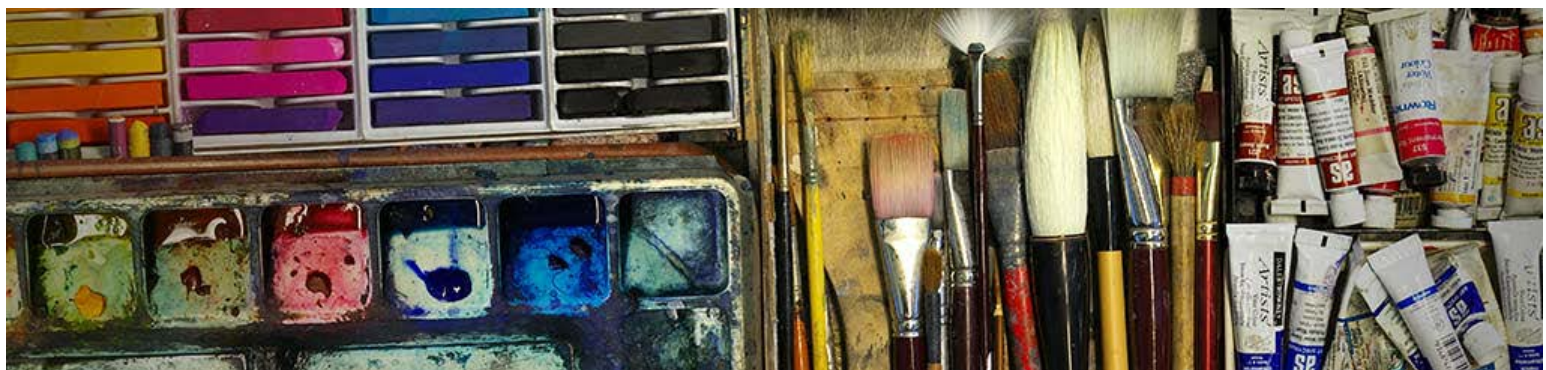




The late afternoon light on this sleepy little backwater makes an interesting subject. The dominant horizontals give a feeling of calmness, punctuated by the repeating vertical posts and masts. To build up a warm afternoon light we will overlay three transparent washes of Aureolin, Permanent Rose and Cobalt Blue. We will also use a gesso glaze to add a soft distant atmosphere that will contrast with the strength of our focal point.



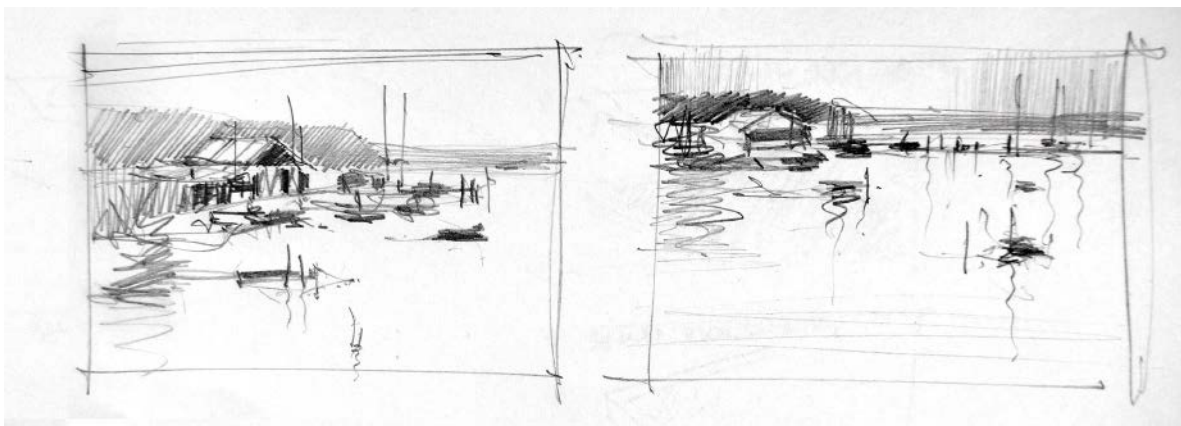
Materials

The four main colors we will use are Quinacridone Gold (or Indian Yellow), Permanent Alizarin Crimson, Phthalo Blue and French Ultramarine Blue. The three transparent glazing colors are Cobalt Blue, Permanent Rose and Aureolin. We will also use some white Gouache and a small amount of Gesso.

I am using a No.2 rigger brush, a 1/4" flat brush, an old 1/2" bristle brush and a 3" Hake Brush. Try these brushes, but if you are more comfortable with brushes you are used to, use them too.

We will also use a pen and Burnt Sienna Ink and a charcoal or neutral colored pastel pencil for our initial drawing.

1/4 sheet Arches (or similar) 300 gsm (140lb) paper



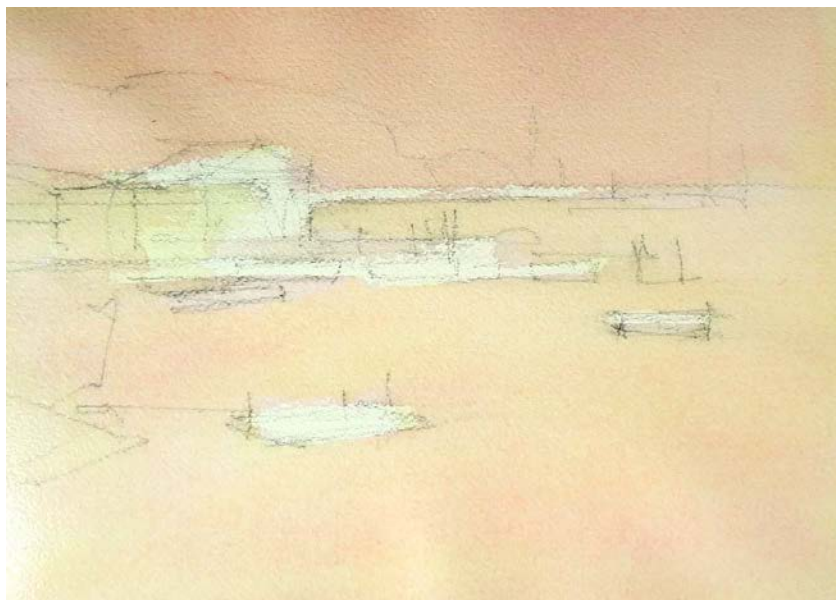
Thumbnail Sketches

It is a good idea to do a couple of small thumbnail sketches to try out different compositions before drawing onto your watercolor paper. I considered pushing the focal point closer to the top of the painting (second sketch) but decided the large expanse of water might have posed a problem so went for the first option. You can try other options if you like – perhaps a low horizon line and lots of sky, or a vertical composition could work well. A few minutes scribbling with a pencil can trigger lots of ideas.



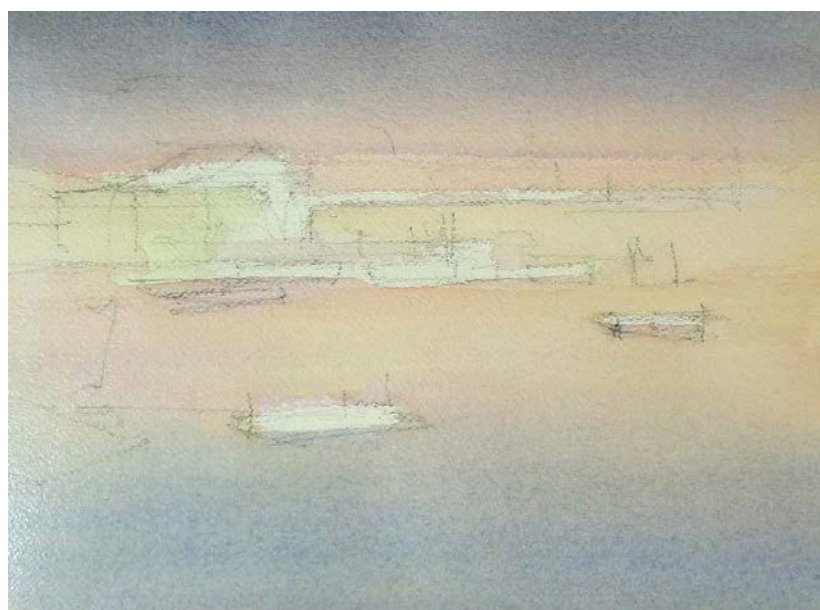
First Transparent Wash

After lightly drawing our subject onto our watercolor paper we can apply the first wash of Aureolin directly to the dry paper. Mix it up thoroughly with clean water and apply it to all but the area of boats and buildings that will make up our focal point. Use a large soft brush to apply the wash – I'm using a 1/2" bristle brush, but a 1" flat or mop brush will work just as well. Make sure you don't leave any gaps in the wash other than the white areas we want to preserve. Once the wash is on, let it dry out thoroughly before moving on to the next wash. A hair dryer can speed this up.



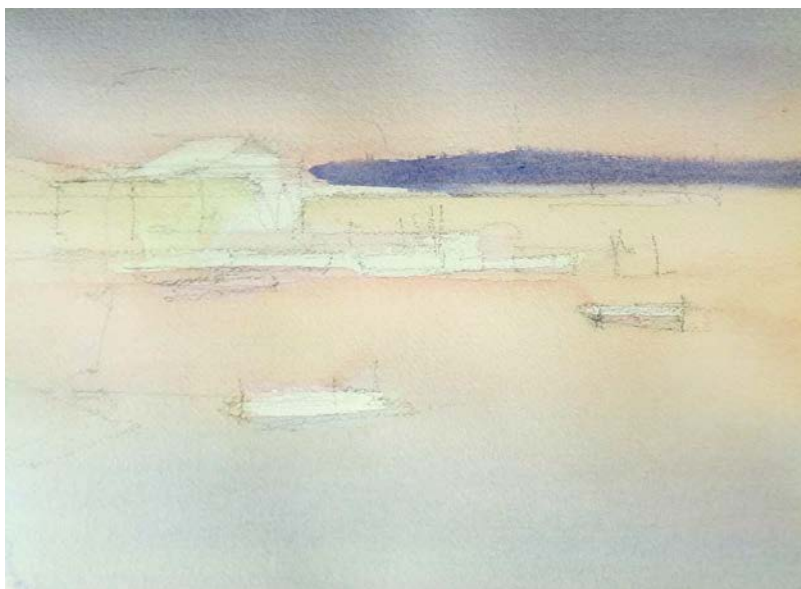
Second Transparent Wash

After the Aureolin wash has dried we can repeat the process with a wash of Permanent Rose. Again, mix it up thoroughly with clean water, and don't make it too strong. It is much easier to apply another wash than to try and wash back a wash that is too strong. Just slightly pink is what we are after. Let this wash dry thoroughly before moving on to the Cobalt wash.



Third Transparent Wash

Mix up some Cobalt Blue with clean water and apply it to the top and bottom of the dry painting. We want the wash to grade out towards the focal area around the boats and buildings. As the wash moves away from the top and bottom, dilute it by dipping your brush in water. By the time you get to the central area of the painting the blue should have disappeared from the mixture.

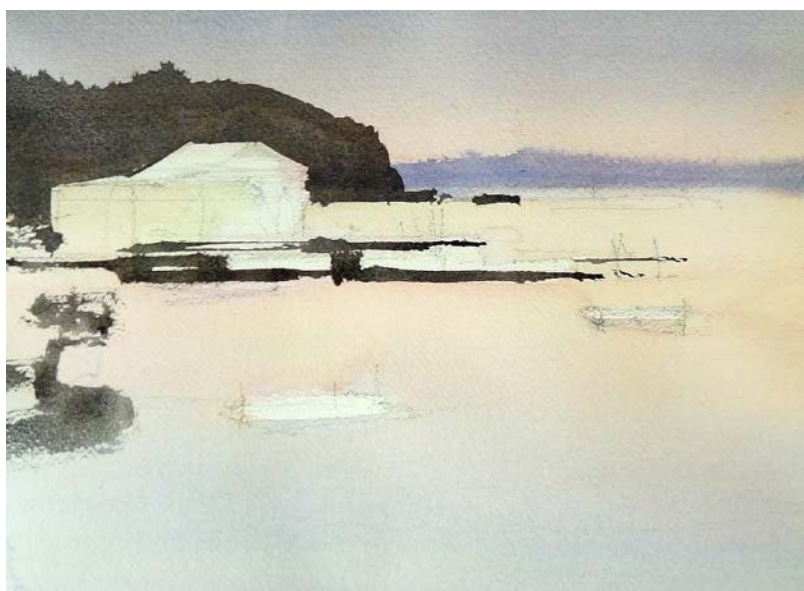


Distant Hills

Let your painting dry again then mix some Ultramarine and Alizarin to paint the distant row of hills. Quickly soften the top and bottom of the hills by running a clean, damp brush along the edge, allowing the paint to softly feather out.

Dark Background Trees

After the hills have dried we can apply the big mass of trees behind the building. Use a mixture of Ultramarine, Alizarin and Quinacridone Gold. Cut it carefully around the top of the building then feather out the top of the trees with a clean damp brush. While we have this dark color mixed we can put in some dark shapes under and around the boats and jetties and suggest the foreground bank. Some of these marks are left hard and sharp and some are softened with a damp brush. I used my 1/2" bristle brush here, but if you find it easier use something you are more comfortable with. Remember though, a larger brush will produce more immediate, spontaneous marks, whereas a small brush will make tight fussy marks.



Adding Color and Contrast

The warm orange of the building is a mixture of Quinacridone Gold and Alizarin. Put it on carefully, leaving some patches of white for the dinghies and building details. Put a couple of patches of the orange color into the area of boats – just to tie the color into the painting. We can add a couple of spots of pure, strong Ultramarine in the area of the boats, then mix a nice strong dark, similar to our background trees and darken around the boats and jetties.





Red Contrast

Before our orange building dries, we can drop in a couple of spots of pure Alizarin to draw attention to the focal point. We can also switch to our rigger brush and add a few posts and details to the jetties. Make sure you vary the height and thickness of the posts and be sure to vary their spacing.

Strengthening the darks

We can mix our dark tree color again – this time very dark (lots of pigment, not much water), and cut it in behind and around the building to squeeze out as much contrast as possible. Put some dark shapes into the dinghies and along under the jetties, a few dark marks at the end of the building and some softer marks and reflections under the foreground pontoon. The distant boat shapes can be added with a diluted mixture of the same color. Keep them long and rectangular – the fine marks we add later will turn them into convincing boats.



Ink Lines

Before our dark background wash dries, dampen the back edge and left hand side of the building to allow the dark color to bleed over and soften that part of the building. Let things dry then work some Burnt Sienna pigment ink lines through the jetty, building and boats. Apply a few lines then quickly spray them with water to feather them out. The idea is to have some hard, crisp lines and some soft, spidery ones. They add to the rusty character of the boats and buildings.





Cobalt Blue Overglaze

Let everything dry once again, then mix up another wash of Cobalt Blue. This time we are going to work it over the foreground water and up either side into the sky. The edge of this wash should be softened and graded out with a clean damp brush, then smoothed out with a dry hake brush. This surrounding blue gradation creates an area of warm light in the upper central part of the painting.

Boats and Masts

The next job is to add some smaller distant boats and masts with our rigger brush. Keep the boats long and flat and vary the height, spacing and thickness of the masts. Quick confident lines make the masts look convincing. You might find it easier to turn your painting around and make the strokes across rather than up and down.



White Gouache Details

While we are using our rigger brush we can put in some fine white spots and lines. Mix a small amount of water into the gouache – just enough to make it flow, then apply the marks with the tip of your brush. Add some white masts, railings, posts and random dots to suggest objects on the jetty.



Change to your 1/4" flat brush and put in some dark, rectangular window shapes. We can also put in a few wiggly reflections under the posts with our rigger brush. Make the wiggles random and uneven, increasing in size as they come towards you. If they look too hard and obvious, a damp 1/2" bristle brush can be used to break them up a little before they dry.



Foreground Phthalo Wash

To put some more color into the water we will put on a graded wash of pure Phthalo Blue right across the foreground water. Don't make the wash too dark, just enough to change the color. Put the wash on use a damp brush to loose the top edge then gently work over the wash with your dry hake brush, pulling the wash in a downwards direction, to make the gradation even.



Soft Gesso Glaze

This is an optional final step. It will soften and push back part of the painting allowing the focal point to dominate and adding a subtlety to the distant boats and hills.

To apply the gesso the painting needs to be dry. The idea is to work gesso into the top and bottom right hand side, stirring in water and spreading the gesso out with your 1/2" bristle brush. The edge of the gesso should grade invisibly into the painting. You need to work quickly, keep the edge damp (spray it if necessary) then gently work the gesso back on itself with a dry hake brush. As soon as the hake picks up gesso it will spread it to other parts of your painting, so every couple of strokes, dry the brush on an old towel.

Let the gesso glaze dry once you are happy with it then use your rigger brush to put back some of the fine detail lost to the glaze.

The finished painting looks detailed and complicated, but when you look closely, most of the detail is just suggested.

The boats are mainly loose accidental shapes that come about by making a variety of long thin roughly rectangular shapes, angling the bow on some, suggesting a water line or rubbing strip on others to offer a clue to what the shape represents. There really isn't that much detail.

The main point to keep in mind is VARIATION. Look at the spacing and size of the shapes, the height and spacing of the masts, the height, spacing, tone and thickness of the posts. Every repeating element should show variation because that is what we are used to seeing in nature and if the painting is to succeed it has to satisfy the viewers desire for variation.

Options

Once you have completed this painting, use the techniques you have learned to make paintings from the two photographs below.

