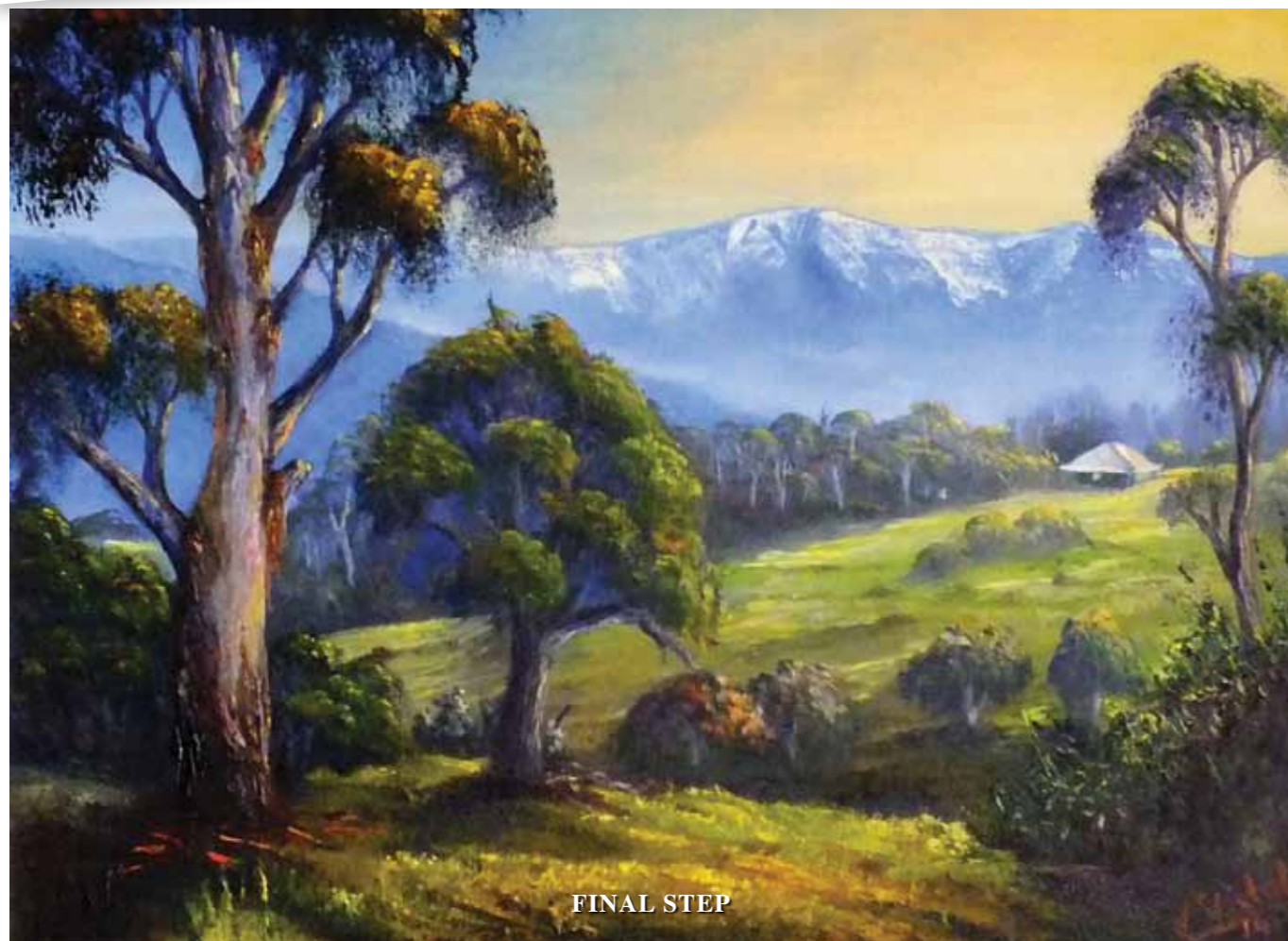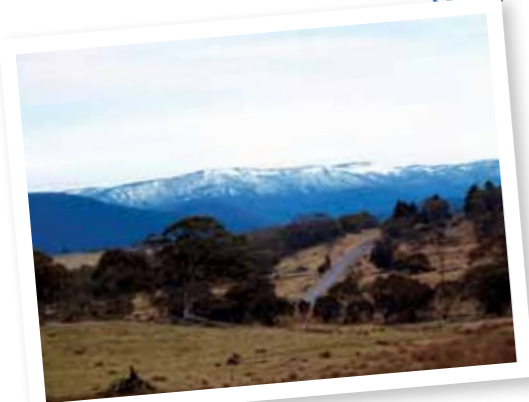Oils

Early Morning – Snowy Mountains

By Christopher Vidal

The region of the Snowy Mountains is one of the most beautiful places in Australia. The origin of this painting comes from a favourite photo at Lake Jindabyne showing distant mountains Blue in colour and a dull foreground.

FINAL STEP

STEP ONE

MATERIALS

- For all my paintings I use artist grade materials and paints since I want to ensure good quality and long lasting durability of my paintings. Most of the materials that I use are Australian made.
- Canvas: For this painting I used a canvas board (45 x 34cm) prepared by me using 10oz double primed cotton duck canvas mounted to a board using acid-free PVA glue. I usually prepare canvas board at least a day before I need to paint on it. For bigger works I stretch the canvas on stretcher bars.
- Paints: Underpainting using Atelier Interactive Acrylics: Yellow Ochre, Cobalt Blue, Cerulean Blue, Cadmium Yellow Deep, Burnt Umber
- Art Spectrum Artists oil colours: Cerulean Blue, Raw Sienna, Yellow Ochre, Cadmium Yellow Light, Titanium White, Zinc White, Permanent Crimson, Spectrum Vermilion, Spectrum Viridian, Sap Green, Australian Red Gold
- Ultramarine Blue (Lefranc), Burnt Sienna, Burnt Umber (Langridge Hand Made Oils), Cadmium Orange (Old Holland), Cobalt Blue (Master Class)
- Brushes: Art Spectrum: Long flat brushes 10, 6 (to block in the main shapes) and a selection of filberts 4, 6, 8, 10. Round golden sable brushes numbers 0 – 2 for fine details. A number 4 fan brush.
- A selection of Art Spectrum painting knives
- Media: Archival odourless solvent
- Tissue paper/rugs
- Baby oil (for brush cleaning)
- Willow charcoal
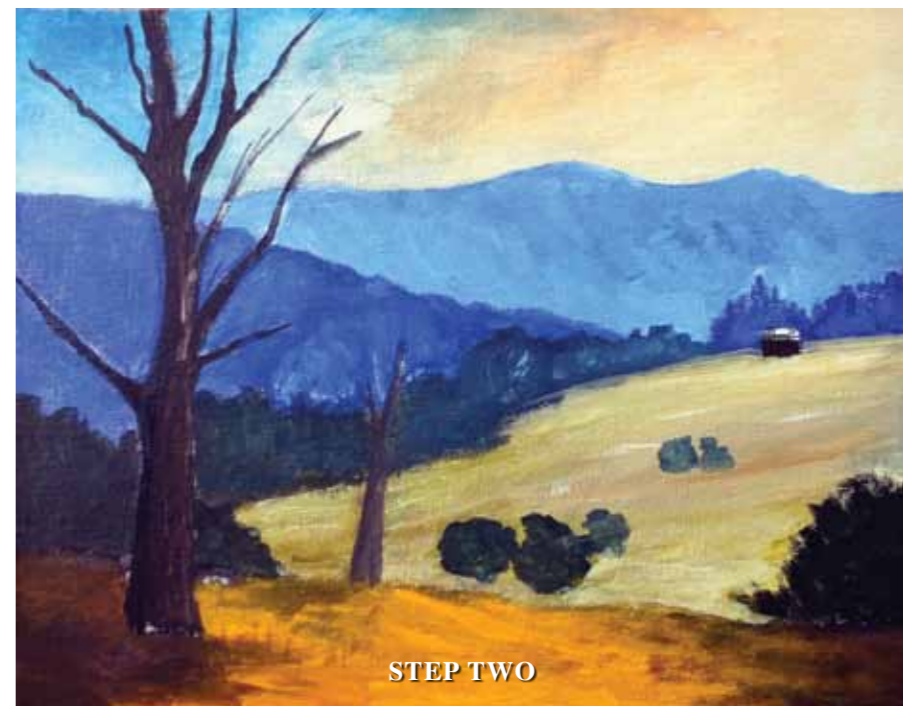- Langridge matte and gloss varnishes (1:1)
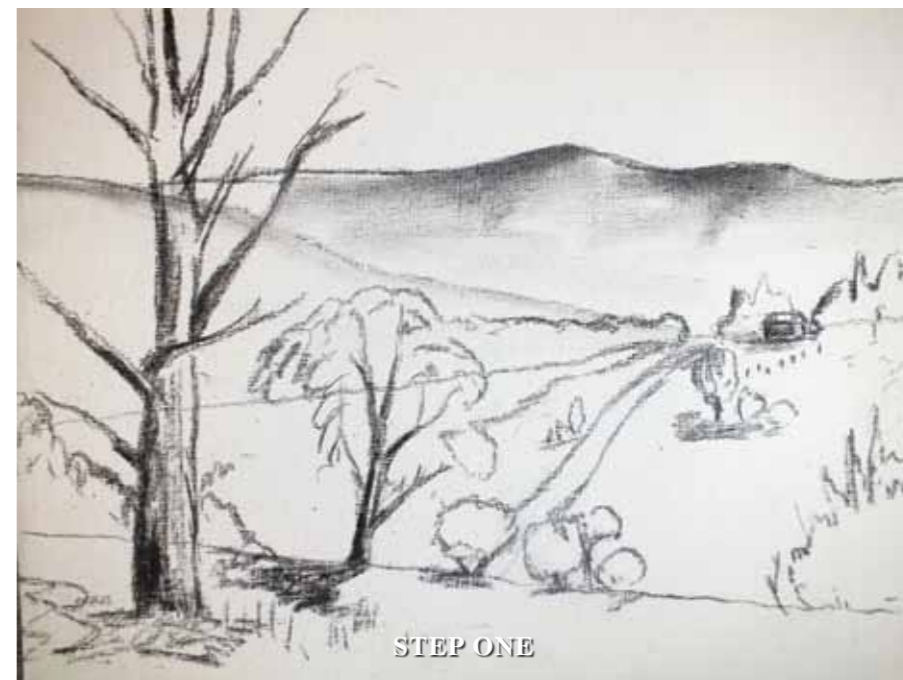
STEP ONE

Before I started, I decided to do some modifications to the reference photo to create a more exciting and interesting painting. The colour scheme was chosen to suggest the early morning light. I decided to keep the same basic shapes and a zig-zag composition to lead the viewer's eye into the picture. Using willow charcoal I sketched the basic shapes and shadows, with light coming from the upper right corner of the painting. I removed some of the trees from the middle ground and added a small house in the distance and a larger tree in the foreground. In the initial sketch I included the road which I later removed.

STEP TWO

Usually I build up my paintings in three stages, starting with an underpainting followed by adding

STEP TWO

STEP THREE

tree, with a darker value applied for the front bush and trees. A mixture of the same Purple with added Viridian and a mix of Cadmium Yellow, Cadmium Orange, and a touch of Viridian and Crimson (in the shadows) were used for the highlighted grassy foreground.

After allowing the painting to dry overnight, more details were added to

ARTIST'S HINTS AND TIPS

• Always use artist quality paint which contains more pigment and so do not fade when mixing.
• Do not use black to tone down the value of your colour but use the complementary colour eg: green toned down with red. If you really need a dark colour then use Payne's Grey.
• Contrast is created by using complementary colours next to each other and by using bold sharp edges to define it.
• The illusion of distance and perspective is achieved by using tinted (low key values) and cooler colours at the background (e.g. Cobalt Blue, Alizarin Crimson, Raw Sienna) together with less detail and proportional smaller objects. At the foreground, use warmer colours such as Ultramarine Blue, Cadmium Red, Cadmium Orange, Burnt Umber and Burnt Sienna. Brush strokes should be bolder with more definition and more detail should be added. I like to use the painting knife to sculpt the details in tree trunks, rocks, and foliage in the foreground.
• Keep the painting simple and focused on the subject.
• Keep the corners of the painting dark to keep the viewer's eyes within the picture.

STEP THREE

After the underpainting dried I started working with oils from back to front. For me this is the best and easiest way to achieve a good illusion of distance. Odourless solvent was used to dilute the colours during the whole painting process. I used Yellow Ochre mixed with White and a touch of Cadmium Yellow Light for the Yellow Light in the sky, adding a touch of Cadmium

more details in mid-tones and then the final stage of adding more detailed work and highlights. Using flat brushes and acrylic paint I blocked in the main shapes using darker tones of the colours I planned to use. I usually use an acrylic underpainting when I am working outdoors and wish my paint to dry as quickly as possible. As an alternative to acrylics I usually use very diluted oil paints in odourless solvent, pre-wetting the canvas with the same solvent. At this stage I only want to have an idea of how the painting will look using the colour scheme that I've chosen, giving importance to the tonal values.

Orange towards the centre. Cerulean Blue and White were used for the bluish part of the sky with some Permanent Crimson added as I moved towards the left hand side. I blended the colours close to the middle of the painting. Cobalt Blue, White and a touch of Crimson were used for the background mountains, using a lighter value towards the bottom.

The same colour mix was darkened by adding more Cobalt Blue and Crimson (shifting towards Crimson) and a touch of Raw Sienna. This mix was used for the closer mountain while using a dabbing brush stroke to give the impression of trees covering it. A mix of Ultramarine Blue, White, Vermilion and touch of Raw Sienna were used for the trees in the middle part of the painting. A lighter value of the same colour was used for the trees in the sunlit areas in the middle ground. The ground was painted using horizontal brush strokes and a mixture of White, Cadmium Yellow Light, a touch of Cadmium Orange, and adding Crimson as I moved towards the foreground. Adding more Ultramarine Blue and Crimson I blocked the middle gum

STEP FOUR

the background mountains. Using a 1:1 mix of Titanium and Zinc White, I prepared two White mixes for the ice caps by adding a very small amount of Yellow Ochre or Cobalt Blue. These two Whites were used for the highlighted and shadowy part of the ice caps. I loaded the edge of the painting knife with colour and while holding it very lightly between two fingers I dragged it in the direction of the mountain peak against the canvas from top to bottom. This will create the effect of broken snow with the underpainting showing through. I then darkened very lightly some areas that are in shadow using Crimson. A mix of White, Blue and a touch of Vermilion were used to paint the trunk of the tree at the front. Using a painting knife and a mix of Burnt Sienna and Vermilion

darkened with Ultramarine Blue, I sculptured the bottom part of the tree and the shedding bark. Details to the house and trees were added.

FINAL STEP

At this stage more details and highlights were added. Using a dry brush I added more White and Cobalt Blue to the bottom part of the mountains and trees, decreasing the value and thus pushing them further back. Background tree trunks were added using a liner brush and the previous colour mix with added Crimson. Various tints of Cadmium Yellow Light with a touch of Viridian were used to highlight the trees at the back and mid-ground, as well as the ground. To highlight the tree trunks at the front I used White mixed with

Yellow Ochre, Cadmium Orange or Crimson. Cadmium Yellow Medium, Australian Red Gold and Cadmium Orange were used to highlight the foliage on the front trees and grass. Very thin washes of the same colours were used to add subtle colours on various parts of the painting. Final touches included darkening of the shadows to create more contrast and lightening of negative space.

After curing completely, I finished this painting by applying a 1:1 mix of matt and gloss varnish and framing it with a white slip and golden wooden frame.

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