

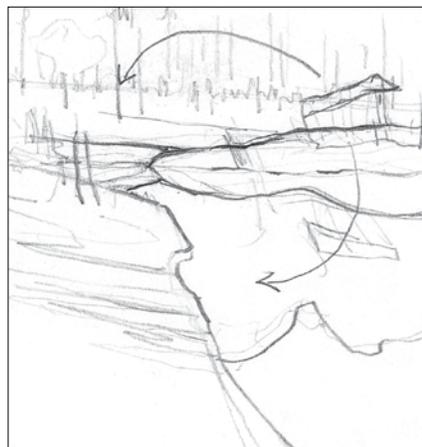
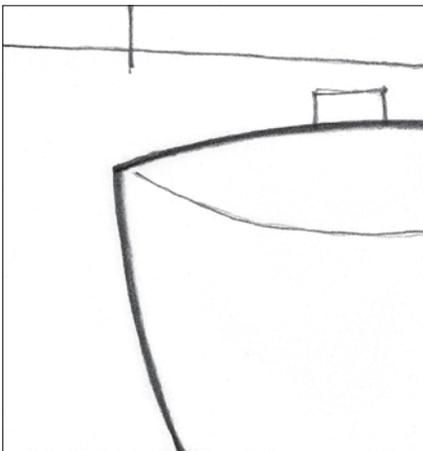
plan big masses when you paint

Before you begin to paint, make sure you have several dramatic value masses clearly in mind. Then, as you paint, stand back often. Make sure they continue to hold your attention and don't fill up with distracting details. If the arrangement of major masses is strong and coherent, they'll carry the painting. You are then 90 percent of the way toward achieving a composition—and consequently a painting—that will work.



Cropping the Photo

Notice how the photo was cropped so it is now design driven, with three or four simple masses.



The Armature and Lines of Attention

Consider how you want the viewer's eye to move through your painting. The main line of the painting, following the armature, pulls the eye back to the lit snow bank and then over to the red dogwoods. There are also two return lines or secondary movements through the painting. The first moves down into the dogwoods' reflection and across the reflection to join the main line again. The second return line moves back into the woods and then down a tree to the sunlit bank. You want to keep the eye moving through your painting. Try to establish this kind of intention before you start. Sometimes return lines are obvious. Sometimes you have to create them.

MATERIALS

Surface

Oil-primed canvas, 32" × 30" (81cm × 76cm)

Brushes

Nos. 4, 6 and 8 hog bristle filberts, no. 6 sable or synthetic rigger, 1½-inch (38mm) utility brush

Pigments

Titanium White, Cadmium Yellow Light, Cadmium Yellow Medium, Yellow Ochre, Cadmium Orange, Cadmium Red Light, Alizarin Crimson, Quinacridone Violet, Dioxazine Purple, Ultramarine Blue, Phthalo Blue, Phthalo Green, Chrome Oxide Green

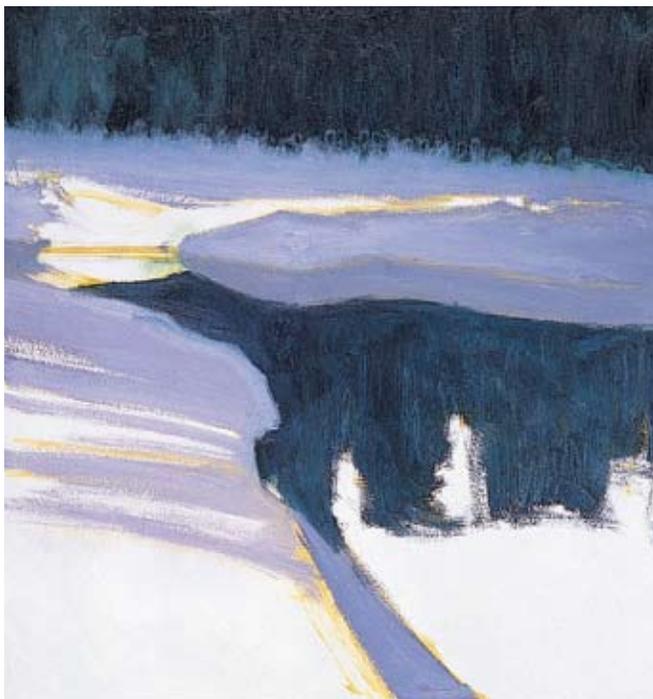
Other supplies

Smooth drawing paper, B and 2B pencils, kneaded eraser, mineral spirits, two pieces of white card cut into an L-shape with inside dimensions of 5" (13cm) and 7" (18cm), rags, palette knife



Find the Value Masses

Use a thumbnail drawing to get a good sense of the value of each of your masses. Make your values dense enough to approximate the values in front of you. Reduce the thumbnail to the large masses only. How do they work together? Do you see a problem? Perhaps the composition isn't dramatic enough, or there are too many little shapes. Maybe you need to crop tighter still. Determine whether you have a strong composition before you start to paint. You will save yourself from a lot of frustration and discouragement.



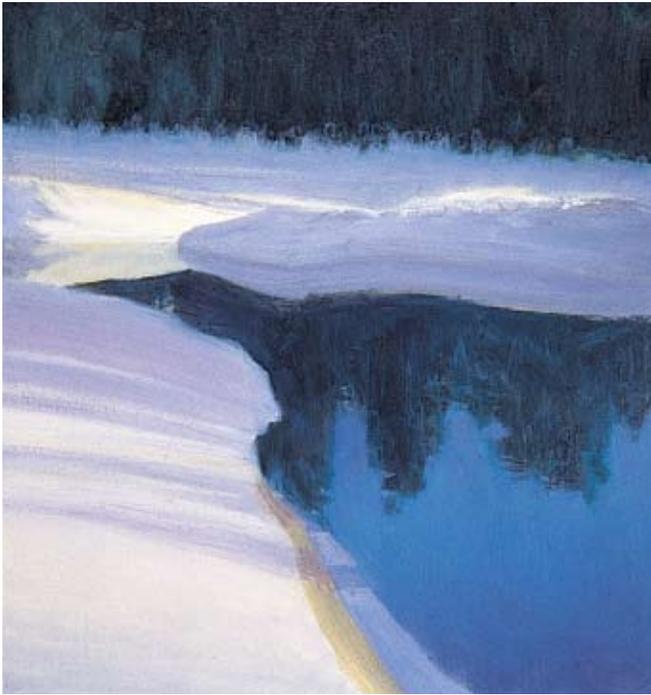
1 Paint Broadly at First

Using Yellow Ochre, mineral spirits and a no. 6 or 8 filbert, draw in the major shapes. Yellow Ochre wipes out easily, so keep adjusting the placement of the major masses until you've got them how you want them. Divide the photo and the canvas into thirds with grid lines if it will help you get the proportions right.

Block the masses in boldly. You want to see if those masses are going to carry the painting. For this size painting, use a 1½-inch (38mm) utility brush. Begin with the shape whose color and value seem easiest to find. In this case, start with the background forest (Alizarin Crimson and Phthalo Green with a touch of mineral spirits). In the area where the return line will pull us down into the painting over to the left, add some Ultramarine Blue and a hint of Titanium White. Wipe the bottom edge of the mass with a rag to soften it.

Continue painting in the simple value shapes with the utility brush. Squint to eliminate all the modulations, highlights and reflected lights that might distract you. Find the value and color that is the midpoint of all the variations in each mass. Test each new color against a mass you've already added. Don't just slap in a big area and then realize it's clearly not the right color. Paint boldly, but take your time on the color mixing.

The reflections of the trees in the water are Alizarin Crimson and Phthalo Green, the same as the forest. The shadow color of the snow is Ultramarine Blue, Cadmium Orange and Titanium White with a hint of Dioxazine Purple and Quinacridone Violet. Paint the snow back into the forest to start the interaction of two masses converging back into space.

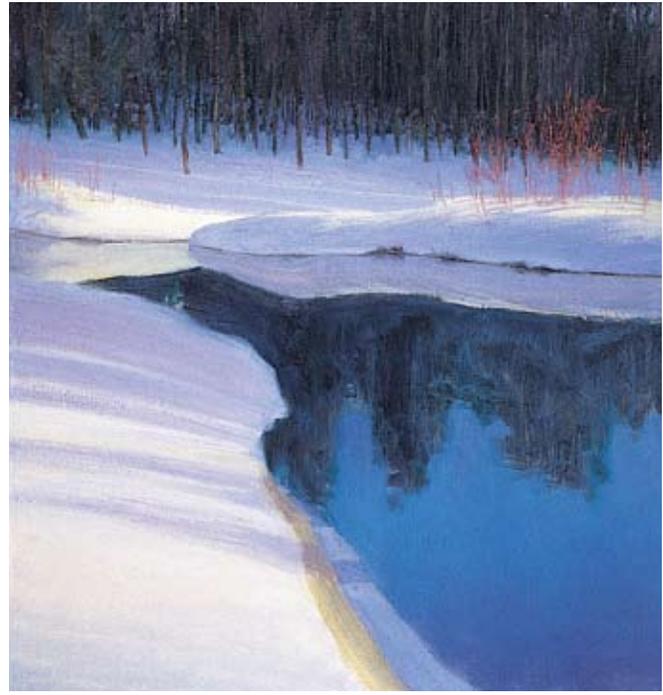


2 Keep It Simple

To paint the gradation in the water, use Ultramarine Blue, Phthalo Blue, Dioxazine Purple and Cadmium Orange, with a hint of Titanium White along the bottom edge. Wipe your brush and create a new mixture. Don't just add paint to the old one. Use the same colors as before, but reduce Dioxazine Purple and Cadmium Orange to just a hint. Brush each mixture next to the first color to see if it seems the right value for the level of gradation you want. You'll have four or five separate mixtures, so you'll have to judge each time. Brush the paint across the area, then blend it into the color below to soften the edge between the two colors. Mix a third color using Ultramarine Blue and Phthalo Blue with a bit more white and a hint of Cadmium Yellow Light, brush that color on above the last, then blend. The final color is the same as the last, only with a bit more white and yellow. Create several distinct "clean" mixtures and blend those if you want clean gradations.

Use Titanium White, Yellow Ochre, Cadmium Yellow Medium and Cadmium Orange for the sunlit snow. You may need to add a touch of Dioxazine Purple and Ultramarine Blue, so that the snow doesn't get too bright. You want it to look like sunlight but you also need to be able to add highlights later. Except for the gradation of the sky reflection and a touch of Ultramarine Blue and Cadmium Orange added to the snow at the very bottom of the picture plane, everything should be flat value masses.

Stand back and see how your masses are working. If they need adjusting, it is still easy to do so. Look at the painting in a mirror. You should be able to see how your armature is working and the main path your eye is taking through the painting.



3 Add Colors to the Main Masses

To turn that dark forest mass into a forest, you need tree trunks. Modulate the mass so that it reads as trees but doesn't distract. Mix colors close in value and intensity, but changing in hue. Using the base color of Alizarin Crimson and Phthalo Green, add Yellow Ochre, Cadmium Orange, Chrome Oxide Green and Quinacridone Violet—not all of them at once. Add some of one, a little of another. Load a no. 6 filbert with paint and drag it down in one stroke. If it's too light, mix something a little darker and drag it on top of the last stroke. You'll need some stronger darks too; the base mixture used more thickly will do. Make sure each mark means something—state it and leave it. When you stand back, you should be able to feel the sense of all those trees without a lot of jumpy vertical marks distracting you.

Create a mixture of Ultramarine Blue and Cadmium Orange with a hint of Dioxazine Purple a step or two darker than the one you used for the shadow color of the snow (step 1). Use this for the snow in the forest. That way when you paint it back into the more shadowed area of the forest it won't jump.

Use Alizarin Crimson, Quinacridone Violet and Yellow Ochre with a hint of Dioxazine Purple for the dogwoods. A couple of broad strokes with a no. 8 filbert will give the main mass. Use a no. 6 rigger for the rest. Load your brush and drag lightly in single strokes. Scrape back any that stand out too much with the tip of your palette knife.



4 Refine the Shadows and Define the Dogwoods

Soften the edges of the foreground shadows on the snow. Mix the color of the lit snow (step 2) and the shadow color (step 1) and brush one up into the edge of the other. Use two brushes (one for each color) and go back and forth between the two colors to control the quality of the edge. These shadows are cast by the tops of trees that are forty or fifty feet out to the right of the picture plane, so their edges should be soft. The shadow cast right at the base of a trunk would be much more clearly defined.

You can use the same modulated colors you used for the tree trunks for their reflection in the water, but just hint at them in the reflection.

Define and refine the dogwoods using the rigger and the original dogwood color. Dull and darken the dogwood color (step 3) with Dioxazine Purple and a hint of Chrome Oxide Green, and brush that in with a few loose vertical strokes for the dogwoods' reflection in the water.

The three dogwoods on the left bank were put in at the end to ensure that the viewer's eye swings around for that return line, before going back again to the lit snow bank and over to the dogwoods on the right.

DOGWOODS AT KOLAPORE
Oil on canvas · 32" x 30" (81cm x 76cm)