

# Master Strokes

## - look before you paint



**Michael Sanders,** influenced by the work of Cezanne, encourages us to analyse and simplify a subject before starting to paint

Occasionally, over the years, I go into reflective mode, collect a number of my paintings from the past, set them up on easels and see if I can detect improvements or changes in style through the years. Luckily I have kept certain

pieces that I thought at the time were 'different' in some way from what I usually did (medium, style, technique or subject). It's quite an instructive thing to do, and means I can spot a trend in my working methods that perhaps I wasn't aware of at the time.

One noticeable change has occurred quite recently, and came about due to a book I was asked to do for Search Press. Part of their 'Ready to paint the Masters' series, it concentrated on the painting style of Cezanne. I really became fascinated, and so I've produced a series of

images since writing the book, taking the ideas onwards and introducing elements of my own. This is one of the paintings in that style.

The technique is unusual for me in that it relies entirely on my response to the scene, with very little pre-planning, and virtually no sketching or blocking in first. It consists of scrutinising the view, analysing and simplifying where blocks or areas of colour or tone are, and painting them on the image almost like a mosaic, in simple, single brush strokes. To begin with it's more looking than painting!

## River scene at Lynmouth

The scene here (below) is a view up-river from Lynmouth near Exmoor, in March, and the attraction for me was the sparkling movement of the water and the indistinct background, in the early morning. This is one of the 'painting venues' for a painting holiday I'm doing in October with Cheddar Gallery, so I wanted to check the places out, and do some work there myself before taking students there.



I used a 12" x 16" piece of grey board, primed with an acrylic gesso that had been tinted pale violet/grey, and acrylic paint from Daler Rowney and Liquitex. Setting the easel up just a few hundred yards along a path from the main car park, I was surprised at the range of tones, and limited range of colours.

**1** I started by mixing a mid dark, with Indanthrene Blue, Burnt Umber and a little Titanium White. This was applied using single bold coarse brushstrokes, in the shadow area, including the river. I used a no 12 bristle brush for this. The fascinating thing about working like this is it really makes you look before you paint. I varied the colour of these darker areas; adding more blue and a touch of

### Materials

#### Acrylics:

- Indanthrene Blue
- Burnt Umber
- Titanium White
- Lemon Yellow
- Naples Yellow
- Cadmium Orange
- Alizarin Crimson
- Cobalt Turquoise

#### Bristle

brushes: 12, 6 and 2

Support: 12" x 16" primed grey board

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white for the distance, with a touch of Lemon Yellow added here and there. No attempt was made to 'portray' anything.

**2** The initial dark colour was lightened with White, and a touch more Burnt Umber added. This was briskly brushed over the area of distant trees with the no 12, allowing all the brushstrokes to show, and getting lighter towards the top. Quickly, before it dried, I scraped out some vertical lines with the handle of the brush to imply winter trees. Then I added a pale mix of Naples Yellow and White to the sky area, thin so that the colour underneath would show through.

**3** Using a touch of Burnt Umber and Indanthrene Blue added to White, I applied paint to areas where I could see a pale grey/blue in the river, using horizontal brushstrokes, with a no 6 bristle brush (I quickly learned with this technique how important the direction of each stroke of the brush is). The dark initial colour was left to show the rocks. A little Lemon Yellow added to this







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△ 'Calstock Through the Trees'  
This was painted as a demo for one of my classes, using the method I've described. It was painted on the riverbank opposite where I live

colour gave me the colour of the moss on the stones, with the same brush. The image is now taking shape.

**4** I added some darker greens, in single strokes of the no 6 brush, varying the angles, and altering the colour slightly here and there. Lemon and Indanthrene Blue, plus a little Burnt Umber, made the range of greens. I found at this stage it was important to not get 'sidetracked' into trying to paint actual objects, but to just put colour where I could see it.

**5** Now, I applied some verticals with the edge of the no 6 brush, using a light Naples Yellow and Burnt Umber mix on the left and the lower tree on the right, the others being a paler version of the initial dark colour. I added pathways in similar colours, leading to the bridge (which will come next).

**6** I lightened the sky around the tree on the right, and put some little touches of Cadmium Orange plus White and Burnt Umber, on the distant trees, with a no 2 brush. A few more bare trees were added, then the bridge, with the minimum of strokes. Some brighter greens were applied on the left. Violet/grey was put on the right side, using Indanthrene Blue, Alizarin Crimson, and White, with a bit of Burnt Umber. The dark stones were livened with orange and violet, and shadows in the water with Cobalt Turquoise and White.

Additional strokes were added to finish the water. Finally, two people who passed by as I was cleaning my brushes were put in, with dark grey.



Michael will be tutoring a painting holiday in beautiful locations in the Exmoor area in October. For details contact Cheddar Gallery; 01934 744188, [www.cheddargallery.co.uk](http://www.cheddargallery.co.uk) or phone Michael on 01822 834799.

Michael's books, 'Ready to paint the Masters, Cezanne' and 'Ready to paint the Masters, Van Gogh' published by Search Press, are available on page 12 of your Annual Home Shop Catalogue. They come complete with techniques and tips on how to reproduce the look of Cezanne's and Van Gogh's masterpieces in acrylic, and tracings to get you started; an ideal introduction to acrylic painting.



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