

Creating Distance

Creating distance in a landscape painting involving a lake and mountains.

In landscapes, we can establish a sense of space and distance by using linear perspective, focusing on key points in the scene to act as guides: fences, posts, shacks, and so on. Large lakes, however, rarely have convenient features mapped out across their surface, thus removing the option of using linear perspective. This means that we have to use color to create the sense of distance.

Distance and scale can be created by ensuring that the very furthest distance is painted with a much lighter tone, and should contain a blue or violet base. The lightness of tone helps to suggest distance. As our eyes are not capable of focusing over a very long distance, the background in any scene is less distinct, containing hardly any detail or color.

Thanks to the earth's atmosphere, blue light is reflected more than any other color, giving the impression of blue hills or mountains when we look at wide open spaces. To create the feeling of sharp, cold lake-land days, use a cool blue, cerulean blue for example. For warmer days, a hint of violet (add a bit of alizarin crimson to sky blue) works well.

The last consideration is "creating a graduation of tone from the background, through the large area of space in the mid ground, to any specific detail in the foreground". The mid ground of a lake may be only a rather vague part of the composition, with little specific detail upon which to focus. This is where color and tone become very important. The mid ground should not be just the space in between the background and foreground, but a balance of tones that leads the viewers gradually through the composition.

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