

Blue Beach House Art
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How To Paint a Rocky Beach Headland

Part of the Stunning Seascapes Series

To start with, I have sketched a rough outline of my rocky beach headland on this partly finished seascape painting. You don't have to be too particular with the drawing but it is important to get the scale right so I like to measure the height and width of the headland on my reference photo. I then multiply that figure by the same ratio as that of photo to canvas.

Rocky outcrops or headlands, when viewed from a distance, often appear blue. The further away they are the paler and bluer they become. This is known as atmospheric perspective.

So, I will start with a blue grey mix working on the nearest part of the headland, which is on the left in this case. Ultramarine is my favorite blue for mountains so I will start with that and then grey it a bit by adding some of its complementary colour, orange. As usual, I am working with a limited palette today so my orange is red gold with a bit of naphthol crimson added. I also add a bit of white to tone it down a bit.

Once I have blocked in the nearest rocks I will add a bit more white and a bit more ultramarine blue to the mix for the next outcrop. And I will continue to do that with each successive part of the headland as it recedes into the distance. That is going to give it some depth.

Now, using a narrower brush, I am going to introduce some shadows. Firstly I'll use a darker grey blue, similar to what we started with and I'll start work on the furthest rocks this time. It's morning in this painting which means the light is coming from the East. In this case that will be the top right hand side of the canvas because this beach is on the east coast of Australia. Of course this in turn means that the shadows will appear at the bottom and left of each section.

I'll just try to imagine which areas of these rocks would be hidden from the sun.

This time I will make the grey darker for each successive outcrop as I move to the left and therefore closer to the viewer. I use a solid line of colour to define the edge of each outcrop. Then I find that any subtle colour variations in the previous layer help me to imagine where the shadows might be. There is no need to follow your reference photo too slavishly. You'll just drive yourself nuts trying to get it right. A bit of artistic licence is what's called for here.

Now it's time for some highlights.

As this is a morning painting I am going to use red gold to show the golden sunlit edges of the outcrops. I'll add a bit of white, of course, to tone it down to the same value as grey shadows and so keep that feeling of distance. Again, try to imagine which areas of the rocks would be hit by the sun. Often it will be the area directly to the left of the darkest shadows. As before, you should reduce the amount of white as you move forward in the painting.

By now you can get a pretty good idea of the formation of the rocks. I'm just going to spend a little time further refining some of the shadows to show more detail. Some of the darks will be darker than others in the areas that are furthest from the light. Therefore it is important not to overdo the shadows. You want to make sure you leave some mid-tones of grey. Sometimes knowing when to stop can be the hardest part of a painting. If you start to lose that feeling of depth then you can further darken the darkest areas to get it back. If you go too far, then simply reapply some of the golden highlights or grey mid-tones as needed.

Even the most barren of beach headlands will likely have some vegetation on the top. In this case, because I live in a sub-tropical area, the vegetation on this area is quite green. If you live in a drier area, yours may be orange. Anyway, I am going to add a green covering to the top of this headland. I am using a mix of ultramarine blue and cadmium yellow light but the emphasis is on the blue as most of the grassed area is out of the direct sunlight. For those areas that are being hit by the sun I will add a touch of pure cadmium yellow light for a nice contrasted highlight. Again, don't forget to add a bit of white to the mix in order to match the tonal value of the rocks.

Our beach headland looks pretty good at this stage but there's one last thing I would like to show you in relation to painting rocks. The rocks in this painting are grey. Grey is basically a mix of all three primary colours. However, when I paint grey rocks I don't mix all three colours together on my palette. I like to apply each primary colour separately to the canvas and let the

viewer's eye do the mixing. This technique will add vibrance to your painting and avoid "muddiness".

So going back to the headland in our painting. We already have blue for the shadows and yellow (or gold) for the highlights. Therefore, to make our rocks appear grey we need to add some red, or in this case when we tone it down with some white, pink. Pink is a warm colour so I am going to use it in the sunlit areas, adjacent to the gold. This will help to reduce the greenish tinge you can see which has been produced by the gold on top of the blue.

And that is the final step in painting this rocky beach headland. Important takeaways from this lesson are:

- Rocky headlands or mountains appear bluer and paler as they recede into the distance
- All shadows are not equal. Some shadows appear darker than others
- Your greys will appear more vibrant if you paint the colors separately and then let the viewer mix those colours with their eyes