

Melanie Cambridge  
Acrylic Landscape Demonstration  
FCSA Friday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2018  
<http://www.melaniecambridge.com>



FCSA was pleased to welcome Melanie Cambridge back to the studio to give a demonstration of a landscape in acrylics. Melanie began by passing around a laminated sheet of her reference material of photographs of Leighton Lock and some canal boats. She noted that green was the predominant colour but she reminded everyone that it is up to the artist to decide how to interpret the reference material. She thought she might opt to make the colours more autumnal.

Using the reference Melanie made a planning sketch. This is an essential first step. She decided to make the eyeline across the centre of the picture and then she marked off the fifths. Melanie finds two fifths works better than thirds and theoretically this is closer to the Golden Mean. Melanie drew the lock gates on the two fifths point of the eyeline. Next it is important to think about the light source. Having decided the light was coming from the right through the trees, she marked in some shadows. This is the basis of the composition and the basis of the painting.



Now it was time to start the actual painting and Melanie had prepared a square MDF board which was a light grey produced by mixing gesso with ultramarine and yellow ochre. She started sketching in charcoal to mark out the main elements of the painting. She uses charcoal because it can be rubbed down and made faint enough not to show through when the paint is applied.

Acrylic paint is flexible and can be watered down to be used like watercolour or applied thickly a little like oil paint. When painting on board it is best to put the paint on more thickly so that it does not run off. Melanie was using a limited palette of lemon yellow, medium yellow, magenta, cadmium red, ultramarine, cerulean, burnt sienna and raw sienna. These were either Daler Rowney Graduate Acrylics or Amsterdam Standard Acrylics. She was annoyed to discover that she did not have yellow ochre as this is one of the colours she likes to use to create greens but undeterred she began to mix a minty green to paint the treeline across the eyeline of the painting with lemon, ultramarine and white.





Melanie likes to use a filbert, German's call this an oval brush, to block her initial painting. She applied a mix of burnt sienna and cadmium red to block in the trees on the right with gusto and then using ultramarine and cerulean she blocked in the sky. To make the clouds she put a little burnt sienna into the blue and added white to create the grey of the cloud base. Melanie then used heavy bodied white to produce a bright white. She applied this with a palette knife. Using heavy bodied acrylic will give the painting texture.

Textured paint and heavy bodied paint will take much longer to dry. Melanie reminded everyone to make sure when putting in sky holes to trees it is important to make sure that these are the same colour as the rest of the sky. Also remember with acrylics it is possible to put the darks in later unlike painting with oils where the dark colours must go in first.



Melanie used raw umber with white to produce the grey of the tow path. She kept working around the painting to harmonise the colours. She decided to add some orange and reds,



medium yellow and burnt sienna to turn the scene into an autumnal one. When it came to the canal boat there was a debate about the colour to make the top body of the boat. She was reluctant to use black and eventually opted for a dark red colour. She added details and a man on the back wearing a blue top and hat. At this point she put in the lock gates. She pointed out that it was important to get all these details in before tackling the water in the canal in order to know where and what colour the reflections would be.

After the coffee break Melanie painted the water. Interestingly she painted with vertical brush strokes pointing out that this helps with the reflections. Then using a small brush she used white to create some sparkle on the water and a bow wave at the front of the canal boat. At the end Melanie decided to put in some people near the lock gate and a little person at the front of the canal boat. She tried a dog on the tow path but removed it when she realised it was not working. Finally, she added some bollards along the canal side.



The completed painting was then inserted into an impressive square frame which transformed the whole work into a very saleable piece of work. Given the limited time that is available to an artist for a demonstration it was very impressive.



**Tips:**

To slow down the drying time of quick drying acrylics use washing up liquid

Oil can be painted over acrylic but not the other way around

Paintings on board or canvas should be varnished once they are dry.

Never work into varnish. If there are gaps in the varnish let it all dry before applying another coat.

Oils and acrylics are best displayed in a dished frame.