



Painting Clear Reflective and Refractive Water

Workshop Overview: Painting Clear, Reflective & Refractive Water

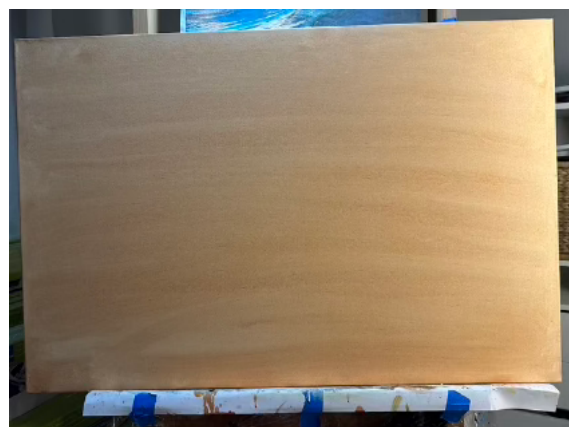
2-Day Intensive Workshop

Instructor: Sabine Baeckmann-Murray

Water is never just water. It is a living mirror—responding to everything above, below, and around it. In this immersive two-day workshop, artists will learn how to truly see water in all its complexity and translate that understanding into convincing, luminous paintings. Participants will discover why painting clear water is less about the water itself and more about interpreting the elements that define it—light, depth, color, surface movement, and reflection. Reference photos become starting points rather than strict instructions; artists will learn how to make intentional creative adjustments to strengthen their compositions and achieve greater realism or expressive effect.

PRE-WORKSHOP CANVAS PREP (18"X24" MIN)

Please prepare your canvas with a light burnt sienna wash BEFORE coming to the workshop. Mix some burnt sienna paint with enough mineral spirits, or a 50/50 medium/ water mix for acrylics, to make a thin wash. Cover the front and all sides of the canvas, then use a rag to rub the wash into the canvas and wipe off any excess wash. Canvas should be dry to the touch within an hour or so.



Day One – Understanding What's Beneath

Stage 1: Topography – What's Under the Water?

We begin by examining the “landscape under the surface.” If we could drain the water, what shapes, colors, and textures would remain? Participants will analyze how these submerged elements influence what we see once the water returns.

Color & Context

Water takes on the colors of the world around it—sky blues, stone browns, soft greens, and reflected light. You'll learn to identify and mix the true colors of underwater elements once they're filtered through water.

Body of Water & Refraction

Using the idea of hypothetically pouring the water into a glass, we'll explore what color the water really is and how refraction (bending of light) alters what's beneath the surface. Students will examine how objects distort, shift, or change shape when viewed through water, and how to paint those changes convincingly.

Day Two – Reflection & Surface

Stage 2: Reflection – Light and Overhead Elements

On day two, we turn our attention upward—learning to paint reflections of objects above the water, from trees to clouds to strong directional light. We'll study shadowing, angles, and how still versus moving water alters the clarity of a reflection.

Atmospheric Understanding: Painting Clouds

Because so much of water's appearance depends on the sky, we'll take time to explore clouds—what they are, how they form, and how to paint them convincingly.

Topics include:

- Cloud Distance: How to tell whether a cloud is near or far, and how size, edge softness, and value shifts help communicate distance.
- Cloud Structure: Understanding the internal anatomy of a cloud—light source, core shadows, diffused edges, reflected color, and vapor density.
- Cloud Color: Why clouds are not simply white or gray. We'll examine how atmosphere, time of day, humidity, and surrounding light sources influence cloud color and how that color transfers into water reflections.
- Cloud-to-Water Relationship: Translating cloud shapes and colors into believable reflections and soft distortions on the water's surface.

Stage 3: The Water's Surface – Texture, Movement & Tonal Strength

We conclude the workshop by focusing on the surface itself. Students will learn to paint calm vs. choppy water, ripples, distortions, and how surface texture affects what is seen underneath or reflected above. As elements come closer to the foreground, we'll explore intensifying color saturation, deepening shadows, and sharpening highlights to refine tonal contrast, creating depth and visual impact and enhancing depth and realism.

