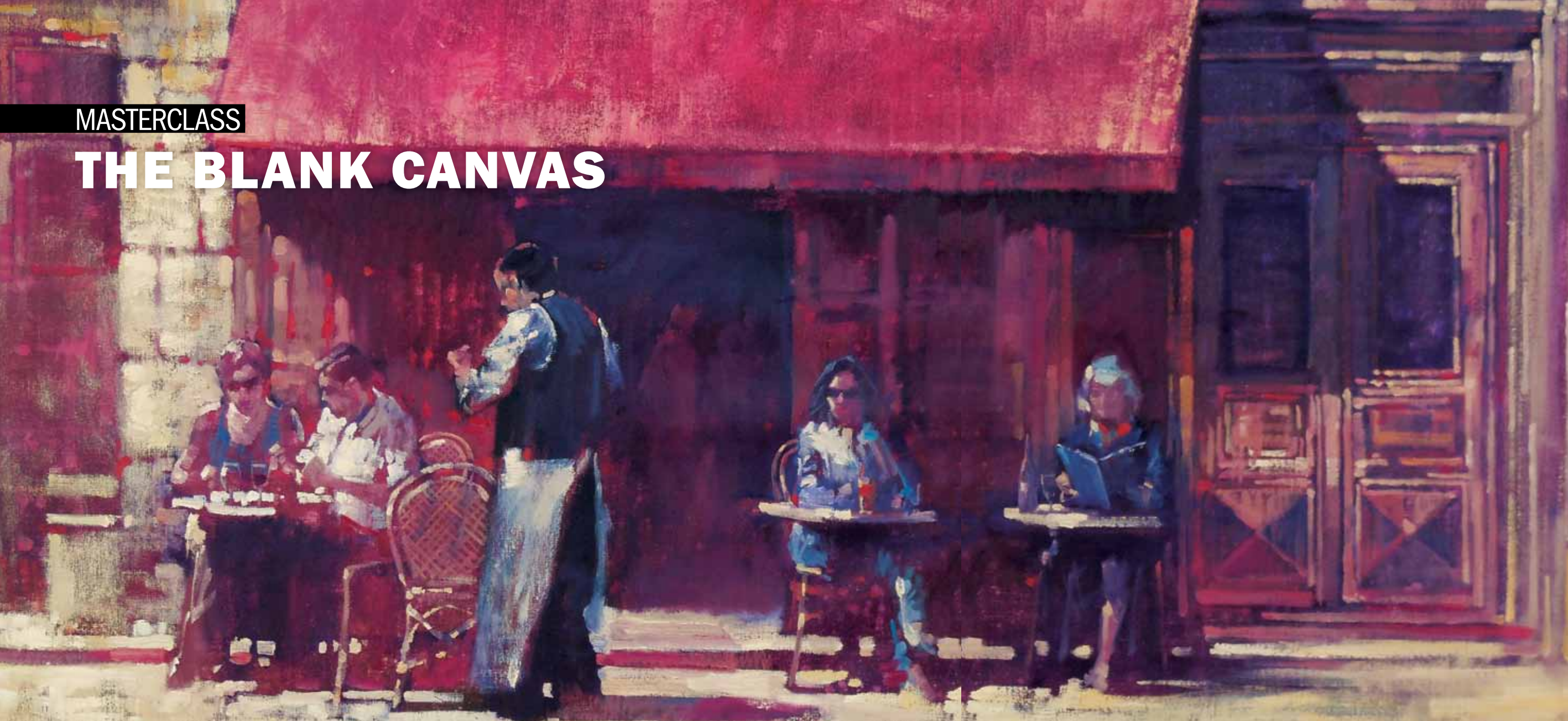


# THE BLANK CANVAS



**TOP TIP**  
Applying a rough underpainting with many mixed colours creates a useful base to work on



**BREAK UP THE WHITE**  
To break up the white of the canvas, I began by creating an underpainting in acrylics. Complementary colours were applied with a wide, flat synthetic brush and vigorously worked across the surface of the canvas. While I usually have an image in mind anyway, these haphazard gradations of colour will often suggest new shapes or a different treatment.

Australian artist **David Hinchliffe** reveals a neat strategy for overcoming your fears and quickly covering up white space that will help create a lively and atmospheric painting

A blank canvas can put off many artists. Making that first stroke can be intimidating, just as facing a blank page can be an obstacle for an author. To avoid this, I like to approach painting much more simply.

I always begin by covering the whole of the canvas surface with an infusion of vivid colours, usually in a mid-hue. I will make this underpainting in acrylic so it usually takes just an hour or two until it is fully dry. I take this time to sit, look at the canvas and imagine how the final painting might emerge.

The next stage is painting in oils. I never undertake a preliminary sketch. I take my subject from quick sketches I've done in situ or combinations of photos I've taken. I build up the painting from that point with darker and lighter tones until forms are sufficiently revealed. I stress 'sufficiently' because I

strongly resist completely revealing all details of a scene. I believe passionately that an artist should present about 80% of the image and allow the viewer to fill in the remaining 20%. The artist creates the basic shapes, but the real magic happens when the imagination of the viewer fills in the detail.

Perhaps it's my previous profession as a full-time councillor that has led me to painting streets – I've gone from paving streets to painting them. As a result, I've been called a 'city portraitist', a description I certainly embrace.

In this painting, *Separate Tables*, I've been drawn once again to the passion of the Paris sidewalks: outdoor diners, officious waiters and the wonderful play of light and shade created by granite walls, timber doors and a large expanse of red awning. [www.davidhinchliffeartist.com.au](http://www.davidhinchliffeartist.com.au)

## YOU WILL NEED

- **ACRYLICS**  
Brilliant Violet, Yellow Ochre and Cadmium Red, all Schmincke Akademie acrylics
- **OILS**  
Flake White Hue, Winsor Violet, Magenta, Burnt Umber, Alizarin Crimson, Cadmium Red Light, Cadmium Red, Cadmium Orange, Cadmium Yellow, Naples Yellow, Yellow Ochre, Viridian, Cerulean Blue and Ultramarine Blue, all Winsor & Newton Artists' or Schmincke Mussini Oil Colours
- **BRUSHES**  
Flat, synthetic brushes in various sizes
- **CANVAS**  
Pre-stretched cotton canvas, 76x152cm
- **TURPS & SOLVENT**
- **REFINED LINSEED OIL**



**2 SPREAD COLOUR QUICKLY**  
For a canvas of this size, it takes about four minutes to spread the paint in sweeping strokes. This part of the process is a real workout as it's important to spread and mix the colours as quickly as possible before the acrylics dry. When they begin to dry, spraying or splashing them with medium creates interesting stains that add to the texture of the underpainting.



**3 VARY THE SURFACE**  
This acrylic underpainting process is never entirely predictable. The lighter spots on the surface that you can see here are the result of water being splashed on the canvas just before the acrylic underpainting has fully dried. The most beautiful tones are usually the result of mixing unlikely combinations of colours.



**4 SWITCH TO OILS**  
I turned to oil paint here as it doesn't dry as quickly. I picked out a darker tone from the acrylic underpainting and recreated it with Crimson Red and Raw Umber oils to sketch in the outlines of people and major elements of the composition. I don't spend a lot of time sketching in detail at this stage and you shouldn't too – just aim to outline the principal shapes and lines.



## 5 BLOCK IN SHADOWS FIRST

I blocked in the larger shapes here, including the awning and the main shadows, and then started to work on the granite wall using a mixture of Naples Yellow, Flake White and Yellow Ochre. The lighter tones were drybrushed lightly over the surface of the underpainting to create an appearance of patina or layers.



## 6 LIGHTEN LARGER AREAS

The large expanse of awning was developed here. To do this, I added layers of increasingly lighter oil paint (Naples Yellow and Flake White Hue) mixed with small amounts of Cadmiums Red and Orange) with a large flat brush on top of the crimson-coloured acrylic underpainting.



## 7 SUGGEST DEPTH

The old door takes shape with mixes of Burnt Umber, Cadmium Red, Naples Yellow and Flake White Hue. I avoid long continuous strokes, favouring a sort of dot-dash application that gives old doors more 'character' and suits the mood. The shadow falling across the door emphasises the angle of the awning and gives an otherwise flat painting a 3D aspect.



**TOP TIP**  
Try using Flake White Hue – it's a modern (and less toxic!) alternative to Flake White

## 10 PAINT IN BROAD STROKES

I always adhere to the principle that "less is more", as you can see in this detail. In a composition that contains grand architecture and five figures, too much detail can become a distraction. Try using broader brushstrokes to convey the planes of light and shade very roughly instead.



## 8 DEVELOP THE FORMS

The various figures and forms are starting to take shape at this stage. I started picking out highlights on the granite wall, using Naples Yellow combined with small amounts of Flake White Hue and Yellow Ochre. I also painted the highlights on the figures using a whiter mix of those same three colours.



## 9 BUILD UP HIGHLIGHTS

All of the work on these three figures was completed with a No. 6 flat synthetic brush. The thin end of the brush was used to create the thinner lines of the glasses and bottles on the café table. The areas underneath the tables and in the shadows are best left to the imagination, so I avoided picking out details there.



## 11 SKETCH THE FIGURES

The highlights on the second set of figures were quickly sketched in with Cerulean Blue and Cadmium Orange. The temptation is to keep adding more and more detail to the figures, but in doing so you risk over-working the painting. Detail can get in the way of conveying the 'mood' of the painting.



## 12 USE DETAIL SPARINGLY

A few finishing touches are required. Some last Cadmium Red highlights helped to pull the composition together, while other areas (such as the spaces under the tables and the inside of the restaurant) are left deliberately sketchy. It might be tempting to continue, but holding back allows the viewer to fill in any absent details.



## 13 SIGN IT AND SEAL IT!

For me, the final act of any painting is the signature. After decades of painting, I've always used this as a means to say that the process is at an end. It is my way of saying that any imperfections left in the painting at that point were meant to happen and it is sealed from any more corrections.