



## Article: Negative Painting

The following is a set of three exercises designed to help you to improve your negative painting technique. Although negative painting is best done freehand, you may find it helpful to draw out in pencil first, then repeat the exercise without any pencil lines.



### EXERCISE 1

In this exercise, think **stain glass window**. Whilst drawing it out in pencil first is likely to make life easier, the real challenge is to attempt the painting without any guidelines at all. You can, of course use any colour you like, I'm using French Ultramarine.

Start from the inside and work outwards.



As the pattern grows, the big challenge here is to keep it symmetrical (particularly if you're doing it freehand).



Finish off by squaring off the corners.



## EXERCISE 2

This time, I'm going to paint something a little more complex. Again, draw it out first if you feel you have to, but work towards trying it without any pencil lines at all.

Paint the background in French ultramarine, leaving a tree-shaped highlight in the foreground. You may be thinking this would be easier using masking fluid, and you would be right, but the object of the exercise is to encourage the brain to think 'in the negative'.



Okay, now its going to get a little trickier.

Repeat the French Ultramarine wash (using the same mix), but this time, attempt to create another tree behind the first tree. What's tricky is that you have to make branches disappear and reappear in the correct places.

Also, work quickly so as not to create **outlines**.



I've created a further tree on the same **layer**.

If you're used to working with Photoshop on the PC, then this is a concept you'll be familiar with; it might help you to think in terms of **layers** (unlike Photoshop, however, you can't delete or modify layers individually).



Now try adding a third layer of trees.

What's happening is, as we add layers, we're actually working deeper into the wood, and getting darker tones by laying transparent washes over themselves.

At this point things really do start getting complicated, and you'll need to keep your wits about you. It's easy to lose sight of whereabouts you are in the grand scheme of things. Just pace yourself, and if it all goes pear-shaped, start again.



After three washes, your painting should look something like this (if it all got too complex for you, then try again, but this time simplify the tree shapes).



Might as well finish it off.

Here, I'm adding a few random touches of Burnt Umber and French Ultramarine to the foreground tree..



...and a few extra branches.

### EXERCISE 3



Finally, this is where I probably use negative painting more than anything else; in creating intricate foregrounds and long grass.

Start by painting a few blades of grass in the traditional sense (ie. positively), but at the base of the area, flick the brush downwards, leaving a few random, 'pointy' highlights.



Here, I've expanded on the scene slightly. Dots and lines, also at the base of the grasses help to break it up.



Vary it slightly. Here, I've added further, longer, grasses, which are tending to curve in the opposite direction.



Allow yourself the freedom to improvise.

You don't necessarily have to repeat what I've done here; feel free to create long, tussocky grass all over the place, just as long as you balance the top (positive) grasses with the highlighted (negative) grasses below.

Avoid straight lines if you can, and note how the general sloping curve of a bank is starting to form.



Now lets add a tree trunk.

At this point, further negative painting is required to create the long grasses at the base of the tree. This is an opportunity to tidy up and capitalise on what you've already painted. Also, feel free to create further long-grass-highlights with the dark tree colour (any white paper can be coloured later).



With a little care, it's possible to include a few tree roots, alternatively appearing and disappearing amongst the grasses.



It's a little rough, but you get the idea. A few long-hanging branches complete the picture.