



Studying The Art of Painting Trees

by Phil Starke

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John Carlson

Making Trees Heavy and Solid

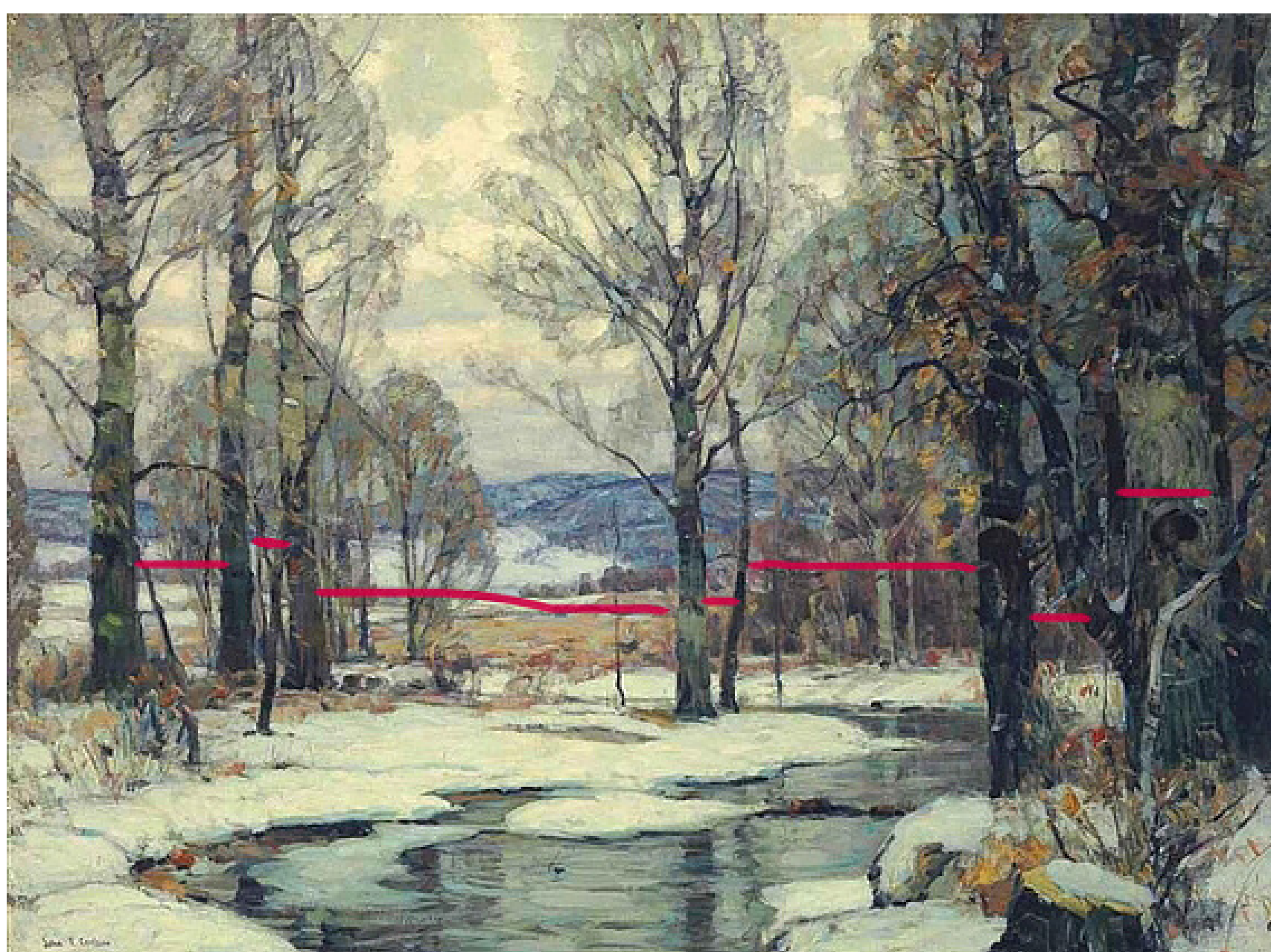
All of John Carlson's trees have weight and mass to them, they don't look light and airy. This is partly because of the angular lines on the trunks and branches, not many rounded off branches, also because of the strong value contrast between the trees and the other planes in the landscape. This makes the trees look more upright. Remember our canvas is flat so we have to be very aware of creating contrast between the planes to show depth in our painting. (For more on the planes of a landscape read John Carlson's Guide to Landscape Painting, Chapter 3)



John Carlson

Spacing Between Trees

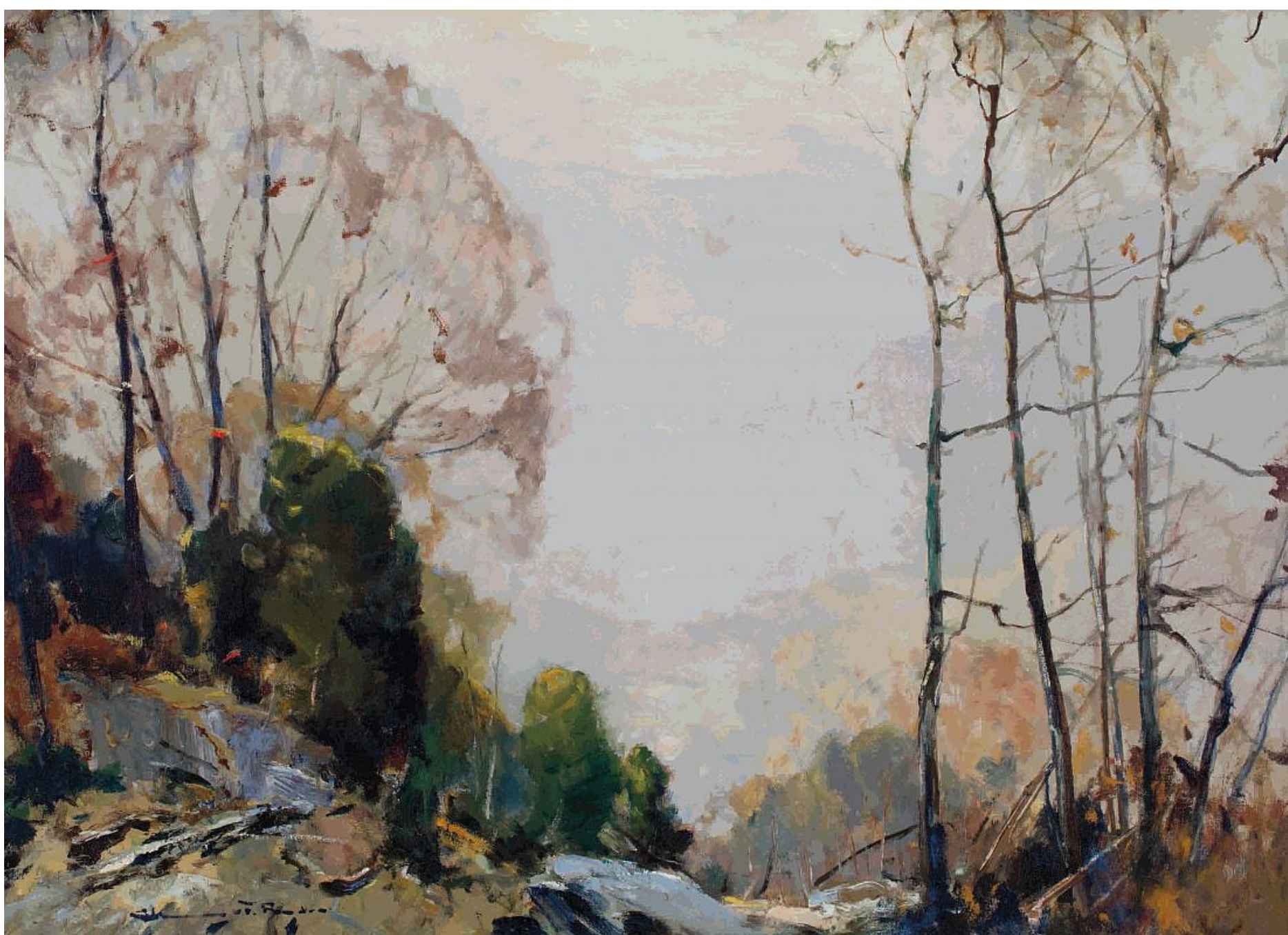
In this painting Carlson staggers the spacing between the trees to create uneven spacing. He also staggers the depth of the trees, some are farther back and some closer to the viewer. Unequal spacing and staggering creates more interest where as straight lines and even spacing is boring and static.



Chauncey Ryder

Designing The Shape of Small Branches

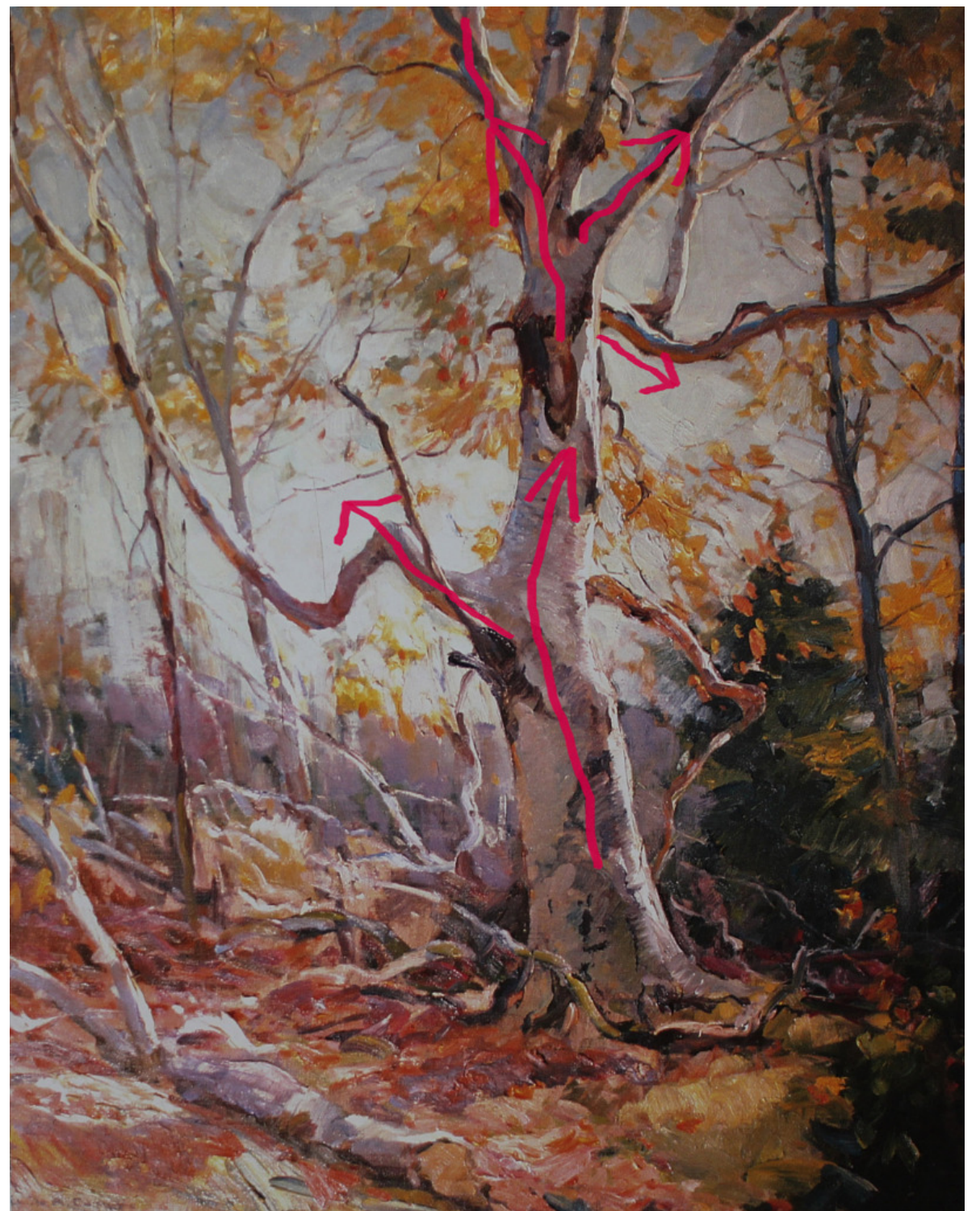
The smaller the branches the more they become a soft mass against the sky. Ryder designs the mass to fit the trunks. Also notice the rhythmic lines of the trunks, none of them are straight. Straight lines are static and will kill the composition.



Emile Gruppe

Trunks and Branches

This painting shows how the trunk changes direction when it sprouts a branch to keep the tree balanced. This creates that meandering look in older trees. Also notice the tapering in the trunks and the branches. They are always thicker at the base and thinner as they grow out.



Marion Wachtel

The Simplified Shapes of Trunks and Foliage

In all of Wachtel's paintings she makes design her most obvious concern. The trunks and foliage are simple shapes that create a balanced composition. She uses the meandering branches and trunks to move the viewers eye around the picture.



Marion Wachtel

The Less Detail The Better

In this painting Wachtel uses one main shape and value to create the group of trees and shadows in the foreground. She uses some subtle value and color change to create form, but not much. The overall design is what's important here, not the detail.



E Martin Hennings

Strong Contrast To Suggest Light

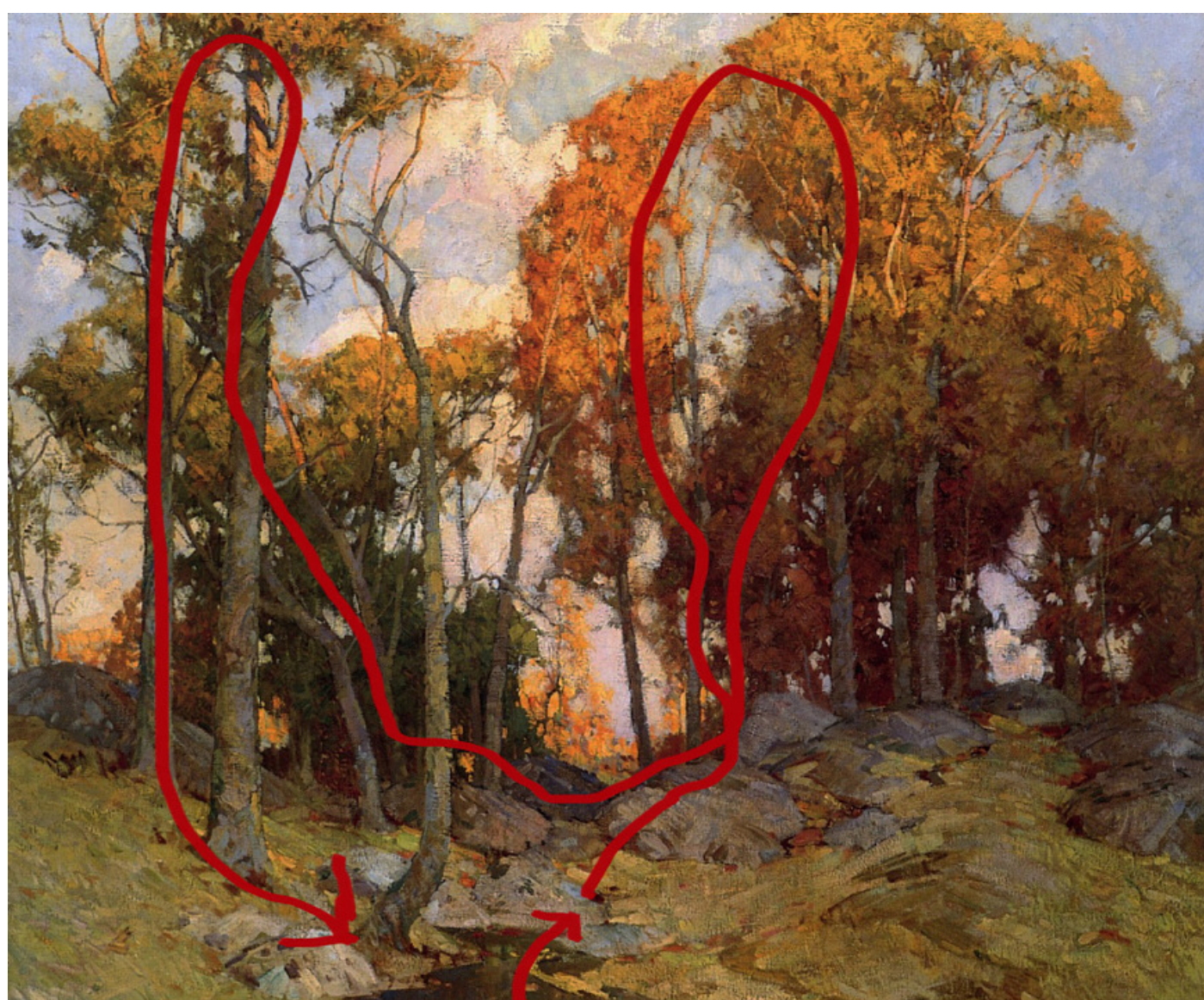
Hennings is painting the large cottonwoods found in northern New Mexico. He uses the strong contrast of dark and light values and the contrast of warm and cool color to suggest the light. The color is a gray or a gray blue but he warms it up in the sunlight with yellow or yellow orange and cools it in the shadow with blue or blue violet. The more you push these 2 contrasts the more suggestion of light you will have in your paintings.



Frederick Mulhaupt

Design the Masses of Foliage, Don't Paint Leaves

In this painting Mulhaupt carefully designed the large shapes of the foliage. He didn't (I presume) just copy what was in front of him. Design is always more important than detail. He uses the sky holes to suggest some separation between trees without painting individual trees. There is also a flow to the shapes in the painting that start in the creek, flows to the orange foliage and around through the green foliage and back to the stream again.



Arthur Streeton

Trees Aren't Always Green and Don't Always Need Detail

Streeton's trees are blue, blue green and red violet, they don't resemble tree colors. But, with the right value, and right shape any color scheme will work within the picture plane. The fact that he keeps the tree shapes very simple makes it easier to read.

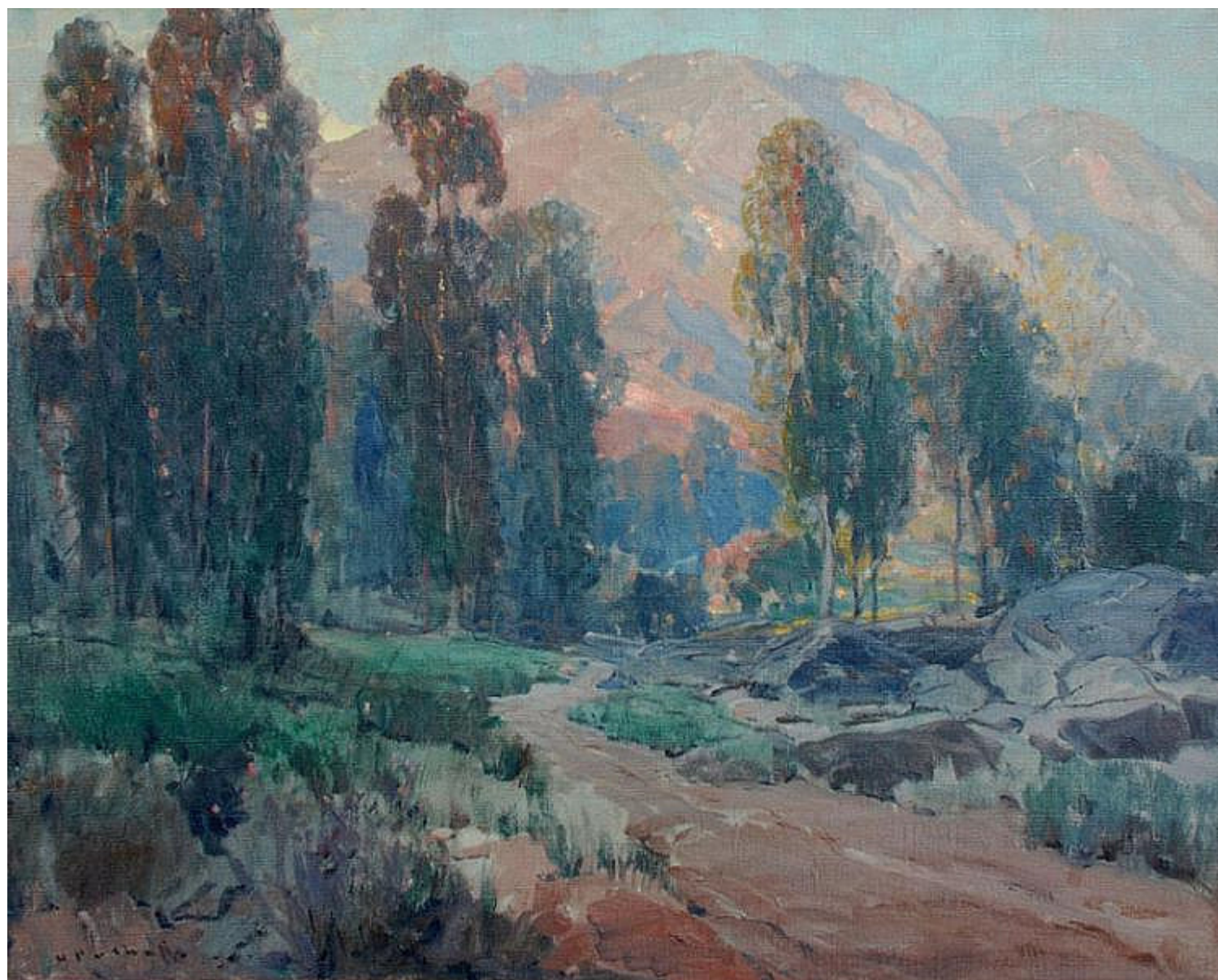
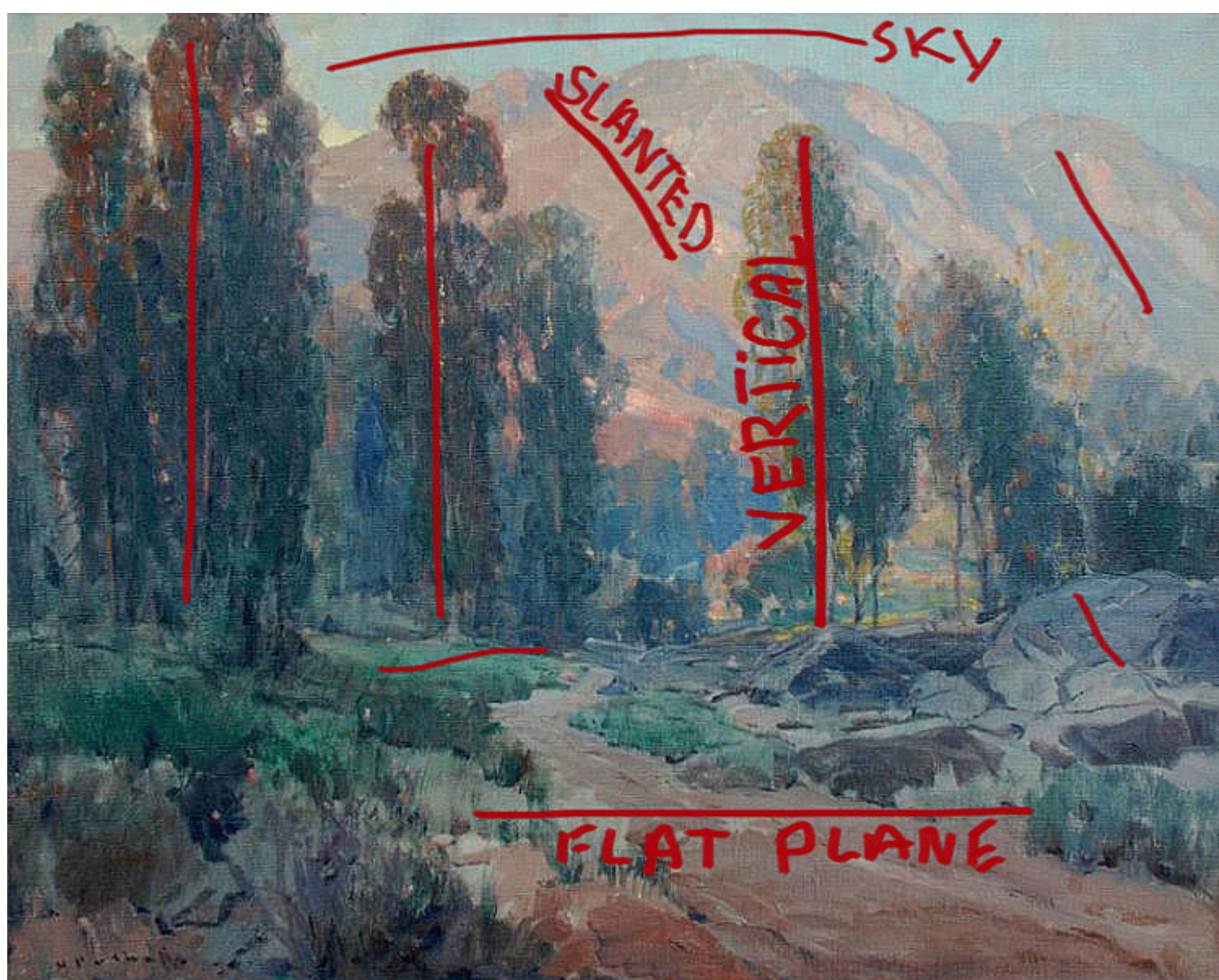
Remember, value is more important than color so be creative and experiment with color. It's the best way to learn.



Hanson Puthuff

Trees Are Generally the Dark Shapes in the Landscape

You can tell in this painting that the trees are the darkest large shapes. As a rule of thumb the vertical shapes in a landscape are darkest, then slanted shapes are lighter and flat or horizontal shapes are lighter yet with the sky plane being the lightest. Of course rules can always be broken but it's a good general rule to know.



William Wendt

Designing the Dark and Light Shapes In Trees

Wendt's trees looked like rocks. They were so solid and heavy looking. In this painting he eliminated a lot of the halftone and designed a strong pattern of dark and light, keeping the shapes angular and sharp. Halftones and rounded edges would create a less solid look, like marshmallows, not rocks.



William Lathrop

Mass and Sky Holes to Suggest Trees Don't Over-Paint

Lathrop uses a simple silhouette and design. He uses sky holes to create some separation. Less is always more. The simpler the design and the less detail, the better the painting.

