



Simplifying Winter Trees

by Phil Starke

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Bare trees in the winter are very busy looking with too many branches going in all directions. so to paint them you have to simplify the shape. It helps to think in terms of designing a shape that reduces the detail and makes it easier for the viewer to look at.

When we look at this tree the detail is overwhelming. The idea of painting it seems exhausting. So we need to think of a way to see large masses instead of individual branches and reduce the values to about 3 or 4 value changes.





In the second stage I want to use the sky and the background to cut into the masses of branches, using sky holes and values from the background to shape up the branch shapes. Then with darker values create some larger branches and trunks to hold up the masses of smaller branches, the idea is to see how many you can eliminate, the photo will have to many larger branches, so less is always better.



In the last stage I want to continue to use the background values to shape up the large masses and add the lighter branches, you want a variety of dark and light branches to create a 3 dimensional look in the tree. In the end you should have a more simplified version of the tree in the photo. The goal is not to copy the photo but to come up with a simple design that reads well. The key is to simplify and create good designs with the masses of branches.

Below are some paintings by **Chauncey Ryder**, notice how he simplifies and designs the trunks and branches, the goal is to reduce the detail.





About The Author



Phil Starke is an accomplished artist. He also enjoys teaching and sharing his knowledge of painting. You can see more of his work at his gallery website: www.philstarke.com.