



# PAINT LIKE... TURNER

Want to achieve a Turner-esque seascape, full of movement, with a glowing, dramatic sky? **SARAH JANE BROWN** shows you how

**J**oseph Mallord William Turner is widely revered as the master of light and atmosphere. His sublime, luminous skies, swirling seas and dramatic storm clouds can, figuratively speaking, suck the viewer in and transport them through a vortex of paint to some otherworldly experience.

Born in 1775, Turner achieved celebrity status during his own lifetime, and his work has continued to inspire generations of artists for more than 200 years. In particular, his later, more expressive works are thought to have influenced the impressionists, and subsequently more abstract art movements.

For me, a Turner painting can project far more than the sum of its material parts. More than any other artist of his time, he managed to communicate something 'sensory'. Personally, this is the reason that I paint. It is a way of expressing something emotional that I can't

adequately describe with mere words. Turner's vast repertoire of techniques was in itself a visual vocabulary; an emotive language full of hope and fear, light and shade, complexity and subtlety.

Like Turner, I tend to make loose preliminary sketches outdoors, taking in not just the sights, but all the sensations of the experience and committing them to memory. Back in the studio I can transfer these experiences onto canvas in a more controlled environment. As you will soon discover, Turner's method of layering glazes with areas of thicker paint requires a great deal of patience! Each layer must be dry before adding the next. This is why I am always working on several paintings simultaneously. All around my studio there are paintings at various stages, propped or hanging up to dry, waiting for the next layer. Fortunately, thanks to the properties of modern materials, we do not have to wait quite as long as Turner did!



About **SARAH**  
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*Sarah developed a deep understanding of the sea during her previous maritime career. Now she creates atmospheric and emotive paintings that capture the sensations of the coastal experience. Based in Pembrokeshire, she exhibits widely and her work is collected internationally. [www.sjbfineart.com](http://www.sjbfineart.com)*

## Materials

- 40x50cm cotton primed canvas
- A range of brushes and knives, the more variety the better, so you can vary the size and shape of the marks you make. A good selection would include a large 2" or 3" flat brush e.g. 'Skyflow brush', 1" natural hair

- brushes round, 1" natural hair
- brushes flat, Size 14 Brights, Size 8 Filberts, Size 5 Brights, and a selection of palette painting knives
- Rags/paper towel
- Yellow Ochre (raw powdered pigment or acrylic)

- Acrylic matte medium
- Whiting (chalk dust) available from good art suppliers
- A natural-coloured soft pastel (Sienna/Umber)
- Limited palette of oil colours: Lemon Yellow or similar, Yellow Ochre, Ultramarine Blue,

- Cerulean Blue, Magenta or Alizari
- Crimson, Cadmium Red, Burnt Umber, Titanium White (I use Alkyd for speed of drying)
- Fast-drying flow medium such as Liquin
- Fast-drying painting butter or impasto medium (optional)



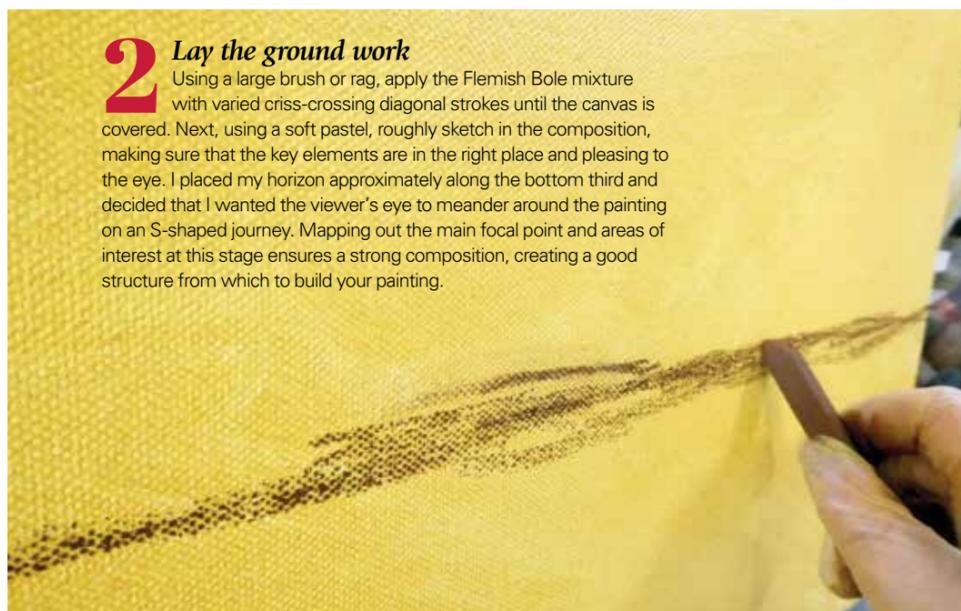
### 1 Preparation: make a Flemish Bole

Turner usually began his paintings by covering the primed canvas with a mid-toned ground, often favouring a 'Flemish Bole' made from ground Yellow Ochre, whiting (chalk dust) and a binder such as egg white. Fortunately, these days we have more convenient solutions and a suitable alternative can be made by mixing a little acrylic paint with matte medium. It's important to still add some whiting, though, as this makes the surface more absorbent. This helps with the drying time of subsequent layers and provides a 'tooth' for the paint to adhere to.



### 2 Lay the ground work

Using a large brush or rag, apply the Flemish Bole mixture with varied criss-crossing diagonal strokes until the canvas is covered. Next, using a soft pastel, roughly sketch in the composition, making sure that the key elements are in the right place and pleasing to the eye. I placed my horizon approximately along the bottom third and decided that I wanted the viewer's eye to meander around the painting on an S-shaped journey. Mapping out the main focal point and areas of interest at this stage ensures a strong composition, creating a good structure from which to build your painting.

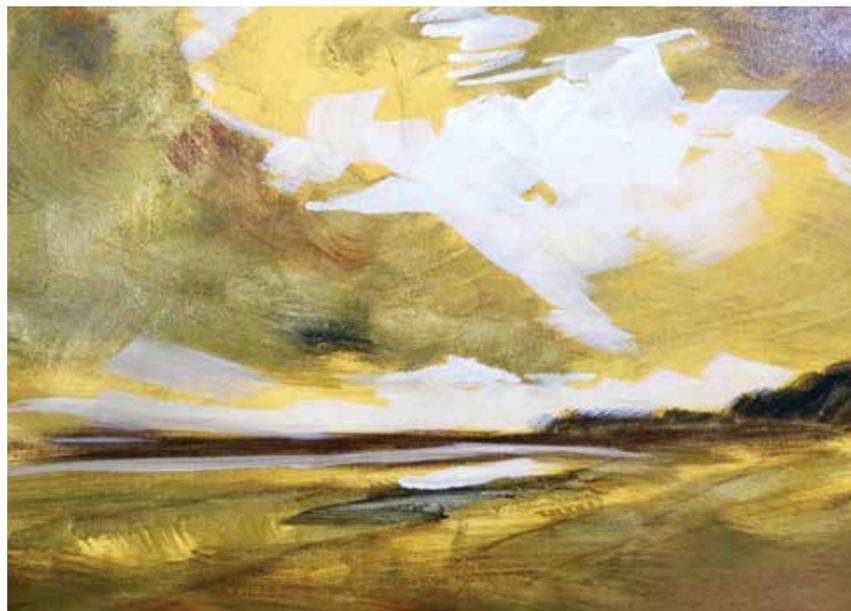


### Get some distance!

Every few minutes, stand as far back from your painting as you can get to get a fresh perspective. When you're feeling stuck or indecisive, the more distance you get, the more obvious it becomes what you need to do next.

### 3 Block in tones

Using some Ultramarine with a little Burnt Umber, mix up a nice, neutral dark. Wet your brush first, pick up some of the paint and thinly block in the darkest areas. Next, use Pure White to block in the lightest areas. Try not get carried away here, the areas should remain fairly separate and clean, leaving the yellow ground to show through in the mid-toned areas. N.B. You must let this layer dry completely before moving on, so for speed you can do this stage in acrylic.



### 4 First glaze

Pour out a little puddle of glaze medium and, picking up a small amount of paint with the tip of a clean brush, mix a transparent 'wash'. Make sure there is no white or other opaque colour in your mix, or it will go cloudy. Apply the glaze over the areas you wish to tint; the transparency will create an optical depth of colour that is otherwise impossible to get. It's like treating a piece of wood with rich layers of coloured varnish, versus coating it with flat, brown paint! Apply a mix of Burnt Umber and Ultramarine in the dark areas, add some warmer reds towards the light source, and yellow over the lightest areas for that golden 'Turner-esque' glow.

### 5 Add some softness

When the glaze is tacky to touch, add in a little white into some areas, gently blending it with a circular motion into the coloured glaze to create a misty, atmospheric effect along the horizon. Using a big, 3" flat brush and a quick, sweeping gesture, you can also add the illusion of light beams. This is very easy to overdo, so use a very small amount of paint and then soften it with a clean, dry brush.



### 6 May the force be with you!

A white area under a glaze is called a 'force'. Light passes through the glaze and is reflected, or 'forced' back to the eye, creating the illusion that light is being emitted from within the painting. With each layer of glaze, less light bounces back from the original force, so we now need to reintroduce some thicker white areas, ready to repeat the glazing process. In this way layers are built up, giving a real sense of depth and complexity. Bear in mind that this will look a bit like a snow storm until the next glazes go on, but you must let it dry first!

### Speed up drying time

As well as paint mediums such as Liquin, I use Winsor & Newton Alkyd White, which mixes well with other oil paints and speeds up the drying time considerably. Alkyds will usually dry overnight even if applied fairly thickly, whereas standard oil paint takes several days (or sometimes weeks) to dry.





**7 Repeat the glazes**  
When the second force is completely dry, you can add more glazes. Remember to glaze the sea area with some of the sky colours to give both the impression of some reflection and a cohesive feel to the entire painting. I like to use a rag to get a nice texture, smudged effect, or even to lift off areas that seem too thick. I also use my fingers for smaller areas, to push the paint into the canvas or scratch back to the previous layer. Turner also used rags in this way and famously had long, paint-stained fingernails!



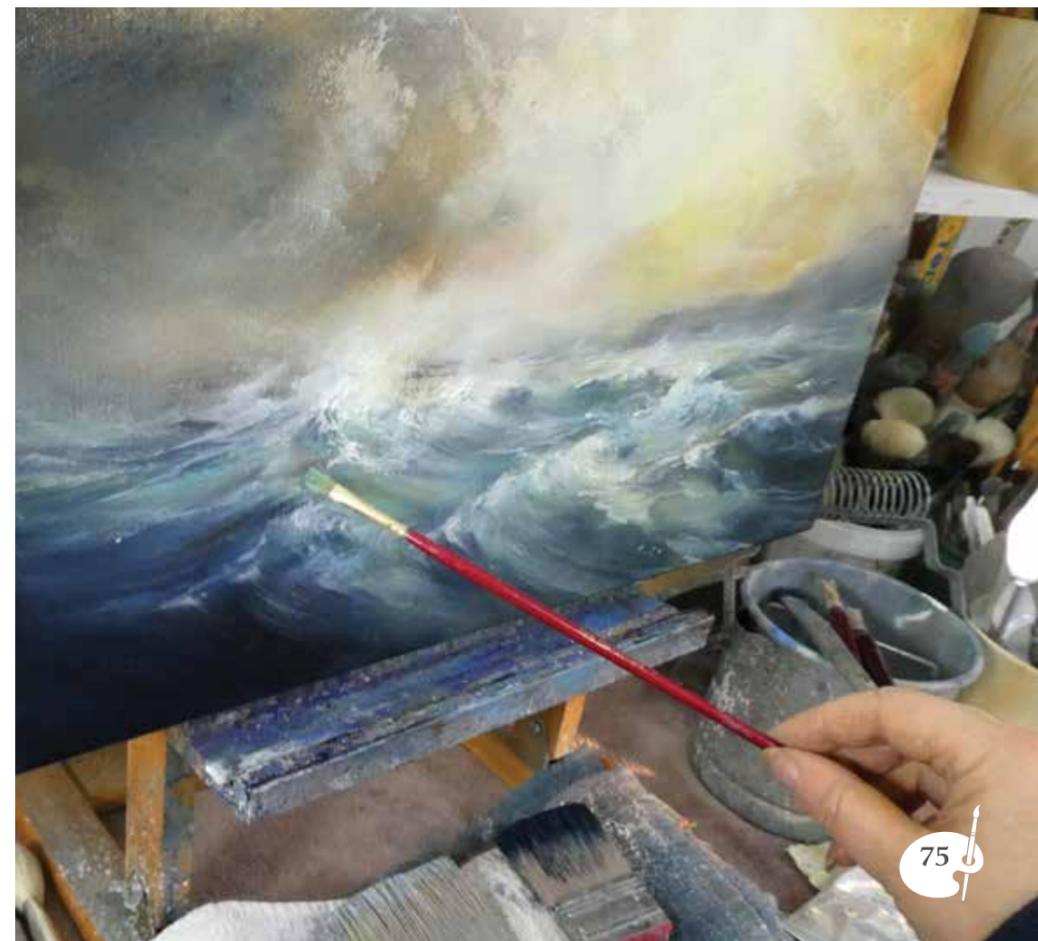
**10 Make waves**  
Take a tiny amount of the light green mix and add more white to it. Take a palette knife and, turning it on its side, pick up a thin roll of the mixture along its edge. Working directly into the wet glazes, touch the knife edge to the canvas and 'slice' it sideways. Then, flattening it slightly to the canvas, drag it downwards in a curving diagonal. As you do this, jiggle the knife sideways in a zig-zagging motion. This does take a bit of practice, so it's worth trying out a few times on some scrap canvas or paper beforehand.

**11 Creating spray**  
Using a small, stiff brush and some thick, almost-white paint, add a few small highlights on the crests of the main wave shapes by flicking the brush upwards lightly so that it appears as though the wind is whipping up foam and blowing it from the tops into a spray. Again, it's wise to practise this first! Reserve this treatment for the waves that form a focal point. Don't do it everywhere; less is more! Below the crests, I also added a few strokes of yellow glaze where the waves face the glow in the sky. This gives the appearance of a reflection and helps tie the sea and sky areas together.

*Kinder clean-up*

Always keep a bottle of baby oil and a roll of paper towel close by. It's the best thing to clean your hands with and much kinder to your skin than solvent.

**12 Final tweaks**  
Taking a small, long-handled brush at arm's length, tease out any foamy areas, add any small shadows or reflections for implied detail and dot in some thicker highlights if needed. If you find the paint consistency a little too soft, squeeze some out onto a scrap of cardboard. This will draw out the excess oil and stiffen the paint. Stand well back to assess and stop before you find yourself 'fiddling'! ●



**8 A touch of blue sky**  
One of the reasons that Turner's paintings have enduring popularity is that however dark, stormy or dramatic his scenes were, they always contained an area that held a sense of hope. There was always a chink of blue sky, a glimpse of sunlight through clouds, the promise of something brighter. Here, by adding a small area of blue sky above the storm clouds, the mood of the entire painting is lifted.



**9 Add sea colours**  
Create a really dark, greenish glaze by adding some yellow to the cloud mix (Ultramarine and Burnt Umber). Add this with a large brush to the bottom corner of the canvas and any areas that would be in shadow. Using the two blues and the yellow, mix a range of sea greens and, with a smaller brush, make short, overlapping strokes (like intersecting smiles). To keep the effect dynamic, leave areas where the underlayers peek through. Finally, add a little white to the green to make a few lighter areas, such as where the waves are facing the light.

