

## Maritime Miniature in Oils

A first oil painting is an adventure. With a small format and simplified imagery, it becomes a trip worth taking!

### (art + history)

Imagine painting ocean scenes and nothing else for years. Marine painting was a major genre within the Dutch Golden Age of painting during the middle of the 16th century. Because of this, the first true "marine artist" career came to be. These painters painted the sea, seafaring vessels, and little else. They were masters of the painted seascape, and their work reflected the importance of overseas trade, plus it documented maritime warfare of the period.

Some examples from this era are spectacular! A painting from 1687 by Willem van de Velde the Younger shows nearly a dozen battleships across a 10-foot-wide canvas. Usually commissioned works, paintings of this kind most often represented victories at sea and were actually a form of patriotic propaganda. While many maritime paintings told the story of battles at sea, others were much calmer. There were paintings that portrayed peaceful, sun-bathed moments and magical stillness that showed slack-sailed boats floating on glassy waters.

Most Dutch paintings were small with the exception of group portraits. Paintings were either done on canvas, or, if extra precision was desired, on a wooden panel. Some artists even used copper plates that were recycled from the printmaking process. Many of the Golden Age paintings were painted over during the 18th and 19th centuries because using a recycled canvas was usually cheaper than using a new canvas, stretcher, and ornate frame.

This project mimics a miniature Dutch painting by creating a seascape oil painting in a 4" x 4" space on a 6" x 6" canvas. After the painting is dry, create an ornate frame right on the painting surface! Display on a mini-easel.

**GRADES 5-12** Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.



### Materials (required)

[Blick Academic 5/8" Profile Cotton Canvas, 6" x 6"](#), Package of 2 (07167-0066); one per student (need 12 packs)

[Utrecht Artists' Oils, Basic Colors Set](#) (02123-1019); share one set across class

[Shiva Stand Oil](#), 3.75 oz (00420-1004); share one across class

[Blick Scholastic Short Handle Golden Taklon Flat Wash, 1/2"](#) (05859-4014); one per student

[Blick Scholastic Short Handle Golden Taklon Round, Size 0](#) (05858-1000); one per student

[Richeson Grey Matters Paper Palette](#), 30 sheets, 6" x 9" (03092-2569); share one pad across class

[Liquitex Light Modeling Paste](#), 16 oz (00609-1036); share one across class

[Westcott Cardstock Borders](#) (55787-1001); share two packs across class

### Optional Materials

[Hardboard Panels, 6"x6"](#) (14945-1066)

[Hygloss Bucket O' Shells](#) (61451-)

[Creativity Street Acrylic Gems](#) (60722-0001)

[Blick Studio Mini Easel](#) (50360-1001)

[M. Graham Walnut Alkyd Medium](#) (01573-)



## Preparation

- Study maritime paintings done during the Dutch Golden Age.
- Study the ornate frames of miniature paintings.

## Process

1. Using a pencil, lightly sketch a line 2" inside the outside edge of the canvas on all four sides. This will result in a 4" square centered on the canvas. This will be the area used for the oil painting. The outer 2" area will become the frame. Place a pea-sized drop of three or four "sky" colors of oil paint onto the palette paper. The colors in the basic oil set can be mixed to create any custom color, or the paints can be mixed and blended on the canvas itself. When changing colors, use paper toweling or newspaper to clean the paint from the brush hairs as much as possible.
2. Begin the miniature oil painting at the top of the 4" square by painting a sky. The sky can be calm or stormy, which will influence color selection. A sunrise or sunset could be depicted. Mix the oil paints with a small amount of stand oil to slightly thin the paint or to create a wash, if desired. Because the canvas is small, it can be painted flat on a work table, but if desired, it can be angled simply by placing a book or other item under the back edge of the canvas.
3. Next, create a calm or turbulent sea. Add the white tops of waves last, if desired. When the background (sky and sea) are complete, allow this layer to dry. Tip: To shorten drying time, mix quick-drying painting medium to the oils.
4. Paint the final detail layer by using a small brush to paint in ships at sea, seagulls, or other details.
5. While the painting is drying, choose a paper border edge for the frame. Paint it with acrylic paint (brown or black are suggested) and allow to dry. Affix the border paper to the frame using a small amount of light modeling paste. Use more modeling paste to build up a frame by adding swirls or textures with modeling tools or brush handles. Embed small shells or gems, if desired. Allow to dry. Stain the modeling paste frame with a thin wash of acrylic paint.

## Options

- Do an oil painting on the 6" x 6" canvas, and omit the framing step.
- Use a wooden panel as the base for the painting.

## National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

### Connecting

#### Anchor Standard #11

Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.



**Step 1:** Create a maritime oil painting inside a 4" x 4" area on a 6" x 6" canvas.



**Step 2:** After choosing four paper borders, paint each with dark acrylic paint.



**Step 3:** Affix the borders to the canvas with modeling paste, then create swirls and texture. Add embedded shells or gems, if desired. As the frame dries, the acrylic paint will be pulled to the surface to create a "vintage" look.