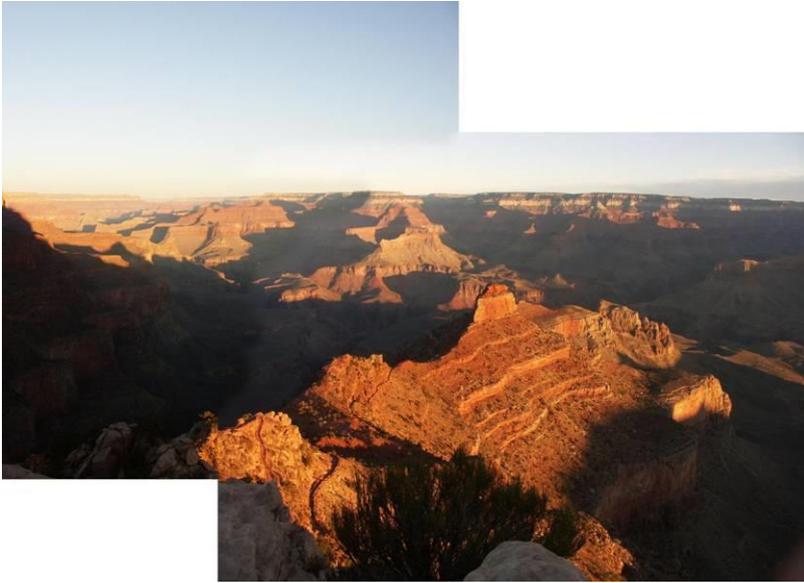


# HOW I PAINTED THAT

by Richard Harpum, MA

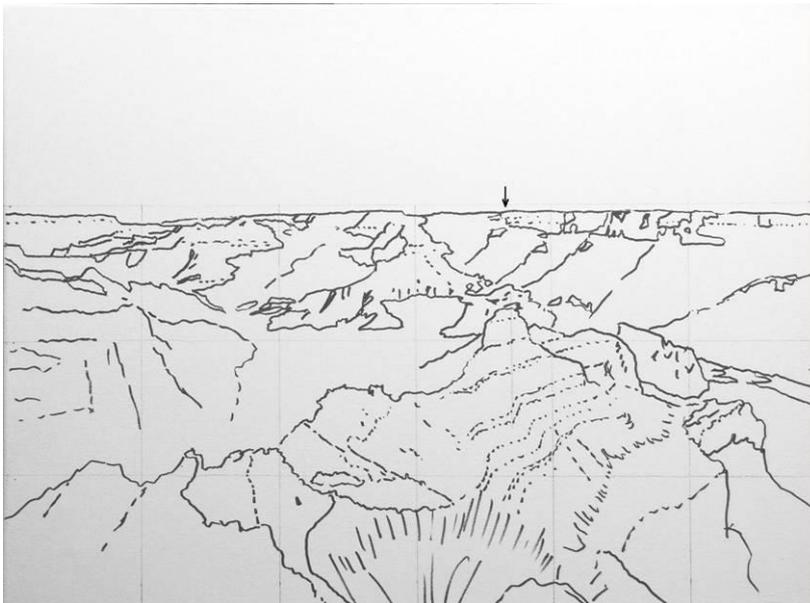
## Morning Glory – The Grand Canyon from South Kaibab Trail

### 1. My reference photographs



I have visited the Grand Canyon on several occasions and in October 2006 hiked down the South Kaibab trail and back up Bright Angel trail, taking numerous photos as I went. As I left Yapi Point just after sun-up, it was well below freezing and there was a thin strip of sunlight along the north rim. The light quickly spread down the canyon, and by the time I had descended a couple of hundred feet, I took the two photos that form the basis of this painting. I have merged them in the computer to give a wider panorama.

### 2. The drawing



First, I applied two layers of acrylic gesso primer to a 18" x 24" canvas, creating a random texture in the process. This makes it easier to apply paint. After lightly sanding the finish, I measured out horizontal and vertical golden ratios and drew these in pencil on the canvas. O'Neil's Butte is intended to be the focal point. I positioned this on a vertical ratio and using a grid, roughly sketched the scene in pencil. I then drew over the sketch with a fine felt-tip pen. This is probably heresy to most artists but it works for me, as it avoids losing the lines under the first coat of paint. I need at least

2 layers to cover the lines, by which time I usually have enough detail in place to avoid getting "lost".

### 3. Initial blocking in and painting the sky



I blocked in the main areas very roughly in colour to get a feel for how the painting would look. I then painted the sky, using Prussian blue and white in several layers to obtain the right depth of colour. I added clouds to create interest and balance. My intent was for the main clouds to lead the eye down through the focal point in a sloping “Z” shape. Clouds were over-painted in white using a No. 4 short hog filbert, with the paint as dry as I could get it (dabbing off excess paint on a rag). Acrylics are ideal for this as they dry so quickly and multiple layers can be applied in quick succession to achieve

a realistic effect. Cloud shadows were created with my home-made neutral dark and some extra blue, again applied almost dry.

### 4. Painting the canyon



Unlike most artists, I tend to complete discrete sections of a painting at a time, rather than gradually building up the whole painting. I can therefore see a finished segment before moving onto another. Not only does this help me to avoid missing crucial detail but I also find that it inspires and motivates me to continue, as I get “instant gratification” with each completed section.

In this painting, the sky was 95% finished before I moved on. I worked from the distance forward. I usually paint distant objects slightly darker than they will end up. I used a base of titanium buff (a “convenience

colour”) mixed with cadmium orange, raw umber and burnt sienna for the rock strata. For the shadows I used my home-made neutral dark with added red and blue to create a purple shade. I only use black for man-made objects and use neutral dark for all shadows, as it looks much more natural. As I add more detail, I use finer brushes, typically starting with a No 4 round and migrating to a No. 2 for the really fine detail. I also use a No. 1 or 2 rigger for the fine lines.

## 5. Painting the foreground



I painted from distance to foreground. Although my photograph shows very little detail in the shaded areas, I wanted to show more, so I enhanced the photo on the computer so that the detail was more visible and used this as my reference. As the photo showed little detail in the foreground, I made this up and moved the tree to create a better balance.

## 6. Creating atmosphere and sunshine



Having virtually completed the painting, my final stage was to add "atmosphere". Acrylics are ideal for this. The base painting is dry within a short time and washes can be applied without disturbing it.

To create a haze on the distant strata, I copy nature by covering the area with a thin acrylic wash of white plus blue, applied with a No.10 round. I wait for about 30 seconds and then wipe off 90% of the wash with a cloth and where necessary rub it with my finger. I use the same process to accentuate shadows (using my home-made neutral dark) and sunshine (using cadmium

yellow). I then dry with a hair dryer. If necessary, I repeat the process until I have achieved the desired level of saturation. The effect is amazing; suddenly the sun is shining much more brightly!

## 7. The finishing touches



After completing a painting, I usually spend a few days standing back and looking at it to find the snags. I note these and correct them in a final session. Here I changed the foreground rock formations, enhanced the highlights and moved the bush.

After scanning, I apply 2 to 3 coats of Liquitex gloss varnish.

## 8. Completed Painting: *Morning Glory – Grand Canyon Vista from South Kaibab Trail*, acrylic on canvas, 18 x 24” (46 x 61 cm)



## **What I used**

### **Support**

stretched canvas (18" x 24")

### **Brushes**

No. 2, 4, & 10 rounds

No. 14 flat

No. 4 short hog filbert

### **Other materials**

white ceramic tile (I use this as a palette, rather than a stay-wet system; it keeps the paint wet, makes it easy to see colour tones and is easy to clean up under the tap)

old towel (12" x 8" for wiping off washes)

water spray bottle (used mainly for keeping my paint moist on the palette).

### **Colours**

Titanium white

Titanium buff

Prussian blue

Cadmium orange

Raw umber

Burnt sienna

Vermillion (hue)

Cadmium yellow (hue)

Neutral dark (home made, 50/50 ultramarine and raw umber)