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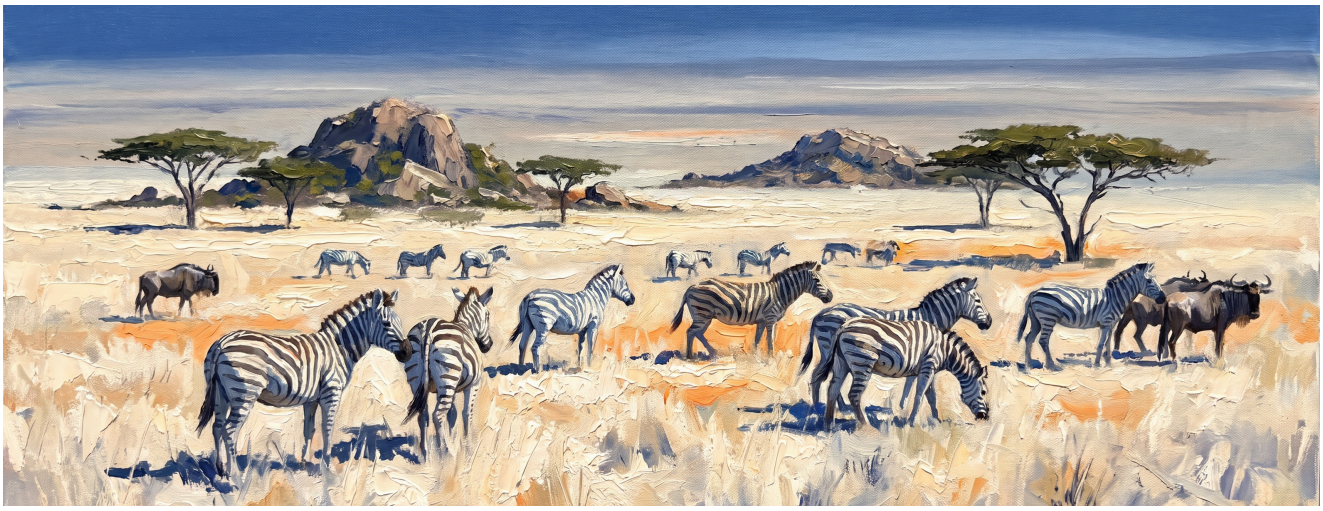
ArtBacco Studio

A STUDIO PLAYBOOK

Painting the African Sun

Sunlit grass, sand, stone and hide, painted indoors. A working method in value, temperature and colour.

OIL & ACRYLIC LANDSCAPE & WILDLIFE EDITION 01 · 2026



THE PREMISE

You cannot paint the sun. *You paint what it does.*

Under studio light, the whitest paint you own reflects roughly a hundredth of the light coming off sunlit sand.

So the sun has to be built from relationships: how far the lights sit above the shadows, how warm sits against cool, and where colour is allowed to be strong. Get those three right and even quiet, greyed mixes will feel like they are baking.

This playbook is for painting African animals and landscapes indoors, in oil or acrylic, from photographs, sketches or memory.

01
Value
Lights high and close together. Shadows far below them. The gap says "sun".

02
Temperature
Warm light, cool shadow, warm bounce. Three temperatures side by side read as heat.

03
Chroma
Pale, quiet lights. The richest colour lives in the halftones and inside the shadows.

INSIDE

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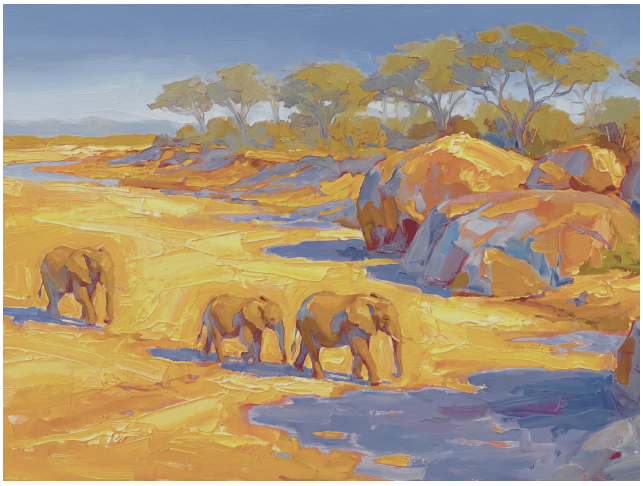
THE PROBLEM

Why tube colour fails

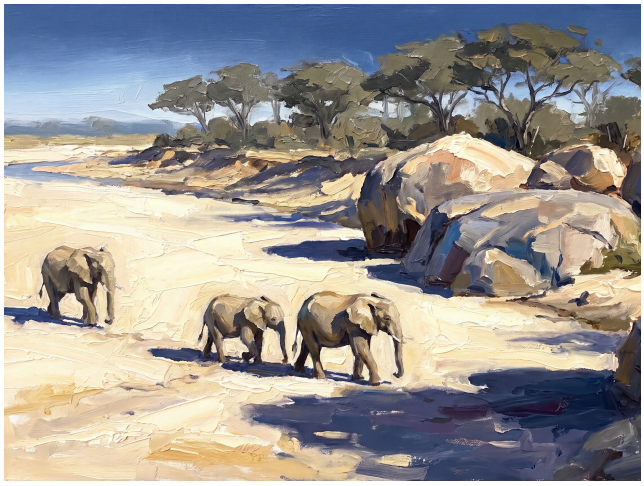
Paint comes out of the tube at its strongest: full chroma, middle value. Sunlight does the opposite.

It bleaches what it hits, pushing the lit planes high in value and draining their colour. Yellow ochre straight from the tube sits near the middle of the value scale. Paint dry grass with it and the scene reads as a poster, or as late afternoon, never as noon. The fix is not brighter paint. It is paler, greyer lights and much darker shadows.

V 6.5	→	V 8.6	V 5.2	→	V 9.0	V 5.3	→	V 7.8
Yellow ochre, from the tube		Dry grass in sun	Raw sienna, from the tube		Lit granite	Cerulean, from the tube		Horizon sky



Tube strength. The same painting, pushed digitally to tube-strength colour with the shadows lifted. The lights sit too low, the shadows too high, and the heat has gone.



Sunlight. Lights paler and closer in value, shadows dark and cool. The colour is quieter, yet the light reads stronger, because the gap is more than twice as wide.

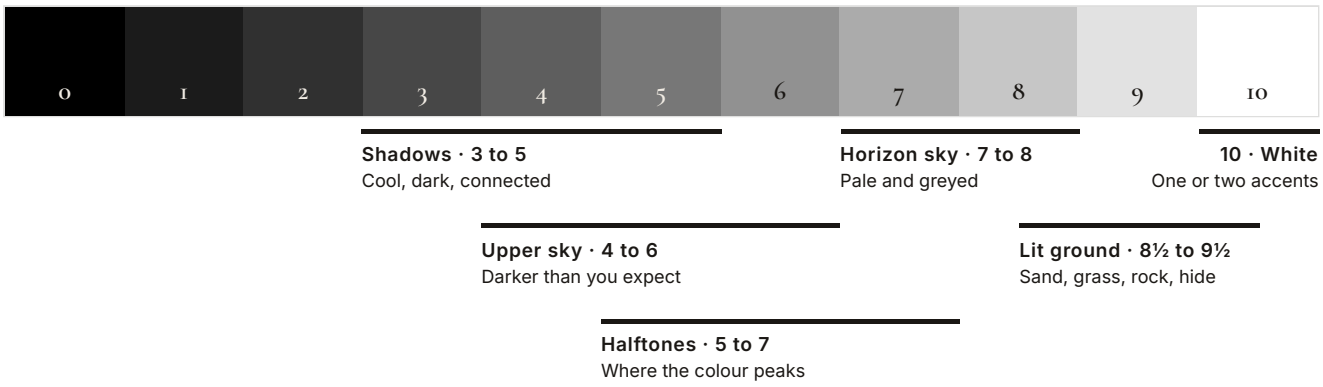
MEASURED ON THE TWO IMAGES ABOVE	DARKEST AREAS	LIGHTEST AREAS	SPREAD
Tube strength	4.5	8.0	3.5 steps
Sunlight	2.0	9.7	7.7 steps

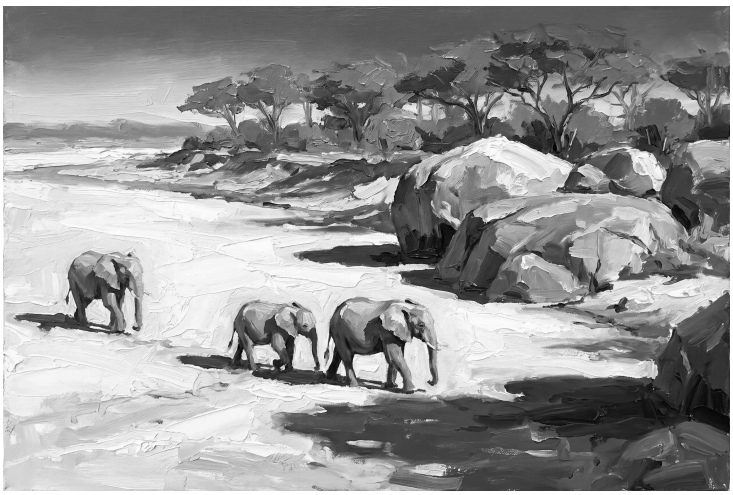
Values on a 0 to 10 scale, 0 black and 10 white, taken at the 5th and 95th percentile of lightness across each image.

LEVER 01 · VALUE

Set the values *before the colours*

Value carries the sun. Put every big shape in its place on this scale first. Colour can only work inside the structure you give it.





The greyscale test. Strip the colour and the sun is still there: one big pale light family, dark connected shadows, and an upper sky that sits below the sand.

MEASURED IN THE COVER PAINTING	VALUE
Upper sky	3.0
Horizon sky	7.8
Sunlit grass	8.5

Compress the lights

Keep the lit ground within one or two steps of itself. Variety inside the light kills the glare.

Open the gap

Drop the shadows four or more steps below the lights. That gap is the signature of direct sun. Overcast light shrinks it to one or two.

Hold the shadows down

Indoors, the urge is to lift shadows to show detail. Resist it. Detail inside a sunlit shadow is dark and low in contrast.

Mind the sky

At noon over pale ground, sunlit sand and grass are often lighter than the sky overhead. The sky is palest and greyest at the horizon.

Save pure white

Use it on one or two accents only. If white is everywhere, nothing glows.

LEVER 01 · VALUE

Design the light *in two values*

Before any colour, reduce the scene to two families: everything in light and everything in shadow.

If that pattern reads as sun in black and white, colour will follow. Add a third value for the sky or the far distance only once the two-value design works. This is the Japanese idea of notan, the balance of light and dark shapes, and it is the fastest check there is.



The painting.



Two values. Light and shadow only.



Three values. A middle tone for sky and distance.

1 · Squint

Narrow your eyes until detail disappears and only big masses remain.

2 · Thumbnail small

Postcard size, one dark marker or one dark mix, ten minutes at most.

3 · Group, don't describe

Link shadows into connected shapes. Islands of dark scatter the light.

4 · Keep the light big

One large, simple light shape beats many small ones.

The phone shortcut

Photograph your reference, switch it to mono and push the contrast to maximum. You get a rough two-value study in seconds. Use it to check your thumbnail, never to replace it: the thumbnail is where you decide which shapes to join and which to leave out.

LEVER 02 · TEMPERATURE

Warm light, *cool shadow*

Every shadow outdoors is lit by the blue sky, so it leans blue-violet. Then the sunlit ground throws warm light back into it. Three temperatures side by side read as heat.



1 **Lit sand**
Pale ivory-gold, very high in value and low in chroma.

2 **Cast shadow**
Cool blue-violet, four or more steps below the light.

3 **Bounce light**
Warm ochre creeping into the shadow from the lit ground around it.

4 **Warm rim**
A thin, saturated warm line where shadow meets light. Use it sparingly.

Edges

Under direct sun, cast shadows are crisp where they touch the object and soften as they travel away from it. Soft edges everywhere read as overcast.

Time of day

At noon the sun is close to white-gold and shadows are short. In the first and last hour it turns orange and shadows stretch. Choose one time and keep every temperature true to it.

LEVER 03 · CHROMA

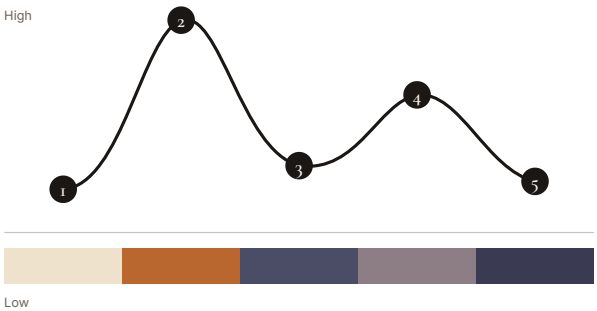
Where the *colour lives*

The instinct is to put the strongest colour in the lights. In strong sun it belongs elsewhere: in the narrow band where form turns from light into shadow, and in the warm light reflected up into the shadow.



1. **Light**
   Bleached cream. High value, low chroma.
2. **Turning edge**
   Orange-sienna. The richest colour on the rock.
3. **Core shadow**
   Cool violet-grey, the darkest part of the form.
4. **Reflected light**
   Warm light bounced up from the sunlit ground.
5. **Cast shadow**
   Darkest and coolest where it meets the rock.

CHROMA ACROSS THE FORM



The lights are the quietest colour on the form. Strength peaks at the turn, then rises again in the bounce.

MIXING · 1 OF 2

Grass *and sand*

Proportions are by volume and approximate. Mix the light first, on a clean part of the palette, and test it against the shadow before it goes on the canvas.

Dry grass

On the palette the light mix should look almost grey next to pure ochre. In the painting it will read as sun.

V 8.6

IN LIGHT
8 white · 2 yellow ochre · ½ raw sienna · a speck of violet or ultramarine

V 6.2

TURNING EDGE
Raw sienna · yellow ochre · a touch of cadmium red light · little white

V 3.8

IN SHADOW
Ultramarine · raw sienna · violet · a touch of white. Olive-violet, never black

Sand

Warm sunlit sand with ochre, not with yellow. Yellow turns it acid.

V 9.1

IN LIGHT
9 white · 1 yellow ochre · a hint of burnt sienna

V 3.9

CAST SHADOW
Ultramarine · burnt sienna · white. Lean it blue-violet

V 5.7

BOUNCE AT THE EDGE
The shadow mix plus ochre, where shadow meets lit ground



Dry grass at noon. Pale straw lights, cool olive-violet gaps, and warm sienna only where blades turn out of the light.

MIXING · 2 OF 2

Rock, sky *and savanna greens*

Granite and rock

The lit top is nearly as pale as the sand. Let the turning edge carry the colour.

V 9.0

LIT SIDE
White · raw sienna · a touch of cadmium red light

V 5.2

TURNING EDGE
Burnt sienna · cadmium red light · yellow ochre

V 3.3

SHADOW SIDE
Ultramarine · burnt sienna · less white

V 5.4

REFLECTED LIGHT
Shadow mix · ochre · white, low in the shadow facing the ground

Sky

Over pale ground at noon the upper sky is darker than the lit ground. Grey the horizon with the ground colour.

V 4.6

UPPER SKY
Ultramarine · cerulean · white

V 7.8

HORIZON
Cerulean · white · a touch of ochre to grey it

Savanna greens

Avoid tube greens. Savanna greens are olive-grey, never emerald.

V 7.0

SUNLIT LEAF
Yellow ochre · ultramarine · plenty of white

V 5.7

OLIVE MID-TONE
Cadmium yellow light · ultramarine · burnt sienna

V 3.5

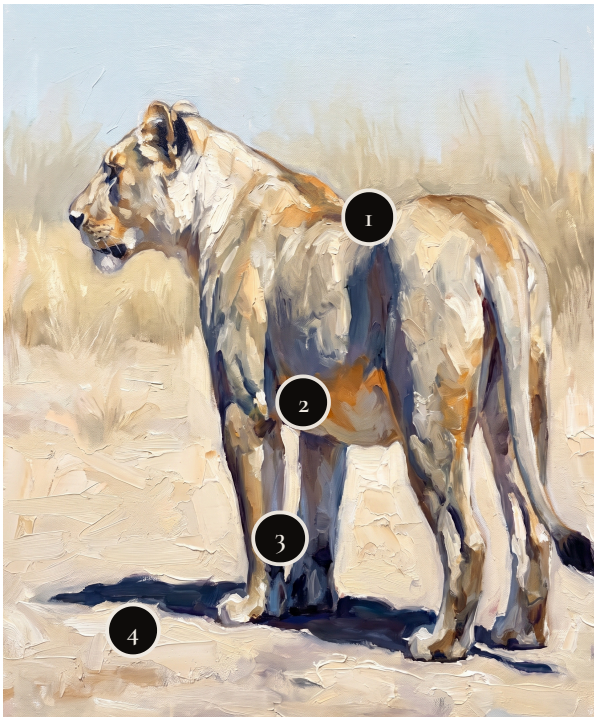
ACACIA SHADOW
Ultramarine · raw sienna · a little ochre

Keeping a black?

If ivory black is already on your palette, cadmium yellow light and black make a cool, believable olive. It is optional. Everything in this playbook mixes without it.

WILDLIFE

Animals *in full sun*



Hide follows the same laws as grass and rock. A lion's back in sun is nearly as pale as the sand it stands on.

1. **Lit back**
   Pale cream-gold, almost bleached.
2. **Halftone**
   The richest warm ochre on the animal.
3. **Shadow with bounce**
   Cool violet-grey, warmed from the sand below.
4. **Cast shadow**
   Short, crisp and cool at noon.

Lion hide

V 8.8

LIT BACK
White · yellow ochre · a touch of cadmium red light

V 6.2

HALFTONE
Yellow ochre · raw sienna · cadmium red light

V 3.7

SHADOW
Ultramarine · burnt sienna · white

V 5.2

BELLY BOUNCE
Shadow mix · ochre, lit from the sand below

The tawny colour you know lives only in the halftone and in the bounce under the belly.

Elephant hide

V 8.3

LIT SIDE
White · burnt sienna · a little ultramarine

V 3.5

SHADOW
Ultramarine · burnt sienna · a little white

In sun an elephant is a warm pale grey, far lighter than its local colour.

Zebra stripes

V 6.2

WHITE STRIPE IN SHADOW
White · ultramarine · a touch of burnt sienna

V 3.2

BLACK STRIPE IN SUN
Ultramarine · burnt sienna · a little white

A black stripe in sun and a white stripe in shadow sit far closer in value than you expect.

THE PALETTE

Nine colours *and a clean knife*



Laid out for sun. Tube colours along the top, warm to cool. Below them, the light piles are mixed before the first stroke.

Titanium white
Every light. Warm it with a speck of ochre or cadmium yellow so it never chalks.

Yellow ochre
The base of sunlit grass, sand and hide.

Raw sienna
Golden warmth in grass and lit rock.

Cadmium yellow light
Sparingly. Sun-struck accents and greens.

Cadmium red light
A touch to warm lit rock, hide and turning edges.

Burnt sienna
Rock, bounce light, and shadows with ultramarine.

Ultramarine blue
Shadows and the upper sky.

Cerulean or cobalt
Horizon sky and cool light inside shadows.

Dioxazine violet
Greys the lights. Deepens violet shadows.

Mix the lights first
Before you start, mix three or four generous piles: grass light, sand light, rock light and one shadow. Give each its own knife or brush. Dirty lights kill the effect faster than anything.

Warm your white
Titanium white straight from the tube looks cold and chalky beside sunlit colour. Warm every white with a speck of ochre or cadmium yellow light.

WORKING INDOORS

The studio *as a sunlit field*



Daylight on the canvas, darkness around it. A warm toned ground shows at the edges of a noon painting in progress.

Daylight bulbs

5000 K with a colour rendering index of 90 or more, aimed at the canvas from above and to one side. Under warm household light you over-correct, and the painting looks chalky and blue in daylight.

A warm toned ground

A thin wash of burnt or raw sienna. Lights laid over it glow, and it shows at once whether a light is light enough.

Acrylics dry darker

Mix lights a shade lighter than you want, and test on a scrap before committing.

Distrust the photograph

Cameras crush shadows to black and blow the lights to white. Keep the value gap, but invent the cool colour and the bounce inside the shadow.

Check in greyscale

Photograph the painting with your phone in mono. If the lit ground and the sky merge, the sun has gone.

Step back

Three metres, or a mirror. The sun effect is read at a distance, not at the end of the brush.

KEEP BY THE EASEL

The sunlight *checklist*

Before you start

- [ ] Choose **one time of day** and keep every temperature true to it.
- [ ] Make a **two-value thumbnail** that already reads as sun.
- [ ] Tone the canvas a **warm mid-tone**.
- [ ] Switch on the **5000 K lamp**, CRI 90 or more.
- [ ] Mix the **light piles** and give each its own knife.

While you paint

- [ ] Lit ground within **one or two steps** of itself.
- [ ] Shadows **four or more steps** below the lights.
- [ ] Shadows **cool**, bounce light **warm**.
- [ ] Strongest colour at the **turning edges**, not in the lights.
- [ ] Shadow edges **crisp at the object**, softer further away.

Final check

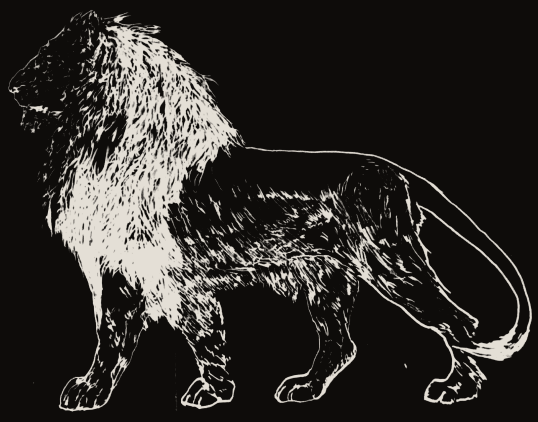
- [ ] In greyscale, lit ground is **lighter than the upper sky**.
- [ ] **Pure white** on one or two accents only.
- [ ] **No tube greens.** Every green is olive-grey.
- [ ] Squint from three metres. **Does it glare?**
- [ ] Lights are **clean**, with no grey drag from the shadows.

VALUE TARGETS AT A GLANCE



SHAPE	TEMPERATURE	CHROMA	VALUE
Lit sand, grass, rock and hide	Warm	Low	8½–9½
Horizon sky	Cool, greyed	Low	7–8
Halftones and turning edges	Warm	Highest	5–7
Upper sky	Cool	Medium to high	4–6
Shadows	Cool, with warm bounce	Medium	3–5

STUDIO NOTES



Something transpires in the making.

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Painting the African Sun · Edition 01 · 2026. The example paintings and studio photographs in this playbook are AI-generated illustrations made to demonstrate the method. They are not works by the studio. Colour swatches are digital approximations: screens and printers vary, so mix and test against a painted card. © 2026 Bacchus Inc.