Workshop in Oils inspired by Emile Bernard's Vue du Port de Vathy Samos

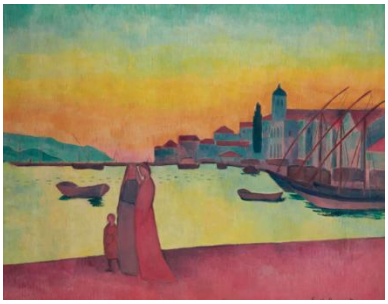
Introduction: Who Was Émile Bernard?

Émile Bernard was a French artist who lived from **1868 to 1941**. He loved to paint **bright, bold scenes** of everyday life — from harbours and boats to countryside towns and people walking by the sea.

Bernard was part of a movement called **Post-Impressionism**, but he also helped start a colourful new style called **Cloisonnism**. This means he painted using **flat colours with dark outlines**, almost like a stained-glass window or a colouring book.

He worked with other famous artists like **Paul Gauguin** and **Vincent van Gogh**, but he developed a style all his own — with **simple shapes, strong colours, and peaceful scenes**. Although some of his work is somewhat faded after 100 years, it is still vibrant and exciting.

Vue du Port de Vathy Samos



Materials Needed for This Tutorial

To follow along and paint your own version of Émile Bernard's harbour scene, you will need:

Drawing Tools:

- A4 white paper (landscape format)
- Pencil (HB or 2B)
- Black fine liner or waterproof pen (for outlines)
- Ruler (optional, for the horizon and buildings)

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Painting Tools:

- Oil paints in the following colours:
  - Titanium white
  - Lemon yellow
  - Cadmium orange
  - Vermilion red
  - Ultramarine blue
  - Viridian green
  - Burnt sienna or deep red-brown
- Palette for mixing
- Soft, round paintbrushes (small, medium, and large)
- Thinning medium
- Blending medium (if required)
- Rag or paper towel (for cleaning)
- Apron or old shirt to protect clothing

Step 1: Draw the Main Shapes

In this first step, we're creating a light pencil sketch of the **basic shapes** in the painting.

What to include:

- The **foreshore line**, sloping gently upward from left to right
- The **three figures** in the bottom left:
  - A **child** in front, facing the water
  - A **woman behind**, facing slightly left
  - Another **woman behind her**, facing the water
- The **horizon line** to separate sky and sea
- Basic outlines of:
  - The **buildings** along the water
  - The **tall tower** and cypress tree
  - The **boats** floating on the water
  - The **distant hills** across the bay
  - The **tall ship** on the far right

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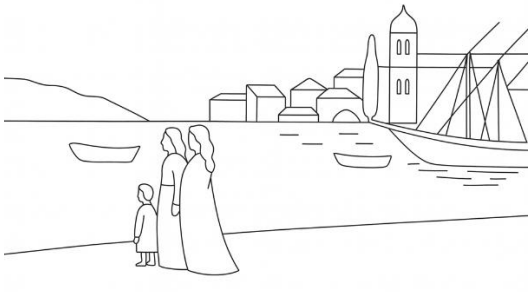
Keep everything simple — no detail yet. Just outline the large shapes so they're in the right position and size.



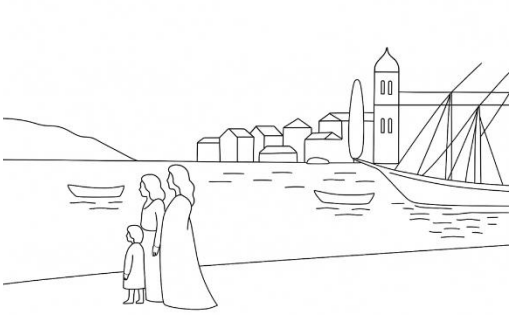
Step 2: Draw the Background Shapes

Now that the basic sketch is in place, it's time to **refine the background** by adding more definition to the major forms.

What to draw in this step:

- **Refine the shapes** of the buildings — straighten their edges and clarify rooftops
- Carefully outline the **arched shapes** on the right-hand ship
- Define the **cypress tree** next to the tower with a clean, symmetrical outline
- Clarify the lines for the **boats** on the water
- Draw in the **small, simplified ripples** in the water
- Make sure the **horizon, foreshore, tower and hills** remain exactly as they are — no changes to layout or proportions

This step prepares the scene for colour. Keep every line **light and steady** — we're still drawing, not painting yet.



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Step 3: Add colour to this in the Cloisonnism style

This step should introduce flat, **Cloisonnism style** layers of colour to the existing black-and-white line drawing.

The colour should be applied in flat blocks, with no shading, texture, gradients, or outlines added. Use bold, simplified colours that reflect the palette of the original painting. Colour areas include:

- Sky
- Sea
- Foreshore
- Buildings and rooftops
- Boats
- Clothing of the three figures
- Hills and trees in the background



Step 4: blending paint to finish off the picture

The Focus of this step is to blend colours to create a soft, even transition between tones, like in the original painting.

Use the **wet-on-wet oil painting technique** to gently blend the colours while they're still fresh. This will remove the flat, stripe-like bands from Step 3 and give the sky a warm, glowing gradient effect.

- Blend the sky from **cool teal at the top** through **warm yellow and orange at the horizon**
- Use a soft brush to gently feather the transitions between each band of colour
- Avoid streaks or visible brush marks — the effect should look smooth and hazy

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Once the picture is dry, we can add finishing touches

Blend the water, from yellow at the back to green at the front - over the top of the orange. Using the orange as a background keeps the colours warm in keeping with the overall tones of the picture.

- Refine the **buildings and rooftops** with final touches of colour, keeping them bold but flat
- Adjust the **boats and ship** to strengthen their silhouette using solid, flat colour
- Slightly deepen or brighten areas of **clothing** to balance the composition
- Add final reflections and ripple suggestions in the **water**, using flat, horizontal strokes

These small refinements help the image feel complete while keeping to the bold, **Cloisonnism** style.



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Extra Activities to Try

Here are some fun follow-up activities for young artists:

1. Create Your Own Harbour Scene
Draw and paint a harbour or seaside from your own imagination using Bernard's flat, bold style.

2. Explore Cloisonnism Colour
Try painting an ordinary object (like a chair or cup) in unexpected colours — a green sky or a purple floor!

3. Line Drawing Challenge
Choose a famous painting and turn it into a black-and-white outline just like we did in Step 1.

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