

Introduction to the Work of Nicolas Poussin

Nicolas Poussin was a French Baroque painter best known for his carefully planned paintings of **myths, Bible stories, and ancient history**. His work often includes **classical buildings, peaceful landscapes, and figures posed like statues**, as if telling a story through still moments. Poussin painted with great attention to **order, balance, and harmony**, using soft light and warm earth tones. He wanted his paintings to **make people think**, not just feel, so he used calm compositions and meaningful symbols in every scene.

Materials Needed for This Tutorial

- A3 or A4 thick paper or canvas
 - Pencil and eraser
 - Ruler (for layout and horizon line)
 - Acrylic paints or water-based oil paints:
 - Sky Blue
 - White
 - Burnt Sienna
 - Yellow Ochre
 - Sap Green
 - Earth Brown
 - Cream or Beige
 - Soft Red
 - Thin and medium paintbrushes
 - Water pot and palette
 - Cloth or kitchen towel for drying brushes
 - Apron or old shirt
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Step 1: Sketch the Basic Layout

Start by lightly sketching the **main layout** of the painting using a pencil. Begin with simple shapes and lines to place the key elements:

- Draw the **horizon line** across the upper third of your page.
- Mark out the **river's curve** through the centre of the scene.
- Use basic shapes (circles, rectangles, and triangles) to position:

- The **two figures** in the foreground.
- The **fallen columns and stones** around them.
- The **tall ruins** in the distance.
- The **tree shapes** on either side of the scene.

Keep your lines gentle and simple—this is just your planning stage.

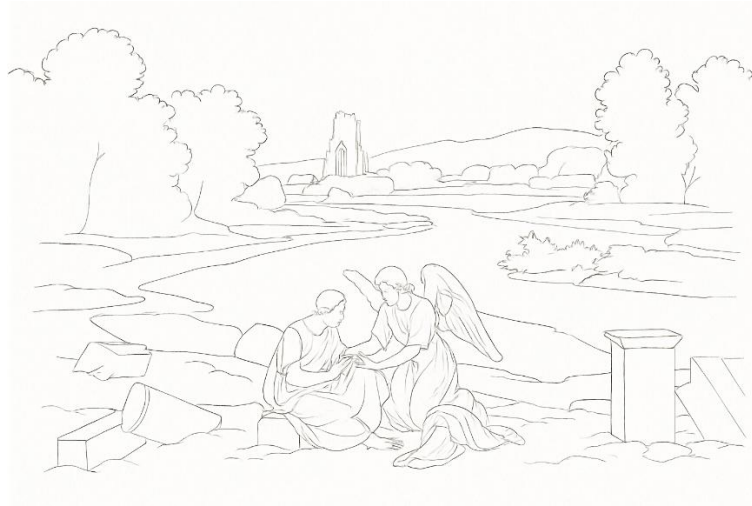


Step 2: Refine the Foreground Details

Now **refine the details** of the **foreground elements**:

- Draw the **two main figures** more clearly. Use flowing lines for their clothing and gentle curves for their arms and legs.
- Add simple **folds and outlines** to show the fabric of their robes.
- Sketch in the **angel's wings**, using long, soft curves for feathers.
- Begin adding **details to the ruins**, like the broken columns and blocks—show their edges and cracks.
- Lightly mark out the **cloth** draped near the figures.

Keep all lines light and clear—this is still a pencil stage, not the painting stage.



Step 3: Sketch the Middle Ground and Background Features

Now it's time to develop the **middle ground and background**:

- Lightly draw the **hills and fields** in the distance, following the gentle curves of the land.
- Sketch the **stone tower ruin** in the centre of the horizon with sharper lines—this gives it structure and makes it stand out.
- Add simplified outlines of **bushes and shrubs** near the riverbanks, making sure they don't overpower the foreground.
- Draw the **trees** with more definition—keep them large and rounded, especially the ones framing the left and right sides of the scene.

This step brings depth to your landscape. You're building the full environment piece by piece, just like Poussin did.



Step 4: Block in the Main Areas of Colour

Now that your full scene is drawn, you can begin painting. Start by **blocking in the main areas of colour** using acrylics or water-based oils:

- Use a **soft blue** for the sky and add a hint of white near the horizon to show distance.
- Paint the **river** with a light blue and gently blend in **reflections** of the sky and surrounding land.
- Use warm **earthy browns and sandy tones** for the ground and ruins in the foreground.
- Apply **deep green tones** for the trees and bushes—but keep them natural and not too bright.
- Use **soft beige, cream, or faded red** for the angel's and St. Matthew's robes to reflect the natural tones of fabric.

Let each section dry slightly before moving to adjacent areas to avoid unwanted blending. You're creating the foundation of light and colour typical in Poussin's classical style.



Step 5: Add Shadows and Highlights for Depth

Now that your base colours are in place, it's time to create **depth and dimension** using shadows and highlights:

- Use a **slightly darker version** of each colour to paint **soft shadows**:
 - Under the folds of the robes.
 - Behind the angel's wings.
 - Around the base of the ruins and trees.
 - Along the far bank of the river where light doesn't hit.

- Then use a **lighter version** of the same colours to **gently highlight** areas that would catch the light:
 - The tops of the angel's shoulders and hair.
 - The curve of the seated man's robe.
 - Edges of stones and fallen columns facing the sky.
 - The tops of distant trees and bushes.

Use soft, smooth brushstrokes to blend. This step will bring the painting to life, just like Poussin's calm but dramatic use of light.



Step 6: Add Final Details and Finishing Touches

In this final step, refine your painting by adding small, deliberate details and ensuring the overall harmony of the scene:

- Add **fine details** to the **faces and hands** of the figures using a thin brush—gently show eyes, noses, and fingers without overworking.
- Paint **individual stone textures** with tiny cracks or lines on the ruins and columns.
- Use small touches of white or pale yellow to add **reflected light** on the water surface.
- Add **subtle cloud shapes** to the sky if desired—use very soft blending.
- Step back and **check the balance** of the scene. If any areas feel too dark or flat, adjust them slightly with highlights or glazes.

Once you're happy with the final image, let it dry completely. You now have a classical-style painting inspired by Poussin!



✦ Extra Art Activities to Explore

- **Make your own ancient ruins:** Create a collage of buildings using cut-up paper or card to design temples and towers like those in Poussin's backgrounds.
- **Paint your own 'Poussin landscape':** Choose a different story or myth and place it in a similar setting with trees, rivers, and ruins.
- **Shadow painting:** Experiment with placing a lamp beside a small sculpture or toy and try painting the shadows just like Poussin used in his work.