

**COLOURWHEEL Art Classes**  
**Acrylic Paint: Bluebell Woods**



In this session we're looking at the work of artist Janet Bell as inspiration for some of those beautiful bluebell woods out there at the moment. Based on the Isle of Anglesey, Janet paints a range of subject including the English seaside and these stunning images of bluebells woods, but with a Scandinavian twist thanks to her Danish roots. Her studio, the Janet Bell Gallery, can be found in Beaumaris. If you'd like to see more of her work, here's the link: <https://www.janetbell.co.uk/>

It's always very hard to duplicate another artists' style – that's their own personality, so we will be using Janet Bell's work as inspiration only to put our own spin on it. You'll all find your own way that may be different from mine!

If you don't have acrylics or even if you do but want to try something different, both soft and oil pastels would work well for this project. I'm definitely going to give this another go with oil pastels.



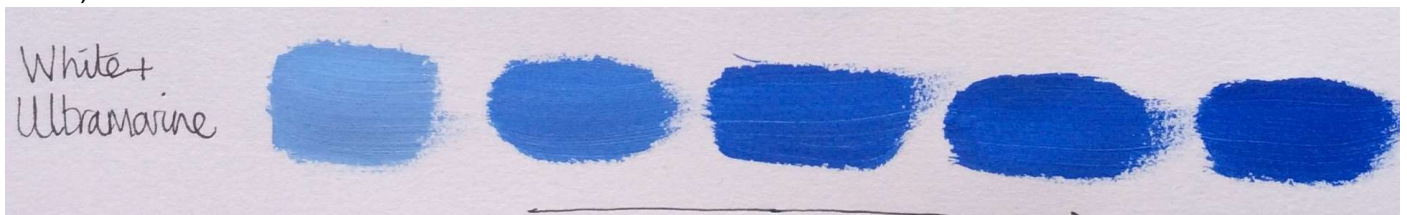
## Colour Mixing Blues

Since blue is an important colour for this project, I wanted to start by encouraging you to play around with colour mixing your blues.

Both blue and green will play an important part in this project so before you start, it's worth getting to know your colours. As with any paintings I do, I recommend using a limited palette as this creates harmony. This is a useful activity as if you don't have the exact colours that I used in my demonstration, then by experimenting with the ones you do have, you'll begin to create your own to use. For the purpose of this subject, I decided to use Ultramarine Blue as it is a reddish blue and I always think of bluebells as having a purple quality.



For the colour chart above, I began by adding a small amount of Ultramarine Blue to Titanium White. In the top row, I added small amounts of burnt umber to this mix to gradually darken the colour and neutralise it. If we think of the colour wheel, orange is opposite blue, and is its complement. Burnt umber can be an orangey brown. Complementary colours darken one another and eventually will create neutral greys and/or browns. In the second row, I've applied the same principle but added orange instead of burnt umber. The third row has started with the same blue/white mixture but a little crimson has been added. To darken this colour, small amounts of Ultramarine Blue and Crimson Red have been added each time.



In the strip above, Ultramarine Blue has once again been added to Titanium White and then gradually more Ultramarine Blue has been added to this mix.



Don't worry if you don't have a range of blues, but I just wanted to demonstrate that sometimes it's good to experiment with mixing your blues. The First swatch is Ultramarine Blue and second Cerulean Blue. These have been mixed to make the third swatch. In the final swatch, white has been added.

## Colour Mixing Greens

Green can be a tricky colour to mix – it's so easy to turn it into mud. Don't get carried away with using too many greens. Using one, perhaps two and altering it with colours you're already using can be a good way to achieve overall unity in your final image. Again, it's worth playing around with creating your own colour charts but beware, the possibilities are endless. I've included an example below of one of my many experiments.



For this project, I went with a ready mixed green – Grass Green. Don't worry if you don't have this, experiment with the ones you have or make your own with blues and yellows.

The top row below shows Grass Green straight from the tube, gradually mixed with increasing amounts of white. In the second row, grass green has been mixed with a little Lemon Yellow and then white has been gradually added.



Left, on the top row, Crimson Red has been added to Grass Green to darken it. Red is green's complement therefore the two will darken one another.

On the bottom row, I wanted to see what would happen if I added a little Ultramarine Blue to Grass Green.

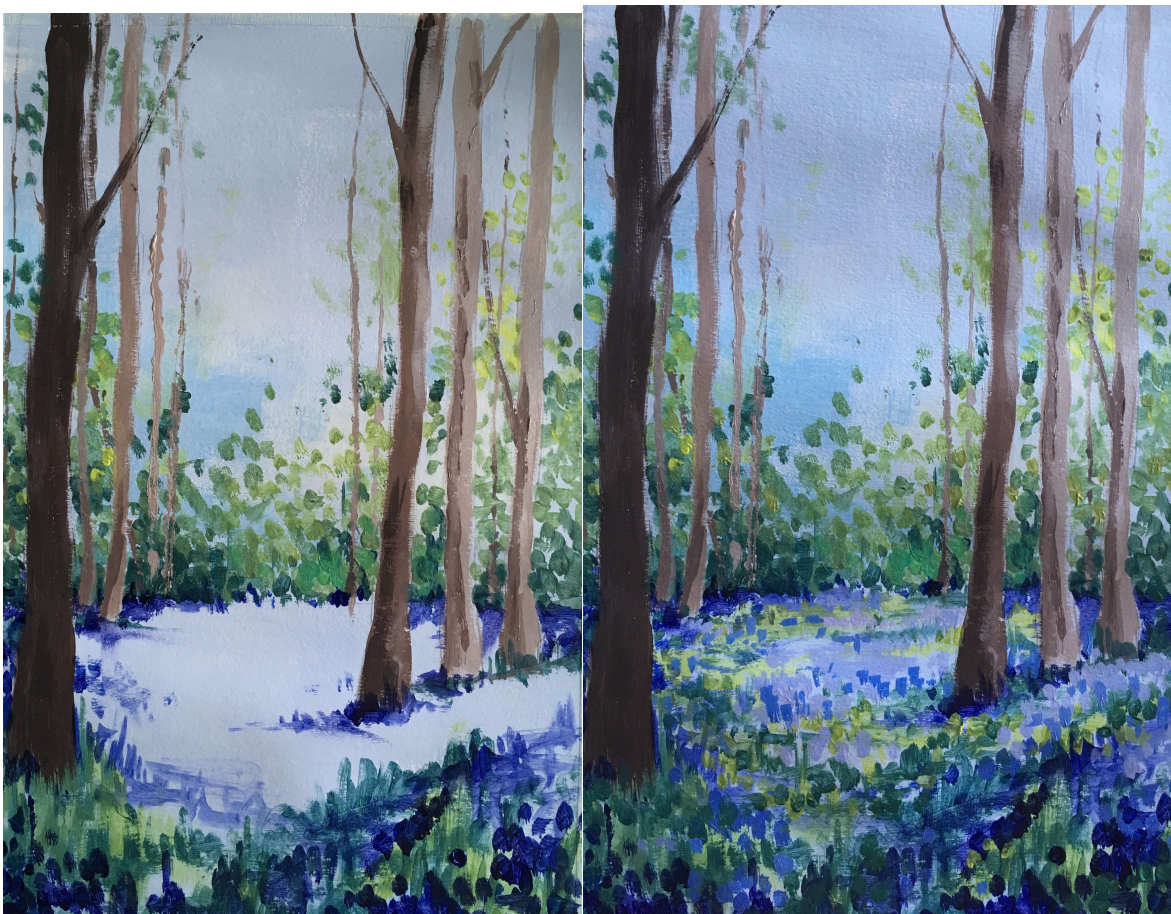
Colour mixing is a lifetime of learning. The only way to learn about colour is getting stuck and seeing what works for you. Do keep your experiments and swatches in a sketchbook as they're so useful to refer to, even those mistakes and pools of mud we all make.

## **Main Task**

**Equipment:** good quality paper such as multimedia paper – the type used in this demonstration, 2H or HB pencil, tape, white palette – a plastic plate or old plate will do, 2 water pots – one for clean water and one to wash your brushes, a flat and round brush, plastic credit card

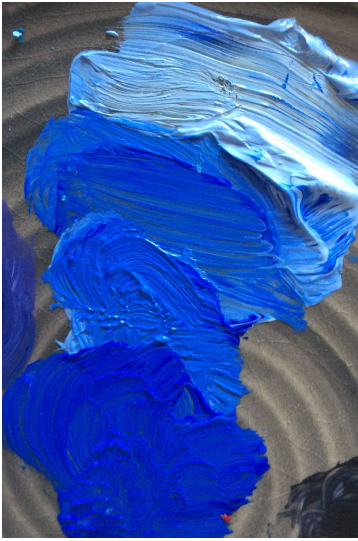
Acrylic paint colours used in this demonstration: Titanium White, Ultramarine Blue, Crimson Red, Lemon Yellow (you could always try a medium yellow), Burnt Umber, Grass Green

If you don't want to use brushes, you could paint the bluebells using a cotton or even the end of a stick with plenty of paint on it. For the raised effect at the end, you may want to experiment with a palette knife.



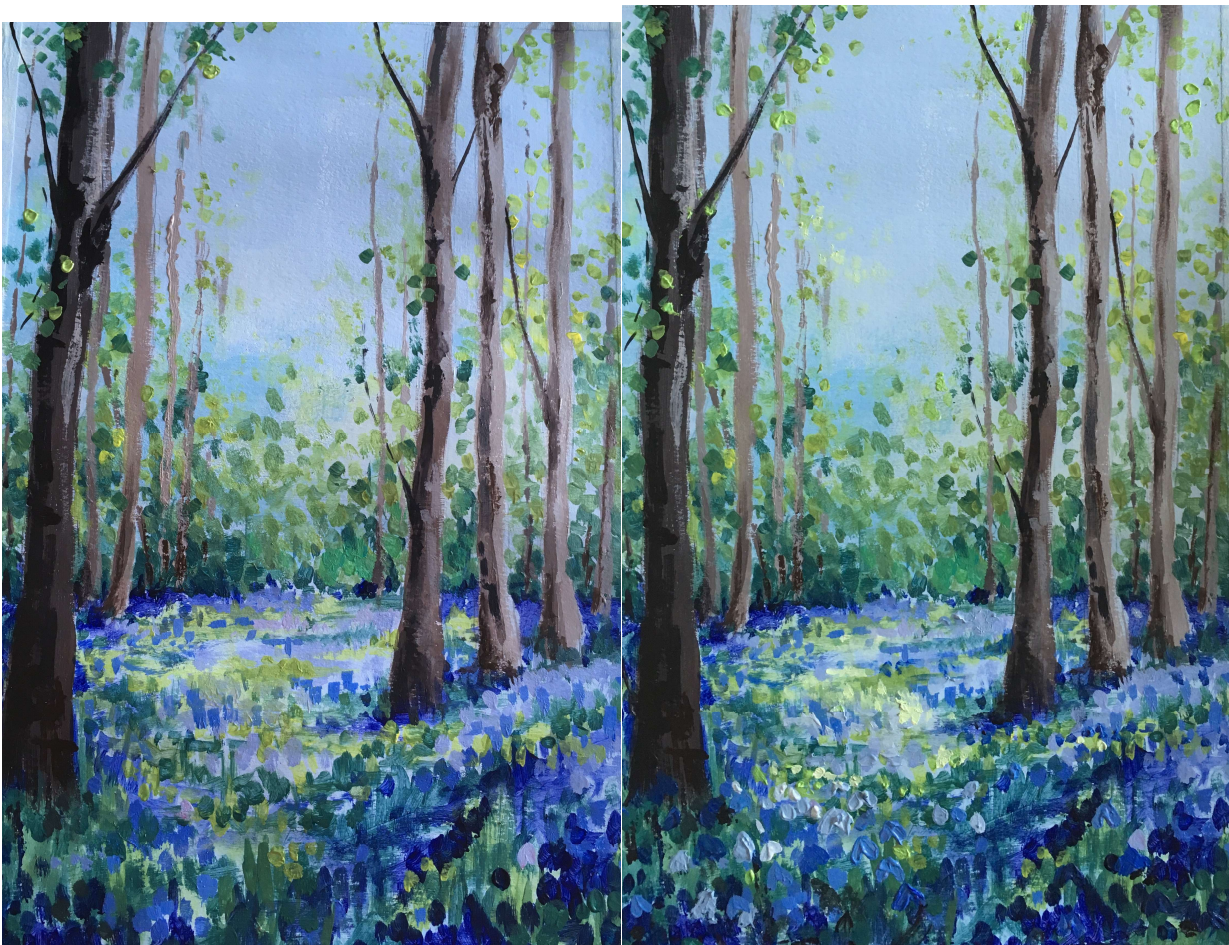
Begin by taping down your paper as this will help prevent some buckling to the paper. Place a large amount of Titanium White onto your palette and mix in a small amount of Ultramarine Blue – the paler the better. **Note: If I were to do this again, I would tone the background with a pale yellow instead of a pale blue. A little lemon yellow, cadmium yellow or medium yellow tinted with white would have made the finished piece a lot lighter – see the first image on the first page. I think I would also change the shape of my paper to a squarer frame. Again look at the examples of Janet Bell's work to see the effect of this.**

Dampen your brush and apply a flat wash of your pale blue colour, with a large flat brush all over your surface. This will help to unify your painting and also gets rid of that scary white! Once dry, sketch in your composition - for mine this was simply the horizon line and the main trees that I could see. Begin with the leaves in the background. Place an amount of Grass Green onto your palette and scoop some off and mix this with a little Lemon Yellow. Take another scoop of your green and mix this with white. Finally take some more of your green and darken it with Crimson Red – go easy. Adding too much red will create mud! Working from dark to light, I began to apply the leaves in the background, using stabbing motions with a round brush. If you're after more of a geometric feel, you could consider using a smaller, flat brush for this. Whilst I had green on the palette, I also added this into other areas of the painting.



Now for those blues. I think it's important to have the colours at hand, especially when working in a more impressionistic way. I like the ability to have colours at hand so that I can almost mix them on my surface. For this I started with a large amount of Titanium White and added Ultramarine blue to it. I took a large amount of this and added more blue to it and repeated the process to get 3-4 tones of blue. Finally, I made a last pool of blue from what I'd mixed and added a little Burnt Umber to darken the colour. Again, beginning with the darkest blues, I began loosely painting in the large areas of bluebells.

Whilst this was drying, I mixed a dark brown by adding Ultramarine Blue to Burnt Umber –the strip below shows how this will darken your brown to a colour close to dark grey or even black. Another blob of Burnt Umber was placed on the palette and this time white was added. The trees were painted in with these colours. For the thinner-looking trees in the background, the side of a plastic credit card was used. A piece of cardboard would work in a similar way.



I continued working in this way, gradually building up detail. Because I work from dark to light in acrylic, one of the last things I did was to mix some Lemon Yellow into Titanium White to begin to add some of the lighter leaves – this will work over the top of the darker tree trunks. When you're happy you've achieved the feeling of a carpet of bluebells, with the bigger shapes in place, it's time for detail! Remember, as tempting as it might be – don't go for those bigger details too soon

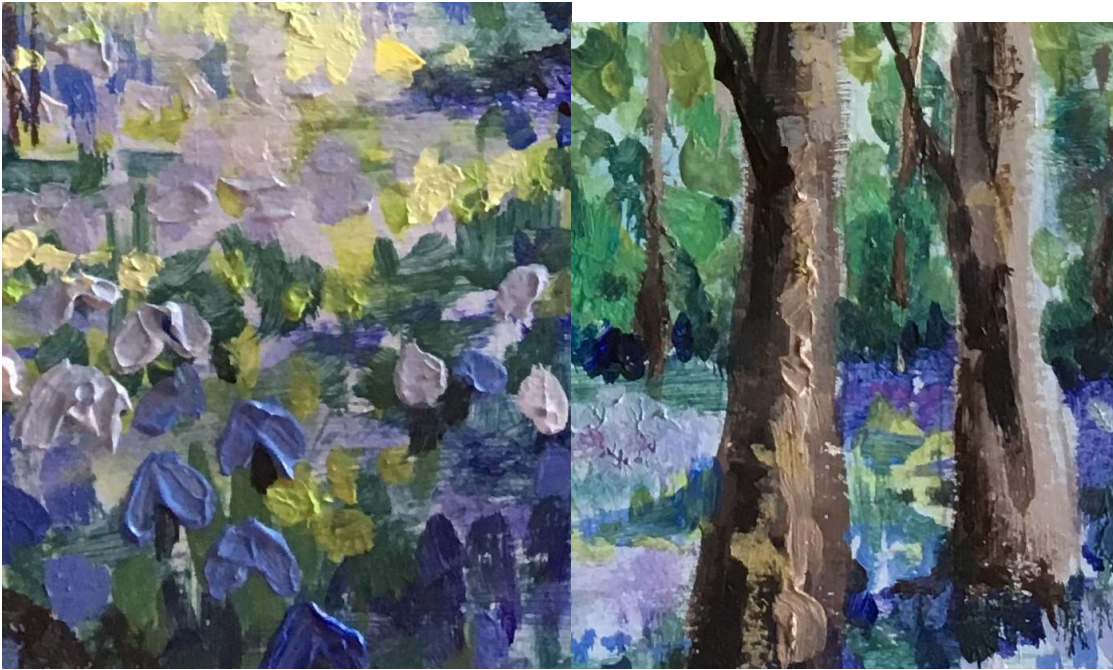


Using the side of my plastic card and a rigger brush (use a size 0 round brush if you don't have one of these), I began to paint in thinner branches and twigs. Note the hint of trunks in the background – this was achieved by painting the side of a plastic card, leaving gaps along the edge and printing this onto the paper. I worked more into the trees, by loading my brush with paint and painting in an impasto style – see close up below. To achieve a sense of perspective, I wanted to work more detail into the foreground so began to add more definite shapes to the bluebells. As with the trunks, I loaded a round brush with thick paint and using the side, defined some of the bluebell shapes using a range of my blue colours, see close up below (a little more white was added to some of these blues). A palette knife would work equally as well. A raised effect in the foreground can really add a little character, especially when the light bounces off it.

When I stood back from my painting, I felt it looked too blue! I added some Crimson Red into my Ultramarine and white mix to create a purple. This was added mainly to the foreground but then more white was added, and using a dry brush technique, placed into the mid ground too to draw the eye. Oil pastels would work well for this last pop of colour too.



Addition of purple – close up of foreground.



Close ups of impasto effect/detail.

I really think that the key to this project is to experiment with those colours first. Don't jump straight in to the painting not being happy with your colour mixes, as this will make or break your work.

**Reference Photographs:** Have a look on Pixabay for alternative images or even better, use any snaps you've taken. Do feel free to crop any of these images and find your own, interesting compositions.

