

Robinson & Crump
**CALIFORNIA
PAINTING**
A Painter's Diary

*A great big THANK YOU to Helen, John, Scott, Alice
and Eric for making this adventure possible.*

6th April

*Landed in San Francisco this morning, not completely zombied
because miracle of miracles I managed to catch a few winks of
sleep on the cattle plane. Sadly they put John in a different row
from me so we didn't get to share his first flight out of New
Zealand (aged 69) which I feel was quite an event. We were
warmly welcomed by Scott and Alice who gave us the tiki tour
down the coast to their beautiful home in Scott's Valley where
my shiny new Soltek easel was waiting for me, fresh from the
factory so we all enjoyed figuring out how to set it up and
noting all its clever design features. Dinner on the deck and early
to bed after a fun evening.*

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7th April - Painting Day!

A slow start on a cold and blustery gray day but we finally decided on Davenport Beach as a good spot among many and got down to business getting this great scene down on canvas, huge waves pounding the sculpted cliffs. The new Soltek easel worked like a charm. I found the extra room really handy and it was stable as a rock despite the strong wind. The painting went well although



"Davenport Beach" 17x11.5" Oil on Canvas

the design from the beginning troubled me with all its emptiness and although I did invent a large soft shadow across the foreground to help with that (repainted three times) I wasn't satisfied with it until the last minutes when I popped some little figures down there on the beach which gave the whole scene a

better sense of scale. I pushed the colours in the cliffs and invented the glowing light effect starting there and extending into the sky and beach and gradated the sky to the right to help with that.



This is the view from the other direction, which I would have loved to paint too. So much to paint, so little time! It's very tempting to sightsee all day going from spot to spot and not get down to work. Someone said, "Painting gets done when the pain of not painting is greater than the pain of painting". If you're a painter you're probably smiling now. :-)

Most people would love to paint because 'it must be so relaxing!'. Very funny. Plein air painting is challenging, exhilarating, frustrating, and exhausting - not what I would call relaxing, but it's good for the soul. So good.



Mr John Crump my painting buddy about to wipe off his painting - we begged him not to but there's no stopping the man.

You can see John trying out a new brush below and the look of excitement he gets just before he starts to paint (below left). Actually it was a little nippy out.



8th April - San Francisco!

Started this one off with some really dark darks in the shadows and worked fairly methodically up through the values from there aware that I had missed out on using any dramatic darks in yesterday's painting of Davenport Beach.



Deciding on shadow colours is always tricky but when you're facing into the light like this it becomes even harder so you really have to knuckle down and compare your large masses of colour with other colours in your painting, or if that's the first thing to be painted, to concentrate more on getting the value right, painting very thinly with plenty of medium and then pushing the colour one way or the other to try and get the temperature right. Sometimes I'll hit it first go, but others I might readjust it 4 or 5 times till I'm happy with it.



"Golden Gates" 11x16" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson

Some subtle things I was trying hard to get right in this painting (previous page) were the reflections in the water of the rock, the bridge and the sky combined with the shadows stretching across the water, and also the glow of light coming around the dark edges next to the light sky on the right. To achieve the glowing effect I basically add a little of the colour of the light behind the object into the edge of the dark, making sure it's a little lighter as well. John's painting of the bridge was a real beauty and I feel mine looks very pedestrian and sedate next to his, but hey Rome wasn't built in a day as they say.



“Golden Gate” 13.5"x 17.5" Oil on Linen by John Crump



I love the light on the California Coast. It perhaps doesn't show it so well in this photo but visiting San Francisco and seeing the strong atmospheric perspective and golden evening light there made me even want to paint the modern city streets there - beautiful!





"Panther Beach" 25x14" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson



Scott was at work today so I got to drive John and myself out on a painting adventure. Wrong side of the car, wrong side of the road. We found this blustery spot and set up camp, driving the car right out onto the cliff tops.

The wind got up to 75kph and was pretty darn cold but



“Panther Beach” 20"x 34" Oil on Linen by John Crump

despite that we had good fun painting together and I used twice the paint I normally do, layering it on with a credit card in places for some nice impasto passages. I like the lone figure on the beach - it really shows how imposing and powerful this place is.

I darkened the sky to help with the stormy feel and to focus the eyes on the light passages in the beach and surf, although looking at John's painting I can see how he intensified the darks in the central rocks against the light of the surf to deliver us again and again back to the centre of focus. There's more than one way to skin a cat as they say. Half frozen and buffeted by the elements it sure was nice to get to the cafe after that painting session.

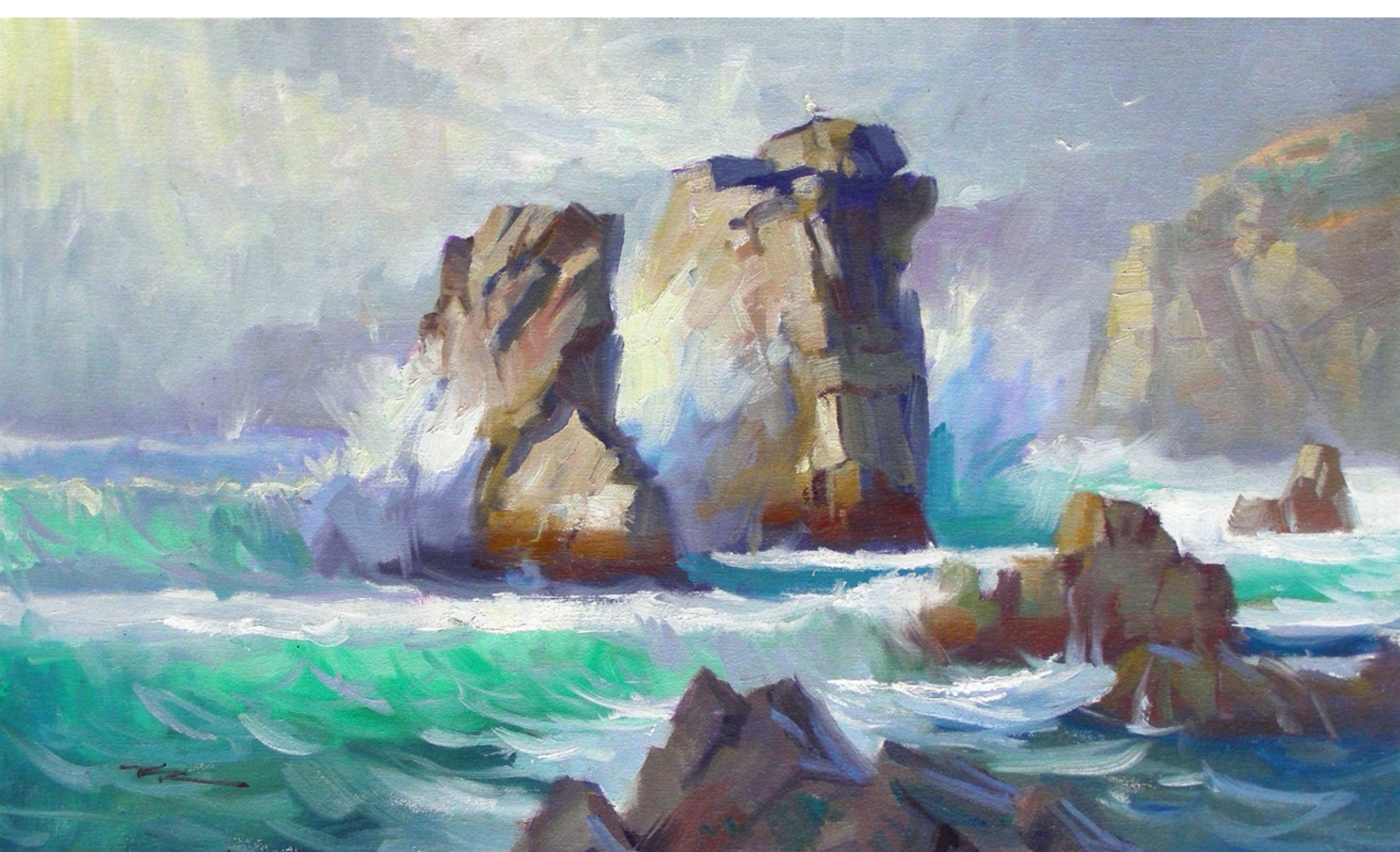
John says, "I didn't feel good at the time with this one done on the cliffs above the beach but strangely, it has looked better and better since coming home!!"



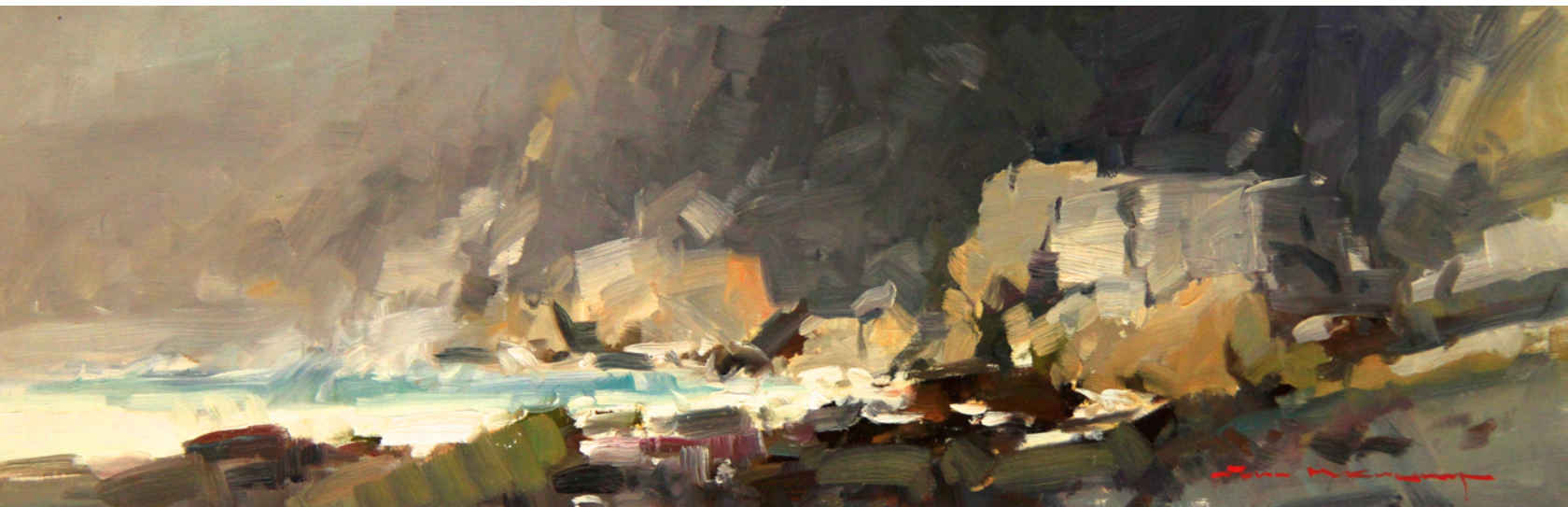
9th April The conference started today so we took the coast road down to Carmel, registered at the conference and then continued on to Big Sur where we stopped every couple of miles to take in each increasingly amazing landscape. The weather stayed good for us all day which apparently was something of a miracle and we were so encouraged by the scenery we decided to stay and paint rather than rush back for the opening of the conference at 4pm. A very good decision by all accounts because the weather stayed mostly calm and cloudless and the paint was flying onto the canvas and we all had a great time painting.



Looks to me now like I overdid the colour a little and made it a bit cheesy, but hey there's always worse and 'eye of the beholder' and all that. The tide was lapping at my feet and I was keenly aware of the chance of a freak wave taking me out so that helped somewhat with the vigorous brushwork. We see so many hackneyed over-coloured paintings of backlit surf it's hard not to be swayed in that colour direction when painting a scene like this. Might give it another go in the studio. I'm reminded again of Clyde Aspevig suggesting that "restraint equals taste". Absolutely. Whose taste?



"Garapatta" 23x13.5" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson ▲ ▼ "Rock Study at Beach Cove" 10.5"x 32" Oil on Linen by John Crump





14th April

The conference ended yesterday on a high as we all had a great day painting down at the harbour, mostly unhindered by the wind. What excited me most about this scene was the colour and then the atmospheric perspective evident in the distant buildings. As good as the demos were at the convention the highlight for me was simply meeting all these other artists and sharing our passion for plein air painting. Good times!



John says, "This one around the cafes and boat moorings at Monterey was a much better day. Yay! I struggled with this one for some time too, but at last, I was happy with the outcome."

"Monterey Boat Harbour"
21"x 24" Oil on Linen
by John Crump

"Fisherman's Wharf, Monterey"
15.5 x 15.5" Oil on Canvas
by Richard Robinson





16th April

Point Lobos. What an absolutely jaw droppingly beautiful place! We lucked in with perfect weather the whole day and a big swell was running which made for some very dramatic surf. I set up right on the edge of a cliff in my favourite spot of many and painted my heart out for 4 solid hours which flew by in no time. I was in love with the scene and ready to paint in a much looser fashion after the tighter rendering of my previous painting of the wharf. The scene spoke of movement so I tried to emphasize that with every stroke. I'm very happy with this one at the moment.



"Point Lobos" 16 x 16" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson ▶





18th April

First day painting in Yosemite today - what a challenge! I thought with all this grandeur around it was going to be an easy job painting here. Wrong! The first challenge is choosing a scene. With so much to choose from it's very hard to settle on one when something even better might be just around the river bend. Then when you've settled on one it doesn't necessarily just fall onto the canvas - a great scene doesn't mean a great painting. There's lots of moving and editing of objects to be done to compose something worthy of the canvas, which sounds a little sacrilegious in such a wonderful place as this and because it is so wonderful I got to feeling almost guilty about editing the landscape and certainly very hesitant to make big changes. I have to do this place justice!



"Spring, Yosemite" 18 x 18" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson



19th April

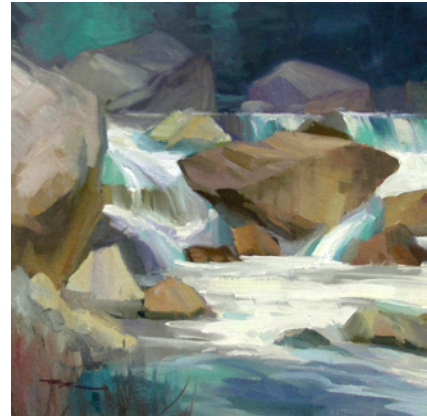
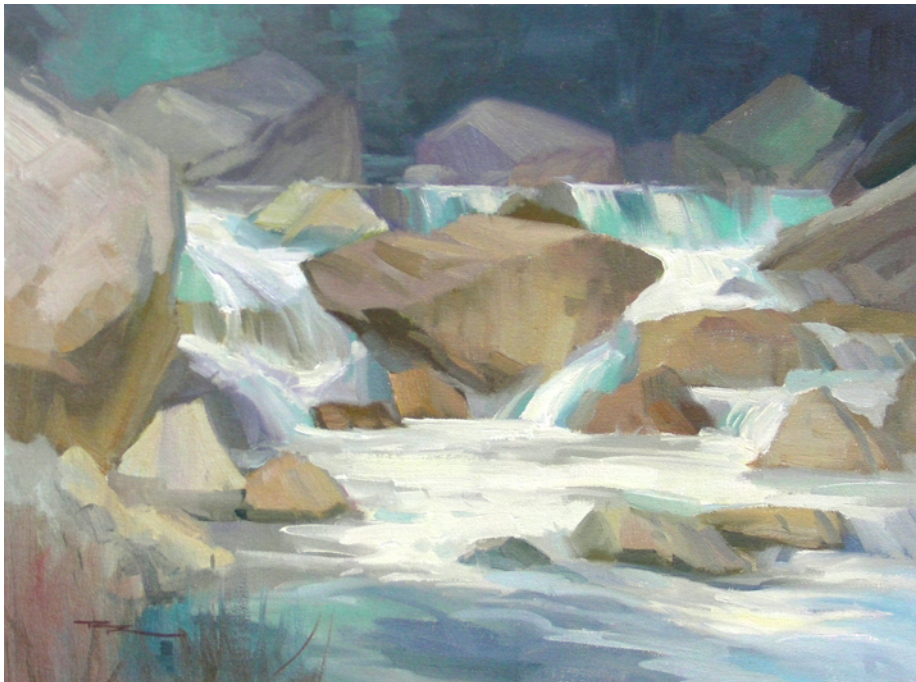
The challenges continued to pile on today. I climbed a rope with all my gear to get on top of this huge rock so I could paint from a perch over the river. The design decision I liked the most in this one was to add the very atmospheric background. Other than that I really had no sense of being in charge of this painting. It was a simple rendition without much magic about it and I began painting without falling in love with the subject - never a good idea. I painted

with Liquin for the first time in years today so that the painting would dry fast for traveling but I wasn't expecting it to dry so quickly and this added to my lack luster performance. The large reflection shapes are too similar and I should alter the one on the left by adding more sky reflection in order to unbalance the foreground. The biggest problem is simply that the dark water is too light and looks chalky - I missed a good chance for some drama there.





With all these confusing rocks I should have begun with thumbnail sketches. I just took a couple of photos to get a rough design idea and I ended up with this odd looking rock smack bang in the middle of the canvas and a very poorly organised background area with similar rocks 1 2 3, although I did like the idea I used of shadowing the background to accentuate the light in the foreground. If I had introduced some darker darks in the background and foreground the painting would not now look so wishy-washy. This is one that will go in the bin but I thought you might like to learn from my mistakes too. Maybe if I cropped it and added some darks like this:



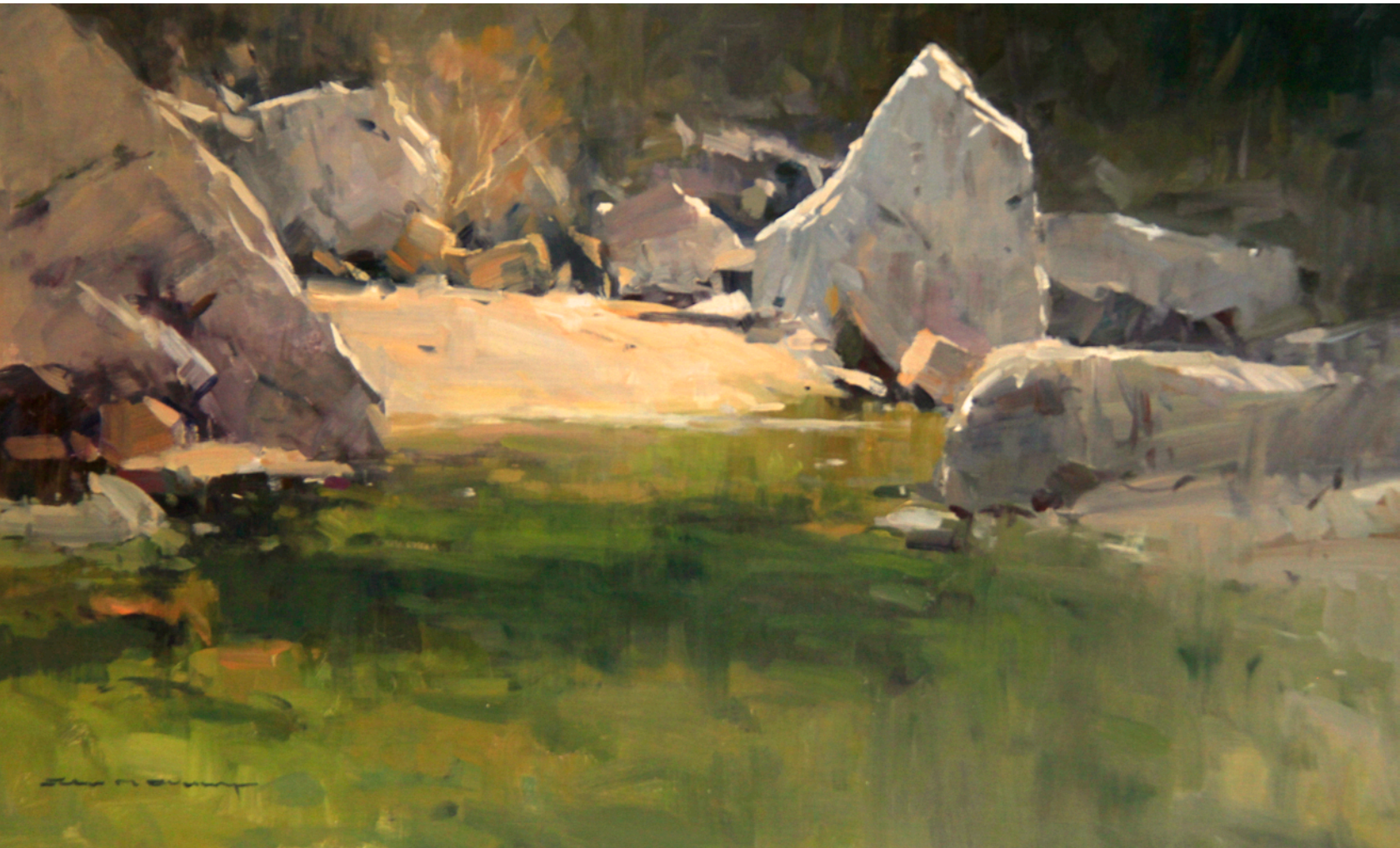


John says, "As we were nearing the end of our trip I felt that I wanted to blast out with a big painting of the river flowing out of Yosemite. The water was a beautiful colour and the rocks were a pearly white.

I even felt inspired so it had to be a biggie! (This is a common experience for me.) BIG mistake!! I struggled with it all day and although I've put it in this diary, I feel that it still needs finishing.

I don't like it when things go this way. It's so much better to travel home with a painting that you are pleased with and that you feel is finished. However, as Richard says, Rome wasn't built in a day.

Despite all that, we had a great time."



"Yosemite River" 20" x 32" Oil on Linen by John Crump

Invention

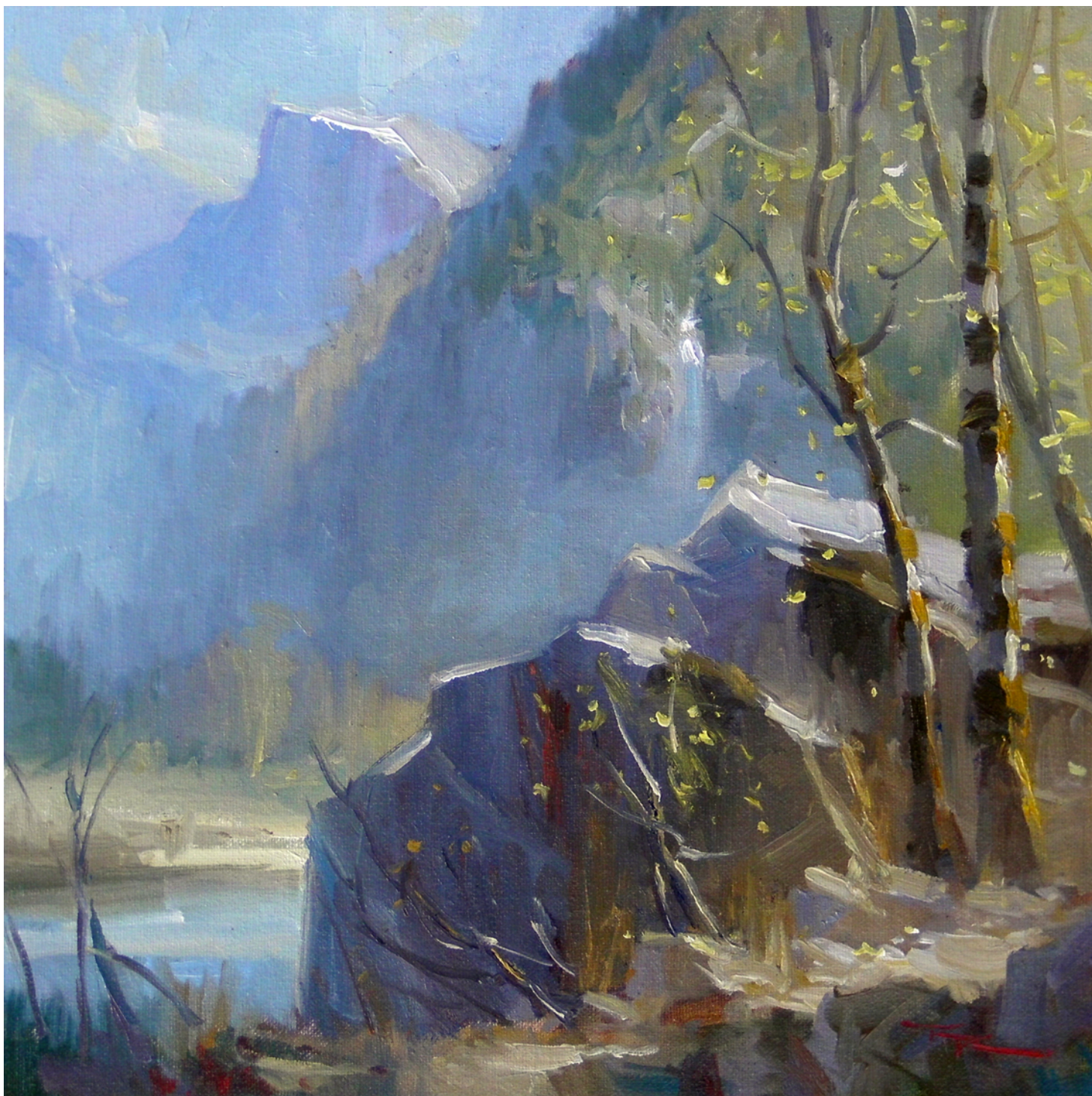
One thing I've fully realised today about Yosemite is that its grand scale scenes do not present themselves as ready made paintings, at all. You really have to shuffle things around to build a good composition here. I keep thinking about Point Lobos and how easy that one was because it was a scene that needed very few alterations to be painted. Learning isn't meant to be easy though, improving is an uphill struggle and today's painting experience was certainly no exception to that.



I pieced this painting together like a jigsaw puzzle - a rock from here, a tree from there, a waterfall invented and Halfdome Mountain from over there. Then I introduced some mist and waterfall spray and added a lot of reflected light into the foreground rocks to give the appearance of the sunlit trail glowing with light.

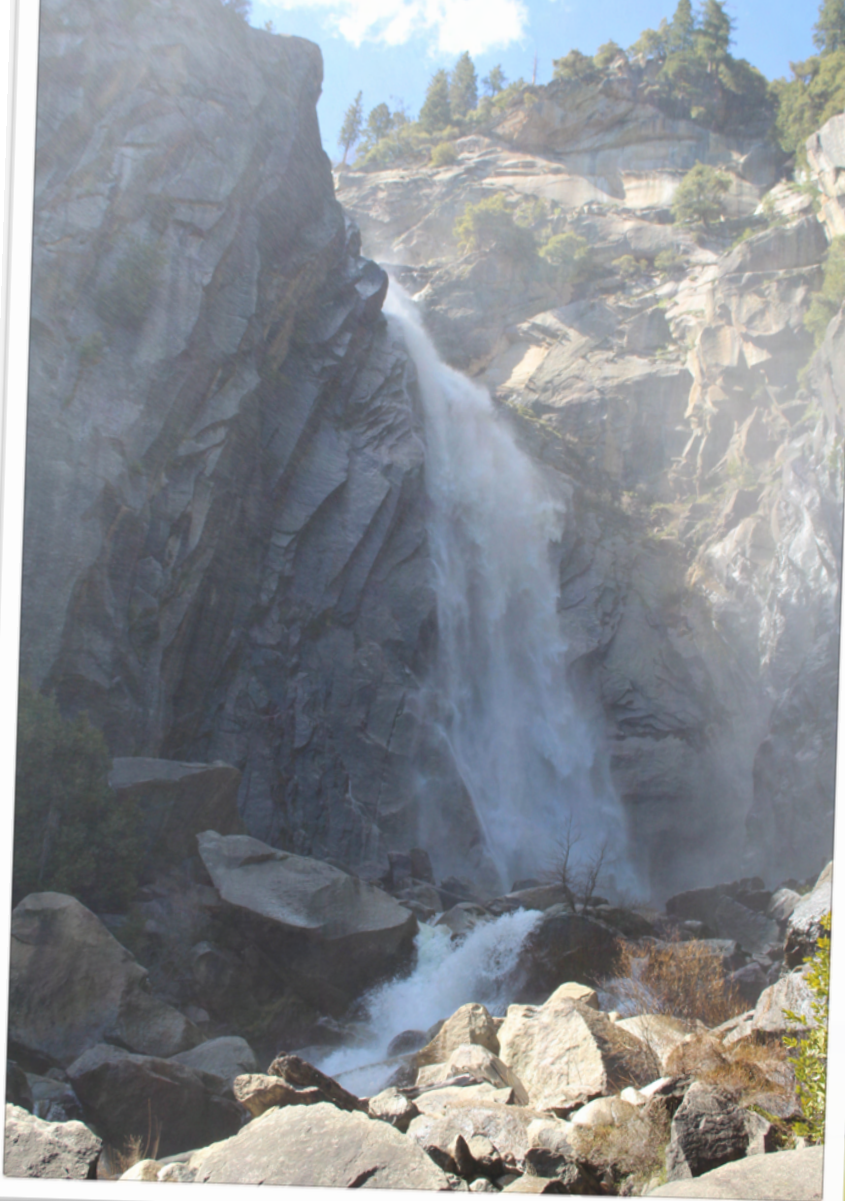
The trouble with inventing so much is that the

painting loses realism at every turn and is ultimately limited by the artist's prior experience with similar subject matter. Perhaps that's why when we're out searching for a painting spot we get so excited when we see a subject ripe for the picking - it saves us so much work! This is the last painting from the trip.



"The Path to Half Dome" 12x12" Oil on Canvas by Richard Robinson





25th April

Finally home! 13.5 hour flight and 3.5 hours on the bus home to be
picked up by my beautiful family.



Thank you for sharing our journey.
May your adventures be without end.

"If you hear a voice within you say 'you cannot paint,' then by all means paint,
and that voice will be silenced." - Vincent Van Gogh

The Artists



B.1975. Richard Robinson lives mostly in Ruakaka, New Zealand and has been painting professionally since 2001. His work is featured in several international publications including International Artist Magazine, Australian Artist Magazine and Plein Air Magazine. In 2012 he was the opening speaker at the world's largest ever Plein Air Painting Convention held in the US.

You can see more of his paintings at www.newzealandartist.com and an extensive collection of his video painting lessons at www.livepaintinglessons.com.



John Crump has been painting for over 40 years. He has had numerous solo exhibitions, his work has featured in a number of art books and magazines, and he has taught many art groups throughout New Zealand. He lives in scenic Glenorchy, where he is able to paint and teach others in the mountain landscape that he loves. In 2013 he was invited to demonstrate at the Plein Air Painting Convention held in Monterey, USA.

You can see more of his paintings, blog musings, and obtain his teaching DVDs through his website: www.johncrump.co.nz



What does an artist learn from 3 weeks in California?

*In April 2013 New Zealand artists
Richard Robinson and John Crump
visited California for 3 weeks.*

*For 4 days they were faculty members at the Plein Air
Painting Convention in Monterey. The rest of the time they
were lost in the landscape.*

*This book is a painter's diary - a collection of thoughts,
realisations, notes, techniques and even an epiphany or two,
written to inspire and enlighten any landscape painter or art
lover with a thirst for adventure and practical painting
know-how. Enjoy.*



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Thanks so much!

Richard.