

Need to explore dark half-tones

# ROBINSON'S Hawaii

A Painter's Diary

Leni

- mid values lowered  
- allows for more vibrancy

Insert boxes in large painting

Oahu

Mahalo to everyone who made this great adventure possible, including Laurie & Ed McKeon, David Turner and the good folks at Camp Mokule`ia and Waialua Elementary, Mark Brown, Kelly and Kevin Turner, Cindy Hoyer, Spencer Chang, Roger Whitlock, Susie Anderson, Lynne Boyer, Louisa Cooper, Eileen Kechloian, Terry & Suzanne Clare, Nancy Lennie, Nancy Yu, Gregg Geary, Dana Smiley, Rita Long, Maithilee Samant, Karen Olson, Kirt Pruyn, Laetitia Atlantis, Cathie & Michael, Mum & Dad & Andy, Anna & Dave and last but not least Helen, Danielle and Luke.

Aloha.



## What does an artist learn from 80 days in the Tropics?

*In August 2012 New Zealand artist Richard Robinson moved to Hawai'i for 3 months with his wife and two children. The goal was threefold - escape the winter, have a family adventure and paint with lots of local artists.*

*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 tropical adventure and practical painting know-how.*



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*Finally got to paint today! As usually happens I flew into the first painting back with gusto, loving just slapping paint down at the expense of good design and drawing, so it's not the best painting in the world but I had a ball doing it and that's the most important part. Hooked up with Mark Brown - one of the nicest most generous guys I've met and also a really good painter. We met with 3 other painters this morning just past the small port of Haliewa. It's so great to finally meet some artists here and get painting again which is the main reason for the trip. Mark uses very bold colour in his work and that and the intense sunlight here inspired my brighter colour choices today. I have to get used painting in the heat and wind here - both of which got the better of me today. I'm going to have to get one of those big clips you see on Mark's easel holding the palette down - either that or grow another set of arms.*





"Painting Mark Brown" 10x8" Oil on Canvas





*We drove an hour to the other extreme of the island this morning to paint with Mark Brown and a few others at Makapu'u Point. A very windy and mostly grey day greeted us but we had fun anyway. Below you can see my new painting technique. (just being silly). Note the rope coming off the back of the easel tied to a big rock which is stopping the easel from flying away and the tripod there helping to steady the canvas. Very difficult to paint when everything is wobbling, including yourself, but I dashed some colour on anyway just glad to be out painting with good painterly folks. We're such social animals aren't we? Painting with other painters is fantastic and I encourage you to get out and do the same.*





"Makapu'u Point" 11x14" Oil on Canvas





*Spent the morning in Haleiwa - the local village. Got so far with this one and had to pack up because the sun hit my spot after 4 hours so I went home and added the combi van from my photo. Really like this one. After the previous two sloppy paintings I decided to knuckle down a bit. The biggest choice I made was to exaggerate the atmospheric perspective down the street in order to give the foreground more punch. In this case that meant adding more blue and white to my colours and decreasing contrast with distance.*







"Haleiwa" 11x14" Oil on Canvas





*Not sure of the name of this beach but apparently it's where they filmed part of the tv series 'Lost'. Nice spot to get lost. Had a pretty intense paint out this morning with 4 other painters - 3 of whom were very experienced which gave me the exciting but daunting feeling of 'oh, well I better do a good one then!' I was the slowest of the bunch - once again I was really pushing my brain - it's a lot like going to the gym, exhausting but worthwhile in the end. The trickiest part was trying to get this big shadow across the foreground and organising the rocks into a recognisable but not too obviously constructed organic pattern which reads easily (but not too easily). See, exhausting just writing that.*

*My painting buddies today were Lynne Boyer, Roger Whitlock, Susie Anderson and Kelly Turner.*





"Lost in Paradise" 12x16" Oil on Canvas





*Next I painted this small colour study of Lost Beach to see how far I could push the colours. The day after that I painted at Haleiwa again with Mark and although the colours look quite pushed in that too, the only colour I really did change was the foreground shadow. The light here is really very strong and throws more reflected light into the shadows raising the overall vibrancy.*





"Haleiwa, Epilogue" 9x12" Oil on Canvas





Painted here with Kelly today. The biggest struggle was making sense of the rocks. If I had painted them just as they were they wouldn't read well - it would be a large gray mess. The goal then is to simplify, make large masses (not messes) with supporting smaller detail. Sounds easy but man what a brain bender! Need more practice at this obviously.

I tried to avoid including vibrant green (which I'm not a big fan of) but the foliage really was that colour. In fact I've even toned it down a little.

Notice the trees, beach and rocks fall into a soft shadow in the top left where I softened the edges too. This all helps to drive the eye to the sunlit beach where the action is. Loved those colourful umbrellas there which is the surprise for the painting. Someone told me every painting should have a surprise in it - something that makes the viewer think 'oh, look! I didn't see that there before! how intriguing!' or something like that. Sounds like a god idea to me.

There is fantastic snorkeling at this beach too, and coming up from a deep dive I was excited to see my first real mermaid amongst the tropical fish. Then I saw her photographer. I expect she had a lot of trouble getting back up the beach with her tail on.





"Three Tables Beach" 12x16" Oil on Canvas





"Beach House" 11x14" Oil on Canvas

*Had a few days off painting, with the inevitable effect of a painting buildup occurring where I had to dash outside with my easel and bash off a painting or two. This one looks down the side of our rental accommodation at Camp Mokule`ia...*





"Camp Mokule'ia Sunset" 11x14" Oil on Canvas

*...and then I spun my easel around and painted the view into the camp at sunset. When you get the urge to paint there's only one thing for it and that's getting your brushes wet!*





*Today I relearned a good lesson about cropping a scene. There I was with my blank canvas in front of an expansive Hawaiian landscape - a gorgeous surf beach backed by towering ranks of volcanic mountains. My eye was drawn to the surf crashing against the rocks, but I just love painting distant mountains. I had to choose to either paint the whole scene, mountains and all, or zoom in on the rocks and focus on the surf. It was a very hard decision to make but in the end I decided to go with my gut and zoom in on the subject that most captured my attention. The decision was also helped to some degree by the size of my canvas which was fairly small at 10x20". A larger canvas would probably have enticed me to paint the whole scene.*





"Pounders" 10x20" Oil on Canvas

*The guy on the rock really was there - for about an hour. He passed me on the way back and said he had been watching the fish. His name was Bruce (which I remember because it's my Dad's name) and he and his family look after the Pounders beach park. I can think of worse jobs.*





*Had a wonderful morning painting this one flat out trying to capture those huge clouds rolling off the coast, occasionally copping an easel full of water (you can even see some authentic water dribble marks down the left side of the painting). It really pays to dry off your palette rather than try to mix oil paints on top of it. Love that feeling when you just have to get a painting out and you're ripping into it with the first big colour blocks - fantastic. The clouds here get a lot more vertical than those in New Zealand, making some really unlikely shapes. There is shade here till 11:30am and great views both ways. Good times.*





"Clouds over Laniakea" 11x14"





"Laniakea Studies" 12x24" Oil on Canvas

Had lots of fun with this today. Photoshopped the plein air piece from yesterday darkening all the midtones which looked quite dramatic so I painted the left study, not copying the screen but just darkening the mid values and leaving the lights. Compressing the mid values allows for more vibrant colours because as you add white colours naturally lose saturation and also cool slightly. For the next study I went the other way and lightened all the midtones leaving only a few dark darks and then slightly warming the whole painting which was the trickiest part - like transposing music on the fly. Interesting having the two studies in the one canvas. Much happier with the midtones in the clouds in the second one and although I did push them a little pinker I don't think it hurts it too much. I like to think of my clouds as very boxy constructions with clearly defined planes and then just soften off areas that don't want attention. That way I can just say okay this is the colour for the lights, this is the colour for the halftones and this is the shadow side. Too confusing otherwise. Once that's done I make a few additional hue variations for the sake of interest and light effects and try to leave it alone after that. Sometimes stopping painting is the hardest part.

"Ko'olina Lagoon" 12x12" Oil on Canvas ►







# BRUSHWORK



One of the last things people notice about a painting is its brushwork simply because most work is seen from a distance at first and then viewed in more detail as the viewer moves closer. To me, beautiful brushwork has variety, unity, purpose and vigour. Up close it should be an interesting abstract collection of marks which resolves into a coherent scene as we retreat from the canvas.

Great brushwork comes from the confidence of knowing how brush and paint and canvas work together in the subtlest of ways and that sort of tactile knowledge only comes from years of painting.

Here are a few tell-tales of beginner's brushwork:

*Hesitant*- many small brushstrokes inaccurately placed.

*Overworked*- brushing over areas again and again leading to muddy colour.

*Destructive*- brushstrokes not used well to denote the forms of objects.

*Monotonous*- lack of variety in mark making.

The first step towards overcoming these pitfalls is to just begin considering your brushwork in earnest.

A good question to ask yourself to open your creative channels is "what would happen if..." and see where that takes you. **PLAY** with your paint! See what is possible - hold your brush a different way, use the side, the tip, drag, dab, push, pull, more paint, less paint, different pressure, change brushes, change speed, use a palette knife, use a toothbrush, use a chicken, scratch back, rub off, rub on, impasto, dribbles, scribbles, splatters, smooth, rough, timid, tough. Enjoy!





"Pounders II" 11x14" Oil on Canvas





*Had a ball painting this yesterday really focusing on the brushwork again. Still not stepping back enough - you would think that's a pretty easy thing to do but I tend to get caught up in the painting and forget to step back from the easel. Really enjoyed the thick paint application and scratching back into it with the back of the brush. Also enjoyed the challenge of moving things around to suit me and inventing the people. The biggest change I made was to remove the fence which was hiding the action.*

"Waikiki Hotspot" 12x12" Oil on Canvas ►









*Waimea Bay, famous for its monster waves. When you walk out on the hot sand on a calm day it feels as if the vast beach is just waiting for a big set to roll in, meanwhile offering up its placid waters to kiddies and snorkelers. On a big day the beach vibrates with every massive onslaught. It seems as if it's been built big for a reason, just as jumping rock down the west end looks like it's been crafted there specifically for thrill seeking jumpers. The best part of painting this scene was having my wife Helen up there painting beside me. Priceless.*





"Waimea Bay" 9x12" Oil on Canvas





"Pounders III" 12x24" Oil on Canvas

▲ Such a beautiful location, this time I couldn't resist the mountains. Feel like this one came out too dark and gray and that's likely because of the technique I used to paint the mountains, blocking in each mountain completely with a blue gray mix and then working on top of that with the light colours instead of leaving space for the lights and putting those in separately. Paint over the gray base tends to muddy and darken the lights which is almost irretrievable without using very thick paint.

► New Technique! After a few hours blocking this one in I was nearly ready to bin this painting of Waimea Bay because it seemed so pedestrian - too much like the small study I'd done previously (see previous page). In despair I took to it with the palette knife and a soft brush, added a few dark accents and points of colour and hey presto, my favorite painting! Never give up!

"Over Waimea" 12x12" Oil on Canvas ►









*Dynamic Shapes, Rich Colour*



Visual concept and notan designs

*Here's the general design process I use:*

1. Find a scene that moves me.
2. Find the visual concept for that scene. What's the big idea?
3. Draw or imagine the notan design. What's the dark/light design?
4. Paint or imagine a limited value study. Where will I place the main values?
5. Paint or imagine the colour study. Where will I place the main colours?
6. Paint the painting. Dark to light, big shapes to small, thin paint to thick.





"Laniakea" 11x11" Oil on Canvas





*Nice to be painting a larger canvas back at this spot. Painting the same scene lets you hone your skills as previous problems fall away. I've developed a technique for the shadowed sand which I'm pretty comfortable with now - laying in a thin brown (warm gray), 'bending' the colour as I go (slight changes of hue, not value), and then working over top with a slightly lighter blue gray to suggest the reflection of the sky. The shadows in light sand, as with snow, can contain all the colours of the rainbow depending on its environment. And yes that's a turtle, not a rock. At another spot I saw a dog barking at a big rock on the beach, which I thought was weird. Then the rock turned around and hopped back in the water.*









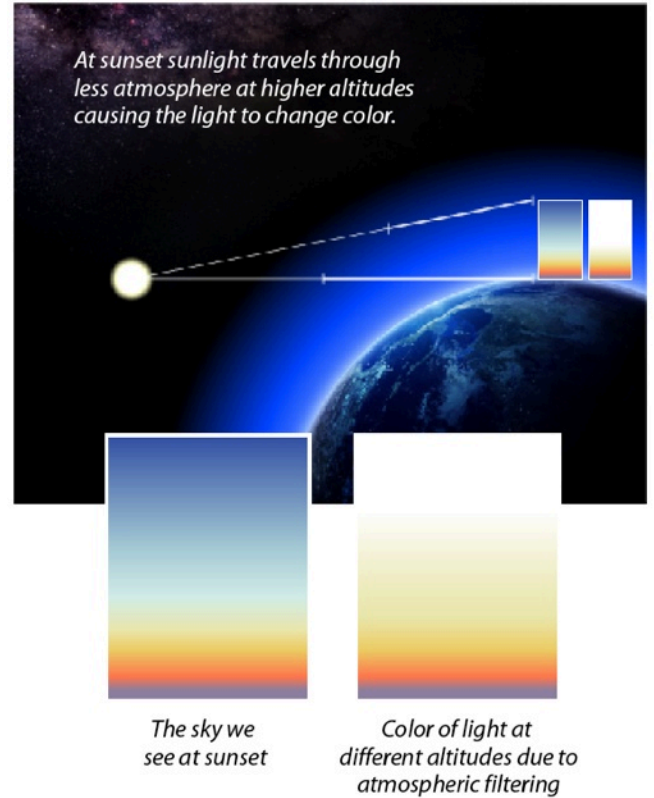
*The colour at this location was truly spectacular and the photo does not do it justice at all. I got the water in early because I could see clouds on their way and knew I didn't have the skill to invent all the sunlit water colours but could however muddle through the rest of the painting. Pays to keep your eyes open and jot down the shadow patterns first because they're the first things to change. If you are painting waves in the studio it's a good idea to get some video footage of the waves so you can pause it at exactly the right spot and also get some idea of the motion which is an important consideration for your brushwork.*





"Ko'Olina Colour" 16x20" Oil on Canvas





▲ A small 5x5" colour study painted in an awful hurry racing the setting sun at Kailua Bay - it sure goes down fast near the equator. Note the colour banding in the cloud from cool blue gray at the base to warm yellow at its highlight. This happens at sunset with the light slicing through the atmosphere at a shallow angle.

► Loved playing with the palette knife on this one today and facing the challenge of all that plain green. Normally I try steering clear of large areas of green but I couldn't see any way around this one. Note the strong 'visual concept' of dark upper third versus light lower section. That's how the painting began, with a visual concept, which is not a thing like 'nice grass' or 'beautiful water'. A visual concept is usually the first thing to excite your eyes about a scene, before you apply meaning to it. For example, dynamic shapes, intense light, interesting texture, spotlight foreground, exciting colour, atmospheric, etc. Every great painting has a strong visual concept at its heart.





"Kualoa Light" 11x14" Oil on Canvas





*Visited beautiful Kaua'i for a week with our gracious host Eileen Kechloian. This is the first of five paintings completed during that time. Some very dramatic coastline there, changing by the minute as the persistent waves eat away at the frozen lava. Notice that I'm painting with my canvas in direct sunlight - bad bad bad. If you do this for long enough you might figure out how to compensate, but for me a painting completed in direct sunlight will always appear darker than you expected when you bring it inside where the lighting is much weaker. I started out in the shade but of course the sun didn't stay still for me and I didn't bother to move the easel once I was underway. Lesson learned, again.*





"Mahaulepu Cliffs" 14x18" Oil on Canvas

*... I did do some things right though - notice the touches of red carried though the painting which serve to enliven the cooler colours (especially red's complement green) and it spices up the whole painting. Maybe I AM learning a thing or two!*





*After painting yesterday in the sun we needed some serious shade today and found it at Poipu Beach, a very popular spot. If you're an outdoor painter it really does pay to have a website and a business card. People stop to chat while you're frantically racing the sun painting and it makes good sense to have your business card handy to give them and say 'if you want to see the finished painting you'll be able to see it on the website tonight'. Works two ways - usually stops them chatting so much and gives them a point of contact for later. I painted the hammock first of all here because sure enough, he finished his book before I finished my painting.*





"Hammock at Poipu Beach" 14x18" Oil on Canvas

*The idea here was light versus shadow so I spent considerable gobs of brain power on lightening the background so that it made the shade that much more inviting. Notice the thickest paint is in the foreground too - another way to help add the illusion of depth to a flat canvas.*





*I just can't pass up an old boat as a painting subject - beautiful! The old Pelican here has certainly seen better days and she looks as if she's still pining for a return to the sea. Surprising how much colour is lost in the darks in a high contrast photo isn't it!? That's another great reason to be outside painting from life. It's often easy to spot beginners paintings done from photos as their darks look like this photo's - too dark and not enough colour in them. Beware! With boats and manmade things the key is in the drawing. All manner of painting sins can be absolved by adding more paint, but not the drawing. To help me get this drawing right (or at least, right-er) I used the old mirror trick, whereby I turned away from the easel and*





"The Pelican at Waiamea Cottages" 16x20" Oil on Canvas

*viewed my initial drawing (and the boat itself) in a little mirror I held up to my eye so that I could see both the drawing and the boat in the mirror at the same time. This works like a charm every time. It lets you see the glaring deficiencies in your drawing before you commit them to serious paint. HOW it works is very simply by magic.*





*Did a wee bit of four wheel driving to get to this spot with Eileen where we painted out of the back of the truck - byo shade. I spent about 3 hours on this beastie going plod plod plod, got sick of it and scraped most of it off which allowed me much more freedom the second time around. Sometimes you have to paint what you don't want before you can paint what you want. Terry Clare from Australia says he goes out and paints three paintings in one session - one on top of the other.*

"Gillian House at Mahaulepu Beach" 18x18" Oil on Canvas ►









*Last painting today on Kaua'i the Garden Island. The day started out gray then turned sunny and I just couldn't resist painting the sunny stuff when it finally came along so there are elements of both in this painting. In my workshops I always recommend they 'start with a plan and stick to it'. Rules are made to be broken though right? The adventure is coming to an end now and I'm looking forward to returning home to plan the next adventure. The thing that has made this trip so special has been the all the people I've met along the way, and their beautiful Aloha spirit.*

"Cove at Mahaulepu Beach" 18x18" Oil on Canvas ►









*Thank you for sharing my journey.  
May your adventures be without end.  
Aloha.*

*( Aloha in the Hawaiian language means affection, peace, compassion and mercy. )*

*" 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*

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## About the Artist

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](http://www.newzealandartist.com) and an extensive collection of his video painting lessons at [www.livepaintinglessons.com](http://www.livepaintinglessons.com)



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Happy painting,

Richard