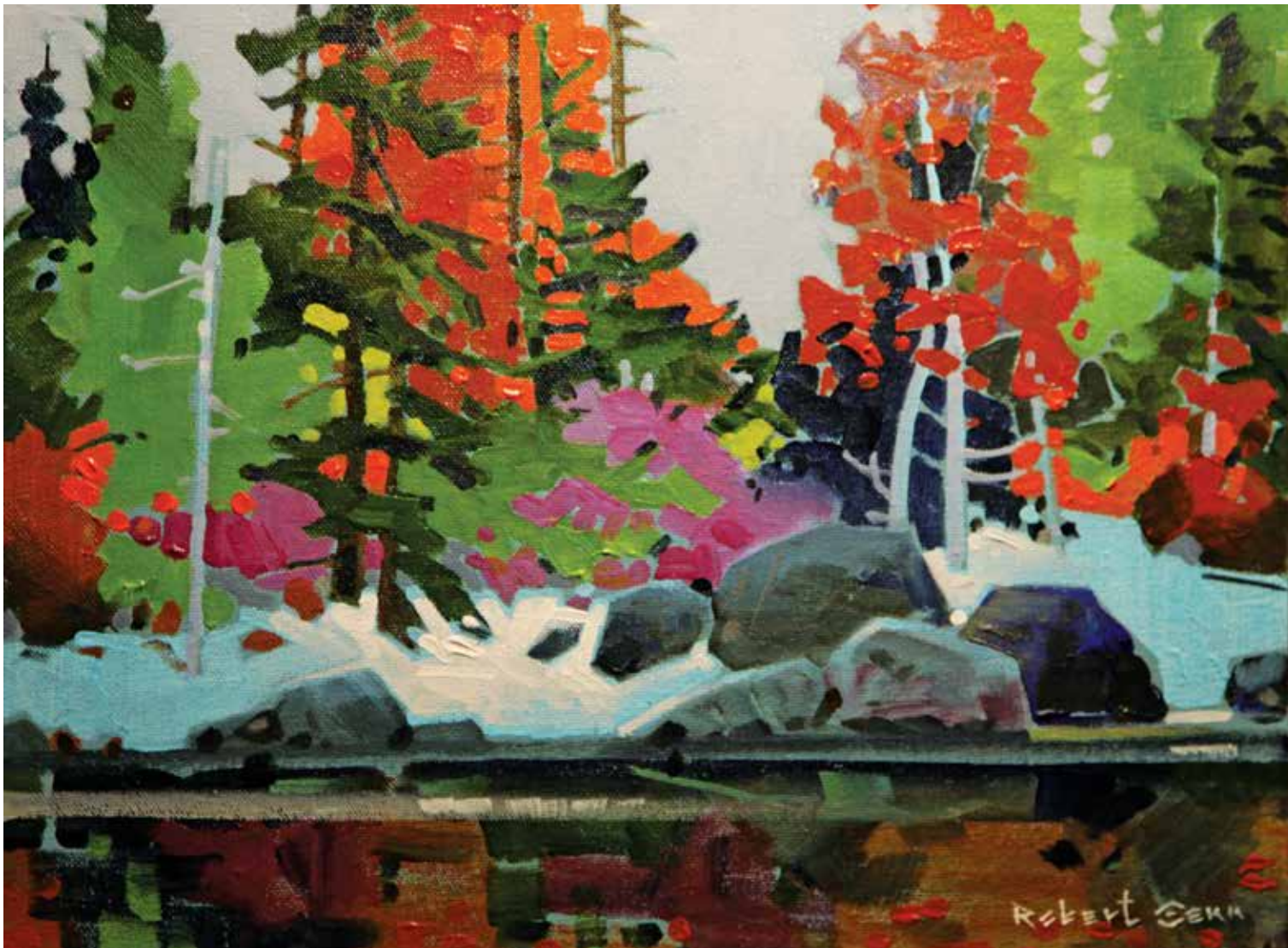


Artist to Collect

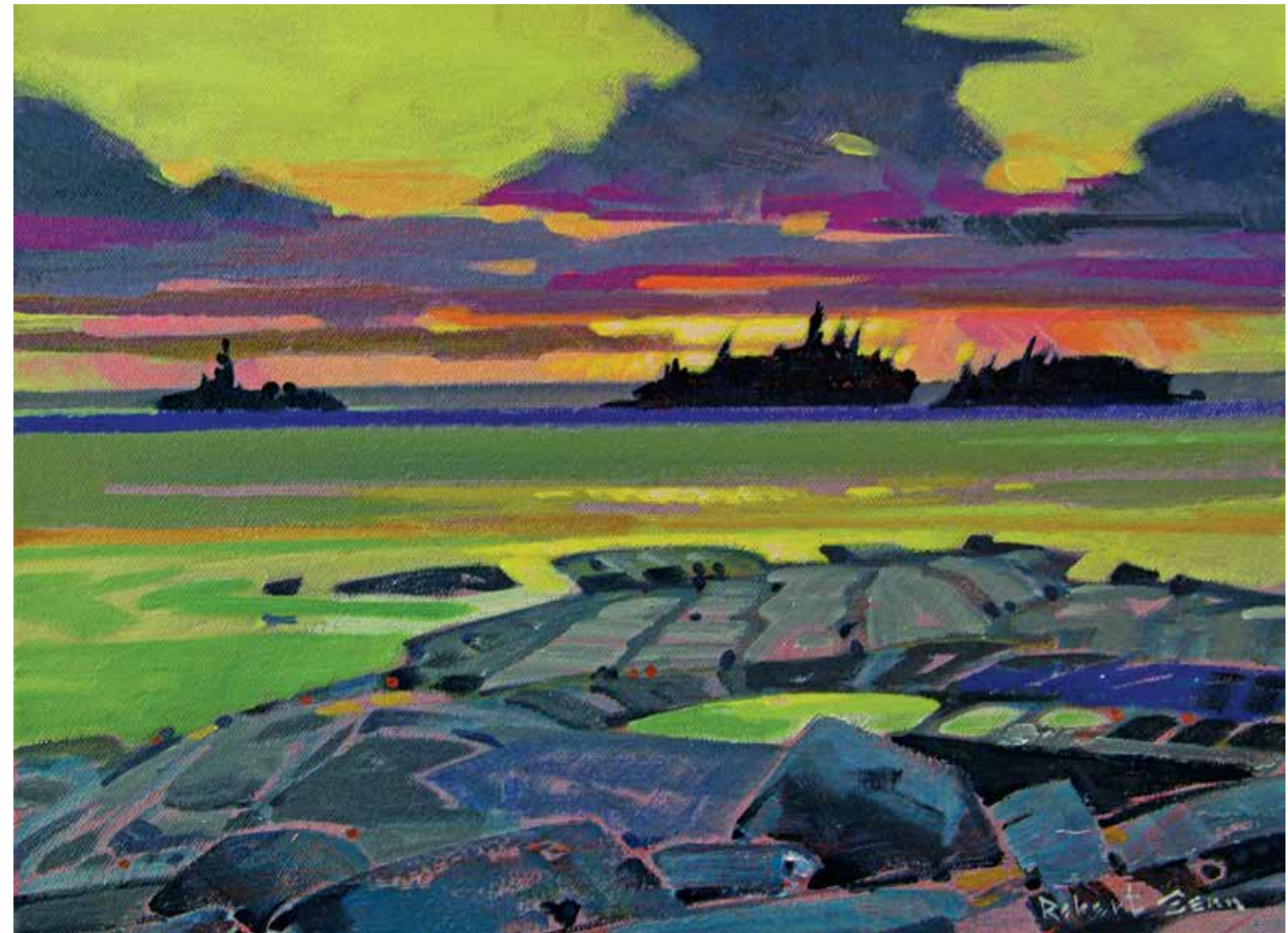
Robert Genn





previous page, Self-Portrait with Emily Carr, acrylic on canvas, 24" x 30"

above, October Edge, Lake of the Woods, acrylic on canvas, 12" x 16"



Late Light, Langara, (QCI) Haida Gwaii, acrylic on canvas, 11" x 14"

Telling it like it is

Robert Genn is recognized throughout Canada and internationally as one of Canada's foremost living artists. Thousands of people read his weekly newsletters and he has great influence in the Canadian Art world. While his subjects are universal and he has painted in many countries, he excels in portraying Canada. He is perhaps best known for his work on the West Coast and in the Rocky Mountains.

written by Robert Genn & Lorie Lee Steiner

"The world is so full of a number of things, that I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings."

-Robert Louis Stevenson

I was born in Victoria, B.C. in 1936 the first of two boys. Both my folks were interested in the arts and encouraged me in drawing and painting while I was still in diapers. By the time I was in High School I was the guy who designed the school annual and painted murals on the gym ceiling. At Victoria University I majored in English, History, Psychology and girls while trying to paint landscapes and wildlife—the same at University of BC. I didn't figure out my destiny until I showed up at the Art Center School of Art and Design in Los Angeles. Here I was enrolled in Industrial Design, and, while I've never professionally designed cars or toasters, the discipline has been

a great aid to my life and art.

My dad always said, "If you can dream it you can do it," and my mom said "as long as it makes you happy," so by the time I returned to Canada in 1961 I was onto painting like a fat kid on a Smartie. At one point in Vancouver I rented a small room where I read, ate rice and painted steadily for six months. Encouraged by architect Arthur Ericson, as well as artist Lawren Harris and others, I fell in love with painting. I never really had a job, so it was a bit of a surprise when Carol and I got married in 1964 and moved to Spain.

While we continue to make our home in Western Canada, I have always travelled to get material. It may be a function of ADD, but there always seems to be something else I need to get my brush around. I love the Rocky Mountains, Canada's west coast and the far north, but I've painted plenty in France, Italy, Japan, England and many other places.

A Family Affair

Carol and I are blessed with three creative kids. David is a rock musician and a music producer, James is a film director and Sara is a painter, as well as a musician. James and I just spent time in Argentina where I painted in the Andes (long on my bucket list) and at penguin colonies on the East Coast of Patagonia. A few years ago, Sara and I navigated the whole length of the Mackenzie River from Ft. Providence to Tuktoyaktuk in a self-designed floating studio and painted all the way. This September, Sara and I are heli-painting in the Rockies with a few of our friends.

While painting can be a shaky business, there was a time when I was in my early thirties when I realized that Carol and our young family were going to be okay—so I can't neglect to thank all the thousands of folks who have collected my work.

A lot of our travels, trials, tribulations and, yes, advice for other artists is in the twice-weekly email



Sunset on Cortes, Hollyhock, acrylic on canvas, 12" x 16"

letters I've been writing to about 250,000 readers for 12 years. I've published four books. One of them is called "Love Letters to Art" and that pretty well sums up my feelings on the subject.

Under the Influence

Most artists in my experience tend to be loners. But you can't go through a life in art without the energy and influence of others. I like to think of it as a great Brotherhood and Sisterhood of artists, dead and alive, who help us sharpen our tools and maintain our keenness. Among these, there is a special place held for Fen Lansdowne, Lawren Harris, Norman Rockwell, Lorne Bouchard, as well as many of the excellent living artists from 107 countries who happen to subscribe to my letter.

I've always been proud of our great country of Canada. Perhaps the best interpreters of its wonders have not been born yet. But I can't fail to recognize the members of the Group of Seven who saw our landscape in a new and un-European

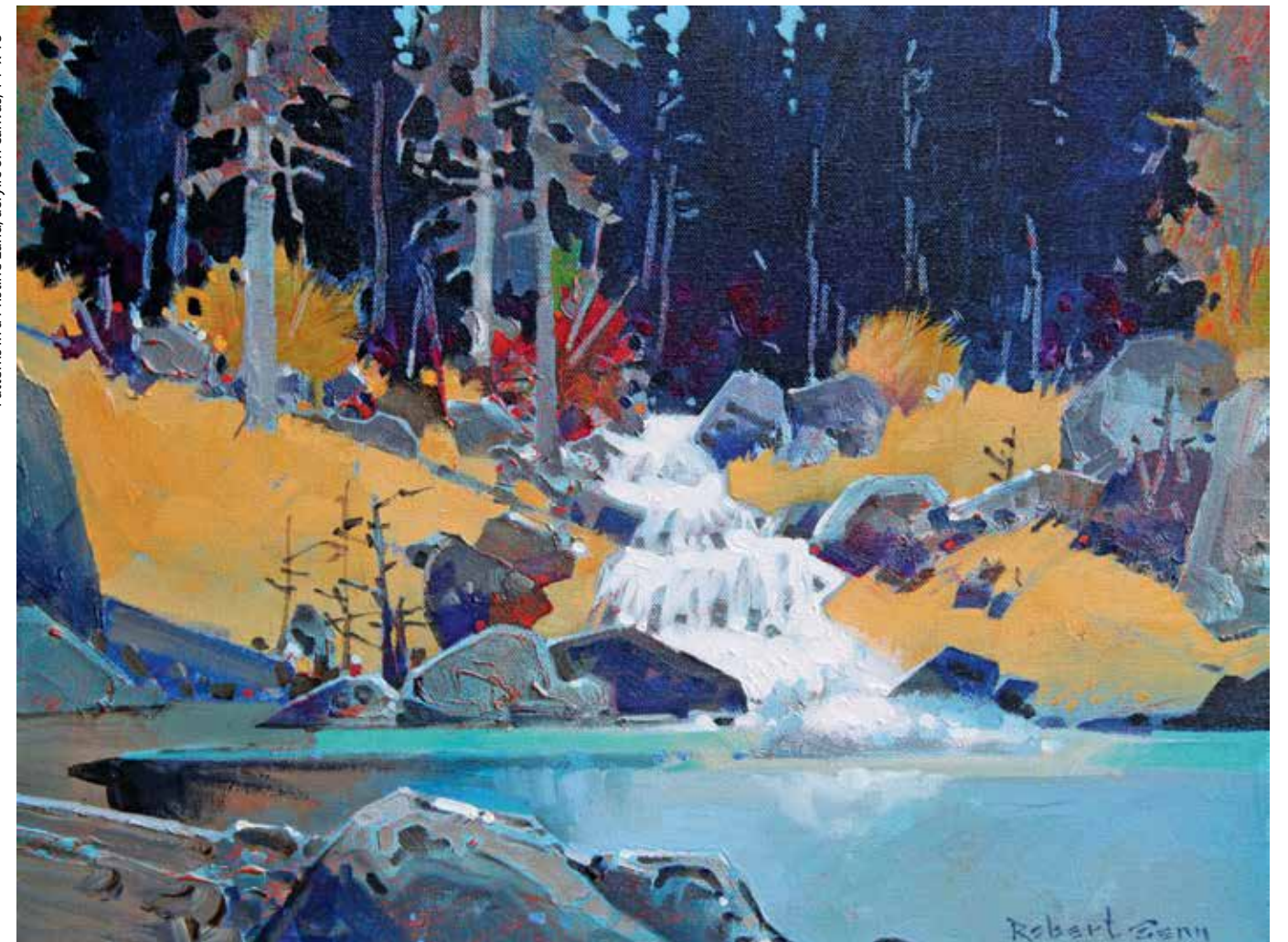
way. One of my hobbies, you might say, is to go and find and paint in the exact places where artists have sat or stood before. These include Tom Thomson, Lawren Harris, J.E. H. MacDonald, Emily Carr, John Singer Sargent, Carl Rungius and Walter Phillips. I like the continuity of it all and being part of the great 'hood.'

On Location / In Studio

Over the years, I have more and more enjoyed the business of working on location—en plein air. In my early days I loved the efficiency of my studio, but these days the "event" of composing and almost finishing a painting out-of-doors seems a privilege like no other. As well as subject matter, the very air is burned into your psyche, and the occasion often flows like a trance from which it is difficult to be shaken. Once, while painting at the back of my car, a man stealthily approached. I didn't notice him until his nose was right against my painting. Finally, he broke the silence: "That,"



Top Looking East from Rocky Point Ridge, Bugaboos, acrylic on canvas, 12" x 16"



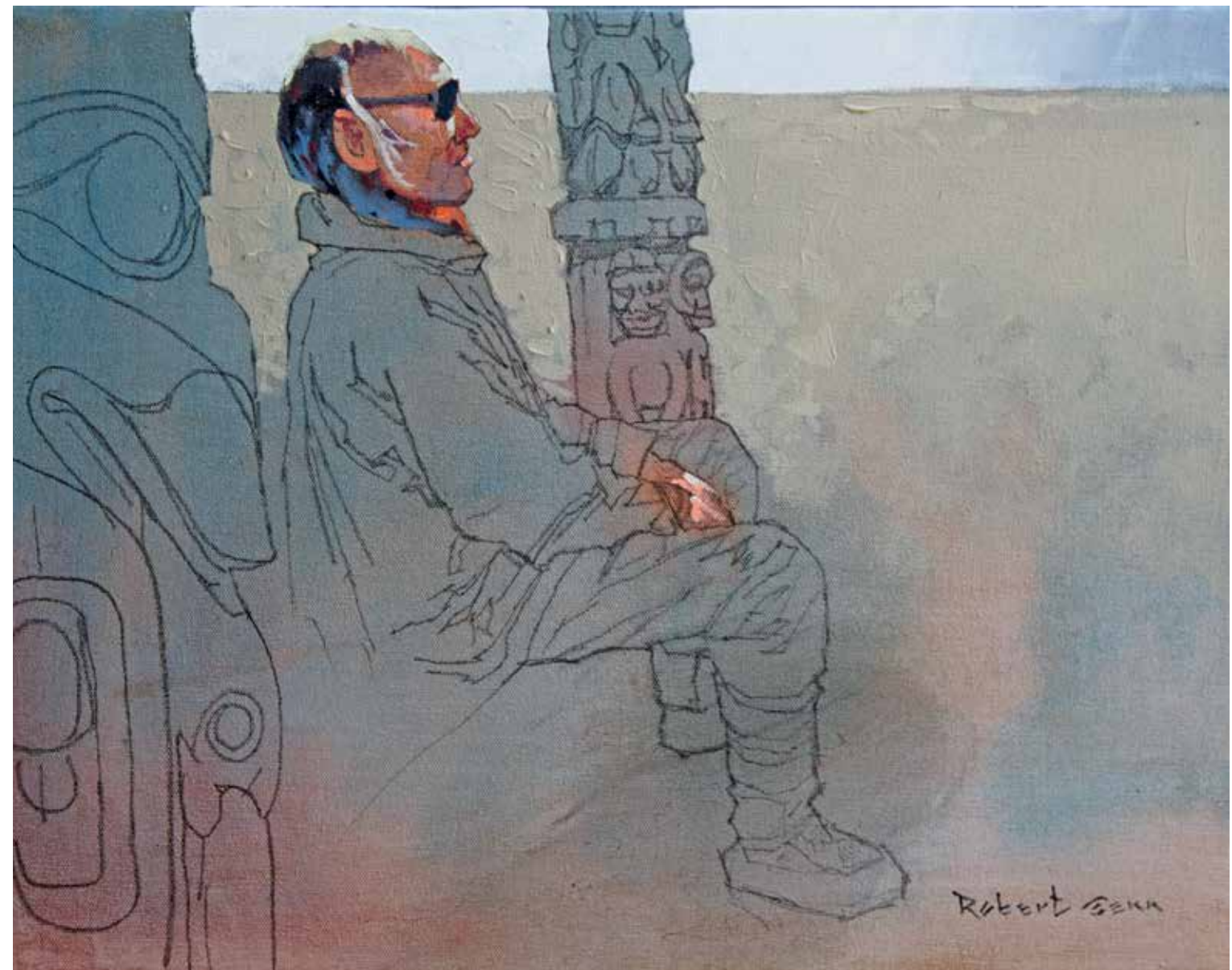
Patterns in a Pristine Land, acrylic on canvas, 14" x 18"



Above the Netloft, acrylic on canvas, 16" x 20"



Heritage, acrylic on canvas, 18" x 20"



Kragtark, acrylic on canvas, 14" x 18"

he said, "is a fantastic brush."

My actual indoor studio is a bit of a mess, but the things I need are filed in a way I can find them. My work is rather less messy, some would say "neat," and many have commented on this phenomenon. I think it has something to do with making sense out of chaos (like nature) and bringing it into a degree of organization and calculated design.

The space overflows with books. Unfortunately, no one ever lends me shelves, so the borrowed books are piled everywhere. As well as this wonderful reference library, I have over 165,000 transparencies, taken myself, of most of the things that have interested me. Cars, boats, flowers, birds, totems, mountains and villages are among them. To this we have now added what looks like about a million digital images. If and when I can't hike any more, I'll still have plenty of reference.

Inspiration

Weekends are excellent for painting. Fewer interruptions. I get up in the morning, go immediately to the studio and ask the question, "What do I want to do today?" Generally, I follow my nose and that determines my favourite thing. Sometimes I go down a wrong path, but all paths are valuable, even the misguided ones.

I like subject matter that has the potential for strong graphic qualities. Painting in the mountains is a good example. Patterns of snow against well-designed rock, lake reflections and talismanic trees give endless possibilities. While there are more than enough "ready-mades" to be found in the Canadian Rockies, a need is still there, in my mind, for further control and drama.

I have no other job. I have never had a job in the standard sense. I think I still work harder than



Bugaboo Spires, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 34"



below, Robert Genn at Lake McArthur, Yoho Park, BC

above, Moraine Lake Pattern, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 34"



a lot of my friends who have jobs. I'm not sure what "retirement" means. For anyone starting out in the craft, I have four simple words of advice: "Go to your room."

I often say "yes" to commissions, I just never say "when." Commissions can expose you to things you didn't know before, and in this way they can be wonderfully beneficial.

Painting is really quite easy to do, but difficult to do well. I truly honour those who do it well. More great artists are living today than in all of previous history, and masters too numerous to be mentioned in a fair way. We are all climbers on a great mountain. Some have more wind than

others. Or, as John Singer Sargent said, "Mine is the horny hand of toil."

Getting technical

These days I'm working in acrylic. My techniques vary from year to year and time to time. Right now I start off by drawing things in with a graphite pencil, punching in darks, glazing and then putting in main shapes in impasto, then glazing again and finishing. This process will probably change. The hardest part of the craft is getting it stopped.

Each work is an evolving piece. I continually ask, "What could be?" and often cave in to my whims. Sometimes, for example, I will add a couple of



above, Alpenglow, Bugaboos, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 34"
top right, Ballyness On Ballyness Bay, Donegal, Eire, acrylic on canvas, 16" x 20"
bottom right, Doagh, Donegal, acrylic on canvas, 16" x 20"





Lisa, acrylic on canvas, 11" x 14"

figures to a painting after the fact, and other times I will take out some figures. Painting is one of the few sports where you carry the ball the whole length of the field and you either score or do not score.

I tried ceramics once, but the salt and pepper shakers I made were not hollow. They were good for people who might need to cut down on salt. While I love oils, always will, acrylic is currently more efficient and permits wider exploration of technique and processes. I love it and would like to get to the bottom of it.

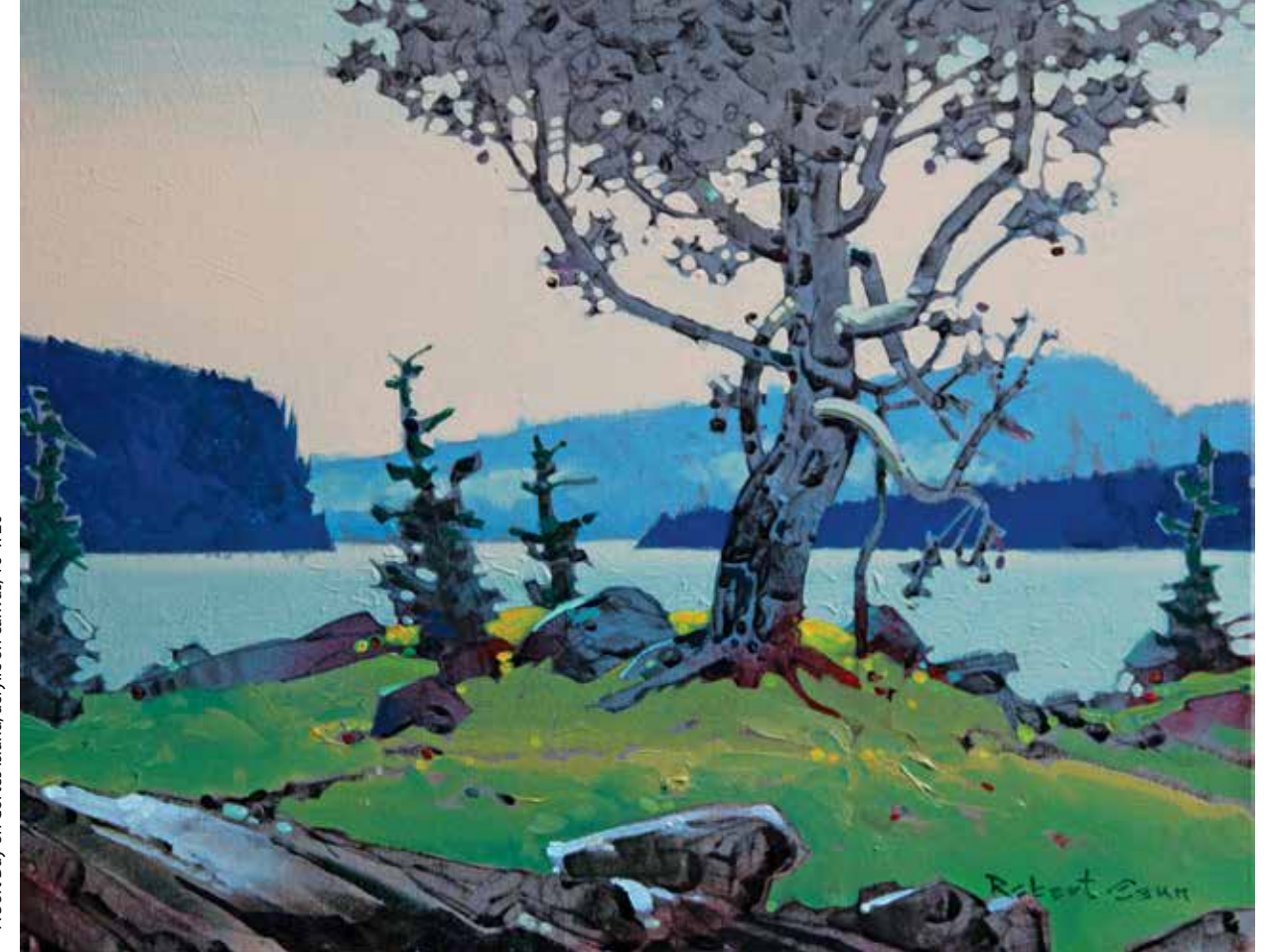
Past meets Present

Because I'm never completely satisfied with any work I produce, I tend to keep ragging at it. This is what propels me out of bed every morning. I come to my studio, coffee in hand, and look critically but optimistically in the face of yesterday's efforts. If nothing is forthcoming to repair, which

is sometimes the case, I ask myself, "What do you want to do today?" This question has served me well. It sounds selfish, but it's one of the keys to keeping on.

When I'm in the studio, I long for the excitement of the out-of-doors. When in the bush, I long for the efficiency of the studio. It's a constant yin and yang, particularly when I go to the mountains. In the mountains is the tangible connection to everyone who has felt the same needs. A couple of years ago, above Lake O'Hara, we found the old rusty can in which J.E.H. MacDonald had brewed his coffee back in the summer of '29. There I found places on rocks where he had cleaned his brushes. I love making art, but I also love being a part of the Brotherhood and Sisterhood.

A few years ago, the old cantilever bridge that Van Gogh painted was found dismantled in a warehouse. The city fathers of Arles in Provence



A Soft Day on Cortes Island, acrylic on canvas, 16" x 20"



A. MacDonald spot above Lake McArthur, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 40"



above, Alpenglow from Tamarack Glen, the Bugaboos, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 34"
top left, Bugaboo High Pattern, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 34"
bottom left, Bugaboo High, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 34"



Sketch, An Argentine Family I, acrylic and graphite on canvas, 12" x 16"



Sketch, Magellanic Penguins at Tombo, Patagonia, acrylic and graphite on canvas, 11" x 14"

decided to re-erect it across a canal that parallels the Rhone a little way south of town – really quite out in the country. I set up my easel in a nearby field, put on the blue tam that I wear while painting in France, opened a bottle of red and got busy. After a while a car pulled up nearby and a woman approached, watching silently for a few minutes. Nodding each other's presence, she asked, "Do you speak English?" It turned out she was not only Canadian but owned a restaurant in Vancouver. We had a good laugh. I think she had the idea at first that she was experiencing a genuine French Impressionist.

One of the ways to find out where a historical painter has set up an easel is by comparing distant mountains or hills that might appear in paintings. Taking a print of one of Emily Carr's along with me, I flew to the village of Ahousat on the west coast of Vancouver Island. It was a

windy day and the charter pilot almost turned me down. Arriving at the village, I climbed the hill behind and found the place where the confluence of the distant mountains matched Emily's painting. From where I re-painted her scene, I could see the pilot down at the float, valiantly hanging on to the wing of his plane so it wouldn't weathercock. After a while a small boy from the village, who had been with him on the float, came and stood beside me, silently watching. Eventually, he spoke up: "You see that pilot down there?" he asked, "He says you're crazy."

The Inner Joy

Painters are most often introverts. When young painters come to my studio seeking my opinion on their work, I frequently ask how they enjoy working on their own. With the art school social culture,

this is often something they have not considered. Painting is a job for a certain type of person, sort of a stubborn individualist with a strong focus and a butterfly mind. The job also requires an informed inner critic to try to filter out the inevitable failures. After a while, you become such an individualist that no one can help you very much.

I was recently a guest at the home of one of my collectors, where I overheard our host confide to another guest: "I've actually got the best work he ever did. He did this one while freezing in a tent at ten thousand feet." While the guy was mildly wrong on both counts, I couldn't help being impressed with the brilliance of our profession.

In many ways, painting is like fishing: you go out and catch stuff. Except in painting you really take nothing from the environment. I feel blessed that I'm one of those who can do this. And I like the idea that collectors can elect to own or not

own my work. This openness and freedom is part of the joy of it all.

Robert Genn is a fascinating, humorous and talented artist. Discover more at www.robertgenn.com and www.painterskeys.com or contact Robert by email at rgenn@saraphina.com or phone 604.538.9197 (studio) 604.538.9198 (home) 604.551.2207 (mobile).

Canadian Galleries representing his work are listed at www.robertgenn.com under Dealers. They include White Rock Gallery, White Rock, BC.; Hambleton Galleries in Kelowna, BC.; Canada House Gallery in Banff, Alberta; Mountain Galleries in Jasper and Whistler; West End Galleries in Edmonton and Victoria; Assiniboia Gallery in Regina; Mayberry Fine Arts in Winnipeg and Toronto; Terrence Roberts Gallery in Ottawa. Art consultants include Ingrid Wypkema, Vancouver, BC.