

Bob Kebic



A Love Affair with Colour

written by Ray Cronin

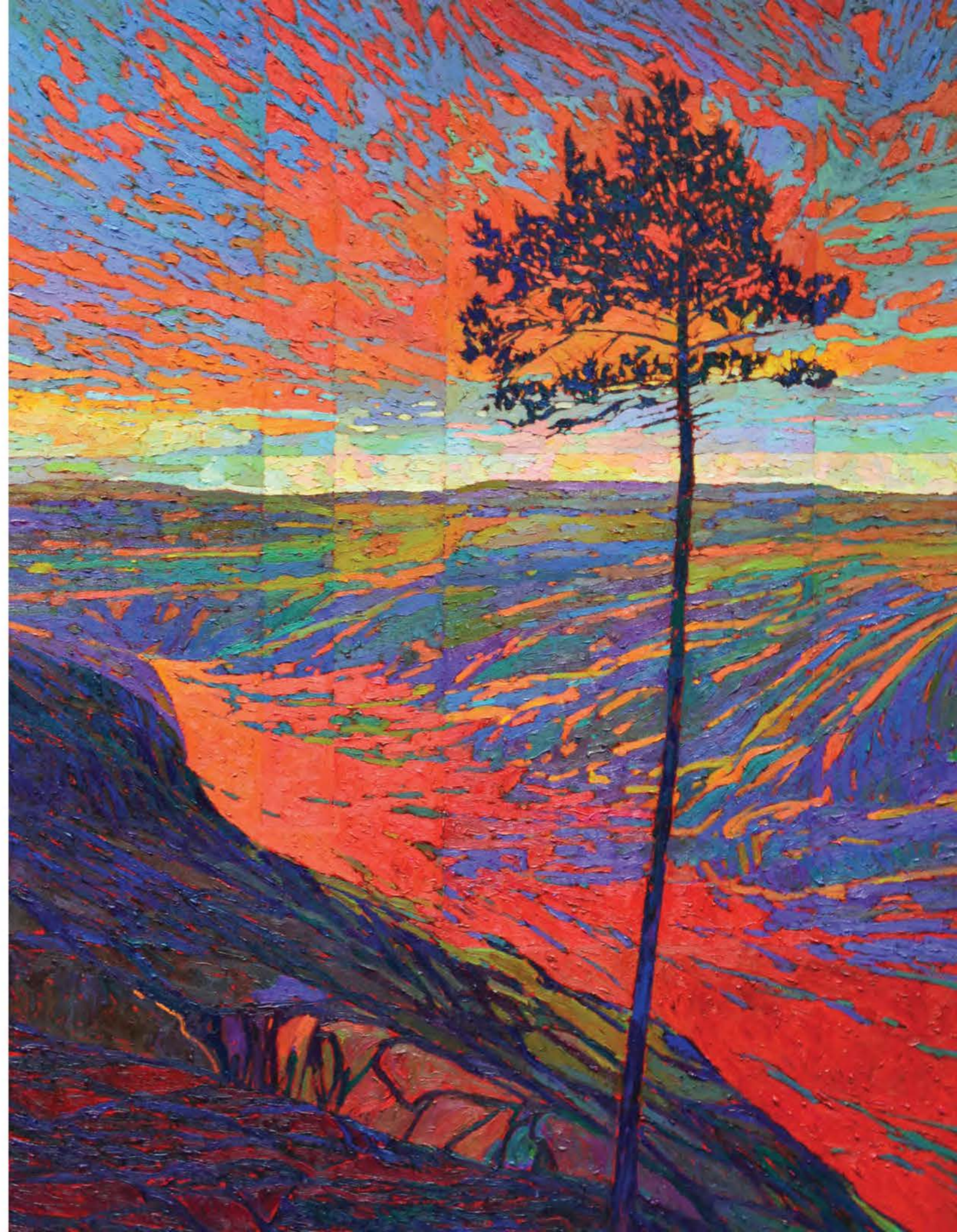
Toronto artist Bob Kebic started his path towards being an artist by writing stories. However, those literary pursuits soon gave way to drawing. As he remembers: "My journey as an artist began when I was five years old. I used to sit on my bunk bed and write war stories. And then one day I discovered that there were verbs, nouns, pronouns and adjectives and decided that writing was too complicated, so instead of writing about war, I began to draw my stories. I can still remember the drawings as the view through binoculars and soldiers crawling through the jungle with bayonets in their teeth. My journey as a storyteller was beginning."

The Art of Illustration

Early encouragement had him looking at a career in illustration. He studied at the Ontario College of Art and after graduating he went to work as a

commercial illustrator, first in the Sherman Laws Art Studio and then as a freelancer for publishing houses McClelland and Stewart, Harlequin Books, and General Publishing as well as for magazines, including Saturday Night. However, he didn't feel that he was being challenged and sought to push himself, and his art, further: "I then decided that I needed something more challenging and I felt I was not progressing as fast as I thought I should, so, I apprenticed under William Biddle for four years where I learned the art of doing finished illustrations and storyboarding for television commercials."

This became his primary focus, and throughout the 80s and 90s he worked mostly in television. It was a good fit, he remembers, "I love doing drawing for tv spots, it seems to be a natural for me, I have no trouble visualizing what the camera sees." Drawing was his primary focus in these years, often in mixed





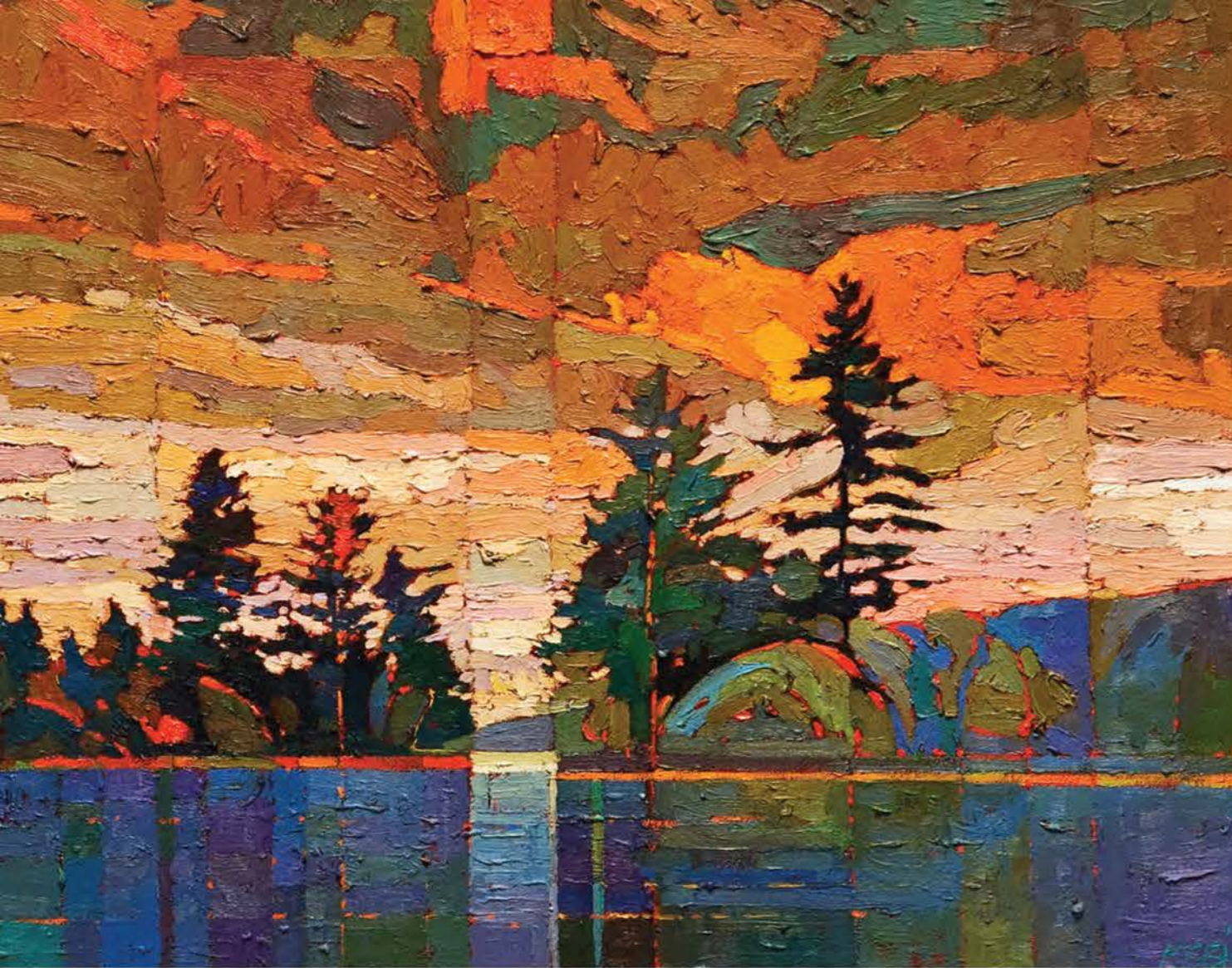
left, #1059, oil on canvas, 36" x 48"

media. Despite the demands of working for clients he still strove to experiment and to push his boundaries. "I worked with mixed mediums. I would use pretty much anything on board or canvas, from crayon, acrylics, chalk, pastel, Dr. Ph. Martin dyes, gesso and casein. I once got a great result using Turtle car wax with acrylics, the only problem was that it took forever to dry and in the advertising business, a quick turnover was essential."

Discovery Oils and Landscapes the Kebic Way

As the 90s progressed his desire to push his work further led to painting in oils — all the while bringing what he learned in drawing into his new medium. "I love drawing as much as painting," he says. "What I have learned from drawing I carry over to my painting and vice versa." As a teenager he had taken a few courses in oil painting, but it was essentially a new medium for him — and that very newness provided the challenge that he had been seeking throughout his career.

And in a further burst of inspiration, a vacation trip to Scottsdale Arizona pointed him in a completely unexpected direction: "Up to 1990, I had always drawn and painted people, I absolutely hated landscapes. I found them boring and medieval. I think that was because landscape paintings were always flat, and the colours always looked muted and subdued. My first paintings were cowboy and Indian paintings that were all the rage in Arizona and Texas. I took a holiday once to Scottsdale Arizona and was



above left, #1092, oil on canvas, 16" x 20"



above right, #1069, oil on canvas, 24" x 30"

looking forward to going through all the western galleries there. Well, after going through about four galleries, I was so sick of seeing cowboy paintings that I was never to do another one again. Fortunately, the next day I went to a gallery out in the middle of the desert called the Fleischer Museum. That was a life changing moment. The paintings were all early American impressionism, 1890 to 1915. I spent the better part of the day staring at these paintings. The fire alarm went off while I was sitting staring at the painting "Capistrano Mission" by Elmer Wachtel. I wasn't going anywhere, the place could burn down

to the ground, as far as I was concerned, that was a good place to die."

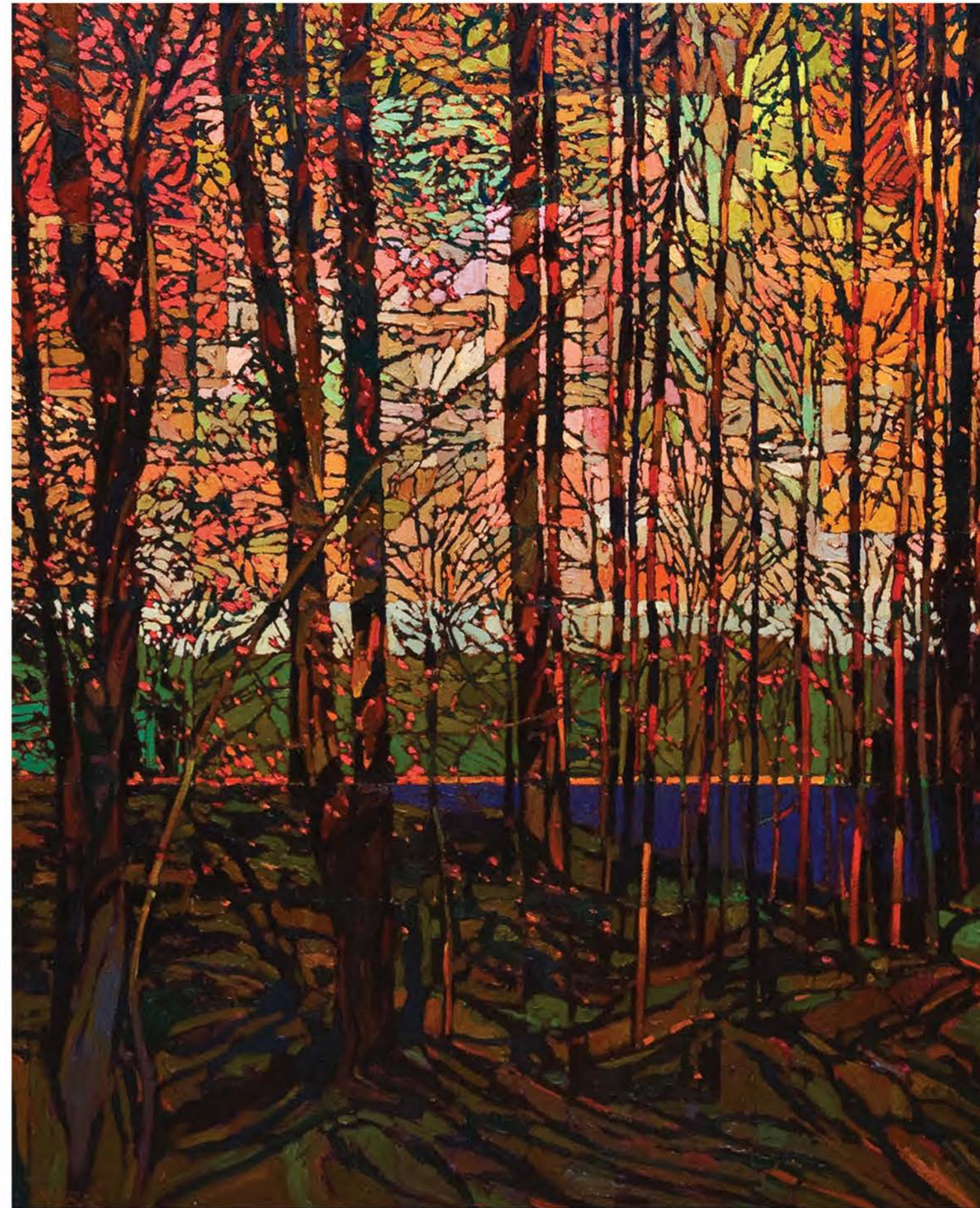
In Impressionism Kebic found an approach to the landscape that made sense to him — not how the landscape was supposed to look, but how he saw it, and how it felt. Oil painting also fed a need for expression in his work. As he says, "The brush strokes and colours spoke to me and I could feel the artist thoughts. To this day I still believe that through the brush strokes of a painting you can see the artists soul. Just take a close look at any Monet to prove that point." Colour became his abiding passion.

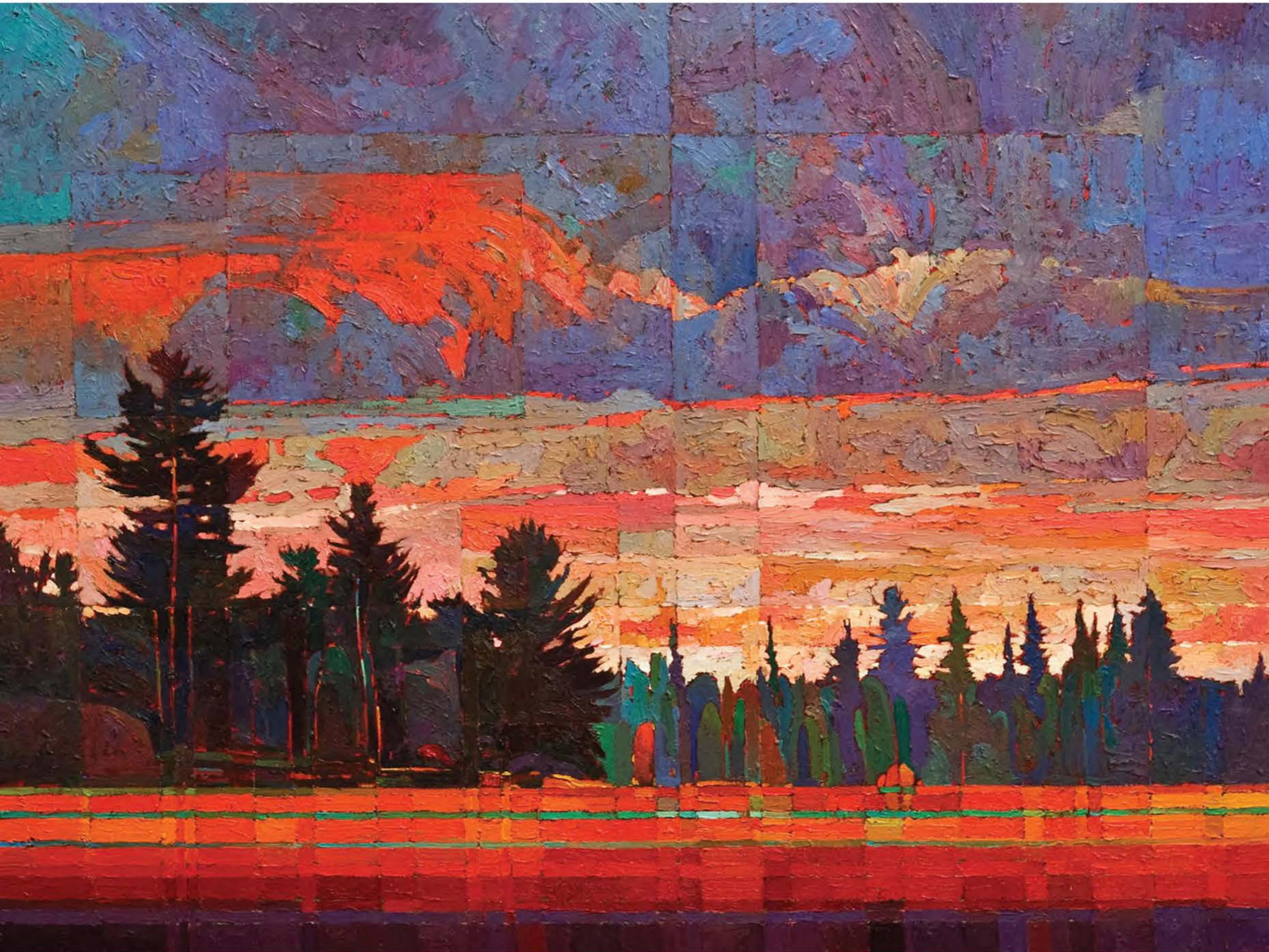
Break the Rules and Look a Little Bit Deeper

"For part of the mid 90s I lived in El Paso Texas. When you live in the desert, you learn that the desert is like a mirror, it will reflect the colour around it. At sunrise and sunset, the mountains will absorb the warm colours, but the shadows are cool in tone. That was where my love for contrasting colours was to come," says Bob. "I stopped seeing blue skies and green grass. Time to break the rules and look a little bit deeper. Your reality may see the ocean, but, what's underneath is where the magic is — the currents below shape what you see above. I broke

the mold and started to free myself from what other people expected. My paintings became very vibrant. My style was evolving. I was about to start separating myself from the norms."

Bob Kebic maintains he is a realist, despite the looser, brushy style he employs. "The colours that I use are not made up," he says. "I really see those colours when I am painting. Most galleries classify my paintings as abstract, but, to me they are realistic. That is what the landscape looks like. I once received an e-mail from a geologist who spent part of his year in the northern landscape, and he wanted to thank





Previous Page, left, #1063, oil on canvas, 36" x 48"
right, #1096, oil on canvas, 30" x 36"

This Page, left, #1061, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"

me for painting the colours that he sees everyday up north. That was a reaffirmation that I was not crazy or in the twilight zone and that some of us saw the same undercurrent."

A Complex Passion

His process is extremely labour intensive, with many layers of overpainting before he is satisfied with an image: "My paintings are really two or three paintings," says Bob. "I first do a complete painting, I will then completely paint over every square inch again often using totally different colours. (If you look closely at my paintings you may see different colours underneath). I may then paint sections again or completely repaint the entire canvas."

In the early days I sold my paintings with just the first painting and could have continued to do that, but, as I mentioned earlier, I challenged myself by painting over a perfectly sellable piece of art. The second and third over paintings have added more depth and push the limits. Because of this process, the amount of paint in each painting keeps growing. On a 30x40 painting I probably have about \$500 worth of paint. I do not use oils or thinners, I use paint straight out of the tube, which is extremely hard on brushes. That method also causes me to go through about a brush ever two hours. I buy my brushes in bulk, usually 100 at a time," states Bob.

"Life is a roller coaster ride," Kubic says, and he's enjoying every minute of it. "I needed to express my

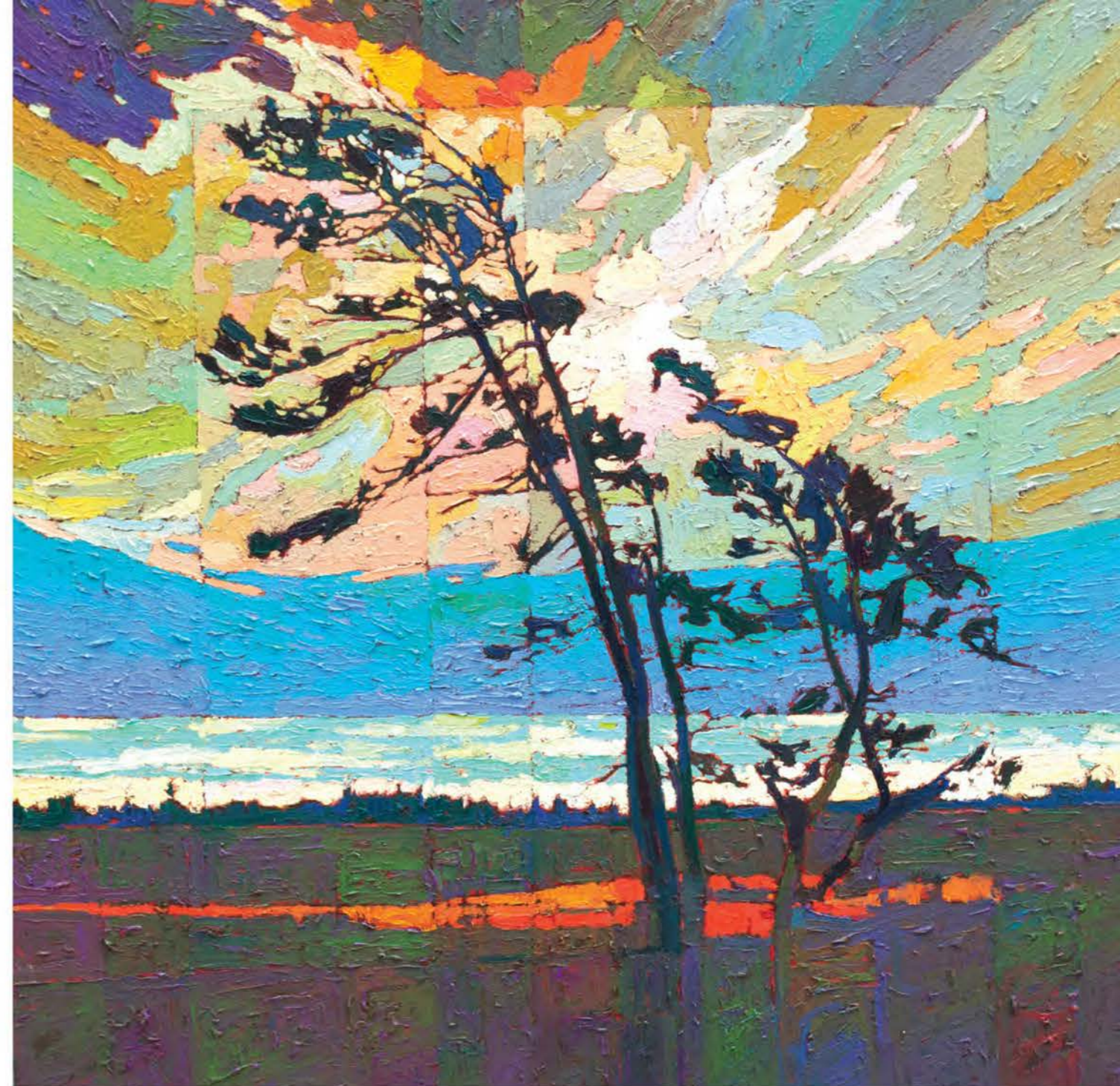


above left, #1037, oil on canvas, 20" x 20"

life's sum through my paintings, I had to find out who I was through this medium."

His love of painting carries over into how he thinks of his process. His work is not planned out in a

meticulous manner, with numerous studies and stops and starts. He paints in a flurry, a direct approach to the canvas that he equates with a love affair: "As far as how I do what I do goes, it is pure passion.



above right, #1078, oil on canvas, 30" x 30"

When I have the canvas on the easel, I don't paint it, I have an affair with it. It is romance. It is not forced. It just happens. Nothing is planned. I never know what the second brush stroke will be until I do the first

one. The tenth brush stroke is unknown until I do the ninth. It is evolution at its purist form. I never know what colour the painting will be. I don't decide — the total sum of what happens between my hand and



left, #992, oil on canvas, 30" x 24"

the canvas, my conscious and unconscious dictates."

His insistence on being challenged, on seeking to push his boundaries means that there is a restless, changing quality to his work. "Every painting has to be a challenge," he maintains. "If your painting doesn't challenge you, it won't change you. When you get comfortable with something, change it. That's how you learn."

Kubic is always learning, always pushing his work that little extra bit to see what more he can find out about himself and the way he sees the world. Ideally, he wants his viewers to share the journey with him:

"Every time someone looks at my painting" says Bob, "I want them to see something that they did not see before. A colour they never noticed or a brush stroke that suddenly appears anew. When you walk into the room with one of my paintings, I want it to speak to you, to be that landscape you remembered, but, as you move closer, I want it to start to fall apart and become abstract. Organized chaos. Disorder and confusion. That is where I live when I paint. I live in the brush stroke, I am only interested in the square inch I am painting, not the totality of the canvas. The joy is in the pieces of the puzzle, not what it looks like when they are all together."

Kubic's exuberance infuses his paintings, with their vibrant colours, staccato surfaces and joyful, driving

intensity — taking his viewers along with him on the roller coaster ride of life.

Information on galleries representing Bob Kubic is available on his web site at:

<http://bobkubicillustrations.com/>

