

# OUT IN THE OPEN

When Robert Malherbe goes to work, he immerses himself and his art in the great outdoors

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A sense of viewing and evaluating the world through an artist's eyes is the common thread that binds Robert Malherbe's latest exhibition. The prolific painter's latest exhibition *In a brighter light* is a collection of dramatic landscapes and dreamy still life oil paintings.

While individually stunning, Malherbe emphasises each work is "more than just a profound piece of decoration".

"The magic of painting is to feel what someone else has felt, to see what someone else has seen.

"You don't always get nice, sunny days. You get days when it rains or days when you get a head cold and you still need to be painting."

The landscapes featured in his exhibition, on show at Jan Murphy Gallery in Brisbane until July 9, were painted over a series of family vacations to Jervis Bay on the New South Wales south coast.

Malherbe, 51, says he tries to visit the region six times a year with his family. He works while they holiday. A typical painting session involves driving to a scenic spot where his wife and children will swim, explore or relax, while he sets up his materials and paints.

"I typically paint all in one go, *alla prima*," he says, estimating it takes him an average of three hours to complete an artwork.

"I might wander out with a canvas, an easel



and some paints, walk around and think, 'oh gosh, that looks good', pull up there and start painting. When the painting is finished, we've come up with this intricate way of putting it in boxes so we can put it in the boot of the car and get it back home safely.

"We had a few disasters, coming back with beautiful paintings where the seatbelt buckle was dragged across it!

"At the end of a day, we'll sit down to dinner and I'll have done two or three paintings."

When Malherbe started painting outdoors two decades ago, he was met with bemusement from within the professional art world.

"It's far more acceptable now than it once was," he says, recalling how he was likened to "a Sunday painter" when he explained his process.

"I paint the things around me, I paint directly from life and I need to spend a lot of time in these areas."

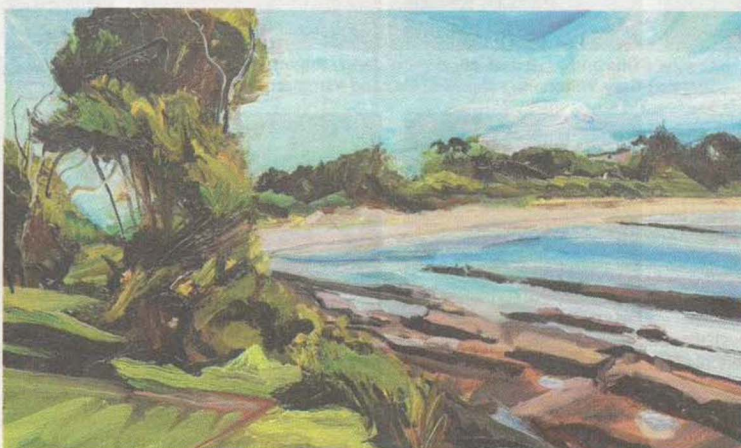
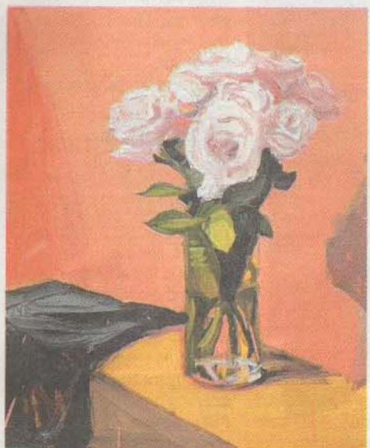
The self-taught artist emigrated to Australia from Mauritius in 1971, left school at 16 and enjoyed a successful career as an animator, before mounting his first solo exhibition at the age of 35.

He now divides his time between his family home in Blackheath, in the Blue Mountains, and his studio in Sydney's Paddington.

The still-life pieces featured in *In a brighter light* are predominantly floral arrangements that play on light and shadow to provide depth of perspective. They were painted in one of Malherbe's home studios. He describes them as companion pieces to his landscapes as they were all painted between late-2015 and early-2016.

"I'll set something up and look at it for a while, then walk away, leave the room," he says of his approach. "When I walk back in, I like that sense of feeling surprised, almost like it's an epiphany."

Robert Malherbe: *In a brighter light*, Jan Murphy Gallery, Fortitude Valley, until July 9



Landscapes of life: Robert Malherbe's works (clockwise from main) *Headland 1*, *Studio Still Life*, *Large View of South Coast Beach*, and *Studio Roses 2* are part of his Brisbane exhibition.