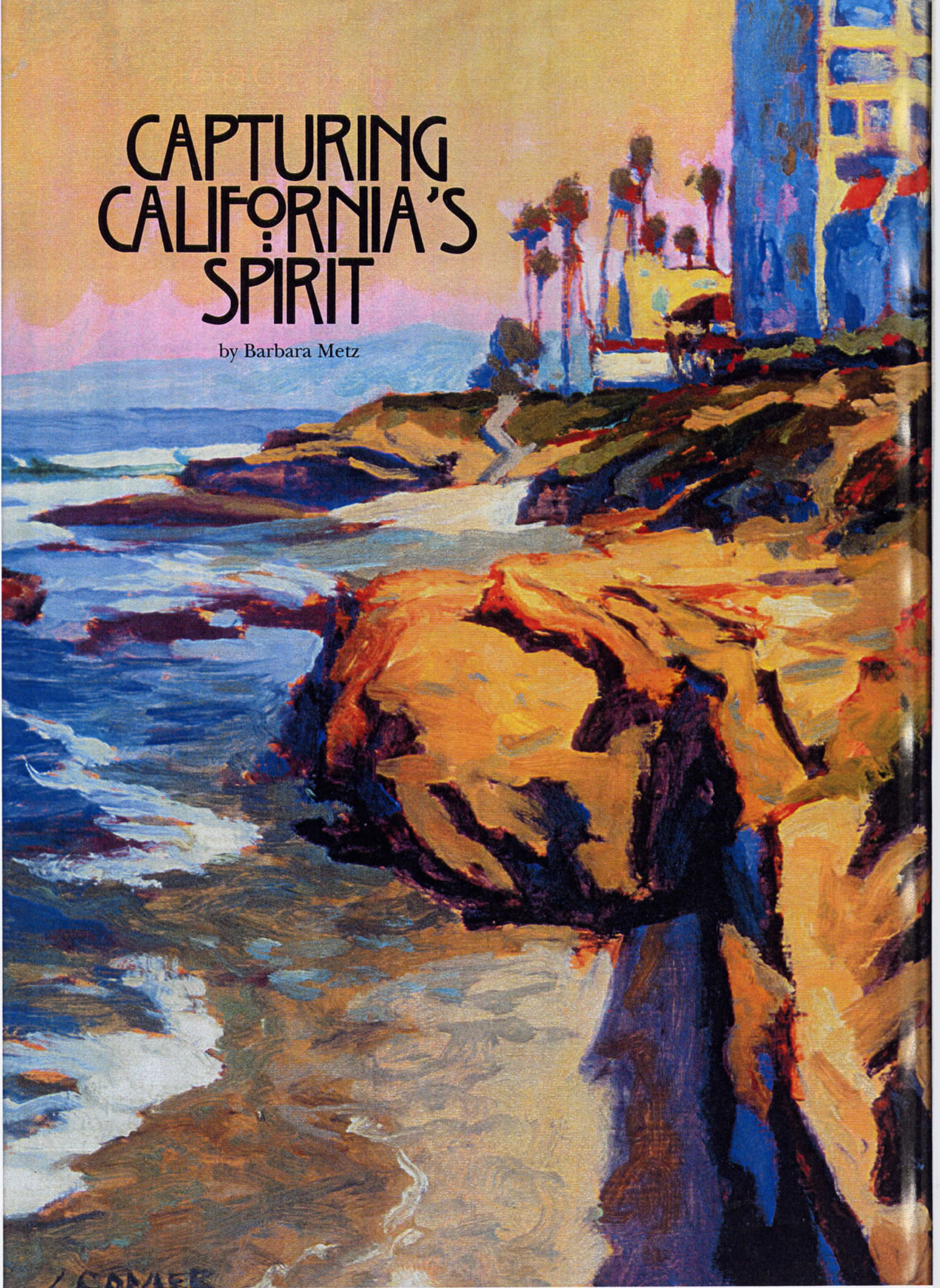


CAPTURING CALIFORNIA'S SPIRIT

by Barbara Metz



1 CAMER



La Jolla (24" x 36")

George Washington Carver said, "If you love it enough, anything will talk to you." Observing the paintings of John Comer, it is clear that California talks to him. The ocean talks to him, the boulder-strewn cliffs talk to him, the seaside villages talk to him.

Comer is a landscape artist whose colorful paintings convey the essence of California.

His paintings encompass the landscape—complete with cars, buildings, people and roads—but they seem to transcend these man-made objects and connect with the spirit of the land, which he uncovers in his examination of motion, weather, and water.

"While John characterizes his work as realistic, his paintings go beyond realism," says Patricia Smith, owner of Art Expressions Gallery in San Diego, who is sponsoring a major exhibition of his

work—the first in San Diego—from May 4 through June 22. "John's paintings have a timeless, mythic quality. It is as if he has captured the spirit of the land that has

lured generations to forsake their comfortable lives in established places and become Californians," she says.

Comer's paintings, which have been



Windansea (30" x 40")

Buildings, Cliffs & Sea (7" x 10")



La Jolla Cove

shown in scores of solo and group exhibitions in the West, have a physicality to them that pays homage to California's startling contrasts and stunning physical diversity.

He maintains that the essence of a place always remains—regardless of the current usage. “Look at a valley that’s dissected by a freeway: it usually follows the contour of the land. Or think about San Francisco: although it is a dense urban center, the buildings hug the land and

further define the contours. In either case, the integrity of the land remains,” he says.

Comer finds the discipline of painting makes it the perfect medium to communicate the essence of the land. “Painting is like poetry. It is lean and spare. The limitation of the medium enables the painter to distill things down. All the things you don’t show sharpens the ability of the painter to communicate.”



Avalon (20" x 30")



Cliff Path, La Jolla (30" x 40")

Comer says that painting was the original expression of ancient man. "I think painting affects us on a cellular level," he says. "In today's world, where people are bombarded with images and messages, taking the time to really experience a painting can hit an emotional mark, like few other experiences."

Comer's paintings are very experience-oriented. His affinity for California—and especially the California coast—has grown out of years on the water. He has surfed and sailed the coastline from Point Reyes to the tip of Baja.

"Both surfing and sailing are very physical," he says. "You are interacting with nature; you are part of it. Similarly,

painting is a very physical medium. Maintaining the energy of the water out of the water is a big part of the rhythm of painting for me."

Surfing and sailing have affected his perception of the water, which is evident in his numerous water-oriented paintings. "As beautiful as the old *plein aire*



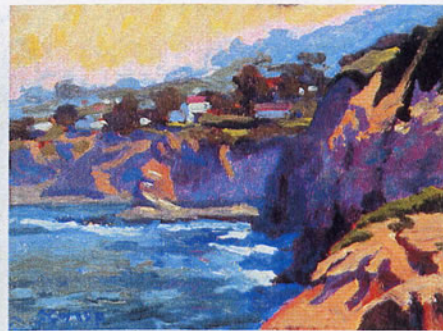
**John
Comer**
"La Luz Del Playa"

oil on canvas 36" x 48"

Sunlight & Shadow

Paintings of California by John Comer • Robin Hall
May 4th - June 22, 2002

Mon.-Fri. 9-5 • Sat. 10-5 • And by appointment
2645 Financial Court • Suite C
San Diego, CA 92117
858-270-7577 www.artexpressionsgallery.com



Morning, Arch Beach (18" x 24")

paintings are, it's easy to observe that some of the early California painters didn't really comprehend the movement of water the way a waterman would."

To maintain his connection with the ocean, Comer and his wife, Lesley, and their 9-year-old son, Reef, live about 150 feet from the ocean on the Central Coast. "When I get stuck, I go down and study the anatomy of water—how it moves over rocks, how it spreads over sand. It's not mysterious. It just takes study," he says.

They also moved to the Central Coast to escape the distractions of Southern California. They live in an old wood-frame beach bungalow. Comer paints in a room with little to recommend it but its northern exposure.

Before moving to the Central Coast in 1996, the Comers lived in Santa Barbara, where John shared a studio with Ray Strong, the 90-something grandfather of Santa Barbara's Oak Group of extraordinary landscape painters.

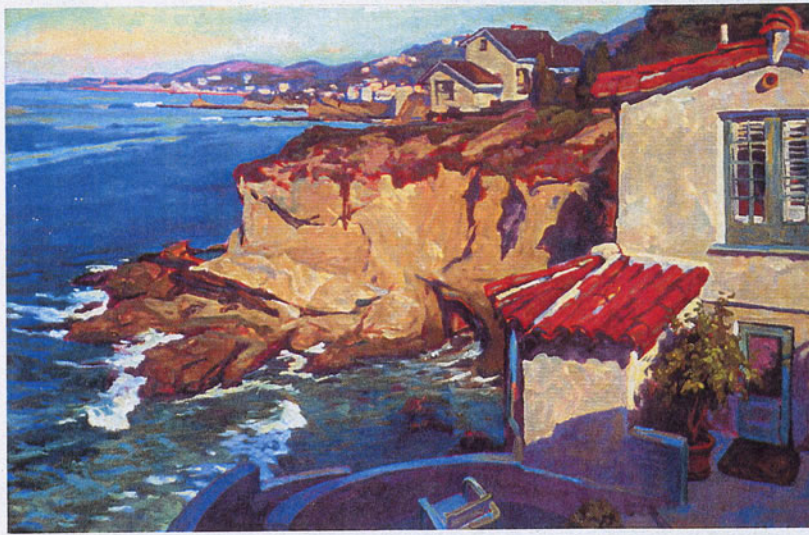
Comer shares Strong's feel for the natural world. "I've seen Ray in the studio with his eyes closed, waving outstretched arms, divining what the clouds are doing in a clearing wind."

Comer also absorbed Strong's sense of "Dynamic Symmetry"—a concept based on the idea that symmetry is static and doesn't move visually, where as asymmetry is off-balance, but does move visually. "This helps me bring man-made forms like roads, buildings, cars and land and sea forms into a cohesive whole," he says.

Strong is one of many painters who



Deserted Beach Houses (24" x 36")



3 Arch Bay (24" x 36")

in historic *plein aire* paintings, and for several years Comer has been invited to participate in the Plein Aire Painting Invitational at the Laguna Beach Museum of Art.

His exhibition at Art Expressions Gallery, "Sunlight & Shadow: Paintings of California by John Comer and Robin Hall," is his first showing in San Diego County. However, he is no newcomer to the area. He has painted approximately 20 pieces that reflect the magic of San Diego. He started to paint in La Jolla at the urging of Pat Curren, one of California's surfing legends, who was a regular at La Jolla's Windansea Beach.

"The things I like the best about La Jolla," he says, "are the light, the weather, and the fact that you can paint from any direction. With its mixture of natural beauty and interesting architecture, it's iconographic coastal California—the California that is so alluring it's given a westward tilt to the United States. ■"

have influenced Comer to become more of himself.

"I have taken bits and pieces from many painters and teachers. Two important influences have been the friends I paint with, landscape painter Michael Drury, and Hank Pitcher, an artist and professor of art from the University of California at Santa Barbara."

Comer also credits the art of George Inness, a nineteenth-century American landscape painter, as having a profound effect on him. "I was privileged to see a major retrospective of his work," said

Comer. "His ability to give the viewer an emotional connection with the subject of his paintings was exceptional."

While Comer feels that both field and studio work are integral to his creative process, *plein aire* aficionados have embraced his work. He is a member of the prestigious California Art Club, an organization noted for its *plein aire* artist/members, and the "Oak Group," a Santa Barbara-based group of painters whose work benefits conservation causes. His work has been shown at the George Stern Fine Arts, a gallery that specializes

"Sunlight & Shadow: Paintings of California by John Comer and Robin Hall," at Art Expressions Gallery May 4 through June 22. Artists' reception 5-8 p.m., May 4. For information, call 858-270-7577.