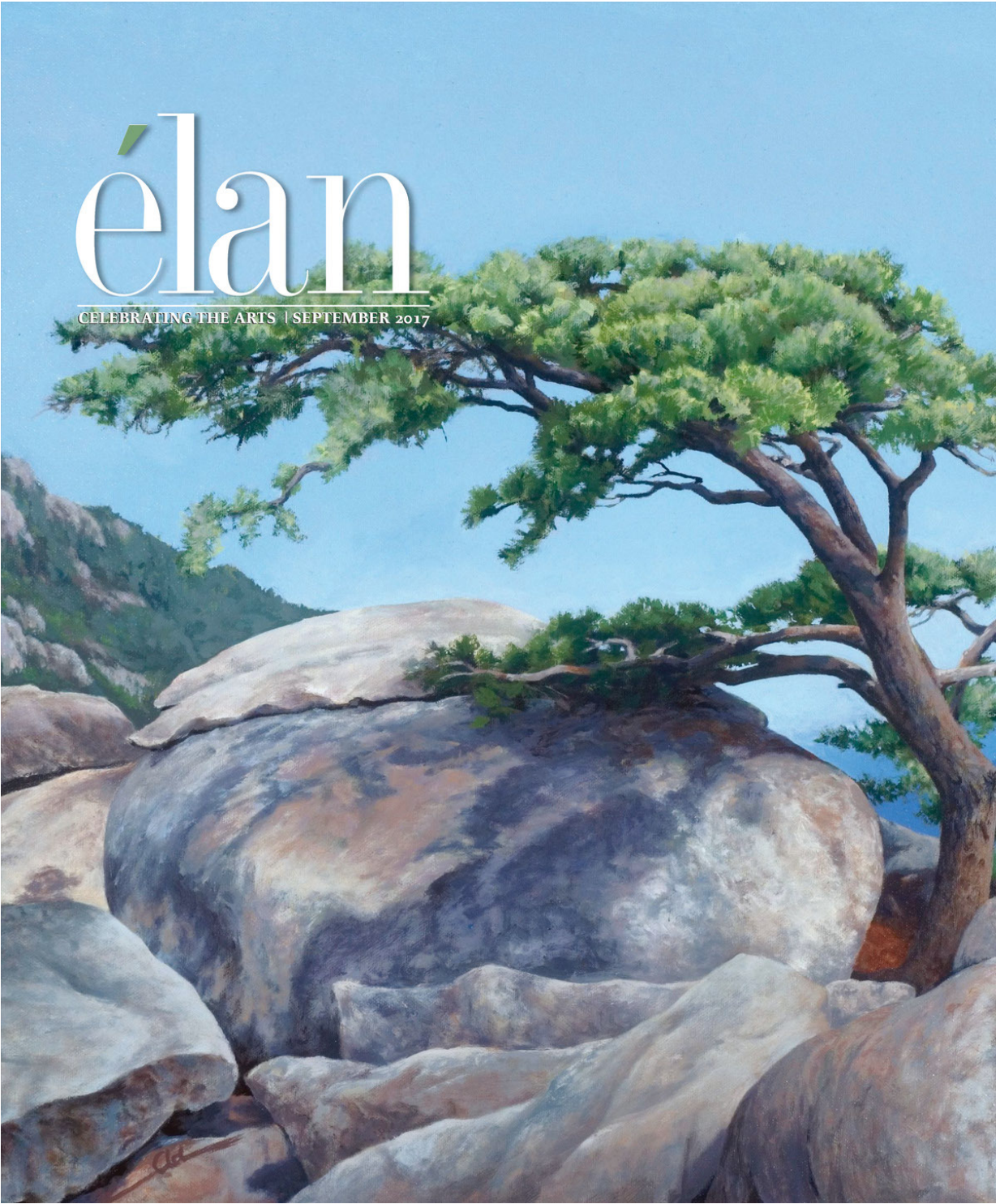


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CELEBRATING THE ARTS | SEPTEMBER 2017



ART IN THE FIRST PERSON

Painting the Backcountry

CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH LANDSCAPES
BY KEVIN H. ADAMS



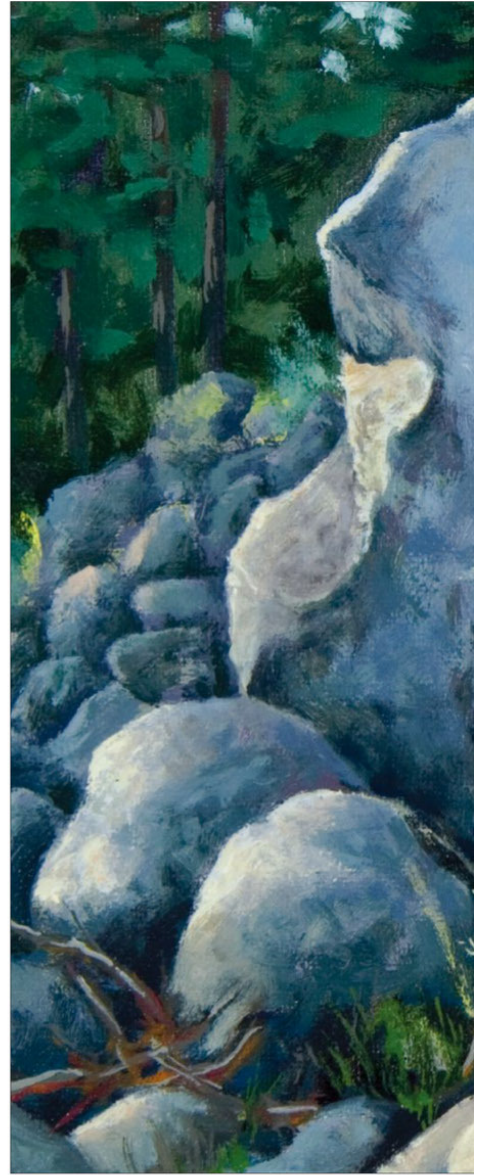
*Shenandoah National Park
Artist-in-Residence Kevin H. Adams*

Thanks to those who have mentored me over the years, I have had the opportunity to create art since I was a boy. And my experiences as a professional artist have ranged from documenting military exercises as a combat artist in the United States Marine Corps to designing sets for the Washington National Opera. But my first love always has been to immerse myself in nature and to share what absorbs me through my landscape paintings.

It might seem odd for someone who lives 11 miles from the Thornton Gap entrance to Shenandoah National Park to have applied to be the 2017 Artist-in-Residence at the Park, but to those who know me and my habit of immersion, it wasn't a surprise. And I am thrilled to have received the residency. I spent two weeks in June living and working in the park.

It was fun, to be sure, but it was also hard work, and the work came with a feeling of serious responsibility. I have always been drawn to and influenced by the work of Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt. The work of these two artists (and others) literally influenced a nation, helping to convince our country's leaders to set lands aside for parks and to protect them as national treasures. I saw this residency as an opportunity to continue in that tradition, at a time when our country's commitment to preserving its parks is in question.

My time in the park was a richer experience than I could have hoped. I thought I knew the park because I hike in it often, live in its shadow and see it from my studio in Rappahannock County. But living in the park allowed me to be on location at an overlook or on a trail every day before sunrise. To start the day watching the sun crest the far horizon, and slowly hit the east-facing mountains around me, is an experience that will stay



with me forever. To have seen the morning fog dance between ridges and evaporate as it rises will be a part of every painting I do, even when the painting is of a blue sky at midday. And to finish the day painting at sunset gave a complete arc of the park's life that day. There are moments, color rhythms, in the backcountry of the park, that a daytripper does not see, and that will stay with



"Rocks and Light," oil on canvas, 22" x 28"

me. My job now is to translate those images into paint on canvas.

I intentionally took more supplies with me than I could use; I didn't want to run out and come home with regrets. I started 40 paintings, ranging in size from 8" x 10" to 3' x 3' square. For the larger canvases, I created temporary easels to support them off the ground.

Knowing that in June there would be a lot of green around me, and that I would be drawn to the rocks and rivers within the park, I primed the majority of the canvases a grey-blue as a base coat. My hope while on location was to try to capture the basic composition and to get right the fleeting color that was in front of me at that moment. With that start, and my notes, sketches,



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—Kevin H. Adams

photos and color studies, I’ve got a big job ahead to finish the paintings, but I can’t wait each morning to work on them.

The Artist-in-Residence program is supported by a generous donation from the Shenandoah National Park Trust. As its president, Susan Sherman, explained, “Donors to the Trust are proud to fund programs like artist-in-residence, which explore new opportunities to connect people with this remarkable landscape.”

And that is exactly what I wanted to do. As part of my proposal for the residency, I planned to invite members of the public who found me painting out on the trails to paint with me. I wanted to share the amazing opportunity of taking the time to understand a little more clearly what was in front of us, slowing down and savoring the colors and textures and changing light of the day. Thanks to a grant from the Claudia Mitchell Fund of the Rappahannock Association for Arts in the Community, I was able to take small canvases, paints, brushes and other supplies with me for park visitors to use. With the park being 105 miles long, I planned my

painting locations in advance, and the park publicized my daily location widely and a sandwich board at the day’s trailhead alerted others to my presence. Some 60 people, ranging in age from 3 to 81, stopped to paint with me, sometimes for a couple of hours. Their smiles were a great reward. I hope that this, and the work that I produce, will help others recognize the value of preserving our national parks for future generations.

This was not my first venture into the backcountry to document the fragile nature and beauty of our national parks. The U.S. Department of the Interior twice commissioned collections of my work: for the 75th anniversary of the Grand Canyon National Park, I undertook a 30-day whitewater rafting trip down the Colorado; I created a series of paintings of the inner gorge of the canyon. For the 85th anniversary of Glacier National Park, I hiked for a month through the backcountry and produced a series of paintings of that park. Both collections were shown at the Department of the Interior Museum in Washington, D.C. and in the parks themselves.



Above: "Forest Light," oil on canvas, 30" x 40"; and Kevin with a park visitor and fellow artist

Opposite: "Corbin Cabin Trail," oil on canvas, 24" x 30"



Where my work from this residency will be shown remains to be decided, although The Gay Street Gallery in Little Washington will host an exhibition sometime in the coming year. In addition, as a member of the Salmagundi Club in New York City, which is dedicated to promoting American art, including representational landscape painting, I will be showing some of the work there in the months ahead. Please come find me. I might have an extra canvas that you can use to paint, too!

You can see Kevin's work at the following upcoming shows:

3-Person Show at Gay Street Gallery, 337 Gay Street, Washington, VA; opening reception 4 p.m. - 7 p.m. on August 19 through October 16, 2017

Solo Show at Julie Heller Gallery, 2 Gosnold Street, Provincetown, MA; September 1 through 14, 2017

3-Person Show at Gay Street Gallery, 337 Gay Street, Washington, VA; opening reception 4 p.m. - 7 p.m. on October 21, 2017, through January 8, 2018

Kevin H. Adams | www.kevinhadams.com