

SEASON

LA
FRONTERA

RICHARD
MCWHANNELL





LA FRONTERA

Season is delighted to present *La frontera* by Richard McWhannell. The show develops out of two visits made by the artist to the 'borderlands' that span Mexico in the south and New Mexico and Texas in the north. During the first trip, made in 2017 in the company of his wife, Donogh, and daughter, Ruth, McWhannell met Roberto Salas, a fellow artist from El Paso, Texas, who became his guide for the second trip, made in 2019. The paintings in *La frontera* represent a poetic travelogue, documenting sights, evoking stories, and gesturing towards the manifold forces—geological, cultural, political, and economic—that have shaped the terrain.

PART ONE: TEXAS TO NEW MEXICO

OCTOBER 2017

When You Comin’ Back, Red Ryder?, a play by Mark Medoff, was given me by a native-born New Mexican woman in 1975 or ’76. Mark Medoff was a friend and former teacher of hers. She, Judy, and her New Zealand husband, Rob, went back to her New Mexico for a time that winter while I took care of their house and dog in Upper Moutere. On their return, Judy said that I would love New Mexico and must go there sometime. 42 years later I did.

Daughter Ruth came down to Houston, Texas, from Toronto and met us, her Ma and Pa. Houston was landing place and a place of intense reconnaissance before we boarded a train that took us across Texas to El Paso. At midnight our train pulled into San Antonio station for a two-hour layover and offered a chance to roam in the city that grew around the Alamo. Back underway we woke to southwest Texan desert and I plugged into the *Hell or High Water* soundtrack on my phone and was agog looking at the infinite variety in sameness, pinching myself while trundling through this land listening to Nick Cave, Townes Van Zandt, et al. Two women beside me became new best friends and shared their tragic life stories. Neither appeared beaten. My eavesdropping reminded me of the gregariousness and lay-it-out-there quality I love in Americans at home.

When our car’s lunch call came, we moved to the dining car where returning El Pasoan, Roberto Salas, asked if he might join us. He became our friend. He’d recognised where we were from as Donogh was wearing a pounamu pendant. No such thing as coincidence, Roberto is a ‘visual artist’ and we all just got on. Back home in El Paso he took us up the city end of the Franklin Mountains to a viewing place where we saw how one city across two countries (El Paso, United States, and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico) appears under street light. The difference is stark. Roberto’s people live on both sides of the Rio Grande. He then took us out for a Tex-Mex dinner at the iconic Leo’s Mexican Food Restaurant, after which he enquired what we’d like to do next. I suggested a place where we might drink tequila and beer. Did we know of Marty Robbins?, he asked. I answered, ‘Grew up with him and his ‘Out in the West Texas Town of El Paso ... Nighttime would find me in Rosa’s Cantina.’ So, he took us there.

It’s his local, a little bar on a highway by the banks of the Rio Grande. Clientele that night: two shaven-headed and tattooed white Texans who may both have been named Brian. The one who’d licked his lips and said, ‘I’m Brian,’ as he offered Ruth a Tequila and suggested she ditch the olds and follow him into the Badlands, sat on the opposite side of the bar to three older Mexicans, who nodded in our general direction and continued their engagement as regulars. On our arrival, she who is now dubbed Rosa said she’d have to see Ruth’s ID, as she looked younger than her 16-year-old daughter. I’d guess Rosa to be about 35. Ruth is nearer 35 than 16! The sensation I have in this region of the US is that I’m walking on crushed bone and splintered arrow heads. I love the place. It’s so stark, so dun-coloured, so gritty and so far from home!

From El Paso we drove up beside the Franklin Mountains into New Mexico. Skirting Las Cruces, we’d driven for some time into the state when we came to a border security check point. There was something farcical about it, reminiscent of a scene in *Blazing Saddles*, in which travellers funnel through an open portal in the desert out of blind obedience. Here we were having our trunk checked while on either side was vast mesquite-covered desert that may have been offering cover to a migrant caravan.

Before leaving on our southwestern odyssey, I’d painted several pictures about what I felt West Texas and New Mexico might be like and what fascinated me about the place. The great appeal of that landscape, the human history and the collision of cultures in these border states. When you’re at a check point, you can’t but think about Trump’s wall. What would the migratory fauna (other than human) do were there to be this absurd barrier? If there’s to be a line in the sand, why not plant a lovely hedge? There was no wall for Geronimo. He roamed spirited across a border that for him wasn’t there. He got sucked as dry as mesquite in the end, but that was some time after he’d warriored fierce to defend his truth and kin. This is no country for old men.

We tripped all that way to see our ‘girl’ from Toronto, and met in the south because dad had the notion that it’d be good to go to the



southwest and see the landscape and cultures Dee Brown, Cormack McCarthy and Larry McMurtry write about, the place of *My Darling Clementine*, *The Magnificent Seven*, *Hell or High Water*. In a place of its own, there's the television series *Breaking Bad*. Then, too, it's the land of Geronimo, Chacoans and other Pueblo communities, of conquistadors, proselytizers, horses, white dogs, arroyos, buttes and mesas. At first, it was tourism, more than thought of painted things that would spill from it. But the 'trip' ranged long after our stay, and the painted things did spill.

RICHARD MCWHANNELL

Jesse and Jane's, 2020

Oil on canvas on board

200 x 300mm

325 Terrace Street SE,

Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Location: Breaking Bad. The

place where Walter White

lost his humanity compass

deciding Jane's fate, robbing

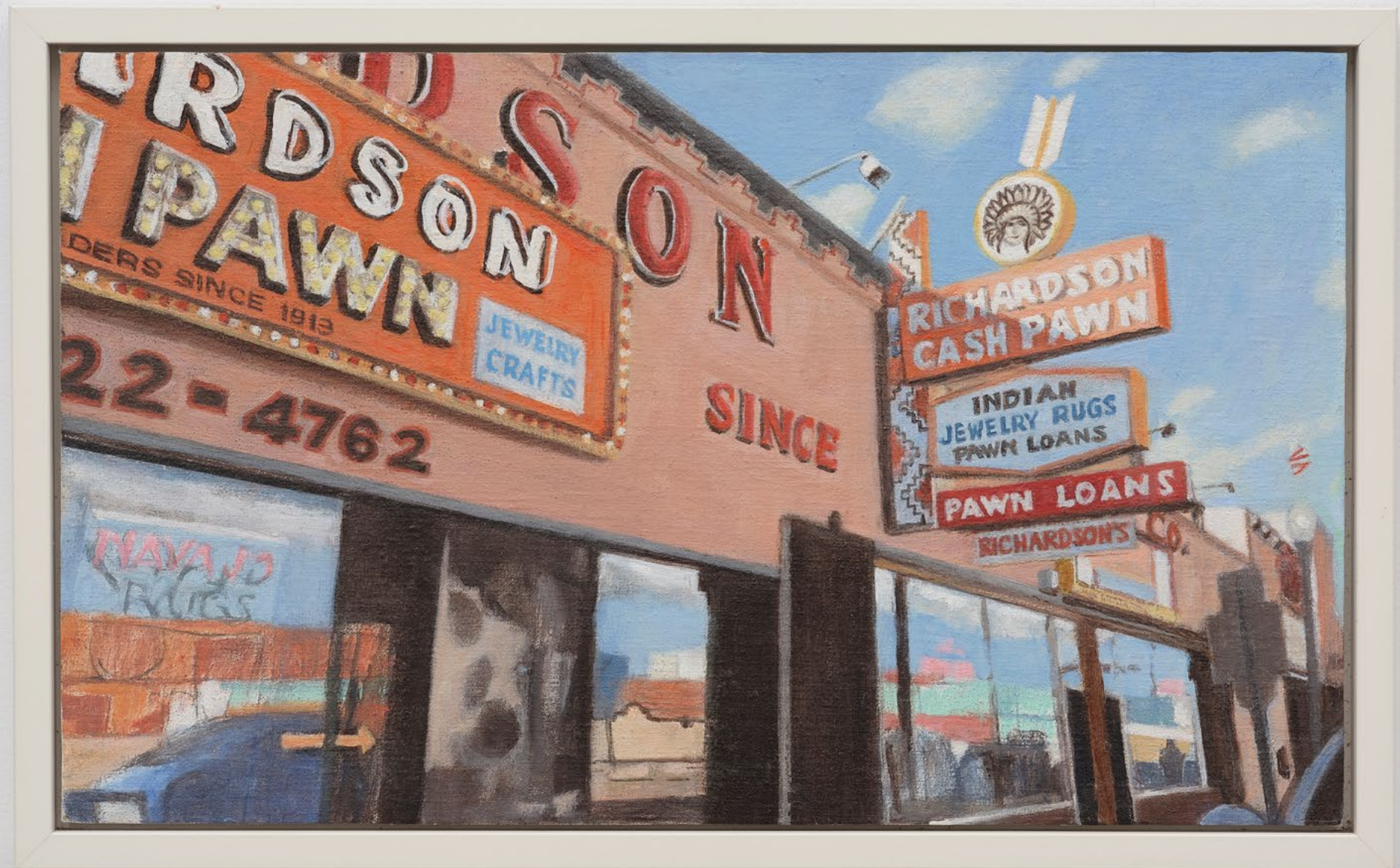
Jesse.





RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Twisters (Burgers and
Burritos), 2018
Oil on canvas on board
300 x 500mm

4275 Isleta Boulevard SW,
Albuquerque, New Mexico.
Location of Los Pollos
Hermanos in
Breaking Bad. Gus Fring's
street store—Here met Walt,
Jesse, Hank and Mike.



RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Richardson Trading Post,
Gallup, New Mexico, 2020
Oil on canvas on board
300 x 500mm

Gallup is a city on the southern
edge of the Navajo Nation.
Route 66 passes through here.



RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Plaza Blanca, Abiquiu, New
Mexico, 2017
Oil on linen
350 x 450mm

Georgia O'Keeffe lived nearby.
A place we bounded toward. I
felt as lucky as ever I had to be
here.

RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Picnic at Plaza Blanca,
Abiquiu, New Mexico, 2017
Oil on linen
450 x 700mm

Georgia O'Keeffe painted this area intensively. Her house not far away. Donogh, Ruth and I met up for a little picnic lunch after individual exploration of the area. Geologically, it's largely volcanic tuff eroded by wind and water into these spectacular Hoodoos.



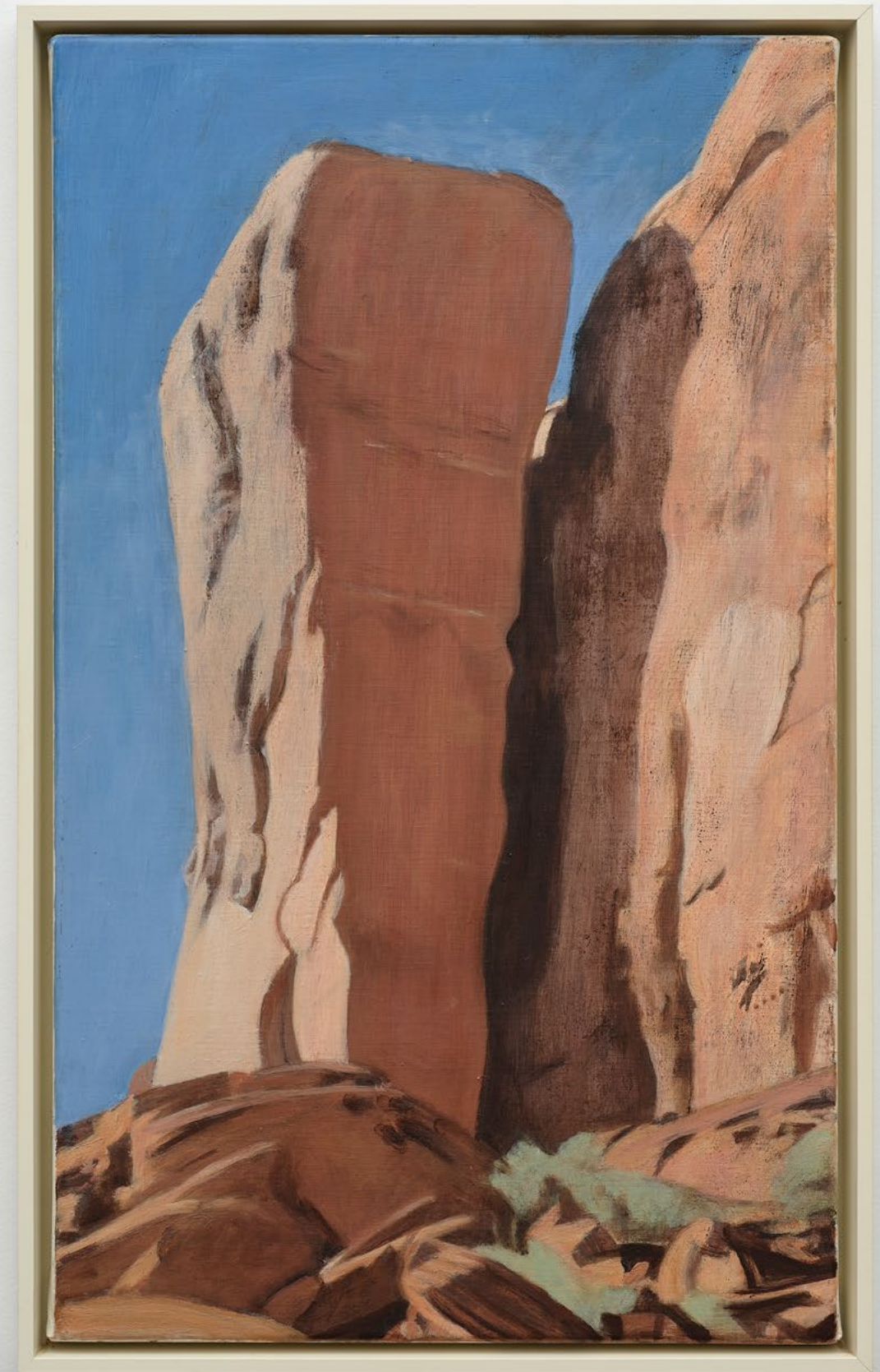


RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Kin Kletso (Yellow House),
Chaco Canyon, New Mexico,
2017
Oil on linen
450 x 600mm

Chacoan Great House, 1100–1150s CE. A trail behind the house leads up the canyon wall to the plateau rim from which you can view remnant cites of the Chacoans and cast an eye over the great San Juan basin. The house had three storeys, 65 rooms and five kivas.

RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Chaco Canyon, New Mexico,
2017
Oil on linen
750 x 450mm

This large wedge has nearly
left is parent cliff face of
Chaco Canyon, New Mexico.
It's situated between the
remains of Chetro Ketl and
Pueblo Bonito. It appears to
teeter; you feel as though
some small leverage would
topple it. The stone is
sandstone. Chaco Canyon
is on the southern edge of
the San Juan Basin. It was
inhabited by Ancestral Pueblo
people until c. 1300 CE. Their
remnant cities line the canyon
wall. It is a breath-taking place
to be.



PART TWO: EL PASO TO ENCINAL

OCTOBER 2019

After three weeks with Donogh and Ruth (daughter and citizen) in Canada, in which time we travelled west across to Detroit, Michigan, from Toronto, thence east to Montreal, with a few days in Mountain Dale, New York, and brief visits to Quebec City and Ottawa, I headed out from Toronto to visit my friend Roberto Salas, who we'd met in October 2017 while on an Amtrak from Houston to El Paso, Texas. Roberto is an artist too, and while he has a studio practice he is more often engaged in community arts projects, where he is typically mentoring and teaching. A native of El Paso, he spent much of his life in Southern California and worked largely on public art commissions. He returned to El Paso (perhaps 12 years ago), with his family aging and dying, to live again in the small cluster settlement (barrio) above the Rio Grande and directly behind Rosa's Cantina, made famous by Marty Robbins who set the song 'El Paso' there. Less well known, Robbins had planned to write the song once he'd visited Rosa's en route to Arizona, but the bar was closed and he travelled into Arizona and penned the song without having been there (Rosa's).

A low 1920s adobe house on Vista Hill Drive is where Roberto lives. If it wasn't always how the barrio was, it is now a triangular remnant of the settlement known as 'Smeltertown'. It's in the westernmost corner of Southwest Texas. Across the Rio Grande is the southeast triangulated corner of New Mexico and beyond the visible Sunland Park, New Mexico, is Mexico itself made obvious by the Border Wall. Half in New Mexico and Mexico is the prominent Mount Cristo Rey ('Christ the King'). This is a place of pilgrimage from all sides (Texas, New Mexico and Mexico). At its apex is a huge statue of Christ. 'The Wall' ascends part way up the western and eastern flanks but such is the significance of the place it remains a site where Mexican and US Catholics make the annual trek, and there is no barrier—who ascends may descend on the other side. All day long there can be seen the glisten from Border Patrol and ICE vehicles keeping watch for illegal immigrants. Ciudad Juárez is the Mexican part of the twin city El Paso/Juárez. Sister city Juárez is dangerous, El Paso not so, except when crazed gunmen come to town! (Shortly before I visited, a young Texan came over from the east and executed many Mexicans who were visiting to get school supplies for the year.)

Subsequent to our 2017 meeting, Roberto had suggested I return to his extraordinary corner of the world and we then would follow

the border and visit Big Bend National Park. He hadn't been and I hadn't heard of it. When we were to be so close given our trip to Canada I said maybe I could clip on a visit to El Paso. His reply was immediate. 'Clip it now,' he wrote. I arrived into a fiery early October day and felt as though I was arriving to my other home. The place is hot, dry, bony and alien as hell but I have a sense of belonging. From being dressed as a little 'camp' cowboy for a fancy dress 'do' at the Gaiety Theatre, Akaroa, in the late '50s, to Mum and Dad playing 'El Paso' on the radiogram, and thence to a lifetime of 'Western' culture in music, film and literature. Many of us have a huge diet of this place on earth.

At any rate, here we are. While preparations are made for the road trip I diligently go about my plein air work—making two first watercolours of the scene from the back corner of Roberto's place, looking out to Cristo Rey and Mexico, evening and morning, while there's coolth enough to work. Roberto presented the plan—we'd leave El Paso going by his cousin Irene's place and picking up a '60s portrait of John Wayne that was promised to friend Dolores in Encinal. The F-150 (Ford truck) was loaded—enough food and water so we'd not perish in the desert. John was uplifted and sat amongst our luggage. We checked on John regularly, asking the inanimate and rugged man on velvet, 'You okay, John?' He always was. We headed northeast to Van Horn (a featured place of nastiness in *No Country for Old Men*) and lunched at Chuy's restaurant. Now I'm leaving most stuff out but at Chuy's we encountered a scene that provided laughter whenever we recalled it. It involved a little old Jewish couple from the East Coast. We figured they'd been out to see Marfa and had come up this far. The old guy was so volubly impressed by this Mexican-as scene that he announced his enthusiasm by walking around the place videoing the (not impressed) patrons and wittering, 'Oh my god, can you believe this scene!! Oh my, oh my, wait till I show them back home.'

From Van Horn, we headed southeast to Marfa, the centre of Presidio County and now an arts centre, having been colonised by sculptor Donald Judd years before. No longer resembling the lawless cowboy town of yesteryear. It is now dripping moneyed voyeurs and arty hipsters. We then headed south to Presidio town on the river and with a border crossing to its Mexican sister connection, Ojinaga. This was more like it! After some time taking in 'Shafter' (silver mine) ghost town, we arrived in Presidio at dusk. I read somewhere:

Presidio was a dull, two-motel border town without any paved residential streets, with dilapidated adobe neighbourhoods near the centre and mobile homes and cinder block houses everywhere else. Presidio was a frontline outpost—Ojinaga a narcotic centre. Nobody who lived there had any reason to fear going to hell—compared to Presidio going to hell would be a breeze!

Presidio/Ojinaga features in the documentary *American Federale* and the book *Drug Lord* by Terence Poppa—both have Pablo Acosta, El Zorro de Ojinaga, a ruthless narcotics smuggler, who controlled a 200-mile stretch of the border, as their subject. We stayed at the salubrious Three Palms Inn. We did not go across into Mexico as was suggested when I enquired about getting a drink. I later found out why it was best we stayed put in ‘hell’. Ojinaga/Presidio also feature in Larry McMurty’s *Streets of Laredo*.

Roberto is a good sleeper—when he slept on in the mornings, I’d venture out on short walks. Walking out from the Three Palms I was reminded of the film *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*. Opposite the motel there’s a very large station for local Border Patrol—I would not have been surprised to see Tommy Lee Jones walk by. In fact, many of the movie’s locations were in the area we were heading to or had come from. We meandered down beside the river to Lajitas, stopping on a few occasions, and drew up to make drawings at one layby with a great view back towards Redford and Presidio; not that the landscape has the drama of, say, a South Island river valley, but because this is the heart of volatile US/Mexico border. It is so unpopulated, so tranquil in its way, this lazy river you could wade across, and no wall! Not needed!

I was delighted to see that in a recent BBC documentary where comedian/commentator Sue Perkins travelled the border from California to the Gulf of Mexico, they featured the very spot using drone footage to great effect. From here we drove on down to Lajitas where is a gross US resort and golf course. It felt Trumpist though his name wasn’t on it. Thence on to the headquarters of Big Bend Ranch State Park. The first obvious racism I encountered was here. Roberto deferred to me to do the talking. The uniformed ranger was cold, hostile even. Were we US citizens? I’m from New Zealand. But what about your friend? He’s from here, a Texan, Tex-Mex, Chicano. She wasn’t going to trust him. We were not welcome in those eyes, and did not hang about, pushing on through Terlingua, a once cinnabar-mining town, now a ghost town that hosts visitors to Big Bend who want a motel or Airbnb. Off-gridders, old hippies and ‘away-from-it-all-ers’ appear to live here.

We headed into Big Bend National Park, looking to stay in Chisos

Basin Campground, elevated and cooler, but there were no campsites. There aren’t a lot available, and fall is a popular time, so we drove out to the east of the Bend to a campground in the region of Boquillas del Carmen. There were plenty of sites there. Here the buzzards we’d seen through the day came to roost in the dead branches of some veteran tree. These are big old birds with fleshy red necks and faces that look like dog pizzles! They are in fact thus so they can stick their heads into the orifices of dead whatevers and eat them from the inside out and avoid bacterial infection. They looked at us as if we were tomorrow’s food. Like Roberto they remained roosted there till late. Before they took off for the day’s scavenger hunt, they came down and alighted on nearby bear safes and camp equipment to check us out at close quarters.

In the evening, coyotes wandered through, as did a large group of javelinas (peccaries that look like pigs). They might have wanted us dead too?! Though they didn’t appear to pay us the mind the buzzards did. The javelinas’ frontal view is impossibly narrow. They look as if they could slip between the slats of a paling fence. My next wildlife delight came when we walked into the Boquillas Canyon. A roadrunner brilliantly camouflaged amongst desert grasses and scrub. At the canyon mouth we engaged with a Mexican from Boquillas. He canoed five miles downriver each day to sell trinkets to US tourists—either directly or by leaving little stashes of the things on the track with a glass jar for the precious US dollars. Most did not engage or buy. Mexicans are to be avoided!! I bought a little faded woven bracelet that said ‘NO WALL!’ Clear sounding from Boquillas itself a defiant sound of Mexican music blasted out over the border stream. You can cross nearby to a border post. There’s no great concern you’ll want to overstay. Were you a reverse-migrant you’d fry before too long.

We met retiree tree feller Adrian from Nambe, New Mexico, at Boquillas/Big Bend camp. Roberto had an idea the man alone might like company. He regretted the invitation. Adrian didn’t have conversation—Adrian did all the talking. And he was of Mexican stock but disparaged his brethren. The one truly interesting thing about Adrian was that he came from Nambe—a tiny area in New Mexico that we’d stayed in two years before. Small world. We now had John to talk to and the Chuy’s filmer and pain-in-the-arse Adrian to mock! We next moved to the southeast—to a site at Cottonwood Campground, Castolon, unbeknownst to us right by the place where the Fox of Ojinaga, Pablo Acosta, was taken out in a death raid by the Federales while the DEA provided support. It wasn’t till I was home that I discovered my obsession with this dastardly narco, 30 years too late, but he colours my picture of the place. So tranquil a spot, looking out over the slow Rio at dawn, looking south to Sierra

Ponce over the flood plain, looking at hoof prints that went in on our side and appeared a few meters away in Mexico. And now I think of it with the sound of copter blades and machine gun fire—a massacre. And for me gentle zephyr and the lapping of a lazy stream. From Santa Elena we headed north again, on the Old Maverick Road, a track through mesquite, prickly pear and ocotillo forests, heading back in the direction of Terlingua. I called for a stop when my eyes lit on the feature known as Javelina Wash (site of the third big painting), looking across the Chisos and down to Rio Grande—where the wash feeds arroyos in times of heavy rain.

After soaking up that wonderland we intrepid three backtracked to Terlingua. I said in the near certain knowledge I won't be back that I'd like to see if the first impression of driving into this land might be recaptured. As it turned out there was much more, yet I made no pictures of anything else seen there. We headed out of the park, travelling north to Marathon and made a stop at an unattended display of fossils, dinosaurs and such, for this is one of the great providers of fossil knowledge in the world. From Marathon we turned southeast again, down through Sanderson, Dryden and on to Langtry back beside the 'ditch'. Roberto was beside himself. 'Turn round,' he said. This is where Judge Roy Bean ruled, where he committed 'Law West of the Pecos'. The stuff of legend. He claimed that he called the place Langtry because of his obsession with actress Lillie Langtry. (In fact, it was named after a railroad engineer, although Bean did name his saloon 'The Jersey Lilly' in her honour.) Known as the 'Hangin' Judge', he is only known to have hung one—perhaps one's enough. But he turns up in film and literature: The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean, played by Paul Newman, and *Streets of Laredo*, which has it that he was assassinated (not so).

To this day nothing thrives in Langtry, population 12, they say. We saw not one and Roy's museum closed just then. So we told longsuffering John, 'We're off to Del Rio to celebrate Roberto's 64th.' Well, John will tell you as well as I, she's hard to find a good spot to celebrate in Del Rio on a sticky autumn eve. But we found an outdoor enclosure where you could get you a beaker of wine or beer, none of it like any I'd tasted before. Del Rio's where I discovered Whataburger. The question remains. How could you charge so little for what tasted like food? They can't have paid the staff or the cow farmers enough. We were on the last stretch now—John was going to his new home in Encinal. Through Eagle Pass/Piedras Negras and on to Carizzo Springs, where we gassed up the big Ford. As I held the bowser nozzle in the tank I was amazed to feel no flow yet the sound of pumping. The hose had detached at the pump and the gasoline was discharging to the ground. In a panic I went to the desk and was

told just hang up the handle and use another pump. They could have cared less! We drove on to Encinal looking back west for the pall of smoke as the station set ablaze. I fancy I did see smoke, but there was never a story on the news.

Now we were with Dolores and her man Casey. Casey is a 60-year-old cowboy with long flaxen hair and carrying a side iron—open carry down here. We'd hardly landed when he said we should hop on his Kubota farm vehicle. Three men, three dogs, we putted off through the mesquite to what purpose I knew not. When we suddenly halted, our guide got down and with a tracker's gaze said, 'Wets been through here.' Wow, thought I; I was yet to meet Dolores, his Chicana fiancée. He was a generous if quiet host, Dolores deliciously warm. We had some days there and I was treated to a day down in Nuevo Laredo. Finally crossed that border that had beckoned so long. On entering via the pedestrian bridge, I was agog at the sight of streets occupied by a carefree population amidst a large presence of Policía Estatal, Federal and Army. Casey said, 'Oh, yeah, there's a cartel war been raging since last month. It's okay. The shooting happens at night, by which time we'll be back home.' And so we were!

Partying up in Encinal on duty-free grog. Only duty free because the Border Patrol woman said, 'New Zealand sounds so great. Go on through.' While down the way there, Roberto was held up. He has the same name as several on the 'most wanted' list. Come Sunday, Dolores (who clearly knew the extent to which Robert could lie in) came and got me to drive the miles down to the grocery at Encinal. She wanted to get me a traditional Mexican breakfast and hangover cure, Menudo. Menudo is tripe—barbecued tripe with lime and soup and tortilla. Even so it's not for me! Later that day, we went some miles to the near neighbours, Janet and George Eager Kruger—Janet an artist, George a rancher. Janet paints South Texas, well. When we met she asked, 'Where you from?' 'New Zealand', quoth I. 'I know you are. I just wanted to hear your voice. My mother came here with my dad after the war. She was from Wellington. McLaren was her name, and she never became a citizen here, with all the difficulty that entailed. She wouldn't give up that country.'

Now, in Covid times, their daughter and son-in-law live here, in Wellington. They saw what was coming while living in Malaysia and thought of gran's country. Encinal has come home down under. John hangs about up there.

Postscript: I asked Casey about his ranching. He's given up on that. The oil companies are fracking on the ranch and the rewards enough for a leisurely life.

Here's an incomplete list of what lies behind my time at 'la frontera'.

Books

Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 1970

Roger D. Hodge, *Texas Blood*, 2017

Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*, 1992

Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men*, 2005

Larry McMurtry, *Lonesome Dove*, 1985

Larry McMurtry, *Streets of Laredo*, 1993

Terrence Poppa, *Drug Lord*, 1998

Films

American Federale (documentary), 2013

Blazing Saddles, 1974

Hell or High Water, 2016

Lone Star, 1996

My Darling Clementine, 1946

No Country for Old Men, 2007

The Magnificent Seven, 1960

The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean, 1972

The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada, 2005

Television

Better Call Saul, 2015–22

Breaking Bad, 2008–13

Narcos: Mexico, 2018–21

The Lone Ranger, 1949–57

Music

(In order of currently most played!)

Selena

The Chicks (formerly The Dixie Chicks)

Alejandro Escovedo

Lydia Mendoza

Hell or High Water soundtrack

Marty Robbins

Chavela Vargas

ZZ Top

Conjunto Primavera



RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Sketch for Evening View of
Sunland Park, New Mexico, and
Mount Cristo Rey, 2019
Watercolour on paper
290 x 820mm (image);
510 x 1030mm (frame)

Painted from Roberto's place,
308 Vista Hill Drive, El Paso,
Texas.





RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Evening View of Sunland Park,
New Mexico, and Mount Cristo
Rey, 2019–21
Oil on linen
660 x 1680mm





RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Morning View of Sunland Park,
New Mexico, and Mount Cristo
Rey, 2019–21
Oil on linen
660 x 1680mm



RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Mi Barrio Es Tu Barrio, 2020
Oil on canvas on board
300 x 500mm

Roberto's: 308 Vista Hill Drive,
El Paso, Texas. This the east
wall of the c. 1924 Adobe.
The Burgundy Ford F-150 was
ready to be loaded. I have
tidied up the yard a little, left
out the man-sized ants, the
skunk and all the other piercing
and biting things.



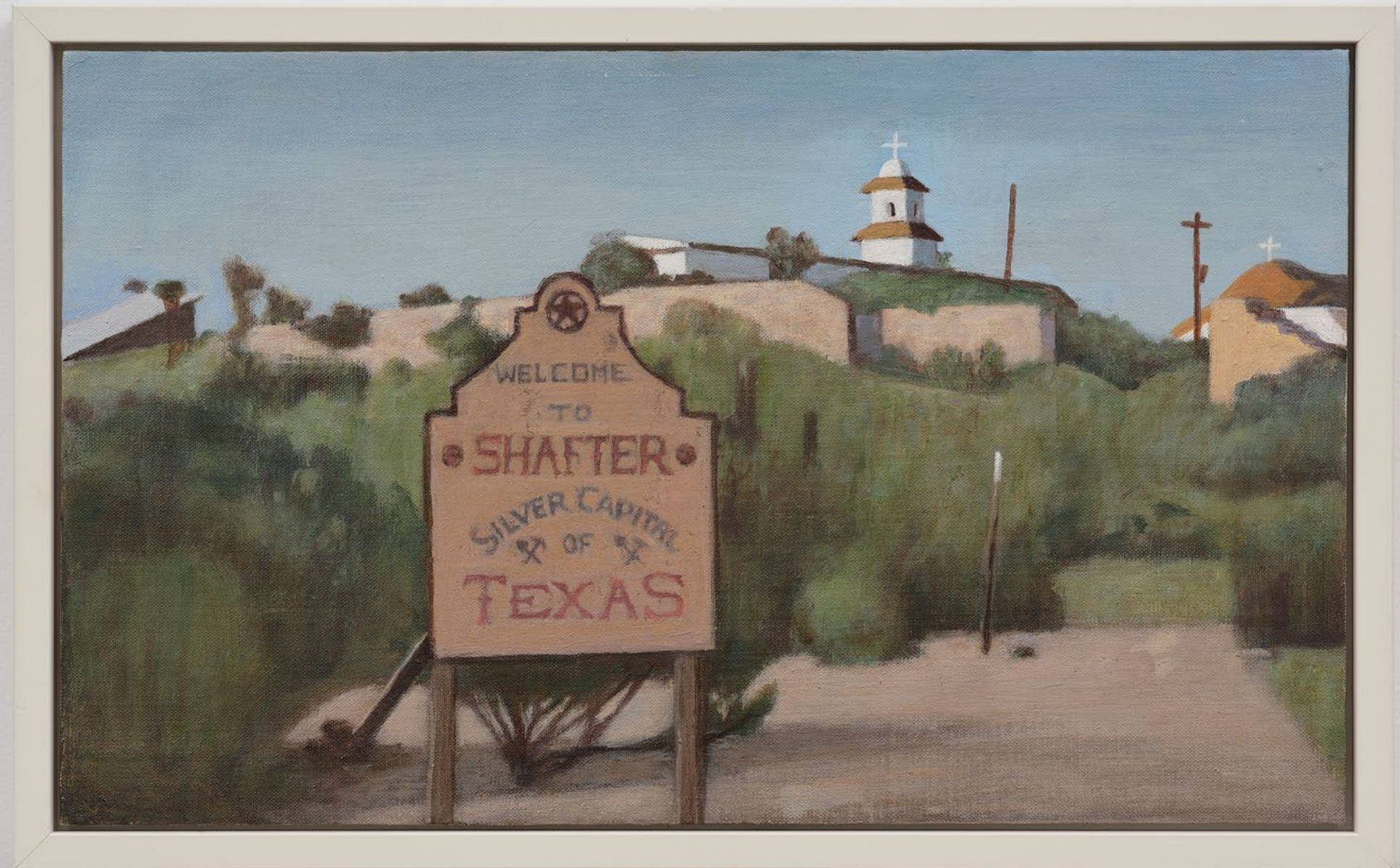


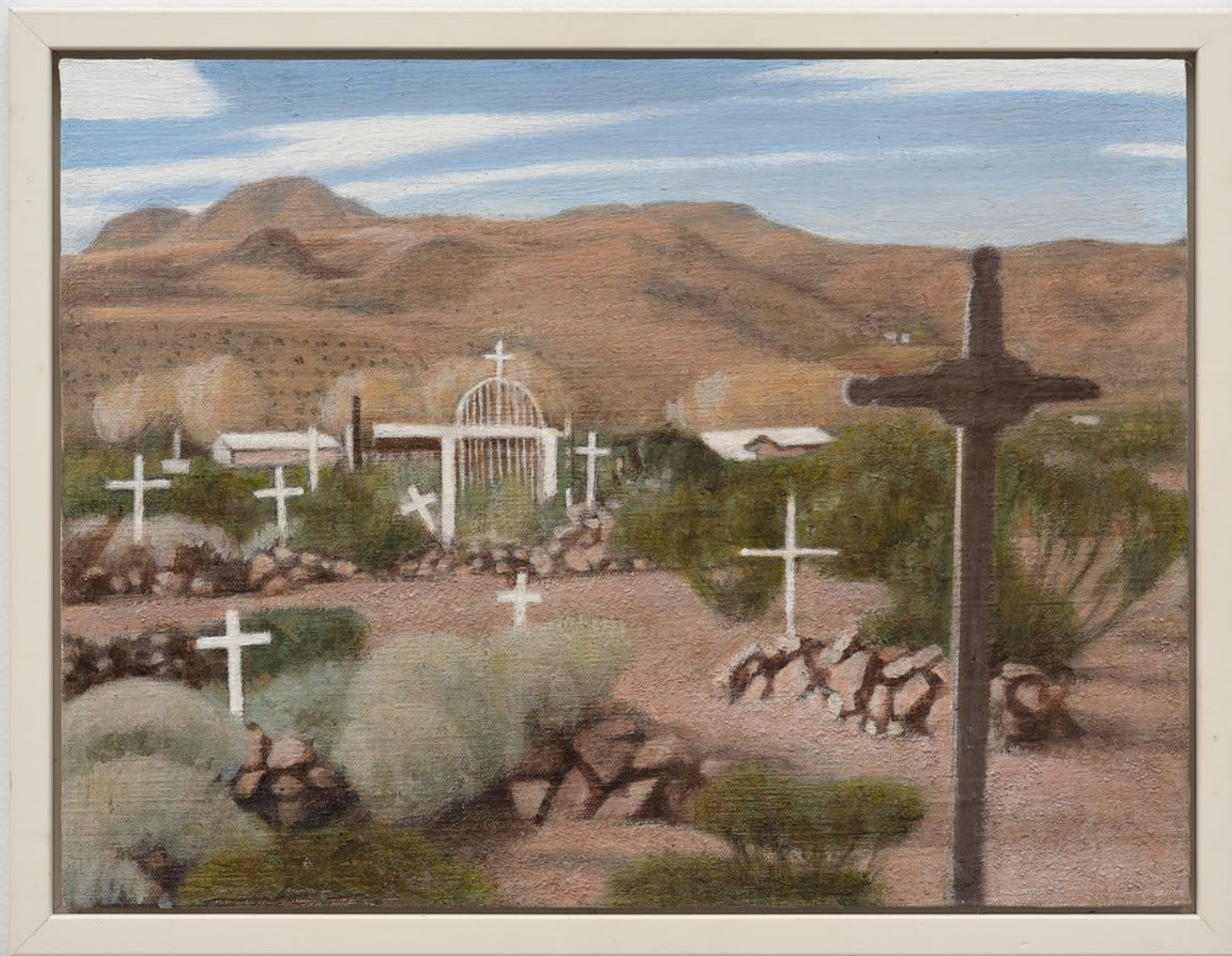
RICHARD MCWHANNELL
And John Came Too, 2019–20
Oil on canvas on board
300 x 200mm

A portrait of John Wayne that looked something like him (painted on velvet) was our cargo from El Paso to Encinal. We picked up John from Roberto's cousin in El Paso, Irene that is. So John was on the road with us in the Thundering Ford. He remained the implacable John the Steadfast while we bent our way through Big Bend.

RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Shafter, Presidio County,
Texas, 2019–20
Oil on canvas on board
300 x 500mm

On US-67, Presidio, Texas.
Perhaps 20 miles north of
Presidio and the border, this
once populous mining town
has just a few off-gridders
living there. It reminded me
of Denniston. Also a little
elevated, it was a cool
sanctuary after the desert
heat.





RICHARD MCWHANNELL
The Cemetery at Shafter
(Ghost Town), Presidio County,
Texas, 2020
Oil on canvas on board
300 x 400mm

This cemetery gives you a fair idea that this was once a busy place. Perhaps silver mining was hazardous. You get the impression the mortality rate in Shafter was high.

RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Three Palms Inn and the Oasis
Restaurant, Presidio, Texas
(2nd version), 2021
Oil on canvas on board
400 x 500mm

I later found it featuring in
US documentary American
Federale, which centres
on Pablo Acosta—El Zorro
de Ojinaga, head of a drug
smuggling organization with
access to 200km of border.
There's a bridge between
Presidio and Ojinaga.



RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Anthony Quinn Plays Roberto
Salas in Salas' Biopic, 2019-25
Oil on canvas on board
400 x 300mm

Illustrated here: the scene
where Salas encounters Adrian
from Nambe, New Mexico, at
Big Bend camp.



RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Moonlit Campsite at
Cottonwood, Castolon, Texas,
2019–20
Oil on canvas on board
300 x 400mm

I was only considering the
beauty of the moment
under my loved moon, not
considering that recent fire
and flood had opened up the
scene to this lovely play of
light.







RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Rio Grande from Near
Cottonwood Campsite,
Castolon, Texas, Early Morning,
2019-20

Oil on canvas on board
300 x 500mm

The Sierra Ponce is the
feature range on Mexican
side (limestone). Santa
Elena Canyon is upstream.
Santa Elena settlement close
downstream. Pablo Acosta
(El Zorro de Ojinaga), '37-'87,
born there and killed there.
Reference: Drug Lord by
Terrence Poppa.

RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Javelina Wash from Old
Maverick Road, 2019–21
Oil on linen
1100 x 1650mm

Big Bend National Park, looking
east to Chisos and south to
Castolon, Chihuahuan Desert.
‘... the local lore is that after
God created Earth, he spread
whatever rocks he had left
over, and sprinkled the
mountains, hills and valleys
of Big Bend with them in a
hodge-podge manner.’—Roger
Wall (Notes from Hunter Creek)





RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Javelina Wash, Looking East
to the Chisos Range, Big Bend,
Texas (2nd version), 2021–23
Oil on linen
450 x 600mm

This view from Old Maverick
Road (to Terlingua).





RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Langtry, Texas, 2021
Oil on canvas on board
305 x 405mm

The intersection at US-90 and TEXAS LOOP 25. The Legendary Judge Roy Bean lived in Langtry. He was a saloon owner and 'lawyer' who said of himself that he was the 'Law West of the Pecos'.



RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, 2019–
20
Oil on canvas on board
300 x 400mm

Corner: Avenida 15 de Junio
and Avenida Vicente Guerrero
(point of arrival via pedestrian
bridge from US). Casey
reassured me: 'There's a cartel
thing been going on since
last month (September). The
shooting happens at night ...
We're back in Texas by then!!'





RICHARD MCWHANNELL
Palacio Federal de Nuevo
Laredo, Mexico, 2020
Oil on linen
400 x 550mm

Casey Tate and Dolores Castro
from Encinal and Roberto
Salas from El Paso are at the
portico.

RICHARD MCWHANNELL

born 1952, Akaroa; lives and works in Tāmaki
Makaurau



Richard McWhannell was born in Akaroa, near Ōtautahi. He studied at the University of Canterbury's Ilam School of Fine Arts in the early 1970s. He was taught by Rudolf Gopas and influenced by friendships with Toss Woollaston and Tony Fomison. Throughout his career, he has placed an emphasis on figuration, painting landscapes, portraits, and fantastical scenes.

In 2006, McWhannell was commissioned to paint the portrait of Sir Don McKinnon for the Commonwealth Secretariat in London. A major survey exhibition was held at the Pah Homestead in Tāmaki Makaurau in 2015. His works are held in collections throughout the country including those of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.



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