

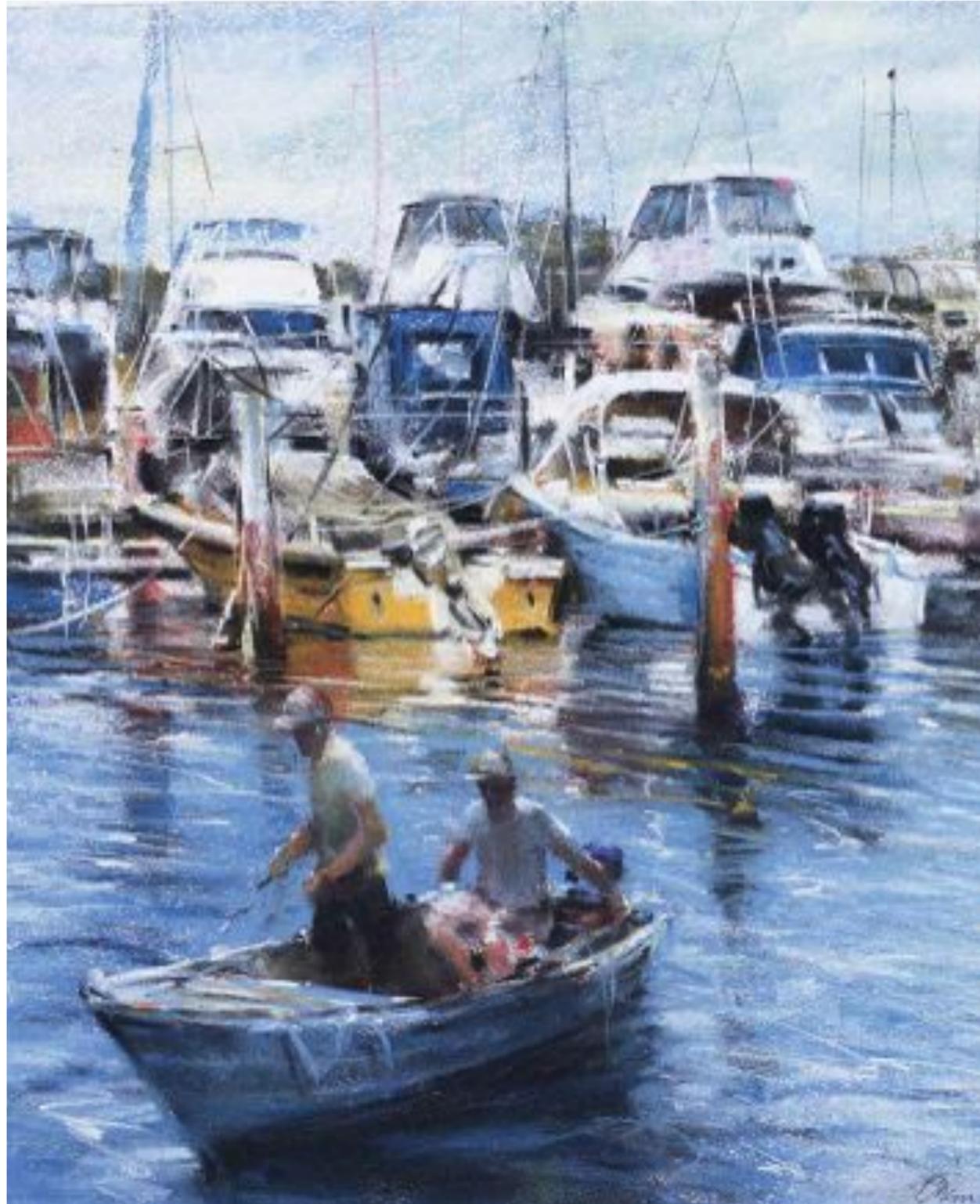
the  
**river**



**FREMANTLE**  
fine independent publishing **PRESS**

**BRIAN SIMMONDS**





## *Introduction*

---

Driving on Mounts Bay Road towards Crawley one day, it occurred to me that the river at my side was much more than just a waterway, some kind of flowing thoroughfare ... it is a thing of profound beauty, a national park; it's our own Sydney Harbour, without the navy perhaps, but with all the beauty. And from every vantage point you look at it, it is different, a moving feast.

*The River* is a pictorial statement on the Swan as a thing of beauty; there are no statistics, no history or geography. It's not a book for serious study but one that I hope will be enjoyed in the way that I've intended it: as a picture book that offers pleasure in its glimpses of the river scenery in my part of the world. In particular the popular beauty spots and well-used recreational areas between Perth Water and Fremantle - places that, for many people have been part of their neighbourhood, their consciousness, all their life. Something they've known forever, part of their own personal history.

Looking at the city from the South Perth Ferry Terminal I remember my delight as a child, when a family visit to the zoo meant a boat-trip across the river. I remember as a five or six year old the beaches of Mosman and of Crawley - where I saw sea-planes landing on the river during the war - and Como Beach where the water was so shallow. But as an artist, the river for me is also a canvas on which I paint the images I see in my mind's eye. A kind of landscape, an area of totality and completeness; a home for many things and many life forms, diverse and coexisting in an underwater realm that humans know little about.

Standing at the shoreline breathing in the quietness, the gentle passing of time when the river is almost completely still, but awake and sparkling, I experience the hushed feeling of seclusion. Even in the stillness there's a complexity in the surface, with its myriad reflections from dozens, maybe hundreds, of angles. Patterns on the face of the water, colours in the patterns, changes in the colours. The surface in constant motion, its liquid designs and shapes forever changing, arranged and rearranged. The perfect canvas.



*Claremont Yacht Club*



In the course of gathering material for the paintings in this book I spent weeks of seeking and finding, surveying beaches and cliffs, boathouses and sailing clubs, riverside cafes and restaurants. I've encountered the river as a living thing with moods and emotions, a personality of its own; a little capricious, unpredictable at times, fickle perhaps. Through the artist's lens there's an invisible dimension that presents itself in the sounds of things, in textures underfoot, the smell of the air, the momentary character of the breeze, all these sensations combining to create the spectacle. The river, with all the meanings it carries, is a piece of art in itself, waiting to be interpreted.

I painted my pictures and sunny days gave way to the not so sunny; winter was on its way all through April and May and I found very different skies in June. The changing season doesn't mean the end of pretty pictures with water gleaming under a steady blue sky. Wintry colour schemes in greys and purplish blues are equally compelling, colour is colour after all and a painting is a painting; there's beauty in every season.

As the project developed I grew to understand that there was more to the river than the beauty of the surface or the life beneath, more than the thrill of a boat race or the quiet contemplation of fishing. It was all of those things and more, but it was also a visionary place where memories are made, where values and meanings are established. As the paintworks emerged, I saw my feelings for the river revealed in them, in responses I had not always been conscious of: amazement, amusement, excitement, sheer pleasure. Suburban jetties and boatsheds took on new meanings for me and a sense of familiarity that wasn't there before. I have the feeling that I've come to know the river.

Hopefully, somewhere among these pictures there's something for the reader's own recollections, something that will evoke an emotional response and bring enjoyment in thoughts of the river.



Fremantle Harbour



---

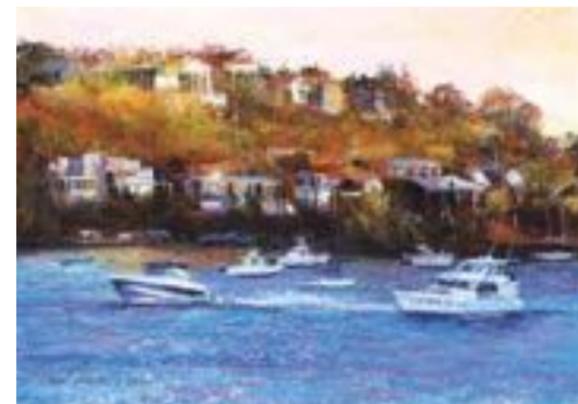
Somehow the mornings had not changed since she was a girl. The big houses in those far-off days were all along the river. The water shone peacefully and the road curved around by the river. Through the trees it was possible to see the town on the far side of the wide expanse of water; clean and always looking as if asleep on the skyline.

Elizabeth Jolley, *The Newspaper of Claremont Street* (1981)

---



*Above: East Fremantle Yacht Club  
Previous page: Mosman Bay*



*Top: Blackwall Reach  
Above: Melville Water Polo Club, East Fremantle  
Following page: Sailing off East Fremantle waters*



*Royal Freshwater Bay Yacht Club. The buildings here have seen another time and reflect their history. River birds and boatsheds, winding paths and a rustic jetty conspire with light and the mood of the river to create a spectacle. There's a feeling of a nineteenth-century novel; take the modern boats out of the picture and everything else seems to be in costume.*





---

THE SILENCE OF MUSSELS

Listening posts  
we used to call them

river pylons  
thick with ears  
tapping into  
who knows what.

At half-tide  
they would be tuned  
to both worlds

slicing airwaves  
above the surface  
filtering what passed below  
through fleshy lobes.

What they  
heard  
shut them up  
for good  
a long time back

or is this silence  
even now illusory  
their sound  
the clap of a castanet  
the beat too slow  
or fast for human ears.

Wendy Jenkins, *Rogue Equations* (2000)

---

*Left and following page: The Old Swan Brewery*



Brian Lawrence