



PAINTINGS Book 4. With writing about painting.



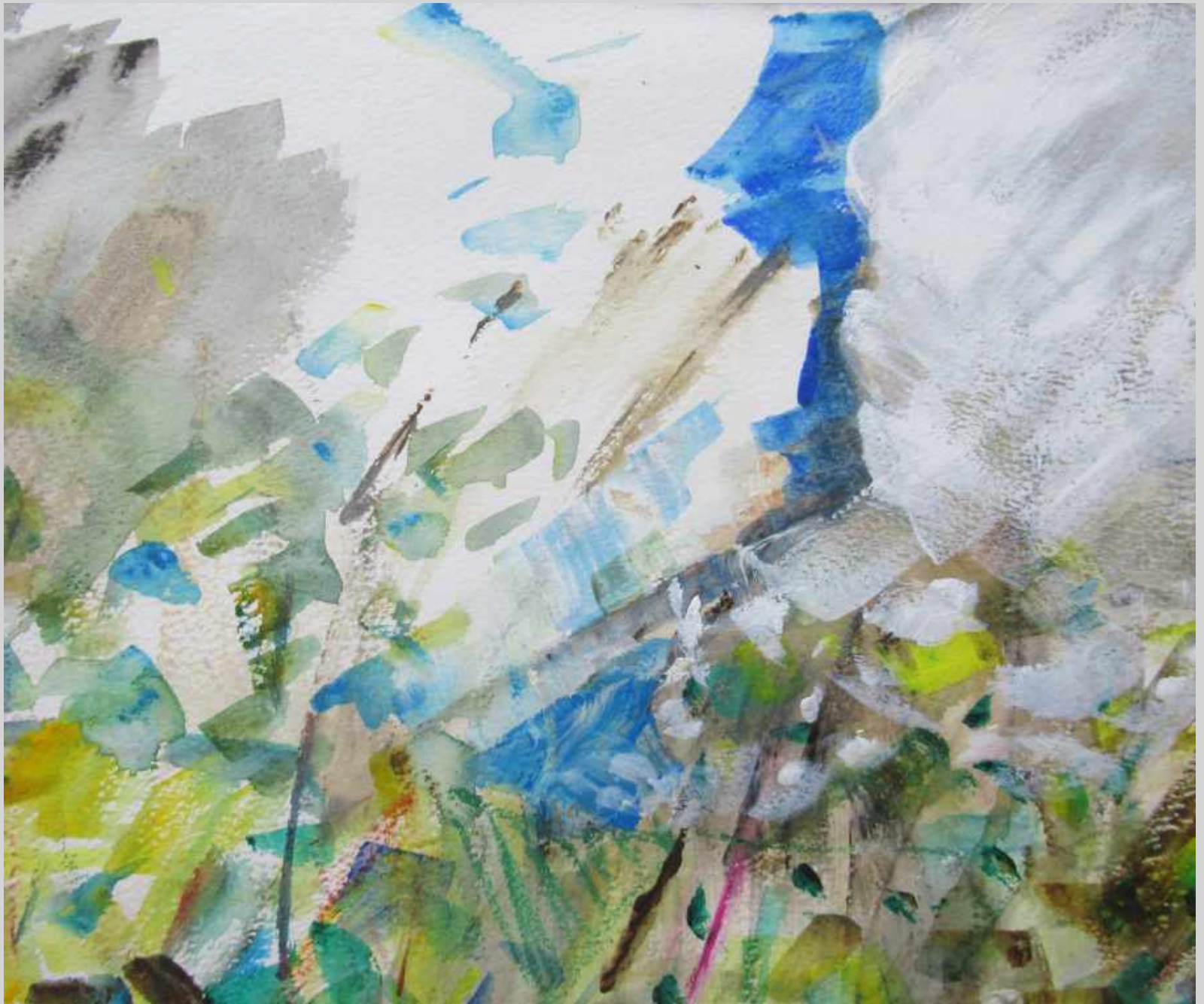
Here is a thought of Wittgenstein's. One of those thoughts that open the ground before one: something suddenly perceived that hesitantly points to what Wordsworth called "unknown modes of being"; "unknown" because the limitations that a way of life puts upon us, make some possibilities impossible, or rather **unseeable**. "There are matters that I have not passed near because they did not lie directly in my path or in my particular world. They are matters and a problematic that pertain to Western thought and the world that it has envisioned (*or thrown up!*) and which maybe only Beethoven and perhaps Goethe have dealt with (approached) and which maybe Nietzsche passed near to but which no Western philosopher has considered and so perhaps such matters have been lost to examination by Western philosophy. I certainly have not confronted such a problematic and so, when "I have done with the world", I will have just left an amorphous pile of considerations like something forgotten in a junk room or loft, which leave the world in all its multitudinous complexity just as it was: (*this is one of the 20th centuries most considered philosophers! Modest or what? And here follows as it were the killer blow to our "culture" and to which Red Indians might have agreed:*) "or perhaps more truly, the end result of all that work is that it has treated the world itself as something forgotten in a junk room".

"Humankind has not woven the web of life.

We are but a thread within it

Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves..... **Chief Seattle. 1854**

An interesting added thought is Wordsworth's - his phrase - "unknown modes of being" which seems along the same lines as Wittgenstein's thinking that western thought has not (other than strangely, a musician and poet, – Beethoven, Goethe) approached the important "matter" and so we have lost "modes of being" because our "form of life" makes it impossible to imagine otherwise. And the "matter"?? That thanks to the massive deviation of agriculture, we now live in the wrong body, wrong place, wrong time, wrong way of life, wrong being; thanks to our apparent adaptability. 1





Pool 1. This "Large pool" was abandoned 35 year ago. The swifts were a recent addition in this later version. When reconsidering it so long after, there was, as it were no strong core that I could discern so I changed and added a lot but without any of that aid which comes from being outside. A painting continued inside may lose touch with the original feeling. Painting inside depends on there being sufficient that was already painted on the spot. 100 x 85 cms. Most of the paintings in the book are 90 - 115 cms square, so these photos need the zoom effects of the PDF version



Detail. In a Landscape painting, marks are made to stand for reality - things out there. ("representation" is too stale a word and "stand for" seems more straight forward). So a painting that claims to describe in some way or other the world out there, has to use marks which though they may be unexpected, are felt to have a consistency which allows the scene to arise. Of course children do lovely pictures of the world and no need of explanation! This painting was painted there that day, but added to considerably years later. Here the scene is of high clouds and children playing by a stream pool. In the detail it is clear that the curved marks are the "handwriting" of the painting - partly imitating the curves of the clouds, the curves of the boughs and leaves and partly the curves in the current of the water - as well as being a sign of energy and exuberance. The white curves "stand for" that whiteness of turned up leaves from the breeze, while the straight white lines stand for "light" - as does the exposed white paper. But these curves and lines also set up a rhythm, or what I sometimes think of as the "music" of a painting - its harmonies and feeling. Then also, that afternoon was one of great energy and fun on the part of the four children and the painting tries to mimic that too, besides catch the fact that now it was all a long time ago!



The viewer and their familiarity with the “language” of painting determines just how “representational” they want a painting to be. But immediately there arise two points. Musicians have a language – shown by notation and sequence which is slowly enlarged by each convincing composer. Likewise poets already have a language which is similarly enlarged by what poets have created. But for the painter? – the only language is that which is embedded in the accumulated paintings of the past and a fresh start has to be made. The signs are just invented marks which do not come from any common language with which to build sense! Which is why we suffer from the Hokusai syndrome – we need a life twice as long in order to invent a comprehensible language! So unlike music or poetry – painting has no “language”, but instead must depend on the viewer’s ability to “read” paintings, which depends on his familiarity with paintings from the past. In what I say here, it is taken for granted that we are not dealing with “abstract” paintings, though strictly speaking all painting is of necessity abstracted – from reality and from three dimensions into two. The most well-known case of the public being foxed by painting’s unexpected “language” of representation, was Impressionism. The term was initially used in mockery of the rough, unrepresentational look of this unfamiliar painting. Now however they seem the height of “realism”. People have got the hang of them and in fact they are one of the most loved type of painting. Having no language other than the precedent of previous painting, skills were once passed down from master to apprentice. (Perugino/ Raffael),⁵





Now each painter looks at others and slowly has to invent his own language – as did those Impressionists and then Expressionist, Divisionists, Cubists etc etc until running out of variation, “artists” abandoned painting for the hybrid sociology/philosophy/psychology - “installations”. In the now old fashioned visual arts, Picasso was the most famous inventor – making something novel out of – for brevity’s sake we could call, the planes of Cezanne and African sculpture. Bacon another who made up his own language to an obvious degree. In fact the negative aspect of this language making is that it became so extreme that hardly anything can get passed on, and instead the emphasis is on endless novelty. But even such as Picasso, Moore, Matisse, Bacon discovered their language by slow trail and error: slowly finding the marks that seemed to more and more convince them as conveying what it was that inch by painful inch was seen emerging, and that convinced them to continue in this or that direction. (There is never a pre-existing mental content to be painted but rather a slowly settling - “way of doing things” – with its intrinsic content. Hokusai’s ironic history of his progress ends with the amusingly “hopeless” affirmation that “when I reach 140 I will then begin to.....”. The question remains – how far into novelty can a painter go while still retaining the comprehensibility for viewers who are only habituated to that which they have already, as it were, digested and got used to? If the artist convinces himself that his marks do catch a comprehension that he has been slowly edging towards, can he be sure others will follow: in both senses? This is relevant also to reading the small areas of a painting, not just the whole image. So in this detail, do the “scribbling” marks of the paint have “content” - both real and psychological?



Pool 2. If representation isn't to stumble, everything has to stay "within the range" of a comprehended reference to reality - as I say of Bacon's indirect directions. But where are the limits of that!!? (well one could say, "If it convinces, it's job done" – but what % of a sample of 100 people has to agree in order to settle it!?). So what is "within the range"? If we asked the 100 people from the street whether they thought a painting were realistic/unrealistic - we might need to get say 70-80% saying ok - to be sure we had avoided an immediately seeming abstract! Or if 80% didn't get it, would we modestly take the landscape away to get more reality into it!? But there's a warning there since the Impressionists took time to convince! A little story. One Easter at Middlesmoor, the village hosted "events". I was on for children doing engraving prints and for doing 5 or so minute talks (or less according to glazing over eyes) – "on what painters (or rather I) was trying to do"! The groups seemed relieved to hear that painters might be trying to make themselves understood!! – they had assumed the whole art business as beyond comprehension as Swift's tales in Gulliver! Again here the question: how much gained "content" - real and psychological does this kind of drawing mark contain.





Pool 3. On later pages (16-23) I have placed 12 small 8- 10 inch details of the larger 40 inch whole. In the relationship of these details to the whole there is this possibility: will the whole image function as a sort of guide, allowing the micro mark "details" to be "read" despite their seeming unfamiliar language. Furthermore, are these details working towards the same end of representation? Out of our sample of 100 people how many would make a hasty leap to think, "No, I think that is abstract," about any painting and why they think it to be so or not - which itself would be interesting to evaluate? (See below* on the good folk on the sofa!). Always the question is - when does "a bit abstract" to some, look totally abstract to others and no reference to reality discernible?
35" x 40"



Landscape painting doesn't give precedence to photography as showing a more "accurate image of what is actually there". Instead with the mere marks, we're still looking for something meaningful – or something that makes a worthwhile observation that fits our experience both of inner and outer world: even responding to this following quotation on our unnatural life and which seems to explain so many of our ills. As Bacon said, "after the camera, painting has to deepen the game". **Journal of Affective Disorders. 2012.** "In effect, humans have dragged a body with a long hominid history into an over-fed, badly nourished, sedentary, sunlight deficient, sleep-deprived, competitive, inequitable, and socially isolating environment, (in mostly treeless, concrete and metal cities), with dire consequences". etc.



Thanks to the element of rough chaos in painting outside, painting sometimes discovers "accidental" felicities: bits of new/ useful "language". My details of paintings on later pages show what I òlike to call am "oblique" representation. I think that the tidying up inside – though plodding - did give the obliquity a better placement **for others to comprehend** and hopefully enjoy a recognisable (to some degree!) place, season, hour, weather. Obliquity" being a word that seems a useful way to describe marks that although not obviously mimicking accepted forms of "realistic-representation," do somehow (!) seem "eloquently" descriptive, despite their unexpectedness. All of which one could also describe as a form of wit – where there is an appropriate inappropriateness in the use of a word: a sort of provocative contradiction of expectations but where the hearer is able to understand and appreciate the witty relevance of the – at first sight, "wrong" description.

Detail of previous.



These details (I'd hope) show the odd, indirect hiding places of meaning in painting (though hard to put one's finger on), but also, they are an advert for the "beauty"? of seemingly meaningless autonomous marks: "abstraction" in fact! **But** that subversive thought – because seeming to encourage "abstraction", is just in time, blocked by another thought: that there is a meaning that is conferred on the unexpected mark by the surrounding sufficient representation – the armature of the real (as Bacon called it) that the WHOLE image declares! Chinese signs; when beautifully presented by the master calligrapher also seem like another opening for "abstraction"! – except that the Chinese sign does stand for something in the world. (Kline made paintings out of his own Chinese like "kinetic" marks. But surely Van Gogh had done that in the service of depicting reality, not just borrowing an purely abstract brush-felicity from Chinese Calligraphy. Painting is a coding, since it tries to make sense within a much wider chaos than music with its fixed tonality, by using meaningless marks, which when taken all together– seem to "say something". As Beethoven said, music is deeper than any philosophy. So you could say – who cares about verbal definitions – except that as Gombrich thought, bad art criticism or art school teaching on bad foundations, make for bad art and thus most art-talk, since we have got used to its blarney, which is vague and pretentious.



Both of these are 42" square. The following page painting is 44 x 43"









This is a painting that convinces me that in the excitement of the 20th century's liberating extensions to the previous narrow notion of pictorial representation, something was lost. In all I have written in these books, Bacon's conversations with Sylvester are important. For example, Bacon's notion of the "the armature of the real" around which referent, the painter as it were, dances his interpretative "vision".

Any landscape painting has to be evocative of the real thing; that is to say, evoke the viewer's past experience of it, must call up those associations which real life experience has laid down in us, by means of some "realism" or other. Here are four thoughts of Constable to guide our understanding.

1. *"When I sit down to make a sketch from nature, the first thing I try to do is to forget that I have ever seen a picture"*. That was so that he might have confidence that he was engaging with the real thing out there, rather than with a mind full of borrowed signs. But in this 2nd thought of Constable is a counter concern in seeming contradiction, but also true.
2. *"A self-taught painter is one taught by a very ignorant person"*. And in between these two "opposite" thoughts there is this 3rd thought of Constable's
3. *"There is room enough for a **natural** painter. The great vice of the present day is **bravura**, an attempt to do something beyond the **truth**"*. So the words "natural" and "truth" refer us back to both thought 1 and 2. A painter inevitably depends to some basic degree on the "language" or handwriting of previous painters and **their** "armature of the real". But he also claims "truth" which is a word that faces both to the truth of what is there but also to the truth that Constable has included and which resides in this 4th thought.
4. *"painting is but another name for **feeling**"*. In his case, the "**truth**" and the "**natural**" are what we recognise as Constable's "vision" behind the modest ordinariness. In that same sense we can talk of the visionary quality of Impressionist paintings for their "realism" often contains that "spiritual" quality that we call happiness! So a painting has the stretching tension between the remembered real world and the way the painting encodes both it and a vision. A painting is a double "representation". It wants adequately and even, you could say, modestly and self-effacingly to present the familiar world while also interweaving what Constable calls the painter's



Pelly's painting. 44" x 43". There are paintings which one has done which when once more seen in someone else's house, catch your attention and maybe remind you of an aspect of painting which they particularly include – to such an extent that both I and a painter friend have marvelling exclaimed, “who painted that”? only to be answered with great surprise – “but it's yours”! In once more seeing this painting these thoughts came to me. In common to the whole painting (but absent in reality), is the rhythm of the small marks: you could say, their music. Yet this attempted “symphony” of small rhythmic marks must also have a main descriptive role; after all a painting must also convincingly and above all self-effacingly remind us of the world out there beyond our ego. (How horrible, as Constable said, is “bravura painting” with its “painterly” encrustations and interfering “style”). So this is “a blackthorn in April”, sagging because a stream has infiltrated the earth around its roots, with clouds building in the sky (implying wind), and in their sloping, echoing the twigs and branches of the blackthorn with only the odd branches of the failing tree, containing the blossom that comes before the leaves to the blackthorn, and along the left hillside are the hawthorns with their echoing slant. Underneath the tree is the first growth of nettles which are also drawn with the same small marks which run across the whole painting and which you could say constitute the “music” of the painting because they make for the rhythms and harmony of the whole and in this sympathy and concert of marks resides its feeling and “vision”. This is I think an example of what Constable meant by a “natural” painting and one whose marks do not issue from “bravura” but observation and love which is visible here in the “content” of this painting: its affectionate melancholy. A landscape painting should seem to represent a moment of time: that is the magic of Constable's Haywain. There; THAT midday, the carters soaking the wheels back to tightness, enjoying the cool pause, the curious dog, the boy fishing, the swallow, the distant haymakers, no doubt hot on that sultry day!



Every stone on the land,
Each rock and each hill,
Each fountain and rill,
Each herb and each tree,
Mountain, hill, earth, and sea,
Cloud, meteor, and star,
Are men seen afar. **William Blake**



Here is a beautiful innocent thought that makes us think of St Francis, and which shows our perdition. It's also a fine perception of what a landscape painter should try and communicate - that wonder? **Richard Jeffers.** (Undervalued early 20th century American poet). *“If we had never before looked upon the earth, but suddenly came to it, man or woman grown, set down in the midst of a summer mead, would it not seem to us a valiant vision? The hues, the shapes, the song and life of birds, above all the sunlight, the breath of heaven, resting on it: the mind would be filled with the glory, unable to grasp it, hardly believing that such things could be mere matter and no more. Like a dream of some spirit land it would appear, scarce fit to be touched lest it should fall to pieces, too beautiful to be watched lest it should fade away”.*



This was one of those paintings that was not finished that day and so spent years waiting in a drawer until the virus "lock down" when it was taken out again! It was a good example however of the two very different painting mind sets - of painting on the spot and thinking about it painting inside. Outside you look all over, all at once. To some degree your looking is all-together- connected, whereas inside you have to re-imagine what you were - so very unclearly -trying to do. That uncertainty is the heart of painting outside because you are endlessly readjusting and seeing all together whereas inside "finishing" it, you have to have some plan to follow as best you can what was intended that day, which can be fatally too much based on your stale past practice! Then you can end with two contradicting paintings in one. Another defect can be a rather lame literalness, whereas the representation of the best sort is often oblique and is "poetic" or musical in its effects . But in reality, all painted marks are "abstract"- standing for, and in a representational painting the "armature of the real" - makes it possible for the "abstract" marks to make sense and become representational.



Detail 1. I think all arts are haptic – mimetic enactments and metaphoric extensions of body sensation (music’s dance, movement and emphasis). And all are concerned in making, by an encipherment, a decipherment of the world: of finding meaning or making an adequate response. We could all find different contents in the opening of Beethoven’s 9th symphony, but none of us would say it was meaningless. It teems with meaning – just out of sight! Such as The enormity of the cosmos? Or the tragedy of human history? Or the space still being created by the big bang!? So – to return to the ordinary! - here is a detail of a thundery afternoon with blackthorn, rain and lightning – the excitement of the sensation – the sforzandi of its dark – light contrasts. The wind that is the “explanation” for the parallelism of the slanting ”lines” standing for rain - in fact, the whole rhythm of the painting. The use of sepia ink to gain the sharp contrast between the setting of the blackthorn in blossom. The whole exclamation mark of it! Those lines of Jeffers again: “The hues, the shapes, the song and life of birds, above all the sunlight, the breath of heaven, resting on it: the mind would be filled with the glory, unable to grasp it...” If only we could paint that!



Detail 2. The diagonal patterning is part of the expressive undertow of the whole painting – its rhythm and order. The “oblique” effects of white paper left unpainted; the eclat and brightness of a water colour or acrylic image: here the imitation of water reflection is shared across the painting unrealistically – just as in the red unpainted “ground” of Constable’s painting. Here the whites create the chiaroscuro contrasts, imitational of such a bright sunset in autumn. These left-over whites in a sense “excuse” the imitational fallacy or banal realism of the little waterfalls – generalises it as bright light in the rest of the painting-giving the whole its eclat brightness. Such threaded through whites are often a useful tool of “drawing” and like the blacks of leading in stained glass also convey a brilliance to the colour which one hopes acts as a metaphor for just those feelings expressed in the passage by Jeffers: a kind of exuberance which is surely one of the qualities of stained glass. A painting should in some way surprise but also confirm the known; and yet convince the viewer with its manner of representation. As usual the question – how much expressive exaggeration or unexpectedness destroys the credibility with the viewer! of these details are about 9-12 inches. I like the modesty of this one, which again, thinking of Jeffers is appropriate.

Detail 3. Trees and distant moor at Tom’s bank This of **Richard Jeffers** justifies repetition! *“If we had never before looked upon the earth, but suddenly came to it man or woman grown, set down in the midst of a summer mead, would it not seem to us a valiant vision? The hues, the shapes, the song and life of birds”,*





above all the sunlight, the breath of heaven, resting on it: the mind would be filled with the glory, unable to grasp it, hardly believing that such things could be mere matter and no more. Like a dream of some spirit land it would appear, scarce fit to be touched lest it should fall to pieces, too beautiful to be watched lest it should fade away”. Isn't that a fine task for a painter to try and communicate - that wonder? I think the best landscape painting encourages a “Romantic” pathetic fallacy, because we participate, as do the figures of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, in nature. I like Keats’ idea that the poet is “the least poetical of creatures because he is continually seeing out into the things he sees”. The way the sky is painted here seems to have me entangled in it as I make the clouds into squiggly lines, which though they draw seem to have a psychological pull. Yet beside this subjectivising of nature it must also maintain some aspect of its non-human otherness.



Detail 4. *Moors, sun, snow at evening.* The poem “The House Beautiful”. I haven’t done enough painting like this. In one of the painting books I quote a poem by Stevenson, because it so well conveys the participatory exuberance and pleasure in this snow painting: even transport and wonder. Such details breed a worry about the relationship of size and distance from a painting. It makes me imagine a painting so big that though you were aware of the whole you could not step back but had to see it in this sort of near detail, where nothing was generalised on the presumption of the viewer “standing back from it”! so that the “abstractions” – were here as integral to the effect, as every instrument in an orchestra – despite 40 bars rest at periods! This detail shows how the musicality of a painting should issue from every touch. “And when snow bright the moor expands/ How shall you children clap their hands”! This painting is rather humiliating, as if it had understood what I haven’t!! The brush marks picking out the tooth of the paper and leaving little specks of white and the superimposition of the successive brush strokes are transposing metaphors for the brilliance of sun and snow and also for our participatory exuberance.

Detail 5. (for whole painting see p.199)
 River Erme. Well, what's to be said! The only change made, (30 years later), was to sort out the lie of the river so as to make it easier to navigate the whole painting for the viewer. The image is clearly an autumn and misty afternoon and the fine rain drops are important in lessening the severity of the abstract look of the panes of overlaid paint – almost Cezanne “passage” except as a noted critic Novotny thought in Cezanne, such paned drawing is quite without what Novotny called “stimmung” using the German word. It means mood, sentiment, atmosphere and opinion; he using it more as our “feeling”. That would fit the idea of the high rationality of Cezanne’s geometry and planes: though I’m not convinced by that “rationalist” view. In this case the panes of colour are still just within the realistic range of representation (with the help now of my clarifying the readability of my river geography) and they definitely create an “atmosphere/mood” and they have a physical, crisp body eloquence.



Detail 6. Moors. Low winter sun. Valentina likes the paintings which have “Dancing particles”: a nice conceit! This is about 8” of painting but looked at here, there seems a paucity of “particles” marks. It should have at least 4 times as many since they are meant to be standing for flicker and sun glare. Also under the “excuse” of representing glare, the little dashes, which are drawing objects and light, can be formed into patterns which then read as pulsating and so also of emotive “magnificence – or rather they should do, if they were more numerous and the range of colour wider to add to that magnificence.





Detail 7. This IS (!) a holly bush and bottom left IS (?) an indication of the stream. (it sounds like Starvling in Midsummer night's dream: asserting "this lantern is the moon" and "I the man in the moon"! - helping us with our imagination.) This detail is a good example of how the whole painting makes such passages easier to "read". This detail also shows remnants of white paper which partly draws and also represents "light". On my side of the stream were some hazels that grew across it! There is a lot of abbreviation here (the crayon marks) and along with the simplified gaps, "unifies" and is readable within the whole image – but maybe it would be more coherent to say that each 8" has to be self-sufficient? I was tempted to claim that the details have an "intuited" (!) sense, given the whole image.

Detail 8. Rain on a wooded hill side and a field. There are a lot of simplified (abstract?) wedges of "tree" "shadow" in the left half and the hawthorns are also in sympathy "wedged" (?) The rain is falling in symbolic sheets/strokes and the strokes partly blot out the trees and field as rain does in gusts. This is a good example of the rhythms that come from reductive drawing in "shapes" that tries to not go too far (!) into abstracting abbreviation. Being abbreviated they permit themselves an exaggerated colour, which is part of the "mood" – which that critic thought definitely Cezanne with his more rationally conceived planes was not wanting.

Detail 9. Autumn trees in front of sun. Not much to note. All the marks are rough, rudimentary wedges. Maybe the marks are meagre and should be increased with more overlaying. This 8" very much relies on the whole.



Detail 10. With such a blackthorn trunk and wobbly dry stone wall you can't go and ignore its isness with mere painterliness. That caving in stone wall, and the extraordinary trunk assert themselves against excessive "abbreviation": so again we're at the common day of Willy Lot's bricks which Constable painted with such a pathos of "the common day"! In some way this sepia seems disappointing – there should be thousands more "dancing particles" to express the beauty of that kind of spring day.





Detail 11. What the "modernity" of painting has lost is that respect for the otherness of nature that shouldn't be obliterated by the artfulness. Though this is only a detail that is (perhaps) supported by the whole, its painterly panache too much overwhelms the isness of the "thing in itself". I think such a respect, lay behind the work of that not enough appreciated American poet of the 20s and 30s Jeffers, Often in painting we have to lie yet convince as if it were truth.



Detail 12. As usual with sepia ink, the monochrome emphasises the chiaroscuro of such a day of wind and fast changing clouds, represents the "sforzandi" of the scene and the degree of water dilution allows such range of representation to the brown ink.

Detail 13.

This detail seems an especially good example of what I was trying to explain on the page previous to these 14 details. That is to say, the way that within the "armature of the real", as Bacon puts it, all sorts of "exaggeration" and obliquity can be read as meaningful within the stated "landscape" : here "summer evening by a stream", so that in this detail, certain apparently "abstract" effects can be included which then are transformed by the whole image into a form of representation of: "summer evening by a stream", into relevant emotional, exclamatory effects. The way that "details" can become parallel re-enactments of the whole.

That is something I have always admired in the sepia drawings/paintings of Samuel Palmer in the Ashmolean museum. The emotional pull of their close up scale, their rhythm and their globular sepia marks that seem to portray a reality, that was hidden to the everyday eye and this other-side visionary painting was clearly influenced by Blake's un-ordinary belief in the higher reality of what he thought of as "Imagination" which he thought of as an organ of perception rather than a special sort of make believe.

Detail 14. Such a detail might disgust a modern eye as lame imitation, but I think painting needs various modes of representation.





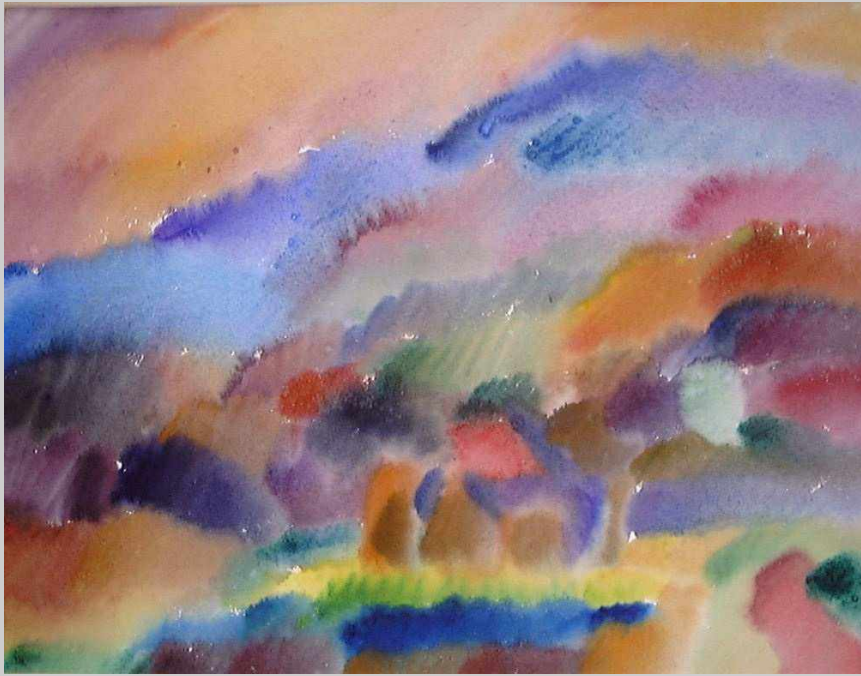
All these details on the last five pages and the next one, should be part of both the representation (or better - refer to the real) as well as being examples of how representation can be more like by its "unlikeness" so that, as Bacon put it, " a (painted) wave can seem more real than "wave" or these clouds seem to gather us up into their exuberance and force.

Any kind of artist should pin a reminder on the wall: "It's the world, stupid"! Painting, sculpture, music, poetry are ways of celebrating, noticing, thinking about aspects of our being-in-the-world. Perhaps they are a kind of homage to aliveness. That is why there are so many more life enhancing paintings done by children and amateurs than hosts of "serious" painters with their pretentious "forms", or painterly "sprezzatura" (= "bold mastery"!) of "marks", which tend to be a thing in itself - minimally referential, and they are meaningless because there is so little of the world of common experience caught up in them. Even the late quartets of Beethoven that seemed so "difficult" to his contemporaries, even "abstract", are almost unbearable in the weight of their aliveness, their sorrow. How full of world they are! What is so beautiful about child art is that the ways of colour and drawing that they invent, strike us as communicating something: they "say" something about the out-there! That metaphor "say" which we feel we need to use about music or painting which are speechless! It's our way of pointing to an obvious content of meaning, even though in the case of those heart wrenching quartets, we cannot name what they "say".

This detail to the right is from a pool painting at the beginning. It tries to encode the physicality of wonder: the exclamation of it. In similar fashion, opposite are two water colours (40 x 45 cms) which are good examples of the inbuilt exclamatory power of watercolour - the way its brilliance of colour on white paper and watery fusions so easily represent light - especially that pulsating brightness of sunset.

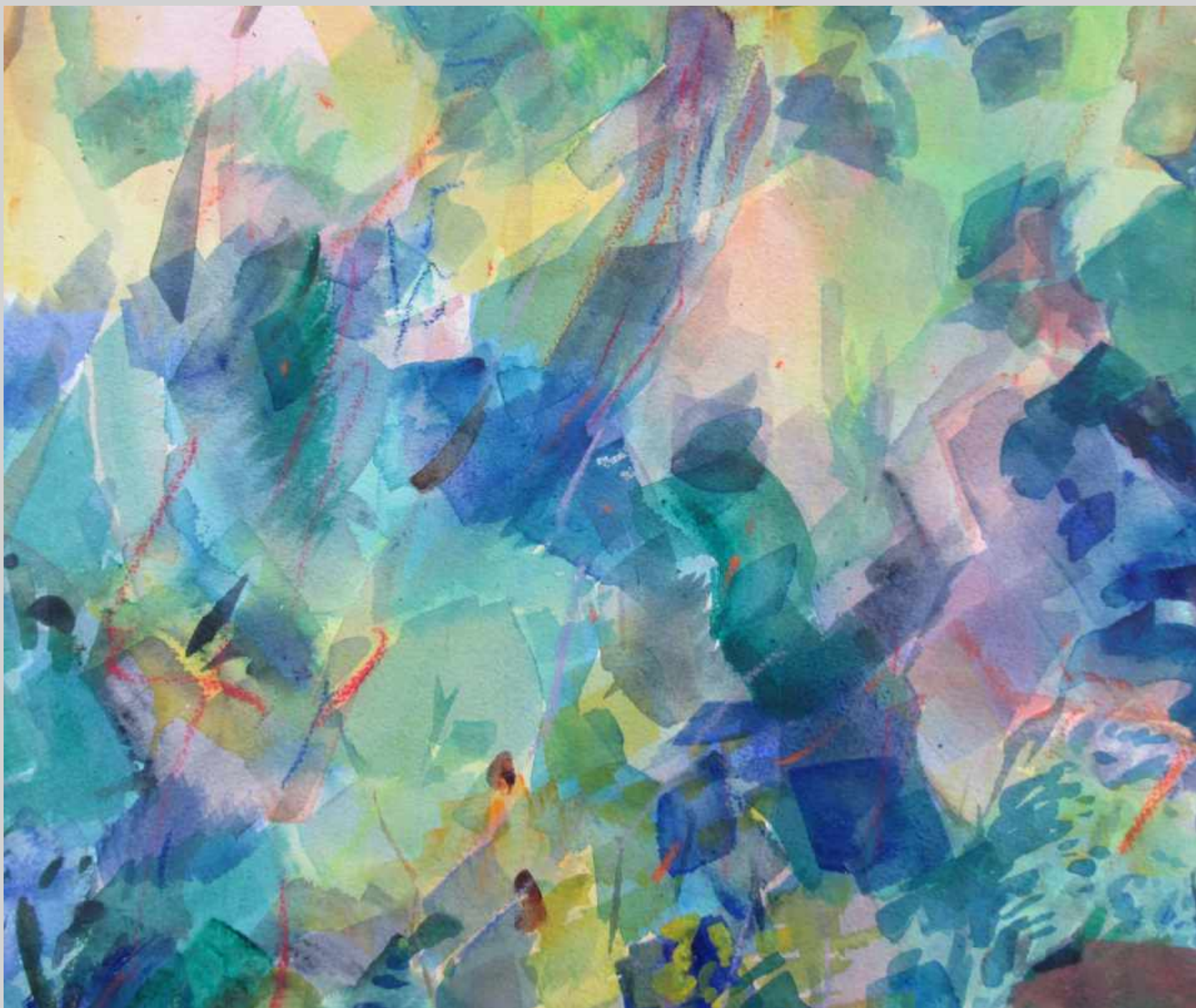
On the next page, a larger (43 x 44 inch) view of the moors at sunset.





What makes me yes, admire Turner but love Constable is that it is obvious that it was “the world, stupid”, that mattered to Constable; as if his own painterly expertise were secondary to what he called the “truth”. Form and content. How deviating and bewitching are the nouns of language! Two words must mean that there exist these two entities, we think!! But in painting or music, the forms and the meanings are born together entwined, single, with laborious trial and error that is for ever doubling back on itself and refashioning what is never finally fashioned, so that form and content are indissoluble – though critics come after and cogitate the “forms”. So it is probable that no painter (just think of Hokusai or Cezanne) is satisfied even in old age with the small certainties that they have eked out of a life-time’s endeavours! The painter never feels – as the Italians express it- “all’altezza” of the world, (= of having got anywhere near the level of comprehension that the world merits). What the 3 quotes of Constable below are pointing to is the indissoluble way that artists, at the same moment as making and extending their vocabulary of marks, are trying to say something worth the effort and which are comprehensible to others’ attention, and that “something” lies in a possible paint thing, so it is not a content looking for a form. What has had such fatal effects on painting is the growth of a critical thinking apparatus that encourages, with a fog of language, bad painting– what Constable (see below) calls “bravura”. (another italian word similar to “sprezzatura”).









The terms of art talk's explanation of abstract art have spread a mould of bogus language over all painting and it has been forgotten that, "it's the world stupid", that counts. Forms and colours detached from representation do not have any deep powers, though like curtain material, they may be pretty: it's the rebounding echo of the two; **representation** and **world** that allows a painting to "say" something worth seeing. The language of most art criticism is destructive of painting. It is so back to front. As Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Picasso or Bacon show, it is the experience of the daily world that is the engine house of originality and of comprehension in the viewer.

1. "When I sit down to make a sketch from nature, the first thing I try to do is to forget that I have ever seen a picture".
2. "A self-taught painter is one taught by a very ignorant person".
3. "There is room enough for a natural painter. The great vice of the present day is **bravura**, an attempt to do something beyond the **truth**". **Constable**. (And by "truth" Constable was referring to something similar to Wordsworth's "common day").





Opposite. Tom's bank summer. 115 x 115cms. Some paintings pose large questions. This one asks, "why is such painting no longer possible" - I mean this type of painting – regardless of the worth of this particular painting. Fashion makes it unlikely that a young painter would entertain such subject matter. One young "artist" I know refused the chance of entering Edinburgh art gallery to see the Rembrandts "because not relevant". That was his loss, art education's and the whole culture's. When 60 years ago I presented myself for an interview at the Royal academy schools, I was told in answer to having viewed my paintings; "we will need to strip you down". Why? So I could be reprogrammed? How very pointless. All of my accumulated enthusiasm and commitment rubbished because they thought perhaps that there were "wave after wave of French invention" that I should be force fed?! This was also back to front logic. Painting is done by a person with their story. Art comes from that as well as from accumulated cultural traces that artists pick up and which should remain as "influences". Art isn't made out of styles, except in the complex "contradictions" of the three observations I gave of Constable's. To follow up what may not be fully understood, here is a passage of art criticism from a noted critic in the London Review of Books on a Tate exhibition of Paul Nash that uses that phrase, "French invention" and in which Nash is taken to task "And this cut Nash off from the modifications of naturalism (?) that might have served him best: the wave after wave of French invention that led from Millet and Courbet to Seurat and Cézanne". That is so mechanical: as if choosing from a cheese board! In the light of that, now return to Constable's thoughts above. As often with artists rather than critics, they reveal a fundamental truth about art that critics miss because they do not have experience of the handicraft facticity of painting with its "objectives" being endlessly modified and never final. Those three remarks are all true though contradictory. They show the tension between art "forms", formalities, "styles" and isms and the fact that every artist wishes to start afresh in order to say something fresh and personal about the common world that we all inhabit and which so sculpts memory.



Wordsworth in the passage opposite is so committed to the world which poetry describes that he almost seems to be rejecting art/poetry as second hand - "a mere fiction of what never was". Both he and Constable seem to be affirming, "it's the world, stupid", and that is what they have in common with child art, and incidentally - Picasso. In these two details are visible what matters to me a lot in the making of pictures; the handwriting. To me it constitutes the breath of a painting. In real handwriting (how shamed we are if our written scribbles are set against the orthography of the 17th -19th centuries!) In painting, the metaphoric handwriting has its own intrinsic beauty besides its job of representation. Its a painting's heart beat - its music.



“Paradise, and groves Elysian,
Fortunate Fields-like those of old
Sought in the Atlantic Main, why should they be
A history only of departed things,
Or a mere fiction of what never was?
For the discerning intellect of Man,

**When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.**
I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
Of this great consummation”. Wordsworth. The Excursion.



How expressive are those "whites" (page 37) which "become" the glistenings of the water movement or here above, the sense of the wind in the sky and trees from the quick flicking marks, the absolute **non**-bravura of the sky and the "childish" (!) crows that help to announce the space. Is there still space in the modish art world for a "natural painter"; for the sort of painting Constable believed in? A loyalty and love for the "common day" rather than fancy paint? No, there's a sign up saying, "this protected area ahead is just for the children and amateurs to play in". As said before, a landscape painting should share with a photo, the catching of a moment - specific - as is that moment of pause and water-cooled silence in Constable's archetypal "Haywain". Sublime.

Opposite. Blackthorn and sudden stormy rain squall. The sepia emphasises the contrasts of dark sky and the blackthorn blossom's effulgence. The sudden illumination before the clouds and rain closed in! The trunk of the blackthorn's intricate spiral and the collapsing dry stone wall: ordinary; real: "A simple produce of the common day", Wordsworth would call it and what Constable called "natural!" painting that tries to celebrate the thing itself. Both 42" square.





In the previous pages "summer" painting, (p. 36) the greys, browns of the cloudy sky and its cloud forms describe the scene. but the brush marks, for example of the middle-middle section of clouds are reductive, quick and diagonal: handwriting, "Tachist". They are what you could call "obliquities" of representation which has been stretched away from a more familiar "likeness". But such drawing in a painting like this has an extra role – namely to build up those mark-rhythms that constitute what you could call the "music" of the image. The marks are also a summary short hand of "shading", used to represent cloud. The greens and browns of the "stream" or blue and grey of the sky are obviously representational, as are the circles of rain drop ripples. But inspite of all these details, the rain falling down the left edge or the 5 crows in the sky, there is an over-all harmony and rhythm: a stateliness that comes from the harmonies of the "drawing" rhythms, but also there is the time of day, the season of the year, the weather with the coming rain, already visible in raindrops and distant shower. Most importantly the paint does not show off its modern "painterliness". The paint marks try to represent the scene both modestly and adequately: this is the place, the coming rain and a certain summer feeling, the high piling clouds and the space in which the crows are flying. The nettles on both sides of the stream and the other generalised indications of weeds is just sufficient and are subservient to the rhythms of the whole. In the painting opposite there is a different "shorthand" being used. Colour too, like "drawing" has its "obliquities": colour may be transposed but must remain relational to the "real". Opposite and detail above: an evening painting of the moors and snow. Such an evening is full of sharp contrasts. I have used the convention of "shading" (parallel and close pencil lines) to allow superimpositions of different colours; and painting with dry brush so that colours do not interfuse and merge - see detail on following page. This tries to also translate the exuberance that such a moment makes us feel - as if by a natural infection by the evening's splendour! Colour too is part of that exclamation.





Such representations as this and on the the previous pages, must have enough details that truely and self effacingly represent the scene. If such representation is too "real" and not self-respectingly "modern", then so much the worse for modernity. Art school gesturalism doesn't leave room for such representation and the words above of the art critic seem to imply that painting must as he puts it , "settle accounts" (!) with *"the wave after wave of French invention that led from Millet and Courbet to Seurat and Cézanne"*. So does landscape painting have to take note of Cezanne and his planes of superimposed and very generalising "passage"? They are to be called "discoveries" with which we must "settle accounts" with (=pay attention to as that review described it?), as if like scientific discoveries each new discovery is looking to integrate itself with previous knowledge? And those crows, the moving water, the nettles, pouring rain, the rain drops, of the previous painting or in this one, the splendour of the snowy evening moors, must give way to the now stale "discoveries" of the past? It is a way of thinking that is so hostile to the real, uncertain, trail and error of painting. As a painter I feel animus towards that sort of criticism because it makes painting less possible and has had a bad influence on art education - above all in schools. Here and in that initial painting, it is the place, weather, time and season that count. It's a painting that wants to present something recognisable of "that day", and not be too pushy with its "art". The moors have almost "infected" one with the jubilation of that moment.

And when snow bright the moor expands		How shall your children clap their hands
To make this earth our heritage		A cheerful and a changeful page
God's bright and intricate device		Of days and seasons doth suffice How perfectly Stevenson's words explain, "why I





What such critics as the one I've quoted do, is to make such painting impossible for any self-respecting "modern" artist. What a pity. What a loss, since a real artistic respect for nature will let it speak in its own voice: somehow! (that **somehow** is the point of the artist, as opposed to the tidy minded critic who is so infuriatingly omniscient with his forms on the highway of art! And how will the "French" waves help me to find the numinous? And surely now more than ever, we need a "nature" painting of respect and otherness? Here again is that expression of a different, non art-forms attitude.

For the discerning intellect of Man, When wedded to this goodly universe In love and holy passion, shall find these A simple produce of the common day.

That is a quotation I often repeat because it suggests that art is a matter of serious things- which might be simply wonder - which I hope the manner of these two details tries to constitute. If Constable read those lines of Wordsworth I am sure he would have felt that they fitted his intentions and certainly fits with the thought that I quoted above from Baumann, and the following thought of Adorno is similar to that of Baumann or the "revelations" of the mystic Boehme, and all are much nearer to what I think should be the influences on Landscape painting; not the task of "translating Impressionism"! -as that critic put it! An artist doesn't take up a "form" to house his "content", (except as stuttering trial and error) and if he picks up hints from the paintings of others (say, Constable from Ruysdael), they are random and always being subducted as it were, into the deeper magma that may or may not later come to the surface as new painting. It is not, as the critic put it, "wave after wave of French invention" that supposedly, should have (!?) influenced Paul Nash that is critical, but the stumbling, trying out of what the artist might decide to do, having randomly picked up hints and intuitions from other painters which then combine with his own tentative explorings and above all with all his **inner life** of experience and dimly wished for effect, so that the final page seems to hold something worth "saying": that dimly intuited feeling of getting near "it" - "Yes, I think that's what I meant"!



Adorno. "Before the times of our enormous "technology project" (to transform the earth in our image/ and according to our supposed "needs"), the aesthetic dimension of nature was once self-evident as a daily cultural-sacred, when our lives were closely embedded in nature. In modern times, art is almost the only medium in which the aesthetic awareness of nature remains. Today art is, as Adorno claimed, an after echo of that silence in which nature speaks – not with our language but metaphoric and encyphered. Only in this indispensable working of art does the old concept of the language of nature still dimly remain". Opposite. Detail **Winter sky**. Above. Detail **April sky**.



What struck me on that day of the "raindrops" painting previously described was the stillness of such a thunder threatening summer afternoon; the expectancy of it. (36.-41) I'd like painting to concern itself, not with "wave after wave of French invention" but with either the utter simplicity of the Stevenson poem or this enormous background, as indicated in this article by the late sociologist **Zigmunt Baumann** of **Leeds University**. **"The word /concept "Nature" came into our languages with an aura of sacredness and indicated that which was divinely created – that which was from the beginning of all things – created by God. Like all divine things it provoked in humans an interweaved feeling of awe, terror, adoration – as Rufolf Otto said – awe towards nature- was an initiating idea for God. As his creation, it towered beyond our comprehension in its power, vastness and generative fecundity. It dwarfed us. This was the "numinous" in nature".** All the arts try to "say" what otherwise cannot be expressed - that's the necessary seriousness that humiliates our endeavours - sincere though they be.





Here again are those lines that assert, "It's the world, stupid"!

“Paradise, and groves Elysian,
Fortunate Fields-like those of old
Sought in the Atlantic Main, why should they be
A history only of departed things,
Or a mere fiction of what never was?
For the discerning intellect of Man,
**When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.**
I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
Of this great consummation”.

That seems a beautiful expression of what Jakob Boehme felt from his transforming visions. To confirm what otherwise might just seem fancy art-talk, think of one of those Bonnard paintings of an interior looking out onto a garden: they are paintings of the “common day” without “bravura”, yet profoundly poetic: visionary in Jakob Boehme's sense. In those words of Constable, “truth” refers to a reality out there or what Wordsworth meant by the “common day”: all “old hat” to modern merchants of an abstract or “spiritual” truth. Such Bonnard paintings cleanse the arteries of response and remind us of the privilege of existence. La douceur de vivre! Such paintings remind us of Blake's words:

“If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern”.
“There is room enough for a natural painter. The great vice of the present day is bravura, an attempt to do something beyond the truth”. **Constable.** (And by “truth” Constable was referring to something similar to Wordsworth’s common day”). There is a “realistic” sonnet of Shakespeare’s that starts

Some glory in their birth, some in their skill	Some in their garments though new fangled ill
Some in the wealth, some in their body’s force,	Some in their hawks and hounds, and some in their horse.....

So each on this list of preferences and enthusiasms is only a beginning of a complete list which one could imagine much, much longer. What it presents is the thought of how each of us has his privileged area of living experiences that we accumulate through life and which we as it were then cultivate in remembrance - like a garden. In modern parlance we’d say that these preferences are our “bubble”, or “bias” where, as it were, we have cut out a clearing in the forest – the source of our particular pleasures and through which we see, as through a lens, life from “our point of view”. An alternative modern manner of saying this would be to call such preferences part of our “identity”. Maybe even those Bonnard paintings or any picture we could cite as significant to us, are “chosen” by our odd accumulation of personal “bias”. “And every humour has its adjunct pleasure wherein it finds a joy above the rest”.

What does it take to find a special value in art or music – either to make it or appreciate it? Like anything of value, we have to invest time and practice in “reading” the special languages of music, or say painting – poetry is relative since the language that we all speak is part of it. Any past-time, “passion” or proclivity tends to be exclusive and require many hours dedicated to it. A composer, poet or painter have to use those famous 10,000 hours of practice to slowly build up a “language” that will carry what they sense is of significance to themselves and (hopefully) comprehensible to others. It’s their inner judgement that winnows out the right sounds or marks and their work has to win consensus from others who have not their practiced familiarity. Think of the absolute miracle of Mendelssohn's Octet written at 16 (!!) A totally new thing on the earth, yet how it exclaims, "It's the world, stupid"! It's breathless with world!

What I found shocking in that critic's version of art history and “influences” on a painter is the back to frontness of it. Just as those who “delight in hawks and hounds” will have spent time and enthusiasm in becoming relatively expert, so too, artists in a much less delimited area must do so in a more open-ended context. What is objectionable about the critic's view is that it is so form dependent – as if an artist’s vision depended on his having absorbed (“settled accounts”) with previous artists’ formal “inventions”, whereas the leading choice is made by our personal leading “humour” which has its “adjunct pleasure” and which is often hidden to ourselves and is rooted in the “world” we have known. It is this personal experience which, in a complex back and forth movement, feeds into the painting forms which are slowly built up by trial and error and the steadily modifying view of which paint marks best carry and deliver the wished for effect. The marks must not loose touch with what Francis Bacon gave primacy to by calling it the “armature of the real”-. Any “forms” or “handling” of paint that are noticed in other painters are endlessly modified by the painter’s



Because of the silly jargon of abstract art's talk, a bogus categorisation has entered the language of art criticism which has created specialised, "aesthetic" values, cut off, from what Wordsworth called "the common day" or Bacon, "the armature of the real": that is to say, the representational bedrock that alone gives meaningful context to "marks". In the case of music, you could say that the "representational" aspect is furnished by the way music depends on our life time experience of body movement and body sensation (hard/soft, smooth/ rough, loud/soft, bright/dark, quick/slow accelerating/slowing and all the extensions of dance. so a lot of musical emphasis depends.on the degree to which music is a metaphor of movement .

Most of us engaged in the dangerous business of art, (dangerous because nearly all of us will not discover, or uncover much), will end disappointed by our relative "failure" at what a lifetime's sincere endeavour has amounted to! Yes, a failure but one that has been worth the effort!At the very least, **an act of disinterested praise!**

The main fallacy that is encouraged by ordinary art criticism such as that critic's is to imply that there are forms, formalities, procedures, etc to be noted and discovered ("wave after wave of French invention"). This then results in the production of a mass of trivial "new" forms without any significance because any real meaning can only be realistically bound in during a very slow personal practice that is entwined with forms that do NOT "express meanings" but only accumulate them slowly in practice, to be recognised by the artist as they emerge! So an artist looks at what he's done and says; "yes, that's something near to what I recognise (now I've made it), as worth making". That is a happy conclusion except that it is mobile and often withdraws its certainty. So Hokusai could jokingly hypothesise, that "at 140 I may have just begun to paint"! Music and painting are endlessly inventing a language at the same time as "saying" something through it! No wonder Hokusai felt he was being slow in getting there!

Art history because it follows A to Z, forgets that it could have been a quite different history, and instead bullishly "takes upon itself the mystery of things", and presumes to know "who's in and who's out". So then much that might have been valuable is loftily dismissed or too early discouraged.

In these 3 quotes below, Constable points out that bravura in painting is empty – all marks must be subordinated to the task of, not "expressing ", but containing something near to Jakob Boehme's private experience of "revelations" about the world experienced, but unlike Boehme, it must have a **language of marks** that makes that revelation" readable and repeatable to others. "It's the world, stupid"! It's Bonnard's open windows.

Here again are those 3 quotes of Constable which show the see-saw importance of learning a painting language while at the same time maintaining a naïve faith with the formlessness (as yet) of our constitutive experience.

Just as in the case of an art - either as informed appreciation or as a practicing artist, our own general beliefs and the peculiarity of our personal experience is a sort of delimiting specialism ("every humour has its adjunct pleasure" - and therefore its displeasure) so it is only through the development of an agile language ability that we make it possible to share understanding across the boundaries or "bubbles"; and so, skeptically question the too clear certainties that language itself deceives us with! The arts too have their languages but there is a very common belief these days that art works with immediacy and within its specialised "art" space– or even more doubtfully, that it communicates special values which are called with that meaningless, baggy concept; "spiritual values"! No, "it's the world, stupid"!

Constable.

1. "When I sit down to make a sketch from nature, the first thing I try to do is to forget that I have ever seen a picture".
2. "A self-taught painter is one taught by a very ignorant person".
3. "There is room enough for a natural painter. The great vice of the present day is bravura, an attempt to do something beyond the truth".

A **windy day in autumn**. Stream. 100 cms square. **It's life that makes one paint - not "art"**, and painting should also be an act of love.

Strange fact of using single "colour" ink: its "untrue" single "colour" can work (like black and white photography) to make certain effects possible.



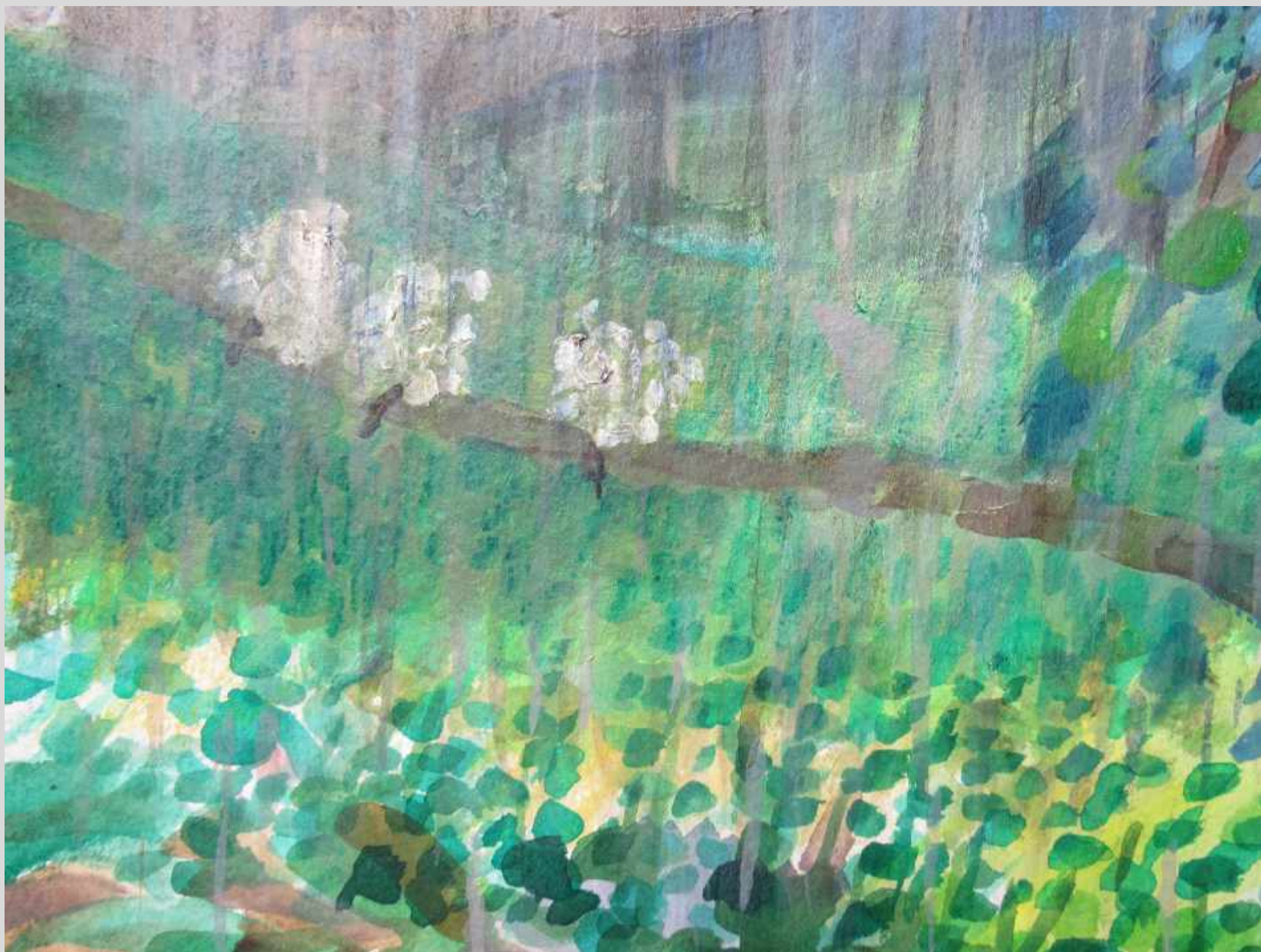
Unlike the previous paintings, these two show the emotive gamut of water colour. Its suffusions. This one above was as you can see at the bottom, rained on, and so the spotting and puddling effusions of the colour into a radiance was suitable to such an evening. Sometimes the weather is an ally! In both you can see the effect of "brightness" in the paper that is left white. That gives the images an "eclat". (French word = bright emphasis). Those little areas of white paper are so intrinsic to the beauty of water colour, and they have a fraternity to the red-brown areas of under priming that Constable left on his "finished" paintings. Of course, the Academy complained the paintings weren't "finished"!













This was a painting that was a little too much worked on by the rain! In modifying it I tried to not interfere too much from the dry indoors!







Memory and experience are always being added to and mingling, so that the simile “like a kaleidoscope” seems a justified simile for our minds. But here the kaleidoscope is a special sort that can be infinitely added to and the coloured shapes are made of memories and what we steadily learn of the world or others, either directly or more indirectly through those influences listed under “sociology” or “art”. In recent years the word “narrative” has become a rather common place word, along with “identity” to describe how we shackle events and ideas together (with maybe the false linearity of a story) to “explain or make sense of ourselves and the world”. But also, sadly to make nonsense of the world!



“Make sense of our lives”, is in some ways a wrong headed endeavour. People were once, naturally born into a so specific environment, so that “reality” was self evident and omnipresent – it was people's continuum. It was made up of the physical and relational connections – their “way of life” never could or would have been a reality to pose abstractly as a problem to “understand”. The 2 Red Indian poems refer to a way of life so embedded that it made it unthinkable to pose our abstract considerations (from outside) of “life” or that modern and misleading preoccupation with “identity”, which for them was simply invisibly embedded in life and place.





Their lives made up a glorious negation of Delphi's recommendation to "know thyself". Perhaps Goethe's counter recommendation to "understand the world" was nearer, except that the Red Indians were the world already. In the lines from Wordsworth's "Excursion", there seems a recommendation that a right connection to the world would make art superfluous. Along with that leitmotif I think of the modest every day "revelation" of Jakob Boehme (1575-1624). His famous moment of common day "revelation" when "a beam of light reflected from a pewter dish seemed to reveal the secret of the cosmos", and how poems (or the best paintings, and certainly music) resemble Boehme's "revelation" in showing something missed by us in our "common day". Compare this of Blake's



"If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern". (Our silly "identities!") Blake didn't have, as did Wordsworth, a sense of the sufficiency of nature, rather than imagination and he might have found this following passage an impossibility in what he thought was still a "fallen" world, that closes us off in our limited 5 senses.

Once more that passage of Wordsworth.
 "Paradise, and groves Elysian,
 Fortunate Fields-like those of old
 Sought in the Atlantic Main, why should they be
 A history only of departed things,
 Or a mere fiction of what never was?
 For the discerning intellect of Man,
 When wedded to this goodly universe
 In love and holy passion, shall find these
 A simple produce of the common day.
 I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
 Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
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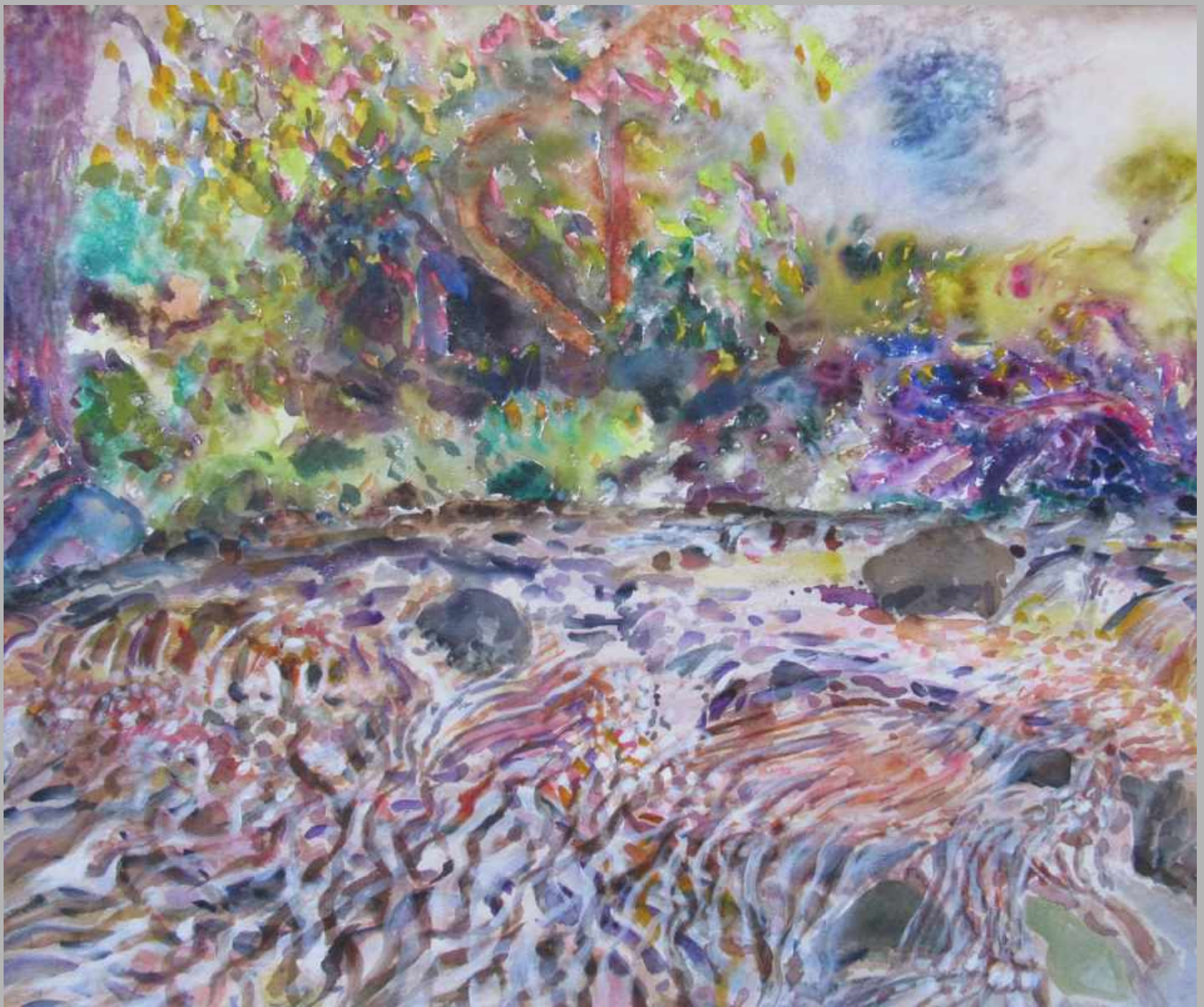






Richard Jeffers. (Early 20th century poet). "If we had never before looked upon the earth, but suddenly came to it man or woman grown, set down in the midst of a summer mead, would it not seem to us a valiant vision? The hues, the shapes, the song and life of birds, above all the sunlight, the breath of heaven, resting on it: the mind would be filled with the glory, unable to grasp it, hardly believing that such things could be mere matter and no more. Like a dream of some spirit land it would appear, scarce fit to be touched lest it should fall to pieces, too beautiful to be watched lest it should fade away". Isn't that a fine task for a painter to try and communicate that wonder?

Journal of Affective Disorders". 2012. "In effect, humans have dragged a body with a long hominid history into an over-fed, badly nourished, sedentary, sunlight deficient, sleep-deprived, competitive, inequitable, and socially isolating environment, (in mostly treeless, concrete and metal cities), with dire consequences". According to WHO (world health organisation), people in wealthy countries suffer depression 8 times more than those in poor countries. It has been calculated that the Kalahari Bushmen only needed to "work" 12 hours a week. Everything was shared equitably. How strange that we can so strongly feel nostalgia for an unknown different life!



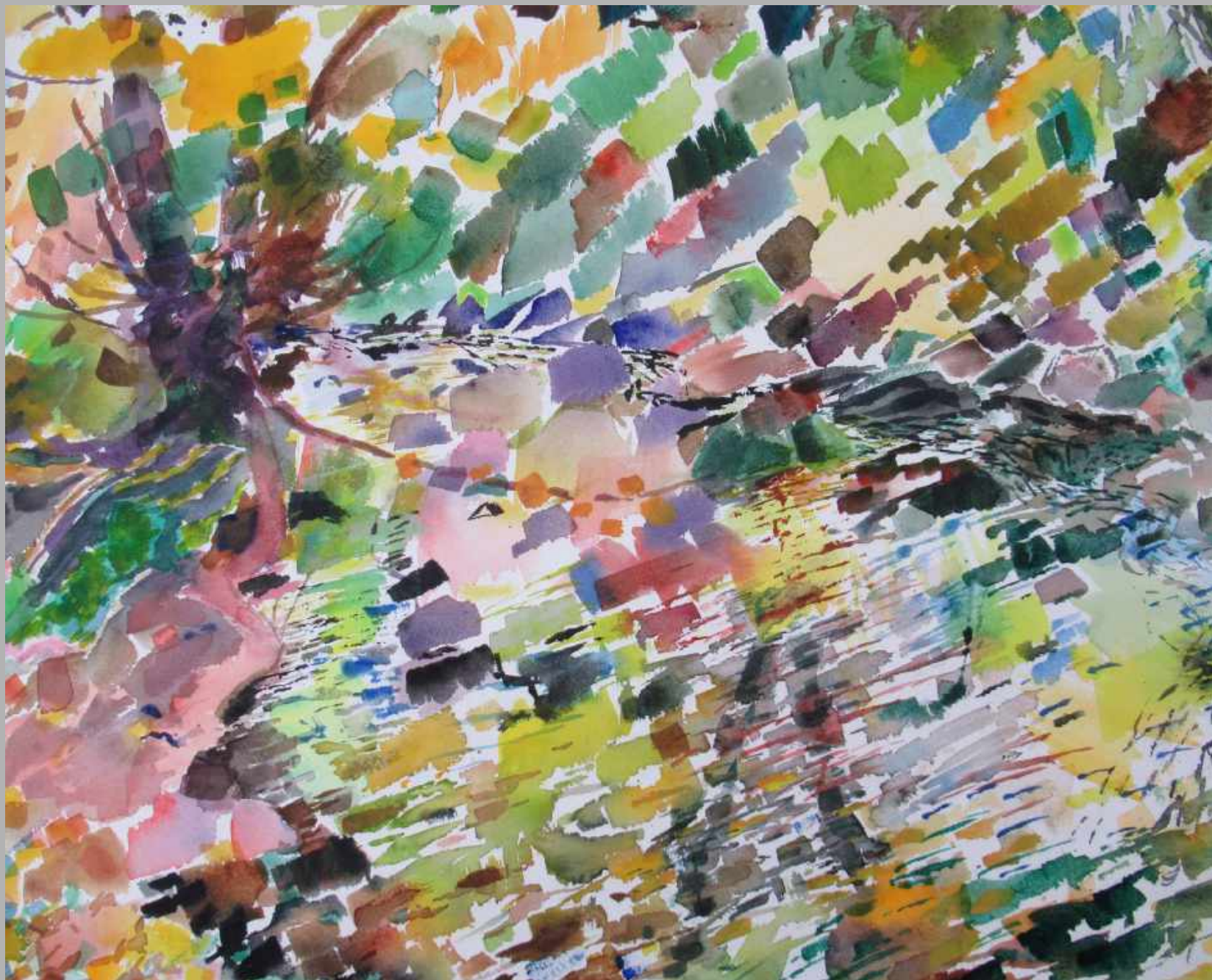






Adorno. *“Before the times of our enormous “technology project” (to transform the earth in our image/ and our supposed “needs”), the aesthetic dimension of nature was once self-evident as a daily cultural-sacred, when our lives were closely embedded in nature. In modern times, art is almost the only medium in which the aesthetic awareness of nature remains. Today art is, as Adorno claimed, an after echo of that silence in which nature speaks – not with our language but metaphoric and encyphered. Only in this indispensable working of art does the old concept of the language of nature still dimly remain”.*

Die ästhetische Qualität als eine der Natur selbst und des Umgangs mit ihr hat eine ubiquitäre Selbstverständlichkeit gehabt, solange Natur und menschliches Leben sakralkulturell eingebettet waren. Die Neuzeit hat diese Tradition unterbrochen, um das Technikprojekt ins Werk setzen zu können. In der Neuzeit ist die Kunst fast das einzige Medium, in welchem die ästhetische Achtung der Natur überlebte. Heute ist Kunst allenfalls noch, wie Adorno meint, ein »Nachbild des Schweigens, aus welchem allein Natur redet: und etwas »sagt«, die mit der Menschensprache nichts zu tun hat, dennoch aber in den Spuren der Kunst metaphorisch und chiffrenhaft zu Bild und Ausdruck kommt“.







Here again is the article by the late sociologist Zigmud Baumann. *“The word /concept “Nature” came into our languages with an aura of sacredness and indicated that which was divinely created – what was from the beginning of all things – created by God. Like all divine things it provoked in humans an interweaved feeling of awe, terror, adoration– as Rufolf Otto said – it was an initiating idea for God. As his creation, it towered beyond our comprehension in its power, vastness and generative fecundity. It dwarfed us. This was the “numinous” in nature – the presence of “the sacred” or God. The idea of humans being in any way able to intervene or meddle with nature was implausible and sacriligious. As the great Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin showed; the lifted up mountains and the vast oceans from the very beginning provoked in humans, feelings of “cosmic fear”, and Bakhtin thought it was this awe, that lay behind all religious beliefs. The modern idea of governing Nature in order to force it to serve our conveniences or purposes would have seemed insolent, daring, and presumptuous The modern story of humanity’s control of nature has been effectively like a change of management. The earth and nature being now under new management and subordinated to our projects, plans and programs. Not a sacred “other” but “stuff” to simply be manipulated to serve our needs. This has been brought about by the victory of human culture over nature”.*

Through the amassing power of human culture we are now both intentionally and unintentionally changing what was once our “natural environment”. Is such a responsibility beyond our evolutionary state? A monkey in charge of the levers?

(But we also know that, for all our proud power, one day, the larger cosmic Nature will bite back and do away with us! - in its way - reassuring!).

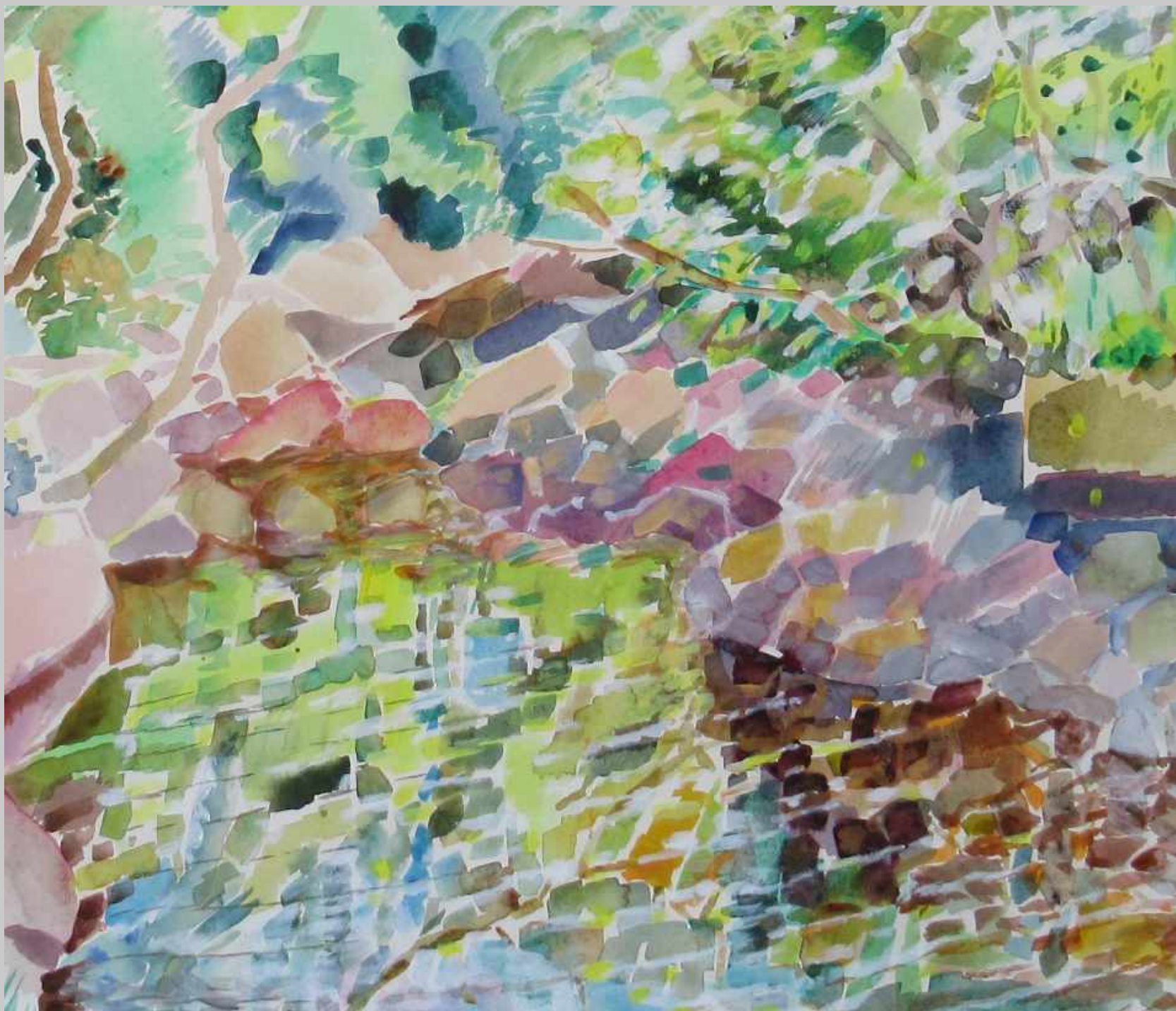
















The German Christian mystic Boehme and the themes of the German romantics both illuminate – for me – landscape painting and my experience of it. This is the last of the 4 books on the paintings and I feel that although all sorts of respectful genuflection is made to art by politicians, academics, historians, scientists etc, yet none of them have much idea of what is actually valuable in what they conventionally praise; almost one feels, out of the politely accepted notion that “art is a good thing!”, before forgetting about it in its area of quarantine!

Anyone who is involved in making some form of art is always nagged by its irrelevance to the modern world, but if they do grapple with large questions, they run the risk of rendering those ridiculous when seen in the light of their own trivial endeavours, because any amateur performer enters the single arena of “art” and therefore finds themselves, with their daubs, embarrassingly among the “mighty dead”.

The arts are specialised vehicles of understanding, enlightenment, and enlargement. (However that seems hardly adequate in the case of the huge mystery of music - “Is it not strange that sheep’s guts should haul men’s souls out of their bodies”! The hieroglyphs of say the last 3 piano sonatas of Beethoven. They say so much though we could never sum it or word it). Nothing else does that, though moments of poetic eloquence can take your breath away.

People see through their eyes but also through their concepts, ideologies, needs, genders, families and national culture – just to name a few “lenses”. Also individual biography forms us;- that is, everything that has happened to us in life, along with what we have steadily, and with difficulty understood of all that which goes to determine how we “see” the world, (and we use the word “see” both in a visual and interpretive sense: “I don’t see what you mean”).













Goethe in his student days had a friend called Behrisch who was an intelligent witty individual and one of his bits of intellectual tom folly reported by Goethe in his biography was a variant on one of his own thoughts. This is Goethe's thought from *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.

“And so I came to realise that the ancient and high sounding task, “know thyself” was in fact an unpleasant piece of cunning of a sort of secret priesthood who by setting people an unattainable goal would perplex and distract them from activities directed to their immediate world and instead towards a falsifying inwardness in which they would lose themselves. A person can only know themselves in proportion to how much of the world they know – of it and through it. Truly, every new object opens in us a new organ of perception”. (ie enriches our awareness and increases our comprehension in a continuing virtuous spiral).

This expresses very well the realisation that how and what we **"are"** is proportionate and relative to what we have encountered in the outer world – our **“experience”**, which Goethe points out, doubles back to become itself an organ of sense; like sight or hearing; and crucially of making sense, and after all, we use “sense” in double meaning of perceptions and comprehension. “What’s the sense in that”? Our experience – fortunate or unfortunate, become determinants of our possibilities, which of course points to the injustice and malevolence (if unattended to), of social deprivation.

So Goethe's friend Behrisch reworded the idea of a predetermining experience in this jocular fashion with words to this effect. “Every new experience is an experience that we experience thanks to the experiences that we have experienced. So no experience is just a single experience: it's only as good as all the experience that you have experienced! As you can see, Behrisch has made Goethe's same point: “Truly, every new object we encounter opens in us a new organ of perception”.

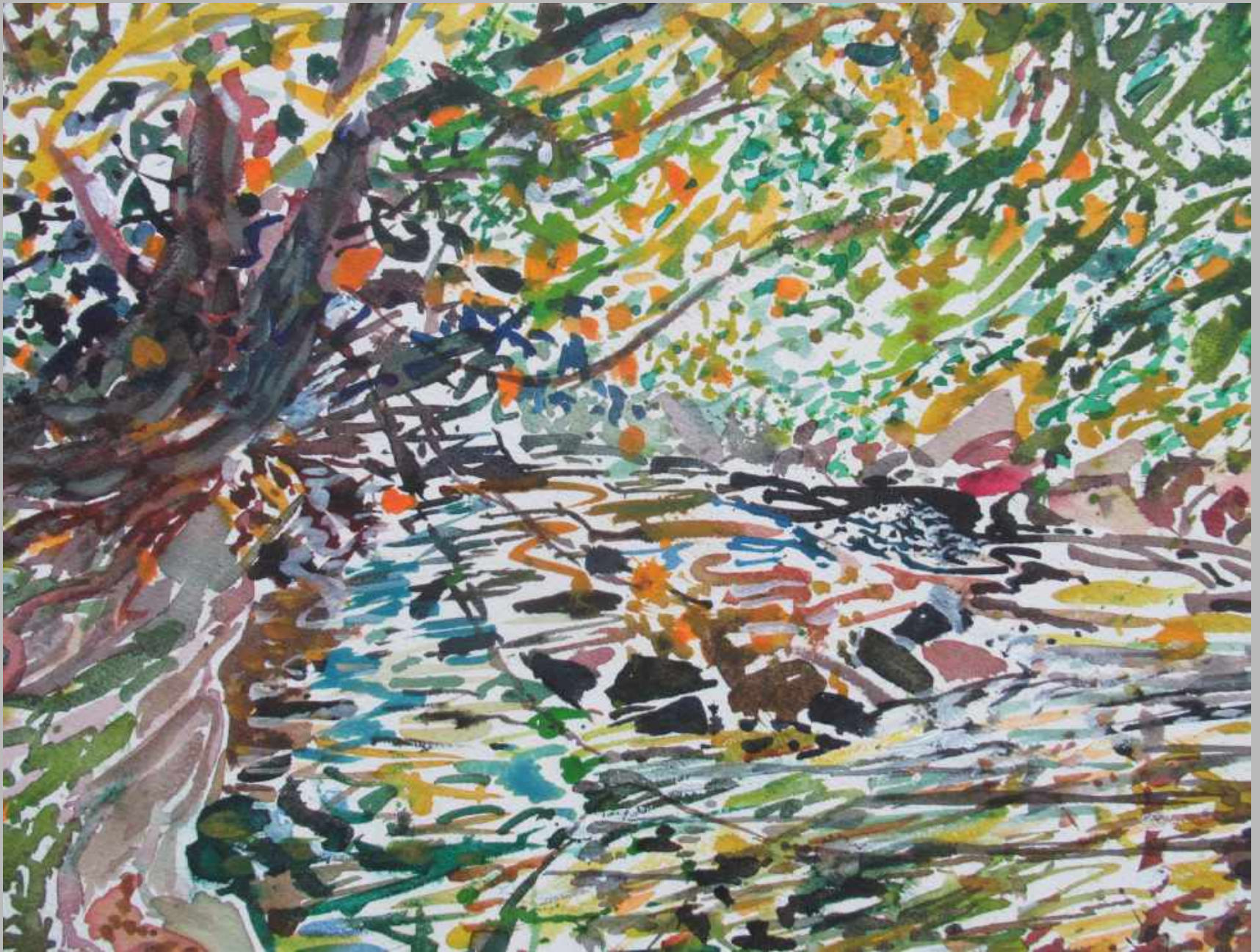




This doubling back on itself of experience is just as true for the making of an art object, where alongside the ordinary daily experiences described by Behrisch, there merges that other parallel set of experiences of making of an art work (poesis), that guides the artist as he works. No artist knows what they are doing in clear terms but they are familiar with the pool of their past artistic experiences and discoveries in making a “something” that more or less convinces them. That’s the nub of it. Just as music is untranslatable but meaningful, so too a painting must seem to say something so that one feels at a certain moment – “yes that’s it”, – that somehow it’s managed to entangle something in its marks! Something worth –(as the expression has it) “capturing”. It is typical of the artist to move with shafts of novelty, invention and originality within a territory of procedures that they already have found to work – “work” in the sense of edging them nearer to those vaguely intuited “right” choices and procedures, so that in front of what they finally make, they can say – “yes, that’s it”: (“I think!”). What is interesting is to wonder what it is that convinces us (or others) or not? Does a landscape painting, for example include an X factor that we have added or a Y factor that we have perceived was there. “What is the truth status of a landscape painting”? (That is an important question). I felt a shock when I came across words of the German romantic poet, Novalis who said something to this effect; that “In the face of a hostile reality, the poet “muss es romantisieren”, (romanticise it): one must see “als ob” (as if), which seems to me a willing self deception. This is a better formulation: “to find that which, though hidden, is there, and which when shown, convinces that it is true”. So artistic practice is a little like the revelations of Jakob Boehme’s mystical insight when he saw a beam of light reflected from a pewter dish that seemed to him to reveal the nature of the entire cosmos. That was a different view of reality but not got with a little “romantisieren”! And Boehme’s experience is of the same family as when we see a spring flower and we say to a companion, “ beautiful!”. Our judgement derives from the accumulation of so much that we have already found beautiful or more obliquely – what we have experienced in our lives.











When I look at “The Haywain” or Renoir’s “Boating lunch” they have such an effect on me – they are not just a place beside the Seine, or a scene in Suffolk that is still visible – from the “The Haywain Visitors’ centre”: (which is vaguely disturbing; as if with its “visitors’ car park”, it were reversing Constable’s vision back into the ordinariness of a place!). Such paintings are to me nearer to what Boehme saw in the beam of light reflected in the pewter dish: a summing up sort of revelation. For a painter or for Boehme, “vision” is “now”. It derives from life’s experiences til that moment. In Boehme’s case, it was also the fruit of his particular religious sense of being alive in the world and gratitude to God. A so called mystic experience is always a sort of harvest or reward for past seriousness and taking note: a certain sort of vision becoming habitual. Boehme’s revelation had a personal history and similarly there is the history of experiences behind what occasioned Goethe’s poem, “Um Mitternacht”, (see a following page) . The span of time all felt in three verses now. With neither a poem, music or a painting is it a matter of “seeing it like that”, but that this particular art object, made like that, seems to cast a light on our “being in the world”. It is not self expression because the image or art thing has to carry across to others. So the “place” that I visit in order to make a painting, has to convince me to stop, because I think that I’ve done the best I can do, to yes, represent a place but also to catch at something extra that is worth being noted: now that I see it crawled into the light!

So experience is the fruit of experience as well of the moment. It is a kind of on-going harvest that is only limited by our final end, and in the case of Cultural experience, it is a harvest without end and which Blake beautifully referred to as (the benign version of the tower of Babel!) “Golgonooza”: that construction over time which humankind accumulates through the sum of its creative acts, kindnesses, and illuminations.





You could say that both the judgements of beauty in nature and in art are mutually enforcing because experience is a multiplier: and that life-long accumulation is perhaps what Goethe meant by “Kunstwerk des Lebens”: (life itself an art work). “What must I do to REALLY experience this world”, and I think it is that which is behind the touching sincerity of many German romantic poems and their profound-sad love for nature and its weather effects. Above, in that passage on a previous page, Wordsworth is wanting to do quite other than “romantisieren es”, (make it romantic, as Novalis put it distastefully), but almost the contrary; to celebrate the “**common** day” and make art unnecessary! I have a feeling that Jakob Boehme and Wordsworth would have understood each other. Wordsworth's idea on the sufficiency (in an ideal world), of the “common day” links him to Jakob Boehme and some German Romantics, where the simple things (the pewter dish) or natural phenomena: the spring, evening, morning, frost etc are the revelation. Such a mystic view is a potential pantheist belief; the Spinoza idea that “God” is simply the life force in all nature and the universe. For Goethe, once God is everywhere and nowhere, “revelation” has to depend on either the richness of our accumulated memory/experience, or on someone’s making of a poem, painting or music which must do the work of revelation to others: (see Um Mitternacht). With Boehme’s restituting of “God” into nature, the religious authorities were preoccupied that Boehme’s revelations were simply pantheistic heresy, for once nature was seen to hold so much “divinity”, God seemed to have been done away with. He was redundant, or rather he had "disappeared" into nature! So religious authorities accused Boehme of heresy. The “Nature” of the German romantics is sometimes a pantheism derived from Spinoza without them knowing it, and at times, remains Pietism’s simple gratitude towards the “Creator”, and to the solace they find in nature and which is often pictured as a foretaste of the peace of a pious eternity! Particularly so with Matthias Claudius' poems; like that hymn, "All things bright and beautiful".

















For a landscape painter there are three places in one. 1. The place that will still be there in an 100 years, (bar a few changes -if it is not built over). 2. The place where I am in that moment and have known in many previous moments and which seems to be important to me because the place has a history of me being in it and painting in it many times – maybe in order to reveal its painting possibilities – though that is too technical and calculating, whereas it's something deeper. I joke about the landscape painter being a sort of Shaman in the sense, not of having any power over anything but of wanting to find or have revealed, some power or meaning in the place. So finally, 3. The place is the painted image of it and whatever power it holds to do what?



Some days after painting outside, I notice on the steep climb home after finishing in summer, how after sunset, both the sky and earth seem to throb with the warmth of the past day's sun, or in winter, when sometimes the water freezes and marks the paper with the most beautiful coloured patterns – sometimes overlaid on each other - like memories (though sadly they fuse as they melt!). Then walking back there is such an intensity in the sky and the line of the hills is as sharp as a knife edge. Such experience is then entwined in one's "seeing" and in one's future painting and maybe a future painting will try to express the wonder of those evenings and which Boehme felt on seeing the light reflected in a dish!

The experience behind experience!

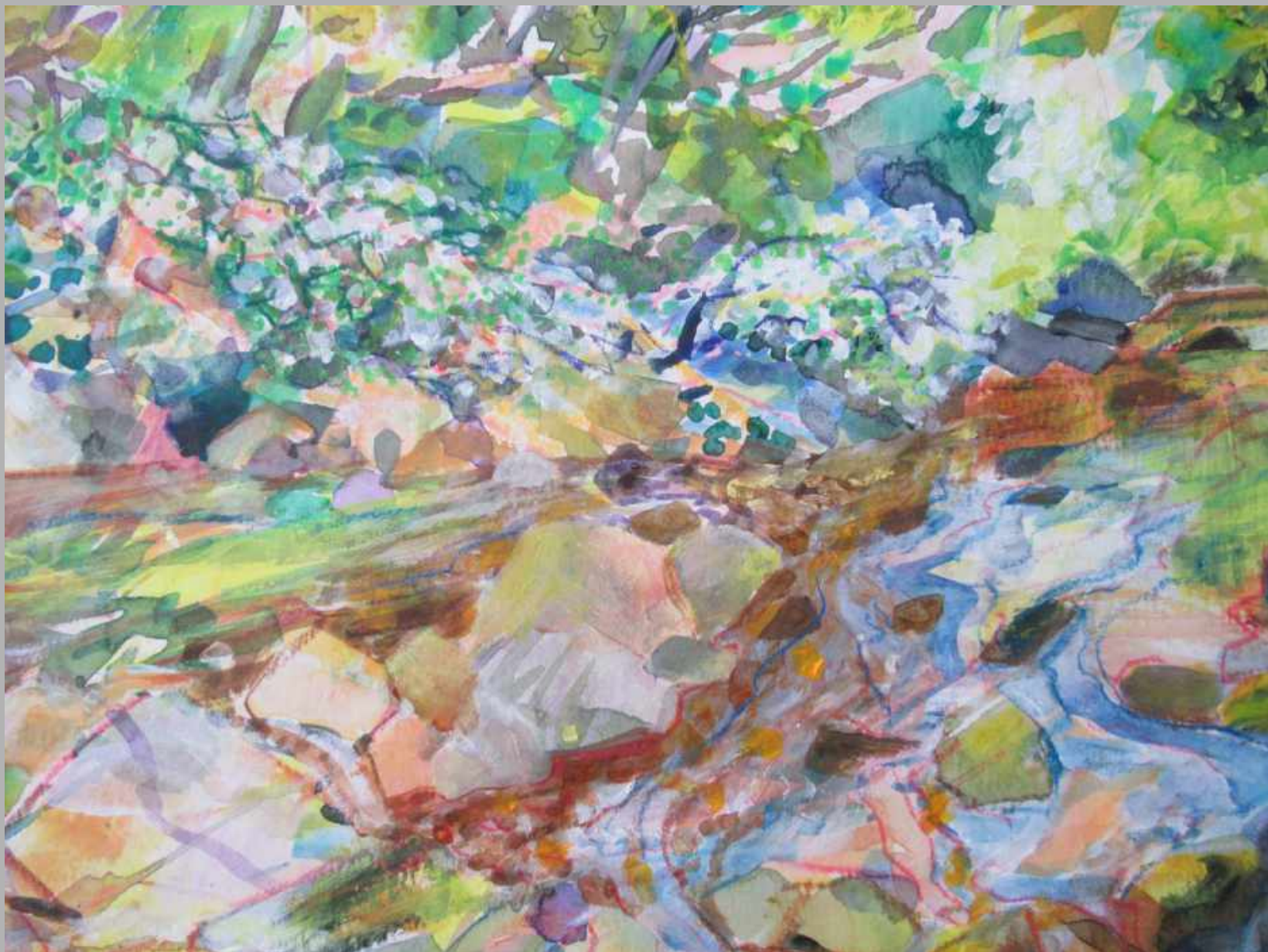














On the theme of personal or artistic revelation, we all have heard of the Proustian moment of the Madelaine cake and each of us probably has a similar vocabulary of deep and significant memories. Boehme's beam of light, Wordsworth's - "the common day", and so too, Proust's remembered Madeline cake or the uneven paving stone in Venice, were dense with "revelation" (Joyce's "Epiphany") and memory, so it became "poetic" in the way Boehme's experience of the reflection of the beam of light was "poetic". The difference being that although Boehme's experience of the reflection was poetic/"visionary", it was private. The poet's "vision", or a landscape painting is different for it must have a **form** that can contain the "revelation" for others to comprehend – as in Claudius' Abendlied.

Der Mond ist aufgegangen,	The moon has risen
Die goldnen Sternlein prangen	The golden stars sparkle
Am Himmel hell und klar;	Bright and clear in the sky
Der Wald steht schwarz und schweiget,	The wood is black and silent
Und aus den Wiesen steigt	And from the meadows rises
Der weisse Nebel wunderbar.	The white mist wonderfully

Of course a German finds magic in the language formation - the words; which shows incidentally that poems are barely translatable! We all have our memory sensations. As we lean forward to smell a rose, we already anticipate that inundation of delicate perfume tinted with nameless memory. We say our senses are overcome as if at that moment, one sense had become plural; more than just smell. As with Proust's famous Madeleine cake, our senses house our memories – though mostly not so specifically. Sometimes we have a particular memory, deeply engraved but often a smell or taste or sound seem to stir up echoes of different layers of our past: vague yet significant. The perfume of a rose can seem to plummet to our depths, for our senses are powerful repositories of our bric-a-brac experience and often of our childhood; but jumbled together. Maybe, a 60 year old suddenly hears from an open window, a piano piece, once played by his/her piano teacher mother. How the piece of music plunges through the senses, gathering up instantaneously others as it strikes the heart in one lightning move: instantaneous. Wordless. You could say that some of our profoundest "memories-without-words", are called up by this huntsman's horn of memory within memory that awakens our great congregation of memories, and important amongst these echoes are the cultural modes that extend (or sadly restrict) the subtlety of our responses to places, objects and to life itself.



So I hear the cuckoo and am dumbfounded by a wordless past; rich, deep and beyond my conscious recall. "Cuckoo"! It stirs up all the years of hearing it: beautiful now, but filled with nostalgia for..... innumerable tracings of forgotten things; of thankful days- significant but indecipherable; for spring itself – that trancing sound. Probably it calls up my 5-8 year old days of endless, unsupervised games in the woods in a Kent school: sunshine and dappled leaves, and us running breathless while "cuckoo" somewhere calls. So now it still echoes with those accumulated memories that measure all the years of its return. The cuckoo calls and then there's silence and then again, "Cuckoo", moving across the landscape and as you listen for it, you seem to be pulled out into that moving, echoing space that the bird's flight delineates: fields and dappled woods; "beechen green and shadows numberless"- beautiful, and beyond words is that sound: "The summer draweth near". "Cuckoo": **"sumer is icumen in"**. It seems to be a code we cannot decipher, as Goethe, in a poem imagining Paradise, spoke of how in Paradise – if there were such - we would understand. "Higher and Highest" things and understand all that a heavenly language might make it possible to say, once we had mastered: **"the grammar of hidden things"!!**

Doesn't that exactly describe what artists try to understand? Certainly what we notice in the deepest music or painting - (certainly in that Renoir painting of the "Boating lunch" or Constable's "Haywain"): **The grammar of hidden things!** Yes, as Constable indicates, that's partly through gathering indications and strands from other paintings, but I think depending more on just how attentive has been our whole experience until then. The "dawning sense" that never quite dawns! "The Grammar of hidden things". What a very beautiful phrase and how well it describes the artistic searching

118 which seems to make all the effort worth while!





















Psychology or Science do not use the categories of religion, so for them it is difficult to deal with thinking that is deeply dependent on (as we put it), a Christian “narrative” with which to explain our experience of the world. To secular life, religious categories are irrelevant; extraneous. Take the example of Jakob Boehme. We are informed that he was a “mystic”, with experience deeply influenced by Luther’s translation of the Bible into German. Luther was, as it were, his guiding code breaker. Jakob Boehme was also influenced by Paracelsus and his attempt to find a totality of interconnections and relationships in nature in what was called Alchemy. Boehme is described as a mystic because of his special way of comprehending the world and helping others to do so, was through “a way of seeing”: a very personal, meditative sense of the unity of all being. But that kind of experience comes from practice and habitual “ways of seeing”.



Boehme described as revelatory a particular moment (such as those described by Joyce as an Epiphany), in which he became aware of the exquisite beauty of a beam of sunlight reflected in a pewter dish, and which seemed to “reveal” the unity of the cosmos. Such a mysticism influenced the German Romantics and their poetry is beautiful with such wonder. Again Blake. **“If the doors of perception** were cleansed, every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern”. Is there a definition of art in that? Does art open up the “chinks”? The idea that through the narrowness of our experience, or opportunity we are imprisoned in a limited experience of the world. This is a thought common to Jakob Boehme, the German Romantics, Blake, and Wordsworth and it is relevant to those restrictions of being that personal and social fortune determines; not to speak of the limitations of our “media” times!





Detail of a wood in April. This on its own and very large would be pretentious compared to the "mere" landscape on the opposite page but I am sure it would command much more respect because people have been browbeaten into dismissing landscape painting as "passe'" and into thinking abstract art as respectably deep! Of course the paintings are at a disadvantage in this book size since they are all around a metre square. Again I think of that Goethe phrase: **the grammar of hidden things.**





Most people are aware of the idiosyncrasy of experience and so it has become a common place to talk of people in their own personal or group, “bubble”. So with both Boehme and the German romantic poets, their habitual feelings and “visions” seem outside of our experience – not our bubble. And a painter may have developed a way of seeing/thinking that is just his bubble- and his uncertainty comes from often practicing an art in near isolation. What was the significance of that beam of light for Boehme? What occurred in his mind to change everything. The “mystic” experience; what is it? A gap that is suddenly filled- like dammed water breaking over? In Boehme’s case it certainly led to a life-long conflict with his church congregation superiors at Gorlitz with accusations of heresy/ paganism. His “revelation” has similarities to the illumination that a poem encapsulates and certainly for readers, a good poem is illuminating, revealing, concentrating, perhaps even “visionary”. Is there a similar sense of water breaking through both in making and responding to art that “works”, and what is it exactly that we mean by “it works”? Is it not similar to Boehme’s light reflected from a pewter dish, that seems to “say it all”? Look at an open windowed interior with view into a garden by Bonnard, or a Picasso figure from the 30’s or Piero della Francesca’s Risen Christ at San Sepulcro, and thousands more one could cite, or all the music that moves us. They all seem to contain messages not quite decipherable, yet we recognise as important. So even though the encodings of art for the most part are closed to us in the sense that we cannot translate them, we certainly know when we have been illuminated or given pleasure by this magic object that draws together our threads of existence; whether a pewter dish or a poem. German romantic poems are often beautiful in the wonder of their picturing.





If we look at youtube for certain presentation talks on Boehme’s “thought”, it is often simply presented as “mystical” as if we knew what that was. What was it in Boehme that made him attractive to German Romantics – or for that matter to Blake. What connection of those poets to his mode of “revelation”? In recent years the term “Narrative” has grown to over use but like any such it still contains an original justification. If we think of Goethe’s student friend Behrisch and his playful insistence on the Russian doll quality of “experience”, we are made to realise that our experiences are like lightly coloured transparent slides and that, superimposed one upon the other, they form new combinations and transformations due to the interpretative effect of subsequent accumulating slides of experience. Memory itself has its bias, since it privileges some “experiences” of the past, polishing them up to become “spots of time”, “nourishing” as Wordsworth put it our continual present:

**There are in our existence spots of time,
That with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence--depressed**

**By false opinion and the round
Of ordinary intercourse--our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;**









So the word "narrative" draws attention to how the experience/story – becomes interpretative, meaningful: – pulls our experience into recognisable shape; and thus becomes a “narrative”. So an author tells a story in order to put in evidence certain aspects of existence to make it a narrative/ story with a meaning or a poem makes us “see” in a certain way. Maybe this double use of the word story or narrative resembles our double sense of History. Is it the “pure” events honestly/rationally told or our interpretative sequencing that is history; making sense of the “one damned thing after another” and disentangling the knots: and of course running the risk, through our discovered “narrative”, of distorting it, so that then someone else will have to (they think), straighten it! That is exactly the point of novels and plays and good TV and Film: they make a story that they are in control of because it can’t be argued with. Though we can question the logic of its geography. So some of what I called the slides of “experience” are those works which artists make and that help us navigate change or offers solace for change or distress. Often intellectual or artistic currents are litmus tests – they show the presence of “foreign” bodies, and maybe the art consoles or strengthens us against those dangerous bodies. Goethe’s Werther was meant to strengthen but a surprising number of male readers simply put themselves in the narrative and committed suicide! The story/ history is part of the local or national consciousness or may be just our term of “modernity”, and takes large matters for granted. The story becomes the common thread, shared by group. A cultural movement like the Romantic movement had a conformity of feeling; as Jane Austin mocked in North Hanger Abbey. It worked like contamination and infection! A great difference with modern secular times is that those without religion (and truly even those with, - since secularism is so dominant) will have to make up their own story and explanations; slowly assemble a sort of cultural bricolage: odd scraps from here and there- and isn’t Christmas such a scrap? Yet we all "do" Christmas, regardless of faith!





Jakob Boehme was clearly not satisfied with the “narrative” of Lutheran fundamentalism with its pessimistic view of the world as “fallen” and unredeemable through any experience except “faith”. You could say that Boehme thirsted for a religion that was more centred on creation (which to him, God had made especially legible and revelatory for us). He wanted to include and celebrate. That was the meaning of his moment of epiphany with the so modest beam of light reflected from the pewter dish: that feeling of it containing All -“Ganz alles” – significantly one of Goethe’s favorite phrases. That is somehow the way for the non religious to understand the space that the word “mystic” occupies. Also the particular value of it was the degree to which it was part of the “common day”, unpretentious though revelatory to Boehme. I think Boehme’s mystic revelations are perhaps better described as “poetic” rather than mystic – which too much claims just by assertion and doesn’t explain much. The “poetic” of Boehme was his sense of the totality of existence “the whole cosmos” but also the “sacredness” of modest, this-world things, like the “pewter dish” – almost a celebratory jubilation of life, and that is clearly what we hear in many German romantics, with the almost childish innocence of their Christian faith – (an almost dependence as if to parents). Not a concentration on gloomy Lutheran sinfulness but just the gratitude of a child saying their evening prayers beside the bed, to a loving God for “all things bright and beautiful”, and that is what is so touchingly echoed in Schubert’s 500 settings of his contemporary poets. (There is a similar gratitude, and jubilation in Van Gogh’s paintings. “...painting: “an act of gratitude”, he called it).





So here again is part of Claudius Abendlied. Evening song.

....Wie ist die Welt so stille	How still is the world
Und in der Dämmerung Hülle	And in the twilight's cover
So traulich und so hold!	So trusting and dear
Als eine stille Kammer,	Like a still room
Wo ihr des Tages Jammer	Where the day's tumult
Verschlafen und vergessen sollt.	Is slept away and forgot
Seht ihr den Mond dort stehen?	Look there at the moon
Er ist nur halb zu sehen	We only see half
Und ist doch rund und schön!	Yet it is round and beautiful
So sind wohl manche Sachen,	And so are many things
Weil unsre Augen sie nicht sehen	Though our eyes can't see.

Here in Claudius you see together the Luthern piety - its criticism of the fallen world, “Tages Jammar”, and a compensating wonder at nature’s beauty which often we miss “Weil unsre Augen sie nicht sehen”. Boehme’s beam of sunlight had revealed – through God, a visionary insight, while the German romantic poet reveals to the reader through poetic language, the visionary beauty.- a painter with marks, a musician with sounds. Both Boehme and the romantic poets might have echoed that thought of Blake’s: “**If the doors of perception** were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.” To the Christian the opening of the cavern would happen thanks to God’s grace, or to the intercession of Christ or through one’s inner struggle. To the poet that happens through the special poetic power of their description of the “beam of light”, or moon, or stars etc. The poet has therefore become a seer through revealing a hitherto hidden perception which he then makes into a cultural object, which can communicate to others and give us another thing to have “in common”.





It is not surprising that religious authorities accused Boehme of paganism and heresy for there occurs a sort of hybridisation of faith and a contemplated “nature”. What is significant in the German Romantics was the way religious language and attitudes were moved across, partly or fully to be relocated to nature, though often there remained the expression of faith in the form of their thanks to the creator for the nature they are celebrating. Our concepts and tools of experience are entangled with the words and cultural objects that we inherit, and what we conceive is still bound, unknowingly to a prejudiced “narrative”. “Urizen looked out from his cavern and became what he beheld”. There is a touching quality in German romanticism; its childlike gratitude. (That is a quality I would like the paintings to possess). There was also that alienated “sehnsucht” (longing/nostalgia) and Christian yearning for a paradisaical wholeness of being “in Christ” and when the explicit religious reference is removed, there remains that sehnsucht for something felt to be missing in life – either a “promised land” of lost childhood as in Eickendorf or an unsatisfiable image of an ideal, set against the disappointing world and so a secular continuation of the Lutheran pessimism about this “fallen” sinful world. It was this displacement of a former religious view to a present secular pessimism that made Goethe define the romantic poets as “ill”. Renunciation, disappointment in love, rejection, social ostracism, loneliness became almost the tropes of their artistic vocabulary. Think of Gaspar Friedrich’s paintings or Novalis or Eickendorf or Schubert’s “Wintereise”. However before dismissing too hastily that romantic vision, theirs was also a response to a severely changing social world which is why they still speak to us. We suffer alienation too.







“What is life?

It is the flash of a firefly in the night.

It is the breath of a buffalo in the wintertime.

It is the little shadow which runs across

The grass and loses itself in the sunset”.

Crowfoot, Blackfoot warrior and orator 1830 – 1890

“Humankind has not woven the web of life.

We are but a thread within it;

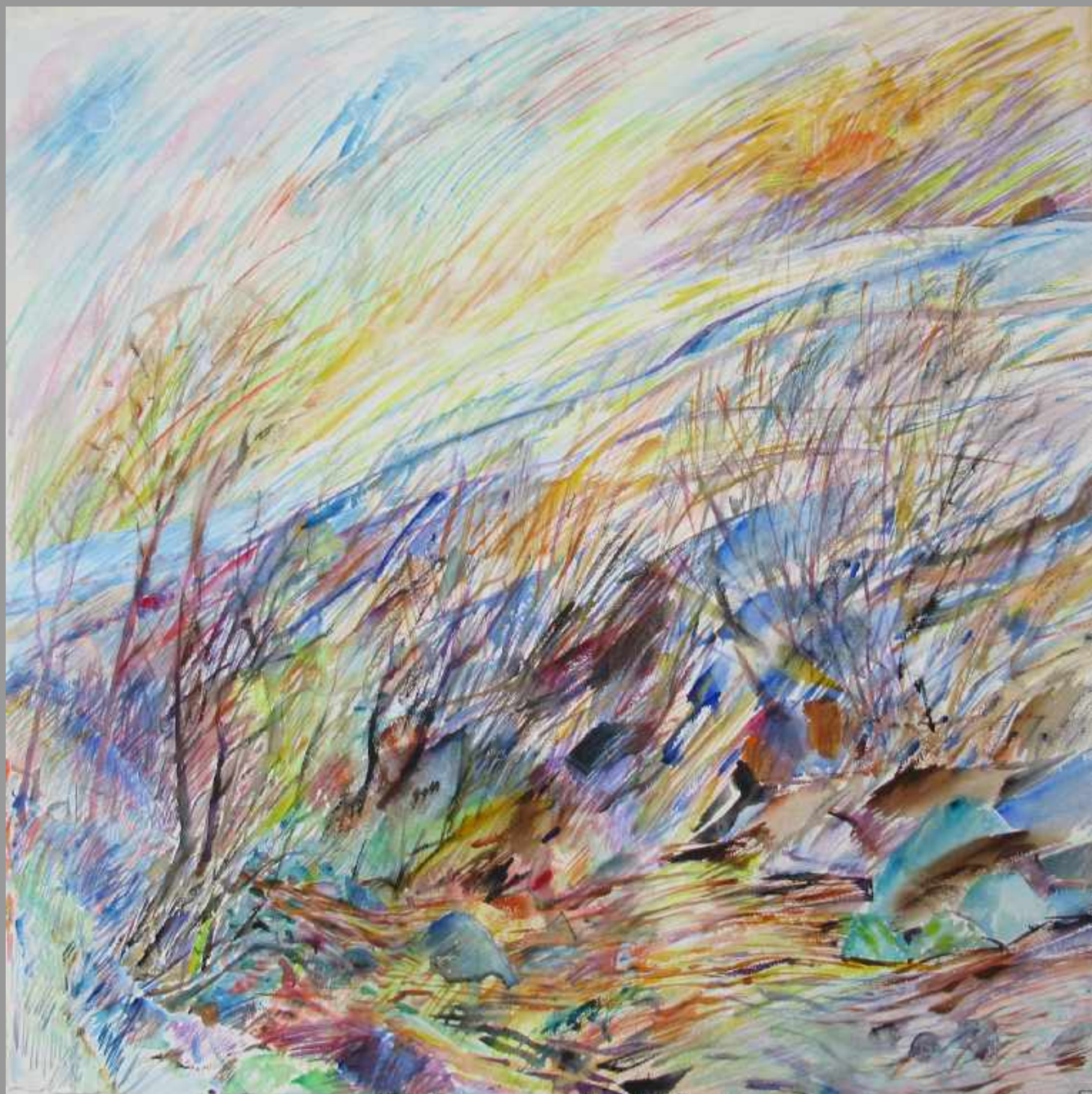
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.

All things are bound together.

All things connect”.

Chief Seattle. 1854 How absolute a truth that we are learning nearly two centuries too late.















So as we said at the start, both religions and the arts are “narratives” or interpretations or consolations by which to make sense of our place and time. Just as Behrisch saw that personal experience was a great on-going construction over time, so is a culture. Cultural residues are strange two faced things. They are both of the present and also, as Behrisch would have reminded us, barnacled with the past.

Jakob Boehme’s visions (1575 – 1624) –were similar to the “epiphanies” of art works. In England, Blake who unsurprisingly valued Boehme’s “mystic” vision, wanted to short circuit the whole false Christianity of his time, and to reconceptualise Christianity in his Prophetic books: thinking that the “Churches” had completely betrayed Christ. You could say that Blake was trying to give Boehme the shape of a story/work of art rather than as with Boehme – simply report a visionary experience. In a poetic, story form he wanted to show how, “the mind-forg’d manacles” are made.

It is significant that a majority of German romantic poets were pastors sons: outsiders. None of this denies what we value in them – precisely the expression of a homelessness that we all sympathise with in “these times” that we vaguely feel “are out of joint” and which, like Hamlet, we feel need to be “set right”: somehow! Werther was Goethe’s Hamlet – both struggling with “thoughts beyond the reaches of their souls” and displacement. You could say that Goethe’s work was a long attempt to get a healthy handle on “the times”. It was Schiller, who made enormous new demands on what the art work should represent and achieve – and certainly what Beethoven, with new and conscious ambition, wished his work to include. (Listen to the last tree piano sonatas. Extraordinary the enormity that they manage to contain.



We have, along with so much other cultural “experience”, inherited what I’d call the romantic displacement of conventional religious belief to a kind of homeless “spirituality” that has migrated to art and presumes to find in it a “spirituality” which simply confuses our considerations of what art is, as if galleries and museums were the new churches. I think that leads to a new mystification of art. In galleries I have noticed the white rabbit confusion and distracted wandering of people looking for what they have been promised in art – that autonomous “spiritual”; something that for instance abstract art has promised to be findable. Or that area of modern art that is an odd amalgam of philosophy, sociology and performance “tableau” that presumes profundity without showing any. (as in too much “Installation art”). There is in fact a great deal of “art” that goes under false pretences; – goes under its high-falluting claims of specialness, “depth” or “spirituality” and so we see those anxious



faces in galleries. (In contrast, Picasso fills a museum with smiling faces that catch his this-world wit!). This migration of “spiritual” from religion to art is maybe less likely in German where “Geist” means both “spirit” but also intelligence or living force– as we conserve in a phase like “high spirited” or “that child has spirit”. There is this astonishing paradox that it is monotheistic religions that render humans in the profoundest sense, irreligious. The Latin “religio” means respectful rites towards the various Gods. In the monotheisms it becomes mere enforcing – dress codes, eating codes, prayer times, saints’ day “holidays” and a whole attitude of being: a massive conditioning system. All these are superstitions of belief that offer precooked experience: stale, second hand experience. All of those enforcements of ritual, eating, prayers etc are a form of channeling of our responses and with the emphasis on the next life’s rewards, take us away from our close experience and respect for this world: and also distract us from changing it for the better!





But cultural conformity does not just exist in religion. You could say it is the nature of humans, who are social animals to be easily, willingly influenced. Conformity is second nature! This means that Behrisch's loop of experience is intertwined with society's pressure on us, so we must wonder whether freedom exists! Maybe one of the purposes of art is simply to undo the self-evidence and make us look afresh. But more than that, the whole romantic movement was a response to a new growing urban society, quite different from agricultural societies bound to land and seasons and the horse. Our hunter gatherer past stretches back so much further than that recent changes of 7,000 year ago. We still carry thousands of years of conditioning in our DNA. (Research at Beijing university found that children with exposure to nature were 7 times more successful at both school and career and that hospital patients recuperate faster if trees are visible!).





I have read about Benjamin Franklin's astonishment that English children kidnapped by Red Indians to replace dead warriors, when grown to adulthood and "rescued", needed little time to decide to escape back into the woods. Why, he asked in wonderment. "Though ransomed by their friends and treated with all imaginable tenderness to prevail with them to stay with the English, yet in a short time they become so disgusted with our manner of life.... and take the first opportunity of escaping again into the woods". Strangely I think Goethe's poetry is an attempted answer to Franklin's perplexity. It voices a "religious" attitude to nature – not dissimilar to certain Indian sayings.

Goethe's poetry is a celebration of the factual ordinariness of this life, in itself and for itself, and though in so different a form, that is what Goethe shares with Shakespeare. "Mental health comes from having a sense of connection to the world and that occurs when a person feels themselves integral to the larger world, to its beauties and to the best qualities of human life. So then she or he is made fully aware of the world by this feeling of connection and freely given wonder, and it is this rejoicing wonder that enables him or her to fulfil their aims and best abilities. Otherwise, what does all this circumstance of sun and planets, of moons, stars, Milky Way and comets, of clouds of once and future worlds signify, if in the end a person is not able to be happy and take delight in an unthinking enjoyment of his fated span"? Goethe.



In our present circumstance of poisoned, warming seas, ever warmer yearly temperatures, both the Romantics and Goethe's work has special urgency. "How did we arrive at this". Here is a fact that keeps returning to me . They say that it takes 25,000 years for a genetic mutation to either affirm itself or not, as advantageous. This means that the enormous change from hunter gatherer to early agriculture that occurred around 10,000 years ago, leaves us still today with the DNA of those 300,000+ years as Hunter Gatherer. No wonder we have problems and anxieties and no wonder that Goethe, in my view, spent a life trying to comprehend the unease that caused him. That was the cause of Benjamin Franklin's perplexity over the rescued English who fled back to the woods. I think much of Goethe's poetry is a voicing of a "religious" attitude to nature and life, trying to catch the disappearing numinous and he was much more conscious of the background of social change that lay behind the alienation audible in the Romantic movement.



“Kunstwerk des Lebens” is the apposite title given to a fine biography of Goethe by Safranski: life as a work of art to be laboured at. That is to say Goethe wanted to define how one could construct a life in full awareness “that everything that lives is holy”, not in the name of some God, but to honour the world and the pressing fact that we have just this one life to live fully. In this continual “Kunstwerk” des Lebens, life must repossess, take back the “spiritual” qualities that mistakenly were ascribed away to art forms or to religion, and maybe that is something that indirectly influences our indifference to the environment: we should repossess not just those supposed “spiritual” qualities but repossess a full, healthy life, where 65% are not obese. But that takes us back to Benjamin Franklin’s perplexity about the whites fleeing back to the forest! For us, 200 years later, it is more pressing in a world reduced to a trash of plastic and catastrophic climate change to reattach value to appropriate “things” than it was for Goethe. Depart from a city in a train or a car and study the the traffic jams, pollution and cramped houses, ugly towns, and we feel ill at ease because we have that background awareness of not being in control. We are being done to.



“Humankind has not woven the web of life.
We are but a thread within it;
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.
All things are bound together.
All things connect”.

160 Chief Seattle. 1854

“What is life?
It is the flash of a firefly in the night.
It is the breath of a buffalo in the wintertime.
It is the little shadow which runs across
The grass and loses itself in the sunset”.

Crowfoot, Blackfoot warrior and orator





But religions, besides being tools of social cohesion or dominance, also save life from meaninglessness. Humans seem to want to give life a shape – a narrative. In Goethe's case the Kunstwerk of his story. There is no better illustration of this than his short poem *Um Mitternacht*. The poem shows beautifully how Goethe found the sacred without the bossy intervention of religion's Gods, but just within the "common day". It is a secular, artistic version of Boehme's "mystic" beam of light, but here made into "art" – that is to say, an object, comprehensible, translatable to our single minds, and which we feel as "revelation", though not at the level of music: "Music is a revelation more sublime than any wisdom or philosophy". Beethoven. Reported by Bettina Brentano to Goethe.



See on following page, "At Midnight" "Um Mitternacht". by Goethe. 3 stages of life in 3 verses and always stars or moon above the lonely individual. The drama of an individual life is that we are born alone and die alone, on "this bank and shoal of time", and while we live, we look at stars and moon and possibly wonder, like the little boy of verse 1, "what does it all mean". The poem seems so typical of Goethe in its unpoetic poeticness. He said that all his poetry was Gelegenheits Gedichte, poetry of the moment. It was also about our experience of the world rather than elucubrations about it– which is how I would describe the poetry for instance of the late romantic Rilke. In Goethe, the individual is "sacred" just in the Spinoza sense of being a tiny participant in nature's enormous chain of time; the fact of having been born into this extraordinary and wondrous world.

"Otherwise, what does all this circumstance of sun and planets, of moons, stars, Milky Way and comets, of clouds of once and future worlds signify, if in the end a person is not able to be happy and take delight in an unthinking enjoyment of his fated span"?

This is conveyed in this little poem through seeing that individual from tiny boy in the 1st verse, grown man in the 2nd, under the same sky and under the impulse of generation, participating, like all earth's nature, in its unfathomable mystery, which is presented in the 3rd verse as a sudden illuminating revelation of an enormous past time intuited in the present instant: that sense of "Ganz alles"; one of those everyday phrases to which Goethe gave cosmic significance. If we can shed the influence of religious thinking, the sacred pertains to this world and its "common" things; not to some "Nobodaddy aloft" who "farted and belched"! (as Blake disrespectfully referred to monotheistic religions' God!). The poem "Um Mitternacht" indicates to us, despite its modesty, an unexpected place of the sacred. It is not "the sacred" handed down from a pulpit or Holy Book. The poem describes the humble individual's personal experience and his sense of himself within the vast cosmos of the stars. **It seems that the awareness of time, the reproductive cycle of the seasons, and the larger universe of sun and stars, ("once and future worlds"; as Goethe puts), with their enormous distances, is one of the constants in what we think of as the sacred. (Surely the case of Stonehenge).** The bossy monotheisms could be said to have appropriated the sacred and made an easy off the shelf abstraction, labelling it: "holy". Calling the life of Christ "sacred" hardly says anything more than "special". Sacred can just be a label.

Um Mitternacht starts with a memory of childhood – which in fact to many people, in nostalgic retrospect, seems to contain a special power that has since ebbed. The special power of certain memories is well described by Wordsworth and is best exemplified by the childhood memories, as explained by him in the extract about "spots of time". You could say that the poem Um Mitternacht is a good expression of Wordsworth's thought on "the common day" given at the beginning of this book. In verse one Goethe "remembers" his little boy experience– though in fact it is a fiction –since his father was not a vicar. In verse 2 there is another prime memory of being in love – hurrying to and from his lover under the same star filled night as the child. In the last verse, the stars and moon seem to fuse past and present into a single overwhelming intuition of connected allness and totality. It is a poem that confirms how what we call beautiful is an accumulation of such judgements and experiences. The night sky is the connecting thread which the last verse seals in a revelatory (Boehme!) moment. Maybe all life to Goethe was poetic: not the "making" (poesis) of a poem but life itself was a poem of significance, (again think of Boehme). "Kunstwerk des Lebens". Beautiful phrase.



Um Mitternacht ging ich, nicht eben gerne,
 Klein, kleiner Knabe, jenen Kirchhof hin
 Zu Vaters Haus, des Pfarrers; Stern am Sterne
 Sie leuchteten doch alle gar zu schön;
 Um Mitternacht.

Wenn ich dann ferner in des Lebens Weite
 Zur Liebsten mußte, mußte, weil sie zog,
 Gestirn und Nordschein über mir im Streite,
 Ich gehend, kommend Seligkeiten sog;
 Um Mitternacht.

Bis dann zuletzt des vollen Mondes Helle
 So klar und deutlich mir ins Finstre drang,
 Auch der Gedanke willig, sinnig, schnelle
 Sich ums Vergangne wie ums Künftige schlang;
 Um Mitternacht.

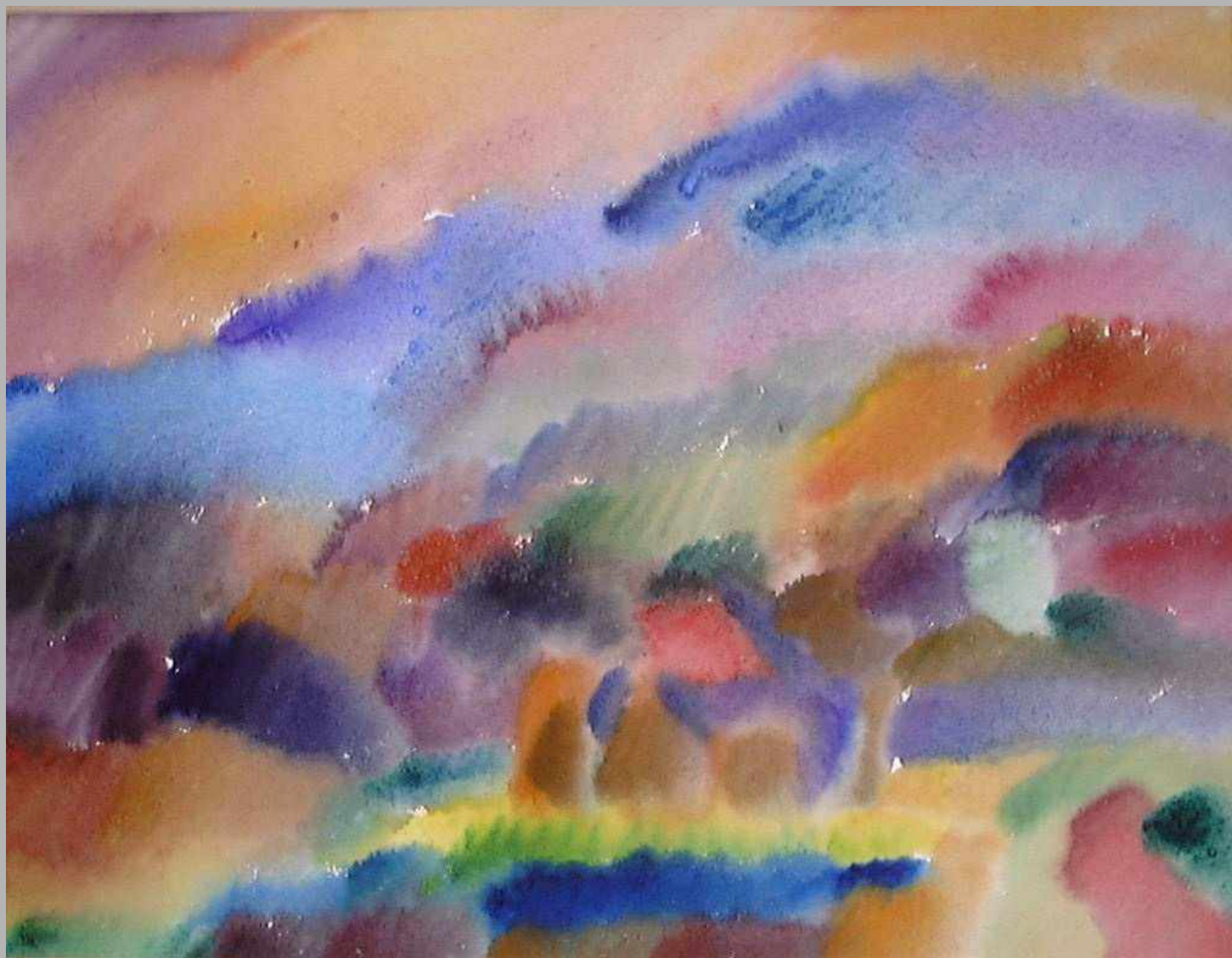
At midnight I'd go not very willingly
 As a tiny small boy past the graveyard
 To father's house, the vicarage, as star upon stars
 Were all shining so bright above me
 At midnight.

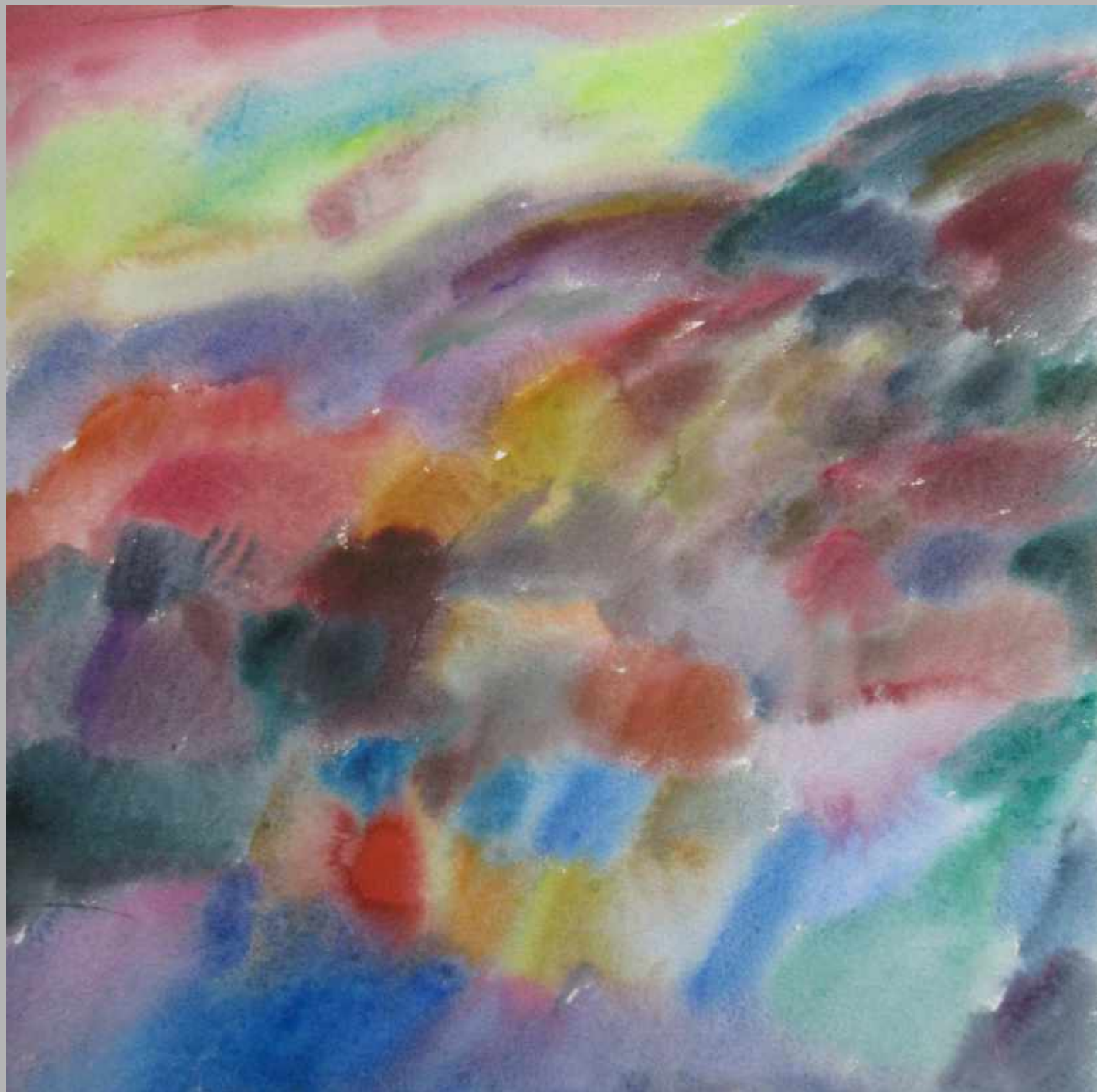
Then later in my life
 When my lover so drew me to her that I had to, had to go
 Stars and the Borealis vied in brightness above me,
 And I, going and coming, sucked in happiness
 At midnight

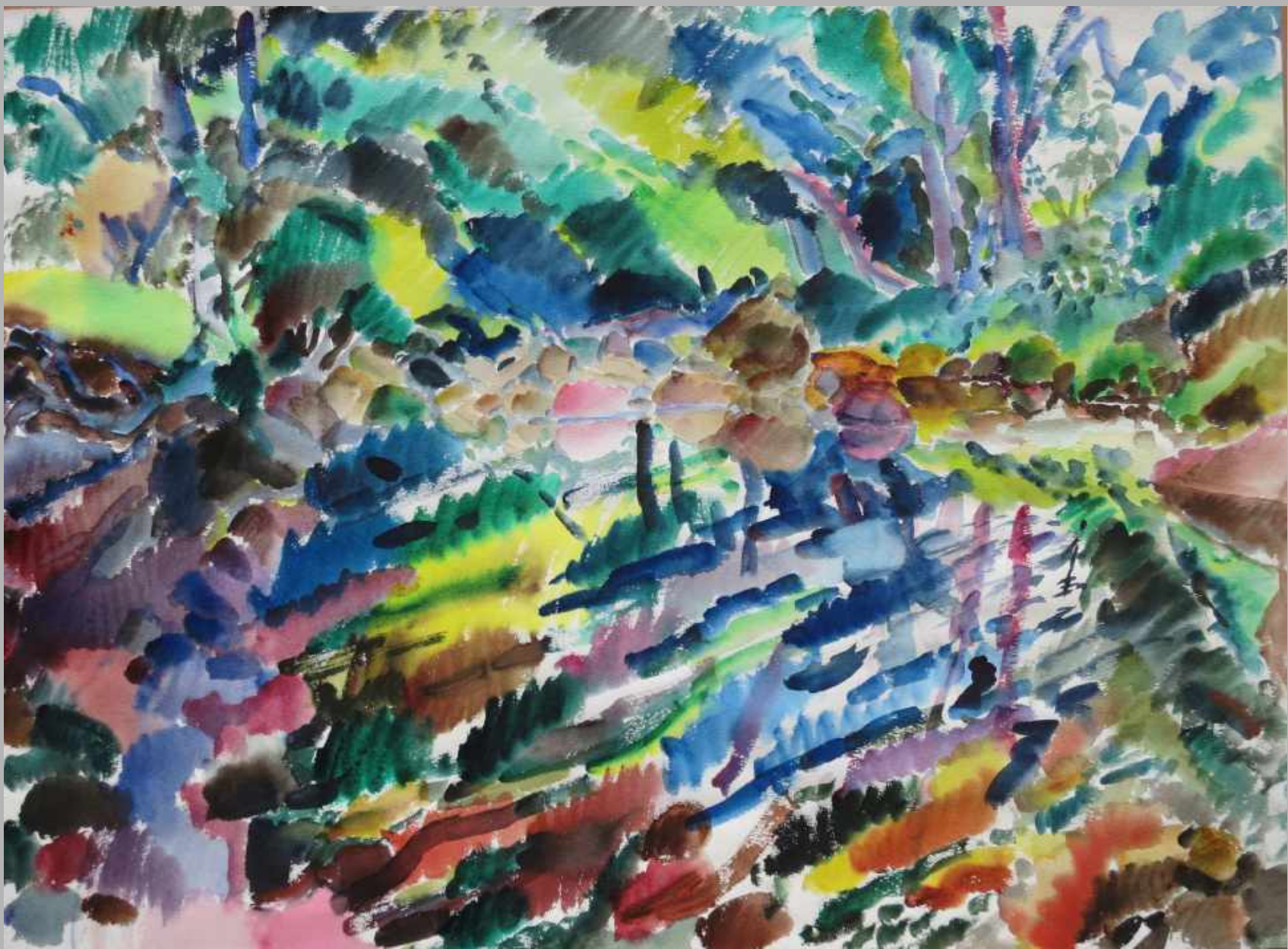
Until finally the full moon's brightness
 Shone so clear and sharply into my darkness
 That thought, willing, felt and swift;
 Encoiled in one, both past and future;
 At Midnight ù



Goethe from his "unbeliever" position, made a special use of a French word: "apercus", to which he gave an extra meaning – to fill, as it were, a linguistic gap. He wanted it to contain the idea of sudden "revelation" in the sense of intellectual illumination. On the opposite page is the poem *Um Mitternacht* which can be seen as just such a sudden poetic "revelation", which is what connects it to our example of Jakob Boehme. Goethe's special use of the word *apercu* gives us a useful insight into the nature of art which is not an aesthetic construct of the "beautiful" to be appreciated with aesthetic judgement, **but** is a special construction of **meaning**, that otherwise would be inaccessible to us, and it comes in the construct of a special form of "language". Beethoven's last piano sonata opus 111 is as we easily summarise; "beautiful", but we mean, an extraordinary construct of meanings that does us good and is **revelatory**! That is what is in Boehme's moment of revelation and the similar marvelling of German romantic poetry and which I have found so illuminating of art and its procedures: Think of Picasso's "revelations" and how in exhibitions, people are smiling at the wit of his "revelatory" way of seeing/experiencing the world of our common experience. I smile similarly at children's art. They notice also sorts of details and make a short hand for it!

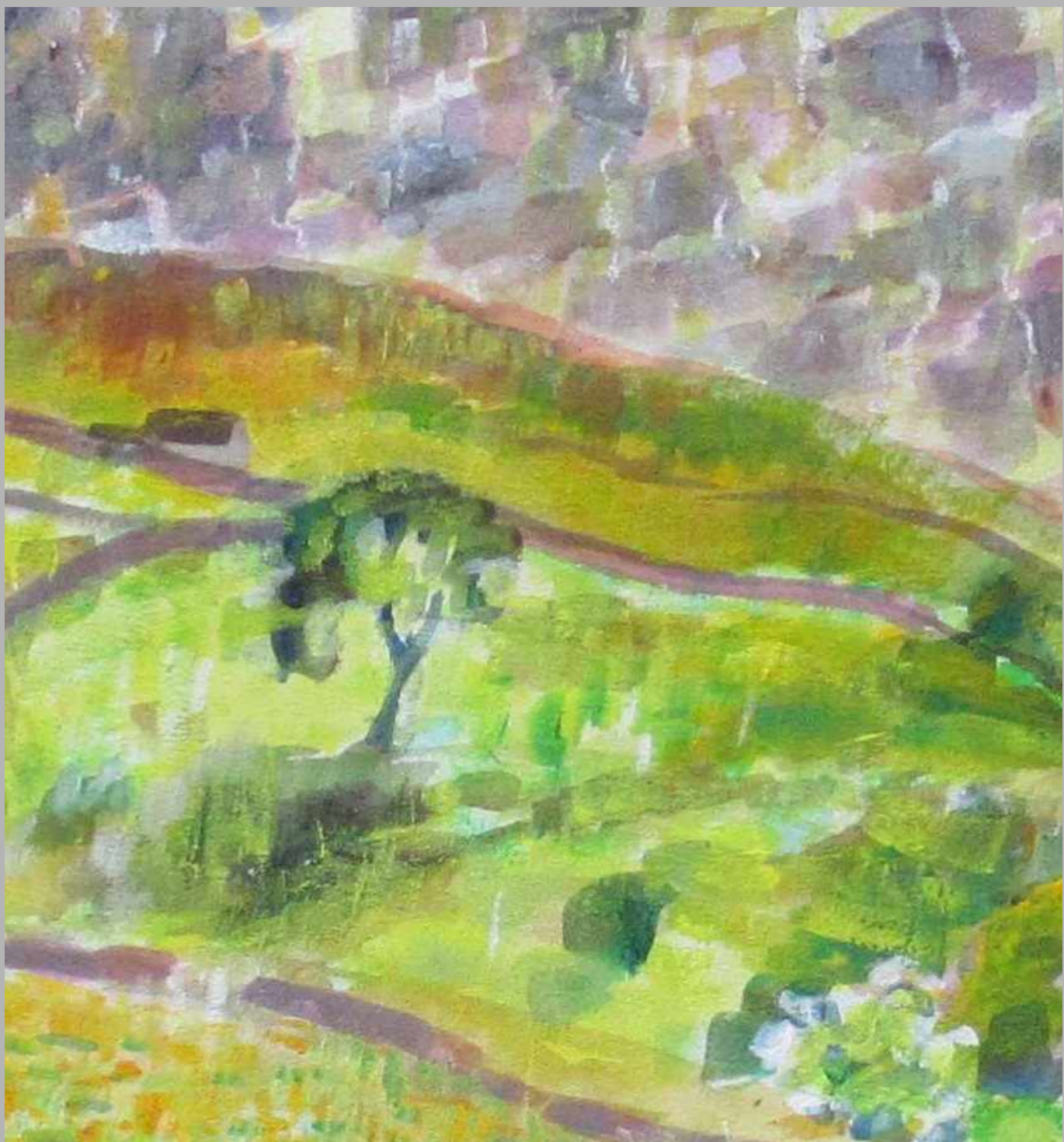
















This was one of those afternoons of broken cloud that attenuates the sun's illumination of the landscape . On the previous version and this I used a white crayon to draw the light breaking through as well as using the alternate chiaroscuro of a light-dark sky. of greys, yellow and mauve. The same lines of light are used in the landscape to suggest that beautiful movement of cloud and sun shadows across hills and fields.





Here are some barefaced parallel “abstractions”(!) essences /scratches of “rain” (?) in the sky which seem acceptable! (but need an explanation of why!). Also the white edged cloud on top left and even the paintings all-on-the-left-sidedness seems ok nor would one like to fill out the stream “elisions” – (another good word) – in the bottom half of the picture nor the “uncertainties” under the arching trunks. The sky shorthand seems acceptable. (The mysteries of obliquity - of describing indirectly!)







It was a marvellous sharp, cold evening. You could almost hear the cold crackle! It's always a very beautiful moment on a winter evening when the yellow and pink of the sky from the sun, now set behind the hills is so sharp and crisp between the twigs of the trees. It's a time of day that watercolour best catches - especially as here, painted with a dry brush on rough watercolour paper because the white paper left untouched, gives the colours an encrusted appearance.









This too, like the previous winter watercolour, wanted to represent that beautiful moment after sunset when the sky seems to pulsate and its green and yellows promise a coming night that will be very cold. By painting with a dry brush you can simulate the lines of a crayon which can set the sky in vibration with the criss-crossing effect of overlaid lines.

Such a moment of the day is worth trying to put in a painting, because the landscape painting that pleases most is at best a celebration of the world that our imaginations cannot conceive will one day be extinguished to us. That is the thought that lay behind Van Gogh's fine words to his brother Theo: "I paint not to please any coterie of "art" but simply as an act of gratitude that I have walked this earth for 30 years". Indeed - and never mind if in our case they are just daubs - it's the thought and act that counts!



















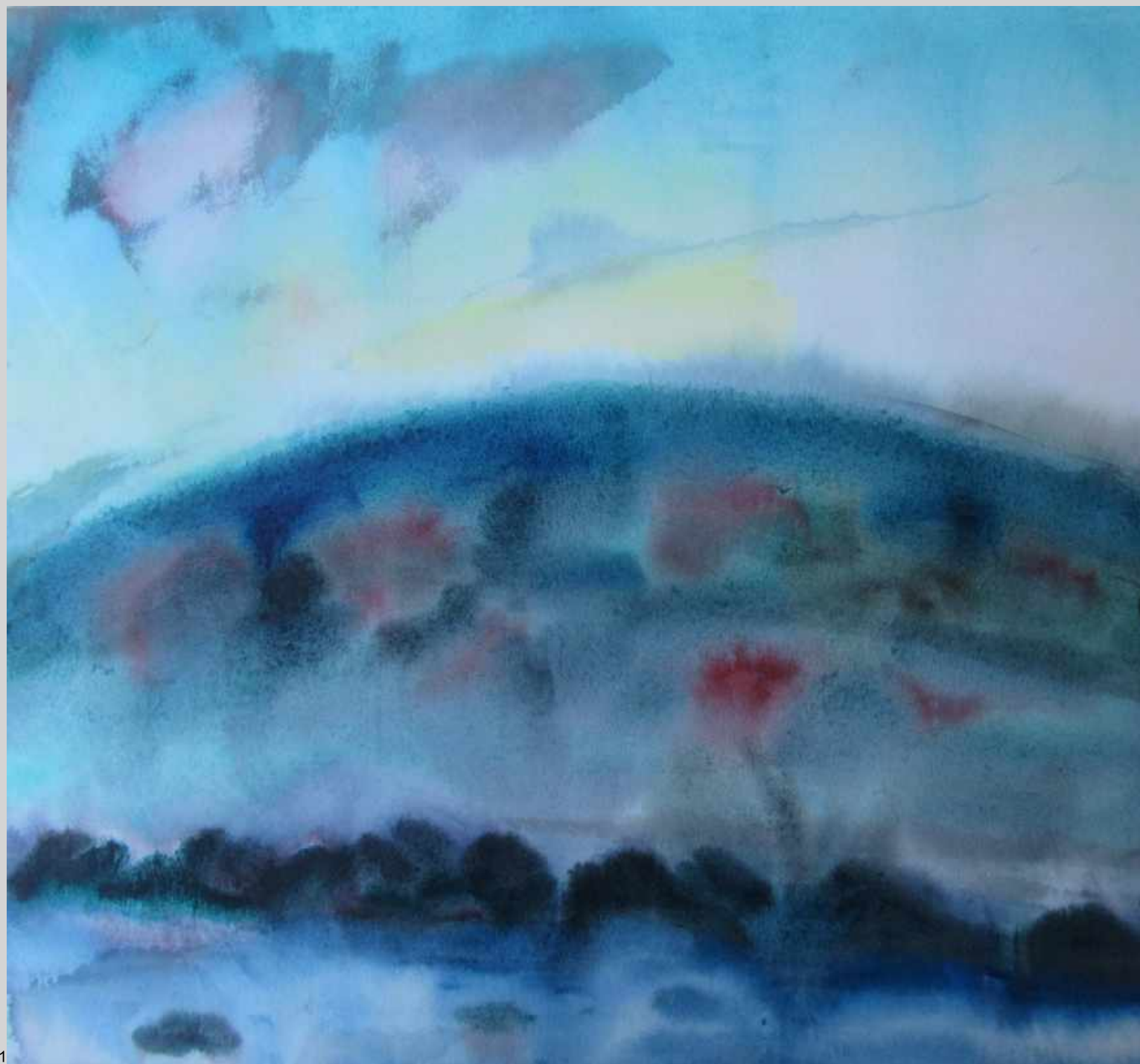




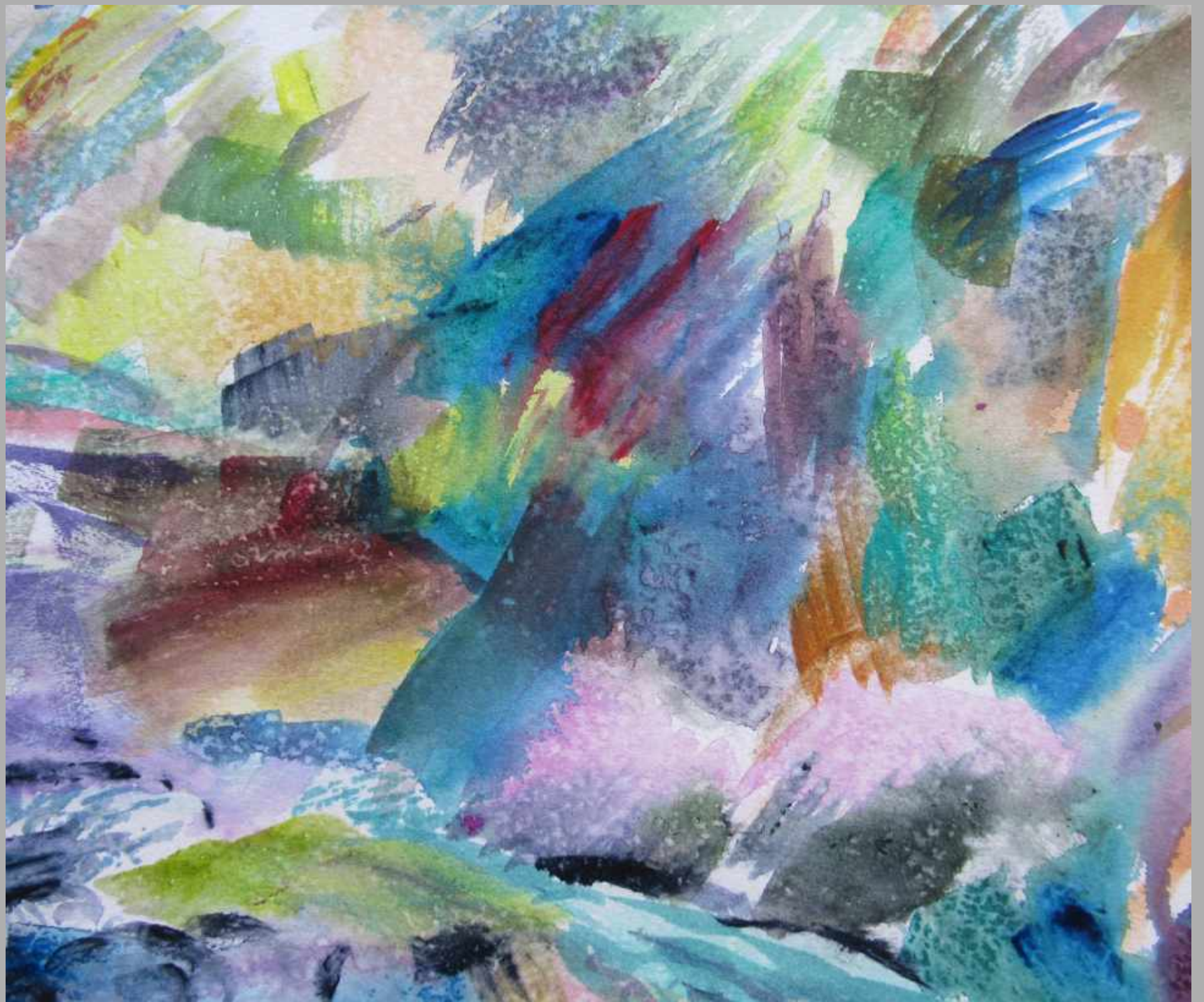


















This was a painting - as often is the case- about the sky. That yellow and mauve sky of a day that is closing with a threat of snow for the coming night. This scene with the last rays of the sun, and the sheep gathered hungrily around the hay carried by the farmer, along with those cold weather icicles, encapsulates for me the relative nullity of an abstract painting that has turned away from representing the world we know and love and which has crept into every nook and cranny of our life-memory. Size 38 x 33 inches.



On the following pages are paintings are watercolours done in the 1970s. They are smaller (10-15 inches) than all done since the 70s. The river on page 204- 205 is the Ticino near Milan done in the early 70s. .Then those following were all done at Carlo and Vittorina's - Bruna's cousins at the farm "La Piov", in Vaccheria under the hilltop of Guarene.near Alba- Cuneo. First 2 pages of apple picking and then (pages 202-221).painted around the farm La Piov. From page 222 to the end, the paintings are of Dartmoor and Dorset done in 1970-80s and maximum 18 inches.

