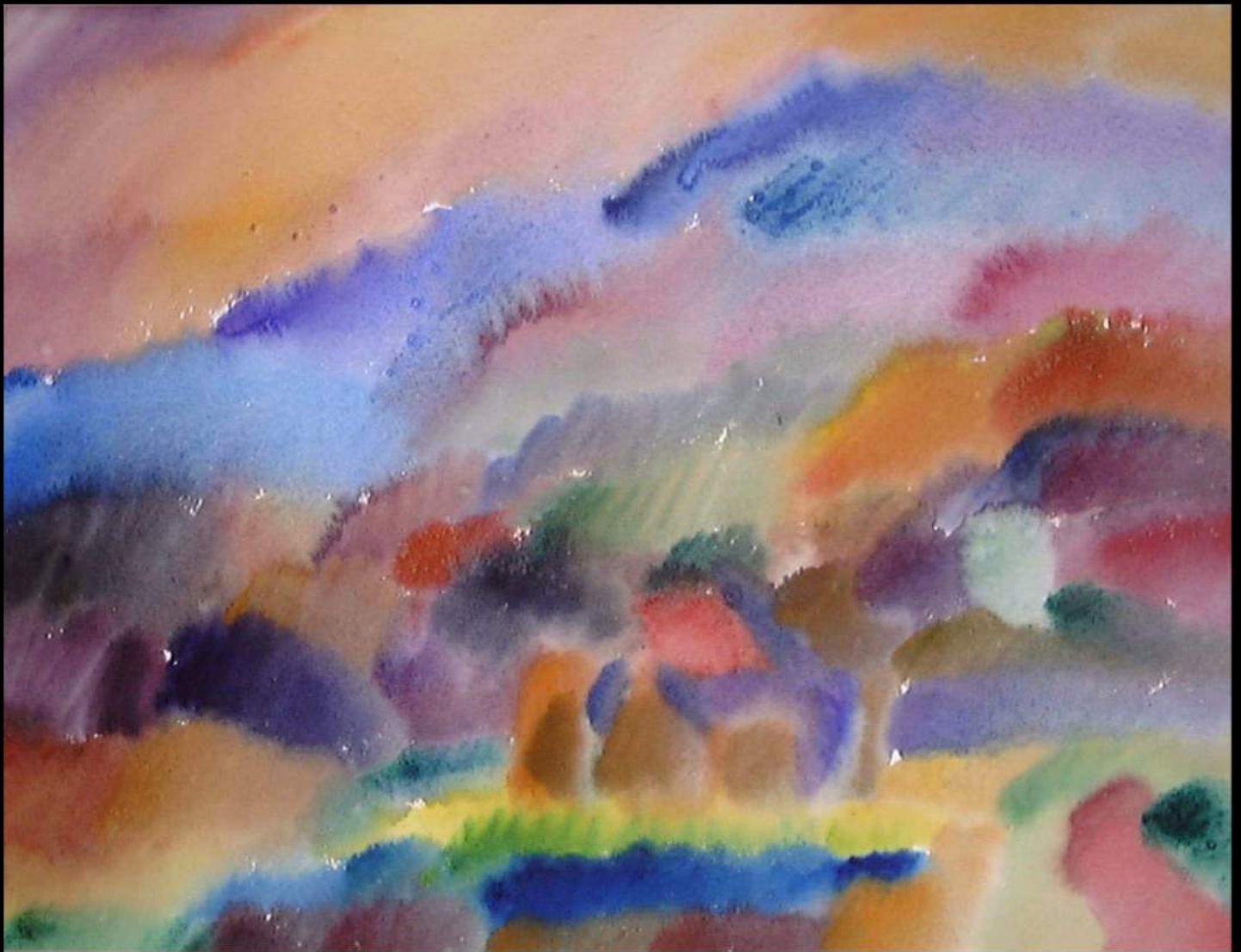




PAINTINGS Book 2. With writing about painting.

Anthony Bamber



What status of "truth" does a painting have? To many that seems a strange question. "A painting is just a painting". But that is a rather belittling view since it makes of painting a solipsistic, personal deviation or a mere "aesthetic" artifact as people say: a protected other thing called "art". Similarly what is poetry? Does it reach the parts that other speech doesn't or is that too an allowed area of "aesthetic" exaggeration not to be too attended to by the work-a-day world? Here are two quotations from Blake. Both show an acceptance of what Wordsworth called "unknown modes of being". Wonder is not a feeling much encouraged by the modern world of well organised practicality - despite a 1 in 4 instance of mental breakdown! Is that the fault of our seeing "all things thro' narrow chinks of our cavern."?

"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."

"How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way, is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?"

Maybe art just offers us practice in not taking the world for granted as already known. The Blake quotes above are best taken as warning against that. In that sense all art is idealistic.

The painting opposite is of a scene in Italy. An evening in Novemebr. Italy (Guarene/Alba). There was the last effulgence of the day still in the sky. The rising hill is various shades of blue in the receding light. There is just visible a part of a farm roof in the middle. In the middle foreground there are some patches of vegetables. The brushmarks all have a diagonal sympathy which is partly an imitation of the rows of vines, and most of the wet patches of colour are interfusing. The paint is fairly dry which is why it retains the striations of the brush strokes. I tried to convey that strange optical effect when the colour of the landscape seems so full as if having absorbed the all-day sunshine. There is a taut quality about the brushmarks because of the slight sizing,

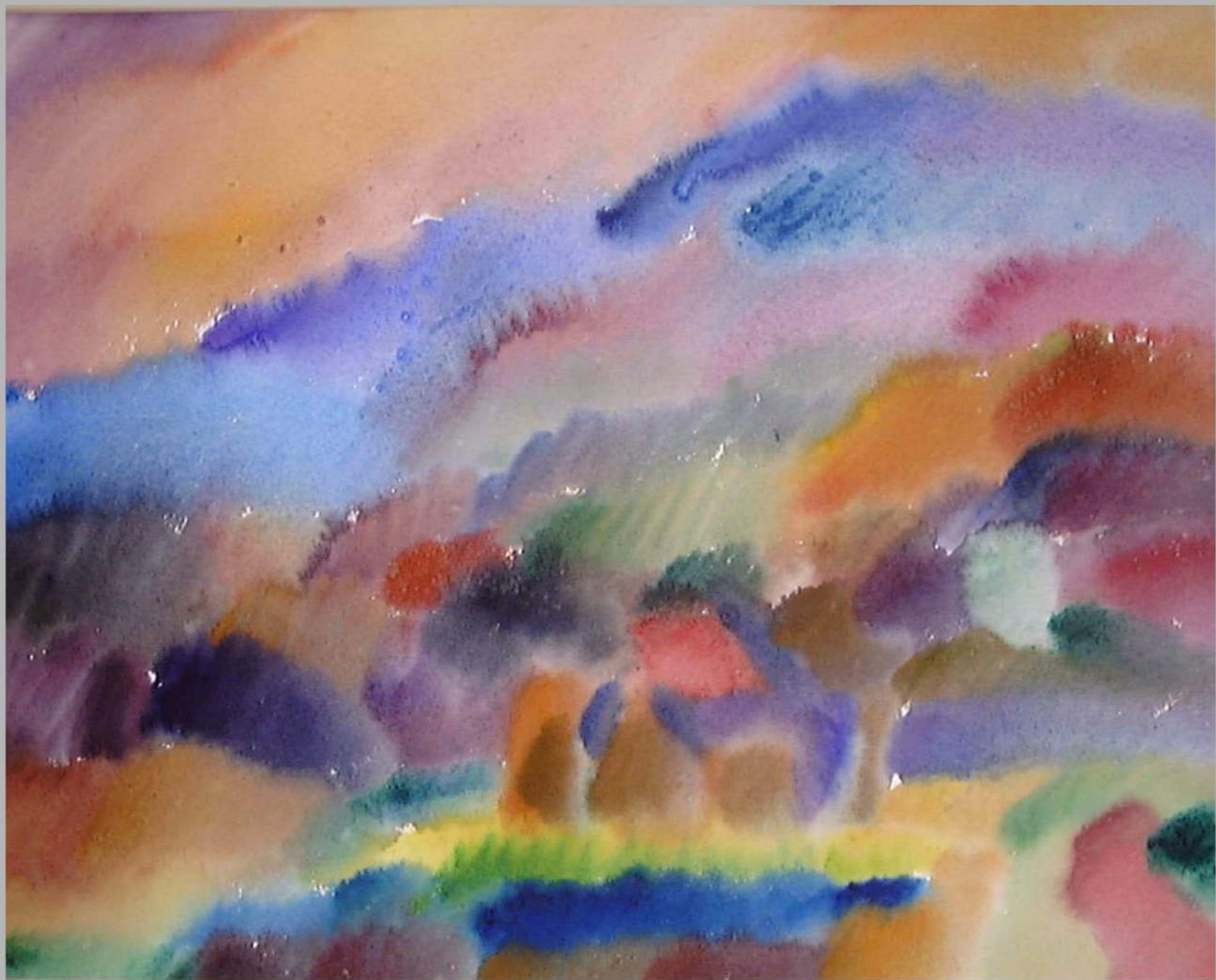
(glue), that the paper has been treated with. The little specks of remaining unpainted paper has an effect on the colours.

Does this painting have any "truth", or any wonder?

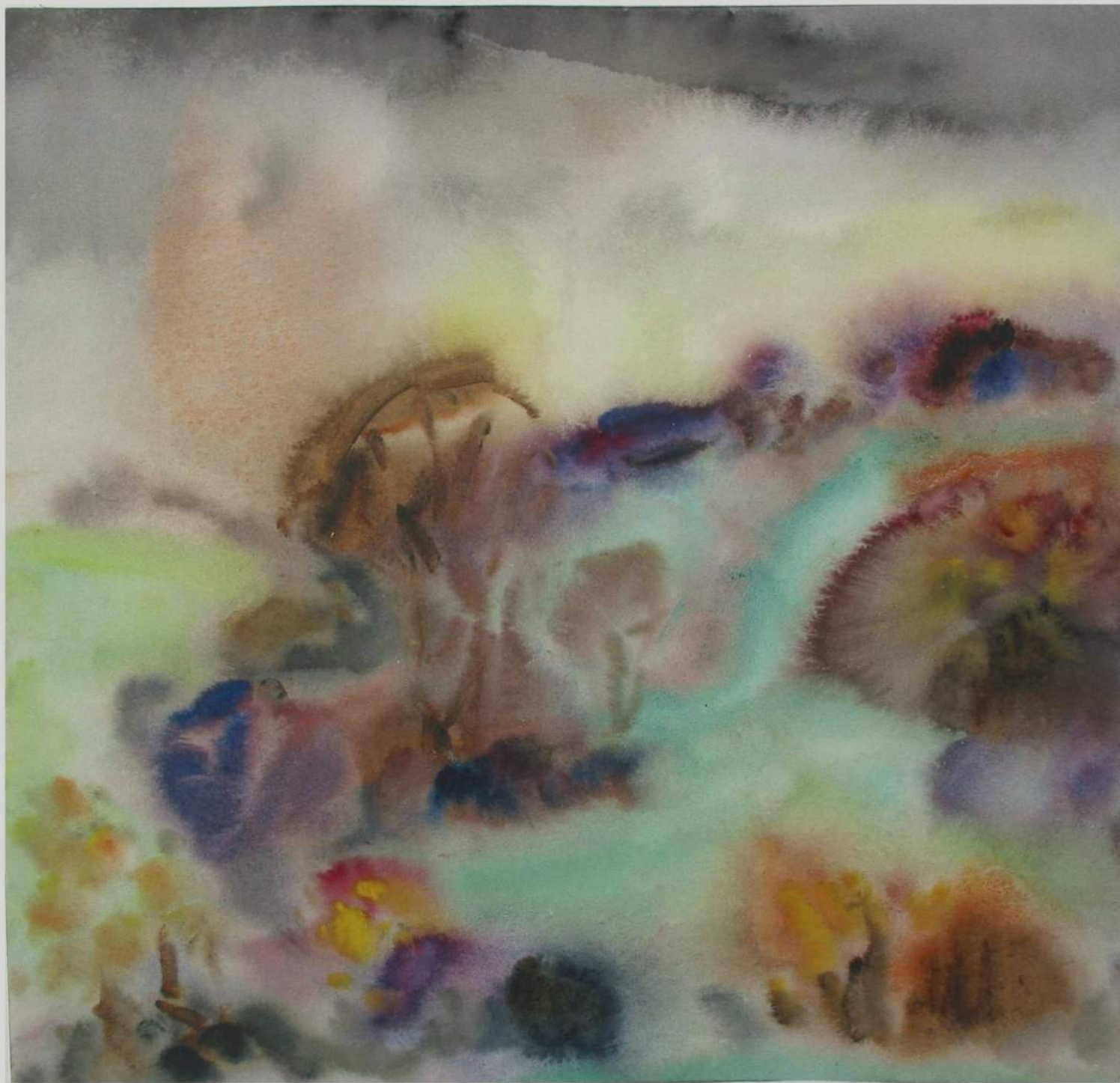
A few pages ahead in the book is a section on the Medieval concept of the Anagogue. I use it as a useful word with which to emphasise how much works of art are things made, constructed and with their own kind of **locked in** meanings, that we draw out in threads.

The term "expression" in art. I don't think artists of any sort "express" an **x** or a **y**. That is a false expectation of translatability of thought/feeling into some artistic "form". An artist, like any person, slowly puts together a homeland or territory of slowly accumulated and reinforcing attitudes. An artist also slowly creates a terretory made of certain habitual attitudes and artistic **procedures/preferences**. So he or she is half consciously going in a vaguely intuited direction so that the "object" they make will have vaguely intuited meanings. Perhaps the ambitious core of landscape painting is to put in question what we think is "reality", and just as feminists (and research) asserts that there is an inbuilt bias in both women and men against a belief in women's competence, so any strong view can carry a foreclosing bias that restricts our vision, and we see "all things thro' narrow chinks of our cavern"?

Is only a certain kind of art seen as "contemporary" and the rest ignored? Think for example of how lightly the term "Romantic" or "Socilaist" is used to neutralise certain thoughts or feelings. And then there is also this. When we make judgements, our reasons are usually safely enthroned in certainty, whereas much that we condescendingly dismiss, is simply off the main designated highway.









I asked on a previous page "what is the truth status of art". But should we just regard a painting as a decorative object merely? Is music proudly meaningless or do composers labour at inventing **meaningful** sounds, not just pleasing ones? Does landscape painting refer us to our general sense of the world; does it highlight certain things or is it just decorative? Following is an attempt to consider that from another angle. It is something written on Christmas day 2017. "It is late sun on Christmas day in the garden. The sun directly in front of me, low. The grass and dead leaves brightly illuminated by the sun at their edges amidst the dark shadows that the plants cast before them. Here, briefly today, outside in the sun, is a little of that sacred that the day supposedly celebrates. Once such a scene of the sun-illuminated plants, especially to old people, might have held a pathos that derived from their awareness that though we are only temporary, such things of nature would endure after us. Now we feel that such natural things are also maybe our future victims in that 6th extinction, as we progressively possess the planet. So today, of all the days of the year, is the one we celebrate in carols as "sacred"- Christ's birth and thus of our salvation- which gave all existence a teleological sense. If pressed to explain the "sacred" simply, we might say that it is all that which strings existence into a chain of integrated **significance**.

The late sun is touching with detail the illuminated parts of the dry winter plants which are our co-survivors of millions of years of evolution! They are what we feel fraternity with, but with our in-door life we have lost touch with them and Christmas seems to point that up, because Christmas is really an **out-door** event! The night sky and its stars, the inn full and only space to be found for the night is in the stable with the warm breathing cattle; and we imagine with carols in our mind, all around, snow and cold.

"Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock,
'Now they are all on their knees',
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.
So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come, see the oxen kneel,
In the lonely Barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know",
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

Christmas seems like a special ritual we have inherited but that now points up how homeless we have become - despite our power over the planet. What we call the world, has become too much our world and so these plants in the evening garden seem just as exiled as we sometimes feel; - "here upon this bank and shoal of time"; and maybe this is particularly so at Christmas with its primitive story and all that sequence of our years that we remember celebrating it. The Romantic movement, particularly that of Germany seemed to misplace that unease within modern times and seek to resolve it with an artificial overlay of a mystificatory "religious" view of the world - one that simply ignored what it didn't like: an invented fictitious "reality" born of a "Wunschdenken", wishful thinking. Today, Christmas has a function very similar to that Romantic overlay. It always seems like a desperate act - at the limits of sanity or coherence; a moment of collective madness born of a response to what Max Weber called "the unmagicing of the world" by modern technology and our industry's extreme use of nature as raw material. (maybe only astronomers retain a sense of wonder at unknown worlds, or any practioner of art, music or poetry a sense of the sacred). It's as if Christmas jogged us into uneasy, ill defined longing for the naïve ages of superstition and the belief in a whole world that included unknown powers, and so it is that childhood has such nostalgic power for many, because seemingly embedded in a once

numinous world: (See Wordsworth's Book 1,2 of "The Prelude"). Is it possible that those crowds that look around art galleries in that strange haunted, lost way, way are looking for something just out of reach? Does that puzzled searching have anything to do with those lost Christmas feelings I described on the previous page. A kind of tugging nostalgia for that magiced world that Max Weber wrote of? So superstition, folklore and belief in the supernatural (including any left over, convinced Christianity) fall before the modern form of life that is itself "unmagiced". The last pages of Cider with Rosie described a world contemporaneous with Max Weber and Hardy.

So we try for a day and its month-long commercial preparation to find what is missing, or we look rather forlornly in art galleries for that "it". Here in this quote from a book by Boehme on the "language" that art conserves, there seems also a relevance to Christmas. The book is "Subjekt und Natur". He quotes Adorno. *"For as long as human life and nature were held together in a culture of the sacred, it was seen as self-evident that nature possessed an aesthetic quality. Modern times have broken that tradition in establishing the technological era. In these modern times, art is almost the only medium in which the aesthetic vision of nature lives on. Today art is as Adorno noted, an echo of that silence in which nature "speaks". In images of loss or absence, art keeps alive that knowledge that has been lost as we regard nature as just another free time consumption. That nature that once was thought in some way to "speak" to us, is now only conserved through the metaphorical and encrypted images of art, and it is there in this untranslatable work of remembrance that there is conserved the "language" of nature. If today we try and recover this special language, it cannot be just as a nostalgic recreation but in a newly conceived idea of the aesthetic of nature that could become a new norm and element of political life".*

Adorno felt that it was this echo of the sacred that was conserved in music and art and it leaps to mind that likewise: - Christmas is such too! In a world that has mostly lost community solidarity (Bauman's "Liquid society") maybe art conserves a "missing".

At Christmas, a founding story of our social life is repeated, though few now "believe" it as any more than just a "story", yet like all good stories, it depends on the outcome which still touches us, despite its "fiction", and at least it links up the chain of all our years, like our carefully stored decorations: "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight". In the unmagiced now that the poem by Hardy describes - the poet still forlornly hopes "that it might be so", and similarly Horatio (in Hamlet) on the battlements of Elsinore replies to Marcellus' beautiful explanation for the ghost's sudden disappearance, of an interlinked world which this so-large event of "Christ's birth" presumes, with the rather forlorn reply, a little like our own mid-way vestigial "belief": "so have I heard and do in part believe it". Marcellus.....**It faded on the crowing of the cock.**

**Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long;
And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.**

Horatio **So have I heard and do in part believe it.**

Now each year when we have to participate, despite our unbelief, we feel hollow, false and insincere- all which normally we would try to avoid. Often playing carols in the band was an outdoor event with a rough and-ready simplicity of **us** playing in the cold for "our neighbours" and that gave it sufficient sense and those traditional carols and tunes were real as well as symbolic. They were the thing itself: the anagogue! Just as music or art are value and facticity combined: the-now-in-act! ALL! So Christmas comes and all day we are ready to receive it but it slowly evaporates. Another year and once more we will with Horatio nod and say wistfully, "So have I heard, and do in part believe it". Is that too what we say to art's "exaggerations"? How much "truth" do we allow it? Can values be embedded in it? Does this naive snow painting with its fugitive, scurrying marks say anything?







On the previous page is a snow scene. 75 x 55 cms. The energetic brush strokes of acrylic paint are an over lay to the representational colour that they also have. Perhaps the "point" of it is its jubilatory "handwriting".

If you look on youtube for **Rothko** paintings and **Newman**, you will see a demonstration of their working methods. The question obviously comes to mind - what are they giving the public; and to return to my original question in this book: what is the **truth** status of what they produce. What revelation or opening of the "doors of perception" are their large abstracts offering us?

I have chosen the painting opposite (farm house roof and vineyards on the hillside of Guarene. Alba) because of its slight fraternity with Rothko. There are "suffusions" of paint; and "vibrations" of "merging", "soft-edged" paint. (all terms used about Rothko on the video). By contrast my painting - besides being very cheap compared to Rothko (!) has no great claims to "revealing" anything. It is simply a landscape of the last light of evening, though I hope it does communicate a wonder and delight towards the world we inhabit so briefly and which we so misuse. The "mergings" here of colour on over-wet paper are a technical effect aimed at making an effective correlative for that evening's bright jubilation. The pretensions to significance in those large abstracts seems unwarranted. Here you might argue is a more restricted and human attempt to find an adequate artistic "correlative" for wonder and what Hannah Arendt called "Love towards the world".

On the subject of wonder here is something of Goethe's.

A light translation might be this: "Our best comes from wonder, and that wonder towards the lasting things of the world is what make us happy. There is nothing "higher" that we can sustain us, nor should we look for anything wider or deeper: here is our limit".

Das Höchste, wozu der Mensch gelangen kann, ist das Erstaunen; und wenn ihn das Urphänomen in Erstaunen setzt, so sei er zufrieden; ein Höheres kann es ihm nicht gewähren, und ein Weiteres soll er nicht dahinter suchen; hier ist die Grenze.

Next pages: two small watercolours from Oxfordshire. Rain falling.









These are some "thoughts" about a mysterious medieval term:

The anagogue.

According to medieval scholasticism there were supposedly 4 levels of interpretation: the literal, allegoric, moral and anagogic: 4 interpretations that as it were we pull out from the text.

In the Garzanti Enciclopedia della filosofia there is this rather disappointing description that keeps the word anagogue corralled in the religious sphere and which we should try and improve by not using lazily the catch-all term "spiritual", looking instead to something more psychological and mental:

"Anagogue. One of 4 types of description; (literal, allegorical, moral, anagogic) adopted by Medieval scholasticism. The anagogic implies (?) that the events narrated in the Bible are to be interpreted mystically (!?) contemplatively (!?) or as an anticipation (?) of eschatological events (?); for example, the resurrection of Christ is to read as a "model" (?) for the redemption of all the faithful. (all the ? indicate very, very fragile and presumptive definitions!)

This 4th type of interpretation, the "ANAGOGIC", has always seemed the more interesting of the 4 because so mysteriously on the edge of an insight - something that would help us to relocate supposedly "spiritual" qualities of the work of art as being psychological-corporal, material qualities and the way that profound meaning seems to be trapped within the special **materiality** of the "anagogue". To explain what I mean by a "spiritualist" view of art is this by Emil Cioran, on Bach's music: "When you hear Bach you see God being born... after one of his oratorio, cantatas, Passions, God has to exist". Well yes and no; that is just a nice "way of saying". I'd like a musician to lay bare the nitty gritty of its musical expression, and in a way, Music, of all the arts, is the best case of the anagogue: meaning that is inextricably-incarnate within the notes! The Garzanti definition is disappointing. Behind all the terms lies a vast unindicated something, so that I am forced to admit that maybe I am making up my own meaning for anagogue in making it depart from its medieval use. Maybe it is possible to do better than the Garzanti definition.

Maybe we can de-spiritualise this promising word, and maybe here in the following quotation, Alice is wrong and Humpty Dumpty right on condition we add this phrase to Humpty Dumpty: *"according to the context given it in a work of art"*;

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean (*"according to the context I give it"*)-neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." ...

But in fact, music and painting's marks/sounds do mean "so many different things", and maybe art, music and literature have procedures - the anagogic ones, that do manage to fuse complex meanings into the figurative-abstract of this physical object, where meanings swarm! The Garzanti definition doesn't seem to get anagogue further than just symbol: an object/sign that stands for a complexity. "This stands for ALL that". The Garzanti use of the word "model" rather than symbol is asserting that some symbols are not standing **for** but are themselves IT! (the Shakespeare quotation on a following page seems to be an especially fine example of figuration /"model" that is more obvious in music and painting. The term "model" makes me imagine this sort of assertion from a rugby coach to his team: "this victory today - and the way you all finally played, must be taken as a model for how we are going to play every game in future"! It is a thing itself holding all the required meanings; a kind of thing-itself-model-symbol. But in this humdrum example there is no transformation of the "model" which just means good concrete example and demonstration. In this rugby example, a video replay would have its meaning simply in the example that it shows. In a way, all that follows is only saying that a work of art, music, literature is a material object, but by emphasising that I think it and the "aesthetic qualities" will be pushing us to interpretative responses and the quality of those is what makes certain works affecting.

The concept "anagogue" (as even considered by the "Patristica") is a reminder of the physical objectness of the sign/model and in the case of works of art, it reminds us that they are as it were, machines engineered to carry/provoke certain responses and refine them.

Watercolour. Dartmoor. 1971. 10 x 7 inches.



All the effects of art lie in this engineered materiality, which yet seems to highlight important aspects of our existence; what some may too easily just call "spiritual" values. I think one of Art's functions is to "cleanse the doors of perception" and provoke empathy or enlightenment through this incarnate thing; the "work of art". If considered as "spiritual experience", we lose this aspect of incarnated physicality. The mystery of works by such as Shakespeare, a Beethoven or a Van Gogh is how they can press into their constructions so much that we find significant and enlightening, though we are unable to name precisely what IT is and this IT remains always locked into the material object. In this sense the work of art gives a better insight into our condition than does dualistic religion (its dualistic, separating - world/spiritual, body/soul). The art /music/ poem/novel materialises /incorporates human qualities which echo in the constructed thing as opposed to preaching them as aspects of a "belief" system dependent on a superior/ spiritual being, separated from the living world. When you read Goethe's autobiography, his seeing and attitude to the physical particularity of the earth and the experience of it was already "sacred" in its respect for life/world, and in fact, monotheisms by their two world dualism and bullying God, makes montheisms inhospitable to true "religious" feeling! Odd paradox. You could say that art, music, literature are where we encounter "religious" respect for life and the world; not usually in religions. Some church services seem just a heap of dry, lifeless words.



detail. Stream and Rowan berries. Rain on paper. 75 x 55 cms



detail. Stream and sunset. 75 x 55 cms



Just the title of Arundhati Roy's book "The God of small things" expresses that sacred to be discoverable IN the world. However, in defence of the Christianity of Christ, rather than of the political church, Christ is the great anagogue because his "way is the life". A life not preached but lived; incarnate: it was IN ACT. It was the absolute corporal "model": the anagogue. The work of art is often mistakenly "mined", as it were for its "meanings" that are "brought to light", but the concept anagogue indicates a meaning incorporated: not detachable. Despite Garzanti's definition that makes use of the word "mystic", there is a something obstinately physical that is itself the thing rather than "containing" a transformable "message". (as Jesus was simply in himself - the message). So when we see or hear any work of art, we are aware of this aspect of a magic thing that refuses interpretation because it simply claims to be an ALL. It is this that lay behind Francis Bacon's idea that a painting should assault our "nervous system", or Tolstoy's idea that a great work communicates by way of "contagion". We don't so much interpret rationally as we are invaded by the whole, and meanings are myriad. This is the secret of the power of Shakespeare's language for its multiple meanings are skewered vertically: figurative, corporal, immediate - in a word "anagogic"! This helps us to understand the hold on the general public that artists such as these exert. Constable with his wind invaded landscapes of sudden sunshine, gestural paint, Van Gogh's bodied, possessed nature, Picasso's subjectivised figures, Bacon's figures that





"assault the nervous system", Matisse or Bonnard's contemplative figures, "distorted" by physical ease! Likewise there is so much body sensation in Shakespeare's imagery. In the following passage from Macbeth, the image purposely fuses the elements; **hope, drunk, wake, dress, sleep, colour of illness** into a nightmare representation: (and a nightmare is a perfect example of the anagogue: a concrete imprisoned "meaning". Thus Freud's interest in the double content of manifest and latent meaning of a dream). In the play, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth goad each other into what their deeper decency (this their tragedy) would wish to refuse, and all this lies in the vertical fusion of such disparate elements.

Was the **hope drunk**
Wherein you **dress'd** yourself?
hath it **slept** since?

And **wakes** it now, to look so **green** and **pale**
At what it did so **freely**?

This you could say is an anagogic presentation of Macbeth, and also of Lady Macbeth who utters this morally obfuscating description of her husband: a delirium of displaced body-identity! In 18th century England with the growth of scientific rationality and the new profession of journalism, poetic language became rather disapproved of as merely ornate - much as "ordinary people" still put aside Shakespeare because "he could have said it more simply", or horror, that it can be "translated into modern English", (and so destroy its very is-ness): its anagogic physicality!! (Such dual texts are for sale at Stratford's RSC! They should be ashamed!)

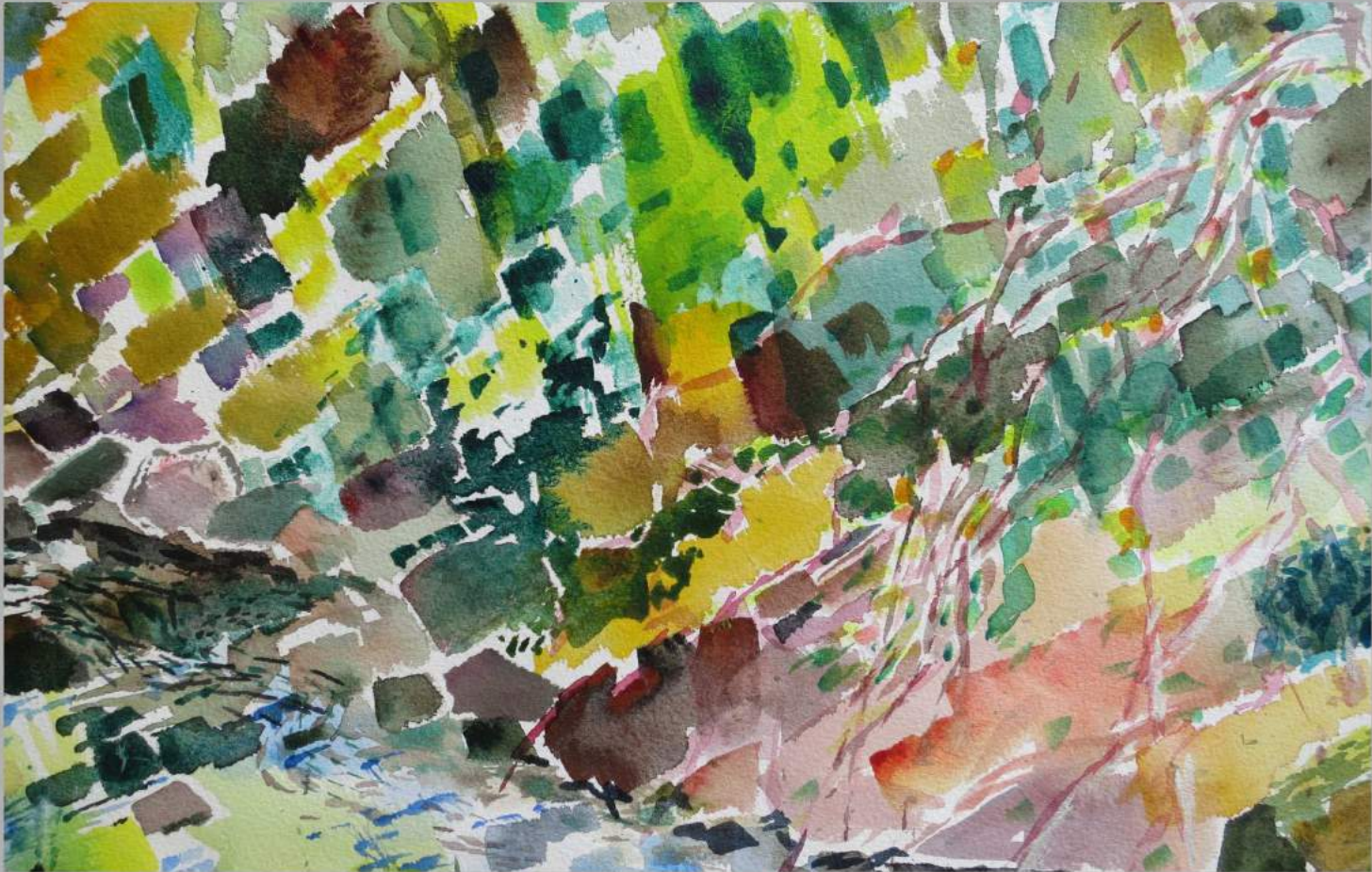




And that is not an elitist remark but its opposite. But think to what lengths one would have to go to "translate" the above verses and yet still fall far short. Significantly, when we learn a passage of Shakespeare by heart, we sometimes find that we have mistaken some key word - substituting usually an abstract word for Shakespeare's physical thereness. The French intellectual Paul Ricoeur was interested in the openness of interpretation in both works of art and dreams. In his 1965 book on Freud he pointed out how Freud saw dreams as "representing" seemingly real events but which also held a latent suppressed meaning that was hidden and disguised in the apparent reality of the dream story. The dream as described by Freud seems in its mixture of symbolism and apparent every-day ordinariness to be another version of the anagogue: the multi-valence, coded figuration. Ricoeur was also interested in metaphoric language and how that too held latent meanings behind the imagistic, physicalizing words. Poetry profoundly disturbs our minds with ordinary words combined in strangely metamorphic meanings. In poetry, language is compressed and words interbreed meaning, so metaphor is this strange hybrid linguistic construction: often very physical words are combined in a pictorial image: so in this following there is presented the act and its likely psychic effect. It is a nightmare anagogue - in which murder, murderer, and murdered, along with the effects, are all vertically skewered as one. All this I think is relevant in considering what painting can do with its own particular kind of "metaphoric" marks.







And **pity**, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the **blast**, or heaven's **cherubim**, **horsed**
Upon the sightless **couriers** of the **air**,
Shall **blow** the horrid deed in every **eye**,
That **tears** shall **drown** the **wind**.

Its pictorial, figurative quality is like the images of myths or here of nightmares, where a whole figuration has a latent meaning. It holds so

much in its oblique, allusive "scenic", dream-like picturing of the situation. Perhaps it is this physicality of the image that is the special characteristic of the anagogue. It is worth remembering how severe mental disturbance has **somatic** traits. This why Shakespeare's use of language, which is so hugely **incarnated** is almost medical in its perception of the close bond of body-soul: Homeric in its insistence on this indissolubility. Thus Tolstoy's idea of art working by "contamination"!









Ricoeur is interested in the way that metaphoric language skewers together disparate images/ideas so that this linguistic fusion reaches deeper than the plain single words with which it is built: it strings sense vertically and some of its daringest combinations seem worthy of that word "anagogue" which means more than mere symbol: the anagogue is a multiple-concrete-abstract and in those lines from Macbeth, such vivid description is part of a whole play that makes nature itself partake in this psychosomatic fusion: "The crow makes wing towards the rooky wood, good things of day begin to drop and drowse". In fact, the whole play is anagogic! The witches are "latent" extrusions of Macbeth's psyche! Both passages from Macbeth seem fitting examples of this psychosomatic fusion.

Objectors to such oblique use of language are all those who dismiss Shakespeare for his ornate, "poetic" language, as many did in the 18th century. Within a similar perspective to his book on Freud, Ricoeur in his "Time and Narrative", 1983-5 (3 volumes) speaks of the total symbolism of whole novels which don't just "tell stories" but present a symbolistic whole with profound meanings latent in that whole - so he might have interpreted "Wuthering heights" as if it were a "dream" - which maybe is exactly what novels are - constructions of multiple latent meaning. So, such novels, we could say have meaning incarnate IN character and story, holding a larger meaning - as does metaphor. They are not the same as somebody relating real events which by their nature are chaotic, and given our limited knowledge, barely comprehensible. Now all this I think gets us closer to a better sense of what the medieval term anagogue was struggling towards, where it is not a symbol that **stands for**, in a rather abstract way but in its physicality is, in some way, perceived as "the thing itself", (is this why Garzanti reaches for the term "model"?): a special form of symbolising, where form and content fuse in a way difficult to disintricate. It seems to me that the best examples of the anagogue are painting and music; - dreams, and poetry. Consider for example "Stopping by woods" of Robert Frost:

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village, though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Here there is the spellbound threading of simple and unfathomable: the simple scene; the unspecified "journey"; the falling snow; the hallucinatory incantation of rhymed lines amidst the "easy wind and downy flake"; the woods, "no farmhouse near", "the frozen lake", the sudden sound of the horse's "harness bells"; the anticipation of sleep deprivation in the phrase "miles to go" -repeated. This pregnant reality; this WHOLE of the poem seems to be brazenly saying, "I am that which I am, and my meaning is intrinsic", "I am a different type of meaning", "I am the anagogue", and its forms are mutable and metamorphic as they metabolise meanings in **each** viewer or listener. It is maybe in this that lies the enormous majesty of Dante's "Divine Comedy": it just IS - an incarnate whole: a gigantic anagogue; a real-symbolic!!

I found by chance recently, these lines from an early Shakespeare play "Two Gentlemen of Verona" which in the gigantism of its small scale demonstrates (I think!) what an anagogue **should** mean! Shakespeare, as we all know, loved metaphor. It is a form of expression that allows lightning meaning to illuminate the mind. He was the world's grandest metaphorer. He also liked a hybrid of metaphor-simile-personification: bursting the bounds of language. In this passage, Shakespeare takes up the Greek personification for music's power in the figure of Orpheus and sets to work (as in a virtuoso piano cadenza in a concerto), with this extended figuration for music's mysterious power over us. It is a figuration made up of scenic, visualising parts to make a whole of symbolic sufficiency, with no need of "explanation" for what it "means"- and is not that the gap which the concept anagogue fills? (just as with the two examples from Macbeth) and which describes an art work?

**"For Orpheus' lute was strung with poets' sinews
Whose golden touch could soften steel and stones
Make tigers tame and huge Leviathans**

Forsake unsounded deeps to dance on sands". (sound is a sailor's verb for measuring ocean depth + of course meaning a lute's "sounds", which here can even penetrate "unsounded deeps". (Shakespeare loved a nailing, double meaning!)

The mind is as it were raptured out of itself, metamorphosised with this marvellous absurdity and fulsome physicality of dancing Leviathans, whose joyful cavortings are made to stand for the invisible, affecting beauty of music: the sinews of poets recycled as lute strings - (was the recycling from dead poets or kidnapped poets stripped of their sinews!?) and thanks to this borrowed sublimity of being from eloquent POET'S sinews, the resultant "golden touch" could soften stones and here comes the "anagogic" virtuosity in the poetic image of whales gambolling on sands -thanks to music's power!

It's an untouchable whole. It's an anagogue- giving us a complex figuration standing as "model" for music's magic e/affects. The abstract thought seems paradoxically to be the more adequately comprehended thanks to the physicality of the figuration and its "vertical" fusions, and that seems to be a much higher and more complex form of interpretative

encoding than literal, allegoric or moral meanings. Here is another example of the untranslatable physicality of anagogues from Romeo and Juliet.

**"O she teaches the torches to burn bright:
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear.**

The vast, dark of night is given a "cheek" (which really belongs to Juliet) and that cheek is now black (night) as is also the "Ethiopian's ear", against which Juliet's bright beauty shines in pearly-white (jewel) contrast. This beautiful personification also functions as simile/metaphor - a special sort of symbolisation in which, as in two opposite mirrors, the "objects"; Ethiop, Juliet, ear-ring-jewel, night, lose themselves in infinite fusing reflections - and this new thing is an anagogue; like Van Gogh's cypress trees, or Christ's leg half out of the tomb in Piero della Francesca's resurrecting Christ (in Borgo San Sepulcro), which just IS; a symbol gone beyond decryption: as also that:

..... **"and huge Leviathans**

Forsake unsounded deeps to dance on sands".

A poem's effect on us is easier to describe and to explain than that of music or painting. Words with whose frequent or rare use we are familiar are already rich in overtones, whereas the marks and sounds of painting or music are, though meaningful, closed to adequate description. Clearly a poem is, (like music), sequential and works cumulatively, interconnecting sense and meaning. Both have to convince by the inner logic of their sequence. Both work by echo and accumulation. Everything should increase the focus; so Beethoven was particular over the smallest details of dynamics with his printers, often ruining a final print with further improvements that gave added focus to his intentions. Music that we find weak and innocuous conveys no meaning. What over the years has grown to be accepted by many people as music of great meaning can yet never be adequately described or the heart of its mystery plucked out. In this sense great music, which has a palpable though indescribable meaning, seems best to represent the medieval concept of the anagogue: an incarnate facticity: a symbolic code that many listeners can only intuit into intelligibility, but not describe verbally. So the arts are untranslatable. Their meanings are multiple and they lie locked in that facticity.





In figurative painting- using the word in its widest sense as given us by the great enlargement of its modes in the 20th century, the symbolic power of colour, shape, marks and "abstractions" can, within the frame of the represented "thing" be deciphered as meaningful.

In the arts there are technical means, rhetorical devices of eloquence, though the whole remains self-standing; an incarnated singularity. Being a whole, its "spiritual" or psychic eloquence is embedded in its physicality: form and content are one. Art should generate meanings, though it can't be pinned down to one meaning. It can never be abstracted from the whole which gives it its life. There is no separation of form and content; its meanings lie in its over-all constituents and the relationship of these to the particular attention each person gives to this or that element. It is an incarnate whole and that it seems is what the medieval term anagogue covers. It is this intense, incarnate, physicality that maybe led Tolstoy to define all art that deeply affects us as working like an infection, by "contagion": we can't help responding, it works upon the body. For perhaps a similar reason Francis Bacon, in talking about painting that affects us, spoke of painting working on the nervous system. Both of these artists were therefore strongly aware of this body pathway to effective communication by the art object, and it is significant that music that we find profound is often rooted in the rhythms of the dance: imagine Bach without that.

Yet also remember this quotation given earlier of Cioran, on Bach's music: "When you hear Bach you see God being born". Compared to the connection made to physical dance rhythms, "God being born" is not very helpful.

So we could say that what started as a consideration of the 4 levels of medieval interpretation of texts, finishes by realising that all effective art has an aspect of the "anagogue", for an anagogue is a symbol that has **broken free** of a servitude to encrypted meaning and just IS, - exactly as a work of art stands or falls by virtue of its corporal sinews, and certainly

Shakespeare's metaphoric writing does just that:

**"For Orpheus' lute was strung with poets' sinews
Whose golden touch could soften steel and stones
Make tigers tame and huge Leviathans
Forsake unsounded deeps to dance on sands".**

-here a lute, strung with poets' sinews that enraptures whales to dance on sands: this figuration is the anagogue, with its "meaning" buried in it. What poetic felicity!

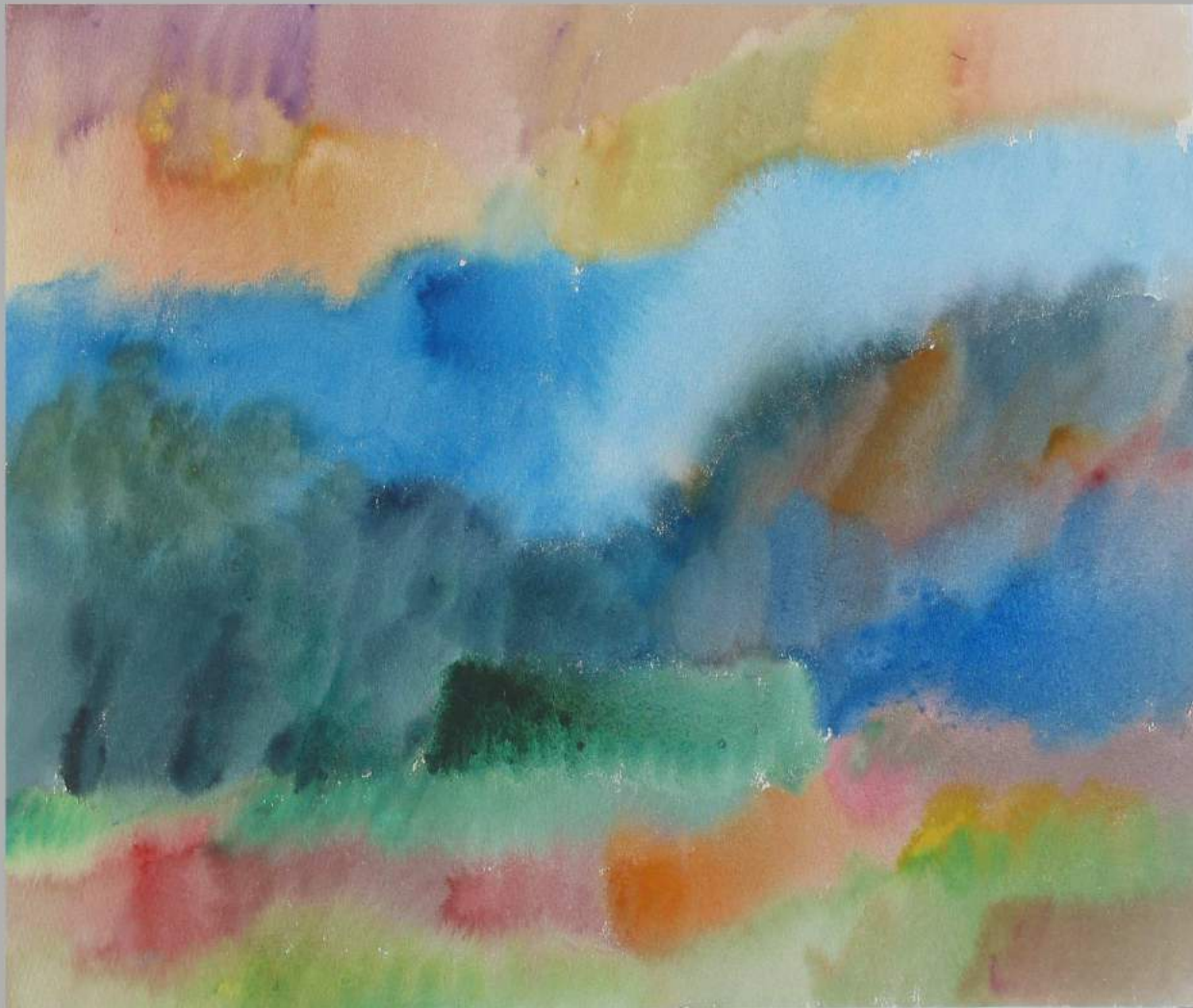
It's worth noting that in his plays, such things are just a Shakespearean "thrown-in", which enraptures as it flashes by! An "unnecessary" over-abundance! An Alleluia just to life; no God.

Footnote on the physicality of Beethoven's "anagogues".

Listen to the 7th cd of Paul Lewis' Beethoven sonatas. No: 13 Opus 27.1 Last movement. Allegro vivace.(track 8)

It's such a good example of music's sound metaphors and the gestural physicality of Beethoven's music. Lewis is particularly faithful to Beethoven dynamic markings. The anagogic quality is obvious as the body is almost forced into participation in this weaving of symbolic meaning - the abruptness, the sudden forcings, the impetuosity of its pell-mell, the humour, its jubilation- all the "abstractions" of body woven into a "representation" in which the oh so human is made incarnate in an "abstraction" (music) that needs no decryption. It is "the thing": an "anagogue", which enlightens as it lightnings and its meanings are all incorporated.

Stream near Middlesmoor. Autumn. 75 x 55 cms Watercolour.



This and next three are of Cascina Piov. Alba. Guarene hillside. Evening. Watercolour. All 40 x 35 cms







Words such as "realistic" or "symbolic" or "spiritual" have been so variously employed that it's difficult to use them with precision. However these are the terms that have been frequently used by artists and critics. "Reality" is a term that has a double life. Either it refers to that raw stuff out there that remains when we are dead, or there is that other "reality" that we humans have made, either personally or through our particular culture and moment in History. Even that seemingly concrete, raw "reality" that "remains when we are dead", is also not self evidently "real". Much of it is now a human reality - ie something invented and created.

What we think of by means of the word "spiritual" is a something that has been differently demarcated in other languages. The German word Geist" may occur in Heilige Geist - as in our Holy Ghost, where it means spirit in the sense of intelligence. When we call some values "spiritual" we tendentiously ascribe that which is not yet proved. The separating word implies that "spiritual" is a clear something: a "higher". But what is a spiritual value? Is it not just a valuation that we cordon off as having special authority: an indication of what we hold as important. The spiritual refers us to a special reality that is held to lie behind ordinary and everyday existence, or it refers to so called "higher" values. For example a concern with cookery would hardly be called spiritual. In English "spiritual" usually refers us to a hidden underlying religious reality: that which going to church, praying or virtuous Christian conduct might address or participate in. Isn't art simply an emphatic yea saying to the here and now?



Poplars near Cascina Piov, Guarene. Alba 40 x 35 cms

Opposite. Yorkshire moor beck.





Late Autumn. Stream and wind. 80 x 65 cm. In the detail above and the painting opposite, the paint marks were not intended as just descriptive. The long slashes don't properly "describe" anything. They are intended to create a sense of inter-penetration of viewer and scene. The word "spirit" has been generally kept as a specialised religious word, though the language still retains "spirited" as in "high spirited horse", or boy. Or in "high spirits". The defining theology of the Middle Ages saw the whole natural world as the book of God that might be interpreted as an outward veil of God's meanings. Thus the cathedrals that were built were symbolic - they were not just stone

buildings to hold congregations.- they held meanings. They were meant to demonstrate a meaning: to be themselves, interpretations. They were anagogic. When the Impressionist painters became accepted; no longer laughed at, people came to see their art as "naturalistic"; describing the as-it-is; as it appears. (As it gives "impressions" to the eye). With no pretention to go behind and to interpret and give special meanings. No, what you got was what they gave. (Cezanne's "Monet is all eye; but what an eye!") But wait. Theodore Duderot might write "The Impressionist sits down beside a river and just paints what he sees", was that true? Really!? We all use language loosely and

usually the justification is that, "well, we know what we mean", though by that we concede that we are not being too scrupulously exact. The Impressionist paintings are not "natural", they are culturally conditioned; they show an attitude to the world, even a "vision". Theirs are interpretations of reality. The Impressionists were much more serious than makers of mere "views"! Even so, an artist like Gauguin could not paint such pictures. He felt a radical unease or even dislike before the reality of his contemporary France. It was Tahiti that he preferred and what he found there made up his "vision", just as Samuel Palmer found his in the amalgam of Blake and his Shorham in Kent.



He wanted to paint pictures (first at Pont Aven and then in Tahiti) that showed something removed from the everyday subject matter of the Impressionists. So it's really in a process of revealing contrast that we use such words as "naturalism". That word seems to certainly fit better a Monet than a Gauguin or a Van Gogh, though Monet's pictures are also "spiritual": that is intellectual- interpretative. - like all works of art. To return to Gauguin. In Tahiti, Gauguin found a reality that suited him better than did his contemporary France. But his Tahiti was not the Tahiti of the Tahitians that he painted. Tahiti offered to him a "reality" that he found more susceptible to the sort of interpretative qualities that he wanted his paintings to contain. In a similar way, the convivial river side Sundays of Renoir's boaters was a reality that suited Renoir, though not Gauguin. If we use the word loosely - as in fact common usage allows us, then Gauguin was more "Romantic" in his artistic views, we would justify this by saying, "well everyone would understand what we meant". That is; a rejection of modernity, of the city, a nostalgia for an imagined authentic life lived nearer to the seasons and nature, an admiration for primitive, less developed forms of civilisation, a liking for exotic and uncontaminated nature etc.

If an admirer of Gauguin had gone to Tahiti he might have been as disappointed as are people who love Cezanne's work or van Gogh, and go to Provence "to see it" and are disappointed to find that the "real" places look so dull and flat compared to the content of the artist's paintings. Which is more real then? Which more true?





Gauguin made his own Tahiti in order to find a means of expression for those yearnings that left him disappointed with the French reality. His painting titles were such as "Who are we"? "Where are we going"? So the justification for using a term like "romantic" is that it too was critical of its social world, its modern industrialisation, its social hierarchy and hypocrisy, its loss of contact with authentic, unprettified nature. A point often missed in easy talk of the Impressionists who "sat down beside a river and painted what they saw" (Theodore Duret) is that the Impressionists did choose subject matter as much as did Gauguin. Their subjects were the Seine, the passing clouds reflected in the waters, the coast, people from towns relaxing in the countryside, city scenes, the small past-times of Sunday boating, the public places of entertainment, the pleasures of being alive, the beauty of a poppy field, the wind blown dress of a woman in a field holding a parasol, the summer shadows in a garden, its flowers, the sparkle of sunlit water, the blood nipping exhilaration of snow scenes. These were "spiritual" subject matter as much as Gauguin's supposedly authentic savages. Gauguin reacted against this subject matter that one could say represented "la douceur de la vie". It seemed too optimistic, too partial in its realism.

Gauguin and Van Gogh offered an alternative "vision". In Van Gogh's Arles paintings, he injected a strongly emotive, expressionist element into the paintings that were certainly much influenced by the Impressionist paintings he had seen in Paris.

The rhythmic emotive marks of Van Gogh or the flat primitive colours of Gauguin represented an eruption of a more marked subjectivism, even though one still sees the strength of the Impressionist ideas on colour. The Romantic movement had also looked for more suitable subject matter. Less polite society and more rugged untamed places and heroic history subjects that gave the individual a heroic setting. A Medieval world, a Classical world, a primitive world, wild phenomena of nature - storms and Mountains.

Let's listen a moment to Courbet. "I hold that painting is essentially a concrete art and does not consist of anything but the representation of real and existing things. It is a completely physical language using all visible objects as its "words". An abstract object, one which is invisible or non existent, does not belong in the realm of Painting".

Now that is an emphatic program for "realist" painting - even though Courbet would have conceded that a painting is always a product of imagination as well as of observation. It is significant that many expressions of Cezanne were in this mould of obstinate realism, though in Cezanne's case the ideal, imaginative element is even more apparent than in Courbet. In considering Courbet and Cezanne's work, we can see how much we need a word that would mean at one and the same time, spiritual and intellectual.

Artists make verbal statements and formulations in order to free themselves from conceptions that they feel obstructs them. They define art in ways that will fortify them in finding those solutions that for the moment they only "know" in vague, uneasy dissatisfaction.

Art is a story of what differing societies have found important. Art sees the visual world but gives it an interpreted sense. In 18th century England, the case of William Blake is revealing. In a way, one could say that just as Gauguin was driven to Tahiti by his dissatisfaction with the values of his society, so Blake was driven to invent a new cosmology and refashion Christianity in order to have material more hospitable to his view of human history and the significance of the individual: to conceive of a "spiritual" world more real than the reality of 1800's England. Blake was a proto Hegel or Marx or any modern Sociologist. He realised that "reality" was a cultural construct, a "spiritual" construct and that our modern world is an invented reality, that might leave us stranded in the "cavern" of our own making.

We are mostly surrounded by the physical things that we have invented. Our cities are human intellectual constructions. We create and then in turn (in worryingly nightmare fashion), are **created by** the intellectual/ physical products of our cities and industry and recently our media inventions. All this was perceived by Blake. " I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's". This one feels would have appealed to Gauguin. Blake's Herculean struggle to re-fashion Christianity and to reassert the claim for a superior spiritual reality hidden behind what he disparagingly called "this vegetable universe", was in order to contest contemporary Christianity and the unjust social hierarchy that it supported. I said that an artist uses words to fortify himself - to help break through all those myriad for-closings that surround him in ordinary language usage, or what we call now an ideology: its guiding, though often imperceptible values. Blake's paintings and prints show how his "philosophy" or radical Christianity allowed him, enabled him to create a figuration and subject matter that was counter-current. He became an outsider. The importance of a fortifying verbal program to artists is particularly well illustrated in the case of a young artist who came under the intellectual, spiritual influence of Blake: Samuel Palmer.

In Samuel Palmer we can see the importance of a view of reality - reality seen in Blake and Palmer as only apparent and that in Medieval fashion was read as standing for. There is such a contrast between the sepia drawings done in the period of religious belief while under the influence of Blake and the subsequent fall in his work when he lost that sense of parallel realities which in a sense saved him from "reality". The influence of Blake gave Palmer's paintings done in Shoreham, a quality that is possessed by medieval windows and sculpture. The physical is imbued with the sense of that parallel spiritual/meaningful world. The Shoreham sepia drawings "see" the world as holy, as significant and this reminds us of Gauguin's paintings of Tahiti. As we make Palmer and Gauguin touch, in this way, we give back to the word "Spiritual", some of its content of the intellectual. "Geist".

Blake objected to Wordsworth's "naturalism" which struck him as little short of nature idolatry and this too has something in common with Gauguin's view of the Impressionists. To Blake, Wordsworth's "nature worship" would never offer adequate "spiritual"/intellectual sustenance.



Although Blake didn't recognise how much Wordsworth was a fine describer of the growth of mind, perhaps the subsequent falling off of Wordsworth's poetic strength does prove Blake's point that the beauties of Wordsworth were planted on too thin a soil. In Palmer's drawings we see how important is attitude. Every smallest flower or leaf was seen as holy and as containing a further existence and meaning and his sepias are authentic-strange. The formality of the drawing shares with child art the rapt attention to small detail and nature is not the natural scene but sign and symbol. These paintings are revealing about some of the criticism made against the Impressionists by artists such as Cezanne, Gauguin or Van Gogh. The French Symbolist movement wished to formulate a rationale for a symbolic non naturalistic art. It is one of the ironies of artistic influences that the Impressionists who started by so scandalising polite opinion with their "abstract" scribbles, should eventually so impose its "new found methods" as to make them seem supremely naturalistic and "easy on the eye"! When habit had "naturalised" these "impressions", they then seemed too ordinary to the symbolist poets: a non imaginative banality or every day life. What they wanted to establish was an aesthetic (and that to some degree had been the function of Blake's reinterpretation of Christianity), that could bring to birth a new figuration that might show that which was hidden: the spiritual, the deep. The whole dynamism of 1860 - 1930 rotates about these variable and constantly redefined terms: realism, spiritual, and those "compounds





strange" that might be found and so show a visible invisible. When we look back on 20th century art, there is this danger. We want to "sort out" what was happening in art. What were the influences, what previous painters or contemporary critics had been determinant on the developing story of modern art: that highway now recognised with hindsight. We gather artists in groups and even are a little annoyed when one or other spoils our categories and doesn't "fit". So for example I have seen a book on 20th century art in which all artists are gathered into 4 sheep pens. Romantic, Symbolic, Structural and Realistic. It's true that Cezanne or Cubism shows a strong "structural" element but so does the supposedly Romantic view of Van Gogh though there we may call his structure "rhythmic". All artists claimed a "realism" and the only valid distinction seems to be between a symbolist/spiritual belief in deeper often religious significance and artists that considered themselves "this-world" interpreters and enhancers of this world that we inhabit for so brief a moment. So Matisse for all his "symbolic" use of colour or expressive deformation of form, is a celebrator of everyday life, just as is Picasso. Proust remarked that the artist gives us another world or better, each artist offers another layer of world. A Cezanne enriches our sight. This is a s true for a Monet or Picasso as it is for those other artists such as Palmer, Gauguin or a Kandinsky, thinking to give us a key to a "spiritual world", a world only revealed by the artist. And every amateur painter is excited by the idea of somehow, one

day, making an image that he will think says **it!**
As Goethe beautifully observed; "every new
object of experience opens in us a new organ of
perception".

That is true of ourselves and particularly true of
those "visions" of the world that music and
painting "reveal", as we mistakenly term it.
Maybe better - that the arts **break open** to us.

In the end, if we write about the abundance
of creative novelty that occurred between 1860
and 1930, we must first dust off the cobwebs
from the terminology and then look at
individual paintings. Yes, to draw revealing
contrasts and parallels between artists but to
describe specific painting: consider how it
works as a whole; judge the effectiveness of its
symbolic mechanisms and its figurative
language. To do so, we may want to invent a
different sort of descriptive vocabulary to that
which Bacon used in conversations with the
critic Sylvester. In most cases of course we will
never get much further into the heart of the
mystery. Cezanne for example will remain as
poorly described as ever and that is only right
for after all the artists **painted**, and so their
meanings are indissoluble with their paint. It
would be a poor art that could just be translated
by explanation! However a more modest art
criticism has an educative role that can
approach a little nearer the complexity that the
artists created and that continue to look back at
us like Sphinxes. And incidentally were it good
criticism it might better ensure that paintings
continue to be actually painted, rather than
being **discouraged by restricting concepts**.









"Spirit being present, hand may be spared execution." Chinese saying from a 17th century handbook on painting: "The Mustard Garden". That could stand for a constant in our response to signs. In spoken language we respond to the condensation of poets that, despite of brevity, seem to defy whatever length we might go to in order to make an adequate prose "explanation" of what their poem "says". Do what we will, in the end we

still find that our description or translation has missed what the poem includes. It is a similar matter in visual art; a simple drawing by Matisse seems so eloquent with so little. Often with watercolour, the type of paper used can have such determining effects- rather as a composer might use brass or strings or individual instruments. Here you can see an effect of very absorbent paper which fits that misty day at Powerstock in Dorset.



Watercolour. Tom. Winter evening. 70 x 50 cms

Sue and Phil's orchard. Wales









This is one of those paintings that have been "made" by the accidental rain that began to fall on it, but that accident is centred and held by the autumn scene, the stream and the feel of misty damp day. Also an odd effect of the messy smudging from the rain is that the painting has some kind of authenticity: the shiny wetness of it!



I think there is a special form of representation, which has an "oblique" reference to the "real thing". In Oblique representation, the image is not retina impressionistic but is a new symbol that only partly contains the real referent, or maybe amalgamates aspects of it and is therefore a composite image. It is partially "abstract" in the sense that its figuration is occasioned by an oblique and not obvious visual referent. I think this odd use of "abstract" points us to something complex about comprehending signs and images that is not much dealt with. I think it brings us to that which Bacon in the

conversations was edging towards defining when he was talking about painting a wave that was so non illustrational (which inconveniently must also mean "unrepresentational"), that in a some peculiar way, the unlike likeness of the painted "wave" could have caught something in its NEW invented image, that communicated: "wave", better than the banal representation might do, and which Bacon dismissed as mere "illustration"!

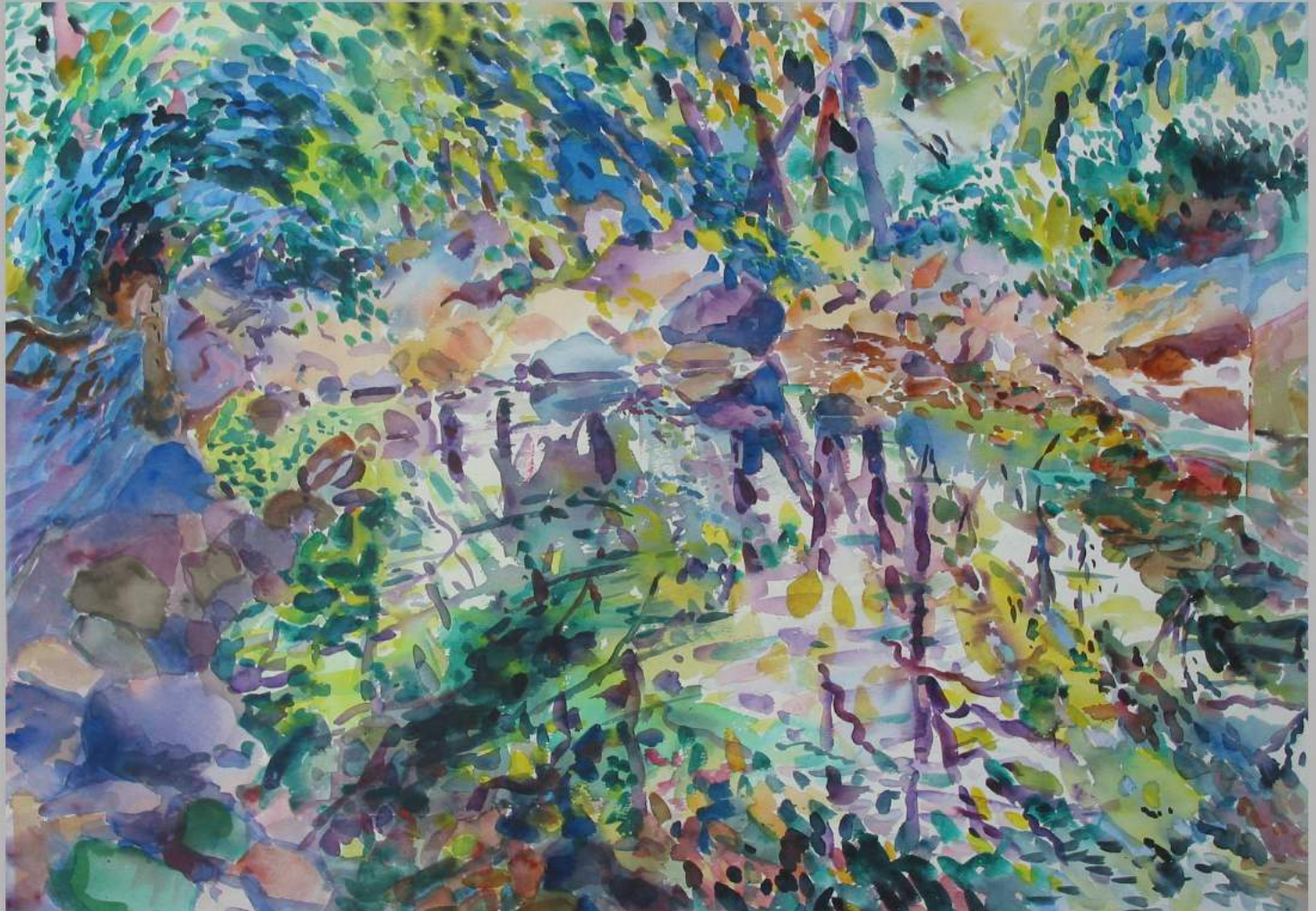
This painting of bank and stream was done on especially absorbent paper - like blotting paper, so that the colours immediately stained the paper, although the abundant rain has also still managed to puddle the watercolour and not be absorbed by the paper.
75 x 55 cms





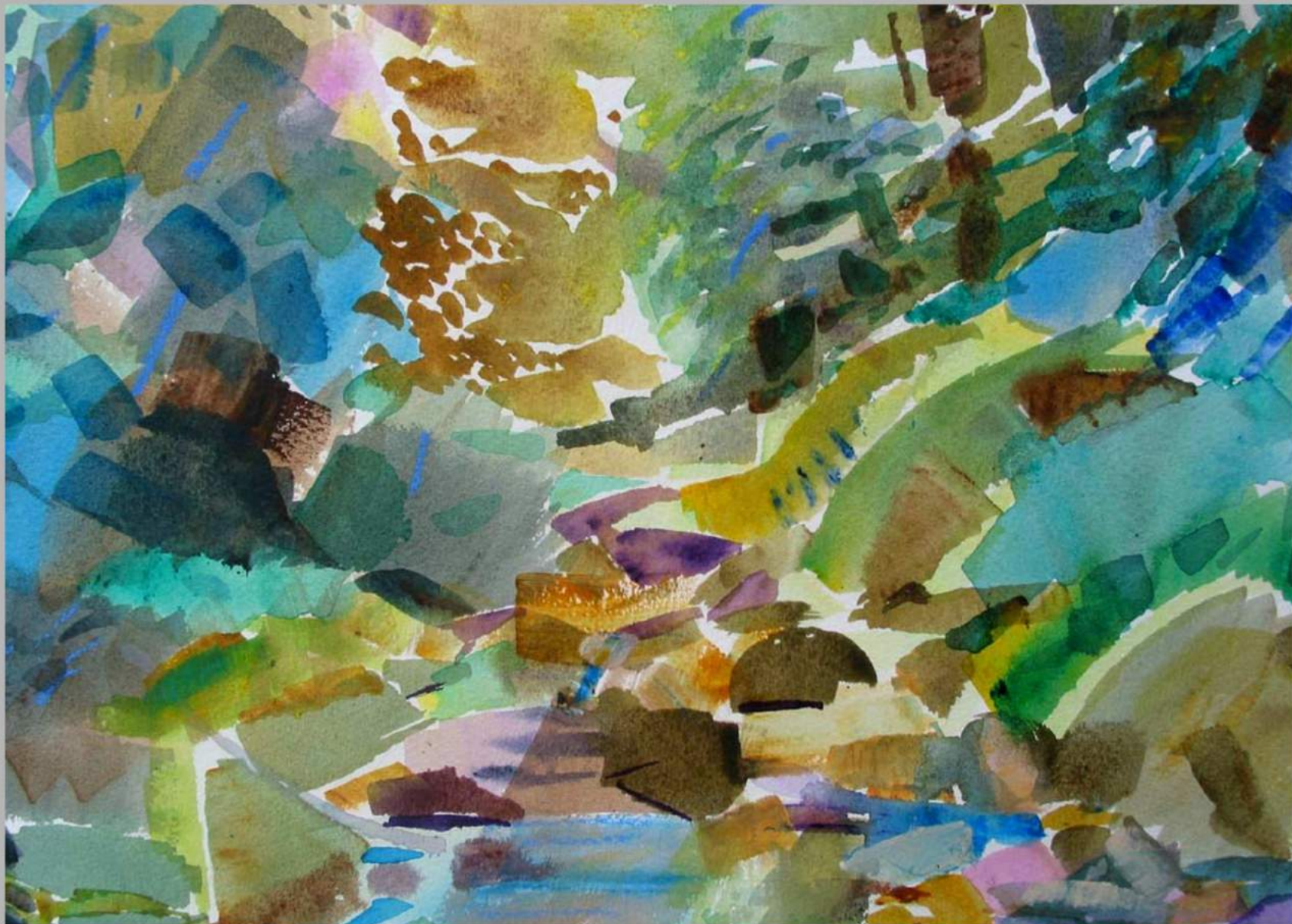


What I mean by oblique is something different to this "abbreviation". There are some forms of figuration, particularly in Picasso and Henry Moore, where the artist's figuration is oblique. I mean that they have not gone so far off from the real thing as to become entirely conventional signs, in the way that Chinese pictograms or Arabic numerals have, and which have become abstract in the proper sense: hieroglyphs - symbols. (with no inverted commas). There is not the extreme conventional separation of Chinese writing, where it is very difficult to decipher the original "realistic" origin of the



signs. What Bacon in his interviews with Sylvester tried to describe was the attempt to catch (p.18) why some paint marks "come across directly onto the nervous system, and other paint in a long diatribe through the brain".

Bacon refers to a possible **oblique** form of symbolism: a representation that is so powerfully appropriate that it convinces, even though it would fail on a superficial, outward likeness.



detail .Watercolour. Summer afternoon. 85 x 75 cms. (Next 5 paintings are 95 x 97 cms). This detail shows well the way the thing represented and the "poetic mode" have to strike a compromise so that thing is not lost in the artistic form.





The "accidental" mark fascinated Bacon as the epitome of the "artificial" and non-illustrational. The mystery being how this could still be at the service of representation. For us the impasse remains; how can we better describe a non-illustrational mark which convinces us of its deeper representation at what Bacon calls the level of our nervous system. Bacon's accidental or artificial marks, which are from the conventional point of view, "inappropriate" (ie, not "illustrational", are in fact

metaphorically suggestive - affect us across the nervous system. At an obvious level, there is a mismatch. That is to say there is not a simple illustrational matching. At a further level we see a spark cross a gap of seeming disjunction between referent and symbol, just as does metaphor work by sudden illumination. In this painting the snow stained the paper when it fell. You can see the dull shadow spots. The surface became wet and really it needs careful modification with brushes and a plant sprayer.











On these pages are 4 large (10 x 110 cms.) ink paintings done with brush. They are good examples of what are non abstract versions of the artist Kline's manner in his "Tachiste" paintings in the spirit of Chinese calligraphy, which incidentally asks hard questions of Abstraction that has had a far too easy ride! Ink, brush and ink is a very eloquent medium and well illustrates the "graffitti" aspect of Chinese hieroglyphs, except that the latter are "words" with a meaning - unlike graffitti. As you can see in this detail, the ink "marks" representing ripples and reflections in part explain abstraction!







detail.

Summer. Midday. Acrylic. 90 x 85 cms





Sepia ink and brush. Summer clouds. 80 x 70 cms



Black ink and brush. Stream and cows.



Devon. Leylands pool.. detail

Sepia ink and brush. 85 x 70 cms







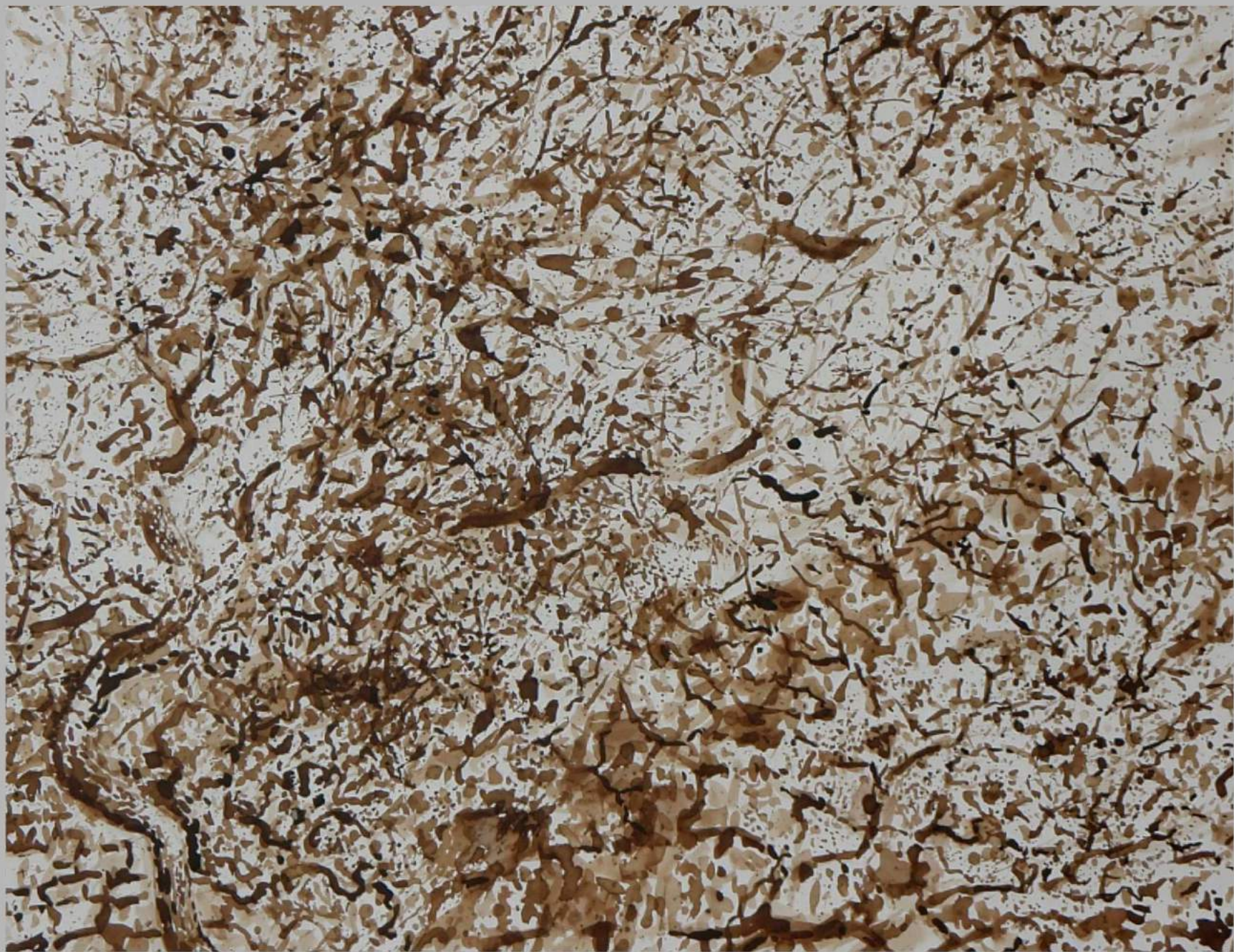














detail

Spring day. Clouds. Acrylic. 90 x 90 cms

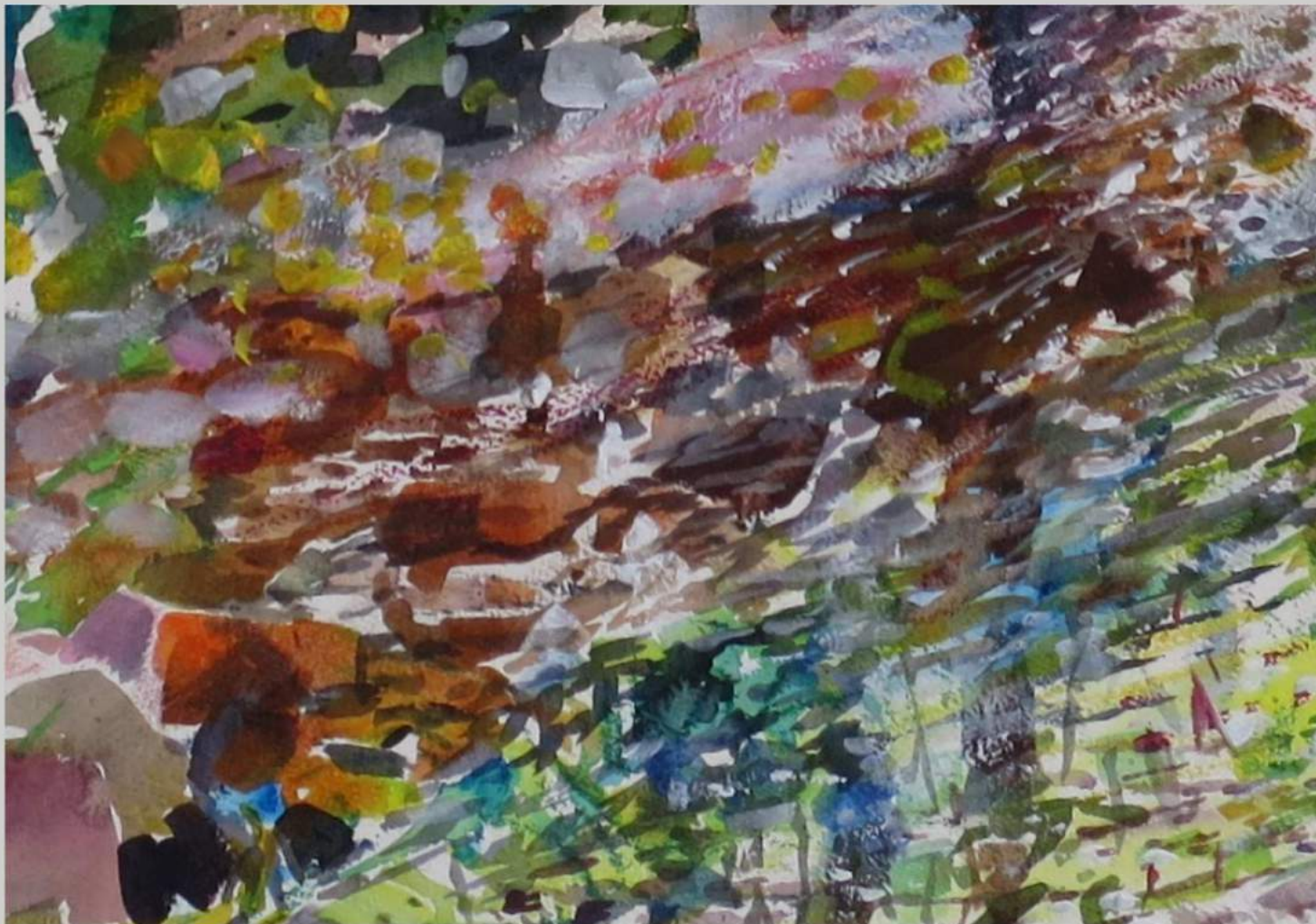




Stream and snow. Inks and crayon. detail

Stream and snow. Inks and crayon. 90 x 90 cms





detail

Autumn afternoon wind. Acrylic. 90 85 cms





detail

Rowan blossom. May. Black ink and water. 100 x 100 cms.





Fallen tree. Sepia ink. Autumn. Fallen tree. Sepia ink.
Autumn. 100 x 90 cms Next 4 paintings are 100 x 95 cms









Leaning Blackthorn. 1. Spring. Watercolour. 75 x 55 cms



Leaning Blackthorn.Spring. 2. Watercolour. 75 x 55 cms



Early morning. detail

Early morning. Winter. Looking towards Stean. Acrylic. 90 x 90 cms







From wood. Windy day. October. Sepia and brush. 99 x 94 cms

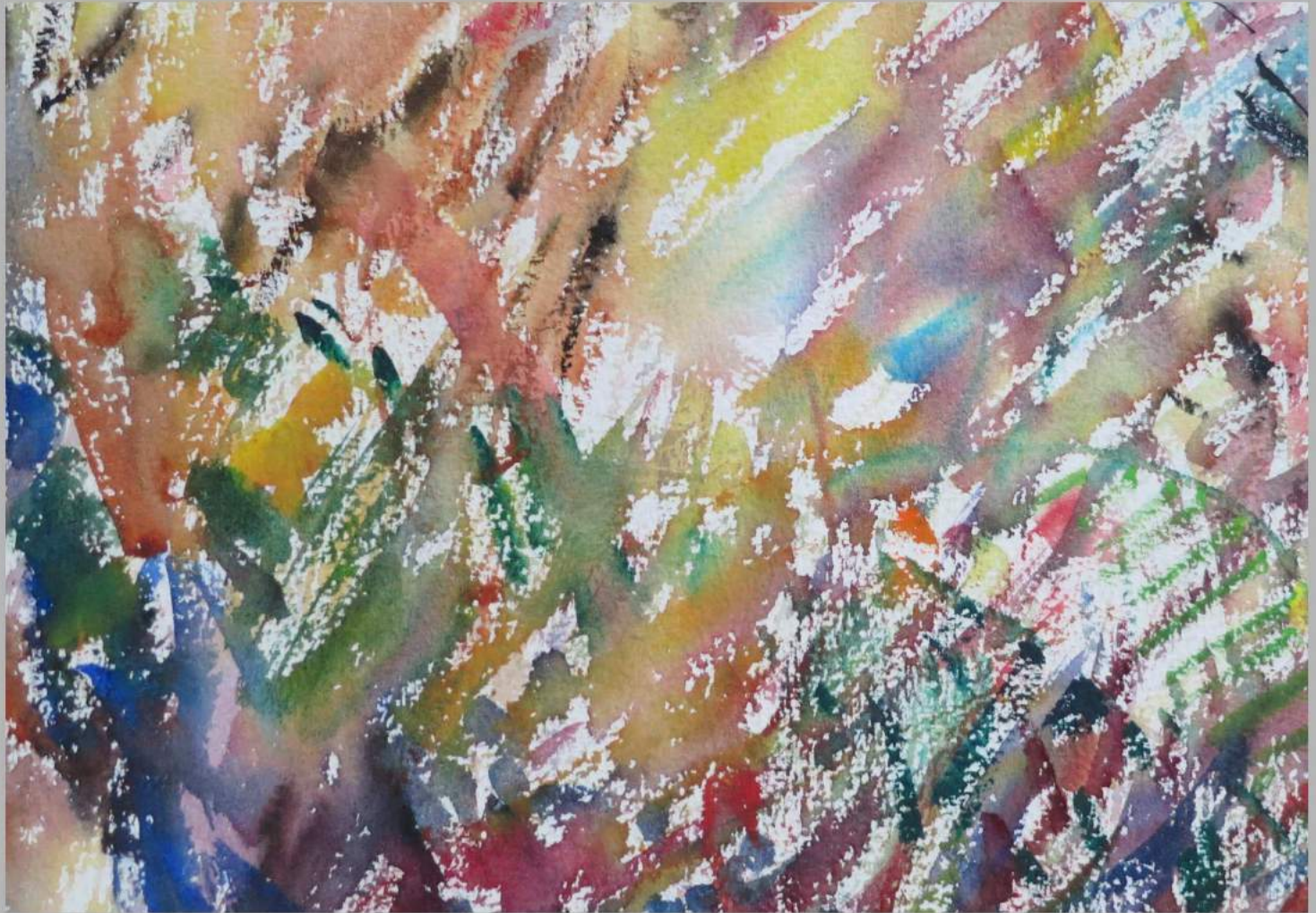
Tom's bank. Linocut. 75 x 55





Autumn sunset. Watercolour and crayon. 75 x 55 cms. This painting is a small example of what I called oblique representation. The blurred, scribbled crayon marks could not easily be termed "drawing". They obviously derive from an idea: "shadow-blue" in the trees: the blue is a sort of "shadow" essence that also calls up a colour contrast to the yellow/green. But it is exaggerated and abbreviated and becomes a sort of counterpoint graffiti. Similar marks are the childish rays of the sun. In a way, you see such "abstract" marks in their fullest autonomy ONLY in a representational painting!





This too is an example of limited representational marks. As can be seen in a detail, the "drawing" is mostly visible in the whole: - rocks, stream, autumn, evening etc. Watercolour has its own handicraft beauty. The way the colours are slightly resisted by the sized paper and the way the brush if fairly dry leaves the declevities in the rough paper untouched by paint. This allows for a lot of semi accidental combinations which in the setting of this bright "autumn evening" are read as suffusing light which also echoes some physical/ psychological response that we have to such an experience.



On the opposite page. 110 x 110 cms. This detail above also has its graffitti "sprezzatura", which after all is what such rain hurrying sky deserves! Sepia ink with its gradations of intensity in monochrome is especially suited to a "Tachiste" kind of painting - especially on rough pitted paper - see the shaft of light on the right of this detail. I think the stream and wood need extra work to equal the sky's eloquence. I often refer to the "graffitti" or manuality of a painting. We usually have a strong physical involvement in landscape and that can be pictured so as to almost feel the rain approaching.







Windy afternoon. Acrylic. 90 x 85 cms. Summer. detail .

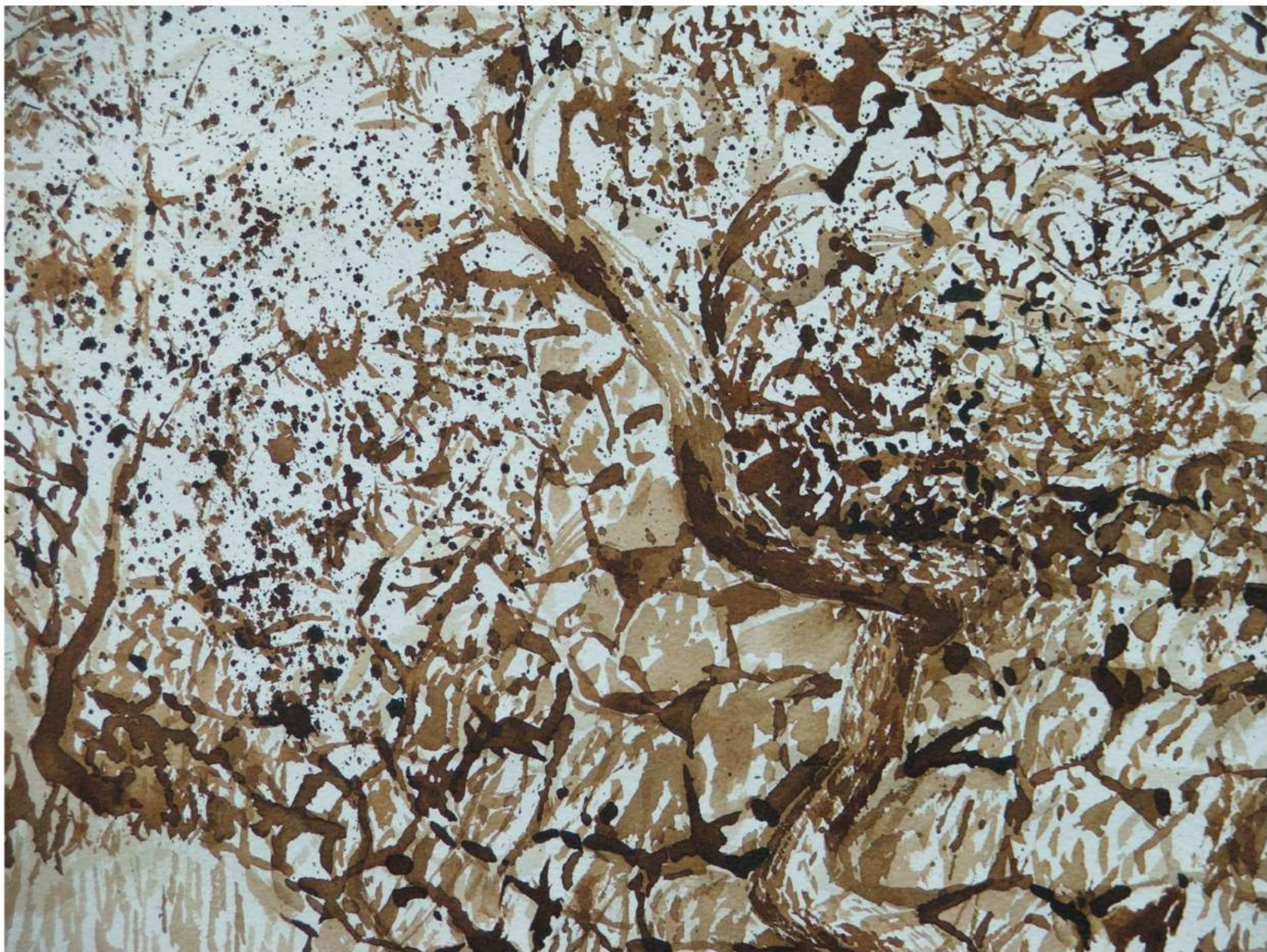
This painting also shows how the "scene" can host a load of "oblique" representation which also tries to communicate a body/feeling of response. One response that landscape painting should sometimes convey is a sort of body wonder and jubilation: but how to find the hyroglyphs for that!





Towards Keith's barn. Winter afternoon. Snow and Holly tree. Acrylic. 100 x 75

detail.









Thunder. Summer afternoon. Acrylic. 95 x 95 cms. detail. This shows an attempt to bring "oblique" assistance to the representation of a stormy sky. Those non representational but somehow representational mauve slashes- a sort of "rain", or "lightning" which has its oblique eloquence that doesn't seem entirely irrelevant to "storm coming"!





Paul writing. Watercolour. 75 x 55 cms



Dining room at Chiasielis. Watercolour. 75 x 55 cms.



Valentina at Eddy's. . Watercolour. 75 x 55 cms







View from La grotta. Watercolour. 75 x 55 cms



La Grotta. Valentina's window. Watercolour. 75 x 55 cms



Bathers's pool. Devon. Watercolour. 75 x 55 cms



Bathers' pool, Devon. Watercolour. 75 x 55 cms
Next 6 pages. 110 x 100 cms













Acrylic and crayon.

Spring, detail





View from garden, Middlesmoor.
Water colour. 75 x 55 cms. Autumn evening.





I think that the undoubted visual impact of "abstract expressionism", or graffiti would be better used in paintings that responded to the world out there. Here there is a painting of hawthorn blossom in June with shadowed grass under it. The paint marks instead of having to carry heavy metaphysical "meaning" are simply hieroglyphs of real things and our memory of them. Bacon was fascinated by this two way traffic of world- paint: he thought abstraction was boring because in representation (of an interesting sort), there is a continual back and forth of reference between paint and thing.













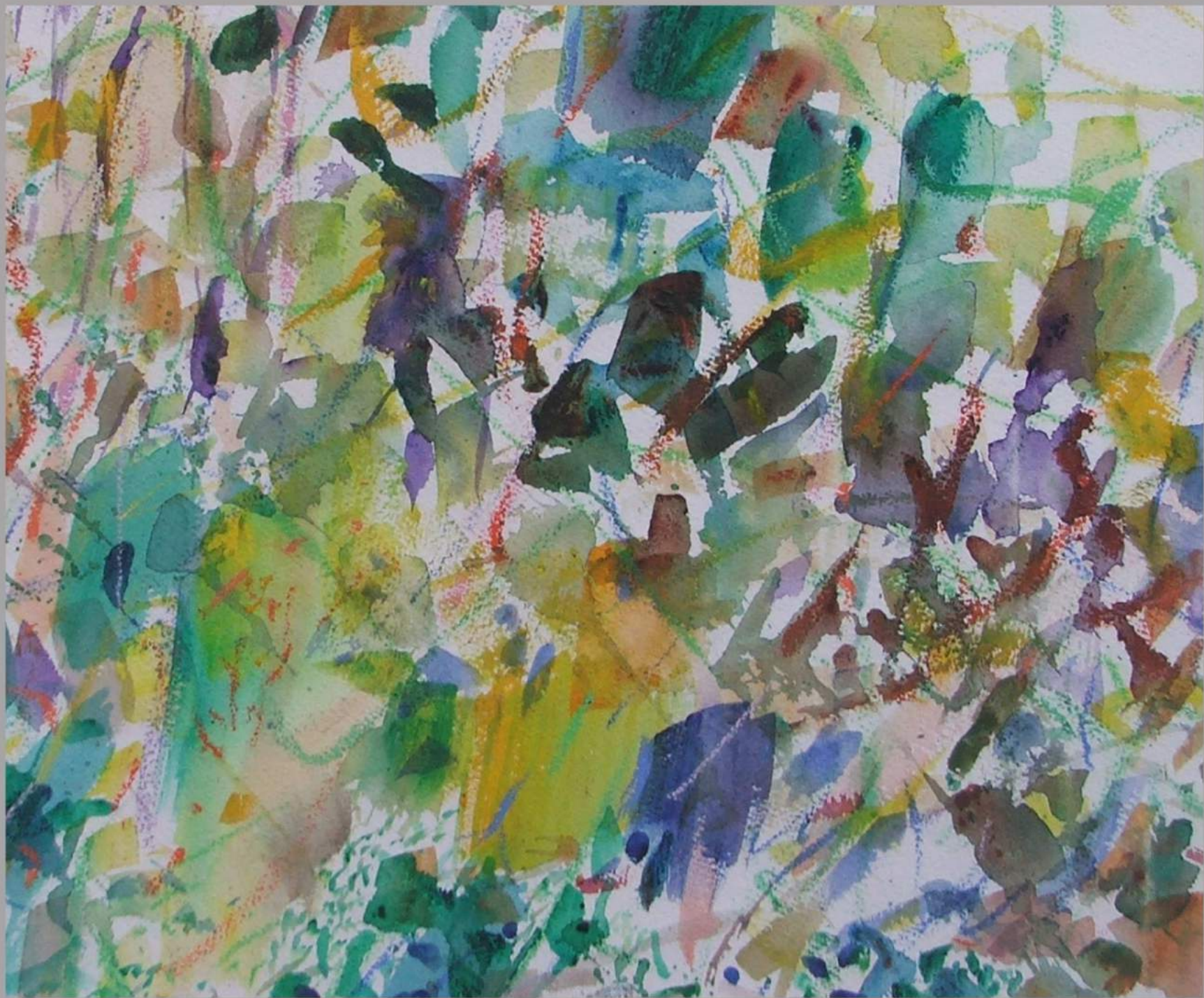










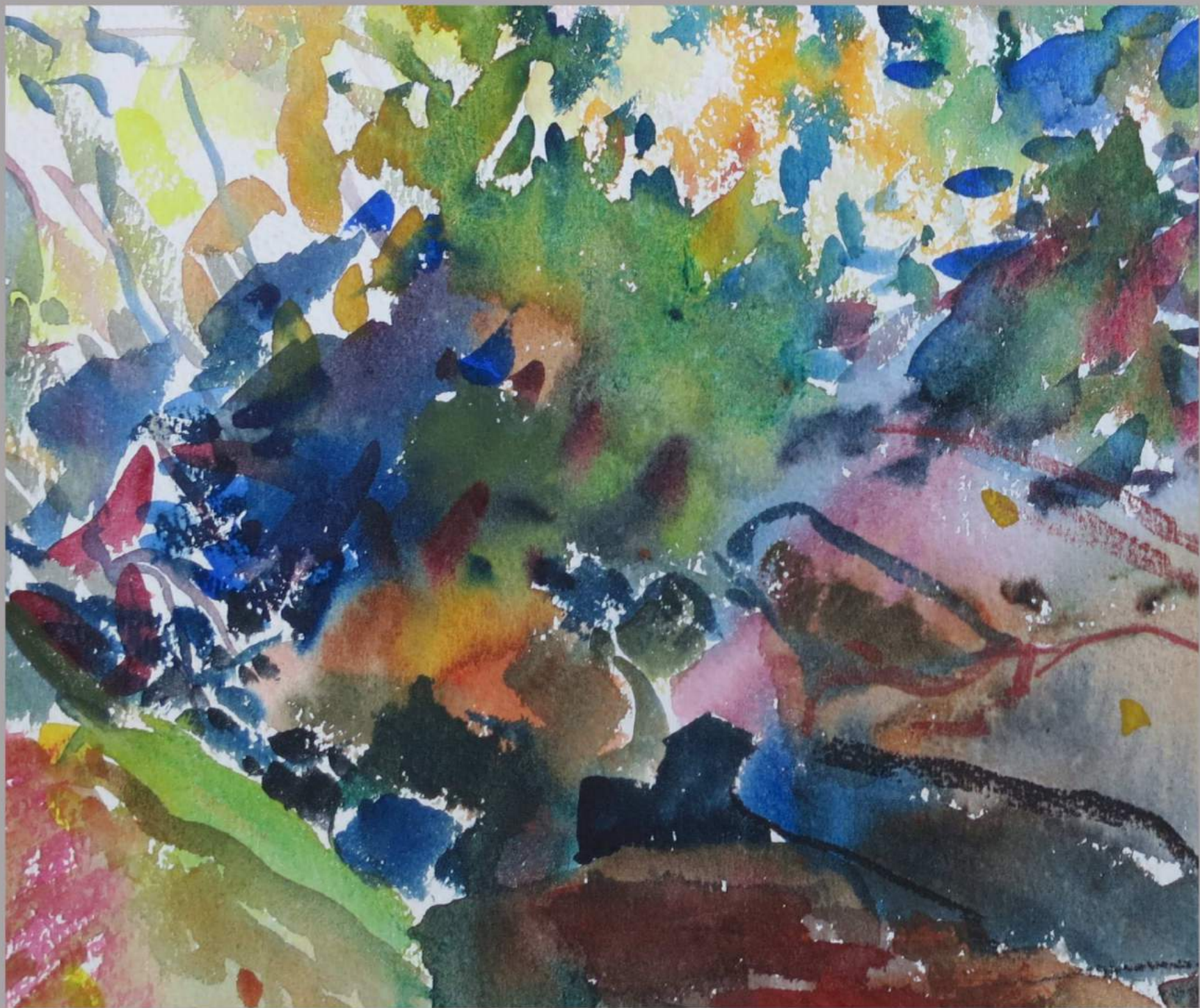








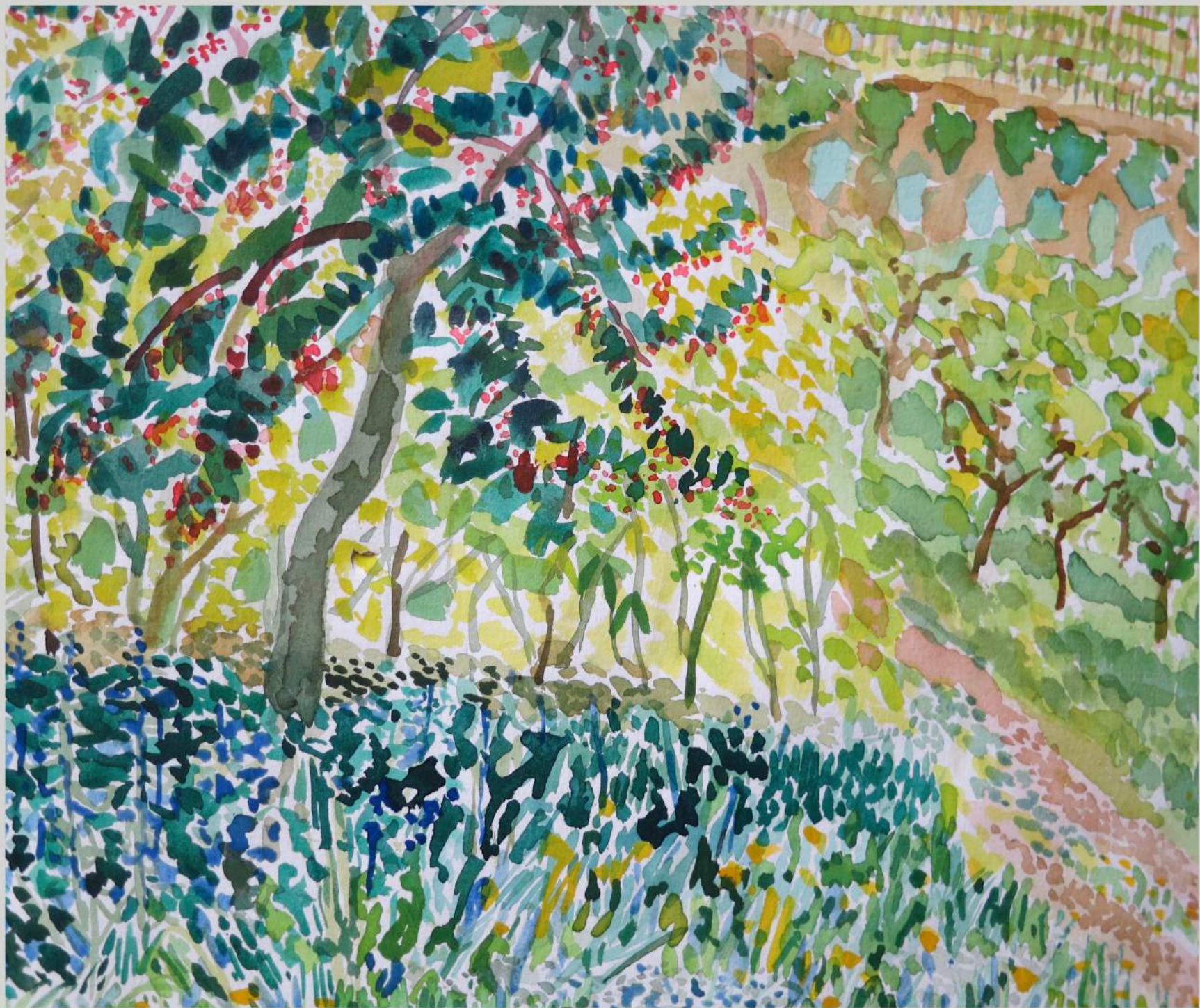


















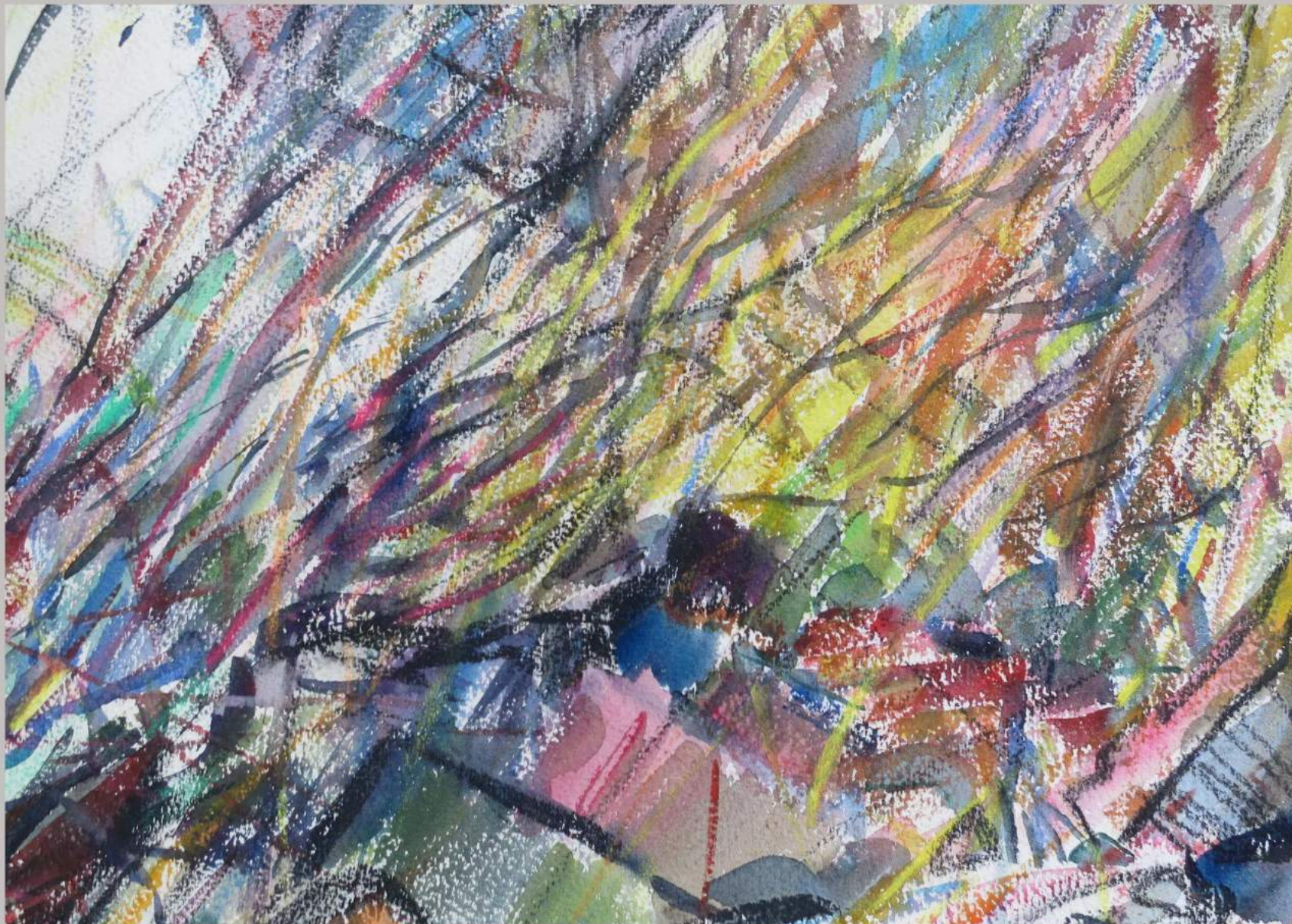






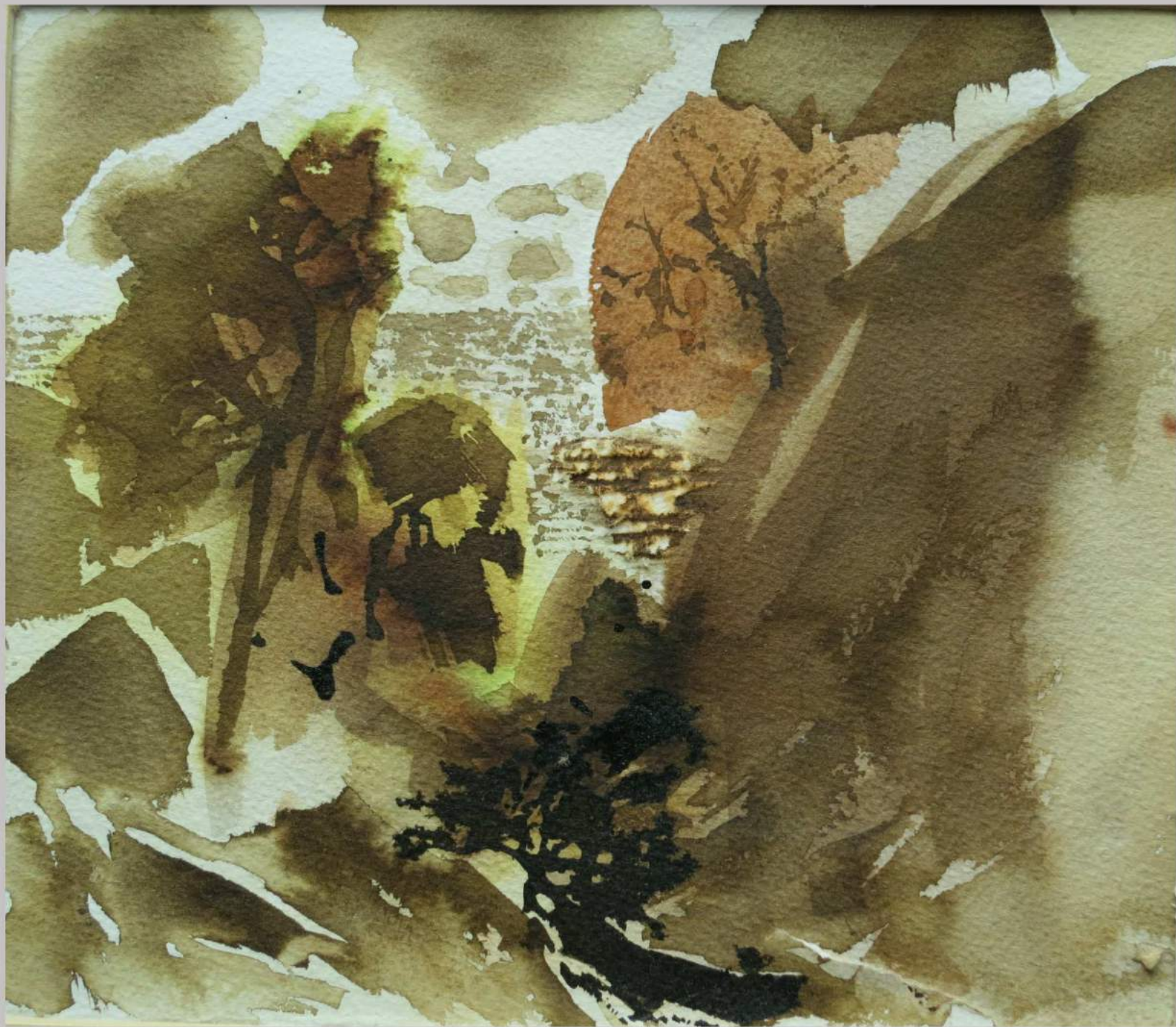
This detail shows what I mean about the best Abstract paintings being in fact **representations** of the world we know! Bacon's "the armature of the real" or his "brutal reality" are the **source** of the marks - however far they are "abstractly" removed: a reality of blossom, clouds, highlight of nettles.





This detail reminds me of my wish to "do a Rothko" of a landscape, but much larger than my usual sizes. Like his, they could be 4 x 3 metres and the looker could never be able to step back far enough, but be forced to stay close enough to **not** miss this representational "graffitti" celebration!





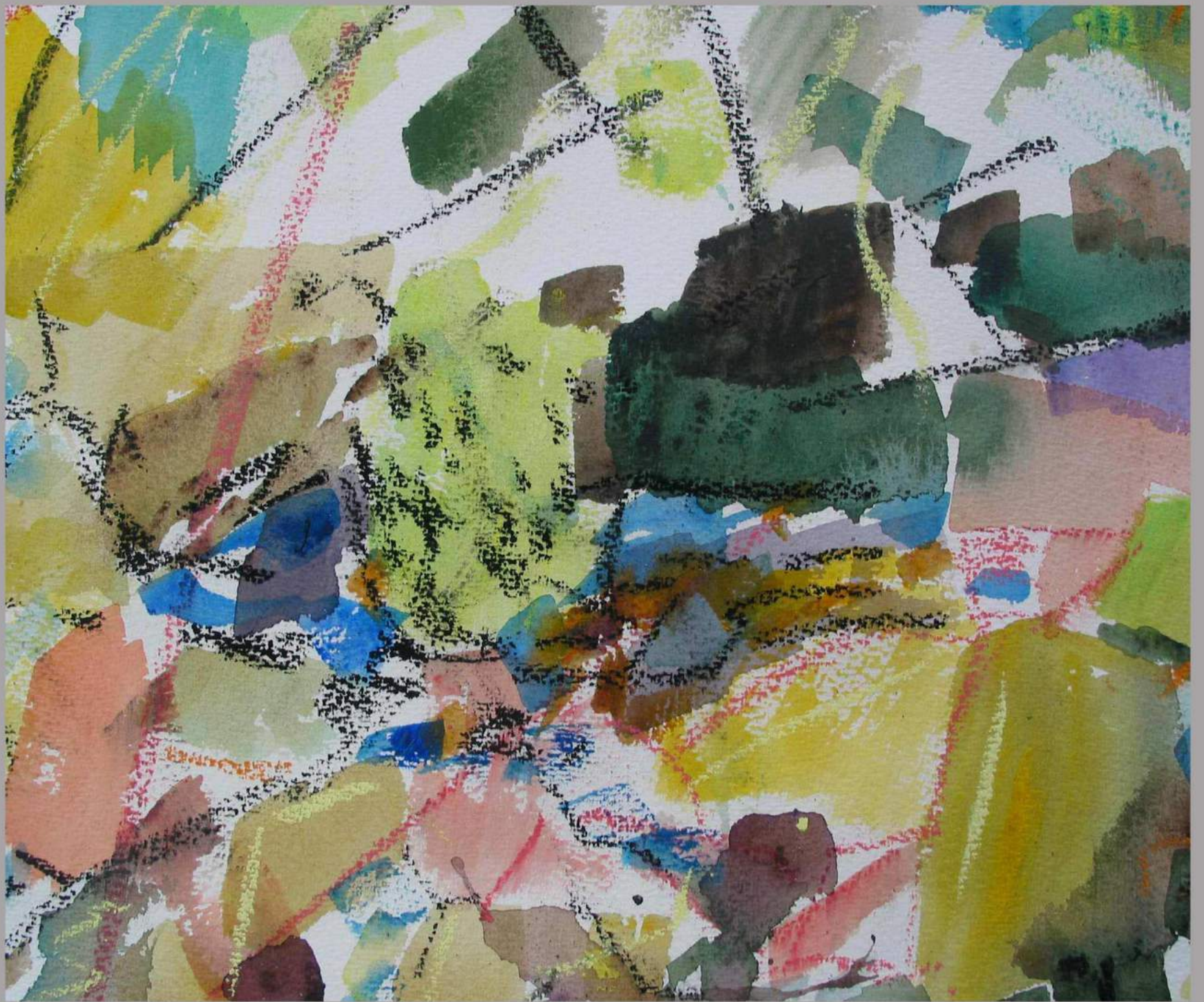










































Winter evening sun. Watercolour



From la Grotta. Rovereto. Watercolour. 75 x 55 cms

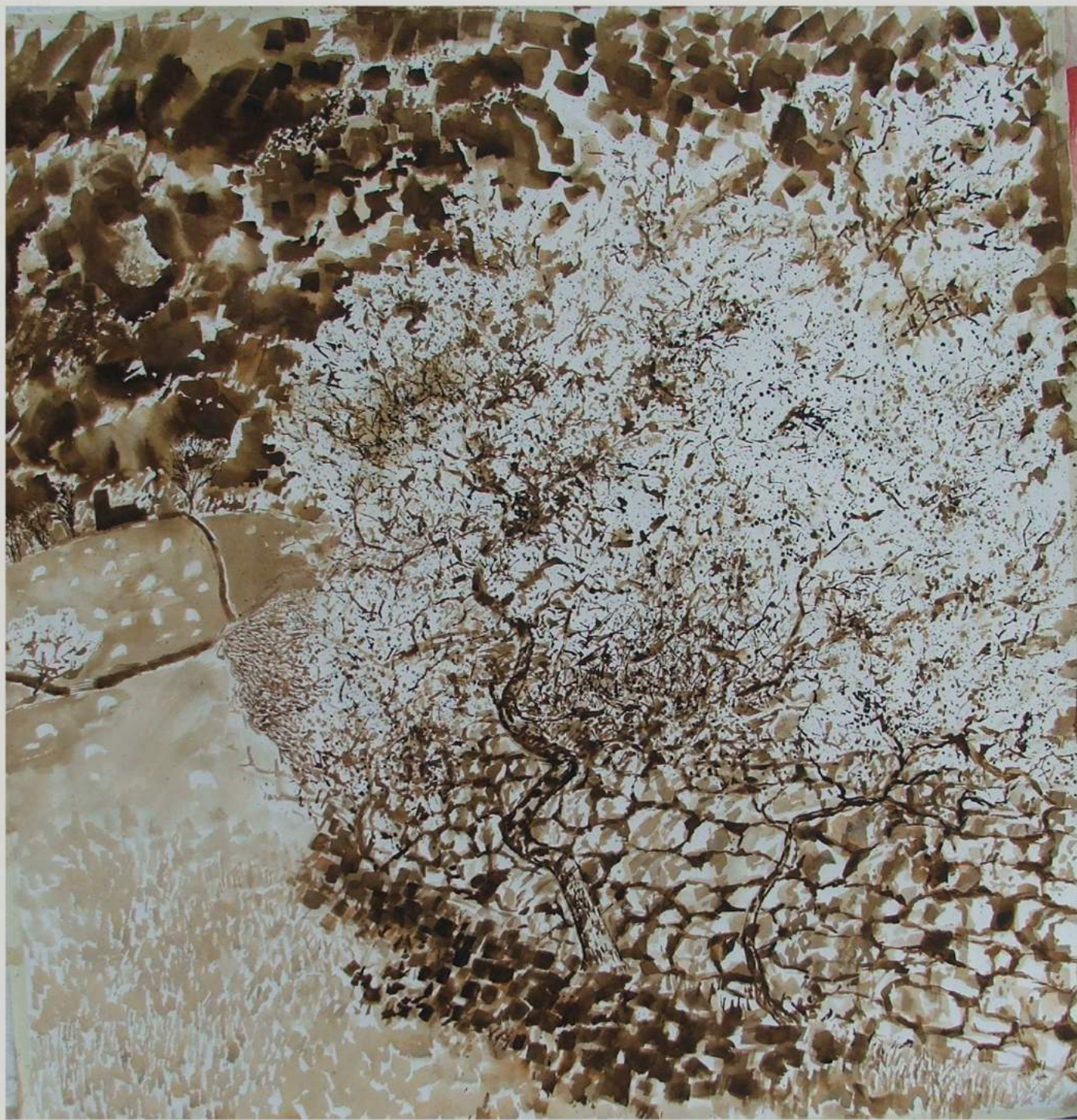


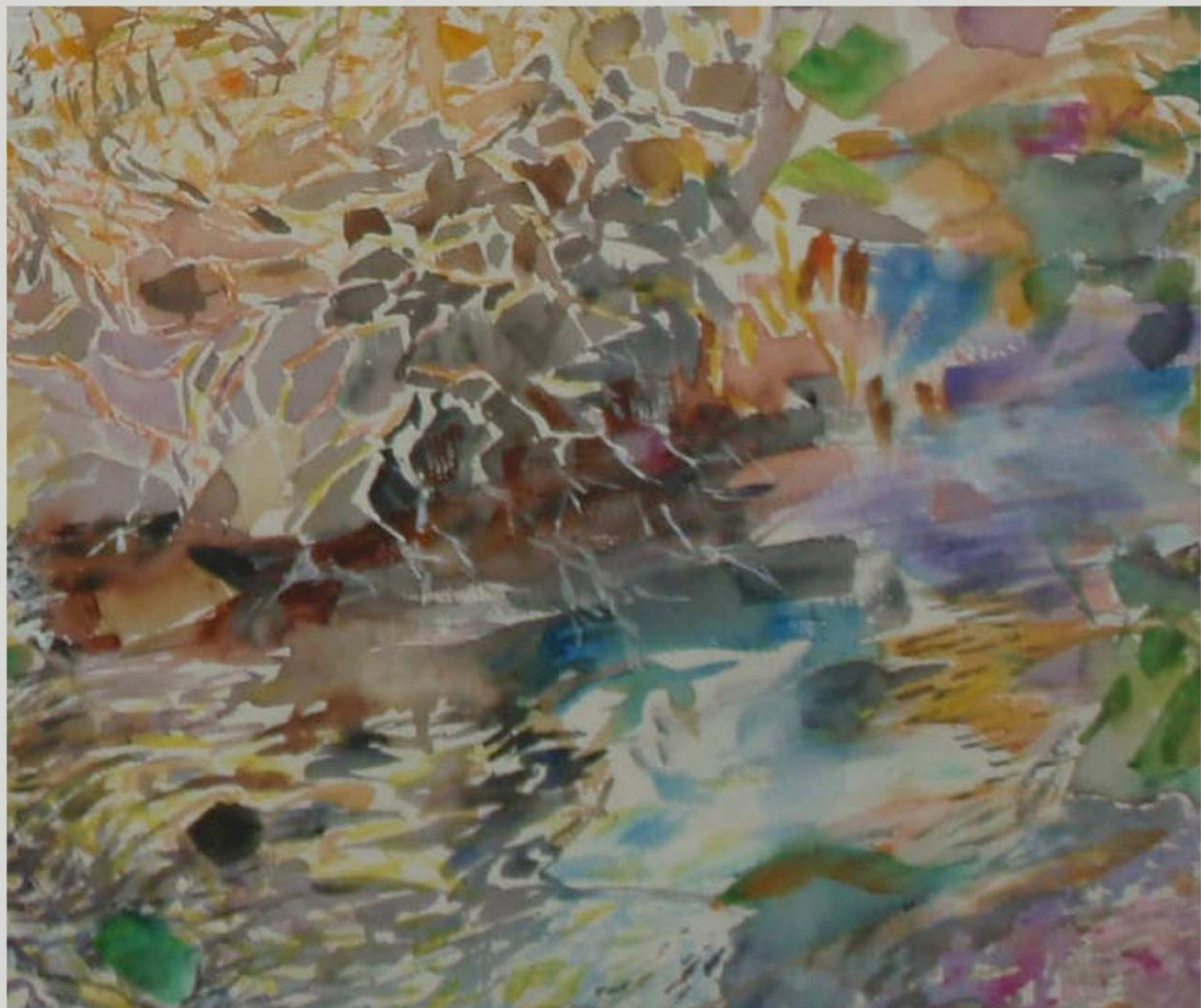
Valentina having tea before La Grotta. 75 x 55























April clouds. Watercolour







Sepia ink. Summer clouds 100 x 95 cms.

detail. Following 2 paintings. 100 x 100 cms







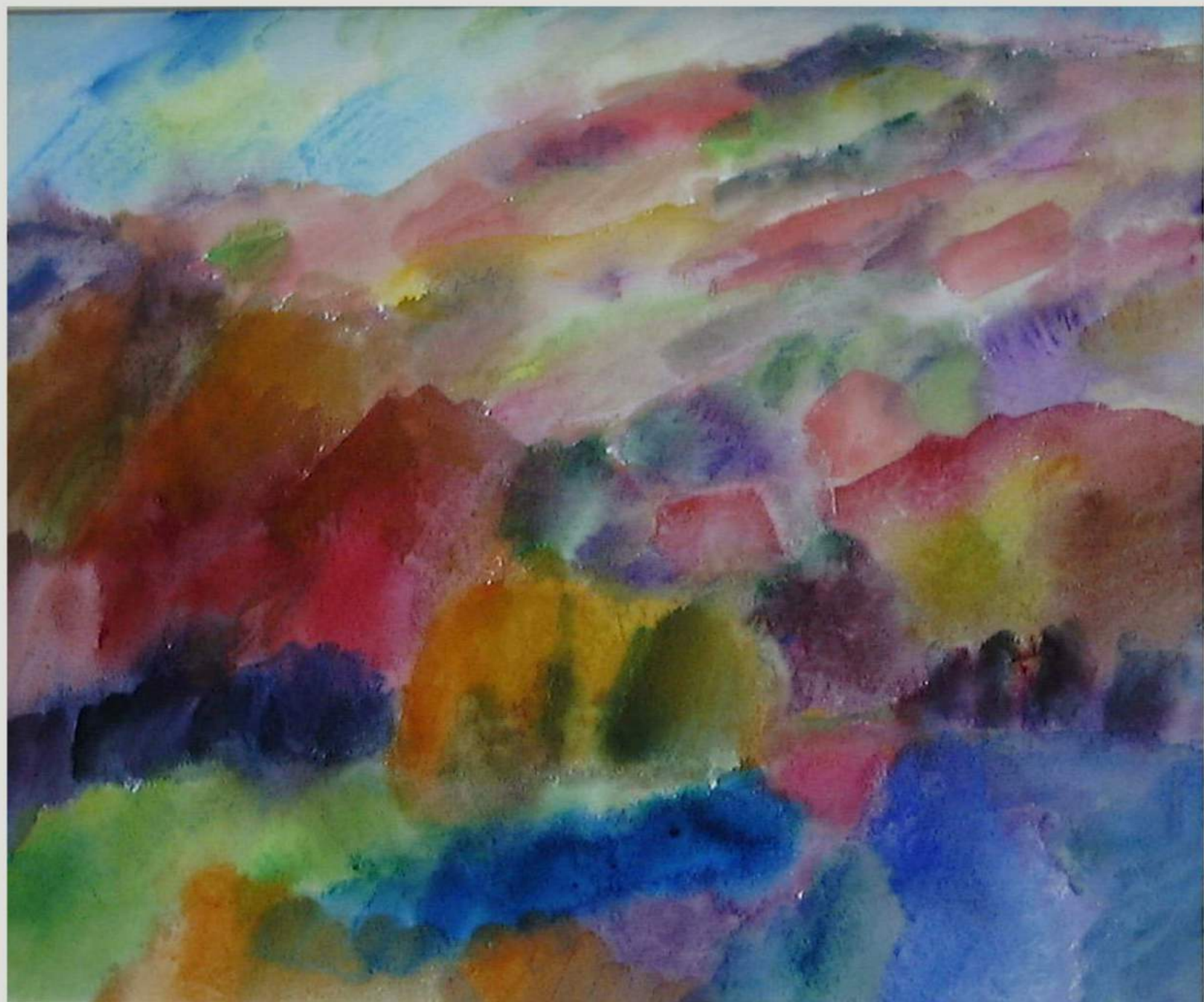




































Sepia and quill. 110 x 110.





Four previous and this Blackthorn. 110 x 100 cms. Early April.







WHAT IS REPRESENTATION IN PAINTING?

Much of what follows are thoughts which were occasioned by the book of famous conversations between Francis Bacon and the critic David Sylvester. They demonstrate how artists themselves have more considered opinions about art since their thinking is embedded in their handicraft.

Although one thinks of the 20th century as "starting" with the Impressionists, the tension between reality and the artifice of the forms of representation is a common thread, though in less extreme form, of the whole history of art. The story of the deceived birds pecking at Zeuxynes' merely painted cherries is homage to the artful naturalness of the painter. Until the camera, art had the self evident role of making an image of reality mimesis - imitation. However, besides this reference to "reality" in sculpture or painting, works of painting or sculpture had parallel effects, aesthetic effects - part of the totality of that seemingly simple imitation of the real, though in Bacon's view the new image should still be loyal to that bed rock of what he called "the brutality of fact".

Bacon was an artist fascinated by the tension between imitation-real. He coined the phrase "the brutality of fact" as if to indicate his firm loyalty to the real-out-there. No Kantian refocus for him on what our minds do to "reality". However, image making - painting, still has to make an aesthetic object from that "brute" fact and to do it in such a way that the aspect of the reality should be somehow conserved.

As Leonardo da Vinci pointed out, the human mind abhors a void and will read into smudges on a wall, faces and figures: humans are egotistical and we see ourselves! The mind participates in the creation of the artists' meanings and interpretations. So the "gaps" in Bacon's figuration are partially projected/ interpreted by us. I think there is a special form of representation, which has this "oblique" reference to the "real thing". What I mean by oblique is something like "abbreviation", though further removed. There are some forms of figuration, particularly in Picasso, Henry Moore, or Bacon (or in a more limited sense, Rembrandt's ink drawings), where the artist's figuration is

so abbreviated as to become oblique, a new symbol that only partly contains the real referent, or maybe amalgamates aspects of it and is therefore a composite image. It is partially "abstract" in the sense that its figuration is occasioned by an oblique and not obvious visual referent. In the famous conversations with David Sylvester, Bacon was edging towards defining his wished-for representation, when he was talking about painting a wave that was so non-illustrational, though "real". So in a some peculiar way, the unlike-likeness of the painted "wave" could have caught something in its NEW invented image that communicated: "wave", better than the ordinary banal representation/"illustration" might do! So it's as if you suddenly had two forms of representation. One he dismissively calls "illustrational" (like Sutherland's portraits in Bacon's view) and the other was his wished for "wave": a deeper sort of image. One maybe that he thought would work along the "nervous system" as he termed it. However none of this is very clear!

So Bacon refers here to a possible oblique form of painted image: ie. representation that is so powerfully appropriate, despite its apparent inappropriateness that it convinces, even though it would fail on a superficial, outward comparison. However, a weakness in Bacon's alternative sort of representational image is that its mystery is not much explained - other than it is working "along the nervous system"! Part of Bacon's almost obsessional attention to this problematic was his interest in our very human propensity to look for meaning. "At night, imagining some fear, how easily is a bush supposed a bear". We fill the gap of uncertainty with OUR content and it was this that Bacon found to be a constituent of our responses also to art's ambiguities or gaps. Bacon, you could say, wants to exploit as artist, the way humans are alert to significance and meaning, even over-alert, and therefore even a sign of very limited detail, stimulates interpretative hypotheses. The ambiguity is either enjoyed intellectually or can provoke feelings. We don't accept a void willingly, and we therefore supply a meaning, rather than be left uncertain. Much of Bacon's painting can be seen as an exploitation of incomplete or ambiguous imaging. In the light of these thoughts let us return to Bacon and Sylvester's attempts to classify this provocative idea of a "non-illustrational" form of representation. All of this would be made much clearer by looking at the leaflet the Tate produced when it exhibited Bacon's Homage to Van Gogh on the road to Tarragon in which the writer

explained, with illustrations from Bacon's 6 large paintings of the series, exactly the mechanics of this unlike-likeness and the beauties of the appropriate inappropriateness of the "homage" paintings to the original by Van Gogh. The 6 Bacon paintings are so eloquent in their homage. They are both dependent on the Van Gogh image and yet so very "oblique" to it.

"Illustration" and "representation" are not as simple as many assume. It's a good example of how we sometimes fail to properly conceive of things because the language is held back by the inherited words from past ways of thinking: fossils as it were of previous views. This is particularly so for the argument on art with representation and "image", (with its rooted metaphor of the mirror- image / imagining!).

Francis Bacon in those conversations with David Sylvester comes back repeatedly to an attempt to define a realism that is not "illustrational". Along with this search for a more significant notion of realism was Bacon's guiding belief that the invention of the camera had forced painting to "deepen the game"; (though I think that phrase contains a dangerous brain-teaser notion!) It is interesting that Bacon continues to use the term "realistic" although with a very personal redefinition of it. The term the "brutality of fact" is also a sort of obstinate assertion of a rock bottom real-reality which could resist aesthetic image making. Bacon is touchingly questioning the truth value of what he himself captures from reality, and maybe his "brutality of fact" resembles the Marxist bedrock, "concrete reality". All the book of conversations deals with the tension between real/representation, which I think any serious artist endlessly must question because "reality" is that which we spend a life engaged with, in a hand to hand struggle of uncertainty and continual reinterpretation.

What Bacon in his art tried to catch and in those interviews describe (p.18) is why some paint marks in a brutal reality way "come across directly onto the nervous system, whereas other paint was just a long diatribe through the brain". Maybe Bacon was looking for new forms of representation/illustration and certainly this past century has opened our eyes to the range of signs and symbols that can be made to convince us of their interpretative and representational appropriateness. Possibly Bacon and Picasso are the two artists who have most looked for

"new found methods and compounds strange", within a commitment to a version, however modified, of representation.

Here is a passage in the conversations between Bacon and Sylvester where they are speaking about Bacon's wish to paint a wave "much more wave" than a mere "illustration" of a wave which to him was just an uninteresting, superficial "representation". Bacon refers to a letter of Van Gogh's in which he says he feels "the need to make changes in reality" and that "lies" can be truer than the literal Yet in the following extract Bacon forces reality full circle into having to be "artificial" in order to be convincingly "real": "I believe that reality in art is something profoundly artificial, and it has to be recreated ... Van Gogh is one of my great heroes, because I think that he was able to be almost literal, and yet by the way he put on the paint, gave you a marvellous vision of the reality of things". (ie. the real "reality"?!)

D.S. Do you want to make your painted "wave" like?

F.B. I want to make it like but I don't know how to make it like.

D.S. But you're sure that you can only make it like in a very oblique way?

F.B. Yes, That I'm sure of. Otherwise, I'd just do one more picture of a sea and a shore..

D.S. What will make it something that isn't just one more picture?

F.B. Only if I can take it away from being another picture, if I can elevate, as it were, the shore and the wave - almost cut it out as a fragment and elevate within the whole picture so that it looks so artificial and yet so much more real than if it were a painting of the sea breaking on the shore.

F.B. "Yes, the more artificial you make it, the greater chance you have got of it looking real".

Following this line of thought you could say that Picasso and Klee's paintings have a witty inappropriate appropriateness; an unlike likeness! The "wit" lying in the way that the unexpected image somehow (!) still depends and draws sustenance from the real referent. The word wit is apposite in this context. Wit in English is the ability to see congruence where others don't and to assert it humorously. In a Picasso exhibition I was so struck to see how very many people were smiling - at the wit of his obliquities, at the extravagance of his realism!!

As part of this search for the paradoxical like-unlikeness, Bacon was fascinated by the "accidental" mark which was to him the epitome of the "artificial" and non-illustrational. The mystery being how this could still be at the service of representation. For us the impasse remains; how can we better describe a non-illustrational mark which convinces us of its deeper representation at what Bacon calls the level of our nervous system. Bacon gave great importance to accidental or artificial marks, which from the conventional point of view are "inappropriate" (ie, not "illustrational"). The reason for his interest is that accident shares something with the "oblique" image, because it seems to offer an answer to an impasse. The "oblique" is metaphoric and suggestive and seems to affect us, he thought, across the nervous system. At an obvious level, we see a mismatch. That is to say there is not a simple illustrational matching. At a further level we see a spark cross a gap of seeming disjunction between referent and symbol, and just as metaphor works by sudden illuminating jump, so do the gaps in Picasso's figuration or Bacon's disruptive images seem to give us a "wave more wave than wave": thanks to their oblique realism. That was part of Picasso's body-genius: his distortions can strike us as oddly, obliquely realistic! The paradox depends on the logic of wit and metaphor - to find similitude in dissimilitude - to find appropriate description in means which are not usual or logical: in Bacon's words; "a non-illustrational form of realism". I once saw a most illuminating example of this deeper realism. A man was walking down a street. He was very fat and found walking difficult, and so had adopted a swinging, pivoting gait. Behind him surreptitiously was walking a very skinny young boy of about 10 who was imitating the fat man's walk. Somehow the imitation looked more real than the original! That tells us a lot about Bacon's conundrum - and great acting!

David Sylvester notices that artists have intentions, but that, in contrast, Bacon while painting, fairly early on, allows accident a considerable power. Bacon agrees, but says that the gifted artist is so by virtue of a more acute self-criticism, so that the developing painting is more finely tested and changed by ongoing transformation. Picasso too, described a painting as the sum of a million destructions. This series of over laying transformations are artifices- artful - artificial and are part of the search for the appropriate "compounds strange" which will refresh,

or replace the now time-worn forms of past "realisms". That explains Bacon's interest in accident in painting which by definition is such an arbitrary, "artificial" element. Of course it's a managed accident and this element of pushing at the image or pushing out the image is a technical search for what he calls "artificial" but which suddenly seems to hold a higher form of realism - wave more wave than wave! (like the little boy!). Bacon goes on: "but does one know why, very often or nearly always, the accidental images are the most real? Perhaps they've not been tampered with by the conscious brain and come across in a much more raw and real sense - it's very much of course, in that sense, like children's art". Artists differ from critics in that they have what you could call a professional, technical sense of art. The larger "spiritual" or eventual expressive power of what they do is almost an epi-phenomena; that is, a spin-off from their manner or habit of working: to them such effects are already implicit.

Bacon is convincingly dismissive of abstract painting. He dismisses it above all because he says, the flesh of actual existence is too interesting to us to be excluded from art, and then besides, painting that can convince us that it is saying something deep and true about the ordinary world that we inhabit must be more interesting to view and far more taxing to depict than mere colour and shape on a holiday from significance. How vivid is Bacon's admiration for Van Gogh and who of us would view his paintings upside down as if they were abstracts of mere colours and shapes! At one point Bacon talks of Michaux who David Sylvester thinks "more or less abstract". Bacon: "Well, firstly I don't think he's abstract - much more "Tachiste" than J. Pollock". What Bacon appreciates in Michaux is the remaining suggestiveness and allusion to the figure in Michaux's supposed "marks". This explains why he finds him superior to Pollock's mere paint dribbles. Presumably, the very obliqueness of the figurative allusion is what Bacon likes in Michaux. After all, one of Bacon's fundamental beliefs is that after the advent of the camera, painting had to find a field entirely its own: "deepen the game". Where some have thus been led to abstraction, Bacon has tried to define the special extra qualities a painted image can and must have after the camera.

In fact in order to understand the way the concept "abstract" has been misused, one could say that the tension between the referent and the sign for it, is the story of art; a story that is necessarily itself already a

story of abstraction and leaves no space for any further level of abstraction. In matters of language, all words are abstractions, for they are signs which stand for things. "Cloud" stands for all possible clouds and to specify further we add "storm clouds" or "evening clouds", and this still doesn't cover their particularity: clouds, now, here, this day and hour. Likewise a word like "red" is a poor thing when set against all the reds of particular flowers or insects. Words sometimes seem flat and insufficient, mere thin convention when compared to the raw reality that they stand in for: that "brutality of fact" standing behind them in Bacon's view. There is an interesting aspect of Chinese characters. They are like fossils of "representation", but by now so conventionalised as to be almost abstract/conceptual rather than pictograms. But Chinese calligraphers add aesthetic qualities to the "image/concept" with the "beauty" of their manuality. This you could say approaches to what the painter leaves in his "extra" brush mark trace of his represented thing. Bacon doesn't want to depend upon a convention of seeing or representation. Like the sonnet below, he hankers after signs which are renewed by "variation and quick change". That reminds one of Blake's saying, "I must invent a system, or be enslaved by another man's". Bacon thinks that the artist has to reinvent realism. He has to work the realism back into the nervous system by his invention, because there isn't such a thing in painting any longer as natural realism". An artist wants to find the new forms that will be hospitable to his different vision. A poet has to accept all the signs/words but can rearrange them within a new order and sequence of sense.

Here in Shakespeare's sonnet you hear an artist hankering after new ways of expression:

"Why is my verse so barren of new pride,
So far from variation and quick change.
Why with the time do I not glance aside
To new found methods and to compounds strange
Why do I keep invention in a noted weed
That almost every word doth tell my name".....

So what is representation? What are the means of its presentation? All arts have their own aesthetic of forms and procedures. Novels can do reality in a different way to plays. Poetry has a different pivot on the mind to prose. Watercolour has a different "spirit" to oil paint. A violin, cello or piano or a combination of all three have their special expressive gamut. In all arts there is a tension between old forms and an intuited sense that the new wine of experience requires new bottles. **All arts are pointless unless they convey or enhance experience.** All in the end are either honoured with longevity or ignored according to their perceived content of significance. In music, Beethoven's music notes seem heavy with significant meaning while the music of his poor contemporary Hummel seems forgettable. A hard human reality.

Now all these considerations on the art of the "mighty dead" shouldn't hide the fact that what really matters is the general artistic activities of a whole community/nation. In a sense a proper understanding and meaningful experience of great art depends on much humbler art being actually practiced: as a background by as many people as possible - just for itself. It's as if, whatever the ability of each of us, all artistic endeavour was important for its honourable witness to the lifeness of being alive. So then there is nothing surprising to hear how participatory music, painting or drama in say prisons, has a great restorative effect on prisoners' damaged humanity. Similarly in a marvellous project in Bishop Auckland under the patronage of Jonathon Ruffer, the whole community was involved in "Kynren", which tells the story of English history over the past 2000 years using 1000 volunteer actors in its robust story telling involving several battle scenes. 100,000 people each year come to it.

That is I think the real message of Schiller's idealistic pamphlet on the "The aesthetic education of men and women". Active art, not passive receptivity.

Properly considered, the two paintings overleaf, and in fact all of these paintings are just grateful scribbles of thanks to being alive - once - briefly! Just like those warning Ancient Greek memorial stones that liked to speak from beyond: *"Pause traveller, I too once breathed the air".*







