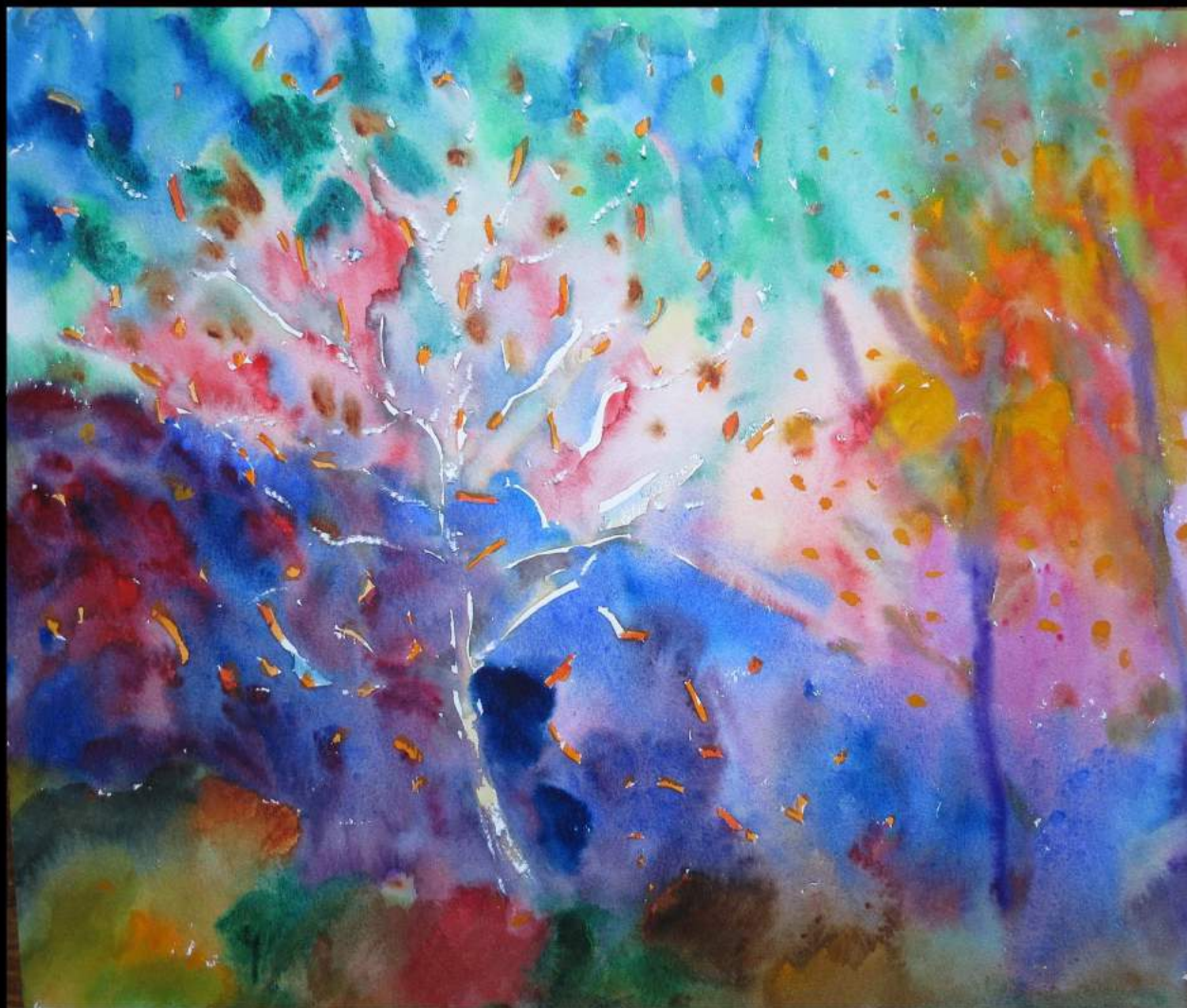
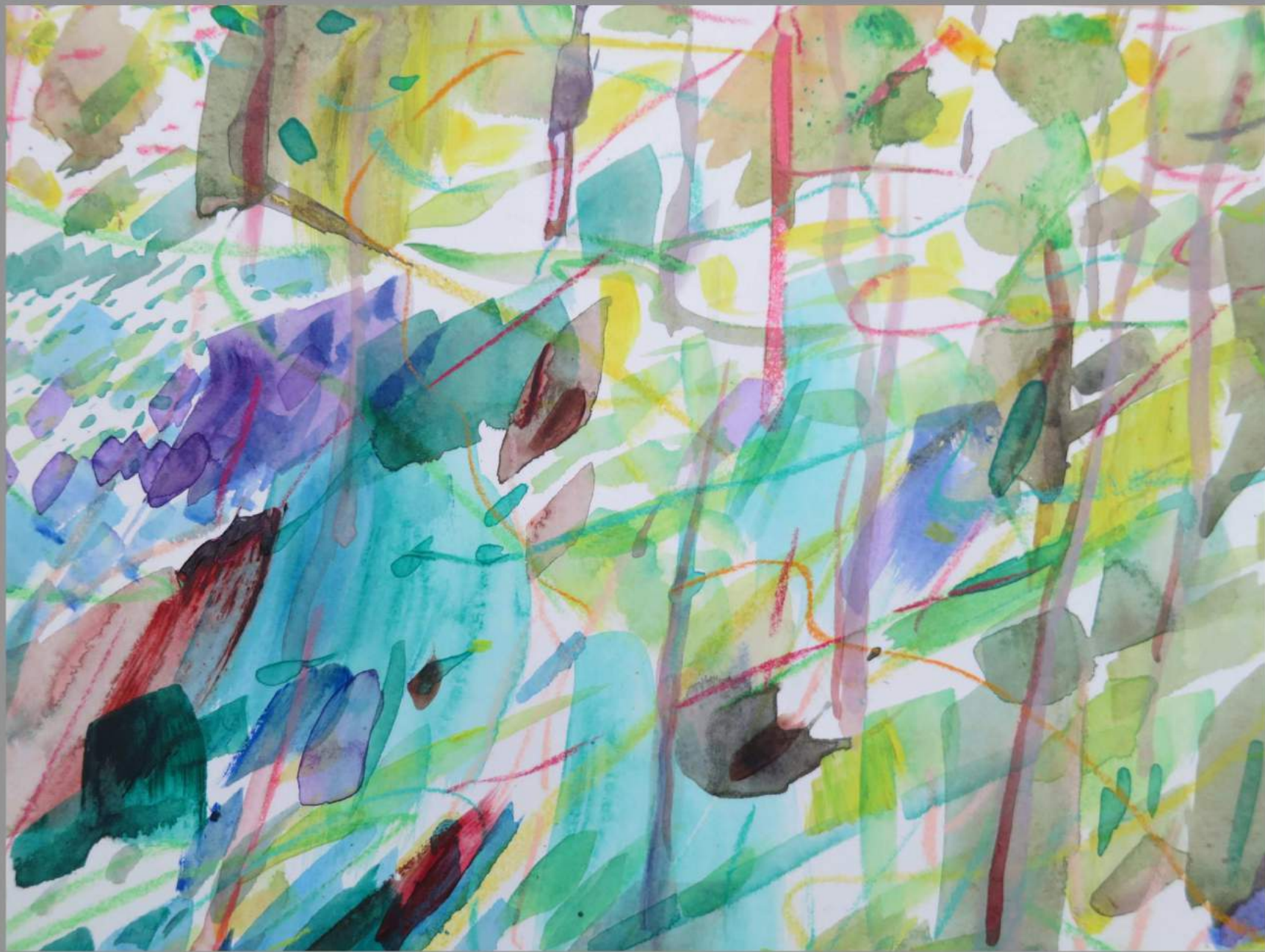




PAINTINGS Book 3. With writing about painting.

Anthony Bamber







On the opening page was a detail of a painting shown later. It seems a good example of how when given the legibility of the whole landscape, certain marks have an interpretative weight thanks to the context of the comprehended "landscape". Similarly in the top detail on the left, the marks are enjoyed both for themselves - their filigree of small marks **and** for what they represent in the whole: twigs in an evening light, the black bird and holly bush. The detail on the first page is given as a provocation. Imagine seeing that very large, (say, 2-3 metres square), in a gallery. We would be impressed because abstract colour/pattern has so asserted itself as "art". An example of this was an exhibition of Turner a few years ago with the snappy title - "Painting set free"! Free from what? Free to do what? A metaphor joins two parts unexpectedly: "He saw red", where the **two parts** are **anger** and **red**/blood; that is, anger making him see in a distorted way. Bacon's objection to abstraction was that humans are interested in meaning - continually looking for it, inventing it. Hopefully how a painter "represents" - however obliquely, (as in Bacon's case), is what gives pattern and colour meaning, otherwise the metaphor has one half missing: what it's standing for. For example the above detail might have an "abstract look" but it is so much more meaningful within "hazels in a late winter afternoon sun". "Painting set free"? To be mere "pure" form/colour? 100 x 100cms









Evening. Snow coming. 95 cms x 95 cms;
as is the previous painting.

The last rays of the sun before darkness and with the coming snow beginning to fall. There's still considerable previous snow remaining on the distant moor seen in this detail. The crows give a sense of space and on the bottom left, the blackbird watches the scene.

When the landscape is sufficiently represented, the paint has a freedom to represent more oblique qualities; such as the melancholy that those greys, yellows and mauves convey. That is exactly the claim that is made for "abstract" colour: painting "set free" from representation but as this shows here, the colour thanks to THIS **context** has a melancholy air.



Ideally a painting would be so big that you could not step back from it, but would always be immersed in it as we would be in the place itself.

The following painting is also 95cms square. It is a snow scene and the white of the paper has a double role. Firstly as "snow" but also as neutral surrounding to the colour, making a kind of stained glass effect surrounding the colour areas of "drawing".

This and previous 100 x 100 cms
Next 3 paintings are also 100 x 100cms



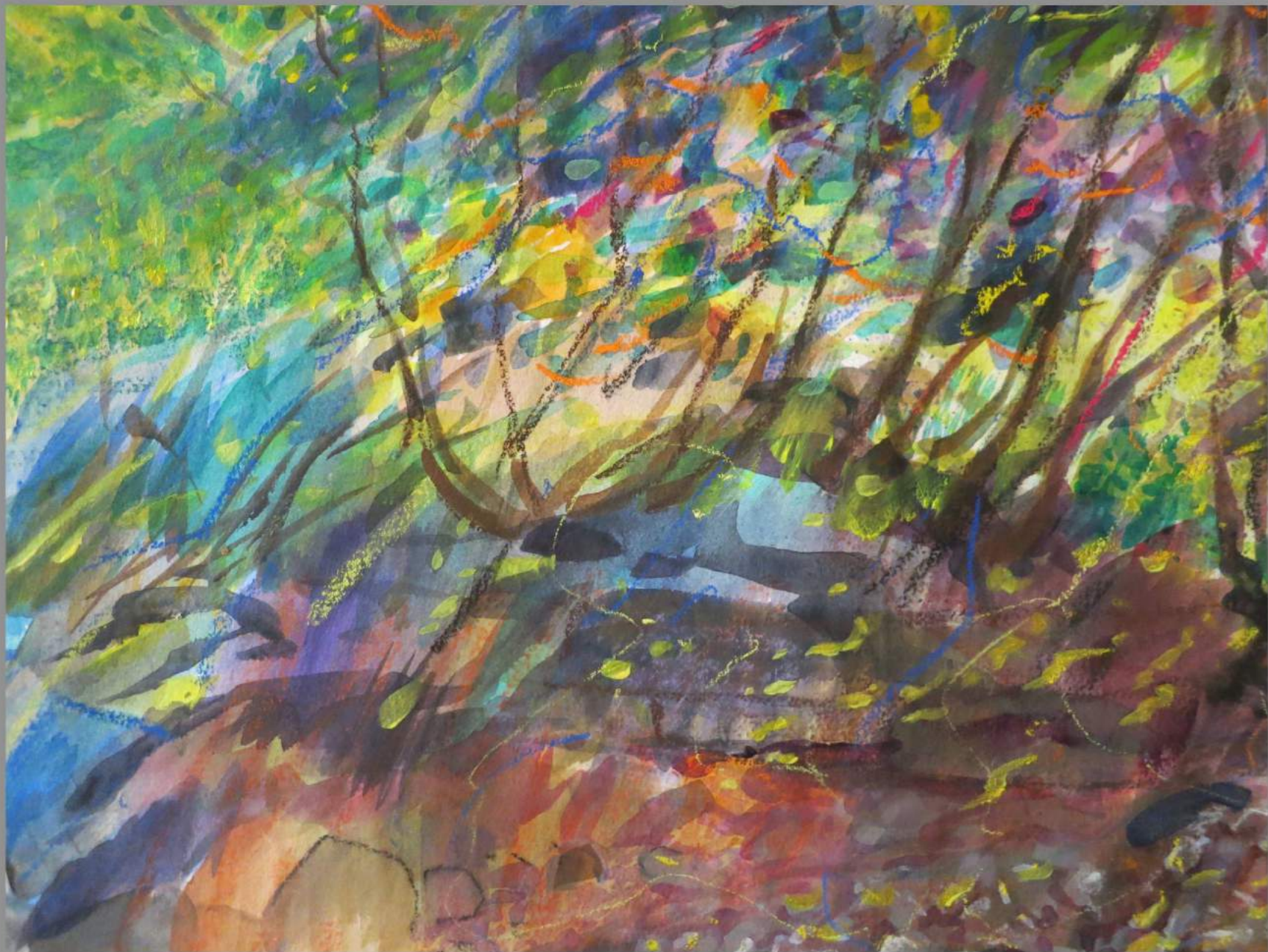






















This, the next and previous four paintings are 95 x 95 cms.

These two quotations are from Goethe's autobiography (Dichtung und Wahrheit). They are typical of Goethe's healthy refusal of introspection and his view of what makes for a healthy connection of ourselves to the world we are born into.

"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".

All the paintings in these three books were done outside. Affection for place has mattered. Perhaps a painting captures better than words the experience of that place, yet there are places in our memories that we visit with a strange, personal insistence; as if it were a primal or representative memory. Such memories fit entirely that beautiful opening of a Shakespeare sonnet.

*"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought,
I summon up remembrance of things past".*

The quietness, the slow enjoyment we get from passing before our mind that which we waken from its resting place deep in





our memory, and in so doing quicken that moment back into life, to be followed, as we let it sink away again, by a tugging gratitude. - The "place" for me is at my second school between the age of 9 and 13. The memory is so specific, as if it were one time, though surely there were many. Such a hot afternoon and we boys filing through one of those metal gates hinged within a circle of metal bars, making it slow for all to pass through; and we were impatient because we were on our way to walk across a hay meadow to the "swimming pool" - though not one in any modern sense. I remember the stillness and heat of the afternoon and the high grass that stroked against our legs, and we having to walk in strictly Indian file to not trample the future hay. Strangely, in this memory of the field, I do not hear much shouting - maybe it was too hot and we were thinking of the pool, which was at some distance. But eventually there it was; in the middle of the field with its concrete edge crowded in by the meadow grasses. Over its green water, dragon-flies darted and on the surface were myriads of water boatmen. As we tore off our clothes we looked into the green depths to spot fish, frogs, newts or tadpoles. The pool had been made from rendered concrete blocks, and the rendering had long ago formed its patina of algae. The water was from a stream that we could hear trickling in at one end and out at the other. The water's inviting coolness in that hot stillness!





The green concrete gave a peculiar smell, that after 60 years when I smell it again, floods me with memory sensation, as powerful as Proust's remembered Madeleine cake. In a garden I once came across a concrete water collector with just that green water and I leant over it as if a connoisseur savouring a fine wine. How it "summoned up" that long ago place: how sadly happy it made me; the boys shouting and jumping into that green water after the hot walk and hurried undressing; the iridescent flitting dragon flies and the frightened frogs making a last minute escape from field into the green depths.

"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"?
- happy physical delight in our **ancient** bodies!

"every new object opens in us a new organ of perception". Yes that "place" was such an "object". Children need that sort of physical involvement with the world out there, and one worries that modern children are lacking in it: the open air, the hayfield, the green water, the dragon flies and frogs, the physical exuberance; the allness of it; the being submerged in that more primitive world, rather than that techno-media world which makes up the new habitat of kids. Remember that Chinese research that found that kids who have had exposure to that older natural world do 7 times as well at school and life!





June. Rain coming. 110 x 110cms

Both this and the next page are of places that were largely painted outside, while the previous 4 winter paintings were only half completed outside. There is an interesting difference I find. I have only recently got around to trying to "finish" 240 paintings, incomplete because being painted outside, I left unfinished for all the various reasons. Either the day or light changed, too much, or maybe I was uncertain how to proceed, or even thought the painting had gone too far in the wrong direction.

With so much experience of painting outside, the indoor completion is a quite different experience. Outside, one can trust to a whole series of intuitional procedures which inside one is left quite without. That is to say, outside there are so many all-at-once stimuli that influence each other, so that then, the paint marks have something that derives from their mingling source: an alternative to the tyranny of the bossy "concept"!

Painting inside seems a different mental process - calculating and less instinctive and driven by feeling. Maybe one makes marks that are more rational or even labouredly "real", whereas outside, what I call the intuitional response opens one to those much wished for "oblique" or metaphoric inventions of representation. How for example might I have painted real falling rain splashing on the stream's surface if instead of "remembering" it, I had been outside? In the hurly burly of it!







Fallen tree 110 cms square

This matter of the difference of painting inside and out, is to some degree attenuated if at least 50% of the final paint marks have been done outside. You try to continue in their spirit, yet the remarks on the previous page still hold. In this painting, (which was 90% painted outside), when inside, you try to screw the image more tightly to a readable, comprehensible place, time of day or season that you remember. You try and make MORE itself that half finished thing. So in this case I tried to "tightened up" the reflections and dripping water and the effects of sunset in the sky and the whole evenig chiaroscuro. However, painting inside has need of its own special, well trialed procedures. It's as if the iindoor and outdoor painter had to be two painters, even though they borrow from each other. Inside one depends much more on memory, though in painting, memory is filtered by the dual thing - **technique- "memory"** and that is so different according to the presence or not, of the **motif's** stimulus.

110 x 110 cms. Acrylic







Also this detail shows the drawing being both representational and also that more indirect representation of a response: here the exuberant enjoyment and the well being that such a place and season occasion, which here is only properly apparant in the deatil, since the whole picture is more than a metre square. A landscape painting should help us to see afresh; to wonder at the world.
110 x 110 cms





Landscape painting portrays a scene, a place but it can also convey sensation and response. The clouds were brisk in the strong May sunshine. The marks both describe the thing and also the feeling. To convey that, everything counts: the colour, texture, the metaphor of the medium - the merging wetness of the colours, the rough crayon marks, the juxtaposition of colours and the **exclamation** of the whole image. A painting unlike music has no temporal sequencing to guide the viewer. Instead it has this all-at-onceness. 110 x 110cms

"Spiritual" is a word so easily bandied about; a lazy word for what we can't properly explain. A word that by its implicit dualising of real/spiritual leaves us ironically with merely "concrete reality"!! Often the word "spiritual" is a kind of human Sunday best. Primitive cultures had no need of such dichotomy because there was still a connection between them and the surrounding world of nature in which they were imbedded, and which in the face of our disrespect, one day will assert itself with terrible consequences. It is not a word to refer to some specialised area of existence - called "spiritual experience". It would be better to ignore the word and just speak of simple respect and love of the world: no Sunday best "spiritual" value, but just a fully felt present, here and now which Wordsworth beautifully called, "the common day" and that I think, holds a possible program for landscape painting. On the following page is the Wordsworth passage containing the phrase "the common day". (Preface to "The Excursion"). It is just asserting the real "Presence of the earth", rather than finding it exiled to that special nowhere land of the "spiritual", of art or the "imagination": ("a mere history of what never was") This page shows details of previous painting. 90 x 90cms. **Opposite** different marks and effect: Winter. On the following page there are two details of Hawthorns outside the wood. May. 95 x 80 cms cms square.







Wordsworth. Preface to The Excursion.

Beauty-a living Presence of
the earth,
Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms
Which craft of delicate Spirits hath
composed
From earth's materials-waits upon my
steps;
Pitches her tents before me as I move,
An hourly neighbour. 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:

April 95 x 95 cms





There's both an admirable simplicity and naivety in this. Wordsworth doesn't want an art that in its ideality is incomprehensible to ordinary people, who are too busy just staying alive, so he sets up against it, the "simple produce of the common day": that is to say, the reality out there that we know and often are only dimly aware of, which we do not fully experience, preferring what he calls imaginary "fictions of what never was". In this program for the ordinary person, all that is needed is that "the discerning .



"intellect" .. should be... wedded to this goodly universe in love and holy passion". It is almost a program that disassembles his activities, except that it is still the poet who must point out that beauty is a "living presence of the earth". So landscape painting, tries without too much "craft of delicate spirits", to present that "living presence", and to do that, "the common day" must emerge, recognisable. The Romantics were like the canary in the mine: they realised what was about to descend on humans: huge





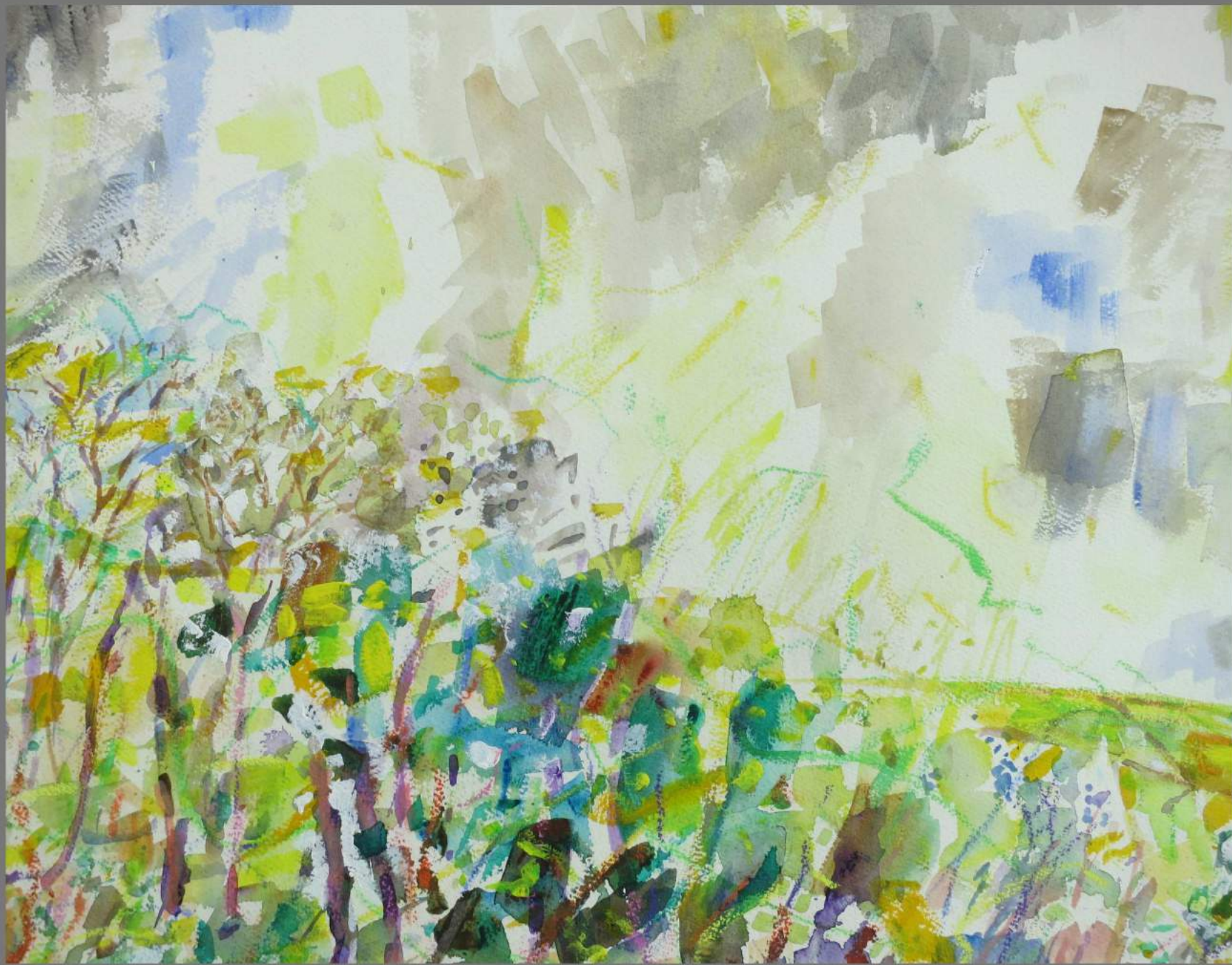
conurbations and population growth, industry and technology, train and air travel, light years distant from the speed of the horse. In our mass society, most of us are unable to get a grip on reality - it is too big for us and that vision of Wordsworth's seems odd, quaint; too removed and beyond our ken. No wonder that 25% suffer from depression. So landscape painting for me tries to enact a form of Shamanistic magic: a kind of therapy of solace, making images of radical nostalgia: Paradise Lost. (but see my bleak last pages!)



Once, an old teacher from school who visited after many years said the paintings were as if of Paradise: well if paradise here, that would be a good thing to set down! The marks try to show the delight of the senses in the clouds, wind, water, leaves and sudden sun. Landscape painting might be like the action of a seismic needle, registering a dimly felt, distant movement of the earth. It is a celebration of place, a locus amoenis, but I think it should both depict what Wordsworth called "the common day", and our vague unease. 90 x 85 cm







What I meant by the radical nostalgia of landscape painting is the hope that in its ideality, it might convey that astonishment which Milton imagined in Adam - that first day's body-mind acclamation.

"It is worth giving again the passage in "Subjekt und Nature" by Boehme. "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". It's a thought, almost beyond our minds because our changes have metamorphosised us: even though we still drag the DNA of our evolution's hunter gatherer past.

These three are small watercolours. 10 x 8 inches. 12 x 12 inches

The previous page. 85 cms

The following are 18 inches sq



Little Bredy. Dorset. 1971



Powerstock. Dorset. 1971

opposite. Piles copse. Dartmoor 1971













detail. Distant shower.

Zum Sehen geboren,
Zum Schauen bestellt,
Dem Turme geschworen,
Gefällt mir die Welt.
Ich blick in die Ferne,
Ich seh in der Näh
Den Mond und die Sterne,
Den Wald und das Reh.

So seh ich in allen
Die ewige Zier,
Und wie mirs gefallen,
Gefall ich auch mir.
Ihr glücklichen Augen,
Was je ihr gesehn,
Es sei, wie es wolle,
Es war doch so schön!

Lynkeus. Goethe

42 x 42 inches square. Below is a passage from Milton's Paradise Lost. Adam awakes.

"Straight toward Heaven my wondering eyes I turned,
And gazed a while the ample sky, till, raised
By quick instinctive motion, up I sprung,
As thitherward endeavoring, and upright
Stood on my feet. About me round I saw
Hill, dale, and shady woods, and sunny plains,
And liquid lapse of murmuring streams; by these,
Creatures that lived and moved, and walked or flew,
Birds on the branches warbling: all things smiled;
With fragrance and with joy my heart o'erflowed
Myself I then perused, and limb by limb
Surveyed, and sometimes went, and sometimes ran
With supple joints, as lively vigour led;
But who I was, or where, or from what cause,

Knew not. To speak I tried, and forthwith spake;
My tongue obeyed, and readily could name
Whate'er I saw. 'Thou Sun,' said I, 'fair light,
And thou enlightened Earth, so fresh and gay,
Ye hills and dales, ye rivers, woods, and plains,
And ye that live and move, fair creatures, tell,
Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here"!

An earth just made, and how it might seem always, "if
the doors of pereception were cleansed:

But in the present circumstances, what these
two pieces of poetry seem to envision, is as closed to
us as Adam's Paradise after the expulsion! We are too
conscious of the damage we have caused and we're
made uneasy by the subliminal messages we receive
from our frustrated archaic bodies. And all that should
be sensed in the content of landscape painting!







100 x 100 cms



Black and white prints offer an insight into "representation". As with drawing, reality you could say is "falsified" by not being denoted by colour. The dependence on just white and black then acts as a delimiting discipline. For example in this lino-cut the 3 dimensional tricks of "shading" has to be substituted by the black of the uncut lino and an idea of depth given either by simple "white" as "illumination" or by tightly cut alternating white/black

lines. Furthermore, as can be seen here in the river "surface", the cut/"drawing" marks are forced into finding a different visualizing short hand which have their own satisfying aesthetic, not of abstract mark but some indirect sort of representation of water surface: here its ripples and broken reflections. The painted/mark metaphor for things. The effect of drawing often depends on the speed of the trace: opposite the drawing line is nearly continuous.



Drawing's brief summarising marks. - on the left, the mauve and the black suggest the sleep and darkness from which Bruna has just waked; and the fingers stretched out and the smile of recognition, is drawn almost as brief as was the instant itself.



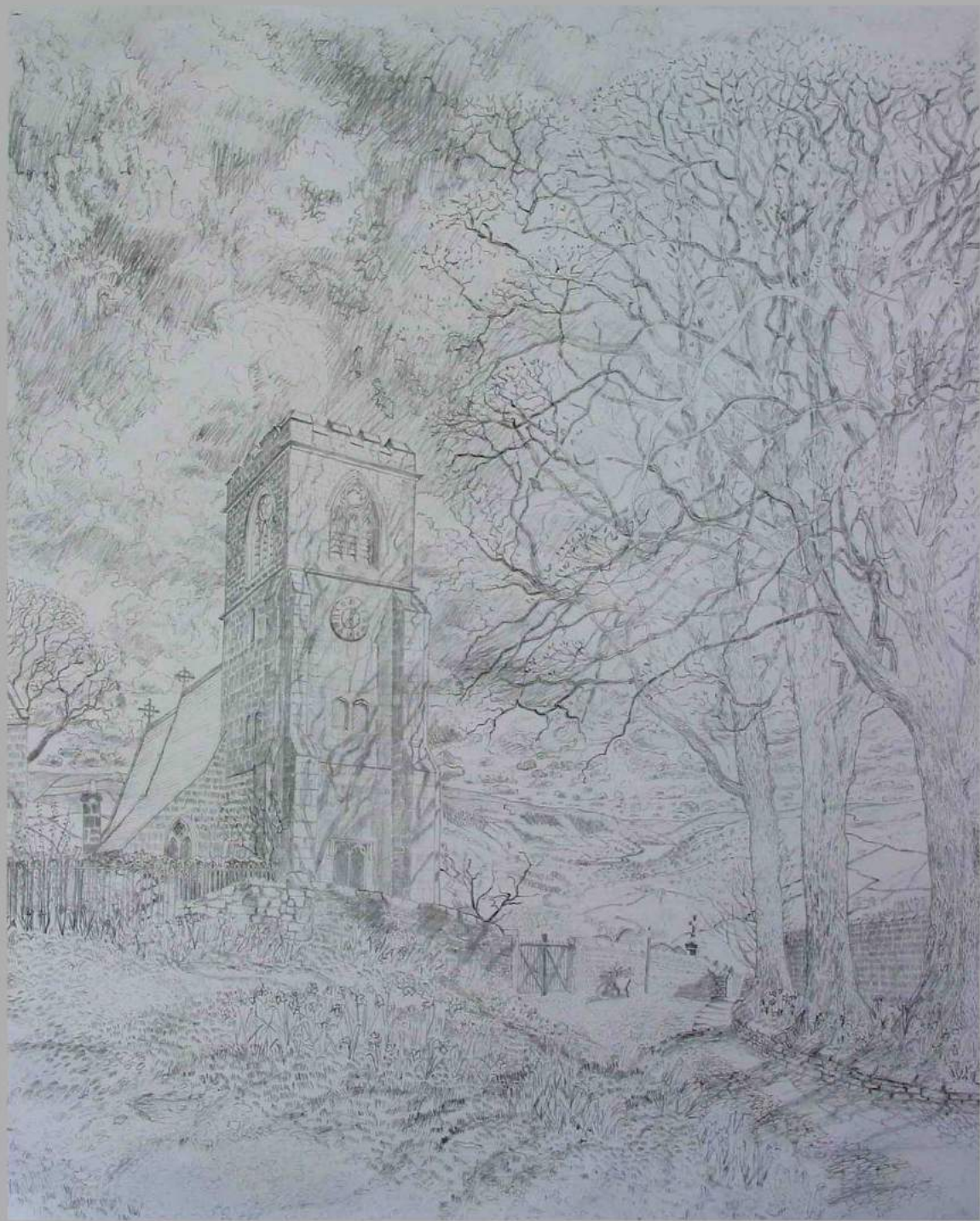


The pencil has its own expressive range. This was a portrait of a prisoner at Dorchester Prison where all the "art class" took it in turns to draw each other. Harry was, the warder said, an "old timer", finding as some do, more safety and support inside prison than out.

Often what makes a good drawing is the abbreviation and "catching" of lifelikeness with limited means. Here the pencil marks slope like the figure.

All lino cut prints are 75 x 55 cms, as are the companion drawings













This sepia drawing is 85 x 70 cms
The following painting is 110 x 110cms









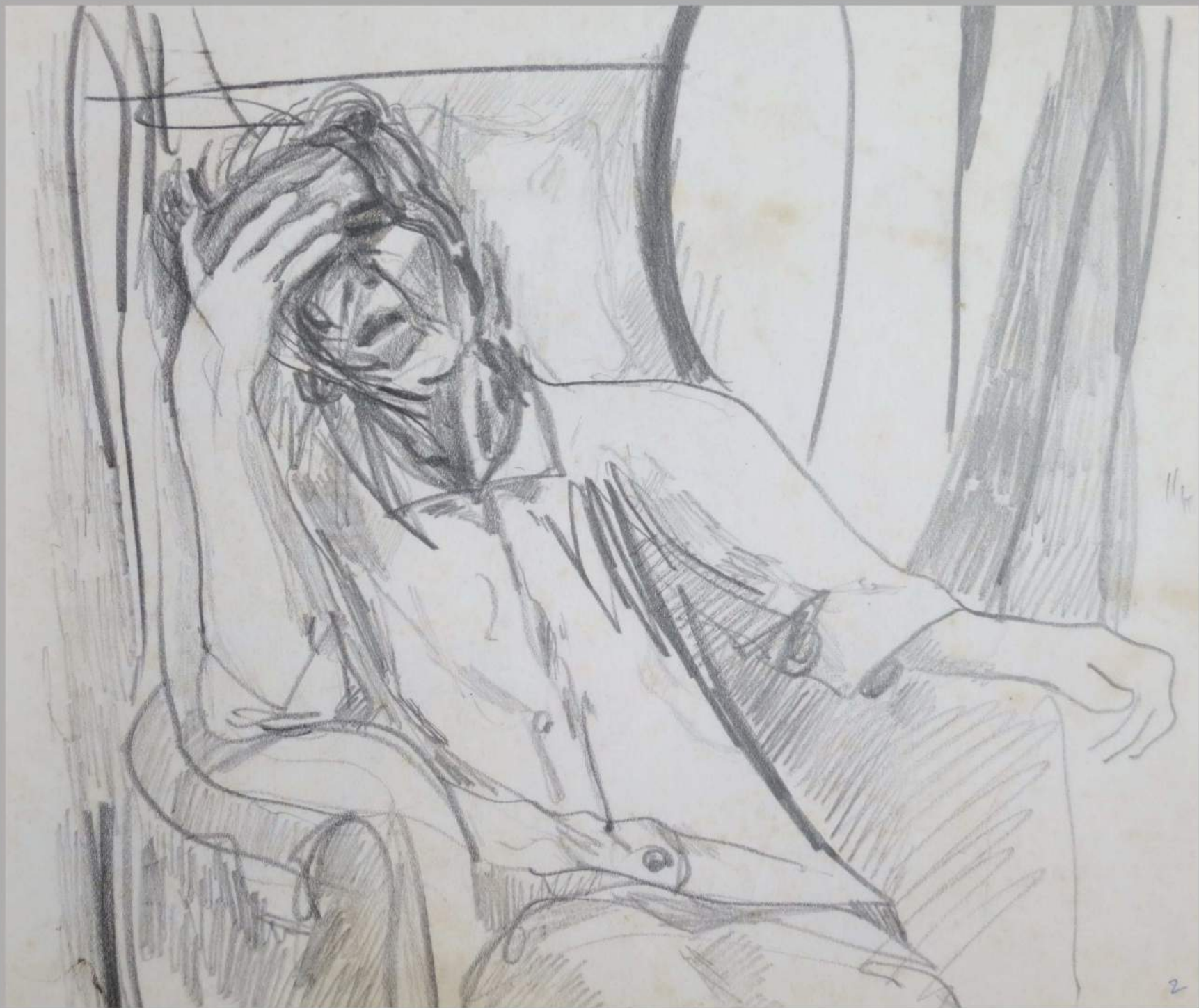




The following drawings are of Granny confined to her chair because of illness. I kept her company as she slept. 1966.









Lovers asleep under a tree. As people have noted about black and white photos, there is a paradoxical realism to these two colours as if the absence of colour functioned like the invisible scenes in novels, where the reader's imagination does much of the work. Then in ink drawing there is also the emotive force of the shorthand marks in themselves. In this and the following drawing in pencil, the soft tone of the pencil is itself suggestive of pale light









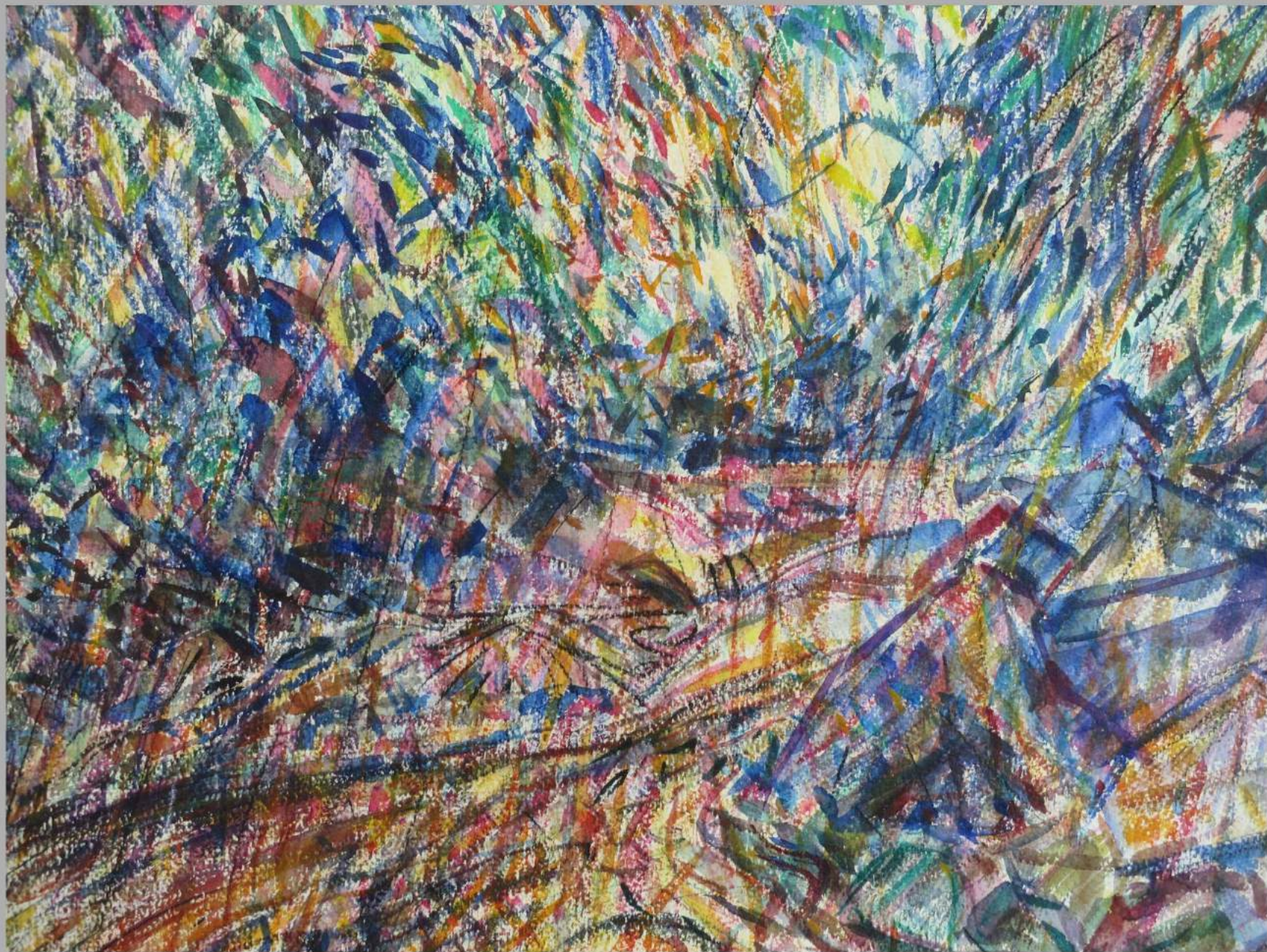




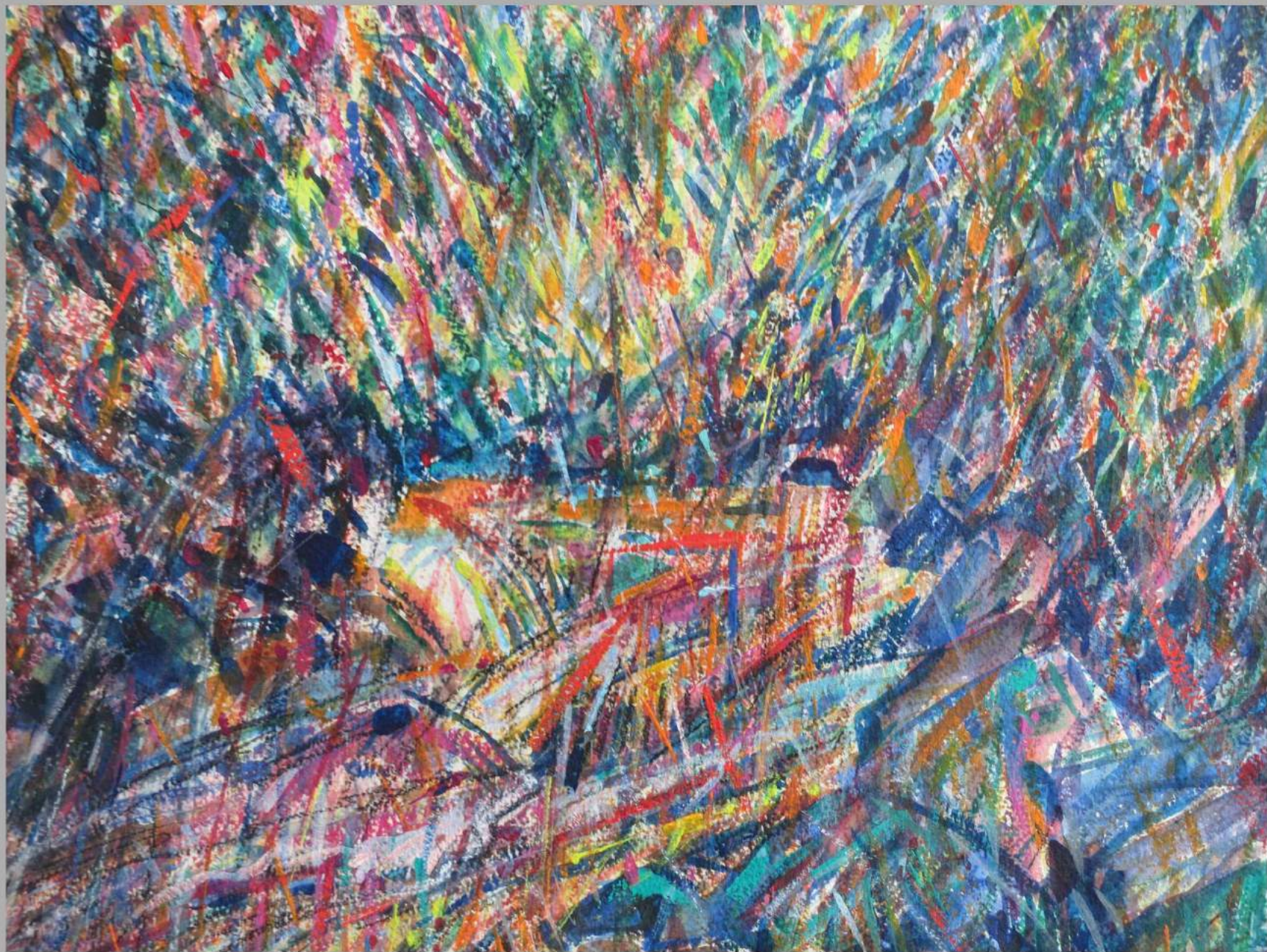


















I like to think of this, and to a lesser extent the 4 previous pages, as slightly "Futurist", - as I understand the period; that is to say, marks were used to convey a sense of speed and movement, though at the same time to represent the real object in abbreviated form. So here the amassing force and movement of the clouds and the strong light on the scene - with the vaguely indicated children playing by a pool. Besides the curves of the tree masses and clouds, there are diagonal "force" marks "representing" the mobile light from the sky. The smaller "leaf" marks add to the sense of movement and breeze. In the previous "sunsets", the marks try and convey the pulsing force of the setting sun's rays and its illumination.

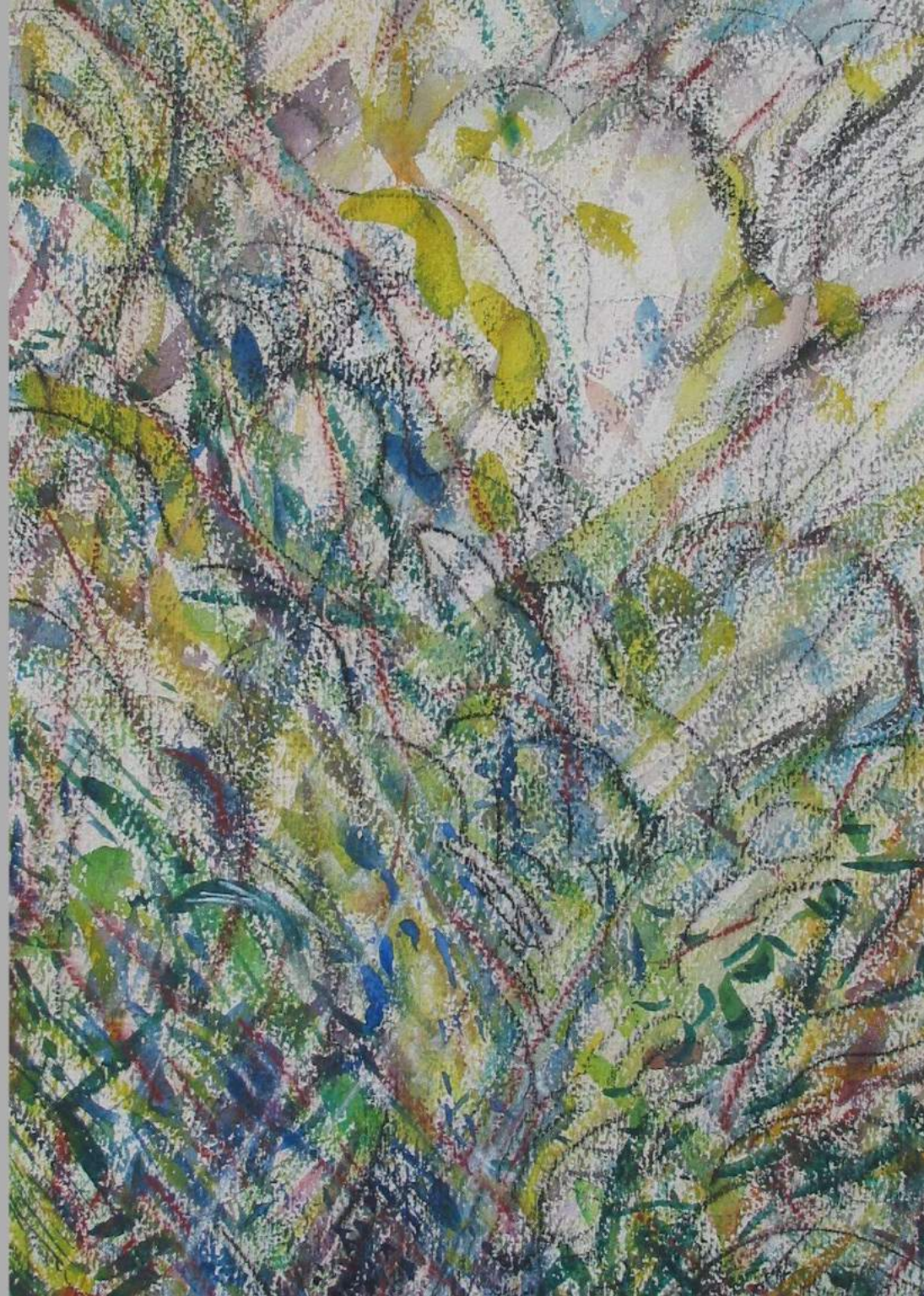
I am thinking of the short hand "symbolic" marks of Futurism: almost the mannerism of its oblique marks standing for speed and movement. There is also something of that "drawing" in the previous lino black and white print of "stream surface". There, with the restriction to just black and white and the restricted variation of the lino cutting tool, there is often a similarly dynamic sort of summarising mark. Maybe painting didn't sufficiently conserve the discoveries of Futurism or Cubism. Maybe advertising or propaganda posters retained it.

Previous paintings are 75 x 55 cms

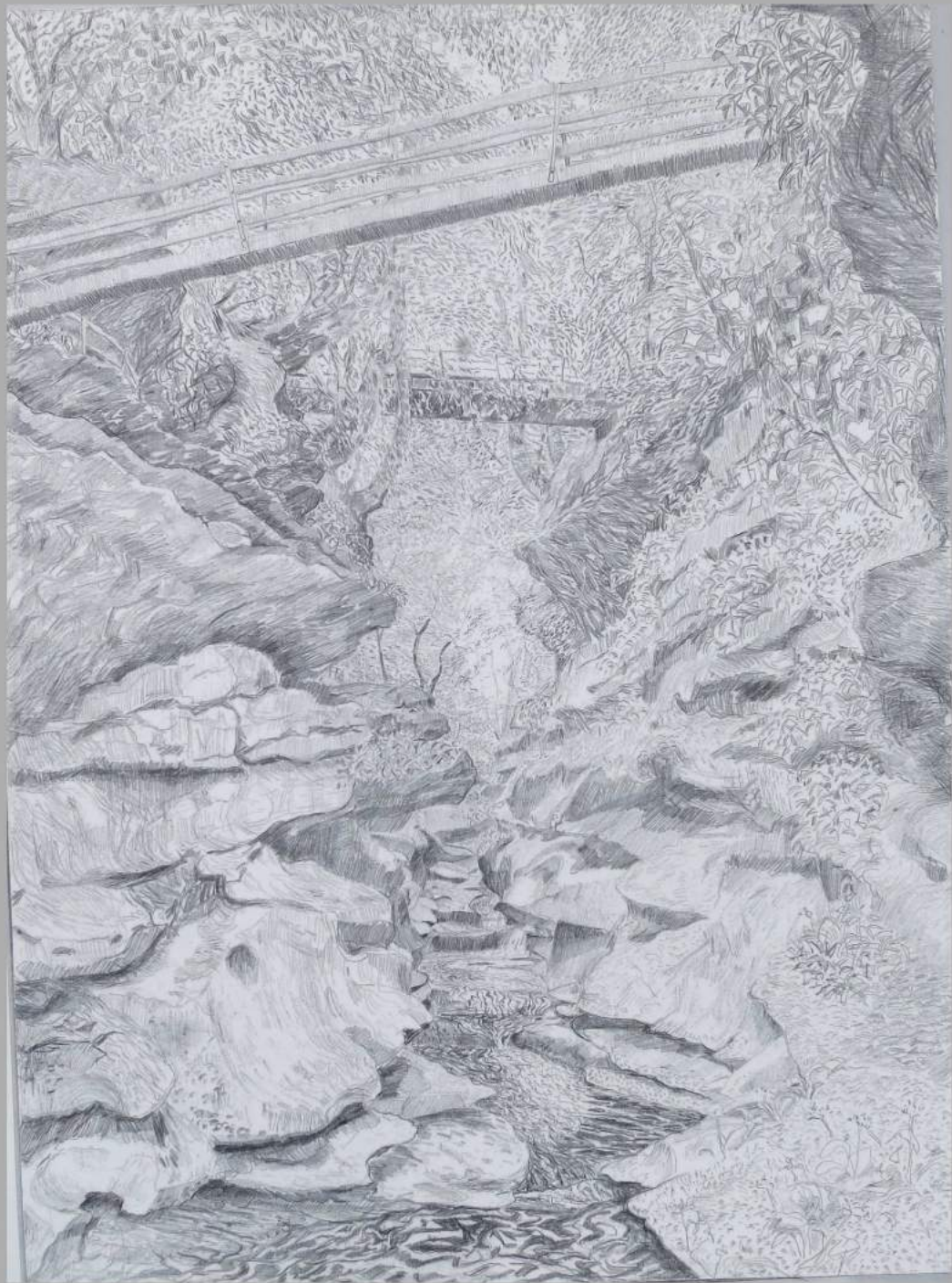
This is 85 x 75 cms

Following prints and drawings are

- 75 x 55 cms.















This page. Middlesmoor. From Church gate
Next page. Jack and Chris Challis taking sheep to the moor.
Coming up Paddock Hill to Middlesmoor. All drawings 55 x75cms.

























Red roof of farm at La Piov Alba. 15 x 11 inch
"Abstract" marks of freezing on the paper.

In book 2, at the end, I wrote of the famous interview of David Sylvester and the painter Francis Bacon who spoke of his struggle to paint "a wave more wave-like than wave". That should be taken together with Bacon's denigration of Sutherland portraits which he classed as "illustrational". (ie. not part of what Bacon called "deepening the game", which he thought essential to painting: its **oblique** marks of representation). Here's a question. Were the Greek statues of the classical period just mimicking the real - just "illustrational" - or a deeper representation and were those birds pecking at the painted cherries of Xeuxes deceived by their "illustrational" quality?! Bacon's tussle with "wave" might stand for that knife edge problem of representation in 20th century art, where a metaphoric symbolism (Picasso's sculpture an obvious example), or Van Gogh and Matisse's "drawing", enriches the represented figure or scene with the psychological involvement of oblique representation that was such an important aspect of 20th century art. But at what point does "wave" just disappear under the imposture of pure mark and so become indecipherable: a unknown hieroglyph? Why did that Turner exhibition title talk so confidently of painting "set free"? Free to do what? Bacon made the interesting observation on Van Gogh; that his paintings were both strongly representational, but also "depend the game" with that psychological extra of his visceral paint. My different response to Turner and Constable comes to mind.

Turner is now considered the greater painter (certainly internationally). His masterly abbreviations are seen as central (even misnamed as "abstractions"). But as beautiful as are his European or Lake district water colours, they do not provoke the love that I feel for Constable, whose paintings seem (as with those cherries of Xeuxes which deceived the birds) to draw you into the thing itself: that cloudy day, that Elm dark shade, those upright nettles, that breeze, the two carters tightening the wheels of the stationary wagon by soaking them, and that Elder tree beside the house - which were believed to ward off bad spirits. (The Haywain). Yes, modern representational painting

extended the boundaries, it "deepened the game", but that has encouraged the extremism of "abstract" art, where pure colour and form has been "liberated" into self-important but meaningless marks and this has fed back into representational art, which shows off its "painterly" sprezzatura and independence. I would like a landscape painting to be subservient to place and messy particularity, so you could almost conjure up the smell of the wild garlic on that bank or sense the wind. I would like a painting to NOT have a finished and intrusive aesthetic manner but remain messy like its source. What I referred to as the interesting and tensioned knife edge between representation and paint is now best seen in amateurs and children who more modestly try and catch "the thing itself". There is a sort of aesthetic snobbery at work, so that catching a similarity seems "naïve"; not proper painting, which instead prides itself on its autonomous nature which presumes to configure - to use Kandinsky's mistaken vocabulary; "the spiritual in art".

But remember, Bacon still wanted to get "wave" into that paint! Landscape painting should be a response to and so occasion in others a radical nostalgia. *That quote from Boehme again: "..... Today art is,, an echo of that silence in which nature "speaks". In images of loss or absence, art keeps alive that knowledge that has been lost.....* In that passage, Adorno indicates how the ancient history of Hunter gatherer is still operative as it were, in our DNA which calls to us through even our so faded present relationship with nature.

Landscape painting is a feeble stutter of something missed: a response of unease.
85 x 75 cms







This etching and other drawings are of Granny in 1966 when she was confined to her chair.
Following page. Valentina having tea at La Grotta. 75 x 55 cms
Opposite. Figure in Landscape. Dorset. 1971









Most days contain some moment in which one notices aspects of modern life that make us wonder, "where did it all go wrong"! Entertainment, "leisure", those are words that describe so much of our "spare" time. So much of modern lives is filled with artificial ways of filling empty time and keeping boredom at bay: TV, newspapers, all the apps of mobile phones, computers, internet. We fill our time with that which if we were in the "last days of your life", would seem irrelevant. In that thought is an echo of Wordsworth's grumble that; "getting and spending we lay waste our powers". Even music, literature and visual arts seem passtimes, passing time fillers, or at least salves for hurt souls; lost souls. We live in a present from which we seem to want to continually escape. On the next page but one is a passage of Goethe in which he seems to already put his finger on a future malady.

detail. From big meadow gate. Opposite. Sepia 110 x 100 cms previous three - watercolors 75 x 55 cms







Tom's bank. Rain on the stream.. detail of 36 x 34 inches

I think any such collection of landscapes, however humble has an implicit question: why should anyone spend a lot of time painting landscapes; especially for little gain. Maybe the answer is as modest as the fisherman's: "just to have the excuse to sit here for hours!" That passage of Adorno quoted by Boehme in a book Nature and Subject is also an explanation. Nowadays it is not just campaigning environmentalists that feel melancholy. Almost everyone has a feeling that the world has in some sense been overpowered by one of its own "experiments": Sapiens; one in trillions of the earth's "experiments" that for the

moment is not yet extinct - as are 99% of the once existent!: a strong argument of proof of God's indecision and poor planning! (Or worse; illustration of heartless "experiment"!)). In such a humbling context, mere landscape painting should remind us of that natural dimension that our culture and inventions have displaced. Here is the Goethe quote. *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?

Yes, Landscape painting should aim to be - as Delgado defined his photos, "a love letter to the planet".



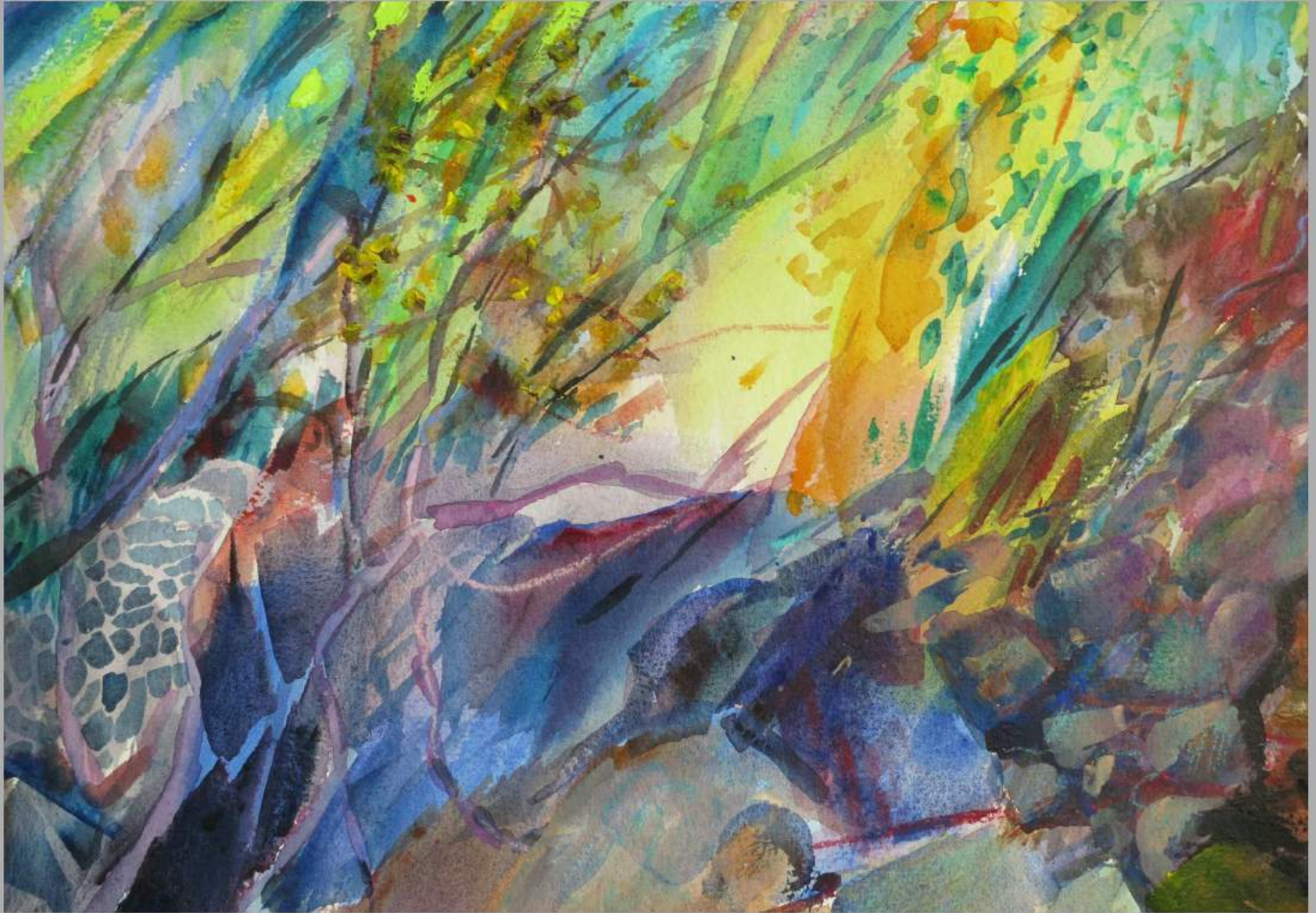
Stream. Summer afternoon. Acrylic 90 x 80 cms





Landscape painting highlights some quality - often of a participatory body sensation - felt in the "motif". Here the crayon marks that stand for "leaves" or "current" are metaphoric abbreviations that we enjoy in a double sense; as both sensual ideogram and thing designated.





Here are painted the rocks and bank beside the stream under the assertive last rays of the sun. This is a painting that makes me think about the aesthetic effects of stained glass where the "leaded" areas interfere with the depiction, yet throw into heightened contrast and brilliance the coloured glass images. It is also a good example of what I have called metaphoric or oblique representation. The stream bank is illuminated by the last evening rays of the sun and the "stained glass" simplified colours makes it possible to better capture the brilliance of that last effulgence of sunlight. I have long wondered how we might explain what you could call the oblique (not illustrational) sepia drawings of Samuel Palmer at the Ashmolean, or of Klee.



Previous .100 x 100 cms These three details.







From meadow gate towards Stean. 70 x 60 cms

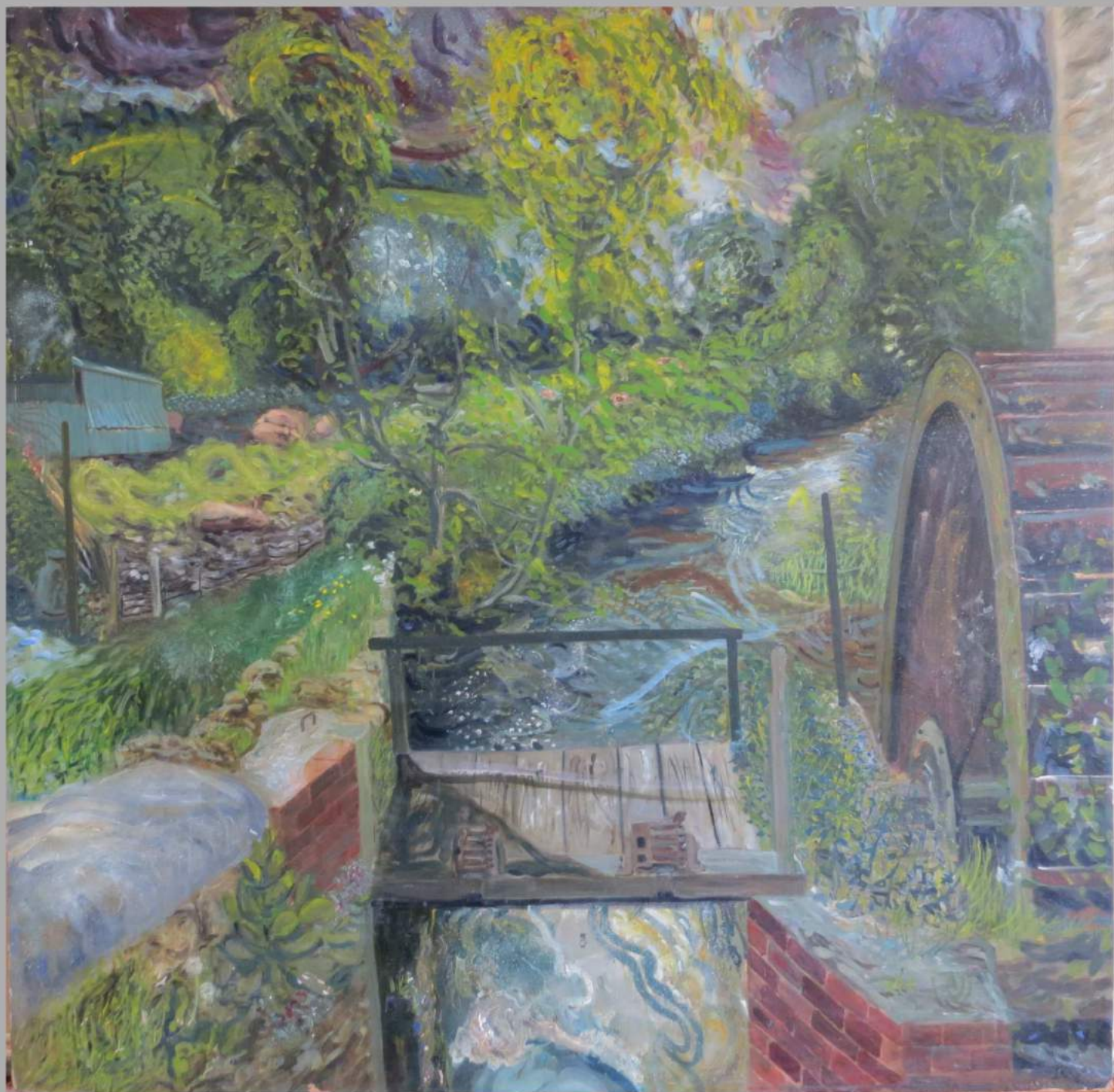
Boredom is an effect of not being able to participate in the moment, an aimless impotence. That was the warning of that previous quotation from Goethe (on the page below "Tom's bank"). Culture of high or low sort seems mere "diversion", entertainment. German has the word "Zerstreuung": scattering, strewing, distraction, but also meaning entertainment. - apposite. The Romantics were the first to consider boredom - the sign of the emptiness of modernity, the lonely isolation of people. If behaviour is largely conditioned by the experiences of our past, then any lack in some essential component that makes for happy existence, it will be discernible in our actions, in our reduced psychological well-being and a need for compensating satisfaction. If modern life is too constraining on our being, which is still fundamentally our Hunter gatherer DNA, the effects will be seen in unsocial behaviour, poor mental health and lack of physical well-being too. As our overpopulation increases, (with its global warming among many effects), so a vicious circle will be initiated of maladjusted, vindictive social behaviour (on-line trolling, the cynical appeal of politicians to large groups of disgruntled "losers") will multiply. Besides these outright negative influences, there are those general ones alluded to in Hamlet's words, as he observes the soldiers of another trivial war: "this is the imposture of too much wealth and peace that inward breaks and shows no cause without why the man dies".

The resentful accidia of boredom and the nagging sense of having "missed the boat" along with the nearly aimless "leisure", has its own destructive effects. Have all these modern distractions from boredom made us more passive and less able to direct our lives autonomously; a downward spiral of conditioning? Modernity's illness of "waiting for Godot"; something at last **significant** to happen - thus the appeal of horrible, unnormal newspaper crime reporting. In this context let's hear again Goethe's words on a previous page: "*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 and so, feeling this connection and freely given and rejoicing wonder, she or*

he is made fully aware of the world and 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? Modern tourism is another form of distraction. On June 14th (2017) in Verona there was a queue of Chinese tourists. The taxi driver taking me and some luggage to the station, told me his story of an "oriental" who had come by train from Milan. She asked to be taken to "Juliet's balcony" - (invented only a 100 years ago). So a play from 400 years ago had become a real place. Had she read the play or was it just another "stopping point" on a tourist itinerary? Most tourism visits foreign places that remain as foreign as before. Though the moving of the woman's body from China to Verona was real - what was the balcony to her? As for imagination - could she not have been better served by a video documentary of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. That Chinese visitor well illustrated that German word for entertainment "Zerstreuung": strewn, entertainment, distraction. Nothing to do with the real warp and weft of her life: - *"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"*. Do our lives of distraction and substitutional behaviour help? All arts should be body-physical; certainly never "abstract". So landscape painting should stir feelings like those alluded to by Bacon that travel along the nervous system: felt bodily; as in his admired Van Gogh. On the right is a painting of pigs on a hot steamy afternoon. A snooty but well known art critic once wrote that Landscape painting can be "productively nostalgic". Productive is hardly the word, but nostalgic covers how a painting should be strong enough to stimulate a viewer's own memories and seem like a celebration of a moment, sufficient in itself: past yet magically stopped in amber! That is what is so beautiful in Impressionist paintings: their cleverly modest ordinariness: they are examples of Wordsworth's lovely phrase: "the simple produce of the common day".



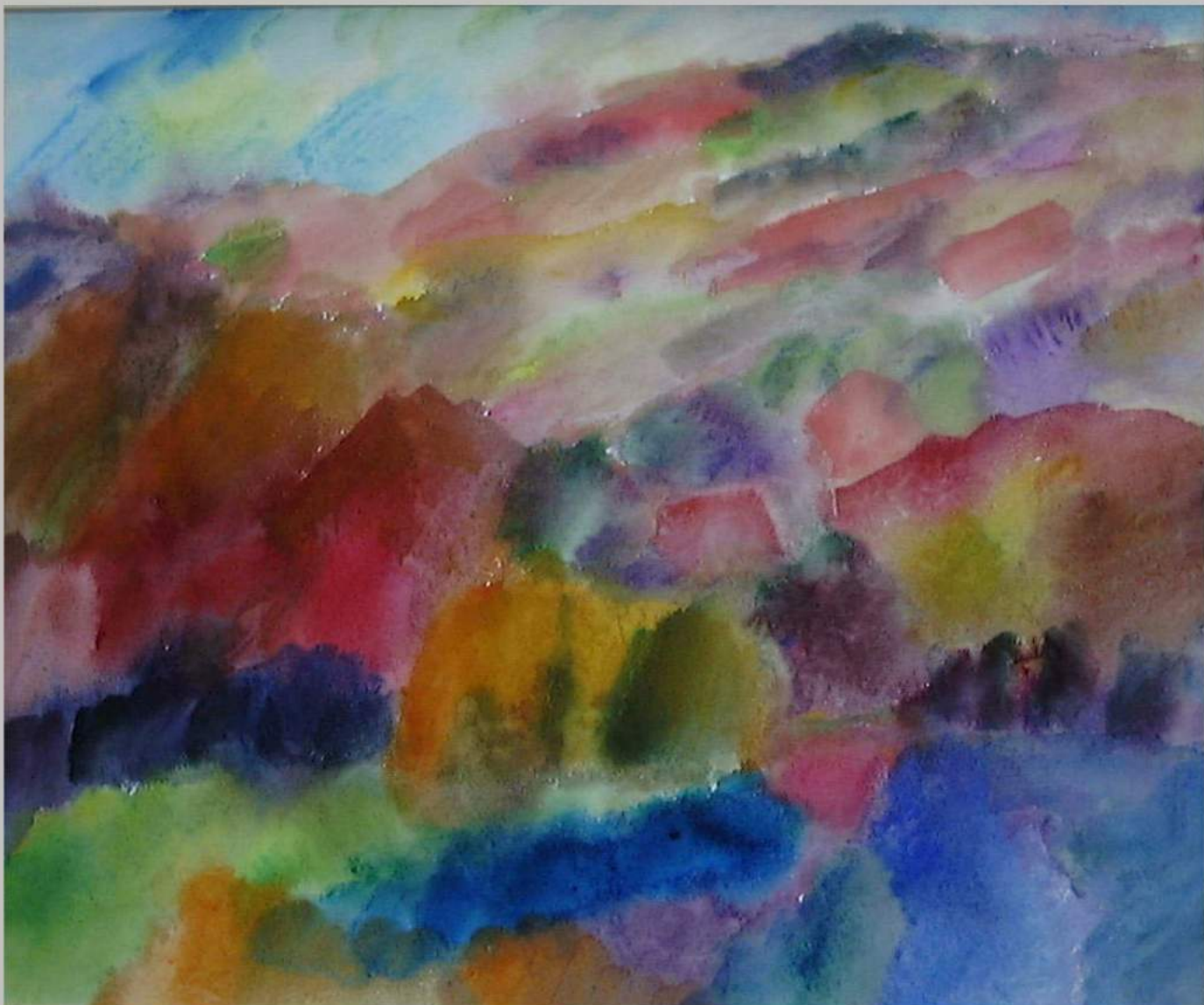
Pigs on a hot afternoon. Oil painting done in 1966.
100 x 100 cms Sherborne Mill





Old Mill, Sherborne. 1966. Oil. 48 inch square. Detail





Farmhouse roof of La Piov. Alba



Here is a counter example of foreignness to that of the Chinese tourist in Verona, that gave a new sense to life to me at that time. All such "real" happenings are part of our "story", just as was that of the Chinese woman's visit to "Juliet's Balcony", which was "real" to her and representative of such "bits" which make up all our existence. Incidentally, on the subject of "stories": these days there is a tendency to use the word "narrative" in a very broad sense. A narrative often refers to that kind of "story" that is either imposed on a series of events; by others, by ourselves or by the public in general.

Often such "narratives" are self justifying in that they link events with supposed causes whereas a story is more likely to be disinterested and at least aims to objectively relate what happened. Our own lives are stories - biographical stories about our past which we turn into explanatory "narratives", which we use to make sense of the major incidents and connections of our lives. For that Chinese, maybe Juliet was part of a future explanatory "narrative" that the woman was putting together, and "narrative" covers that aspect of a purely personal and crowded map of references with which she

will make sense of life. Novelists tell "stories" which because they are such an explanatory map, are where we once used the now extended word: "narrative". Maybe a landscape painting shares with "narrative", the sense of personal vision, and truly, one slowly builds up the marks that trace a "vision" that seems "right". Once as I painted the fruit pickers, the sound of singing came from the trees, as all from their common "popular culture" began singing, in 4 part harmony, the traditional songs. Now there are motorised lifts not ladders and they with their chugging, silenced that popular "art". Sad!





So here is both a story and a narrative. I was a foreigner at that farm and so despite the obvious simplicity of the place, the buildings and the people, it seemed exotic. In that farmhouse in Vaccheria near Alba, my first wife Bruna was speaking to her cousins in a language I had never heard before; "Piemontese", and the next space to the kitchen was the cow house, with all the animals tied up. After some fruitless time spent trying to catch for assistance the French imbedded in the dialect, I went outside to the vineyards and fruit trees. Under a cherry



tree in blossom, I painted a picture of hens scratching about, with in the distance, the cemetery where we had buried Bruna's mother the day before, and I heard the nightingales singing. (next page). The dialect and those cousins who she had played with once as a child, are now old and 49 years later, the factories creep closer and soon the places I painted there will be swallowed up; a first wife long dead, that generation of "contadini" no more, and the nightingales gone. Is that the nostalgic echo in landscape painting?











Bonfire and Guarene's hill from below. 105 x 110 cms. Water colour is a lovely liquid thing: a pity for people to step back too far and miss it!



next page: Daniela's house. Chiasielis and La Grotta Rovereto

















Previous page. Piles Copse. Dartmoor.
This page. Autumn Both 70 x 55cms

There are clusters of ideas that seem to congregate together and thus reinforce each other, maybe held together by the gravity pull of one chief force. One such idea is that just 10,000 years ago humans began to give up a 200,000 year culture as hunter gatherer and we changed ourselves by adopting agriculture; "the agricultural trap" as Harari put it in "Sapiens": "a grass domesticated us"! Once humans began sedentary farming, populations increased and thus the power of the group. As a result, as Harari also put it, "the trap snapped shut". There was no going back and the remaining hunter gatherers were gradually forced out and ever outwards.

Recently, leaving Leeds in a train we passed through the suburbs and the satellite towns. Pleasant houses and gardens too, but I thought of the jobs of the owners of these houses. The traffic queues at morning and night, the unnatural life and the way we are all locked into a life of a certain form: our "being" stretched out too far. That is a sad feeling. They say that even the sight of green trees around a hospital makes patients recover quicker. But 5 mile motorway traffic jams? Beijing research found that young people with early exposure to nature fared 7 times better at study and subsequent work. Yet it is the concrete, plastic and electronic world that is forming us and is our new habitat. The result? Here is a psychiatric report: 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. In modern life we sometimes experience what German calls "Entfremdung" -more concrete than our "alienation" - it means becoming a stranger to oneself or one's time. Well, regret is out of place. We have what we have and must make the best of it.

But though we must adapt to this present, we must try and recuperate backwards, both to some better adjustment to our more ancient selves and recuperate the planet that is finite unlike our proud "progress", or otherwise the planet will take its revenge with an explosion of enormous pent up power that we will provoke from it with our plunder of its stored carbon fossils.

Some interesting facts from North America at the beginning of modern times: Benjamin Franklin noted that, "when an Indian child has been brought up among us, taught our language and habituated to our customs, if he goes to see his relations and makes an Indian ramble with them, there is no persuading him to return", but white captives "rescued" from the Indians, "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". (But what would they have thought of our lives!). Mary Jenison taken at 15 years of age by the Seneca tribe, told a rescue party: "We had no master to over-see us or drive us, so we could work as leisurely as we pleased. No people can live more happy than the Indians did in times of peace...their lives were a continual round of pleasures". A woman, quoted by the secretary of the French Legation: "Here I have no master, I am the equal of all the women in the tribe, I do what I please without anyone saying anything about it, I work only for myself. I marry if I wish and unmarry when I wish. Is there a single woman as independent in your cities"? A French émigré called Hector de Crevecoeur said in 1782, "There must be a social bond, something singularly captivating and far superior to anything to be boasted of among us". Yes but not that only. When you stand in a station especially at night and step back from a wind that would suck you into its path as a huge goods train thunders through, you have such a sense of the power of the modern human habitat; all that cooperative social effort creating something so enormous as to transform the world itself! Listening to Benjamin Franklin's puzzlement we can just shake our heads. The trap's now shut.







Cherry Trees in Vaccheria. Piemonte. 95 x 85 cms..
Next page. Etching and view of Middlesmoor in rain from Rustic
cottage field. 15 x 12 inches.





"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

Sometimes we are all struck by an unease, as if we were not living the right life. Those statistics from Beijing university that showed how young people significantly exposed to nature at a young age do seven times as well at school and in subsequent life than others, are revealing. Let's also remember that perplexity of Benjamin Franklin at the ungrateful whites, "rescued" from the Red Indians, who fled back to the forests. That too shines some light on many of our present "natureless" maladies. It certainly makes landscape painting seem less superceeded than some snooty modernist critics make out.

If mutational changes take 25,000 years to prove either genetically advantageous, and so "evolve" or to fall away as giving no advantage, then our bodies and psyches are still those of our ancient being, 200,000 years old that lived on until just 10,000 years ago. So this utterly different life we have invented is bound to cause mental breakdown, unhappy bodies and weird superstitious "religious" resolutions of our unease and enforcements of obedience. Well it's too late. "The trap snapped shut". We are the servants of a grass and rice! Considered in this light, one catches in the finest high art, the sound of "beautiful" misery. Listen to the last piano sonatas and quartets of Beethoven. What pain and loss: almost too much to listen to. Even stranger is how despite the privilege of being alive on this beautiful planet, some people invent the nonsense of a purely imaginary next world for the sake of which, on mere hearsay, some will blow up innocent people in this world for their "faith"- or is that simply another sign of "the pain of living" which they resolve by blowing themselves up into "Paradise", and their victims to an assured hell, just because they are "infidels"?

Truely deranged. Or think of that collective madness of Nazi rallies- thousands dedicating themselves to death. Both the "religious" terrorists' "Paradise" and the Third Reich are signs of the weird and ill. No wonder the rescued white captives soon ran back to the Red Indian forests, or why the Red Indians were so astonished by the white man putting up fences everywhere.

Listen to John Oberly. US commission of Indian Affairs. 1887. "The Indian must be motivated with the exalting egotism of the American Civilisation, so that he will say "I" instead of "we" and "this is mine" instead of "this is ours". The chasm of it!

I remember having similar thoughts once in Robin Hoods bay when we went into a fossil shop. We had been tourists wandering idly around the village and there in the shop were these modestly extinct Trilobites. They seemed majestic in their modesty, as if saying; "we passed away without fuss - or Paradise, and we left no plastic behind us or mass extinction". (our 6th in the making).

A "Human", **Goethe** wrote in **Wilhelm Meisters learning years**, *"is born into a particular, limited place, that is to say, he can get a grip on near and particular aims and he becomes used to utilising all that is ready to hand; however as soon as goes further out he neither knows what he wants nor what he should be, and it is all the same whether he distracts himself with a multitude of objects or sets himself a higher aim. It is always his misfortune when he is expected to strive for something with which he cannot have a regular and self-determined connection.*

In many ways these paintings are forlorn. They were mostly painted outside and are very modest and unmodern. Few have been sold, so they were done more for their own sake and because painted outside in beautiful places, seem to have something in common with Tibetan prayer flags - just hung up for the wind to move - a thankful homage.

Once more that thought of Goethe's

"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".



View from Big Meadow gate. Water colour. Cold day.
Frost. 75 x 25 cms





Ceraino. Val d'Adige. 75 x 55cms
The lower detail is a good illustration of the "abstractions" created by representational painting. However, it also is part of the attempt to catch the misty day beside the Adige. At Ceraino are the very beginnings of the Alps in this part of Italy.



I once I took a tent, paper and paints and cycled from the Arctic circle to Sicily, doing a painting a day. (October to December). The peddling, the tent, the landscapes and the towns provoked many similar thoughts as those I've written here. Perhaps the most shocking experience was of the contrast between the often beautiful off-road places where I slept or set my tent, and the outskirts of the towns. Right across Europe were the signs of the same carelessness towards the outer space - the ugly houses, the unlovely concrete, the brutal indifference to the common living space, the run down shops and the mostly shabby, unhappy looking people. That fatal "agricultural" choice described by Harari seems to have brought us to an enslavement.

We are still contemporaries of the Romantic period which laid bare our underlying discomfort from the stresses from which our lives suffer- that vague sense of something wrong. Keats' Nightingale with its contrast: "light winged dryad of the trees, in beechen green and shadows numberless, singest of summer in full throated ease".... and "here where men hear each other groan". "Productive nostalgia"? Desperation more like! And once more from that "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".

We are all now up to our necks in it, as one notices when sitting in traffic jams, miles long. We must catch any "balm for hurt minds" - music, alcohol, drugs, cruise ship holidays, TV fictions, pop music that hammers the brain gratefully senseless, novels, plays, or religions' silly promises that defraud us of this one and only life. All designed to take us out of our stressful present.

Maybe as Kurzweiler, engineer at Apple predicts, one day soon we will fuse and merge to make that "singularity" he describes, where we become one with our technological tools. Then the vanished Nightingales will not disturb our equanimity as "sadness" - for after all, we will be able to call up "Nightingales" with the touch of an app! What's to regret!

Next page. Hawthorns in blossom, seen from the Big Meadow gate. 90 x 85 cms.



Evening. La Poiv Farmhouse. 75 x 55 cms Watercolour.



















Both Little Bredy. Dorset. watercolours 33 x 28 cms. 1971





Bruna listening to her dad.





Valentina and I waiting for Daisy. 70 x 57 cms.







Valentina and Daisy at Sue and Phil's 75 x 55 cms





Valentina playing the recorder. 75 x 55 cms
Butler's cottage garden. Harford. Devon.



Once again consider this passage from Wordsworth's preface to "The Excursion".

Beauty-a living Presence of the earth,
Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms
Which craft of delicate Spirits hath composed
From earth's materials-waits upon my steps;
Pitches her tents before me as I move,
An hourly neighbour. 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:-

It's a strange piece - beautiful and shamanistic, and wanting to go beyond poetry to a kind of ur-poetry. It is typical of a certain preoccupation of Wordsworth's. How to remain modestly true to, "Beauty, a living presence of the earth". Beauty, they say, "is in the eye of the beholder"- we create it in our eye-mind, but at the same time find the cause beyond us - out there - in this case, in Nature. But with Wordsworth, that is not just beauty; mountains, lakes, sky, but something more. Wordsworth says, "a living presence"; a power, not just a beauty. An actor we think must have stage "presence"; that eloquent extra quality. So the noticed beauty of which Wordsworth speaks, is not just an appreciation, it is this awareness of a "living presence of the earth"; no less, and the power of this presence is so sufficient that Wordsworth tells us, it makes unnecessary the "imaginings" of "fiction" - "Paradise, Groves Elysian", making them superfluous, because we can accede to that presence directly, if our "intellect is wedded to the goodly universe in love and holy passion". So then the intellect will already possess that sought for insight that usually is claimed conventionally to lie in the various "arts"- "those fair ideal forms" crafted by "delicate spirits". Wordsworth is trying here in poetry to by-pass poetry!

Words have such accumulated power. In comparison, painting is dealing in marks to which "meaning" must be given NOW. Here, Wordsworth in speaking of "presence" indicates how words, because of their long familiarity, perhaps lose out to representational painting, for it is precisely the "presence" behind the appearance that painting is trying to catch.

Here Wordsworth is declaring that art and imaginative fictions would somehow be unnecessary, (but excepting his "spousal verse"!), if he could somehow fully experience that "living presence" , and then the "common day" will be itself sufficient: on condition of it being viewed by the person with "holy passion". Then to further explain that holy passion, Wordsworth introduces a kind of Shamanistic poet who doesn't invent "ideal forms" but instead makes a special verse - a "spousal verse", because it celebrates all-in-one sufficiency, when humans will be "wedded-to-the-universe in love and holy passion": which would make poetry unnecessary! That is what I think a Constable, Van Gogh or a Monet - and all the rest try to do: their images of "the common day" seem so imbued with presence that they succeed more convincingly in creating that "spousal verse" of special vision than well worn words.

Wordsworth's whole piece is a sort of admission of poetic insufficiency, a sort of check mate, similar to the lover's admission that it is impossible to express a love in words. Wordsworth wishes to just find the earth itself sufficient. (Interesting how Blake completely mistook Wordsworth's honouring of "this goodly universe". I think Blake's dualism of nature (fallen) and imagination (good) was the reason for the unnavigable quality of his "imagination's" "Prophetic" books. Wordsworth is a Romantic poet seeing beyond that substitutional idealized art "form", to the life of the "common day", whereas a Novalis felt the common day **had to be** "romanticized": ("romantisiert"), a strange, willful and unhealthy self-deception). In Wordsworth's refusal of that Blakean "Imagination" in favour of the "common day", there seems something marvelously healthy. Like those English that fled back to the Red Indian forests. But the eventual disappointment in Wordsworth's later poetry was because this vision depended too much on his mere memories of his instinctual life as a child, and to conserve that into later life you need the larger view of a poet like Goethe who refused all dualisms.

Watercolour. Autumn. 55 x 75 cms.

Oh, many a time have I, a five years' child,
In a small mill-race severed from his stream,
Made one long bathing of a summer's day;
Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again
Alternate, all a summer's day, or scoured
The sandy fields, leaping through flowery groves
Of yellow ragwort; or, when rock and hill

The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height,
Were bronzed with deepest radiance, stood alone
Beneath the sky, as if I had been born
On Indian plains, and from my mother's hut
Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport
A naked savage, in the thunder shower.
Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up.....

The tragedy of Wordsworth - as seen in his later poetry, was that his life as an "Indian child" was closed off by the developing forms of the society around him. That was the very reason why the young English captured by the Red Indians when rescued, would escape back to the woods, and to the puzzlement of Benjamin Franklin, Red Indians rescued by "civilization", also fled back. It is as if in this passage on the "common day", Wordsworth had noticed that art, (made by "delicate spirits") was (unless a handicraft), an unnecessary substitution; a salve simply for hurt minds suffering from wrong social forms of life.

There is a sad contradiction in the passage. Despite this insistent wish to just have the "living presence of the earth", Wordsworth is still writing poetry that memorialises "beauty", and so he reinvents his role as a Shamanistic poet, who by means of his "spousal verse" will effect that "great consummation" of pantheistic fusion. So after all, the poet will still be needed in order to dissolve the film of distracted blindness over our eyes because, by "getting and spending, we lay waste our powers", as Wordsworth noted in another poem. This passage charts a sort of cul de sac, a sad homage to the far off enthusiastic body-transports of his childhood, (so beautifully described above from Book 1 and 2 of The Prelude), but a world which he wishes to (some how) propagate for all, through his "spousal verse" fortelling that "great consummation", of an existence, (as in his childhood), when the common day would be all-sufficient; a pantheistic whole: reality imbued with - not spirit, but significant sense and love! But sadly, in the end, the abstract "spiritual" of dualistic Christianity split him from this non dualistic "consumation" .

Wordsworth and Goethe, better than others, charted the alienation that the new reality was imposing on humans, who still carried all the needs and desires laid down in their hunter gatherer DNA. Rather than being a spousal verse for a great (and now impossible) consummation, this was poetry of regret for the lost childhood integrity and authenticity of a humanly sufficient, "common day".

Both Wordsworth and Goethe, but particularly the latter wanted to locate spirit and value in that common day. (Goethe even stated that all his poetry had been "Gelegenheits" poetry; that is to say, referring to particular moments and occasions - precisely of the common day). Wordsworth, unlike Goethe, slipped back into an unintegrated belief in a spirit separated from mere "day". In his conventional Christianity (which Goethe never accepted). Wordsworth lost that very wholeness that this passage celebrates. That was his tragedy and in "Peele Castle", he says, what Goethe would never say; "a power is gone that nothing can restore". Goethe to the end continued to find the common day sufficient, precisely because he was still "wedded to the goodly universe by his "love and holy passion".

The passage of Wordsworth seems an admirable program for landscape painting though obviously that too falls under the same radical critique made against "delicate spirits": after all a landscape painting though it represents the common day, is like other arts, interpretative. Yet looking at Constable's Haywain, is that painting not a marvellous testament to the "living presence" of the "common day"? The two carters pausing a while to soak back into tightness their wheels, the dog turned, the boy fishing, superstition's guardian Elder bush, the distant haymakers, the swallow low over the water, the clouds caught forever in immobile movement: the sheer breeze of it all! As further examples, think of Impressionist paintings. What celebrations of an ordinary "living presence" of the "common day". What modest health! Words are like well-worn coins ; too easily taken for granted. They can tempt us to make presumptions of self-evidence. They can pull you away from saying what you want to express, or which maybe you can never express. A landscape painting deals with the common visible and although not cramped by "known" words, it has a different problem: its undictionaried marks have to convincingly represent "the common day", while carrying a convincing something else: that "presence". Was that the integrated life which Wordsworth was imagining in his "spousal" pantheism, and which we all experience as a **lack**?
75 x 55 cms Water colour.











In all that I have written in these three books, there are certain recurrences.

- The interview of Francis Bacon by David Sylvester on all the by forms and ways of "representation".

- The subject of "Abstract art".

- The quality of modern life and our vague unease within the natural environment that we are so modifying.

- Nature as that which science studies, but also as that "home" from which we grew away into our artificial city environments and we carry as a dim sense of loss, which is the subject of Landscape painting.

- The quotation from Boehme's book Subject and Nature has also recurred in these books. Of course, if I try to define "why landscape", then immediately apparent is the inadequacy of the paintings that accompany the argument. It involves sometimes the conversations between Bacon and Sylvester or the ecological arguments about the obvious limitations to our over-populated, city founded way of life, and our "spiritual"-psychological unease, - even the illnesses that are the indicators of our stressed distress, so far from our origins. In such a context, Landscape painting is important as a form of silent witness which should somehow find adequate images that are both celebrations of natural beauty and maybe at the same time, premonitions of loss which yet must (somehow) fortify our will to preserve it.

This and previous are 100 x 100 cms



In that context, the conversations between Bacon and Sylvester are important, for they are one of the most important discussions on the language of painting and what it can include. In talking about painting, Bacon makes apposite comments on Abstract painting on the one hand, and on the other, on what Bacon calls, painting that deals with an "armature of the real". The fact is that painting has a sort of natural ceiling beyond which it cannot go - certainly it has a quite different range in its "language" to music. So I have mentioned the absurd title to a recent Turner exhibition, "Painting set free". - Dangerous rather than harmlessly absurd; (set free to do what!), because it is part of that whole gibberish of "significance", that has quite emptied considerations on painting of any sense or backbone. Claims for pure colour or form were answered by Bacon by the assertion that they could never capture human meaning; certainly none of those so specific human things that the series of Homage to Van Gogh on the road to Tarragon occasion in us, nor the possible content I listed above as a wished-for tincture to landscape painting.

The Wordsworth passage at the beginning of this Book 3, showed a poet wanting to avoid the fictional, "imaginative" content of art and instead to celebrate the "simple produce of the common day", by which he meant, that nature into which human kind was born - though long ago. Abstract art was encouraged by a mistaken intellectual program that thought painting could dispense with all reference to the "common day"; and even ape music. Consider for a moment those paintings by Bonnard of interiors with views onto gardens. What "poetry" and profound meanings and "interpretations of life" there are in them compared to abstract painting that quite lacks the "armature of the real", and are merely "beautiful" and pretentious with a supposed "spiritual" content! But Abstraction, once arrived, opened a flood of mystificatory talk on art. After all, ALL painting properly considered is already abstract by necessity: marks "stand for"! Picasso, Matisse, Bacon himself, even Klee (his titles work as "armatures of the real" and the paintings are witty about that and so, full of meaning). As prime example, are the series of paintings by Bacon; "Homage to Van Gogh on the road to Tarragon". In these, the "obliquity" of Bacon's drawing of the figure of Van Gogh and the landscape around him, shows what paint can do when NOT "set free", but rather, bound down to that which matters to us in life, where, "the muddy vesture of decay doth grossly close us in". It is that lumpy reality that interests us. In the homage to Van Gogh series, there are so many meanings and feelings of almost religious awe towards the lonely figure that is captured in those lumpy, slashed, scraped, aggressive paint marks. What an armature of the real! It is the emotional, intellectual substrata caught in the paint that matters: painting **bound**, not **set free**!

When you see an exhibition of Picasso you notice so many smiling faces - despite the obliquities of his figuration, or rather precisely because of them: people get it! They see his **jokes**, his meanings; everything we mean by wit! Praise be! His wit derives from his figurative deviations. Because Picasso's paintings contain so much healthy good sense. Read again the passages below of Wordsworth and Goethe. Here first is something nearer to home: our actual life. Remember that quote from the "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". No wonder the Romantics were already so distressed!! 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". Here again those two passages of Goethe -

1. "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"?

2. A "Human", he wrote in Wilhelm Meisters learning years, "is born into a particular, limited place, that is to say, he can get a grip on near and particular aims and he becomes used to utilising all that is ready to hand; however as soon as goes further out he neither knows what he wants nor what he should be and it is all the same whether he distracts himself with a multitude of objects or sets himself a higher aim. It is always his misfortune when he is expected to strive for something with which he cannot have a regular and self-determined connection. (of which the abstract aims and "principles" of the French Revolution were to him a prime case). As a modern psychologist might put it - satisfaction in life comes from a sense of agency: a sense that your life matters. 90 x 90 cms





90 x 90 cms





In the 60s I remember that on street walls or in public lavatories, you'd see the graffiti message; "Kilroy was here". No specific name but someone enjoyed leaving their "witness"! Just as people carve names on trees or monuments - or nowadays, spend months finding out about family trees. Does it make any difference? Perhaps it's another indicator of what the sociologist Bauman called the "Liquid society": all of us with more fragile, unrooted identities and seeming to need the reassurance of connection to past lives - - finding a root, as if to give our flitting lives more substance. So now, autobiography is the big literary genre - a comforting attempt, in the absence of religion's big link or of deep community, to gather up our "liquid", evaporating lives! That is also a motive behind these 3 books - a similar attempt to reassure myself that despite making little money from it, they were worth the effort: "Kilroy was here"! Better if they had justified the beautiful words of Goethe's Lynkeus, "From the Tower". (see page 48).





Not only the political confusion of Brexit, but also the statistic that 25% of people suffer from some sort of depression in their lives, is part of what we could call, the Kilroy syndrome within a "liquid society"; where there is so much isolation and such unnatural forms of life, that leaves so many with a sense of insignificance, failure and of being a "loser". In that context lies I think, an explanation for Islamic terrorism, fueled by an excluding religion and the dissatisfying society; and that also fuels populism's rancour.



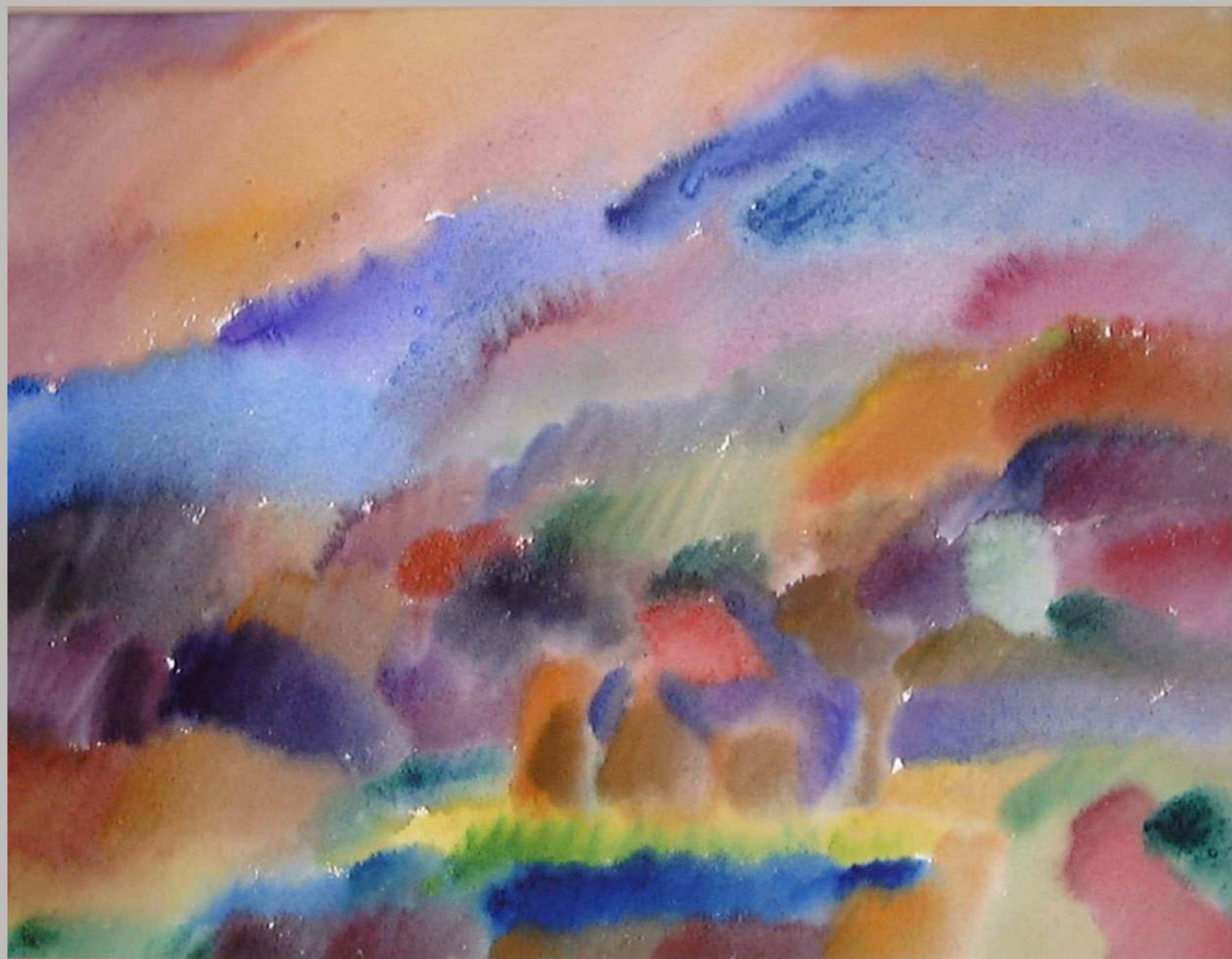
"At last I am being significant". That is even clearer in those shootings in American schools; where there is no religious text utilized to justify the violence and rancour, or in the 1970s in Germany and Italy, the Red Brigades, who believed their murders were justified by their "sacred" Marxist texts. Remember those two quotations that explain so much about our modern situation - from the "Journal of affective disorders". 2012, and the attractions of Red Indian life for "rescued" whites who fled back to the forest.

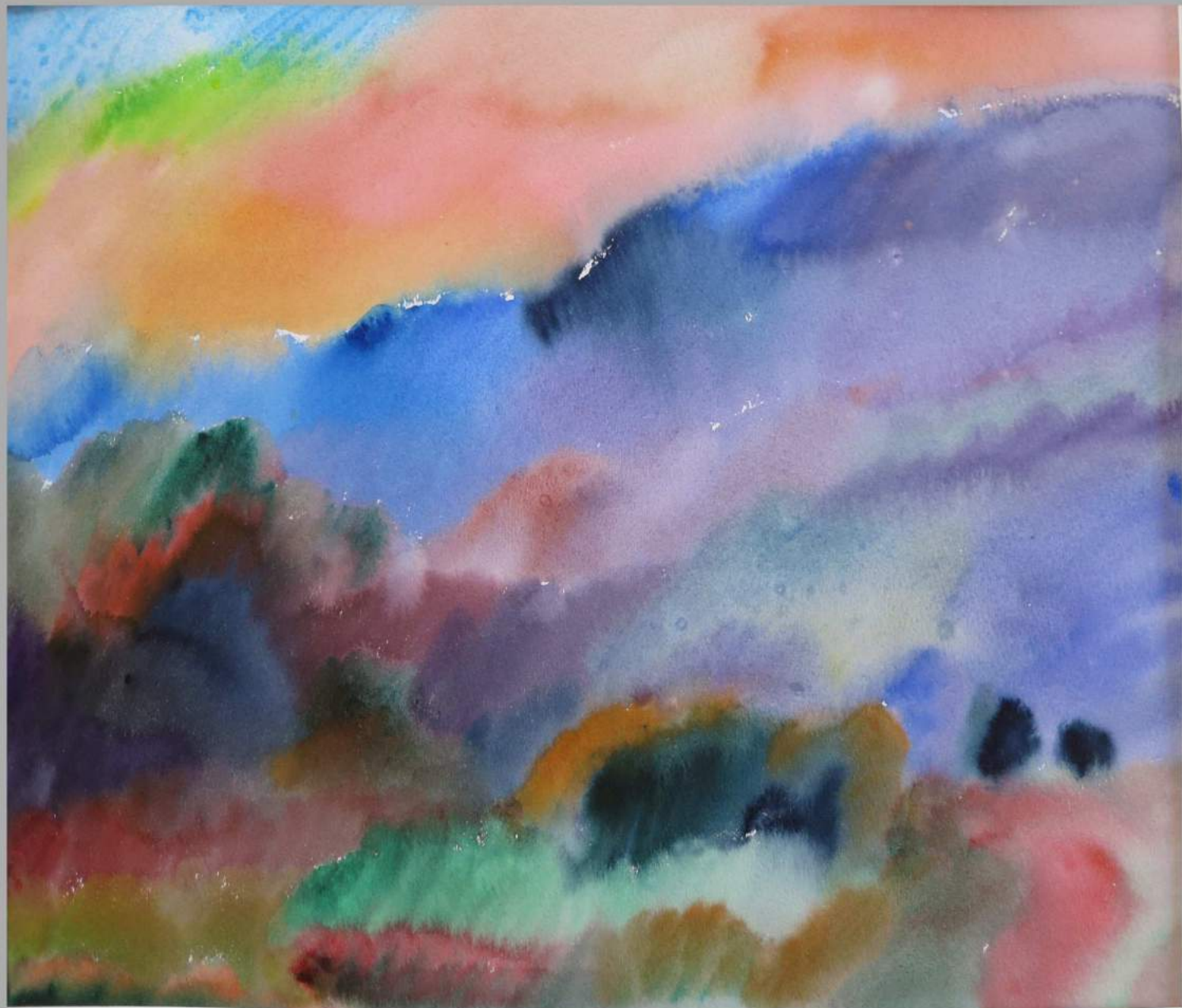






In that description from Sebastian Junger's book, "Tribe", and the passage of Wordsworth on the "common day", there is a reproof of the substitutional motive behind artistic creation seen as just an echo of Paradise Lost? It's quite easy to develop a nostalgia for our hunter gatherer past, when you look at the form of life that we have "progressed" to. **Opposite**, Stream and snow. Above. Dartmoor.

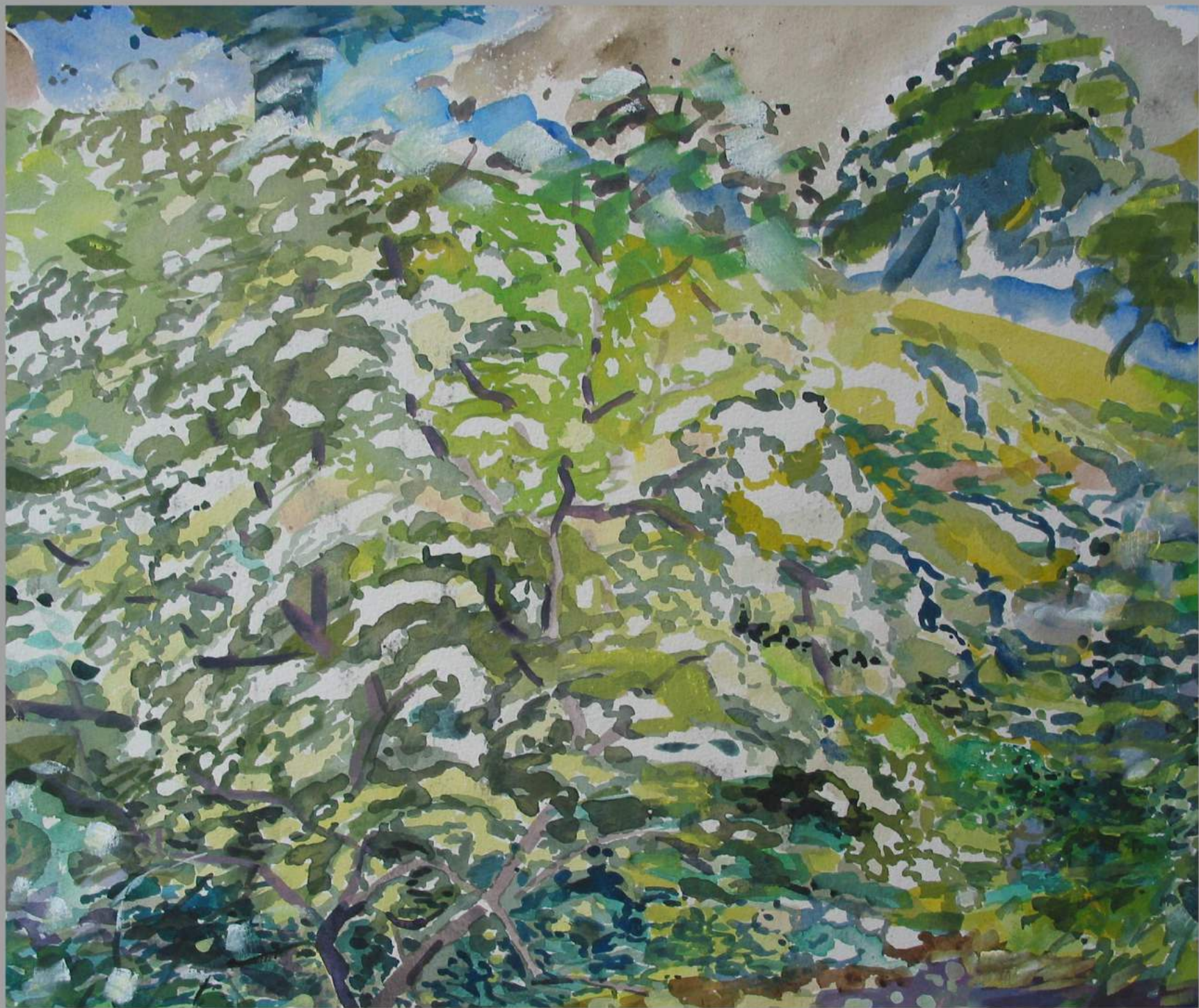




















Previous acrylic 85 x 75 cms. Black lino print 75 x 55 cms. This
above 24 x 18 cm. Following. 85 x 85 cms. Afternoon snow. . Next.
Evening snow scene before the wood. 75 x 55 cms









detail of acrylic. 85 x 85 cms.



Acrylic. 80 x 90

Is the sacred recoverable?

So, "where did it all go wrong"? How did we get to this threat of global extinction through man made climate change? Maybe it began with the clever short cuts made by some hunter gatherers who began to plant the seeds of what they liked - probably to revisit the site the following year; and then eventually and fatally to settle there; and effectively to be domesticated by that which they had seemed to merely use! Why fatally? Because this agricultural revolution - maybe as earth changing as the Industrial revolution, was what made possible the larger populations which lead to the evils of large hierarchical societies with their soldiers, slaves and elites; their trade specialisms whose eventual discoveries would lead to that other cataclysmic event - The Industrial revolution and now cities of 20 million - and rising. By contrast - as shown in the Kalahari Bushmen, hunter gatherers societies were perforce - egalitarian - all in it together! No freeloading bankers, too big to fail. "Leadership" would have been factual and consensual, and "work", it has been calculated, maybe 12 hours in a week. The rest was a meaningful involvement in their environment. All this makes our hankering after poorly labelled "spiritual" life rather forlorn. If you consider the form of our daily lives, there is not much room for what is vaguely called "religious experience" or "the spiritual". (and it seems that all the arts are a rather desperate substitute of "significance" for actual life). Monotheisms were the inventions of a ruling

class. Certainly true of Jewry and Islam and Christianity which really developed when Constantine made it a state religion, useful to social hegemony. They share the angry, retributive God - though in Christianity that owed more to the Jewish Old Testament than to Christ. The ONE God of the monotheisms was a useful echo for the all-powerful ruler and his laws and punishment. This is particularly evident in Islam which means submission! It is significant that the only spiritual remnant left to general Christianity is Christmas! The out-doorness of it. The star. The Wise men from afar. The child - the savior of the world. The virgin. The stall warm with the humble animals. A mystery. As Christmas "draws nigh" - (see how we like to maintain our more numinous, older language and its carols) in that season, many of us feel the tug of a primitive, elemental world; but the day comes to find us all watching special "Christmas TV programs" in our overheated homes. The wise men and their star have gone, unnoticed. That's why playing carols in a brass band at Christmas for "our neighbours" would start on Christmas day with the bandmaster's "Let's have a bit of Christmas"; meaning banding outside. The vaguely remembered words and the instruments outside in the cold air gave it a dim sacred. To have any idea of the "spiritual", we have to ignore the bossy monotheisms and their threats and vengeance. The "religious" is nothing to do with power and authority. Stonehenge and yes the Medieval cathedrals were celebratory of this world, as was the nature respect of "Primitives" and the Red Indians.



"watercolour. 75 x 55 cms



watercolour. 75 x 55 cms



watercolour. 75 x 55 cms



watercolour. 75 x 55 cms

Treat the earth well.
It was loaned to you by your children.
We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors,
We borrow it from our children.

Ancient Indian proverb

"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**

"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

There we hear an awareness of humans within nature - integral with its cyclical life - the wonder of the earth - its vast variety and beauty - the privilege of existence within it - not the mere utilizing of it: our raw material. Wordsworth phrase, "getting and spending we lay waste our powers might be given a modern twist, "getting and spending we lay waste the earth". Maybe for me, painting landscapes has been a forlorn artistic substitute for what I don't have: it's been a forlorn "romanticism", though I have tried to make images of physical, exuberant response to what is out there; to make celebratory paintings.

Consider this medieval "remnant" in Shakespeare's Hamlet: Marcellus' explanation for the sudden disappearance of the ghost of Hamlet's father on the battlements of Elsinore at the opening of the play,

*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.*

You might say that Marcellus is describing a world that is shot through with the "sacred": it is a connected entirety. Shakespeare was a writer who was both an inheritor of this medieval "Catholic" view of the world, and also a first modern (along with Cervantes). Hamlet is with his introspection and doubt, typically modern. Thinking as Marcellus does, was to see the world as meaningful whereas the play's figure Hamlet doubts all. He and Horatio now only "in part believe it": that the world is meaningfully interconnected. You could say that those Red Indian sayings also reject the world of mere objects and unmagiced "matter". (The German sociologist Max Weber wrote of the modern world's "Entzauberung der Welt"- unmagicing) -much in the spirit of Horatio. Look by contrast at this, said by a contemporary of the Red Indians. 1887. John Oberly. US commission of Indian



detail of watercolour 90 x 95 cms



detail of 100 x 95 cms Acrylic



detail of 75 x 55 cms watercolour.



detail of 90 x 95 acrylic

Affairs. "The Indian must be motivated with the exalting egotism of the American Civilisation, so that he will say "I" instead of "we" and "this is mine" instead of "this is ours". That says it all!

So the monotheisms gave us God- eternal ruler with a special privileging plan for US! That God, all-KNOWING is an initial and fatal deformation of our relation to life - life as that omniscient force; not of a "God", but that which animates and directs all nature - as in those Red Indian sayings or as in Giordano Bruno who was burnt (1600) for it! Now (when perhaps it is too late), we begin to learn that our catastrophe will be part of that same Nature and that nature will teach the error of treating it as just raw material to our supposed needs. What the God-lawgiver idea gave humans was the idea of our privileged specialness and the presumption that our reason - like God's, was self evidently rational, "lawful"; yes, "God given". Thus the Catholic support for unlimited births as if you can't have too much of a good thing! Furthermore, the Monotheisms are arrow-like, forward directed, not cyclical within the "web of life". WE are going somewhere! To Paradise! The next world more important than this! Another monstrous distortion, for which some will even blow up innocent people to arrive at, as "reward": Paradise! Monotheism's idea of the end of time is a mental preparation for a finite extinction. Our endless "growth" is just

such an arrow-like, blind "forwardness": straight to extinction. Yes, "where did it all go wrong"! (but no one is at fault!). In becoming so powerful and so dominating of the earth, we have built a new habitat, and thus our sad "preparations" for Christmas always fail because "there is no room" left for it in our trashy man-made habitat and we feel false and hypocritical: there certainly is no space for Marcellus or religion - except as cover for political/ethnic solidarity. We have become the measure of all things and even in the face of the 6th extinction which threatens to out-do the Permian extinction, we are incapable of changing course simply because of the concrete fact of our "way of life"; and that is not just a mistake of a "mode of thought", ("materialism"), but of our massive inheritance of 10,000 years of "civilisation" as it is presumptuously called. It is a shirt of Nessus, a straight-jacket into which we are tied. We are prisoners of a massive past. It's nobody's fault! Humans through "culture" have amassed mistakes that become cumulative with multiple knock-on effects. Extinction its end game. Remembering Spinoza's idea of God in nature, immanent within the earth/universe, it is perhaps only in certain areas of science that there remains such a "religious" awe towards the universe. By everyday contrast, think just how our ubiquitous street lighting has blocked the stars, moon and darkness and thus denied us the experience of the night's vast





two details

otherness. In the accumulations of such dearth lies an explanation for why 25% of people will suffer depression at some time in their lives. So, other than as it were, the religious" moments of birth and death, our lives are conditioned by the plastic human world of supermarkets, entertainment, our useful machines, all our various screens, the dull triviality of 450,000 children betting on line, (in this country alone), our desperate dependence on alcohol and drugs, our time filling obesity, the enormous populations gobbling up the space of other species.

It is a paradox that should be better understood that it is the 3 monotheisms that have destroyed the "religious" and the "spiritual" and that the mocked Romantic movement was a desperate attempt to recapture what was disappearing or was already out of reach, but which in its desperation could lead Goethe to define the Romantic as the "ill": it was, but that was logically so. When we get caught in enormous traffic jams - all our metal boxes in lines, modern life does seem a special sort of enslavement. The mad deformity of it, and what difference is there if the metal box is electric: the form of life remains. "Nature" in its "invention" of predation (1-2 billion years ago) caused an infinite arms race of defence-attack which lead to a clever creature (us) who will turn out to have been "too clever by half"!!

Another paradox is that what the experimental scientist wonders at, because of nature's wonderful intricacy, the rest of us, rich in everything that science has invented for our ease and enjoyment, have become arrogant, as if all this was simply "ours" and "aren't we clever", and even though we personally may be ignorant, we still see ourselves as the God of "our" inventions. But as Blake wrote about his mythical figure of "Reason", Urizen, "He looked out from his cave and became what he beheld"! As illustration, Kurzweiler, a chief engineer with Apple, hopes (!) that soon we will become integrated with our inventions to make a new form of life that he calls the "singularity"! Then all my silly fears will be stilled like a babe's because being integrated, I shan't "know" what I've lost, and the vanished plaintive cuckoo and diving swift I shall call up on an app! But they'll have no meaning, no sacred other! Screens are our Aladdin's lamp! He rubbed, we scroll. Is "reality" now virtual? In fact, the monotheist idea of Paradise gives the game away. It's a ruler's con. It's a nasty system of punishment and reward; (and what parent does not know that a child is only "educated" by developing an internal, self-administered sense of right and wrong- and that, mostly through silent example!). Furthermore such a Paradise sets up a fatal dichotomy



two details



between a natural reality, and a "spiritual" nowhere land, in which are made to migrate all the "higher" values that should in fact enrich THIS here and now world. As illustration I have heard a religious person opine that the environment was only of secondary "earthly" value compared to the next life; a dualism not much better than that of terrorist Islam. Quite plain is the confusing use of the word spiritual. As Nietzsche once pointed out, we invent a word that can carry a set of actually quite tangled concepts and think that with that word we have sorted out a problem whereas often we have just lazily packed it away: still muddled! "Spiritual" is different to the German word "Geist" which has a larger, more inclusive range than our latinate "spirit" - often set dualistically against "matter". Geist, yes is used as with us in Heilige Geist, but also as intelligence and like our "high spirited",

but Geist also has something of consciousness, so that Zeitgeist, -"spirit of the times" might better translate as meaning "a way of being and thinking" in the times". Of course, a further reason for the inaccessibility of the "sacred" comes from our awareness that we have trashed the world with our detritus and that our ever expanding population is gobbling up the living space of other creatures. Even the once immeasurable oceans are now dustbins of plastic - with dead anoxified areas; not capable anymore to fulfil the "sacred" ascribed to them in this poem of Keats. "And watching..... Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite, The moving waters at their priestlike task Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,

The sacred was once simply the earth - not a schizophrenic separation of earth life from spirit life or worse still "after life". Christianity took over the "natural" religious celebrations of pagan mid winter and Spring, calling them Christmas and Easter. (Think also of those Red Indian "poems").

Maybe we respect religion too much when it is in fact a facet of consciousness. Religion is very language dependent in its monotheistic guise, using it to prove whatever words stretch to. Religions have an element of wishful thinking to them.

Perhaps early man found it hard to believe that a person now dead is not in some way still present. We wish fulfill! Through language we invent meanings, or also enforce meanings; giving to "imagination's airy nothings, a local habitation and a name".



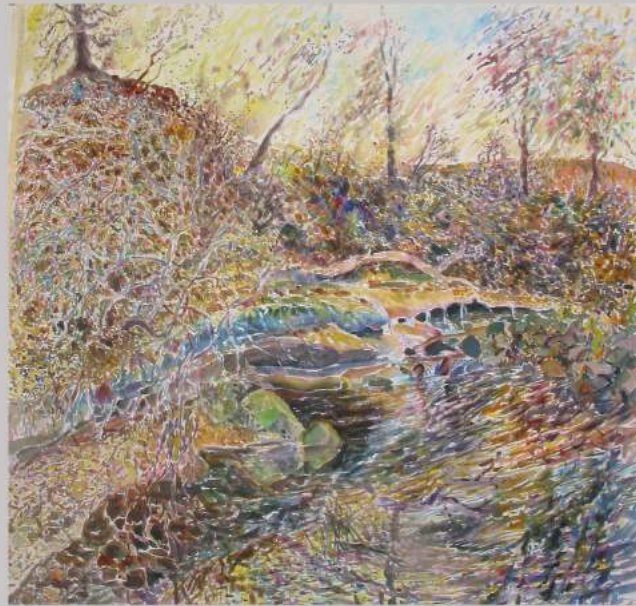


Language allows us with its words to prove many things. It is what Wittgenstein referred to as the bewitchment of language against which philosophy's job is to protect us. In a sense History is the tale of human social evolution - its forms and the changes of consciousness. Hegel was a philosopher who realised to the full how much history is not just a tale of deeds, events and famous men, but all that society invents and passes on to coming generations. Hegel realised that what we see as "concrete reality" is as much a congealed residue of past thought and invention so that, in a city, looking around us, in almost everything we see, lies "congealed spirit" -/consciousness; the product of human intelligence - So Zeitgeist - is that congealed intellectual residue of the past left in social or technical invention and which preconditions our "Geist". For that reason, Hegel thought of history as "rational" - not in the sense of being "right" but in the sense of an accumulating intelligence and human consciousness.

With our language and all that is derived from science we have made an alternative evolution. Various creatures pass on tricks to a next generation but mostly we call it instinct - steady "refinements" of natural evolution. From the first, humans through language and inventions escaped from natural evolution's slow trial and error, but if, - as they say, evolution's mutations require 25,000 years to prove their adaptive relevance, our present felt needs show many traces of the DNA of our hunter gatherer life that only ceased 10,000 years ago. Extraordinary! The biblical myth of the apple of

the tree of knowledge, wishes to show that although evolving knowledge has allowed us to escape from slow evolution, there is a price to pay for that escape from nature. We may think that we have freedom to choose, but we are also made to choose through the accumulation of past generations choices which condition our choices. History bites. So we feel a nameless nostalgia for some other form of life. But from the first, once humans made the change to agriculture, there could be no going back. The "trap snapped shut" as Harari put it. Religions clearly have the rationale of a cohesive "story" to strengthen socio political cohesion. (particularly evident in Islam). However ignoring that for a moment, religions allow humans to escape from being embedded within the cycle of generation and decay, and to imagine themselves as saved from time and to be ear-marked for an "end of time", for "eternal" time and judgement day; as special as that!

But as the 25% frequency of depression shows, as do all the substitutional resorts to time filling which modern culture furnishes, we feel homeless and estranged from the hunter gatherer being of only 10,000 year ago, which let us remember is a small time span in proportion to our 200,000+ year evolutionary history, and which lies, as it were beached in that ancient DNA which we still carry. I have pointed out that the German poet Goethe is notable for his life-long attempt to save the sacred which in Red Indian manner is to be found in the here and now: what Wordsworth movingly called "the common day".





"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".

Here is a poem that shows beautifully how
Goethe found the sacred without the bossy
intervention of "religion", but just within the
"common day".

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 went, not very willingly
As a tiny boy past the graveyard
To father's house, the vicarage, as stars upon stars
all were 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 shone in competition above me,
And I, going and coming, sucked in happiness
At midnight



Until at last 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

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 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 through a participation in nature's timelessness, and the sense of having been born into this extraordinary and wondrous world, 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, and time span, 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.





The sacred pertains to this world and its "common" things; not to some "Nobodaddy aloft" (as Blake called common 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 vastness of world and cosmos.

It seems that the awareness of time and the larger universe with its enormous distances, of "once and future worlds"; as Goethe puts it in another place, is the constant element in what we think is the sacred. The monotheisms could be said to have appropriated the sacred and made an easy, off the shelf, labelled version of mere assertion: "this is holy". Calling the life of Christ sacred hardly says anything more than "special". Sacred is just 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 in "The Prelude".

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.

.....Among those passages of life that give
Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how,
The mind is lord and master--outward sense
The obedient servant of her will. Such moments
Are scattered everywhere, taking their date
From our first childhood.

You could say that the poem *Um Mitternacht* is a good expression of Wordsworth's thought. 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.

This feeling is what I imagine the word sacred wants to signify. There is a pop song from the 60s by the Kinks, "Days" "Thank you for the days, those endless days, those sacred days you gave me..." is the refrain. They are days made sacred by their loss and distance but through which to quote Wordsworth, "our minds, are nourished and invisibly repaired.

Maybe primitive people made "sacred" certain places, "spots" in which their lives seemed anchored - places like Stonehenge or the burial places along the hill tops of strong protective leaders. After all, our lives pass by in a "blip "; or as Macbeth puts it, "on this bank and shoal of time", and we try desperately to save that life from oblivion by making certain moments or places, or effective leaders, "sacred". So though the sacred is something out there, it depends for





75 x 55 cms



its sacrality upon the anointments of memory, or ritual, which is form of social remembering, such as the annual remembrance day at the Cenotaph to the dead of two world wars: "sacred to the memory" as it is eloquently said, and accompanied by Elgar's Nimrod. I sense that Goethe's ordinary day was less ordinary than ours. Um Mitternacht presents a sacrality of the ordinary which we miss with our specialised "sacred". And in this ordinary sacred is held I think a parallel definition of poetry, as well as the sacred. Poetry is language used at its most compressed and effective. The painter, poet or musician give us the means to experience to the full (sacred?) significance of that moon and star filled night that we too know. Not as Wordsworth fatally did as nostalgia, (a later poem Peele castle "A power is gone which nothing can restore"), but instead within the actual experience of the world now. Here in the poem, "There is a low glare in the sky", by Alison Brackenbury is a fine example of meeting place of poetry. common day, love and the sacred. Here the word seems, appropriate because the life, although described in some way as failed and narrow, has been respected and has been lived wakefully, bravely.

There is a low glare in the sky
sweeps to a rainy night.
The planet's wrong, the house unsold,
and, after thirty years, you write.

My cycle coat blows on the line.
The old cat paws the door.
I tell you I am badger grey,
but wiser than before.

I do not tell you that I cried
since it was not for you
but for a child, since they break hearts
as no mere man can do.

But now my child is married,
the ones who fought me, dead,
and I am moved by your hands' grace
beside my clumsy head

although I cannot see you
and will not again.
My yellow coat flies like a flag.
The long night turns to rain.

Such a modest poem but fusing time, world and individual. Time and that "bank and shoal of time", but seen in the light of the ordinary or what Goethe defined as the subject of his poetry "Gelegenheits gedichte" - of the moment - "My yellow coat flies like a flag. The long night turns to rain".

Goethe was dismissive of many of Germany's romantic poets. One of Eichendorfs's favourite phrases was his invitation to think, "als ob", "as if" which seemed an open invitation to self-delusion and similarly Novalis said that since reality had such a hostile aspect, poets should

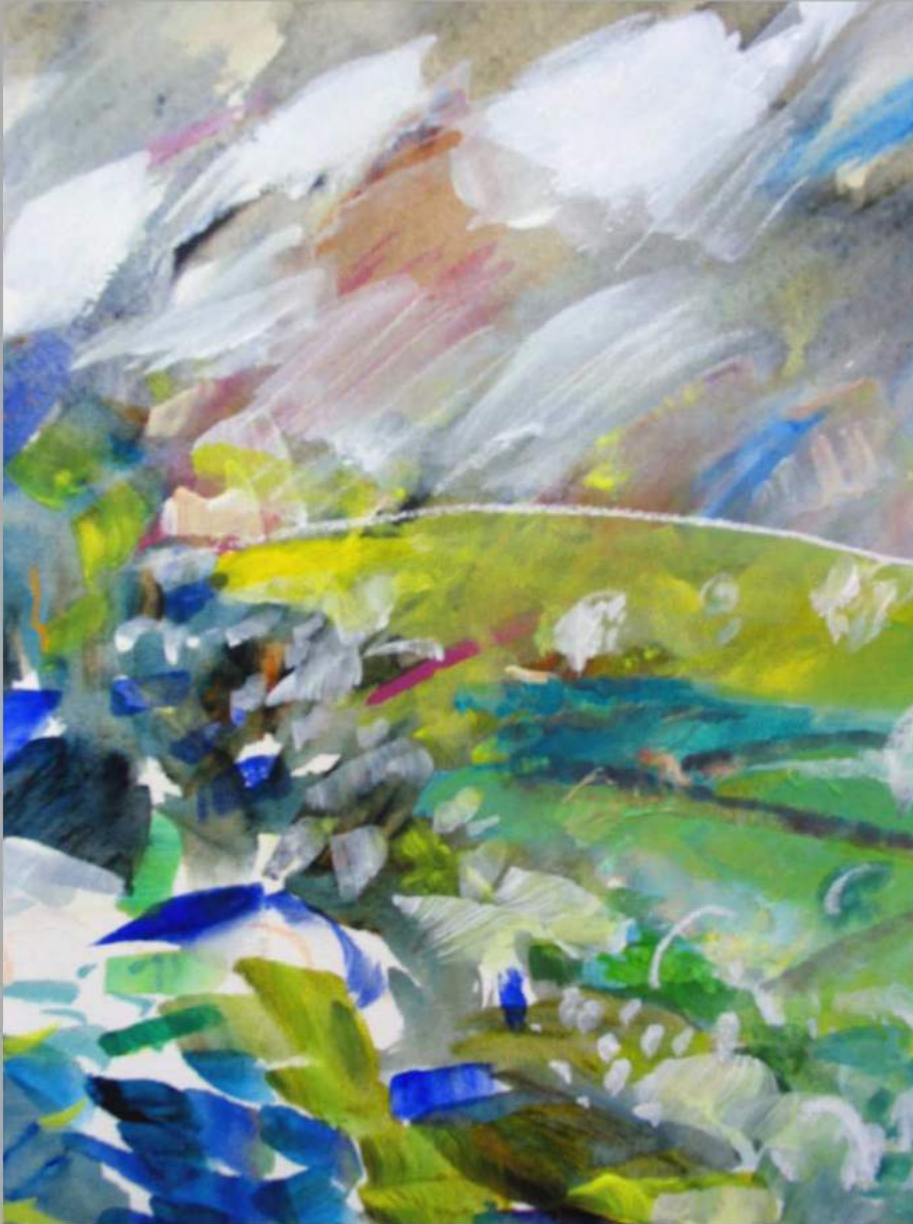


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"romantizieren es". But "romanticize"! is s clearly delusional. That is precisely what Goethe, though clearly personally involved in the "Young Werther's" troubles, criticises and shows the inevitable outcome in disappointed suicide. By contrast Goethe finds the sacred that the romantics were also searching for, in this modest poem Um Mitternacht -within the given of natural life - not fleeing from it into delusions that can never hold the line.

In recent days they have reported on a 5000 year old black oak found preserved in the Norfolk Fens and which will be made into a 14 metre table exhibited in Ely Cathedral. An oak that grew before there was a single house standing in England! That size, that age, that so differing habitat of hunter gatherers. The mind reels. It is often the things of non-human nature that give us the feeling of the scared briefly recovered. We feel imprisoned in our purely human habitat: our plastic, concrete trash, and our fearful over population, pushing out other creatures who once were of our company. To illustrate this, imagine that inevitable, future spring when no swallows return. Dead and gone. Extinct. One feels extinguished at the thought. Painting landscape outside: I had a vague hope that the painting would include that intuited "something more". A landscape, whether succeeding or not, should always presume to reveal a sacred "other". This is also what a good poem does. (those two poems above). What we recognise as our familiar experience is connected and bound by the poet into all that which makes our lives seem better anchored

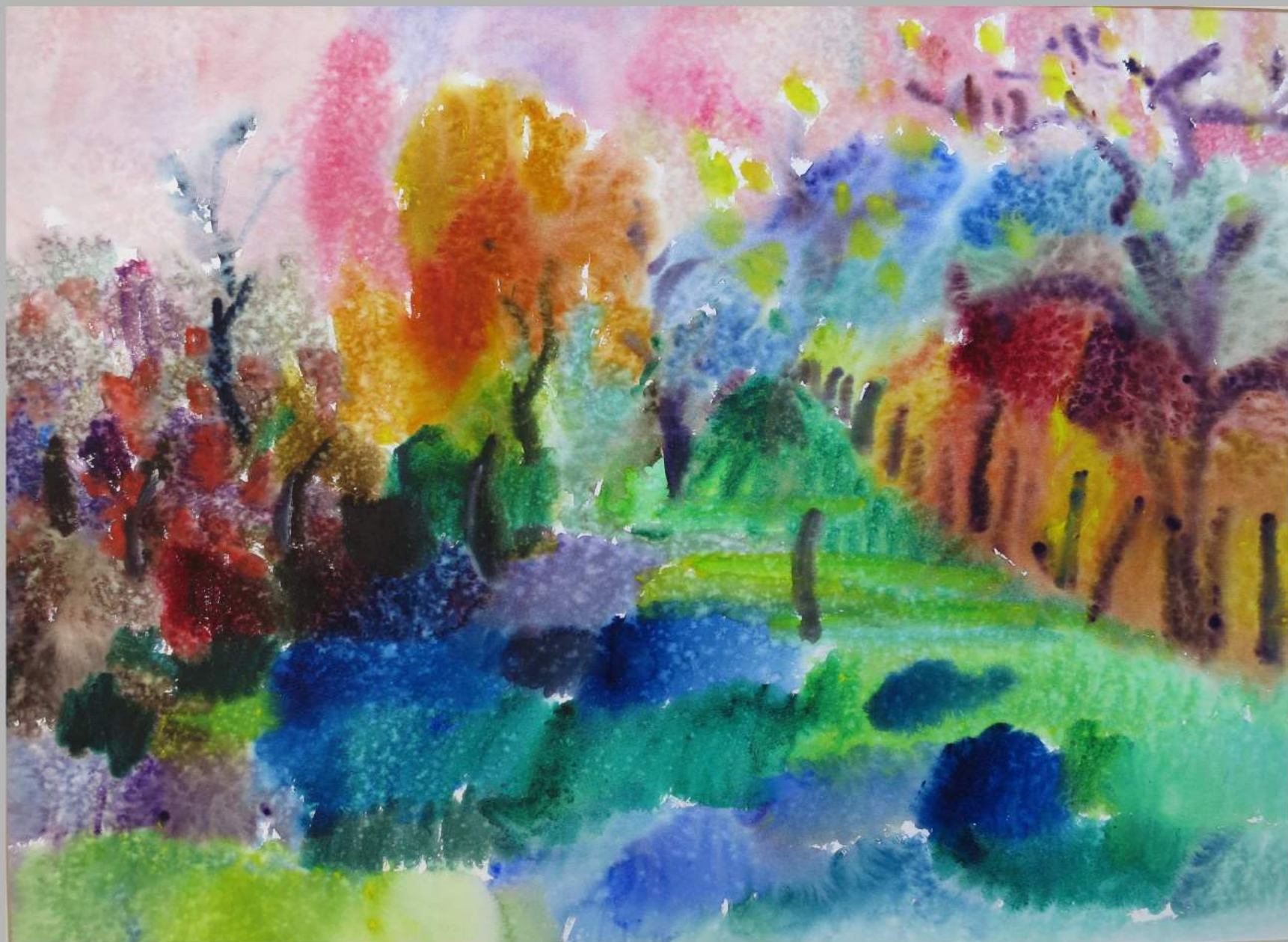


and comprehended; and also to all we've vaguely thought or vaguely felt. So even in *The Raincoat*, though it has a melancholy realism about a "failed" life, yet it still seems, "to say it all". In *Um Mitternacht*, it is the more immediately "poetic" night sky that is sacred in its so distant otherness, and which seems to "say it all".

Here are the often quoted lines of the *Tempest* which sound so realist, though the context is so benevolent - a show put on for the two young to-be-weds. In a book by Peter Brannen, *The ends of the world*- New York. Harper, 2017. Collins, he points out how humans will leave little trace in the future geological strata. All our imaginings, our arts, our religions, our knowledges, our wars, our forms of social living, our little lives lived within that human arena and also within the ungraspable universe: All this, he says will in fact leave few traces in the strata of future geological time. Our "insubstantial pageant faded", will "leave not a rack behind". How gently admonishing of pride that is!

"Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep". The *Tempest*,









After all the facts in Wallace Wells' book, "**The uninhabitable earth**", and the Red Indian quotations, you look at our present mass society, its plastic detritus and how we live, and what we live for, and you wonder; did humans trash the world just to get to this: again, that quote from 2012: "**Journal of Affective Disorders**".

"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".

- Our ingrown frustrations that need an "entertainment industry", TV and "screens" to block boredom, our aggression and wars that require endless destructive armaments, the Gadarene migrations of air travel and "cruise" tourism, our self-obsessed, self-righteous "religions", with their presumptuous promises of "Paradise" - (except for the disobedient sinners and "infidels"): and all to give us this polluted unhappy human world, where WHO reports (world health organisation), that people in wealthy countries suffer depression 8 times more than those in poor countries. Nice contrast that the Kalahari Bushmen only needed to "work" 12 hours a week. Everything was shared equitably. No doubt the selfish were eliminated or starved! No irresponsible banks to save!





There are climate statistics that make the paintings and comments in these three books absurdly irrelevant. A different world will arrive, and then "nature" will no longer be that which - (in that quote from Adorno that I have used several times): ... "once was thought in some way to "speak" to us, and which is now only conserved through the metaphorical and encrypted images of art....". That connection will be irrelevant, for our

relationship with "nature" will be with the bare, pitiless facts of cosmic chemistry. (What happened to the water on Mars?). What makes Venus uninhabitable?) Some foresee a "runaway Venus effect" here. That would be the pitiless reply of cosmic "nature" to our presumptions of human uniqueness and hopes of "eternal life"! The following are taken from Wallace Wells's book: "The uninhabitable planet".



1. In the Kyoto Protocol: world leaders' made an "agreement": BUT in 20 years since, we have made more CO2 emissions than in the previous 20 years.
2. United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: if we institute immediately all the "Paris Accords" (nowhere yet implemented) we will arrive at 3.2 degrees of warming. (the tipping point for collapse of ice sheets is 2 degrees!) If we stopped

- at 2 degrees increase, we then arrive at 500 parts CO2 per million - cf 300 parts in 1800. Yet a President can say that "Global warming is fake news"!! (Only if you can ignore the properties of CO2, and the past CO2 information trapped in ice cores).
3. At 3 degrees the south of Europe will be in permanent drought.
4. United Nations foresees at present rate, 4.5 degrees of





warming. (Don't forget that the much desired "economic growth" and "increased GDP" involve warming!)

5. A warming planet will (is already) melting Arctic permafrost which contains 1.8 trillion tons of carbon:), which is more than twice as much as is now in the atmosphere! (except that permafrost also contains methane = 34 x more powerful). *NASA 24/6/2013 "Is arctic permafrost the sleeping giant"?*

6. According to WWF, in the last 40 years, vertebrate animals have halved in numbers, and in just 25 years, in one German study of nature reserves (and they must be well treated!), the flying insect population has fallen by 3/4. (<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0185809>.) - with its effect on pollination. (In America bees are commercially lorried in to pollinate! "Nature" turned into business: see John Oberly 1887. - opposite page). Soil erosion. 75 billion tons of soil lost each year. USA loses x 10 topsoil as is made. India/China lose fertile top soil X 40 as in USA. All this is unrepairable.

7. In a paper of 2018; in "Journal Nature Climate Change", a team with Drew Shindell tried to quantify "suffering" at 1.5 degrees - only! - If it were instead 2 degrees, the result would be 150.000,000 extra deaths from air pollution (and who thinks 1.5 degrees realistic?). Even heading for 1.5, there now are 7 million deaths a year from pollution - a "Holocaust" each year!. UN projection. Climate migrants by 2050 - 1,000,000,000?

8. The five warmest European summers since 1500 AD, have all occurred since 2002.

9. In Saudi Arabia in the summer, 700,000 barrels of oil are burnt daily, mostly to power the air-conditioners.

10. Globally, since 2000, coal power has nearly doubled in use. (www.carbonbrief.org/mapped-worlds-coal-power-plants (year 2000 = 1.061 million megawatts, year 2017 = 1996 million megawatts)

11. UN calculates that by 2050, increased world population, (cheerfully encouraged by arrogant monotheisms) will require twice as much food - but as CO2 rises, food loses nutritional

value. 2018. A team led by Chunwu Zhu looked at 18 strains of rice (the staple of 2 billion people) and found declines of protein content, iron, zinc, and vitamins B1, B2, B5 and B9.

12. The spiral of - CO2 - warming - forest fires - CO2 - more warming - more fires. - 12% carbon emissions come from deforestation. 25% from forest fires. Of the world's forests, the Amazon absorbs a ¼ of the total world forest CO2 absorption. Bolsonaro won an election proposing deforestation of the Amazon! Such short sighted ignorance is colossal. In 1997 peatlands fires in Indonesia released 2.6 trillion tons of carbon(=40% of average annual world release EXTRA!)

13. At + 3 degrees USA could be facing **x 16 more wild fires**. Now 10,000,000 acres are burnt each year.

14. Acquifers - deep earth reserves of water are being used up to cover present shortages. That has a time limit!

15. Lake Mead that supplies waterless Las Vegas, has lost 400,000,000,000 gallons in a year

16. Lake Chad has evaporated.

17. The Oceans suffer from ever larger- "anoxification". No oxygen, so no life; "dead zones" as they are called. In 50 years there are now x 4 globally. (= size of Europe) (Warm water holds less oxygen + effect of pollution and CO2). Oceans have absorbed huge extra quantities of CO2 from atmosphere - to our benefit - for a time, but that also causes acidification of the oceans, so less fish.

What a short list taken from **Wallace Well's** book! He makes this observation, which a mere "landscape painter" finds annihilating. He writes:

"One legacy of the environmentalist creed, which long prized the natural world as an otherworldly retreat, is that we see its degradation as a sequestered story, unfolding separately from our lives, so that the degradation acquires the comfortable contours of parable, like pages from Aesop, aestheticized even when we know the losses as tragic".

We may seek to recover, as it were, a Red Indian



connectedness to the earth; but in the present context, that remains a merely pretty "thought", because our "way of life" is foreclosing of any alternative: we are caught in a trap of "growth" and a mind-set conditioned by our present artificial habitat with its built in, "normal", and from that we have spun a "web of life"!

"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**
But our "way of life" is unable to share that joined-up thinking. As with Adam's Paradise - there is no going back.

We will "understand" only when our web of Anthropocene CO2 destroys us!
"When all the trees have been cut down,
When all the animals have been hunted,
When all the waters are polluted,
When all the air is unsafe to breath,
Only then will you discover you cannot eat money". **Cree prophecy**

Maybe the lines of Wordsworth: "Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers", needs to be refashioned: "Getting and spending we lay waste the earth" - as the Red Indians suspected, and in that context it is worth remembering for its iron "logic". Here is a different logic in the words of **John Oberly**:

1884- US commission of Indian Affairs. "The Indian must be motivated with the exalting egotism of the American Civilisation, so that he will say "I" instead of "we" and "this is mine" instead of "this is ours".

Against such a background, is art just a feeble delusion - too late and weak to change that "way of life", and instead, offering an alibi of "understanding", or solipsistic "love": just an aesthetic solace?
Delusion.



