

## **Ideas, Memories and Dreams: Landscape and Still Life**

### **The Brattleboro Dulcimer**

A few years ago I paid a visit to my old school friend who now lives in Sunderland, Massachusetts. She'd not been well, and neither had I, so we combined our efforts for a week or so to put up her hay shelter, which had blown down in a storm. While I was there, we had a day out; and went to Brattleboro and in the music shop there was this beautiful dulcimer.

Years later the dulcimer models for a still life. It's a lovely instrument with a uniquely plaintive voice. I can play a few tunes and songs on it, including 'Come My Way' by Vaughan Williams, and 'Bells of Norwich' by Sydney Carter.

The jug and the pot were made by me, a very long time ago.

### **Swan Dreams of the Water**

A fellow artist has this graceful vintage cast metal swan for his garden. Here the swan is accompanied for still life purposes by a small solid squash. The squash has no dreams – it has a happy vegetable existence, and appears to be trying to anchor the swan to its landlocked life. But the swan is dreaming of the swirling, tumultuous water and the freedom of the lakes and rivers.

### **'I remembered we had this green demijohn in the air raid shelter'**

Always the search for still life ... we still store things in the little room my grandfather built under the garage, though there has never been an air raid. My friend gave me the green demijohn, once owned by her father, a keen winemaker. Echoes of other days. I make apple wine every year.

### **Swan Looks to the Sky**

Here the swan, surrounded by leaves and fruit, is looking to the heavens, where a wing-beat might carry it, high into the air. It reminds me of a book *The Lord of the Rushie River* which I had when I was a child – 'Swan! swan! take me to the Rushiebanks!'

### **The Morris Hat**

In artist Geoffrey Harcourt's hallway, when I visited his artweeks exhibition last year, was this lovely chair, and a selection of his hats. My own morris hat joins some of them for this still life. Hanging on the wall is his beautiful painting: *The Bridge at Gweek*.

I have been a morris dancer since 2003. It's necessary to have a straw hat decorated with flowers. So this painting carries memories of May Day in Oxford, the hush in the Botanic Gardens before the choir begins to sing on Magdalen tower, the mayhem in the streets afterwards, trying to dance when you can hardly hear the music for the loud six bells at St Mary's. And the hat in this painting is resting on the chair knob, gathering its energy for next May Day.

### **Lanterns**

The dark days of winter ... the fruits shine like lamps and the chinese lanterns add to the effect of luminous festival lights ...

Pete found the nice little wooden tray in an antique shop in Winchester.

### **Weather Over the Shiants**

This picture has a poem to go with it. Shiants is pronounced Shants. The islands are between Harris and the north end of Skye. It means holy, bewitched, otherworldly, haunted.

This poem's for Pete: an organiser of inspiring holidays. We sat in the café at Grinneabhat on a wild wet day, Gaelic voices around us, excellent cake, and I wrote this on a paper napkin.

#### **'The Shiants'**

The cloud lifts. And dark on a grey sea  
are islands, distant, holy, haunted islands  
showing as silhouettes, as gradually  
the cloud lifts. And dark on a grey sea  
shadows race the wind, and suddenly  
sunlight unloads blessings on the high lands  
as cloud lifts. And bright on a dark sea  
are islands, shining, holy, haunting islands.

### **Calanais**

#### **Standing Stones, Calanais**

#### **Imbolc Calanais**

We often go to the Hebrides in February. Imbolc is the Celtic festival of fire and light, and in many Pagan traditions celebrates the Celtic hearth goddess Brigid. It marks the midpoint between winter and spring. This is a festival of purification, a festival of light and fertility, and new beginnings.

#### **North Light, Seilebost, Harris**

On these beaches the wild wind, bright sunlight, the flying cloud, all invoked the spontaneity of island weather in the vast skies and crystal clear air. Wonders unfold every minute.

**Eilean Glas**

We went to Scalpay to look for the Shiant Islands - this was my first glimpse of them. The lighthouse was begun in 1789 by Thomas Smith, the stepfather of the Lighthouse Stevenson dynasty. The present tower was built by Robert Stevenson in 1824. I love a lighthouse. Read 'The Lighthouse Stevensons' by Bella Bathurst. Great stuff.

**Ding Dong Mine**

About two miles north-east of the road between St Just and Penzance lies Ding Dong mine. It is not known when the tin mine began to be worked. In 1714 three separate mines were operating: Good Fortune, Wheal Malkin and Hard Shafts Bounds. It was finally abandoned in 1915 and it's now part of the Cornwall Mining World Heritage Site. West Penwith is another rare, spare, windswept landscape.