

Ideas, Memories and Inspiration: Landscape and Still Life

'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

A fellow artist has this graceful vintage cast metal swan for his garden. 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 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.

Gallox Bridge, Dunster

Dunster is a favourite place of ours for walking in the Quantocks and surrounding areas. At Gallox Bridge there is a medieval packhorse bridge and a ford; a picturesque and an atmospheric place. In the Middle Ages Dunster flourished as a market and port for wool, fleeces being brought down from the moor to be sold there. Many of them were carried by packhorse across the river Avill via Gallox Bridge, originally the main route into Dunster from the south.

This painting is early in the day, but the fire is already lit in the cottage ... here is a poem from the end of that day:

'Dunster, Late November'

Wood smoke rises
dusk descends
the village draws its winter curtains
as the day's end
fades to night
the week before the Candlelight.

In the first weekend in December, when Dunster by Candlelight takes place, the little town is beautifully decorated with candles but also crowded with people!

Plenty of Potential, Tiree

Early this year we went to the island of Tiree. This is a beautiful little island, where the inhabitants have renovated and updated many of their 'black' houses, very old houses made of thick stone walls, which would originally have had thatched roofs. On other islands black houses tend to be either museums or heaps of stones; on Tiree they are cheerful and charming residences. However, Tiree still has its share of empty houses awaiting loving renovation. This is not a 'black house' but a house of a later date; just now it is sad but hopeful ...