

A2 personal study

Understanding a Place by Journeying Through It

Cornish air is saturated with mist resting on the damp earth, a common sign the 'dreary truth of autumn' has arrived. Walking through this place, the crunch of the fresh grass and withered leaves harmonises with the prevalent trickle of the river. As the gaze rises from the ground, the unassuming 'soft treachery under foot' (Clarke, J.), a wall of dense vegetation is instantly confronting. The leaves' embroidered detail overwhelms the eyes, prompting them to dart away to investigate other facets of the landscape. Yet it is the intangible elements of a place that provoke an emotional response.

Enveloped in the atmosphere of the river Fal, the weather's mood changes drastically. It is often the weather that has the biggest influence on the mood of the river. It has the power to control all aspects of a place, stirring up the water and the clouds, sculpting the landscape to orchestrate a reaction from any that attempt to venture into/along it.

Arguably the only way to fully understand a place is to explore it, giving rise to the question how do artists explore a place? A landscape is comprised of infinite features and can consequently be explored in many ways. Standing in a natural landscape, different elements are of variable significance to each person.

Only when an individual has considered all the facets of a place, are they able to form an accurate response. Therefore, the more an artist explores a landscape, the more accurate their interpretation of it likely to be, resulting in a better reflection on that place through their artwork is. Exploring the length of the river Fal can give a great insight into its character.

One method many artists have used to explore a place, like the river Fal, is by journeying through it. A journey can be defined as many things; the physical traveling from one place to another; a course/ area suitable for travelling/ a period of travel and a passage or process from one stage to another. The journeys of artists like Kurt Jackson are arguably all of these things. He embarks on a physical journey from one place to another, to understand and interpret the landscape. It is only once an individual has journeyed through a place and explored it fully, as artists have done for centuries, that they are able to understand and reflect on their interactions and experiences with a place.



"As part of my working practice I've completed many projects about rivers in this country, Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas. To follow a river from its source as it grows and changes, erodes and meanders, evolving itself and the land; this is not just a journey, getting to know the river itself, but is also about discovering and understanding the host country, the history, people, culture and wildlife. The river becomes a metaphor for life itself. This exhibition is a diverse selection, a retrospective of paintings and other works representing those different rivers from the past three decades."

- Kurt Jackson 2014

Hannah Woodman is a Cornish artist who aims to capture the movement in a place. Woodman's work is based around the Devon and Cornish coast. She describes how trying to capture (the Cornish coast) on canvas is an endlessly exciting challenge (Woodman, H.). Benington describes Woodman's work as occupying the borderline territory between realism and abstraction. Woodman often focuses on the intangible elements of a place, exploring light, colour and the impacts of weather.

'When you stand and watch a weather front approaching over the seas and see how the light changes the colours and mood so rapidly it is a thrilling engagement with your surrounding'

-Hannah Woodman



Unconventionally, Woodman paints the mid- tones first, building up the dark and light areas to increase the tonal contrast, generating more drama within the landscape. Layering plays a key part in Woodman's work in order to create depth. Woodman also drags paint down the page with palette knives and large paint brushes. Some could be viewed as showing landscape over time, like a long exposure photo. This evidences the extent to which she has explored these areas. Furthermore, by minimising the detail within the paintings, Woodman can control and dictate what elements of the landscape the viewer sees and focuses on. It could be said that this is woodman's biggest tool in creating a landscape.

Artists that explore journeys illustrate their findings in a plethora of ways. Sir Richard Long focuses his work within the environment he is travelling in. By moving/ adjusting elements of a landscape, for example moving a rock from one place to another, Long has had a physical impact on that place.



This physical change could be viewed as a reflection of the landscape's emotional impact on him. Another way in which artists have historically manifested their experience of a place is through painting.

One key advancement in recording a place through painting is the romanticist movement in the late 18th/ early 19th century. Turner and Constable were two pioneers in this movement. Their ongoing competition as artists resulted in great advancements in the way their landscapes were conveyed.

Constable was an English artist, who spent most of his career exploring the landscape around him in the English countryside. Through his work, Constable 'measured the moods of nature'. To achieve this, he studied his local environment at a much deeper level. To convey his perspective of the landscape, Constable worked to understand its scientific properties, with a keen interest in meteorology.



Technological advancements have furthered the extent to which artists can explore meteorology and how artists are able to study clouds. Looking from above, clouds rest upon the sky's intangible surface laid like gentle waves, frozen in time. Momentary cracks within the surface reveal the seemingly infinite blue expanse below. Clouds can encapsulate a landscape or completely liberate it.

J.M.W Turner was also an English artist, working predominately as a painter. Turner travelled further afield than Constable, making many journeys across the country, some to Cornwall. He also travelled within Europe whilst there was a cease fire in the war (Battle of Trafalgar). Whilst all of Turner's work is recognisable due to its distinct, loose, oil washes and palette, unusual within that period, there is a great deal of variation within his work and styles. This evidences the continual influence of a place on Turner.

Turner was famous for his reformed land and seascapes. A distinctive feature throughout Turner's work is his lack of detail. Turner defines a place through the atmosphere and weather surrounding it. This can be seen within his studies of Falmouth. Like Hannah Woodman, he was drawn to the 'drama and expanse of the place' (Woodman, H.).

Common for the romanticist period, Turner often uses a versatile gold-like tone for the sky and land. Dramatic oil washes build the sky from the light horizon in the distance, to damning greys confronting the viewer as the clouds draw closer.

Within this collection, there is often an integration of land and sky, Turner shows the interaction of these features through overlapping paint and reflecting glimpses of the sky's colour in the land and water and vice versa. Turner's collection conveys the evolving relationship between the sea and sky. They can either be opposing forces battling each other or work together to create a harmonious setting. They reflect each-other's emotions with an equal force.

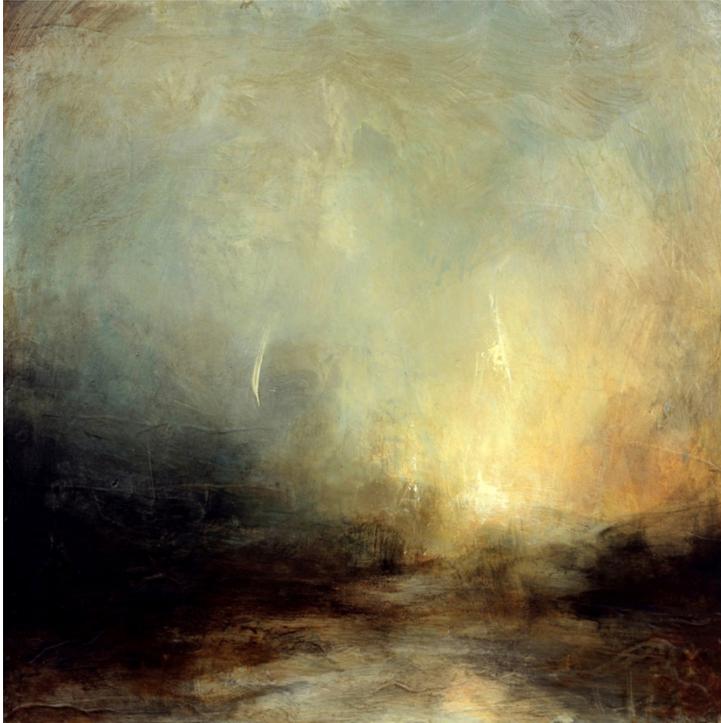


Like Constable, Turner often finishes the painting with cream/ yellow highlights, occasionally breaking mould and layering thicker paint to accentuate the light. This illustrates how Constable and Turner viewed light as a key part in forming a place and a viewer's reaction to a place.

Lacking the ability to fit the 'infinite landscape into the confines of a canvas' (Woodman, H.), artists like Hannah Woodman are forced to interpret a place and recreate a version of it from distinctive features to them. This is often done through abstraction. Abstraction isn't about seeing a place from one viewpoint; it is about seeing it from every viewpoint and taking what you want from it (Meads, D.). It is increasingly interesting to see how artists manifest their reflection of a place through their work.

A landscape is comprised of a number of key elements all interacting with each other to create a sense of place. Instantly, colour has the biggest impact on an individual, triggering their 'fight or flight' mode. Colour is ingrained in the mind as an instinctive symbol of how safe something is. For example, many would view red as danger. Interestingly, it is the combination of colours that people sub-consciously respond to depending on their personal experiences, knowledge of a place and instinctive nature. Many artists such as Amy Albright use this to prompt a certain response from the viewer. These responses can be exaggerated through the use of temperature. Artists, such as Kerr Ashmore, use a warm palette to mellow the atmosphere within the painting, bringing warmth into the landscape. This technique is often manipulated depending on the artist's style or their subject.

Kerr Ashmore is an abstract artist that focuses on the atmosphere and air quality of a place. Using earth tones and confident oil washes, encapsulating the landscape, Ashmore gradually builds tone and depth within a place.



Interestingly, Ashmore places very minimal detail in the landscape. The land is usually a simple shape, allowing the sky to dominate the painting. Unconventionally, Ashmore typically uses a square canvas. This creates more excitement and balance within the painting, moving further away from classical landscapes. It also suits Ashmore's style of oil washes encompassing the piece as it reduces the amount of negative space.

Another element of a place that both influences and is influenced by temperature is clouds and the weather. Constable explores this extensively throughout his work. Clouds dictate the movement throughout the landscape, shadows, wind and light. Therefore, by utilizing the cloud, the artist can alter/emphasize aspects of the place.

More modern artists, such as Amy Albright, are continually developing and exploring how they convey and personify a place. Albright could be described as a minimalistic painter, taking only a couple of elements from a place and then developing them, rebuilding a new vision of a place centuries old. 'Her paintings communicate an intimate view of the intangible and ambiguous in nature' (Albright, A.). Like Turner and Constable, Albright visually explores a place through sketches and then paints from memory in the studio, with an emotional as opposed to literal focus. Where Albright's work differs from that of Turner and Constable begins in her sketches. Using paints, she interprets an element of a place, like a tangled strand of seaweed or bubble floating to the surface of the water.



The sketches are usually created using oil washes or watercolours in a fluid nature with occasional pieces of detail, if the subject requires it. The colour palette that she uses consistently reflects her coastal and rural journeys with predominantly blues, greens, whites and earthy tones. It is a complete

journey and variety of sketches that influence Albright's artistic response to a place. By using abstraction and contemporary art, she is not confined to any single image/place? But can intertwine these places to present a final piece/ series of pieces illustrating not only the place but also her journey through it.



Albright uses numerous oil washes and stripping back to reveal different aspects of her journeys within a place. This gives the viewer an understanding of a landscape that goes beyond a photo. Albright doesn't show a place through a cornucopia of detail but rather explains it through different colours and techniques.

As these artists have discovered and illustrated, it is only through journeying through a place that it can be truly understood.

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