

blister on my east foot

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introduction

blister on my east foot is a collection of texts arranged in the form of a glossary. The texts are a combination of notations on place, walking and studio work, quotations and short essays on important references in my practice. Three short essays form the core of the collection: on Roni Horn's *Library of Water*, on Robert Smithson's film on *Spiral Jetty* and on my relationship with painting. The texts as a whole revolve around notions of landscape, particularly focused on thoughts around walking, memory, body, time and language.

My practice focuses on how we encounter place through our senses, memories and imagination. I am interested in the physical and the imaginative experience of landscape, and in the bodily experience of moving through and being within a place. When walking alone in the landscape, time becomes stretched, and our focus shifts between the very physical and the abstract. Walking allows the mind to slow down to the pace of your feet, and to wander as freely as the body does. The relationship between the body's movements and thoughts becomes more fluid. Connections are made between geography, body and time; walking is a way of understanding place.

Painting's relationship with place and the physicality of the painting process are key to my practice. Experimentations with colour, abstraction and spatial depth are a constant preoccupation of mine. A painting creates a space of its own as well as being a depiction of a place. I enjoy creating spaces that hover between representation and abstraction; that refer to a place that is both real and imaginary. Throughout the masters I have been developing a body of work which centres on these relationships between physical experience, observa-

tion, imagination and memory. I have been building up a series of small scale paintings, painted from memory; although they reference real places and walks, the paintings are rooted in imagination. They play with abstraction, also making connections between the physical act of painting and the physical experience of place.

Parallel to painting I have been working with collecting and with exploring the use of natural pigments. The process involves collecting an object when walking (for example moss, rock or earth), from which I make a pigment; I then use this pigment as a drawing material, in the form of pastels or dyes, or as a sculptural object in itself. I am fascinated by mapping, recording, marking; tracing the shape of a walk. Alongside this I have been documenting the walks with text. These ongoing bodies of work have been shown as installations, bringing together paintings, objects, text and drawings to evoke a sense of place, solitude and the bodily experience of walking.

The notes I make when walking, marking time, cardinal direction and observations, are a way of both recording an experience and of heightening my own awareness when out in the landscape. Whilst I find it difficult to make visual work on site, writing feels very natural. The notes become both factual and imaginative recordings: as Kenneth White states in *The Blue Road*, somewhere between “the calculable and the incalculable”. When read they have a slowness and a steady rhythm that reflect the act of walking.

I often make notes when working in the studio, particularly when painting. Painting can become a very abstract process at times and writing can feel like a way to clarify thoughts and trace how a painting slowly evolves. Over the course of the masters my practice has expanded from being almost solely

focused on painting to encompass object-based work, installation and text. Whilst writing regularly has been an important way for me to bring these elements together and to understand the changes in my practice more fully, writing has also become material in itself.

Interspersed throughout the collection are quotations and references from sources ranging from visual artists to radio to literature. They have all informed my practice and my thinking and have a strong relation with my current body of work. In this text I will look at the notion of place as an idea and a state of mind through Glenn Gould’s *The Idea of North*. This interest in the plural subjectivity of place is reflected in my own way of writing: in the texts I often oscillate between ‘I’, ‘you’ and ‘we’. Throughout the collection are also scatterings of landscape words taken from Robert Macfarlane’s *Landmarks*, a book which acts as both a walking narrative and expansive glossary, in which Macfarlane explores how our sense of place is formed through language. The locality of language and its relationship with landscape is a strong interest of mine. The words listed by Macfarlane are incredibly precise and poetic, and in their clarity say so much about observation and our changing relationship with place over time.

I recently saw Robert Smison’s film on *Spiral Jetty* in its entirety and will examine the piece and the questions it raises for me concerning landscape, memory, time and narrative through the very visceral experience and memory of watching it. Roni Horn has been my most important reference over the past few years, particularly since I visited her *Library of Water* in Iceland in 2014. There is a directness and clarity in both her visual work and her writing that I admire. I am fascinated by her relationship with place, particularly in her deep and long standing attachment to Iceland. Although it is visu-

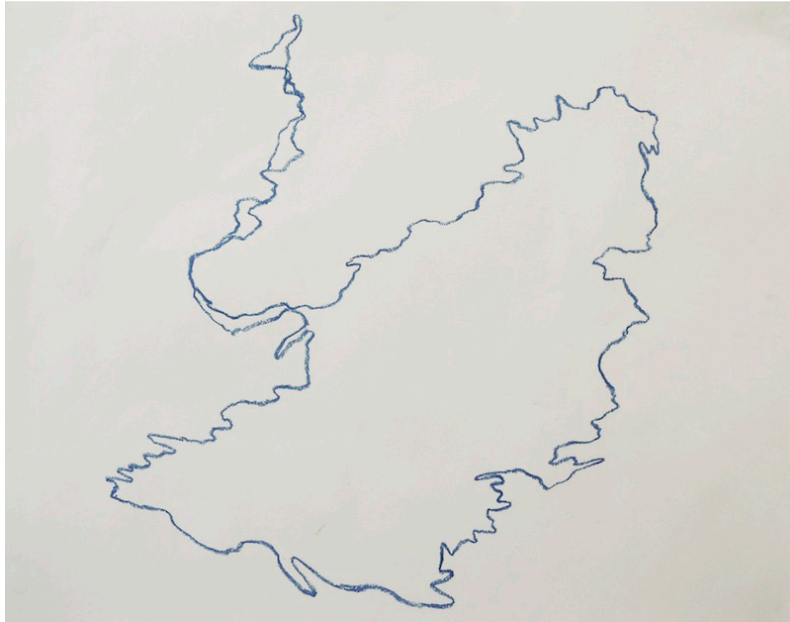
ally very different from my own, her work and her writing highlight many questions in my own practice. Horn often addresses what it means to be present, 'here', in a place; the struggle for that clarity of experience, and of how the 'here' is defined by so many external and internal factors. It is a question that I come back to frequently in my own work.

The glossary format of the following collection is in reference to the catalogue, *Roni Horn aka Roni Horn*, that she assembled for her 2009 Tate Modern show. Unlike a linear format, the glossary reflects both my working method and key ideas in my practice concerning collecting, navigation and language. The texts are small fragments, both made and collected; you have to navigate between them and their different fields as you do in my visual work between the paintings, objects and texts. This act of navigating, and the spaces that are created between, are important. They allow an active engagement with both the texts and the works; a sense of creating your own thought space and finding your own path.

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see **maps** and **fog**

arctic

“How do people imagine the landscapes they find themselves in? How does the land shape the imaginations of the people who dwell in it? How does desire itself, the desire to comprehend, shape knowledge?”

Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*

arctic (2) see **pink** and **pink (2)**

blue

10.36 S blue frozen lake blue sky

10.39 S three rocks reflected

10.48 SE distant ice fall

11.24 N lichen landscape

the blue road

“But what’s a ‘blue road’ I hear someone asking.

Maybe the blue road is that passage North, among the blues of silent Labrador.

Maybe the idea is to go as far as possible - to the end of yourself - till you get into a territory where time turns into space, where things appear in all their nakedness and the wind blows anonymously.

Maybe.

Anyway, I wanted to get out there, up there, and see.”

Kenneth White, *The Blue Road*

body see **library of water**

collecting

“Collecting tightens down sight.”

Roni Horn, *A Hot Water Map*

didder

of a bog: to quiver as a walker approaches (East Anglia)

east foot

looking north, blister on
 my east foot
 I watch as the orange line escapes
 into a circle of
 light on the ground
 pools, seeps and then disappears
 I re-grind the pigment and follow these lines until
 there is another light in the dark, moving
 down the mountain

wind howling
 ear against cairn

with each day the darkness is more eager, as
 dried heather hangs over these
 potions, changing colour with the months
 we measure in feet
 mapping and marking, walking from sunrise to sunset
 and after counting seventy-four cairns
 we descend
 down to the dark road home

the horizon line moves from outside to in but
 I still have to crane my neck to see the view

flotsam

On Kvalvika beach, flotsam had washed up from the previous days
 storm. Plastic chairs. Bottles. The beach awash with spots of colour.
 A flotsam altar had been built overlooking the beach, up on a sand
 dune, centered around a huge ship mast. Plastics and ropes of all
 colours were precisely arranged around the wooden mast, glowing in
 the grey. A green wheelie bin was propped up beside the mast and on
 it read *Thanet District Council, thanet.gov.uk*. I had a flutter of excitement
 to see something from home in this isolated far off place. It

seemed untouched from its epic journey of over 1200 miles
 from the gentle Kent coast to its new windswept arctic home.
 It was pride of place at the altar, as if to honor its journey.
 There were low clouds skimming the tops of the mountains
 and a few spots of rain. Brightness out at sea. My boots were
 still sodden from the previous days rain. I headed back up
 the valley and could still see the altar from up high, shining. I
 gave it a nod before rounding the corner and losing sight of
 the sea.

fog

I woke up to a sore neck and a dense whiteness. Wind and
 rain had lashed against the tent all night and I had barely
 slept, the night full of feverish dreams of ice and storms.
 Below me was a frozen lake, partially thawed with jet black
 holes surrounded by thin turquoise ice. My body ached after
 twelve hours of constant walking and a night of delirious
 dreams, and my stomach sank at the total whiteness. The plan
 had been to continue on north for two more days, but despite
 it being August, the snow was enough to cover many of the
 cairns. There is a strange fear that comes with fog. A sinking
 sense of disconnection from the ground. I made porridge
 behind a hut, crouching to shelter from the wind, and by the
 time I was done the fog had cleared and the sharp blueness
 of the sky filled me with a false sense of safety.

Brisk, blue and calm, I set off around the frozen lake and
 climbed upwards, crisscrossing between black rock and white
 snow. But a sudden darkness in the north was unsettling.
 Without crampons it was difficult, but not impossible, stamp-
 ing to dig my boots into the hard packed snow. But there was
 one snow slope where, with a sheer drop to an icy lake on
 one side, I had to take a deep breath, stamp very carefully,
 and distract my thoughts from the terror below.

As I reached the highest point the wind began to blow, then the rain, and I got a brief glimpse of the land ahead before the fog came down and enveloped me. Ahead was a patchwork of white and black: much more snow than I had imagined. Now it was only white. Huddled behind the largest boulder I could find, I decided to go to the next cairn in the hope that the fog might lift. But I knew really that I would have to turn back. I could just about make out a boulder in a sea of white and headed for it, body bent against the squall. This boulder was bigger, and gave enough shelter from the wind to sit more comfortably for a while and assess the weather.

An hour passed as I watched the fog move quickly across the white landscape, marooned on my rocky island. It would lift slightly and I would be able to see familiar rocks, but then in an instant everything would disappear again. A small bird landed on my island; it felt strange, like it had come from another, greener world. It seemed happy enough, unperturbed by the howling wind and rain.

In a brief moment of half clarity I headed back across the white sea. Even in those few minutes I became disorientated, unsure of which rock I was heading for and which direction was which; all my senses confused. Step by step I headed down the mountain again, waiting for the cloud to lift before heading to the next cairn, again and again. I reached again the slope that had filled me with terror, and it looked even worse from above. But there was no other way down without a long detour, and the thought of becoming completely lost in the white was worse than the fear of the chance of slipping and the possibility of that terrible drop into the lake below. It took a while to pluck up the courage and to decide on the least stopped route across, all the while unable to think for the wind and rain and increasing cold seeping into my

bones. Slow steps, carefully balancing with my rucksack being pushed by the wind, and thoughts of everything in the world except snow and ice lakes, got me across. From then on the path was clearer, and thoughts of returning to warmth and civilization quickened my steps off the mountain.

glaab

opening between hills or between isles through which a distant object may be seen (Shetland)

glacier see **library of water**

glocken

to start to thaw (compare to the Icelandic glöggur to make or become clear) (Yorkshire)

here

“I don’t want to read. I don’t want to write. I don’t want to do anything but be here. Doing something will take me away from being here. I want to make being here enough (...)

I need to find a way to make myself absolutely not here but still be able to be here to know the difference. I need to experience the difference between being here and not changing here, and being here and changing here.

I set up camp early for the night. It’s a beautiful, unlikely evening after a long rainy day. I put my tent down in an El Greco landscape: the velvet greens, the mottled purples, the rocky stubble.

But El Greco changes here, he makes being here not enough. I am here and I can’t be here without El Greco. I just can’t leave here alone.”

Roni Horn, *Making Being Here Enough*

hibernation

A pile of stones under a grass roof, nestled in the dip between two mountains, overlooking the black lake. It was what I had been looking for after nine hours of walking in constant rain and storm force winds, soaked to the core. Barely there, it was so camouflaged that it was almost invisible even half a mile away. It felt like a trick, an illusion, that the ground might swallow it up again as you approached it. As my eyes adjusted to the darkness inside I realised that the walls were more air than rock. Piled precariously on top of each other, the rocks held up a wooden roof and there was a small glass window at one end. The flimsy door had to be held shut with a rock. There were two wooden benches and a table where I could sleep. The floor was mud, and I made a pathway out of black bin bags so that I could walk around in dry socks. Soon enough the place was full of dripping clothes.

The wind and rain blew through the walls, sometimes viciously. I hung my soaking wet tent up on the far wall where the wind was coming in, and with each gust it billowed into a huge green monster. I got to the shelter at 4pm and didn't leave again for another 18 hours. The weather never eased, not once; 28 hours of solid rain and wind. I entered into a strange kind of hibernation mode, and slept deeply on and off almost the whole time. Occasionally waking, heart racing, to the green monster billowing at my feet and window shaking, or to a change in the wind direction bringing the rain through the wall and onto my face. The deep, uncontrollable sleepiness unnerved me. It never got dark outside of course, which made it even more disorientating; trapped in a half light windy stone hole where I could not stay awake.

In the morning I waited through a number of breaks in the storm. Sudden quiet, followed by anxious listening before the

wind picked up again and soon enough the rain was howling through the walls. Finally a break lasted longer than an hour and I picked up the nerve to leave. Wet socks, wet boots, wet backpack on, I headed back along the lake, one eye on the sky. When I looked back, I could no longer make it out amongst the rocks. It was gone. It left me feeling uneasy as I continued on along the sodden path.

horizon

“One is always crossing the horizon, yet it always remains distant. In this line where sky meets earth, objects cease to exist. Since the car was at all times on some leftover horizon, one might say that the car was imprisoned in a line, a line that is in no way linear... A horizon is something else other than a horizon; it is closedness in openness, it is an enchanted region where down is up. Space can be approached, but time is far away. Time is devoid of objects when one displaces all destinations. The car kept going on the same horizon.”

Robert Smithson, *Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan*

horizon (2)

I search for open landscapes most of all; mountaintops, moors, plateaus, deserts, coastlines. There is something about having that distance, a horizon line, that changes the way I think and the way that I experience place. I become more aware of my own position, my verticality, my vulnerability to the elements. These places are often windswept.

It is a very different experience walking through a forest or valley to walking in an open landscape, with nothing to immediately relate your body to. The microscopic and the macroscopic become interchangeable. It is part of the reason I am so drawn to Iceland. There are no trees, only open vast horizons. It simplifies things: rock, water, sky, me. A horizon brings me out of my own thoughts and into another space.

I can never quite grasp those distances, they are unattainable somehow. When I am walking and can look out and see somewhere I have walked from, and perhaps it took hours or days, when I can understand it through the relationship between time and my feet, only then can I grasp that distance.

horseid

Low clouds and spots of rain. Autumnal valley. Bog feet. Forgetting that the water is sea water. Unpacking and repacking. Pines. Everything still wet. Looking up to snow. Rocky waterside path (the most exhausting kind). Balance. Bag weight. Orange. Up and out of the trees. Barren lake. People hidden behind rocks. Jumping between boulders. Slippery. Crevasse. Endless. Edge of the water. Upwards again. A mountainside of streams. Cold water cup. Holding onto moss. Vertical snow field walk. Boots digging into ice. Clouds hovering. Over the edge. Wind. Blue far below. Quick moving clouds. Black mountain tops. Creeping fear. Wind blown hands. Looking down. Looking up. Ridge concentration. More boulder hopping. Don't look down. Sliding snow. Wind tears. Through the gap. Sun between two mountains. Wide eyed. The smooth grey clay. Valley sweep. Don't look up. Guessing scale. Down and down. Mud. Clear water. Green. Along the stream. Grass to sand. Mounds. Pools. Eagle. Sky clearing. Barefoot beach. Numb pain. Turquoise churning.

ice

16.50 NW perfect hole in the ice
 17.10 W into grasslands, matte blue
 17.20 W iceland mountain
 17.50 W sun gone
 18.25 NW camp set up, green glacier water purple rock

ireland

A green salty heaving mass in my lungs. Black peat on my

boots. Pink rock and wet moss.

iset

colour of ice: isetgrey, isetblue (Shetland)

ivon hitchens

I found an Ivon Hitchens painting in a catalogue when I was a teenager. Thick autumnal colours, a hint of a grey sky, and that thin line across the center, fragile, bent as if blown in the wind. I think about that painting all the time. The precision of it, the intensity of colour and the tension of that line. The spaces and forms are so grounded; they are tied to the mud and sky and trees. But there is air, the paint has a life of its own. The marks are confident, loose and ambiguous all at once. Hitchens has his own very distinct language; there is a lilt and pace to the paintings as you read their horizontal formats from left to right, as if each colour were a word, a precise exacting word to describe nature.

ivon hitchens (2)

12.01 NW brightest lichen
 12.59 NW ivon hitchens
 14.24 E ice water relief
 15.32 N bag rubbing on hips, quick time
 16.10 N wounded rock

journeys

“I take journeys for reasons. That’s a problem. I take journeys to gather inventory.

That’s why I can’t see the landscape as it is when I’m not there.”

Roni Horn, *A Hot Water Map*

landscape

“In the landscape, the distance between two places, A and B,

is experienced as a journey made, a bodily movement from one place to the other, and the gradually changing vistas along the route... We are all cartographers in our daily lives, we use our bodies as the surveyor uses his instruments, to register a sensory input from multiple points of observation, which is then processed by our intelligence into an image which we carry around with us, like a map in our heads, wherever we go.”

Tim Ingold, *The Temporality of the Landscape*

language

“Language is like a road, it cannot be perceived all at once because it unfolds in time, whether heard or read. This narrative or temporal element has made writing and walking resemble each other.”

Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*

language (2) see robert macfarlane

library of water

It was a cold March day when I visited Roni Horn’s *Library of Water*, a constant wind blowing, and the sky and ground ever-changing shades of white. It is located on Snæfellsnes peninsula, a couple of hours drive north along the coast from Reykjavik. The peninsula is barren and wild, with a small glacier crowning the westernmost point. Its southern coast is wide and open, with black sand beaches, shipwrecks and devil rocks. The wind is always strong there. On the northern coast the towns are perched on the very edge of the land, nestled under the steep mountains. Looking further north out to sea there is a cluster of tiny islands and in the distance a wall of mountains: the west fjords.

Stykkishólmur is on this northern coast, on a piece of land that juts out into the sea. On that morning the streets were

silent, with that muffled feel that comes with fresh snow. Corrugated iron clad houses; green, red and yellow against the whiteness and grey. Icy pavements. I turned up at 11am to a woman hovering. In typical Icelandic fashion she looked at me blankly, asked who I was and if I had made an appointment. I said yes, and she looked irritated and told me to take off my shoes. The room was full of light, with a large curved window facing the sea. It is a white Art Deco building high up on a hill above the houses. It feels like a ship or a lighthouse: bright and open. There are twenty-four columns of water in the room that stretch from floor to ceiling. As you maneuver around them, the snow covered streets and cold sea outside, along with your own reflection, become distorted and contained within the columns. They are lit from above and below, and if you look carefully you can see that in some there is a layer of black ash settled at the bottom. They contain water from twenty-four glaciers and glacial tongues around Iceland. The initially terse woman turned out to be incredibly friendly, as it always seems to be in Iceland. She told me that two of the glaciers already no longer existed, that these columns of water were now the only record of their existence.

There is a small room with maps and the *To Place* series of artist books on display. Hot Pools. Owls. Moss. A library within the library. On the floor around the columns are words to describe the weather in both Icelandic and English. Fittingly, the library stands on the site where the first regular monitoring of meteorological conditions in Iceland took place (James Lingwood, *Journey to the Library of Water*).

Drungalegt (dreary / foreboding)

Balmy

Gunstmikill (blustery / blasting)

Fierce

Kyrirt (calm)
 Oppressive
 Thick

Language bridges people and weather. Our desire to read weather and nature is inherent; it is ingrained in our collective consciousness. As a glacial tongue carves through a landscape, or own tongues desperately strive to describe it. “Landscapes were the first human texts, read before the invention of other signs and symbols... language is rooted in landscape” (A.W. Spirn, *The Language of Landscape*). Language is rooted in landscape as much as we are rooted in language. The words in the *Library of Water* are evidence of this innate need to record, condense and describe nature; to understand it. Whilst the water is a direct extraction from nature, the words are a very human representation. The words are testament to the locality of language and its rootedness in place.

Cold, white light streamed in through the windows and contorted in the columns. Physically the columns relate to our body more than the landscape. Their verticality is at odds with the sweeping, horizontal world outside. In the room the presence of the body is as important as the presence of the landscape. As with the weather words, the physical presence of the columns act as a mediation between the human and the natural worlds. You have to maneuver around the columns to experience them fully: crouch, bend, move forwards and backwards. The piece is activated as you move around it, encompassing the bodily experience of landscape. The reflections compress and contort, the landscape outside the windows becomes mixed with your own reflection and the glow of the water. Through their verticality the world becomes fragmented, whereas your own reflection is whole: you see your entire body reflected back at you. As you move through a landscape your experience of it is in constant flux, changing

at the pace of your feet. Horn awakens this bodily experience through the placement of the works, creating a constellation, a map in which to navigate.

There are a finite number of things in the desert: the space, the ash, and the rocks. The light, the weather, and the ice. There are other things as well, but only a few. Some of them aren't even here, but you can see them from here and differently than from any other place. I saw the moon for the first time from here— it was a large piece of the sky, a terrain—looming and white.

I use the desert as measure, as lucid reflection. It gives nothing. What I take from the desert is who I am more precisely.

Having limitations defined this clearly is identification. The desert allows nearness to the unknown. It sets distance before the known. It finds direction and place that never become familiar. The desert's a place ineluctable, a constitutional future— unknown and necessary. This is inner geography.
 Roni Horn, *Inner Geography*

Whilst the collected waters are a product of loud, earth shattering forces, tectonic shifts in the earth and ice tearing through rock, the columns act as silent memorials to landscapes that are quickly fading. In one room there is a large, curved window spanning the entire length of the room which overlooks the sea and small peninsula attached to the town. Grey sky and seagulls. It began to snow a little. In the corner was a chess set.

Leaving the stillness of the library, I headed back out into the

wind. The ear-numbing, howling wind. Down by the harbour the ground was thick with ice and I slid across it towards the sea. A lump of rock sticks out into the water, connected by a very narrow bridge of land. I climbed to the top of the lump to the squat, orange lighthouse, and looked out to the islands, body braced against the salty howl. I looked back at the library, sitting there quietly above the rest of the town, perched on black rock and yellow grass. The wind numbing my face and knotting my hair, the salt, the water, the words, it all connected: we report the weather, and the weather reports us.

lichen

Collected 18th of October, somewhere between Finse and Eidfjord. Brightest lichen I've ever seen. I was going to try and make pigment from it, but it formed such a nice nest shape in my rucksack as I carried it for the next two days, that I cannot bear to break it up. I'm keeping it like this.

loom

slow and silent movement of water in a deep pool (Cumbria)

maps

"One is liable to see things in maps that are not there."

Robert Smithson, *The Spiral Jetty*

maps (2)

I've been drawing memory maps from walks. I'll sit and go through the walk, each turn, each doubling back, every stream crossed and peak reached, and draw a line as I go along. It's funny how, from looking at the drawing, it is impossible to tell if the walk was three days or three hours. There is nothing precise about them, no GPS coordinates or elevations. But for me I can look at them and remember it all, the colours and smells and changes in weather, just from that one line.

They are about that intense bodily relationship with place. They are about the physicality of walking, the aching legs and sore feet, the navigation from one point to another. And they are about memory, about how to find a way to access that specific space again; the space of the landscape and of the clear mindset of walking, once I am no longer there.

memory see **maps** and **spiral jetty**

midnight sun see **pink (1)**

moss

12.20	S	hot sun too many layers
12.31	SW	pillars of ice, black path
13.16	W	flat field, moss and snow
13.35	W	not a breath of air, blue shadows

mud

Richard Long's feet are his usual tools for making, but in his large scale mud works his hands become the mark makers. Instead of marking mud through walking, Long brings it into the gallery, and with it too the action and movement of his walks. Long specifically uses tidal mud; the properties of the mud itself transforming with the tides and with time. Long says the works are "a mixture of time, water and stone". The works are often variations of lines, spirals or circles, alluding to "cyclical and linear time, the finite and the infinite, roads and routines." (Rebecca Solnit, *The Shape of a Walk*).

The mud is thrown or slapped onto the wall with his hands, and just as in his text and sculpture works, you can feel the movement of the body along with the essence of a place and a material. Mud as a material is incredibly tactile, reaching into childhood memories of play, and further back to something instinctive; to the first images humans ever made. Long says

that “they’re not paintings as I understand paintings”. But they are paintings. To paint you are manipulating a material and how it lies on a surface. Long is interested in the colour, the texture of the mud, the drips and splashes and the way it dries. He is interested in shape, form and scale: you don’t always need paint to make a painting.

north

Glenn Gould’s 1967 hour long experimental radio programme, *The Idea of North*, explores the notion of the north as an idea and as a state of mind. Through the stories of five speakers that have all experienced living in the far Canadian north (an anthropologist, sociologist, civil servant, nurse and surveyor) the programme reflects on ideas of “isolation, absence, stillness, remoteness” (Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North*). In the opening, Gould narrates:

I’ve long been intrigued by that incredible tapestry of tundra and taiga which constitutes the Arctic and sub-Arctic of our country. I’ve read about it, written about it, and even pulled up my parka once and gone there. Yet like all but a very few Canadians I’ve had no real experience of the North. I’ve remained, of necessity, an outsider. And the North has remained for me, a convenient place to dream about, spin tall tales about, and, in the end, avoid.

It is a place “to dream about”: the true north lying somewhere in this gap between imagination and experience. The realities of the harsh physical terrain are alluded to through very personal accounts of the expectations of, and the experiences of, living in this remote environment. The stories talk of a universal space, an unknown territory where we not only encounter the other, but where this otherness forces us to encounter ourselves more clearly. The monologues of the five

speakers are weaved together and overlapped; we dip in and out of their stories, sometimes hearing three at once, picking out words rather than whole stories. One speaker says, “I felt cooped up in the wide open spaces... I was so scared of getting lost.” Another, “the chance to be alone and to be quiet.” Throughout, the sound of the train pulses in the background. It feels like we are eavesdropping on these conversations as we are taken ourselves northwards, open landscapes speeding past the window, on our way to “the vast unknown”, where “the night is going to fall, endlessly it seems.”

As the programme continues the narratives build. The voices overlap more intensely until, listening, I can feel myself being lulled into the rhythm of conversation and of the train’s movement. In the final ten minutes of the programme the last movement of Sibelius’ *Symphony no.5* is played alongside a single monologue from the surveyor, W.V. McLean. His monologue becomes an exploration of humanity, war and ‘mother nature’; the symphony building along with his passions. At times the music swallows his words, and at others it recedes so that we can listen.

Now most of us um have got a built in sense of direction and this need have nothing to do with uh North or any uh direction that is physical. We all have a gyro compass that uh gives us inner direction or a sense of possible purpose, certainly a sense of awareness that uh we don’t properly understand ourselves. Now this gyro compass I talk about is directional in this way, that it points us to a direction but it barely recognises the landmarks. Very often we travel in two ways. We travel either by pinpointing at some point in our journey something where we can say Ah, we’ve been there. We know this place. We go from the known securely to the unknown, eh?

This idea that an “inner direction” points us north in order to “understand ourselves” is at the core of *The Idea of North*. We too are collectively pulled north through the act of listening. One of the speakers states, earlier on, that “the north is process, it is finding, no not so much finding, as seeking.”

orange

10.26 W collecting mud, orange shovel

10.35 E exmoor

10.41 S ice like jellyfish

11.23 SW junction

painting

I destroyed a horrible blue and purple painting. It was sickly and timid, the purple too muddy. At first I covered one edge in red. It didn't help. So with a bigger brush I covered the rest, or almost the rest, in white angry brushstrokes. And then I left it in a pile under my desk, with the other sickly paintings. A week later I took them out to look at again, to see if there were any I could save. And it was this one, the angry red and white one, which stood out. I had been trying to paint the pink winter skies I had seen in the north over and over, and I couldn't get it. I couldn't get the deepness of that sky or its luminescence; how the pinkness sunk into everything. But without trying this little painting came close to that. It has the pink openness and the distant blues of that place.

painting (2)

I cannot escape painting because I know it is necessary, vital even. And yet it is not everything. For a while it became everything, and I felt increasingly trapped within the limits of the canvas. But I also love it. I love its substance and versatility, the creamy thickness and thin transparent washes. I love it when the solvent breaks apart the paint into spidery, cloud-

like webs. I love beeswax and gum turpentine and damar. I love those colours that you want to dive into. I love fighting through the muddy mess and finding some kind of clarity. I love, but also hate, the struggle between ultimate control and a complete loss of control.

You cannot hide from yourself in painting. You cannot escape your own mark.

I feel in painting sometimes an endless repetition, a nagging restlessness building up in my shoulders. (The fear of being a bad painter.) Trying to break habits in painting is painful. I hate it when you can feel that you are trapped in a mark; when laying on another wash becomes just a cheap trick to improve a bad painting, to hide it. I hate it when a painting is too clear, when the landscape takes over and the paint has no life of its own. Then I don't see the point in painting at all. I hate it when a mark is too timid, when it feels over thought through. When it has no weight. When painting I always feel both completely in my element, and utterly lost. The best paintings always have to go through a stage when they are awful. The stage when you can't bear to look at them any longer so you do something quick and bold.

I need to create spaces that are grounded somehow, but not too grounded: they also have to float.

I need horizons, and yet I always then want to destroy them.

They are imagined places. They might have a starting point rooted in experience, or end up reminding me of a place I've been, but in between they become something, and somewhere, else. That is why painting feels so different to anything else. It becomes so much about creating a space that I want to be in. Perhaps it has been difficult painting recently because if

I need mountains, or weather, or an open horizon, I just walk from my house and find it. It's all around me. Maybe I don't need to paint it. Maybe I want to make being here enough.

The recent work, the texts, the maps, the collecting, they all revolve around painting. Whilst in some sense they are for me an escape from the comforts and traps of painting, the process is completely and inescapably rooted in it. When I collect a rock or a bundle of lichen, I am mostly drawn to it because of colour. I want that colour. I want to contain it, to use it. But also shape. Sometimes there is something satisfying about a shape; it fits in my hand well, it is somehow striking in the landscape, or perhaps it has an interesting surface. They become a physical memory of that place. Colour, shape, surface, memory. These are ways of thinking and collecting that come from painting and from observing landscape. The texts work in a similar way, skirting around painting but in essence being paintings in text form. These ways of working circle each other, weaving between and connecting at various points.

It is a process of experience, extraction and mediation. A process of looking and making. What I am really looking for is a language that is completely my own. There is an insecurity and a frustration I feel about painting that I am trying to let go of, and which I can feel is slowly beginning to break.

Throughout the masters I have almost only painted on a small scale, on paper or cardboard. There has been an ease which comes from this scale and medium, a lack of pressure. It encourages a looseness with the paint: it is quick and it is cheap. There is also an intimacy in this small scale that draws me in, a privacy. I like the idea that I can easily pack up all the paintings I have done and put them in my rucksack.

Something has changed here; painting has become something

else because it has not been everything. I can feel I am getting closer to knowing it's function, and to finding my own language.

painting (3)

10th of October

It started off as a small space, a pool of water, red earth, green swooping in on the left. One line, deep blue, made it a huge space, a coastline. The pool is now a sea. It looks like the south-west coast of England (I can see Beesands is just around the corner now. December light, mild air, salt mud and wind. I can walk along the steep craggy part of coast from the lighthouse, down through the field and up again, through the small trees clinging onto the soft soil, and down to the white wall, stretch of shingle and fish shop). I don't know whether to destroy the horizon, to bring in something at the top and take away that space, the sky.

11th of October

I took away the open space. Orange line. Thick dark green verticals. A pink swoop. A mountain, or sky, I don't know. I'm deciding whether to keep areas open. I'll leave it overnight.

It's definitely not England anymore.

pigment see painting (2) and walk (3)

pigment (2)

"If you were to ask me what I do, I would say I draw – this is the primary activity – and that all my work has this in common regardless of idiom or material." (Roni Horn)

I saw a selection of Horn's pigment drawings on show at the Vigeland Museum in Oslo last year. The drawings are made from lines of pure pigment and varnish cut and pasted

from various drawings to form sprawling, intricate, moving formations. Weather and nature seem to blow through the drawings: they become clouds, molecular structures, meteorological diagrams, islands and maps all at once. From afar they appear whole, but as you move closer you start to see the small cuts and precise arrangement of the lines. Adrian Searle describes them as “incomplete diagrams, details, instances... Up close you become aware of (...) signs that the artist has circumnavigated the drawing, and worked on it as though she were a cartographer, mapping a new place, and writing little notes to herself as she goes.”

Up close to the drawings I found my gaze roaming the surface, appreciating the slow and fragile process of piecing together the small pieces, the richness and depth of colour that the pure pigment has, my eyes fixing on certain words and trying to make some sense of them. The words, having no direct relation to each other and often rhyming, add a disjointed narrative, taking the viewer on a non-linear journey through the drawings. They become fragmented tracings of places and thoughts, imaginary maps that emit both an energy, a restless movement, and a quietness and intimacy.

pink

The sun had dipped down just below the clouds and just before midnight, setting the water alight with orange and pink. It was the kind of light that you are used to seeing only for a brief moment, just before sunset or sunrise. But up here it lasts for hours. The light has indescribable intensity and depth; a glow that cannot be real.

Across the water a spotlight of strong orange sunlight grew and intensified on the dark hills. There was a break in the pink water; a black fin, a puff of air. Porpoise. Rain was falling on a nearby island and I watched as it moved across the

stretch of water, blurring the landscape as it went. Then, as it reached the center of the bay, a midnight rainbow appeared. Colour bursting from every pore in the landscape. Eventually the colours began to soften, as if a contrast dial was being slowly turned down. So, just before one am, the sun was rising again already.

pink (2)

It was midday already and the just-risen sun was reflecting on windows across half the city; two days after the sun returned after months of darkness. I had only imagined blues, lots of darkness and blue, and the pinkness and the light took me by surprise. In the distance, the pink glowed on the odd angled shapes of the mountains and there was a clear line of deep blue on the horizon; the line of night fading. I walked higher and higher to frozen ground, but just missed the sun. A red glow, orange to pink to green to blue. The feeling of teetering at the top of the globe in a cloud of pink, the most north I've ever been. There are patches of open ground, rich coloured lichen and rock protected under a thick layer of clear ice. And a crescent moon rising.

The line of blue on the horizon slowly began to creep nearer again already. The sunset was at 1.35pm, but it lasted for hours. I ate peanut butter using a snowed in shelter as a wind break, and then, too cold to sit still any longer, continued up, crisscrossing to avoid the slick iced over snow, jumping between patches of open ground.

With only snow and mountains now the sky and ground were a kaleidoscope of colour. And the sun still slowly setting. I drew maps of the walk up with cold fingers in the soft parts of the snow and realised as I was drawing that the patch of snow looked like a bear, standing up on its hind legs. The blues and greens began to soak in, but the mountains still

retained a pinkness. I couldn't tell how far away the next peak was; there was no sense of scale. I decided to turn back.

pirr

light breath of wind, such as will make a cat's paw on the water; a light breeze (Shetland)

place

Painting is inherently connected to place; a painting creating a space of its own whilst also being a depiction of a place. Marks and colours become their own world. A blue mark will become a puddle, a pool and then the sea. The sky will change from pink to grey to green. A brushstroke that started off as a mountain becomes a rock.

Scale slips and slides and places form and dissolve and then reform again as somewhere new altogether. The place stays as fluid as the paint, until something indefinable suddenly makes it solid, and the painting is finished.

richard long

walking with the river's roar great himalayan time a
line of moments my father starlit snow human
time frozen boots breaking trail circles of a great bird
countless stones happy alert balanced paths of shared
footmarks atomic silence sleeping by the river's roar

a twenty one day footpath walk. nepal 1983.

Richard Long, *Walking with the River's Roar*

robert macfarlane

Robert Macfarlane's *Landmarks* is a collection of place-words from around Britain and Ireland, and an exploration into both how landscape shapes language, and how our sense of

place is formed by language. Macfarlane walks extensively and throughout his travels has built up this collection of jewel-like words: they are crystal clear, poetic and yet often factual observations of the landscape, describing natural phenomena in very human terms. Macfarlane writes "what we cannot name, we cannot in some sense see", and laments the loss of these intricate, deeply observational words for nature. The glossaries are arranged by topography (flatlands, uplands, waterlands, coastlands, underlands, northlands, edgelands, earthlands and woodlands) and reading through them is like traversing the landscape with eyes wide open. When walking I notice things I wouldn't have seen before reading these terms: I never noticed how a bog quivers as you approach it before knowing the name for it, didder.

Ammil is a term from Devon, an area in the south west of England, used to describe the thin film of ice that covers leaves and blades of grass when a freeze follows a partial thaw, and that in sunlight can cause a whole landscape to glitter. It is thought to derive from the Old English ammel, meaning enamel (*The word-board: Robert Macfarlane on rewilding our language of landscape*, The Guardian) The word practically shimmers with its meaning. Then there's the word loom, from Cumbria, which describes the slow and silent movement of water in a deep pool. It is so specific, and has so much of the sound and feel of the movement it describes. It is this precision and clarity in description that I love. These words are rooted in who we are and where we come from.

This precision in language is similar to finding a mark when painting that, with minimal detail, can clearly define a specific type of light, surface or space. In the same way that we see things more clearly when they have a name, I often feel when I am walking that I am suddenly inside a painting of mine. It might be a certain light, or a form in the land, that I notice

because I have painted it before. This clarity in thought, in language and paint, brings also clarity in sight and enhances the way that we see and experience the world around us. In the way that I enjoy fighting through the murkiness of painting to find some kind of clarity in paint, I feel the same with language. There is something very satisfying about finding a word so clear, so exact and so rich, that it needs nothing else; it can stand on its own. Macfarlane's collection of words are about an awareness of landscape, about living, breathing and speaking the language of landscape over a long period of time. As these words fade into obscurity, so does our own awareness and understanding of the land.

route 175 north

“Out from Quebec City.

Route 175 North.

I like the bare mathematics of it, between the two charged words.

The calculable and the incalculable.”

Kenneth White, *The Blue Road*

salt see spiral jetty

shepherd

“After hours of steady walking, with the long rhythm sustained until the motion is felt, not merely known by the brain, as the ‘still centre’ of being ... you walk the flesh transparent ... It is not ecstasy, I am not out of myself, but in myself. This is the final grace according to the mountain.”

Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*

site

I find it very difficult to work on site. It has something to do with losing the enjoyment and clarity of an experience by forcing myself to make work there and then. I feel the

need to be observational when working outside. In the studio there's more freedom and less pressure; memory and imagination are more present. I spent yesterday drawing outside around the harbour, oil pastels and graphite, ships and piles of netting. I enjoyed it. It is like something in your mind switches off, and a new thing switches on. You become hyper aware and at the same time your thoughts quieten. It's a focus a lot like walking, actually. But I can't shake the creeping stress in my shoulders of making horrible drawings, and the feeling that there is something missing when I work like this.

There are countless times when I have taken my paints with me into the mountains and felt like having the paints with me ruins the walk. They are weighted with expectation. I feel guilty if I don't use them, and inadequate when I do. I stiffen up if I work on site, and I can't seem to shake it. I lose the clear mindset of walking; I lose the enjoyment. I wonder if I'm avoiding something important because I find it difficult, or whether to trust that my instincts about it are right.

spiral jetty

I recently watched Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* twice in a row. I've seen fragments of it many times, but never the whole film at once. I stumbled upon a dark corner of the Istanbul Modern after a week exhausting the Biennale and found myself not wanting to leave. I entered the film near the end, with a shot from above of Smithson running towards the center of the Spiral Jetty. A pinkness glows from low sunlight and the hue of the rocks and water. The sound of the helicopter pulsating. And Smithson's voice, muffled:

North	Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
North by East	Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
Northeast by North	Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

Northeast by East Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

Everything rotates and repeats, the camera shaking, the incessant noise of the helicopter. The words over and over. He keeps on running. It seems never ending, mesmerising; in every direction only mud, salt crystals, rocks and water. There is no sense of direction, the camera moves above the jetty, the helicopter itself spins. The sun is reflected in the pink water: it is blinding. And yet cardinal directions are repeated again and again, as if to somehow ground us in the earth.

East by North Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 East Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 East by South Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 Southeast by East Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

“Space can be approached, but time is far away. Time is devoid of objects when one displaces all destinations” (Robert Smithson, *Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan*). The film takes the viewer on a journey through geological and human time. It is a fragmented, nonlinear experience, moving from dusty dinosaurs in glass cases, to microscopic salt crystals, to the sun, beating down on the water. The narrative weaves process, science and poetry. An extract from Samuel Beckett’s *The Unnamable* is followed by very specific information about the process of making the jetty (“A string was extended from central stake in order to get the arcs in the spiral.”) The narrative is built up from a collection of quotes: from *A Guidebook to the Geology of Utah*, the work of mathematician and science fiction writer John Taine, to *Black’s Medical Dictionary*. It becomes about process, about research, and a very physical and experiential act of making.

Southeast by South Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 South by East Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 South Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 South by West Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

It is also about memory, both human and geological. The cardinal directions, the mud and salt crystals, rocks and water have been repeating in my head ever since I saw the film in its entirety, along with flashes of pink, that endless spinning horizon, and Smithson’s voice. I have never been to visit *Spiral Jetty* (though was once driving through Utah and was frustratingly close to it without realising), and yet the film has such a tactility to it, that the experience of watching the film comes strangely close to a physical experience of landscape. When thinking about writing about this piece, I tried to get a hold of a copy of the film, but in the end it didn’t feel necessary. The memory of it was strong enough. There is an extra layer that memory adds to this piece, the strange flashes that come back to me, the feeling that I have walked out onto the jetty. The way the narrative is built up, the selection of quotes, mimics the head space when out alone in a landscape. It moves from the practical to the abstract, from microscopic details to the immense space of the desert.

Southwest by South Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 Southwest by West Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 West by South Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water
 West Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water

It took a while before I noticed the two long glass cases on ei-

ther side of the room, and peering into them in the darkness I could make out small fragments of mud and salt crystals, very precisely arranged. There was no light, your eyes had to adjust to the darkness in order to make anything out at all. It was perfect. These small relics of such a monumental act quietly sitting there in the dark, waiting to be seen. The listing of directions started for a third time, drawing me back to the film, but I reluctantly tore myself away. I felt shaken emerging into the white gallery light, eyes sensitive and head spinning. The feelings strangely echoed the final words in the film:

Sunstroke : This term is usually restricted to the condition resulting from exposure to intense sunlight. In mild cases, it may consist only a headache and a sense of lassitude, persisting for a few hours. In more severe cases, there may be intense headache, aversion to light, vomiting, and delirium. The skin is dry, the pulse is rapid, and there is a moderate rise in temperature. Recovery may be slow in severe cases, and for a long period subsequently, there may be loss of memory and inability to concentrate.

snaw grimet

colour of the ground when lying snow is partly melted (Shetland)

snow

It is both comforting and uneasy to be immersed within fifteen tons of snow. Inside it is silent, a cold cocoon that melts under the warmth of your body. White is the presence of all colours. The blueness is deep and soft and after a few minutes becomes another colour altogether. Snow demands to be played with and to be explored. As a working material it is malleable, responsive and ultimately unpredictable.

When walking in snow you leave a physical trace of your body and its movement through the landscape. Beneath your feet every indecision, shortcut or wrong turn is recorded.

The whiteness of snow can be disorientating. In a white-out you become cloaked in it; lost in a white world with no sense of direction and no escape. It can be as fierce as it can be gentle. A soft pillowy covering that makes a familiar landscape immediately unfamiliar.

But it is its temporality which makes it so alluring. Its solidity and weight will slowly dissolve, and eventually disappear completely.

solnit

Walking itself is the intentional act closest to the unwilling rhythms of the body, to breathing and the beating of the heart. It strikes a delicate balance between working and idling, being and doing. It is a bodily labour that produces nothing but thoughts, experiences, arrivals.

Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*

sun

7.25	W	waking up on mars, glow on the glacier, packed and ready
8.15	W	sun reaches mountain tops, orange
9.07	SE	sun reaches us, yellow

ungive

to thaw (Northamptonshire)

water see **library of water**

walk

I like the idea of condensing a walk into a single colour.

For four days I walked from my home to the gallery space, four different routes through the mountains. I made notes along the way: time, direction and observation. On arriving I would sit and draw a map of the route I had taken, a memory line. On each walk I collected something, a piece of moss or lichen or grass, and when I arrived at the space I made a dye from the collected material. Over time the colours have changed, deepened.

Tuesday's walk is golden. Friday's walk is black.

walk (2)

7.39 E half-light teeth brushing
 7.58 SE martian mountain desert
 8.43 SE down in rolling green, profile of abraham
 lincoln in iceland cliff
 8.46 SE lincoln turns into a troll
 9.14 W ptarmigan in winter coat
 9.32 SE overwhelmed
 10.34 W glass path
 11.35 N frosted descent
 12.04 NW down 1000m in 1km, shaky knees
 12.55 SW flat feet on flat ground, machine mode

walk (3)

When walking for a number of days everything changes. The speed and pattern of my thoughts change, becoming aligned with the pace of my feet. Thoughts become slower, deeper, moving into strange places and memories; everything quietens. I become aware of every inch of the landscape and weather because I have no other choice, I have to find my way and I have to be prepared for the changing elements. Anything I eat tastes delicious, no matter how basic, and I realise how little food I actually need. Drinking from an ice cold stream becomes the greatest pleasure. I become aware of my

body, its pace and aches, and how it manages to get me from one place to another. And at some point I reach that quiet, steady equilibrium where my limbs and mind and the path and the horizon have no separation: I just keep on walking.

white

14.16 NE neon
 14.50 E white hare
 15.50 S snow field uphill, red ring around the sun

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