

Nadja Gabriela Plein

Outlandia Residency,

Glen Nevis, Scotland

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I came to Outlandia looking for solitude, looking for its essence (I am in mind of Patrick Sueskind's parfumeur), distill it into a little flask of precious water, and mix it into my paints. What would the colours be like, filled with solitude?

I imagined the taste of solitude to be sweet, but not sugary, like mountain water, a whole lake of it, all to myself.

What would solitude feel like in my body? And in my mind? Where would it be located? In my chest? Just before my lips? My fingertips?



Every painting comes from somewhere, even abstract ones. Painting is a conditioned thing, it does not come from nothing, not even from thin air. For me there are two key places where my work comes from, my Buddhist meditation practice and, my background in music composition – I gained a doctorate in music composition from the Royal College of Music in London. Both inform my approach to painting, my working process.

During my time as a doctoral student, one of my main areas of research in music composition was the idea of pausing within a sound world, exploring the possibility of investigating the dynamic nature of sound non-dynamically, from a still place. Gradually this research led me outside of music, following a path of investigating musicality outside of sound.



The second important influence on my work is my Buddhist mindfulness and meditation practice. Mindfulness (whether practiced in daily life or during meditation) is the practice of present-moment awareness watching, and sometimes investigating, things arise and pass within our experience.



It is interesting how intricately linked music and meditation are. Both are acutely aware of time. For music, time is the canvas on which it paints. For meditation, time is the thing that shows us the impermanence of all things. Painting has become my still place from which to watch the flux of things.

The idea of time and that of impermanence are very closely connected. We see the passing of time through change and change is impermanence. If there were absolutely no change and things were perfectly constant, the concept of time would have no meaning. Yet, still, it is our continuing conflict against change that causes us so much suffering.



Walking alone along highland trails is a lesson in time, a lesson in impermanence. Alone, unencumbered by social niceties, one has the opportunity to devote oneself to the watching of change. Walking, I can see how things arise in my experience and then cease. Visual

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objects along my trail: a tree, a mushroom, a broken branch, a bush of heather, a little forest mouse; sounds: the song of a bird, far-off machinery, a brook, a spring, a waterfall, the wind through the leaves, my boots on the ground, twigs breaking, gravel being disturbed; memories and other thoughts, arising, sounding in my mind, colouring what I see, arising and ceasing just like the objects along the trail, objects in my mind.



At one point, I looked at the mountain, Ben Nevis, and saw its rocky summit; there was a time when it wasn't here and there will be a time when it will have ceased. Then I saw the waves of the Nevis river, each one standing up with such strength and self-assurance, as if each wave were sure of its own importance in this world, only immediately to cease, again. I wondered about a little being so small and living so quickly that one wave might seem solid and constant like the mountain seems to me. Then I wondered about a being so large and living so long (aeons and aeons of years), that the mountain would seem like a wave, arising, so filled with self-importance and passing in the blink of an eye.

Everything in my body is like the wave, it arises and passes, everything in my mind is like the wave, every thought, every feeling, every sense of self and identity, like the wave they arise, feel important and pass. It is rather beautiful, this sense of being like a river.



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My paintings are about trying to see the change, the impermanence of all being, about trying to waken up to it and be like the river. A painting is a still place from which to see movement, just like solitude. Being alone gives one the opportunity to watch things arise and pass. A painting does that same thing. Each brushstroke recorded is a something that arose and ceased within time.

During my time at Outlandia, I painted, drew, wrote, walked and meditated. The paintings included in this documentation were made during the residency. They are all watercolour and ink pencils on paper (approximately A5 size). I intend to extend the work I started at Outlandia and work towards an artist's book with small works on paper and poems/short texts.



Thank you, Outlandia, for a wonderful time and opportunity.