



MOMENTS BARELY SEEN, FORGOTTEN

Sabbatical Report

JS Bird

Spring, 2024

Intent

The series of art-work that initiated this sabbatical started in 2022. After a long and fairly serious illness, I took up art again, and became fascinated with drawing. This started when my online covid students talked me into doing an assignment with them. Little did I know at the time that a single, silly drawing would lead to a multi-year series of serious works on paper. In this work on paper I am using both painting and drawing materials, thus these pieces are neither true drawings, nor paintings, but live in some middle ground.

Sequence of Events

Jentel Artist Residency, Banner WY, April 30-May 7

Travel in the Highlands, Isle of Sky, Scotland: June 6-13

Travel to London: June 13-17

Further studio work: Late June through summer

Concept: Self, Spirit, Earth

*I, reach over and the fruit of life stands still**

*All headline quotes, and title of sabbatical, are from lyrics of Yes, *Tales from Topographic Oceans*, 1973

The questions that were essential to the work of my sabbatical include the following:

- How do I incorporate aspects of Celtic and Norse mythology into my work without simply appropriating it?
- Is there unmined depth in my ancestral connection to the land of the United Kingdom?
- How do I connect to or sustain spiritual wisdom of ancient awareness in my own life and work?
- How do I sustain joy on a planet of environmental destruction and gloom, as I watch the environment change drastically during my lifetime?
- How do I explore these difficult questions and create work that is both mythical and authentic, yet related to theories of post-modern and contemporary art?

Throughout my exhibition career, the content of my studio work has consistently incorporated some juxtaposition of science, mythology, spirituality, loss, memory and the natural world. My MFA exhibition, in that long ago 20th century, that mythical time before the internet, was titled *Self, Spirit, Earth*. Conceptually, these three things were the foundational concepts of my work at that time. Now, as I step into retirement from academia, I can see it hasn't changed much, if at all. I can honestly say every exhibition I have ever had, except for perhaps a three-year phase revolving around the myth of Psyche, could have had the same title; the work derived from these same concepts.

I am most fascinated by the human relationship (or lack-thereof) between spirituality/religion, power and nature. I find this issue to be primary to my life as a human on this planet, the history of humanity, and the current existential threat of climate change. My core believe is that to truly react to climate change, humanity must rebuild a reverent symbiotic relationship to nature, rather than one of exploitation and plunder.

To pursue these questions is ambitious and perhaps even folly, yet this quest has provided fuel for my work for decades. Furthermore, the process of creating this work is a means by which I have sustained my own life; an essential use of energy and time in this life, which has provided a sense of purpose and joy. An opportunity to paddle upstream against the flow of capitalism, exploitation and hopelessness. Consequently, this labor has also impacted how I live my life, my desire to appreciate and experience this beautiful world in its natural state, to consider and alter my actions, to make mindful decisions concerning my own participation in our current systems, and attempt to keep alive some sense of spirit and earth in my day-to-day existence.

Visual/Technical Issues of my work

Stand, on long forgotten hills of yesterdays...



Art by Roger Dean

Yes, *Tales from Topographic Oceans*:

For years I have strived to create a visual equivalent of the classic 70's music of the band Yes.

To understand this, one must have a context for the music. In the 1970's, Yes created cutting edge progressive rock, influenced by classical music and early electronic music, that invoked a polarized critical and audience response. The music is complex, ambitious in scale and scope, multilayered, offering dark lows and elegant highs, fast and aggressive, mystical and slow, all of which may be in a single piece of music. The music is not readily accessible to the casual listener, and is not for the faint of heart. It is obsessed with mastery and virtuosity. This music is considered by some critics among the most accomplished rock ever made, and by others, pretentious, self-indulgent, and overblown excess.

In particular, the double album *Tales from Topographic Oceans* (1973), is the most divisive of their work and also particularly relevant to my sabbatical body of work and working process. This album consists of four twenty-minute songs, each song based on one of the four bodies of Hindu shastras. Like my art, this music is conceptually built around concepts of spirituality, history, myth, evolution, and enlightenment. And, like my art, there are multiple pieces built around one overarching theme or concept.

Whether one appreciates the music or not, it is a musical attempt to authentically create masterful, ambitious, complex, meaningful work that the listener must participate in. It is not easy, quick, catchy, passive entertainment. One must approach the work with an open mind, curiosity, and time. The result of this effort could lead to a masterpiece or an utter failure, but the belief in greatness is essential to attempt it. To me, this reach is what makes great art, and it is what I strive for.



Fetish Icon I: Femina Lupa mixed media on paper 50" x 38"

At its core, creating art for me is a transfer of energy, a kind of crucible, from my being to the paper. The more energy I contain, the more authentic the experience, the more powerful the work becomes. However, this power must be tempered by aesthetics, craft and form. In my work I strive to create a balance of oppositional forces and a variety of approaches to imagery and material. The work includes a diversity of images juxtaposed and presented in a variety of approaches, styles and materials. In a single image the viewer may expect to see representational imagery, scientific diagrams and formulas, abstract elements, and text, as well as a range of scale. The media used includes traditional drawing materials and traditional painting materials utilized side by side or layered together, with non-traditional or non-fine-art materials such as gesso, colored pencil or aqueous media pencils.

Approaches to the imagery and media includes abstract elements, aggressive expressive drawing; which may include drips, slashes, and very dark heavy areas, juxtaposed with representational drawing and a use of diagrams and stencils, which are orderly, controlled and specific. These various elements may also be presented very lightly, ghostly or layered, making them not immediately available to the viewer. I use many layers in my work and often imagery is built through scraping and revealing what is underneath a surface layer, excavating imagery as if revealing artifacts under layers of earth.

Like Yes's music, one must dig into the work and sit with it for some time to see (or hear) all that is there. Just as one cannot glean all there is in Yes's music with one listen, the viewer will not see all the depth and layers of image and meaning at first glance. In this way I am asking the viewer to stay with the work and invest some time into deciphering the piece, both visually and conceptually.

I know this is a big ask. Particularly in the age of AI, loss of critical thinking, objectivity, facts, instant information and shallow attention spans. This ask is exacerbated by the nature of the imagery, which in many cases is dark, heavy and provocative, and may stir or trigger viewers in a variety of ways. I am not ignorant of these issues, yet I am asking anyway. To confront our future, at some point, we must look into the darkness and address difficult questions. We cannot look away indefinitely. The earth is in danger and it shall rise up and have their say.

Sabbatical Direction

We advance, we retrace our stories

As I pursued this work, and in preparation for my sabbatical application, a question was presented to choose one of the LCC core values, or strategic directions, and explain how this activity is relevant to the sabbatical.

I chose this.

Sustainability: Integrating practices that support and improve the health of systems that sustain life.

If I only knew...

How does one live each day knowing your loved ones have been, and are still, being harassed, assaulted, raped, murdered and abandoned? How does one maintain sanity in this situation? Day after day of this violation, in the news, on the web, outside the window. All one has to do is pay attention to see it.

I live with that question often. For I am in love with too many to count. I am in love with the trees that live in the yard, the tall stately firs, and the precocious maples and the humble and gnarled apples. I am in love with the hills to the south that rise up their coats of firs and offer so much change of light, color and weather. I am in love with the clouds that build and lower themselves to shroud those hills in mist and grey and silver and pewter, and the fields to the north and the mist and ground fog that skirts the grass on cool mornings, and the herons that stalk the fields; and in the brush rows between, the robins, juncos, doves, sparrows, wrens, flickers, towhees and jays that frequent them. And out west, beyond what I can see, into the dense forests and raging rivers and placid lakes and the twisted trees of the coast and the waves crashing into the stubborn rock and passive sand, and the flitting schools of birds winging as one over the surf, and the calling gulls and stately pelicans, and all the creatures living furious lives under that massive water I cannot see and do not know, across the ocean to Asia. And I love them all.

And to the east also, the big mountains and vast high desert of sage and weather beaten small and stubborn trees and shrubs that teem with hidden life. Deer and antelope and grouse and turkey, pheasant, eagles, hawks, owls, songbirds, coyotes, snakes...

well, you get the picture.

I too, love the ones I cannot see. The orangutang charging the bulldozer with a rock as a weapon, the starving polar bear swimming for miles and days on end seeking ice, the albatross feeding their babies plastic until they die, the whale dragging fishing nets through the water and through her skin, the corals dying white and still, the shark sinking to the depths with no fins, the baby gorilla in a small wooden cage in the hidden market, the white rhino guarded 24 hours a day by men with guns, against other men with guns. The ant I just accidentally stepped on; or the deer I hit with the car the same night I watched a 21-year-old girl die in the hospital.

I could go on, but I won't.

How does one live each day knowing that your loved ones have been, and are still, being harassed, assaulted, raped and abandoned? I don't know. It's not easy.

Niro fiddled while Rome burned. We, apparently, are happy to tap and swipe and post and shop at Amazon and buy more trucks, boats and 4 wheelers, and more plastic stuff and fill storage units with worthless crap and watch while the world burns. All the while using more energy to do so. As I am now. Since I too am complicit.

...Integrating practices that support and improve the health of systems that sustain life.

Sometimes I tune out and watch nonsense, or turn on the PS4 and engage in nonsense. Sometimes I read and lose myself in the craft of words and prose and narrative and character development. Sometimes I write and wrestle with those same issues. Sometimes I go into the forest or fields or rivers and soak up that beauty and magic and magnificence and feel my soul connect with the world, and sometimes when there, I cry and scream out my grief. My utter anguish and grief.

And sometimes I make art.

During this sabbatical I did not make much decorative, nice art, and I am not particularly happy about it. I am not happy that what and whom I love are being defiled. I am not happy that I have to experience this loss and anguish. And most of all, I am not happy that we, as a species, don't do much of anything about it.

I am not happy that I have to make this art.

But I am happy when I make the art. Ironic isn't it?

They say, nowadays, that the earth is feminine. Mother Earth. Yes, this is true. But it is not only feminine. That's too easy. It's too easy for misogynists to find a target. It's too easy for the middle eastern father gods to rise above it, like they are not part of it, and send the minions out to "hold dominion" and increase profit, while Pan withers and dies in the underworld, where Apollo left him.

The rain and the hail and the snow fill and fertilize the lakes and valleys. The deer, elk and stag rattle their antlers with testosterone blood; the raptor fathers spend the spring and summer hunting for family; the mountains and buttes rise up in straining pride; the alpha gorilla guards his village, the rams fill the air with clashing horns; the maned lion kills the cubs of his rival. This is not separate, this is earth. After all, the male salmon, too, return home.

No, you men, too, are anciently connected, and the current disconnect is killing you also. You cannot live alone. The Dine' knew this, for each part of the earth has two aspects; male and female mountain, male and female Hogan, male and female plants, minerals, directions, and so on. The Wiccans know this, reviving old Gods of Earth, striving for balance, honoring all aspects of life, rise Cernunnos, and be resurrected. You may be our only hope.

Perhaps we should learn from the new generations. Perhaps she is not she, or he, but they, Earth They, or They Earth. Perhaps this reunion offers a glimmer of hope.



Stag's Grave (detail)
Mixed media on paper 50" x 38"
2023

Sabbatical Part One: Wyoming

Power spent, passion bespoils our soul receiver

I received, for the second time, just as my last sabbatical, a visual art residency in Wyoming at Jentel. For three weeks I worked 8-10 hours a day, day after day, in a spacious studio, with previous ideas outlined as above, balanced with my reaction to being in Wyoming, and what was happening while I was there.

What a contradiction it is. Acres and acres of open land, hills, rivers, plains, mountains. Alive with deer, elk, moose and antelope; wolves, coyotes and foxes, cougars and bobcats, badgers, beavers and porcupines, and raptors everywhere. Golden eagles, bald eagles, falcons, harriers and hawks, and an abundance of owls.

It's also all fenced ubiquitously and privately posted, keeping one from walking or connecting with this wild land. Here ranchers eagerly kill every predator and animal they can and the ranch store displays rows and rows of assault weapons and ammo that you can buy with your boots or work gloves.

I arrived in Wyoming in the process of working on a triptych based on a stanza from the Norse Poetic Edda, concerning the creation and destruction cycle of the Norse Gods, Goddesses and mythology.

Brothers shall fight | and fell each other, And sisters' sons | shall kinship stain;
Hard is it on earth, | with mighty whoredom; Axe-time, sword-time, | shields are sundered,
Wind-time, wolf-time, | ere the world falls; Nor ever shall men | each other spare.



Wolf Time center panel of triptych
Mixed media on paper 50" x 38"
Created at Jentel 2024

As with much mythology, the wisdom and symbolism remain timeless across centuries and cultures. The stanza above seems so relevant to our current political and cultural divisions and strife. Ultimately, I see the wolf as a symbol of nature and wildness; the wildness that humans seem to revere and despise simultaneously. In Nordic mythology the great wolf Fenrir is chained to the ground through magic and deceit, and as he is humiliated and oppressed, his children, Hati and Skol devour the sun and moon, bringing about the end of the world. Just as we destroy the environment bringing about our own end.

Wyoming A - The wolf:

The wolf in particular has been reviled and slaughtered and oppressed and nearly slain into oblivion, and thus becomes a dynamic symbol for nature at large, which we also oppress and have nearly defiled into oblivion.

Ironically, as I worked on this piece, thinking of wolves as a symbol as described above, I was made aware of an issue connected to wolves that fueled my work, and lead to the development of the second triptych.

Wolves are despised by ranchers above all other predators, and it is legal to kill wolves on your ranch, or pretty much anywhere in Wyoming, for that matter. One rancher ran over a wolf with his snowmobile, which is also legal in Wyoming, and the wolf was still alive after doing so, so he wrapped up its legs and muzzle with duct tape and took it to a local bar where it was chained, mocked and tortured by locals, until it died.

...Integrating practices that support and improve the health of systems that sustain life.



Red Riding Hood (panel 3) detail, created at Jentel, 2024

Wyoming B - Coal: While I was in Wyoming the Biden-Harris administration approved new EPA coal regulations, including:

- A final rule for existing coal-fired and new natural gas-fired power plants that would ensure that all coal-fired plants that plan to run in the long-term and all new baseload gas-fired plants control 90 percent of their carbon pollution.
- A final rule strengthening and updating the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS) for coal-fired power plants, tightening the emissions standard for toxic metals by 67 percent and finalizing a 70 percent reduction in the emissions standard for mercury from existing lignite-fired sources.
- A final rule to reduce pollutants discharged through wastewater from coal-fired power plants by more than 660 million pounds per year, ensuring cleaner water for affected communities, including communities with environmental justice concerns that are disproportionately impacted.
- A final rule that will require the safe management of coal ash that is placed in areas that were unregulated at the federal level until now, including at previously used disposal areas that may leak and contaminate groundwater.

The regulatory impact analysis projects reductions of 1.38 billion metric tons of carbon pollution overall through 2047, which is equivalent to preventing the annual emissions of 328 million gasoline cars, or to nearly an entire year of emissions from the entire U.S. electric power sector. It also projects up to \$370 billion in climate and public health net benefits over the next two decades.

It was estimated that this would result in...

- Up to 1,200 avoided premature deaths
- 870 avoided hospital and emergency room visits
- 1,900 avoided cases of asthma onset
- 360,000 avoided cases of asthma symptoms
- 48,000 avoided school absence days
- 57,000 lost workdays

The governor of Wyoming, Mark Gordon, called the new standards “an abomination” and directed the Wyoming Attorney General to engage with and lead a coalition of states to challenge the power plant emissions rule and we are prepared to apply litigation to the oncoming wave of federal regulatory actions.

I guess the governor does not have children, or perhaps does not care about their future if he does. This is just one more example of the fight humans continue to participate in to defile our world for money. Trillions of dollars are being spent in 2024 in subsidies that continue to bespoil our planet and the creatures that live on it.

Thus the image below.

...Integrating practices that support and improve the health of systems that sustain life.



Red Riding Hood (center panel) 60" x 48" created at Jentel 2024

Wyoming C – Chronic wasting disease (Zombie Deer): This disease is spreading across the country infecting deer, elk and moose. The prion-based disease effects, degrades, and eventually destroys the brain, nervous system and spinal cord of the animals, which creates zombie like symptoms of staggering, drooling, impaired vision, inability to eat, and irrational behavior. There is some evidence that shows it is quite likely that predators, wolves, coyotes, bobcats and cougars' digestive systems destroy most prions before it can transmit to the predator or spread to other animals.

There is an old Inuit legend that when the caribou got sick the old woman pulled the wolf from the ice to heal the herd. But here in Wyoming, other ranching areas, and in much of the world, predators are killed at such a rate that the grazing population explodes so the disease spreads unchecked.

...Integrating practices that support and improve the health of systems that sustain life.

Wyoming D – Elk Hunting: And as above, because of the lack of predators in Wyoming, the elk population has exploded. Elk also are considered a nuisance by ranchers as they compete for forage with cattle and can damage and destroy fence lines. The answer to this dilemma is that Wyoming decided to offer unlimited hunting tags for all elk this fall, including unlimited cow and calf tags, including in some areas of national forest. So, basically the hunters can kill as many elk as they want to.

Wyoming would rather slaughter unknown numbers of elk, including calves and cows, as opposed to trying to establish a natural balance between predator and prey. Yet another example of our faulty misguided relationship with the environment.



Stag's Memory mixed media on paper
44" X 30" 2023

Sabbatical Part II: Scotland

Stand, awhile we search our past, we start anew



Travelling to Scotland, specifically the mountains and lochs and moors, was an intention to return to ancestry and the past. To see what this fascination was with this land, and feel how authentic a connection actually existed. This return to roots exists in both genetic and conceptual/ spiritual paths. I have always been drawn to hills, mountains, streams; to ancient rock formations and spirals and mist and rain and earth based mythology. In recent years this interest and search has focused more and more on Celtic, Norse and Druidic artifacts, landscapes and mythology, and an interest in Wiccan theology. As well, my ancestry is from German and Great Britain heritage. Thus, this return is one of blood and spirit, and also to the well-spring of my artistic ideas, influences and concepts.

Below is one of the first pieces I made after my illness when I started my healing journey. These are images of Scotland I held in my mind and heart when I thought of visiting the country. Fortunately, I was able to visit or witness or experience all of the elements of this piece while there. Below I outline elements of each panel of this work and how it related to my trip.



Highlands No 3. – mixed media on paper 40" x 108" 2022

Mountains, moors, lochs, rivers and stones.

All that I had hoped. Picturesque, quiet, empty. Rain and mist and clouds, wind tugging at the grasses, rocking the camper and chilling flesh. Gorgeous barren hills and mountains rising lonely and silent into the clouds and harboring raptors and hidden stags. Rock formations and clusters decorated with a vibrant collection of lichen. Towering monoliths, standing sentinels through time. Gorgeous lochs of calm water nestled between steep valleys of wind and mist. Valleys and groves of thick rich forest with clear running streams and unknown songbirds.

Center left panel above – Celtic cross and Golden Eagle

In ethereal graveyards behind and around various silent old stone churches, we wandered among the stones and ghosts and memories and circles of time. Several Stone crosses in particular I was drawn to and I became more cognizant of the concept of the grave as a symbol of the three levels of mythical existence, the underworld, the world, and the above world. This concept has already shown up in the first piece completed after my journey.



Elegy for Cernunnos (detail) Top half of Triptych
Mixed media on canvas 104" 44"

I have created several Golden Eagle pieces in reference to Scotland, as it is the national bird of Scotland, even as it is also an icon of the U.S. West and a powerful symbol for many North American Indigenous people. I was lucky enough to see several Golden Eagles in the mountains of Scotland.

Middle right panel above - Eilean Donan Castle, Red Stags

I was able to see several groups of red stags in the Mountains of Sky. I saw a group of stags high on a mountain side in the sun, laying in a group and wandering the steep hillside. I also saw several male stags laying in the grass near a river in the evening and was able to get within several hundred feet, and spend considerable time watching them. One strange aspect of Scotland is the significant time animals seem to spend lying down, be they cows, sheep or stags.

I also visited Eilean Donan Castle, which was one of the more disappointing aspects of my trip. I had always thought of this castle as a sentinel isolated on a loch under the steep hills, perched over a wild and lonely landscape. And while it is a sentinel, built on a rock island in a loch under the mountains, it is unfortunately situated at the edge of a small village quite near the road and overrun with hundreds of tourists and buses and giftshop, store, and restaurant, which really took much of the mystery and romance out of the experience.

Left panel above – Fairy Glenn

A gorgeous setting up on the bluffs above the sea on the Island of Sky. Amazing Conical hills with sheep trails around them in concentric circles to the top, thick groves of stunted trees, and steep rock outcroppings like mystical cairns built by Druidic Goddesses. But the little conical stone maze referenced in the drawing above was small and anti-climactic and surrounded by tourists with phones. Thus, we moved of the tourist trail into little magical glens where one would expect to see hidden fairies. Small glades and canyons of green and stone, the stones covered with remarkable white and grey and brown lichen, silent except for the wind.



Far right panel – The Old Man of Storr/ Standing Stones

High up in the mist and wind and craggy peaks there are a series of natural standing stones that overlooks Staffin Beach and the Sound of Raasay. I was able to make most of the multi-mile climb to the stones and experience the wildness and harsh beauty of this island. However, like many areas, here too there were an abundance of tourists, cars, busses, and cameras, and it was difficult to truly be alone with the land and feel and experience the past and timeless energy of these places and these massive stones.

I am fascinated with the shapes of cairns, stones and monoliths used in Druidic and Celtic art and life. The forms have been part of my image lexicon in the past, back to the very early days of my artistic journey, and will undoubtedly appear in subsequent work as well.



In Conclusion

Unfortunately, the Scotland trip did not go as I had exactly planned or hoped, and I did not see nearly as much as I had hoped, or travel to as many areas as planned. We rented a campervan and the roads are very narrow. It was difficult to drive the camper along the narrow and sometimes single lane roads. Travel was arduous and took much longer than anticipated. We had issues with the heating and electricity of the camper, as the battery was faulty, and thus we could not camp in the wild, as we had to have electricity at night from a campsite. I would have needed at least a month to do everything I had intended. In addition, I was bitten by some sort of venomous spider, which affected my leg for more than a month. Not sure if this was some sort of message from the ancestors or Wiccan deities, but I wonder.

Sabbatical Part III – London

London too, was a return to my ancestral heritage. My paternal grandparents came to the US after WWI. In the war my grandfather was a decorated RAF pilot who flew both fighter planes in combat missions and long-distance reconnaissance planes. My Grandmother grew up in Windsor castle as the adopted daughter of a driver for King George V. They came to America and bought a farm in upstate NY. My Great Grandfather had a string of candy stores in England and was quite wealthy and also quite a tyrant in a string of tyrants.

Despite this ancestry, London held no particular meaning to me, other than a city to visit. I did not feel any stirrings of blood or home during this time.

The focus of the trip to London was to attend the major art galleries and museums of the city, and an opportunity to see significant paintings and artworks in person previously only seen in books.

Visited:

Saatchi Gallery
Serpentine Galleries
Tate Modern
Natural History Museum
The National Gallery

Unfortunately, the galleries and museums too, were a bit of a let-down in comparison to what I had hoped to see. I did not see any Odd Nerdrum, Anselm Kiefer, or Jenny Saville, three contemporary artists who I admire greatly and are significant influences in how I think about my own work. Nor was I able to see any Waterhouse paintings from the Pre-Raphaelite period. Both Waterhouse and Saville are British artists, so that was both surprising and disappointing.

I did see work that was both exciting and rewarding and undoubtedly will and has impacted my studio work. The most exciting piece for me was *The Execution of Lady Jane Grey* by Paul Delaroche. This large painting leaped off the wall and forced me to sit and look and contemplate and soak up the beauty, luscious virtuosity of paint, form and color, and integrity of every section of the canvas. As I am working with low color in my current work and an abundant use of white, I was particularly struck by the white gown of Lady Jane. The glow and sheen and verisimilitude of the gown was exquisite, the form and detail created by the smallest change in hue and value, in which every brush stroke matters. This attention to detail is so important to me and my work, and again I must make a connection to the music of Yes, in which complex chord structures and the design of each note is thoughtful and important.



The Execution of Lady Jane Grey (detail left) Paul Delaroche 1833

What was interesting to me about this piece is that I had never paid much attention to this artist previously. I had seen this painting in books many times, but it never really captured my attention. This is another example of how important it is to witness visual art in person, as it is intended, rather than in a book or on a computer or digital projector screen, which I tell my students regularly.

In addition, I was fascinated with the dark background and the subtle details and color and value change of the architectural forms. In using so much dark in my work I am also learning and experimenting with more degrees of black, which has always been difficult for me. I was drawn to so many paintings of the Baroque and Romantic era's, which has always intrigued me, with their scale and heroism. Now, however I was fascinated with the dark grounds and the use of black and brown and the variety of depth, space and hue one can achieve with these colors, and it is something I have been working with and something I will continue to be influenced by in successive work.

Two other pieces that attracted me for similar reasons, the use of white, and black, or light and dark are the two paintings below. Both paintings I was not previously familiar with but appreciated for the same reasons as above.



Road in the Village of Baldersbronde
Laurits Anderson Ring



An Old Woman with Rosary
Paul Cezanne

The focus on working with these high extremes of value and limited color can be seen below in this detail of a triptych I created after my trip to London. Hopefully one can see a relationship between the pieces above and this new work in the use of whites and strong darks of black and brown. I expect this experience will continue to direct and influence my work as I continue to focus on and these aspects of my work.



Elegy to Cernunnos (detail, of panel one of triptych) 2024

Aside from this exhibit, I was fascinated by the cement walls in the lowest floor of the Tate building. These cement walls had previously existed as part of an electrical station. The patterns and stains and written numbers I found to be very visually compelling and the circles were filled in receptacles for electrical conduit. The surface of this structure is not unlike an Anselm Kiefer painting as well as aspects of visual imagery I have used repeatedly in my work. Perhaps one can see the relationship between this wall and this detail of my triptych *Elegy to Cernunnos*.



Elegy to Cernunnos (detail, of panel two of triptych) 2024

The last thing I want to mention is the visit to the Tate Modern. The highlight of this museum was the retrospective exhibit of Joan Mitchell. I am a huge fan of Joan Mitchell and respect her contributions as a twentieth century abstract painter. Currently labeled as a feminist painter, I would argue that she was a great painter who just happened to be a strong woman and overcame the obstacles before her, not so much as a feminist critique, but through a deep belief in her own contribution to painting as an artist, male or female.

This sabbatical was truly essential to my pursuit of the issues of my work, and I am extremely grateful to have this opportunity one last time before I step away from teaching.

I am very grateful to have had this opportunity now and in the past. I was also very grateful for the assistance I received from the people at faculty development and the financial assistance I received which helped make this trip and work possible. This is a great program at Lane and I hope it continues into the future.

JS Bird

2024