

Zoe Benbow

OUTLANDIA

Artist Residency Review - June 2015



Zoe at Outlandia

I first visited Outlandia at its opening in 2010, a bunch of us art folk came down the Great Glen on a visit from the Great Glen Artists' Air Show, happening at H-I-C-A , Loch Rufus, Inverness - an event organised by the Arts Catalyst.

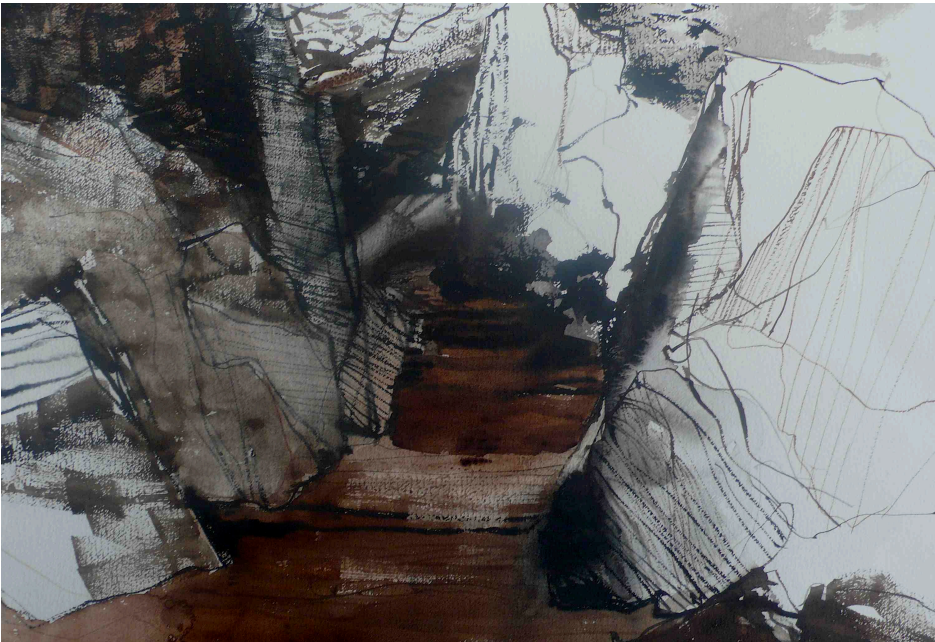
The trip was fun, a social occasion and much merriment was made. I was struck then by the beauty and sheer majesty of Outlandia – somehow it seemed so silent, stoical and solid in the landscape and yet it hovered above the ground and swayed gently in the slightest breeze. It was like a space in the forest that represented a physical realisation of the mind's eye.

I hoped then to be able to return and was inspired again in 2014 when listening from a parched South of France I heard the summer Resonance FM broadcasts evoking the sounds light and textures of Glen Nevis.



My paintings aim to communicate a sense of awe and enjoyment in landscape, as a means of questioning our cultural construct of wilderness and our relationship to the natural world. I'm particularly interested in the experience of landscape as intimate and surrounding - as opposed to being distancing and remote.

It was my intention whilst at Outlandia to explore the landscape, gathering information and researching material to be fully realised at a later stage.



In many ways the week felt short in terms of attuning one's city self to the environment and I felt a personal dilemma between wishing to be quiet in the space and a longing to be out in the open wildness. Perhaps this defines Outlandia for me, a space between spaces, a liminal space of transition. I came to understand the allure of the forest for its magical narratives and folk lore- a space between the pastoral and domestic and the fear inspiring peaks.



Outlandia being off grid and off the ground represents a still point in a turning world, a quiet space for reflection, I spent time meditating there. It was brilliant to re-discover the space alone and I felt it as a great gift of stillness, which I was able to hold and possess for a short time. I spent the week walking and drawing- Outlandia offering a context by which I was able to become a part of the continuing history of the Glen with an accentuated awareness of past habitations in relation to the perception of the Glen as a wilderness.

Poor weather conditions during my stay meant that I was unable to draw outside as much as I had hoped and walking instead became a meditation on the landscape. I have recently followed a reading path inspired by the writings of Roger Deakin, Robert McFarlane, Rebecca Solnit and Nan Shepherd. Like Nan Shepherd I have a tendency to wander in mountains, searching, stopping, looking and bizarrely napping here and there.

I particularly enjoyed walking in Upper Glen Nevis and loved the sense of the glen as an enclosed world inaccessible by car but easily reached on foot with its wonderful waterfalls and diverse landscape, somehow timeless, the relative payoff - its incredible beauty against lack of extreme exertion leaves the mind free to wander.

Whilst walking fragments of other landscapes and other times invade the mind with an awareness of the construction of the self in relation to the landscape. I will use the material gathered in Glen Nevis well into the future, just as Outlandia is intimate in relation to the mountains so my week there represents a small beginning for some new large scale oil paintings -they will take time to make. Through an intense engagement with the processes of painting and studio practice, the resulting images will become as much a meditation on a geology of association and memory as of an actual place.



Zoe Benbow, July 2015

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