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Trevor Wood is a Scottish artist and musician who lives and works in London. He works from a Space studio near London Fields in Hackney.

Beginnings

Trevor engaged in painting and drawing as a kid from as far back as he can remember. Many members of his larger family used to paint and draw so it was encouraged and not brushed off as a futile pastime. He was also into astronomy and telescopes, electronics and making model trains, planes and boats; and this was also encouraged. He was given a book about birds when he was eight and developed an interest in ornithology and, whilst sketching bird illustrations in books, he also pursued his long-time passion for astronomy making drawings from observations from his telescope of planetary objects. Also in the background was the observation and following of the space race/exploration forever in the news at that time and he remembers corresponding by letter with his father, working away from home at that time, on how this was progressing and sharing sketches of the latest American and Russian spacecraft. These musings were more in the form of diagrams rather than 'art works' but art and craft classes were also stimulating in his primary school years. From an early age, he was always building constructions and things. So the foundations were laid and sketches, diagrams, and plans are still the starting point of any art project he attempts.

Secondary Education

At Trevor's secondary school, there was no real interest in nurturing art studies as it was more science and academia-orientated, so he was on a science path until he got interested in music, learning to play classical guitar and drinking up the vibrant music scene that was the 60's and later on playing in a few bands. It was when his older sister went to art school that he realised that this was the pathway to meeting musicians. The list of successful musicians, who first studied art in a formal setting, is quite impressive. Not only does it include John Lennon and Joni Mitchell, but also other steadfast performers, such as Cat Stevens, Ronnie Wood, Syd Barrett, Keith Richards, David Byrne, Pete Townsend, Jimmy Page, Eric Clapton, as well as Tony Bennett. Many of these future performers chose art school because the lifestyle was laid back and easy going. Furthermore, these specialized education institutions presented more of a freethinking atmosphere than one might find at a music school or conservatory, where practice demands could be quite rigorous.

So at the end of secondary school, he changed direction from studying science at university to art and, after school, started a course at Aberdeen College in order to acquire the skills, not to mention a portfolio, to gain entry to Art School. In a very short time he learned a lot, mainly thanks to art teacher James Furneaux, whose passion for the subject greatly inspired him and helped him acquire an interest in French art, especially Impressionism, which increased his fascination with colour. As well as an Art A level, he picked up another O level (music) in the process – convincing his examiner that he could read the set pieces he was playing when he

was actually working from memory and improvising!

Art School and Beyond

The approach at Gray's School of Art, Aberdeen was traditional and provided Trevor with a firm foundation in drawing and painting; and one of his works was selected for the Scottish Young Contemporaries Exhibition in Edinburgh. The landscape and ancient history of the north east of Scotland was always a fascination and he realised, whilst biking around the area doing research for a sculpture project with a fellow student that stone circles and ancient Celtic and Neolithic sites and symbols littered the whole area.

After Art School, music, California, then London beckoned; and after some time Trevor picked up the brush again and started diversifying his interest and appreciation of many styles. He started painting freely and semi-abstractly, applying context via his own history and heritage – Celtic traditions and landscapes - making a fusion of both and, for convenience, using only paper and watercolour and acrylic paint. However, he soon returned to oil paint via a few portrait commissions and also completed a course in lithography run by his local Adult Education Authority.

During this era, Trevor was exposed to the wealth of styles exhibiting in London Galleries, contemporary and traditional, and other emerging trends, including the Glasgow figurative art wave that was happening in the 80's. His influences at this time were Alan Davy, Cecil Collins and Ken Kiff as well as Abstract Expressionists especially Mark Rothko but also Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Clyfford Still. Alan Davy was a particular influence in counteracting the stiff discipline of Art School, especially his recommendation:

".... that one should empty oneself and let the painting make itself at the right moment, and that an image must happen in spite of me rather than because of me."

A trip to India also greatly inspired Trevor at this time – exploring religious sites and absorbing the rich imagery and iconography observed in temples, homes and street art. His artwork up to and including this time can be broadly described as Symbolic because the images are allegorical, emblematic, and spiritual.

Then, moving even further away from the traditional painter scenario, Trevor undertook a Masters course (Art in Architecture) at the University of East London where there was a diverse mix of fellow artists, not to mention the steady bombardment of trends and directions of contemporary conceptual art that was everywhere at this time (early 90's). He took the subject off the canvas using a whole new range of materials for him i.e. concrete, wood, plaster and film/photography. After securing a professional studio, he then had a constant flow of creativity and channelled this into larger projects/paintings and adopted a more experimental approach using found materials and surfaces on which to try out new techniques.

From his earlier discovery of the American Abstract Expressionists his practice was

also aiming for a freer way to paint. Trying to capture the essence of Pollock, and de Kooning was a vast departure from Art School training. The path this period of exploration led him to was a more considered and meditative method – literally 'watching paint dry'. The resultant works aimed to capture the ways we see landscape, a cursory glance at 180 degrees and the reflection of what the brain had remembered or processed in these brief encounters with landscape.

Simultaneously, he was juggling his resultant new productivity and output with his music projects and, following the completion of a PGCE at the Institute of Education, University of London, he started teaching art to young and older adults.

From his early work, classified as Symbolic, he had progressed to two main themes: Wilderness and Urban – both a response to his relationship and involvement with the environments which inspired him – the Scottish Highlands and the Lower Lea Valley (his Edgeland) in London. Recurring topics are natural phenomena, man's intervention, decay and renewal; but one constant is his reliance on landscape imagery - it defines the content. He works, modifies and distils the source imagery into his surfaces through motifs and designs that compliment or jar with them to both stir the perceptions of the viewer and evoke an air of familiarity.

Wilderness – Highlands of Scotland

Trevor's Wilderness works are influenced by both the language and geology of the Highlands of Scotland. Gaelic has the ideal vocabulary for describing landscape – opulent and explanatory. For example it has over 80 words for hill, mountain or slope. Beinn (hill) is very common and, as with other place names, usually a qualifier is added denoting colour, position, shape, texture, another topographical or meteorological feature although people, flora and fauna are also sometimes mentioned – a veritable feast for the artist.

For its size, Scotland has the most varied geology and natural landscapes of any country on the planet and their formation, from the dawn of time itself, is a fascinating story (Scotland: The Creation of its Natural Landscape by Alan McKirdy & Roger Crofts, 1999). Its primeval past is visible in the natural landscapes fashioned by geology - Scotland's landscape is a living tapestry of cosmogenic forces writ large in stone. Trevor illustrates both the uniqueness and similarities of the areas which have been the focus for the majority of his work in the Wilderness Galleries.

The landscape of the Eastern Highlands is dominated by mountain giants like the Cairngorms and rolling plateaux with relict tors, easterly flowing river systems which contrast with the steep sides of corries and glacial troughs. It features red granites and crystalline rocks largely created by weathering during humid climates followed by the effects of ice then melting water.

The grandeur of the scenery in the North West Highlands, from its rugged peaks of sandstone often capped by quartzite to lochan-strewn surfaces forged by the passage of ice, has been described as an 'exhumed' landscape. Also visible is land characterized by bedrocks of red sandstone, which gives a gently undulating landscape, to areas of blanket bog – thick carpets of sphagnum and pools which have built up over the millennia.

Mountains and lochs are also key features of the landscapes of the Western

Highlands. From the metamorphic rocks with angular peaks and ridges, rugged as a result of ice action and resistant to erosion, to deep valleys filled with sediments deposited in the Ice Age or fresh water forming lochs.

On the Western Islands, rock types have a more pronounced effect on the landscape – the basaltic lavas provide a stepped landscape and the remains of volcanoes, especially the Skye Cuillin, form significant mountain groups. The island of Skye is perhaps the finest example of an ancient volcano whose bowels and inner plumbing have been laid bare by the elements, eroded by wind, water and ice. In both the Western Highlands and Islands, a special type of sand system called ‘the machair’ has evolved – it is formed almost entirely of shell fragments derived from animals living in deeper water offshore and swept shoreward by wave action which fragmented the shells. There is also evidence of early vegetation and creatures in the topography – sea lily which grew in tropical seas, fern which originated in a tropical rainforest, fossilized tree stumps and the tracks of small reptiles next to their remains.

Edgeland – The Lower Lea Valley

One of the most important factors in the siting and development of a city is its water supply, namely, its rivers. Since 894 AD, when Vikings rode up the Lea valley the river Lea has become an integral part of the development of London. It is 46 miles long and flows from Luton in Bedfordshire to Blackwell in London, where it joins the river Thames. From its origins in Leagrave Park, north of Luton, it flows south east through Hertfordshire (by Welwyn Garden City). It enters Greater London near Waltham Cross, then moves through East London via Enfield Lock, Ponders End and Tottenham Hale; through Upper Clapton, Hackney Wick, Stratford, Bromley-by-Bow (past Fish Island), Canning Town; and, finally to the Thames just east of the Isle of Dogs.

The lower Lea Valley is the area around the final leg of the river’s journey through the London Boroughs of Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets, which all have sites which were demolished and redeveloped to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. It has a long and fascinating history – its landscape is the result of centuries of use and change, comprising a complex network of canals and rivers, roads and railways, interspersed with former industrial sites, gasworks and bridges, derelict land, factories and warehouses, and light industry. It also contains places where certain species of plant and invertebrate, which could no longer thrive in the country due to changes in farming practice, have flourished, which is a common feature of areas on the urban/rural fringe.

The lower Lea Valley has the primordial quality of a landscape that has always been there, and which precedes all the layers of culture and civilisation imposed on top of it. The metropolitan significance of this landscape cannot be overstated. However, the tidal river with its unkempt, untameable surrounds represents nothing less than the edge of the city, as evoked with both precision and emotional resonance by Victor Hugo in his description of the ‘bastard countryside’ in *Les Misérables*. Both spatially and qualitatively, it is an ‘edgeland’.

In the lower Lea Valley, there are layer upon layer of past lives, individual characters

who have influenced or been part of the landscape and communities now gone or replaced which have left their mark – in bridges and mills, deserted post-industrial wasteland, tracts of reclaimed land, and archaeological sites. Although people are not immediately visible in this landscape, their presence is a given, their lives are part of the landscape, and the social, political and spiritual dimensions of human existence and endeavour are confirmed or assumed.

The history of the lower Lea Valley highlights common factors in Trevor's work - the relationship between natural phenomena, man's intervention, and phases of decay and renewal which cumulatively created the urban wilderness or 'edgeland' known as the lower Lea Valley. It is a history of change and the last 20 years have seen the most radical transformations in the service of urban renewal, property development and more recently as the site for the Olympics - from a patchwork of small businesses and artists' studios, which built and enriched both community and culture, in a healthy co-existence for the general good, to an ordered chaos in the post-industrial near past, and finally to a cold economic wasteland.

The lower Lea Valley is an example of how an area is affected by changing priorities, for example, with the growth then decline of industry, increasing environmental concerns, and the development of the Olympics sites which also have social, economic and political implications; and also how these cyclical changes affect communities – established and new. It demonstrates the principle that natural green spaces are essential to the vitality of industrial urban zones. The history of the changing relationship of man to land or, in the urban context, to space is demonstrated in the lower Lea Valley; and how this relationship (man to land or space), the essence of man's being as a species, can be enriched by closer contact with nature.

The lower Lea Valley has been the focus of many of Trevor's exhibitions including Making Sense of Change at the View tube (overlooking the Olympic Stadium) The Greenway, Marshgate Lane, Stratford, E15 commissioned by the Leaside Regeneration Partnership, July 2010. They confirm that Trevor finds beauty in this Edgeland, so rich in human history.

Edgelands in general and the lower Lea Valley in particular have been the focus of considerable media attention following the publication and reviews of 'Edgelands: Journeys Into England's True Wilderness' by poets Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts in February 2011; and also because of the ever-increasing controversies over the development and legacy of the site of the 2012 London Olympics in the lower Lea Valley. (Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project by Iain Sinclair, 2011; Boundaries and Borders and the Hinge City by Richard Sennett in Living in the Endless City, 2011 edited by Richard Burdett and Devan Sudjic)