

THE EARTHLINES REVIEW

THE CULTURE OF NATURE

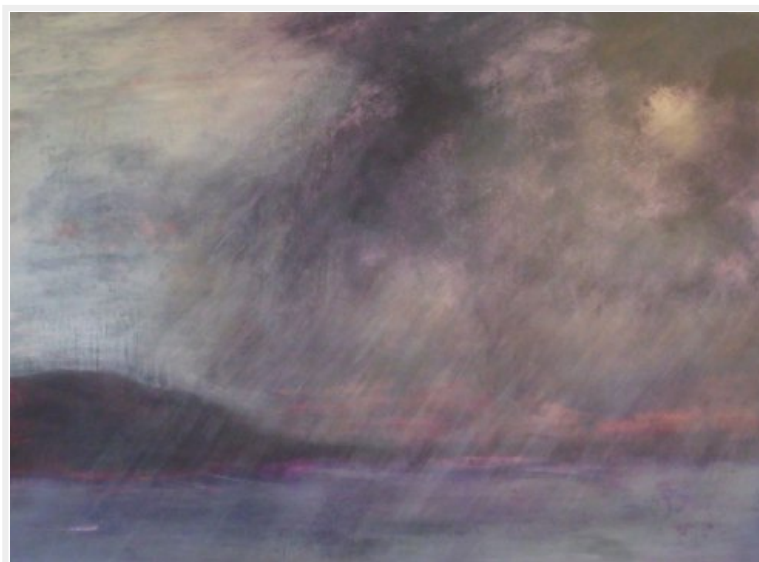
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Guest Post: Landscape, Weather and Community: Bridge House Art, by Emily Wilkinson

March 16, 2013 by [Cat](#) [1 Comment](#)

Emily Wilkinson is an artist and coach who creates in mixed-media, textiles and words. She also works one-to-one and holds participatory creative spaces with groups and communities. Exploring themes of journeys, roots, place and belonging, Emily works with transformational narratives which connect with wildness and highlight feminine experience. Follow her on Twitter @emilywtweets.



Droch shide (bad weather) (2013). Janis Breckenridge.

Bridge House Art is a creative environment for making and studying art in Ullapool, North West Scotland. Set up 17 years ago by artist and teacher Eleanor White, Bridge House Art offers year round courses, a summer school and a winter Portfolio Course. The Portfolio Course is a four-month visual arts intensive for those wishing to go on to art college, develop their work or take a sabbatical to deepen their practice.

Last October I decided to say goodbye to the big city and moved up to Ullapool for the Portfolio Course, a decision based not just on a desire to make art, but also to reconnect with nature and experience living somewhere rural. To make the time and space for creative development and healing in a small community. In a past life I worked in sustainability, but London life leaves little time for true relationship with the environment. For the small group I have been part of over the winter, having this experience in this specific place opened our eyes to new ways of seeing. Speaking for myself, it has even opened doors to a new way of being in the world.

The work which emerges from Bridge House Art often has a connection to the local environment. I

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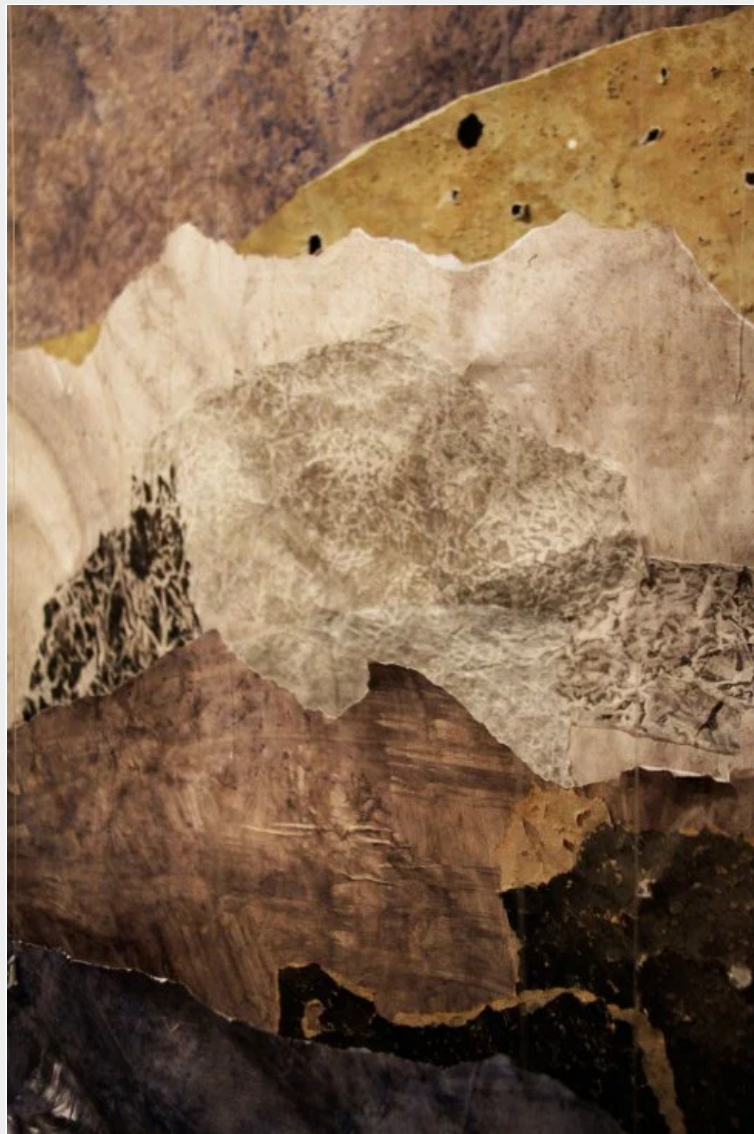


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spoke to Eleanor White to find out more about this connection.



Detail from Tidal Layers, Nina Morris (2013). Mixed media installation.

Emily: Why did you choose to set up Bridge House Art here?

Eleanor: During my time working at Leith School of Art, I was inspired by the teaching there and the way students were encouraged to respond to the urban environment. My husband and I wanted to move to the North West of Scotland, and I was interested in offering courses which had the same intensity and quality of teaching as Leith in a rural setting. I wanted people to not see Bridge House Art as something lesser because it's a smaller place, but offering something completely different because of our rural context.

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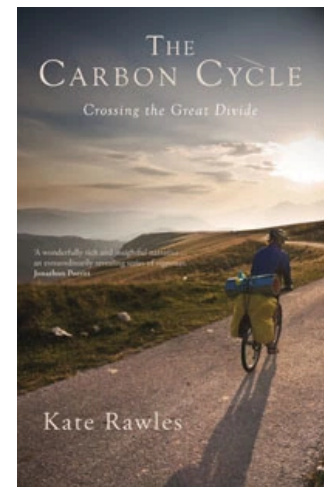
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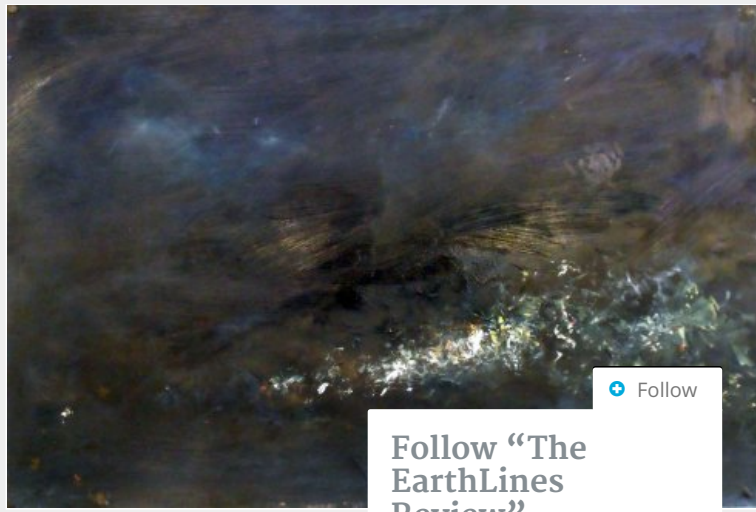
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Lochbroom Nightscape, Eleanor White

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Emily: What are the advantages of studying art in a rural area?

Eleanor: A lot of people come here because of their home environment. Those coming from cities here. It's not a retreat but can be like that for so long on what they are doing.

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Many people who come haven't actually experienced a holiday but haven't been here for a whole winter. The weather and landscape becomes part of their daily life, and how they interact with it and respond to it influences the work they make and their experience of the course. Sometimes it feeds into the work and sometimes it doesn't, but the fact that they've chosen to come here over anywhere else makes a difference.



Land Take Flight, Emily Wilkinson (2013). Modroc, textiles & acrylic.

Emily: Yes, you get something very different from being here in the summer don't you?

Eleanor: Absolutely, I do run summer courses which are lovely and people often go from those onto the portfolio course. The summer courses are almost all based outside in the landscape whereas the winter course is based indoors. The week long summer courses give people a great start in looking at and being in the landscape, but because they're only a week you can only go so far. On the winter course, people have the choice of whether they're going to respond directly to the landscape or not, and some work in a very abstract manner, choosing subjects that have nothing to do with the environment. However the essence of the landscape comes into the work and is transformed into art, but that doesn't necessarily come out in pictures of the landscape.

Emily: So the environment can have an almost sideways influence on art?

Eleanor: Yes, one thing you can safely say here is that the weather changes constantly. Sometimes this translates into the way an artist approaches materials, and how the materials move and change within a surface, and how they make marks. That is sometimes where the environment comes into somebody's work; in the actual process rather than representation. In others it will be very much representational. Both are utterly valid.



'S'e turadh a th'ann (a break in the weather) (2013), Janis Breckenridge.

Emily: Apart from the influence of the environment, what are the benefits of coming here to make art?

Eleanor: When you commit yourself to something like this, you are serious about what you want to do. So, you have to question yourself before you come. Some are using it to go onto college, others for a change of direction and it's very important to come with intent. The challenge of the intent is the thing that people rise to. In this process they may realise they came for a different reason, and the direction of their work may change completely. This is a crucial awareness; to realise that they are on a journey of process and if they're honest and truthful to that it will take them somewhere new. What most people get is a sense of purpose of what art is for them.

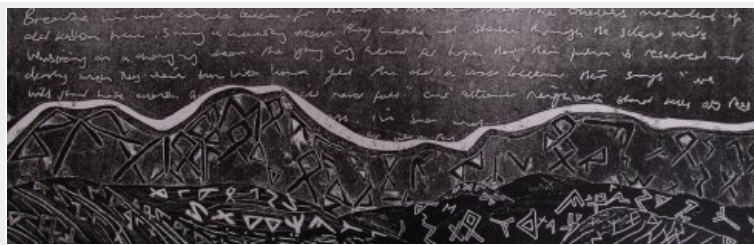
Accompanying this experience is the surrounding community. When people come to Ullapool they see that the community itself has a lot to offer because there are a lot of creative people here. It's just big enough to be anonymous or to get involved with the huge amount of activity here. We have a diverse enough community to support people of all ages, abilities, interests. When people come here they see how vibrant a small community can be and how people can find a place within it. I think this adds to the creativity of the place and the course and the experience of living here.



Beinn an Eoin (Mountain of the Bird), Diana Moonie (2013). Mixed media sculpture.

Emily: It's as though you're describing an ecosystem of place, made up of the landscape, weather and community, which supports the experience of finding your voice as an artist.

Eleanor: I would say so, and would add that whilst there's a creative community, there's also a non-creative community who are equally important. Ullapool and the surrounding areas have an incredibly active community full stop, and there's a lot of very committed people here with a strong sense of purpose for the place. Yes it's a small village, but it's big enough for everybody.



Untitled, Sabi Preston (2013), Collograph print.

To find out more about Bridge House Art visit www.bridgehouseart.co.uk, join the [Facebook page](#) or follow @bridgehouseart on Twitter.

The photographs above are of work exhibited in Do, Undo, Redo (February/March 2013) at an tallas