

Muncrech Mountain

A short story by Guy Allott

In 2020 I went hiking through Switzerland.

It was a chance to visit places I had been in the past that I promised myself I would go back and explore in more depth in the future.

Towards the end of my journey I stayed in a studio in a village nestled at the foot of a Mountain in Ticino, the Italian speaking part of Switzerland.

During that time, I enjoyed the solitude of walking the winding footpaths, over bridges which were themselves over streams cascading over boulders worn smooth by atmospheres long gone.

As I had no obligations outstanding, I had begun to lose a sense of time - I forgot what day or week it was for example – and I found it was quite a calming experience, a luxury even.

I knew it was late summer when I took a walk along a familiar path. What felt like the sun on my face (and in my eyes!) should have prevented me from seeing the hut in the forest which became a pivotal point in my life although of course I did not know this at the time.

Would I have proceeded further if I had known what was to come? Who can say?

Swiss Chalet Hideaway

“As I get closer to investigate, I realise it is occupied. I notice – albeit subconsciously - the sparsity of objects placed outside the chalet mean it is probably one individual who lives there.

I am reminded of the Mary Celeste, that ill-fated Brigantine found drifting close to the Azores almost 150 years ago. Tools seem to be leant against the wall in mid use rather than being stored there. I take a few photographs on my iPhone through which I noticed some smoke coming from a shuttered window, which immediately made me feel dizzy in that way one does if they find themselves trespassing.

I can't quite leave the area of the wooden house and find a way to walk around it from a distance, still taking images on my iPhone.

I put to the back of my mind the feeling that I am being watched. It's 2021 and I live in London and I am filmed almost everywhere I go. To spend any more time thinking about it simply leaves you petrified and immobile. Life is too short.”

Nescio Quid Quod Non

I started to make paintings from the images I had taken. The chalet became the main subject matter of my paintings so much so that most of my walks took me close by this mountain hut.

I never met whoever lived in the house. He never showed himself to me properly at least.

Over the months that followed I would go two or three times a week to look at the building and I started to leave gifts by a large tree which I knew would be seen by the occupant. I'd started to wonder who 'he' was. I had given him a gender after all! At first the gifts were just things I'd seen in a charity shop in the village, but then I decided I wanted to let him know who I was so I left small canvases, brushes and a selection of oil paints in a wooden box by his tree and this became a weekly trade of finished paintings and raw materials.

I left him old magazines such as some copies of Art Forum and Art Review and the Burlington Magazine from the 1980's which a friend had found in a skip and given to me when I was an art student.

I am guessing it was these magazines which had helped him to learn to write because I would see letters everywhere on the walls and on paintings, not that any of it made any sense to me. Not at first anyway.

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These paintings are included in the exhibition too.

I always visited during the day so that I could paint in my studio at night upon my return - when I felt most inspired.

On what turned out to be my final visit (although I did not know this at the time) I could not help but make the trip in late afternoon. To this day I do not remember walking back down the mountain later that evening

But I remember that my tears were mixed with laughter.

Guy Allott
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