

CLIMB UP TO THE MOOR

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

paintings by Judith Bromley & Robert Nicholls
with informative interpretations of the landscape,
and personal insights by the artist



The artists' paintings and written responses to the moorland came together in the form of a book published in October 2011. Their initial aim has grown into a much bigger vision, evolving from their direct experience of the fells:

*The more time I spent up on the moorland with the calls of curlew and lapwing,
the more I rediscovered my true relationship with the changing of the seasons,
the turning of the earth, and the more passionate I became about
caring for our precious jewel of a planet:*



oil on canvas 60 x 80 x 7.5 cm

1. ROCKFACE

The bedrock is the skeleton of the landscape. Over time the underlying rock has been eroded, forming the characteristic terracing of the fells. Deposits from the ancient river delta have been compressed and solidified by their own weight and that of the sea above. This has created rhythmically alternating layers of shale, sandstone and limestone. The soft shale layers have worn away more quickly than the harder rocks, creating darker limestone scars or outcrops.

One of these scars is very familiar to me, having admired it enough to spend hours painting it. Once a seabed and now high up the fellside, the rockface looks out over the dale, exposed to the elements. I had to perch precariously up there to explore the fossils within it.



oil on canvas 60 x 80 x 7.5 cm

2. BOG ●

Rainwater collects in the impermeable "iron pans" that have formed in the rock basins holding the bog. Unable to drain away, it creates a habitat that has resulted in thousands of years of growth, mainly of sphagnum moss, which lives on the minerals it finds in rainwater. As it dies, the sphagnum is unable to decay because of a lack of oxygen in the static water and so builds up, forming layers of peat.

Enjoying the clean basic smell of wet peat, I manoeuvre my way across the bog, finding sphagnum moss, star moss, cotton grass and stripy deer moss. These wetlands bear no resemblance to what we imagine bog should be -smelly and stagnant. Hummocks, formed where the peat has become very thick, are raised and drier, on which grow heather and the evergreen cowberry.



oil on canvas 60 x 80 x 7.5 cm

3. POOL ●

These wetlands are havens of wildlife. Having adapted to the special conditions, particular flora and fauna thrive, each surviving because of the other. Insects that breed in the bog pools are vital food for the chicks of ground nesting birds.

A myriad of tiny insects perform their mating dance just above the pool, and voracious water boatmen skim across, sensing with their feet the smallest movement of a midge as it lands on the surface. Generations of sphagnum have built up around the overflow to cause the basin to sit higher than its surroundings.



oil on canvas 60 x 80 x 7.5 cm

5. PEAT HAG ●

Peat hags are black vertical cliffs of peat and can be up to three metres tall in places. They have been created as a result of the mining or digging out of peat. The sterile peat preserves whatever gets caught or laid down in the layers of sphagnum, revealing what life was like as far back as seven thousand years ago. Pollens, charcoal layers and even bodies have been found!

I find my blue horizons obstructed by a foreground of tall peat hags, ancient presences wearing hats of bilberry leaves fringed with an overhang of crisped crunchy lichens. Standing here in the shelter of these exposed layers I try to grasp the time it took for enough soil to build up to sustain forests, then how long it has taken to create this depth of peat, and now how the flow of water has gradually eroded the layers.



pastel 61.5 x 45 cm framed

46. PINE IN PEAT

Amongst this spectacular primordial landscape, I'm excited to stumble across a fall of crumbling peat that reveals a scattering of broken pine branches, looking like tattered old dragons heaving themselves out of the mire. They are likely to be thousands of years old.



oil on canvas 60 x 80 x 7.5 cm

4A. SPHAGNUM FLUSH ●

The spongy peat is constantly immersed in rainwater and new growths of sphagnum absorb yet more moisture. As the moss builds up the whole area can become raised and domed. Water overflowing from the blanket bog gradually feeds the streams and rivers. The drainage becks can wear away the peat causing deep steep sided valleys and great collapses.

I climb high to an overflow point where the water spouts out and works its way through deep sphagnum. Water crowfoot, reeds and masses, sphagnum of a variety of shades and colours grow in abundance, feeding off, capturing, holding and floating in the flow.



oil on canvas 60 x 80 x 7.5 cm

4B. SPHAGNUM FLUSH

Although the inspiration for this project evolved from the experience of Yorkshire Dales Moorland, most of the paintings and text are appropriate for all British moorland. The following is the Yorkshire viewpoint:

The Yorkshire Peat Partnership has been formed by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England, North York Moors National Park Authority and the Environment Agency. It receives support from Nidderdale AONB, Pennine Prospects, Environment Agency, National Trust, Yorkshire Water, Moorland Association, National Farmers Union and Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust. The aim of the partnership is to restore and conserve upland peat resources in order to ensure the long-term future these unique and valuable habitats

The potential project area is vast, encompassing the uplands of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, Nidderdale AONB, North York Moors National Park and areas of the South Pennines, North of the river Calder. Within the Yorkshire region alone there is nearly 70,000 ha of upland peat soil, upon which a staggering 4,350,000 m of grips (drainage channels) have been incised! There is a real and pressing need to undertake restoration in the Yorkshire region in order to protect these precious carbon sinks.



oil on canvas 60 x 80 x 7.5 cm

6. COTTON GRASS DRIFT ●

We now know that peat bogs are among the most significant carbon stores in the world. Artificial drainage known as the 'gripping' of the moors, used to be encouraged and subsidised. However we now know that by draining the bogs and drying out the peat, carbon is released into the atmosphere, contributing to global warming. Gripping has also been blamed for flash flooding in the valleys and plains below. Whilst the peat bogs are damp they act as a sponge, allowing heavy rain to drain away slowly. Once dried out they repel water which then falls in torrents down the fellside. Projects to fill in the gripps and revitalise the bogs will enable sphagnum to re-absorb the carbon.

There is evidence of gripping here, but thankfully the ditches have been blocked up again so insects abound for the growing chicks and the balance of flora and fauna has returned. White silk swathes of cotton bobbing grass are reminiscent of winter snowdrifts.



oil on canvas 60 x 80 x 7.5 cm

7. PEATSTREAM

Water draining off the peat bogs is acidic and the colour of malt whisky. When it runs over limestone it acts as a solvent causing the water to have a high calcium content. The power and energy of water has been manipulated by humans for centuries. Now we are looking to find sustainable sources of energy again, some of the earliest hydroelectric systems are being reinstated.

The land is a fascinating interweaving of both acid and calcareous soils, each with their own flora. Here a dark peaty stream joins clear limey spring water before bubbling down and mixing together into one.



oil on canvas 60 x 80 x 7.5 cm

8. CAVEMOUTH

Limestone is dissolved and shaped by water, which has created a series of underground cave systems. A limestone landscape is known as 'karst' and has areas of bare rock worn into clints (blocks of bedrock) and grykes (deep fissures), known as limestone pavements.

I scramble through fallen boulders to find the mouth of a cave I visited years ago. We had to crawl through the narrow entrance and wade through what felt like chest-high water before being able to walk upright on dry land alongside the flow that had hollowed out the cavern. I was pleased to have been brave enough to have done it, but relieved when we emerged back out into freedom of sunshine, air currents on my face, and the colours and beauty of the dale.



oil on canvas 60 x 80 x 7.5 cm

10. JUNIPER ●

Juniper is one of only three conifer species native to Britain and was amongst the first colonisers of the high plateaux scraped clean by the ice age. It was once widespread in the upland fringes of northern England, growing as a shrub in open woodland of Birch, Rowan, Alder, Hawthorn and Hazel, or as a column-like tree. It is likely that even the youngest trees are 100 to 150 years old. Juniper is now on the UK list of priority habitats for biodiversity action and collected seed is being grown by a professional tree nursery so that plants will be available for suitable new native woodland planting in years to come.

There are male and female junipers. I choose one and sit with her, drawing her, dancing with her curvaceousness. How many years has she stood here? Strong earth and solid stone lie beneath me, into which tough roots delve to find sustenance and support.

Infinite space moves above us.



oil on canvas 60 x 80 x 7.5 cm

9A. GRASSES ●

Flushes are areas of land into which water drains down from the moor. They can support quite different flora according to the content of the water. Water from the peat bogs is acidic whereas alkaline water springs from underwater limestone systems.

Having reached the summit and rested on a cairn to admire the view, I descend from rock and bog to a 'flush' area where the rare yellow marsh saxifrage is to be found. The tall grasses blow against my legs in the midday breeze then suddenly I am knee deep in cushions of massy saxifrage, the grasses now shoulder height



oil on canvas 60 x 80 x 7.5 cm

9B. GRASSES ●

The same stream of life that runs
through my veins night and day runs
through the world and dances in
rhythmic measures.

It is that same life that shoots in joy
through the dust of the earth in
numberless blades of grass
and breaks into tumultuous waves of
leaves and flowers.

It is that same life that is rocked
in the ocean-cradle of birth and death,
in ebb and in flow.

Gitanjali, Rabindranath Tagore



oil on canvas 60 x 80 x 7.5 cm

11. JULY EVENING ●

We are experiencing a spell of very hot weather. The thinning of the ozone layer means that nowadays when the sun does shine the heat is too powerful for me to be exposed up here for very long. The peace is interrupted by the sound of a plane overhead carrying holidaymakers to far distant places. The evening sky is crisscrossed by plane trails painting a beautiful spectacle out of exhaust pollution.



oil on canvas 50 x 70 x 4.5 cm

12. SNOWDRIFT

For over a week we have had snowfalls and snowmelts down here in the valley, but up on the high ground the snow has stayed throughout, layer upon layer of snow; the greater the altitude the deeper the snow cover. Crossing the cattle grid onto the moor I enter a stunning and dazzling white wasteland, a frozen ocean.



oil on canvas 100 x 50 cm

13. GREENING THE MOOR ●

walking along this track has always felt like turning the earth around with my feet, watching the shapes of the landscape change: the grandeur of the high fells, the rugged ravines, and the sweeping windswept spaces.



oil on canvas 100 x 50 cm

14. APPROACHING STORM ●

This terrain was created through global changes over millennia. Will the earth adjust to the challenges we are thrusting at the fragile interdependency of life, to become something quite different? Will climate change destroy the whole planet, or merely threaten the human race?



oil on canvas 100 x 50 cm

15. FLIGHT & 16. TARN

This circle of intense blue is held, suspended on the high plain, reflecting the proximity of the sky, up here in the heavens. There is constant movement in this stretch of perpetual timelessness. What a privilege to be part of it for a short while.



oil on canvas 100 x 50 cm



oil on canvas 100 x 50 cm

17A & B SUN & SHADOW

Climbing, I shed all troubles and complications, and am overtaken by a profound sense of timelessness. I become aware of the simplicity and is-ness of the present moment, but also of the complexity of the interdependence of all things. Surely the wisdom of the earth will ensure that life continues?



oil on canvas 100 x 50 cm

18. RAGWORT ●

I am struck yet again by the contrasts between the infinite and the intimate, millennia and milliseconds that I find and experience up here: the great expanses of earth and sky, the detail of tiny flowers; the eons of time behind the creation of the landscape,



oil on canvas 100 x 50 cm



oil on canvas 100 x 50 cm

19. NOVEMBER FLOODS ●

In many cultures water is used as a symbol for spirit. With this in mind I contemplate the journey this water has taken from the watershed, and that it will make from here down to the sea, and remember a quotation from Khalil Gibran: 'Life and death are one even as the river and the sea are one'.

Looking at my own journey I recall times of feeling 'enspirited', and other times of drought and doubt. I know that even when feeling disconnected, there remains, deep within me, a flow that connects me to 'all that is', seen and unseen. I recognise that the path of my spiritual journey can sometimes merge with that of others; at other times is unique to me, can take me flying into rainbows, or deep into subterranean passages.

20. GROUSE IN HAWTHORN

The grouse have come down from the high moor to feast on the berries of an old hawthorn hedge



22. LICHENSTONE ●



23. SNOWHOLE ●



24. HEATHER ●



25. BOGPOOL ●

I revisit the small deep clear pool just below the scar. The weed is bedecked with bubbles, which bounce back up when I poke my stick down to assess the depth. It does not reach the bottom.

I am struck by how the white surround intensifies the colours of the tapestry of moss. A luxurious textured carpet of reds, greens, dark rich siennas and umbers, contrasts with the old and tainted snow.



26. SEPTEMBER HEATH ●



all on these pages oil on canvas 30 x 30 x 7.5 cm



27. ROCKROSE

Lichens creep and cling over the limestone surfaces. As they decay they create enough soil for the roots of the rockroses and thyme snuggling in the cracks.



28. UNDERHEATH



29. SPHAGNUM ISLAND

I hadn't realised that sphagnum moss comes in so many forms and colours, like tiny wet forests, some of their stalks well over a foot long emerging from deep down in the peat.



The universe is a community of subjects
not a collection of objects

The natural world is
the larger sacred community
to which we belong.

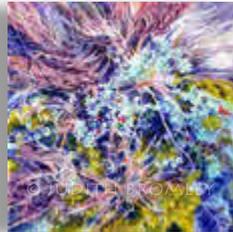
To become alienated from this
community is to become
destitute in all that makes us human.

To damage this community is to
diminish our own existence.

Thomas Berry



30. WATER CROWFOOT ●



31. MOORLAND MATCHES ●



32. MOSSES LICHEN & GRASS ●



36. MOSSES & LICHEN ●



33. FUNGI 1 & 34. FUNGI 2 ●



Each fungus consists of the mycelium: a root-like network of filaments that extends under the surface of the soil, interlocking with other mycelia to form a web that covers the earth like a caul, just under the surface. When the conditions are right the toadstool we recognise, the fruiting body, pops up into the air; but most of the year, the fibrous net is busying away breaking down organic material into compost - enriching the soil. When we humans apply weed-killers or artificially change the composition and chemistry of the soil in other ways, we risk killing these beneficial organisms to our own detriment.



35. VIOLET CRACK
The fallen boulders and steep cliffs are decorated with ferns and violets



37. FERN ●



all on this page oil on canvas 20 x 20 x 7.5 cm



oil on canvas 50 x 60 x 7.5 cm

39. MOOR BURN

Three quarters of the world's remaining heather is conserved here in Britain, as a possible result of 200 years of moorland management for red grouse. Grouse thrive on new fresh shoots of heather, so on managed grouse moors burning is done to maintain a young vigorous growth and a patchwork of age diversity. Heather burning is a specialist art, gamekeepers burn small areas to stimulate young vigorous growth and create a patchwork of different heather heights. This patchwork quilt provides a suite of other birds like curlew, lapwing and golden plover with their perfect niche when they return in the spring to breed.

Thick yellow smoke billows up where the keepers are burning strips of heather. Some say that as heath fires were once a natural occurrence, this practice is only imitating nature. A quick 'cool' heather burn does not remove the seed bank below, and creates 'fire-breaks' should a deep burning wildfire take hold in a dry spell. A deep burn is deadly for a peat bog and it will never recuperate - certainly not in the lifetime of the next generation. Such a fire would not only destroy the rich diversity of the ancient bogs but also the heather.



oil on canvas 50 x 60 x 7.5 cm

41. SUNSETMOON ●
A fall of snow bedecks the scrub. The sky is clear and the sun sinking low. The glowing moon reveals itself as the heavens darken, and stars begin to sparkle out. Our earth floats amongst them, a precious living jewel.



oil on canvas 50 x 60 x 7.5 cm

40. SUNSET SNOW ●



oil on canvas 50 x 60 x 7.5 cm

38. AURORA BOREALIS ●



oil on canvas 70 x 40 x 4.5 cm

42. EXPOSURE ●

Here there are sweeping views of dark and light snowmelt patterns. The deeper drifts remain along the wall sides and in the dips and gullies, but thinner layers have melted all away.



© JUDITH BROMLEY

oil on canvas 120 x 100 x 4.5 cm

43. MAYMOOR ●

Looking back I see the track winding away into the distance as a symbol of my life's journey. The stratification of the landscape becomes eroded in time, exposing important features, just as parts of my life have faded into insignificance, leaving milestones of influence more easily distinguished. Each time I climb higher I can see beyond my previous horizon. Each time I review my life my perception changes.

Remembering how long it has taken to create all these rocks, peat, heather, and grasslands, my own problems are put into perspective.

All this space... all this time...

I am merely a speck spending but a few seconds up here...



oil on canvas 60 x 80 x 4.5 cm

44. MOOR FREEZE ●

The weather-beaten grasses are now covered with a growth of ice crystals, shaped like sickles and scimitars by the howling freezing gale. Icicles look like ogres teeth in the black mouths of the peat hags.



pastel 69 x 49 cm framed

45. EARLY MORNING FOG ●



oil on canvas 100 x 80 x 4.5 cm

49. WATERSHED ●

I'm amazed at how much goes on in this windswept wasteland. The bleak and empty wilderness is actually a seething breeding ground. How do all these creatures manage to exist up here? It is a completely different world to our comfortable life in the valley.



oil on canvas 50 x 60 x 7.5 cm

47. QUIET SPACE ●

What a contrast between the wide space up here and the busy life down in the valley. I, like many people I suspect, spend my life going from task to task, to entertainment and back, from one occupation to another, not allowing for any spaces in between. Making more spaces in my life, wide open spaces in which I can just BE - be where and as I am - would enable me to absorb and receive from my environment, as happens up here on the moor, instead of always doing and giving out.

Perhaps with a better balance between doing and being, giving and receiving, my existence may become more sacred, precious, valuable.



oil on canvas 100 x 80 x 4.5 cm

48. HEATHERCLOUD ●

The heather is in flower. As I walk I can smell the heather pollen all ready for collection into thousands of little leg pouches as the bees sip nectar, flower after flower, from dawn till dusk. What abundance!

How much the whole complex system of life on earth relies on bees and other insects. Without them visiting blossoms the whole year through, and in so doing pollinating the majority of all plant life, our crops would fail. And yet bees numbers are declining all over the world, vast numbers of them are sick. Has our use of pesticides and herbicides caused this? Is it our industries sending poisons into the air that has affected their health? Have we gone just that much too far in upsetting the balance and interdependency of living things on our precious planet?



watercolour approx 93 x 74 cm framed

50. CURLEW ●

I tell you -

I would rather we lost
The entire contents
Of every art gallery
In the whole world
Than lose
Forever
The cry of the curlew

Alastair McIntosh, from 'Love and Revolution', Luath Press.



watercolour approx 95 x 75 cm framed

51. BUZZARD ●



©ROBERT NICHOLS

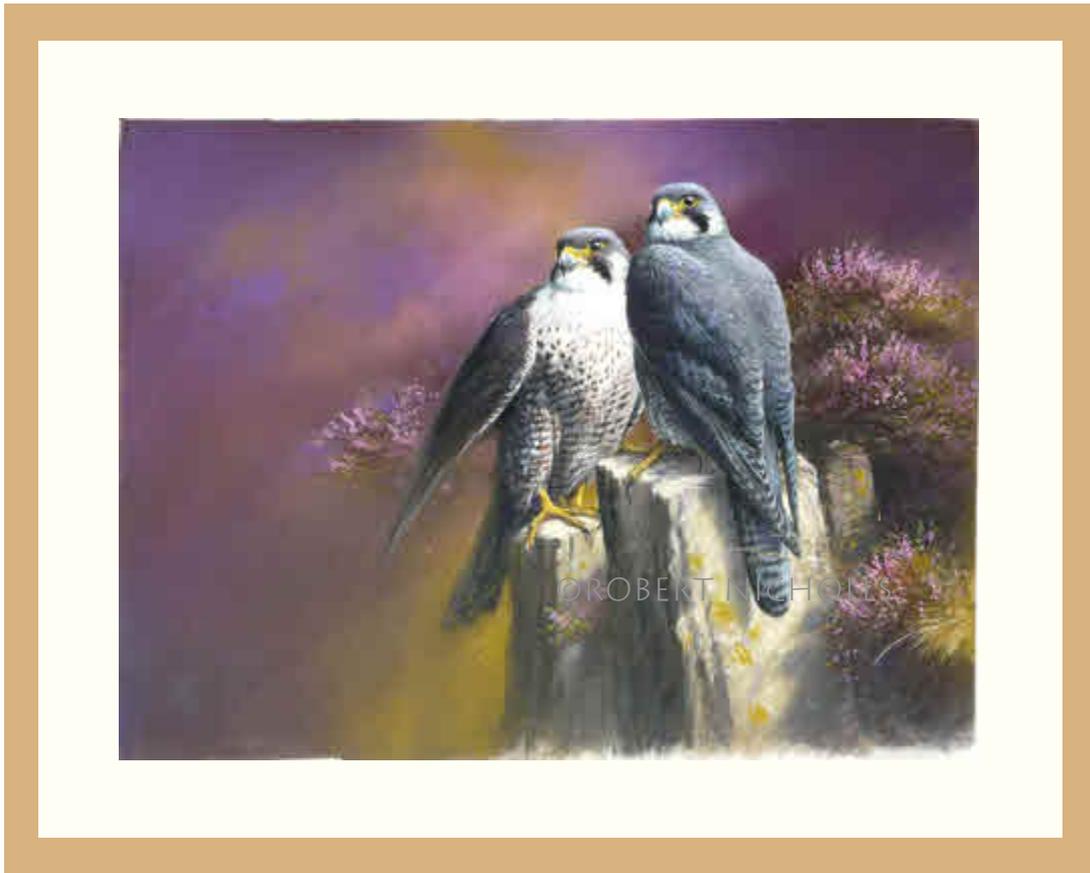
watercolour 87 x 67 cm framed

52. LAPWING ●



53. BLACK GROUSE ●

watercolour 76.5 x 64 cm framed



74. PEREGRINES ●

mixed media 95.5 x 75 cm framed



57. LONESOME HARE ● mixed media 74 x 46 cm framed



62. STOAT DANCE ● watercolour 69 x 50 cm framed



66. SHEEP IN HEATHER ●

For several centuries wool played a major role in the English economy. Today however, despite it being the original high performance fibre, competition from cotton, artificial fibres made from oil and recycled materials means that wool only accounts for 3% of today's textile market.

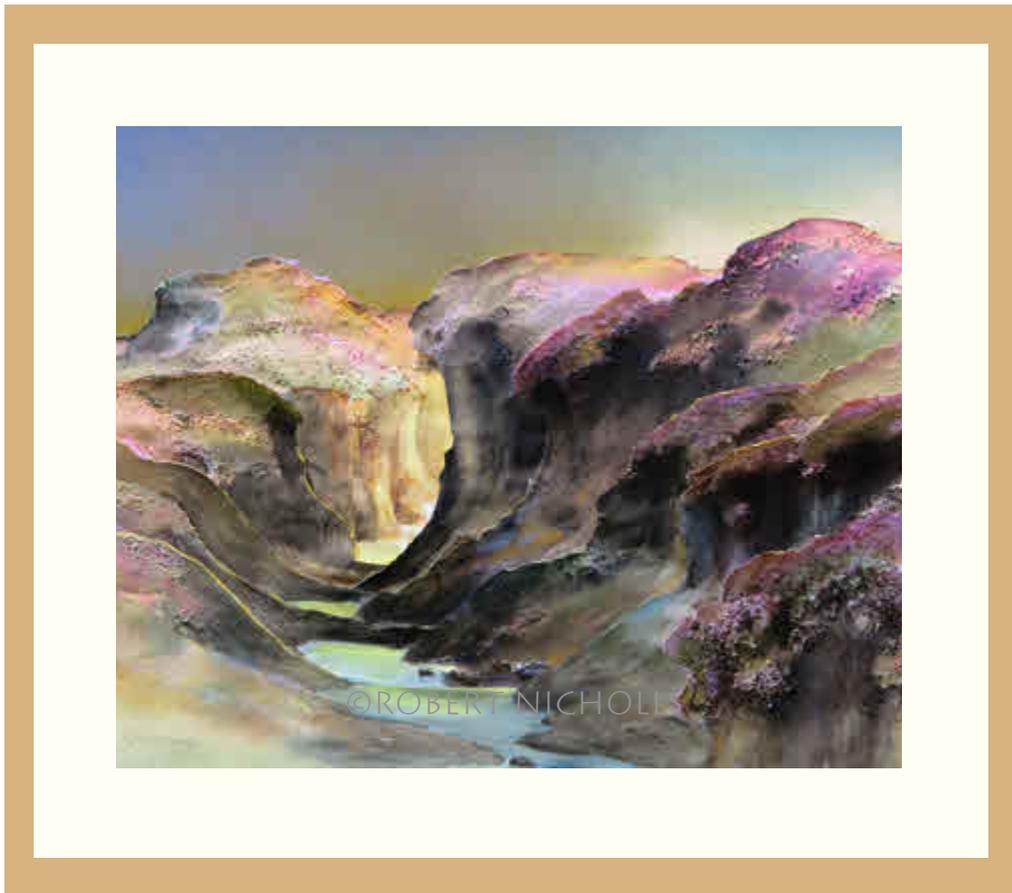
It can be made into yarn, is resilient, has fabulous insulating properties, can be made into virtually waterproof felted fabrics and is fire-retardant. It is important that its various uses are promoted, that demand is generated and that through an increase in the price of wool, shearing will no longer simply be associated with the welfare of an animal, but will be a source of additional income.

Sustainable use of the moor is all about balance. There is an area that I like to visit which has not been grazed for a dozen years, now rich with diverse species. Over the fence sheep have overgrazed the land into a grassland desert. Flat growing heath rush has no appeal to sheep, so on degraded moors it can predominate even over the plants the sheep do find nourishing.



mixed media on torn cut and punched paper - approx 70 x 68 cm

76. HEATHER MOUNTAIN ●



mixed media on torn cut and punched paper - approx 88 x 78 cm

76. PEAT HAG VALLEY ●



watercolour 38.5 x 55 cm framed

59. SKYLARK ●



watercolour 52.5 x 65.5 cm framed

58. GROUSE DISPLAY ●



watercolour 43 x 49 cm framed

64. SPIRIT OF THE MOOR ●



watercolour 37.5 x 40 cm framed

65. WHEATEAR ●



watercolour 49 x 53 cm framed

60. OYSTERCATCHER ●



watercolour 69 x 51.5 cm framed

55. GOLDEN PLOVER ●



watercolour 69 x 51.5 framed

56A & B GOLDEN PLOVER FLIGHT ●



mixed media: approx 70 x 50 cm framed ●



watercolour 45 x 33.5 cm framed
68. HEATH BERRIES ●



watercolour 48.5 x 28.5 cm framed
69. WINTER GRASSES



w/colour 44 x 54.5 cm framed
70. HEATHER ●



w/col 27 x 41 cm
72. BOG
ASPHODEL



watercolour 47.5 x 47.5 cm framed
73. FLUSH FLOWERS ●



watercolour 47 x 16 cm framed
67. LICHENS & CLUBMOSS ●



w/col 33.5 x 28.5 cm
71. HEATHERLING

SALES

A very few of the paintings are still available to purchase as of 2024.

Please contact us if you are interested in anything you see without a red dot!

01969650266 or askrigg@askrigg-studios.co.uk

PRINTS

See the giclee prints catalogue on the website