

Winter Words

Robin Richmond

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Robin Richmond: Winter Words, 2018

I am back working in a real studio again. Ignoring Christmas, and walking in the wintry landscape and then disappearing into my work. I have space to move around here, with my patient easels and faithful tables and stoic studio sink that I have washed my brushes in for 42 years so very very very glad to have me back.

I tend to anthropomorphise my tools. It's bonkers. Walls have memories and brushes have personalities. Some are beloved and ancient and must be treated with respect and care. Some are *parvenus*, real wise guys and destined to be ruined. I have been making huge messes and throwing paint around like a 5-year-old and I feel I am breathing again.

Living and working in the very small room in Paris last month made me realise that I need physical and emotional distance from my work. Much of what I do happens away from the studio in my head, and I feel the best work comes when I sneak up on it. Sort of pounce on it without thinking too much. I have this mystical notion that the studio is the sum of every painting I have ever done in it, and there are accretions of experience in the very walls, with one painting leading to the next. I am privileged to have worked in my London studio for over 40

years and the French one, where I am now, almost as long... not many artists are this lucky.

Years ago, I became allergic to oil paint and was happily converted to acrylic but this past week I've been getting the old oils out. Some of the tubes belonged to my mother who I hope is painting her lovely still-lives in the sky. Seeing them again is like seeing dear friends. Venerable Italian paints by Maimeri (do they still exist?) that I used as a young girl in Rome have my mother's thumbprints where I now place my own in a kind of communion across time. My own wanton teenaged smears are still visible. It drove my mother mad. It's a kind of emotional archaeology. So far so good. No rashes. No swollen eyes. No burned fingers. The resin smell of pure turpentine is heavenly. The smell of my childhood and the smell that makes my children remember their's.

The winter landscape is lovely in these last weeks of 2018. What a year. Horrors, impossible political screw-ups and human tragedies all around but also the birth of a beloved new family member. One can remember here that the world is a fine and good place looking at the soft burned umbers and ochres that blur the horizon of my land. Sludgy skies that are all colour and no colour limn the tops of trees that are down to their winter skin; leafless and as delicate as a Japanese ink drawing by Hokusai. I scavenge the forest and pick up bark and leaves and berries - trophies to decorate the studio. It is the dying of the year, but it is a beautiful death.

May 2019 bring peace and joy to you all.