



# THE JACKDAW

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Independent Views on the Visual Arts

## PULLMAN



## ATSO







It is nearly 30 years since I first saw the extraordinary series of six landscape drawings in ink by Samuel Palmer at the Ashmolean Museum. Created in 1825 when he was 20, they depict a vision of landscape unlike anything I had ever seen before ... so full of invention in their depiction of flora and fauna, so bold and original in style – a true celebration of man in harmony with nature.

The ancient wisdom of these works made such an impact on me and they continue to relate to my world in a direct and relevant way. I grew up on a hill farm in Mid-Wales – a place where living with the land was second-nature and animal husbandry was considered to be an art. Over many centuries grazing sheep and cattle have shaped the rolling farmland of this area which in turn sustains a cultural life rich in music and bardic traditions, and keeps the Welsh language – a priceless gift – alive.

This has been the backdrop to my art. It is my ancestral landscape and therefore a very inspiring subject matter. My response to it comes from the heart – and the work is my handwriting. While the act of drawing has always been central to my practice I like to embrace different materials and methods of working, sometimes choosing to work on paper, sometimes on fabric.

It is strange how this deep sense of belonging to a place actually allows me great freedom, to look outwards, to explore and to keep growing. Over the last decade there have been valuable periods of study and travel. The large scale experimental works in ink on acetate originated during a period away studying printmaking techniques. The first of these works *Afon y galon* (River of the heart) challenges me in terms of scale, technique and emotional content. It is highly gestural and expressive in nature, always concerned with balance and rhythm. A form of choreography and personal mapmaking.

There have also been residencies at Columbia University, New York and the Sanskriti Foundation, Delhi. This was followed by a journey to Uttarakhand to see the sacred river Ganga near its source in the foothills of the Himalayas and to witness landscape as wilderness on an unimaginable scale.



**Top:** *Afon y galon* (River of the heart) in progress 2011, ink on acetate, 200 x 450cm.

**Above:** *Yn y dyffryn – yn ymyl y nant, ailymweliad* (In the valley – near the stream, revisited), ink, and pastel on paper, 69 x 102cm, 2019

Back in my Mid-Wales studio I have recently embarked on a series of large ink drawings titled *Yn y dyffryn* (In the valley). These depict the minutiae of my most familiar landscape – visiting and revisiting, sensing the layers and bones of the old place.

Increasingly it feels like a landscape under threat as concerns grow about future agricultural policies. The old patterns and certainties no longer apply as connections to farming and food production shift and change, possibly squeezing out a way of life.

This heightened sense of urgency adds to the power of the landscape ... and to the power of Art.

#### Forthcoming solo exhibitions:

**Twenty Twenty Gallery, Ludlow, March 7th – April 4th**

**Egni: A Decade of Creativity is at Ruthin Craft Centre, April – July 2020.**

**Eleri Mills is represented by Thackeray Gallery.**

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