



THE ARTIST IN SOCIETY

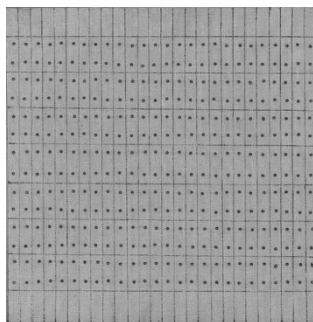
*When we arrive we will rest against the ceiling.
We will tread our legs and look down on the
monumental. On the very large projection of our
sketch. We will eat what is left of our sandwiches
and try to get our bearings on the map. But we
won't make sense of the cypher. Because being up
there will make everything flat and we will panic
and blame one another. Whose stupid idea was this?
To come all the way up here? It is even colder up
here than down there and we can't get back down
and we're lost. Where is it? This is not it. We do
not recognise these faceless things. We do not know
what they are. We will cling to each other and cry
like children and then suddenly you will be alone.
You will no longer recognise me. You will no longer
know what I am.*



Mrs Johnson was my first teacher. She was a steely woman and the first great teacher I ever had. She ran the weekly Writer's Circle that was held every Thursday afternoon until four. I was prolific back then. I churned out stories with confidence. I was precocious and appropriated heavily. I won a prize for my short story *Jaqueline Stiller's Needing to Know* (mum was reading *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*) and Mrs Johnson suggested that I be placed in a program for gifted children. My mother laughed and said no. 'She's not gifted she's just smart'.

My mother was a harsh critic. A few years later I got an A+ for a short story I wrote about Pakistani boys being forced to weave rugs (I'd read a magazine article about Pakistani boys being forced to weave rugs and based it on that). I felt like a literary crusader. I was touched by my own empathy. My mother was not: 'It is not your story to tell'.

Every year the Writer's Circle would go on Writer's Camp. Mrs Johnson was friends with a children's author who had a farm, and once a year we would go and camp on the floor of her hexagonal house. I enjoyed the countryside and spending time with Mrs Johnson but I got homesick and cried a lot. I remember Mrs Johnson teaching me how to make rissoles and I remember feeding the tawny frogmouths (the author rescued injured native animals and then wrote about them in works such as *Harry the Hairy Nosed Wombat*, *Fraser the Dingo* and *Velvet the Flying Gecko*). On the farm there was an old wooden hut. It was called the 'enchanted cabin' and it was very dusty and filled with strange objects: antiquated farm implements, glass bottles in different shapes, sizes and colours and some of them had bubbles trapped in the glass. I decided to clean it. I spent hours scrubbing and dusting it. When I was finished I sat and admired it. The following year I went back, cleaned it and sat in it again.



When my nephew Jack was four, we were in the back seat of the car and he was resting his chin on his fist and looking out the window. When I asked him what was up he said “I just wish I had more time to myself.”

We were invited to a barbecue. It was hot so everyone was out in the garden and in the garden was a tiny old shed. It was colonial and empty but had lots of shelves built into it. Jack spent most of the night in there. He found a chair and pushed it up against a shelf and sat at it like a desk. He told me he lived there. I asked him where all his stuff was and he pointed to the shelves. I asked him if he had a TV. He said no just books. I asked him if he had a fridge he said no. I asked him what he did in there. He spoke with his hands which he waved at the shelves and said he read and he slept - over there. We sat in his house until it was time to go home. It was a bit small for me but it fitted him perfectly.

A couple of years after the night in the shed, Jack's class was given a homework task. Everyone in the class was asked to take in a postcard of their favourite place. Jack said his favourite place was home (15 Terrace St. Newmarket). So he took in a photo of that.



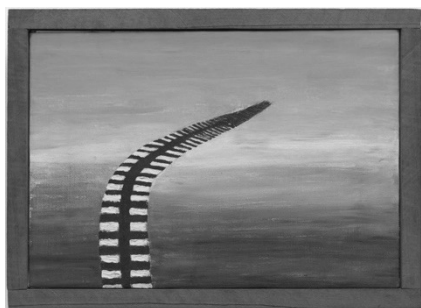
I used to keep silkworms. I kept them in a shoe box under my bed and I fed them on mulberry leaves from the mulberry tree in the front garden. I collected all their silk but I never figured out what to do with it.

Forrest Bess lived in Chinquapin, Texas and was a bait fisherman. He painted at night, in a shack, that he made from materials, he found on the sand spit he lived on. His house was mostly white but the edges of the roof, door and windows were painted blue and red. The shack had two bedrooms and a veranda and a dock. Bess was not a recluse. Despite his unconventional beliefs, he had a close knit of friends who loved and accepted him, even though they lead comparatively conservative lives. Bess's shack was isolated by water but not far from the local community and every day fishermen would come to buy shrimp. Bess's visionary little paintings were often shown to the most unlikely of audiences. Some people didn't get them, or him, but a surprising amount of them did. Bess was represented by The Betty Parsons Gallery in New York but his last exhibition was a small show in Texas, put together by a group of ladies from the Bay City Arts League.

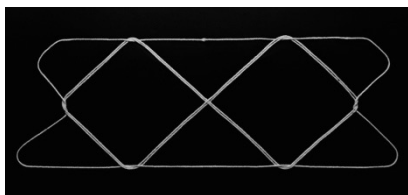
For the first time in my life, I feel at home and it's the place of my earliest memory as a child. When you get off by yourself as I have, very close to nature, those laws which are predominate in nature become a part of you. If there is a desire for understanding 'big thoughts' then that

desire alone is a terrific force. Our life here is close to the elements... Riding along in my boat on the canal, pulling my shrimp trawl behind, I often look at the banks of the canal with their spoil and weeds, but with a bit of imagination - the miniature landscape becomes large, the mounds of dirt removed from the canal become hills and mountains, the weeds become beautiful jungle trees and a very quiet feeling arises, that this is as it should be - the panorama is a reflection of a much greater panorama - the banks of a much greater river and Man moves along this Great River, pausing here and there but ever moving on. Sometimes in my fantasy it seems that just around the corner might be a harbour of another dimension - another civilization.

- Letter to Betty Parsons 1949¹



My best friend was called Sam. We were born a year apart and our parents were friends. We both had much older siblings and were often the only children at social gatherings. It was always hot and Sam and I didn't like outdoor activities, so we spent most of our time inside watching movies. We didn't have many videos so we watched *Watership Down*, *Astro Boy* and *Alice in Wonderland* over and over again. When we got older we watched 1950s horror movies like *The Thing from Another World* and *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. I remember one day during the summer holidays, his mum forced us outside with a basketball. After a few failed attempts at getting the ball in the hoop we just stood under it and waited until we were allowed back inside.



My mother used to send me on errands to the neighbours. 'Go on it'll be good for you.' I used to keep an object in my pocket to play with, like a coin or a button, so I could imagine that I was the object, safe inside my pocket, and not on the front step next door.

Once a year the Jacaranda trees would dot the hills with clouds of blue and turn the streets into archways of colour. The bell-shaped flowers fell like snow, covering the ground in a carpet of bells that were juicy under foot. Jacaranda blue is pale and almost purple. It is the same blue as plumbago and it stands out at dusk and turns pink before storms.



Janet Irwin was a doctor and her house was filled with beautiful things. She had a paperweight with a dandelion head suspended in it. She had mother of pearl opera glasses and a ceramic Loch Ness Monster that was dark green and had four segments and looked like it was breaching the shelf. She had aquatints of Scottish mountains and an antique punch bowl that had a pearlescent lemon-yellow glaze and was the size and shape of a swan. One day we wagged school together. She took me to meet David Attenborough. When I went to get my copy of *Life in the Freezer* signed, he said something and I was struck dumb and ran away.



The 90s was a good time to be awkward. Grunge was in and I hid in jeans, baggy t-shirts and flannelette shirts that I never did up. I screened my face with hair and sometimes I'd wear a beanie, despite the 35-degree heat.

In high school I learned to forge my mother's signature. I would get up, get dressed, walk up the hill and walk straight back down again. Some days I negotiated off - 'study days'. It was partly true. I did more work at home than school; in class I spent a lot of time gazing out of louvers at crows in the empty school yard. They had glossy plumage and a rainbow sheen. They had pale blue eyes and would swear at each other as they hop-walked and rummaged in bins.

In my first year of art school me and my friend Sam (a different Sam) sat in boxes for four hours. We called them boxes but only one was a box. The other 'box' was a desk fenced off by partitions and the boxes were open on one side so we could document the work. We sat in our boxes for an assignment on Time. Our premise was that time was not independent of light and space and we tested this theory by shrinking space and tampering with each other's lighting to see how accurate our sense of time was. We sat in our individual boxes, side by side, and had three light sources set up so we could plug and unplug them whenever we thought five minutes had passed or, we could try to deceive each other by plugging and un-plugging the lights at random (we thought we were pretty clever). My friend Sam (who probably shouldn't have spent four hours in a box) couldn't stop fidgeting and afterwards when we sped up the video I was in focus but Sam was just a blur. The trick, I figured, was stillness. The more you moved the smaller it got and the longer it took. So I didn't.

At the time, I was inspired by the work of Taiwanese-American artist Tehching Hsieh a.k.a. Sam Hsieh (yet another Sam). At the age of twenty-four, Hsieh sailed from Taiwan to America and jumped ship in Philadelphia. Hsieh operated on the margins and was an illegal immigrant for fourteen years during which, without gallery representation or any real connection with the New York art scene, he made his seminal *One Year Performances*. Hsieh is best known for *One Year Performance 1980 - 1981* when he punched a time clock every hour, on the hour for one year. This however, was never my favourite. I was more interested in *One Year Performance 1978 - 1979* (when he locked himself in a cage for a year and did not speak, read, write, watch television or listen to the radio) and *One Year Performance 1981 - 1982* (when he lived outside for a year, not entering buildings or shelter of any kind and wandered around New York with a backpack and a sleeping bag). There's a nice progression to Hsieh's subsequent performances which see him retreating further and further into what has been described as a 'sustained invisibility'². For *One Year Performance 1985 - 1986* Hsieh announced that he would give up art for a year. He didn't make art, look at art or read about it. After that Hsieh spent the next thirteen years making art but not showing it. During this time, Hsieh started a work called

Disappearance but never finished it. For the *Disappearance* work, Hsieh set off for Alaska but stopped after six-months because he felt that he was already in exile and *Disappearance* was taking him too far down a road he was already on and could not bear.

Despite literally putting himself in tight spots, Hsieh is not one to be pigeon holed by the art world's belated interest in him:

*Some people want you to be more political, but actually I am more like a cave man - primitive. I trust my intuition. Of course, I understand civilization; New York is civilized - very strong. I came to do my work in the city; I didn't go to the mountains to be a hermit because I knew that staying in the city to do this kind of work would be ironic, and that's what I wanted.*³

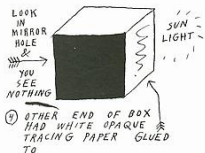
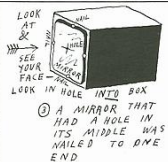
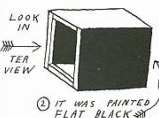
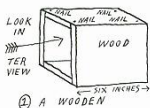
Hsieh made a career out of walking the tightrope between the private and the performative and art and life, although he insists that art was not his career, but his life. Which makes the announcement of his retirement, somewhat of a paradox. But in 2000, that is what Hsieh did:

*"I don't do art any more, I no longer feel creative. I don't want to do what the art world expects me to do. This is my exit. This is my freedom."*⁴

NOV. 15, 1983
AN INTERVIEW

WHEN I LIVED ACROSS THE
HALL FROM JOHN CAGE ON MONROE
STREET (1950'S)

I MADE & GAVE TO HIM:



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The art school was in a jam factory. It had wooden beams and arched windows. It had harbour on its front and a mountain in the background. 'There's snow on the mountain.' If it did snow. Never down at sea level. Depending on the traffic it took less than an hour. You had to cross two bridges and a causeway. One of the bridges had five lanes. Over a kilometre long and 60 metres high in the middle. It was a popular suicide spot with a spectacular view of the river. You could see the botanics as you headed in. The only swathe of autumn, rimmed by the constant blue grey of gums. They said the drawings were contrived. It mattered less in the car. Putting distance. Cresting the bridge. Changing shores. More shores. More bodies of water between. Damming it all. From Forcett they were abstract. The way the road wound long and curvy. Red Hill was too straight. A blot on an otherwise perfect line. The trees bled like ink wash. They liked those drawings. But they said they looked like landscapes. Sped from Copping. He flashed me once. A country nudge. Behave yourself. On the veranda. Days between classes. Unfettered making. Thinking down the valley.



Leigh Hobba had pale blue eyes and silver hair (he had been a red head but I never knew him as one). He was quietly spoken and notoriously elliptical. His students referred to him as *The Hobba* and he was famous at art school for nailing himself inside a wooden crate. The crate was the size of a coffin and next to the crate was a live-stream projection of The Hobba inside. Years later when I was asking him about it, he laughed and said “I wasn’t in it.” I’m not sure if this was: a lie, a ploy to get out of his own opening or something conceptually tighter, but if I had asked he would have said something cryptic. The Hobba had trained as classical clarinettist before turning to video, sound and performance art. During a 1978 performance, he was buried in the ground, apart from his hands which played a clarinet (it was the only way he could breathe). He represented Australia at the Paris Biennale and lived in Europe until he realised that all he wanted to do was ‘come back and go for a walk in the Tasmanian bush’⁵. During critiques, apropos of nothing (and usually after a long pause) he would say something like: ‘have you thought about a string quartet?’ The way he said it, it sounded like an existential question. He was always going on about whales, *Moby Dick*, Bas Jan Ader and Donald Crowhurst (the amateur sailor who lied about his coordinates during a round-the-world yacht race and disappeared off the coast of

Spain). One day when I asked him a question about *Moby Dick*, The Hobba said “I don’t know. I’ve never read it”. Despite being my supervisor and promising me that he would stay until I graduated, he retired two weeks early and (allegedly) sailed from Tasmania to Guam; a distance of 6,102 km that involved crossing the Bass Strait (a nasty stretch of water known for its shipwrecks and powerful storm waves). No one heard from The Hobba for months. When rumours of his return began to circulate, I thought about contacting him but it didn’t seem right.



Nothing at all inappropriate
and
performance

After Mrs Johnson, school went downhill. Every morning in the Daihatsu Charade (and later the Holden Barina) I would beg my mother to hit the open road. *Don't turn left! Turn right!* I would describe big skies and triangles of road. But she never did turn right and I was forced to reprise my earlier career as a violent fugitive. In kindergarten, before the steady influence of Mrs Johnson, I had been prone to violent attacks on authority figures. There was the odd punch but mostly I was a kicker. After kicking my way to freedom I would climb on the roof and sit there until somebody phoned my mother. By primary school I got better at the quiet exit and would sit, unmolested, on the roof. During these elevated moments of freedom, I would concoct plans for a mass break out. I would pick out a place on a distant hill (a distinctive building like a church) and decide to make my way there to start a better life. I came up with the fool proof acronym R.A. (run away) which I used during covert discussions with prospective escapees. I remember being frustrated by their lack of outrage at the conditions we were forced to submit to and only a handful of pupils would agree to leave. We never got very far. As we set off through the gates, the rumbles of dissent would begin. Joshua Brown was the worst. He'd start crying before we made it round the block and we'd have to take him back and then we'd get busted.

Disgusted by the cowardice of my fellow students,
I washed my hands of them and became friends
with the school cleaner. Her name was Elly Perrier
and according to Elly, her husband's grandfather
had been heir to the Perrier mineral water fortune
but had lead a dissolute life of wandering and been
stripped of his inheritance. Thus, Elly was a cleaner.
She was very glamorous and wore huge earrings.
She dyed her hair pomegranate red and wore it in a
beehive. We used to sit in her tiny cleaning cupboard
and she'd tell me stories about her life.

Margaret Tait was born in the Orkney Islands off the North Coast of Scotland. At the age of eight she was sent to boarding school in Edinburgh where she later studied medicine before serving overseas in the Royal Army Medical Corps. From 1950 to 1952 she studied filmmaking in Rome and after two years in Italy, she went back to Edinburgh before returning to Orkney in 1960 where she remained, living with her husband and making films about Orcadian life. Tait was a doctor, a poet and a filmmaker and her work was made with affection for a subject she was deeply familiar with. Her close connection to the culture and landscape of Orkney and her focus on the details of everyday island life, give her work an enchanting intimacy. Using sounds and images from the environment in which she lived, Tait made films that immerse the viewer in a world, familiar to her since childhood. Choosing to cut herself off from the outside world, she worked slowly and independently in a converted church, gathering isolated images and gradually assembling them into a lyrical whole. Margaret Tait lived on a tiny island in the middle of nowhere and took a long time to make short films about her home, her family and her friends.



There is nothing quite like the potential of a house to yourself. Some days in high school, after my walk up the hill, I would go straight back to bed and wake up feeling confused. Some days I would make pasta and string it up on coat hangers all over the house. For a while there I was doing a four-day week. I was especially bad when it rained. It didn't rain much but when it did it was heavy. I would sit on the sofa and look out the window, watching the rain as it bounced on the road. It ran off the roof and rushed down the street and when I was little I tried to sail boats in the gutters but they always capsized and were swept into drains. The sound of the rain on the roof pulled the ceiling down close and when the rain stopped, everything steamed and the plants would turn dark shiny green and the air would be thick with the smell of wet earth and the sound of dripping on leaves.

When Albert York died, he had stopped painting. He had slowly retreated further and further away from the art world and then finally so far into himself that he no longer made work at all. It is estimated that he made between 200 and 250 works in his lifetime. York was private and reclusive. His small and mysterious paintings, mostly landscapes and still lifes, or still lifes *in* landscapes, effuse a strange heaviness. His forms are stocky and have an eerie presence. His compositions are condensed and his awkward but precise arrangement of things creates a subtle disturbance. There is something off-hand and concentrated about his paintings. They seem both solid and vulnerable and they do something weird to time. Time is frozen and exposed, as if all time is acting itself out, all at once, on his irregular pieces of Masonite. Albert York's images are compelling and uncanny. Seen individually they have an immediacy that eludes language but when experienced together they start to speak in a language all of their own. In her book *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, Elizabeth Broun described York's paintings as "the simple utterances of a recluse, out of the habit of converse with society."⁶



ULLMAN

Physically, it's not a very demanding job. The only thing that can get a bit trying up here during the winter is eh... the tremendous sense of isolation.

CUT TO:

JACK

Well, that just happens to be exactly what I'm looking for. I'm eh... I'm outlining a new writing project, and eh... five months of peace is just what I want.

CUT TO:

ULLMAN

That's very good Jack, because eh... for some people eh solitude and isolation... can of itself be a problem.

JACK

Not for me.⁷

THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

You cannot say, or guess, for you know
only

A heap of broken images, where the sun
beats,

And the dead tree gives no shelter, the
cricket no relief,

And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red
rock),

And I will show you something different
from either

Your shadow at morning striding behind
you

Or your shadow at evening rising to meet
you;

[11]



Mum decided I needed shelves in my room and she found an old hippie with a plaited grey beard to make them. I didn't care for him but I became engrossed in the project. I didn't want any old shelves. I wanted them to be different shapes and sizes and to fit my possessions perfectly. I culled unnecessary items and based the dimensions of the shelves on the remaining objects. I had a 1980s television that was deep and cube shaped. I had a short, wide VCR and a wide, slightly taller CD player. I had two IKEA CD racks that were a meter tall and slightly wider than the CDs. I had two speakers that were 43cm x 24cm x 19 cm. I had a long lava lamp and a stack of LPs. My library was always changing, so the bookshelves had to be moveable but it was important to sort the books into sizes so they would fit snugly. I got the hippie to measure my largest book and build a shelf based on its dimensions. I got the idea from the cartoon series *Hey Arnold!* Arnold (who wore a kilt and had a head the shape of a football) had possibly the greatest bedroom *of all time*. It was described in the series as an 'urban, post-industrial, rebop bat cave'⁸ and it had a wall of shelves that fitted Arnold's stuff perfectly. But the splendour didn't end there; Arnold's bed tucked up against the shelves and was the length of the width of the room, he had a water cooler with goldfish in it and a sofa that came out of the wall

when he pulled a lever; he had house plants and a ladder up to the roof but best of all - he had a glass ceiling. Sadly, mum's budget didn't extend to a glass ceiling so I had to content myself with the wall of shelves. When it was done it was magnificent. It was an altar of inlaid rectangles. A shrine to all my shit. I positioned my bed so it was facing the shelves and would lie in it and marvel at how well everything slotted into its perfectly tailored place.



The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting was compiled during the early Qing Dynasty. It was originally published as the second volume of *The Tao of Painting*. It is a manual on landscape painting and is broken into three parts and many books, such as: Book of Trees, Book of Rocks, Book of the Orchid, Book of the Bamboo, Book of the Plum, Book of Chrysanthemums and Book of Grasses, Insects and Flowering Plants. *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* takes its name from the home of its publisher, Li Yu. Li was a playwright and essayist known for his humour and unconventional subject matter. He wrote on a wide range of subjects from homosexuality (*The Fragrant Companion* and *House of Gathered Refinements*) to gastronomy (*On Having a Stomach*) and the everyday (*The Arts of Sleeping, Walking, Sitting and Standing*). Li built a small house and bookshop on a hillock in Nanking. The house, due to its small size and hilly surroundings, gained the name ‘Mustard Seed’ because visitors often remarked that it brought to mind the Buddhist parable ‘Mount Sumeru is contained in a grain of mustard seed.’⁹ By the time Li wrote the preface to the first edition (‘the third day after the Summer solstice in the Chi Wei cycle, the eighteenth year of the reign of K’ang Hsi’¹⁰) he was sixty-nine years old and one year away from death. He describes his joy in journeying through

landscapes without having to ‘wax one’s sandals or take up a bamboo staff’, a joy that, given his ailing health, would have otherwise been denied to him. In a personal note, Li describes his relationship to landscape painting and in doing so, transports the reader, back through the centuries and into his Mustard Seed:

I have been ill now for the past year and unable to travel, being confined to sitting or lying in my room, shut off from all other activities. Fortunately, I have paintings and so can unroll whole landscapes on my table. They are here before me even while I eat or sleep. I enjoy this kind of wandering while at rest. It has prompted me to write on one of these scrolls: ‘Many walled cities under my roof and many landscapes before my eyes.’¹¹



I wanted a treehouse but the only tree big enough was a palm tree. The bamboo in the front garden was tall enough but it was too bendy. I could have made a treehouse out of the bamboo but not in it. The bamboo ran amuck in the front yard. It hemmed in the mulberry tree and pushed up the bricks. My mother was constantly waging war on it; her exotic ornamental had gone feral and was now a vigorous monument to her fallibility. It was as stubborn as she was and her attacks were violent and cyclical. She would hack it off at the base and poison its stumps. Denuded and muddy, the front yard looked terrible. The frayed bamboo pipes stuck out in lengths of five to ten centimetres and pock marked the ground. One day when my dog escaped (as it often did) I jumped the fence in pursuit of the dog and landed with the centre of my bare foot smack bang on one of the shafts of bamboo. It glided with ease into the soft arch of skin and splintered into thousands of needle sharp hairs. The removal of the bamboo was laborious and involved tweezers that pulled out the fibres, one by one.

*There is a bamboo grove in front of my hut
Every day I see it a thousand times
Yet never tire of it.¹²*

*One night in April 1952 near Darwin, a strange, shy man, 60 years old, with a cultured voice and intense pale blue eyes, climbed aboard a raft he had constructed from aircraft drop tanks, and shoved off into the Timor Sea.*¹³

For the last twenty years of his life, Ian Fairweather lived in a palm-thatched hut on Bribie Island. He painted by the light of a hurricane lamp, using cheap materials such as house paint, toothpaste and the ash from mosquito coils. As a child, Fairweather read Knut Hamsun's *Pan* and memorised 'the opening lines of it in Norwegian. Translated they are: "I sit here and think of that time, of the hut I lived in, of the forest behind the hut."' ¹⁴

Before settling in his hut on Bribie Island, Fairweather's life had been eventful. Born in Scotland in 1891, the youngest of nine children, Fairweather was raised in Jersey by deeply religious, alcoholic aunts. One day, according to Fairweather's brother Geoffrey, the aunts, convinced of the coming apocalypse, dressed the children in their Sunday clothes, closed the blinds and made them sit, waiting for the end of the world (it didn't come). When one of the aunts fell out of a window the parents returned from India but their relationship to their children remained distant. As a child, Fairweather indulged

in desert island fantasies and would spend whole evenings alone on the rocks, cut off by the tide until morning.

During the First World War Fairweather was captured by the Germans and imprisoned in a POW camp where he spent his time drawing and studying Japanese. Fairweather later described his four years of imprisonment as ‘some of the happiest of my life - no responsibility for practical things like money, food and shelter, endless time to devote to something I enjoyed doing.’¹⁵

After the war Fairweather studied art in the Netherlands, London and Munich. While studying at the Slade School of Fine Art, Fairweather attended the School of Oriental Studies where he took evening classes in Chinese and Japanese. After graduating from university Fairweather lived a nomadic existence. He worked in Canada harvesting grain on the prairies. He lived in China for four years studying calligraphy and Mandarin and worked as a road inspector before falling into abject poverty. He travelled to Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Borneo and the Philippines before returning to Australia in 1938 where he lived in an Aboriginal community. He then travelled Australia, working as a bush-cutter and lived in a deserted cinema,

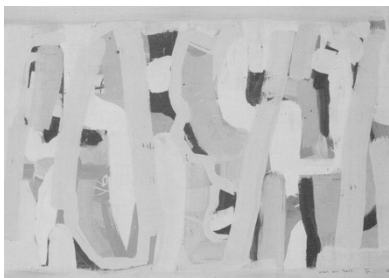
concrete mixer and abandoned goat dairy. During the Second World War Fairweather was stationed in India but after the war he returned to Australia where he continued to paint and to drift.

In 1952 while living in a wrecked boat in Darwin, Fairweather built a triangular raft. He packed a sack of bread and a compass and set sail for Timor. It took 14 days and he nearly died. On the fifth day he started to hallucinate:

The sea was quite black and the haze took on the appearance of a mosquito net hanging down over the raft. On the net I could see lines, drawings of figures behind which the stars danced. I lay contemplating these with much pleasure, for they were better drawings than I had ever made on land.¹⁶

When Fairweather washed up in Indonesia he was arrested and deported back to Britain. In the UK he dug ditches to fund his return to Australia but after a year his family (wishing to spare themselves any more embarrassment) gave him the money to go away. He went to Bribie Island and built two Malay-style thatched huts out of local bush materials.

Fairweather had embarked in an old life boat and landed by chance on Bribie Island. At the time he said he had found 'the idea of the bush that haunted me in India and brought me back here against all reason'.¹⁷



It was a long walk up the beach to our spot. The beach was a bare curve and had a cluster of dead gums at the very far end. The sun had bleached them blinding white and when they came into sight you knew you were there. They had fallen in the sand and lay like the bones of a whale or the hull of a shipwreck. Others remained upright and twisted like smoke into the sky. The sky was blue and bled to purple-pink at sunset, unless there were bush fires and it burnt blood orange. Behind the beach was Ian Fairweather's hut. It was in the bush and the breeze got blocked by scrub. It was always too hot and the red sand burnt my feet. I remember the hut but I can't possibly remember it. The council burnt it down.

The local council didn't like the huts. They said they were concerned about Fairweather's health and living conditions so they built him a house. He used it to store his paintings but continued to live in his hut, until he died, and they burnt it down.

When I was younger we went to Bribie Island. When I got older we went to Stradbroke Island. To get to Stradbroke Island we had to drive for an hour and catch a ferry. It was rusty and salty and mum used to say that the air 'blew the cobwebs away'. The adults would drink beer and lean on their cars and the wind would do silly things to their hair.

I am sitting in a room. I am sitting in a room on a
rock in the Baltic. I am sitting in a telegraph station,
built by Russians, one hundred years ago. I am
looking out a window at a lighthouse.

Ingmar Bergman lived and died on an island in the Baltic. He worked there. He made films there. He built a private cinema and is buried there.



The Remote Series was a 2015 sound art project that explored the idea of distance. It was initiated by a sound artist collective based in the small town of Seyðisfjörður, Iceland. Surrounded by fjords and obscured by darkness for half of the year, the Skálar collective became deeply interested in the idea of the remote and the relationship between sound and distance.

Sound waves move. They travel through space and vibrate. Without distance sound would not exist. Not content with the idea of remoteness as: existing outside the geographical centres or a feeling of having journeyed vast distances to desolate places, *The Remote Series* attempted ‘to expand this definition beyond a sense of centre versus periphery, and to consider the defining feature of remoteness as the experience of distance, however minute or vast, in time or in space.’¹⁸

Solitude, isolation, seclusion, place, space, acoustics and concealment permeate the series. Fishing boats, electrical fields, mines, underwater soundscapes and previously inaccessible realms made accessible by new technologies, all serve as reminders that remoteness is a feeling and while technology may be ‘collapsing distance’, distance is still valuable and necessary. Without distance there is no sound,

no relationships, no communication, no connection.
A connection is, after all, a link between separate
things.

Petri Summanen is the graphic designer at the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts. One day in autumn he was helping me make a book. I remember it was autumn because whenever I caught the bus to the printers the trees out the window were red and yellow and orange. We were sitting behind Petri's desk, discussing spaces and typefaces and making a pdf and I noticed a photograph stuck to his computer monitor. It was of Pandanus trees leaning over a rocky headland. In the background was the ocean and on the far left was a dark green triangle of coastline rimmed by a white strip of beach. There were two waves breaking in to shore and two surfers were riding the crest of the one furthest out. The water was crystal clear and the ridges of sand on the ocean floor were clearly visible. In the shallows created by the swell, the water was the colour of the sand but where it got deeper and more distant it was tinted blue by the sky. The printer had run out of ink as it printed the image and only the far left was correct. The remaining two thirds had run out of blue and the image was red. The ink didn't fade as it ran out. It stopped suddenly and vertically in a line. It could have been anywhere. Surfers. Pandanus. Half of Oceania looks like that. I asked Petri where he'd taken it. He said it was when he was surfing in Australia. I asked where. He said Fraser Island. Fraser Island, Bribie Island, Stradbroke Island. They line up along the Queensland coast, one after another.



Bedknobs and Broomsticks is a 1971 Disney film about three children who are sent from London, during the blitz, to stay in a village with a complete stranger. The children are lucky enough to be in a Disney film and housed with a benevolent witch who, to keep the children quiet about her occult activities, bribes them with a transportation spell. She casts a spell on the knob of a bed which, when tapped three times and turned a quarter turn to the left, sends the bed flying off to wherever they asked it to go. I found the idea of a flying bed inspiring. It was a vast improvement on the magic carpet. The flying bed offered comfort, security and a two pronged escape: you could escape by going somewhere far away (at one point they fly to a remote island) *and* you could escape by going to bed. I was terrible in the mornings. All I wanted to do was burst into tears and crawl back to bed and I would fantasise about going to school, wrapped in my duvet and sitting at my desk like a giant witchetty grub. The concept of a flying bed was too much to resist but my bed didn't have knobs. I had a stupid wooden trundle bed. We did however, have an old velvet arm chair on the front veranda. It had tassels on it and I used the tassels as a complex system of bell pulls to control the flight path of the chair. It was hugely important to keep all your limbs inside the chair as you travelled through the air to

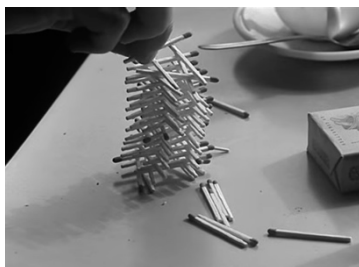
distant places. I would force the dog to accompany me and become hysterical when the dog (having had enough of this cerebral carry on) would jump off the chair, unaware that we were no longer on the veranda but thousands of feet up in the air and she was leaping to her certain death.

*Your alarm clock goes off, you do not stir, you remain in your bed, you close your eyes again. It is not a premeditated action, or rather it's not an action at all, but an absence of action, an action that you don't perform, actions that you avoid performing.*¹⁹

The Man Who Sleeps is the 1974 film adaptation of the 1967 Georges Perec novel *A Man Asleep*. It follows a young man in Paris who withdraws from the world. He lives in a tiny one-bedroom apartment in an attic. He stays in his room, leaving it only to aimlessly walk the streets of Paris, carried by the crowd. He dawdles. He has no preferences. There is no hierarchy in his world. He sees without looking. He looks at faces and paintings as if they were a crack in his ceiling. He looks at a crack in his ceiling as if it were a face or a painting. He goes to cinemas and cafes alone and with indifference. He is aimless and cut off. He is 'inaccessible like a shop window'²⁰ and lives 'in a parenthesis'.²¹ As his life decelerates his perception changes. Everything is listed, one after another, with patient resignation: the buildings, the boulevards, the bowl of Nescafé, the cracked mirror, the socks soaking in a pink plastic tub. The film, like the book, has a second-person narration:

*Your room is the centre of the world, this lair, this cupboard like garret which never loses your smell, with its bed into which you slip alone, its shelf, its linoleum, its ceiling whose cracks you have counted a thousand times, the flakes, the stains, the contours, the washbasin is so tiny it resembles a piece of doll's-house furniture, the bowl, the wallpaper of which you know every flower, these newspapers that you read and re-read, that you will read and re-read again; this cracked mirror has only ever reflected your face, fragmented into three unequal portions; the shelved books, thus begins and ends your kingdom...*²²

As he detaches himself from the world and time slips away, he realises that he is free but at the cost of his happiness. He is anxious, angry, paranoid. People repulse him. He can no longer sleep. He wakes up afraid. He is haunted by dreams and tormented by sexual desires. He bites his fingernails until they are bloody and he realises that he has learned nothing. For all his powers of neutral perception, he has 'perceived everything and received nothing'²³.



Georges Perec was, like many others, inspired by Herman Melville's 1853 short story *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (Bartleby being the anti-protagonist who famously said 'I would prefer not to' and didn't). Eleven years after *A Man Asleep* Perec published another book about another man with an aimless existence, this time called Bartlebooth. Bartlebooth appears in Perec's 1978 novel *Life a User's Manual*. Bartlebooth is a wealthy Englishman who lives in Paris and embarks upon a pointless fifty-year project that involves spending ten years learning to paint water colours and twenty years of travel to, and painting of, 500 sea ports. Once completed, the 500 watercolours of the 500 sea ports are posted back to Paris, where Bartlebooth has a neighbour glue them to board and cut them into jig saw puzzles. On completing his travels, Bartlebooth returns to Paris and starts to reassemble the puzzles. As he completes the puzzles he sends them, one by one, to be miraculously re-bound with a special solution. He then has their supports removed and posts them back to the port where they were painted. Twenty years to the day of their creation, Bartlebooth has each watercolour placed in a solution that this time dissolves the watercolour and leaves the paper blank apart from the traces of the jigsaw joins. The erased painting is then returned to Bartlebooth. It doesn't pan out of course. Bartlebooth goes blind

and an art critic becomes obsessed by his project and desperately tries to intercept the destruction of the watercolours. In the end Bartlebooth dies with the last piece of a puzzle in his hand and the piece is the wrong shape for the hole.

Bartleby, Bartlebooth and *A Man Asleep* are not, of course, the only literary examples of indolent anti-protagonists. Samuel Beckett was hugely influenced by Dante's Belacqua: the man who was found in a foetal position under a rock in purgatory.



It had stopped snowing. The overcast broke here and there; leaden grey clouds parted to reveal glimpses of the sun, whose rays lent a bluish hue to the landscape. Then the sky turned clear. A bright, pure frost reigned, winter's splendor settled over mid-November, and the panorama beyond the arches of the balcony was magnificent – snow-powdered forests, ravines filled with soft white, a glistening sunlight valley under a radiant blue sky. And of an evening, when the almost circular moon appeared, the world turned magical and wondrous – flickering crystals and glittering diamonds flung far and wide. The forests stood out black against white. The regions of the sky beyond the reach of moonlight were dark and embroidered with stars. The sharp, precise, intense shadows of houses, trees, and telegraph poles cast on the sparkling surface looked more real and significant than the objects themselves. Within a few hours after sunset, the temperature sank to twenty degrees, then seventeen degrees. Its natural squalor hidden, the world seemed to be under a spell of icy purity, trapped inside a fantastic dream of fatal enchantment.

Hans Castorp stayed out on his balcony, looking down on the bewitched valley until late into the night... His splendid lounge chair with its three cushions and neck roll had been pulled up close to

*the wooden railing, topped along its full length by a little pillow of snow; on the white table at his side stood a lighted electric lamp, a pile of books, and a glass of creamy milk, the 'evening milk' that was served to all the residents of the Berghof in their rooms each night and into which Hans Castorp would pour a shot of cognac to make it more palatable.*²⁴

Thomas Mann's 1924 novel *The Magic Mountain* is, among other things, an ode to idolatry. It is set in a Swiss sanatorium where the patients sprawl about on balconies, saunter through Alpine Shangri-Las and gorge themselves on five course meals. Never has illness been so alluring. The obligatory 'rest-cures', as described in the passage above, provide moments of solitary repose where the characters drift into dream-like states of semi-consciousness. *The Magic Mountain* positively oozes with leisure. It is, sadly, critical of it too. There is a nasty undercurrent and an irritating Italian, which insist upon leisure being a selfish distraction from an individual's responsibility to society. I chose to gloss over this and focus on the lengthy descriptions of characters, supine on balconies and other intoxicatingly idle moments such as the one where the protagonist lies on a bench in a glade to have a nose bleed and muse about the nature of time. But the allure of the sanatorium is

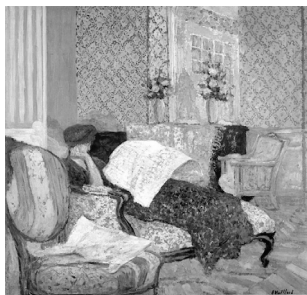
not unique to *The Magic Mountain*. In 1977, the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, checked herself into the Seiwa Hospital for the Mentally Ill. Kusama became a permanent resident and lives there today by choice. Her studio is nearby and she comes and goes, at her leisure.



For the Masters trip we were sent to Zurich for *Manifesta 11*. I diligently spent the first day traversing Zurich to view the exhibits and their ‘satellites’ but the second day I got up early and caught a train across Switzerland and up into the Alps. I come from a long way away. The idea of going to Switzerland and not to the Alps was ridiculous. I was also resident in a very flat country and had recently read *The Magic Mountain*. I got off the train and walked in the opposite direction to the tourists. I walked down a valley that was no more than one-kilometre-wide and ran between stupendously high, almost perpendicular, limestone precipices. I spent six hours walking up a disused mountain bike trail and lay down on a bench and listened to the tinkling of cow bells. I ate some cheese and drank some wine and pushed on and up and got lost on the border between good and bad weather. Back in Zurich, in a meeting in a cube that had curtains but no windows, somewhere in the University of the Arts, we were discussing ‘The Contemporary’ and I felt a frisson of rebellion at the memory of my Romantic infidelities.



I married a man who grew up in the highlands of Scotland. His bedroom was in an attic and accessible via an iron, spiral staircase. His family were very outdoorsy. Roddy was not. He remembers with relief when he was, as the eldest, finally excused from the family walks. At first I thought his fondness for booths and small spaces was endearing but we have spent the last thirteen years in contention over corner seats.



Maggie Best had short white hair and I can't remember what colour her eyes were. She retired early and bought a property on the Tasman Peninsular and built a tiny wooden house. Her bed butted up against the walls of her bedroom like a berth on a train. Her kitchen was very small and her living room had no windows but the front wall opened on a green valley and a thin strip of sea. She had a big shed and a huge garden. After twenty years she was fully self-sufficient. She had chickens and geese and occasionally pigs. She made a moss garden and a tea garden and dug her own grave and had it certified. She painted her house Egyptian red and in it was a vase of peacock feathers. We spent the evenings sitting by the fire, listening to Madam Butterfly and she would read me Walter de La Mere poems and I always made her repeat:

Red blood out and black blood in
My nanny says I'm a child of sin²⁵

I lived in Tasmania between the ages of three and six, twenty-two and thirty. Tasmania is a triangular shaped island off the south coast of Australia. To the North of the island is Melbourne. To the East is New Zealand. To the West is nothing but Indian Ocean until you hit Argentina and to the South is nothing but more ocean until you hit Antarctica.

I lived in a shack in Bream Creek and I worked part time in my friend's microbrewery. My friend was called Sam (a different Sam again) and he was a surfer. He grew up in Hobart and all he had ever wanted was to live in Bream Creek. Sam had a problem with authority figures and after not graduating from art school, he silkscreened Tasmanian sea creatures onto tea towels and sold them at a tourist market. He did surprisingly well out of this and bought a house in Bream Creek and when one of the other stall holders sold his business, it was Sam who bought it. Sam worked a lot but he worked for himself and he worked when he wanted. He structured his life around surfing and fishing and nobody told him what to do. One day we were bottling ginger beer in the shed and a park ranger came in making accusations about dogs in national parks (it was true but it wasn't me. Roddy had been busted with the dog in Fortescue Bay and temporarily evaded prosecution by giving a fake name). Sam lost it. He's six-foot five so it was impressive. He went quiet and red and then shouted at the ranger that he had no authority in his shed and to get off his property. It was a ridiculous job in many ways. Sam was the biggest distraction in the shed. He was always disappearing and giving me beer and complaining that I worked too much. I'd be labelling ginger beer and he'd creep up behind

me and cast a fishing rod so it snared my jumper and he'd reel it in. Sam had never worked for anyone other than himself so he had no idea how to be a boss and we never referred to him as such. There was, however, one huge tiny snag in Sam's perfectly engineered life: he fell in love with a tiny, bossy, charismatic, blonde beach bum and had three tiny, bossy, charismatic, blonde children. It was chaos and Sam, who had never had anyone tell him what to do, now had a boss and three loud, wild, demanding responsibilities.

We stacked the boxes of ginger beer on palettes in the shed. Over the busy Summer period we were always running out of room and having to play Tetris with the teetering stacks and a palette jack. We would stack them five layers high unless it was busy and we were forced to stack them all the way up to the ceiling where they were a pain to get down and made the palettes too heavy to move. It was a delicate operation. The shed had wooden floorboards and was a patchwork of repairs that Sam had made by hammering annoying pieces of wood to the floor; they weren't flush so they snagged on the palette jack and had to be circumnavigated. The shed was built in the 60s or 70s and had originally been a kaleidoscope factory. It had high ceilings and wooden beams that Sam stacked his surfboards on and the storage situation created an added pressure when hopping from one stack to another. I told Sam that if, one day, God forbid, one of his boards were to be damaged by my ginger beer activities, I would go straight home and he would never see me again. He nodded and agreed that this would be a sensible course of action. Then he added another precious obstacle to further obstruct my trajectory when he came back from selling ginger beer at a market, with the shell of a Tasmanian giant crab, mounted on a wooden plaque. He was delighted with his purchase as apparently he had wanted one for years and he

hung it in pride of place, right where I pole vaulted off the stacks using a very long broom. It was a cardboard mountain range and the gaps created by deliveries were used as footholds by his children, who would ascend to the geometric summits and leap from one stack to another. When I was labelling I had to build a wall of boxes. It blocked out the window overlooking the sea and his children saw it a personal challenge to tear it down. It was a madhouse. When the youngest was little I would put him in a box while I tried to reason with his brother and sister. He was quite happy sitting in his box (I told him it was a boat) until he got older and followed in his sibling's footsteps, tracking them up into the cardboard mountains.

When I lived in Bream Creek my jobs were part-time and seasonal. The ginger beer factory was my main job but I also worked weekends on a dairy farm and Summers picking gumnuts. Gumnut picking was either on a very tall ladder in the trees or in a cherry picker in the tree tops. Depending on which way the basket was facing, you could see way out to sea. High up in the gums were very strangest insects. Delicate weird bodies, intricately patterned in reds and greens, matching the gums. The air smelt of salt and eucalyptus and the basket would sway in the wind and to the motion of the pickers as they stretched out to grab branches. One day I was in the cherry picker with the farmer. His name was Garry Kingston. The Kingston's were one of the oldest families in Bream Creek and in Bream Creek you were a 'blow in' until you'd been there for at least four generations. Sam called Garry 'Special K' because he was a legendary surfer and when Sam and his mates were skiving school to go surfing, Special K was king. You have the strangest conversations in a basket in the trees. Mostly you don't talk at all but when you do it's as if your discussions are tempered by the smell of the gums and the rocking of the basket. Garry told me that when he was a kid, an old man used to live in a humpy on the farm. It was in the days before herbicides and Garry's grandfather paid him to dig

up thistles. Garry told me he used to sit with the old man in his hut, drinking black tea. Then he lapsed into silence and we picked for a bit and he said 'I still drink black tea.'

Forrest Bess's shack looked a lot like the Dunalley fish market. The fish market was a ten-minute drive from Bream Creek and a local institution that was miraculously spared by the 2013 Bush Fire that burnt Dunalley down. We were forced to evacuate and got stranded in Hobart. I remember watching the news and seeing friends holed up in rescue centres. The aftermath was shocking; a changed, flattened landscape of charcoal and twisted tin. One of our friends had a studio in a boat shed out on the water but it, and thirty years of work burned away.



Before she had three kids, Sam's wife was a drifter. All she had ever wanted was to travel and she was always trying to get him to go on holiday but he never wanted to go: it was a mystery to Sam why anyone would want to leave Bream Creek.

*We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.*²⁶

In the 1960s Scott Walker was a superstar. He was one third of The Walker Brothers and pretty much everyone's favourite. They were described as America's Beatles and were treated to their own version of Beatlemania; Walker remembers an incident in Dublin when their car was flipped by fans, who continued to beat on the windows. Walker had a nomadic childhood and didn't make friends easily. Not, he says, that he regrets this; 'I don't mind being on my own because when you're on your own a lot as a child, your imagination grows. That is still the case with me.'²⁷ The Walker Brothers formed in California and started out playing in clubs on The Sunset Strip but they ended up being bigger in Europe than they ever were in the US; their dark baroque pop melodrama having more in common with the films of Ingmar Bergman than going to San Francisco with flowers in your hair. Walker, a devotee of the films of Bergman and Carl Dreyer, was watching European cinema when his contemporaries were watching surfing movies (he even lived in Scandinavia for a time). Not suited to pop stardom Walker became increasingly critical of the music business which he described in typically Holden Caulfield-esque language as 'a big, phoney mess'²⁸ (Walker was once called 'pop's own Salinger'²⁹, after the reclusive author who wrote in a bunker and reputedly locked his later works in

safety deposit boxes). In 1967 The Walker Brothers broke up and Walker went to learn Gregorian chant in a monastery on the Isle of Wight. After the commercial failure of his 1969 solo album *Scott 4*, Walker had what he calls his ‘years of bad faith’³⁰ when he lost confidence and was pushed into making commercial music. The next ten years, Walker had a troubled, on and off relationship with pop music and would disappear for years at a time. In 1981, after one of his prolonged absences, he released his first solo album in ten years. In a rare radio interview from that time he spoke about the isolation that preceded and included the making of the album:

*All the time in the six years I was working towards what I call a silence. Where this could come to me, rather than me force it. It was very important that it flowed to me rather than me trying to push it on, and so I was looking for the right atmosphere, and time and perception seemed to arrive at once. I’ve found that it’s a kind of kaleidoscopic process. I don’t know. I don’t like to talk about the process because I don’t really understand it. When it got to this album it got away from me and I’m a little superstitious so I don’t talk about this too much.*³¹

Over the years, Walker’s ‘gothic and beautiful gloom’³² has got longer and darker and more

inaccessible. He started out as a 1960s teen heartthrob and has metamorphosed into an avant-garde composer. In his youth, Walker wore scarves and dark shades. Today he wears a baseball cap that he pulls down low so his eyes can't be seen. He has not performed live in nearly forty years. But Walker says he has 'long since stopped worrying about fitting in in any way, I'm an outsider, for sure. That suits me fine. Solitude is like a drug for me. I crave it.'³³ But he resists the label, so often attached to him, and says he is not a recluse. 'I'm definitely not that. I have friends and I go to dinner. I like people, but sometimes I can't wait to get away and be on my own again. I am solitary, though. I need to be for my work. That's the deal.'³⁴ And that's one of the most important things about Walker's withdrawal. Despite claiming not to understand how his artistic process works, Walker seems to have a pretty good handle on where and when it does. He may not be very prolific but his work has been slow and steady for most of his life. For Walker, withdrawal and slowness is not about indolence or running away from work, but running into it. By creating the right conditions, Walker allows the work to take shape and his brand of escape is no idyllic holiday:

There's always urgency. It drives you, it drives you really crazy but you can't push it because if you do

*it doesn't work. It has to be exactly what it is and you've just got to sit around and do it and years can go by and nothing and, look it's different for everyone, maybe I'm just slow, you know, but for me it's very difficult.*³⁵

Walker's 2006 album *The Drift*, took seven years to make. *Ulysses* took seven years to write (James Joyce ran off to Europe as well). By today's standards, neither Joyce nor Walker, would have a very long C. V, but they are considered to be, two of the best in their fields. The narrow road to the deep north, may not be the most straight forward of career paths but perhaps it is a case of nothing ventured nothing gained or, as Jarvis Cocker said, of the work of Scott Walker:

*It's like an intrepid explorer or something, you know, it's somebody who goes to a part of the world that nobody's ever been to before. Now that part of the world might be very inhospitable and full of dangerous animals or whatever, you wouldn't particularly want to live there yourself but you have to admire somebody who is prepared to follow the path to there, you know and stick a flag down and say look this is where you can go.*³⁶



I first became taken with the idea of the walled garden when I was nine and cast as Dickon in *The Secret Garden*. Half way through rehearsals I quit due to artistic differences but by then I was already enamoured of the concept; I liked the rusty keys, hidden bedrooms and doors obscured by ivy. After the play I started a gardening group. We took over a dry patch in the school yard but the ground was hard and full of couch grass and we squabbled and lost interest.

Josef Sudek's studio was walled in by apartment buildings and a neglected garden. He photographed it for nearly fifty years. He photographed still lifes inside his studio and landscapes in his garden. He photographed the view from the window out into the courtyard. Growing in front of the window, was a strangely twisted tree. The tree became a familiar presence in his work. Like the tracery of a window, it cut into the photographs, framing miniature abstractions within the larger images. Sudek made elaborate installations inside his crowded studio. He called them labyrinths and photographed them. Interiors and exteriors were of equal importance to Sudek. He shot panoramas of Prague and portraits of objects with slow shutter speeds. He had an attentive eye and placed no greater value on a cathedral than a pear, and a great deal of value in both.

I was stencilling post-cards of my courtyard in Helsinki and I was using a piece of paper to protect the table from the roller. On the piece of paper was a photocopied image of the courtyard and in the middle of the image was a tree. The tree was bare and twisted and after stencilling the pale blue parts, I noticed that I had accidentally painted it and it looked like a Jacaranda.



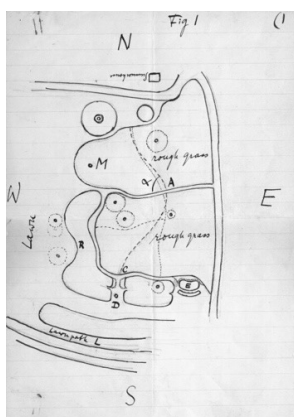
Two Years at Sea is a film of objects as much as it is a portrait of a man. The man lives alone in a horseshoe shaped house in the highlands of Scotland. The house, like the film, is full of stuff; a plastic bottle hangs by a thread as condensation drips along its corner and into a frayed hole that is illuminated from behind by light that threatens to blow out or underexpose the image; the filament of a lightbulb bleeds into celluloid then shrinks into itself as it extinguishes; a tiny window is streaked with condensation and frames a lozenge shaped patch of trees in cloud and mist, the contrast between the last rays of sun, the gathering darkness and the silhouette of the roofline delineates an aperture that looks like an eye. Here, perception is everything. In one part of the film the man's caravan slowly rises up into the tree tops and he wakes to find himself high up in the air. Later in the film he returns to this spot and sits in the caravan. It jerkily sways then slowly calms itself and he sits, motionless, staring out the window from this new vantage point. At another point in the film the man trudges along with a wooden frame and four large, white, plastic containers. He arrives at a loch and blows up an inflatable mattress. He hitches the mattress and the containers to the frame and paddles a short way into the loch. It quickly becomes apparent that this is not an expedition to the other side but about being in the loch, where he sits

looking at the landscape in another altered frame. He pulls in his paddle and drifts, using it again only when he comes too close to shore. He is not a long way out, just in. In Jane Campion's film about Keats, he says that poetry is like a lake, the point is not to get to the other side but to enjoy the feeling of being submerged in the lake. The man is not in the lake but on the lake which makes his poetry more about being submerged in the landscape. He lies down on his back and stares up at the sky. Another image. And all the while the image we are looking at is morphing into abstraction. The four white containers, attached to the corners of the raft, start to line up as the raft is turned by the current, the perspective and reflections twist and double the raft and containers, into a strange creature with eight square teeth which floats in an amorphous landscape like something in a Joan Miro or Yves Tanguy painting. Ben Rivers, the director of the film, says he is drawn to subjects who have created 'very specific, hermetic worlds', people who haven't conformed to 'perceptions of the way we should live.'³⁷



*Paradise haunts gardens, and some gardens are
paradises. Mine is one of them.*³⁸

Derek Jarman lived in London but he also lived in a fisherman's cottage in Kent. He was an artist, filmmaker, stage director, writer and gardener. His cottage was black and yellow and next to a nuclear power plant. The site was flat and coastal and covered in shingle and he created a beautiful garden where nothing would grow.

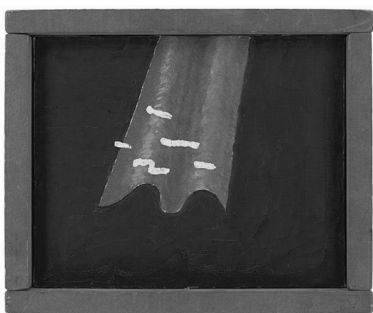


Herman Hess's 1943 novel, *The Glass Bead Game* is set in the future, in a fictional province that is home to an order of intellectuals who run an elite boarding school. The province and its intellectuals are cut off from the world and devote their lives to study, meditation and the Glass Bead Game. The rules of the game are never made explicit but its players are required to spend years studying music, mathematics and language. From the vague descriptions given of the game, it appears to entail making in-depth connections and elaborate patterns out of seemingly disparate things. The school is an academic utopia where students spend decades acquiring what Bertrand Russel called 'useless knowledge'³⁹. The school is also a rigid and hierarchical structure that neither values nor has access to the outside world of quotidian things such as technology, labour, politics and family. The book follows the life of the prodigy and later Magister Ludi (Master of the Game) - Joseph Knecht. Finding that the 'rationalistic, somewhat anti-mystical, decidedly Confucian spirit of the school'⁴⁰ cannot (or will not) provide him with the instruction he craves, Knecht sets off on foot, for his years of 'free study'⁴¹, to the hermitage of a scholar of the *I Ching*. After rambling through 'mountain passes, stretching southward in a blue haze, with sunlit terraced vineyards and stone walls alive with lizards'⁴², Knecht arrives at the Bamboo

Grove. The Bamboo Grove was established by the hermit who now lives inside it, in a Chinese pavilion with a miniature garden and a goldfish pool. When not tending his garden, the hermit meditates, copies scrolls and lives on a diet of bread, fruit and ‘excellent’⁴³ pancakes that he cooks on a tiny stove. Knecht and the hermit spend hours together, sitting in silence under the swaying bamboo and years later, Knecht speaks with affection of his time in the Bamboo Grove and the hours he spent by the goldfish pool, gazing:

*... into the cool small world of darkness and light and magically shimmering colours, where the bodies of the golden fish glided in the dark greenish blueness and inky blackness. Now and then, just when the entire world seemed enchanted, asleep forever in a dreamy spell, the fish would dart with a supple and yet alarming movement, like flashes of crystal and gold, through the somnolent darkness.*⁴⁴

The goldfish become a symbol of obedience and the hermit allows Knecht to stay in the Bamboo Grove on the condition that he is ready ‘to keep as still as a goldfish’⁴⁵. Ultimately, however, Knecht is forced to leave the Bamboo Grove and return to the order of intellectuals. But in time he leaves that too and plunges himself into the real world - where he drowns in a lake.





Images:

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