

Alive in the Landscape

Sarah Salway



A collection of poems written to
paintings and etchings by Perienne Christian
in her exhibition

Alive in the Landscape
Dreaming a New Dream

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Alive in the Landscape ~ Dreaming a New Dream

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today's robe
has seen too much,
slides from the world's shoulders
to safeguard the night

~

Although these poems are a form of response, some come from different angles and others dance off triggers, however abstract, that I've found in the art. They aren't intended to be a direct reply to each painting because, like the most nourishing open and ongoing conversations, everybody will see something different in both the words and the art.

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Among the Reeds, 2022

Watercolour on paper.

H370mm W470mm

Among the Reeds

It's an old story
heard with only one ear,

the child launched
to take its chances on water.

Maybe there'll be a fair wind,
a dolphin, wolf, or fisherman,

there'll be somewhere to get to,
a change to be made,

a belief that if we look to the future
we can cope with the now

like my friend who told her children
when they kept asking *why*,

why do so many strangers hate us,
to seek the helpers,

not dolphins, wolves or even fishermen
but how sometimes on dry land

a woman will cross the street
to stand next to the tear-drenched girl,

a rough-whiskered man will sit for hours
with his handpainted sign of welcome

and the sailor will risk his own life
to offer a stranger their fair wind.



Seeing Light, 2022

Watercolour on paper
H240mm W290mm

Seeing Light

at first light
before the sun's treasury
burns our path to gold
we lick our fingers
to feel how the teasing sky
will play games
with the rest of our day

the inky secrets
of our dreams leak
away with every sip
of tea, fiery love
and cryptic sorrows
tempered with a dash
of milk

open the window
we can do this



Horsetail Dream, 2022

Etching H240mm W290mm

Horsetail Dream

this poem is a fishing net
to catch hope

each word a lobster pot
to hold it safe

every stanza a wooden shack
to store them up

so one future day
when the tide turns

I'll row my boat out
feast on faith



Carried Through, 2022-08-02

Watercolour on paper

H160mm W210mm

For Carried through:

What can't be seen

Under an umbrella of blue skies,
on yet another sunny day,

when grass bites at bare feet,
hosepipes snake in dusty coils,

we smell meat burning too close by,
press cold cans to our foreheads

and remember painting at nursery,
children in red shiny pinnies,

tongues poked out over the page
as we captured what couldn't be seen:

not the blue wafer-line of sky at the top
or the bottom's narrow green strap,

but how the middle was left open and wide
for families, swings, apple trees.

How thrilling to step into that void now
before we were forced to join it up.



Dreaming, 2022

Watercolour on paper

H860mm W1140mm

For Dreaming

The plant collector
sleeps with one eye open
so as not to miss a moment
of the world's beauty –
bark peeling like snakeskin,
fresh parchment petals,
uptwist of lily,
lion's tongue of iris,
but then to dream of birdsong
like the skylark from home,
daisies in the churchyard,
the river's silver glimmer,
before waking to a fresh morning
on the silk route, every day
a search for one more miracle.



Thistle, 2022

Watercolour on paper
H190mm W220mm

For Thistle 2022

The thistle waits for winter.

A woodpigeon rocks the holly hedge, and the sky is heavy with rain that just won't fall. The garden is letting go of summer. It races through all stages of grief before it circles back to denial. Meanwhile under the shadow of the russet tree, the thistle's eye sharpens: a poppy next to charcoal from the last barbecue, rose petals beside a dried up sprig of thyme. She's dizzy to be touched by so much colour, could go on like this for weeks – red, black, red, black. But when she leans back to rest her head against the tree's bark, she feels a light pink rush as if next year's blossom is already starting to form. A purple blush falls on her like a spotlight as if, at last, she could step free from the clump of other thistles, shimmer over the jewelled grass to see her reflection in the pond. The sunrise paints her, and her alone. Her heart softens, and for those brief moments, she's solo dancing in slow motion.



Reflection, 2022

Watercolour on paper
H240mm W290mm

For Reflection 2022

Ignition

Late again for yoga, I run past the sudden flame of sunset as it reaches out over the path ahead. The heat of it still burns as I stretch into Downward Dog, smoulders through my Pigeon, blazes out of Warrior. Even a cautious Cat and Cow can't put it out. I try to breathe cool evening air from the open windows, to concentrate on where I am, to focus my intentions on peace, but all I can think of are those moments when I too was just walking home.

red dots on phone trackers,
women whispering
our bodies may lie here



Orb, 2022

Watercolour on paper
H285mm W240mm

For Orb

Does a ton of feathers weigh the same as a ton of bricks?

Words drop like feathers,
I've never told anyone this before....
trails of conversation
like white clouds float behind us,
when *I've been thinking...*
weighs as much as *Is that an egret?*
We take secret phone calls
we can't bring back to the party,
medication... safe... so sorry...
but when you're listening so hard
and being heard back,
Do you remember...
it makes you vulnerable,
it makes you stronger than you've ever been,
I care for you so much...
because all of us tending the fire
have flown to the sun,
guide each other safely back to land.



Plantain Medicine, 2022

Watercolour on paper

H180mm W180mm

For Plantain Medicine

Medicine

Once I went to a market to buy plantains with another woman. She'd been pin-pricked by so many small regrets the colour had run out of her. She was so slight, so pale. Maybe I hoped that the fruit's starch would strengthen her spine.

Later, we held hands over a gold candle flame and talked of our fathers. We could have been anyone at any time. I cooked the plantain with coconut juice, watched as the sap spat across the kitchen floor, landed close to the fire. As we laughed, a tree shrugged outside the kitchen, so many nights written white.



Seed, 2022

Watercolour on paper

H240mm W280mm

For Seed 2022

Nowhere to Go

The joy of a morning unlaced
and on holiday, until the rococo

sideshow of the morning news
causes itches impossible

to reach. Maybe I'd be happier
if I could treat strangers' stories

as seeds on the wind, blowing
that shadowy twitch of a why

into a what, a where and a when.



Pine Dream, 2022

Etching H290mm W240mm

For Pine Dream

Blood moon

At the wood's edge
we lay out a rug,
sit down to taste
the stars.

I watch your chest
rise and fall,
match my breath
to yours
so our wishes
fall together,
can drop
fruiting
like pinecones.