

# 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*

~

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.