

***Natural Inclusions***

**Paintings Combining the Art and Science of Life**

**By Alan Rayner**

**Vol. 1, 1969 - 1999**

## Preview

'Natural Inclusion' is to my mind a fundamental principle of Nature. This principle provides us with a navigational aid, *using our cavity at heart as compass*, which helps us to recognise and avoid the problems and falsehoods that arise from abstract perceptions that estrange Nature from human nature. Moreover, by recognising our bodily existence as an expression of, not an exception from natural energy flow, it enables us to discover ways in which we can live wiser, more loving, creative, sustainable and fulfilling lives. It is the evolutionary source of all the diversity of material form that emerges in Nature through the receptive-responsive relationship between space and flux – void stillness and energetic movement.

To understand this principle requires a shift from the abstract perception of space, time and material boundaries as sources of definitive separation between independent *objects*, to recognising them instead as mutually inclusive sources of natural continuity and dynamic distinction between *flow-forms*. In effect this represents a shift from rigidly static to fluidly dynamic framings of reality: from abstract 'freeze-framed geometry' to natural 'flow geometry'. Although I did not initially realise this, all my paintings made since 1969 illustrate this shift in perception. They all depict imaginary scenes, based on real experience and study of natural form, which often come into my mind 'out of the blue' rather than deliberate intent. They are sometimes accompanied by a poem. My role as artist is to allow these scenes to form in my mind and then to portray them to the best of my self-taught ability.

**"FIERY HORSE"****Oil on Board, 1969**

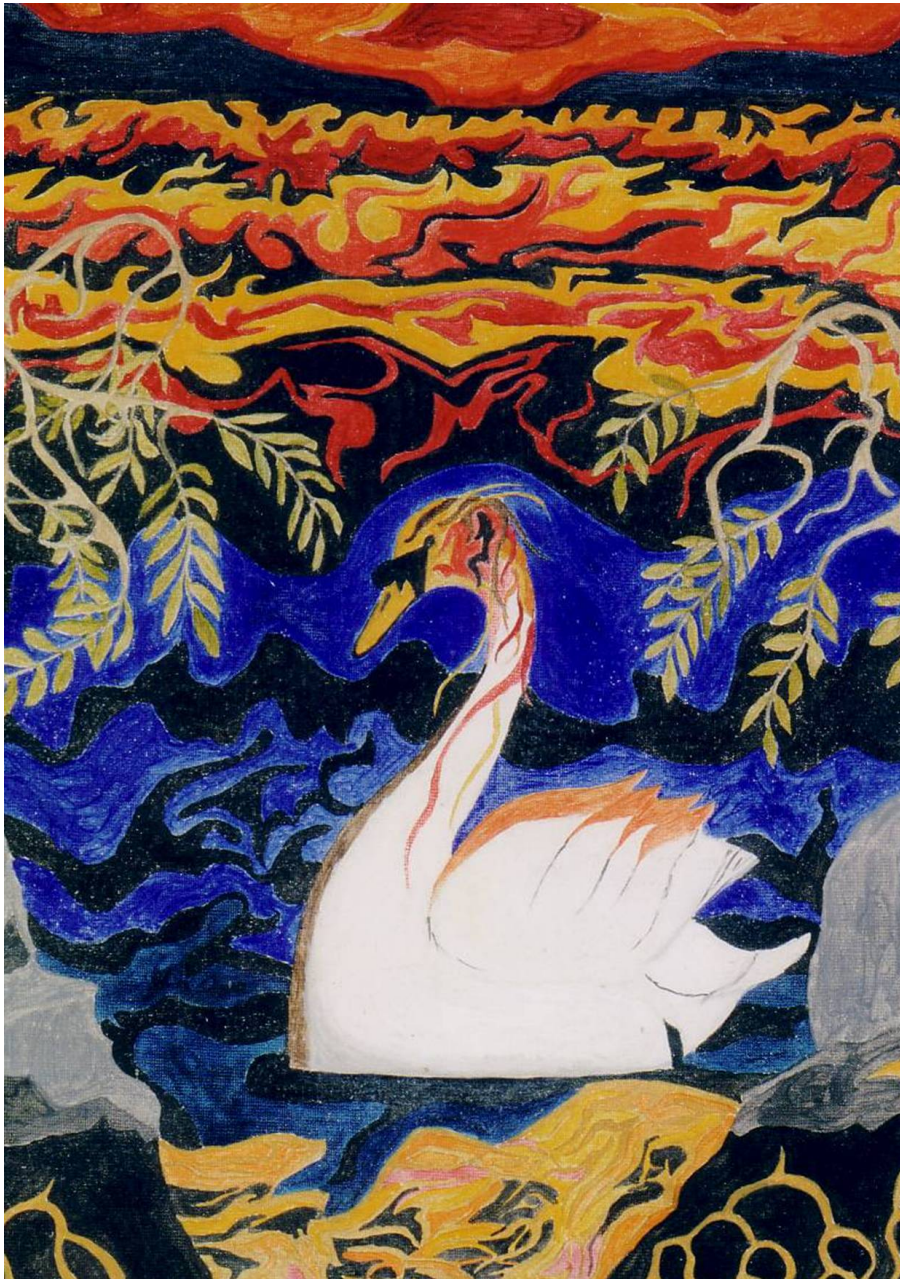
An early experiment with oil paints, depicting my adolescent male yearning for female care and guidance to soothe and direct my agitation.





**"FIERY SWAN"****Oil on Board, 1970**

Made after an idyll by a sea loch in the west of Scotland, this marks a kind of breakthrough when I found a style of oil painting that suited what I wanted to express in spite of, or perhaps because of, my technical limitations. It was also the first time that the swan emerged, both in dreams and in paintings, as a symbol of serene wandering and fiery self-assertion.





**"BALLETTIC TERN"****Oil on Board, 1971**

A delicately counterpoised tern, balanced above a moonlit enclosure of sea, takes in with the spread of its beak, wings and tail, contrasting scenes of highland and lowland, dryness and wetness, darkness and light, framed by tangles of fuchsia, bramble and quaking grass.





## **"TROPICAL INVOLVEMENT"**

### **Oil on Board, 1972**

This painting, made after my final examinations, depicts the dynamic complexity of living systems. A turbulent river rushes between rock-lined banks from fiery, tiger-striped sunset towards unexpected tranquility where it allows a daffodil to emerge from its shallows. A night-bird follows the stream past intricately interwoven forest towards darkness. A dragonfly luxuriates below a fruit-laden tree, bereft of leaves. Life is wild, wet and full of surprises.



## "ARID CONFRONTATION"

**Oil on Board, 1973**

This painting, made after a year of postgraduate research, depicts the limitations of unempathic, analytical methodology. At the end of a long pilgrimage, access to life is barred from the objective stare by the rigidity of artificial boundaries. A sun composed of semicircle and triangles is caught between straight lines and weeps sundrops into a canalized watercourse. Moonlight, transformed into penetrating shafts of fear encroaches across the night sky above a plain of desolation. Life is withdrawn behind closed doors.





**"OUT OF THE SHADOWS"****Oil on Board, 1973**

A golden eagle, symbolizing hope, emerges out of the shadows of an austere rock face to fly out over sea towards sunlight.





**WILLOWY BRIDGE"****Oil on Board, 1974**

A rowing boat is guided along a channel, too narrow to dip its oars, between opposing cliffs of abusive aggression and serene obstinacy, symbolized by hawks and swans. The way out into the sunlit ocean is through a curtain of leaves trailing from the hair of two willowy female figures who bridge across the chasm between sides that, at base, are not so very unlike one another.



**"NIGHTFALL"****Oil on Board, 1974**

A female figure draws a net curtain of stormy darkness across a glittering daytime scene, irradiated by sunny terns and with flowers receptive to the wanderings of a butterfly and passing gannet.





**"FISHING IN HOPE"****Oil on Board, 1975**

Painted at a dark, self doubting time (I was completing my PhD!), this depicts the feeling of hope and reassurance that I once felt as a child watching a party of Italian fishermen, fishing in still water by means of light and net.





**"BROADLAND"****Oil on Board, 1976**

Painted after a holiday on the Norfolk Broads, this contains a rather elaborate heron, a marsh harrier and a bridge to nowhere, reflecting the relief of tension in that watery landscape.





**"PANDA"**

**Oil on Board, c. 1984**

Painted for my younger daughter, Philippa, because she loved Pandas.



**"KOALA AND OWL"**

**Oil on Board, c. 1984**

Painted for my older daughter, Hazel, because she loved Koalas and Owls.





## **"SOLSBURY HILL"**

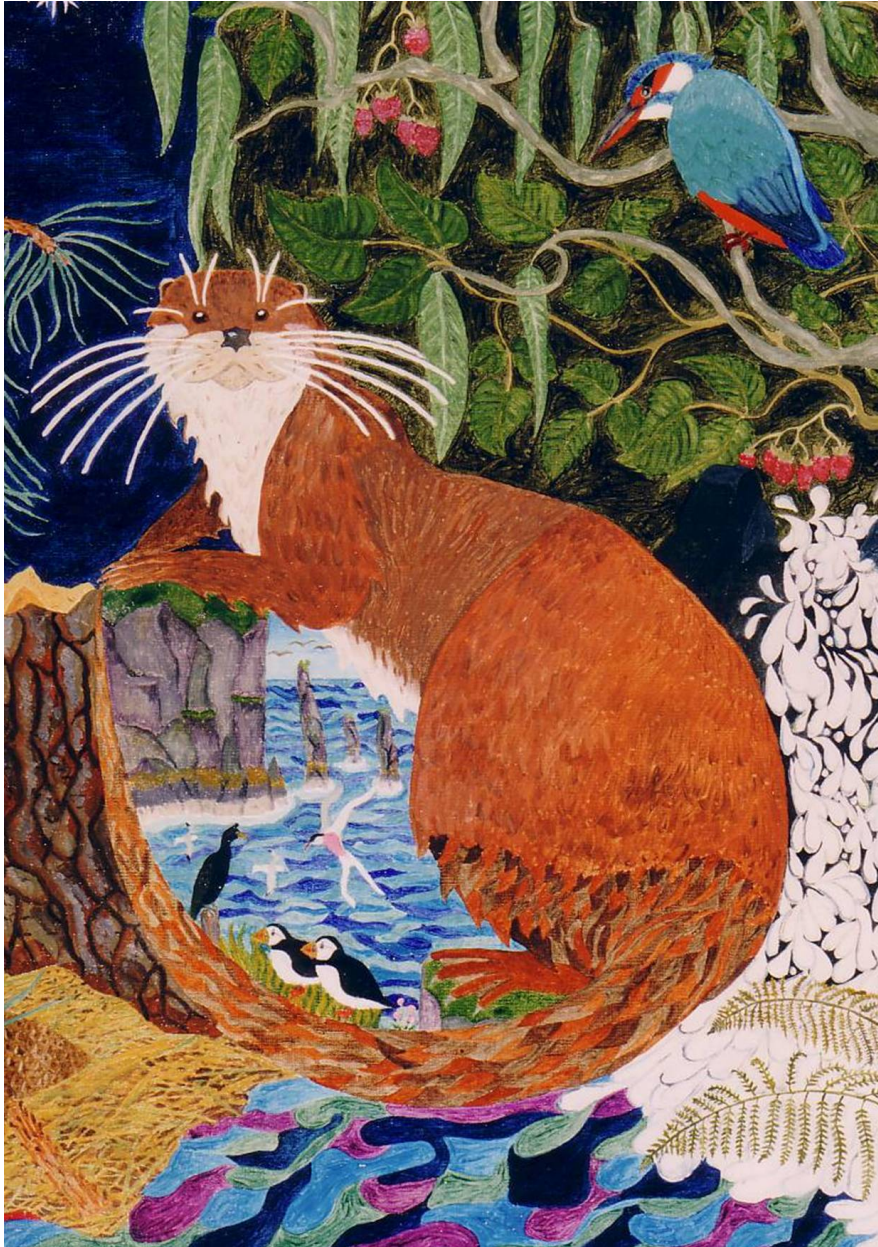
**Oil on Board, c. 1990**

Painted for my daughter, Hazel, based on the scene she loved from her bedroom window of the ancient hill fort of Solsbury Hill, and drawing from the lines of the Peter Gabriel song about that hill, "an eagle flew out of the night".



**"OTTER"****Oil on Board, c. 1990**

Painted for my daughter, Philippa, because she loved otters. The painting includes some favourite themes of recession, water droplets and the self-repeating patterns of fern fronds.





## "IVY RIVER"

**Oil on Board, 1997**

An ivy river sweeps down from its collecting tributaries in steep-sided, lobed valley systems in high mountains, through dark forest and out across a sunlit, starkly agri-cultured, flood plain. Thence it delivers its watery harvest through deltas of leaves and fruits to a sea filled with the reflection of sunset. The fruits and leaves of a real ivy plant fringe the view of the distant river. The erratic pattern of veins in the lobed leaves contrasts with the focused pattern in the unlobed leaves and reflects the difference between the energy-gathering and energy-distributing parts of the river.



## **"LOVING ERROR"**

**Oil on Board, 1998**

This painting illustrates the dynamic interplay between differentiation and integration, irregularity ("error") and regularity, and negative draining and positive outpouring that is embedded in living system boundaries. The erratic fire in the venation of a lobed ivy leaf is bathed in the integrating embrace of a heart-shaped leaf which converts negative blue and mauve into positive scarlet and crimson. The midrib of the heart-shaped leaf emerges as a bindweed which communicates between extremes of coldness and dryness.





## "FOUNTAINS OF THE FOREST"

**Oil on Board, 1998**

This was painted for the British Mycological Society, in my year as its President, to depict the dynamic interrelationships of trees and fungi. Within and upon the branching, enfolding, water-containing surfaces of forest trees and reaching out from there into air and soil are branching, enfolding, water-containing surfaces of finer scale, the mycelial networks of fungi. These networks provide a communications interface for energy transfer from neighbour to neighbour, from living to dead and from dead to living. They maintain the forest in flux as they gather, conserve, explore for and recycle supplies of chemical fuel originating from photosynthesis. So, the fountains of the forest trees are connected and tapped into by the fountains of fungal networks in a moving circulation: an evolutionary spiral of differentiation and integration from past through to unpredictable future; a water delivery from the fire of the sun, through the fire of respiration, and back again to sky, contained within the contextual boundaries of a wood-wide circulation.



## "OASHISS"

### Oil on Board, 1998

Painted to depict the vitality and unpredictability of the partnership between DNA and water, the informational traffic and the contextual waterways, of living systems. A riverine snake, with DNA markings, guards a water-hole in a desert of sand particles blown into waves. Pebbles at the edge of the water, modelled on the "stone cells" ("sclereids") that make pears gritty, are separate, yet interconnected via their cores. A goat skull and a fish out of water show the effect of exposure to dryness.

How do we react to the snake? Do we attempt to control and predict its movements? Do we recoil from it? Do we relate ourselves to it? Which of these reactions promises most, or most threatens our quality of life?





## **"TROPICAL HEIGHTS AND DEPTHS"**

### **Oil on Board, 1998**

Painted for my friend, Rytas Vilgalys, following a meeting in Puerto Rico where, on successive days, we explored first a coral reef and then a rainforest, heralded by a blast blown through a conch shell by our navigator. The ascending, spiralling cavities of the conch shell refer to the venation pattern in the yam leaves, the climbing ferns and the termite trails in the forest. Their boundaries contain an underwater scene in which corals and sea fans relate to the architecture of trees, tree ferns and mosses in the forest, and fish reflect the descent of raindrops.



## "CONCH QUEST"

**Oil on Board, 1998**

Painted in the same vein as "Tropical heights and depths", this was for me and my wife, Marion, as a reflection of our soulful quest together to find meaning in the diversity and richness of life patterns.





## "INTERTIDAL HIGHLANDS"

### Oil on Board, 1998

A standing wave of sugar kelp leads in from the ocean edge across mussel-bound rocks strewn with a chain of starfish. Brown, red and green algae, lichens and barnacles, limpets, sea anemones and dog whelks array themselves in zones and cyclic progressions under the angry gaze of a red-eyed, lurid swimming crab who surveys his kingdom from a bed of pepper dulse. Vulnerable brittle stars insinuate their way towards shelter. Choughs ride the air waves.

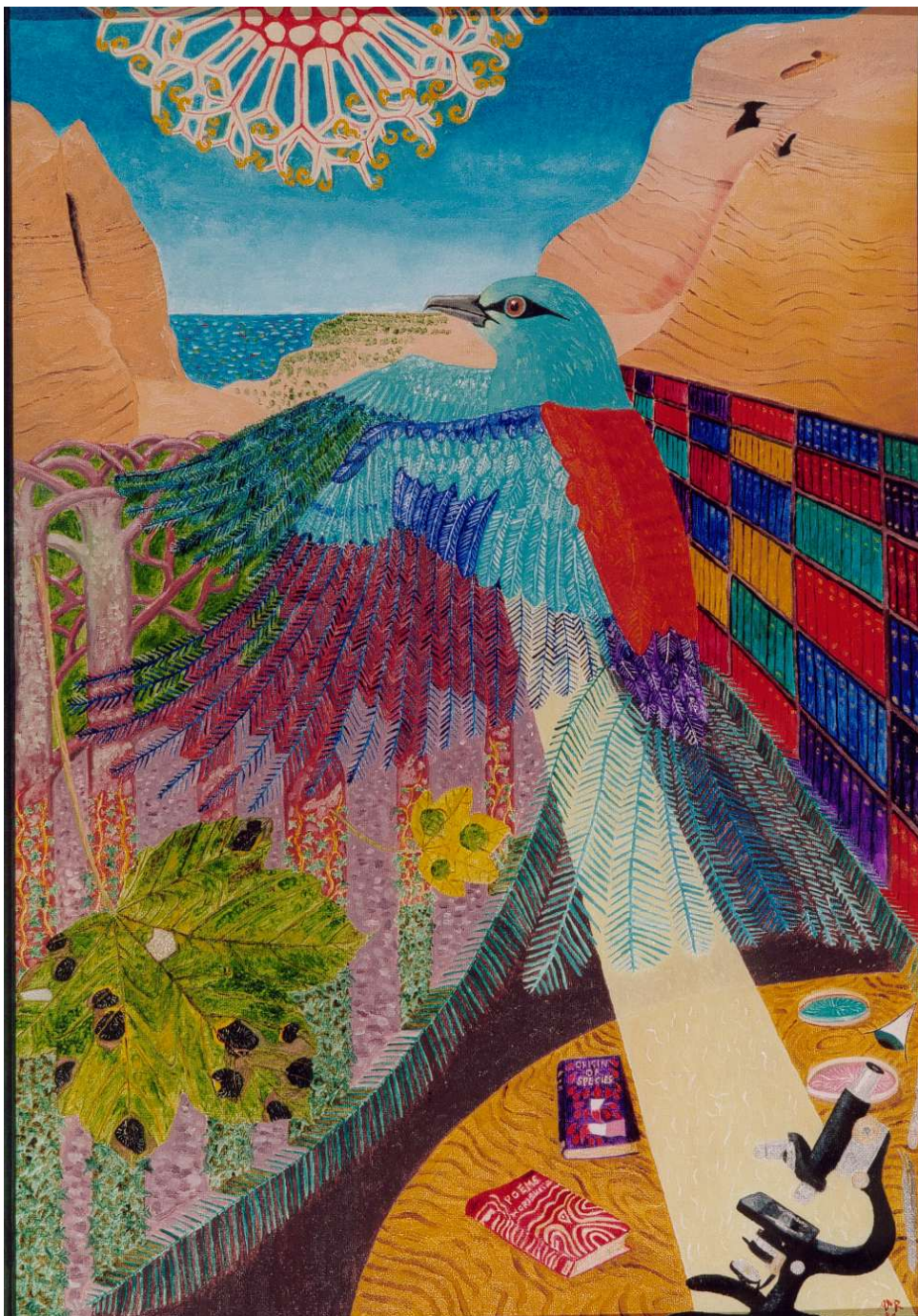




## "ROLLER COASTER"

**Oil on Board, 1998**

A ferny-feathered blue roller, streaming upwards, transforms a dusty brown study of books and analytical devices, precisely but incoherently arrayed out of perspective of table-top context, past claustrophobic, tar-spotted sycamore woodland, into an eternal quest for belonging. Bookshelves become rock strata whose caves have protected ancient scrolls through ages riven by the pain of conflicting aspirations. A sun, the magnification of hidden powdery mildew fruit bodies on the underside of green-blotched leaves casts its beauty into the eye of the beholder.





## "IBOTENIC THREAD"

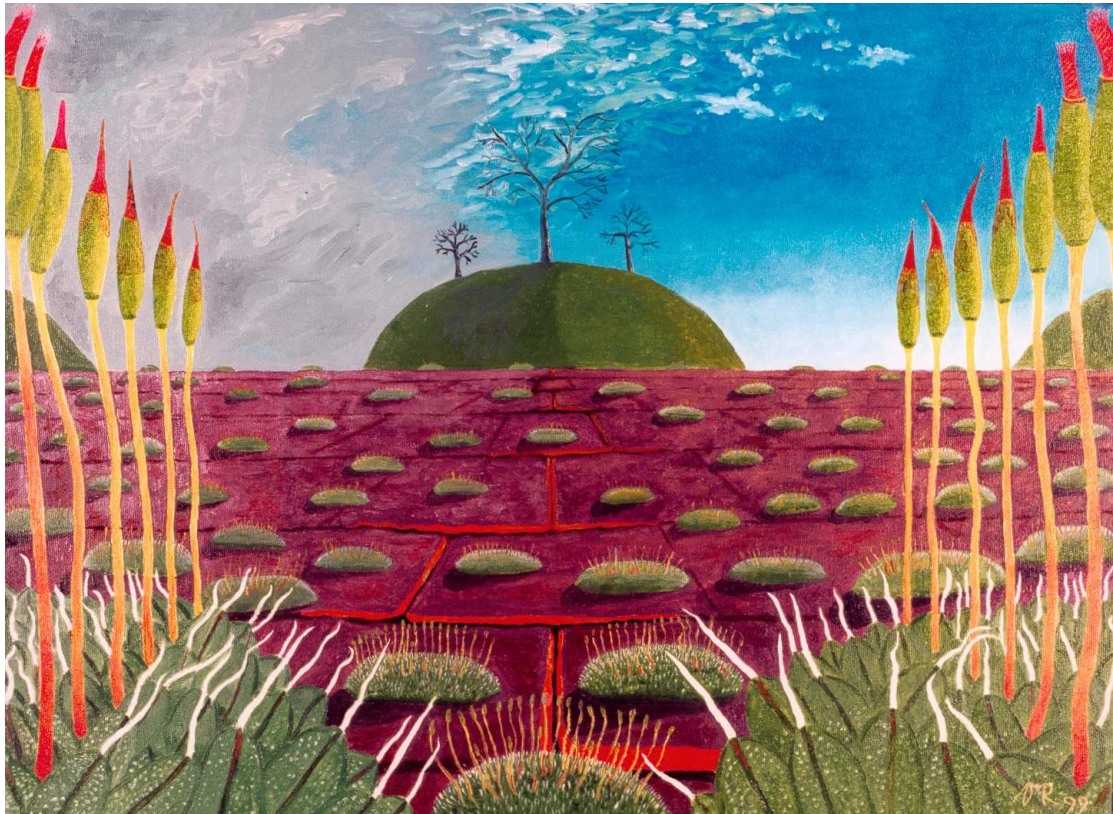
**Oil on Board, 1999**

This painting illustrates the significance of the fly agaric mushroom, *Amanita muscaria*, or, more specifically, ibotenic acid, the hallucinogenic compound that the mushroom contains, in human culture. The scale-shifting properties of the mushroom, said to have inspired Lewis Carroll's *Adventures of Alice in Wonderland*, are depicted as a spiralling red and white-spotted screw-thread (based on the mushroom cap) around a telescopic staff (based on the mushroom stem). The groove of the thread links a Heavenly sky containing rain clouds formed from the spore-bearing "basidia" of the fungus to a Hellish inferno across an earthscape of mountains, forests, rivers, flood plains and sea. This thread symbolizes the Shamanic use of the fungus, and the endless communion of masculine (linear) and female (curved) themes, to transcend outermost and innermost realms of consciousness.



**"TORTUOUS ADVANCE"****Oil on Canvas, 1999**

The moss, *Tortula muralis*, with twist-topped spore-producing capsules and cushions of bristle-pointed leaves, advances across an exposed boundary of constraining brickwork built both to shelter and to confine human beings, towards a distant green hill. The hill contains the self-same shape as the moss and is topped by a trinity of trees, two straight-trunked, the other forked, symbolizing the natural communion of shadow and conscious selves.





## "VERNAL ILLUMINATIONS"

### Oil on Board, 1999

Separate sexes of hazel and alder catkins, and hermaphrodite flowers of celandines, illuminate springtime emergence from winter darkness. The impenetrable, mirror surface of a lake of clear tear water contains both shadows and reflections but admits no insight within its straight-edged, arum-lined, and sinuous boundaries. Grief is fathomless, imponderable, but not without respite or hope cascading from the conciliation of polarities.





## "PLAIN BROTHERHOOD"

**Oil on Board, 1999**

Silver and gold strands of rain and sunlight are strung, harp-wise, from the sinewy, strong legs to bass clef wing plumes of a male ostrich with negligee of black belly feathers. Black-backed, pink-palmed, male hands, modelled on my hands, emerge like primary feathers from white coverts and fiery secondary feathers in the wings of crowned cranes, mutually supporting each other's one-legged stance. The hands stretch out to pluck the harp strings. Wet season gives way to dry, across a sinuous path on which two warriors stand one-legged, spear-supported to left or right, vigilant yet content and open-handed in the generosity of their unconditional love. Swallowtail butterflies link darkness and light from giraffes to zebras. Acacias transform stems to leaves. An egg cracks open, perpendicular to the hatching plane to reveal – what? This is where I came from.





## "RETICULATE CONCERTO"

**Oil on Board, 1999**

Painted for Tom, Barbara, Emme, Patty and Sam Bruns who visited Bath and England from Berkeley, California. Tom studies mycorrhizal fungi and evolutionary trees, and his e mail name is *boletus*. The painting picks up these themes and associates aspects of Bath and England with aspects of North America and California. A *Boletus reticulatus* fruit body, with organ-pipe tubes, Berkeley hillside cap and Golden Gate Bridge over fog-strewn Bay, emerges out of a forest network tapped into by Indian pipe plants and broken into by fire and poison oak. Redwood columns emerge from the network, supporting a fan-vaulting of least parsimonious branches conjoined by the Gorgon's Head of Sulis Minerva. Yosemite waterfall and oak moss lichen cascade between the columns. Yosemite valley stretches into the distance, the deep blue sky given point by a passing turkey vulture. A real-life internet connection.



## "FRINGE FESTIVAL"

**Oil on Linen Canvas, 1999**

Patterns in *Cladonia* lichen, *Marchantia* liverwort and blue fescue grass combine with rock and water to create an illusion of fireworks, ocean spray and bepalmed tropical island, overlooked by turreted light and dark towers and surrounded by incoming wavelets and sandy shore bedecked with castles of child's play.





## "I'M-MIGRATION"

### Oil on Canvas, 1999

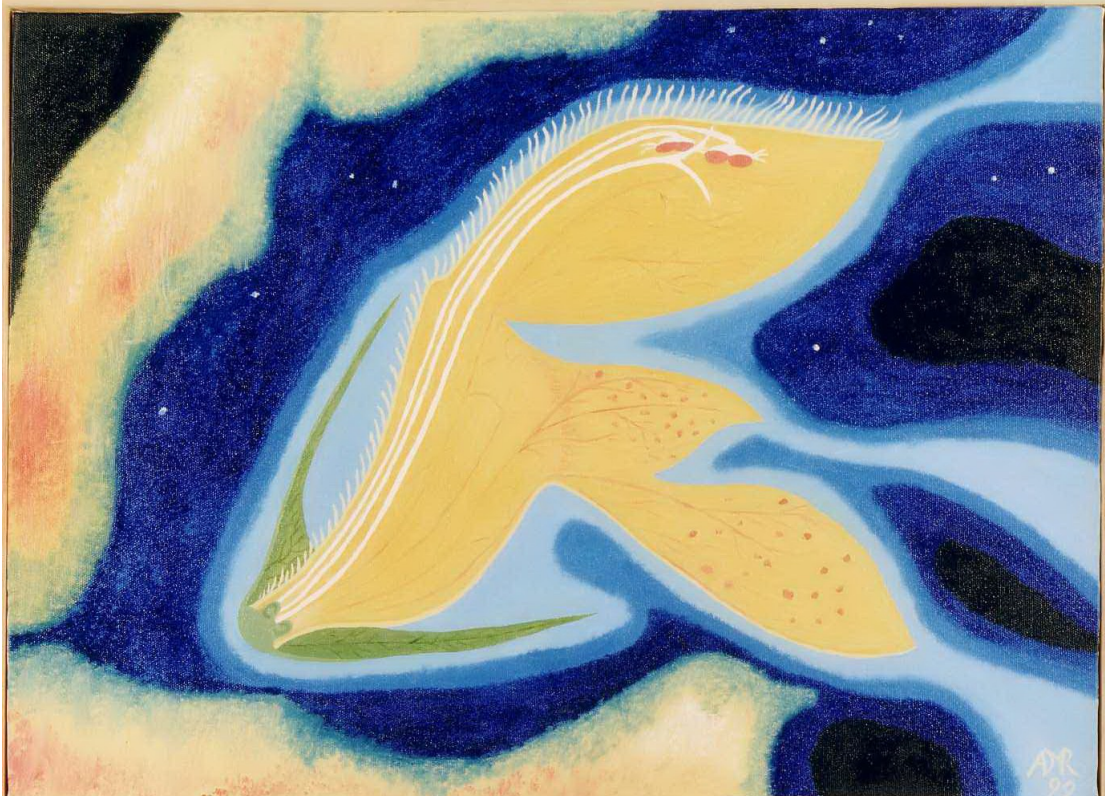
Implicit in the outward forms of migrant birds and animals are travellers' tales of flights and treks, of arrivals, departures and time in motion. The migrants bring with them a cultural heritage that enriches the lives of residents. In its long journey, an English Swallow, dark from above, light from below, swallows landscape. Its travail begins in the elemental South African solar heat that is transformed by photosynthesis into *Protea* flowers. The heat generates a propelling force that carries the bird over veld, above water-seeking springboks, across deserted sand dunes and dark-light realms of fluttering hoopoes until green-topped, white cliffs signal arrival time before May begins to bloom. Speedwell urges onwards; forget-me-not reminds of home; cowslips reflect the strengthening warmth of rising sun, and terns join in aerobatic arrival celebrations. But where is the welcome for human immigrants?



## **"ARCHANGELIC CHANNELS"**

**Oil on Canvas, 1999**

A hermaphrodite Yellow Archangel Flower, cut in half to expose receptive channels of gynoecium and donating channels of androecium, flies and falls through universal space, creating and following channels of least resistance bounded by cascading Aurora.





## **"TRIPLE ENTENDRE"**

### **Oil on Board, 1999**

A lost, last, low speed train draws out of blackness towards open sky across a viaduct. The viaduct is supported by the cyperaceous triangular cross-section of a stem of wood club-rush containing air- and water-filled channels and framed by the left and right sides and head-on symmetry of three emerald and yellow grasshoppers fused by their antennae into a chaotic three-way attractor. The triangle is wedged between domains of grass and sedge, each with tripartite flower arrays and inhabited by grasshopper and sedge warblers with their fishing reel and grating voices. The traverse of a harvest mouse conjoins the domains and so in its own small, sweet way makes the whole interdependent, multidimensional scene possible, complete with sound and visual reverberations.



## "COUNTER-CURRENTS"

**Oil on Canvas, 1999**

A detached silver feather, blown by wind, and a fallen gold leaf web, caught in river currents, drift apart. But ducks, propelled by their self-possession of both wing feathers and feet webs, take to both air and water as they choose and so, within shifting limits, make their own ways. In these ways they create the fore and aft of a life-boat pattern, seen only from an imaginary perspective, that plies the surface of yet greater, more mysterious depths. So too might airy intellect and watery emotion be related when life's dynamic context is fully filled.





## "OPENING ENDINGS"

### Oil on Canvas, 1999

An elm tree's demise, its wing-barked boundaries opened by ravages of bark beetle and fungus, makes way for new life to fill its space. Maple leaves take over the canopy between earth and sky, but their coverage is only partial, leaving openings for arriving and departing flights of woodpeckers. Fungal decay softens the wood to allow the tunnelling of long-horn beetle larvae and probing and chiselling of beak-endings. A nest cavity provides a feeding station between egg and air.

