Other Ways of Seeing

*Shetland Notebooks and Shetland Sketchbooks*, Kate Walters (£30.00, Guillemot Press)

As I get older, I have become more and more interested in artists’ sketchbooks, the process of making, and images and ideas before they become too finished or polished. Kate Walters’ new books arrived the same morning as a sketchbook by Barbara Rae (published by the Royal Academy) from her Arctic exhibitions.

Walters’ new publications contains two books and an original painting in an envelope, and at first glance the small, A5-ish, landscape format, sketchbook seems similar to Rae’s. Both feature loose sketches and drawings of landscape and animals, yet Rae quickly formalises her glaciers and icebergs into soft-edged geometric patterns she can use on the larger canvasses she works on in her studios. And, truth be told, Rae can’t draw animals – her silhouetted beasts on said canvasses are just embarrassing.

Walters small sketchbook contains one animal image, a rabbit or hare, blue and grey, springing across the page in scribble and outline, all fleeting energy. The endpapers show pressed flowers, whilst elsewhere the landscape shimmers and disappears into blur and fading edges. If Rae imposes images on her paint, Walters' emerge from the materials.

On the back flap of the larger volume of notebooks, the Rev’d Richard Davey suggests that ‘These are not paintings that build form, but vehicles through which we are pulled into formlessness: encounters with the ephemeral rather than the physical...’ Now, there are all sorts of discussions one might have about how formlessness (if such a thing exists) could be articulated, or the suggestion of spirit and shamanic worlds which Walters claims to articulate, but there is no questioning the beauty and power of the texts and images gathered here.

Walters creates spirit worlds on the page, beings who emerge from liquid and stain; then articulates and accompanies them with dense, heartfelt texts. Animal and child spirits are channelled into simple yet ecstatic natural forms and phrases; these are dream states made literal and visual. Each copy of this work is accompanied by an original postcard-sized painting. Mine is an orange and red speckled bird creature holding the sun on its elongated beak.

Walters work has always been challenging, with its focus on sexuality, sensuality and inner-being, along with natural and unseen worlds. Recently, however, through pilgrimages, walking and residences she has found a new focus and clarity. This new work, exquisitely presented and produced by Guillemot, is understated, clear-hearted and numinous, tales from another world where there are other ways of seeing.

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