

# Shopping in my Garage

Robin Richmond, January 10, 2018



Winter Bonfire



Silver Birches



Archipelago

Installed for the moment in deepest, darkest France, many miles away from urban life, and an icy hour away from my local art supply store, I am spending time reflecting on my own work and the materials and ideas that I depend upon, back in my other life in the city studio. No museums and galleries here. No art shop down the road when I run out of zinc white. Online shopping is not an option here. I am off the grid literally and metaphorically. There is intense quiet. There are no distractions, only the beauty of rain-washed skies, skeletal trees, icy lakes and muddy fields too sodden to cross. Winter, in other words.

It's a reflective time. January and all that... The show planned for this coming March cancelled due to the closure of my long-time gallery; and much anticipated family births and much mourned family deaths bringing forth existential New Year contemplation and re-evaluation. I paint therefore I am, so it all comes out in the wash, and wash is the operative word. I am working with water on paper, initially using age old printmaking techniques, and then painting on top of the marks that I have printed.

All this is partly for practical reasons. Artists never own up to these banalities, but storing huge canvases is a logistical nightmare, and paper, at least before it is expensively framed, is easily stored in plan chests and transportable on RyanAir, a very important consideration for me. So paper it is. Big sheets of Canson watercolour paper that I have been using and abusing with tools culled from the endless depths of a garage that stores our 30 years of sundry discarded implements and tools, and probably 100 years' worth of old farming implements that we inherited with the house.

The subject matter is water in all its forms - ice, cloud, fog, and snow. Cold colours. Dark colours. Not yet having a press, I thought I would challenge myself to what I could scavenge in the spirit of upcycling. So an old metal oven splash-back is my plate. A heavy carpet layer's block is my press. Old household painting tools and a set of windscreen cleaners are my rollers. A rich brown walnut stain, made from their husks, called *brou de noix* (much favoured by Pierre Soulages, a local hero) is one of my pigments. Straw from the barn, glued onto the plate creates a rough texture that grips the paint...

None of these tools are in the medicine bag of a conventional printmaker and I have only made one proper numbered edition in my life. I prefer to make monoprints, one-offs, unique artist's proofs, as I love the way a painted mark translates onto paper from embossed metal under pressure. It's totally unpredictable and totally fascinating, and the finished paintings that are born out of this chaotic process have jolted me out of my winter blues.

And the garage is my favourite new art shop.