

Barbara Rae RA



Barbara Rae RA

'The Lammermuirs - An Lomair Mòr'

BARBARA RAE CBE RA - 'The Lammermuirs - An Lomair Mòr'

The Caledonian Antisyzygy is a term invented to describe the supposed harnessing of conflicting opposites under the common yoke of the Scottish character. It is a trope of Scottish literature defined by James Hogg's Confessions of a Justified Sinner and R.L.Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Perhaps this antisyzygy is actually deeply rooted in the Scottish landscape itself, however. There is hardly a piece of fertile land in Scotland where you are not simultaneously aware of the wild hills whose character is so very different although it is their shelter that makes possible the land's fertility. Nor are they just a backdrop; like the antisyzygy, they are an integral, but contrasted aspect of the same landscape. Nor need they be mountains. The Lammermuirs that shelter the green fields of East Lothian on one side and of Berwickshire on the other rise to no more than fifteen hundred feet. You can go from fertile field to wild hill in no time at all, but because Scotland's climate exists on a knife edge, in that fifteen hundred feet, you go from temperate low ground to near sub-Arctic high ground. There can be snow on the Lammermuirs any time between September and May. In several pictures Barbara Rae vividly evokes the bleakness it can bring.

Under the restrictions of the pandemic, she couldn't travel to the Arctic as she has done in recent years, so she made an instinctive choice and turned to the Lammermuirs in winter, you could almost say to the Arctic close at hand. Certainly, as she did in the Arctic, she found a world that was not monochrome as might be expected, but full of colour. The pictures in this exhibition are pictures of winter, but if their key is turned up to give them force, the colours are there in the landscape all the same. Andrew MacIntosh Patrick once told me how his father, the landscape painter James McIntosh Patrick, was wont to say: "I canny paint summer. There's nae colour." Where the light is so soft that there are scarcely shadows, every shade and nuance of colour can sing as it does in these pictures.

What is also constantly reflected in them however is how, unlike the mountain wildernesses of conventional Scottish iconography, these hills, though apparently barren, are marked by millennia of human presence. There are neolithic and bronze age monuments, Iron Age settlements, ancient forts and even at the eastern end of the range, almost uniquely in southern Scotland, a broch. Carrying their fish to market in Lauder, fishwives from Dunbar used to walk the length of the hills, their creels on their backs. The tracks they left are still known as the herring road. The hills are marked by the lines of these and other ancient tracks, by enclosures, dikes and ditches, sheep folds, patches of burnt heather, plantations, marginal fields won painfully from the bare hillside, their shelter belts of windblown trees and, too, the spiky profiles of wind farms.

All these things are like drawing on the hills themselves and that is how they are reflected in the graphic patterns the artist deploys in her pictures. The boundaries too where the pattern of fields gives way to the hill frequently mark a second horizon cutting across the picture to create three zones, sky, hill and cultivation. The big picture, Cranshaws, is a superb example, of this pattern. There is a black sky, the curved profile of a hill and, beneath, the more richly coloured, geometrical pattern of fields. With the dark above, light and colour below, this picture, like several others, also magnificently illustrates this landscape's antisyzygy.

1. Tool Law Rig

Mixed media on paper
98 x 98 cm



For all these traces of human activity, however, the Lammermuirs have kept their wild integrity. Indeed, only the Romans ever drove a road across them and, now the A68, it has been in use ever since. The Goddodin marched along it to catastrophic defeat by the Saxons at the Battle of Catterick around 600AD, an event recorded in the eponymous Welsh poem The Goddodin that also contains the only contemporary reference to a warrior called Arthur. (The language of southern Scotland was Brittonic like Welsh.) There are certainly ghosts in these hills. We feel their presence here.

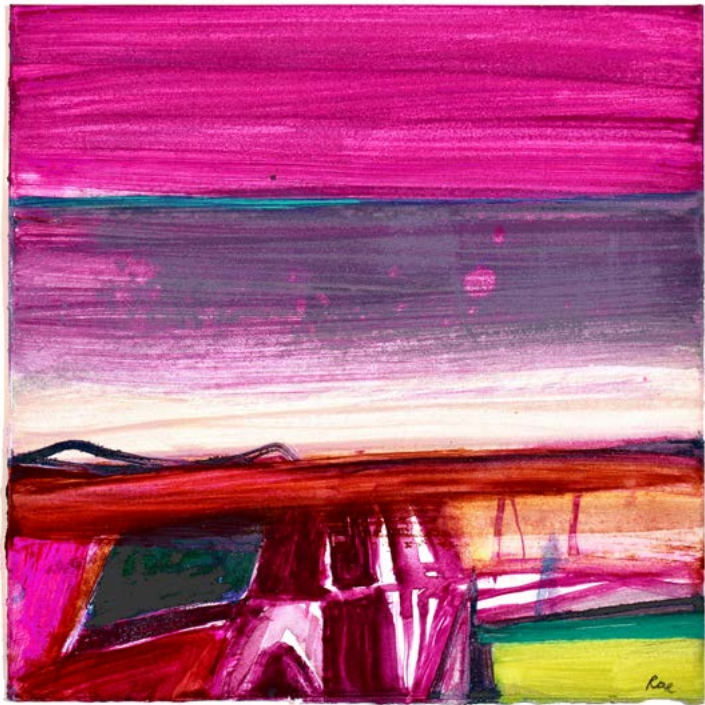
William Gillies was among the first seriously to explore this landscape as a subject for his painting. He was principal of Edinburgh College of Art when Barbara Rae was a student there, but as principal he was no longer teaching and she dismisses any link. She has however stuck to something that has been definitive of Scottish art whether at Edinburgh or Glasgow where she taught for many years: that it is rooted in experience. Even further from Gillies's example however, like her older contemporary John Houston, or indeed Joan Eardley before him, she has taken on the new freedom seized for painting by the abstract expressionist artists of the postwar years, both European and American, and brought it to inform her account of the actual landscape. Loyal to the idea of an art based in experience, she pulls the abstract back to the actual to endow her images of this rich and fascinating landscape with vivid energy. Although her pictures were done in the studio, they are based on direct observation recorded in her remarkable sketch-books. They reflect the real world directly apprehended and swiftly too. The rapid spontaneity of this work is manifestly an emotional response to the actual, but in its rapidity it also sets up another counterpoint. Her glance takes in both the momentary movements of light and shade and in contrast the stubbornly enduring human presence marked so strikingly on the landscape. When she raises her eyes above the horizon to take in the wide expanse of the hills beneath the winter sun, however, we also see at once the agelessness of their geology and against it the march of time in the rhythms of the days and of the seasons.

Professor Duncan Macmillan

2. Penshiel Snow

Mixed media on canvas
152 x 152 cm





3. Blackburn Ridge I
Mixed media on paper
28 x 28 cm

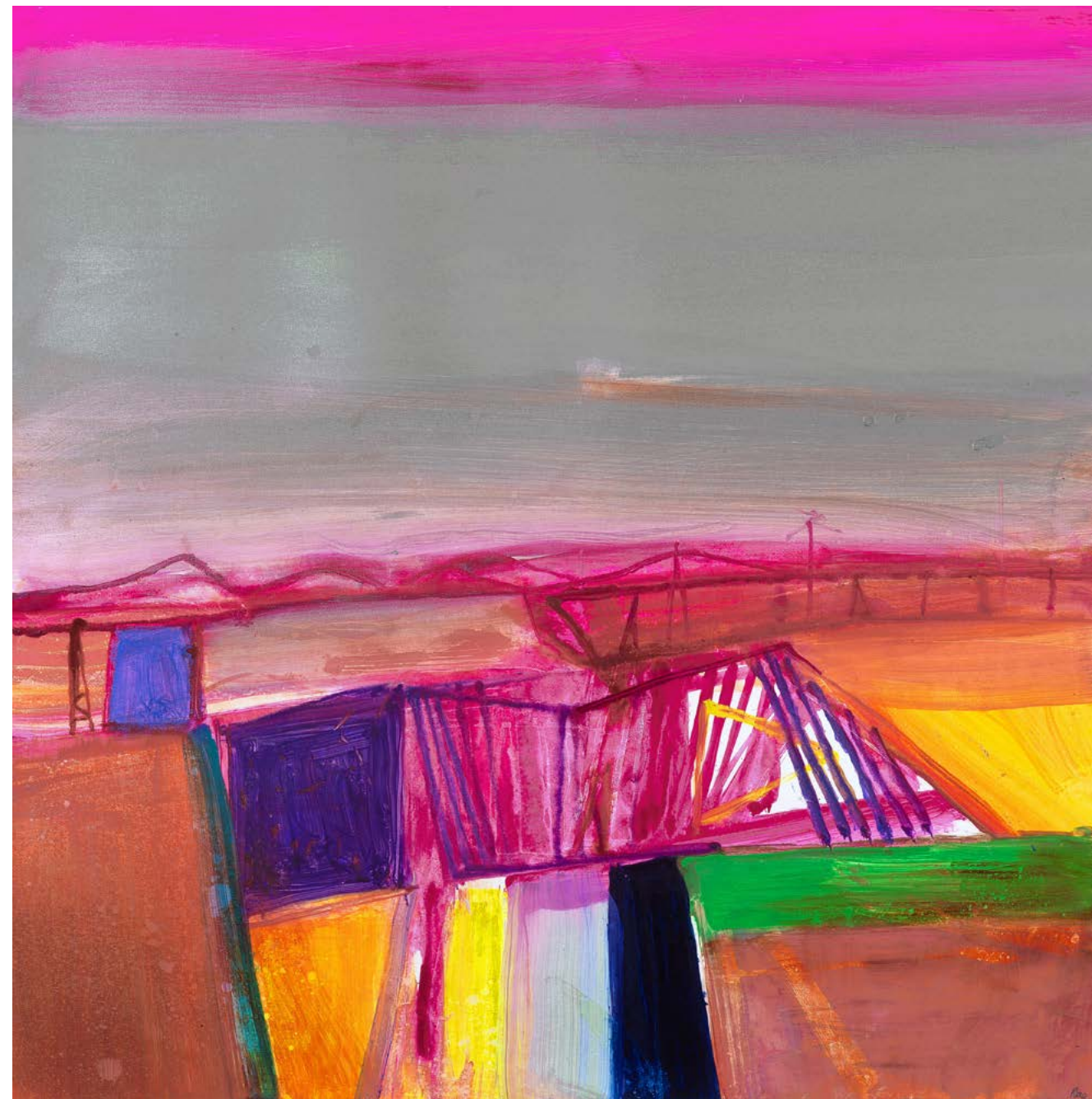


4. Priestlaw
Mixed media on paper
98 x 98 cm



5. Southern Law - Winter II

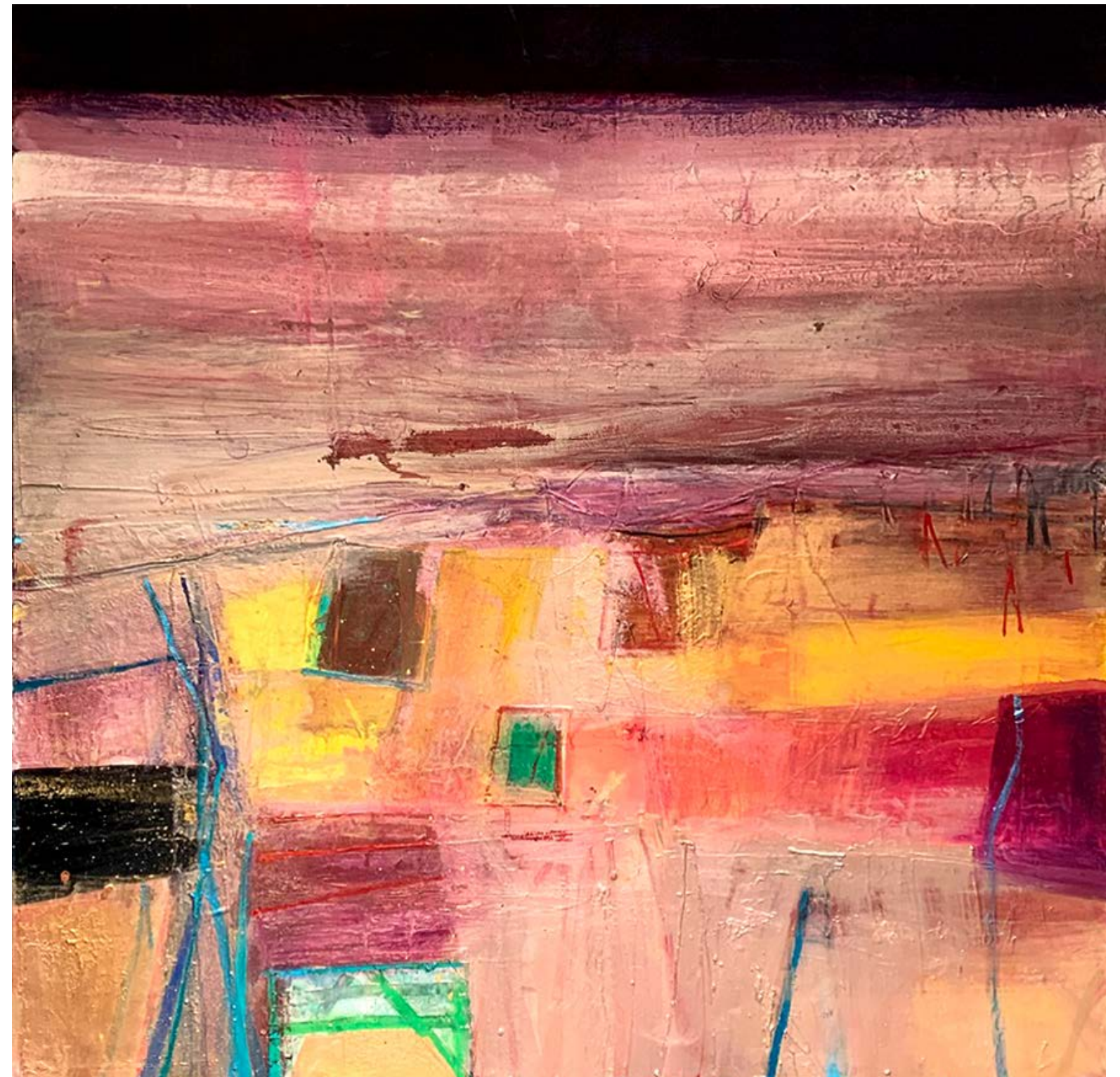
Mixed media on paper
28 x 28 cm



6. Collar Law

Mixed media on paper
98 x 98 cm

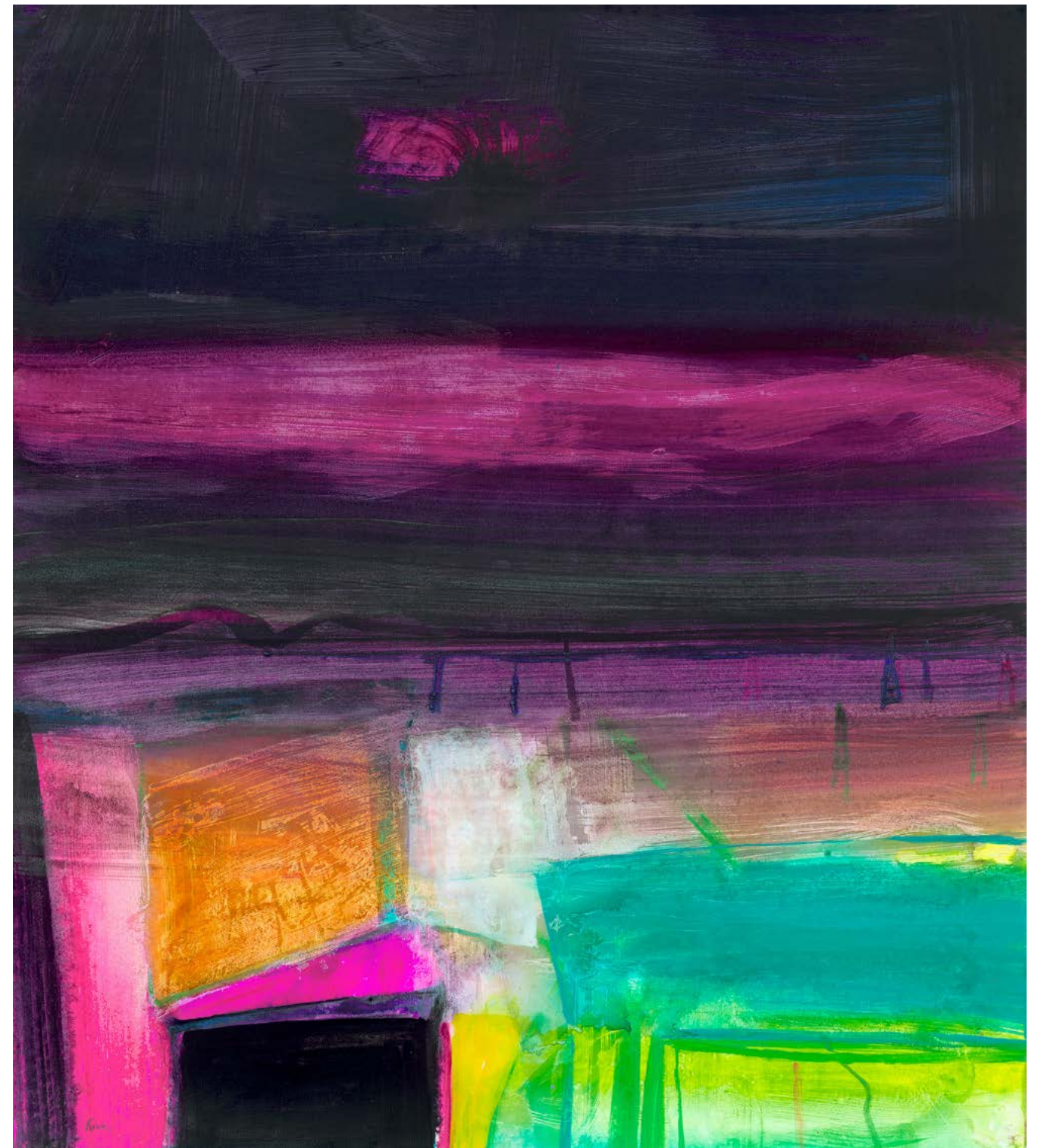
7. Priestlaw
Mixed media on canvas
183 x 183 cm





8. Herds Hill II

Mixed media on paper
28 x 28 cm



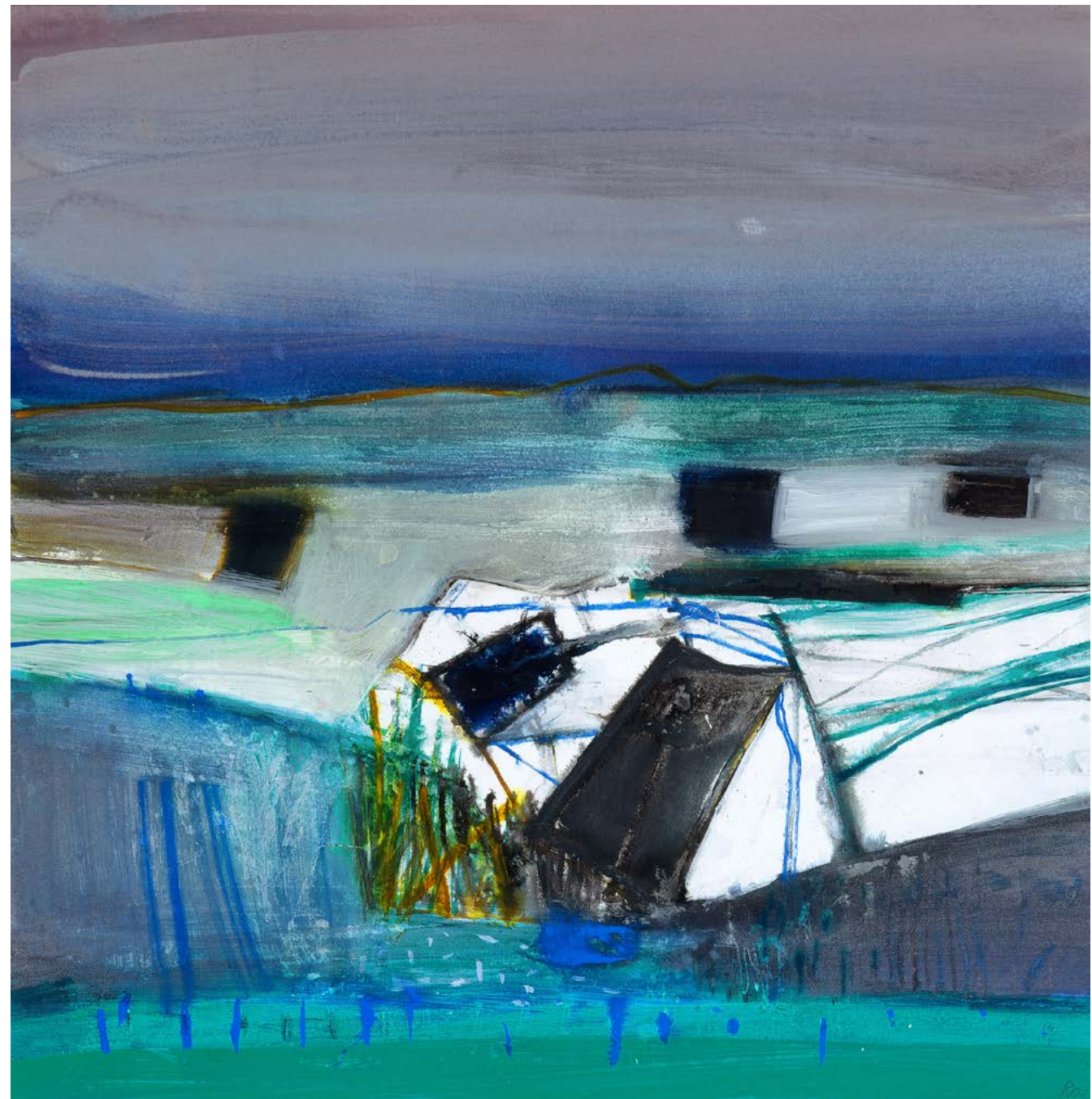
9. North Hart Law

Mixed media on paper
109 x 97 cm



10. Moor - January Sun

Mixed media on paper
28 x 28 cm



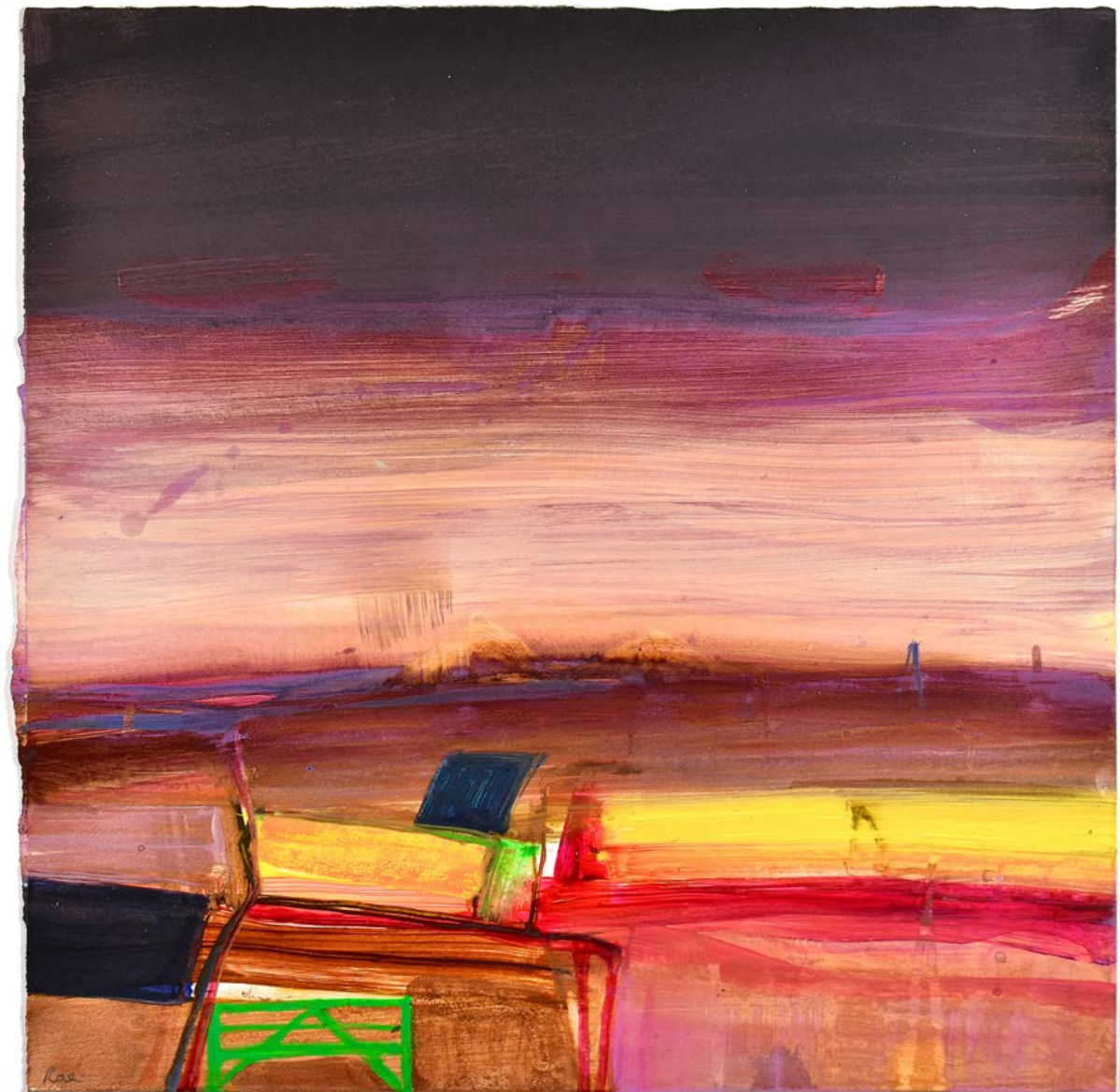
11. Snow - Herds Hill

Mixed media on paper
75 x 75 cm



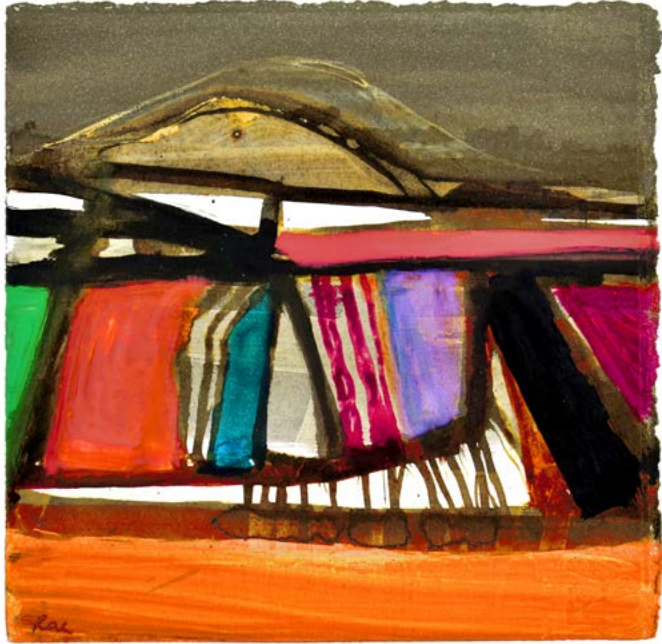
12. Yellow Moor

Mixed media on paper
28 x 28 cm



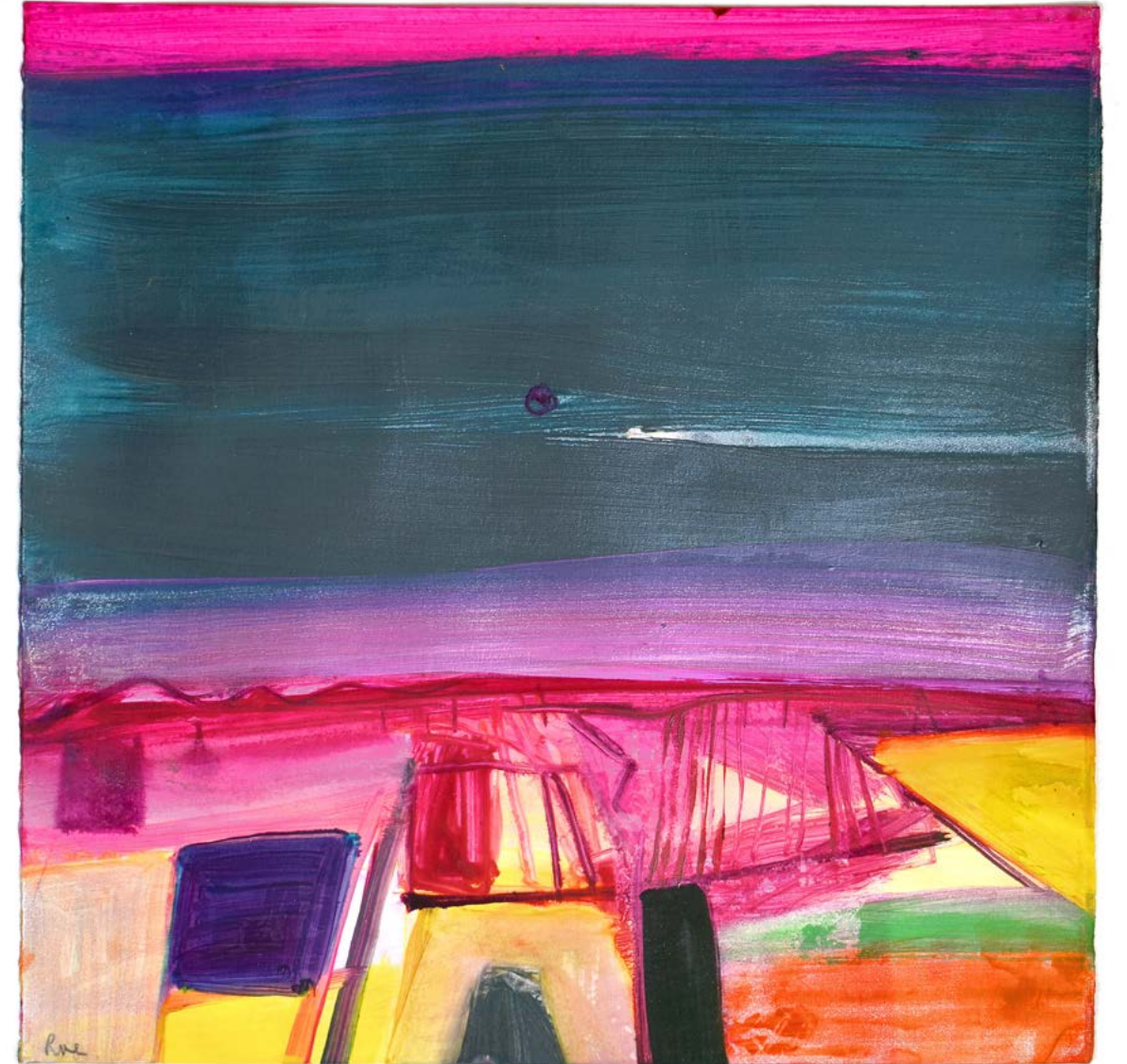
13. January Moor - Upper Knowe

Mixed media on paper
56 x 15 cm



14. Quarry Ford

Mixed media on paper
19 x 19 cm



15. Blackburn Ridge - Dark Sky

Mixed media on paper
56 x 56 cm



16. Penshiel I
Mixed media on paper
28 x 28 cm

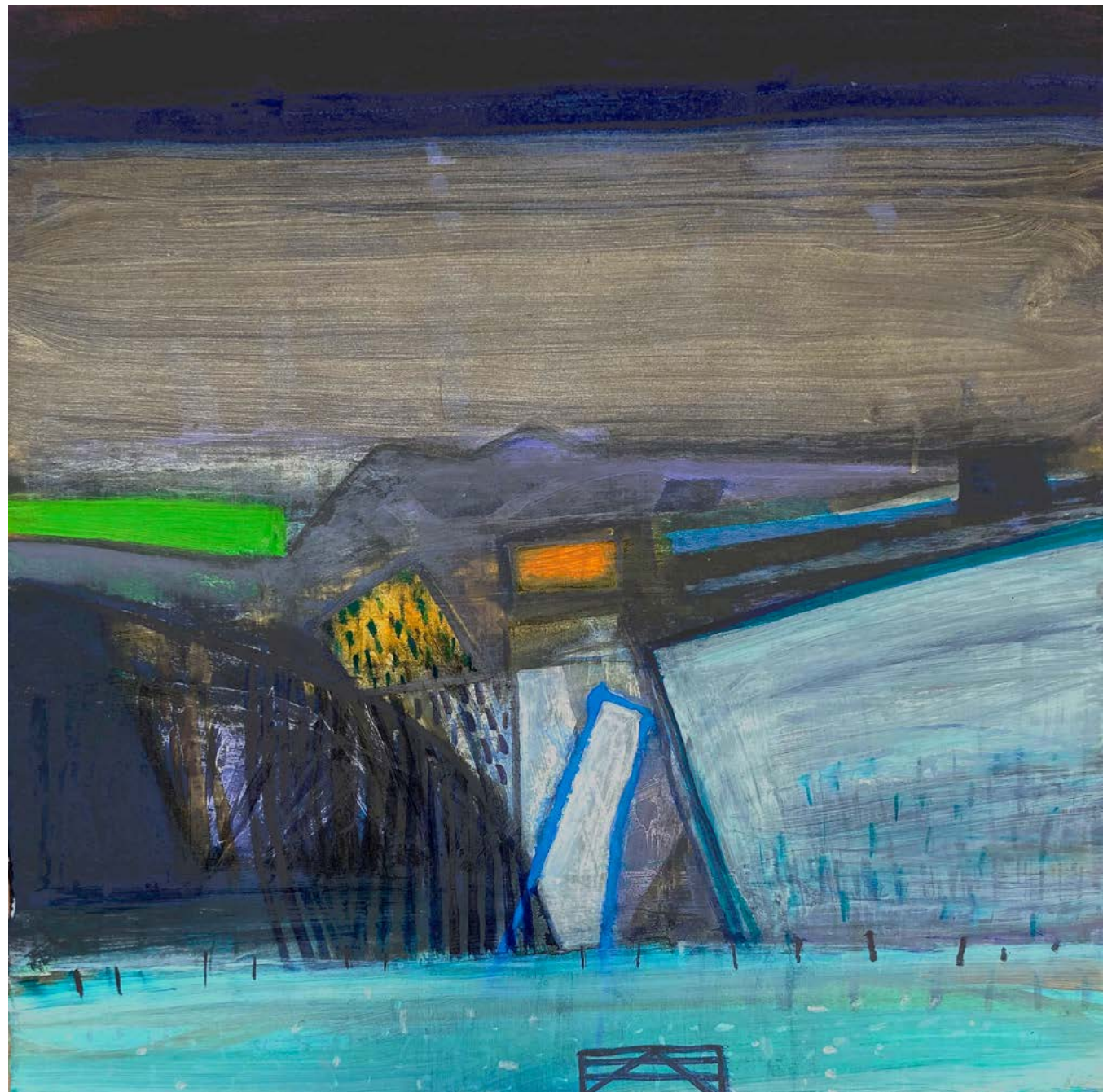


17. Cranshaws
Mixed media on paper
94 x 107 cm



18. Southern Law - Winter I

Mixed media on paper
28 x 28 cm



19. Southern Law - December

Mixed media on paper
75 x 75 cm



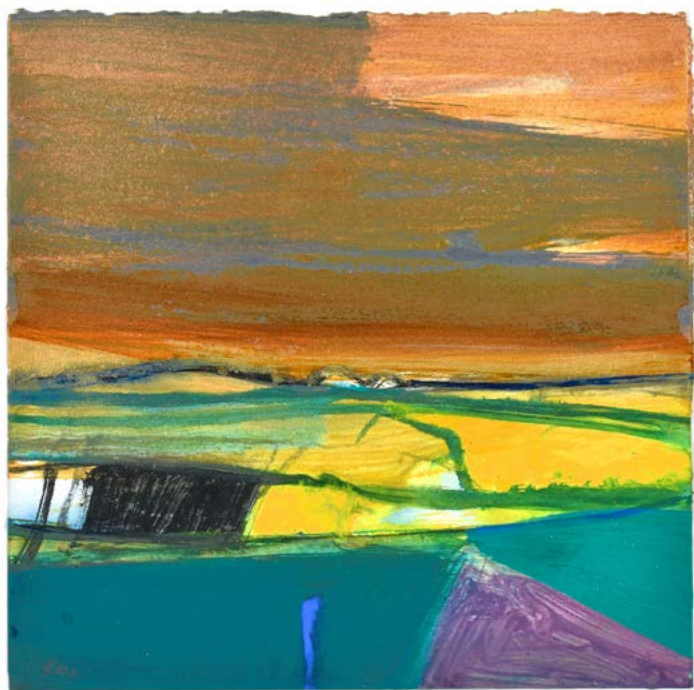
20. Winter Pensheil I

Mixed media on paper
28 x 28 cm



21. Weather Law Gate

Mixed media on paper
56 x 56 cm



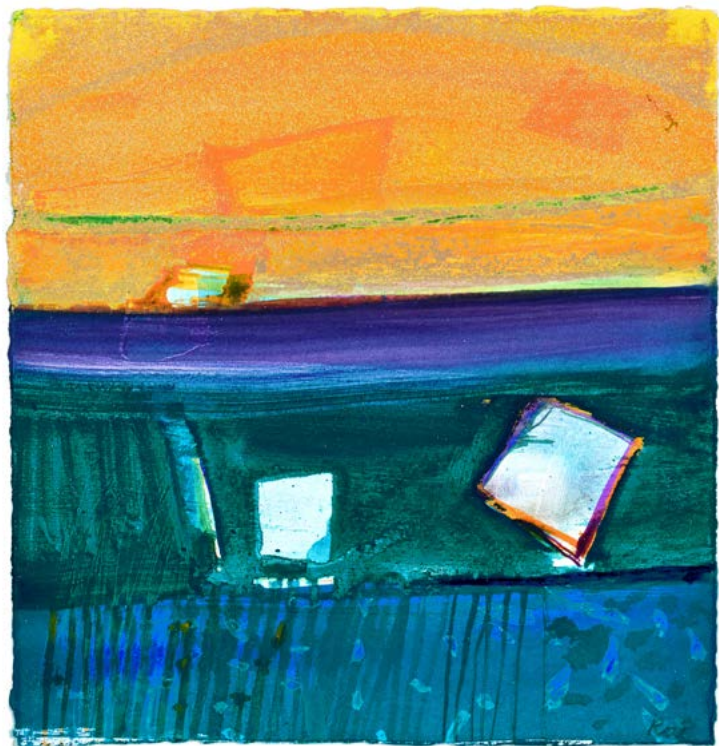
22. Moor - Late January

Mixed media on paper
28 x 28 cm



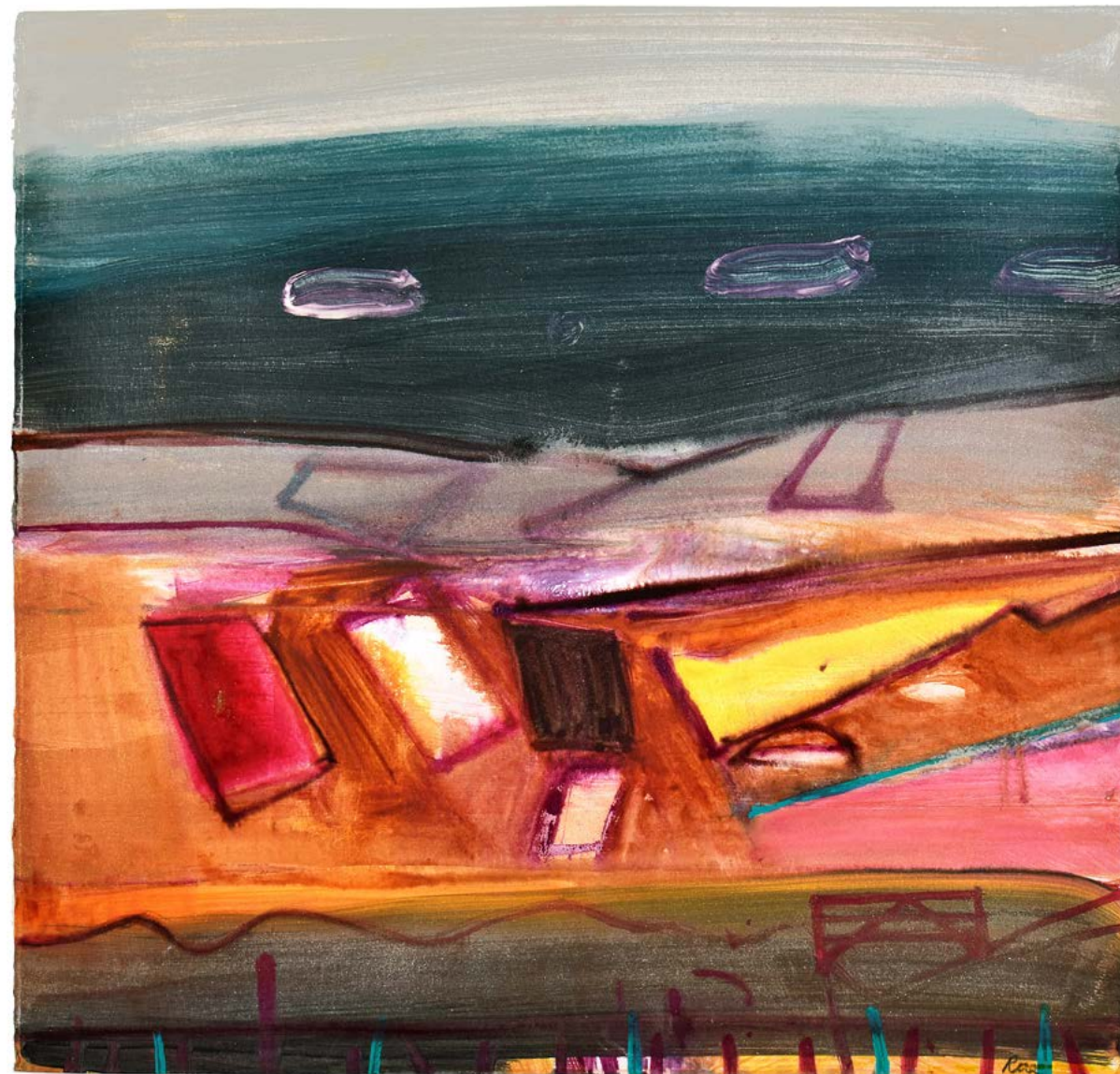
23. Black Gate - Blythe Edge

Mixed media on canvas
56 x 56 cm



24. Herd's Hill I

Mixed media on paper
28 x 28 cm

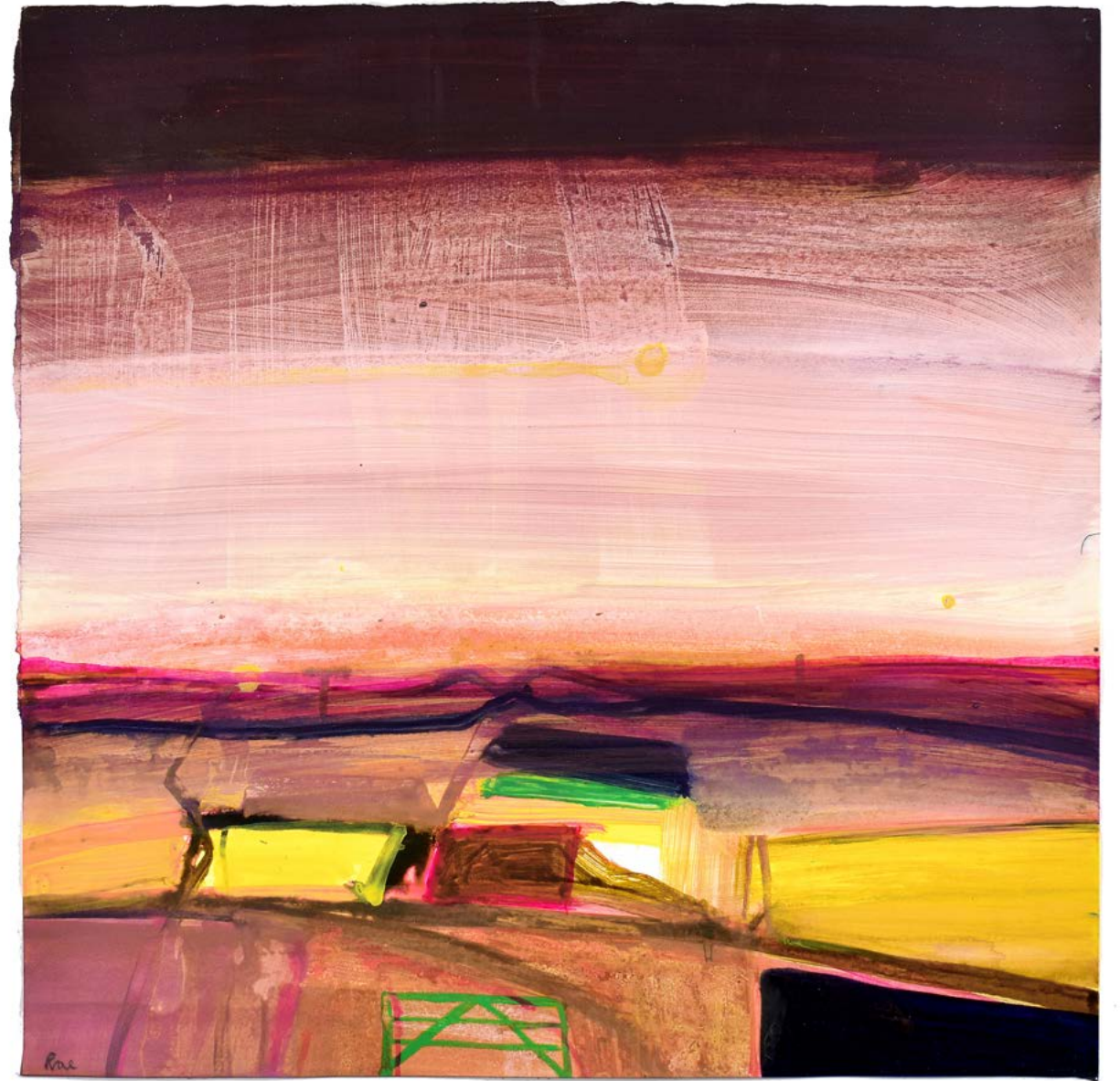


25. Southern Law

Mixed media on paper
56 x 56 cm



26. Winter Penshiel II
Mixed media on paper
28 x 28 cm



27. January Afternoon
Mixed media on paper
56 x 56 cm



28. Track to the Moor

Monotype
Image: 38 x 38 cm
Paper: 83 x 55 cm



29. Green Gate - Southern Law

Monotype
Image: 38 x 38 cm
Paper: 83 x 55 cm



30. Quarry Ford

Monotype
Image: 38 x 38 cm
Paper: 83 x 55 cm

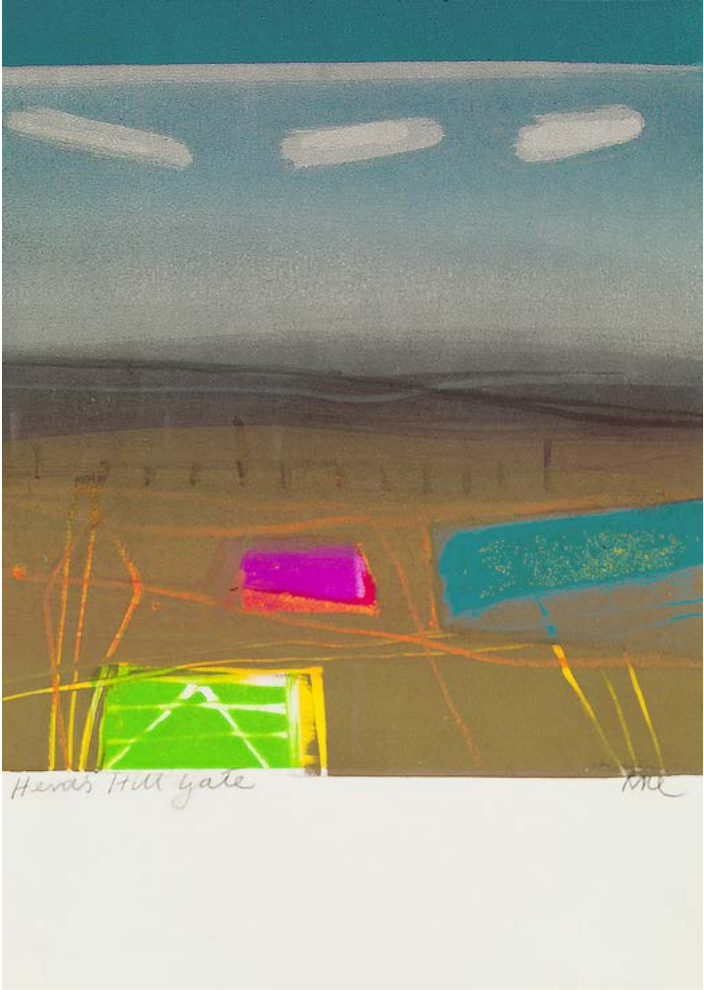


31. Burnt Heather - Priestlaw

Monotype
Image: 38 x 38 cm
Paper: 83 x 55 cm



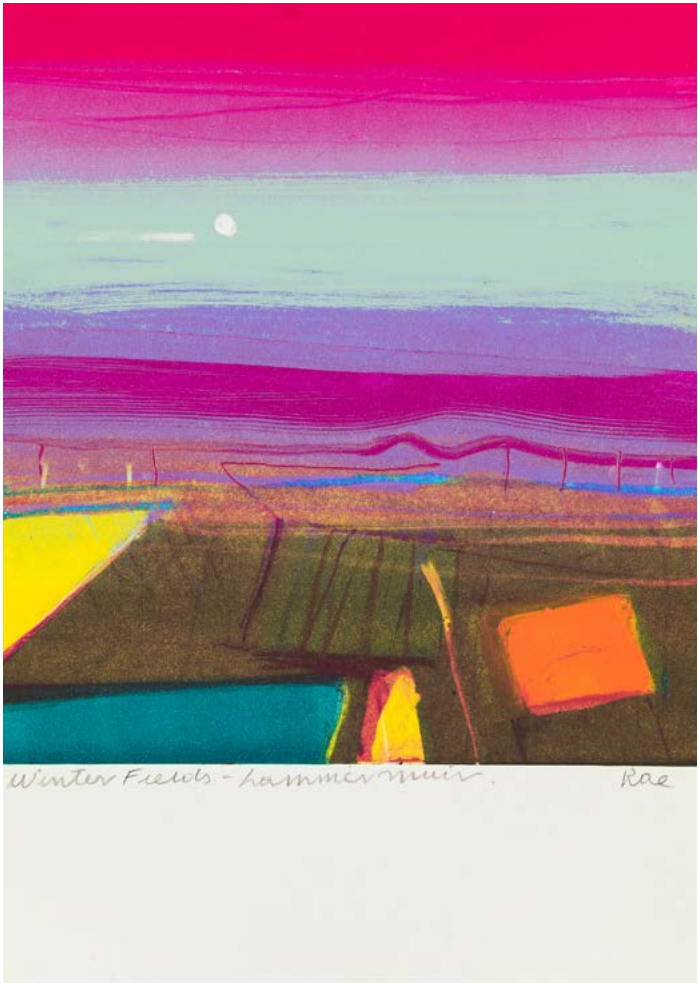
32. Dark Gate
Monotype
Image: 25 x 24 cm
Paper: 33 x 24 cm



33. Herd's Hill Gate
Monotype
Image: 25 x 24 cm
Paper: 33 x 24 cm



34. Kilpallet
Monotype
Image: 25 x 24 cm
Paper: 33 x 24 cm



35. Winter Fields - Lammermuir
Monotype
Image: 25 x 24 cm
Paper: 33 x 24 cm

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS:

Aberdeen Art Gallery
Birmingham City Art Gallery
British Museum, London
City Arts Centre, Edinburgh
Contemporary Arts Society, London
Derby Museum and Art Gallery
Dundee Art Gallery
Dundee University
Fleming Wyfold Art Foundation
Highland Regional Council
Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow
Isle of Man Arts Council
Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museums, Glasgow
Leeds City Education Department
Museum of Art for Woman, Washington DC, USA
Perth Art Gallery and Museum
Royal Bank of Scotland
Standard Life
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh
The Scottish Office, Edinburgh
University of Edinburgh
University of Glasgow
University of York
Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester



Professional Affiliations:

1986	Member of the Art Panel, Council of National Academic Awards
1986-90	Trustee, Arts Education Trust
1986-90	Member of the Royal Society of Painters and Watercolours
1991	Member, Board of Friends of the Royal Scottish Academy
1992	Judge Paisley Drawing Biennale
1992-94	Member of the Board of Friends of the Royal Scottish Academy
1992-94	Member of the Merchandise Committee
1993	Curator and Hanger Royal Scottish Academy Student Exhibition
1993	Vice President, Royal Society of Painters and Watercolours
1993-94	Curator and hanger, Royal Scottish Academy Annual Exhibition
1995-05	Member, Royal Fine Art Commission of Scotland
1996	Member, Board of Trustees, Hospitalfield House, Arbroath, Scotland
1996	Member of the Royal Academy of Arts
1996	Member of Council of the Royal Academy of Arts
1998	Member, Board of the British School, Rome
1998	Lecturer for the British Council in Japan
2005-06	Member of the Council of the Royal Academy of Arts
2008-10	Chairperson, Board of Alumni, Edinburgh College of Art
2014	Patron Art in Health Care
2014	Member Royal Academy of Arts Council



Selected Awards:

1968	Scottish Arts Council Travel Award	1990	The Scottish Amicable Award – Royal Scottish Institute
1975-81	Major Scottish Arts Council Award	1990	W.J. Burness Award – Royal Scottish Academy
1977	Guthrie Medal	1999	CBE – Commander of the British Empire
1979	May Marshall Brown Award – RSW Centenary Exhibition	1999	Honorary Doctorate of Arts – Napier University, Edinburgh
1983	Royal Scottish Academy –Sir William Gillies Travel Award	2003	Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Art
1983	Caloustie Gulbenkian Foundation Printmaking Award	2003	Honorary Doctorate of Literature – Aberdeen University
1989	Alexander Graham Munro –Royal Scottish Society of Painters & Watercolours	2008	Honorary Doctorate of Literature – St Andrews University
1990	Hunting Group Prize winner	2016	Honorary Fellow of the Royal Scottish Institute of Architects



