

*She paints*

in a long, wide room above a shed full of orphaned and abandoned puppies. There are leaning easels, trestle tables, flat-pack shelving units, repurposed food-tray trolleys, an overcrowded book cabinet, a wicker chair, a pink suitcase. There's a battered treasure chest which looks as if it has been salvaged from the wreckage of a pirate ship. There's the unblemished corpse of a tit which looks as if it might have chosen this particular surface – in between a mirror and a glass globe – upon which to crash-land.

*She chooses*

to push the main body of clutter to the darkest end of the studio, furthest from the space where she paints, in the light cast through the largest, front-facing window. The top floor of the shed overlooks a road, some fields, a fat stripe of ocean. The view is uncluttered, and the studio becomes sparser closer to the largest window. The walls empty; the furniture thins out; the floor changes from timber-imitation lino to bare boards. Up through the boards wafts the sound of small beasts playfully yipping, but she says that she can no longer hear them. Over the years, she says, because she knows that they are safe, she has become deaf to the puppies.

*She listens*

instead, to the paint as it meets the tools and surfaces she chooses; to the beats and cadences and silences of propelled bristles and scraping blades; of colours mingling, bleeding, dripping. She listens to the objects she has collected and placed: seashells, tassels, tiles, skulls, leaves, bulbs, pompoms, deflated balloons, charred kindling, the thin sole of a baby's shoe. She listens to the clink of a stick of chalk as it drops inside a sardine tin; to the screech of a stiffened, twisted limb of kelp as it is nailed into the plaster. She listens to the poems she has pinned up, and to the postcards which show pictures of ancient gold – a torc, a lunula, a sundisc.

*She looks*

at her attentively selected pictures, poems and objects only rarely. Instead she is copying from the impressions they have left in her mind. She is putting down, in paint, what she has remembered without having to look. A halo of beaten yellow, a black lock of hair, a pearly moon.

*She sleeps*

down in the modest house beneath the studio, adjacent to the shed, hemmed in by countryside – the gently sloping, bumping, rumpled fields, the blanketing bracken and disarrayed gorse, the hedges of tangled, outstretching fuchsia. Indoors, the domestic landscape slopes, bumps and rumples too. Supple forms spill and fold, wet towels fall, heaps accumulate; small human hands reach up and grapple.

*She wakes*

in the night, when the house should be dark. Instead the mechanised lamp of a lighthouse flashes its prodigious beam into the sea-facing windows. She wakes to a silent stirring; she sits up with a soft, separate heartbeat pressed into her chest, and watches as the lighthouse runs through its unfathomable pattern, throwing lazy, staggered blinks across the sleeping rooms. Shadows rise and wobble and dip; afterimages print themselves into her memory, and in the morning, she paints the pinpricks and blurs; she paints the absences and obscurities.

*She milks*

time; she milks resources. She milks blackberries, in autumn, to make ink. She also makes, in the course of an ordinary day, packed lunches, piles of laundry, toys, costumes, shelters, fires and snacks in the same spirit of urgency as she makes her paintings, in the same surge of colour. She looks to her children for demonstrations of how to describe the world. She borrows from their curiosities and fascinations and appropriations; she borrows from the mauling, scribbling business of their small, grappling hands. She thoughtfully notices the details they notice thoughtlessly – feeling her way, making radiant mistakes.

*She swims*

in every season, down in the fat stripe of ocean her large studio window overlooks, using her overworked hands to keep her body afloat. She plunges in, paddles and kicks, allows the water to lift her up and drift her away from the land's edge. This is her salve. And later, on dry land again, in her studio, she paints the plunges and uplifts and drifts and edges, the marks the wind makes on the water, the trails left by worms and crabs and flounders in the sand and shale. She paints the contours of smooth sticks and cuttlebone and bladderwrack. She paints the deafness of submersion and the feeling that the freezing water arouses – the flush of adrenaline, and then the cold glow of calm. She paints the vulnerability, the danger, the disarray and its attendant, invisible order.

*She paints*

and by painting, she attempts to contain the wildness of the ordinary days.

*She puts out her paintings for me*

on the bare board, paint-splashed floor. They are leaning, furling, lying down; un-framed and often unexplained. Handwritten notes are scattered around their feet – phrases, names, unfinished sentences. She puts out her paintings for me – all that they might mean, and all that they remember. She puts out their possibilities, and leaves me to decide.

Sara Baume, January 2020