

# A Language of Birds

Paintings Inspired by Landscape, Wildbirds & Poetry



by Suzy Sharpe



This body of work is in many ways the beginning of a project in which I am focusing on a few of the very precious and delicately balanced landscapes that support much of our local wildlife. It feels like taking a step back and looking at the broader picture, whilst the focus for me is still on the birds, it also recognises their symbiotic relationship and reliance on particular landscapes. This feels like an ever changing dialogue between wildlife and water. As weater and tides shift, reservoirs rise and fall. It is also inspired by poetry and most importantly the experience of being in the landscape, which for me is brought to life by the wildlife. Those momentary glimpses, barely heard calls and distant flocks passing through.

## The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls

The tide rises, the tide falls,  
The twilight darkens, the curlew calls;  
Along the sea-sands damp and brown  
The traveller hastens toward the town,  
And the tide rises, the tide falls.  
Darkness settles on roofs and walls,  
But the sea, the sea in darkness calls;  
The little waves, with their soft, white hands,  
Efface the footprints in the sands,  
And the tide rises, the tide falls.  
The morning breaks; the steeds in their stalls  
Stamp and neigh, as the hostler calls;  
The day returns, but nevermore  
Returns the traveller to the shore,  
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



Hayle Estuary  
60 x 60 cm Acrylic & Mixed media on Canvas

## Sound of the Sea

The sea awoke at midnight from its sleep,  
And round the pebbly beaches far and wide  
I heard the first wave of the rising tide  
Rush onward with uninterrupted sweep;  
A voice out of the silence of the deep,  
A sound mysteriously multiplied  
As of a cataract from the mountain's side,  
Or roar of winds upon a wooded steep.  
So comes to us at times, from the unknown  
And inaccessible solitudes of being,  
The rushing of the sea-tides of the soul;  
And inspirations, that we deem our own,  
Are some divine of foreshadowing and foreseeing  
Of things beyond our reason or control.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



Hayle Estuary  
60 x 60 cm Acrylic & Mixed media on Canvas

## The White Birds

I would that we were, my beloved,  
white birds on the foam of the sea!  
We tire of the flame of the meteor,  
before it can fade and flee;  
And the flame of the blue star of twilight,  
hung low on the rim of the sky,  
Has awakened in our hearts,  
my beloved, a sadness that may not die.

A weariness comes from those dreamers,  
dew-dabbled, the lily and rose;  
Ah, dream not of them, my beloved,  
the flame of the meteor that goes,  
Or the flame of the blue star that lingers  
hung low in the fall of the dew:  
For I would we were changed to white birds  
on the wandering foam: I and you!

I am haunted by numberless islands,  
and many a Danaan shore,  
Where Time would surely forget us,  
and Sorrow come near us no more;  
Soon far from the rose and the lily,  
and fret of the flames would we be,  
Were we only white birds, my beloved,  
buoyed out on the foam of the sea!

William Butler Yeats



North Cliffs  
60 x 60 cm Acrylic & Mixed media on Canvas

## The Herons Of Elmwood

Warm and still is the summer night,  
As here by the river's brink I wander;  
White overhead are the stars, and white  
The glimmering lamps on the hillside yonder.  
Silent are all the sounds of day;  
Nothing I hear but the chirp of crickets,  
And the cry of the herons winging their way  
O'er the poet's house in the Elmwood thickets.  
Call to him, herons, as slowly you pass  
To your roosts in the haunts of the exiled thrushes,  
Sing him the song of the green morass;  
And the tides that water the reeds and rushes.  
Sing him the mystical Song of the Hern,  
And the secret that baffles our utmost seeking;  
For only a sound of lament we discern,  
And cannot interpret the words you are speaking.  
Sing of the air, and the wild delight  
Of wings that uplift and winds that uphold you,  
The joy of freedom, the rapture of flight  
Through the drift of the floating mists that infold you.  
Of the landscape lying so far below,  
With its towns and rivers and desert places;  
And the splendor of light above, and the glow  
Of the limitless, blue, ethereal spaces.  
Ask him if songs of the Troubadours,  
Or of Minnesingers in old black-letter,  
Sound in his ears more sweet than yours,  
And if yours are not sweeter and wilder and better.  
Sing to him, say to him, here at his gate,  
Where the boughs of the stately elms are meeting,  
Some one hath lingered to meditate,  
And send him unseen this friendly greeting;  
That many another hath done the same,  
Though not by a sound was the silence broken;  
The surest pledge of a deathless name  
Is the silent homage of thoughts unspoken

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



Stithians late Summer  
60 x 60 cm Acrylic & Mixed media on Canvas

## The Wild Swans at Coole

The trees are in their autumn beauty,  
The woodland paths are dry,  
Under the October twilight the water  
Mirrors a still sky;  
Upon the brimming water among the stones  
Are nine-and-fifty swans.

The nineteenth autumn has come upon me  
Since I first made my count;  
I saw, before I had well finished,  
All suddenly mount  
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings  
Upon their clamorous wings.

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,  
And now my heart is sore.  
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,  
The first time on this shore,  
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,  
Trod with a lighter tread.

Unwearied still, lover by lover,  
They paddle in the cold  
Companionable streams or climb the air;  
Their hearts have not grown old;  
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,  
Attend upon them still.

But now they drift on the still water,  
Mysterious, beautiful;  
Among what rushes will they build,  
By what lake's edge or pool  
Delight men's eyes when I awake some day  
To find they have flown away?

William Butler Yeats



Stithians late Summer  
60 x 60 cm Acrylic & Mixed media on Canvas

## Sonnet

I love to see the summer beaming forth  
And white wool sack clouds sailing to the north  
I love to see the wild flowers come again  
And mare blobs stain with gold the meadow drain  
And water lillies whiten on the floods  
Where reed clumps rustle like a wind shook wood  
Where from her hiding place the Moor Hen pushes  
And seeks her flag nest floating in bull rushes  
I like the willow leaning half way o'er  
The clear deep lake to stand upon its shore  
I love the hay grass when the flower head swings  
To summer winds and insects happy wings  
That sport about the meadow the bright day  
And see bright beetles in the clear lake play

John Clare



Stithians late Summer  
60 x 60 cm Acrylic & Mixed media on Canvas

## Nature and Art

Nature and Art, they go their separate ways,  
It seems; yet all at once they find each other.  
Even I no longer am a foe to either;  
Both equally attract me nowadays.  
Some honest toil's required; then, phase by phase,  
When diligence and wit have worked together  
To tie us fast to Art with their good tether,  
Nature again may set our hearts ablaze.  
All culture is like this; the unfettered mind,  
The boundless spirit's mere imagination,  
For pure perfection's heights will strive in vain.  
To achieve great things, we must be self-confined:  
Mastery is revealed in limitation  
And law alone can set us free again.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



From Here  
29 x 42 cm Acrylic & Mixed media on Paper

## Sea Fever

I must down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,  
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,  
And the wheels kick and the winds song and the white sails shaking,  
And a gray mist on the seas face, and a gray dawn breaking.

I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide  
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;  
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,  
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying.

I must go down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,  
To the gulls way and the whales way, where the winds like a whetted knife;  
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,  
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long tricks over.

John Masefield



North Cliffs  
29 x 42 cm Acrylic & Mixed media on Paper

Moonlight on the Bosphorus  
( “ La lune etait sereine. “ )

Bright shone the merry moonbeams dancing o'er the wave;  
At the cool casement, to the evening breeze flung wide,  
Leans the Sultana, and delights to watch the tide,  
With surge of silvery sheen, yon sleeping islets lave.  
From her hand, as it falls, vibrates the light guitar.  
She listens — hark! that sound that echoes dull and low.  
Is it the beat upon the Archipelago  
Of some long galley's oar, from Scio bound afar?  
Is it the cormorants, whose black wings, one by one,  
Cut the blue wave that o'er them breaks in liquid pearls?  
Is it some hovering sprite with whistling scream that hurls  
Down to the deep from yon old tower a loosened stone?  
Who thus disturbs the tide near the seraglio?  
'Tis no dark cormorants that on the ripple float,  
'Tis no dull plunge of stone — no oars of Turkish boat,  
With measured beat along the water creeping slow.  
'Tis heavy sacks, borne each by voiceless dusky slaves;  
And could you dare to sound the depths of yon dark tide,  
Something like human form would stir within its side.  
Bright shone the merry moonbeams dancing o'er the wave

Victor Hugo



North Cliffs  
29 x 42 cm Acrylic & Mixed media on Paper



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## Two Pewits

Under the after-sunset sky  
Two pewits sport and cry,  
More white than is the moon on high  
Riding the dark surge silently;  
More black than earth. Their cry  
Is the one sound under the sky.  
They alone move, now low, now high,  
And merrily they cry  
To the mischievous Spring sky,  
Plunging earthward, tossing high,  
Over the ghost who wonders why  
So merrily they cry and fly,  
Nor choose 'twixt earth and sky,  
While the moon's quarter silently  
Rides, and earth rests as silently.

Edward Thomas



Stithians in Autumn  
29 x 42 cm Acrylic & Mixed media on Paper

## The Plover

The plovers' wind is blowing  
A lusty wind and strong  
In viewless torrents going  
The leafless boughs among.  
It shakes, it fills with riot  
The bent and groaning pine,  
And stirs a pulse unquiet  
In nature's veins and mine.  
The plovers' wind is blowing,  
It fills the brimming springs,  
And sets the hot life flowing  
In all created things.  
To all it brings renewing  
The sap to bush and tree  
The plover to his wooing,  
And the ghost of love to me

Cicely Fox Smith



Stithians in Autumn  
29 x 42 cm Acrylic & Mixed media on Paper

## Written on the Sea Shore

On some rude fragment of the rocky shore,  
Where on the fractured cliff the billows break,  
Musing, my solitary seat I take,  
And listen to the deep and solemn roar.  
O'er the dark waves the winds tempestuous howl;  
The screaming seabird quits the troubled sea,  
But the wild gloomy scene has charms for me,  
And suits the mournful temper of my soul.  
Already shipwrecked by the storms of fate,  
Like the poor mariner methinks I stand,  
Cast on a rock; who sees the distant land  
From whence no succour comes — or comes too late;  
Faint and more faint are heard his feeble cries,  
'Till in the rising tide th' exhausted sufferer dies.

Charlotte Smith



Hayle Estuary 29 x 42 cm Acrylic & Mixed media on Paper

## Sonnet To The Curlew

Sooth'd by the murmurs on the sea-beat shore,  
His dun-grey plumage floating to the gale,  
The Curlew blends his melancholy wail  
With those hoarse sounds the rushing waters pour.  
Like thee, congenial bird! my steps explore  
The bleak lone sea-beach, or the rocky dale,--  
And shun the orange bower, the myrtle vale,  
Whose gay luxuriance suits my soul no more.  
I love the ocean's broad expanse, when drest  
In limpid clearness, or when tempests blow:  
When the smooth currents on its placid breast  
Flow calm, as my past moments us'd to flow;  
Or when its troubled waves refuse to rest,  
And seem the symbol of my present woe.

Helen Maria Williams



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