

# Clachtoll Storm

<http://www.kimmstevens.com>

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The painting Clachtoll Storm derives from a study and experience on a trip to NW Scotland, Sutherland one late summer afternoon. I make large pastel and paint drawings directly on site in these trips. These stand-alone pieces provide a source material for larger compositions made in the studio at home.

My long suffering partner, Sarah agreed to go for a walk along the bay and explore the opposite promontory while I made the pastel/painting. I duly set up my little exam desk and drawing board and



carted all the tins of paint, pastels, paper and box of pigments and glues and varnish to the low cliff edge overlooking the rocks and the beach.

I have to work fast because the weather in NW Scotland changes by the moment – sunshine can shift to torrent in a matter of minutes – today was no exception. I had noticed the big black clouds collecting to my right and could just make out Sarah climbing towards the pointy cliff opposite me about half a mile away.

Anticipating the oncoming squall I hastily set up a dark wash to the right of the composition and a light shimmering silver towards the left then worked into the underpainting with pastels.

At this point the rain let rip. Not a shower or downpour but a full on deluge so powerful you couldn't see past it. I had to save the work and remain dry enough to continue –it was too far to get back to the car where the dog was luxuriating in Citroen dryness – so had to turn to board over on the desk so the

pastel wouldn't wash off any more than it had, and then crawl under the desk to keep away from the rain - there I was, huddled under the table with the rain washing over board and down around me.

Half an hour later I emerged to a clear shaft of sunlight with the squall rushing across the bay towards Sarah who had watched the sorry scene through her binoculars.

Once in the studio the only reference I have is the site painting and the memory of the experience and the idea I wish to convey in the piece. There is the romance and portent in the image of the deluge and the power of natural forces. There is the silliness of sitting under a table in the middle of a field trying to preserve a ridiculously fragile medium as pastel (basically dust) from the rain. There's the comedy of having an audience seen and unseen while this is all going on. Then there's the beauty and power and majesty of nature itself its rhythm, the anticipation; the light and the cataclysmic dark all shifting and changing.

The diptych format offers many possibilities. 2 square panels create a panoramic rectangle which creates a sense of space – yet each square is stable and static. Both the rectangle and static squares can be divided in different ratios and intervals in relation to each other to create rhythm and a sense of movement and time – this lends itself to a sense of narrative – the change from sunshine to rain to deluge.

Armed with the site study, some preliminary drawings and various geometric possibilities I embark. This often takes much time and the piece goes through many stages until the solution resolves into the final state. Initial ideas are rejected, understanding grows and purpose and intention come into focus. Pattern and rhythm reflect the waves and pulses of rain – the deluge finally takes on the obliterating power across nearly half the piece. And, after many months the piece arrives.



*An earlier stage in the painting – ideas are in place but it is too complex and the narrative of the figure in the rain hampers and diminishes the direct purpose of the piece – the deluge.*



I see these paintings as mechanisms to show ideas and convey experience through the language of the painting; shapes, geometries, images – rather than a 'picture' or scene. Yes, they represent a subject but also, I hope convey the process and mechanics of a painting at the same time – shape, colour rhythm and image orchestrated to convey a moment and an idea – a memory.

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