

Another bend in the road

Effie Galletly takes light and shade from the landscapes of the Western Isles

AS I DRIVE south on the road from the Butt of Lewis to my island home, a group of houses comes into view which I remember catching my eye when I first came north to the islands. It was near the beginning of my quest to try to interpret the muscular stark landscapes of the Western Isles: the colour, light and form of the place, and the way people over time have inhabited the spaces. As it turned out, this same group of houses marks the turning into South Galson where years later I now have a home and a studio from which I can take time to seriously become familiar with the environment; where I can realise how a quiltmaker might see it.

The working life

Over the past decade and a half I've been engaged in showing work and teaching in various parts of the country and abroad. As I pass into my eighth decade it becomes obvious that the travelling has started to eat into the energy, which I would so much rather be giving to my own work or to teaching others. Something has to give. I've come to another bend in the road, and like all other bends it's hard to see what comes next

while accessing the curve. Luckily I do have a few ideas.

It's an interesting time of life. I've lived long enough to have lots of experience and at the same time I'm also coming to a point where I feel I have less physical energy to expend. This is the dilemma that set me off writing my book *Patterns in Landscape* (see the panel on page 20). I wanted to be able to pass on a good graphic description of what I had discovered both for myself and from others along the way. It's a step-by-step guide to making landscapes in pieced fabrics, which I hope will be useful to anyone who would like to do this kind of landscape work.

At home and abroad

I'm lucky enough to live in two very different places: the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides in the far northwest of Scotland; and in Hove, by the sea on the south coast of England. Over the last eight years or so I've had my work shown regularly at Morven Gallery in Lewis, a beautiful gallery facing out over the North Atlantic, showing all kinds of painting, ceramics, photography, books, jewellery and textiles.

Above:
Towards Loch Maree,
Wester Ross

"I find the landscapes of the Western Isles endlessly fascinating, inspiring and seductive"

On seeing my work some visitors were astonished that it was possible to see landscape through the 'lens' of a quilt, and were touched by how it connected with what they were seeing all around them. As a result, many of my landscapes have found homes far and wide in this country and abroad. In a place like Nova Scotia, where I was invited to exhibit a few years ago, that connection was even more extraordinary, with those ties tugging at the hearts of the descendants of the Scottish families who had left Scotland and the islands far behind, long before.

The success of the island shows prompted the idea of teaching masterclasses in Lewis. Students come for a week or so in the summer, bringing partners, siblings, and other family members and also friends; or they come in a group to share the experience of both work and play; or they may be local people. I offer three days of serious creative work and, of course, the opportunity to venture forth into the island landscape and history.

Working small

Since moving to Hove in the south, my husband and I have been renovating an older house into a



“Thought still has to be given to shape, colour, light and perspective”

Left:
Galson Beach, Isle of Lewis

Below:
Houses at Galson

new home for ourselves. With this and my book taking up a lot of my time and energy over the last couple of years, I had the idea of making landscapes on a smaller scale so that I could keep doing some creative work in between everything else. It was a new experience to think of colour in a more focused way. It made me distill all my ideas of colour, light and shade into a much smaller surface area.

This is more of a challenge than you might think. The actual sewing can be very quick, but thought still has to be given to shape, colour, light and perspective. A whole sky could be one piece of purposefully hand-dyed fabric, rather than working out a structure of pieces. The grading of colour still has to be subtle but in a small number of shades, so the colour and forms on the surface of the fabrics used are even more important. It was from this ‘working small’ that I had the idea of creating a workshop ‘A Landscape in Less than 10 Pieces’.

One of the things that most





worries students about creating landscapes is their insecurity about designing. So I put together three designs/patterns on this smaller scale and kept the pieces to a minimum, i.e. fewer than 10. Having a pattern already made takes away some of the hardest parts of landscape work and gives a great deal of pleasure and purpose in working out the elements of colour, light and shade. It can also be completed in a few hours. This has turned out to be a great way for students to start learning about making pieced and quilted landscapes.

In the months when I'm in Lewis I'm lucky enough to be part of Stornoway Quilters. When I told them about my ideas for a new class they were keen to have a go at the new patterns, so they became my prototype/guinea-pig class. They are a very resourceful and imaginative group and created some lovely pieces.

If students become excited about this way of working, there is the opportunity to do the more committed masterclasses in Lewis. These three-day workshops offer the chance to start right at the beginning of the process, designing an individual original pattern and learning from the actual lines in the landscape about perspective

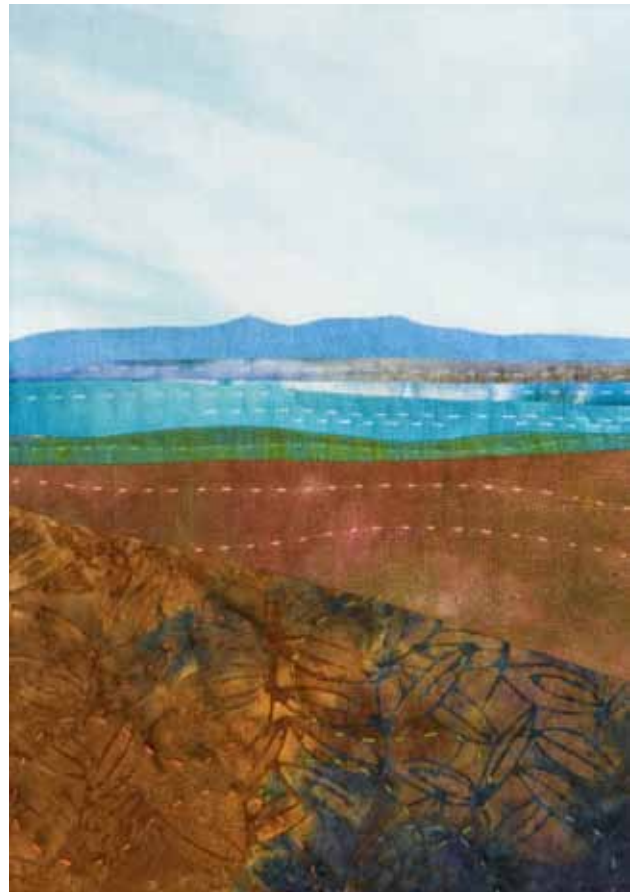
to create distance, and how to make it work for pieced fabrics. It is important to select the minimum lines to start with, and work into the design further along in the process; to notice what matters to interpret the landscape chosen; and see how different they can be.

Looking to the future

I can confirm that there is definitely a working life after 70. However, for me it won't involve so much travel. When it comes to my own creative work, whether there is the energy to complete large, medium or small pieces, the struggle to create convincing landscape compositions goes on. The elements are always different and always need to be worked out. The actual interpreting and making of the work are the most important parts to me, and I find the landscapes of the Western Isles endlessly fascinating, inspiring and seductive.

I expect to continue passing on information, techniques, ideas and all that goes with them. I will show work when and where I am free and asked to, which at time of writing takes me well into 2017. Not everything has slowed down!

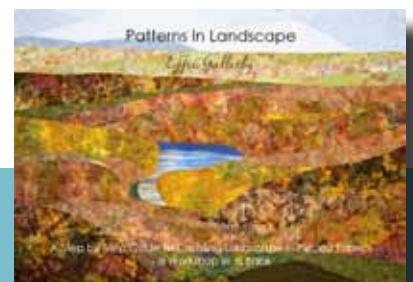
I appreciate all the opportunities, students, galleries and ideas that



Above, left and right: Small patchworks using fewer than 10 pieces

come my way. It's a great mix which should see me through to the next bend in the road whenever and wherever that finds me. Right now a walk down to the small beach at the end of this road and a steady look at 3,000 miles of North Atlantic Ocean is a great place to start.

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Patterns in Landscape

by Effie Galletly
84 pages p/b, £17.50

Whilst not representational, through her trademark painterly style of patchwork, Effie captures the spirit of her much-loved landscape of the Outer Hebrides. This guide shows you how to make landscapes in pieced fabrics. Before starting on your own design, you can practise the technique using the pattern and step-by-step instructions provided.

You can buy Patterns in Landscape from www.effiegalletly.co.uk