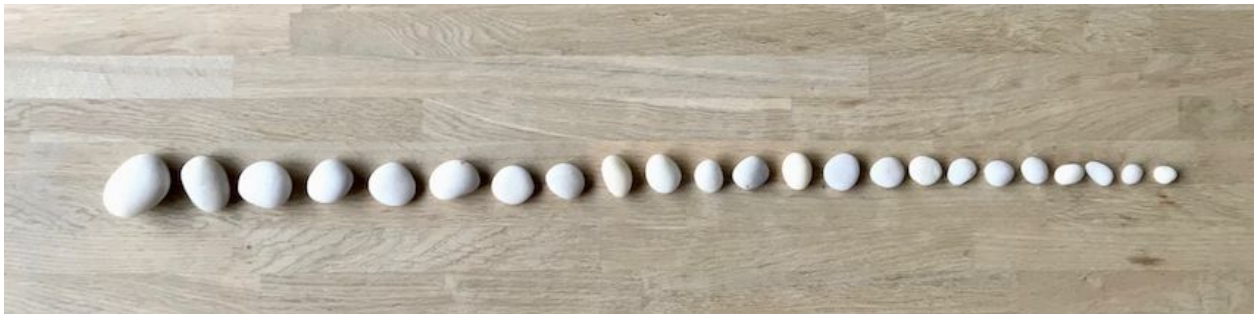


Elemental Outcomes



Well, I'm not sure where the month of May has gone, but it's gone. Whilst I tried to avoid increasing the pace of time, it sped up anyway and became filled with many 'doings' and not much studio work. However, in the last week of May one of my 'doings' was a trip to northern Scotland, one of my favourite places on the planet. Our rented cottage was in the middle of nowhere with no WiFi and no cellphone connection. I can't say how blissful that was and when out and about, I made sure my data roaming was switched off as often as possible to avoid the frantic binging and ping-pong of arriving emails and texts. Selfish perhaps, but lovely.

We were outdoors as often as the weather permitted and a walk along Findhorn beach has stayed in my mind. The beach was pretty deserted on that blustery day with a mix of sunshine, cloud and a bit of rain. During the first part of the walk I was focused on the long vista of sea and sand but soon got distracted by the fabulous pebble bank sitting above the sand line – so fabulous it was all too easy to walk with my head down, seeking out the next treasure. I decided to focus on translucent, white pebbles whilst Claudia became fixated on those with rings and interesting lines. At one point James asked me why I chose one white pebble over another - I replied that I didn't really know, only that they called out to me.

We moved up from the beach and into the dunes, an area carved out by wind and rain into sculptural shapes embellished with tufted grass, heather and gorse. Small birds flitted back and forth and it became quieter due to the blanketing effect of the sand. I had meant to stay within the dunes for the return journey but a massed rank of concrete sea-defence blocks caught my attention. Time and weather had turned them into a series of abstract 'paintings', each with a different composition of colour, line and texture. Here are nine of the myriad close-ups I took...

Her Quiet Materials



Her Quiet Materials



Seeing such an array of 'work' led me to thinking about the simple power of repetition, and how the repetition of these massed blocks gave me so much pleasure. I'm also convinced they'll serve as inspiration for future work.



So why not think about repetition a little bit? Take a leaf out of Dorothy Caldwell's book and collect one hundred of something; pine cones, pebbles, rice grains, needles, pins, leaves, twigs, seedheads, macaroni, potatoes - whatever. Have a peaceful but stimulating time playing with various arrangements, enjoy the outcomes and perhaps photograph each one (and then arrange the photographs). An activity like this can quiet the mind and often lead to the germ of a new idea.

On return from Scotland I sped straight into three days of Open Studios, co-exhibiting with an old friend of mine, Roger Murphy. Roger works with wood and makes stunning Windsor chairs and turned bowls and platters. Sitting by the firepit later that evening we talked about the importance of risk and experimentation, resulting in an elm platter being put into the fire; deliberate charring in the style of David Nash but on a somewhat smaller scale. Liking the result, we got rather carried away (possibly due to red wine consumption) and proceeded to char three more blocks of oak that James conveniently had available.

Roger now has to let the wood dry out (we had to hose everything down once out of the fire), establish how robust the charred element is and explore how things might get developed.., not to mention sealing the charred wood so charcoal doesn't constantly transfer everywhere. We both think there's potential here and it's great that Roger now has five pieces to experiment with.



Charred Elm Sphere

There was much for me to enjoy in the results of our exploits, as I'm fond of neutral colours. The angle of light determines whether you see black, or many shades of grey, blue-grey and taupe and the texture is also rather delicious. Roger has promised to keep me posted as to how these pieces develop. When I know, you'll know.., and maybe one day I'll turn to the weather and the fire to distress my cloth.



The edge of the charred sphere



Charred oak block

What risk(s) will you take with your work in June?!