

Niki Logis

March 27 - May 8, 2021

THE JOHNNIE TOWN-MOUSE LECTURES ON LANDSCAPE ART

Of Rocks and Clouds, or The Heft of Drawing Water

It was on a cold and frosty morning following a dark and stormy night conducive to the collisions that snarled traffic all the way to the airport that Johnny Town-mouse decided to travel to the Isle of Skye. Packing his sturdy field portfolio with perfect squares of one hundred percent rag drawing paper and a score of 2B black Conte crayons, he was wafted by jet engines to Staffin Bay at the foot of the Quiraing.

The tilted plateaus shimmered in the mist, the hills detained the clouds that fondled their peaks, the wind scoured the boulders that punctuate the moor. Johnny Town-mouse was delirious to mount into the bealach but first to find lodgings for townfolk are acutely aware that the night follows the day and as his name directs, Johnny Town-mouse was not up for camping.

The lichened gables of the old stone lodge breathed forth “Stay!” The windows smiled, the door coaxed and beckoned, the creeper blushed confederacy. “This must be the place,” said Johnny Town-mouse and rang the bell.

“Come in, come in” said Timmy-Willie with the utmost friendliness, as welcome as it was to be expected for this was the Isle of Skye not Manhattan where finesse of design does not equate to manners. “Oh, I see you are an artist,” said Timmy-Willie, “so I think you will like the Blue Room with the window nook that gives a view of the Minch as well as the hills.” Johnny Town-mouse was so impressed by this swift deducement from his equipage that he almost fell into a faint.

Timmy-Willie led Johnny Town-mouse up the stairs to a most lovely room with nook and two views. “Breakfast at 9, porridge and poached eggs, whisky after dinner by the fire.” “Oh, Rapture!” exclaimed Johnny Town-mouse who slept like a stone that night after his long journey.

Every day Johnny Town-mouse hiked into the Quiraing, sat on his brown folding stool and covered the squares of perfectly white paper with the strokes of his perfectly black crayons engrossed to oblivion by the view. The clouds marshalled by the wind, the wind summoned by the heat of the sun, the rain falling from the clouds refining the surface of the hills and eroding the rocks in place, carving great nubbly escarpments and crevasses littered with fallen medium sized rocks that made for just the right amount of detail in the otherwise too grand and general panoramic sweep of the hills standing on an incompetent substrate of rotting limestone sliding inexorably into Staffin Bay, and best of all the vast desolate moor whose

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surface was all available to see for there were no trees sticking up and no flowers sticking up and no fruit hanging down: “Oh, Rapture!” exclaimed Johnny Town-mouse, for it was the highest compliment he could utter.

Every night Timmy-Willie sat by the fire fed with aromatic peat sliced from the moor in which he had a stake, the extraction of which could hardly be said to be contributing inordinately to the inexorable slide of the hills into Staffin Bay which in any event was as far away from now as now was from when the moor, as a moor, first appeared. “It is only when one is in the middle that these proportions make themselves manifest,” said Timmy-Willie, although he said it silently for he did not want to provoke Johnny Town-mouse into a further articulation of his austere if too mannered sense of doom that leant the vital touch to his drawings but sometimes dimmed the charm of his company.

Every Sunday afternoon Timmy-Willie examined the drawings on the large oak table in the sitting room. Putting on his wire rimmed spectacles, for Timmy-Willie was long sighted accustomed to spotting predators before they spotted him, “Where’s that?” said Timmy-Willie. “I’ve never seen that and I’ve lived here all my life. Oh, yes, now I see. Yes, yes, well done. Now I shall never be able not to see it.” Johnny Town-mouse was besides himself with glee for his highest ambition, like his highest utterance, was to convey the rapture that he felt in those endless hours of scribbling in the face of the clouds and the rocks, and the wind and the rain, if only he could be worthy of them.

At the end of a month’s stay Johnny Town-mouse took his leave of Timmy-Willie who was busy in the kitchen baking bread the which although he could not eat it as it did not agree with him it was his pleasure to serve to the guests who stayed at the Lodge.

They say that ~One place suits one person, Another place suits another. For my part, as long as I can work on my drawings and get a hot shower and plenty of whisky, it’s all the same to me, but just as a lodging is not the same thing as a place, a place does not always constitute a lodging.