



Good Evening.

Thank you for coming.

In this talk I shall relay the story of my work - and show some photographs of some places.

I have lived in Lancaster for a very long time but I grew up in the northern end of mainland Britain, in Sutherland. This county is so called because the Vikings called the north coast of Scotland the Southern Land. This was taken on the north coast of Sutherland.



My early childhood was spent here in Tongue, which is situated on the Kyle of Tongue,
near



this mountain, Ben Loyal.



This shows the peaks of Ben Loyal.



The Kyle has a curious sand bar.



This shows the sand under the sea.

In 1957, my family moved to Helmsdale on the east coast. One day, in the mid-1960`s, on a drive



to the west coast of the county, we were suddenly confronted by an astonishing view of an array of isolated peaks rising from low land. It was intensely dramatic and my seeing it started my love of Sutherland scenery. Sadly, that view - I mean precisely that view - cannot be seen nowadays, but this photograph shows the same mountains from a different place. They look less dramatic from this direction.



One of the mountains was Suilven, which has been called the Sugar Loaf mountain and also the most fantastic hill in Scotland. It is very long and very thin and so looks its most extraordinary when seen end-on, which of course this does not show.



Sutherland has a population density of just over six people per square mile. In my childhood, all but one of the roads - the trunk road going up the east coast - were single track with passing places. The immense



wilderness felt, and was, more or less undiscovered and when I went to art school, which I did in London, much of my work was driven by a desire to show everyone what it was like. I drew at least



one hundred images of Sulven. I was studying textile design and I put



images of Ben Loyal and Suilven onto fabric. I think this design is absolutely ghastly! So I'm going to put this away and show instead



this nice photograph of Loch Hope. My collage thesis was about life in Sutherland as it was then – 1973 - and I am glad I made that record as so much has changed. It was entitled `Ye Canna Live on the View` which was what a woman who lived overlooking the Kyle of Tongue once said to my father. After I left college, I returned to Helmsdale and set out to write a book about Sutherland. This resulted only in a pile of journals and I realised I simply wanted to paint Sutherland landscapes, albeit in a non-figurative way. My work became abstracted landscapes, painted with watercolour on paper.

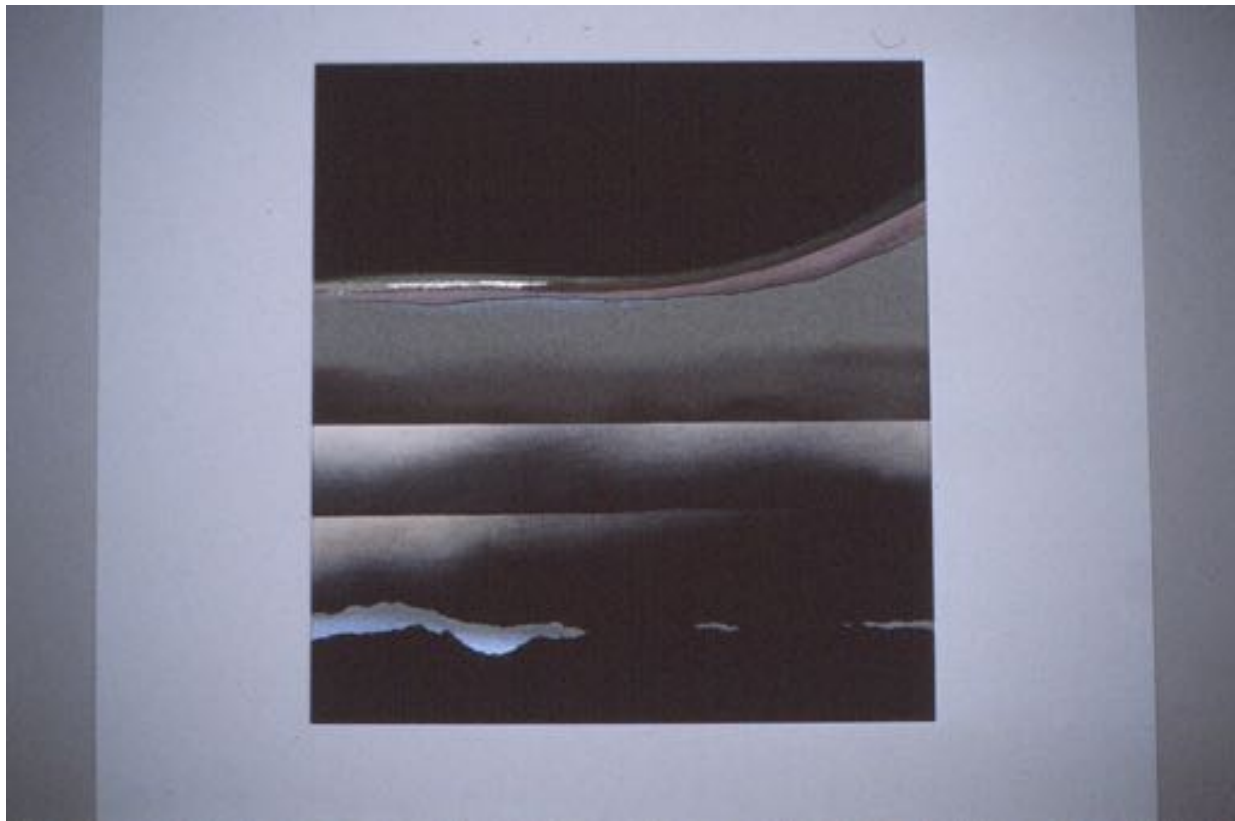


One day, in the mid 1980's, I let a piece of painted paper drop onto the floor and it landed beside another, overlapping it. I liked the effect and, since that moment, my work has been collages, made with components that overlap.



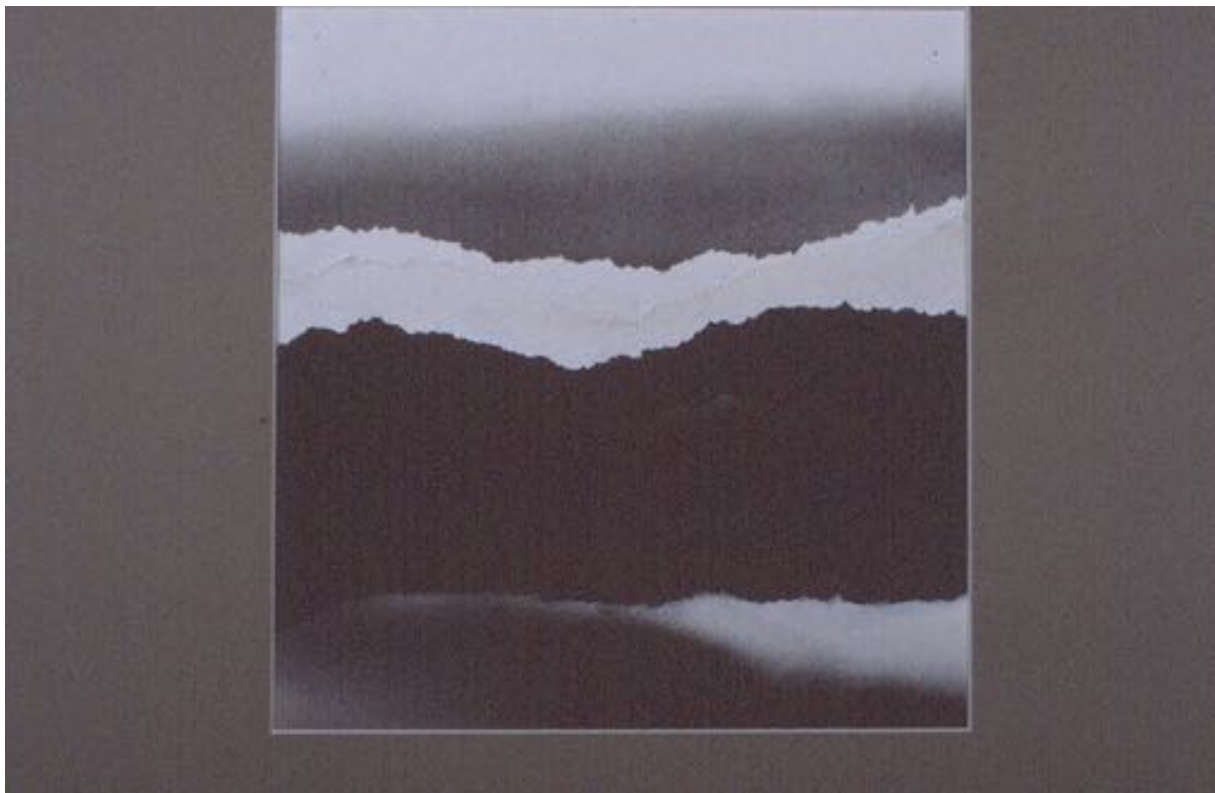
I did these pieces in the 1980`s.





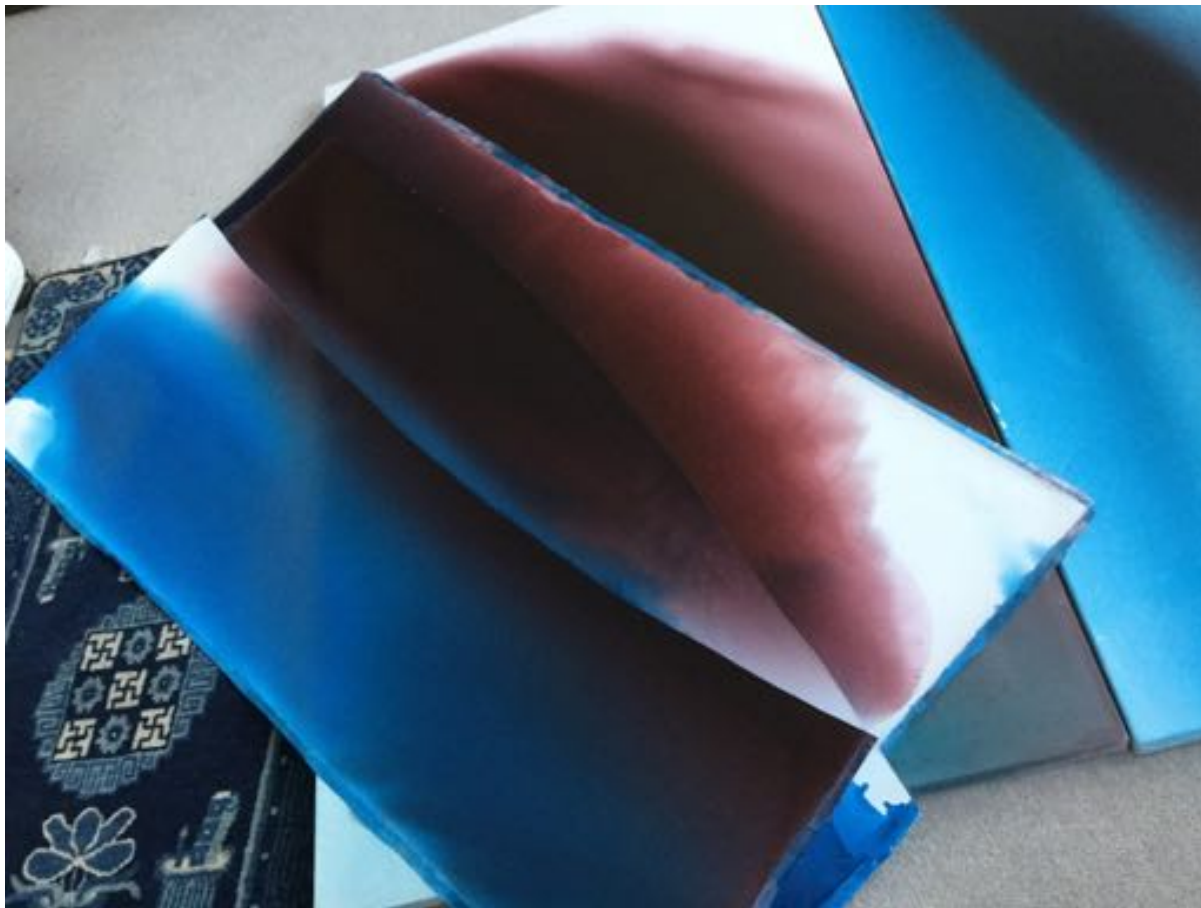








I shall talk about how I compose my collages. The first stage is to colour a ground which I usually do with a wet-on-wet technique. This stage is fun! When the result is dry



I cut or tear it and then I make a composition using the pieces. This is collage Number 11 [in the exhibition], a recent acrylic piece, in the early stage of its being designed. It is easy to quickly juxtapose collage pieces and make a striking effect. However, I find an affect made in such a way almost invariably looks ugly when seen from a distance. Because of this,



when a composition I like starts to be formed, I tape the collage pieces to a vertical surface and stand back from them. This is collage Number 7 [in the exhibition] during the composing stage. I make adjustments to the composition and stand back after they have been made. I usually try scores of permutations, and so walk back and forth for days! I find that, the further back I stand, the better I can compose -although looking at a photograph of my progress can also be useful. I use registration marks and removable tape which enable me to make alterations to the composition without losing the whole design and also which prevent loss of a design when I take the construction apart in order to have it permanently adhered. These two points are crucial for my work.

My work continued to be based entirely on Sutherland until 2001. For a long time. I wanted to visit places that are more northerly and more remote. I visited Iceland in 2002



and Greenland in 2005. What I liked best about Iceland was the strangeness of the landscapes – this is a collage of a lava cave – and I was also struck by



the redness of some of the earth there and



the huge waterfalls.



This photograph was taken in Greenland. There is, in west Sutherland, a parish called Assynt, which means `the rocky land`. Much of what I saw of Greenland looked like a giant version of Assynt. Perhaps this is



not surprising, as Greenland and Scotland were once joined. It certainly looked like the
`exaggerated`, as I used to call it, version of Sutherland I hoped to see, but the ice



was what I enjoyed most.



This was taken at Sermermiut. The areas I visited are on the west coast of Greenland.

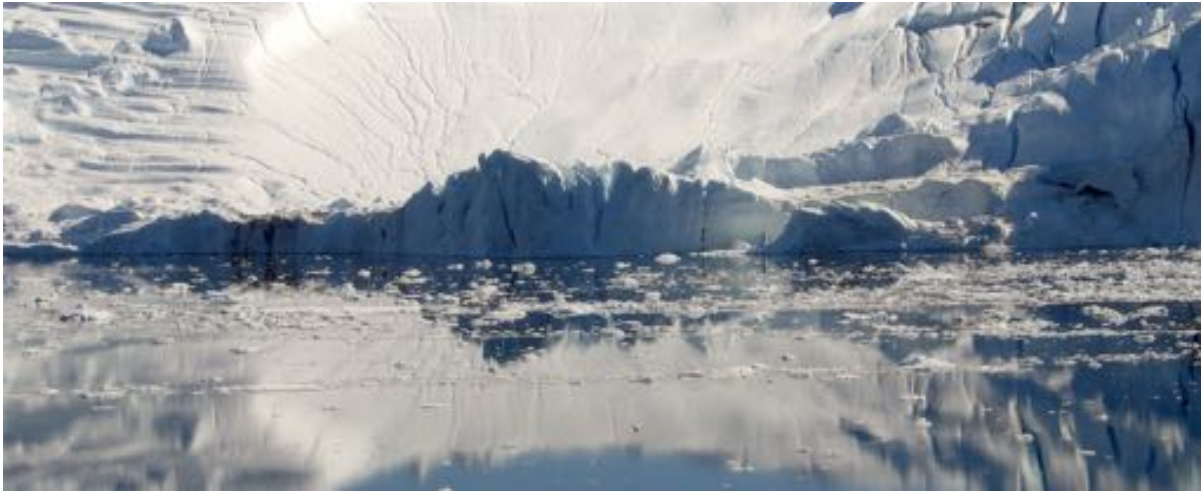


These are close ups and enlargements of [photographs of] Sermermiut.











More ice in Greenland.







The scene here sparkled like crystal.



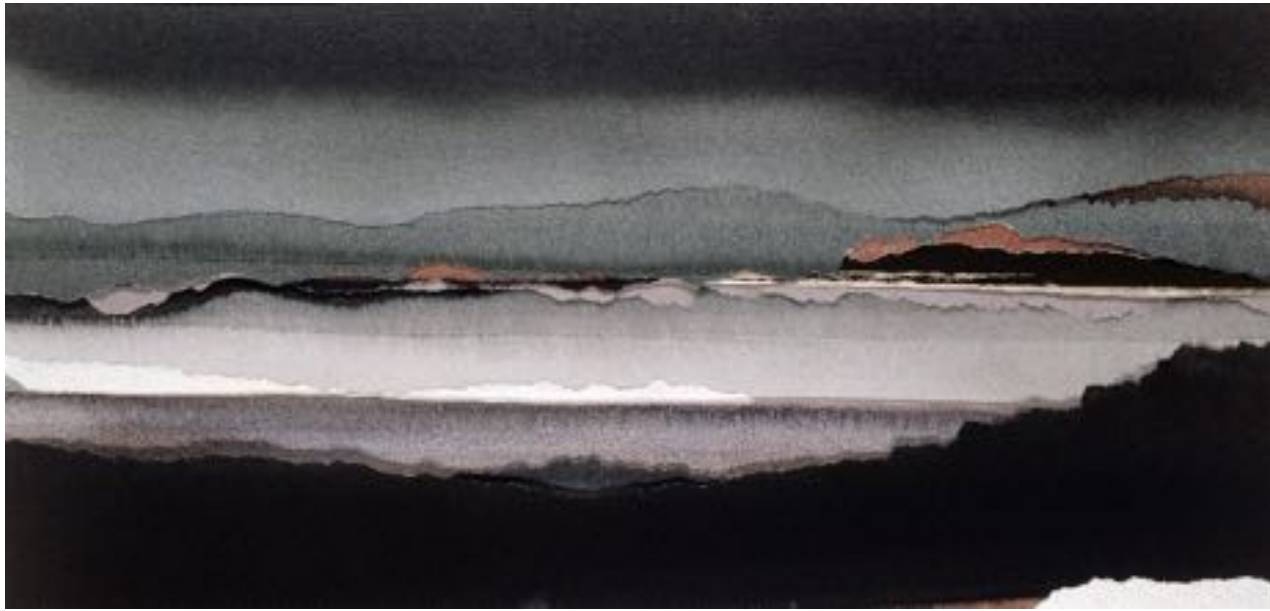
In early 2009, I completed a body of work that I call 'North from Sutherland' and that is concerned with all three places. The three Iceland pieces I showed are part of that. Here are some Greenland pieces:







`North from Sutherland` comprises 30, mostly watercolour-on-paper, pieces and it represents almost 10 years` work. On average, each piece represents three months` work. The method I developed and used involves 30 procedures in the production of a piece. It took me many years to develop that method. Here are some Sutherland pieces:





I used to occasionally make collages using pastel work. This is one.



This is a mixture of pastel work and watercolour.

In 2011, in order to see pristine sand dunes, I went to



Namibia, mainly to see Sossusvlei.



Here are some photographs of Sossusvlei.



























Here are other photographs of sand in Namibia.











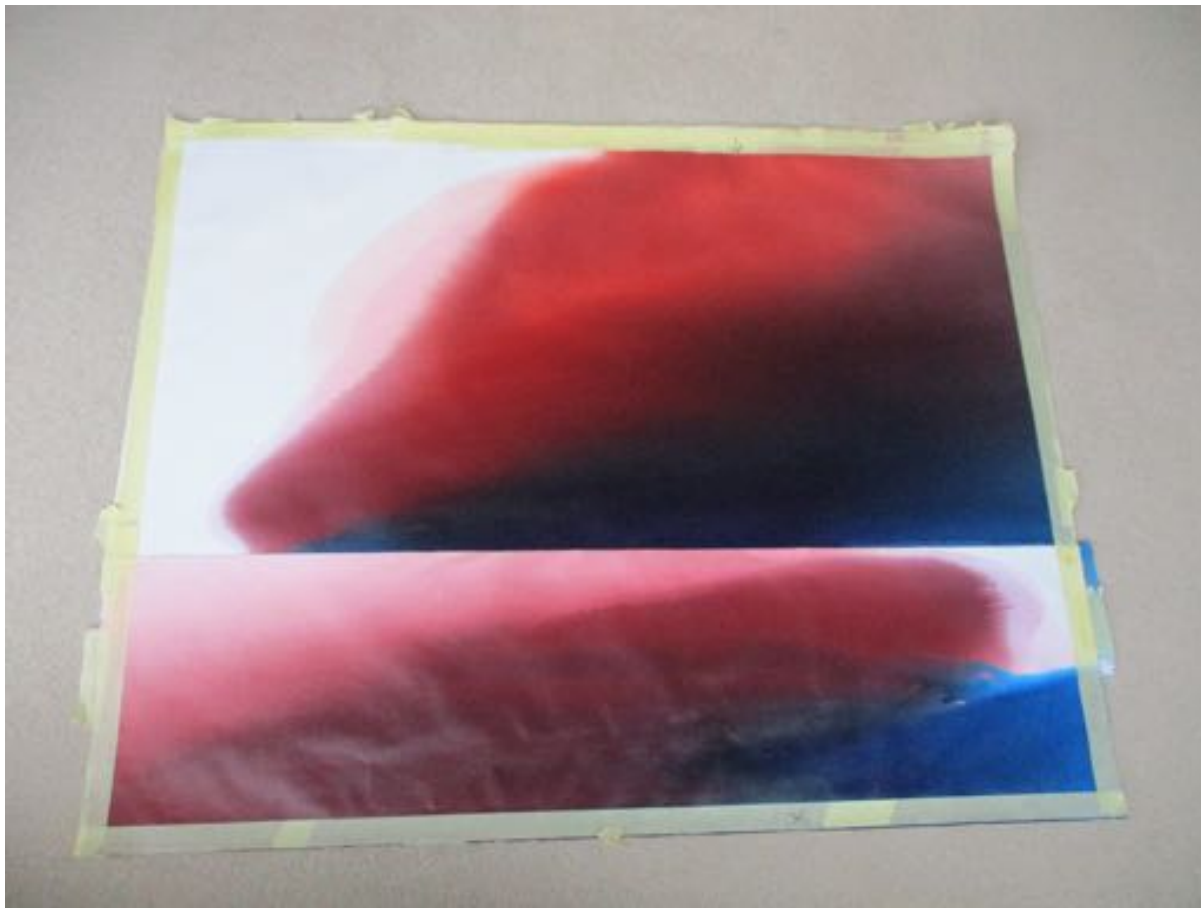


And some rocks.





A few years ago, I decided to find out how to adapt my watercolour collage method to one using acrylic paint on canvas. The amount of trial and error was great! The method of composing is the same - apart from my being unable to tear canvas and so it has to be cut - but the production of collage pieces and the methods of adhering are different. I shall show some of the stages of adhering a composed piece, piece Number 7,



which is a Namibia piece.

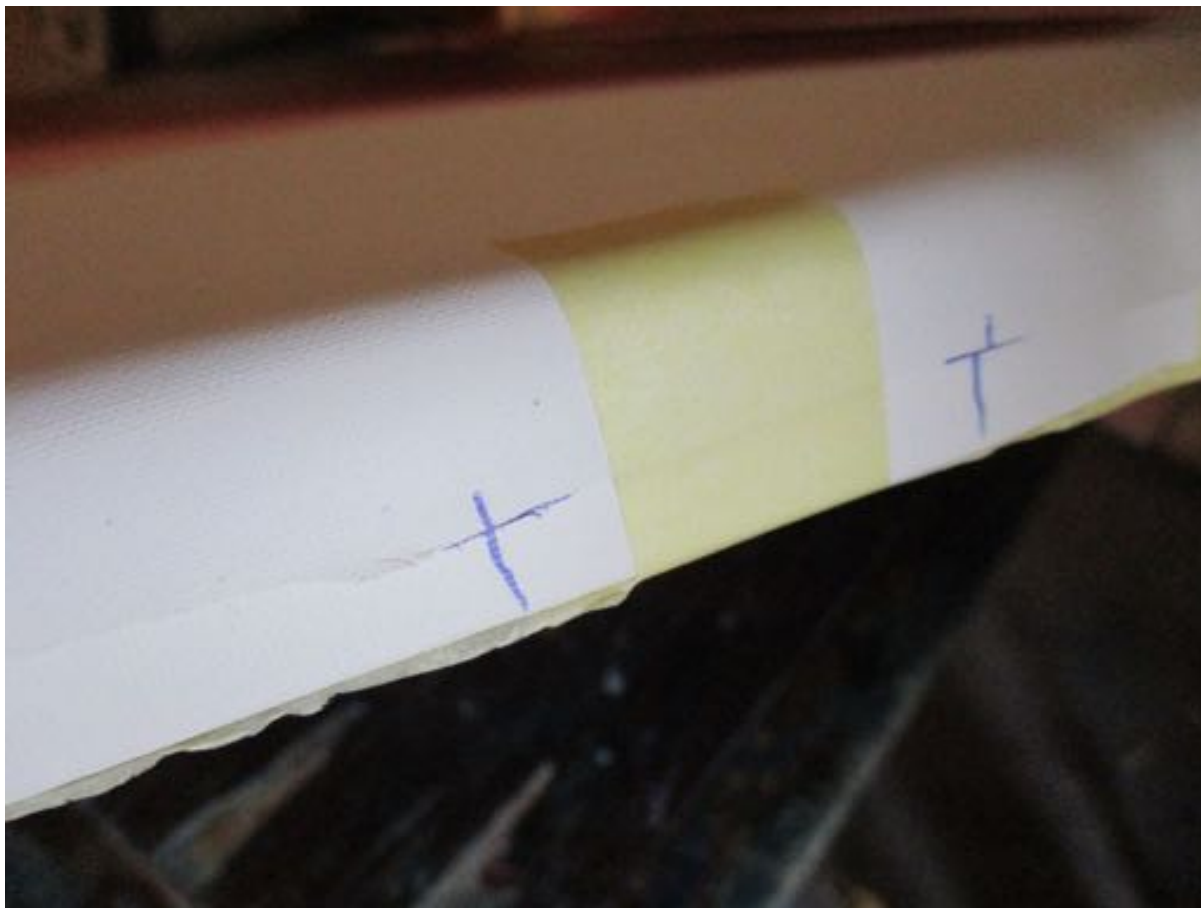
The composed artwork has masking tape around its perimeter. I measure the artwork to the nearest millimetre.



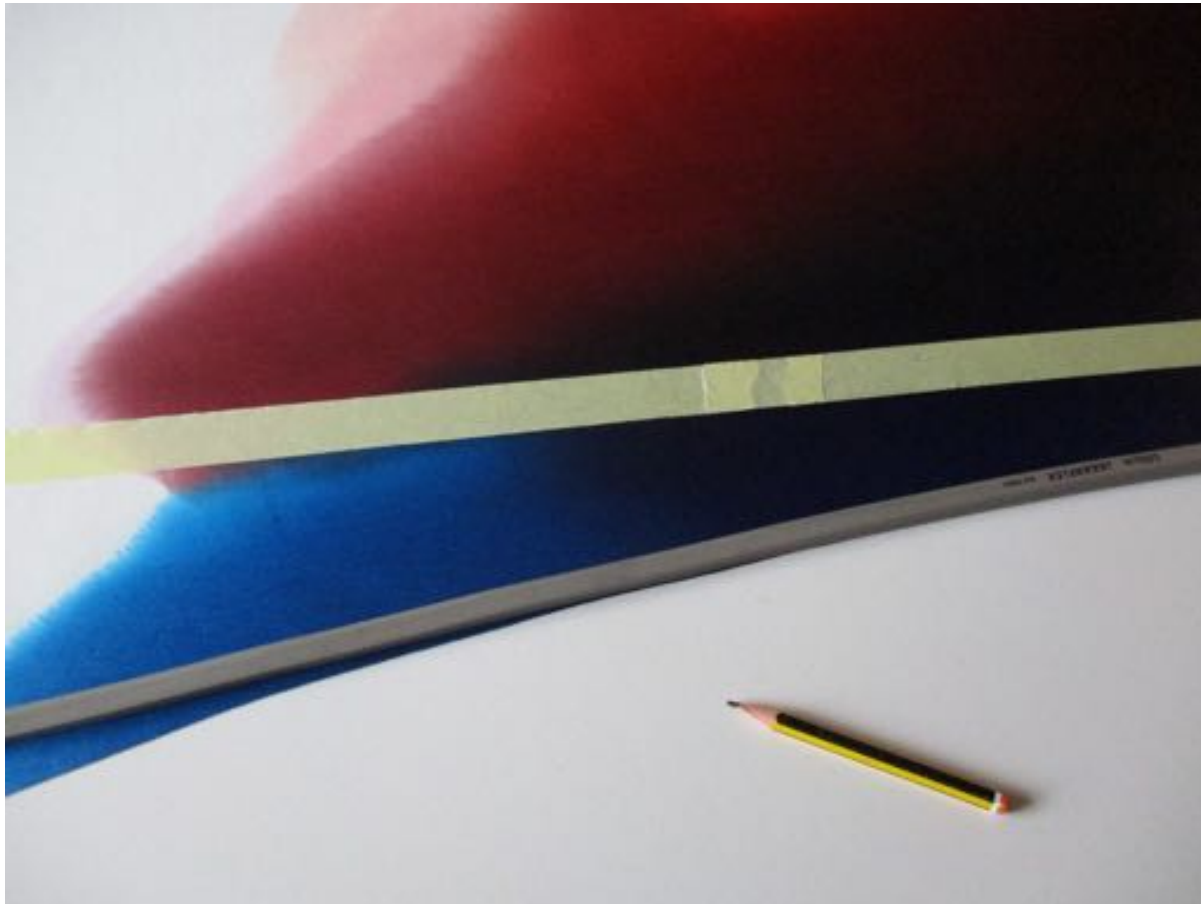
I have a backing canvas made for me. The service I use will give me the dimensions I want to the nearest millimetre, which is important for me. I put masking tape on the back of the stretcher bars and cross bars to keep them clean. I then paint two coats of an acrylic medium called Gloss Medium, onto the front, and part of the sides, of the canvas.



Next, I attach the construction to the canvas, folding it over onto the sides of the canvas, and removing surplus material where necessary.



I then put registration marks where necessary on the sides of the canvas.

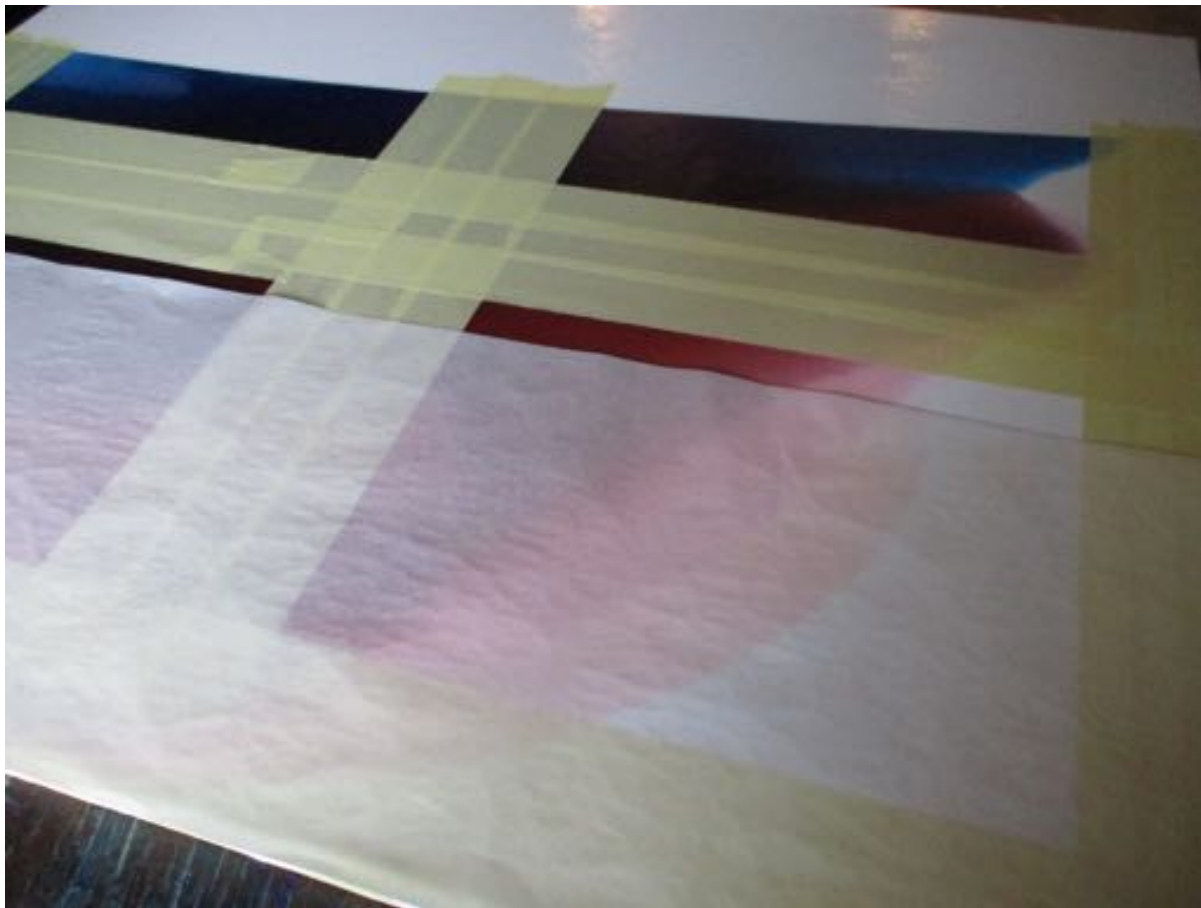


I have to design the edges of collage pieces that are overlapped by other collage pieces as these edges create ridges on the artwork.

I first of all identify which collage piece has to be adhered first. I tape it to the canvas in its position then do the same with the piece that will overlap it. I then put tape around the edge of the latter, then remove that piece. I can then see how I should trim the first piece. The grey line here is a flexible curve that I sometimes use when I want to draw then cut long curved edges.



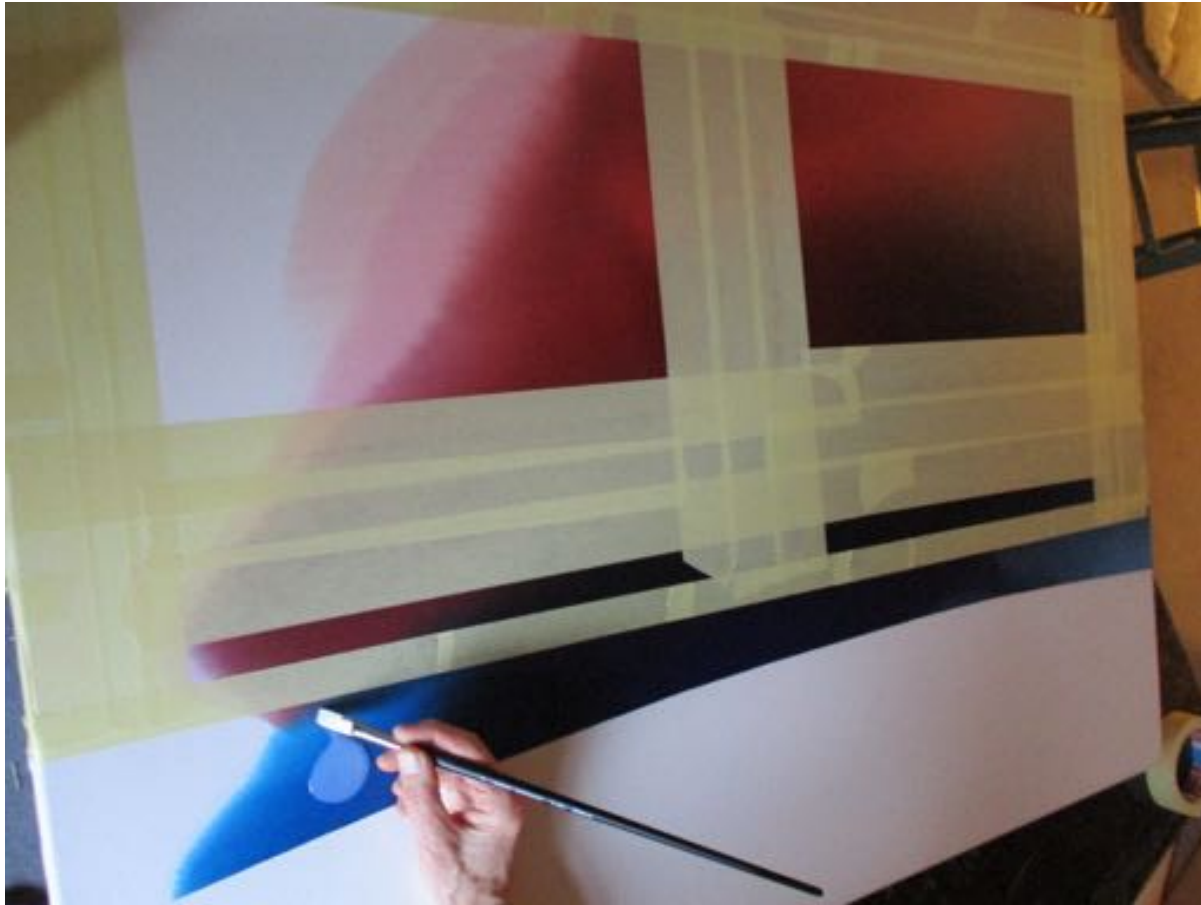
After I have trimmed the piece, I apply Gloss Medium to the back of it and let this dry.



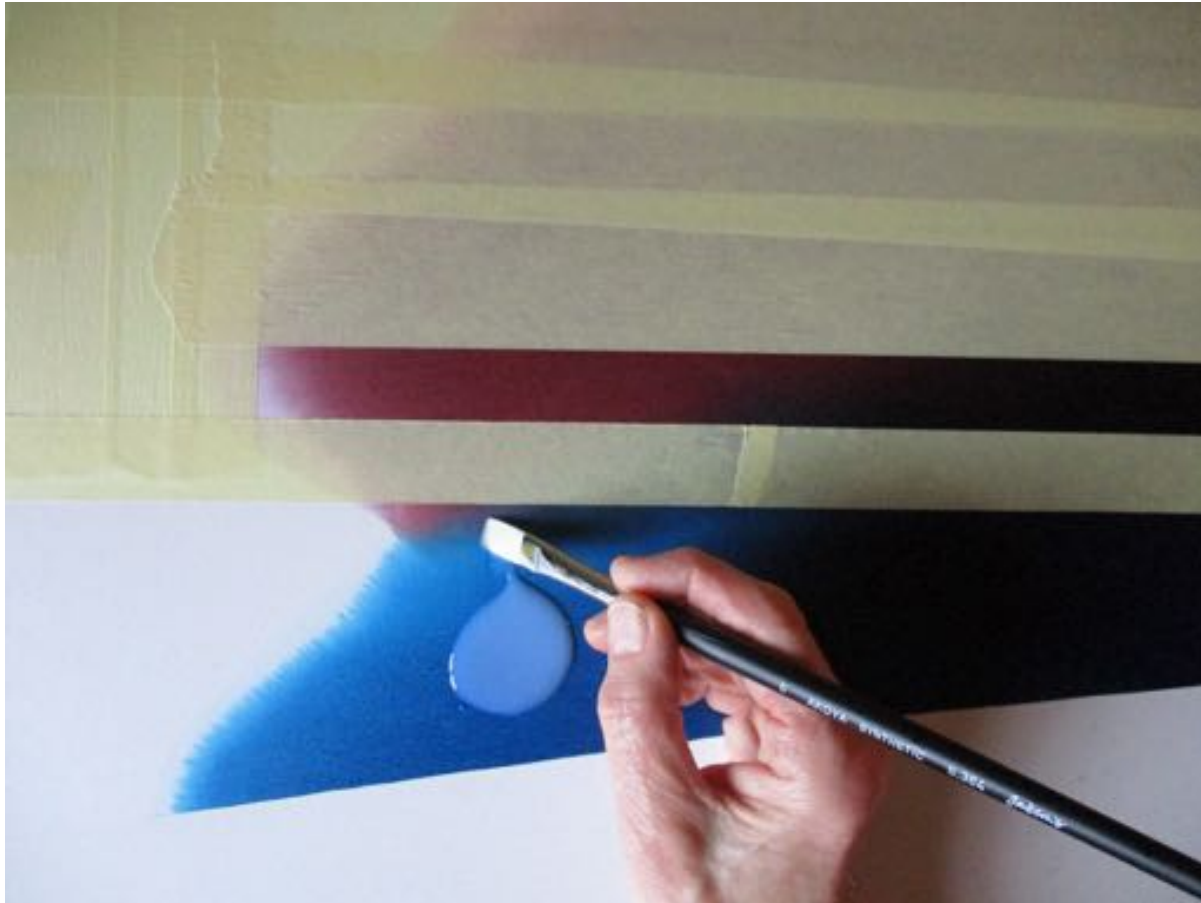
I return the piece to its position and secure it. I then prepare to iron it. I use masking tape to protect the vulnerable areas: these areas are those above stretcher bars, crossbars and - in the case of adhering subsequent pieces - those areas above parts of previously adhered collage pieces. This is because the heat of the iron damages the paint where extra pressure exists. Additionally, I place silicone paper over all the collage piece before ironing it, to protect it.



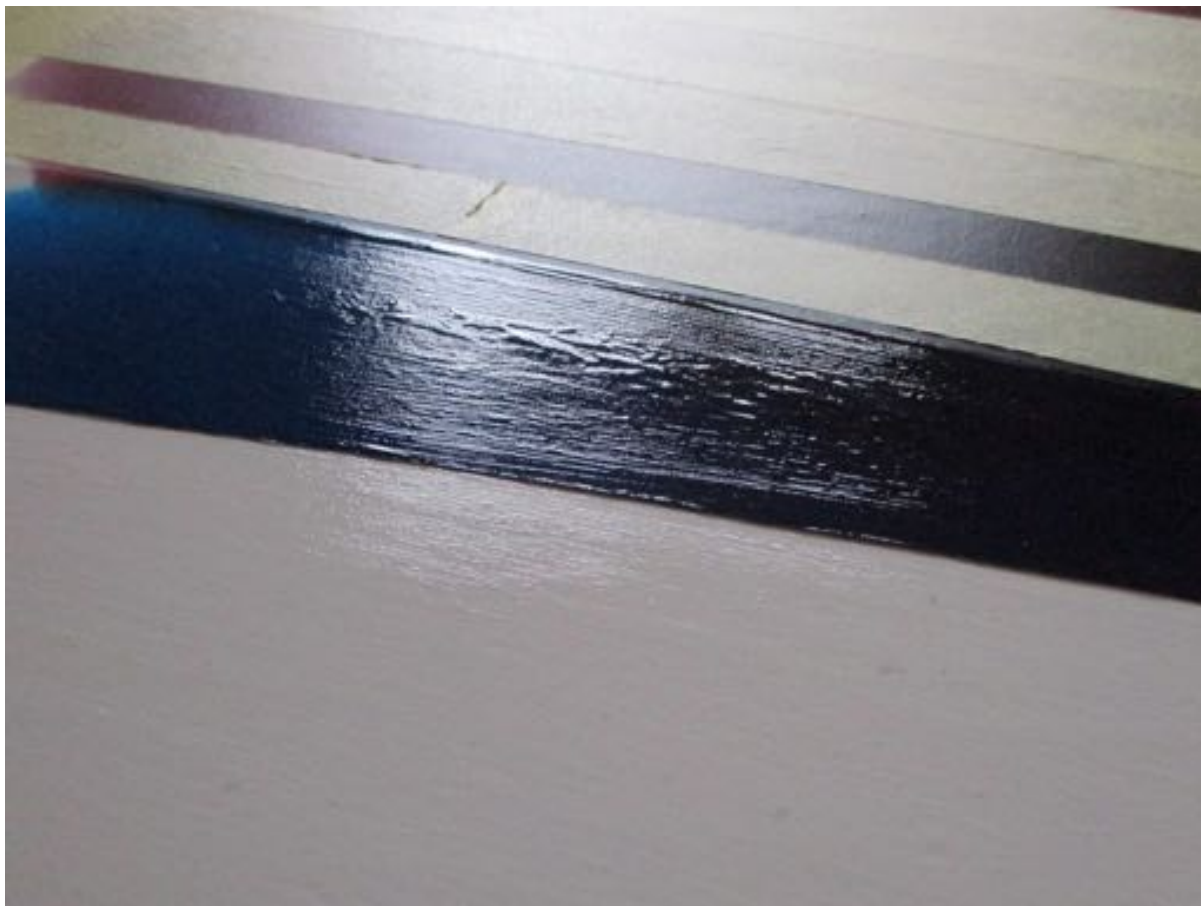
I then iron on the piece.



Before I adhere any collage piece that is to be adhered subsequently, there is a further task to be done. Gloss medium has to be applied to that part of the previously-adhered piece that will be covered by the next collage piece. Again, I use masking tape to show exactly where the second piece is to be positioned.



When I do this, I leave a narrow margin of $\frac{1}{8}$ ", in order to ensure the Gloss Medium will not show.



I let the Gloss Medium dry.



Any collage piece edges that will be visible have to be tidied and coloured.



The ironed artwork is ready to be re-touched. The parts of the collage pieces that are folded onto the sides of the backing canvas are also ironed on. I do not know how many procedures there are in my producing a collage made with acrylic on canvas - but I have written down all my instructions for all the collage methods and the acrylic ones are the most lengthy! I will not describe how I make the textured acrylic pieces - other than to say I use palette knives. I intend to put my acrylic collage method instructions on my website, but their main purpose is to keep myself right!



Here are some photographs of Antarctica, which I visited in 2017.































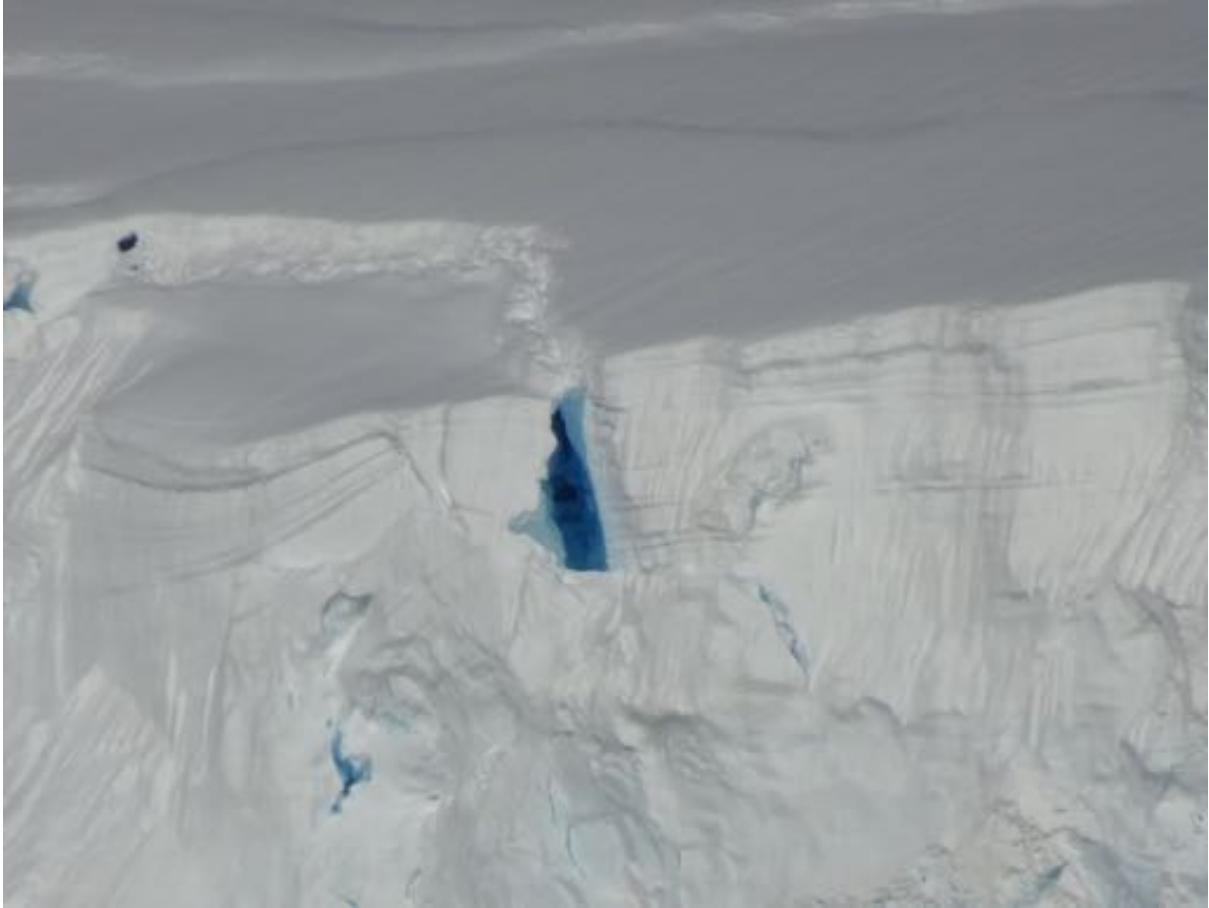
















































A question can arise: to what extent does my work derive from real landscapes? One might say it is a chicken and egg conundrum. The places I've chosen to see fit into `artworks` already in my mind. The artworks I make don't really look like the places I've seen.

I do think of the spirit of a particular place when I start a new piece, and use its colours to try to evoke that spirit. However, the paint and the composition [the composing] take over. Every piece, in fact, then evolves into something I would not have thought of and, indeed, am not capable of thinking of. Moreover, the spirit of a completed piece is sometimes that of a place I did not have in mind at the beginning.



In fact, I entitle a piece only after I know, in quotes, where it is. A good example is piece Number 10 [in the exhibition.] It was initially intended to look like, or give the feel of, somewhere in Antarctica - but I realised it looked more like the sand of the sand bar in the Kyle of Tongue and so I have named it thus.

For me, it is fitting to end this talk at the Kyle of Tongue.