

There is always a window to glimpse into another world

I ALWAYS look forward to the trip to Orkney, especially when I can stand out on the open deck of the boat.

I love breathing in the salty air and looking down at the dark and swirling water below, as the ferry ploughs through the currents. Fortunately, on this journey, the sea was relatively calm.

I was crossing the Pentland Firth to pick up work I had on display at Northlight Gallery in Stromness last month. The owner of the gallery decided to put a selection of artists' work in the windows.

During lockdown when so many shops have been shut and the general mood has been rather bleak, this was a visionary decision.

The windows of art have been a true gift to the community, serving as a source of connection between artist and viewer, and providing hope, colour and creativity through some very tough months.

On my return journey



Northern Drift

By Monique Slidrecht



You only need to look down into a tide pool to recognise it as a window to a hidden universe.

to Caithness, I looked out of the large glass wall onto the foggy seascape and was grateful for the view up to the rolling haar. A couple of razorbills flew across, following the ferry for a while.

Even when we cannot always see much further than our own noses, there is always a window to something, somewhere.

One day at Freswick, when the seas were wild, I ventured out at low tide, carefully walking across the barnacled surfaces to the edge of exposed coastline.

The waves were crashing against the rocks nearby, sending splashes up which sharpened my attention. It was exhilarating.

Looking down from where I stood, I noticed the kelp being corralled



A calm corner of kelp and the clear sea.

to one corner of the inlet from the force of the tidal current, clearing the way to the bottom of the sea floor, which was a beautiful, translucent aqua green.

I sat in a single ray of sunshine for as long as I could before dark heavy clouds moved in and droplets of rain came down. I picked up a large floating piece of sugar kelp while stumbling back across the uneven terrain, and carried it home for a closer look.

On Tuesday, June 8, it is World Oceans Day. I've been thinking about the ocean a lot lately, and considering our relationship with it. The sea and its hidden depths are truly fascinating, leaving so much room for the imagination. In one way it is frightening to think about

the unknown mysteries inhabiting those deep waters. On the other hand, it is wonderful to consider all the things yet to be explored and discovered.

As it happens, I was given a book on Orkney called 'The Brilliant Abyss' which states that 7/8ths of the earth is ocean, yet we probably know more about the surface of Mars than we do about this mysterious expanse which holds many important elements keeping the world in balance.

You only need to look down into a tide pool to recognise it as a window to a hidden universe. Similarly, the book is a porthole to a deep underworld which we are only just beginning to comprehend.

I recently watched a

wonderful film called 'My Octopus Teacher'. It follows the growing relationship between a diver and an octopus. Within a year, what starts out as vulnerability between an invertebrate creature and human develops into a beautiful, strong connection.

Through these careful observations and discoveries we can help nature do what it does best and protect the delicate balance that maintains life on earth. Exploring, but not exploiting. Delving deeper, all the while recognising the crucial part we play in the magnificent ecosystems of our world.

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