

Resilience, Relinquishment and Restoration

Working towards Deep Adaptation

I haven't written for some time. I've been teaching abroad and locally, been engaged with Extinction Rebellion activities, looked after grandchildren and participated in Christmas festivities: see our tree made from scrap wood - a project James undertook with four of our grandchildren.



Throughout this period I was thinking "I haven't done a blogpost for ages, I must sort it". Part of that non-writing was also due to not being able to focus on a topic. I didn't have anything to say and had also been finding it very hard to get back in to my art practise. I've worked at moving on some work-in-progress and two pieces are now destined for the bonfire. While this isn't unfamiliar territory, it's been hard to find any kind of peace, any kind of stillness, any kind of quietness, any kind of meaning, any kind of joy.

After a period of reflection and writing, I think I've identified what lies beneath my struggles: Grief and Rage for everything this Earth has lost and will continue to lose. Rage against the politicians who lie, deceive and don't act in our best interests, don't act **now** to start dealing with the Climate Crisis. Rage against the greedy corporations who've fed our hunger for MORE, fed our desire for consumption and instant gratification. Rage against those who make war, are divisive and cannot live and let live. Rage against inequality and injustice. And Grief for not doing more to stop it.

I believe that most of you are 'climate crisis aware' and that the Earth and all that live on her are in dire straits. James and I have been 'into' the environment for over 25 years – James published in that area for some time. As such, we've never been deniers of climate change, we've acknowledged and believed in what our own eyes and science has to say about the situation that's been building. But I also have to acknowledge we've probably paid lip service outside of whatever lifestyle changes we could make to improve things. But in July of 2019 we looked at each other and said "we have to do more, we have to make bigger changes, we have to commit, we have to shout loudly".



Dark clouds, but no silver lining; quite the reverse in fact

At 62 years old I believe I've lived in what might be called a golden age; good upbringing, decent education, big job market, lots of opportunities to make more than a decent living, technological progress, plentiful good food. And for the last 25 years, the gifts of travel to my beloved wilderness areas, becoming an artist and living in a beautiful rural environment. But that golden age was in fact a silver cloud with a dark lining. I have contributed to that dark, toxic cloud with more than my fair share of carbon emissions. I have made a large contribution to the crisis the Earth now faces.

What to do? Feeling helpless or hopeless isn't a way forward. To help us shout louder we joined Extinction Rebellion (XR) and began to engage in civil protest to get the Government to Tell the Truth and Act Now. James got arrested sitting down in the street outside of Downing Street; he hasn't been charged yet and doubt if he will be as the Police lost their court case against banning XR gatherings across London.



James sits down outside Downing Street, and students strike in protest of inaction

We're very active in our local XR Group. We off-set our carbon footprint. We Refuse, Re-Use, Repair, Restore, Recycle and all the other 'R's in this category! We've ordered an electric car – although even that has environmental impact due to the batteries. Electric bikes are planned for purchase this Spring so our local journeys can be done by bike – one advantage of living in a small country is that things such as supermarkets aren't too far away! We grow our own veg and have a wildflower meadow instead of a lawn. All good stuff.,



But when it comes to 'Refusing', one of the quickest ways of reducing our carbon footprint is to stop flying. James and I are now committed to only undertaking absolutely vital flights. Sadly, this means that once my international teaching obligations have been fulfilled (the end of 2021) I'll no longer teach anywhere I can't get to by car, ferry or train. While I can off-set the carbon of my flights, that doesn't stop it being released into the atmosphere. Carbon off-set doesn't stop emissions.

As I've grown more active my reading list has expanded considerably and a research paper written by Jem Bendall struck a deep chord. 'Deep Adaptation' (published July 2018) introduces the concept of 'Resilience, Relinquishment & Restoration':

- **Resilience** is about the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances so as to survive with valued norms and behaviours. One aspect of Resilience asks society to consider what we really want to keep (in terms of assets, products, services, behaviours and beliefs), and how do we keep them. Examples might include good health care and education, continued development of technology - particularly sustainability. If we consider our use of plastic we have to consider its vital role in hospitals, so maybe we have to continue (slowly are fairly) to extract oil but instead of gobbling it up as an energy source, use it for the production of 'vital' plastic goods and make sure what we have left is distributed fairly across the globe. It can also mean the provision of counselling services and discussion groups to help communities get to grips with emotions such as fear, grief and a sense of helplessness.
- **Relinquishment asks** "what do we need to let go of (again in terms of assets, products, services, behaviours and beliefs) in order to not make matters worse?". Examples include the cessation of coal extraction, forgoing flights (or only flying when absolutely vital), accepting less choice in terms of products, giving up or eating very little meat or 'carbon-heavy' foods (no more asparagus from Peru), buying less 'stuff' and less clothing, giving up the need for speed and instant gratification.
- **Restoration asks us** "what can we bring back to help us with the coming difficulties and tragedies?" It involves us rediscovering attitudes and approaches to life that a hydrocarbon-fuelled civilisation has eroded. Examples include re-wilding landscapes, changing diets back to match the seasons, rediscovering non-electronic forms of play, using (hopefully improved) public transport instead of always jumping in a car, holidaying within our own country or to places we don't need to fly to, shopping local,

buying local produce, shortening the supply chain, encouraging our kids to get outdoors and be more physical, re-engaging with nature and our local communities.., and slowing down.

I want to continue to engage in protest and call-for-change initiatives with Extinction Rebellion, but I also want to work in contributing towards the process of Deep Adaptation and 'Resilience, Relinquishment & Restoration'.



Dorking XR's dawn 'Chicken Run' in the run-up to the 2019 December election.

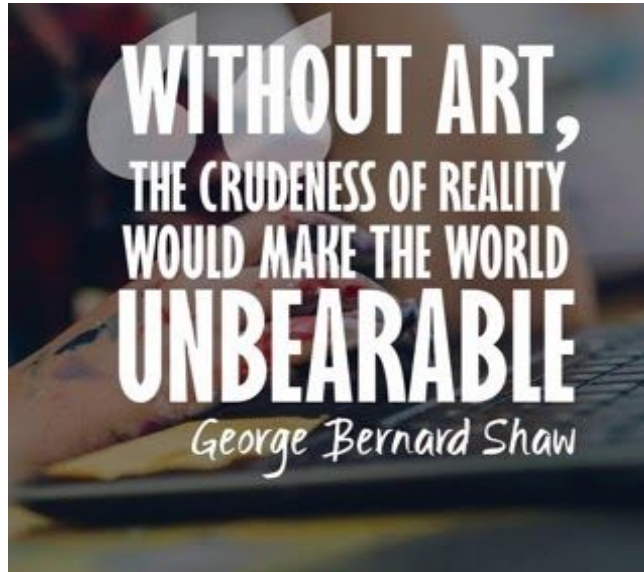
Working with and through our local XR Group, James and I want to help our community develop initiatives that might include:

- **Information & Discussion Points:** setting up a stall once a month in the town centre, stocked with information and staffed by volunteers who are willing to engage, listen empathetically and answer questions honestly and clearly - a 'Climate Café' already exists in Dorking but could be better known and utilised - an Outreach Point would help raise awareness of such initiatives. Providing talks and lectures are also an important element of education and outreach.
- **Open House/Climate Social:** offering or organising a space (preferably outdoors/in nature, - weather permitting!) where community can gather together, have cuppa and some cake, or a drink and a bowl of soup whilst connecting with the community and talking about what they want to retain, relinquish and restore. Open House and Socials are also an important part of outreach initiatives to encourage people to engage and get involved.

- **Climate Counselling:** I am particularly aware that deep-seated anxiety, grief and rage exists around what we face if we don't change. Those changes will need to be radical, will involve much relinquishment and therefore be very challenging. But if we don't make radical change I fear the challenges will be even greater, particularly for our children, grandchildren and future generations. Having access to trained people or simply a friendly face to sit with, talk to and be heard can be transformative.
- **Peoples & Citizens Assemblies:** enabling the public to be part of solutions. Assemblies where questions around Resilience (what do we want to keep), Relinquishment (what do we need to let go of) and Restoration (what do we want to bring back) can be tackled, prioritised and agreed. The output from such assemblies is then fed back to local and district councils and government., with the expectation they'll be acted upon, and swiftly.
- **Regenerative/Restorative events:** organising walks with nature and wildlife experts, craft or arts workshops (darning and mending would be a good start!), creation of 'Repair Workshops' where people can bring stuff to get mended and learn how to mend (there's already a brilliant BBC programme called The Repair Shop). Initiatives of this nature link in to Outreach and provide a 'soft' channel to get people engaged and active. Provision of small gatherings that use ritual to enable people to check in about how they're feeling, speak out, be heard and process emotions; particularly important after taking part in events such as National Rebellions.



We can't do this alone but with the support of XR and other climate crisis organisations such as Wildlife Rebellion, Greenpeace, IncredibleEdible, Green Shoots of Rebellion, Culture Declares etc., it can happen.



And how can I employ Resilience, Relinquishment and Restoration in my art practise? Anyone engaging with art or craft knows that sooner or later, 'plastic product' can come in to play., along with the use of other potentially harmful stuff. I currently use acrylic mediums to bind earth pigments on to my cloth and although I usually dilute them with lots of water, acrylics will always have plastic content. I've used acrylic mediums to lay cloth on surfaces that give up their tatty bits of paint or grit due to the glueing properties of the mediums. I want to relinquish my use of acrylics and gaining a residency on the foothills of the Sierra Nevada in Spain is going to help me with that..





JOYA: Air (images courtesy of their website; www.joya-air.org)

James and I will be travelling (by train) to JOYA:Air, an eco-driven creative residency. The accommodation and facilities are fantastic and as JOYA has a strong focus on ecology, I'll be turning to the age-old method of using Soya Milk to bind local 'dirt' to my cloth. I'll also work with a small range of pigments from other parts of the world and will - of course- stitch.. We'll spend two full weeks at JOYA and have taken the chance to make the journey part of our adventure. ...



A subject always close to our hearts! (Image by Sascha Kriese)

First, London to Paris, where we'll grab a good Bistro meal before hooking up with the Barcelona train, arriving late but in perfect time for the city's late-night dining preference. We'll then spend a day re-acquainting ourselves with Barcelona and eating more lovely food. From Barcelona it's then on to Granada (even more lovely food) where we've allowed for a 3 night and 2 day stay. And in Granada we've hired a small car to undertake the final 2-hour leg to JOYA. We'd have preferred an electric car but JOYA is pretty remote and as yet, the re-charging opportunities aren't quite good enough! I'll be writing In April/May about our experiences at JOYA.

The other dilemma I face is what to do with my existing stocks of acrylic-based media? I could let it evaporate and throw it away, where it'll end up in landfill. I'm not sure that's the solution. Instead, I'll use them when teaching; I'm already committed to teaching several more workshops involving acrylics but once they're done, I won't be teaching with them again. I'll use them to finish off my current body of work on the Atacama. And when they're gone, they're gone. I feel that using them to make art that will hopefully hang on someone's wall and last for a while is better than immediate disposal of the raw material in a landfill site (although I accept the art may also end up in landfill one day!).



A plastic dropcloth loaded with earth pigments and acrylic medium:
I think it has potential!

During my struggles and thrashings-about, I've been turning to hand stitch as it still has the capacity to offer me solace and stillness. As such, I'm going to return to the 'In the Fullness of Time' body of work and develop new pieces using thread and stitch on my treasured antique hemp. Alongside that I need to get three large pieces ready for hanging, and complete approximately 10 smaller works for my 2021 exhibition at Gallery 57 in Arundel.



A detail of a small piece from the Atacama body of work. As yet untitled.

Having identified the cause of my struggles I'll press on, be kinder to myself and take my time with it. Slow is good as far as I'm concerned .

I'm hoping that somehow, James and I can work with our community to create a different way of living. A way which I suspect is an 'older' way of living, a local way of living, a simpler and slower way of living. A way that connects us to Nature and all she can and could give us., if we give her the chance. I hope many of you feel the same way, and will act on those feelings in order to Walk in Beauty.

George Marshall (in his brilliant book, 'Don't Even Think About It') says: "Remember that how we respond now will provide the template for future responses. Acceptance, compassion, cooperation, and empathy will produce very different outcomes than aggression, competition, blame and denial.

We hold both futures within ourselves and, as we choose whether to and how to think about climate change, we are choosing how we will think about ourselves and the new world we are creating".