

Heidrun Rathgeb
NORDIC LIGHTS

John Martin Gallery



9. Hiding Place, 2020
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 5½ inches, 17.5 x 14 cms

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18 January – 11 February 2022

A Watchful Eye Charlotte Verity

I met up with Heidrun in Munich where she introduced me to the Alte Pinacotek and, as though navigating a party - 'be sure you meet...' she described the place where I would find the *Flight into Egypt* by Adam Elsheimer. It is a night time scene. A young family comes across warmth and shelter after a long day of travel. The small portable panel holds three sources of light: a fire to feed and warm the travellers, the glow from the holy child, and most powerfully of all is a full moon reflected in water and stars, numerous such as us town dwellers rarely see, stretching into the vast universe. At its heart is a domestic scene but one which is almost eclipsed by a sense of wonder at the vastness of the sky and the beauty of the moon.

Heidrun loves the night. Her paintings speak of being alone and the special way that one's mind drifts back and forth when the day is done. When the house is quiet she goes across to her studio. She sifts through her many drawings and re-ignites them with colour and definition until they have a life of their own. She cares about colours and is knowledgeable about pigments and grounds. The chords are delicious: the pink and buttery yellow of the canoes animate the many blues and greens of the water. The solitary boat of faded red is set amongst the mountains of many greys which loom above it. She remembers the pleasure of the northern sunlight and renders it by a small spot of scarlet geranium against a dwelling boarded in black, then couples it with a Bonnard-like chord of pink and lavender. Even that very particular dull green of damp grass that has been under snow has been sought out from amongst her pigments. The figure takes no notice, preferring the drama of the further shore, but Heidrun does - she knows that green.

You'd think that courage is a strange word to associate with painting ones own children and the countryside on a small scale. You'd imagine perhaps, that like snaps of people unknown to us that they would be dull, charming at best, sentimental or nostalgic. These small panels are never these things, but they run that risk. Since Heidrun has been depicting the people and places that matter to her most, her work as an artist has found a momentum which feels unstoppable. As a parent there is so much else to do - things press upon you with immediacy - to sit or stand and draw, to take oneself out of the diurnal round to watch and note, doesn't feel like the right thing to do. Amongst the clamour she keeps a watchful eye on her family and is on the lookout for subjects. When a child is preoccupied and stilled, out comes the small drawing book and well-used pencil, and it is noted. These moments are not often the stuff of serious art, but Heidrun knows how precious they are, and insists on making them so.

She watches as the world is tested and explored. The young figures who stand at the edge of the lake, take in the sun or stand at a threshold, are real moments seen and noted but as they are distilled onto the surface of the panel they feel familiar to us too. We can share her pleasure in the chequered quilt, the rusty swing, or a surprising bird box but we also sense the parental mixture of pride and anxiety as a child hovers on the edge of open water or when their boat drifts away from the shore. Unlike the young explorers, we can see what lies ahead.

And you have to be brave to leave your family for a few weeks at a time, to isolate yourself in a remote part of the North - Scotland, Denmark, Norway or even high up in the Alps that form the backdrop to her home - and to be totally alone. Here she finds moments of extraordinary natural drama. A primrose yellow sky, an astonishing harvest moon, the mountainside dramatically streaked with snow. Dusk - there is a lot of dusk in Norway - and our place in this vast and ancient landscape, is touchingly rendered by a very faint wisp of smoke coming from a simple dwelling at the foot of a mountain. A solitary figure shelters (in the modern way) within a gently illuminated pod pitched in the wild; the only other presence is a large and beautiful moon. Elsheimer was painting four hundred years ago but to this artist, being so rooted in painting and the natural world, his exquisite *Flight into Egypt* never feels far away.

Charlotte Verity is an artist who lives and works in London. Since graduating from the Slade she has exhibited regularly, most recently with a two-part solo exhibition at Karsten Schubert, London. A monograph 'Charlotte Verity' and 'Echoing Green: The Printed Year' are both published by Ridinghouse.



Adam Elsheimer, Flight From Egypt, 1609
Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte Pinakothek, Munich



4. Capsule, 2020
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 9½ inches, 18 x 24 cms



7. Cross Country Skiing, 2020
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 5½ inches, 17.5 x 14 cms



1. Nordic Light, 2020
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 9½ inches, 18 x 24 cms



15. Midnight Sun, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 9½ x 7 inches, 24 x 18 cms



5. Blue Hour, 2020
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 9½ x 7 inches, 24 x 18 cms



2. Staufner Haus, 2020

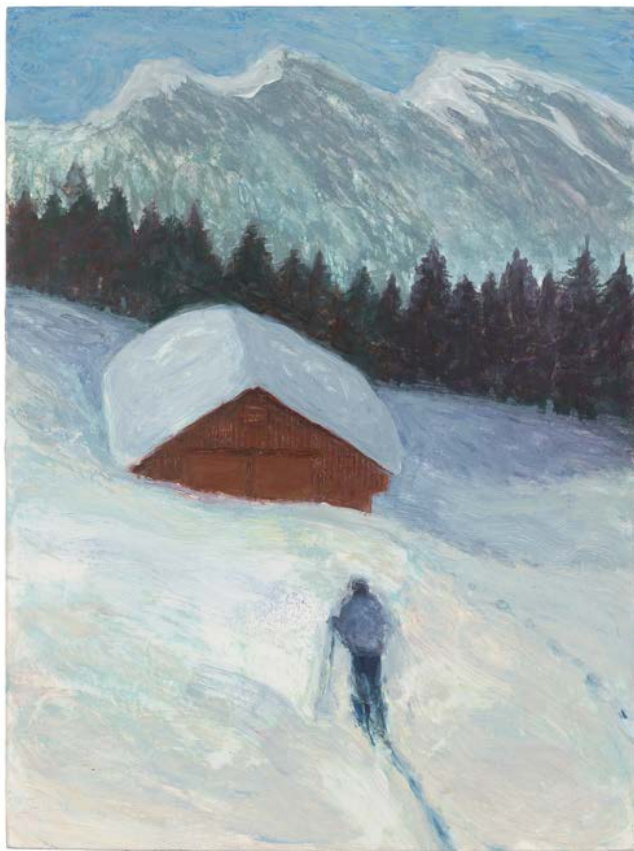
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 5½ x 7 inches, 14 x 17.5 cms



48. Wohin ich mich Träume (*Where my Dreams Take Me*), 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 9½ inches, 18 x 24 cms



43. A Special Place, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 5½ inches, 17.5 x 14 cms



12. Glutschwanden, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 9½ x 7 inches, 24 x 18 cms



6. Bach (Stream), 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 5½ inches, 17.5 x 14 cms



50. Bodensee (Lake Constance), 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 9½ inches, 18 x 24 cms



8. Deep Snow, 2020
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 9½ x 7 inches, 24 x 18 cms



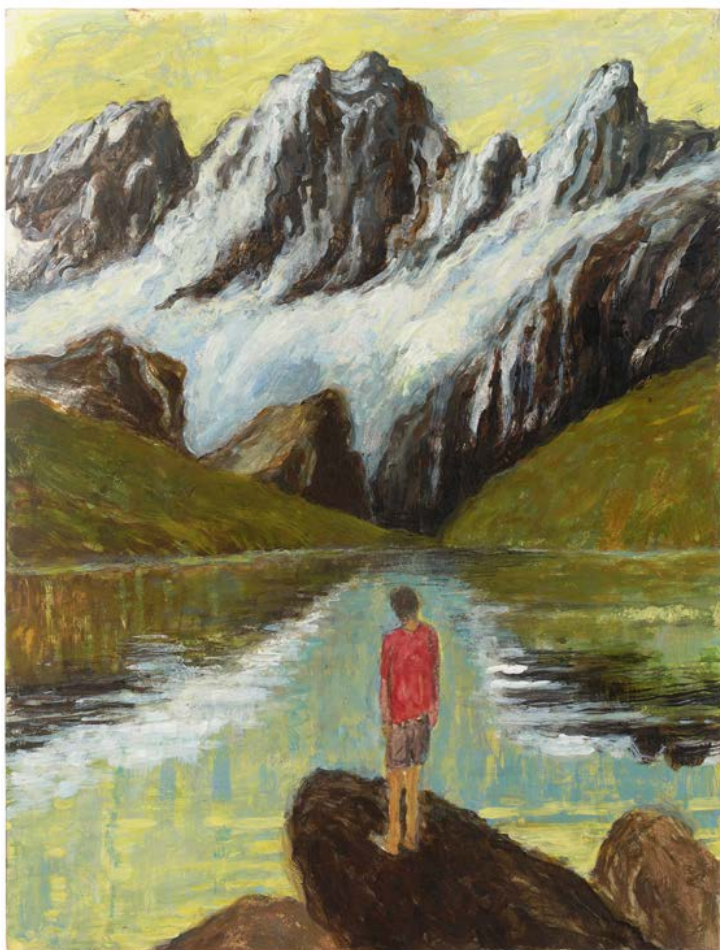
34. The Enigmatic Neighbour, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 5½ x 6½ inches, 14 x 17 cms



30. Cloud Mirror, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 5½ inches, 17 x 14 cms



52. Māngata, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 9½ inches, 18 x 24 cms



44. Towards Balme, 2021

Egg tempera on gesso panel, 15¾ x 11¾ inches, 40 x 30 cms



47. Helgumannen, 2021

Acrylic and tempera on gesso panel, 15¾ x 19¾ inches, 40 x 50 cms

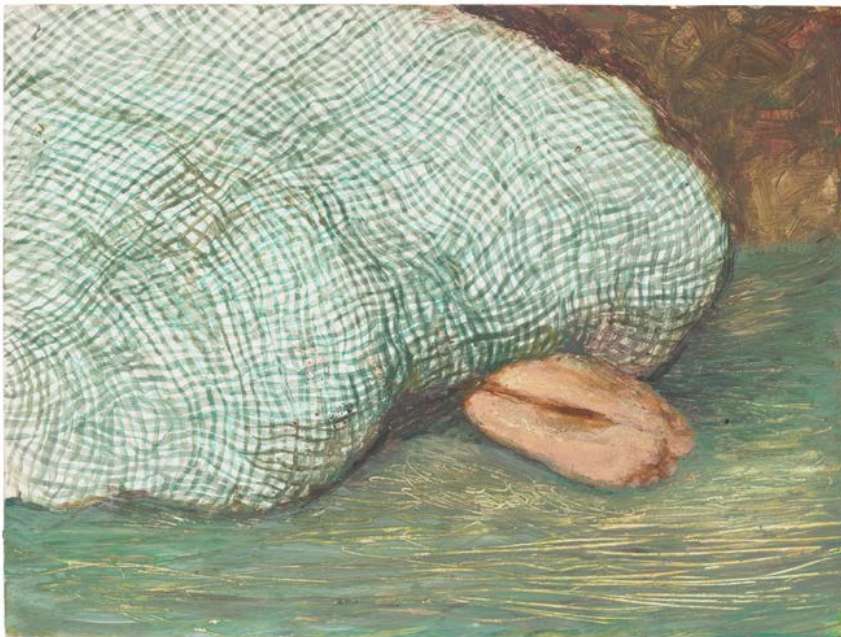


54. Mondgewand, 2021

Egg tempera on gesso panel, 15½ x 11¾ inches, 40 x 30 cms



32. Bubble Bath, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 6¾ x 5½ inches, 14 x 17 cms



23. Almagmach, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 9½ inches, 18 x 24 cms



24. Mount Orkia in Dusk, 2020
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 9½ x 7 inches, 24 x 18 cms



13. Warming, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 5½ x 7 inches, 14 x 17.5 cms



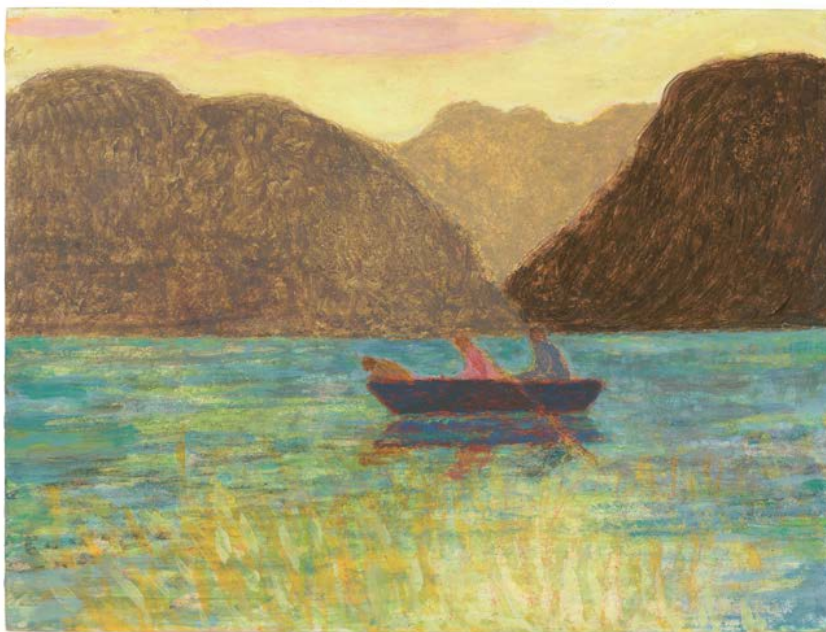
42. Lotti, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 6¾ x 5½ inches, 17.5 x 14 cms



16. Pink Sky Today, 2020
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 5½ x 7 inches, 14 x 17.5 cms



11. Passage, 2020
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 9½ inches, 18 x 24 cms



52. Fish Gazing, 2020
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 9½ inches, 18 x 24 cms



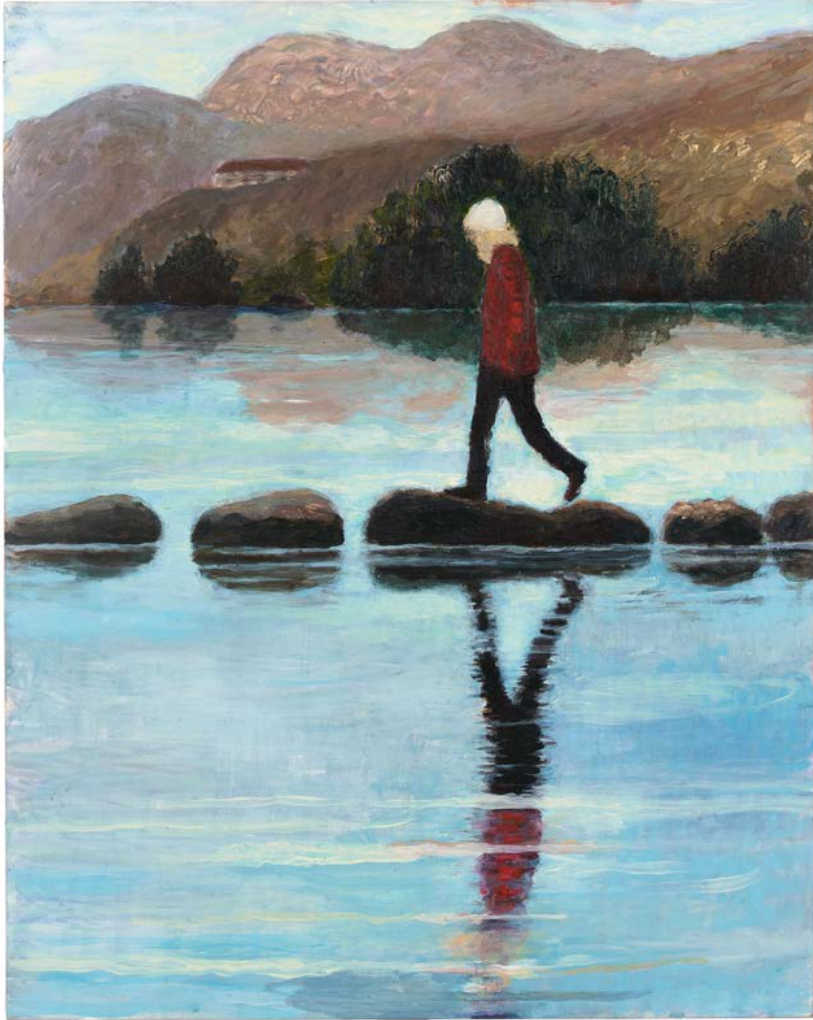
21. Mondspiegel, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 5½ inches, 17 x 14 cms



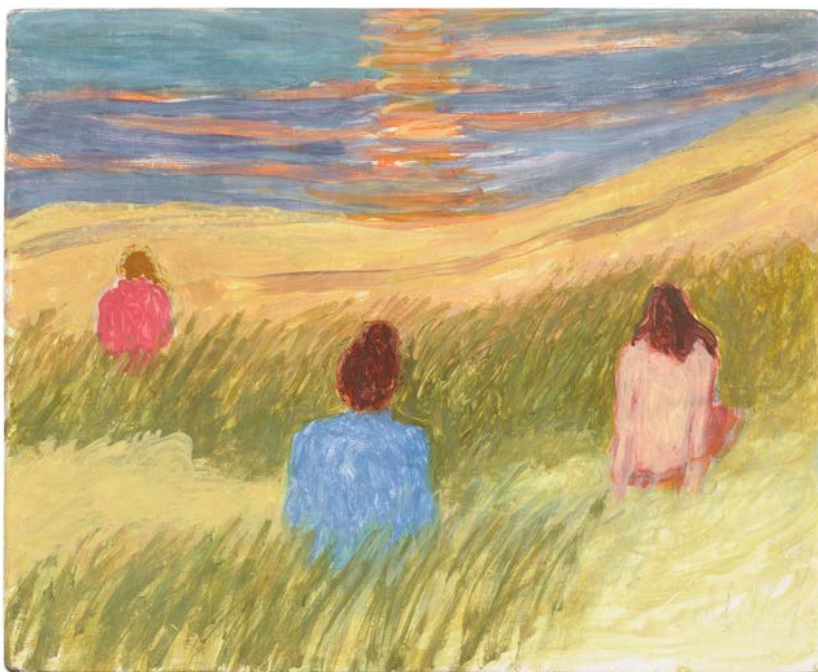
14. Fløyen, 2020
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 9½ inches, 18 x 24 cms



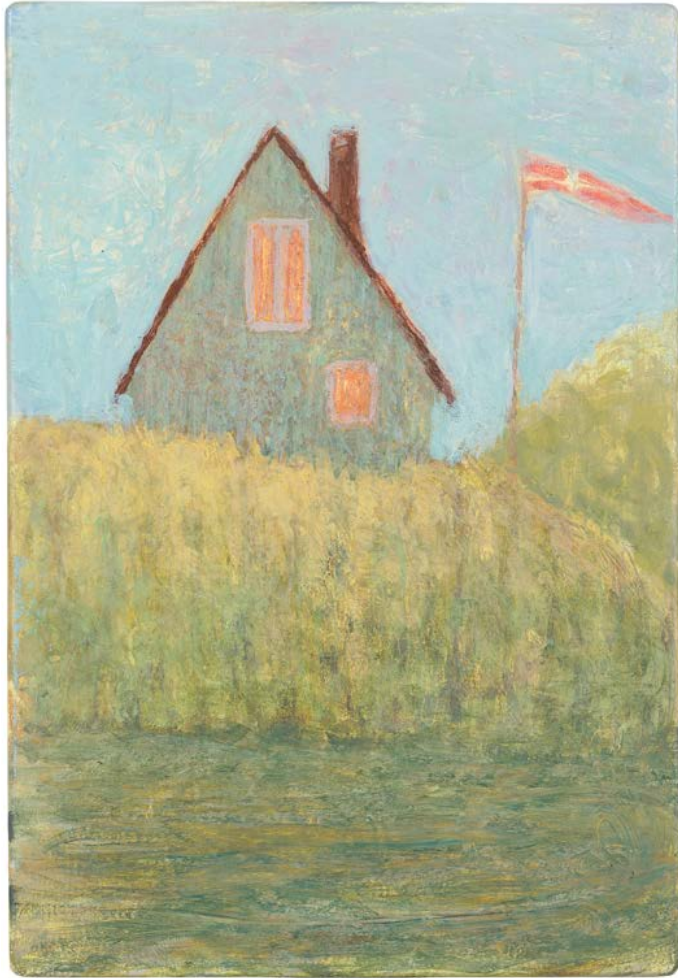
56. Lanterns, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 4¼ x 6¼ inches, 11 x 16 cms



34. Skipping Stones, 2021
Acrylic and tempera on gesso panel, 19¾ x 15¾ inches, 50 x 40 cms



45. Three Sisters, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 5½ x 7 inches, 14 x 17.5 cms





25. The High House, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 7 x 5½ inches, 17.5 x 14 cms



52. Vom Untergang (Sunset), 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 5½ x 6¾ inches, 14 x 17.5 cms



33. Schattenwesen (Shadow Being), 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 4 1/4 x 6 1/4 inches, 11 x 16 cms



29. To Nikolai, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 9½ x 7 inches, 24 x 18 cms



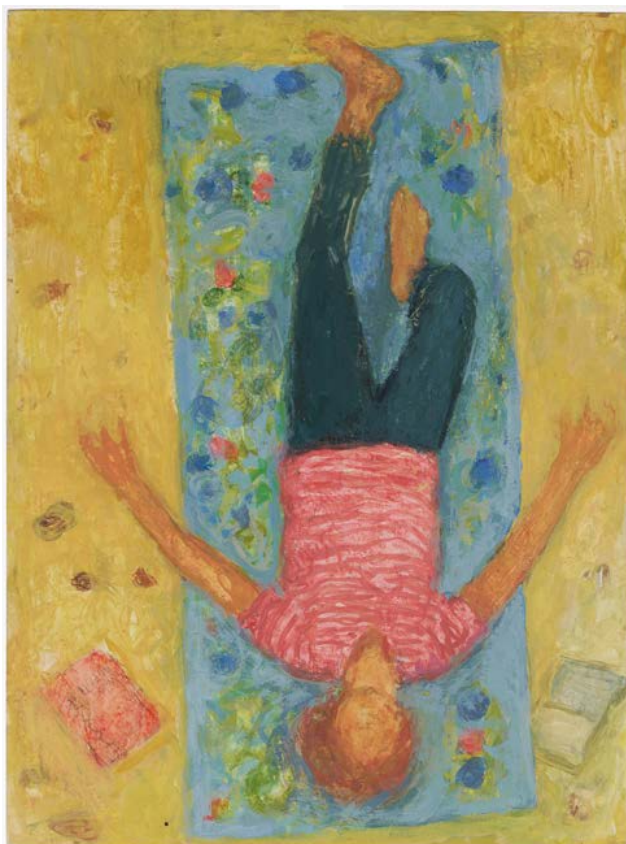
41. Playing in the Dunes, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 6¾ x 5½ inches, 17 x 14 cms



37. Drinking Sunshine, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 4¼ x 6¼ inches, 11 x 16 cms



26. Lights Off, No. 2, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 4¼ x 6¼ inches, 11 x 16 cms



51. A Seagull's View, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 9½ x 7 inches, 24 x 18 cms

Most of these small panel paintings were made without thinking they would ever be shown. They came together from different sources of inspiration – my children, our home in rural Southern Germany, as well as several artist's residencies since 2018 in Norway, Denmark and the Isle of Lewis in Scotland. The long hours of dusk and dawn, the mellow colours and light casting long shadows, the wild untouched nature keeps drawing me to northern countries but also to the alps, the dark woodlands and moonlit nights at home.

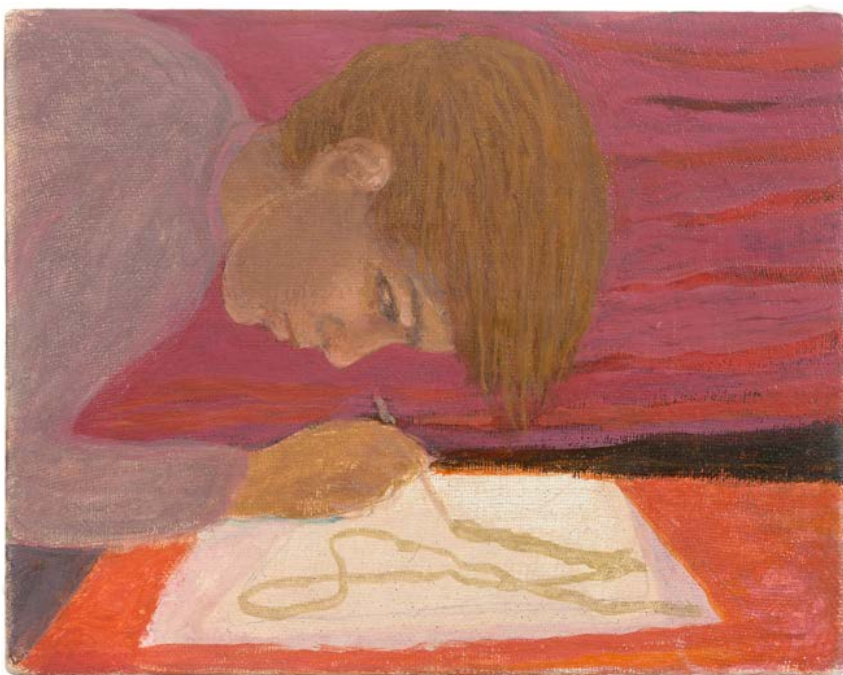
Nearly all of my paintings grow out of drawings. My sketchbooks form an ongoing collection of experiences – my daily epiphanies. A drawing can hold the memory of a place, the light the scent and, however briefly scribbled, it forms a rich source for a painting.

While painting I try to connect deeply to the particular moment. An artist friend once said, "Be as specific as you possibly can be". It became one of my guiding sentences scribbled to the wood above my painting table. By being specific I don't mean literal but true to the feeling of a moment.

I paint in egg tempera, a medium I always preferred to oil painting for its glowing colours and shorter drying time. It allows me to work in layers. The small lime wood panels are cut to the size of my sketchbooks, primed in several layers of gesso then sanded to an ivory-like surface. I paint holding the panels in my hand as I like feeling the object itself. There are always several paintings on the go. This helps me see what a painting needs and gives me courage to make more radical changes without ever getting too precious about its parts. I feel my paintings have to be in flux, in constant danger of getting ruined, reworked, re-found until they eventually stop and maybe take on their own life.

Heidrun Rathgeb

Heidrun Rathgeb was born in 1967 in southern Germany. She studied painting in London at the Slade School of Fine Art (1996-99) and the Byam Shaw School of Art (1993-96). Since 2001 she has lived with her family in a remote farmhouse close to Lake Constance and the Alps. Nordic Lights is the artist's first solo exhibition.



39. Drawing a Line, 2021
Egg tempera on gesso panel, 5½ x 6¾ inches, 14 x 17.5 cms

E-catalogue for the exhibition
Northern Lights by Heidrun Rathgeb,
John Martin Gallery,
38 Albemarle Street, London, W1S 4JG
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Monday to Friday 10 to 6pm

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