

Ruth Lacon

Ruth Lacon has had an interest in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien since her Edinburgh childhood in Scotland, and managed the unusual feat of reading the Silmarillion when aged 12. Ruth joined the Tolkien Society in 1986 whilst at university, and has been a member ever since, contributing articles and artwork to the Society's publications. She holds two degrees, a B.Sc. (Hons) in Zoology from Aberdeen and a B.A. in Design (Illustration) from the University of Wales. Ruth has produced many works of art inspired by the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, some of which are featured in her published book, *The Art of Ruth Lacon*. She also writes scholarly papers on J.R.R. Tolkien. Ruth also writes non-Tolkien based fiction, and creates paintings inspired by a range of myths and legends.



August 13th -15th, 2010

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Kelso Races/Calchvnydd

This piece looks at the intersection of past and present on one piece of land, the peninsula between the Rivers Tweed and Teviot above their confluence at Kelso on the Scottish Borders, my family's home country. Now used only for recreation, this bare green place was the site of Scotland's greatest medieval city, Roxburgh, once bigger than Edinburgh and with the fairest castle in the Kingdom. Its past reaches still deeper into the forgotten links between Scotland and Wales. Roxburgh is an Old English name replacing the Celtic *Marchidunon - the Fort of the Horses. Its early kings appear in Welsh poetry and genealogy. So the black horses endlessly turning in this picture are at once the modern racing Thoroughbreds and the chargers of March the father of Arthwys.

Dinas Bran

This painting explores personal and creative identity through the folktale of the treasure hidden under the hill. To find it, you have to follow the wall-eyed dog which can see the wind - to look beyond the workaday world of mere appearances and trust in unlikely friends and inspiration. The treasure is guarded by three ravens; a common feature of such stories on the Welsh Marches, where beliefs from both sides of the Welsh/English divide reinforced each other and survived. They are Otherworld birds, guardians of knowledge more than mere treasure. And following one version, there is a last hurdle to pass; to ignore the golden ox of worldly wealth and seek the owl of true wisdom.



Gwraig y Gogledd or Woman of the North

In this painting I looked at the forgotten links between Southern Scotland and Wales through the lens of one piece of very familiar landscape, the Castle Hill of Edinburgh, the city where I grew up. But Edinburgh is also Din Eidyn, capital of the Gododdin, the people whose glory and downfall are celebrated I one of the earliest surviving Welsh poems, by one of the first known master bards, aneirin. Hardly ever mentioned in history books, these ancient links inspired the mix of Welsh and Scottish symbols in the side-panels, the Dragon and badger, the Lion and boar, obvious images paired with older, less known ones. The two sleeping horses speak of a forgotten past, the waking one with its classic Otherworldly colouring, of a history lost to all but imagination.

The next group of paintings all draw their inspiration from folklore, a subject area dear to my heart because my maternal Grandfather was an amateur storyteller with a great love of the lore of his own land in the Borders. He died while I was young, and the quest for his stories has been a lasting part of my artistic and literary inspiration.

Wind-dancer

This piece was inspired by the dramatic landscapes and Norse-influenced folk-lore of the Orkney and Shetland Islands, places I was taken to as a very young child, which assumed extra significance later as a place longed for from the opposite side of the Pentland Firth, but unreachable.



The Sunken Palace

The advantages of a representational but not realistic style such as mine really show here, allowing me to depict what can't be seen as one - the above-water Welsh landscape of the mountains close to my adopted home, and the below-water world of one of the great Welsh folktales of supernatural retribution visited upon wrongdoers, told of several lakes including Bala and Llyncllys. Fish and an otter swim where once light and music brought the halls to life...



Waterfall Magic: Pystyll Rhaeadr

The inspiration behind this is a place I know and love, one of the Seven Wonders of Wales. Here, a freshwater mermaid (with a salmon tail, following Scottish lowland folklore) ends her journey upriver at a magical cascade where autumn's falling leaves become golden fish - swimming leaves transformed by artistic vision.



Carpet Pages: Outside Looking In and Opening the Book

The name 'carpet page' is taken from art-historical accounts of the great Insular manuscript books of the Dark Ages, as an apt term for a page of pure design which nonetheless has meaning. These two were part of a set done as trials for a possible group inspired by the Qur'an, a project which did not then go further. They draw on one of my great loves, manuscript painting both West and East. They stand as aniconic images of spirituality, whatever the viewer's background.

The next group of paintings, falling into two pairs, employs a different medium, acrylic (those above are in gouache). I use both media as it allows me to be more versatile. The strengths of the one are the weaknesses of the other, and by using both, I can broaden my range of subjects and approaches. The particular importance of the acrylics for me is their ability, through painterly style, to communicate emotion to the viewer. They are designed to work not at one viewing distance, but at several, and can be approached from some way away, the viewer discovering fresh depths in the image as they draw near.

Sir Gawain Steals the Ship Guingaloet

This is an Arthurian piece, but one with a Tolkienian inspiration. I rediscovered the Arthurian legends as a result of researching what we know about J.R.R. Tolkien's last major unpublished work, the alliterative poem, *The Fall of Arthur*. Very possibly nobody ever

wrote this exact story; the image sprang to my mind as I explored the strange coincidence between the name of Gawain's horse and Wade's ship, drawing on hints from several different texts and papers.

King Arthur's Dream

The inspiration here was the great and strange dream-sequence in Layamon's *Brut*, telling of the portentous vision which Arthur has as he crosses from Britain to the Continent for the war which will lift him to his highest glory but also open the way to Mordred's treachery. Evolving the image, I came to meditate on the odd coincidence between the dream's language and modern speculation about catastrophic events during the 'age of Arthur', and chose a colour-scheme drawn from my own sighting of the Northern Lights, long ago and far in the North of Scotland.



A Portent at Persepolis

This could be subtitled 'Nocturne in Blue and Silver'. The image simply evolved under my hand as I worked drawing first, then painting, exploring a haunting vision of another time and place. Interpret its significance and symbolism as you please - who knows what truth I set down unknowingly?



Titania and the Indian Woman

This draws on one of those tiny incidents in Shakespeare where his world expands to something rich and strange. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, act II, scene one, Titania defends her reluctance to yield up her page by telling of how she and the child's mother, her 'votaress' or worshipper (a hint of Titania's exalted past, which I used to good effect) would meet on an Indian beach by night and watch the ships go sailing by - ships the woman would mimic in jest, bringing gifts to please Titania.



'When we have laughed to see the sails conceive, and grow big-bellied with the wanton wind, which she, with pretty and with swimming gait following, (her womb then rich with my young squire), would imitate, and sail upon the land, to fetch me trifles, and return again, as from a voyage, rich with merchandise.'

I've long loved the Indian miniaturists, and this scene was the perfect vehicle for East to meet West.