

Fig.1 Sketchbook  
Study: *The Morning  
Path, 3.*



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Fig.2 Sketchbook  
Study: *The Morning  
Path, 4.*

# Song of the Path

ROSIE MONTFORD

#4 “How walking and drawing intersect” is an account by walking artist Rosie Montford of her experience of walking and drawing in landscape. Themes of travel, creativity and immersion become interwoven through a meandering walk of sketchbook and practice that a trip to Greece, in order to participate in the Made of Walking 2019 gathering, where this intersection is most keenly felt.

Pausing to draw whilst out walking is shown as a way of locating oneself in the landscape by “losing” oneself in it and yet finding oneself at one in the space. Starting on the Pelion Peninsula and drawing from the actual path ahead; travelling on to Meteora, to walk the old monks’ routes, through woodland to the distant monasteries perched high on the rocks. On Lake Prespes, crossing over to the island of Agios Achillios, a location later shared with participants making a collaborative drawing from the bridge for the walkshop: “Looking for echoes of the body in landscape”. And finally, a walk along a narrow track on a high promontory down to a remote beach, where struggling with how to make the return ascent, a drawing reveals a route. This group of related studies led on to a series of prints and drawings on the theme: ‘The Song of the Path.’

Keywords: pausing; locating; intensity; immersion.

*“Como caminhar e desenhar se cruzam” é um relato da artista ambulante Rosie Montford sobre a sua experiência em caminhar e desenhar na paisagem. Temas de viagem, criatividade e imersão entrelaçam-se através de uma caminhada sinuosa no caderno de rascunhos que emergem de uma viagem à Grécia, a fim de participar do encontro Made of Walking 2019, para que essa interseção seja ainda mais sentida.*

*Fazer uma pausa para desenhar enquanto caminha é mostrado como uma maneira de se localizar a si mesma na paisagem, “perdendo-se” nela e, ainda assim, reencontrando-se no espaço. Começa pela Península de Pelion e segue viagem para Meteora, percorrendo as rotas dos velhos monges através da floresta até aos mosteiros distantes no alto das rochas. No lago Prespes, atravessa a ilha de Agios Achillios, um local posteriormente compartilhado com os participantes do encontro que fazem um desenho colaborativo: “Procurando ecos do corpo na paisagem”. Finalmente, faz uma caminhada por uma trilha estreita num promontório alto até uma praia remota, onde ao lutar para fazer a subida de regresso, um desenho revela uma rota. Este conjunto de estudos relacionados levou a uma série de impressões e desenhos sobre o tema: “A música do caminho”.*

*Palavras-chave: pausa; localizar; intensidade; imersão.*

As a travelling artist, my practice explores the dialogue between walking and drawing. I seek out landscapes from which I can physically combine my disciplines of drawing and printmaking, carrying forward the work drawn on my travels back in my studio.

For me, pausing to draw whilst out walking is a way of locating myself in the landscape and yet finding myself at one in the space. Drawing anchors me to a place that marks me at that particular spot; in order to respond to where I am right now, what I can see, what I feel, what I can hear, smell, touch. I walk with a small haversack, use a Moleskin sketchbook and bring a small tin of watercolours, graphite, Japanese ink stick and water soluble soft leaded pencil. The trick is to bring the minimum but not feel restricted. I want to be able to work fluidly and build an image up in layers, to feel and find my way as I respond to what I am looking at and experiencing.

The path before a person is at once both welcoming and daunting. As Barry Lopez notes “is there no end to the going and the seeing?” (Lopez, 2009, p.s.e)

I use this notion of “going and seeing” here, to explore some of the pathways – both figurative and contemplative – that have inspired, defined and shaped my practice as a walking artist.

Arriving in Greece for the Made of Walking 2019 gathering held in Prespes, it felt imperative to include walking between the experience of the flight and the conference and so I began on the Pelion Peninsula, where the Gods used to spend their summers. Each morning I would skip along the cobbled paths - *kalderimia* – leading from the village, down and up into the hillside, smelling wild sage and brushing dried flowerheads and grasses in the slight breeze. This was an area where there had been centaurs and there are centaur / dragon trees growing here, known locally as *kentavri*. Sometimes there were rough steps hewn out of the rocks underfoot, occasionally a shady patch of pine trees, and above all this amazing sense of quietness, beauty and energy from the earth. For the first time I found myself stopping actually on

Fig.3 Sketchbook  
Study: *Meteora*.



Fig.5 Francis Bacon,  
*Study for Portrait  
of Van Gogh IV*,  
1957. Tate Gallery,  
London.



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the path and making a drawing of the route before me – it felt as if I was incorporating my next breath with my next mark with my next step – it was total immersion: everything together as one.

I travelled to the area of Meteora, especially to walk the old monks' routes: *monopati*, that lead you up to the monasteries that are perched precariously on the high clifftops.

Fig.4 Sketchbook  
Study: *Half tree:  
half deer*.



The paths often led through woods, were narrow, nobody else walking them and I was unsure of the way, yet I felt a terrific sense of peace along that quiet route. I felt protected by the trees and I stopped to draw one, sensing a doe's profile in the line of the dividing branches. Daniel Deardoff has noted "that things happen when we allow ourselves

to enter into the presence of living myth: certain images come to us and cherished beliefs fall away." (Deardoff, 2009, s.e) I saw flailing limbs in the arches of the upper part of the tree and scored eyes in the scars of the trunk. Yes, the tree was dancing and seemed to be inviting me to join in and move too. I think it was saying "don't take yourself so seriously – remember: you are half tree too." (ibidem)

Though the monastery was my destination, it was the experience of walking to it that stayed with me and helped me connect with the sense of ritual and repetition that is part of the daily life of a monk.

Francis Bacon made a series of paintings depicting the lonely but resolute figure of Van Gogh setting out across the landscape to paint, including *Study for Portrait of Van Gogh IV* (1957) influenced by Van Gogh's painting *The Artist on the Road to Tarascon* (1888). Jill Constantine, Head of Arts Council Collections, has noted that Bacon said of the *Study for Portrait of Van Gogh VI* (1957) "that the haunted figure on the road seemed just right at the time, like a phantom of the road, you could say."<sup>1</sup>(enum) This surely is an image that haunts many landscape artists too, as they set out not knowing what might lie ahead in terms of inspiration; the sense of total immersion of the figure and the path is extraordinary.

In the film *At Eternity's Gate* Julian Schnabel continued this theme, noting that it was "definitely an artist's film about an artist"<sup>2</sup>(enum). Together with the cinematographer Benoit Delhomme, they deployed a handheld camera technique to evoke Van Gogh's vulnerability and to contrast the scale and power of landscape with the figure of William Defoe as Van Gogh immersed and overwhelmed in the fields.

Francis Bacon proclaimed: "No, I don't believe in teaching. One learns by looking. That's what you must do, look."<sup>3</sup>(enum)

On my final leg, in the northwest of Greece, I stayed in the area of Prespes, an area of outstanding natural beauty, with a magnificent lake and vastness that is home to migratory birds. I borrowed a child's bike to assist me in going further than I could have walked on a hot day. This gave me the freedom to

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<sup>1</sup> [artscouncilcollection.org.uk/artwork/study-portrait-van-gogh-vi](http://artscouncilcollection.org.uk/artwork/study-portrait-van-gogh-vi)

<sup>2</sup> Julian Schnabel talks *At Eternity's Gate*, <http://www.curzon.com/AtEternity'sGate>

<sup>3</sup> [www.francis-bacon.com](http://www.francis-bacon.com)

Fig.6 Sketchbook  
Study: *Water  
all around me.*



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whizz past fields and suddenly pull up and leaning the bike against a gatepost, climb over and settle amongst the beans growing and make a drawing. I found paths that were made by the regular leading out of sheep or cattle to graze in the fields, and I would catch sight of a shepherd sleeping under a tree. I made my way round to the island of Agios Achillios. To access it, I had to walk across a very beautiful bridge with water all around me, bulrushes growing either side and an intense light shimmering across the lake. I walked across, pausing at times, air each side of me, sometimes walking with my eyes shut, softly stepping along the endless planks, interrupted at intervals with a mesh grid underfoot. I felt as if I was in a Basho haiku: the elements, nature, the island, a slight breeze, Dalmatian pelicans and geese flying low, a conger eel slithering at the edge of the water: it was a magical arrival.

Fig.7 Sketchbook  
Study: *Pausing  
on the bridge.*



I used this particular bridge as the location for: Looking for echoes of the body in landscape, my “walkshop” contribution to Made of Walking

(Greece 2019). I began with an introduction to my sketchbook made as I travelled towards Prespes and I showed two recent prints, one from the myth of Daphne pursued by Apollo and changing into a tree and another of seeing myself as a tree: looking at landscape can feel like making a self-portrait: often I find the more I look at landscape, the more I begin to identify with it as a human body – as my own body.

The myth of Daphne is extraordinary imagining the physical sensation of limbs literally becoming branches and the sinewy forms I cut from lino gave me a strong connection.

A performative element to presenting my work invites participants into the sharing of my practice. It often involves creating a physical piece such as an extended collaborative drawing that flaps and unfurls in the wind, making its presence felt – and alerts us to the fact that we too have a presence here in this landscape. We unfurled a long roll of paper and drew from three locations along the bridge, working next to each other, to record the reeds and bulrushes growing and spreading out either side of us, considering their human scale and the gaps and spaces. Gathering up the drawing we moved on to the next two drawing stations and completed a collaborative drawing 30 metres long!

Finding myself through losing myself is a recurring experience within my practice. Towards the end of the Made of Walking gathering, I followed a narrow track to a high rocky outcrop, on a promontory surrounded by water, where the border intersections of three countries met. I scrambled further round the headland, dipping through ancient juniper woods, which in earlier times had been used for boat building. I slipped and slid down a very narrow path, grasping rough grasses, roots and loosened rocks as I skidded further down. Eventually I landed on a small rocky beach and followed the track round to where a monk’s refuge had been hewn out of rock. I explored and made a few drawings. I stayed visible in case I was unable to make the return climb, knowing that boat trips occasionally visited this particular beach and I would be able to hitch a ride back. I was unsure

Fig.8 *Self becoming Tree*, Linoprint, 2019.



Fig.11 *Dragon Tree with Golden yellow path*, Pelion Peninsula, Linoprint, 2019.



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if it was even going to be possible for me to make the ascent to the distant village I had walked from. I decided to make a drawing of the winding path above me, so that if I fell and my body was recovered, my sketchbook would tell someone how I had been attempting to find a way back up. Yet by pausing to make that drawing, when I came to make the steep climb, I could do it - it was as if the act of drawing had shown me the way, revealing a route and given me courage - it felt an extraordinary gift from the very walk I was making. Once on the top again, I drew an extending tree over that drawing, giving the sense of growth from the bowels of the earth growing right up through my body and supporting me. I felt the connection when I read Martin Shaw (2011) writing "of how sometimes the earth is actually speaking back to us."

Fig.9,10 Photo. Credit Annemie Mestdagh.



I select images I want to make prints from using a printing press in my workroom. It is a quiet, gradual process - usually working with lino that I cut into, making separate colour blocks and experimenting placing them in varying sequences. I print on paper and only in small print runs as I want to keep the sense of something made by hand.

Japanese woodblock printing is a more delicate printing technique and the absorption of water based printing inks produces a much softer, more hesitant image that I like to think of relating to haiku.

I have been working on a series of prints and drawings on the theme: "The Song of the Path" inspired by paths that resonate with my body: a golden yellow path like a journey through my intestines; threadlike paths weaving an angular form down a hillside; a drifting tidal path.

I have started to experiment with etching lino and by using this as a layer for some of the colour separations I find the freer textural marks give a more flowing translation of a drawing and remind me of paths that sing out of the hillside itself.

This summer I have worked on layered woodblock prints depicting woods I cycled past. In these restrictive times, enjoying the wonderful sense of freedom that being out on my bike resulted in, I stopped to draw, complemented by a cycle helmet rather than a straw hat as, like others, I am having to rediscover a localised landscape instead.

Adrienne Rich in her poem *Plaza Street* and *Flatbrush* captures perfectly the sense of reward from waiting, seeing and responding: The painter taking her moment / - a rift in the clouds - / and pulling it out. (Rich, 1999, s.e).

I have had to be resourceful, resolute and disciplined to try and open my eyes afresh to where I live. Exploring the path both figuratively and metaphorically, the artist's eye is continuously "pulling it out", enabling each landscape - whether newly discovered or familiar with each step - to be experienced anew.

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Fig.12 *Dragon Tree with Golden yellow path*, Pelion Peninsula, Linoprint, 2019.



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Fig.13 *Tidal Path*, Linoprint, 2020.

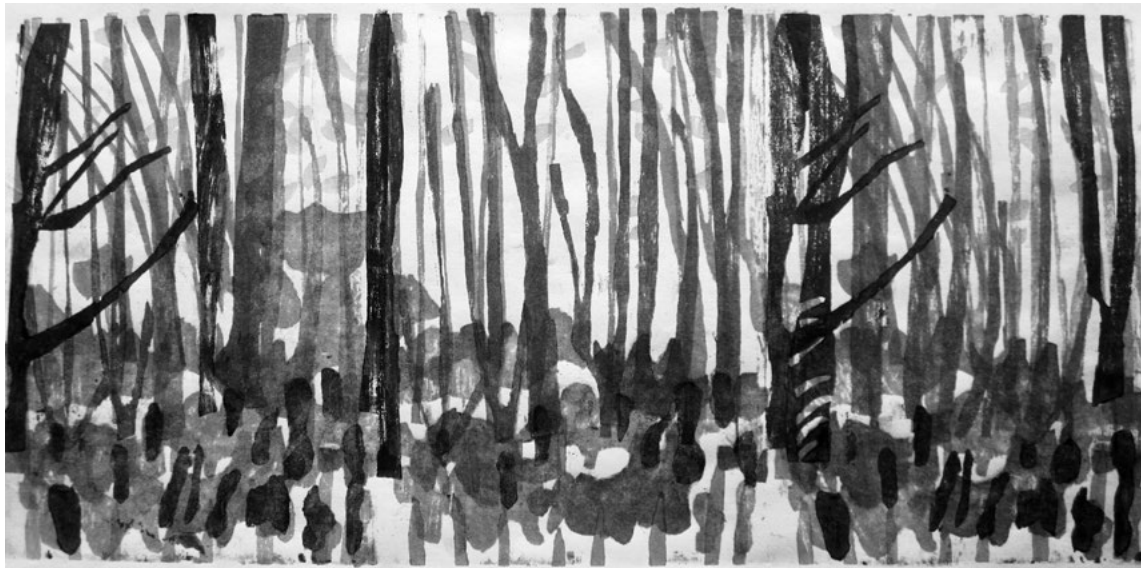


Fig.14 *The Morning Path*, Linoprint, 2019.

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I studied Fine Arts at *Camberwell College, University of the Arts, London*, the philosophy of learning through making staying with me. My practice explores the dialogue between walking and drawing, seeking out landscapes from which I can physically combine disciplines as I work across drawing, printmaking and book making.