

ARUSHA

GALLERY

Northern Shore – Gail Harvey

A shore is an in-between. It is not sea, nor solid land, but somewhere in flux. A shore is a place at which the sea laps, licking rocks repeatedly until they crumble under ceaseless caresses. Which makes the sea sound romantic, the sand its lover. While it can be forgiving, carrying one's weight so you finally float, it too can devour and destroy: devastate. Somehow it is not to be trusted, this sea of many faces. Or maybe that's how love is, if you sink in.

The shore is a space of uncertainty; it never quite knows how it's going to be treated. Poet Norman MacCaig said of the sea that it 'shifts, breathes, can be so poised but never quite settles into resolution'. So if the sea is breathing, what is the shore? The soft tissue of lungs; a container, making space to be filled; an aging body, mutable with time. And some people say that it's dying. And I think that it's true that it's dying.

The Shetland Islands are far away – far away if you're not there. A subarctic archipelago. They divide the Atlantic Ocean to the west and the North Sea to the east, so they too are an in-between. They are their own shore. To me they seem so cold. I imagine how the wind might burn my skin if I stand on their cliffs and stare out to sea, the rain trying its best to soothe, but what a beating.

The Scottish painter Gail Harvey lives there, her house on a hillside: 'and I look out over the broad sweep of landscape and sea.' Her painting *Northern Shore* speaks of her life there, a life that is so close to the elements, to in-between-ness. She says, 'it's a bit like an open stage, which the light and weather moves across.' A place where performers are not people but climate patterns, which endure or erode.

Her sky is slate grey, and it hangs still above a tumult of colour. This sea is fighting itself; quickly coming out in velvety bruises of deep purple and greens beginning to yellow. Spurts of blood smear, slowly browning. The blues are trying to stay positive, although they know it's a loosing battle. White froths to lift a suffocating cerulean and verdigris is being carried by the wind. Aquamarines and indigos tussle. The sweeps of seashell pink suggest a sunset somewhere beyond, lilac reflecting in waters too caught up to notice.

The paint is energised: disorderly and uninhibited. There are no edges, though there is a contrasting depth and shallowness of colour, which makes sections seem solid, or otherwise flyaway – dissolving. It is thick and textured, elsewhere milky – a creamy sea of many colours.

As you may sense, something in me is afraid of the sea. When the waves begin to rise and swell, I know they will break. I've seen it; I've felt it. I remember being underneath, my body spun so that up was down and down was up and the surface wouldn't surface. The washing machine door won't open, and the drum is filling with sand and soap, and

I'm spinning around without air, only froth, and grit is grazing my skin. My soft lungs relent and breathe in only water.

Colour is consuming me and everything is dark. Through translucent skin, blood looks blue. Rivulets flow inside. Perhaps the sea wants to plug into our veins so that somehow we are flowing as one. I am dissolving and becoming water, my edges softened. I am no longer spinning but back in the womb, where everything is fluid. I am being nourished rather than ravished. I am my mother and my mother is me and together we are a body of liquid.

Louisa Elderton