



Gallery Newsletter July 2015 Hello!

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Interview with Les Bates

Can you tell us a bit about yourself? I was born in Leamington Spa (1954), 'leafy Warwickshire'. From very early on I was an avid book reader and interested in the natural world. I began to take photographs and write from about 14 years of age, pre-digital, processing photographs in a cupboard and printing my writings on a gestetna printing machine, or straight off the typewriter. I did a weekend butchers round to pay for a typewriter, books, records, cameras and film.

I first came to Scotland in 1971, hitchhiking up the motorways to the Isle of Rum to do work experience. I did a Land Use History of Rum for the Nature Conservancy Council in 1975-76 photographing and surveying any signs of past human activity on the island. All the photographs were taken with an Olympus trip camera and are now archived by the Royal Commission for Ancient Monuments, Edinburgh. I had my first permanent home in Scotland at the 'Torran Ruadh', ghillies bothy at Inchnadamph, Sutherland from 1979 onwards.

Prior to moving to Torridon in 2008, I lived & worked in Oxford (Blackwells, Thorntons), Paris (Shakespeare and Company), Rum, Edinburgh, Assynt, Coigach and Moniack, Inverness shire; always working for experiences to add to life's rich tapestry.



Image: Ponies In Hill Mist, Glas Bheinn, Assynt 1979



Image: Les Bates at the community orchard he designed and planted in Beaulieu

How did you first become interested in photography? Can you also tell us a bit about your style?

This began with simple cameras and wanting to capture images of natural or historical subjects, but always quirky individual objects too. I was influenced more by painters than photographers, Manet, Courbet, Van Gogh, Samuel Palmer, the Pre-Raphaelites and works in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. My first SLR cameras were Zeniths and Practicas enjoyed being able to look down through the lens and adjust the aperture to the available light working with various speeds of 35mm film. The 'seeing eye'. I was keen on capturing 'Images', painting which I did a little of too is a 3D medium, photography is flatter so you have to work with depth of field, shadows and light to bring the photograph alive.

What camera(s) do you use? I currently use a Canon 500D digital SLR and a small Samsung WB250F camera, taking photos and short digital films on my gardening round from Diabaig to Fasaig. I am creating a video/ still show from this material called *'Elemental.....a year in Torridon'* to show at the Torridon Community Centre, during the Torridon Mountain and Sea Festival.



Image: Weather Systems, Torridon

You have a number of published poetry books and writings, can you tell us about this side of your creative nature? I began to exhibit in small galleries, and sold framed and mounted photographs and gave readings of my writings. In 1971 I was lyric/song writing for a number of bands in the Midlands, but primarily for the band Barnabus who recorded a double album containing ten or so of my songs. This added a sound dimension to the creation of images. My writing was published in small literary magazines and some natural history journals.

Highlights of my work in Scotland were a one man show at the Eden Court Theatre, Inverness on publication of my 3rd collection of poetry, *'Quiet Barrier'*. This ran for a full month with my photographic images shown throughout the theatres public areas. Also my work with community land and growing in Scotland culminated in the launch of the Community Woodland Association at the Scottish Parliament with other founding directors in 2003.

Are you working on a project at the moment? In my writing and photography, I try to relate what is out there in the natural world and try to capture the poetry of what I feel, see and hear. Torridon provides me with wonderful inspiration for this. I am currently working round the themes of Celtic being and culture through a study of Beccan, a poet who lived at Papadil on Rum, and was a contemporary of Columba. Also thoughts and research around the working of the land around Torridon, the summer shielings, inbye land for a work of poetry and photography, *'Lios Mor , Lios Beag'*.



Image: Orange croatal on wormed wood

Les's Work is on display at the Loch Torridon Centre Gallery. His website can be found here www.croft7.com

enjoyed her time at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and graduated in Drawing and Painting. Lys went on to teach art in