

Art Pilgrim



Art school, travel, a degree in Indian art and philosophy, a spell in academia as a researcher critiquing the shit out of educational research using complexity theory... none of it answered my questions about how and why to make art.

Website edition: Paris

POETS, MUSICIANS, WRITERS, SINGERS, ARTISTS, SHADOW PLAY...

There's something quite disturbing about trying to write about my recent experience of five days in Paris. It feels a bit like deciding to paint a landscape and then submitting it to a conventional gallery; suddenly I would be in the thing that I've never wanted to be part of - 'the art world', where a person's creative output is judged against the entire history of European art, and entangled in the politics of who knows who and who has the right

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TASTING THE WINE OF MONTMARTRE



Jules Depaquit, (1869-1924), Dégustation du vin de Montmartre

You'd think by now I would have a cast-iron

See Page 8



Chats et Lunes (detail), about 1885, by Théophile-Alexandre Steinlin (1859-1923).

PARIS EATS ME FOR BREAKFAST

The great thing about having had a crap early education and then spending 25 years studying India, China and Japan is that everything closer to home is now brand new.

Two weeks ago I took a train from Scotland to Paris, where I had been only once before. I know nothing about France. While you guys were digesting Camus, discussing Rimbaud, deep in your attempt at Proust, I was reading about Alexandra David-Neel, a Victorian woman who disguised herself as a man and spent many years travelling inside Tibet. When you were reading about Aristotle and Heraclitus, I was lost in Paul Brunton's 'A Search in Secret India', and trying to digest a history of modern Japan.

Continued on Page 2



Alexandra David-Neel in Tibet, 1933

I could scarcely believe my eyes.
Paris in the real.



We booked an airbnb in Montmartre, completely oblivious to the fact that it was *the* place for artists at the turn of the 20th century; Renoir, Bernard, Dufy, Valedon, Modigliani, Monet, Degas, Derain, Toulouse-Lautrec, Mondrian, Picasso, Pissaro,

Van Gogh, the list goes on. Five minutes walk from the Moulin Rouge.



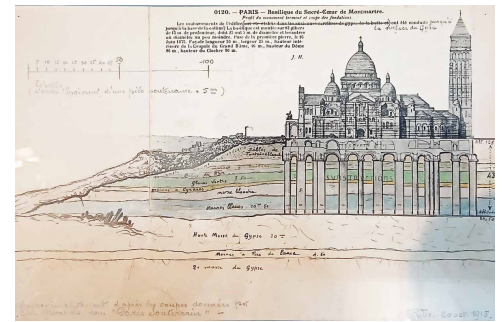
After getting stuck in the Gare du Nord for an hour and a half (do not try to use the transport app) we were found and escorted back to this cute apartment, above a piano shop and otherwise completely quiet, miraculously.



Warm air, figs.



A short walk to the extraordinary Basilique de Sacré Coeur, built on a hill that had been mined for gypsum (all that plaster of Paris) so had to be well supported from the underneath...

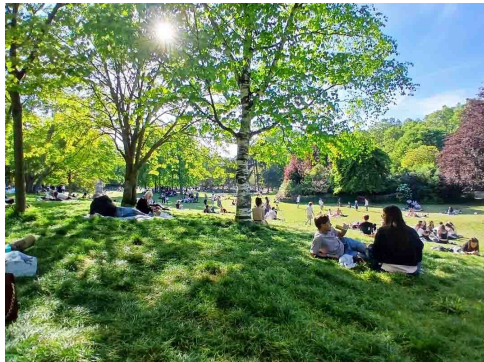




The whole thing later rendered with fearsome exactitude by yours truly.



The park felt like sitting in the middle of *le déjeuner sur l'herbe*.¹



The Musée De Montmartre was the first museum I could ever remember being in² that wasn't full of stolen, context-free, misrepresented objects. It seemed to simply be a museum of the history of a certain aspect of a particular locality.



I'll tell you more about it next time. Maybe. Or perhaps I'll be sucked in to the story of the Art Nouveau entrances to the Metro. Or maybe the exhibition of work by two painters I had never heard of, Otto and Adya Van Rees. Or make a plea to reinstate *Le Chat Noir*. Honestly, I don't know. I'm still reeling.

Footnotes:

1. A painting by Edouard Manet.

2. Apart from the Palestinian Museum in Edinburgh, where I was confused about its status as either a museum or a gallery.

POETS, MUSICIANS, WRITERS, SINGERS, ARTISTS, SHADOW PLAY...



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 1876, *Bal du moulin de la Galette*

There's something quite disturbing about trying to write about my recent experience of five days in Paris. It feels a bit like deciding to paint a landscape and then submitting it to a conventional gallery; suddenly I would be in the thing that I've never wanted to be part of - 'the art world', where a person's creative output is judged against the entire history of European art, and entangled in the politics of who knows who and who has the right connections/pedigree.

How can I write about an area of Paris which I knew nothing about, but which is likely to be well-known to many of my potential readers; about the work I saw there which was by artists who everyone has studied in their journey through European art history? But write I will, because it's never been my intention to teach or inform, only to explore and to write about the things I find.



I hadn't thought in depth about the Impressionists since my art A level. I didn't prepare myself in any way for this trip, and had ended up in Montmartre quite by chance. Totally overwhelmed by the Paris-ness of Paris, when our host told us that the museum was within walking distance, we decided to take a look.

The Musée De Montmartre is located in a building which was occupied by numerous artists at the turn of the 20th century, including Renoir, Bernard, Dufy, Valedon and Utrillo. My first stop was its glorious and peaceful garden, which felt like a holy miracle, given that the museum is about three minutes walk from the Basilique de Sacré Coeur and the tourist hordes.



Am I really going to tell you about my slice of Quiche Lorraine? But for the April 2026 experience of a naive in Paris - the quiche was central (of course I have no picture of it, who on *earth* takes pictures of their food...?). Accustomed to the cold slabs of undercooked pastry topped with a thin layer of watery egg which are the norm here in Scotland, what arrived was monstrous. Three inches high. I swear. Crisp, buttery pastry, deep Indian yellow egg, multiple layers of top quality ham. This was art.



Memory of a Quiche Lorraine

As I was eating, I noticed a swing, long ropes from a high tree, which women kept stopping at and climbing onto to have their picture taken. I wish I'd taken their pictures myself now; each person arranging themselves

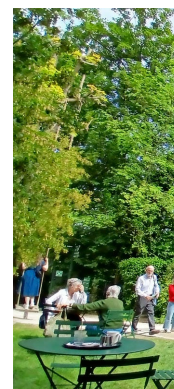
differently, some sitting, some standing, some coy, some laughing, some serious. I understood that this was no ordinary swing.



Pierre-August Renoir, 1876, La Balançoire

It turned out to be the very swing that Renoir painted in the summer of 1876 for La Balançoire.

If you look to the left of my picture you can just see it (on a spring, for health and safety...).



I don't know what to say about physically being in the places where things like this happened. Perhaps it's an example of ritual time, where suddenly the fabrication of a linear past disappears, and all that remains is a timeless now which contains everything that has ever happened in that place, all at once¹.

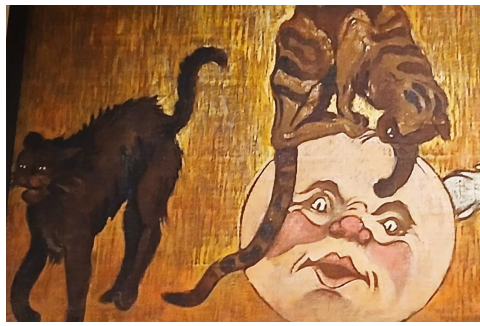
Eventually I came out of my quiche-fugue, and went into the museum.

The first thing I noticed were cats. Above the entrance, and then, in the first room, these two paintings.



These images resonated in a way that I can't describe. There's a quality to art made in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century for me. It's something that I can't put my finger on, which makes me wonder whether there's something inherent in paintings that were breaking new cultural ground at the time that they were made. Is that even possible? Or is it something more prosaic like the quality of the paper or canvas, or the more natural pigments that were used at that time, or the fact that there was no acrylic paint, only oils?

I was mesmerised by the texture of the canvas, much rougher than you would see now, and the way that the yellow ochre and alizarin crimson were smeared across it so thinly in places that you could see the grain coming through. The colour was gorgeous.



The cats were wild.



*Chats et Lunes, about 1885, by
Théophile-Alexandre Steinlin (1859-
1923)*

'This presentation of a variety of cats on a neutral background related to Steinlen's numerous illustrations in 1884-85 for the Chat Noir journal. The frieze is a remarkable early painting by Steinlen what was lost for over a century. Cats play a dominant role in Steinlen's art: his illustrations, posters, prints, paintings and sculptures, all pay homage to the feline personification of human traits. Steinlen's home in

Montmartre at 58 rue Caulaincourt was filled with cats to the point that it was nicknamed Cat's Cottage'

Museum text

I learned that the Chat Noir was 'the first modern cabaret', in the sense of people sitting drinking at tables while being entertained by a variety show on stage. The black cat was apparently an artistic reference to Paris, where 'stray and meowing cats roamed especially at night'.

Founded by Rodolphe Salis in 1881, in a small space of two narrow rooms, one behind the other, the first Chat Noir barely held thirty of the artists, writers and musicians who were its clientele.

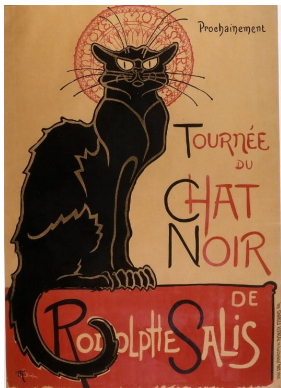
In 1982, Salis began promoting the cabaret with Le Chat Noir journal: 'The Chat Noir is the most extraordinary cabaret in the world. You rub shoulders with the most famous men of Paris, meeting there with foreigners from every country in the globe... It's the greatest success of the age! Come on in!! Come on in!!'

Museum text

Three and a half years later it moved to a larger venue, attracting poets and singers, becoming the birthplace of a short-lived movement known as *Les Arts Incohérents* (an early precursor of Dada), and branching out into shadow play and comic monologues.

*Image missing here in this print version
but you can see it in the previous article*

Eventually the cabaret was responsible for renewing the popularity of the shadow play in France, developing an innovative technique using zinc silhouettes:



Advertised by this poster, the shadow play toured France, Tunis,

Algeria and Belgium.



Before leaving the room with the cats and the zinc shadow play scenes, I want to mention an extraordinary painting which was displayed between two shadow play paintings (the first one is in the previous article).



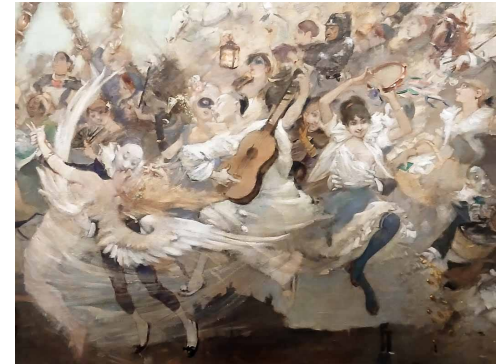
This is 'Parce Domine, Parce Populo Tuo' (Spare Lord, spare your people') by Adolphe-Leon Willette, 1857-1926.



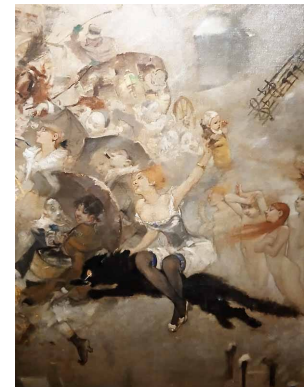
'A work created for the Chat Noir cabaret, the Parce Domine, Parce Populo Tuo is a cry of distress and

terror issued forth toward God by a suffering people. The atmosphere created by the work and its muted colours help to relate the scene. A farandole cascades down from Montmartre. 'At the head of the retinue Pierrot commits suicide'. Taken from a play on words on the liturgy of words, this macabre dance can be seen as an allegory of death and the futility of life and its frivolous pleasures'.

Museum text



A Pierrot dancing with a white-winged woman, another playing a guitar with wild abandon, a woman with tambourine dancing her stockings off.



A woman riding a black cat...



...with a shocked-looking Pierrot trapped below her in a mayhem of women, someone smoking above his head.



Multiple angst-ridden Pierrots, including the one at the front with a pistol (sorry, didn't seem to include that in my closeup), who's being assaulted

by a black-winged fairy, presumably death.



Some rather young-looking naked woman gazing from the sidelines.



And above them all, a line of dancing ballerinas slowly dissolving towards a huge skull.

Here's an interpretation from one internet source:

Willette painted the scene of Pierrot's suicide and his funeral procession of revelers for a famous cabaret on the Parisian hill of Montmartre, Le Chat Noir (the Black Cat). The painting hung there as a prompt and a notice to its patrons: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." (Isaiah: 22:13) Look closely at Willette's painting and you'll see many renditions of Pierrot (in

the foreground, right to left) with his signature skullcap and pale face: as a lad tossing away money, lifting a dancing girl, playing music, romancing a beautiful angel, tripping over himself with empty pockets, being relieved of his soul by a black-clad angel with dark wings, and finally, next to the lead nun carrying the cross, making his ascension to heaven. The painting is his biography.

Over the centuries, Pierrot's constellation of incarnations in theater and art—from the bungling buffoon to the lonely sufferer whose only true friend is the moon—made him Everyman: the doomed innocent blessed and burdened with the follies, foibles, and fatal flaw of being human'.

Blowback Trilogy



Adolphe-Leon Willette, Pierrot et une femme sur une colonne, 1885

Apparently the same artist also designed the Moulin Rouge.

There's so much more that could be explored here, but I'm going to end with the original sign for Le Chat Noir, which was apparently also designed by Adolphe Willette.



The museum has a later sign on display which was created by Caran D'Ache in 1882, based on Willette's original (with reflections!).



It's all impossibly romantic and no doubt the reality of this heady time was

far from the fantasy we create about it now.



But I do love the idea of a place like this where all the arts came together; where painters made posters as well as oil-paintings, and where music and literature and art and dance were in riotous conversation with each other.



Should we revive Le Chat Noir?

Footnotes:

1. For a big discussion of different ways of conceptualising time, see my previous essays on this topic. (August-September, 2025)

TASTING THE WINE OF MONTMARTRE



Jules Depaquit, (1869-1924), Dégustation du vin de Montmartre

You'd think by now I would have a cast-iron system for making sure that everything I photographed in a gallery or museum could be linked to its title and its creator. Not so. However hard I try, I always end up confused about the origin of at least some of the paintings.

It happened again at the Musée de Montmartre. I was floating around in such a cloud of awe that all I could barely take in the images themselves. So today I'm going to take you on a tour of a riot of beautiful images, without being able to tell you exactly what they all are.

After the cats, first there were the posters. They felt familiar. Anyone who was a teenager in the 70s is well-versed in Art Nouveau; we all had Toulouse-Lautrec and Mucha posters, pinned, in my case, onto the burnt cork walls of my bedroom. But now I was in the birthplace of it all, looking at original posters, and images that I'd never seen before. I learnt that colour lithography was developed during this period, and that in the excitement of both new technical possibilities and the wildness of the cabaret traditional divisions between painting, printing, and design began to break down.



Léonce Burret, (1866-1915), Lire le Chat Noir, 1886



Eugène Ogé (1861-1936), La Lanterne, 1902



Jules-Alexandre Grün (1868-1938), Guide de l'étranger à Montmartre, 1900

They were familiar, but in their detail and their quality, not familiar at all.



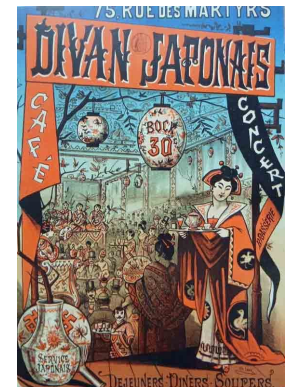
Anonymous, 1913

We can say now that we're being romantic about this period, but the wild joyousness of it all is unmistakable.



Jules-Alexandre Grün (1868-1938), Bal Tabarin, 1904

Then there was the artistic 'discovery' of the colour and design of Japan, which influenced many painters at that time (the Impressionists, and Van Gogh in particular). This poster was advertising a Japan-themed cafe-concert venue.



Charles Levy, Divan Japonais, 1885

Egypt was also a source of exotic novelty.



Lost the details for this one

Racism? Certainly Orientalism. I'm not going to go into it, but I see it.



Jules-Alexandre Grün (1868-1938), *Décadent's Concert*, 1893

No shame in decadence!
Nor affluence, it seems...

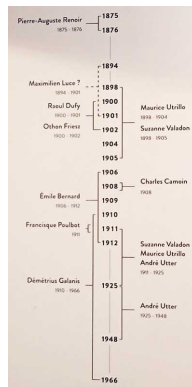


Lost this one I'm afraid...

Then came the painters. I'm a person who can't abide people being starstruck by celebrity (for god's sake they're just humans beings like you and me) but I have to admit to being a wee bit affected by what came next.

THE ARTISTS WHO LIVED AT 12-14, RUE CORTOT

The building at 12-14, Rue Cortot—now home to the Musée de Montmartre—was a studio block for painters in the second half of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century. During this period, it was occupied by a succession of artists who are now considered major figures in the history of modern art: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Maximilien Luce, Raoul Dufy, Othon Friesz, Charles Camoin, Émile Bernard, Francisque Poulbot, Démétrius Galanis, and also the 'wicked trinity'—Suzanne Valadon, André Utter, and Maurice Utrillo. More than just living there, they often made drawings and paintings of the building and its gardens, which became subjects for their innovative formal experiments. Montmartre became the new capital of the arts at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century; hence, these studios were ideally located in the heart of this artistic hub. Many artists of all types settled there, met other artists, and exchanged ideas in a context of sharing and artistic emulation. All the works shown here were produced by these famous inhabitants, whose studios became truly legendary.



PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR (1841-1919)

1. *Nature morte, soupière et deux pommes*, vers 1900

Huile sur toile

Collection particulière

2. *Deux femmes au chapeau*, non daté

Fusain et estompe sur papier

Collection particulière

3 et 4. *Pages de l'album « Douze lithographies originales »* :

Ambroise Vollard et *Étude pour femme nue assise*, 1904-1905

Épreuves sur vélin blanc

Éditeur Ambroise Vollard, 1919

Musée de Montmartre, collection Le Vieux Montmartre

Don Indivision Petiet, 2023



RAOUL DUFY (1877-1953)

Ensemble des *Quatre Bois*, 1910-1911

La Chasse, La Danse, L'Amour, La Pêche

Bois gravé, épreuves sur chine volant au japon, tirages de 100

exemplaires

Musée de Montmartre, collection Le Vieux Montmartre

Don Indivision Petiet, 2023

Arrivé en 1899 à Paris, Raoul Dufy est élève de l'École nationale des Beaux-arts et suit les cours de Léon Bonnat. L'année suivante, il s'installe pour quelques mois au 12, rue Cortot où il partage un atelier avec son ami Othon Friesz rencontré au Havre, leur ville natale. Séduit par Luce, Calme et Volupté de Matisse (Paris, MNAM-Centre Pompidou) au Salon d'Automne en 1905 et marqué par les œuvres de Cézanne à partir de 1906, Dufy fait siennes la liberté créatrice et les couleurs fauves tout en maintenant l'importance du dessin, dissocié de la couleur. Dufy revient s'établir durablement à Montmartre à partir de 1911, au 5, impasse Guélma.

Raoul Dufy, who came to Paris in 1899, was a student at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts and entered Léon Bonnat's studio. The following year, he moved into 12, Rue Cortot for several months, where he shared a studio with his friend Othon Friesz, whom he met at Le Havre, their native city. Captivated by Matisse's *Luce, Calme et Volupté* ('Luxury, Calm, and Pleasure', Paris, MNAM-Centre Pompidou) at the Salon d'Automne in 1905 and influenced by the works of Cézanne as of 1906, Dufy adapted the creative freedom and the bright Fauve colours, while focusing on and dissociating line from colour. Dufy returned to live permanently in Montmartre as of 1911, at 5, Impasse Guélma.

By now my head was spinning, and my capacity to keep track of labels in relation to paintings began to go downhill fast.

HENRI DE TOULOUSE-LAUTREC (1864-1901)

Aristide Bruant au Mirliton, 1893

Affiche lithographique en couleurs sur papier entoilé
Musée de Montmartre, collection Le Vieux Montmartre

THÉOPHILE ALEXANDRE STEINLEN (1859-1923)

Chez Bruant, "Monsieur Alexandre", 1891

Crayon et gouache sur papier
Weisman & Michel Collection

CANDIDO ARAGONEZ DE FARIA (1849-1911)

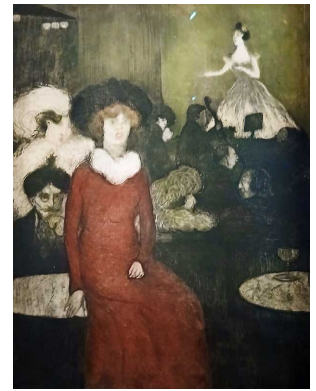
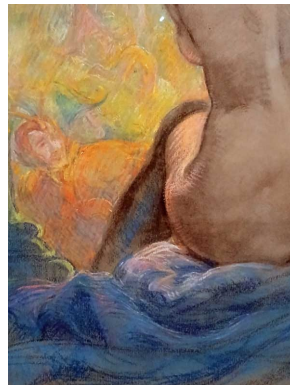
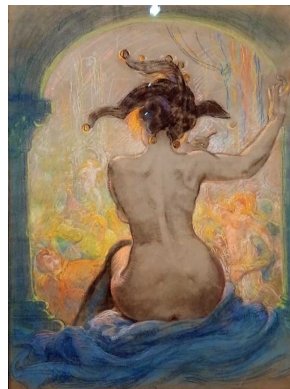
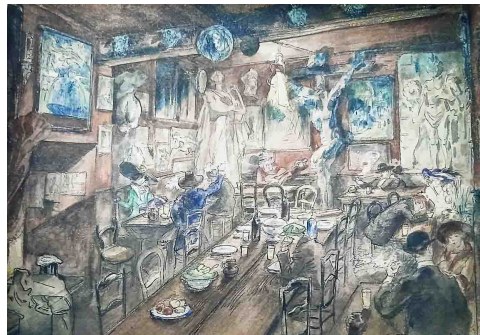
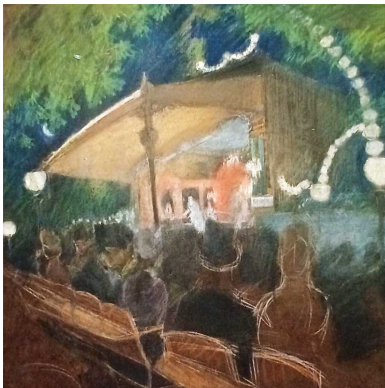
Portrait de "Monsieur Alexandre", 1890

Graphite, lavis, aquarelle et gouache sur papier
Musée de Montmartre, collection Le Vieux Montmartre



In 1885, Aristide Bruant opened his cabaret, Le Mirliton, modelled after the Chat Noir, where he gained attention by greeting the audience with his famous humorous insults. His success was ensured thanks to his songs, inspired by popular slang-based folk songs and naturalistic texts, as well as the dissemination of his image through posters. "Monsieur Alexandre" – nickname of Alexandre Leclerc – was among the many followers of Bruant, presenting himself as his pupil. Recognizable by his small glasses, he was employed at the Mirliton as a singer and gave performances heavily inspired by those of his master. In 1896, he opened his own cabaret, Le Bruyant Alexandre, but was sued and convicted for unfair competition due to the similarity with Bruant's style and image.

For the next images I lost track completely, but they're all about being inside different cabaret venues.



I am in awe of le cabaret.



Articles included in your edition of the Substack Print:

<https://tamsinhaggis.substack.com/p/paris-eats-me-for-breakfast?r=1b6gdj>

<https://tamsinhaggis.substack.com/p/poets-musicians-writers-singers-artists?r=1b6gdj>

<https://tamsinhaggis.substack.com/p/tasting-the-wine-of-montmartre?r=1b6gdj>

Apologies for the odd bit of wonkiness in this print version. The programme that pulls the articles off Substack sometimes can't cope and I have to adjust manually - hence the little extra paragraphs or images that sometimes appear at the bottom of the right hand column.

About Art Pilgrim

Follow the adventures of Art Pilgrim as she leaves art school perplexed, becomes a teacher, and journeys onwards to Italy, North India, and the distant mountains of a Tokyo skyline, before studying Indian art, philosophy, and Sanskrit. Dive with her into complexity theory as an approach to unpicking models of adult learning, then follow her out of academia and back into the world of colour and paint. Watch her struggle to reconnect to her art as she draws on biology, fractals, and the sculptures of ancient India as sources for her painting. Finally, arrive with her back into the Edinburgh present and see what happens next.



This is a Substack Newsletter published every week by Tamsin Haggis at tamsinhaggis.substack.com. Most recent newsletters have an audio version.

There are currently more than eighty essays on Substack. The personal story (which, though personal, takes in Indian and Chinese art, complexity theory and teaching) runs from October, 2024 to June, 2025. After that, they cover a range of topics which are stimulated by visiting Edinburgh galleries and reflecting on what I find there. There's a seven-part series, for example, on Context and Time, which arose after my first visit to the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art. Check me out!

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