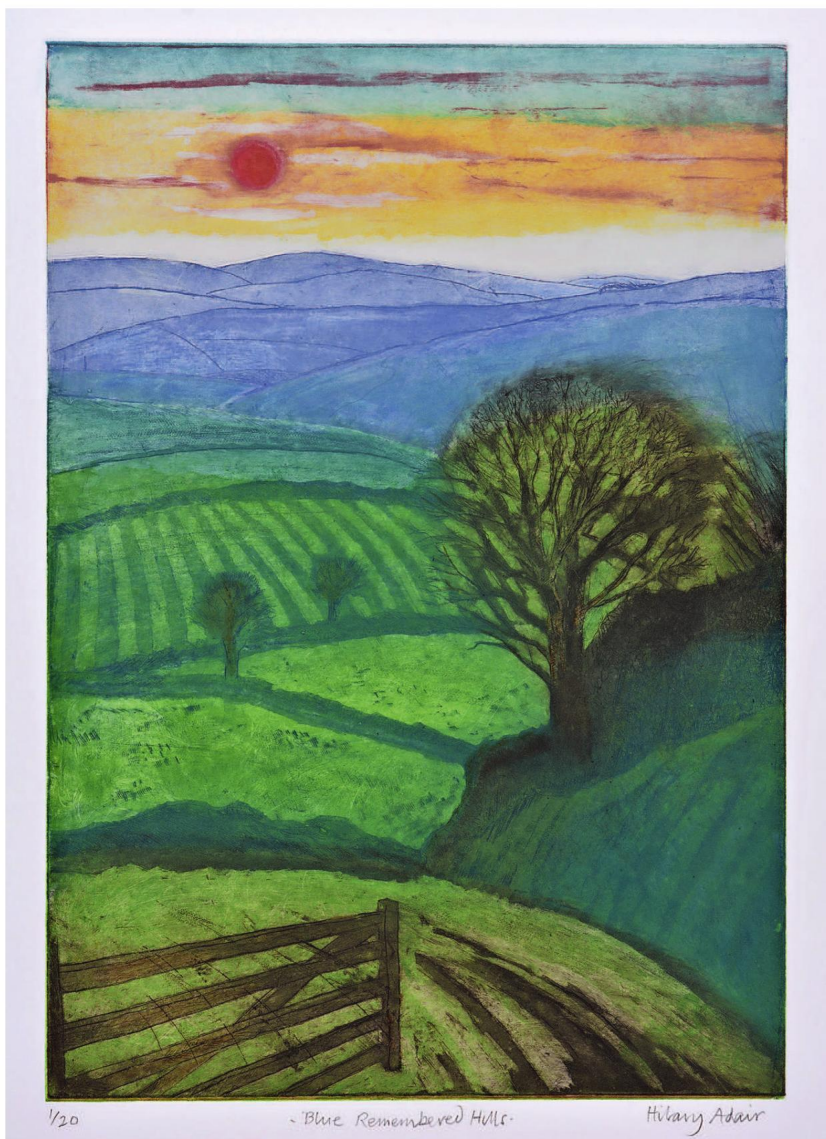


From Athens to Exmoor

When Hilary Adair moved from Athens to Exmoor she was surprised by how similar the two places really were, she tells TIM SAUNDERS



'Blue Remembered Hills'

It was more than 30 years ago that Hilary put her roots down in the county, following a visit to her mother in Winsford, near Dulverton. "This convinced us to move back to England and give our two small children an Exmoor upbringing," she says.

Hilary met her husband Julian at art school and then relocated to Greece where they lived for 11 years. She had her first solo exhibition there, at the British Council in Athens, which was 'a virtual sell out'. The couple's two sons were born there and leaving her life in Greece with its islands and small villages was a wrench for Hilary, but the similarities she discovered in Winsford softened the transition. "The stunning landscape, the kindness of local people, the powerful cloudy cider, an ancient historical context, sheep grazing on moorland, a fete on a specific summer day, church bells and a pub – life is very much the same here.

"The impact of Greece is evident throughout the Western world and to my delight there are many temples, urns and statuary in formal gardens throughout Somerset. There is even a rather perfect Temple of Harmony near Taunton, which has been a source of inspiration, as has the little Doric temple at Hestercombe."

Finding a cottage in Winsford, the couple borrowed some money to build a studio and lived there for nearly 30 years. Hilary's painting style changed.

She stopped using acrylic paints better suited for flat areas of colour and the strong light of the Mediterranean. “I started using oils because the softer light on Exmoor was better expressed using this medium.”

In 1991 Hilary was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Painter-Printmakers at the Bankside Gallery in London. Her paintings and prints have been widely exhibited and are in many public and private collections.

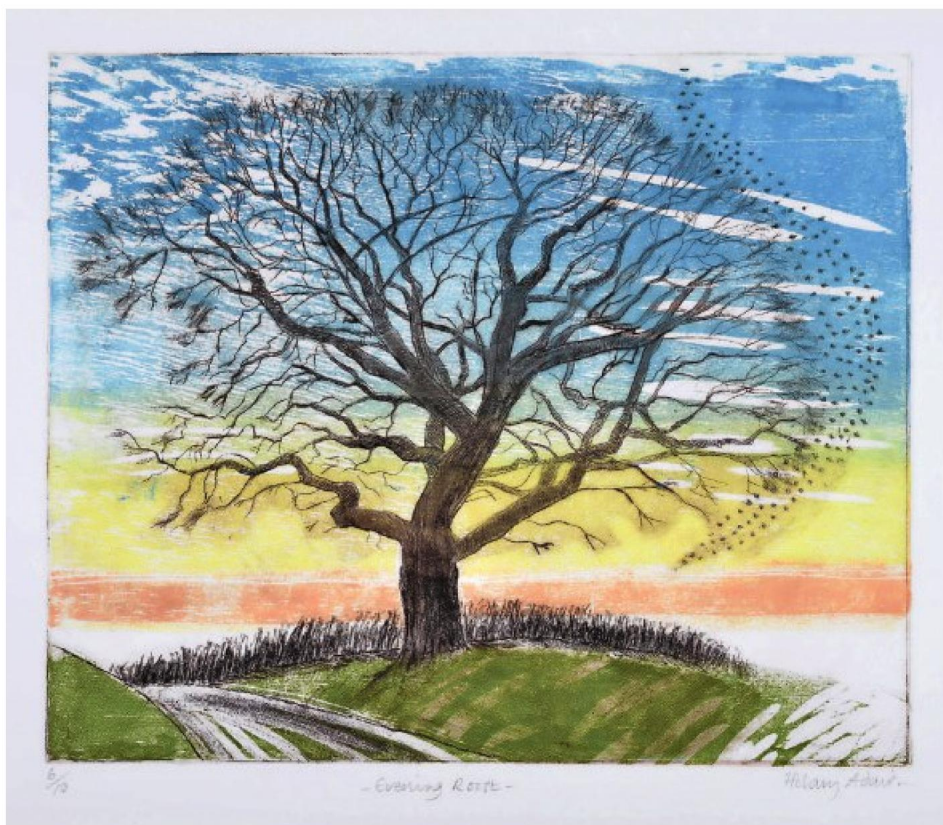
Twenty years later Hilary and her family moved to a house in Minehead. The old summerhouse in the garden has now been transformed into Hilary’s studio where she has her etching press and all the equipment needed for painting and printmaking. “With a view over the sea and the moor, I have the best of both worlds. Windows are a theme that prevail in my work and I particularly like the one in my studio.”

Hilary knew from a young age that she wanted to be an artist. “It was the age of student grants. I spent five precious years finding out about art and life at Brighton College of Art and St. Martin’s School of Art in London, free of debt, for which I will always be grateful.”

After leaving college Hilary was offered a part-time job as visiting lecturer at various art colleges, which gave her the time to continue with her own work. “When I felt ready I exhibited my paintings wherever there was a good opportunity, including within the colleges where I was teaching. I was young and didn’t need much money to survive, feeling that a sale meant I had bought time, in order that I could do another painting. Exhibiting as much as I could, some works sold and others didn’t but I tried not to compromise over subject matter. I only accepted commissions if I thought I could carry them out well and this continues to be my attitude.

“I keep loyal to my taste and instinct and believe in what I do, keeping prices at what I consider to be a reasonable sum. If a collector can’t afford to buy at the viewing, and I trust them, I suggest they pay me in monthly instalments.”

She went on to exhibit with the Royal Academy in its summer



'Evening Roost', an etching by Hilary

show and at the London Print Fair.

“The RA sold well for me,” recalls Hilary, whose commissions have included one for four editions of large etchings for the P & O ship, Aurora.

“Best of all is when the commission is for a private space by someone who likes what I do and lets me get on with it. Success is when I manage to produce a work that I can look at with pleasure and no regrets.”

An early riser, Hilary makes sure that she is in her studio by 9am each day. “I decide what to do, sometimes framing, finishing all those pictures that are not resolved and planning ideas for the future. I listen to classical music, check through the prints I have made, write necessary letters, phone friends and then start making art. In the winter months I do my printmaking, which for me is an energetic activity, keeping me warm. In the spring and summer months, I paint. I prefer to work in natural light and look forward to those lovely sunlit evenings in June and July.”

Hilary gathers her subjects and

draws, makes colour notes, plays with ideas and develops some of them into prints, watercolours on paper and paintings on canvas. Concentrating on landscape, gardens, interiors and Greece her ideas are expressed using sketches, drawings, acrylics and oil paint. “I do get obsessed with some ideas and produce a series of linked images. Some ideas spring from poems. For these I have used both etching techniques and relief linocuts. The medium of etching can be rich but subtle and intimate with the potential for lovely line, texture and tonality, but it does require patience and persistence to resolve the image - and lots of time.”

Her paintings are more direct. “I feel the contrast between the two ways of image-making are similar to writing a novel as distinct from poems.

“So, my time is divided into paint/print in roughly equal measures. The admin for exhibiting is very time consuming, as are all those hours getting stuck, wondering how to solve a dilemma, waiting for a Eureka moment.” ♦