



17.

Idolatry

- This is the first mandala that I have not had an easy relationship with, and I can't quite say why.
- I set out to make an eight-pointed star, consisting of two squares, and subsequently discovered that this is the Hindu Star of Lakshmi, representing the eight forms of wealth.
- I enjoyed the challenge of painting the interlocking squares, but as an image it lacked spiritual flow, and lay neglected and unfinished for several weeks.
- By chance, a quaker friend who sometimes attaches one of my mandala images to his eloquent writing on climate change and so much more, asked me if I had ever 'mandala-ed *idolatry*'? Instantly, I knew I had found my title!
- The image completed itself with a few final brushstrokes and sits more comfortably now.

Feb - May 2020



18.

Forest Bathing

- As we moved into coronavirus lockdown, I became aware that while my relationships with people were likely to feel a little thinner, my connection to the natural world around me had never been as intense, enriching and immediate.
- The lockdown coincided with the fullness of spring in exceptional weather; fat buds on trees, joyful birdsong, blue sky glimpsed through filigree branches.
- It was the trees that particularly captured my attention. I am a latecomer to trees. My lifelong passion for deserts, their aridity, space and fierce light has led me to seek places with vast horizons. Until now.
- In those early weeks of lockdown, with each experience heightened by unfamiliarity, I came to see the canopy of trees I walked under daily as a source of constancy in the face of uncertainty, a source of protection, and a symbol of endurance and hope.
- The Japanese honour the practice of simply being in nature, connecting with it through all our senses, while it enhances our physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. They call it shinrin-yoku: forest bathing.

May 2020



19.

Wildflower or Weed?

- Angela's poem about her shifting relationship with the dandelions growing in her garden started me thinking about the random value we assign to different plants, and our inclination to label those we don't like as weeds. While some of us delight in uncultivated daisies and forget-me-nots, few people are enchanted by a profusion of golden-headed dandelions.
- With what authority do we decree that it is a wildflower if we welcome it and a weed if we don't?
- In creating our precious planet, (let's call the creator God), did God set out to design weeds?
- And do we extend the same spurious judgement to the value we place on particular groups of people?

June 2020

Dandelions

by Angela

The dandelion seed
has germinated
while my back was turned
and I am surprised
how beautiful its flower is
as I pull it out of the earth
and put it in the barrow.
Next day, I pass by
and the dandelion is there
again, young leaves showing
roots, spreading and growing already.
I pick it out
and throw it carelessly
into the bin,
cursing. The yellow
garish sunshine
bursts out in
splendour from its centre
as I get rid of it.
Next week, the same
dandelion.
This time I cry as I pull it naked from
the ground
where it hurts no-one
and I question it.
“Dear Dandelion,
why do you keep returning?”
It never answers, has read gardening
books
which state categorically
‘A Dandelion is a weed’
and it knows its own fate.
I go away, on holiday.
On my return,
the garden is jam-packed
full of bright over-cheerful dandelions,
waving in the autumn breeze.

They greet me as
gloriously as the dead
of every poppy day, so glad to see me
again.
This time I haven't the heart to
rip them out of their
resting-places, so
I go indoors to fetch my camera, a
birthday present from God
and fate and a reward
for being disabled. I take pictures,
one lying on my back,
looking up at the dandelions,
another one, standing up
looking down,
and finally face-to-face
with a fragile loving
beauty that defies
popular misconceptions.
Come November the 5th,
the dandelions
are still wonderfully
alive, if a little cold.
I take my gardening books to the local
community centre
bonfire and burn them.
The dandelions die off
of their own accord,
slowly and naturally,
in the winter snow.
But what an autumn
that was; dandelion tea,
drunk on dandelion wine,
rabbit food galore for Perky,
and first-prize
in a photography competition.

