

Andrew Stratford

Wild Sea

A collaboration



Wild Sea

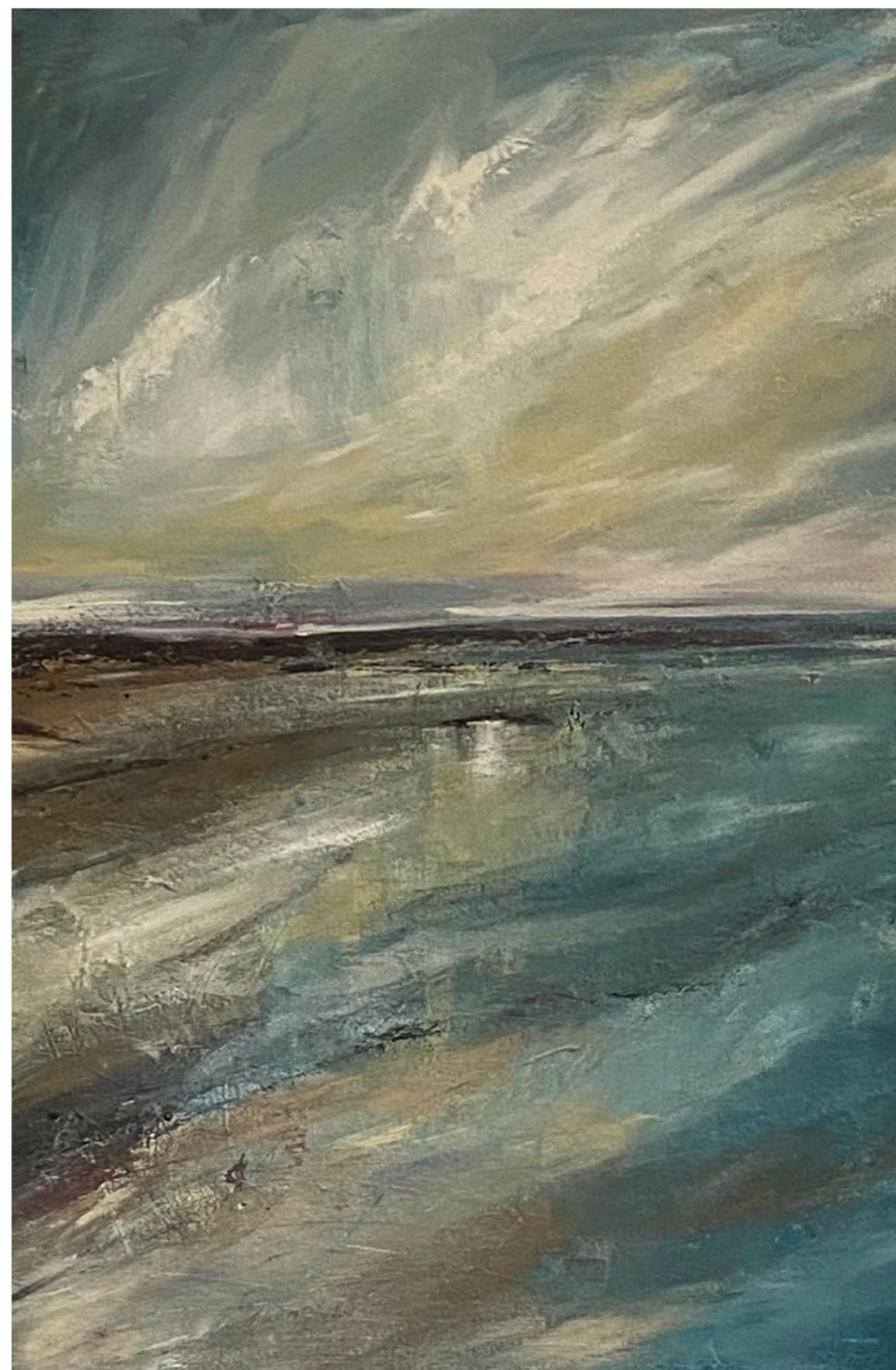
About this book

This book has been produced in celebration of the stark beauty and wildness of the Northumbrian Coastline. It is a collaboration between artist, Andrew Stratford and a group of amazing women who, on an almost weekly basis, gather on the beach and brave the icy chill of the North Sea to swim.

Andrew has attempted, through a combination of paintings and silk-screen mono printing, to capture a sense of the space, colours, mood and feeling of this wonderful and unique part of the British coastline.

The Wild Sea Women have conveyed, in response to a questionnaire, their thoughts and feelings about swimming, the sea, the beach and the landscape. Above all, however, their writing has demonstrated the importance of being a part of the group, the friendship and joy experienced when they meet each week to immerse themselves in their surroundings and, for a short time, forget the stresses of everyday life and become at one with nature.

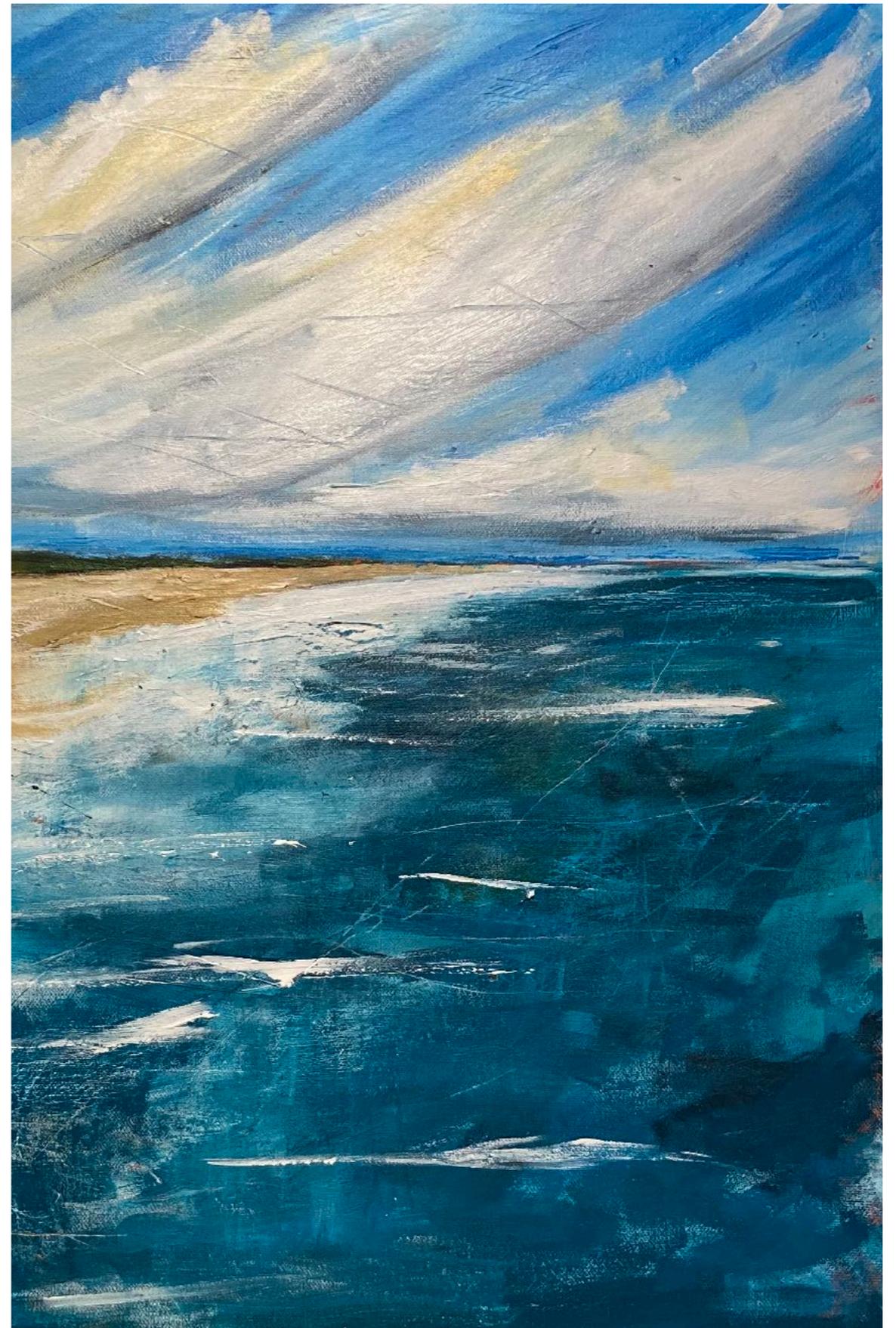
This Wild Sea collaborative project, which began with the writing and images reproduced in this book, culminated with an event to make a painting on the beach, celebrating Wild Sea Women group.



Wild Sea

Describing the landscape, the beach and the sea

glorious picturesque calm cold inspiring welcoming beautiful
spacious panoramic tranquil powerful secluded grounding
expansive ethereal exhilarating peaceful fresh vast awe-
inspiring freedom clean breathtaking stunning ever-changing
serenity strong nature alive undulating unpredictable
mysterious home wild exciting



Wild Sea

What do you like most about the coastline, the beach and the sea?

Space, freedom and beauty. Openness, views and calming scenery. Colours, the sound of the sea and me time. I like the sounds and the smells and the space. Freedom and the ever-changing seascape.

The Melodic sound of the waves breaking. Beauty, excitement and sunrise. How the weather, colour, and atmosphere are ever changing, the salty sea smell in the air, the wildness of it all. The fresh air, the sky and the natural sounds.

I like the beauty, the light and the sense of freedom. The beauty of the Northumberland coast, the calmness, the freedom to walk and swim and forget about any stress. 'Life stuff' is put on hold when you're there!

Feeling connected to nature, how relaxed I feel at the beach, the cold water. Being in nature, how it ever changes and the power of the sea. I love The waves, the sounds and the touch of all three. I like The Colours, the ruggedness and the emptiness



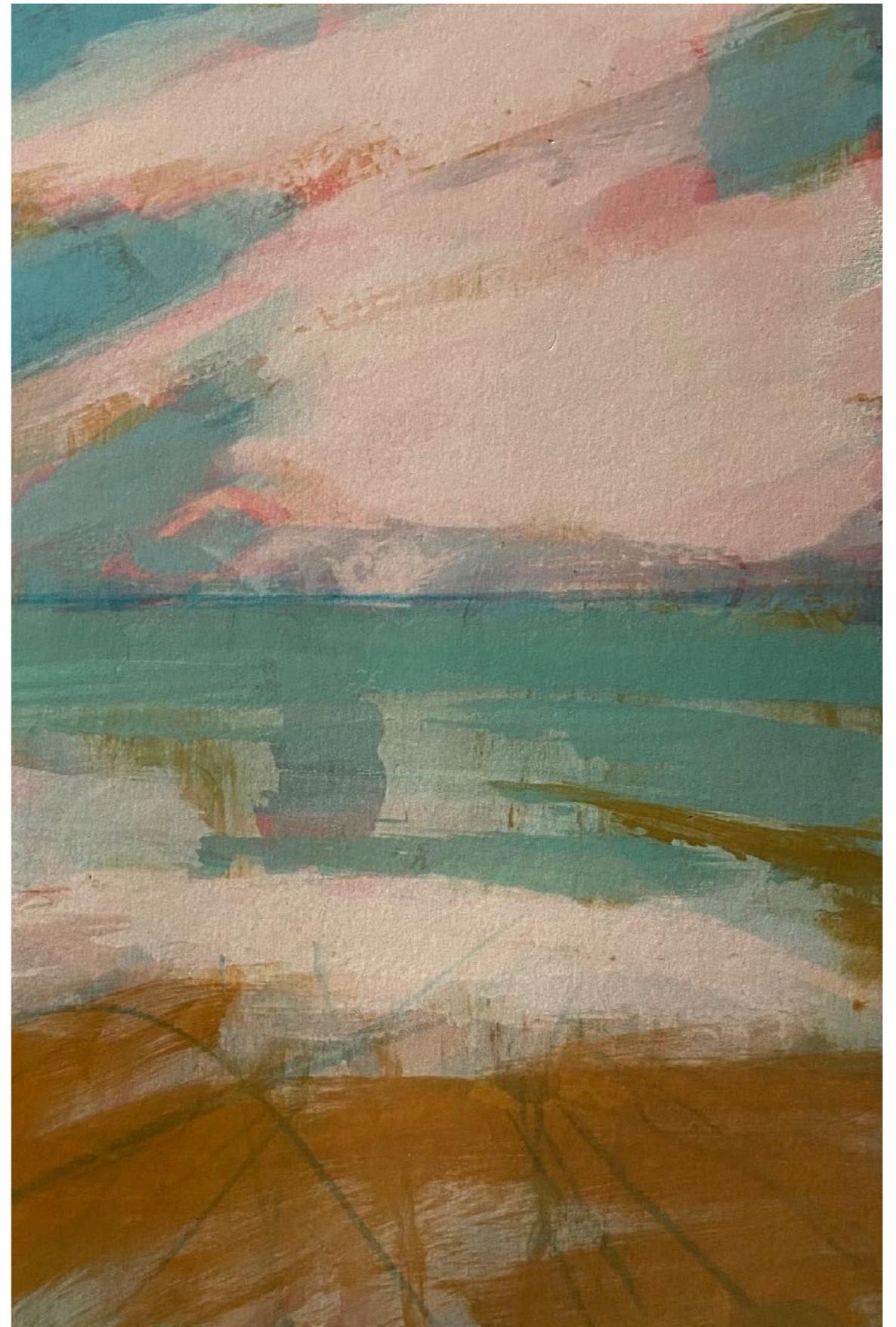
Wild Sea

What are your feelings when you arrive at the beach for a dip?

Relief! I feel like a weight is lifted from my shoulder, I feel I can breathe, I feel free. I know it sounds silly but I feel like I'm about to become whole again. I feel a calmness yet I have butterflies because there's unpredictability about going into the sea. Anticipation and freedom, enjoyment and excitement, anticipation and joy. Happiness and sense of being belonging. Initial trepidation, but eager for what is to come.

I feel free and adventurous, relaxed, at peace. A sense of companionship, I instantly become calm and relaxed. The feeling of the sand beneath my feet makes me relax. Anxiety disappears and the calm takes over. Relief and excitement when I see the others there. I feel excited and all stress just flies away. I look forward to meeting up with all the other inspirational women. I also look forward to the fun and laughter we share.

Excitement, anticipation of the cold water and hearing the sea. Apprehension and excitement, I feel focussed. It's like coming home, belonging.



How does it feel when you first get into the water?



It feels exhilarating, exciting, breath taking. I feel a sense of childishness. It's invigorating and playful. Silky, I feel alive, I can sense every part of my body. The water feels tingly, biting and soothing. Challenging and exciting, a surreal sense of calm once you get over the initial cold feeling. Excitement when it's rough and the waves hit you! Diving into the waves, amazing! Liberating, a shock to the system! Amazing! Tingly with heightened sensations.

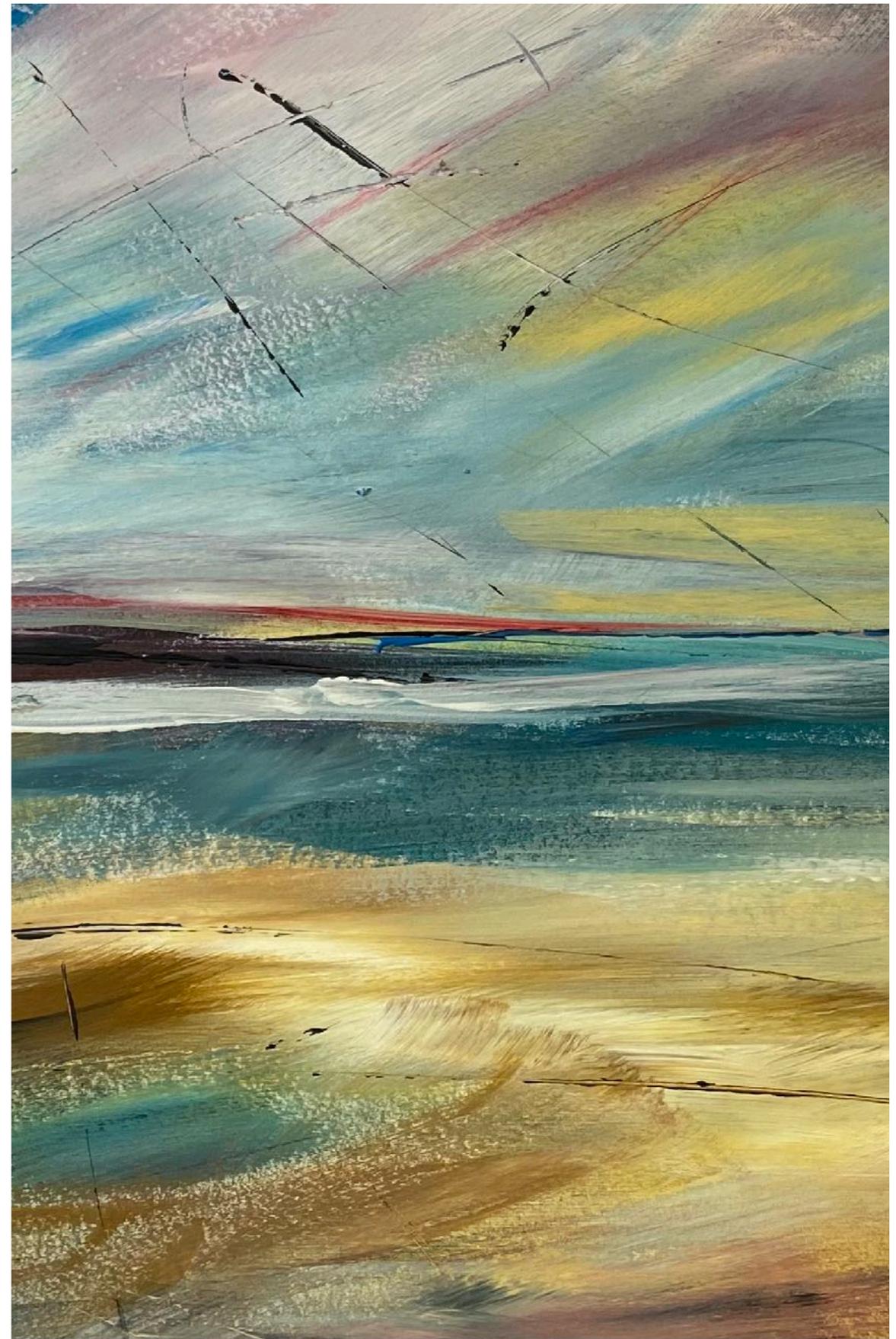
If the sea is calm I feel like I'm being lightly held and gently massaged. If it's rough I feel like the sea is giving me tough love and making me challenge myself. Although I keep my safety paramount, I feel brave and fearless. Stimulating, letting go, alive, alert and real, joy, release. The sounds of the waves rushing and crashing are exciting and calming simultaneously.

Wild Sea

When you are in the water
what do you look at and what
are your feelings?

The sea and the waves, friends and happiness. I look at the sky, the birds and the sunrise. I feel safe and relaxed, I feel carefree. The power of the waves and nature around me. Feeling free and calm.

I feel exhilarated, I enjoy the landscape all around and chatting with the other dippers. I admire the horizon, waves and sky. I look at the sea, the shore lines, the sun beating down, the reflections in the water, the friends I'm dipping with. All of them make feel happy and contented. I feel like the water is my home. The horizon as far out as possible. How small I am, therefore so are my worries, which very quickly dissipate as my body tries to cope with the cold. Then laughter and joy.



I look at my surrounding area and feel at peace. Alive, free, no cares, a sense of nature being alive... thankful. Just for being alive and being allowed to share the freedom with nature and with others who, for a short time, leave everything behind, nothing matters, money or work, just in that minute.

I look at the vastness of the sea, sky, nature, and the next wave.

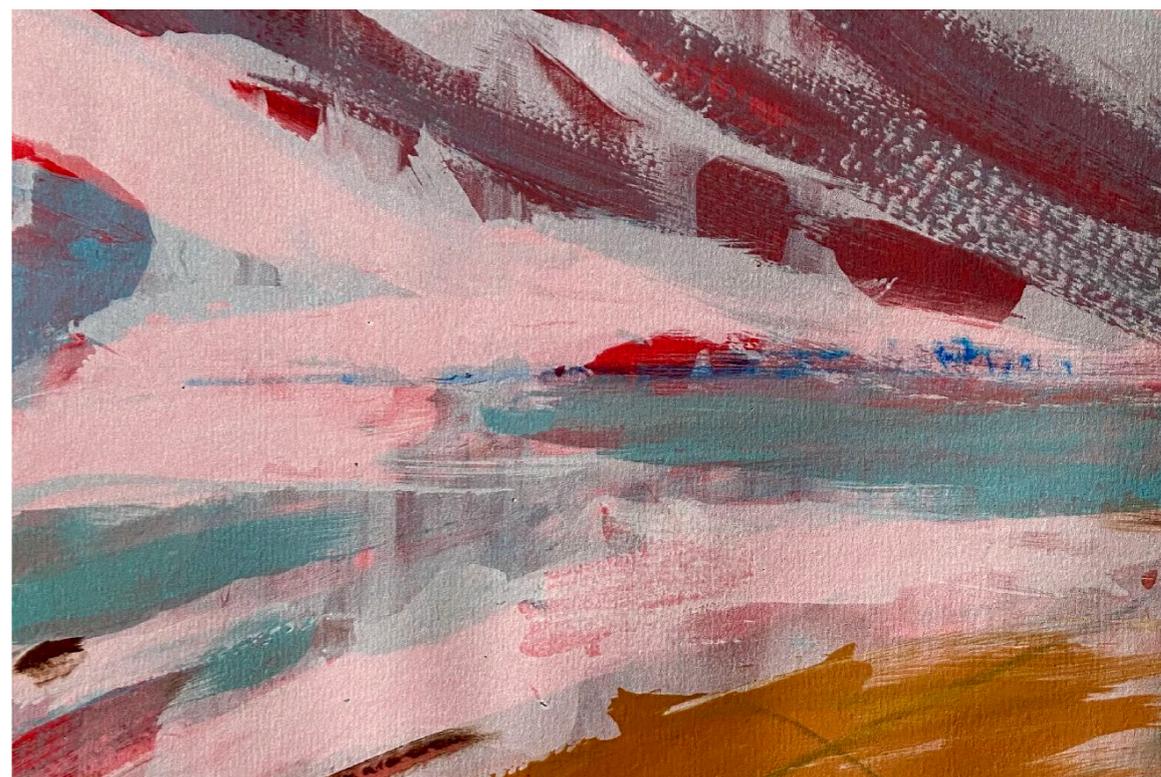
I look at the expressions on the faces of others and the waves coming in, the sky. I feel Relief, happiness and calmness. I look at my friends, the waves and I look out for seals and dolphins.

I look at my fellow dippers and their enjoyment. I look at the land and the sky. I feel a sense of childlike escapism. The clouds and sky! I hadn't realised how beautiful the sky and clouds are until I was in the water at sunset or early morning, the sky is amazing!

I look at the ladies in my group, I am always head counting and watching to make sure nobody swims out too far or moves too far from the group. I look for waves and often have to shout 'wave!' to make sure everyone knows its coming! I loved to jump the waves with the ladies, laugh and have fun. I enjoy the calmer dips when I can relax a little more and just float, chat and catch up with the group.

I start by focussing on the sea. The colour, the smell and feel of it. I always wear swimming goggles so I can look under the water. I then look around at my surroundings and take more notice if there are people around me. Lastly I always spend time looking at the sky but it's extra special if it's a moon swim. In a funny way I feel like I'm where I belong, whether I'm swimming or floating. I also feel lucky that I can swim and feel comfortable in the water.

I focus on the horizon then the waves and sky. Watching the clouds or breaking waves. Looking down into the blue green water. I feel exhilarated, at one with the sea, like a mermaid or selkie. Surrounded by the earth and everything in it. Cushioned and cocooned by the landscape.



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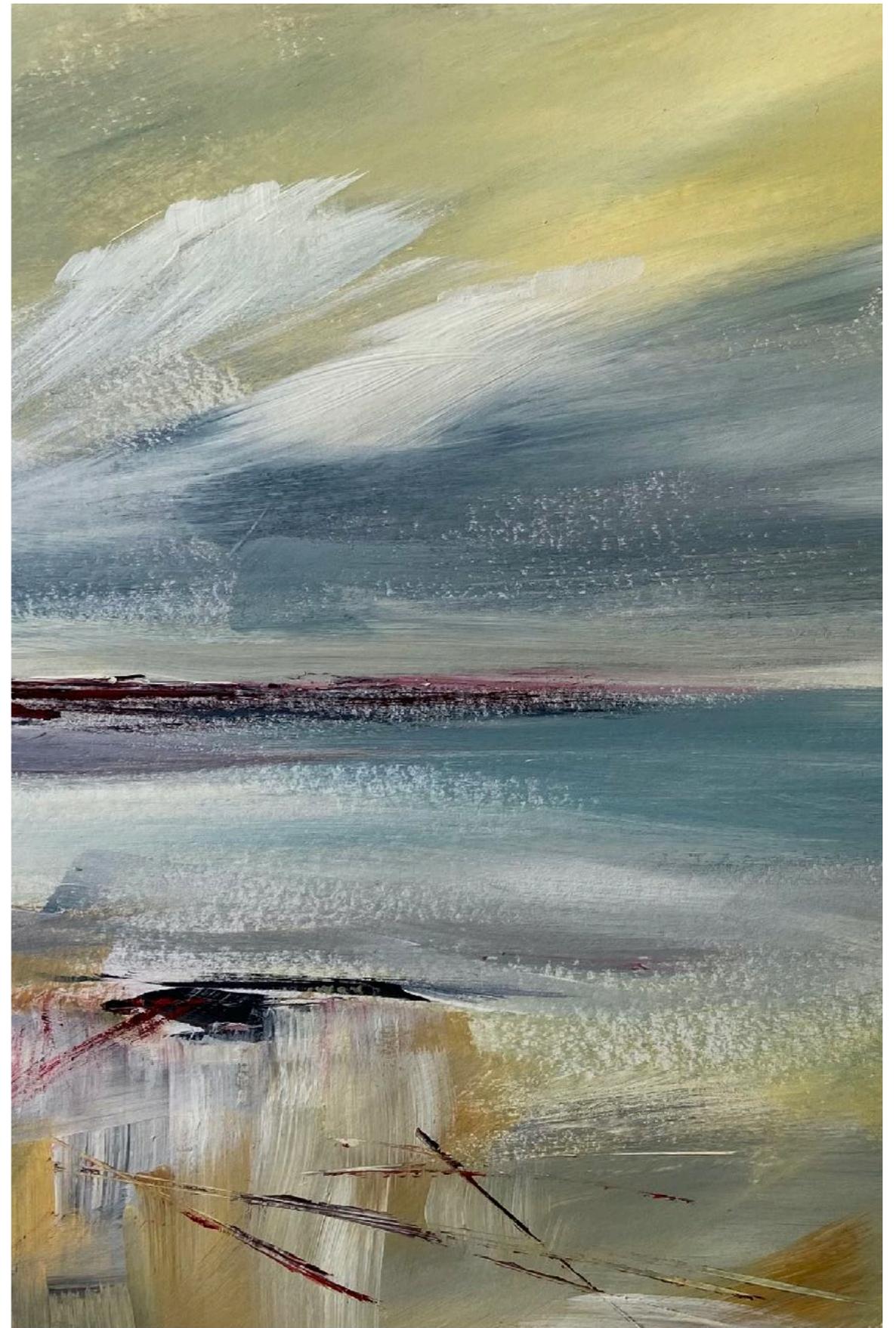
Describe how your feelings change when you come out of the water and as you leave the beach.

I leave the water feeling rejuvenated, fresh and alive. I leave the beach, boosted with a new energy, a sense of belonging and tranquilly.

I leave looking forward to returning and the sense of readiness for the day ahead. Even when we're cold everyone is on a high.

I think it's a sense of achievement.

I can't describe it, I've tried to describe it to friends and family who think I'm mad for going in the North Sea in winter! A sense of calm, feeling amazing!



I Come out of the water feeling exhilarated, full of energy and happy. The importance of getting dry and warm makes me focus on myself a little more. Once I'm dry, I feel relaxed and happy, invigorated and renewed.



I'm happier leaving the water and leaving the beach, this feeling lasts a long time. My thoughts speed up and I think about the practicalities of getting dried, and putting my clothes on.

When I get in the car to leave the beach, I'm happy to see my dog, Meg, who has been waiting in the car but my overall feelings are of calmness, stillness, lightness and a feeling that I have just done something naughty, I feel recharged and totally relaxed. Back to the responsibilities of everyday life, but with more serenity.

My worries are completely washed away during the time we share. I feel so much more relaxed coming out of the water, feeling proud of having completed a dip.

I feel happy to have shared it with the group, to share in the collective calm. I have a number of disabilities and in the water I forget about them.

I don't often feel proud of myself but when I get out, regardless of how long I've been in, I know I've accomplished something.

I Feel more alive, happy and free. I feel fit to burst.



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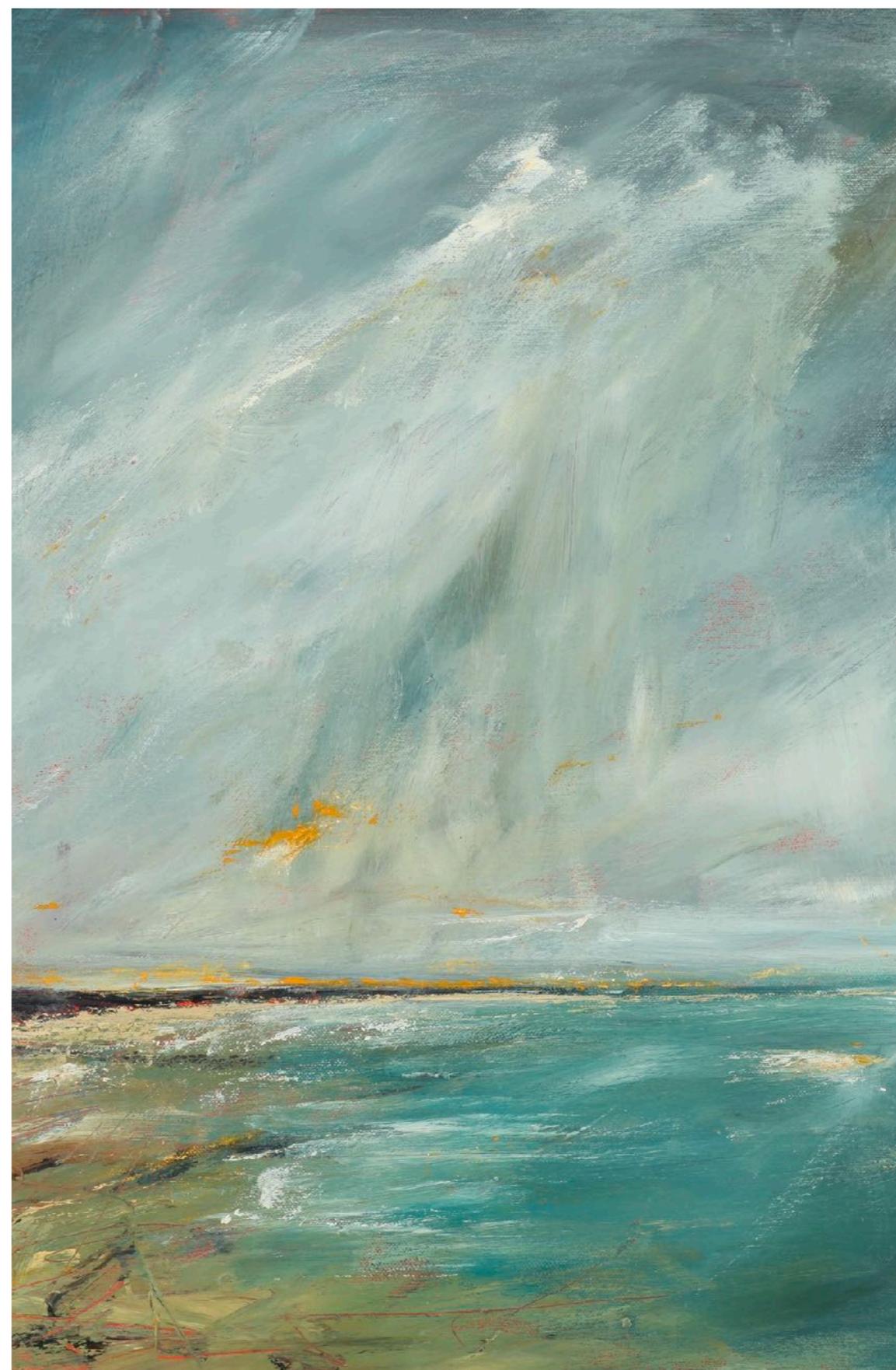
What does it mean to you being part of The Wild Sea Women group?

Being with my tribe... Like minded women who I can call my friends.

I love this group of non judgmental people. It makes me feel as if I'm part of something very special. I feel honoured and thankful to be a part of the Wild Sea Women group. I can't put into words what it means to me.

I'm a Wild Sea Women leader, and it has changed my life. It has opened up a whole new world, new friends, new opportunities.

I find it hard to mix with groups, and new people, But the communal joy and energy offsets any anxiety I have. I can be myself rather than putting on a persona to cope. I Met some women I would never have met before and feel part of a genuine supportive group.



To know someone is there.

To be with others who 'get' that feeling, And support with energy and warmth.

Friendship, fun and shared experience. Community, belonging, laughter and happiness

It's the most important group I'm in, I've made real friends here

We all share a passion for the waves which it is not safe to enjoy alone. The physical and emotional support we give each other is priceless.

I've been part of this fabulous group since we started at Cresswell, I'm now one of the leaders. It's become a huge part of my life. I've met some amazing ladies, I now have as my good friends, I miss everyone and the sea if I don't dip for a week! It's part of my life now and hopefully will see and encourage more ladies to join us

It is a huge part of my life and something I am very proud of. This group of women has helped and supported me for almost two years now, through my return to work after maternity and my husband deploying last year. To see how women support women and what we can achieve together is just amazing.

The amazing support, connection and camaraderie.

Shared experiences. We're on the same wavelength and I feel so lucky to meet such amazing women. It feels like we have a secret language and understanding of how amazing it is to be in the water.

I love being able to meet with them whenever I can, I feel welcomed and supported even though I am a visitor from outside their area. I feel part of the Wild Women Community and always enjoy their company. It makes me feel braver to approach other things in my life I find challenging. I love celebrating the sea with them.



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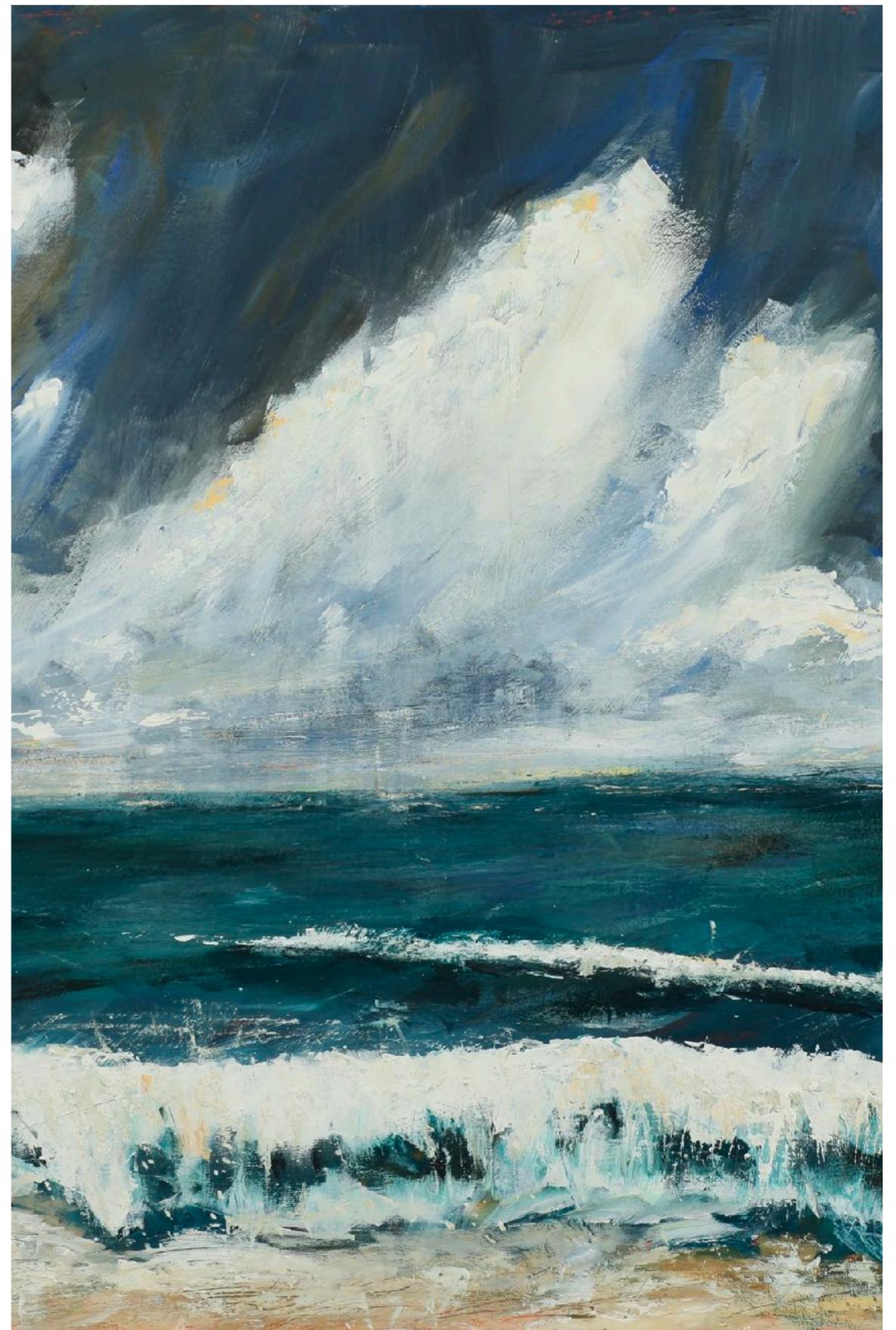
Where is your favourite place on the Northumberland coastline and why?



I love Cresswell because it is like my second home and it has so many different aspects of the sea coast in a small area. It is usually quiet and empty. I also love Lindisfarne because of its atmosphere...it always feels special, mystical and otherworldly, connected to the past but separate from the rest of the land.

Duridge Bay, beautiful landscape, sun rises and sun sets.

I don't swim in Northumberland very often so don't know it very well. I love the ruggedness. I love Beadnell or Cresswell.



I love Druridge Bay at sunrise. I am blessed having the privilege to wake up to it every day with its ever changing appearance.

My favourite place is Cresswell, it's so open, quiet and you can see for miles.



Cresswell - where Wild Sea Women, Northumberland, began and grew and continues to be where we have our adventures.

My favourite places are Cresswell, where we dip, and Druridge Bay. My parents took me my sister and brother there when we were young. My parents are now disabled and

can't get to the beach. I have many happy memories with them at Druridge and Cresswell.

Cresswell, beautiful!

Cambois, I just love that beach and the coast houses with all the colours, plus its a nice place to take my dog.

I love the unspoilt nature of Cresswell, its vastness and wildness.

Embleton Beach. It has Dunstanburgh castle, which is said to be John of Gaunt's Avalon.

I don't have a favourite part of the coast line. As long as I'm near the sea and beach, I'm happy.

Druridge Bay as I'm fortunate to live next to the beach and appreciate it immensely.

Cresswell. I love the sense of space in all directions.

Favourite place is Newbiggin to swim, but I love all of the Northumberland coastline for its beauty.

Cresswell for the views and closeness to home.



Thank you to the Wild Sea Women for their collaboration on this project, for sharing their thoughts and feelings and giving me a brief insight into what is a remarkable and truly amazing group of people!

Laura Rowberry, Barbel Williamson, Linda Wilson, Sam Cherry, Judith Brown, Diane Cooke, Louise Waldock, Stephanie Tucker, Lizzie Beattie, Helen Rogers-Doyle, Julie Stratford, Cristina Perdomo, Hilary Edwards, Roxanne Gtx, Clare Phillips, Julie Teer, Sarah Hepburn, Josephine Heburn, Jean Perfect, Pauline Edwards, Liza Rathbone-Lax, Syl Elliott, Jane Thomsen, Rachael Lenderyou, Jo Robinson.



Working on 'Wild Sea' - a collaborative beach art work



'Wild Sea' Acrylic on Canvas - Created on Cresswell Beach, Northumberland 23 April 2023

“Going dipping in the water has been the best thing that happened to me, it has given me the most amazing friends.” Barbel Williamson

“WSW is much more than just dipping, its a social space where we are all ourselves and have fun and share.” Cristina Perdomo

“It’s made me realise how lucky I am to have found such friendship and freedom.” Linda Wilson

“Love being a Wild Sea Woman!” Jo Robinson

