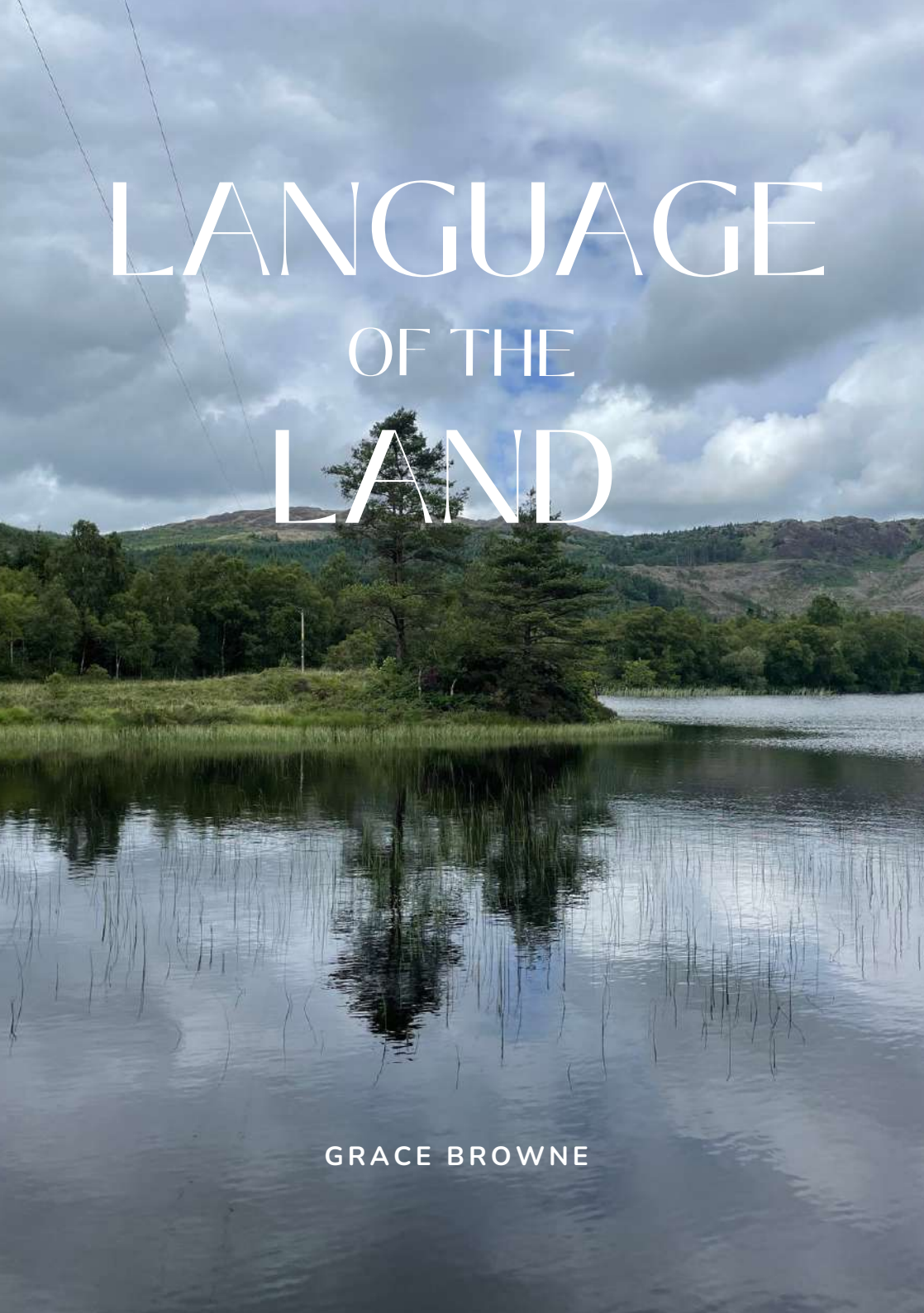


A landscape photograph of a lake with a large tree on the shore and mountains in the background under a cloudy sky. The text 'LANGUAGE OF THE LAND' is overlaid in white serif font.

LANGUAGE OF THE LAND

GRACE BROWNE

LANGUAGE OF THE LAND

Grace Browne

LANGUAGE OF THE LAND is a one-year project in which I researched and developed a nature-based ideographic visual language and foraged earth pigments palette. The project explored my foremother's traditional arts and their relationship with nature. They are the Idoma body art, inale, and the Igbo body and mural art called uli/uri.

The project ran from February 2023 until February 2024. The research involved conversation with Nigerian academics and knowledge holders, as well as learning from the original teacher, Mother nature.

I used the Gaelic seasonal festivals Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh and Samhain as markers. Each season I observed natural environments in Glasgow and visited the East, South, West and North of Scotland. This resulted in four large scale ideographic paintings and the development of an earth pigment palette.

This publication is produced to accompany the Language of the Land project. It brings together conversations with knowledge holders, my learnings and thoughts during the project and the earth palettes.



SPRING

IMBOLC

February - April
East



In many cultures across Africa women create stunning abstract murals often on earth buildings. They turn everyday spaces such as their homes into beautiful works of art. These arts are communal and temporary. They're refreshed and renewed for celebrations such as festivals, weddings and ceremonies.

Through my art I re-member my foremother's art practices. My maternal foremothers practiced uli, the ancient wall and body painting tradition of the Igbo women of Southeastern Nigeria. What I love about uli is that it is created purely for joy.

My explorations have led me to the wisest teacher, nature.
The pause, the starting point.

There is so much beauty...

A chorus of hundreds of small brown birds, gathered, singing in unison on a cold morning. The joy of a dog bounding across the river to say hello. The laughter and high pitched screams of children playing. A magpie smacking a dogs tail. The smell of earth after it rains.

There is brutality too...

Two crows eating an egg. A bird pecking at a dead squirrel. A worm lying squashed on the pavement. A pigeon hobbling with one foot. An uprooted tree felled by strong winds. The earth slowly swallowing humans trash.

The more I pause, the more I notice that everything is in constant motion. The bud that's here today, may be a flower tomorrow or carried by the wind the day after.

I'm learning to accept that all is temporary. All is passing. All is dual.

If we accept, truly accept, that all is transient how would that change what we bring into being? How would we create if we remembered that everything comes from the earth and to the earth everything will return?

I love that Igbo women's response to this is to come together to create art in celebration of life's moments. To let the paintings be washed away by the rain creating space for the new. To create beauty for no other purpose than joy.

Joy is a dance to life's rhythms.



Gratitude asks us to trust that there is enough

When earth meets air

Spring painting

And then she appears
A butterfly sweeping past
An insect landing on my arm, ticking
The birds chattering
The daffodils by the roadside
The dog playing in the water
breathe
pause
the invitation
heart open

gratitude



Spring earth pigments collected
from Linn Park, Glasgow



“Uli is an act done in the spirit of
fun”

Derick Ofodirinwa



SUMMER

BELTANE

May - July

South

Collecting the pigments for the summer painting taught me an interesting lesson. I went to collect the colours on a new moon inspired by a conversation I had. I went to the river and in an act of reciprocity I took away rubbish. When I started making the pigments, I realised some stones I'd collected thinking it was white was actually yellow.

So I went back one evening to try to look for a white pigment.

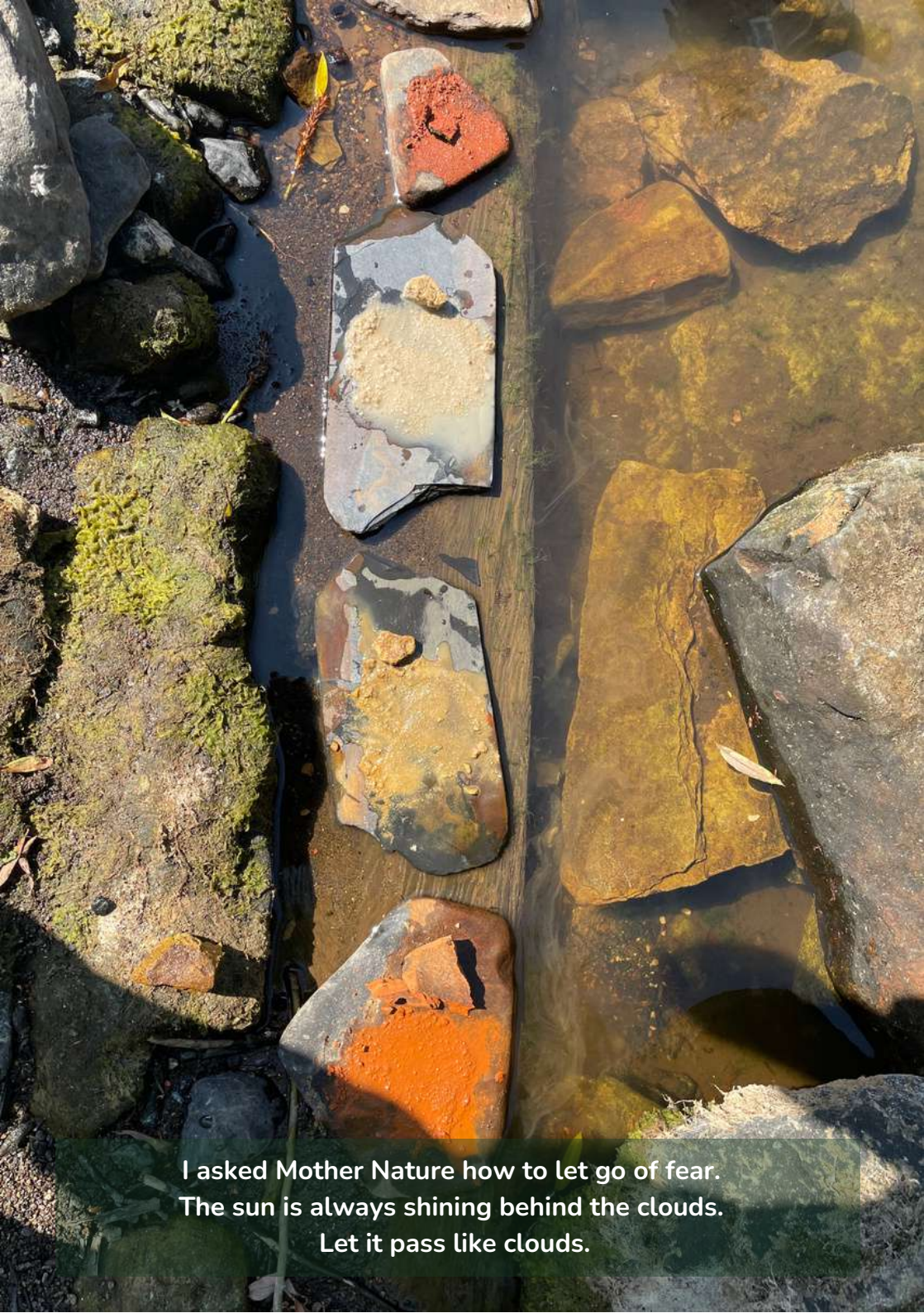


At the spot where I usually collected the rocks there was rubbish everywhere. I was tired and overwhelmed by thought of picking all that up. So I decided to go the next morning.

As I neared my usual spot I felt a pull to walk further on and try to spot the heron nesting in the tree I'd seen a few days earlier. When I got there, the tide was low revealing lots of beautiful white stones. And there was no rubbish.

I felt the earth say, "this shouldn't be a burden. Follow what makes your heart happy."





I asked Mother Nature how to let go of fear.
The sun is always shining behind the clouds.
Let it pass like clouds.

Embrace the mess

Summer painting



Summer pigments

Kelvin River, Glasgow

“Your cultural identity lies in the land. Your identity is rooted in the land. Even when you are far away the land of that place can identify you.”

Dr Tracie Chima Utoh-Ezeajugh



Dawsholm Park, Glasgow.

Yellow Earth

“When I worked with some of the women, when they completed a painting, they would organise a dance. Dance around and make merry to celebrate the success of a completed work. I think somehow they considered it a sacred achievement. Recognising that art is not something that is ordinary, it takes extra sensory ability to be able to conceive and execute a work of art. The songs and the dancing were symbolic ways of celebrating their own creative spirit and anticipating future creative achievement as people who were committed to carrying the burden of creativity. I say burden because in the society of the past the art was not sold, the people were not paid so it could be a distraction. So for people to continue in it and engage in the art it was something worth celebrating.”

Dr Chuu Krysdy Ikwuemesi





AUTUMN

Lughnasadh
August - October
West

Great Earth
sitting silent
still
am I silent?
the wind whispers
am I silent?
the water gushes
am I silent?
the rocks groan
am I silent?
you breathing



Remember earth holds memory.
Water shapes them.

Don't play with water if you don't want to get wet

Autumn painting



"Inale is the name of the substance that is use to leave an indelible mark on your body. It is the name of the plant."

Dennis Anyebe Olofu



Autumn pigments

Seil Islands

"The Idoma philosophy of Ifa, which literally translates to "appealing," "pleasant," or "beauty," advocates for the belief that everyone's body deserves a pleasing appearance. Therefore, everyone is permitted to adorn their bodies in ways that bring joy to their souls and foster inner peace."

Okwoli Moses Elaigwu

The Dynamics Of Body Art In Idoma



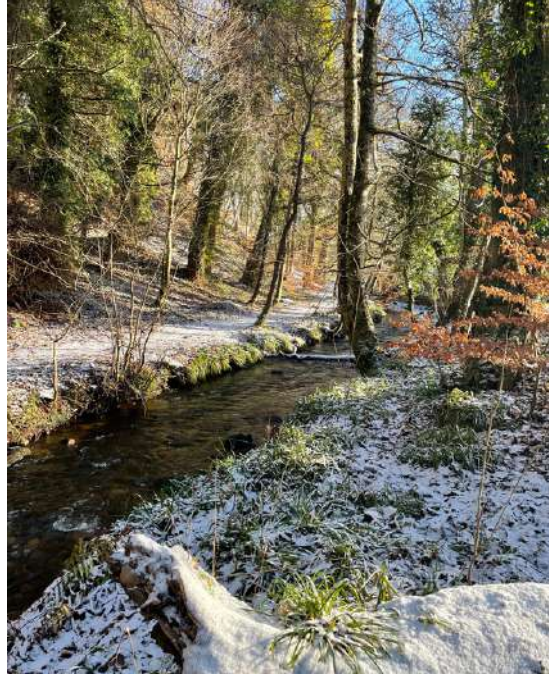


WINTER

Samhain

November - January

North



I was sitting on a bench in the park, watching the trees...

I looked down & saw a worm moving across the pavement. I thought “let me help”. Let me move the worm to the grass where they will be safer and won’t get squashed.

I tried to move them but the worm started wriggling away. I tried with a stick, with a leaf, with another stick. But still no movement, the worm clung to the ground. My help seemed to be causing more distress.

What if the worm doesn’t want to be moved? I thought.

What if my will and desire to help is not more important than the worm’s desire to just be and to continue on their journey?

What if my help is causing more harm?

Would they be safer in the grass or more easily spotted by a hungry bird?

Can I accept that the worm know’s what is best for themselves?



Like clouds passing over a lake.
The water isn't the clouds, the clouds aren't the lake,
yet, both are water.

Maybe the worm doesn't want to be moved

Winter painting



“”The stream says that because he hasn’t seen anyone in front of him that is why he is meandering”

Idoma saying shared by Edward Mark

“”The lizard said the smoke does not kill it. What the smoke does is to give him wrinkles”

Igbo saying shared by Ngozi Mark

Winter pigments
Black Isle





With thanks to

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