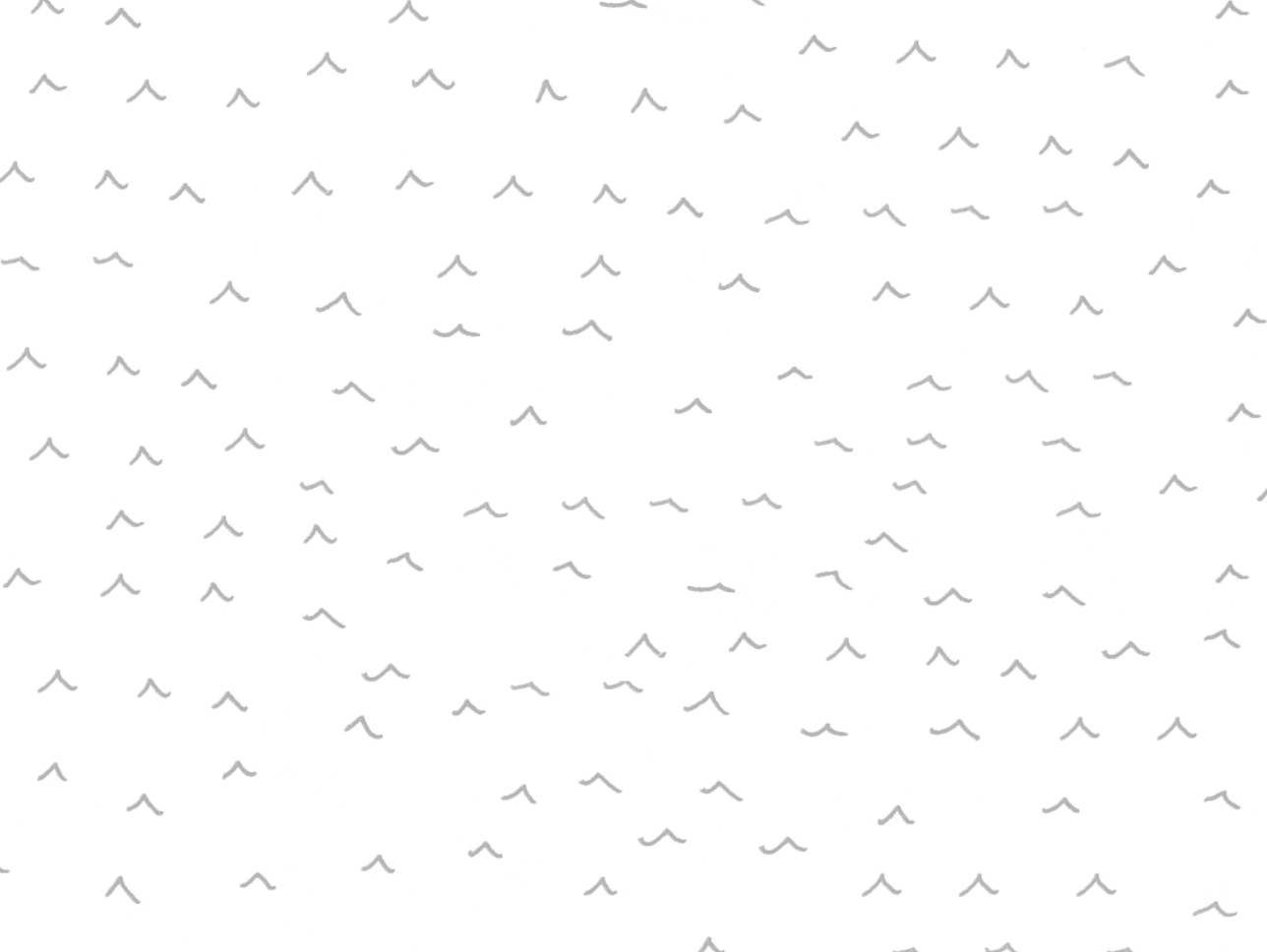

**HEBRIDEAN
VIEWS**

**C O N T E M P O R A R Y
P O S T C A R D S F R O M
T H E O U T E R H E B R I D E S**





HEBRIDEAN VIEWS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF NARRATIVES & IMAGES
ABOUT CONTEMPORARY HEBRIDEAN LIFE

COLLECTED BY GEORGE STEVE JARAMILLO
AS RESEARCH FOR THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF
ART'S INSTITUTE OF DESIGN INNOVATION &
THE HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS ENTERPRISE



Looking out from the window of the Bombardier airplane, the western coast of Scotland and its islands seem like an intricate jigsaw of deep blue, jagged green, and heathered brown mountainsides locked in a perpetual fractal pattern. From above, the landscape seems serene and endless, unchanging and untrammelled. This simple, yet incredibly strong Romantic image is difficult to let go, particularly, when it is repeated across posters, postcards, travel shows, and websites.

This book is about unpacking those Romantic views by exploring everyday perceptions in Hebridean life. This is done through a visual method of postcard making where the traditional picture postcard is turned on its head to understand contemporary views of place and Hebridean identity. Therefore, the illustration becomes the ethnographer and critical tourist. These cards go beyond picture references of landscapes, instead present a landscape constellation of minor histories showcasing

INTRODUCTION

*It is easy to assign the islander to this misty, rather beautiful world, and leave him there if one first of all succeeds in making that world unreal, and its inhabitants unreal, off the edge of things, a noble savage with his stories and his unmateri-
alistic concerns.*

Iain Crichton Smith, 1989,
Real People in a real Place

new views into regional life. It is through these insights that we can support new innovations of creative and alternative industries within the region that are more attuned to the complexities of island living.

Throughout the following pages, we explore the notions of Romantic views that have inspired this views and focus on alternative perceptions of these islands. The stories told through these images are more than just reflections about a landscape, but rather in articulating a different way of seeing the islands, where the issues of infrastructure, isolation, surveillance and detachment are highlighted by its residents. As Iain Crichton Smith's writings suggest, the islands should not be thought and kept at a place with 'unrealistic concerns', but are entangled within global and everyday concerns. Therefore, the hope is to bring about a newly changed perspective within these Hebridean views through these images.

Throughout recent history, the Western Isles landscapes have been encountered through a detached outside perspective where the landscape is something to be viewed like a painting or photograph, based upon the eye and what is present 'out there'. These ways of seeing the landscape have influenced the perceptions Highlands since the Enlightenment where the influence of landscape aesthetics contain a pictorial appreciation of landscape that comprises a set of theories revolving around the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque.

In the Hebrides, as much throughout Highland Scotland, tourism grew through the late nineteenth century as sublime oceanic journeys to the islands developed and inspired by eighteenth century writings. The proliferation of railroads and ferries opened up, what at one point accessible only via ship, to be reachable for any central belt traveller to enjoy a day

ROMANTIC VIEWS

trip out to the western coasts. These trips with the new influx of tourists would influence the way the region would grow and promote itself to the outer world. The collective tourist gaze brought about a dedicated industry of service that Fraser MacDonald calls the 'visual consumption of the Highlands'.

Today, those images can be seen in contemporary examples of the VisitScotland webpage or even a stop at a tourist shop where postcards are sold, along with reproductions of vintage railroad company posters. The solitary figure, the sublime coastline, and rocky shores became a key component in representing the Scottish Highlands and Islands and carries on today. The Romantic splendour and writings have become the dominant narrative and image that prevails in the imagination of visitors and residents. Yet, these views are problematic in contemporary lives of the islands.

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TO  THE
HEBRIDES

DAVID MACBRAYNE 1ST CLYDE HOUSE GLASGOW C.2



ISLE OF SKYE

GO NORTH THIS YEAR

BRITISH RAILWAYS

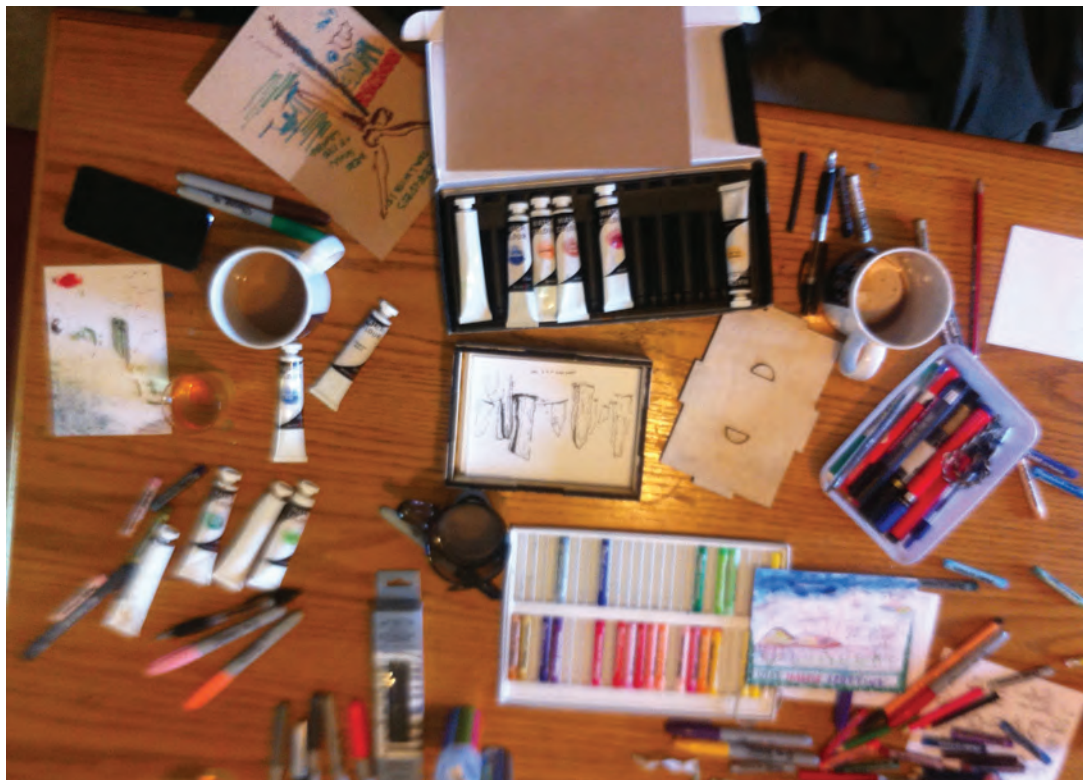
TRAVEL BY RAIL

ALTERNATE VIEWS

The Western Isles carry a collective memory and image of these windswept beaches, but along with this image, are subversive narratives. These narratives include themes of tragedy as in the sinking of the *HMY Iolaire* or of eventual expulsions from native lands as clearances brought dramatic changes to the islands. Stories of defiance through the Land Wars of the nineteenth century developed a culture of resistance or of indignation to external changes, as was the case with Leverburgh and Lord Leverhulme's ill-fated whaling stations and fishing enterprises on Lewis and Harris. These stories are what Walter Benjamin refers as part of the minor histories. Benjamin's historical materialism countered the traditional understanding of history. In *Theses on History*, he states, 'the true image of the past flits by. That past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the moment of its recognisability, and is never seen again'.

The image of history is not a long string of events but rather moments cast upon each other, each one there and not. As Stephanie Polsky states, ‘a minor history operates ... through series, pairings, repetitions and deviations of the appearance of ordinary locations. These happenings then are not linked but instead form a constellation of little drama’. These small dramas are the alternative narratives that are sought within this project. The island narratives contain ‘minor histories’ or subversive flitting moments and perceptions of the landscape, that are just as integral to its making as the dominant Romantic narrative. Contemporary notions of the region then can sit along with the more Romantic views of the landscape, and in turn provide new views that may not necessarily get the attention they need. Therefore, to find out some of these minor histories a new way of gathering views was done in collaborations with the islanders.





A series of three workshops were held between April and October 2017 at locations in the Isle of Lewis, North Uist, and South Uist. Each workshop had a selection of people including elderly, young adults, and other island residents. A diverse base of people were chosen whose life histories would highlight the 'counter-narratives' inherent within, attuning to the 'minor histories' that show the complexity and breadth of the landscape.

The main question provided was: How do you perceive your landscape? This question was intentionally left broad to get as many viewpoints and representations as possible. Various drawing utensils were supplied and participants were asked to bring whatever they wanted to make the cards. The only consistent element was the A6 card supplied. After a period of drawing, the cards would be placed together and a brief reflection would give the participants time to talk about their

POSTCARD MAKING

images. Using drawing as a method for data collection represents not only the happenings in the world but also the mind's action upon the paper. Used as a journalistic tool the act of drawing is an immersive part of landscape representations. A drawing questions what we see, whereas the photograph has been made for preservation. Drawing is a tool in which to understand the world, it gives your eyes, brain and hand a way to communicate with each other to reflect upon what is seen rather than just accept what you receive through the eyes. In this case, the use of drawing for postcard making encourages a reflective and thoughtful approach to the question of the Hebridean landscape.

In the visual and narrative analysis of these images, constellations of the landscape are created; those that are developed through a careful consideration of what the participants' landscape was in their head. With this in mind, the images can be divided into





three categories: First, representations of household and livelihood including crofting and fishing; second, a landscape 'view' either are descriptors of a particular view or of an idealised concept; finally, the landscape as social commentary, where a personal observation of their place is expressed in the image. It is these narratives that are key to understanding the contemporary notions of community and place, allowing for the minor histories to be brought forward.

The following pages represent a constellation of landscape views and perceptions that sit in creative tension with each other. Some of the text shows quotes taken from the participants, a few are author interpretations, and others are left for you to interpret. Each one is a reflection of contemporary life on the islands.

POSTCARD VIEWS

I have found that the islands are much more open to inter-generational exchanges than the mainland. It is ok to be amongst young people and they among the elderly.

South Uist



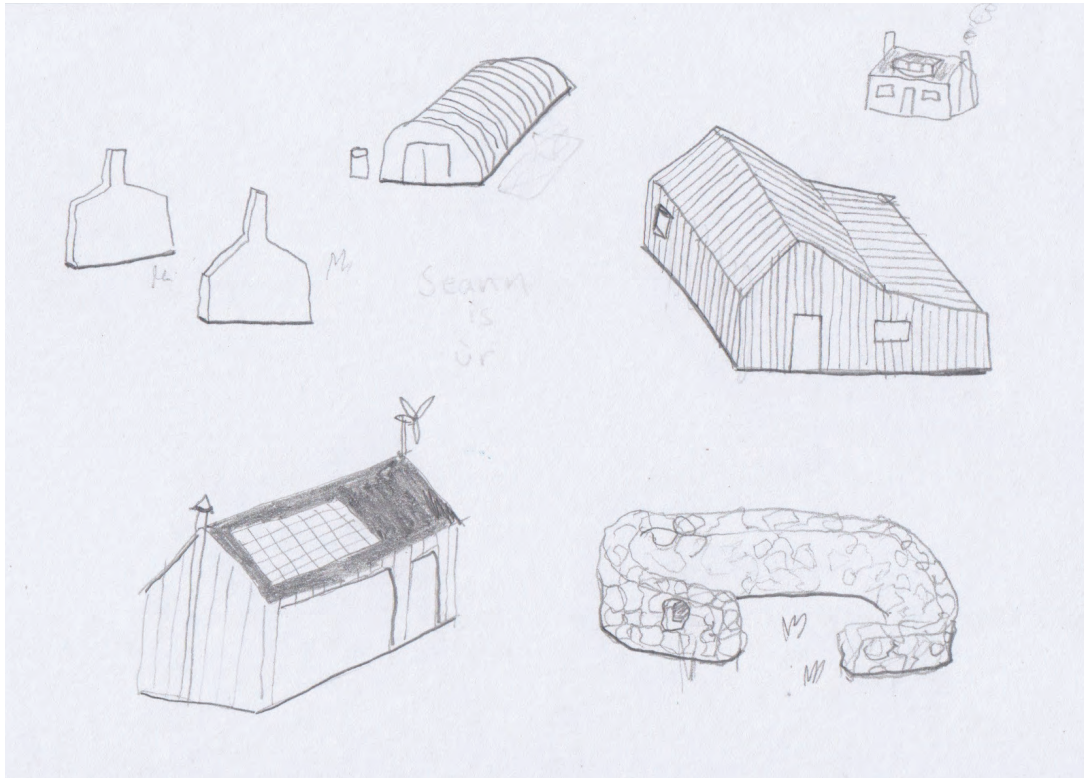


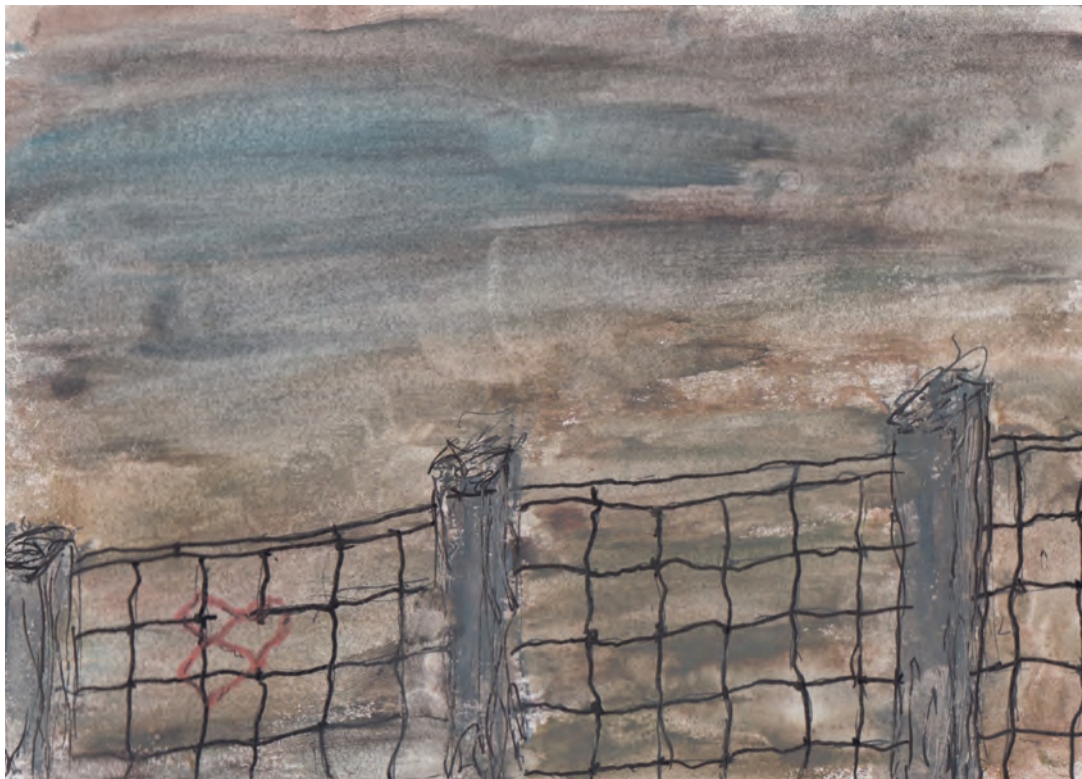
The landscape is like a nest of eggs where I feel nestled and protected here on Lewis. Though I may not be from here, I have made my home here.

Isles of Lewis

A ruined blackhouse and rubble farmhouse, a croft house, a shed, quonset hut, and modern home form a livelihood constellation.

North Uist





*Do you know, I can't tell you the amount of times we are
apologising because of the weather, it's not our fault but
it's an expectation that it's going to be beautiful colours
and beautiful this, that and the other.*

North Uist

Isle of Lewis



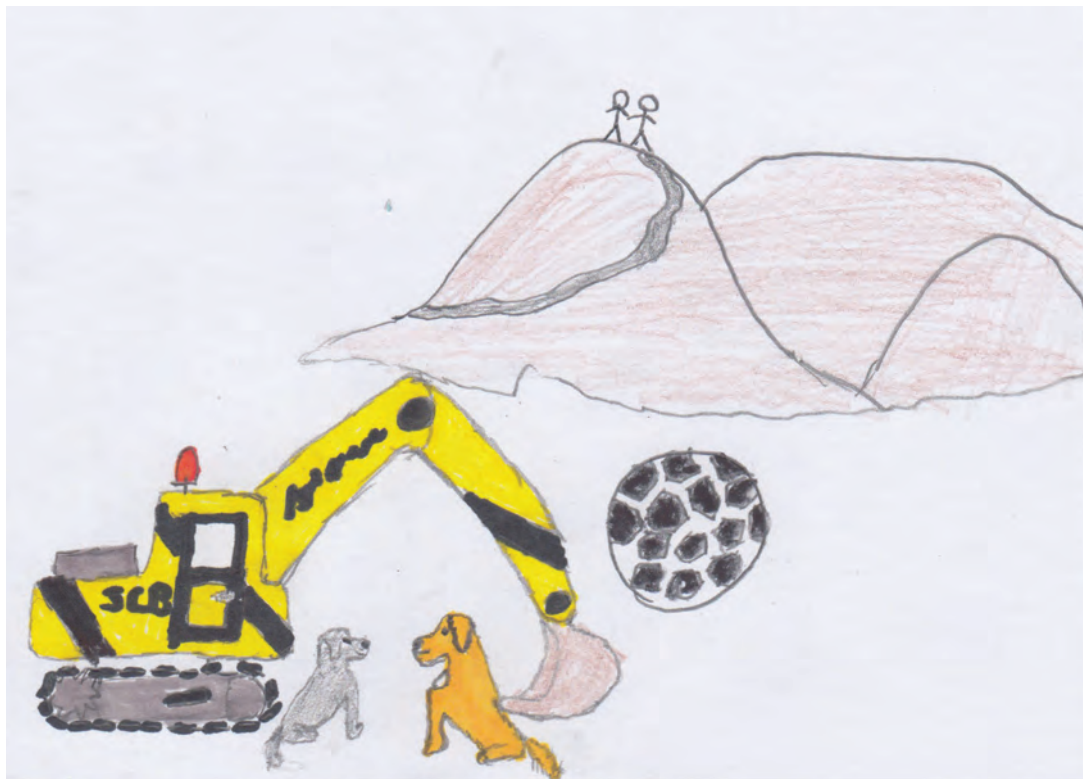
The greenhouse is my landscape.

South Uist



A football, dogs, hills, and a JCB, form a representation of a young person's life that showcases a landscape of desires to play professionally, of necessity to work, and a quiet reliance on the way these worlds come together.

South Uist



COME at ONCE.

*That moment when a message...the sparing use of
words...*

Grimsay



There are at least three knit and (k)natter groups in the Uists... These groups are vital to the communities enabling elderly ladies to meet and catch up on island news.

Isles of Lewis

Isle of Lewis



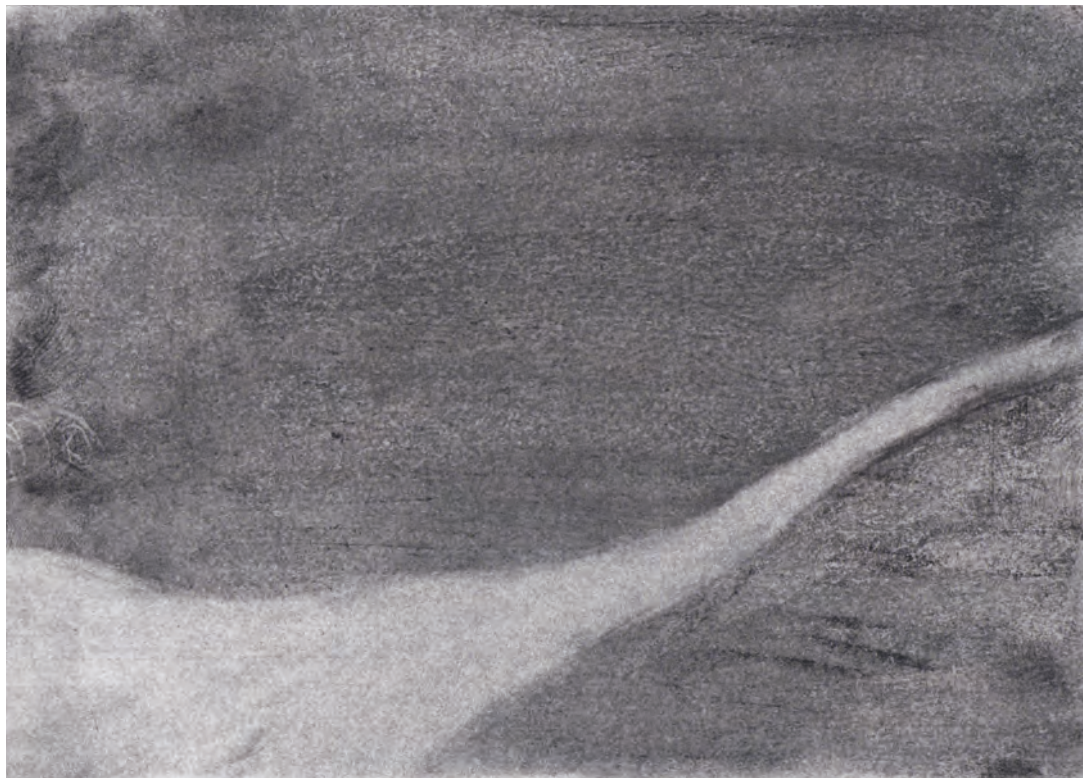


Quite often you see it in the sand dunes, you always get a layer falling away and you get ... where all the rubbish has come and you always get lines of shells and the burn remnants but also when you actually draw that, it creates a sound. A kind of ... [an] additional message, but trying to get the message ... the past and then you are thinking maybe it wasn't like that ... just what we perceive as reality.

North Uist

*That was just a road, that element of travel and travelling
through time. Travelling through seasons and moods and
feelings — journeys.*

North Uist



Colours of Uist

North Uist

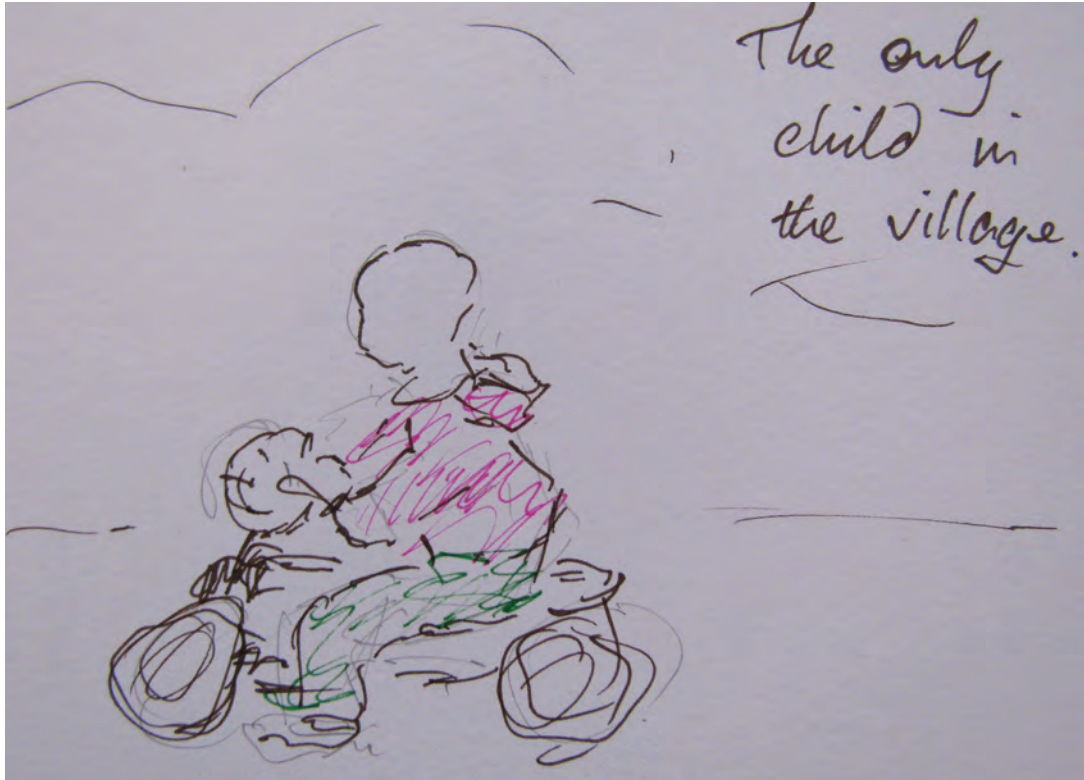


Isle of Lewis



**At the end of our road in the village is a wee boy on his
push bike — the only boy.**

North Uist





Electric pylons

North Uist

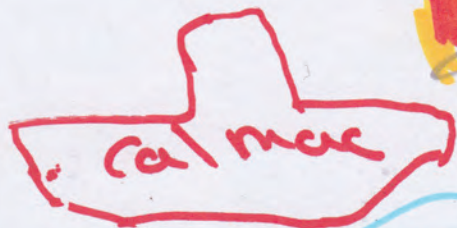


**Though it can be sunny day here, storms are always out
on the horizon, ready to move across the islands.**

North Uist



Coming Home



**The view from the ferry returning home with a fire
awaiting.**

South Uist

I just love the weather, it just lends itself to that practice. I love the rhythm of the island the heartbeat—it's something.

South Uist



In the islands it is not possible to be disconnected from the people around you. Relationships are a web built over generations. Sometimes that web can feel restrictive, like a trap rather than a support. It is a relief to leave it for mainland anonymity, occasionally.

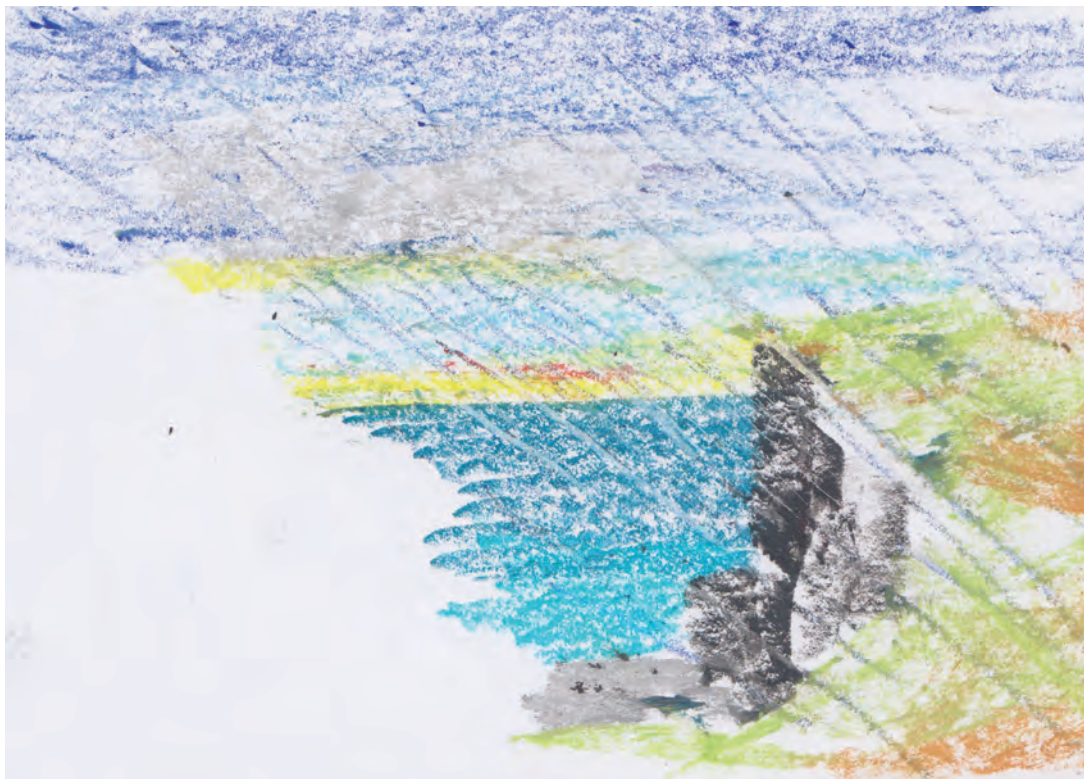
North Uist



**Playing on the beach with my family and a rainbow
appeared.**

Isle of Lewis









This book has sought the fragmentary collection of stories, images and perceptions that are present in contemporary Hebridean society. It is neither trapped within a duality of wild untrammelled space nor bucolic sublime coasts. These cards form image constellations of the islands, representing how people understand their place. These minor histories of identity, desired change, detached history, or immediacy form new ways of approaching the islands that tends to be lost amongst the larger stories of holiday homes, sailing trips, and wild narratives. The minor histories presented here do not necessarily cover the newest ground, nor are they problems unique to these particular islands; however, it is in this 'everydayness' an exposition of isolation, immediateness, and surveillance that new pictures are painted about the islands. They are not just spaces of play, sublime wonder or unruly residents; rather it is a complex constellation of perceptions that generate the contemporary Hebridean landscape.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The islanders' stories sit squarely within the landscape, seeking out within its own images of the contemporary landscape like an ethnographic projector. This then lends itself to asking 'How do we counter the dominant narrative?' And what mechanism can be put in place to acknowledge the nuances and complexities evident in the Outer Hebrides. It is up to our desires and needs to change that perception, challenging how we perceive not only those islands off a larger island of Great Britain, but of our own pre-conceived notions of many regions in the world. It is towards this end that these images hope to provide new insights into an ongoing struggle of changing the expectations and understandings of these 'peripheral' places.





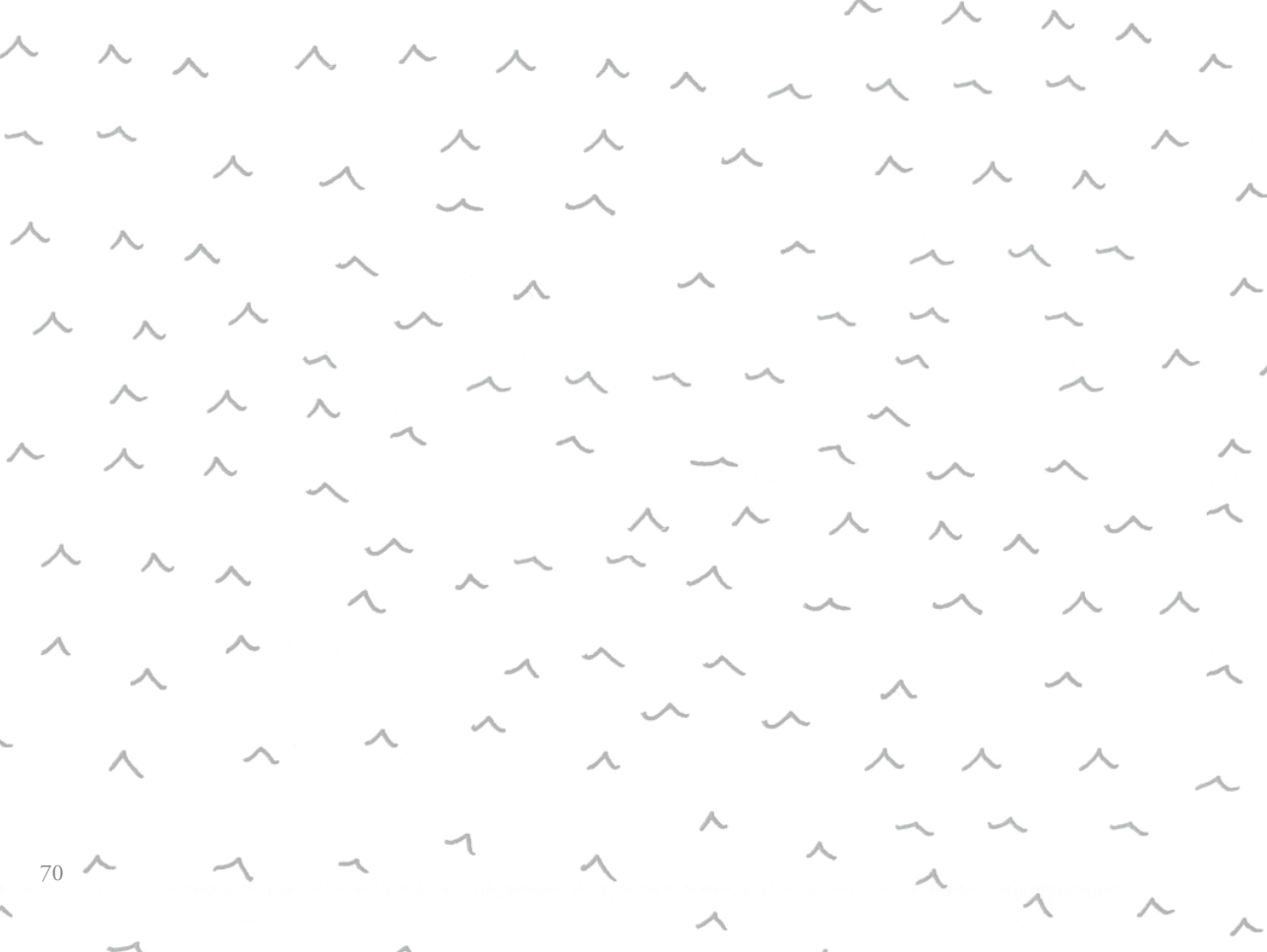
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Creative Futures Partnership (CFP) is a pioneering partnership between The Glasgow School of Art (GSA) and the Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE). It has been established to deliver transformational benefits for the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Through research and teaching programmes the partnership is committed to the long-term and sustainable development of a creative, entrepreneurial and internationally connected region. This book is an outcome of research and collaboration with communities in the Outer Hebrides through the Archipelago 136 research programme. The researchers would like to thank the communities and groups on Lewis, North Uist and South Uist for their support in this project. For more information on our work and research, please contact srobertson@gsa.ac.uk.

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Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean





a collection of contemporary
postcards illustrated by
residents of the western isles

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