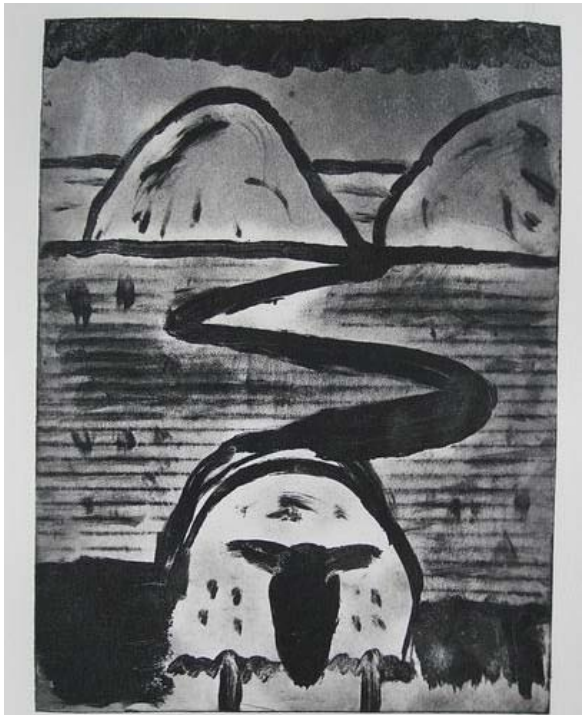




BULB LOG 29.....21st July 2010



I thought this would surprise you: a splash of colour from the print workshop –not the garden. As I said, I was busy all last week learning about non-toxic intaglio printmaking and what an eye opener it was. Keith Howard took the workshop as the innovator of many of the processes he showed us. There was a lot to learn – finding out new ways to make marks and create original prints – not to be confused with reproductions. I have shown two of my first trials exploring a number of ways of working below – these are before I started to add colour by multi-plate printing.





Dactylorhiza

I had little time to see the garden last week so it was good to see what had progressed in my absence and one of the plants that caught my eye was the Dactylorhiza which had now reached the stage where the spikes were fully mature with all the flowers open. You can get some idea of the scale from the picture below where I have included my hand the spike of flowers is 30cms .





Crocus scharojanii

Crocus scharojanii is one of those frustrating beauties that has so far proved very difficult to keep and flower in cultivation. There have been wonderful pictures posted on the forum showing it growing by the thousand in its natural habitat but here in Aberdeen I have only flowered it a handful of times and have never had more than a single flower in any year since first getting some seed in November 1996. How excited I was to find that this flower had appeared growing strongly and untouched by slugs – my very first flowering of this species was destroyed by slugs. The main problem in trying to grow this plant that I have discovered is that it will start to go dormant as soon as the temperature rises in spring and that is usually before it has completed its growth cycle of passing the store of food from the old corm to the new one. This results in both the old and new corm being roughly the same size sitting one on top of the other and no further transfer of nutrients will take place so corms rarely get to flowering size. I am working away with my paint brush fertilising this single flower in the desperate hope that I might just get some seed on it.



It is only when I knock off the gravel layer that I find the ripe and open seed pods of *Crocus caspius* which never rise up on a stem in our conditions – I do not know if this is how it is in the wild.



To save space and because this is a new form of *Crocus caspius* to me I have sown the seed back in with the parent corms by simply removing the compost down to the corms, refreshing it, adding just enough back to cover the corms then sowing the seeds at that depth, see picture below, before filling the pot back up with compost and top dressing it with gravel.



Crocus caspius seeds sown deep



Repotting Narcissus

As you can see I have made a start to the repotting of the bulbs now but as I have not got in any new sand or gravel this year I will be recycling all the compost. As the mix that I use is just sand, gravel and a wee bit of leaf mould it does not deteriorate only the leaf mould decays and that is easily replenished where required.



The procedure is the same for most bulbs. First I pull away much of the dried leaves and stems that remain.



Next I knock off the gravel top layer into a sieve.



Then I knock off the compost down to the top of the bulbs. When there are plenty bulbs this is usually quite easy as the bulbs form a division layer that separates the compost above and below so it is not necessary to disturb the bulbs. When I can see the bulbs I decide whether to knock them all out, clean them up and replant them or to leave them undisturbed, based on how healthy they look, how many there are and how much old skin/tunics are attached. In the pot above I decided that as the bulbs look clean and healthy and I could just get away with one more years growth before they outgrow this pot:I will just top dress them.



To replenish the nutrients I add some volcanic rock dust; a rich source of minerals and trace elements essential to the health of all plants.



Rock Dust

I have discussed the benefits of this volcanic rock dust, which is being marketed quite widely in Scotland, in the bulb log in previous years. The addition of rock dust to improve the fertility of soil has long been recognised as I have read in old journals that the quarry men took home rock dust to spread on their gardens and they had the best gardens. There is no doubt in my mind that the absence of these trace elements in the soil will cause problems in plants – much like our health would suffer if we did not receive our required vitamins and minerals- and this form of crushed volcanic rock is a very good source of these elements.



Bone meal

Having scattered a pinch of rock dust over the bulbs I need to add some nitrogen and phosphorous and the way I like to do that is with a wee scattering of bone meal which releases these two major nutrients in a slow and organic way.



Compost with bone meal

Because of its slow release over a long time the amount of bone meal that I add is not too critical so I basically add a pinch between my two fingers to 7cm pots and slightly more to the larger pots. When topdressing I scatter the bone meal into the top layer of compost that I removed before I replace it.



Top dressing complete

Having tidied and replenished the compost I can replace the cleaned up gravel and the job is done – two pots down-thousands more to go. I should add that I only do one pot at a time so there is no chance of mixing up the bulbs or the compost between pots.



Colchicum bulbs

When I see bulbs with lots of loose tunics like this Colchicum I will normally tip it out of the pot completely to clean it up as there is a danger that in our conditions these tunics will retain too much moisture.



Colchicum cleaned up

To clean up the bulbs I simply rub them gently between my gloved hands which will remove all the loose and brittle layers of the old skins or tunics without harming the bulb and its newest layers of coating. Once this process is done I will mix a pinch of rock dust and bone meal into the compost before repotting the subjects.



Narcissus cyclamineus bulbs

When I think the bulbs prefer damper conditions and would benefit from the addition of some leaf mould I will also knock them completely out of the pot so I can add a small amount of leaf mould into the compost along with the rockdust and bonemeal – Narcissus cyclamineus would be one of these. I grow most of our Narcissus cyclamineus either in the garden or in open frames where it never dries out but for some reason I have this one in the bulb house and it is not too happy. The bulb on the right shows advanced signs of rot attack and has been discarded the other two are a bit desiccated and wrinkly due to being dried out too much: a sure sign that it would be better placed outside where it will not dry out completely.



Tropaeolum speciosum on Rhododendron bureavii

I will leave you with a colourful combination from the garden of Tropaeolum speciosum growing up through probably the finest of all the foliage plants Rhododendron bureavii.

