

**From Where do we Begin -**

When I was a child  
I could easily see and feel things  
They were so real, they were at the dawn of my knowing:  
My experience of them was all part of my becoming.  
The smell of grass when you'd finished rolling down a bank  
Or the mowings through which you tumbled your hands,  
Until it became a throwing game,  
I hadn't thought about drawing grass,  
It just was.

Later,  
With my friends,  
We chased through woods and trees  
In the yellow evenings when the trees were black.  
Our games were serious and of real intent,  
and our value marked in each other's eyes  
Whatever talent we could show.  
For I could draw  
They said.

One day back home,  
A man called, a friend of the family,  
"When you can play 'The Bluebells of Scotland' I'll give you a pound".  
So, there were things worth striving for,  
Real achievements that grown-ups recognised,  
and then there was the first box of oils  
And the underground sea from 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth'.  
It recreated something for me;  
They liked it.

Next  
Came a lake and a glen;  
My father's pound for that.  
But the oils still worked in nasty lines  
Even the sky wasn't as flat as it should be.  
He's good at Art they said, and so  
To Art School I was sent.  
That's where the journey into me  
Began.

It seemed,  
From what they said,  
That there were ways of doing things.  
But I liked lights and shades across woods and fields,  
And to escape into symphonies and the elemental forces.  
Even so I did not exist in my imagery  
Nor yet in theirs, they made that clear.  
My approach was wrong  
And my darks a fake.

So it was  
That inside me  
Nothing connected any better  
For all the compromises I had made.  
Any vision was passed through the jaws of discussion  
And masticated on endless thoughts.  
The forms and images which grew in paint  
Did not connect  
With feeling.

But sometimes  
I feel real inside  
And my imagination strives for form.  
Ideas grate over a sea of shallow cliches  
That anchor the spirit in empty shapes. Their shapes?  
Sensation breaks on a barren shore and like a blind bat  
The vision flits about my bone cave  
Seeking sanctuary  
In real form.

From where do we begin?  
That which is outside forgets;  
That which is inside knows.  
Of course we must learn more about the outside  
Its structures, harmonies, language and order,  
And how to communicate and solve problems.  
Perhaps the forty minute periods repeated often  
Enable us to grasp patterns and strategies  
Through a certain imprinting.

Yet time flows through me  
And I sense another pattern,  
A more enduring and persistent reality,  
Not dissolved in the acid tests of a designed solution,  
But a reality that identifies meanings  
Enabling me to seek their origin  
And restore the language whose inner light  
And outward form  
Are one reality.

Above all else  
The trust we seek  
Was there at the beginning.  
Believing that there is an inner life of images,  
Rooted in sensations which we only later know,  
Striving for persistence in material form,  
Its times and rhythms beyond our knowing.

But yet a task more real to see  
Because it's there in you and me.

**Keith Gentle**