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Broken North

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turning away from the Cuillin

spare a thought
for the Skye granny who
the moment before she died
turned her head
taking one final look
at the Cuillin saying

take away those useless
great lumps of meaning,
I’ve no more use for them

(after William Carlos Williams)  
Alec Finlay

Prof Craig Richardson, Northumbria
… the practice of retreat spread to what is now western Scotland and coastal Wales: a centrifugal motion, carrying men to the brinks of Europe and beyond.

London: Granta, p. 24-5
Broken North
Ben
Hope
There was nothing, save the walls of rocks I had made and the summit cairn, to suggest history. Nothing human. I turned east and south, straining to see if there was any flicker of light in the hundreds of miles of darkness around me. Even a glimpse of something lit, however distant and unreachable, would have been reassurance of a sort. Nothing. No glimmer. …

The comfortless snow-shires, the frozen rocks: this place was not hostile to my presence, far from it. Just entirely, gradelessly indifferent. Here there was no question of relation. This place refused any imputation of meaning.

I had expected to find evidence of contemporary damage, contemporary menace, but I had not thought to encounter these older darknesses.

Joseph Beuys, *Voglio vedere le mie montagne*  
(*I want to see my mountains*) 1950–71
Centre: Joseph Beuys, 
*Runrig* 1962 - 72
Joseph Beuys, *Loch Awe*, 1963 – 70
Vitrine: *Dust Box* (Wooden box, dust, metal, drawings on paper);
*Loch Awe Piece* (Lead box containing peat, wood and copper Eurasian staff).