

# Wilhelmina Barns-Graham in Lanzarote



A Virtual Tour

A Handbook to accompany the exhibition catalogue for

**A Distant Isle – Wilhelmina Barns-Graham in Lanzarote**

at Belgrave Gallery St Ives, June 2019

A Virtual Tour showing points on the island that Wilhelmina Barns-Graham visited and drew/painted on her visits there between 1989 and 1993, as these pertain to the artworks selected for this exhibition.

When Wilhelmina Barns-Graham (Willie) arrived in Lanzarote on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1989 she discovered a wholly different landscape but one that triggered the same responses within her that she had experienced in Tuscany, Sicily and the Balearics three decades earlier. The island is dominated by the substantial volcanic activity, the last eruptions being very recent in geological terms. Well-documented eruptions took place in the Timanfaya area between 1730 and 1736, when lava and ash covered around two-thirds of the island and buried many villages and fertile agricultural land in the process. It is thought that over thirty volcanoes spewed forth at this time. A century later, in 1824, there was a further eruption in the same area.

This was Willie's first visit, and it set a course of events which led to her to return each year for five years, the last in 1993. The resulting body of work is significant not only as it informs us of her ongoing engagement with the natural world, something which underpins every aspect of her entire oeuvre, but it is a rare opportunity in her later work to see the direct effects of a particular environment on her painting. Her study of this extraordinary landscape is absolutely consistent with her fascination of Switzerland's Grindelwald Glacier (1949) and the canyons of Tuscany (1953-55), let alone the direct influences of the rough Cornish coastline. Her trips to Orkney (1984 – 86) were also intense and deeply felt, the geology of those islands leading to a new series of collages and abstracted forms. In Lanzarote, Willie experienced something new again, though the act of discovery was one with which she was familiar.

Willie marvelled at the black rock formations and conic hills, and the strangeness of the lava fields. She was inspired by a world in which the rebirth of the land was a dominant feature. In La Geria, centrally located on the island, the smooth conical shape of the volcanic mounds are offset against the chaotic patterning of the lava, much of which has barely eroded, the surfaces sharp and abrasive. It is not easy to walk amongst it which is why she often drew from the roadside.

Willie stayed in the north east of the island and travelled extensively throughout the volcanic regions. For convenience this virtual tour starts in the most volcanically active area, the Parque Nacional de Timanfaya that contains the Montanas del Fuego – mountains of fire (1). There one takes a bus to the top of the Timanfaya where the restaurant grills its meats over natural heat vents that reach deep into the mountains' core. This is a dormant volcano but that is not to say that it is powerless.

Back on the main roads one drives up through La Geria, bearing towards the north east. Willie made many drawings and related works of the La Geria area (2-5), capturing the conic stacks set against the rough, flat lava plateau. On the lower slopes of these hills the farmers grow their fruit and vegetables in the black volcanic gravel, or picon, which has the ability to absorb dew and prevent evaporation (4). Set into small 'bowls', the crops are protected from the wind by walls that ring around them, built of larger pieces of volcanic rock.

Next point of interest on the road that caught Willie's eye is the whitewashed church at Masdache (6). It is a small, irregularly shaped building, serving the local community. Willie drew other churches on the island but this is one of the more distinctive.

The route continues past San Bartolome and turns east towards Tahiche. This area also has an extensive lava field (7) and is most visited now by those heading towards the Funcacion Cesar Manrique, established by the artist who has made a huge impact on the island, not only for his publicly installed art that features everywhere but for his influence on ensuring that the island will never be overdeveloped.

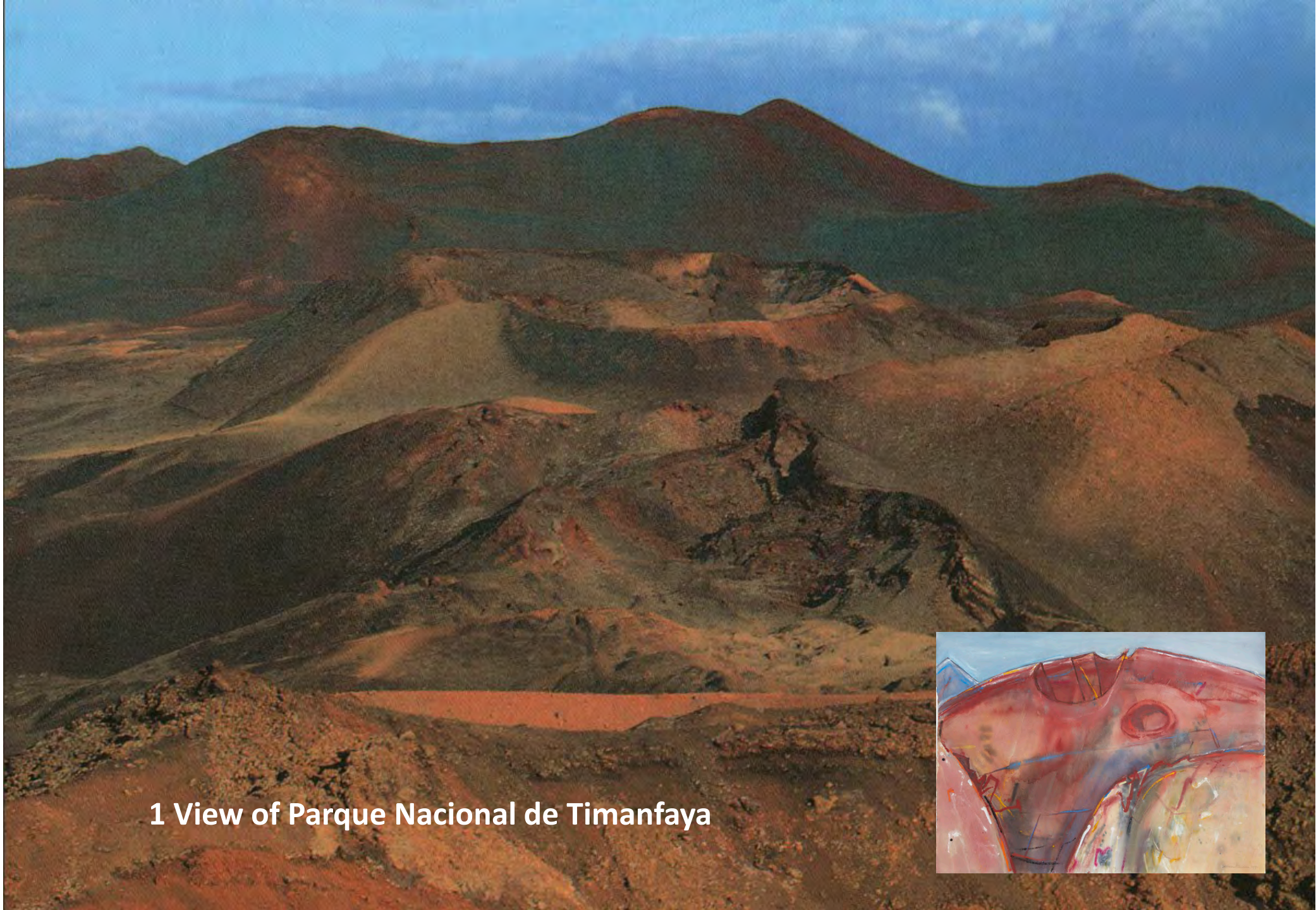
From here the route takes us directly north, passing by Guatiza (8) and Tabayesco (9), to the community of Orzola (10, 11) at the top of the island. There Willie was taken by the rows of one and two storey terraced houses with their blue or green doors and window frames. (This colour scheme is found throughout the island, the green representing farmers, the blue fishermen. Red-brown seen elsewhere represents all other professions.) The visual rhythm echoes collages she had made a few years earlier arising from her trips to Orkney. The salt pans lying in front, now disused and overgrown, act as a counterpoint to the terraces, an urban equivalent perhaps to the volcanic landscape she depicted elsewhere.

Finally, the road leads back south down the western side to Maguez (12) and ends with the wonderful image of Willie walking down the road towards La Caleta de Famara, the cliffs of Famara on the right and the Isla Graciosa in the far distance (13).





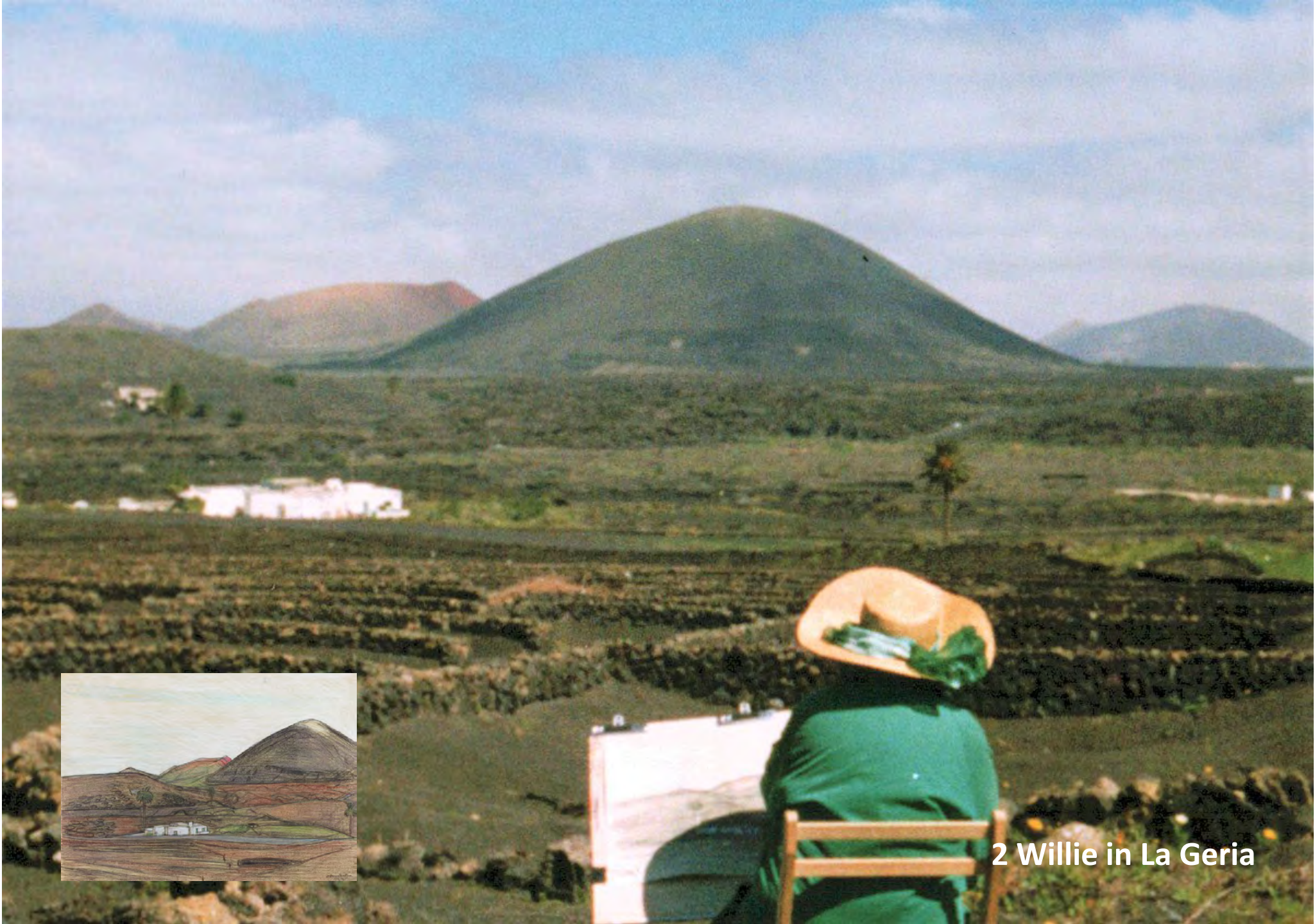
1	View of Parque Nacional de Timanfaya	Insert – Lanzarote [Timanfaya], 1991, gouache on paper, 56 x 75 cm
2	Willie drawing in La Geria	Insert – Lanzarote, nr Tias, 1991, pastel on paper, 49 x 69 cm
3	Montana Negra, La Geria	Insert – [Untitled – Black Mountain, Lanzarote], 1990, mixed media on paper, 38.5 x 56.5 cm
4	Farming in La Geria	Insert – La Geria, 1990, gouache on paper, 56 x 76.5 cm
5	Montana Testeyna, La Geria	Insert – La Geria, Lanzarote, 1991, pencil on paper, 56.5 x 75.5 cm
6	Church, Masdache	Insert – [Church, Masdache, Lanzarote], 1989, oil pastel on paper, 57 x 77 cm
7	View to San Bartolome	Insert – [Lava Lanzarote Series], 1992, pencil on paper, 28.5 x 40 cm
8	Guatiza from North looking South	Insert – Nr Guatiza, March '91, 1991, pen and ink on paper, 29 x 40 cm
9	View to Tabayesco	Insert – Lanzarote (Tabayesco), 1989, pencil o paper, 57 x 75 cm
10	Houses, Orzola	Insert – Orzola Slipway, Lanzarote, 1990, pastel on paper, 49 x 68 cm
11	Derelict Salt Pans, Orzola	Insert – Salt Pans No.4, 1990, acrylic on card, 20 x 28 cm
12	Maguez	Insert – Maguez, 1990, pencil on paper, 57 x 76.5 cm
13	Willie on road north to Famara	



**1 View of Parque Nacional de Timanfaya**

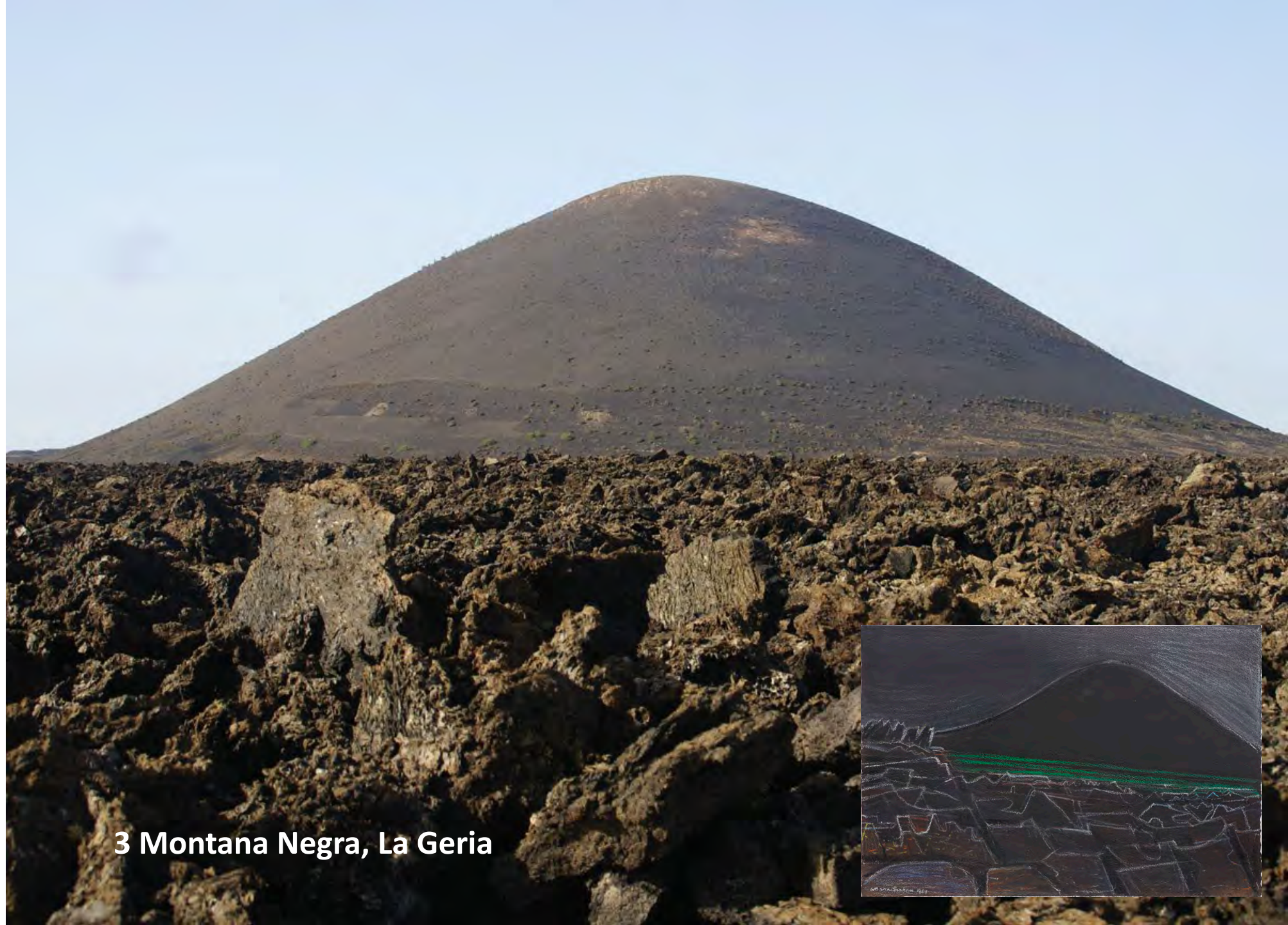






2 Willie in La Geria





**3 Montana Negra, La Geria**





4 Farming in La Geria





5 Montana Testeyna, La Geria







6 Church, Masdache







**7 View to San Bartolome**







8 Guatiza from North looking South







9 View to Tabayesco







10 Houses, Orzola







11 Derelict Salt Pans, Orzola







12 Maguez





13 Willie on road north to Famara

*Wilhelmina Barns-Graham in Lanzarote- a Virtual Tour*

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Text, layout & design - Geoffrey Bertram,

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Published by Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust 2019



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