

Art course closure leads to exhibition



Four Edinburgh artists are mounting an exhibition of prints and drawings in the Festival. Nothing unusual in that. Except that these four artists are all associated with the only course in Scotland where students can study art part-time and still reach degree level – a course that is set to be closed down. They want to show that something really valuable is going to be lost.

The exhibition “Working Lines” takes place at 2 Howe Street from Saturday 24 August to Sunday 1 September. The exhibition is full of prints and drawings, from small to large, in two rooms. Some are abstract, some are naturalistic. All are original.

Three of the artists – Marion Barron, Sheila Chapman and Ruth Thomas – are at various stages of their degree course at the Edinburgh College of Art, a course which can often take up to seven years to complete as they fit their studies around work and families. Ruth, who is in her final year, and came to Edinburgh many years ago from Australia, will be showing some colourful large scale drawings based on her textile installations; their shapes and themes draw on the contrasting landscapes of Scotland and New South Wales in Australia.

Sheila is in the early years of her course but has already exhibited successfully: last December at the Royal Scottish Academy and at the Society of Scottish Artists Open Exhibition in March this year. Her drawings in the exhibition explore the shapes and forms of local plant life. “In my drawings I seek to capture the spirit of the plant and the impression it leaves in the mind,” she says.

Marion will be showing primarily abstract drawings, inspired both organic forms and by buildings, and the empty spaces within buildings, in Edinburgh and elsewhere. Her other commitments mean she can now change to study full-time at the College, but said "I couldn't have started on my lifelong ambition to study Art without the part-time degree course. Unfortunately, mature students like me will no longer have the opportunity to study in this way. A door will be closed to them'.

The fourth artist in the exhibition, Trevor Davies, the former Edinburgh councillor and convener of the Planning Committee, came to his art later than the others and just missed the opportunity to enrol on the degree course. "I'd completed a number of years in evening classes," he says, "and tutors told me I was ready to apply for what is a very tough programme of work over a number of years. Then I was told the course had closed. It was an immense disappointment and makes it more difficult for me to learn." In the exhibition he'll be showing prints and drawings of both still life subjects and landscapes.

The part-time BA in Combined Studies at the Edinburgh College of Art is the only one of its kind in Scotland. When Edinburgh College of Art became part of Edinburgh University it decided to shut it down and it will close when the final student currently on the course graduates.. The course has been successful and popular and is mostly used by students – young mothers, carers, retired people and others – developing art as a career later in life. Students in the closing years of the course come from Fife, the Borders, Glasgow and Dumfries as well as Edinburgh itself.

Students on the part-time degree course have been trying to convince the College of its unique value to Scotland and asking them not to close it for good when current students qualify.

Submitted by [Trevor Davies](#)

