

Leith School of Art Alumni Show



'An attempt to communicate something of the deeper nature of reality' – that's how painter [Craig Jefferson](#) describes his art. Jefferson's bold and colourful canvases form part of [Leith School of Art's](#) Alumni Exhibition, which opened last week at the [Dovecot Studios](#). The exhibition celebrates the School's 25th birthday, and brings together the work of some of its very best students.

Jefferson's '**Clay Figure & Mirror**' and '**Empty Chair**' make striking use of yellows, reds and turquoise; there are also some black and white pictures worked in oilbar, soot and graphite. Images seem to drift in and out of their surroundings; the chair becomes visible as you move away from the canvas, only to melt into the background as you move closer.



Craig Jefferson clay figure and mirror

Painting is well represented in the exhibition. [Hans Clausen](#) describes his raw materials as 'the palette of everyday detritus.' Here he shows '**Before Present**', commemorative plates suspended upside down over a mirror, and '**Raking over the past**', a huge rake made from a piece of red acrylic with a hardwood handle. Clausen is interested in 'the visual vocabularies, narrative qualities and emotive associations of ubiquitous objects' and describes his work as 'an attempt to examine the relationship between artist, object and viewer.'

His thought-provoking pieces take items out of their conventional contexts, encouraging us to question how we see, or do not see, things that have acquired unchallenged and accepted associations through daily use.

[Owen Normand](#), BP Portrait Award Young Artist of 2013, is interested in the link between narrative and image, and aims to depict a turning point in a character's story. He says that the lone figures in his paintings are meant to 'act as a stimulus for the viewer to create his own narrative.' The titles are similarly enigmatic: **The Drawer** features a man holding a guitar, whilst **The Acoustics of Snow** shows a young woman looking out as snow falls on water. Puzzles of a different kind are seen in [Alastair John Gordon](#)'s exhibits; some look like wood covered in masking tape, others appear to be pieces of wood lying on top of another wooden surface ; each is a trompe l'oeil, a painting made to look like a three-dimensional object. Gordon is following a tradition of illusionist painting that proliferated in Northern Europe in the 1600s. In his work parts of the real wood panel underneath the painting are often left exposed, as he seeks to 'explore the cognitive boundary between displays of death and displays of life.'



For [Michael Hlousek-Nagle](#) art 'is an essential emotional unburdening of the psyche, a safety valve...a statement of faith in the continuity and unity of human experience.' Hlousek-Nagle follows the Western figurative tradition, feeling that the human figure is still relevant in attempting to understand the fundamental questions in life. He has produced the art work for the covers of a series of acclaimed recordings by the composer James MacMillan OBE, and his portrait of MacMillan stands out in this collection of his paintings.

An artist dedicated to engagement with his public, [Chris Rutterford](#) films his projects throughout their conception. From an illustration background, he is used to deadlines and pressure, 'I like my work to have an honesty and force that comes from rapid execution.' The video here shows him painting his 20m mural, **Tam O'Shanter**; it is accompanied by a brilliant bluegrass rendition of the poem by his cousin's

band, The Turkey Smokers. Rutterford has now started to paint in public, 'turning the simple act of painting into more of an adrenalin sport.'

Glasgow-based artist **Toby Paterson** is interested in the post-war reinvention of cities under the influence of Modernism, and says his work 'positions itself between architectural conception and built reality.' He exhibits **Pavilion Plan**, a screenprint bathed in white so that the plan itself is barely visible, **Ludic Bricolage**, in which detached staircases, signs and a chess table seem to float in the space of a red background, and **Hypothetical Relief: Moscow** – strips of acrylic are formed into curves, resembling a bird's eye view of a dolls' house or a plan for an office. He aims to 'hint at the possibility of a creative engagement with and reinterpretation of the spaces that surround us.'

[Jane Keith](#) exhibits scarves, ties and scarves to showcase her fabrics. Rich in natural colours – russets,, blues, greens – they are inspired by landscapes, seascapes, colours and most importantly patterns; tractor trails, dried seed heads of wildflowers, ploughed fields. Keith hand prints and paints her textiles at her studio in Balmerino, Fife. Strong horizontals mingle with slanting lines; on some scarves, concentric circles resemble whirlpools or tractor wheels. Clothing of a different kind comes from [Morwenna Darwell](#). A striking blue dress and coat have an oriental, mysterious feel; Darwell says that one of her many interests is 1960s Hong Kong (another is pigs..) Morwenna, who is now studying at the Royal College of Art, tries to create garments with interesting tactile qualities as well as carefully considered cutting.

The show also includes some impressive jewellery, with work by [Jessica Howarth](#) and [Ebba Goring](#). Howarth crochets cotton then casts it into precious metals and combines this with gemstones ; her pieces here were inspired by her hometown on the banks of Loch Leven, the setting for a dramatic episode in the life of Mary Queen of Scots. Queen Mary's influence is

seen in a beautiful heart-shaped pendant on a green necklace and some very pretty filigree earrings. Meanwhile Goring has made a fascinating miniature village, complete with tiny houses, sheep, goats and pigs, from enamel, copper, silver, gold and silver leaf.

[Tim Moore](#) is an artist: he is also electronic musician **Discreet Unit** and as such continues to DJ and perform worldwide. Moore combines drawing, typography and printmaking with digital techniques. Interested in graphic art and musical performance, he enquires into typography and the visualisation of music. His screen print **Commitment**, referencing John Wolfgang Van Goethe and WH Murray, draws the viewer into the meaning of words scattered across the canvas. He also exhibits his artwork for the cover of **Linkwood – System**, an album released by his brother.

Moore is not the only dual-career alumnus represented in the show: **Tommy Grace** is the synthesiser operator for rock group [Django Django](#) as well as a highly successful artist working in print, and co-founder of Edinburgh's Embassy Gallery. Here he shows hybridised newspaper collages that draw us in to read their words – until we see that they are all typed in Lore Ipsum, a text of scrambled Latin used by graphic designers to allow them to concentrate on the layout and visual appearance of a document. Moore says that his works 'reject the communicative function of the printed word and remain stubbornly mute.'

Jamie Stone's contribution to this exhibition is a short film, [Orbit Ever After](#). He focuses on domestic dramas within fantastical settings, and tries to capture a 'more textural, rural kind of science fiction.' The film, which was nominated for a 2014 BAFTA, is about feeling stuck, drifting and yearning for escape. Nigel lives with his family on a ramshackle space ship; the girl of his dreams is orbiting in the other direction; what can he do? *Orbit Ever After*, which features Mackenzie Crook and Thomas Brodie-Sangster, has

already won numerous awards. It was made on a low budget, using miniatures and some inventive techniques to deal with such problems as antigravity.



Pernille **Spence** is a performance artist. **The Breath Between Us** is a film (made with Dr Sonia Rocha, a researcher into hypoxia) of Pernille blowing into a meteorological balloon; controlled breathing techniques enabled her to maintain this for three and a half hours. Pernille is interested in the invisibility of oxygen; as the balloon inflated her breath became visible until the balloon was finally (and deliberately) popped. **Not My Tomorrow** is a record of Pernille's four day performance work based on personal accounts of prisoners of conscience and others whose fate has been taken out of their own hands. For 14 hours each day, she was shut into a black-painted one metre square box on which she etched the names of prisoners and political hostages. As she scratched lines on the glass, light from the box gradually spilled into the darkened gallery space.

An installation, performance, video and sound works artist, **Graham Maule** regards artwork as 'a process culminating in an event rather than a product.' His work here involves a series of black boxes inside some of which films are playing, lights, and a video showing on a screen covering one wall. Maule works for the [Wild Goose Resource Group](#), a project of the Iona Community; for him art is a ritual process involving both artist and audience. In this installation we are led into a dark and unsettling room; a walking stick and a pair of 3D glasses lie on top of one of the boxes; on the screen, a dog runs about.

Paul Clowney and his wife were close friends of the founders of Leith School of Art, **Lottie and Mark Cheverton**, all of them sharing a strong Christian faith. Lottie and Mark were killed in a car crash in 1991, but the school carried on under its

present director **Phil Archer**. Clowney himself died in 2012, but his work is exhibited at the Dovecot in a fitting tribute to the founding vision of the School. Found items form the basis of Clowney's these pieces: he has used mainly driftwood to create **Tidy Beach** and **Presque Vue**. Clowney's friend Simon Jenkins described him as 'having ways of thinking about art and faith that were unfamiliar and highly creative...he was so curious about objects that they would eventually reveal their secrets to him.' This surely could apply to all of the artists exhibiting here; all of them have gone on from Leith to make their mark in the art world, each of them is a testament to the huge achievement of the Chevertons in setting up the school and of Phil Archer in carrying it forward to where it is today.

[Leith School of Art Alumni Exhibition](#) is on at the Dovecot Studios, Infirmary Street until 31st May. The Studios are open Monday to Saturday 10.30 to 5.30. Entry to the exhibition is free. [Stag Espresso](#) runs the excellent cafe in the building; the cafe is open 8.30 to 5 Monday to Friday and 10 to 5 on Saturdays.