

Spotted on Dundas Street – Birch Tree Gallery

Jurgita has a real vision for her gallery which has only just opened this year, one she has held for a long time.



Jurgita Galbraith

She explained : “When I moved to Scotland I had to reinvent myself. I was a landscape architect in Lithuania and I would have had a lot of new things to learn here if I wanted to continue with that.

“So rather than re-learning my profession as a landscape architect in a new context in Scotland I felt that this was a good opportunity to have a new start and do something about my long held dream.

“I have always had a dream of having a gallery.

“I was and, to some degree, still am hesitant to use word “crafts”. As a non-native English speaker, I am puzzled that the same word can be used to describe a huge range of items made by hand and can be used in a very different capacity, including items made by preschoolers or as hobby.

“In my native, Lithuanian language, there are different words to describe handmade objects. ‘*Rankdarbiai*’ describes items created as hobby (such as knitting, crochet, stitching). ‘*Tautodailė*’ is traditional craft, typically practiced as an occupation, but rooted in folk art (such as wood-carving, leather goods making, traditional amber jewellery).

“Japan has a really deep and rich tradition of that kind of craft – nearly every household item, such as fans, lacquerware boxes, tea cups or kimonos, requires skill and years of

apprenticeship.

“When I think about traditional crafts in Scotland, hand-woven textiles, such as Harris Tweed, stone-carving, perhaps bagpipe-making come to mind.

“Taikomoji-dekoratyvinė dailė” – crafts as decorative-applied arts, is certainly the closest description to what Birch Tree Gallery intends to exhibit.

“The slight modification would be the fact that applied-art objects no longer need to be “applicable” – they can forfeit their original purpose and be seen as art objects exclusively for aesthetic enjoyment.

“Hence, my primary interest is fine crafts, one-off handmade objects that require sufficient skill to make, but also have a unique artistic expression.”



“I am originally from Lithuania, that’s where I was born and studied for my degree. Then I studied in Denmark for a year and then lived in the US for 18 years.” (and that’s where she met her Scottish husband!)

Jurgita told us about the summer exhibitions she is hosting at Birch Tree Gallery : “In August I will have the work of two artists on display here. The first is Laima Dzigaitė from Lithuania. Her work is collage using plant materials on pastel backgrounds. And I will also have work by Cathrine Holtet who is a water etched porcelain artist who lives in Dundee but comes from Norway.

“They both have very delicate plant elements in their work therefore I think they combine very nicely into one exhibition.



“The exhibition opens on 3 August and runs till the end of the month.”



Birch Tree Gallery. Laima Dzigaite. Nex to the gate (photo D.Vytas)

“I am still working on the final details of what will be shown here later in the year, but I will certainly have sculptors. I am working with a stone and metal sculptor for future exhibitions.

“I will have more printmakers more ceramicists and I am sure there will be new jewellery makers as well.”



Birch Tree Gallery. Cathrine Holtet. Mountain bowls

Jurgita loves being in Dundas Street. She continued : “The best thing is that I probably get a lot of art lovers who, even without knowing about my existence, come here.

“I then have the opportunity to show the work I am exhibiting to them. But I also love this space itself. I get the wonderful afternoon light here.

“It feels cheerful and very bright and white. I think in some odd way finding a suitable venue, the physical premises on Dundas Street helped to finalise my primary interest in crafts.

What's in a name?

“As to the name of the gallery, the birch tree image is very simple, but powerful. The strong visual and tactile quality of its bark embodies many of the same qualities that differentiate fine crafts from other arts.

“After all, birches do not have the same bark when they are young, it comes with maturity.

“There is another component to the story. My home-town Šiauliai in Lithuania, is at the exactly same latitude as Edinburgh – 55.9° N.



Birch Tree Gallery. Laima Dzigaite. Morning Allegro (photo D. Vytas)

“Birches are quite prominent in Lithuania and in the Scottish Highlands and two species *Betula pendula* and *Betula pubescens* are indigenous to both countries. I wanted to have this “tie” to my native landscape – something I would be aware of, but what would not stand-out to others.

“While I was still agonising about the gallery name, I was already mapping out the first exhibition with Louise Oppenheimer and Maggie Zerafa. Both of them have featured birches in the past – Louise has woven a few tapestries depicting birch trees and Maggie had a series of cups and pots with birch-bark patterns.

“So, it felt like a good sign that Birch Tree Gallery was the right name. Interestingly, neither of them will have any works featuring birches for the inaugural exhibition ‘Semitones’!

“It’s also a small enough space that I feel can relate to a domestic environment. and not be intimidating. I don’t want to be an intimidating gallery! I want people to feel welcome here.”

Birch Tree Gallery

23A Dundas Street
Edinburgh, EH3 6QQ

