

New portrait of Mary Moriarty unveiled at Leith Theatre

The former landlady of the Port O'Leith on Constitution Street and Leith legend, Mary Moriarty has been painted by Edinburgh based artist Sarah Muirhead.

The artist was commissioned by Ms K Hamilton to paint the portrait which will be unveiled at a private event tonight at the theatre.

Mary used to run the very well-known pub wearing her high heels and where the clientele was very mixed. If you got up to dance on the bar that was allowed – if she said so. Now in her eighties she is a driving force behind the Leith Festival.



Mary Moriarty said : “I am honoured and delighted that a portrait of me will hang in Leith Theatre, how thrilling and exciting. Both the Theatre and myself have shared exciting times in Leith. I have very fond memories of 25 years in the Port o’ Leith Bar meeting lots of lovely Leithers and of course workers in the Docks and Crew members of ships docked in Leith. Credit should go to the lovely young talented artist Sarah Muirhead – it was great to be able to chat to her when she was preparing the painting, also a big THANK YOU to those who commissioned the portrait.”

Sarah Muirhead is a figurative painter born in Glasgow and

based in Edinburgh since graduating from Edinburgh College of Art. She has exhibited extensively in the UK and was nominated as one of 10 new sensations by a panel including Kirsty Wark and Tracy Emin. She has exhibited in group and Solo exhibitions in The UK, Europe and US. A recent solo exhibition 'Scopophilia' was named in the Whitechapel Gallery top 5 during Frieze week. Sarah's work hangs in public buildings such as Oxford University and has been commissioned to paint several famous figures known for their contributions to art and science. Her work explores the physicality of altered bodies, focusing on voyeurism and the sensation of being watched. She refers to classical art and allegory and plays with the idea of control, judgement and sexuality, more recently referring to the ownership and decay of objects of antiquity and contrasting these with depictions of the human form.

Sarah Muirhead said, "I was delighted to be asked to paint such an extraordinary woman. It was important to me that Mary was honoured and represented as someone who is so loved and respected in her community and known quite rightly as Queen of Leith. A nod to her status as elected monarchy is the formal composition of the painting. I wanted to optics in the bottom left corner to look like jewels but to refer to her trade and background.

"I thought it right to make her halo a scene of Leith Links and to include a photograph of her husband who still feels like a very present figure in her life and that of the community of Leith. I included various objects in her home which she was kind enough to show me around and tried to communicate her warmth, character and nature which I think is distinct and unique. It was a pleasure painting someone I would have liked to paint regardless of the commission because she is fascinating and has a powerful presence."



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Euan Myles and Mary Moriarty last summer at the launch of the Fly Spotting campaign PHOTO Martin P McAdam