

# **Fair Botanists brought to life . . .**

**The two main characters in author Sara Sheridan's historical romantic novel, The Fair Botanists, have been "brought to life" and feature in a winter art exhibition.**

**Set in Edinburgh in 1822 around the time of King George IV's visit to the city and when the Royal Botanic Garden moved from its original Leith home to Inverleith, the book's main protagonists are widow and botanical draughtswoman Elizabeth Rocheid and vivacious and mysterious Belle Brodie.**

The author's friend and acclaimed artist Sophie McKay Knight has translated Elizabeth and Belle from the pages of The Fair Botanists onto canvas, and they are on display at the Velvet Easel Gallery in Portobello.

Velvet Easel owner Jane Grant, said: "These large canvases are painted in Sophie McKay Knight's distinct style. The two paintings are similar in their colour palette but both very

different in terms of the characters they portray, and once you have read the book you will understand what I mean by that.

“It is fantastic to see art and literature come together so wonderfully in these evocative paintings and it was great to have a visit from both the artist and the author who came to see the paintings in situ in Portobello.



Belle Brodie, one of the main characters in *The Fair Botanists* book by author Sara Sheridan, painted by Sophie McKay Knight.

“It was unusual for women to be interested in botany at that time, certainly very unusual for them to get any recognition, as it was a very male dominated profession. Both of these paintings are available individually, or as a pair, and I think they would look stunning in an Edinburgh house.”

There are two lovely paintings for sale [@VelvetEasel](#) and here we find out the [@sarasheridan](#) story behind them [pic.twitter.com/T67PUqtPt7](https://pic.twitter.com/T67PUqtPt7)

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [December 1, 2021](#)

Author Sara said: “‘I love Sophie’s work – she is an artist who truly makes magic. I was blown away when she decided to paint Belle and Elizabeth, and she has captured them so beautifully. Belle is very flirtatious – you can see that straight away – and Elizabeth is both vulnerable and haughty. I love both paintings.

“Seeing them close up in the gallery was like meeting these women, who exist in my imagination, in real life. It’s an honour that they engaged the imagination of such a talented artist.”



Velvet Easel owner Jane Gallery with painting of Elizabeth, one of main characters in *The Fair Botanists*

Artist Sophie revealed that Sara had no idea she was creating the characters, which are acrylic and screenprint on canvas.

She said: "I am often inspired by historical and/or fictional characters, but my images are usually fused with people I know or developments from previous paintings.

"As soon as I 'met' Belle and Elizabeth in Sara's book, they existed for me completely and in a very real sense. The two women in Sara's novel were so real to me that I absolutely had to paint them as individuals.

"It is a credit to Sara's wonderful writing and character conception that I was able to do this. As soon as the paintings were 'born' I had to show Sara, who had no idea I was creating them."

Elizabeth and Belle – and a wide range of paintings, prints, ceramics, glass, jewellery and gifts – feature in the Velvet Easel's winter exhibition until February. [The gallery at 298 Portobello High Street](#) is open Thursday to Sunday.