

Art Exhibition hopes to highlight everyday beauty

From her enjoyment spotting a poppy fresh in bloom as it shoots out of cracked concrete to her stunning series of a sun-kissed Calton Hill, Musselburgh-based artist Martha Ellis' first solo exhibition is a unique, fun and celebratory must-see.

Located in the Patrioathall Gallery, in Stockbridge the free exhibition runs until 28 July.

Challenging the observer to look closer, the magnificent collection of mounted drawings ranges from big and small sculptures, created using laser cutting technology, depicting plant life, people, and architecture that Ellis discovers in the wild.

She said: "I quite often I think of myself as a visual person, but then I realised I'm actually quite terrible at *looking*. So I have to force myself to look and see things. Flowers are beautiful, and we give them as gifts, but actually, just when you go out for a walk, down on the ground or in trees and stuff – there are so many things that are really beautiful if you stop and *look*.

"And I'm terrible for not stopping to look at them. So, it kind of forced me to do that.

“By doing that, I’m kind of wanting to do the same for other people.”

Room 1 showcases the artist’s documentation of the effects of the changing seasons on wild grasses and plants found on the banks of the Whiteadder in the Scottish Borders.



Martha Ellis, artist standing in front of ‘Grasses – spring, summer, autumn and winter’, a Laser cut MDF Edition of 10 at her first solo-exhibition at Patriothall Gallery, Stockbridge. Ellis explained one of the largest pieces in this room entitled: ‘Grasses – spring, summer, autumn and winter’ with its rich burnt-edges giving warmth to its now cool, industrial surroundings. She said: “I love the process with the laser because you get a burnt edge.”

Room 2 features works such as ‘The Allotment’, created using Laser cut MDF and the large-scale ‘Bexley Village, 8th January 2022’; a Hand cut plywood drawing of people.

Evoking intrigue with every step, the figures change and almost give the impression of distortion as the viewers’

attention is looking closer at the finer details of a single moment in time.



Artist's Calton Hill entitled:
Calton Hill – North, South, East and West'. Laser cut MDF
Edition of 50



Having studied and worked as a teacher London, Ellis' depiction captures people in the south-eastern Greater London borough of Bexley Village. Circling the work, I felt a sense of life and movement,

despite the piece depicting a memory captured perhaps long ago.

The 39 year-old artist, and former student of Fine Art at Central Saint Martins and Middlesex University in London, said that the gallery space in Stockbridge has provided a great location for her largest collection of unique hand and laser cut drawings to-date.

She said: "I had one of the pieces at the RSA this summer, that was also down in London and then I've had some minor pieces in kind of group exhibitions down in Yorkshire or in Scotland as well. So this is the first time having a solo show to have the space to fully give the work room to breathe.

"If we're in a mixed exhibition, you always feel a little bit squeezed in. I think having the space to allow for shadows and having the gallery where you can really play with that, and allow the work to be seen in that way has been really exciting for me. Because it's the first time you're able to have the space to put things up."

The journey began in 2019, when Martha set out to document the effects of the changing seasons on wild grasses and plants found on the banks of the Whiteadder.

She continued: "My sister lives in the Borders, and I'd quite often go for a walk down to the river there. And again, going back to the noticing things you didn't notice, kind of sitting down by the river and seeing the grasses silhouetted against like the setting sun, that kind of set me on the path of looking at grasses and wanting to capture a certain place in time."

A perfectionist at heart, the artist confessed her delight in the existence of shadows in the gallery space. She said: "When I came into the gallery yesterday morning, I went into the back and the shadows were completely different than what I expected. And I'm like, that's awesome. I don't have control

over that. They move, and it's almost like they breathe even though they're still exactly in the same place."



Marquette visualisation presenting the artist's larger works: 'I always cut everything with the laser to begin with. So with the big work, I'll go small. I'll cut it to see what they're like when they're physically cut out' – Martha Ellis.

Depending on size, scale and intricacies of the drawings, the Yorkshire-born artist approaches each piece slightly differently, paying close attention to detail and what she wants to convey to the observer.

For example, familiar species of flower found in her work titled: 'Daffodils, Grape Hyacinth, Dandelion and Primrose – one to four', treat onlookers as they are dwarfed by its fun, intentionally enlarged, playful scale.

She concluded: "I think my work is quite fun. Like, it's a celebration. It's not serious. My plan is to distil things down and work out how do I make something recognisable."

'The Cut Line' title emphasises the fact that each piece began as a pencil-to-paper drawing. These drawings are then either hand cut from sheet material using a Stanley knife, Jigsaw or plasma cutter, or by using laser technology.

You can find the exhibition by following the aptly green, freshly painted arrows pointing from the Patriothall archway towards the gallery space.

The installation of the collection, branching across two spacious rooms in the gallery was a three-day process, assisted by Martha's brother-in-law, who also lives in the house around which many of the artist's naturalistic work centres.

The free exhibition is available to view at the gallery from 10.30 am – 4pm each day until 28 July.