

# **Edinburgh Art Festival 2023: Scottish Landscapes: A New Generation**

Once upon a time landscape painting was usually about just that: the look of the land – though it was often embellished or altered to the suit the artist's patron's ideas.



In Scotland the 1707 Act of Union produced art that sought to establish a strong national identity; Highlanders in kilts roamed a romanticised version of the countryside, and when Queen Victoria acceded to the throne in 1837, sentimental scenes of rural life became all the rage. In 1851 Landseer – Victoria’s favourite artist – exhibited *Monarch of the Glen*; a red deer stag standing proudly in front of idealised Highland scenery. (No mention of the connection between deer hunting and the notorious Highland Clearances...)

Nowadays, however, a different approach is emerging; what does landscape say about the important issues of our time?

*Scottish Landscapes: A New Generation* at Dovecot Studios on Infirmary Street brings together ten recent Scottish art school graduates, each of whom has considered the land in the light of our current crises. The landscape is no longer just a backdrop, or a way of enforcing ideas of 'Scottishness'; now it is a precious resource, and one with a history and meaning of its own. And landscape is not just countryside; cities and towns are as much a part of it as lochs and mountains, and each has a story, a value (and not just a monetary one); every one is a complex resource.

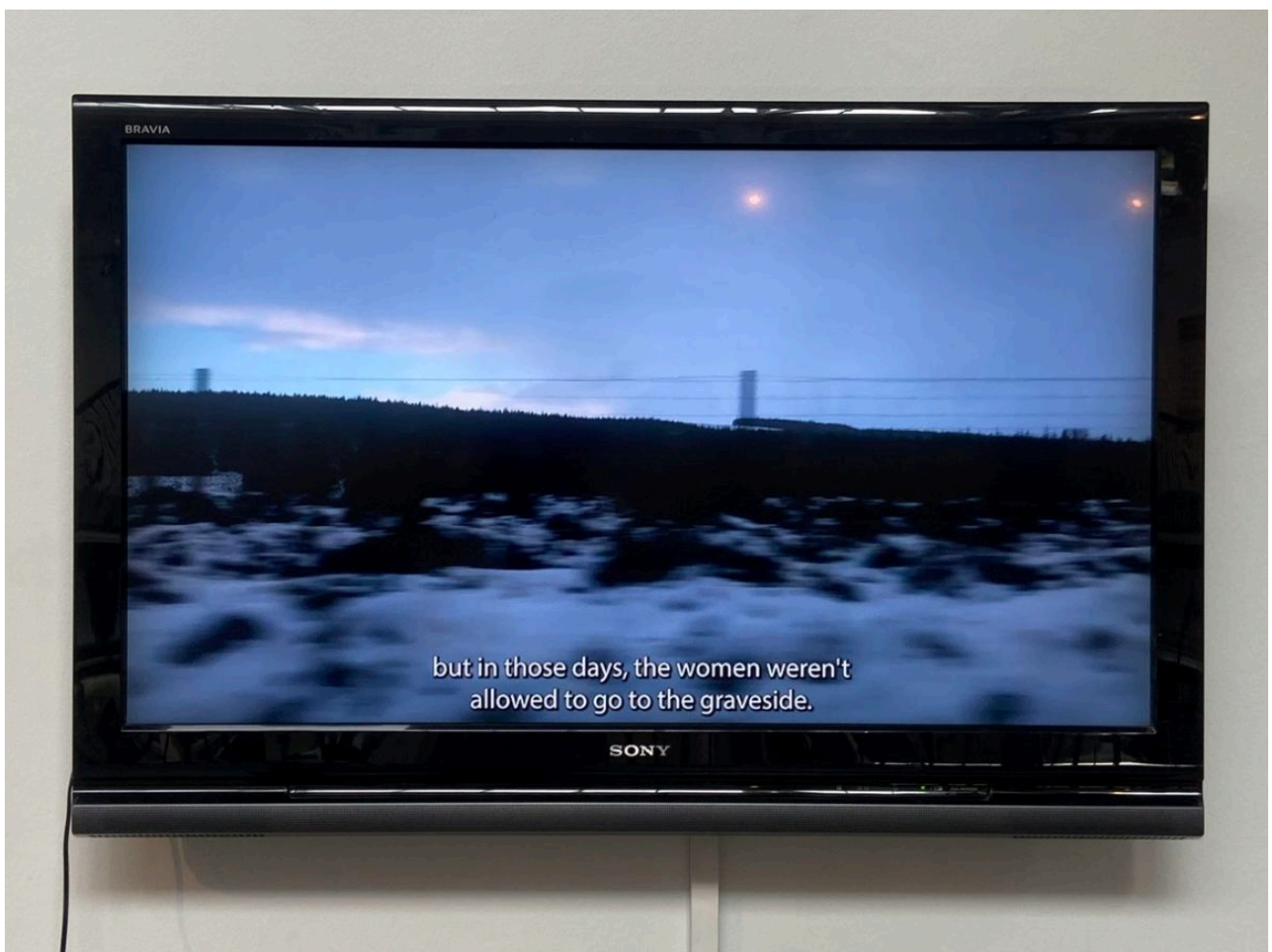


**Saoirse Amira Anis : Untitled (from In Place of an Altar)**

Themes from sustainability to grief, isolation, post-industrialisation and walking, are explored by the ten artists

working in five pairs. **Saoirse Amira Anis** and **Sinead Hargan** look at Ritual, Anis focusing on joy and Hargan on grief. Anis , under her alter ego of Freedom Princess, combines dance, tradition and nature to create an alternative world, free from violence, shame and the burdens of human history. The glaze on a beautiful earthenware vase *Untitled* (from *In Place of an Altar*) suggests flowing water, or a streaked blue sky, while *Font of Holy Joy* takes the traditional Catholic stoup and transforms it into something more playful; Anis labels it 'FOR JOY'. She says;

*My art is both a celebration, and a protest....I believe in the importance of caring for ourselves and others, and the extent to which this nurturing can benefit us both personally and politically.*



in collaboration with women from the Dundee Gaelic Choir and sound artist John Bryden, Hargan has developed a live

performance piece *I Just Go On* in which she recreates the now obsolete Gaelic Celtic tradition of keening, a professional art form in which women expressed grief on behalf of a mourning family. In her film *In my chest and in my bones*, set against a backdrop of the sea and the sky, members of the Gaelic choir talk about the experience of keening together;

*'The keening seems to have just died out...and it's maybe not a bad idea to bring it back...it gives you a facility to vent your feelings.'*

Hargan reshapes this extinct tradition and creates new rituals in order to access a deeper understanding and care for the world around us;

*The idea of using performance to access something beyond description is at the core of my practice.*

**Iman Tajik** and **Rosie Trevill** look at Clearance; the Highlands may appear 'natural', but they've been shaped by many things, including the historic barbaric practices of landowners. Tajik aims to bridge the gap between art and activism, to create work as a form of socio-political currency, addressing power structures. He uses the Highland Clearances to address themes of modern migration and globalisation; he 'performed the border' by walking from Glasgow to places like Dungavel House Immigration Removal Centre. Here we see photographs of him performing *The Dreamers III*, a work made at Deveron Arts in Huntly.



Iman Tajik: The Dreamers III

The artist raised a flag made from an emergency safety blanket (the kind given out to people rescued from the sea) as a symbol of reclaiming political space. He questions the very notion of borders, and the role of nationality in a time of emergency, and spotlights and stresses the need for resistance toward barriers and boundaries that are implemented socially and politically in favour of some people but not all.



### Rosie Trevill: Hares on the Mountain

Trevill utilises language and textiles as a form of resistance and resilience within personal and societal frameworks. Here her textile work looks particularly at the now sparsely populated area known as the Cabrach, while her film *Hares on the Mountain* subverts the gender relations of a traditional folksong (which asks what would happen if young men were transformed into creatures or plants, and suggests that young girls would hunt them down) and considers the embedded history of heritage architecture and the power of the collective voice. Four women dressed in white sit among the ruins of a cottage and chant the song; it uses ritualistic repetition and gradual breakdown as a meditative grievance for all life forms, human and animal, that have suffered violence and displacement.





Rachel McClure: Clatter

Nan Shepherd talked about 'walking into' a landscape; **Rachel McClure** and **Siobhan McLaughlin** investigate this in their own

ways. Elgin-based McClure practices urban walking and considers the meshwork of individual rhythms and maps created by walkers in the city. She uses sound recording, photography, print and cast-making to document her experience. Her collection of plaster tiles record sounds she hears, and thoughts she has, while walking. Also presented is McClure's 9 minute *Soundwalk Elgin*, in which the listener can hear the sounds of the city that are so often ignored.

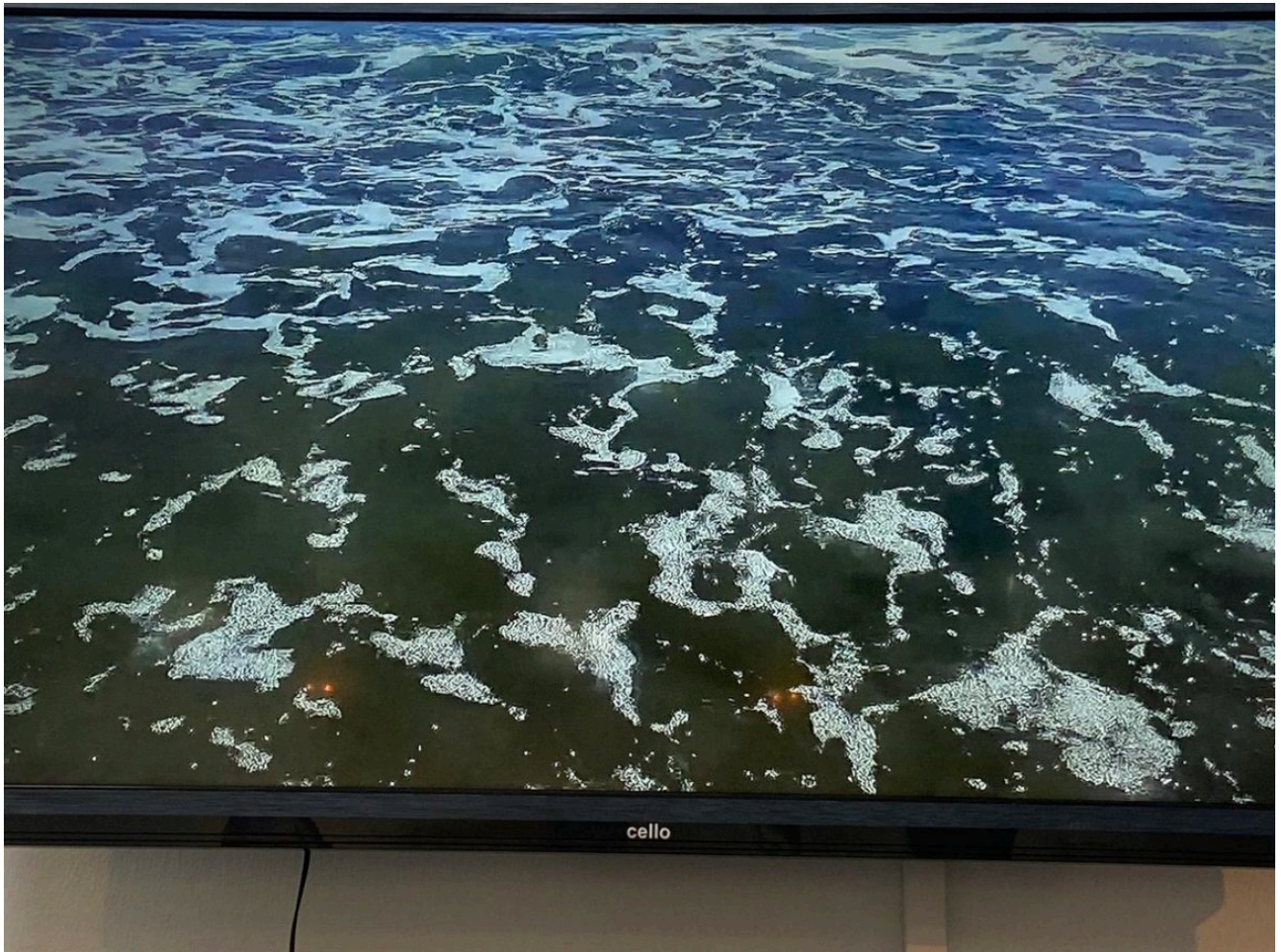


#### Siobhan McLaughlin: Mountain Pass

McLaughlin, who curated this exhibition, combines personal experience with sewn materials and earth pigments (made from materials she collects on her walks) to create non-traditional paintings. She particularly prioritises 'slow-looking' and care over high tech processes, noting the nuances of landscape in light, weather and time to explore themes of place, vulnerability, memory and sustainability, and highlighting often overlooked aspects of the environment to counteract

over-romanticisation. Some of her work is based on sketches she made of Ben MacDui while on a residency in the Cairngorms, where she herself followed one of Nan Shepherd's walks. Here she exhibits a beautiful painting *The Mountain Pass*, rich with earth colours and marks.

Two artists look at how water can not only sustain but also teach us.



Natasha Thembiso Ruwona: *what is held (between waters)*  
Tom Jenkins (1797-1859) was Britain's first black schoolteacher; **Natasha Thembiso Ruwona** addresses *what is held (between waters)* to him. In this film Atlantic salmon guide a story of home and time as Ruwona investigates the connections between Scottish history and Black geographies; the film explores the landscape of the River Teviot, its Atlantic connections and the memories it holds. Ruwona provides a poetic narrative to accompany images of water; she speaks of the salmon struggling to complete their journey, of the

fishes' innate understanding of when it is time to leave and to return, and uses them as metaphor for borders and kinships;

*'They swim as one...the river and its salmon encounter the haunting of the Atlantic ocean.'*

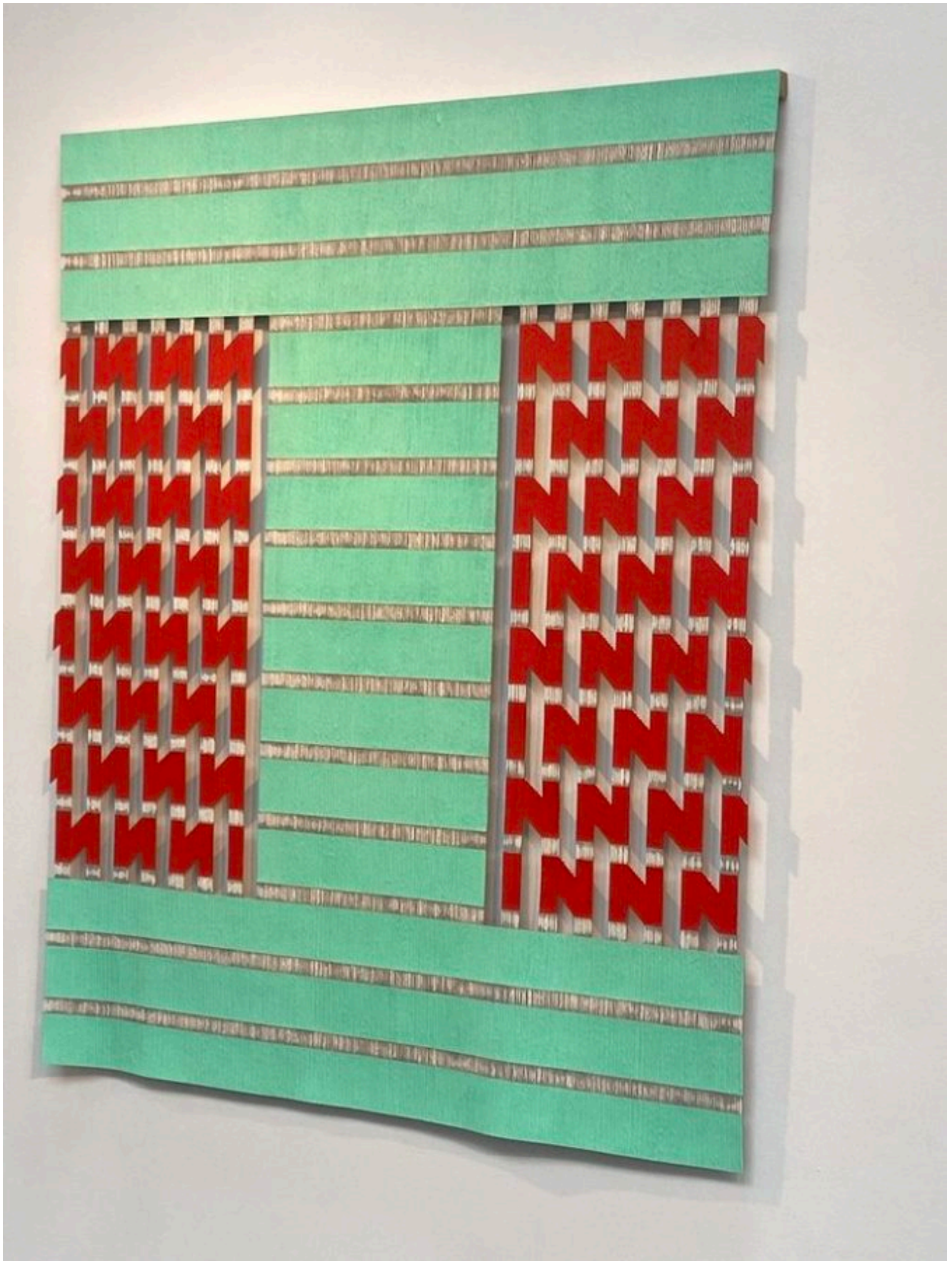


Katie Taylor: *Serpentine Tide*, *Casting Tide*, *Spring Tide*  
Like Siobhan McLaughlin, **Katie Taylor** takes slowness as a key theme in her practice. She explores tides and the patterns the sea leaves behind on land. In *Time and Tide* glass panels are suspended from a steel rod; they move gently through the air. Taylor contrasts the slow rhythm of the landscape and the forced speed of life; her screen-prints *Frozen Tide 1* and *2* show fragments caught in ice; her analogue photos *Serpentine Tide*, *Casting Tide* and *Spring Tide* capture the patterns of the water as it moves.

Labour is often tied to the land, or to a specific place.



Logan's delicate *Devil's Bit* and *Wakes the Aconite* refer to two special moments in the year on Orkney, where he grew up. He explores traditions of hand craftsmanship and labour-intensive making, while responding to the cycles of the weather, seasons and human experience on the islands. The precarious nature of Logan's works, which are made from acrylic suspended in a warp of string, itself held together by multi-layered paint which he chips away to leave a lattice work structure, references both life 'on the edge' and growing up queer on that edge.\*



Brandon Logan: Devil's Bit



Brandon Logan: Wakes the Aconite

This is an exhibition that challenges us to see our country differently, to break down the preconceptions with which we



grew up, and to value the land, be it rural or urban, as a keeper of histories, a healer, a teacher, and a victim needing our help.

*Scottish Landscapes: A New Generation* is at [Dovecot Studios](#), Infirmary Street until 7 October 2023. It is located on the Tapestry Studio Viewing Balcony, which is open to the public Monday to Friday 12pm – 3pm and 10am – 5pm at the weekend. Admission to this exhibition is free.

\*Ingleby Gallery, Barony Street will be presenting a solo presentation of Brandon Logan's works in spring 2024.