

Wandering in Stockbridge

Stockbridge in Edinburgh has a reputation as a ‘posh’ residential area and an attractive destination – especially at the weekends. Visitors’ itineraries often combine a trip to this little ‘village’ with places along the Water of Leith Walkway such as Dean Village.

According to the 2023 *Skinny Guide to Edinburgh*, Stockbridge’s ‘scenic streets are a manna for influencers’ and full of ‘bougie shops’, brunch spots, as well as an ‘astounding number of charity shops’.

This might be seen as a superficial view of Stockbridge and one which leaves out its long reputation, from Sir Henry Raeburn onwards, as an area for artists. One of the few remnants of artistic Stockbridge is Patriothall Studios & Gallery, a ‘stalwart’ of the Wasps network of art studios – found across Scotland. Founded in 1984 and refurbished in 2004, I suspect that thousands pass by Patriothall every week without knowing it’s there – it’s easy to miss.

Stockbridge at the weekends tends to be busy, with the narrow pavements overloaded. The market draws hundreds every Sunday. Luckily, Stockbridge is full of quiet spots, such as the nooks around St Bernard’s Well. Patriothall Studios is another, tucked away in a courtyard between Hamilton Place and the boutique-laden St. Stephen Street. Entrance is via a wide but unprepossessing pend.

Even as you reach the courtyard you are uncertain where you are heading; your eyes caught by the U-shaped housing development of deck tenement with their neat balconies, supported by ornamental metal brackets. You have to turn the further corner to find your goal, a tall red bricked building tucked away in a corner. Your way into the building is through a vivid orange door. This former factory is a reminder that this area was once industrial, as well as artistic.

For example, the area around Glanville Place and Bakers Place off Kerr Street was the site of the large Stockbridge Mills. These aspects of Stockbridge are often overlooked in contemporary accounts which focus on its leafy elegance and 'villagey' feel.



Patriothall – photo by Eva Vaporidi

The gallery area itself is functional and spacious, but not pristine or clinical. Its roughness gives it character as do the white tiles that cover much of the interior. At the back, large panes of glass on a door allow you to see through into a sitting out area. There's a feeling of nature trying to get in, with branches snuggling up against the glass.

Patriothall Studios is typical of the way that such industrial spaces have been creatively repurposed, with the arts leading the way in this. The cavernous rooms provide an odd feel. On

this quiet Sunday afternoon, even whispers echoed through the rooms, while a bike being clattered by another visitor sounded menacingly loud. Even the ceiling is of interest. In one corner, there is a circular design which draws the eye; did an artist paint this or is it a legacy of industrial activity. You leave none the wiser.

Currently on show is an exhibition entitled **Wanderings** which explores contemporary imagined space, featuring the work of three artists; Lynsey MacKenzie, Rowan Paton and Julie-Ann Simpson. The work has distinct styles but they are complementary. Visually arresting with vibrant colours, they contrast markedly with the very quiet and simple setting. Julie-Ann Simpson's *Lost Hours* seems almost childlike at first viewing but pays closer inspection which reveal layers of intricacy and subtlety. It looks like a depiction of a wintry dream world, with the thoughts of the character at the centre transmitted by smoke through the ether.

Lynsey MacKenzie's series of abstract landscapes is effective in transmitting the unsettled feelings that you often get while wandering along a stream, or in a woodland. A sense of uncertainty and being geographically psychologically lost. The theme of *Wanderings* was well reflected in her oil paintings. Paton's main contribution is a series of eye-catching small acrylic and collage prints. Striking, meticulous and playful, with a cake obsession running through them.

Paton was on hand to welcome visitors. She related that the studios were used by our wide variety of artists, some of whom are well-known names. While she currently uses her own studio at home, she sees great value in a place such as Patriothall. With the artists based there using a variety of art forms and techniques, there was great scope for collaboration and the exchange of advice. It is, she says, "a space for artistic dialogue".- something that those who work on their own miss out on.

Another attraction for her of Patriothall was the gallery space itself. The large windows allow light to cascade in, providing an ideal environment to look at art – as well as create it. Patriothall is currently home to over fifty artists, and has an annual programme of exhibitions. However, the hidden character of Patriothall means its exhibitions probably need more promotion, including in the local area. Stockbridge's artistic tradition needs to be re-emphasised. At present its status as an 'Insta' hotspot threatens to drown this out.

Wanderings is at

Patriothall Gallery – Wasps, EH3 5AY

Until 23rd September 2023

Open 10am–4pm Monday to Friday – Saturday/Sunday 11-4pm.