

University commissions community artwork to celebrate 150 years

An East Lothian artist has been commissioned to design and create a unique public art piece which will take centre stage in the grounds of Queen Margaret University (QMU).

Made possible by donations from members of the QMU Community, the engaging artwork will be unveiled in 2025 to coincide with QMU's 150th anniversary celebrations.

Artist Martha Ellis, a resident of Musselburgh, was selected out of a pool of applicants to create the piece which can be enjoyed by students, staff, visitors and the local community.

The aim is to capture the people and activities which make up QMU, both from the past and present, creating a piece that will inspire all who visit, study and work at the campus.

Martha Ellis is a visual artist with a passion for showcasing a 'sense of place' in her signature 'cut-out' drawing style using sheet metal. This is one of her first public

commissions. She said: "This project will not only enable me to flourish as an individual, but it will also add to the creative offering within my own local area.

"The concept is to capture the community so that its members recognise themselves in the artwork. To do so, I will engage in all things QMU – taking part in public engagement activities, delving into the university archives, physically being in and around the campus, and chatting with students and staff to build up a clearer picture of what makes QMU what it is!

"Given that QMU has expertise in the creative and cultural sectors, creative practice and community arts, I know there will be lots of opportunities to engage with the University community on this project.

"From my research into QMU so far, I have been struck by the many amazing things that the University has achieved – and continues to achieve."

Martha is known for her unique wall mounted and free-standing artworks which she creates in her studio in Edinburgh. With a background teaching art and design in schools, over the years she has enjoyed developing her use of laser cutting technology to create bold and stylised cut-out artworks.

Martha introduces the effect of light and shadow, by mounting the drawings slightly off the wall or with her free-standing pieces which have shadows that move with the changing position

of the sun. This unpredictable element to the work is a playful contrast to the clean bold lines of the cut edge – a deliberately interactive and living aspect to her art.

Sir Paul Grice, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of QMU, said: “I am incredibly thankful to our donors who have made this project possible by supporting our vision for a unique piece of public art, created by a local artist. This is a great example of the power of philanthropy at QMU and showcases the impact our donors continue to make on the QMU Community.

“Queen Margaret University is all about people – improving people’s lives, producing graduates who can make a difference in the world, conducting research that has a positive impact on others, supporting students to achieve their goals, and creating a strong sense of community where everyone is welcome and where we support each other.

“We are sure this piece of art will not only be visually engaging but will also connect with the variety of people who make up our wider QMU community.

“This project is to mark and celebrate a very impactful and important time in QMU’s history as we come together in 2025 to celebrate 150 years of our pioneering institution and we look forward to Martha’s artwork taking centre stage.”



Martha Ellis