

Edinburgh textile artist stages first exhibition in Dundas Street Gallery

Staging her first solo exhibition in her seventh decade has proved to artist Alison Johnston that it is never too late to follow your dreams.

On Wednesdays and Sundays the artist will give a brief talk about her work.

Ms Johnston's new career began during lockdown when she celebrated her 60th birthday, and now she is opening her first solo exhibition of textile art, Needle Pulling Thread, at the Dundas Street Gallery until 30 March.

Alison, from Edinburgh, said that reaching her milestone birthday during the pandemic helped spur her on to fulfil her long-held ambition.

She said: "I turned 60 in 2020 and I just thought 'Life's too short'. I've always wanted to do this full-time.

"When I realised I had all this time ahead of me in lockdown, I decided to go for it and use that time creatively and develop new ideas in my work. When normality started to comeback, I knew I wanted to carry on."

Alison is no stranger to overcoming barriers, having succeeded in a variety of jobs from knitwear entrepreneur to art therapist, all while being severely deaf.

She said: "I've had a lot of challenges working in the hearing world, but it has never stopped me doing what I want to do. Now I can't wait for people to see my work."

She was born in Galashiels and is proud of the fact that she is the fifth generation of her family to work in with textiles. In her twenties, she studied knitwear design at the Scottish College of Textiles in Galashiels, and launched her own knitwear business, making jumpers and cardigans which were stocked by stores such as Jenners.

Having later worked as a clinical support worker in hospitals, she studied for a degree in art therapy in her forties and spent a decade working with adults with complex disabilities and dementia.

She said: "A lot of the people I worked with were not able to communicate well verbally, but I think my deafness gave me a kind of sixth sense, I could be more attuned to what they were trying to communicate."

During the lockdown she started making large scale textile pieces inspired by a recent trip-of-a-lifetime to Mexico. Others, like "Glimmer of Hope" were directly inspired by the pandemic.

Even breaking her ankle in three places in 2021 didn't hold her back. She used the time to teach herself to embroider by hand, and now incorporates that into her work.

She said: "I love starting off with a few scraps of fabric and seeing something grow and grow."

"Some people are very fortunate and are ready to go straight from art college and become established artists, but I know that wasn't right for me."

"I think all the experience I've picked up from the journey of my life has given me the confidence to do it now."

[Artist](#) talks at the gallery on Wednesdays 12,19 and 26 March at 2pm and on Sundays 16 and 23 March at 3pm.



Alison Johnston opens her exhibition "Needle Pulling Thread", at the Dundas Street Gallery, until 30th March 2025
Alison Johnston with one of her works "Radiant Rays".
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Alison Johnston with one of her works "Radiant Rays".



Alison is pictured in her studio in Pilrig with some of her works: "Glimmer of Hope" on the left and "Mexican Graffiti" which she is holding.



Alison Johnston, from Pilrig, Edinburgh opens her exhibition "Needle Pulling Thread", which is on at the Dundas Street Gallery, Edinburgh, until 30th March (2025).

Alison is pictured at work in her studio in Pilrig, with some of her works: "Glimmer of Hope" on the left and "Mexican Graffiti" which she is holding.



Alison is pictured at work in her studio in Pilrig.



Alison is pictured at work in her studio in Pilrig, with her piece "Mexican Graffiti".



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