

Art First is delighted to announce a **new gallery space** adjoining its first floor office at the Forge, 15 St Mary's Walk in Lambeth, just a few minutes' walk from the Imperial War Museum.



**Helen MacAlister, *The Glamour of Backwardness* 8 September – 18 October 2022**

It's a great pleasure to present this long-awaited body of work, conceived and made in Edinburgh over the past decade. Those of you familiar with MacAlister's art, know that language plays a central role. For her it is a rich landscape of shared experience and in her subtle explorations painting and language elide. Duncan Macmillan observed this previously:

*'They are there in the unravelling of the layers of meaning, of her reflections on language, on the exchanges between Gaelic and Scots, on poetry and on the poets and their commentators, to all of which she also adds her own words in the notes she writes as guidance to her work.'*

The exhibition's title does indeed have accompanying notes which hint at what the elegant body of recent paintings have set out to explore:

"Glamour may comprise the Gaelic *glac* – to seize, to lay hold of, to fascinate + *mor* – great. "

*'As for 'backwardness', this was until around the middle of the century the condition attributed by Her Majesty's subjects to most of the rest of the world. It meant those incapable of industry and democracy, or still on the long uphill road of modernisation. A summit or advance-party view, it looked back with inevitable condescension to the treacherous lower slopes of picturesque superstition and back-sliding ignorance. The glamour of this backwardness is its legitimation through icons of continuity and reassurance: ....'*

(The Enchanted Glass – Tom Nairn, 'The Glamour of Backwardness' 1988)



MacAlister's titles are sourced from a wide range of literary references as well as newspaper columns and articles, offering us 'a culture's grand pattern'. *Open Canon*, 2013, is one example. She entered a dialogue with Alan Riach, Professor of Scottish Literature at Glasgow University, and went on to give visual expression to his article, '*What Good is a Canon? The Case of Scottish Literature*'. This body of six pencil drawings of lists, 'drawn up' as it were, offers a rare visual-verbal experience which Riach applauds.

Illustrated here are two diptychs and a triptych from thirteen sets of paintings, demonstrating the exquisite workmanship within the built-up layers from a buried black ground, just detected at the raised edges, to the yellow/green of the diagrammatic Gorse flowers emerging through the white surface. The look of them at first resembles some form of botanical lace. It is beautiful and beguiling but with the just-visible words you are briskly reminded of the purpose, the poetry and the pointed commentary on Scotland's culture, reflecting amongst a myriad of things, 'the glamour of backwardness'.

Writing about MacAlister's work in an accompanying catalogue, Dr Lindsay Blair speaks of the 'New Historicism' it represents, and how MacAlister is among a group of Highland artists dealing with a collective consciousness with the artist as witness, as a 'participant observer' (the title of a MacAlister drawing from 2011). The new work is urgent, it is vital, lucid and of its time, and now is a very good moment to see it.



Top: *Banal Nationalism and Imaginative Identification*, both 2018, oil on linen, A4 x 2  
Above: *The Wallpaper of Political Life*, 2018, oil on linen, A4 x 3

An illustrated catalogue with an introduction by Lindsay Blair accompanies the exhibition.

### **Will Maclean *Points of Departure*, City Art Centre, Edinburgh, 4 June – 2 October**

This magnificent retrospective exhibition is a rich visual feast which celebrates Maclean's position as an outstanding artist of his generation, still working at the height of his powers. Spanning fifty years, it is anchored in the history, archaeology and literature of the Scottish Highland people. His narratives are personal and yet universal, and his art eloquently brings the past into an immediately felt present. Maclean's subject matter, comprising assemblages of found and crafted material arranged as box constructions or free-standing sculpture, is delivered with a honed brevity and a reflective, tactile beauty that is always a tribute to the real.

It has been a great privilege to represent Maclean in London since 1994 and it's exciting to see some familiar works lent by museums and private collectors amongst the 150 featured in this exhibition. David Patterson, Director of the CAC and the exhibition's curator, has achieved something quite remarkable for this year's Festival exhibition. Warmest congratulations to him, and to Will Maclean.



Above: Franklin's *Second Journey to the Polar Sea*



Above: the artist with *Voyage of the Anchorites*

Read more: Exhibition notice attached.

To find out about related events taking place at City Art Centre throughout the exhibition, visit [www.edinburghmuseums.org.uk](http://www.edinburghmuseums.org.uk) and book online.

Two new publications accompany the show - the excellent exhibition catalogue, and a book produced by Art First, *Compelled by Memory, the Lewis Land Monuments 1994 - 2018*. These five award-winning Lewis Land Monuments have an extraordinary power and beauty. All overseen by Will Maclean, *An Sùileachan* in Uig and the *Iolaire* memorial in Stornoway were co-designed with his wife, Marian Leven. They form an important part of Maclean's practice which is not presented on gallery walls and this book conveys their fascinating story through the evocative photographs by Robin Gillanders and four essays by distinguished Scottish art historians. The history of the events behind these contemporary monuments is brought to light, offering a vivid insight into memory and place, and a profound collective sense of tribute to the courageous struggles of the 'heroes of the land raids' – those crofters who stood up to power and defended their rights and their Gaelic culture over a century ago.

Published by Sansom & Co copies are available for £20 + £3 UK postage from Art First.



### British Art Fair

Saatchi Gallery, Duke of York Square, King's Rd, SW3 4RY  
29 September – 2 October 2022, Stand 54.

The BAF is back, and we are delighted to be participating in this refreshed edition, presenting work by **Simon Lewty, Bridget Macdonald, Kate McCrickard, Jack Milroy** and **Donald Teskey**



You are welcome to contact us for tickets and further information, or visit <https://www.britishartfair.co.uk>

## Other Exhibitions:

**Donald Teskey, *Decade*, 8 September – 23 October**

The Royal Hibernian Academy, Ely Place, Dublin 2



Teskey's work from the last decade covers a changing world, beginning with his residency in Paris in 2012. This enthralling selection reflects aspects of those changes from the artist's point of view and offers us a series of distinguished paintings including coastal studies, views of Crum Creek, and of Paris, which have not been presented in Dublin before. There is a new catalogue to accompany the exhibition.

*Boulevard August-Blanqui* 2012, acrylic on paper, 76 x 100cm

**Alex Lowery, *Picturing*, till 11 September**

Sladers Yard Gallery, West Bay, Dorset.

West Bay, Portland, and Chesil Beach are leitmotifs in Alex Lowery's reductive paintings all bathed in marine light, each one a quiet meditation on form, turning the bustle of a small English port and its surrounds into a harmonious silence.

Below: West Bay 317, 2022, oil on canvas, 40 x 100 cm



Art First's new gallery space will be open during exhibitions from Wednesday – Friday, 11 am – 6pm or by appointment. Please visit the website to check exhibitions and other activities and get in touch if you would like to make a special appointment. We look forward to seeing you soon.