

**Will Maclean**

***Points of Departure II***

11 May – 23 June 2023

Art First is delighted to present works from Will Maclean's celebrated 2022 retrospective festival exhibition at the City Art Centre in Edinburgh, alongside new smaller pieces which highlight the themes he consistently addresses.

Maclean's work remains intrinsically anchored in the history, the archaeology and the literature of the Scottish Highlands and the Highland people, including members of his own family. The exquisite, highly poetic nature of his box constructions, sculptures and drawings, often alludes to Surrealist orthodoxies of assemblage, especially of flotsam and jetsam found on beaches and transformed in the ordered context of his ship-shape studio. They also focus on wide-ranging themes relating to the sea such as exploration, navigation, the Clearances and emigration, whaling et al. Maclean's narratives are at once personal and universal. On occasion the deeply considered memorials he creates stand for those individuals and communities who might otherwise never have them. His art eloquently succeeds in bringing the past into an immediately felt present, igniting fresh interest and renewed, dynamic connections for viewers of every generation in countries around the world.

Maclean respects legacy; he delves into history and the stories, songs and poetry of those who brought him and us with him, into our contemporary culture. The wit, the 'symbols of survival', the occasional tragedy referenced in his subject matter, are delivered with a honed brevity and a reflective, tactile beauty that is always a tribute to the real. Like a good poem, 'often it cut[s] straight to the bone', as R F Foster wrote recently of Seamus Heaney's poetry. Maclean and Heaney were both participants of *The Great Book of Gaelic/An Leabhar Mor*, 2002, a collaboration between Irish and Scottish poets and artists which became a world touring exhibition.

*Points of Departure II* runs concurrently with the exhibition *This Fragile Earth: How pioneer Scottish Artists anticipated the climate crisis* at Coventry Cathedral, 5 April – 29 May 2023. Work by fellow artists Frances Walker, James Morrison, Glen Onwin, Elizabeth Ogilvie and Thomas Joshua Cooper demonstrate how they were all ahead of their time in their prescient responses to the threat of climate change. The exhibition in Coventry is presented by the Fleming Collection.

They have selected Maclean's large piece *Red Ley Marker* 1989, mixed media on board, and *North-West Passage*, also in mixed media, from their permanent collection. The ley marker is an image familiar to him - a red triangle warning beacon at the entrance to the harbour at Kyleakin. This is a reference to landscape, but he invests it with mystery and with a powerfully symbolic composition.

More evidently linked to climate change is the work in his Art First exhibition, *Ice Log*, 1998, a mixed media construction 121 x 71 x 10cm. Its shimmering white surface opens into an aquamarine ice hole in the lower half, of the kind cut by fishermen in the icy north, into which they inserted fish traps - cleverly evoked here in surreal form. This work and others relating to the North-West Passage are featured in '*Points of Departure*', where *Schematic Skate* (2010) and the 2018 *Baleen Zoomorphic* (154 x 29 x 9cm) pieces demonstrate his assured use of the found object with its ready-made connotations harnessed ingeniously into powerful statements about the marine world.

Two books published in 2022 in association with the exhibition are available from Art First @ £20 each: The illustrated catalogue and *Compelled by Memory: The Lewis Land Monuments 1994 – 2018*. Will Maclean with Marian Leven and Arthur Watson.

To read more about Maclean's exhibition history, the publications about his work, the public collections where his work is held, the great stone monuments on the Isle of Lewis which he oversaw between 1994 – 2018, visit the Art First website: [www.artfirst.co.uk](http://www.artfirst.co.uk)



*Schematic Skate*, 2010  
Found objects and mixed media, 70 x 76 x 7 cm



*Ice Log*, 1998  
Mixed Media Construction, 121 x 71 x 10 cm



*Baleen Zoomorphic*, 2018  
found objects and mixed media, 158 x 28 x 9 cm