

The Receding Tide - Donald Ian McLeod A Retrospective

Taigh Chearsabhagh Museum & Arts Centre Gallery 1, 10th February to 4th May 2024

The Receding Tide is a retrospective exhibition celebrating the work of North Uist artist, printmaker and teacher Donald I. McLeod (1948-2016). The exhibition is composed of geological and coastal-themed larger-scale mixed media Pointillist artworks.

Other earlier and contributory works, including evidence of his processes from sketchbooks and reference photographs, comprehensively researched and gathered by his family, provide a further insight into Donald's practice.

This body of work, created mainly from 1993-2007, but finally completed in 2014, is inspired by the convoluted stratification and erosion of Lewisian gneiss found in Uist, particularly around Hosta & Tigharry, and rivulet markings of erosion and deposition made on beaches by the receding tide.

Donald produced a varied body of work over a forty-year period. He was an accomplished draughtsman, painter, photographer and printer, having graduated from Glasgow School of Art in 1970 in Mural Painting and later at Glasgow College of Building and Printing, where he gained a distinction.

His later series of mixed media works were inspired by, and later titled, The Receding Tide. They were developed as a way of interpreting the coastal landscape of Uist in the Pointillist style, a way of working which increasingly fascinated him and which led to each piece taking months of painstaking work to produce.

Donald's precise draughtsmanship and technical printing background inspired his investigation of Pointillism, as practised by neo-impressionists Georges Seurat and Paul Signac in France in the late 1800s, and latterly by Canadian artist Alex Colville in the 1950s, utilising colour theory and the application of separate contrasting dots of colour which, at a distance, create the optical effect of visually blending together to form a harmonised unity.

Donald's study of the technique led him to note; "The term 'synthesis' was used to denote an artistic unity achieved through the conscious simplification of drawing, of composition and of the harmonisation of colours."

Latterly Donald experimented with a bas-relief technique of painting on layers of MDF to give a three-dimensional aspect to his work, inspired by printmaking, woodcut and the collage approach of his earlier pop art inspired work.

The landscape of Uist, in particular the incredibly intricate, multi-coloured banding of metamorphic rock on the west coast (some of the oldest rock on the planet) and the delicate and ephemeral patterning in the sand on an outgoing tide, were inspirations to Donald and countless other artists over the years.

None have captured the true vibrancy of the colours, textures and patterns of these phenomena in quite such an accomplished way as Donald's Pointillist works, in which he painstakingly invested a vast amount of research, development and fine brush work into achieving his final goal.

Andy Mackinnon, Arts Curator, Taigh Chearsabhagh Trust

Biography: Donald Ian McLeod 1948-2016

Donald studied at Glasgow School of Art, graduating in 1970 in mural painting and design. He later studied at Glasgow College of Building and Printing where he graduated with distinction.

Donald was an early contributor to the Scottish Young Contemporaries, exhibiting work in the New 57 Gallery and Star Club. His later work was exhibited in various venues in Uist and Stornoway.

After travelling widely in East Asia, honing his photographic skills, he worked in various jobs in the Highlands while he pursued his art. He developed a taste for island life while living on Colonsay, returning to his family's roots by settling in Uist in 1979.

Donald worked initially as a community artist, painting murals in the new lochdar Hall, setting up the Uist Community Press and printing Am Paipear.

In 1982 he began work as an itinerant art teacher in schools from Berneray to Eriskay. His work took him to every corner of Uist and he was seldom seen without his beloved Nikon camera. His goal was to capture the quality of light, the vast Uist skies and the land and seascapes which were his inspiration. These images were transformed into his own remarkable interpretation of the Pointillist style, celebrating the Uist landscapes.

In 2010 Donald suffered a massive stroke which left him paralysed on his left side. Amazingly, his determination to continue painting, with the dedicated support from staff at the Craigard Centre, led him to complete his last painting for the Receding Tide series in 2014. This was a final postscript to his artistic oeuvre, an expression of praise to the light, the sea and the rocky shoreline of our island.

Catherine MacLeod