

Weaving Water, Woven Land

Exhibition hosted by BTG Scottish Region at Farfield Mill, Cumbria from 30 October 2019

Reviewer Margaret Parker

Farfield Mill has several gallery spaces and the BTG exhibition occupied a light, airy room on the second floor with plenty of space to move around, though not quite enough for just sitting and taking in the atmosphere of the weavings. There were lists available of all the tapestries on show and a file of the weaver's statements, but sadly nothing that a viewer could take away as a reminder of the exhibition.

As I looked around the gallery wondering where to start my attention was drawn to a seascape 'The wave at Dalmore Bay, Isle of Lewis' woven by Elizabeth Radcliffe who had noted under its title "As I got weaving, I remember thinking I'm never doing this again!". Looking closely at how she had expressed the sense of movement and agitation of the water I appreciated her sentiment and skill in the detail that she portrayed. For me it was the highlight of the exhibition.



I was particularly taken with the many imaginative ways that seascapes had been depicted such as 'Mellon Udrigle in Wester Ross' a triptych by Siobhan Ratchford where the views of the beach, the sea and the distant dark hills had been woven as three separate panels. Any one panel on its own would have been sufficient, but the three together, evenly spaced on plain dark blue fabric were spectacular.

A tapestry woven by Lyn Dunachie of a beach in Luskentyre used a clever interplay of blues and fawns which gave a vivid impression of waves breaking as they reached the shore line, whilst further out to sea, beyond the surf line the gradation of colours from sea green to dark blue revealed the deepening, less turbulent, water.

In contrast 'Stromness Houses' by Gill Owen depicted the roof lines and gable ends of houses in Stromness but they had been given a comical drunken appearance which was very endearing. The walls and roof lines were delicately outlined clearly defining their shapes. The piece was mainly blues, pale ochres and grey and was mounted on plum coloured fabric which allowed the weaving to project out to the viewer in a most appealing way.

'Field of Dreams' by Lucy Sugden was another tapestry in three parts. It depicted a leafless tree in the left foreground with a green flower-filled meadow and a dusk-blue sky. The tree looked as if it might have been woven separately using supplementary warps, its woven branches spread eerily over the sky; in the same way a meadow full of long grasses and flowers stood out around the tree. The sky was woven in a different plane and (it seemed) overlaid the meadow seemingly supporting the tree's branches.

A tapestry, which for me epitomised the title of the exhibition 'Weaving Water, Woven Land' was 'Gaia' by Lorraine Darwen. She had integrated strips cut from an old OS cloth map of the Outer Hebrides showing the Summer Isles into a navy blue tweedy background. The warps were in 3 sections of a different colour – black, mid blue and white – and the background formed a frame within which the map strips were woven. The strips were of differing width and lengths each cut with oblique ends. They were woven in a random way through the warps. A huge sun set at the top of the woven strips shone out against the dark weft background.

'Ripple and Flow' were two pieces by Gillian Morris both using exposed warp technique. The wefts flowed between the warps and around the areas of more solid weaving just as the flowing tide meanders around the objects it meets in its path. The wefts used – linen, cotton, silk and metallic yarns in shades of blue, grey and green – gave a true feeling of the title.

A tapestry woven as a frame was 'Water Watches' by Judith Aylett. Her piece captured the shades of blues and green seen when viewing the sea at a distance with darker patches showing depth or dark underwater boulders or seaweed beds and the lighter colours the shallower areas framing sea blues of rippling water.

Several larger pieces were hung from the ceiling so that they wafted in the air as you passed by them, one showed a rocky seashore 'Winter Calm' by Trisha Gow. I was drawn by her skill in depicting the movement of the water as it approached the shore – the swirling to and fro as water ebbs and flows.

I always enjoy looking at tapestry exhibitions. There is always something new to see and inspire and new techniques to explore. There is also the magic in how an exhibition theme has been interpreted. This exhibition fulfilled all my expectations.

It is some while since I had visited Farfield Mill and I was very pleasantly surprised, and impressed to find not only that it was still open (thanks to the many donations to keep the building in business) but that every corner of every room was being used. Entry is via the first floor where there is a shop and a gallery around the sides of which are textile-related studios. On the ground floor is a café selling refreshments from coffee and teas to tasty lunches. The second floor is an area where groups can hire space for exhibitions. The top floor is mainly open plan with looms of varying types, ancient and modern, used by the Weaving Friends for demonstrations on Mondays, Wednesdays and at other events. Some artists also have studio areas there.

21 weavers submitted 31 pieces

[Woven Art website](#) for photographs from the exhibition.

'Mellon Udrigle', Siobhan Ratchford. Photo (c) Anna Wetherell

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