

By Karen Carruth

It’s an area of natural and bleak beauty in the far north of Scotland that inspires Magi Sinclair every time she takes her sketchbook to The Flows.

Peat bogs maybe don’t sound like the obvious choice for a series of artwork, but Magi talks of the beauty of the tiny things that she notices when she sits and looks. The flora and the fauna, specialist plants that have adapted to the landscape. Tiny flowers, some of them with their own agenda. The sundew plant which captures flies, the reflections on the water, the hidden bird life. It’s wild and emotes danger and she loves it.

Magi Sinclair now lives in Latheron on the coast, not far from Wick, and works from a studio in the family farmhouse. The farm, Nottingham Mains, is farmed by her two brothers and she has recently come back to the family home after returning to art when she took a late degree as a mature student at Edinburgh. At this point, Magi was living in the Borders, she had worked with Pringle of Scotland after doing fashion and textiles at Galashiels.

“I was nervous about going back as a mature student, but it worked out brilliantly. I was really surprised and delighted to win the Astaire prize as the best piece of work in the 3rd/4th year. And then I won the Hermione Hammond drawing award just after. That gave me a huge boost of confidence.”

Magi works part time in Thurso Gallery, it seems her immersion into the artistic life is complete.

A solo exhibition in Edinburgh last March was a huge body of work to produce for Magi, but the exhibition went exceedingly well. She says: “I worried about taking my work which was based on the landscape of the far north of Scotland into the capital city, but I was really surprised how well it was received. I sold lots of pieces and am now in the middle of trying to build up a new body of work.”

The exhibition included a range of paintings that detail an old croft house called The Corr. Magi says: “When I was a child I used to visit this croft, it was owned by the Keith family. I loved going there as they had a Clydesdale horse called Monty which they allowed me to stroke. Over the years, the croft has fallen into disrepair. I wanted to capture the memories I had of the place and the joy I remember when they allowed me to use the butter churn and help them



Magi has a wonderful way of capturing light and movement on the water in and around ‘The Flows’

Inspiration ‘flows’ for Magi

make crowdie.”

There are also a few paintings that strike a chord with those of us living in the world of farming. A study of a perfectly steady post, and dyke and stab – all three of them depict a somewhat less than perfect solution where the stab is an old trunk of a tree, the dyke is leaning over with barbed wire holding it together and the steady post has beautifully detailed observations of the lichens and moss that grows on farm dykes all over the country.

Magi’s work is very detailed. She works on large pieces at 1m wide often. That means that one can take up to a month to complete. She has a stunning

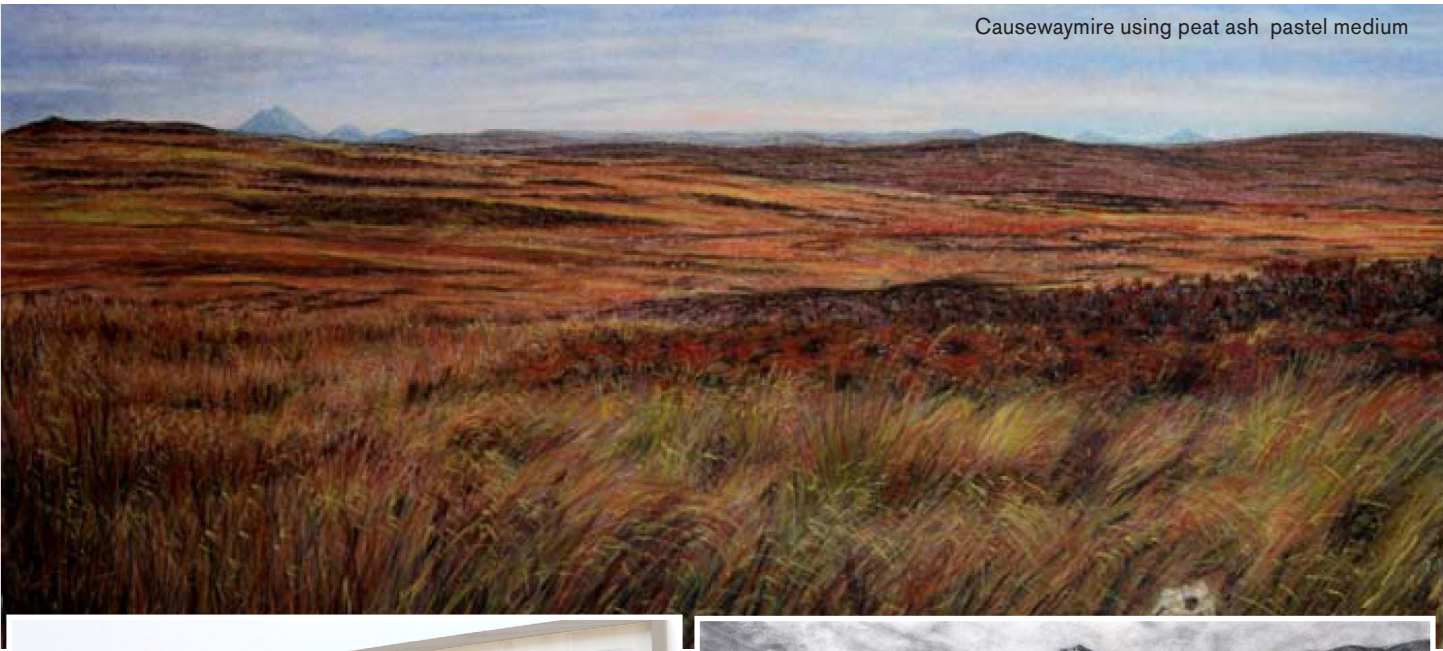
portfolio of work not only detailing the Flow Country, but also the Whaligoe Steps which are in Ulbster, in Caithness.

They are a set of unique steps which lead down the steep cliffs to a small natural haven, at the bottom there is a man-made bink or platform, which was used when the fishing industry was at its peak. The women of Whaligoe carried fish in baskets on their backs up these 320 steps or so, which zig-zag their way up the cliff. Then they walked on to Wick. The strength of these woman was admirable as they also carried the men on their backs in their stocking soles across a board to deposit them into their boat with dry feet!

Magi says: “Every step down and up has to be carefully taken and is quite daunting for the first-time visitor. Only glimpses of what is to come next can be seen with each set of steps and a different view of cliff or sea is the reward. The sea colour changes regularly ranging from deep emerald greens to clear blues, the bottom can go from calm to raging with flying globules of spray.”

Magi likes to push the boundaries and has been working with peat ash, which is a deep orange colour, almost terracotta, as well as one of her favourites, carbon on paper.

Magi likes the idea of using carbon to tie in with the amount



Causewaymire using peat ash pastel medium



Magi alongside one of her works while she was exhibiting in Edinburgh



The image above is of the croft belonging to Messrs Keith, sparking childhood memories for Magi



Above: The Perfect Stab, an everyday farming scene picked out and captured by Magi

Left: Blue ripple, at Dubh Loch

of carbon that the peat bogs hold.

After such a big commitment as the exhibition, Magi is taking time to rethink her subject matter at the moment. She says: “You do need time to reflect and to think about what the next

project will be. I’m enjoying experimenting.”

Magi’s work is also available in limited edition Giclée print and she has also produced cards which she says sold very well. “Buying original artwork can be outwith some people’s budgets,

that’s why I decided that prints would be a more accessible way for people to buy my work.”

A selection of her work is available to view online on her website, and at the moment she isn’t accepting commissions, preferring to work from her own

inspiration which she then offers for sale.

Prints are available on high quality paper from £100.

www.magisinclair.co.uk