

ARTS: Farm women are focus of new Abbot Hall multimedia show | The Westmorland Gazette

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Dickie Felton, of Lakeland Arts, experiences part of the exhibition at Abbot Hall Art Gallery entitled Tracing the Landscape.28/03/2018JON GRANGER



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A RARE spotlight is shining on Cumbria's farming women, at the latest exhibition to be staged at Kendal's Abbot Hall Art Gallery.

In specially created sheds, visitors have the chance to immerse themselves in the stories of five women who work the land by watching individual films

about their lives.

The intriguing show - Tracing the Landscape: Cumbrian Farm Women - is by Glasgow-born artist Patricia MacKinnon-Day. Commissioned by Lakeland Arts, she spent a year with women aged between 30 and 80 across the county. Some have managed farms for generations, while others are newer to agriculture.

Patricia's exhibition is described as offering "a play on all the senses" with each shed featuring historical farming artefacts from the neighbouring Museum of Lakeland Life & Industry, part of Lakeland Arts' collection, as well as possessions and materials chosen by the women.

Female roles in farming are explored alongside the hopes and frustrations experienced in an industry often seen as "a man's world". Although the women have wide-ranging, passionate and differing views on agriculture, they are united as women farmers.

"To these five women, farming is not a job but a way of life. It is in their blood," said Patricia, who studied fine art at Liverpool School of Art and completed an MA at Royal College of Art London.

"Male voices around farming are well-documented; however, women are often overlooked. Women farmers always seem pushed into the background. I wanted to bring the stories of this often marginalised group to the fore."

Lakeland Arts' events programme for 2018 links to the nationwide celebrations of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which allowed women to vote for the first time in Britain. "There is a sub-text to the exhibition that the stories of women in agriculture are often invisible," said Patricia. "The exhibition will also look at the standing of the women in their communities as they consider where they sit in society."

Lakeland Arts says it is delighted to be working with Patricia and using contemporary art to explore the lives of Cumbrian communities. Jennie Pitceathly, head of learning, said: "The five women who feature in the exhibition are rooted to the landscape, the land and their communities. Tracing the Landscape will bring their voices and experiences to a wider audience."

The landscape and farming-themed show coincides with Abbot Hall's display of Monet's masterpiece Haystacks: Snow Effect - believed to be the very first time a Monet has been displayed in Cumbria.

Also on show is new contemporary digital work by Katie Spragg. This includes a stop-frame animation which explores memories, experiences and interactions with nature; and While Away, which sees visitors recline on a chair to watch grass made of porcelain blow in the wind. Both works are said to "evoke a sense of wonder about being outside in nature".

The Tracing the Landscape exhibition comes at a time when there is increased focus on the Lake District, its landscape and people, after it was awarded UNESCO World Heritage Status in summer 2017.

For more, visit lakelandarts.org.uk