

Spotlight on Cumbrianwomen who work the land

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Date: Friday 2nd March 2018



Maria Benjamin features in Artwork by Patrica MacKinnon-Day.

WOMEN who make their mark in the male-dominated world of farming are the focus of a new exhibition.



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Mary Brough pictured at work by Patricia MacKinnon-Day.

Tracing the Landscape: Cumbrian Farm Women opened yesterday and runs to 9th June at Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal. The multimedia exhibition by artist Patricia MacKinnon-Day has been commissioned by Lakeland Arts.

Patricia spent a year with five farm women from across Cumbria. Aged between 30 and 80, some have managed farms for decades, others are newer to the sector. They were Joyce Dalton, Low House Farm, Ayside; Maria Benjamin, Grange Farm, Ulverston; Mary Brough, Chapel House Farm, Uldale; Caroline Grindrod, Oaks Farmhouse, Loughrigg; and Janet Wilson, Highgate Side Farm, Beckside.

During the exhibition visitors will immerse themselves in the stories of these five farm women by entering specially created sheds in the gallery to watch individual films about their lives.

A play on all the senses, each shed will feature historic agricultural objects from the Museum of Lakeland Life and Industry, part of Lakeland Arts' collection, as well as possessions and materials chosen by the women.

Tracing the Landscape: Cumbrian Farm Women examines female roles in farming, their hopes, frustrations and place in an industry often seen as a "man's world". They each have wide-ranging, passionate and differing views on their industry, but are united as women farmers.

Patricia MacKinnon-Day said: "To these five women, farming is not a job but a way of life. It is in their blood. 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."

The 2018 Lakeland Arts' programme of exhibitions and events links to the national celebrations surrounding the Representation of the People Act 1918 which allowed women to vote for the first time in Britain, highlighting gender discrimination in the art world.

Jennie Pitceathly, head of learning at Lakeland Arts, 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 exhibition coincides with the display of Monet masterpiece Haystacks: Snow Effect — which is 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 evoke a sense of wonder about being outside in nature.

On 22nd March, a special panel event linked to the exhibition will take place at Abbot Hall. Women in Conversation will explore life in the rural landscape and issues affecting farming today.

During the event, exhibition artist Patricia will be joined by Sian Lincoln, ethnographer and communications lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University. They will answer questions from those present and people watching the event live on Facebook.

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14 King Street, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 7AH
Telephone:01768 862 313
Fax: 01768 890 363
Email:news@cwherald.com
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