

Arts

Visual art

Two shows celebrating new work and that of nonagenarian Frances Walker have their roots in Aberdeen's Peacock Visual Arts, writes Susan Mansfield



The New Aberdeen Bestiary
Aberdeen Art Gallery
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Frances Walker: a selection of print works from Peacock, 2010-2022
The Print Room, 252 Union Street, Aberdeen
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Laura Aldridge: Lawnmower
Jupiter Artland, near Edinburgh
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Andrew Sim: two rainbows and a forest of plants and trees
Jupiter Artland, near Edinburgh
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The New Aberdeen Bestiary ends 5 January 2025; Frances Walker ends 31 August; Laura Aldridge and Andrew Sim at Jupiter Artland end 29 September

These days, the arts feels like a hand-to-mouth survival economy, so milestone birthdays feel like significant achievements. Aberdeen's Peacock & the Worm (previously Peacock Printmakers, then Peacock Visual Arts) turned 50 in June, marking the date with a series of exhibitions and events, from a civic reception in the Town Hall to a two-day show by David Bellingham in a set of restored Victorian public toilets.

At the reception, Peacock director Nuno Sacramento pledged an increasing public presence for the organisation, and that's certainly true at the moment with three exhibitions continuing across the city, and a further show at Drum Castle on Deeside.

Aberdeen Art Gallery is hosting **The New Aberdeen Bestiary**, for which Peacock commissioned seven artists over three years to make new print work inspired by a medieval bestiary in the Aberdeen University collection. The result is a showcase of contemporary printmaking woven into an installation



Spirit of Aberdeen



with Carla Filipe's lizard skin screenprints making a kind of wallpaper.

Responding to the marginalia in the original manuscript, the artists have made a kind of celebration of marginality. Three of them have an interest in travelling communities: Delaine Le Bas, on the shortlist for this year's Turner Prize, who presents a reworking of the symbolism of the Medusa; French artist Joy Charpentier, who reimagines the rat as the protagonist of a punk utopia, and Pedro G Romero, whose work is part text, a free-wheeling wander through ideas, places and history.

Madrid-based Julio Jara has made a series of arresting images using donkey masks in

Installation view of The New Aberdeen Bestiary, main; detail from Antarctic Refuge Hut, 2000, by Frances Walker at The Print Room, Aberdeen, left; Laura Aldridge by her fountain at Jupiter Artland, right

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Jupiter Artland continues to offer artists opportunities to make ambitious work

collaboration with the residents of the homeless shelter where he works, British-Nigerian Abdulrazaq Awofeso recalls the cockerel which used to wake him every morning in his Nigeria childhood, and Aberdeen-based Sadie Main takes on the unicorn and its role as the national animal of Scotland.

Frances Walker was one of the Peacock's founder members, and continues her connection with the printmaking workshop into her nineties. A selection of her prints from the last 14 years is on show at Peacock's Print Room (252 Union Street), including works made during lockdown in socially distanced collaboration with the workshop technicians.

Walker is a master and this show is an enduring pleasure, as we observe her delving into a range of printmaking processes to get the results she wants, whether the subject is a line drawing of rocks at Achmelvick or a sweep of ocean in saturated blue. There is work inspired by her earlier travels to the Antarctic and Svalbard, as well as long-term inspirations such as the Isle of Tiree.

Many of the works are in panoramic format: the wooden walkways across the bog at Finlaggan on Islay; the long curve of an Antarctic shore, complete with penguins; a wide sweep of coastline approaching Cruden Bay which takes in several different weathers. But this skill with wide open spaces is matched by a work like 'Tiree Window' which glimpses a square of the outside world

from the dark interior of a cottage.

Meanwhile, Jupiter Artland continues to offer artists opportunities to make ambitious work in its exhibition spaces as well as in the sculpture park. In the Steading Galleries, brilliantly turned into topsy-turvy nightclub toilets last summer by Lindsey Mendick, Glasgow artist **Laura Aldridge** has created an immersive installation which includes ceramics, glass, fabric, film and sound.

The walls are an orange yellow, the steps replaced with a bright pink ramp. Lighting is low, allowing her beautifully crafted wall-mounted lamps – nests of plant-dyed fabrics with ceramic centres – a chance to shine. There are loveseats which viewers are invited to use, adorned with glass ornaments.

The show foregrounds the sensory over the intellectual response. It's also highly collaborative: she worked with a textile dyer, a furniture maker and a glass-blower as well as with fellow artists Juliana Capes, Morwenna Kearsley and Sarah McFadyen to make the audio and film.

It's an invitation to have a sensory experience and see where it takes you, an interior which is, in some way, about interiority. Meanwhile, in the garden, her fountain, through which water rushes and tinkles over a tower of giant ceramic snail shells, both looks and sounds beautiful. You stay for a moment, then you move on. It's as profound and as ephemeral as that.

In the ballroom, Glasgow artist **Andrew Sim** – who is now based in New York – presents their largest show in Scotland to date. Sim makes large-scale 'paintings' using pastel on canvas, drawing on a personal lexicon of symbols which includes werewolves, rainbows, sunflowers and monkey-puzzle trees.

In this show, yucca plants flower and multi-headed sunflowers dazzle against dark, starry skies. They represent specific plants the artist has encountered, making them points on an autobiographical journey as well as being symbols, though what they are symbolic of we can only guess. They have the kind of flat luminosity which makes one think of children's books. One picture shows a plaintive looking pink werewolf. Sim has done unicorns too, in the past, though there are none here.

The ballroom, with its splendid rococo-style ceiling, feels like an awkward place for them. One partly blocks a window. The rainbow over the fireplace is deliberately hung too far to the right, messing with the head of anyone of a symmetrical disposition.

Sim's work offers a stylised take on the natural world which the contemporary art market is currently falling over itself to collect, not unlike the painting of Nicolas Party, who designed Jupiter Artland's ultra-cool cafe nearby. It's pleasant enough if you like a bit of ironic naïveté, but if there are hidden depths, they're kept very well hidden.



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