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LifeGuide

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

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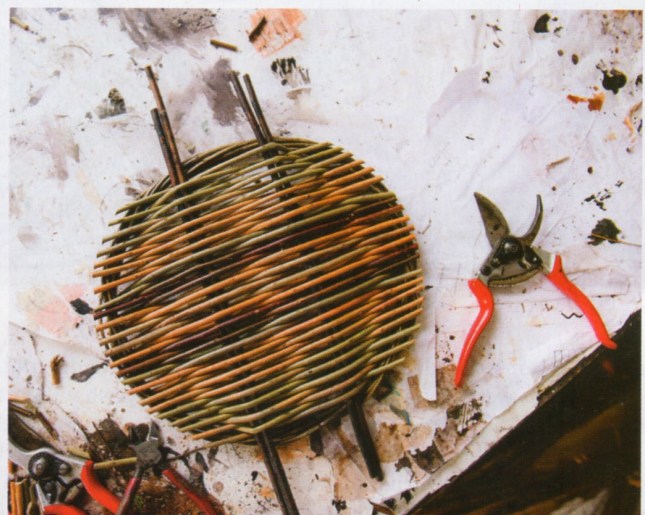
Lizzie Farey in her
studio at WASPS in
Kirkcudbright

Dream weaver

One of the region's best known and most prolific and successful artists, Lizzie Farey has sold her work all over the globe and has been commissioned by hospitals, churches, and famous folk from the worlds of arts, sport and entertainment. Here she talks about finding beauty in the small things, and the wonders of willow

WORDS CAROL HOGARTH

PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID MOSES



Stopping at traffic lights, a brief glimpse of sun glinting through grassy seed heads on the verge as they sway in a breeze is enough to inspire a beautiful work of willow art by Lizzie Farey.

And it's this gift for finding beauty in the small things, seeing what most of us wouldn't notice, or think important, that sets her apart as an artist.

"I think I always knew somehow that I was an artist," she says. "I saw things differently from other people and I would have strong emotional, intuitive reactions to things."

Lizzie, who lives near Castle Douglas and has a studio at WASPS in Kirkcudbright, is one of the region's best known and most prolific and successful artists.

She has sold her work all over the world and has been commissioned by hospitals, churches and a major city law firm, as well as individuals including household names in the arts, sport and entertainment.

She has an incredibly busy 2019 lined up. First, she is showing at Collect, the international fair for contemporary craft and design at the Saatchi Gallery in London from February 28, as one of 15 Scottish makers representing Craft Scotland.

Then it's on to producing more work for Dumfries & Galloway's Spring Fling open studios weekend in May; a joint exhibition at Cambridge Contemporary Art in October, and a major solo exhibition at Flow gallery in London's Notting Hill next year.

This is in addition to more than 50 individual commissions Lizzie completes each year.

"I am so happy and lucky that people want to buy what I make. I do worry about becoming overwhelmed by taking on too much, but I'm learning not to bite off more than I can chew."

Lizzie's light, airy studio at the front of the WASPS building looking over Kirkcudbright's High Street is crucial to fulfilling such a heavy workload.

She moved in when the studios opened eight years ago, having previously worked in barns and outbuildings: "I never realised before what it was to have a beautiful, warm, light building. I was always very driven anyway but having this space is wonderful.

"I see it as going to work. I arrive by



about 8.30am every day and I'm here sometimes seven days a week. I can't keep away."

Lizzie grows her own willow in a field at Kirkpatrick Durham which she shares with fellow willow artist Trevor Leat, best known for his giant wicker sculptures.

The pair, along with Graham Glanville from Whithorn, all worked as traditional basket makers around the same time in the 1990s, but their work headed in very different directions.

"I was making good, practical baskets, and there's something lovely about producing something useful, but the artist side of me decided I needed to show off this incredible material.

"I had seven years' experience making baskets so my hands had gained

the knowledge and I knew what you could push willow to do. I started making knotted balls and vases and experimenting with materials, plaiting rushes, using larch, lime suckers, anything that would bend around my wrist."

Living at the time in an isolated cottage, Lizzie was surrounded by, and inspired by, a wealth of natural treasures: "I had larch, heather, birch and gorse all around. I would see materials like bog myrtle and find ways to incorporate them."

This total immersion in nature goes back to childhood family holidays where Lizzie's love of Scotland and wild places began. The youngest of five children (with her identical twin Rachel), Lizzie was born in Singapore

and moved around as a child, with her father in the Royal Navy, but Scottish holidays were a constant.

"Mum insisted on it. She adored Scotland. I used to go off and explore and find amazing places. Right from that point I had an affinity with wild places, with woodlands and streams. As a little girl I just felt this was it; this was life. I think I'm always trying to get back to that point."

After a foundation year at art school in Canterbury, Lizzie enrolled on a course in fine art painting but left to go travelling on the back of her brother's motorbike, which she describes as "a different kind of education".

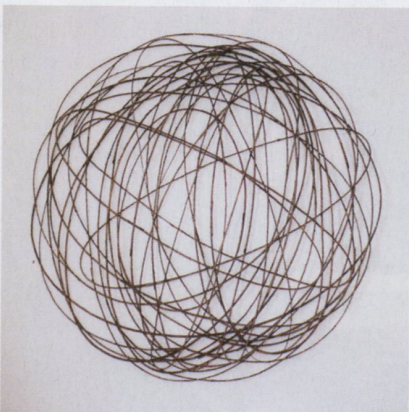
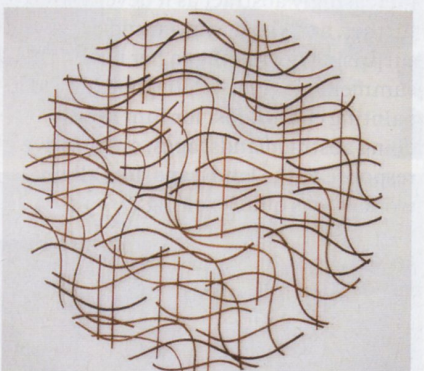
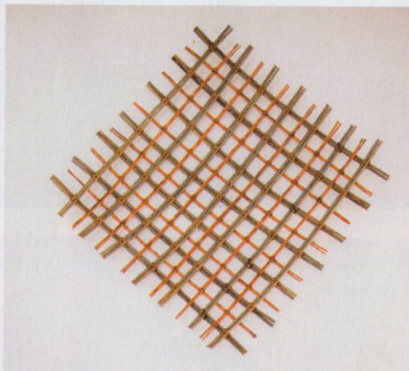
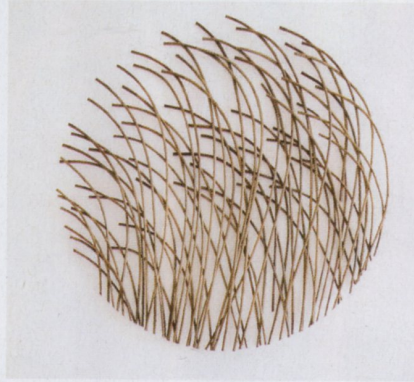
Later, while working for a gallery in Bath and part time with the mental health charity MIND, she had the chance to volunteer at Lothlorien Therapeutic Community for people with mental health problems in Galloway.

Settling in the region, she worked at Ottersburn Gallery in Dumfries and had a part-time job in Castle Douglas but, having discovered basket-making,

'I think I always knew somehow that I was an artist. I saw things differently from other people and I would have strong emotional, intuitive reactions to things'



Lizzie finds inspiration in nature and in Japanese aesthetics



would “race home” to start weaving.

Lizzie was introduced to the craft by her sister-in-law in Wales: “She’d made a wicker cradle for her daughter and it was so beautiful. After one weekend I came back with two baskets. I was so taken with the immediacy of it.”

Crediting Designs Gallery in Castle Douglas with encouraging and supporting her and stocking her work in the early days, Lizzie went into business in 1997: “Right from the start, people seemed to know about me, this eccentric woman making these funny things.

“The postman would bring me apple prunings and, when I got into making nests, I would come home and find a little nest left on my doorstep. People knew I was making things connected with nature.”

In that first year, her work was featured on the front cover of the prestigious *Crafts* magazine and offers of exhibitions and commissions began to flood in.

Exhibiting, and winning awards ►

at the Chelsea Craft Show, greatly encouraged by Gracefield Arts Centre in Dumfries, raised her profile still further.

By 1999 Lizzie was showing in Connecticut, USA, followed in 2001 by her first exhibition in New York, with many more to follow.

A three-week trip to Japan in 2006 proved hugely influential and saw a change of direction from three-dimensional work to wall-hung pieces: "I'm very drawn to the Japanese minimalist look, the quality of line, and I was fascinated by their use of natural materials."

Having developed her wall art, including her hugely popular swallows, Lizzie staged her first major solo show, Spirit of Air, at the City Arts Centre in Edinburgh in 2010. The centre now has a piece of her work on permanent display, as does National Museums Scotland.

Despite the enduring popularity of Lizzie's distinctive balls, nests and wall sculptures, her "drive to create" takes her work in new directions.

"My ideas are dictated by the materials themselves. The large, suspended sphere I made for the opening of Kirkcudbright Galleries, for example, was made from the stems of bog myrtle and I used heather roots in a new way the other day."

Lizzie believes her work will become increasingly abstract as it develops further, and she may even add a surprising new string to her bow: "This summer I went up to Ullapool and did a painting course, just for fun. I was doing abstract landscapes, an intuitive response to the landscape, like all my work. It was quite exciting..."



'This total immersion in nature goes back to childhood family holidays where Lizzie's love of Scotland and wild places began'