



MEET THE MAKERS

ARTISAN PROFILE

Lizzie Farey has been drawing inspiration from the Scottish landscape for as long as she can remember. She fell in love with it as a child: her family drove from Bath to the Mull of Kintyre for a holiday one year, and liked it so much that they came back every summer. As students, she and her twin sister worked in a hotel on Iona ("Guests must have thought I was working twice as hard as the other staff") and after leaving art college Lizzie settled in rural Galloway, establishing a business making stained glass.

"I decided I'd had enough of that when a builder put his ladder through the church window I'd just finished," she recalls. She decamped to Wales, where her brother has a smallholding, and within an afternoon had learned the fundamentals of basketry from his wife Mandy Coates, who makes traditional willow designs.

Returning to Galloway, she bought her first supply of willow from growers in Somerset, and started to create her own pieces – baskets at first, evolving over nearly three decades into less-functional vessels and 'nests', and more recently into award-winning random-weave bowls, sculptural forms and decorative wall pieces.

The colours, textures and scent of the Galloway Hills are woven into all of Lizzie's work. She has a willow field (about 15 miles away from her Kirkcudbright studio), which she harvests once a year, and also incorporates pussy willow sprays, larch twigs, and rushes, reeds and bog myrtle, which grow profusely in the area. The compulsion to make comes from the landscape, the hills and, she says, her inner self: "We work to find out who we are. And spending time with your materials means you form an intimate connection with them and helps you get to know them."

Natural materials have a calmness to them, she adds, and her working life runs in time with the seasons. She loves the fact that willow is sustainable and renewable,

that you can cut it back to ground level one year and it will shoot up again to a usable height the next. "You find a seam of gold and it just flows," she says, which sums up the way willow has transformed her life, as well as the plentiful supply of materials around her.

It's a tremendously satisfying way of working, and has always felt far more 'right' than having to buy in glass and lead for her windows. Yet a sense of her glass work still remains in Lizzie's simple, innovative willow designs: people have told her they can still see lead lines in her sculptures and wall panels, and an exhibition in 2017 at Edinburgh's City Art Centre showed her work alongside other Scottish-based artists under the title 'A Fine Line'. She uses sketches to create her initial designs, and assembles the materials on her studio floor, laying out sections of rod and rush rather like a stained-glass pattern, before pinning it in place.

Kirkcudbright has long been an artists' town, and her studio – a first-floor space overlooking the hills – is in two buildings converted from Georgian farmhouses and let to artists through the WASPS scheme (Workshop & Artist Studio Provision Scotland). Lizzie shows regularly at UK galleries including Cambridge Contemporary Arts, the Scottish Gallery, London's Contemporary Applied Arts and Flow Gallery, and was at

Collect, at the Saatchi Gallery, in February this year. She teaches during exhibitions, too, and runs workshops when she has time. Taking on apprentices would be tricky, she feels, because her work is so individual, but she does involve the community as much as she can: agricultural students help out with the willow harvesting.

Waiting lists for commissions can be up to six months, but once a year the studio is open for three days. It's a chance to let visitors and local people see her work close up, to feel its connection with the landscape and invest in it for themselves. "Someone was leaving the area," Lizzie remembers of a recent customer, "and bought a piece so she could take something of Galloway with her."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHANNON TOFTS

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