

*Hulabhaig Presents...*



# THE BEASTS OF HOLM (*Biastan Thuilm*)

Mhairi Law : Gill Thompson : Margarita Williams : Geoff Stear : Irene Blair : Andy Laffan

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## The Beasts of Holm

New work from Hebridean Artists reflecting the events of 1919 when HMY lolaire struck the rocks known as Biastan Thuilm (The Beasts of Holm).

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### *Hulabhaig Presents...*

New work from six Hebridean Artists reflecting the events of 1919 when HMY lolaire struck the rocks known as **Biastan Thuilm (The Beasts of Holm)**. Over 200 lives were lost in the worst tragedy ever to hit the Outer Hebrides.

“Scarcely a family was left untouched in the close-knit communities of Lewis and Harris. The homes of the island are full of lamentation — grief that cannot be comforted.”

***The Scotsman, 6 January 1919***

“Not a few of them had suffered shipwreck time and time again during the war, but always they escaped. And now with all these perils past and the peace and comfort and liberty so well earned in prospect, they come home only to be creully done to death within twenty yards of the shore and at the very entrance to Stornoway harbour!”

***Stornoway Gazette, 1919***

“We never spoke about it, I never asked her about it. My husband and I never mentioned it in front of her and our children knew it was never to be brought up when she was in the room.”

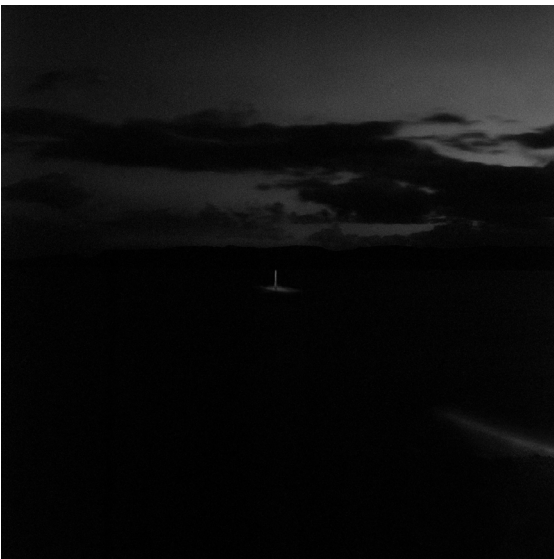
“That's quite extraordinary when you think about it. A woman widowed by the lolaire disaster, her daughter orphaned by it. The widow living so long that the daughter was 66 years old when she died - and they never once discussed it.”

“And I think that, more than anything else, brings home the horror of the lolaire disaster in the Lewis community.”

***Extracts from - The last lolaire orphan.  
Transcript of interview with John Macleod,  
author of ‘When I heard the Bell’***







## Dawn

Mhairi Law

h: 103 w: 103 d: 3(cms).  
Medium format photographs,  
ink-jet prints, 2018.

We live in a world filled with light. It is often taken for granted that this invisible source is available to us at the flick of a switch. Cities spill their light for miles around, torches are accessories on gadgets, and ships are guided safely into harbours. Dark skies can be rare, and in some areas

protected. It's not often we find ourselves in complete darkness, with no option of light to guide our way, or keep us from harm. In the early hours of New Years morning 1919, this would not have been the case.

This photographic series Dawn, aims to capture this sense of blackness felt on one of the darkest nights in Lewis's history. The monument serves as a constant, a memory still felt. Perhaps the most harrowing moment of this memory comes

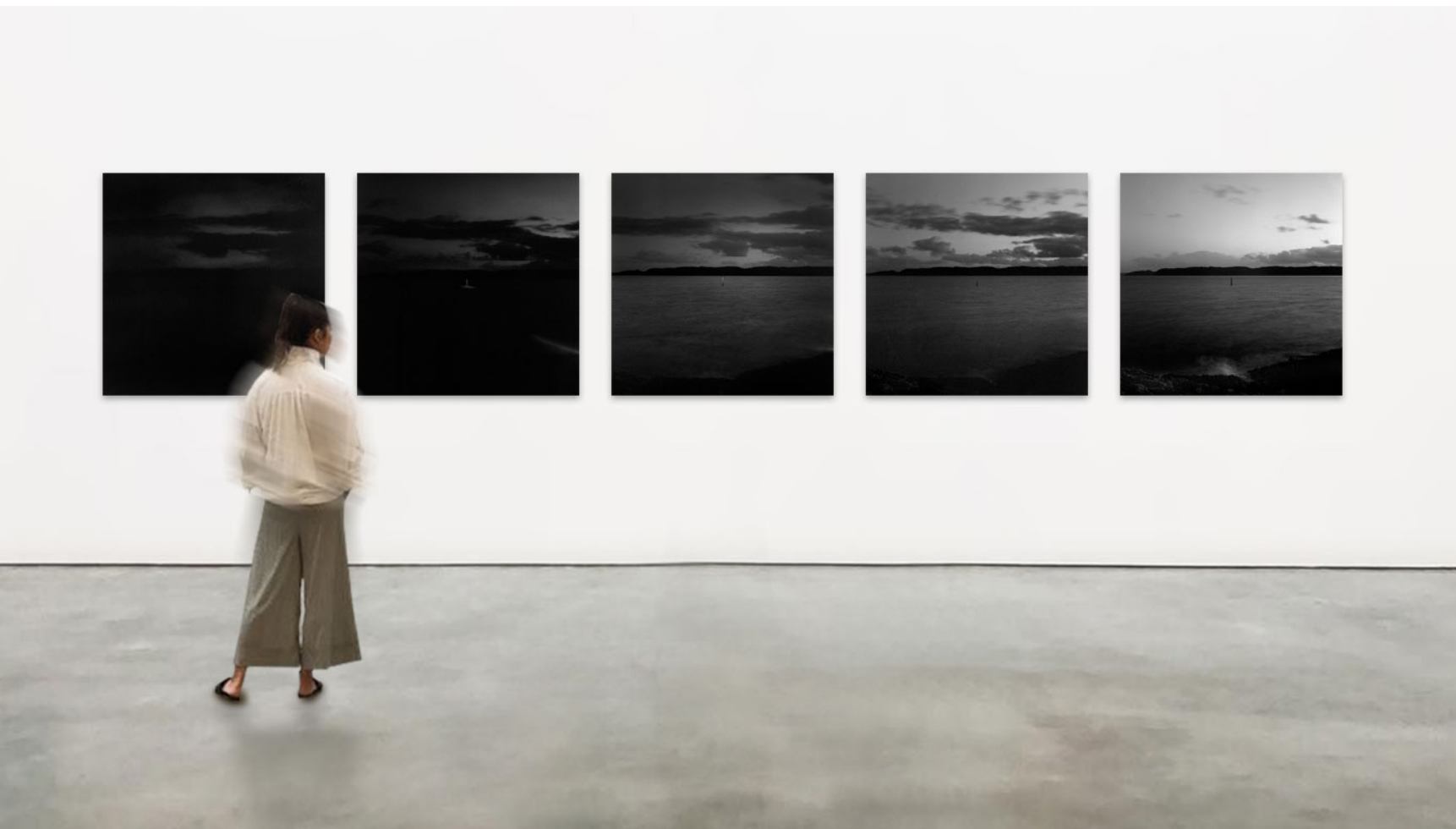
with the arrival of dawn. Light slowly breaks over the Beasts of Holm, onto a very different island.

Working primarily in medium format photography, Mhairi Law has recently opened a black and white darkroom and workshop space on the Isle of Lewis. With projects spanning from the Faroe Islands, Chilean Patagonia and Lewis itself, her work explores landscapes with focus on evidence of human interaction.

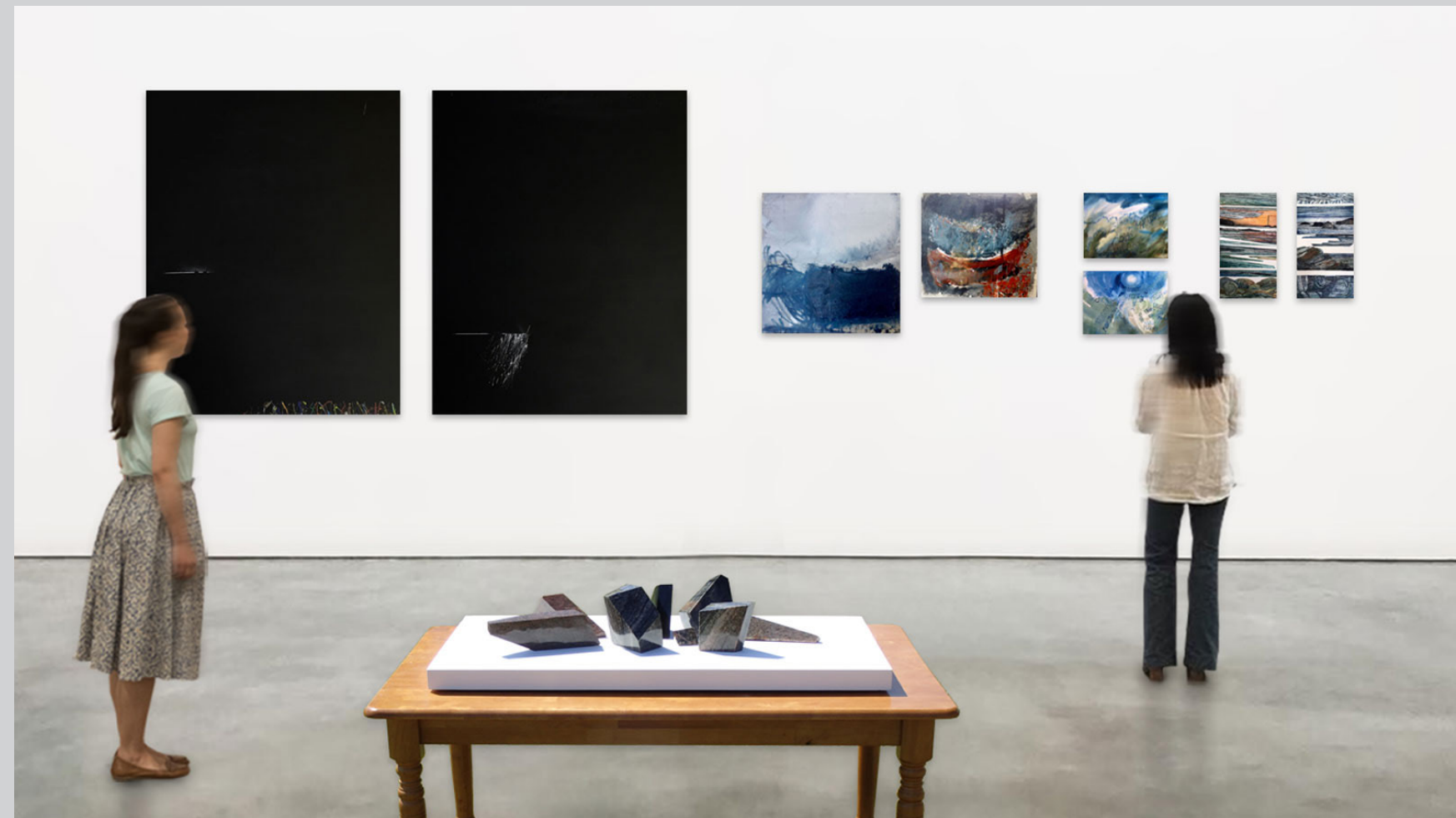
**MHAIRI LAW** (born Scottish Borders 1991) lives and works on the Isle of Lewis. She studied photography, film and television at Stevenson College (now Edinburgh College) in 2009. Graduating with Honours from the Photography and Film course at Edinburgh Napier in July 2014, she went on to undertake a year-long residency

with Stills: Centre for Photography in Edinburgh. After exhibiting at the Free Range shows in London and An Lanntair Arts Centre in Stornoway, in November 2015 she was awarded first prize at the Jill Todd Photographic Award. In June 2016 she undertook a month-long artists residency to the Faroe Islands, exhibiting the resulting work with Stills gallery as part of their 40th year events in the Pathfoot building at Stirling University. Recent work has been a poetic and photographic mapping of the Braemar region, Gathering, alongside poet and artist, Alec Finlay and commissioned by Hauser and Wirth. Her most recent project 'Dawn' is currently being shown at An Lanntair, Stornoway as part of the lolaire centenary events. Her work has been featured in the Island Review, Of the Land and Us photography blog and SSHoP (Scottish Society for the History of Photography) magazine.

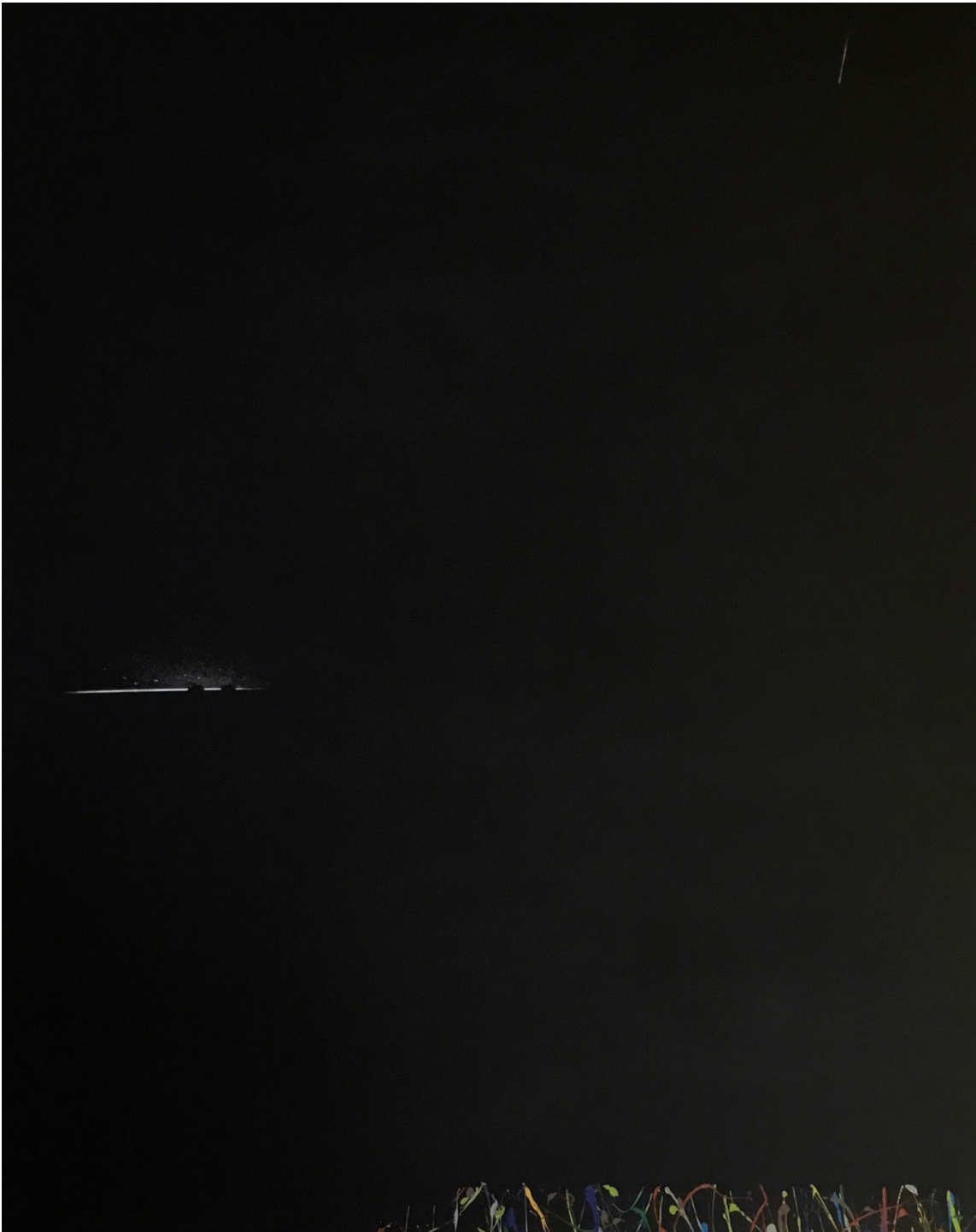




Dawn - Mhairi Law



From left to right.  
 1.1.1919 The Waiting - Geoff Stear, 1.1.1919 The Sinking! - Geoff Stear, Storm Rising - Irene Blair, North West into a Force 8 Northerly - Irene Blair, Last Words? and Last Words? (Gaelic Version) - Margarita Williams, The Beasts of Holm - Gill Thompson, Beasts - Gill Thompson, The Beasts of Holm (Sculpture) - Andy Laffan.



### 1.1.1919 The Waiting

Geoff Stear  
h: 150 w: 120 d: 2(cms).  
Acrylic paint on canvas.

**GEOFF STEAR** has studied fine art at the Regional College of Art, Bradford, the College of Art & Design in Birmingham and St. Martin's School of Art in London. He has exhibited extensively including at, Young Contemporaries, Northern Young Contemporaries, Sunshine Show, RBSA Galleries, Birmingham, Big Paintings For Public Places, Royal Academy of Arts, London & also featured in the BBC TV Arts (1969), the John Moores Exhibition, Liverpool and in 2004 had his first one man show at

'Loft', Leamington Spa. Working as an assistant at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, he gained experience and knowledge, and in some respects, has been influenced by UK and USA artists such as Raushenberg, Hoyland, Walker, Lee Krasner and King. He has lectured at the College of Art & Design, Birmingham (1976-1978, 1984-2005), Salisbury Art College and Bournemouth Art College (1977). In 1977 he set-up and managed 'Room Twenty Three' A Birmingham Design Studio.

More recently and since moving to Scalpay, a small island connected by bridge to the Isle of Harris in the Outer Hebrides Geoff



#### 1.1.1919 The Waiting (Detail)

The colourful detail at the bottom of the painting is in contrast to the total image and symbolises the waiting women and families, sadly in vain!





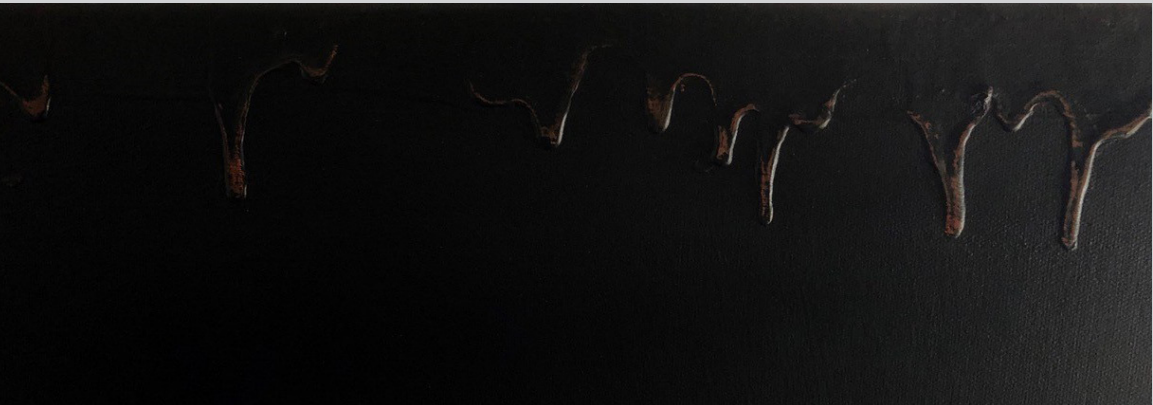
### 1.1.1919 The Sinking!

Geoff Stear  
h: 150 w: 120 d: 2(cms).  
Acrylic paint on canvas.

*has devoted his life to painting and fine art and has exhibited in many solo and group shows including: An Tuireann, Portree, the Isle of Skye, The Royal Hotel, Portree, the Isle of Skye, Solo show The Hebridean Series at Within the Domestic Gallery, Leamington Spa 2009, Grinneas nan Eilean (2005-2017), Solo Exhibition of my 'Float' print series at Gallery Frøyaog Sommeracadamiet, Kalvåg, Bremenger, Norway (2016), Solo Exhibition of residency work and prints at Svelgen Omsorgssenter, Bremenger, Norway (2016),*

*iNORGE I, solo exhibition at An Lanntair, Stornoway Norwegian residency work (2016), iNORGE II, solo exhibition at An Lanntair, Stornoway studio work (2017), Talla na Mara, West Harris, solo exhibition (2017) and Hebridean Lights, Group show, Country Frames Gallery, Inch, Aberdeenshire (2017).*

*Commissions include: 'Building our Islands Project', digital artwork projected onto the front of the building Giral at Rodel, Harris (2017), 'Hebrides International Film Festival', digital artwork for programs and promotional posters (2016-2017) and 'Harris Arts Festival and Carnival', design work for PR material (2018).*



#### 1.1.1919 The Sinking! (Detail)

Showing the top edge of the painting, an almost veiled image of 'black/red paint dribble' symbolises the blood left in Europe and at sea.





## The Beasts of Holm

Gill Thompson  
h: 44 w: 22 d: 0(cms).  
Original collagraph print.

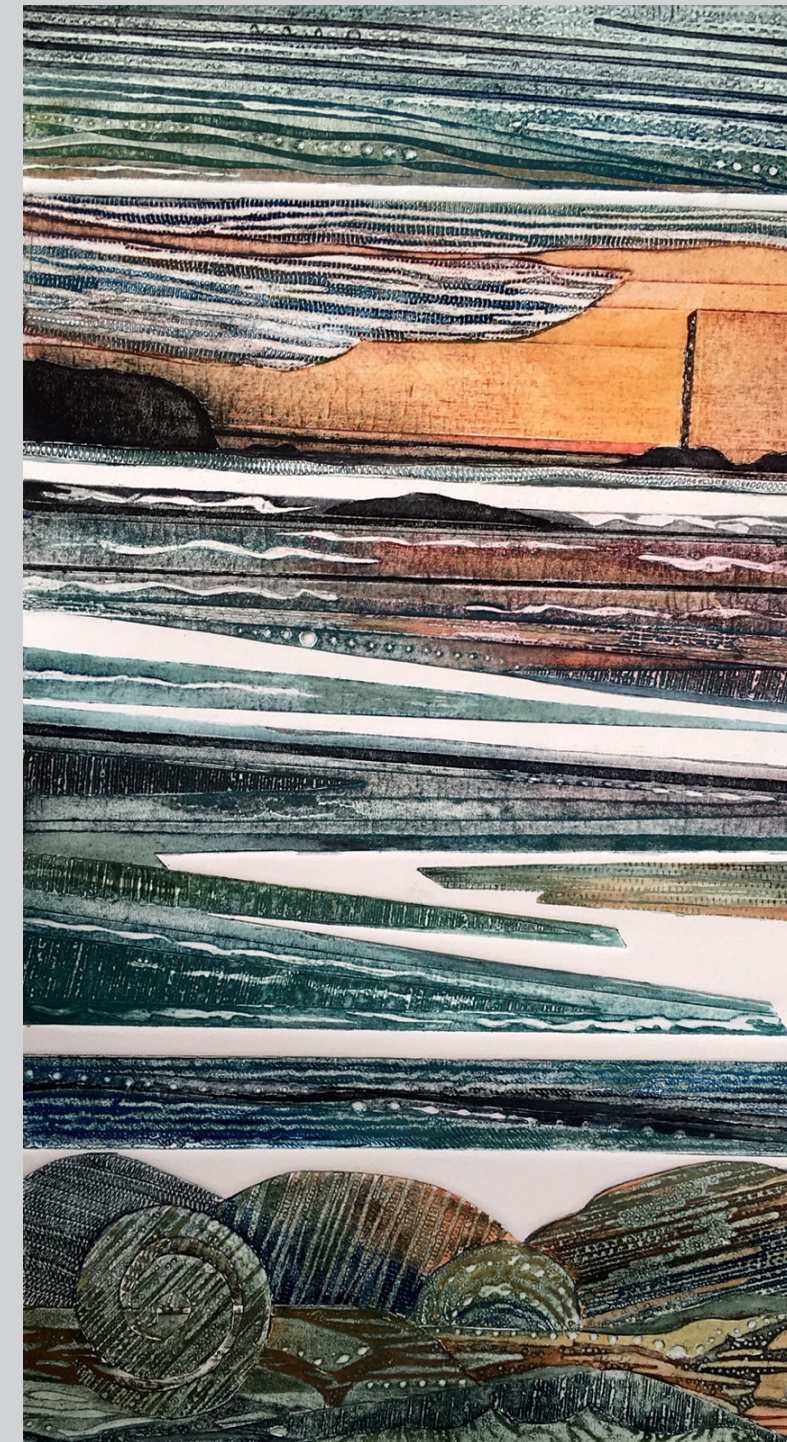
These prints are original hand-pulled collagraphs on Somerset paper using Caligo inks. They depict the rocks on which the lolaire foundered 100 years ago. At low tide they are visible but at high tide the Beasts lurk below the surface and are treacherous to boats large and small.

Gill Thompson is an artist and fine art printmaker based on the Isle of Lewis. She uses shape, colour and texture from the rich island environment to inform her printmaking and mixed media work, constantly developing and discovering new ways of creating work that reflects the landscapes and seascapes and ever changing light.

**GILL THOMPSON** has studied Speech and Language (BSc), Central School of Speech and Drama, London, Theatre Design (MA) at University of North Carolina, Education (MA and PGCE) at Worcester University and Fine Art and Printmaking at Hereford College of Art. She has exhibited at Morven Gallery, Isle of Lewis, Country Frames Gallery, Insch, An Lanntair, Stornoway, Talla na Mara Gallery, Isle of Harris and Caithness Horizons Gallery, Thurso, and regularly runs classes and art workshops for adults and children. She works from her studio which looks out across the Minch to mainland Scotland.

## Beasts

Gill Thompson  
h: 44 w: 24 d: 0(cms).  
Original collagraph print.







## The Beasts of Holm

Andy Laffan

h: 100 w: 153 d: 91 (cms).

Sculpture (50 kgs)

Lewisian gneiss on kitchen table.

This sculpture is a commemoration or remembrance that focuses on the impact the Beasts had on the families, waiting in deep anticipation of the return of the sailors after four long years of fighting. The wives, parents, sons, daughters brothers, sisters, girlfriends and a whole community joined together by collective relief that these men, who had survived against the odds, were coming home.

The sense of celebration was even more keenly felt, because they would be returning and would be reunited on the morning of the New Year - a New Year of peace that meant healing and new beginnings, meals were prepared and the traditional kitchen table was laid in anticipation.

Around 2.30am that night, with the lights of Stornoway Harbour in sight and just yards from home, the lolaire struck the rocks known as the Beasts of Holm. The sea, as it so often does in poor conditions, acted swiftly and callously, changing the table of celebration to a table of silence.



Andy Laffan thinks in three dimensions and after a career in interior design, space planning, exhibition design, computer visualisation and technology he is now developing his own artistic and curatorial practice here on the Isle of Lewis. He is influenced by the magnificence of stone, it's permanence as the core material of our planet, and yet it is fluid, in constant flux through natural erosion and metamorphosis by pressure and time, his stone work explores the interventions of nature, human industry and social development throughout history. Geology, biology and technology are common themes throughout his work. Combining elements of each within assemblages of different materials.

**Geology** - The earth, our planet, that lonely blue spot in the vastness of the universe, the intervention of time, represented by Lewisian Gneiss with its beautiful metamorphic strata, being 2 to 3 billion years old (almost 2/3 the age of the planet).

**Biology** - Life, biological and natural intervention represented by wood or other organic material.

**Technology** - Human and industrial interventions represented by acrylic, plastics, metals and other man-made or processed substances.

The long-term metamorphosis of our planet and the development of life in its infinite complexity have dominated the natural history of the earth since its creation, but now in the



relative short time of modern human habitation our industrial and technological interventions are having a dramatic effect on the delicate fine balance between geology and biology. From the simple human usage of rock for building, to chemical separation of elements for industry, to farming and forestry of natural resources, to the manipulation of genetics and DNA. All to be used to fuel and build the modern world for the benefit of humankind. But at what cost?

His recent sculptures are carved, cut and polished (his own personal intervention), some are representational and some abstract, but all expose the material and minerals in all their natural beauty, the form is generally determined from the original found object. He is interested in applying direct carving principals as used by late 19th and early 20th century sculptors to a more contemporary implementation using assemblage, found objects, technology and landscape art to explore his own sculptural ideas.

**ANDY LAFFAN** recently exhibited in the group show *Iùl at An Lanntair, Stornoway (2018)* and *The Royal Scottish Academy (2018)* and was awarded the *Scottish Arts Club Award (2018)* for his work *Fluid-Rock*, winning a solo show in Edinburgh scheduled for 2019. Before moving to the Outer Hebrides he has exhibited extensively throughout England including: *New Sculpture, W-CA/Division of Labour, Worcester (2013)*, *Royal Society of British Artists, annual open, The Mall Galleries, London (2014)*, *MECA, Malvern Exhibition of Contemporary Art (2009)*, *The Pitt Gallery, W-CA group show, Worcester (2008)*, *Hammer on Chisel Collection, Malvern (2008)*, *VMA Open Studios, Stockport (2005 and 2006)*.







# Storm Rising

Irene Blair  
h: 66 w: 66 d: 7(cms).  
Acrylic on canvas on board.

“Storm Rising is an abstract painting in my Blue Day Series of paintings influenced by the strengths and failings of humans in an ever increasing world of disasters.”

**IRENE BLAIR** is a practising artist and her main metier is in painting, but recently she has been drawn to artist's books as she finds the exploration of creating an artist book in 3-dimensions is exciting and inspiring. She has exhibited with the RSA, SSA and VAS many times over the last few years and has also, for the past 10 years contributed to Open Studios North Fife in her own studio. Now having moved to the Isle of Skye she feels inspired by the strength of the Cuillins.

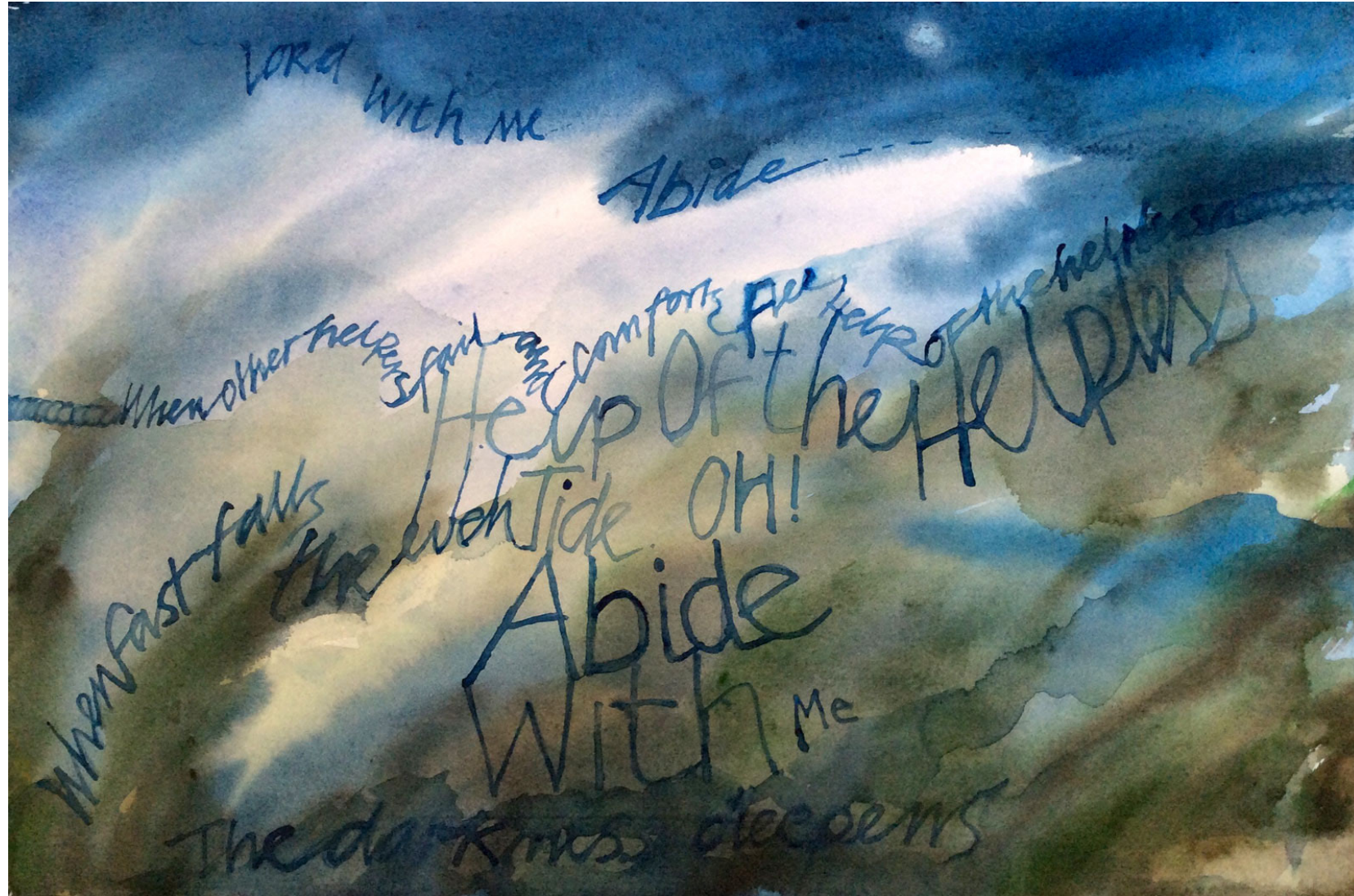
# North West into a Force 8 Northerly

Irene Blair  
h: 50 w: 55 (cms).  
Acrylic on paper.

“North West into a force 8 Northerly is the second painting in my Blue Day Series. The looming night and crowding of the people in the boat, hoping to reach safety creates the atmosphere of the painting.”







### Last Words?

Margarita Williams  
h: 26 w: 40(cms).  
Watercolour.

"I found this a difficult subject to represent in a sensitive way. Focusing on the last moments of those who did not survive, I imagined the dark movement of water, and the last desperate thoughts of the men, as hope of all human help faded away, the only hope was what lay beyond the deep."

Margarita Williams is a Gaelic speaker and lives and works in the village where she was born, on the Isle of Harris in the Outer Hebrides, where her family have lived for many generations. Her painting expresses the wild beauty and drama of the unique, varied landscape, the changing light on sea, land, the crofting environment and its many wild flowers. Each day is the start of a new adventure in using watercolour, her preferred medium. She also enjoys mixing media and the technique of Japanese woodblock printing. She lives largely outside the mainstream art establishment, but her paintings go to all corners of the world and her work has been shown at the Royal Scottish Academy.







***Hulabhaig***

*Contemporary Art from The Outer Hebrides*  
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*Front cover: **The Beasts of Holm**, 2018, Andy Laffan.*