

Unfurl

CONTEMPORARY
ANDCOUNTRY

Stapleford Granary
Bury Road, Stapleford
Cambridge
CB22 5BP

BOTANICALLY INSPIRED ART AND DECORATIVE OBJECTS

23 February to 28 April 2024

MEDIA RELEASE FOR JANUARY 2024

Unfurl is a group exhibition curated by Contemporary & Country presenting eight artists and makers, whose work celebrates the fecundity of flora and fauna as the winter months slip away and burgeoning bulbs and buds herald spring! The exhibition will open Friday 23 February, until Sunday 28 April 2024.

OPENING TIMES

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday & Friday 8:30am - 4pm | Wednesday - CLOSED | Saturday 9am - 3pm | Sunday 10am - 3pm. Entry is FREE, Granary Arts Centre, Bury Road, Stapleford, Cambridge CB22 5BP

The gallery at Granary Arts Centre is also open during evening events for concert ticket holders. Occasionally, the venue closes the foyer area of the exhibition due to events taking place in the concert hall. Please check the exhibition page on the website before visiting for status updates.

The exhibition will encompass painting, photography, drawing, collage, ceramics, textile embroidery, turned wood, handblown glass and shell work by eight creative talents based in Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. Participating artists and makers are **Claire Coles, Carolyn Brookes-Davies, Helen Derbyshire, Mark Edwards, Elizabeth Merriman, Tim Plunkett, Ella Porter, and Layne Rowe**. These artists and makers will show how they embark upon their portrayal of the natural process of renewal. Each takes a different aspect of the genre of botanical art away from its traditional origin, toward more innovative personal outcomes in a collective celebration of the cyclical start to the year.

Botanical art has, until relatively recently, been viewed as a discipline subservient to scientific research, rather than as a recognised genre. There have been periods where Still Life painting embraced botanical subject matter, particularly in Holland in the seventeenth century. However, it was only during the twentieth century that artists like Georgia O'Keeffe pursued a pathway, informed by further photographic study, and developed the subject area independent of the genre's original purpose. The artists and makers included in Unfurl extend this trajectory, using their work to describe the natural process of renewal that sparks a sense of 'eternal spring' underling their subject matter.

In recent years creatives have found a variety of means to represent plant life across different taxonomies without relying upon mere objective description. During their research, observation, and production process they gain considerable personal insight into the life cycle of their subjects. Their increased depth in understanding and interpretation of botanical subjects, and simple biological organisms has led to the present circumstance where the subject is now recognised as a rich genre for legitimate creative exploration. By transgressing the boundaries between genres, these artists and makers have attracted appreciative audiences as they gain insight into the value of the natural environment and our dependency upon its biodiversity.

Visit this website for access details and opening times: <https://www.staplefordgranary.org.uk/>

Unfurl

CONTEMPORARY
AND COUNTRY

Stapleford Granary
Bury Road, Stapleford
Cambridge
CB22 5BP

23 February to 28 April 2024

BOTANICALLY INSPIRED ART AND DECORATIVE OBJECTS

WHY THESE PARTICIPATING ARTISTS?

We have selected recent work for Stapleford Granary by a group of artists and makers whose work is highly skilled, often with extremely specialised production processes to take into consideration, that will sit well together, displayed throughout the different spaces in this beautifully appointed art centre, café and concert venue. Their work will provide opportunities for visitors, young and not so young, to be engaged by the exhibition theme as a resource for learning. The materials and techniques used by them should appeal to seasoned art lovers as well as non-art or 'new' audiences. Each of these artists and makers is highly regarded in what they do, leaders in their field. Several of them are known for creating different bodies of work right on the cusp between fine art and applied arts, their work is accessible on several levels in terms of content.

Claire Coles designs and handcrafts couture wallpaper murals and appliqué artworks. Paper, silk, and leather are collaged and freehand embroidered to create a range of decorative surface patterns inspired by flora and fauna. She observes the natural world through a lens that filters out the unnecessary and concentrates upon what is distinctive about a flower, a stem, or a series of cascading branches, rendering them in profile without resorting to embellishment.



There is a vintage feel to the way Claire records her botanical subjects. Her designs look fresh and are suited to modern interiors, yet they're carried out with an attention to the quality of stitch or application of découpage, that lends a timeless quality. They could have been conceived at any point during the last sixty years.

This may be because she uses a sewing machine as others would use a pen or a pencil in a loose and fluid way, intricately stitching her motifs together. All her designs are original and are handmade in her Norwich studio.

Claire works with her clients to create bespoke pieces that reflect their vision. Her patterns translate across many formats in fashion print, packaging, ceramics, and wallpapers. Her unique method of embroidery can be applied across a variety of mediums from fashion print to luxury packaging.

The impact of human activity on nature is a recurrent theme throughout **Carolyn Brookes-Davies'** work. She is inspired by the encounter between natural and manmade, by the cycles, patterns and dualities in nature and those forms and processes that shape her surrounding landscape.



Her work uses natural and man-made materials in their unaltered state to echo the recurring patterns, colour and underlying rhythms found in nature. Combining shells, sand, soil, and metal collected over time, she uses repetitive sequencing of these found and recycled materials, transforming common objects to become powerfully evocative of the ancient and the found, of vessels uncovered and revealed, and echoing the protective shelter that shells provide for the vulnerable and exposed.

Ideas are explored through the improvised process of making and the intuitive selection and application of the materials, prioritising their inherent qualities. Time and labour is present as a trace of activity; the process of collecting, organising and assembling is meditative and absorbing.

The unintentional and guileless beauty of the found materials appeals to Carolyn. The patina of weather eroded metals and the encrusted beauty of the shells reflect the passing of time. There is a simplicity and integrity in the materials each of which has an accidental and unique beauty of its own, and which suggests the arrangements and form of the finished piece.

Helen Derbyshire from a family of artists and craftspeople. She grew up spending all her free time drawing, sewing and making, and studied art to A level. Further education took her professional life in an entirely different direction. She spent more than thirty years working with organisations including the Department for International Development, Oxfam and Christian Aid supporting social development in Africa, until her retirement in 2021.



In the mid-2000s, Helen took time away from work to study for a BA in Visual Studies at Norwich University College of the Arts, graduating with distinction. Here Helen developed elements of her distinctive style – experimenting with mark making techniques; combining art, craft, photography and stitch; and balancing elements of control and chance. At that time, Helen exhibited extensively in Norfolk and more widely and her work is held in a few private collections. Helen has returned to art and to exhibiting in the last few years as an active member of the Norwich-based Art Depot NR3 collective. She started exhibiting with Contemporary and Country in 2023 participating in the East to East exhibition at Houghton Hall Stables.

Helen's work is about the textures and mood of the landscape around her – focusing sometimes on the details of vegetation and sometimes on evoking a sense of the season, of space, light and weather. She draws and uses digital photography, in combination with experimental textile and mixed media approaches, drawing on and referencing domestic sewing skills and traditions.

Helen's work in this show is inspired by the exuberance of wildflowers in late spring. Clouds of cow parsley have always been a favourite subject - evoking for Helen childhood memories of walking to primary school in her Warwickshire village home through a magical tunnel of flowering cow parsley.

Mark Edwards is an accomplished artist/photographer, his project work is conceived in a variety of ways. For this exhibition he has agreed to show a selection of large format colour photographs of informal flower arrangements he found in the porch of a Suffolk church, he visited and decided to document as and when each arrangement was left. The series is; 'The Songs That Saints Sing Have No Ending: St. Andrew's Church, Claxton, 2019-2021'. As their title indicates they were all taken at St. Andrew's Church in Claxton, Norfolk, a small village about 8 miles south of Norwich.



"church porch's predominately face south all of the pictures look towards an East or West facing niche. The flowers were photographed as found, without the knowledge of the flower arranger as I wanted them to retain their sense of functionality. Given the structure of the niche, painted over and over on seemingly countless occasions, and the arrangement of the flowers (gathered from local hedgerows, fields and gardens), represented a knowingness of art history, in particular 17th century Dutch flower painting. Although the pictures vaguely chart the changing of the seasons and the liturgical cycle, they show the first signs of decomposition and embody the symbolism of a Memento mori to nature and the landscape, amidst the existential crisis of climate change."

Mark Edwards is an Associate Professor of Photography at the University of Suffolk, Visiting Research Fellow at the UEA and a practicing artist. His imagery is included in major photographic collections including the V&A Museum, The Government Art Collection, The Hyman Collection of British Photography and Norwich Museum. It has also been published and exhibited extensively both nationally and internationally with recent exhibitions including Rituals, Gallery 881, Vancouver, Canada, Spotlight, Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Norwich (2019-20), Into the Woods: Photography & Trees, V&A Museum, London and A Green and Pleasant Land, Towner Gallery, Eastbourne (2017-18). His work is also currently on display at the British Embassy, Berlin, the British High Commission, Islamabad and HM Treasury, London.

Elizabeth Merriman's studio permeates every room of her house. Works are arranged on walls with a variety of objects, many of which have appeared in her paintings. Each room leads one to the other, immersing you in a succession of intense colour.



The garden - one of her main inspirations - encompasses and encloses on three sides of her home/studio. Elizabeth moved to live in North Norfolk in 2000, after 15 years of being in London. Coastal living has freed her to develop an independent path in her work.

Her still lives are beautiful. However, they are not merely, decorative. They're unexpected and fearless colour combinations as well as stochastic experimental flourishes.

The biggest experiments are taken in the application of the background colours, often applied and reapplied late in the day.

This undermines the stillness at the heart of the work allowing the gesture to meet the energy of the colour juxtapositions and gives the work a surprising sharpness.

Tim Plunkett produces elegant, functional pieces that highlights the beauty of natural wood using graceful, uncluttered lines, for daily use in the kitchen and at the dining table.

With a BSc in Environmental Science and involvement in direct action opposing the destruction of ancient forests and cultures, it is important to Tim that all his work is made from sustainably supplied, locally sourced wood. Entirely self-taught and thoughtfully-shaped through the process of precision product development – his work has found a receptive audience.

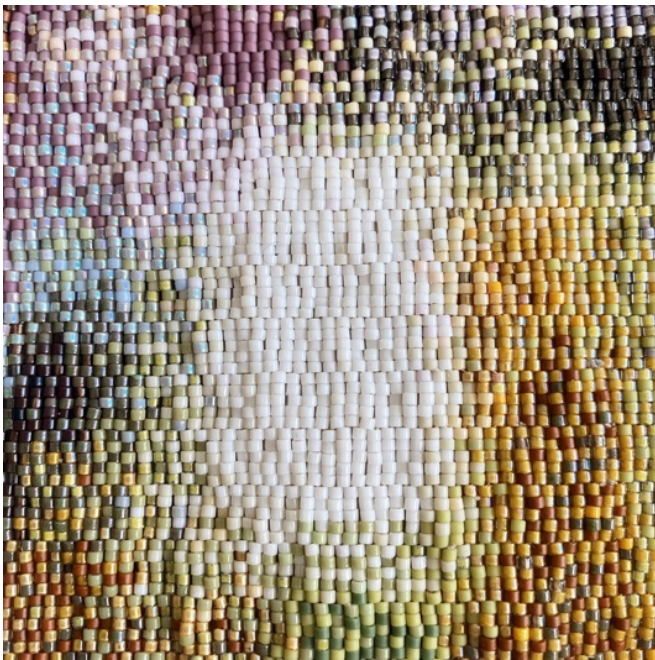


Ella Porter has a multidisciplinary practice, which explores interchangeable material languages and processes between ceramics and print. Her work displays a strong relationship between surface and form, exploring ideas surrounding the mark of the maker, temporality, trace and place.

She makes work informed by both the urban architecture of the city, as well as the rural and coastal landscapes of North Norfolk, where she has spent much of her life and where her family currently live.

Ella is inspired by both the urban landscape and coastal features of North Norfolk. Graduating from the Royal College of Art with an MA in Contemporary Ceramics, she continues to base herself in London, and works across disciplines of contemporary craft and fine art. Her present interests stem from a background in painting, printmaking, and ceramics.

"Throughout the making of a work there is a continual shift between layering and erasing: a conversation with the material. By visually scanning the surface of an evolving work, I read impressions it may have picked up. These impressions directly inform the conscious actions I impose on the material. I sense the conclusion of a work when I reach a place of wanting to hold onto what is left - a sense of something pre-existing revealing itself."



Layne Rowe is a Cambridgeshire-based glass artist. The material qualities present in hand-blown glass are a constant source of inspiration for him.

"I have always been inspired to create and have a desire to use my hands, to see creations forming in front of my eyes. Glass is the ultimate medium for speed. It's alive and requires constant attention and quick decision making. Glass is a thrilling material to work with and with its beautiful qualities such as fluidity, transparency and with all its colours it creates its own inspiration."

He has been making an ongoing series of forms inspired by Stratus coastlines with their corroded sedimentary rock formations, and landscapes with layered horizons. Layne's series 'Woven' and 'New Horizons' reference these distinctive coastal formations in North Norfolk, as well as the vast Fenland skies where he has his workshop.



The level of detail in these series comes from intricate glass cane work, selecting coloured glass rods and 'weaving' them with overlays and fine cutting, which replicates natural processes that we see in sedimentary coastal rock forms and the freshness of new plant growth.

Layne has been invited to exhibit in the UK and worldwide, including the V&A, Saatchi Gallery, and Ebeltoft Glass Museum, amongst artists such as Graysen Perry, Alexander McQueen, Lino Tagliapietra. He was awarded the Bavarian State Prize in 2015 for his Woven series. Most recently receiving a Craft and Design Award for "Ornithology" at the British Glass Biennale 2022 and exhibiting in the Belgium Ceramic and Glass Biennale 2022.

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

Contemporary and Country (C&C) present contemporary art and handmade objects by established artists and makers from the east of England in pop-up exhibitions that celebrate our rural surroundings. C&C work with artists and makers who include the natural world in their subject matter or production process. They bring about a closer understanding of the countryside, and what makes the east of England landscape so unique. The artists and makers C&C feature look creatively beyond the passing trend and encourage greater consideration for nature, as its appreciation and conservation has become ever more prescient to our time. C&C show the work of artists and makers from across Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire.

CONTACTS

Contemporary and Country Curators

PAUL VATER and PAUL BARRATT

Mobile 07943 291834

paulvater@contemporaryandcountry.com

paulbarratt@contemporaryandcountry.com

<https://contemporaryandcountry.com/>

SOCIAL MEDIA

INSTAGRAM @contemporary_and_country

FACEBOOK contemporaryandcountry

STAPLEFORD GRANARY

Stapleford Granary is a beautiful Arts Centre with award-winning facilities set in a converted 19th century farm complex. It is situated at the foot of the Gog Magog Downs just 5 miles from the centre of Cambridge. A home for the culturally curious, we host an all year-round concert programme of outstanding indoor and outdoor events and community days. Our art exhibitions and our on-site cafe are open 6 days a week (closed Wednesdays)

WHATS ON <https://www.staplefordgranary.org.uk/whats-on/events>

TWITTER @SGArtsCulture

INSTAGRAM @StaplefordGranary

CONTACT & IMAGES:

Press Contact

Louise Bruning

louise@staplefordgranary.org.uk

Tel 01223 849004