

A life in landscapes

Tim Saunders meets Scottish landscape artist Barbara Mackie

'The Mountains of Assynt'

Barbara Mackie was born in Penicuik, Midlothian, and lived in Aberdeenshire for 25 years. She has lived in the Lothians since 2008.

“Scotland offers artists a lot of dramatic scenery and atmospheric light,” she says. “There are many fine towns and cities with great subject matter for drawing the built environment. In the countryside, there is farmland, moors, forests, woodlands, rivers and coastline and a variety in the mood of the weather.”

For Barbara, who studied drawing and painting at the Edinburgh College of Art (the University of Edinburgh), “drawing is the most fantastic thing to be doing, to be into”. “One shouldn’t stress about making a drawing right, but try to enjoy making the line,” she says. “People worry about making a drawing true but if you can relax into it that frees you to draw more creatively, authentically, rather than technically. There is a place for instruction in observation, but anxiety is counterproductive.”

Barbara gained a scholarship to Yale University Summer School of Music and Art in Connecticut, USA, and graduated with a four-year diploma, followed by a postgraduate diploma in Teaching Art.

In her twenties, she spent a few weeks

by Loch Torridon. “I have always been inspired by the ancient sandstone mountains there. Those mountains stand out individually as superb subject matter. There is Liathach, Ben Eighe, and Beinn Alligin and travelling further north into Assynt, Stac Pollaidh and Suilven. These are all wonderful to capture, particularly in line or watercolour to reflect their rocky nature.”

Barbara is also inspired by the Cairngorms plateau. “Rising steeply and depending on winter temperatures, they hold on to their snowy tops and cornices. Their sheer scale is impressive.

“Of course, walkers and skiers see these mountains as a paradise, but I think that finding a spot by the nearby Loch Morlich, is an ideal place to view these hills, maybe go camping or sailing there, too.”

A pochade, a small wooden box that carries neat canvas panels, some oil or acrylic paint and a brush or two is ideal for Barbara’s spontaneity and practicality.

For Barbara, the Scottish Borders provide continuously changing views on all the winding routes, of well-kept farms with neat hedges, and steep furrowed field patterns, castles here and there, fine



Barbara Mackie

houses (Abbotsford, Thirlestane) and small towns and villages.

“High up the views are panoramic in all directions and dramatic in all seasons. The Mearns (south of Stonehaven and Aberdeen, down past St Cyrus, to just north of Montrose and Dundee)

have heather moor hills and productive farmland, with reddish brown soil and a beautiful coastline (read *Sunset Song* by Lewis Grassic Gibbon as it epitomises this area).”

Barbara is developing “a few strands at the moment”. “One is about the joy of reunion, which relates to my friend in Norway and her artist friend there. I have started to sketch from my head, with figures meeting, sitting, walking, talking, almost whispering.

“Another is from a trip to Canada where I admired the ancient Cedar Forest but I haven’t decided what form that will take and maybe they will appear in other work or their lovely colour and texture will instead.”

In May and June Barbara showed some of her work, including a triptych called *Looking North at House of Soutra*.

To find out more, go to www.barbaramackie-fineart.co.uk



“Balmy Seabreeze”



“The Croft, Aberdeenshire”