

Out & About

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Craft show has been 'a long time coming'

By Leah Seator

The talents of two Orkney women went on show to the public this week, in an exhibition that has been "a long time coming."

Friends of over 20 years, Greta Craigie and Mary Sinclair finally brought their work together for a combined show in Kirkwall's Masonic Hall, thanks to American artist, Jeanne Bouza Rose.

Jeanne flew all the way from her home in New York to help the two craftswomen display and launch their amazing collection of work.

The show opened on Tuesday, July 28, and the two women proudly welcomed a host of visitors, keen to explore the display.

Some were heard to describe the show as "an amazing inspiring display from just two women."

In fact most who paid a visit couldn't quite believe the sights that were on show in the hall.

Both women began honing their skills as children, in needlework and handicrafts. While Mary has chosen to specialise mainly in needlework, Greta has decided that anything and everything is useful, when it comes to creating artwork.

As a result, nothing is safe. Old yoghurt pots, egg cartons, and bubble wrap are viewed as essential materials for her creations. And while most assume these items are simply rubbish, Greta can recycle them into colourful, shining, glittery creations.

She clearly enjoys telling people how her work came to be, pointing out that the sturdy looking chain mail on her Viking figurines, is merely spray painted bubble wrap.

And what of the stunning 3D floral image on the wall beside her chair at the entrance? The delicate petals must be made from expensive glass, or even ceramic? Or yoghurt pots...

Lerwick born Greta does not brag about her work, but is in fact very modest. And it is clear that in hosting this exhibition, her satisfaction comes from seeing the wonder in folk's eyes, as they discover that such creations can come from normal, everyday items.

She said: "I have great fun making all of these things. I'm very lucky because I'm 85, and my fingers are still nimble, and I've got my memory.

"I just love making things, like this owl which was made from an old feather hat which came from Howie Firth's mother. I just love using whatever comes to hand."

Along with her famous mice, viewers of the display are treated to sequinned pictures, scenes

toys, clothes and outfits for dolls, not forgetting her own dabbings in painting and encaustic art.

Among her collection, viewers will spot Princess Diana dressed in splendour, Santa Claus, knitted to perfection, and some of Mary's first creations from school,

she explained.

"I like doing all handiwork, and if I see something new I'll try it, but patchwork is kind of my favourite thing."

"I like wool embroidery too — it can be a challenge," she added, pointing out a particularly stunning bell-pull hanging on the wall, which had "caused some problems."

"A lot of it was done for the WRI and competitions — it gives you the incentive to do things," she continued.

But Mary admits that even though her days with the WRI are over, due to disability, she still finds something to work at regularly. She also has fond memories of her time spent teaching evening classes, in Rendall, Evie and Finstown.

"I did enjoy doing evening classes, and they were always very popular. I did that for five or six years, and it was teaching all different age groups. They don't seem to teach much sewing or handicrafts in the schools now,

including a pair of "drawers!"

Like Greta, she is modest, but speaks lovingly of her passion for craft.

"Patchwork is my favourite,"

made from tinfoil, and encaustic art, not to mention Greta's handmade cards, which she has never sold before now, because, she says, "I didn't think anyone would want them."

Every step through the hall brings a new treat for the eye.

Mary's varied work lines the walls of the back and far side of the room, and while completely different, both collections somehow feel like a natural combination.

Mary, who grew up in Rendall began knitting and sewing at school, aged just six.

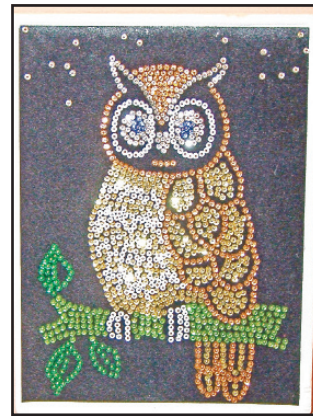
"It was my best subject," she laughed.

But it has become her life's passion, and to see some of her pieces on display with Greta's is a dream come true.

Her work includes cushions, a stunning patchwork quilt, embroidered framed pictures,



Celebrating the finest of Orkney's handicrafts — American artist, Jeanne Bouza Rose, centre, is pictured with Mary Sinclair, left, and Greta Craigie, right, at the launch of their Kirkwall exhibition. She travelled all the way from New York to help the two women bring their work to a wider audience.



An owl made from sequins, by Greta Craigie.

but I think if folk are interested — maybe they see their granny doing it, and if they are really interested, they will start doing it."

Both Mary and Greta are thrilled to have finally brought their work together for an exhibition, and say they owe it all to Jeanne.

Mary said: "It was great to have Jeanne involved. It is so good of her, because it's taking up most of her holiday."

"She seems to be so delighted. She is a teacher, and has brilliant ideas. We've spoken about this for years, but never was anything done about it. We thought it was now or never and Jeanne heard about it and we got everything together."

Greta said of Jeanne: "It means everything that she's here. She is a tower of strength and she is so generous. Without her, we could never have done this."

"Yes you could," said Jeanne.

"You just wouldn't have." Jeanne herself, said she was "overwhelmed" to see the show up and running, and hopes it will inspire others to do the same.

"This work needs to be preserved and looked after," she said, suggesting that perhaps a Folk Life Museum would be the way forward, creating a special place where select items of local work could be kept.

"So far everyone coming in has a smile of amazement on their faces. I feel totally overwhelmed by the whole thing," she added.

Jeanne returned to New York yesterday, Wednesday, but the exhibition runs until August 1, raising money for cancer charity, CLAN.



Mary Sinclair's skilled needlework, perfectly complements the mixture of handicrafts portrayed by Greta Craigie.



Greta Craigie's Viking Ship — can you spot the bubble wrap?

'Making a mark' at the Loft Gallery

Robert Shaw Prints and Paintings
The Loft Gallery
St. Margaret's Hope
July 18 - September 1

I have known Robert Shaw's work over many years. He is a veteran of Edinburgh's print workshop in its three locations and has had several solo shows there and a major one in Edinburgh University's prestigious Talbot Rice Gallery.

Orcadians will know his work from exhibitions at the Pier Art Centre in Stromness.

Shaw's career has been unusual.

He never attended an art college, for instance, and

this may account for his originality. A parallel may be drawn with another art: many competent trained singers never make a mark.

On the other hand there can be somebody like Billie Holiday, an unforgettable voice, a one-off.

Not that there is anything naïve or primitive about Shaw's etchings. He has looked long and hard at Rembrandt and Goya, supreme masters of this finest of printmaking techniques and aspires to be in that tradition.

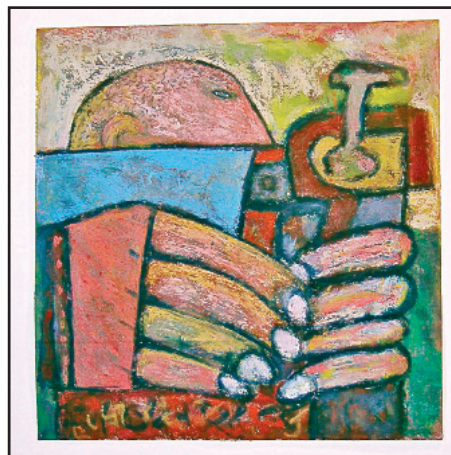
In his current exhibition at the Loft Gallery, St Margaret's Hope, we can see how Shaw's etchings are never poor relatives of paintings.

In one of his finest pieces, *The Preparations of Icarus*, the medium is explored to the full with gradations of tone, fine line, luminous darks and varied mark-making.

Both works utilise writing, not necessarily legible, to produce yet another textural effect, different in each case. The themes of these works are Greek myth and carnival, respectively, but these are mainly there to give scope to Shaw's own dramatis personae and compositional manipulation.

Shaw's painting has developed from his etchings but the technique has been adapted to suit oil painting.

Out goes the burin's delicate delineation to be



replaced by bolder outlines with a crayon-like texture, enclosing shapes subtly variegated in colour.

Three related works show the technique. In each of the square medium-sized

canvases, *Board Player*, *Keyholder* and *Chanter*, fingers larger than life-size dominate the space manipulating the pieces of a game, fiddling with a key and playing a chanter, while

an eye or two peeps from behind.

These are completely successful works, but the etchings still hold their own with them.

Robert Crozier

