

During my Hons degree at Grays School of Art in Aberdeen, I received a scholarship to study at Oregon State University for 1 year (this was the 3rd year of a 4 year course). Here I was introduced to textiles as a fine art rather than design discipline. 'Fibre art' being popular, I took a few workshops with papermakers from California, Oregon and Washington. I also attended the Surface Design Conference at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg Tennessee. I loved the hands-on messy technique. And particularly the fact that technology didn't get in the way of ideas!

After completing my Hons Degree at Gray's, I went on to do an MA at Manchester Metropolitan University. Again in the textile department, but the course was MA by project.....meaning you tell them what you want to study. I chose papermaking for gallery exhibition. My thesis became a major part of my MA (40 %). This has the big title of 'To demonstrate the versatility of hand papermaking - in particular, recycling in the primary school, with reference to the National Curriculum information available at the time of research'. This was practical research involving workshops at primary schools in Wigan and Leigh. The results of my work and the children's were exhibited at the Drumcroon Educational Arts Centre in Wigan.

I grew up in Caithness, and very much wanted to return. Papermaking is a technique that initially does not require much equipment.....so no big outlay to set up a studio. My first job after graduating was artist-in-residence for the Isle of Skye.

Papermaking is great.....its suitable for all ages and abilities.....from 2yrs upwards!!!! My workshop kit fits into a travel bag with wheels, so it's extremely portable.....although now, having being based in Dunnet for the past 10 years....I have started to accumulate larger equipment for my own use!

I drive past Mary-Ann's cottage every day.....but earning a living takes me to all sorts of places.....from Shetland to Taiwan! So I thought it about time I do something that's on my doorstep!

I started my research as soon as it opened for the summer season.....at the end of May. This is very much new work.....I've been dashing down to Mary-Ann's from the first day they opened this season. Taking my peat paper sketch book and linen paper sketchbook, assortment of pens and my own foldaway stool! Everyone has been very helpful.



But there has been the few day that I've been away teaching in Thurso and Cromarty. I'm just back from a CraftScotland board meeting in Edinburgh, and next week I'm teaching at the Lyndbank hospital in Dunfermline with David Swift (he's a previous Creative Scotland Award winner and was one of this years judges). So I'm looking forward to that.

Mary-Ann's is a way of life that has now almost disappeared. The cottage has been left as if Mary-Ann would return.....all original and nothing out of place. Time has stood still. You don't just walk into the past when you go into Mary-Ann's, but you see things as they gradually change since it was built in the 1850' by her grandfather. Things like the tiny kitchen added, but the original open fireplace in the living room with the swive to hold the kettle and all the pots over the fire where most of her cooking was done are still there.....the modern did not replace the old, just added. They kept everything.....nothing wasted, nothing thrown away.....nothing bought unless it was absolutely necessary. I think we all have a lot to learn from Mary-Ann's way of life.

Mary Ann's father, William Young was born in 1856 and at the age of 14 went to sea. His sea chest has a magnificent painting inside the lid of the boat he as on, 'Westland'. You can see it at Mary-Ann's.

There are also kists used by the female members of the family to hold their belongings when going into service.

The house is full of boxes of various sizes, from 'Tooth Soap' to the tall drawer designed to hold hats.

I like to open things and discover what's inside.

I've done lots of sketching. I have spent most of my time drawing the many implements in the shed.....all are fascinating shapes to draw. It's a way of life, not just a home. And the guides have been keeping me right. Visitors to have been particularly interested in the peat papers. I decided to experiment making paper from peat, for this research project, as I wanted to start drawing the peat spades. The peat is mixed with cotton rag.....so the pages are thin and flexible....it looks like only peat.....but it would crack if you tried to make it into paper on it's own. So there is always experimenting in my work!

Its a two way-thing.....trying to inspire those interested in the arts to visit the museum and also open the eyes of museum visitor to the possibilities!

I've invited all the volunteer guides from Mary-Ann's to my studio on the 17th July.....to see my studio and have a go at making paper themselves, as a thank you for their help.

You'll have to visit Mary-Ann's ! Its open daily from 2pm - 4.30 pm except Mondays.

I've still got a lot of research to do. And it will have to be on hold for a while as I've accepted a job as artist-in-residence for the Durness Development Group. I'll be based in Durness for 3 months from the 21st July. My project is about journeys over land, sea and through time for the Durness and Cape Wrath area.

I hope to continue my research at Mary-Ann's next year.

I don't have any funding at the moment, and will be actively searching out what possibilities there are. I'm thinking big.....with a possible touring exhibition and series

of workshops. Last week I visited the educational and outreach section of the National Library in Edinburgh to discuss my research at Mary-Ann's.....I showed them my peat paper books.....they are interested.....things just take time.