

TIME OUT Your entertainment, leisure and lifestyle guide

The sunlit skin of Gwen Hardie

'Boundaries' exhibition opens at Taigh Chearsabhagh

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A SUBJECT examined in minute scale leads to universally expansive notions in artist Gwen Hardie's 'Boundaries' exhibition which opens at Lochmaddy's Taigh Chearsabhagh museum and arts centre, North Uist, on Saturday, January 5th.

"I am very pleased to be showing at Taigh Chearsabhagh – the location of remoteness and unspoiled natural beauty has special significance for me," says Gwen.

"Growing up in Aberdeenshire, at the foothills of Bennachie, I've lived in big cities ever since. The powerful influence of living close to nature when I was young has shaped my particular vision of life and subsequently influenced the way I choose to explore the figure in painting."

Engaging with figuration and the act of perception, Gwen's delicate works represent a small portion of the skin, lit by the sun. Entitled 'Boundaries' the series of paintings in the show reveal the artist's perception of skin as a boundary between inner and outer, self and other.

"In a way the body is the most central to the human condition, so it's a very familiar, intimate subject," she explains in a short video of her works (www.gwenhardie.com). "For me it's almost a non-subject in the sense of its kind of a starting point to contemplate existential notions. Looking at the skin close-up is actually showing me in a very real way that the body is made up of a range of elements, not at all as solid as one would like to think, and how connected we are to nature.

"Painting from life, there is just so much looking going on that it's an experiential, long interaction with the subject.

"There's something about it that's so basic and familiar, so choosing to make a painting of it interesting is about the quality of attention brought into the image. That registers as a look into perception and intricately, and the tension between the objective and subjective world."

Born and educated in Scotland, Gwen lived and worked in Berlin before settling in New York City in 2000.

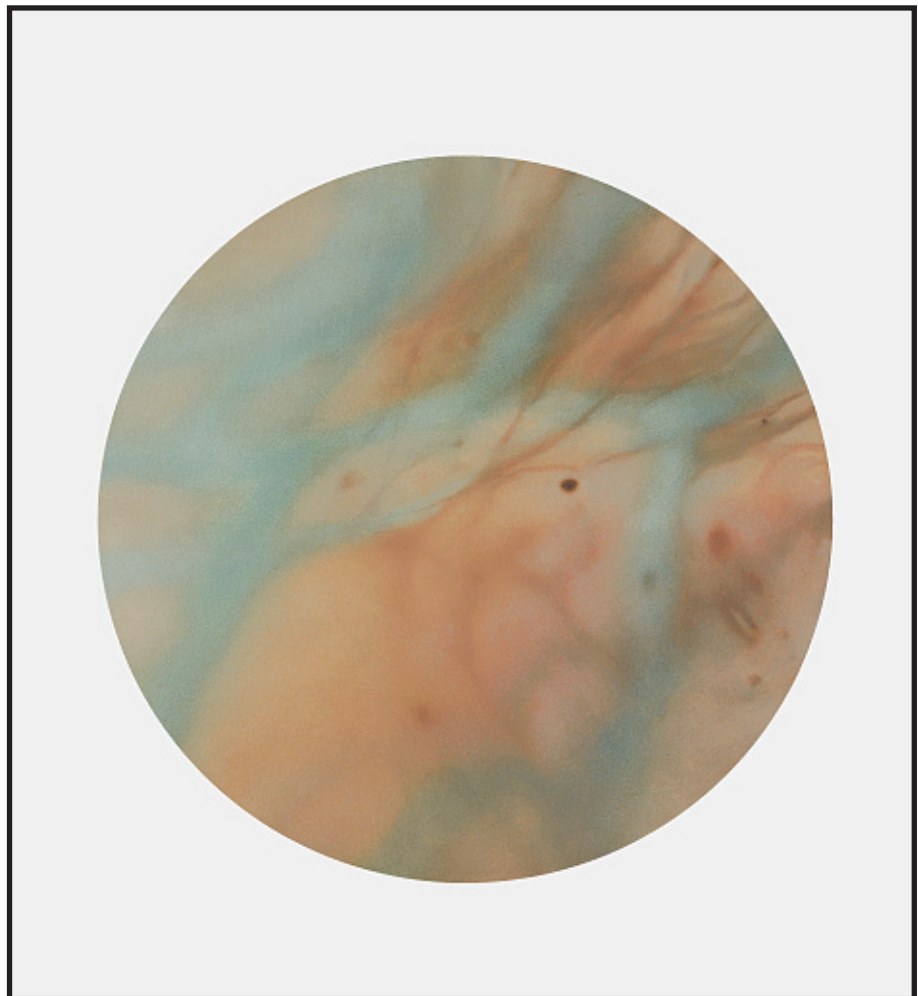
And the move across the Atlantic saw a loss of brush-strokes in her work as the smooth, veiled yet almost translucent surface depth of her canvases displays the attention she delivers to each tiny section of skin under artistic examination.

She explains: "The brush-marks in a way get in the way of a spacial illusion. The technique is done wet into wet paint and as the paint starts to get tacky you just manipulate it a little.

"It creates a very super fine, almost like silk, membrane of oil paint. I'm blending different colours in such a way you can't see the brush marks – it's really just an illusion of shifting plains and shifting colours.

"The concept and the technique are very close together," Gwen adds.

Of utmost importance to the creation of the 'Boundaries' exhibition – and indeed to the artists work as a whole – however is sunlight, as she continues: "I always use sunlight – the range of hues that are shown up in sunlight get reflected in something as tiny as a piece of skin.



Displaying the magnificent beauty of small section of sunlit skin are the works in Hardie's 'Boundaries' exhibition.

"Working this way made me realise how you can use tones and colours in such a way that it can create a vibration that feels almost animate, feels alive. In the shifting colours there's very close values between warm and cool; I try to make it representative of the skin so that the warm and the cool are sitting next to each other and creating a kind of vibration, a kind of life force."

Gwen Hardie was the youngest living artist ever to be given a solo show at The Scottish National

Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh in 1990; has works in collections of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art; the British Council, and the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art amongst others; and was most recently in summer 2012 was awarded a fellowship at The Constance Saltonstall Foundation, Ithaca, New York.

Her artistic pedigree is secured – and highly visible through the Taigh Chearsabhagh show.

Her magnifications of sunlit skin draw to

mind the light effects in the landscape, from the intimate to the monumental as the minute body image shifts back and forth in its grand execution, drifting between an atmospheric illusion and a thing of gravity, real and tangible.

As Gwen remarks: "Looking at how the light plays on a tiny part of the body, this sort of macro close-up view is presented in a way that you can take a journey to its opposite, to open fields and vast universes, so in a way they're metaphysical."