

Is a thing lost

if you know where it is?

This is a part of a family story from Lewis. The cook has thrown all the cutlery over the side of the boat along with the washing up water. He breaks the news to the skipper by posing the question – Is a thing lost..... if you know where it is? But if a thing can't really be lost if you know its whereabouts, there's nothing to worry about. Because you know for sure that all the stuff is over there, down at the bottom. The exhibition opening at an *Lanntair* on Friday 25th March is an exploration of storytelling in many forms.

The Arts Centre has been working with Ian Stephen for more than a year, to make and commission new work as an exploration of how a story can exist in many different versions. Ian has looked back on several journeys, usually by sea and he and other artists also tell the stories of new voyages, made during the project. The log of these explorations is told in different ways by the photographers, painters, print-makers, film-makers and musicians involved. There are drawings, sculptures, videos, music, installations – and there is a range of works made by linked artists in collaboration. But all of these artists are essentially storytellers in the project.

This show has become a chart, tracing a route from Brittany to Iceland. There is also a wide detour to Denmark and on to the Finnish Islands to continue the creative links set in place between *an Lanntair* and their Baltic partners. Islands closer to the Centre's home are also studied in depth – particularly the St Kilda group, 40 miles west of the Hebrides and the Shiantis, 18 miles south of Stornoway. There are also evocations of journeys to neighbouring Island groups and Orkney and Shetland are featured.

A core element of the show examines a proposition by Emmanuelle Waeckerlé comparing the roles of the storyteller and the artist to the characters in the legend of Echo and Narcissus. This artist, who lives and works between London and central France, took part in an arduous crossing from Stromness to Stornoway in April of last year. Her log of the adventure is set beside an account with a very different tone by Stephen, who skippered the yacht which made that particular rounding of Cape Wrath. At the same time, another pair of artists, the poet Gerry Loose and photographer Morven Gregor were taking a more leisurely row across Scotland through the Forth and Clyde Canal. So the two methods of moving across Scotland, east to west, are set beside one another like different versions of the same story. This body of work was commissioned by the Collins gallery, Glasgow and a substantial publication is available.

Waeckerlé and Stephen show individual works, exploring the storytelling theme but they have also joined forces to produce videos and a series of printed works in different mediums. Emmanuelle was given stories in Gaelic, English and Doric along with photographs of charts and landscape taken as a record of navigating the geography of the story. She had the idea of recomposing the map or image with the text of the story as a visual medium. Her composition was then realised

as a series of 3 large scale photo-polymer prints, produced by John McNaught, Studio Manager at Highland Print Studio.

The Inverness based organisation also produced two new screenprints for the show and screenprinted interventions of a group of garments as the imagery suggested by still more stories. John conducted monoprint workshops with several Lewis schools. These have resulted in story-banners which are also on display.

Pat Law is another artist who undertakes voyages as part of her practice. She is a painter but has also made an extensive web-based work called Seven Sails. Invited artists working in many different mediums and living in several different countries, responded to each other's work, originally prompted by Pat's own evocations of a journey. It became an electronic Chinese whispers game. In this exhibition she looks back to a visit to Iceland and her paintings and installation juxtapose that imagery with a return to the Shiant.

Colin Myers is a former shipwright now living in Lewis and an active member of the Trusts which operate traditional Island sailing vessels. He was invited to imagine the cut plank shapes which comprise the complex form of an Orkney boat. He worked from a photograph of a small 1912 vessel which ended her life in Stornoway harbour. His elegant drawing, which was produced for an associated exhibition at The Pier Arts Centre, has been developed into a screenprinted limited edition. Colin's photography is also represented as a celebration of the last surviving example of a working *sgoth Niseach*. He was one of the crew who sailed the vessel up to Sula Sgeir in 2010, her 75th year. Footage of the same boat's fast crossing from Port of Ness to Orkney is also shown.

Two new films were commissioned by the project, thanks to additional funding from Creative Scotland. Both of these have the Shiant Islands as a focus but they are completely different in their approach to a story. ***A Boat Retold*** by Sean Martin and Louise Milne is a poetic documentary centred on a return voyage to the Shiant by a vessel rebuilt from the keel up. Another version of the good ship *Broad Bay*, in fact. ***Sruth nam Fear Gorm*** is Andy Mackinnon's take on the story of the blue men who haunt the Sound of Shiant. Both films use new music from the Lewis based pianist and writer Peter Urpeth. He is joined by the internationally renowned vocal improvisation artist Maggie Nicols for a dynamic improvisation.

An event on Saturday 26th March at 2030 will screen the new films in the *an Lanntair* main auditorium and the music will be performed live along with storytelling in Gaelic and English from Maggie Smith and Ian Stephen. Maggie Nicols will also be leading a voice improvisation workshop in the afternoon of the 26th.