



FRONT **Atlantic Messengers: Messengers/Fulmarus**, 1998 (detail), sculpture installation in three parts, each 158 x 52 x 31 cm

ABOVE **Lifeboat Allegory**, 2014, mixed media sculpture, 45 x 23 x 83 cm



Top: **Nomad Trace**, 2011, mixed media construction, two panels, each 122 x 244 x 5 cm

Above, left: **First contact. Badentarbet**, 2014, graphite on paper, 56 x 75 cm Above, right: **Columba**, 2014, collage and graphite on paper, 52 x 52 x 4 cm

Above, centre: **Winter, North Atlantic**, 2014, painted wood and resin, 124 x 105 x 5 cm



ART FIRST, 21 EASTCASTLE STREET, LONDON W1W 8DD

TEL: +44 (0)20 7734 0386 | INFO@ARTFIRST.CO.UK | WWW.ARTFIRST.CO.UK

Texts first published by An Lanntair, Stornoway. Reproduced by kind permission of An Lanntair, Stornoway



WILL MACLEAN

Veering Westerly Fiaradh Gun Lar

An Lanntair, Stornoway
Iona Gallery, Kingussie
St Fergus Gallery, Wick
Inverness Museum And Art Gallery
An Tobar, Mull

2015–2016

TIOMSACHADH

Aon uair 's gu bheil an ealainiche a' toirt an aire gu bheil a dh-
alchas a' sìleadh às, chan iongnadh ged a thòisicheadh e ag oidhir-
peachadh air a chumail na chèile. Tòisichidh e air cruinneachadh
thuige fhèin mirean sgaoilte dhen dualchas ris a bheil taobh aige
agus a tha dèanamh ciall dha. Ma tha e fa leth mothachail agus
cruthachail cumaidh e air a' toirt nam mirean sin na chèile an
dòighean sònraichte gus ealain a thogail. Mar gun robh e, aig ire
do-thuigsinneach dha fhèin, a' dèanamh slàn na tha air a dhol
na mhìrean.

Nuair a sheasas tu ann am meadhan rùm le bhallachan air an
sgèadachadh le na h-ìomhaighean soilleir, eireachdail aig Uilleam
MacGill-Eain tha thu mu choinneamh obair-ealain a tha air tighinn
gu foirfeachd thar iomadh bliadhna. Agus tha mòran shamhlaidh-
ean air tighinn a-steach dhan obair aige anns an ùine sin—mìrean
a thagh e, nan cairtean-ìuil, gus a sgeul a libhrigeadh dha fhèin
agus dhuinne. Ach às bith dè na mìrean a tha mu ar coinneamh
agus às bith dè mar a laigh e iad gus snas a chur air an dealbh,
tha an aon amas a' stiùireadh gach cruth a thagh e gus ar n-aigne
a lèirsinneachadh.

Ann a bhith na phrìomh fhear-ealain dha na Gàidheil thagh
e modh-cunntais a thog e bho òige ann an taighean-tasgaidh agus
lean an cumadh 's an cruth sin air na dhealbh e thar nam bliadh-
naichean. Oir 's e obair taigh-tasgaidh mìrean a chur an taic a chèile
gus sgeul innse. Ach tha Uilleam air seo a thoirt gu ire eile. Oir tha
e air oileanachadh fhèin gus mìrean ùra agus mìrean sean a chur
an altaibh a chèile gu h-inigeil agus le suim is faiceall a tha singilte.
Oir 's e liut an fhir-ceàird a tha a' toirt an ealain gu boillsgeadh

Thagh e bho thùs na mìrean a lean ris o òige, agus chan eil dad eile
cho soilleir air a sheilbhidh 's a tha an cuan mòr agus na h-èisg agus
na h-eòin-mhara a tha beò na chois, oir bha e fhèin agus a chuide-
achd aig muir agus ris an iasgach.

Fionnlagh MacLeòid



A-staigh ann an saoghal nam meataforan sin tha feadhainn eile
mar an diobhail a rinneadh air a dhaoine le bhith gan reubadh
às an fhearann 's gam fògradh air falbh mar thràille. A sin
thàinig dealbhadh nan cuimhneachan miorbhaileach dha croite-
aran Leòdhais a rinn ar-a-mach an aghaidh nan uachdaran.

Tha e a' tighinn air a bhith toirt nithean sìos chun a' chnàimh,
biodh e na chlaigeann isein no na bhàta—mar a rinn e leis
A' Chrannghal. Tha altairean adhraidh gu minig a' nochdadh,
nan comharr air spioradalachd dhaoine; mar a tha iomadh seòrsa
de dh'ionnsramaid innleachdach, gus saoghal is iarmailt a leugh-
adh. Thug bàrdachd nan daoine bho thùs neart is doimhne dhan
dealbh, mar a thug obair-saidheans is matamataig an cois bith-
eòlas, gu h-àraidh le obair D'Arcy Thompson. Tha arc-eòlas a' noch-
dadh a mhìrean cnàmhach fhèin, 's an ealain sa gan tabhach oirmn
mar ar cuid fhìn. E fhathast a' dealbhadh epic nan Gàidheal—
à iomadh seotal.

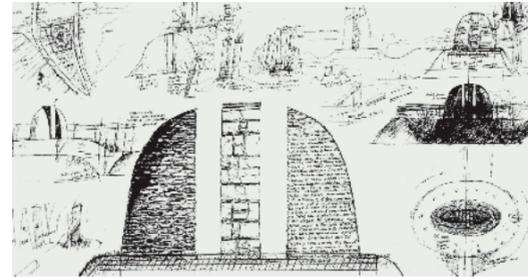
LANDMARKS

Will Maclean was part of An Lanntair's opening programme
in 1985 and had a key role in the success of our early As an
Fhearann exhibition as well as numerous other shows over
the years that followed.

My first sight of Will's work was an exhibition of watercolour
sketches shown at Gray's School of Art in the 1960s. They were the
fruits of a Mediterranean scholarship awarded the previous year,
and I remember how they warmed my first snow-swept Aberdeen
winter. His creative development over the half-century since has
embraced multiple materials, media and locations and made him
one of Scotland's most respected and internationally recognised
artists. I have encountered Will's artwork on three continents but
his centre of gravity has always been the Scottish Gàidhealtachd.

No other visual artist has contributed more to the promotion and
resurgence of 21st century Gaelic culture. His work has ranged
across all of Gaeldom's big subjects—from his early homage to the
Ring Net fishing tradition to renewal of the Scottish Irish connec-
tion in *An Leabhar Mòr* and his great recurrent theme of the High-
land Land issue.

Islanders who do not know his name are familiar with his work
through the multi-award winning *Cuimhneachan Nan Gaisgeach
Cairns*. These monuments to the Lewis Land raiders at Balallan,
Gress and Aignis are now an important and popular part of the
Lewis landscape. At the first opening event for the *Ballallan Cairn*
a crofter thrust a £10 note in my hand saying, 'I don't care what
you do with it—just do more of this'. The fourth of these cairns—
the Saltire Award-winning *Suileachan* monument commemorating
the Rìof Raiders, designed in partnership with the artist Marian
Leven—is also a celebration of the Land Reform Act and sits high
on a community-owned hilltop close to Will's ancestral roots in Uig.



Will Maclean's work has established Gaelic culture as a legitimate
and deeply rewarding subject for the visual arts and inspired
younger generations to explore and re-imagine this rich territory.
His artistic preoccupations have been those of the old Land League
—the land, the language and the people—but one could also add
the sea, the culture, the history plus dispersal, emigration, diaspora,
memory and more. His explorations have navigated and charted
the cultural landscape of the Highlands and pioneered a highly
creative reconciliation of heritage and contemporary arts practice.
This exhibition gives some sense of his wide range of skills from
graphic narrative to sculpture to assemblage where he finds new
forms for things that have been discarded or fallen into disuse.
His assemblages invest the everyday material remains of Highland
life with a new significance and render them resonant with associ-
ations, ideas and conjunctions of myth and experience. The flotsam
and jetsam of people's working and domestic lives—these inciden-
tal fragments of the past—are recomposed into something entirely
modern and contemporary. Will's iconic symbols of Gaelic identity
and survival assert the cultural memory of his people—our people—
in an increasingly amnesiac world.

Malcolm Maclean

Gress Raiders Memorial, 1996, cairn, Gress, Isle of Lewis

PARADIGMS OF TRANSMISSION

In their recent publication, *Spheres of Action: Art and Politics*, Peter
Osborne and Eric Alliez write that post-national discourses of the
present time tend towards 'politically oppositional' perspectives
and embrace 'alternative streams of thought'. Will Maclean's land
pieces on the Island of Lewis are openly political: they are radically
removed from structuralist formalism by deliberately renewing
the dialogical relationship between people and their history. Like-
wise they raise questions about curatorial or aesthetic categories
constructing the artwork under the aegis of the community and
aligning it with Heideggerian notions of temple. The language
is connected syntagmatically with land art or social sculpture
but it operates paradigmatically also with the past and a projected
future for the community. Maclean's Lewis artworks function as
ontological paradigms, serving their communities both as 'models
of' and 'models for' reality, which means that they do not just
'manifest', but 'reconfigure' the historical ontologies undergirding
their cultural worlds.

In his *Cabinets of Curiosities*, Maclean alludes to the Surrealist
orthodoxies of readymades and installations, the display boxes
of Joseph Cornell, the glass cases of Joseph Beuys and the
more contemporary re-envisionings within the drug cabinets
of Damien Hirst and the archaeological 'wunderkammers'
of Mark Dion. As with the above artists, Maclean deftly bypasses
the infantilist audience responses elicited from exploitative
contemporary spectacles and re-engages the viewer with the
spirit of enquiry. His *Nomad Trace*, *Composition from High Latitudes*,
Navigator's Box/ Stormfinder, *Shaman Board/Herring Caller*, *Bottle Beach
Settlement 1–3* renew a dialogue within the original terms of the
debate by addressing the boundary lines of science and art whilst
subtly reconfiguring the issue by the juxtaposition of the fictive
with the historic.



The terminology which dominates critical conversations about
Maclean's art typically ranges from the anthropological to the
archeological; the art historical to the literary. The discourse which
proceeds from such well established semiotic foundations has
enabled a dialogue with the past, and especially a Scottish High-
land past, to move beyond well-worn binaries and stereotypes but
the central principle of his art—the act of transmission—can remain
obfuscated by the plurality of its manifestations. In his collabora-
tive publication with John Burnside, *A Catechism of the Laws of Storms*,
Maclean blends the aura of Doré's fantastical forebodings with
Ernst's absurdist conceits. The relationship between image and
text resembles more improvisational conversation than illustra-
tion. Giorgio Agamben insists that

'when a culture loses its means of transmission, man
is deprived of reference points and finds himself wedged
between, on the one hand, a past that incessantly accu-
mulates behind him and oppresses him with the multi-
plicity of its now indecipherable contents, and on the
other hand a future that he does not yet possess and
that does not throw any light on his struggle with the
past. The interruption of tradition, which is for us now
a fait accompli, opens an era in which no link is possible
between old and new'.

In Maclean's work the counter-narrative suggested by his order
of things allows for new becomings, unexpected assemblages
of old and new, scientific/artistic reachings: from an 'interrupted
tradition' perhaps, but without any sense of *fait accompli*.

Lindsay Blair

ABOVE LEFT **Shaman Board/Herring Caller**, 2010, construction, 152 x 63 x 7 cm ABOVE RIGHT **Diviner's Wall**, 1991, mixed media construction, 162 x 162 x 8 cm

Crotle Box, 2014, mixed media, 45 x 38 x 7 cm