

It's a pleasure to share some news about forthcoming and current exhibitions by Art First artists with notes about awards and commissions, and simply to wish you all a fruitful summer, wherever you are.

KAREL NEL *Translucent Worlds*

[Everard Read Gallery, Circa Building, Johannesburg.](#)

September - October 2026

I am delighted to announce that this long-awaited exhibition of new work is to open in Circa's beautiful architectural space from 3 September.

Not since [Karel Nel's](#) 2015 exhibition [Observe at Art First](#) in London has he had sufficient time to create and present a body of new drawings and at last, here they are.

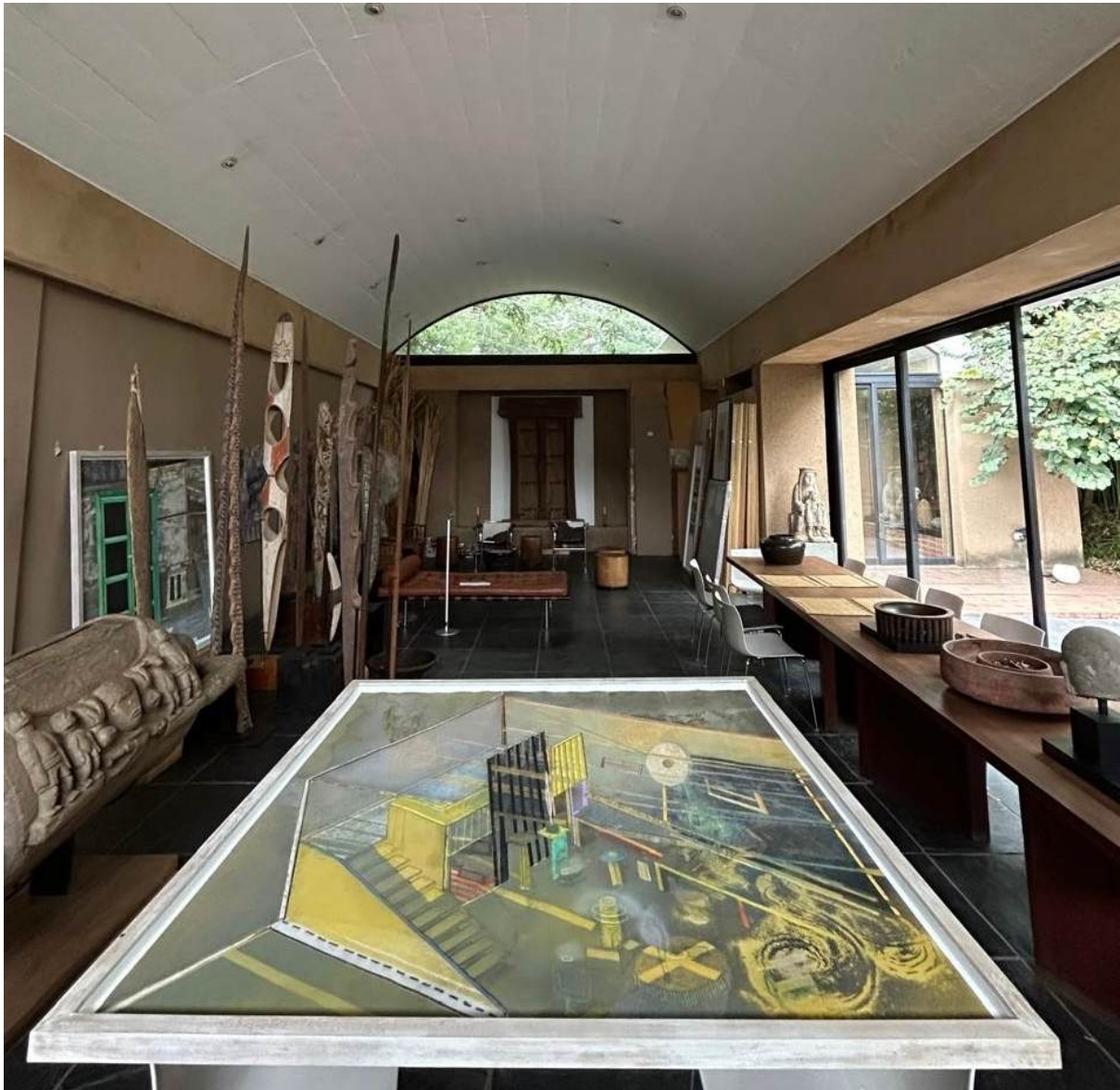
Leading up to this exhibition, however, Nel found time to mount a significant 2024 survey exhibition at the Wits Art Museum (WAM). Curated by Fiona Rankin-Smith alongside some of Nel's African and Oceanic objects, the exhibition was centred around his four works held in WAM's permanent collection. The Museum also hosted public walkabouts, fully attended by current and past students among many others, because Nel had been a longstanding associate professor of Fine Arts at Wits and had always enjoyed a dynamic relationship with the Museum itself.

In January 2025, a long-anticipated book based on the WAM exhibition *Close and Far* was published by Palimpsest. It is a handsome, cloth bound volume with illuminating text by Elizabeth Burroughs and a foreword by Federico Freschi. The book explores Nel's exceptionally multi-layered life as an artist, a collector, curator, teacher, writer and traveller, all of which, eloquently disclosed on every page, have shaped and informed the large, fascinating drawings and screens which span his career.



From the metaphysical to Brancusi's studio with its sculptural presence and tools, to the books and items of furniture in Nobel literature selector Per Wästbert's extensive library, the new drawings venture into the world *suggested by* books and the tools of creation, considering them as stacked thoughts, as tools of knowledge. Just as his own drawings are stacked together before being displayed, and his ideas for the next drawings remain safely stored in his mind's eye as in a data bank, 'translucent worlds' are stored in countless ways, ready to be down-loaded, savoured, shared and passed on to other imaginations as inspiration for unknown futures.

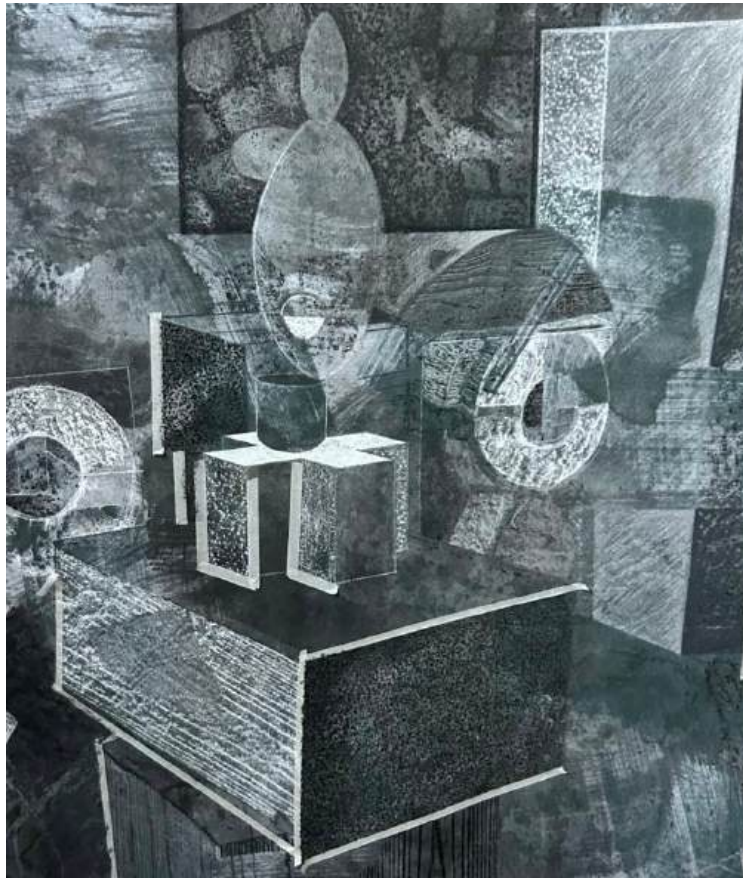
For more information about Karel Nel, visit artfirst.co.uk/artists/karel-nel/



Above: laid down drawing ready for finishing touches in the artist's studio.

Previous page left: 'Close & Far', the book.

Right : The artist in his Paris studio during a residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts in 2025.



Top: drawing of Brancusi's Studio, Paris and below, studio drawings under way.

JAKE HARVEY James Hutton and Glen Tilt

Jake Harvey – Helen Douglas, Blair Castle & Gardens, Pitlochry, Scotland.

6 May – 30 October 2026



Sculptor Jake Harvey and book artist Helen Douglas pursue their collaboration in paying tribute to the Eighteenth Century rock findings of Dr James Sutton, the founder of modern geology whose discoveries unlocked the theory of deep time.

For the tri - centenary celebration of Sutton and his discoveries within Glen Tilt itself, the Blair Castle Charitable Trust has commissioned this exhibition of beautiful honed and meditative rock works by Harvey and through the eye of the camera, the evocative findings conveyed on paper and in book form by Douglas.

[You can read more the exhibition here.](#)

Their previous exhibition *Meeting Point : Within the Lewisian* accompanied by a handsome book, is on tour and comes to the RSA in Edinburgh in 2027. [Discover more about *Meeting Point: Within the Lewisian* here.](#)



Above: Gallery shelf with Jake Harvey's stone pieces and Helen Douglas's folding book.

Right: Jake Harvey, *Infused Spheroid*

ALEX LOWERY *beyond words*

Sladers Yard, West Bay, Dorset.

9 May – 4 July 2026

New paintings of Portland and West Bay deal with [Lowery's](#) signature subjects, bathed in distinctive marine light and moving elegantly between abstraction and naturalism. He retains a fresh eye in these formal explorations of the clustered geometric buildings, saturated in rich flat colour or of the sea's edge, set below cliffs, ranging from Chesil Beach to industrial elements of harbour, concrete walkways, bollards, street lights.

The poised silence and the absence of figures are contemporary yet timeless and Lowery's long term observations of this coastal place in Dorset teach us how to see in the ordinary something we think we know, but then he makes us stop to look again.

[Click here to discover the exhibition at Sladers Yard](#)



Top: Portland 199, 2026, oil on canvas, 60 x 120cm

Below: West Bay 332, 2026, oil on canvas, 30 x 65cm

KATE MCCRICKARD

After her beguiling exhibition [TELLTALE](#), with fellow artist Dasha Shiskin at Emanuel von Bayer's gallery in Cecil Court, [McCrickard](#) and Shiskin met up again in March for a week's residency in the Dordogne at La Force, Deborah Chaney and Stéphane Guilbaud's rural printmaking studio.

Working on stone lithography using some complicated processes with expert guidance to hand, *Big Time!* (below) was the result. This magnificently crowded nightclub scene with the disc jockey at its centre, was taken by D.S. Fine Art Editions to present at the Brooklyn Fine Art Print Fair, New York.



The print joins a sequence of significant drypoints and monotypes which have recently entered the collections of the [British Museum](#), the De Reede Museum in Antwerp and the Los Angeles County Art Museum.

New paintings in the studio are under way. Here are a couple from my May visit before attending the book launch of Simon Morley's ['La Belle France'](#) (Yale University Press) about British artists working in France from Sickert to Hockney, which of course includes Kate and himself, both of them speakers at the event.



Top: *Big Time!*, a big canvas which relates to the lithograph is almost finished, demonstrating the dynamic flow of ideas between McCrickard's drawing, print-making and painting practice.

Lower left: the artist at work in a large landscape.

Lower right: Simon Morley at the book launch of *La Belle France* in Galignani Bookshop, Paris

WILL MACLEAN

[Will Maclean](#) and his wife, the artist Marian Leven, have been working on their two most recent commissions for stone monuments commemorating the land struggles of the Scottish Highlands. Close to their ancestral home in Polbain is the latest, *An Lorg* (the Gaelic word for footprint), with completion due in July. It relates to the event in Coigach in the 1850's when a group of courageous women successfully resisted five attempts to evict them from the land; a remarkable achievement, and a story now celebrated through community effort and the richly informed design by Leven and Maclean.



Above: An Lorg in progress, and Marian Leven's watercolour for the project

In North Lewis the stone and wood land monument *Na Dorsan* was completed in 2025 and deservedly won the prestigious [Marsh Award](#) for excellence in Public Sculpture. *Na Dorsan* (open door) is constructed by local stonemasons and carpenters from the Galson community in memory of their ancestors who had been cleared off the land to make way for sheep farming 100 years ago.

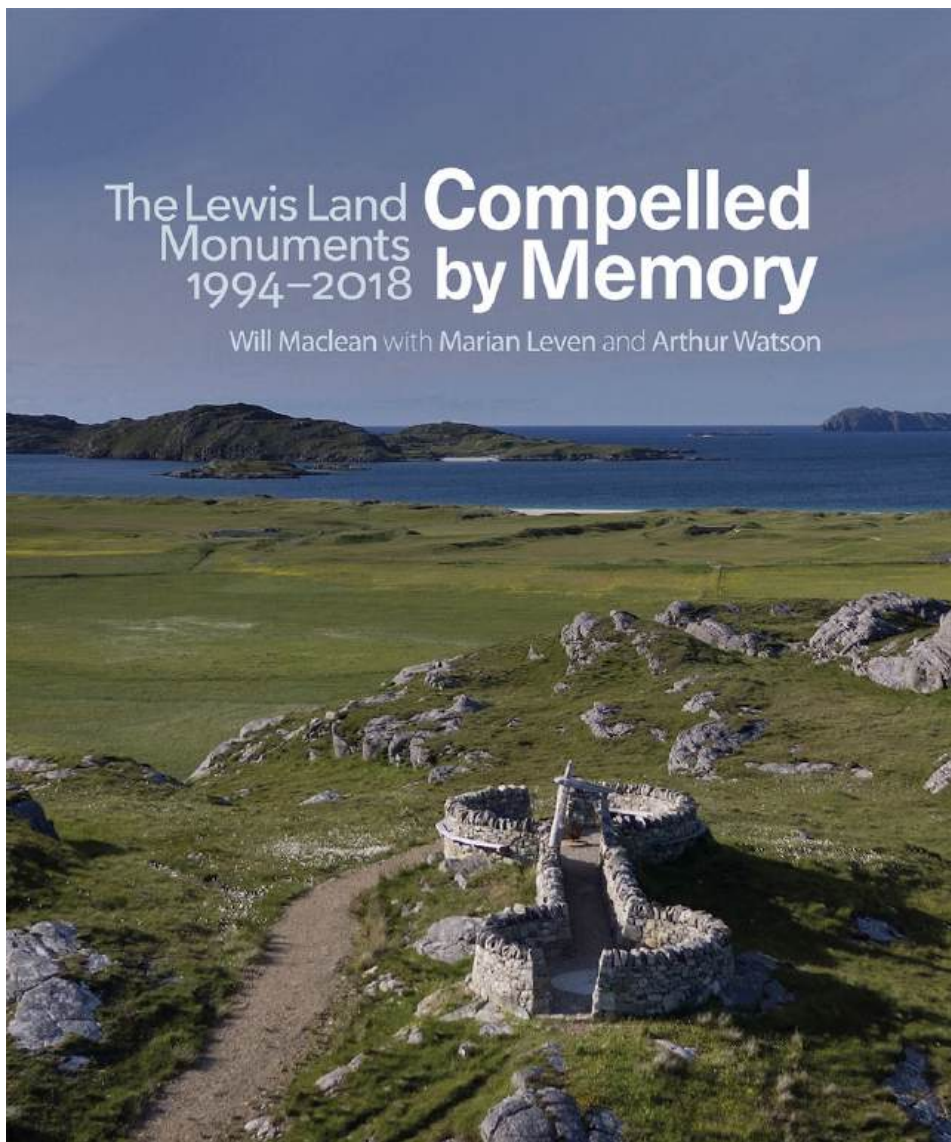


Above: *Na Dorsan*, North Lewis, and below, an aerial view.

The Isle of Lewis now hosts six meaningful and magnificent stone structures, all of them award winners and a central part of the proud island history. In every case, Maclean has been centrally involved in their conception and was joined by his wife for the design of *An Suileachan* 2013, on the west coast close to Uig, and *The Iolaire* 2019, in Stornoway as well as *Na Dorsan*.

The profoundly moving story of how the Lewis people rescued their Gaelic language, culture and way of life is told in a book called 'Compelled by Memory' published in 2022 by Sansom & Co and produced by Art First. Essays by Duncan Macmillan, Joni Buchanan, Tom Normand and Lindsay Blair, with photography by Robin Gilanders pay tribute to the integrity of the vision behind the monuments and their restorative impact on the Communities for whom they were created.

[Do contact us if you would like to buy a copy \(£20 plus p&p\).](#)



To discover more about any of the Art First Artists - visit artfirst.co.uk/artists/

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