VERDANT WORKS MUSEUM

Impressions in Jute

At Dundee Heritage Trust, we take great pride in showcasing artistic talents through a calendar of exciting temporary exhibitions.

Our latest Verdant Works temporary exhibition, Kim Appleton's '*Jute as a Material and Subject: from Literal to Abstraction*', represents Appleton's experimentation with Dundee's most famous fabric as both as a material to make art with and as a subject – a symbol of the city and its people.

In this blog, Kim Appleton shares her creative processes behind the eye-catching exhibition.

Detail of a painting depicting the 1801 Boulton & Watt Steam Engine

How would you describe yourself and your art?

"I enjoyed art in school but became a scientist, working in cancer research and clinical trials. I did continue to study art in the evenings though and gained a couple of qualifications in art. In 2018 I decided to become an artist full-time and enroll in a part-time degree in Fine Art with the Open College of the Arts. In 2020 I also became a framer, working from a workshop in my garden.

"I have always been very experimental in my practice, using untraditional tools and pigments; my course work has allowed me to explore this further.

"The materials I use are quite important to the work I produce and I often incorporate things I have found or textiles that have meaning to me. One landscape has my mother's scarf collaged in which reminds me that we visited the location. Sometimes I collage newsprint with a particular news story onto my work and then I paint over it. Only I know the significance of these objects, they are hidden to the viewer."

Tell us a bit more about the project; how long did it take to put together?

“I was studying an artist called Michael Armitage whose parents are from Uganda. He paints on Barkcloth which is made in Uganda from the back of a specific tree and has great cultural significance. I was intrigued that by using this surface, Armitage was able to confer great meaning to his own art through the materials he used, as well as through what he depicts.

“In a similar way to symbolism in classical paintings, I considered how I could use different materials in my work to convey a story and how that story would be different depending on the viewers’ own experience of the materials.”

Courtesy of Kim Appleton

“I am also interested in some of the New Materialism views, in that inanimate objects can have their own agency – almost like they display their own form of life. While my views are a bit more scientific, I do recognise that inorganic objects can have an effect on people for many reasons and they can exert a great effect in this way.

“With this in mind, I was looking for a textile that had some kind of cultural significance in Scotland and a friend mentioned jute. We came to visit the museum and it all fell into place from there.”

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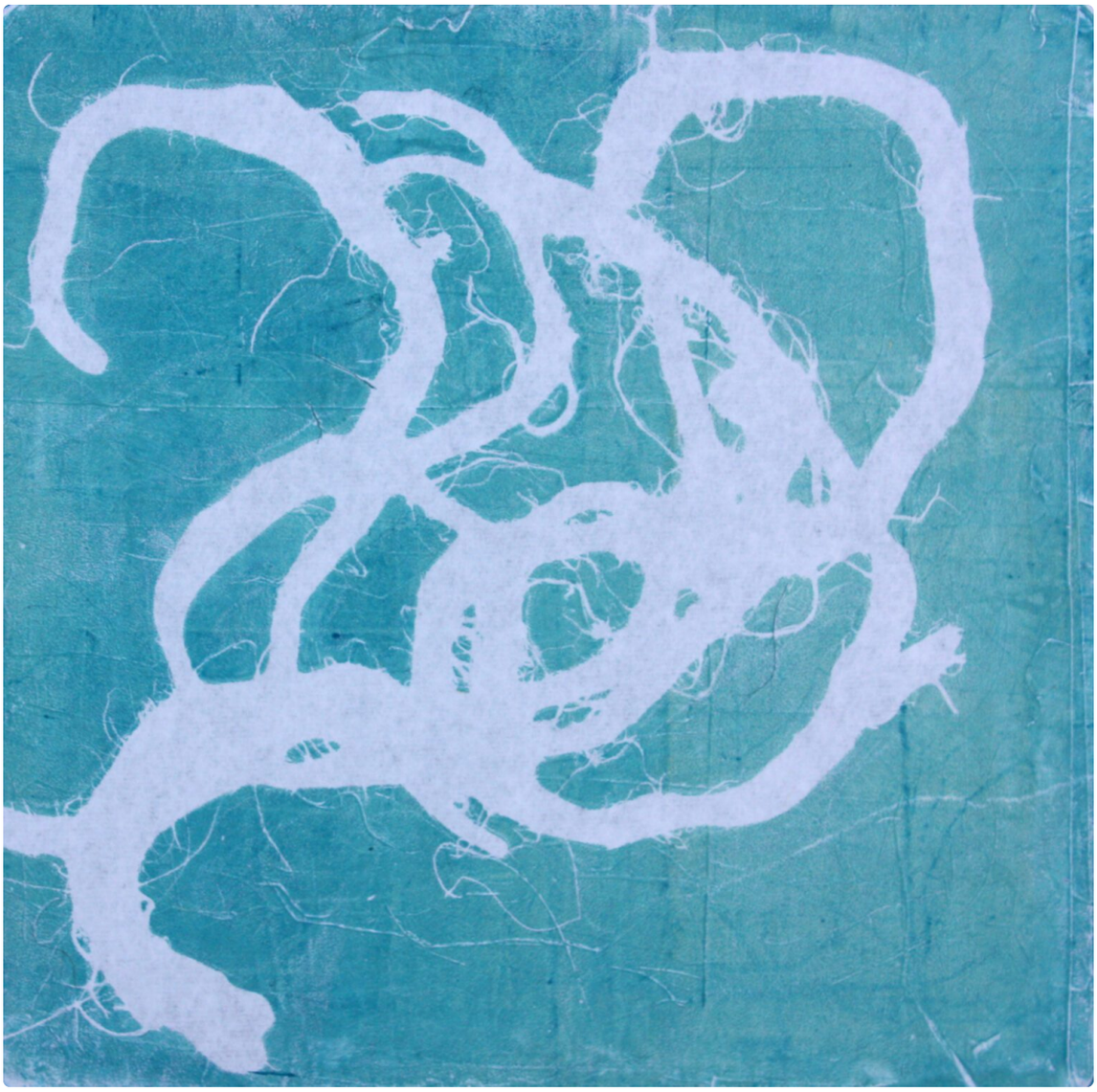
>
> **KIM APPLETON**

“It started out as my project for my course, but I carried on working on it after this because I knew there was more to explore.

“The work in the exhibition is a mixture of styles, from literal paintings of the mill to more abstract paintings and monotype prints of the jute itself. This represents my journey of exploring the subject and the history of Dundee, before culminating in using the fibre itself as a surface, collage material or, object to print with.

“There is overlap with some of the works. For instance, I have used the monotype prints of the fibres as a collage paper and the jute itself is embedded into some of the works.”



What does it mean to show your work here at Verdant Works Museum?

“I am so proud that I am able to exhibit this work in Verdant Works Museum because its creation is so closely entwined with my experience of visiting the museum and with the story of jute and Dundee.

“The context of having the exhibition in a jute mill is pivotal to the meaning of my works. Hopefully, the viewers, having visited the mill and learned something of its history, will consider the exhibition in a different light than if it had been displayed in the traditional white box gallery.”

Were there any connections or stories in particular that you learned of during your research that were pivotal in shaping the project?

“During my visit to the museum I was told quite shocking stories of the conditions that the workers had to work in and of the poverty and disease that was rife in Dundee. You might notice that my depictions of the mills are in dirty dull colours and in some of my works I have collaged my monoprints of the jute fibres over the sky, reflecting the curling smoke clouds that must have been ever-present, coming from the mill chimneys. I think these stories drive my colour scheme in these works.

“In contrast, I was able to talk to someone who had worked in the jute mills more recently and knew about the luxury that the so called ‘Jutewallahs’ lived in while in India, with fabulous social lives, beautiful houses and servants.”

Courtesy of Kim Appleton

Thank you very much to Kim Appleton for telling us more about this wonderful exhibition, with its deep connections to Dundee and the city's jute boom. Explore Appleton's fascinating use of jute in her exhibition, 'Jute as a Material and Subject: from Literal to Abstraction' at Verdant Works Museum until 6th May 2024. Exhibition entry is included in museum admission, which comes as an annual pass allowing unlimited repeat visits this year!

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VERDANT WORKS MUSEUM

Exhibition: Jute as a Material and Subject

Kim Appleton uses Dundee's jute industry as inspiration, as well as printmaking with the fabric.

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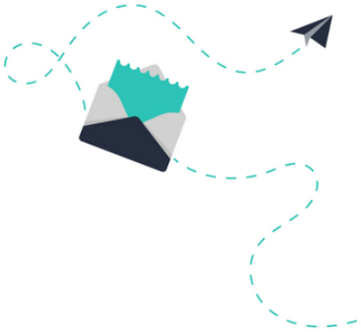

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