HAG.

Knowledge, Power & Alchemy Through Craft

Welcome:

Creating Hag
Curating Hag

The Artists:

Lise Bech
Gilly Langton
Emma Louise Wilson
Fiona Hutchison
Patricia Shone
Susie Redman
Amanda Simmons
Carol Sinclair
Judith Davies
Jo McDonald
Claire Heminsley
Ruth Elizabeth Jones
Caroline Dear

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Creating Hag.

Kate Grenyer, Fife Contemporary Director

Since I first moved to Fife, I have been fascinated by the history of the women persecuted in the witch trials in Scotland from 1563 onwards, and the moral panic and hysteria that accompanied them. It is particularly noticeable how close this period of history feels when you're in Fife. From the grave of Lilias Adie at Torryburn to the story of the mob-murder of Janet Cornfoot at Pittenweem Harbour, the history of these times can feel very alive today.

In recent years, witches and their history have become a growing subject of fascination and anger amongst a new generation of women. Vocal and articulate campaigners are turning this anger into advocacy and pride through podcasts, new history books, updated research, and online campaigns. These have all contributed to making witches a talisman for modern women's own stories of marginalisation and misogyny.

Intertwined with these conversations across history and time, is the story of Craft. In Scotland, 84% of those accused of witchcraft were women, often those with an independent and outspoken spirit, as well those who were of independent means. These were not wealthy or powerful women, but they were more capable and more knowledgeable than those around them, and this made people suspicious. Their financial independence and knowledge enabled their ability to be makers, whether of medicinal tinctures, or by spinning or weaving thread, or making pottery. They would also often be midwives, using matriarchal (and therefore unofficial) knowledge in support of other women.

Textiles in particular, were a common source of independent income amongst persecuted women, as was baking and other food preparation. This suspicion of women who make things continued long past the period of the witch trials, which ended in Scotland with the repeal of the Witchcraft Act in 1736, and continued in fairytale and myth. Think of the witch and her spinning wheel in Sleeping Beauty or the occupant of the gingerbread house in Hansel and Gretel. The mastery of a

craft by women became characterised as an opportunity to trick and deceive, or for that craft to be used for ill. Knowledge and skill in the hands of women was and, in some places, continues to be seen as dangerous.

This connection felt like the kernel of an exhibition, but how to bring this together in a meaningful way?

When sitting and discussing potential exhibition ideas with jeweller Kate Pickering - someone known widely to understand, enable and empower others through making - we came across this shared interest in witches and began to discuss how this could be done. Storytelling through craft is a Pickering specialism, and as we worked on how to pull these ideas together, I set this challenge to her; can she curate an exhibition of women artists with the persecution of women in mind, and can she make it relevant to today? This fantastic exhibition is what she came back with; and it felt surprising, exciting and powerful.

The theme of the show had made her think of all the women craft artists she had learned from and admired throughout her own development as a maker. This, alongside the inspiration she drew from ‘A poem for all the Old Hags’ written and performed by actor Sarah MacGillivray, crystallised her ideas. She wanted to recognise that older women are still marginalised in our current visual culture and media and counter this by embracing the experience, knowledge, skill and wisdom that comes with many years of work towards the mastery of a craft.

The thirteen women invited to be part of this exhibition are some of the very best craft artists in Scotland. To make them more visible, we were delighted to be supported by The William Grant Foundation to commission the new photography found in this exhibition and catalogue. They were produced by another Scottish woman excelling in her creative field. When seen alongside the works, the portrait photography of Lydia Smith added a crucial new dimension to this exhibition and publication. This sensitive photography allows us all to experience the working spaces and practices of these artists at still greater depth by capturing them in the studios where their talents bring new work into the world.

Kate Pickering chose a title for the show that was as provocative and as challenging as the outspoken women from across history who prompted its use as

an insult. When we first discussed it, ‘Hag.’ had the potential to be an off-putting, even insulting, title for this show. But the dogged intention to reclaim the narrative that has underpinned this entire project, meant ‘Hag.’ continued to feel right for the show as the exhibition planning and preparation progressed. Its ability to evoke both the marginalisation and the quiet and determined confidence of the women celebrated in this exhibition is what gives it its power. You may find it difficult, even offensive, but like the artists featured here it can’t and shouldn’t be ignored.

Curating Hag.

Kate Pickering, Curator

Hag. Knowledge, Power & Alchemy Through Craft celebrates the word “hag” as a symbol of resilience, empowerment, and creative mastery. This exhibition brings together the work of thirteen remarkable Scottish artists, each embodying the transformative power and wisdom often feared, misjudged and suppressed by history. Here, we celebrate their skills and legacies, revealing craft as both an expression of strength and an enduring source of connection.

Historically, women who defied convention, particularly those living outside prescribed norms, were dismissed as “hags” or “witches,” and marginalised for their independence, knowledge, and refusal to conform. Often older, single, or living on the fringes of society, they practised crafts such as weaving, basketry, and pottery, alongside herbalism, midwifery, and other forms of care. These skills, rooted in ancestral knowledge, not only sustained their communities but also challenged patriarchal authority. Branded as witches, they became scapegoats for society. Their wisdom and creativity were misunderstood and feared. These labels, steeped in superstition and prejudice, have cast a long shadow, shaping perceptions of mature creators and the roles society permits even today.

Hag. seeks to rewrite this narrative, reclaiming these symbols of derision as emblems of honour and strength. Here, we celebrate craft as a channel of transformative power, expression, and resilience that connects us all to generations of makers who came before.

Call me a hag, I dare you!

I delight in all it means

For in my eyes are burning bright lights of

power and from me it beams

‘For all the Old Hags’ by Sarah MacGillivray

Through this exhibition and publication, I invite you to celebrate the term “hag” with these artists, using it as a beacon of strength, community, and the transformative power of craft for all. Let it become a badge of honour, symbolising a lasting beauty and strength born from experience, dedication, and expertise. We claim this word, to celebrate age and the legacy of those whose skills foster artistry, identity, independence, and a connection to craft that spans generations. Creativity sustains and empowers us; each piece and each artist is a testament to the alchemy of craft.

Every artist in this exhibition has dedicated years to mastering their medium, from basketry and tapestry to glass, clay, and metalwork. Their work reveals skill and a profound relationship with the materials they shape and transform. In their hands, craft becomes an act of both defiance and connection, a process of turning raw elements into forms of beauty and meaning. Every woven thread, carved shape, and fired form holds a story that defies age and celebrates transformation.

Lise Bech

Basketmaker & Willow Grower

Lise Bech works exclusively with organically grown Scottish willow, imbuing each sculptural form she creates with traceability, rootedness and a sense of place. She sees her work as a combination of elemental forces; using wood - water and light - which is then shaped with simple metal tools. Her practice embodies the transformative power of craft, rooted in ancestral knowledge and a deep connection to the land.

Bech's work is large and suggests human forms. When working on this scale the making-process is a whole-body experience. For the artist, their bodily forms provoke questions, "how do we present ourselves to the world?", "are we enclosed or open?" or "do we feel safe to share our outer or inner selves?"

Her pieces are the result of long-gathered muscle and mind memory gained from 40 years of collaboration and play with willow. Her sculptural forms, created through decades of skill and dedication, resonate with the exhibition's celebration of resilience, creative mastery, and the enduring relationship between maker, material and place.

Gilly Langton

Jewellery Designer

Gilly Langton's work embodies the boldness at the heart of this exhibition. Inspired by the nautical forms of her coastal surroundings, her pieces are unapologetically powerful - echoing the spirit of those who draw creativity from the landscapes and communities around them.

Langton's jewellery explores the relationship between hard and so materials by combining crisp silver forms with layers of colourful hand-dyed elastic. Using traditional silversmithing skills, with hammers and a steel former, Langton chases textures and details into her work.

The nautical architecture she surrounds herself with, near her coastal Scottish home, is a constant source of inspiration for her pieces. The hollow forms and shapes of these structures allow for a lighter weight for the wearer in contrast to their strong sculptural forms and large, powerful shapes. The coiled elastic reflects the coils and knots of fishing ropes and combines techniques such as French knitting to add further form, tension and structure.

Emma Louise Wilson

Silversmith & Enameller

Emma Louise Wilson's work beautifully captures the quiet power of nature and the deep, personal connection she feels to the sea. Through her mastery of enamel and metalwork she reproduces the experience of seeing light reflecting on the sea, playing on the waves. The shapes of the bowls are inspired by the shapes of pebbles and how they feel in the hand.

Light Reflected is a collection of seven hand-raised silver bowls with vitreous enamel and fine gold inlay. Within each bowl Wilson aims to distil aspects of the seascapes around her home and studio in Aberdeen - capturing the moment when the sun rises from behind vast, northern clouds, or evoking the elemental forces of the forbidding, steely grey skies.

Wilson transforms raw materials into pieces that hold both the vastness and intimacy of the natural world. Her hope is that the work will bring to mind the feeling or a memory of standing on a beach, pebble in hand, looking out to sea.

Fiona Hutchison

Tapestry Artist

Fiona Hutchison's work reclaims discarded materials, turning them into something meaningful and beautiful, much like the women in the past who transformed overlooked resources into vital tools. Her tapestry and sculptural pieces not only reflect her connection to the sea but also challenge how we view waste, seeing potential in what is often forgotten.

Turning the Tide is an exploration of materials and techniques inspired by her love of the sea. This striking tapestry installation features strips of woven cotton, linen and entangled, repurposed plastic as a reflection on our continuing consumption of materials and resources. By combining discarded and undervalued materials using traditional tapestry weaving techniques, Hutchison hopes to encourage viewers to reconsider both the value and the beauty of materials we use and discard.

Further deepening Hutchison's connection with the sea, her small sculptural forms in 5 Sea Knots demonstrate an essential seafarer's skill to tie, to bind, to secure, and to join together. These knots symbolise an unbreakable pledge.

Patricia Shone

Potter

Patricia Shone describes her work as operating somewhere between science and alchemy as she embraces the process of transformation, both in her materials and in her creative journey. Shone starts with raw clay, the feel of which provides her with a physical connection to the world, then shapes it through knowledge and skill, mirroring the resilience and wisdom of earlier generations of women celebrated in the concept of the “hag.”

Finally, she allows the unpredictable magic of raku firing to reveal something entirely new. Shone sees in her works an expression of herself, an artist working within the human history of the material world. Her work is grounded in the controlled forms of functional vessels, which are then liberated from constraints of function by ruptured, textured surfaces. Her work balances the skill and knowledge required for consistency across her pieces, then the alchemy arrives when the unexpected happens. Texture is crucial to the finished pieces and the physical response a person might have to holding them. They can evoke memories, thoughts, and emotions unique to each person experiencing them.

Susie Redman

Handloom Weaver

Inspiration for Susie Redman's work comes from the materials she uses, her processes of weaving and working with yarns and fibres, and the significance and history of vessels. The vessel, and its association with gathering and collecting is a crucial starting point, creating objects that convey everyday facets of human life that unite us across cultures and throughout time.

Each vessel has been handwoven on a floor loom. The warp yarn is a short fibre linen known as tow, and the weft yarn is a Japanese paper, some of which has been wrapped in silk. Once off the loom, the pieces are stitched together and homegrown willow rods are woven into the cloth to provide both structure and form.

Redman's understanding of growing and using plant material highlights the interconnectedness of craft, nature and tradition. Redman's work is informed by the structures willow branches provide, allowing their natural curves to inform the shapes of the vessels. By combining handwoven textiles with the organic forms of homegrown willow, her vessels embody the alchemy of transforming raw materials into objects that carry meaning, history, and a sense of shared human experience.

Amanda Simmons

Glass Artist

Amanda Simmons captures the “hag” spirit through her exploration of the dark, defiant energy of Ted Hughes’ poem, Crow Hears Fate Knock at the Door. She developed the Crow Portals in response to a complete book of poems by Ted Hughes which contained this work.

This particular poem concerns Crow investigating the universe, taking things apart, trying to understand how it all goes together. Crow is consumed by the unravelling, and ends the poem with a defiant prophecy to convince themselves they are not going mad from the intricacy and overwhelm; “I WILL MEASURE IT ALL AND OWN IT ALL, AND I WILL BE INSIDE IT, AS INSIDE MY OWN LAUGHTER….”

By layering textures and black glass powders, Simmons captures the sense of unravelling and defiance in the poem. She creates a visual representation of struggle, knowledge, and the intense will to understand. She depicts the poem darkly, building texture by layering patterns of dark matter and feathers. Her own experience of the poem, built into her work, is that of beautiful, strong words that allow you to project into space.

Carol Sinclair

Ceramic Artist

Carol Sinclair was invited to be part of Hag. because her work, being rooted in sustainability and mindful making, challenges the status quo and embodies the spirit of reclaimed narratives and empowered women.

She created three new pieces for the exhibition, After the Storm I, II and III. The patterning in these new works is inspired by broken branches left scattered in her local landscape after recent storms. The branches fell as the result of increasing frequency and intensity of these storms that is being caused by global warming. Sinclair sees this fall, and the patterns and shapes created, as urgent messages from the environment, warning us to respect and take care of our world.

All three pieces in After the Storm have been created in porcelain and black stoneware, decorated with Sinclair's signature inlay technique. Working with a voice that echoes resilience and defiance against societal norms, she uses soft slabs of clay to create the form before applying coloured inlays which are then cut and reformed to create individual patterned shapes.

Judith Davies

Ceramicist

Judith Davies's profound connection to materials and processes perfectly emulates the exhibition's theme. She is inspired by the coastal environment, rivers and estuaries and the liminal space where water and land meet. Precious, mysterious, and pulled by the moon, she sees water as a life-giving force and an essential influence on her work. Water's capacity to erode, and to slowly affect and change solid surfaces of stone and sand through constant motion, is a direct influence on the pieces she has created for Hag.

Davies's approach to ceramics and drawing, inspired by the natural world and the tension between chance and control, adds a tactile and contemplative dimension. Her work arrives through experimentation, touch, and material processes, with the hand-built and coiled pieces evolving as she works. Her forms are organic and asymmetrical, and often have a rippled surface obtained through a rhythmic form of burnishing, mimicking the movement of water over sand ridges.

After layers of richly coloured pigment are washed in and rubbed back, the marks of her hand are revealed and her touch remains embodied in the work.

Jo McDonald

Tapestry Artist

Jo McDonald reflects the spirit of this exhibition by reworking discarded books into new forms that honour their history, while giving them fresh life. Her work explores storytelling, history and shared experience, as she works with these books and their history infused with traces of the past – fingerprints, skin, dedications and scribbled notes – offering a glimpse into their earlier lives.

Her process of deconstructing and reassembling speaks to the reclamation of forgotten knowledge, transforming the old into something that bridges the past and present with creativity and purpose. Inspired by traditional weaving methods and construction, she uses wire and monofilament as the warp and paper as the weft.

The books are chosen for both their written content and their subtle tonal variations in colour. McDonald blends the pages much like a painter's palette, mixing the dark browns of old books through mid-browns and creams of fiction, to the whites and creams of textbooks. She handles and cuts the books herself, ensuring the clean straight lines of the cut edges but also allowing time to feel and explore each page as she immerses herself in the experience of making.

Claire Heminsley

Artist & Designer

Claire Heminsley's work connects deeply with the idea of the "hag" by celebrating the rebellious, empowered women who defied the odds. Her aprons not only challenge stereotypes around older women but also embody strength, resilience, and the spirit of activism, claiming the word "hag" as a symbol of defiance and wisdom.

Inspired by the women who seized control of the Greenock Lee Jeans Factory in 1981, Heminsley has dedicated the past few years to researching workwear and aprons. She views these women as fabulously strong "Hags", embracing the determination and outspoken rebelliousness the word evokes. These were "women who did not take any shit!" and were ultimately successful in stopping the Greenock factory closure. To Heminsley, they were rebellious women wearing rebellious aprons.

The five aprons play with Hag words - Haggage, Haggish, Hagdom - and acknowledge the positive traits of being an older woman; wisdom, experience, being both visible and invisible, empowerment, resilience, joyousness, being spirited, not toeing the line, and becoming the person we were meant to be.

The aprons are made using combinations of paper, gouache, stitch, cloth and cut-outs.

Ruth Elizabeth Jones

Ceramic Artist

Ruth Elizabeth Jones's work has a deep connection to ancient traditions, using coil-building techniques to create vessels that reflect the strength and wisdom of matriarchal cultures.

Jones's practice centres on the vessel form, using coil-building techniques dating back to matriarchal Neolithic pottery cultures, and making ongoing reference to the female ceramic record. Jones focuses on the materiality of clay, developing large sculptural vessels which balance inner volume and outer form. The smoke-firing process imbues her sculptures with a sense of ancient wisdom and elemental power, echoing the mystical traditions of the past.

Three vessels are presented for Hag. - a Mother Vessel, a Female Ancestor and an Offspring - inviting contemplation of the timeless connection between humans and the earth.

Caroline Dear

Artist & Botanist

Caroline Dear's work revives the cultural and symbolic significance of traditional female garments through the act of making. By using locally sourced materials and slow, meditative processes, her practice embodies a profound connection to heritage, ritual, and the timeless relationship between maker, material and community.

Made using native plants and simple weaving skills, Dear's works are contemporary versions of traditional female clothing. The Earasaid was a draped women's dress garment worn bound with a belt across the waist. It was less colourful than male plaid, and oen embroidered with the women's initials. Her piece Veiled evokes both the fragility of the thin fescue grass used and our limited 'veiled' perception of the world around us.

Dear uses processes which take time. The plants she uses pass through her hands many times; gathering and processing, then making thread and weaving. This slow, meditative method of making is fundamental to her practice, as she feels herself embodied in the final pieces.

Kate Pickering

Hag. Curator

Kate Pickering is a jeweller, educator, and curator whose work centres on the power of craft to foster creativity, community, and empowerment.

With a BA in Jewellery and Silversmithing and a Masters of Design from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design (DJCAD), she has dedicated over a decade to building creative platforms that inspire makers and bring together diverse voices. Pickering has curated exhibitions, worked with cultural institutions like The Scottish Goldsmiths Trust, and developed innovative projects that bridge traditional craft and contemporary dialogue.

Lydia Smith

Hag. Photographer

Authentic, edgy and emotive, Lydia Smith is a passionate portrait photographer based in Scotland who strives to capture and represent the true spirit of her subjects.

Focused on making her clients feel at ease, Smith knows that the best portraits come from genuine connections, allowing her to reveal the true character of each individual she photographs.

Smith's previous commissions include working with V&A, UNESCO, Architecture and Design Scotland, and National Museums Scotland, as well as many local businesses and creatives. Her work has been displayed on billboards, in print and on the walls of such prestigious venues as V&A Dundee and the National Museum of Mathematics in New York.

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Cover image: Homegrown Scottish willow harvested by Lise Bech.
Cover insert image: Amanda Simmons laying glass pigment.
Page 4: Emma Louise Wilson in her studio forming fine silver.
Page 5: Caroline Dear tying locally foraged plant fibres.
Page 8: Gilly Langton working on sketches in her studio.
Page 36: Claire Heminsley in her studio working in a sketchbook.
Page 37: Fired pots at Patricia Shone's home studio on Skye.
Page 39: Kate Pickering photographed by Fife Contemporary. Self portrait provided by photographer Lydia Smith.
Page 40: Raku-fired pot by Patricia Shone. The authors would like to thank all the artists involved in the exhibition, writer Sarah MacGillivray, photographer Lydia

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