

This exhibition brings together the work of international Scottish artists David Blyth and Su Grierson, each based in the North East of Scotland and having strong personal and creative links to rural identities and practices. It is the first time the artists have exhibited together, and the first time Blyth has exhibited in Lithuania, Grierson has longstanding artistic connections with the country. Their work is concerned with culturally specific notions of the domestic and the rural. Grierson having lived on a family farm in Perthshire for 40 years and Blyth who is raising his young family in a cottage on a sheep farm, cite the workings and realities of living in the country as a major influence on their work.

Blyth explores themes of domesticity and procreation, drawing subtle parallels between the lambing season and the birth of his own children. His highly crafted screen prints soothe the viewer with deceptively anodyne pastoral scenes, rural idylls which belie harsher underlying themes of castration, death and genetic mutation. This juxtaposition of the bucolic and the brutal is not immediately apparent to the viewer, the images tempered with delicate pattern and colour, but such rural paradoxes will be apparent to anyone with experience of farm living. Here domesticity and death are closely intertwined.

Grierson is less shocked by the same issues, but wants to confront what she describes as the complacency towards everyday life and rural issues. Her work, unlike Blyth's which strives to create a unified pictorial space, is a collage of disparate but familiar elements. Grierson also engages with the theme of domesticity, but her films and digital images take everyday symbols and objects out of the home and juxtapositions them, sometimes jarringly, often surprisingly, with the natural world. Repatriation means sending someone back to where they originally came from, and here Grierson repatriates the domestic by returning it to nature. In this way she forces the viewer to confront the ordinary and reconsider what is often overlooked in our day-to-day lives.

Pattern is a key element in both artists' work. Each artist employs pattern and abstraction found in nature and the decorative arts, crossing the border between fine art and design. Grierson's work has long dealt with pattern and colour, her experience with natural dyes and spinning, and her interest in textiles is apparent here. This attraction to pattern and colour was seen as an anathema on the very conceptual MFA she undertook, but has always been an important part of her work. Blyth describes himself as a relative newcomer to colour and pattern. He trained as a painter, focusing more on the removal of colour, working in muted hues and umbers. He has recently been influenced by artist David Bachelor's book, *Chromophobia* (Reaktion Books 2000), which explores the modernist attempt to purge colour from culture, and Blyth's sensitive exploration of colour here is a manifestation of this.

Both artists reference patterns that are familiar or have specific personal or historic meaning to them. Grierson's work looks to pattern found in the home - the floral curtains we remember from growing up, a detail from a ceramic fireplace, domestic patterns and designs that are ubiquitous and often unnoticed, a re-fashioning of the everyday and the ordinary. Blyth also borrows from the familiar - using domestic patterns and textile furnishings selected from old family photographs and personal belongings from his late grandmother. Their work explores how colour and pattern might be used to conceal content and obscure surfaces. Pattern is the embodiment of order in design and nature, and part of its appeal is its repetition and certainty, but it can also be oppressive, obsessive and unsettling. In Blyth's work pattern is used to distract and disguise - sheep ticks become abstracted star shapes which are strangely pleasurable to look at. Castration rings, also used to dock lambs' tails, are unrecognisable, repeated as soft toy-like shapes, benign and unthreatening. Grierson sees pattern as a means of creating order out of chaos, but by digitally merging disparate visual elements, she challenges notions of simplicity and stability, bringing the mess of reality back into the arena of design.

Both artists have found common ground in this first joint exhibition of their work, through shared connections with place and the referencing of the domestic and the rural through their individual use of colour and pattern. Ultimately Blyth sees his work as being integrated into a domestic space, rather than destined for a gallery. Grierson, on the other hand, feels she is doing the opposite by liberating domestic symbols from the home and setting them free in the wider natural world.

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Moth (detail)

Su Grierson Domesticate/Repatriate

In this project the signage of nature, it's abstracted and simplified pattern, is recombined with the photographic representations of the social and natural world.

For centuries, landscape and nature have been domesticated on the surfaces of textiles, ceramics and furnishings, but here they are re-fashioned into new and contemporary outcomes.

Pattern contains history, each representing the ideals and ideas and techniques that were relevant at its own time of production.

What is real? How much do the images that surround us in everyday life affect how we see and feel about the real world? To what extent do these images even register on our consciousness at all? Yet, they undoubtedly do subliminally affect our understanding of the natural world.

Pattern, its simplicity and its essential essence, removes the mess of reality. It symbolically abstracts the basic form, but by reuniting that abstraction with images from the real world it can take-on a different set of perceptions.

Not so much a patchwork but an integration or layering. These works not only cross barriers between representational techniques but also bring together the distinct art disciplines of art & design. A merging or synthesis takes place, the borderlines are gone, a kind of in-between space arises.

Here I am looking for the 'immediacy' of the image. The point at which it is first and foremost a visual experience, where some kind of understanding kicks in at the moment before thought - which is perhaps one interpretation of the sublime.

BIOGRAPHY

Su Grierson is a visual artist working with video, image and sound, to present land and landscape from differing non-traditional perspectives. Exhibiting in galleries and venues in Scotland and abroad, she aims to visually and aurally stimulate understanding and awareness of the land.

Su Grierson graduated Masters of Fine Art from Glasgow School of Art in 1995 having previously received a BA (Hons) first class at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in Dundee. She is Chair of Perthshire Visual Arts Forum, regularly brings international artists to visit rural Scotland, and is actively involved in developing contemporary art and supporting artists living outside of the urban centres.

www.sugrierson.com



Detail 1



Detail 2



Detail 3

Su Grierson