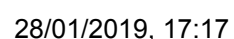


Monday, January 28, 2019 5:16 PM

Clipped from: <https://www.bigissuenorth.com/centre-stage/2018/04/tracing-landscape-cumbrian-farm-women/>



and economic hardship,” says MacKinnon-Day. “Working closely with the Cumbrian farm women for a year gave me the opportunity to probe deeper and produce artworks that aimed to make visible their contribution to agriculture.”

MacKinnon-Day’s approach to the exhibition required her to be something of a sociologist as well, spending months with her subjects, aged 30 to 80, without any preconceived ideas about the artwork she was going to make.

“Empathy is key to my research, as learning how it feels to be part of that community and becoming completely embedded as an artist on site is crucial to the success of the artwork.

“This process of developing understanding over time helps me to access complex meanings within a place, identify special codes, rules and the symbolic meanings of things: semiotic clues as to what is going on.”

In Benjamin’s case, that process of identification has led to a shed at Abbot Hall containing a small hand-written diary from her husband’s father, who had the farm before her, a bespoke bottle feeder made from an Irn-Bru bottle, sheep’s wool covering the wall, farming books and – reflecting the need for diversification forced on many farmers – handmade soaps.

What surprised MacKinnon-Day the most about the time spent with them?

“As a city dweller I was previously ignorant of the intensity of their round the clock workload and of the everyday physical, emotional and economic demands. The biggest shock was to discover that their input has historically been largely unpaid and unrecorded.

“I was always humbled by their warmth and welcome, even in the midst of crisis and during their relentless work schedule.”

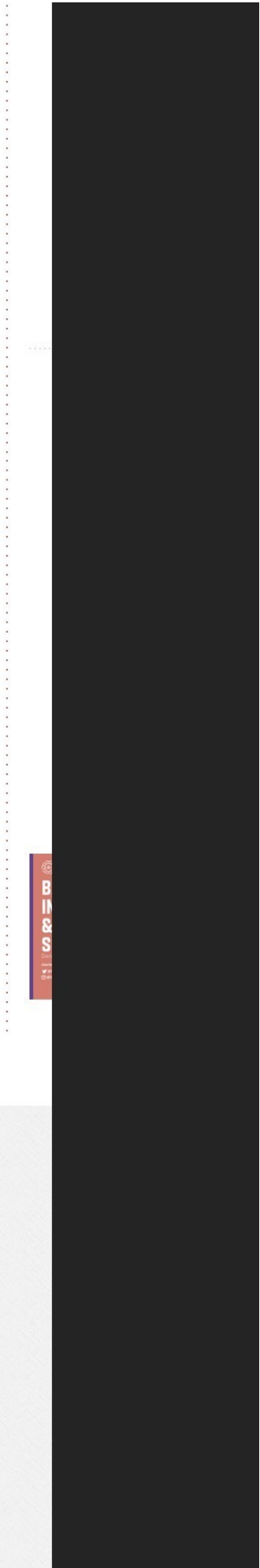
[Tracing the Landscape: Cumbrian Farm Women is until 9 June at Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal \(abbothall.org.uk\)](#)

Main image: Maria Benjamin in artwork by Patrica MacKinnon-Day. Benjamin has been farming in Ulverston for three years and describes it as a "way of life"

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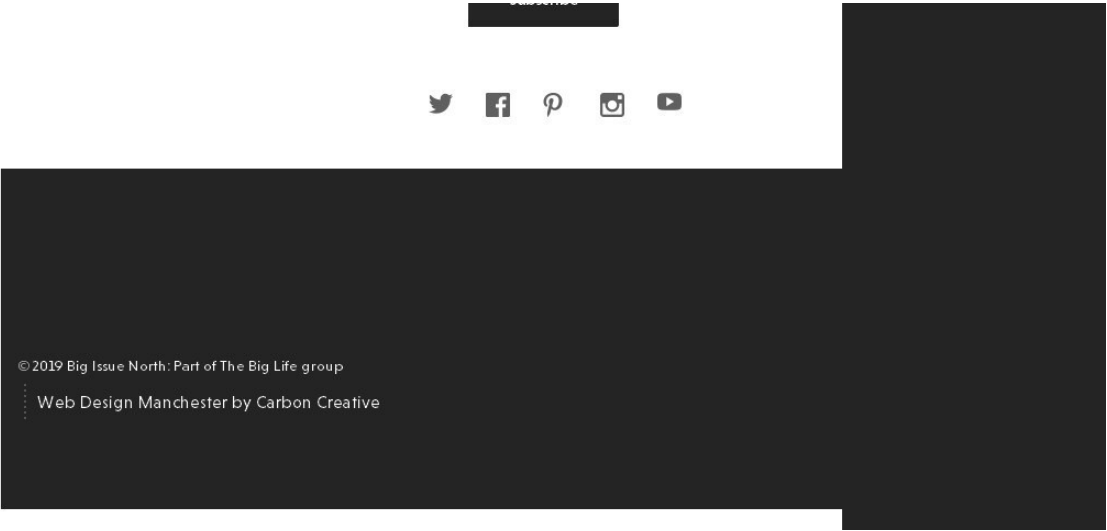
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