

# PAPER SHOES AND FASHION



## Good on paper

Using everything from old books to teabag paper, Isabell Buenz is taking origami to a whole new level

Creating an end table from paper was about a bit ahead of German artist Isabell Buenz, who swapped her home-land for Edinburgh seven years ago.

Her first mission for a local newspaper: as we already had lots of kitchen paper from the big roll," tells Isabell. "I started making things with it and it all developed from there. I studied traditional bookbinding as I was always interested in the end it gave me the confidence to work with old books."

Isabell makes sculptures in a small studio near the capital, and in a large workshop in Garching of them from old books, which are transformed into anything from models of castles to hats and jewelry. "Most recently, I've made hair pins for the hairdressers I meet when I do face books in Edinburgh," explains Isabell. "I made a hair clip from a copy of Thomas Mann by Peter Robert Louis Stevenson once," she also makes using paper from the Beatles, which she can make as a souvenir for her many visitors here. In 2014, she made a beautiful book and then in 2015, I made a beautiful bag," says Isabell.

Working as an accountant and an expressive art and musician, a form of self-development, Isabell has made shoes, hats, purses, and jewelry before she took up an old friend, but it was a bookbinding for high heels that kickstarted her journey into the art of paper.

I was invited to an exhibition that had no specific theme, so I decided that I wanted to make some paper shoes," says Isabell. "In my first set, and so in my pattern, so I even made some high heels that I could have high heels with the thick platform sole. I did two shoes but as I don't think I'll get away with it, they're how I include my passion," Isabell has created quite a collection of paper shoes in all shapes and sizes, from size 36 to 42, and has sold out a show in the German State Museum.

As a medium, Isabell enjoys making art from something that is normally disposable. "Paper is normally seen as something of value," she says, "but I can make something really precious from it. I love the fact that it is very cheap, but I can make it into something so sturdy and lasting, something that can be treasured and kept."

In 2016, she plans to open a shop in Edinburgh where people can do the same. [www.isabellbuenz.co.uk](http://www.isabellbuenz.co.uk)

Image: Isabell Buenz makes the sculpture, but the real ones are made from old books for original paper shoes.

## contents



94 GOOD ON PAPER Isabell Buenz creates fabulous art and fashion from paper

Left and above: *Scottish Field* – March 2016



**Creative** Teabag paper dresses at Spring Fling

# Tea for two as Spring Fling gets under way

**Dozens of artists add the final touches to their exhibitions ahead of Scotland's premier open studios event.**

Stylish, fun and made entirely of tea-bag paper, the dresses created by Isabell Buenz are one of the many attractions at Spring Fling 2015.

No fewer than 94 studios all across Dumfries and Galloway are taking part in the contemporary visual art and craft event from May 23 to 25.

Thousands of visitors from across Scotland, and far beyond, are expected to attend the 13th annual Spring Fling, which features everything from paintings, photography and original print to ceramics, jewellery, sculpture and textiles.

Isabell has been making the final adjustments to a variety of pieces created from different kinds of paper and books.

They include dresses, shoes, accessories and flowers and will be on display at The Aquarium in Gatehouse of Fleet and the nearby Cally Gardens.

"The dresses are made from lengths of the finest quality tea-bag material - with enough for 600 cuppas going into the smaller and 850 into the more elaborate one.

And while they are really intended for display rather than use, the artist says they are surprisingly practical.

Isabell said: "You could go out to a party in one of these dresses and it would be fine - but you'd need to be careful getting between the car and the front door in the rain!"

Her love of making things from paper developed when she was a child in Germany.

"My father worked in newspapers and there were always lots of them lying around.

"I loved making things from them so I guess I was recycling and up-cycling from a very early age.

The models for the final tweaks, which took place at The Grange, near Kirkcudbright, were Megan Giblin, 17, from Auchencairn, who has recently completed training to become a lifeguard, and Rachel Schnapp, 18, from

Moniaive, who is studying English and philosophy at Glasgow University.

Leah Black, Spring Fling director, said: "One reason people love Spring Fling is that there's always something fresh and different to enjoy - like Isabell's amazing dresses.

"She has a real sense of style and fun.

"This is our 13th annual Spring Fling and we are looking forward to welcoming people from all across the country, and overseas, to see the huge range of art and craft which is created in this beautiful region."

In 2014 Spring Fling attracted around 13,000 visitors, half from beyond Dumfries and Galloway, who contributed an estimated £1.4 million to the economy.

Dumfries and Galloway Council is supporting the event with a £38,000 investment as part of its Major Festivals and Events Strategy.

Anyone looking for a great gift can look online at the superb selection available in the Spring Fling shop at <http://www.spring-fling.co.uk/shop>.

## Getting around Spring Fling

Visitors can download brochures or collect ready-printed maps to help them get around - or join bus and cycling tours.

There will be four bus tours provided with help from Thornhill Community Transport Initiative.

Each will visit studios in different parts of the region.

Full details are available in the Spring Fling brochure which can be downloaded from the website.

The brochure also has details of the cycle tours which are kindly organised by Ted Norfolk and Mike Gray.

These offer a very pleasant way to enjoy a day of superb countryside while touring a selection of studios.

For details and bookings contact: Saturday ride - Ted Norfolk at [enorfolk552@btinternet.com](mailto:enorfolk552@btinternet.com) or on 01988 700432. Monday ride - Mike Gray at [grayjohnmichael@aol.com](mailto:grayjohnmichael@aol.com) or 07751 978563.

## A festival worth drinking (tea) to



A LIFEGUARD and an English and philosophy undergraduate have joined forces to launch a major visual arts festival in the south-west of Scotland.  
Megan Giblin, 17, from Kirkcudbrightshire,

and Glasgow University student Rachel Shnapp, 17, from Dumfries-shire, wore teabag paper frocks made just from recycled teabag material to highlight one of the many attractions at this year's Spring Fling.

It is estimated that almost 1,500 cuppas could be made from the amount of material used in the outfits, made by artist Isabell Buenz, who was inspired by Scotland's Year of Food and Drink.

Spring Fling is a three-day festival of 94 open art studios and events around the Dumfries and Galloway region which begins on Saturday.  
Photograph: Colin Hattersley

*The Herald* – 19<sup>th</sup> May 2015

## £38,000 COUNCIL SUPPORT HELPS DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAYS SPRING FLING SERVE UP A TREAT

### Our Cup of Tea – Teabag Paper Fashions Shown at Spring Fling

Council Support Helps Serve up a Treat for Thousands of Visitors across Dumfries and Galloway this Weekend



Fabulous frocks made from teabag paper will be among the amazing exhibits at Spring Fling this weekend. Scotland's premier open studios contemporary visual art and craft event will feature everything from paintings, photography and original print to ceramics, jewellery, sculpture and textiles.

And this week paper artist Isabell Buenz has been making the final adjustments to some of her stunning creations. Her work will be on display at The Aquarium in Gatehouse of Fleet and the nearby Cally Gardens.

No fewer than 94 studios are taking part in Spring Fling 2015. Now in its 13th year the event attracted over 13,400 visitors in 2014, half from beyond the region, who contributed £1.4 million to the economy.

Dumfries and Galloway Council is supporting the event with a £38,000 investment as part of its Major Festivals and Events Strategy.

Councillor Colin Smyth, the council's Events Champion said: "Spring Fling is a huge attraction and we are looking forward to welcoming thousands of visitors from all over the country and overseas for a fantastic weekend.

"The level of creativity in Dumfries and Galloway is really inspiring and it's something we are proud to be supporting and encouraging as this region-wide event is such a great showcase for our region. The council's targeted investment is one cause, together with the dedicated work of the event team and the quality of our artists and craftmakers, in Spring Fling growing in economic terms so strongly over the past two years. "

Many visitors come because there is always be something fresh to enjoy – like the dresses, accessories, flowers and other artworks which Isabell makes from materials including teabag paper and books. Her work enjoys a huge reputation for its stylishness and sense of fun.

The dresses are all made from lengths of the finest quality teabag material – with enough for 600 cuppas going into the smaller and 850 into the more elaborate one. And while they are really intended for display rather than use, the artist says that they are surprisingly practical.

Isabell said: "You could go out to a party in one of these dresses and it would be fine – but you'd need to be careful getting between the car and the front door in the rain!"



Her love of making things from paper developed when she was a child in Germany. "My father worked in newspapers and there were always lots of them lying around. I loved making things from them so I guess I was recycling and upcycling from a very early age. "I loved to experiment with different sorts of paper and met the rep for a teabag company on a plane once and he agreed to send me some – I've never looked back. It's great to work with, and quite strong."

The models for the final tweaks, which took place at The Grange, near Kirkcudbright, were Megan Giblin (17), from Auchencairn, who has recently completed training to become a lifeguard, and Megan Shnapp (18), from Moniaive, who is studying English and philosophy at Glasgow University.

Spring Fling takes place from 23-25 May and visitors can download or collect ready-printed maps to get around –

or join bus and cycling tours. Leah Black, Spring Fling Director, said: “This is our 13th annual Spring Fling and it’s going to be loads of fun. There’s so much for everyone to enjoy – from superb visual art and craft to fantastically quirky works like Isabell’s dresses. “It’s great to be working in a region where the arts are really supported and recognised as something which adds quality and colour to life, help the economy and create career opportunities for existing and future generations.”

***The DGWGO Weekly Newsletter – 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015***

## SPRING FLING TEABAG PAPER FROCKS ARE THE PERFECT DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY WEEKEND BREW

### **Dozens of Artists Add the Final Touches to Their Exhibitions Ahead of Scotland’s Premier Open Studios Event**



Stylish, fun and made entirely of teabag paper – the dresses made by Isabell Buenz are one of the many attractions at Spring Fling 2015.

No fewer than 94 studios all across Dumfries and Galloway are taking part in Scotland’s premier open studios contemporary visual art and craft event from 23-25 May.

Many thousands of visitors from across Scotland, and far beyond are expected to attend the 13th annual Spring Fling, which features everything from paintings, photography and original print to ceramics, jewellery, sculpture and textiles.

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**The DGWGO Weekly Newsletter – 17<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

## PAPER CHASE

### *Isabell Buenz turns old paper into haute couture*



I can find inspiration in many things, it could be as simple as the colour or the feel of a piece of paper. More often than not encounters and observations with nature and my close-up plant photography are the starting point for new work. My interest in people and passion for people watching also greatly influence my work and as result, viewers easily relate to it by recognizing their own feelings and experiences.

Since my childhood I have had a particular interest in the re-use of paper and other material in my craft, art and sewing projects. I started to establish myself as paper and book artist in 2000 while still working with the NHS in Edinburgh. My main focus has been on exploring paper for my unique artists' books, altered books and paper sculptures. Since leaving my job in the end of 2011, I have worked as a full-time artist and rediscovered my love of designing and creating clothes. My work now includes fashion items and accessories made from paper, ranging from tiny dresses, shoes and accessories to life-size wearable outfits and giant stilettos.

I like working with all types of paper but prefer to use recycled and sustainably produced material. I use discarded library and other second hand books for my altered book sculptures while my shoes, dresses and other fashion items are mostly made from tea bag paper that I receive directly from the producer in the Scottish Borders.

I enjoy working with material that is by many people considered to be worthless, ready to be discarded without thought and too delicate to last. My pieces transform old, sometimes tattered books and faulty tea bag paper into unexpected treasures, giving all a new lease of life. While most of my work appears to be delicate, the pieces are surprisingly sturdy and long lasting.

For my book sculptures I hunt for old books that closely relate to the subject I'm exploring in order to create a story that responds to and represents the venue or event they are made for.

The paper I use dictates to a certain extent the result of my work. Using the organza like tea bag paper for most of my creations allows me to produce work that is soft, flowing and rounded, allowing for whimsical pieces to develop. The use of all white material adds to the dream like quality, evoking thoughts of fairy tales and happy endings.

My most recent pieces, created for the Artists' Book Market at the Fruit Market Gallery in Edinburgh, are fashion accessories made from second hand book pages. This collection bridges the gap between my altered book sculptures and the tea bag paper fashion items. 'Book Fashion' was displayed by 5 models attending the event who mingled with visitors and stall holders creating a more unusual way for me to display my work.

I usually exhibit my work as installations with a theatrical feel that tell a story and appeal to a wide audience. My shows intend to make paper art more popular and art in general more accessible to all ages. At present I am planning to transform my entire studio into a fantasy paper garden as a backdrop for the work produced for this year's Spring Fling Open Studio Event (May 2015, [www.spring-fling.co.uk](http://www.spring-fling.co.uk)).

Most of my artistic skills are self-taught, often acquired over years through trial and error, some going back to my childhood when I first developed an interest in creative work. I now feel anything is possible in paper. I engage in traditional paper art methods, such as origami and papier-mache and combine them with machine stitching as well as printing and dying.

I now mostly create work for exhibitions, fashion shows, commissions and as samples used in lessons, workshops and presentations to demonstrate the limitless possibilities paper can offer.

# LITTLE WHITE DRESS GRACEFIELD ARTS CENTRE, DUMFRIES 2013/ 14

LifeGuide ARTS & CULTURE

## The art of elegance

'An outstanding example of how much can be made from so little'



**LITTLE WHITE DRESS, ISABELL BUENZ.**  
Until January 4, Gracefield Arts Centre.  
Admission free.

A 1950s shop mannequin welcomes visitors to Isabell Buenz's striking exhibition, explaining she is one of several used by the artist as moulds for the elegant models which take centre stage in Gracefield's Gallery 2. *writes Carol Hogarth.*

Eight of these 'models' are suspended from the ceiling, dressed all in white, in elegant, fragile avant-garde outfits complete, in some cases, with intricate head pieces and exquisitely crafted shoes. They invite curiosity and it is only on closer inspection, and with the knowledge imparted by the first mannequin, that the true genius of Buenz's creations becomes clear. Each outfit is made from tea bag paper and paper string. Each mannequin is moulded from newspapers and

magazines, one covered by cut outs from property pages, another by celebrities' faces.

In its new couture role tea bag paper loses all its humdrum associations and is transformed into delicate, aetherial fabric, muslin-like, pure, clean and crisp. Each of the eight installations, complemented by close-up photography around the gallery walls, incorporates an encounter with nature, explained and explored by text, in the artists' own handwriting, written on hanging paper strips.

Though at times difficult to read, the words tell of the daisies, bluebells, dragonflies, lilies, roses and bobbies - as well as the less poetic horns and tubeworms - which were the inspiration behind each design.

Buenz has lived in Scotland for more than 20 years, teaching photography and expressive arts both here and in Germany. Her work combines her love of fashion, passion for photography and nature and is an outstanding example of how much can be made from so little.



Dumfries & Galloway  
Life - January 2014



# ANDREW CARNEGIE DAY/ CELEBRATION BOOK WEEK SCOTLAND 2013



Fife Provost Jim Leishman with artist Isabell Buenz at the Dunfermline Carnegie Library. Picture: David Wardle.

## Read all about it: book week events launched

FIFE CULTURAL Trust launched Book Week Scotland in Fife yesterday.

To mark the national celebration of books and reading, a programme of events was organised including an author's talk, a comedy performance by Suit and Piece, a display of special, commissioned book sculptures and a Dunfermline Question Quest.

This is the second year Fife Cultural Trust has taken part. Dunfermline took centre stage on the first day, as part of Andrew Carnegie Day, but events have been organised right across Fife.

The Dunfermline

Question Quest is for anyone who enjoys solving puzzles and can use Facebook, Twitter or the internet.

Participants who solve the clues to find a password, then deliver that password to the secret location in Dunfermline can win a prize. The daily competition is to win one of the five book sculptures commissioned from artist Isabell Buenz. Each sculpture represents a well-known venue in Dunfermline.

The first set of clues was released online yesterday and all participants have to do is answer the questions and deliver the answers to a member of staff in one

particular venue each day to be entered into the prize draw. A new set of clues will be released each morning.

Libraries service development manager Jane Souer said: "Isabell's sculptures are little masterpieces. You can see them in Dunfermline Carnegie Library and in other local venues all week. There is also a sixth book sculpture, which will be part of the grand prize for another competition, which runs alongside the Question Quest."

As well as the book sculpture, the winner will receive a goody bag that will include books and theatre tickets.

The Courier, Fife Edition –  
26th November 2013

YOUR PAPER, YOUR VOICE

Dunfermline Press, 28th November, 2013

### ANDREW CARNEGIE DAY 2013

# Happy 178th birthday Mr Carnegie!



**BUSINESS BREAKFAST:** Pictured from left at Monday morning's business breakfast at the Carnegie Conference Centre, which kicked off the Andrew Carnegie Day celebrations, are Provost Jim Leishman, Andrew Carnegie aka Alex Kellin, Sir Tom Farmer and West Dunfermline's Jo Frazer and Thomas Moray. Above: Youngsters from some of Dunfermline's high schools attended the business breakfast; below: Isabell Buenz and her book sculptures at Carnegie Library; bottom: guests at the business breakfast Photo: Jim Payne

DUNFERMLINE got philantropic to celebrate Andrew Carnegie Day on Monday.

Visit Dunfermline organised a string of Carnegie-related activities to celebrate the 178th birthday of the metal magnate who was to become the richest man in the world by amassing \$489 million.

But the Dunfermline-born entrepreneur made history again by giving away \$350 million of that fortune to create a legacy that is still going strong today.

Organisers kicked off the day with an Entrepreneurial Breakfast at the Carnegie Conference Centre where up to 200 guests heard an inspiring speech from Scottish entrepreneur and founder of Kwik-Fit, Sir Tom Farmer, who revealed the secret of his success was the people who surrounded him - his family and his workforce.

Scottish Book Week launched at the Dunfermline Carnegie Library accompanied by a speech from children's author Keith Clarke which was the first in several literary events in Fife's Cultural Trust's Question Quest Social Media Challenge peaked interest.

Participants had to solve clues using social media to find a password which then had to be delivered in a particular venue in the town in the hope of winning the top prize - one of five book sculptures each represent-

ing a well-known venue in the town - which had been specially commissioned by artist Isabell Buenz.

Two social media workshops were put on at both the Carnegie and Dalloch libraries followed by the Big Book Bash and children's events throughout the day.

The Carnegie Birthplace Museum hosted a day of free family activities as well as two free heritage guided tours around Dunfermline and Carnegie Hall with special refreshments served up at Tiffany's Lounge afterwards.

And 120 guests from local homes in the area were treated to a special afternoon tea and entertainment at the terraces on the Glen Pavilion.

In the evening, Michael Malone's book, 'Carnegie's Call', was launched at the Carnegie Library.

The Previously... Scotland's History Festival also got under way on Monday with 247 events across Scotland.

Press Sport columnist Ross Reddy Craig is giving a series of history talks at the Carnegie Library and two sessions are still available for this Saturday.

The first will be at 2.15pm and is titled 'Scots and Slaves' and the second at 3.45pm which he has named 'How their Explains Scotland'.



Dunfermline Press – 28th November 2013

# THE MOFFAT RAM 1<sup>ST</sup> PRIZE IN THE MOFFAT SHEEP RACE RAFFLE 2013

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[www.dng24.co.uk](http://www.dng24.co.uk)

Annanda



**NEW RESIDENT . . . Mitch Murray of Cafe Ariete is the proud new owner of Ramsey which was commissioned by Forestry Purposes LLP, Eilly Hurren of the company is pictured with her son Olly** DNG974

## Ramsey takes pride of place in cafe

THE SHEEP race may be over for this year, but one ram remains in the town.

Ramsey, a specially commissioned papier mache ram, has been donated to Cafe Ariete.

Forestry Purposes LLP asked paper artist Isabel Buenz to create a sheep to be raffled off as part of the 2013 races.

Winners Mr and Mrs Oakley from Dumfries opted to donate the sculpture to the town and selected Cafe Ariete, which means 'ram' in Italian, because they enjoy the cafe's coffee and wanted to be able to see it again.

Made from chicken wire, play wood, two broom handles, bubble wrap, old newspaper and two discarded library books, Ramsey now takes pride of place in the cafe.

Owner Mitch Murray said: "He is suspended from the ceiling in the arch in the middle of the cafe.

"He looks good and fits in well."  
**Sheep race action- page 8**

Moffat News – 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2013

## CRAFT & DESIGN FEATURE



artmag – August/ September 2012



Paper is the medium of choice for Isabel Buenz, who makes sculptures, installations and artists' books from this versatile material. Recently she has focused on creating whimsical paper shoes, and her collection ranges from doll-size booties to giant stilettos. She also recycles "pre-loved" books by altering their appearance and shape into sculptural pieces through creative folding techniques. 'Altered books' is a recognised art form practised by many paper-artists around the world, but has had little exposure in the UK.

[www.isabellbuenz.co.uk](http://www.isabellbuenz.co.uk)

# TRANSFORMATION THE GERMAN SHOE MUSEUM, HAUENSTEIN 2011

Ausstellung im Deutschen Schuhmuseum

## TRANSFORMATION

Exhibition 2011

DEUTSCHES SCHUHMUSEUM HAUENSTEIN  
Sonderausstellung "Transformation"  
(Künstlerische Umgestaltung von Schuhen)  
Isabell Buenz (Schottland),  
bis 17.07.2011, täglich von 10 -17 Uhr geöffnet.



Hauensteiner Bote – 14<sup>th</sup> July 2011

## Die filigrane Welt der feinen Schuhe

Ausstellung von Isabell Buenz im Schuhmuseum

**„Transformation“ – so umschreibt die Papierkünstlerin Isabell Buenz aus Edinburgh (Schottland) ihre Ausstellung mit filigranen Schuhkunstwerken, die morgen, Sonntag, um 11 Uhr im Schuhmuseum Hauenstein eröffnet wird.**

Isabell Buenz bezeichnet sich selbst als Papierkünstlerin, Fotografin und Schriftstellerin. Sie bleibt dem Schuh treu und wandelt „Realität in Kunstformen“ um, was nach ihrer eigenen Aussage in idealer Weise mit dem Kunstobjekt „Schuh“ gelinge. Seit 2002 hat Isabel Buenz, die in Schottland lebt und arbeitet, rund 50 Ausstellungen in Großbritannien gezeigt, aber noch keine in Deutschland. Die Hauensteiner Ausstellung mit ihren künstlerischen Schuhformen ist auch eine Premiere für ihr künstlerisches Schaffen in ihrem Heimatland, dem sie um 1990 den Rücken kehrte.

Seit Jahren hat Buenz Schuhe und ihre Besitzer „studiert“. „Man kann viel über eine Person lernen, wenn man sich ihre Schuhe ansieht“, sagt sie. Schuhe verkörpern ihre Eigentümer: Im Gegensatz zu anderen Kleidungsstücken verändern sie ihre Form während des Gebrauchs und bleiben in dem Zustand, auch wenn sie nicht benutzt werden. „Fußbeklei-

dung hat sich von ihrer ursprünglichen Rolle von einer Funktionalität in ein Objekt entwickelt, das Identifikation, Festlichkeit und Begierde repräsentiert“, reflektiert Isabell Buenz über ihre Kunst.

Ihre Papierschuhkollektion regt die Vorstellungskraft der Besucher an. Sie lockt den Betrachter in eine Welt voller magischer Transformationen, eine wunderliche Welt voller Schuhe, die für Märchenfiguren und mythische Geschöpfe geeignet sind und dazu einladen, Charaktere und Geschichten zu erträumen. Die Ausstellung ist bis 17. Juli zu sehen. (ys)



Isabell Buenz zeigt auch ihre bekannten Fotos. FOTO: YS

Die Rheinpfalz – 18<sup>th</sup> June 2011

# THE WYCH ELM PROJECT ROYAL BOTANIC GARDEN EDINBURGH 2009 – 2010

THE BOTANICS WINTER 2009 |

## A new lease of life

Once upon a time, a great wych elm stood in the Edinburgh Garden. It was a majestic giant, nearly 200 years old, with elegant branches stretching high into its broad crown, and was much loved by visitors. When Dutch elm disease struck in 2003, the tree had to be felled and many mourned its loss.

But the timber was saved and the tree's spirit was given new life through the Wych Elm Project, which invited some of Scotland's leading crafts people and artists to transform the wood into beautiful new work. With the opening of the John Hope Gateway, visitors to the Garden could once again admire this tree – in its many new manifestations.

The exhibition showcases a striking range of designs, from stylish furniture to jewellery, calligraphy and even a Kyrgyzstan-style yurt. Some makers, such as jeweller Caroline Cloughley, were working with wood for the first time. Others were already familiar with the eccentricities of wych elm,



such as Roger Hall, a furniture maker who now specialises in letter-carving. One of his works features the inscription 'he who has planted a tree has not passed in vain upon the earth.'

It is apparent that every piece of this tree has been treasured and nothing has gone to waste. The off-cuts from commissioned furniture have been made into beautiful bowls for sale,

one intricately bevelled, others inlaid with platinum and gold. Even the wooden shavings from the making of the magnificent Aeolian harp have found a new lease of life as decoration for Isabell Buenz's exquisite paper shoes, crafted for the mythical little creatures that may once have lived in the old, gnarled branches of the majestic wych elm.

**The Wych Elm Project runs until Sunday 28 March at the John Hope Gateway, 9.30 am (9 am on Saturday and Sunday) until 6 pm. Closed Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Free. For information on the accompanying publication visit [www.rbge.org.uk/publications](http://www.rbge.org.uk/publications)**

**Above:** The Wych Elm Project in the John Hope Gateway, featuring commissioned pieces all crafted from the wood of the one tree.

**Inset:** Necklace by Caroline Cloughley.

**Left:** Children from Kames Special School were involved in the Wych Elm Project. Here they visit the exhibition and make boats to float on the Garden's pond to celebrate the opening.



### Wych craft brings elm back to life

A 200 year-old wych elm which grew at the garden until 2003, when it fell victim to Dutch elm disease, has returned as the key element of the inaugural display in the John Hope Gateway's temporary exhibition space.

In keeping with the RBGE's commitment to recycling, wood from the tree was seasoned and distributed to 30 manufacturers and artists to use in a series of commissioned works and to create pieces ranging from furniture to sculpture, pottery, jewellery and toys.

The role of the tree is not always immediately apparent. For example, the plain boots and fairy slippers by Isabell Buenz incorporate leaves and shavings of the tree in the paper used for making the shoes. Bespoke fishing rod maker Harry Jamieson, meanwhile, used the wood to create a decorative feature in the handle of his piece.

With its rich colour and distinctive grain patterns, wych elm has many traditional uses: the first piped water ran through elm pipes in the 17th century and wooden wheels (traditionally had hubs of elm). Yet, with few exceptions, it was never popular for furniture making. Instead, it was in ready availability as a result of Dutch elm disease in the 1930s that led Borders-based furniture maker and sculptor Tim Sead to refocus attention on the timber. His work celebrated the curved grain and large, irregularly shaped (barrel) knots in the wood. A table and bench by the Workshop of Tim Sead will be the only pieces to remain after the exhibition closes.

The exhibition is accompanied by a book, profiling the makers and telling the story of wych elm. It is further complemented by short film documenting the commissioning process of some pieces.

● The Wych Elm Project runs at the John Hope Gateway until 28 March 2010, 9.30am-5pm (9am on Saturdays and Sundays). Admission is free.



**Above:** 'The Botanics' – Winter 2009  
**Right:** 'The Scotsman Magazine' – 10<sup>th</sup> October 2009

# Artists in wood Women breathe new life into wych elm

*The Wych Elm Project, to be unveiled at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh this summer, sees a much-loved but diseased tree given new life by a range of craftspeople. Fi Martynoga takes a look at the female artists taking part.*

In 2004, Dutch elm disease reached a favourite old tree near the Chinese Hillside in the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE), affectionately called the Botanics. The tree declined swiftly, became dangerous and was felled.

The wood, however, was not carted away for firewood. It was cut up and taken to Lothian Trees and Timber to be planked and stored. Air-dried for three years, the planks were then moved into drying sheds, where a dehumidifier brought the moisture content down sufficiently for the wood to be ready to work.

At that stage, RBGE announced its plans for *The Wych Elm Project*. It builds on the experience of two previous art-based tree projects at the Botanics. The first was *The Botanics Ash* in 1993, when Tim Stead single-handedly created a memorable exhibition by opening up and displaying the entire sections of the trunk and branches from an ash tree felled in the Gardens. He also used the wood to make a series of intriguing objects – boxes, boxes within boxes and three-dimensional puzzles.

The idea of using all the wood from a single tree was developed further in 2001, when an oak provided the material for a second project. Called *One Tree*, this time a variety of different artists and makers contributed work to display the inner secrets of the mature oak with their furniture and finely wrought objects in another remarkable exhibition.

Facing page, clockwise from top left: Furniture maker Fiona Campbell at work; jeweller Caroline Cloughley creates delicate butterflies with elm inlays; sculptor Jennifer Watt's pod- and seedlike shapes are inspired by birth in its many forms. Right: Elfin shoe by Isabell Buenz. Photos: Amy Copeman/RBGE; Isabell Buenz.

*The Wych Elm Project* plans to do something similar. This time, there will be an additional note of celebration in the exhibition being planned. It will inaugurate the gallery space in the John Hope Gateway, the splendid new visitor centre to open at the West Gate of the Botanics this summer.

The tree project was launched with a dedicated website [www.wychemproject.org](http://www.wychemproject.org) and other publicity intended to get both artists and potential clients to sign up. RBGE undertook to match individual clients and their needs to appropriate artists, although the showcase provided

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Caroline Cloughley

by the website, with its links to the artists' own websites, has actually made it easy for potential clients to select possible artists for themselves.

A total of 22 artists are taking part, too many to mention all, although there are names like Roger Hall and Geoff King that will be familiar from recent issues of this journal. Instead, since female artists have been shamefully under-represented in this column, the project offers an excellent opportunity to have a closer look at the work of the nine women involved.

## Champagne and smiles

It is notable that several of these women are already award-winners and, from the quality of their work, destined to be high-fliers. Fiona Campbell was Student of the Year when she gained her degree in Aberdeen. Now, after a further year at the Chippendale School in Haddington, she is skilled in the use of both hand tools and machines to turn out furniture – from the most

lovingly traditional Windsor chair to innovative chess tables and pieces.

Elm, with its rich-coloured grain, is Campbell's favourite wood. She is complimentary about *The Wych Elm Project* and the way it is being organised: "It is good that the Botanics people are keen to show processes and stages of development of work, not just the finished product. They want to display sketchbooks and photographs of work in progress, to help people understand what is involved." Campbell has made champagne trays from some of the elm. These will be used at the opening reception for the new John Hope Gateway Centre in June. The new exhibition space will house the wych elm artists' work for around six months.

Michaela Huber, a furniture maker, will have to call back pieces she has made to commission for the project. One of them is a revolving bookcase which will display the good grain of the wood



she was given from the wych elm. Huber trained in Munich as a cabinet maker, but has practiced her craft in Scotland since 1980. She works almost exclusively in Scottish hardwoods, so the elm offered by the project was perfect for her purposes.

Her portfolio is varied, showing hand-made kitchens, conference tables, music stands, handrails and desks, but best of

all she loves making chairs, particularly rocking chairs. These employ a range of woods, and often have elm seats, though the laths are usually ash and the arms can be other hardwoods. "Scottish-grown laburnum makes wonderful arms for a chair," says Huber. "It has rich yellows and browns and takes on a polish like that of stone."

**"The wych elm, with its many gnarled branches and full leafy canopy, could have been a perfect living and hiding place for little creatures."**

Isabell Buenz

Of her own unusual design for a kissing chair, with scorched larch laths and yew seats, she comments: "I was so delighted when I saw people at an exhibition sitting in my chair. They found themselves obliquely opposite each other, making easy eye-contact. Suddenly they were smiling and laughing. It made me feel really good!"

Jennifer Watt is an award-winning sculptor. She lives in Dumfriesshire, and as she likes to work in British hardwoods, she was naturally attracted to *The Wych Elm Project*. "Recently I have been working on a series I call *New Beginnings*. The pieces are all inspired by birth in its many forms, whether it is a chestnut opening to reveal its glossy inner shell, a seedling pushing through the ground, or the birth of a baby."

One such piece, a pod revealing its cradled seed, she made, appropriately, from the Botanics elm at the request of a client they found for her. Like all her pieces, it has an exquisite, lustrous finish that illuminates the inner nature of the wood. The seed is made from a dark rusty-brown wood. This contrasts strongly with the pale grain of the section of elm from which Watt has chosen to make the pod.

#### Butterflies and faeries

Two jewellers are among the women artists embraced by *The Wych Elm Project*. Caroline Cloughley and Beth Legg are both recent graduates from

Edinburgh College of Art. Cloughley's attitude to materials is fresh: she likes to appose the precious and the familiar or commonplace.

Her plan for the elm is to use shavings and inlay them with tiny pieces of metal to create pieces like the wings of the white letter hairstreak butterfly which breeds in the tree. "As well as an artistic challenge, I feel this is a worthwhile cause, as it is raising ecological awareness," she says.

Legg likes to work very intuitively with materials to explore their embedded memory. That makes taking on sections of a 200-year-old elm with a known human history particularly attractive to her. She is aware that it is "touched by different eroding processes which give them resonance and a sense of preciousness."

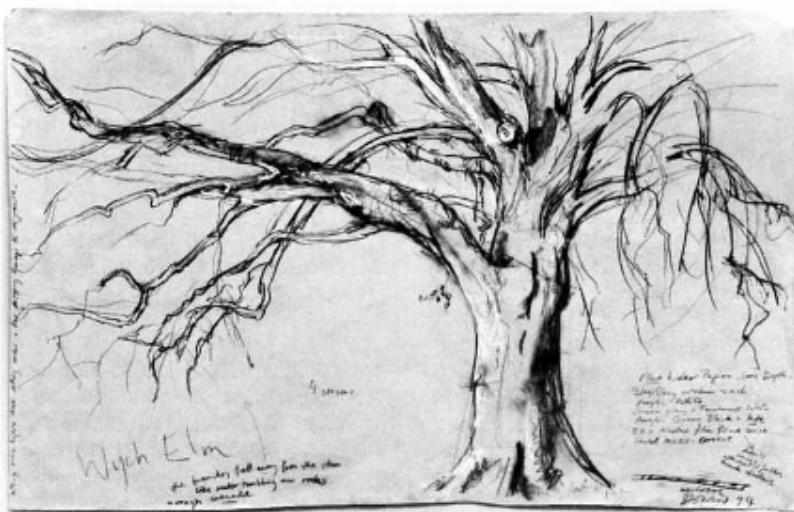
A similar sense is conveyed by the beautifully wrought boxes made by Mette Fruergaard-Jensen. For these, the elm provides the material for lids, while the boxes themselves are made of other natural materials like amber, bone,

from the elm. They have a real sense of faerie.

Artists who work in other media have also become involved. Kate Downie was first attracted to the living elm tree when she used it as a model for a massive light installation in the Edinburgh City Council offices in 1994. She has produced two new screen prints based on the tree then, and one of its offspring growing today. She will exhibit drawings of the tree as it lived.

Jane Kelly is a potter who makes fine domestic ware, all of it with an interesting history. She frequently uses raku, so the connection with the elm is its sawdust, which will be used to fire her raku kiln.

These vignettes of artists' work are intended as tasters of the exhibition. With all this wealth of design and craftsmanship described, along with the work of the 14 men who are contributing, the opening show at RBGE's John Hope Gateway gallery looks set to be stunning.



horn and copper. Originally a potter, boxes are now Fruergaard-Jensen's speciality.

Isabell Buenz has a different and charmingly creative approach to the project. "The wych elm, with its many gnarled branches and full leafy canopy, could have been a perfect living and hiding place for little creatures," muses Buenz. To tell her fairy tale about the tree she creates elfin boots, sandals and slippers out of paper made of shavings and leaves. These she adorns with twigs and tiny wooden beads also derived

#### Find out more online

Wych Elm Project website  
[www.wychemproject.org](http://www.wychemproject.org)

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh  
[www.rbge.org.uk](http://www.rbge.org.uk)


A full-colour book entitled *Wych Elm* will accompany the exhibition. See [www.rbge.org.uk/publications](http://www.rbge.org.uk/publications)

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Above right: Drawing of the living tree by artist Kate Downie. Photo: Michael Wolchover.

# CHRISTMAS CARD UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW, DUMFRIES CAMPUS 2009

**A 'Frosty Morning' to you!**  
**Our winning Christmas image**  
We are keen to support local art and enterprise so we invited artists and photographers to contribute images for this year's Christmas card. The winning image, chosen by a panel of staff, was 'Frosty Morning' (below) by Isabel Buenz. This will appear on around 300 cards distributed across the UK and further afield.



[www.isabellbuenz.co.uk](http://www.isabellbuenz.co.uk)

*Above: 'Dumfries & Galloway Life' magazine – January 2010*