

Upland



Exhibiting artist Gyllian Thomson. Photo by Colin Hattersley

Upland – a bold champion of the arts in Dumfries Galloway – is launching a special exhibition for the start of its 10th birthday celebrations.

Despite tough times for the creative sector (hit by everything from public spending cuts to COVID and the Cost-of-Living Crisis) it has successfully promoted the region's artists and makers at home and overseas.

The free-to-enter *Decade* exhibition, at the Kirkcudbright Galleries (18 January to 9 March), will be a chance to see pieces by 45 artists and makers highlighting the extraordinary breadth of talent within Upland's membership.

Decade will span painting, sculpture, ceramics, film and more.

Founded in 2015, the visual art and craft development organisation runs a year-round creative programme featuring exhibitions, residencies and events including Spring Fling, Scotland's leading open studios weekend.

These initiatives have raised the profile of the creative community in one of Scotland's most rural regions.

Indeed, Upland and Spring Fling are recognised as playing an invaluable role in the lives of many artists and makers.

Gyllian Thomson, a tapestry maker, said: *"Upland has been pivotal to me. I am so grateful we have an organisation that works on behalf of us all."*

"Spring Fling put me in the centre of the artists' community and enabled me to be part of something wonderful."

"It is the biggest and best part of my year opening up my studio and meeting people who really appreciate what I do. We are lucky to have Upland and Spring Fling in our amazing region."

Upland plays a determined part in harnessing the power of the arts to shape and enhance communities and address environmental issues, such as threats to wildlife, and encourage sustainability.

Cat Coulson, painter, said: *"My work explores biodiverse habitats and nature reserves across Dumfries and Galloway."*

"Upland encourages exploratory, non-commercial and unique work, where the process of creating is valued."

"And through Spring Fling they provide an essential space for public engagement. Upland has supported my creative and professional development."

"By connecting with other Upland members, at events, peer crit groups and workshops, I have gained friendships, support and resources."

Upland has striven to nurture talent, preserve endangered crafts, create inspirational public art and showcase the region's artists and makers at home and abroad.

Frances Ross, a ceramicist, said: *"Upland is an intrinsic part of the arts ecosystem of the region and is central to my practice taking root here."*

"Through Upland I've connected with makers across the region and had the opportunity to work with talented people in many disciplines. In this region brimming with creative talent, the work of Upland lifts us all."

Each *Decade* exhibition piece will reflect the shared journeys, creative growth, and meaningful relationships that define Upland.

Natasha Kinsella, Upland's Events and Exhibitions Development Manager, said: *"In the face of a fragile funding environment and the uncertainty that lies ahead, this moment allows us to spotlight and celebrate the incredible artists and makers we have in the region."*

"It's a testament to the resilience of our creative community and the vital role Upland has played in nurturing it over the past decade."

Amy Marletta, who has been part of Upland from the start and is now its Creative Director, added: *"What has allowed Upland to become such a driving force in the arts is that it's deeply rooted in the landscapes and communities of Dumfries and Galloway."*

"Decade is more than just an exhibition, it's a recognition of 10 years of creativity, collaboration, and connection. It's a milestone I'm proud and delighted to celebrate."

The artists and makers

The exhibition features ceramics by Andy Priestman, Archie McCall, Doug Fitch, Frances Ross, Heather Armstrong, and Ruth Elizabeth Jones.

There is mixed media work by Denise Zygadlo, Helen Walsh, Alison Corfield, Anne Waggot-Knott, Linda Mallett, Rory Laycock, and Silvy Weatherall plus furniture design by Daniel Lacey and Ian Cameron-Smith.

Visitors can see glass by Katy Quinn, hand-stitched creations by Elizabeth Stephenson, and jewellery by Lisa Rothwell-Young.

There are mobiles by Jay Rubinstein, mosaics by Kate Anderson, and a rich variety of paintings, photography, and prints from Upland members including Alexander Robb, Briony Anderson, David Quinn, Hazel Campbell, Colin Blanchard, and many more.

- See the Kirkcudbright Galleries website at kirkcudbrightgalleries.org.uk.

Some Upland initiatives

Spring Fling – Run by Upland since 2015, [Spring Fling](#) is one of the UK's most successful visual art and craft events. In its first 21 years, Spring Fling attracted over 174,000 visitors who made 546,000 studio visits. Over £10.2m of art and craft was bought and the event has brought over £17.5m to the local economy. This year it will feature more than 80 studios and takes place from 24-26 May.

Emerge – each year Upland provides bursaries and mentorship from established artists to two emerging artists and makers with strong connections to the region.

Rural Mural – A series of collaborations between Upland and Recoat involving locally-based artists and national and international street artists, creating bright and spectacular temporary murals on the walls of everything from barns to boat sheds.

Artful Migration – A series of artists' residencies and commissions (delivered in partnership with Moving Souls Dance) exploring the threats facing birds that migrate from around the world to Dumfries and Galloway.

Upland made: A winter contemporary art and craft sale organised ahead of Christmas giving people the chance to buy unusual, hand-crafted gifts created by local artists and makers.

Exhibitions – Upland has taken work by the region's artists to galleries across the UK. It has also organised exhibitions in more unusual settings, such as *Kilsture Roaming*, which took place in the middle of Kilsture Forest.

Modern Makers – From 2017 Upland brought together small groups of enthusiastic young people to learn craft skills. These included everything from woodwork and ecological building techniques to costume design, clog making, slipware pottery and glassmaking.