

THE  
**DOCK**

**Anna Macleod**

Tír Breac /

Speckled Land



Image: Half lone hawthorn tree from the townland of Shancarraig, Co. Leitrim, the living part of the *Alltar* sculpture, with artist Reiko Goto, 2023.

## Introduction

*Tír Breac / Speckled Land* is the latest iteration of an ongoing project that considers our human relationship to nature and place through 'speckled ways of seeing', defined as a Celtic perceptual attentiveness to the seen, heard, and felt granular details of a place. 'Speckled ways of seeing' implicates the lens of indigenous knowledge passed down through oral histories and ritual landscapes, which this work combines with organic materials and heritage craft practices to critique modern knowledge of land and nature.

The Gaelic culture of Ireland and Scotland sought to understand nature, through the solar and lunar cosmologies of the Neolithic standing stone and henge sites, and by mapping the mysteries of place through the Dindsenchas and other epic mythological cycles. *Tír Breac* refers to these ancient cosmologies through its attention to the calendrical festivals that mark the changing seasons in the agricultural cycle: Samhain, Imbolc, Bealtaine, and Lughnasadh. Speckled ways of seeing involve an intimate understanding of the land through the seasons, as light, pattern, and colour constantly shift by the minute, the hour, and the season.

Moreover, speckled ways of seeing entail a sensitivity to a world inhabited by Others. In Celtic folklore and mythology, flora and fauna have shapeshifting qualities. A salmon can give wisdom to the person who eats its flesh. The wind has colours. The bark, fruit, and leaves of trees can heal or harm. Gods and goddesses rule the light and the dark. These other-than-human entities can appear in liminal spaces and the thresholds of seasons.

This series of works explores speckled seeing by employing organic materials and heritage land practices to 'trouble' contemporary understanding of nature. The following materials were predominantly sourced in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland and the Northwest of Ireland: hay and straw, found bog oak, hawthorn from fallen lone trees (hUath/ Sceath Gheal), and blackthorn wood thinned from the hedgerow (Draighneán Donn). Research has drawn extensively on archives and artifacts in local and national museums in Ireland and Scotland. Groundwork also included time spent with local historians, musicians, storytellers, crofters, and Harris tweed weavers, as well as with Leitrim farmer, storyteller, and writer Gerry Bohan, with whom the artist has an ongoing working partnership.

## Events

**7 March:** Opening reception with performance by Pádraig McGovern, 2–4pm. No booking required.

**21 March:** Guided tour with Anna Macleod, 11am–12pm. No booking required.

**25 April:** Anna Macleod and Gerry Bohan in conversation with Mary Conlon, 11am–12pm. Booking required.

**16 May:** Uisce Sionainn / Flora Liatromensis, performative walking event, 11am–1pm. Booking required.

The Uisce / Flora series of river walks was developed by Anna Macleod and textile designer Katie May Anderson as a transferable model for performative community river walking to celebrate the transformative power of water. The event will include talks by guest speakers on ethnobotany and river regeneration, and a zine with an essay by Dr. Phillina Sun.

## About the zine

A zine will accompany the exhibition *Tír Breac / Speckled Land* from 16 May, consisting of an illustrated essay by Dr. Phillina Sun on *Uisce Lite / Flora Edinensis*, a project by Anna Macleod which emerged from research, collaboration, and art-making focused on The Water of Leith. The river travels for 22 miles from source to sea, from upland grassland and heathland, past wetland reservoir habitats, through agricultural grassland and forestry, into urban riparian woodland in Edinburgh where its banks host wildflowers and patches of ancient woodland. To trace a river's life is to trace the links between the river and the human and non-human communities along its banks. Over the course of two years, Macleod researched the river's plant and animal life, exploring archives and consulting historians and scientists.

The essay examines the social values underpinning the project, which revolve around an awareness of the cultural and historical significance of riparian flora. Research drew on scientific studies of the caddisfly, nineteenth-century teaching diagrams by John Hutton Balfour, studies of specimens at the Royal Botanical Garden in Edinburgh, and natural dyeing techniques.

Talks in relation to the project examined the plant communities along the river, ranging from their resilience and adaptability, to their medicinal and dyeing properties, to their presence in Scottish folklore. Underlying the project is an interest in the utopian potential of education, whether through scientific diagrams or herbarium collections or folklore, to teach us how to live harmoniously with rivers.

From her research, Macleod created several mobile textile and metal sculptures that drew on riparian lifeforms: a banner, a large textile seed-pod, and staffs in the form of caddisfly cases (exhibited in Gallery 3). The sculptures were used as ceremonial objects for a performative art walk. Sun's essay surveys the craftwork, materials, imagery, and knowledge used to create these objects. The essay also considers how the art walk takes on the form of the procession, an ancient ritual in which a community expresses its spiritual values through intentional walking. The art walk, combined with the objects, celebrated the river's recovery and renewal. As the procession wound along the river, it carved a mythic space in time, in which the river is a living spirit to be revered as a being that has shaped human and non-human life for millennia.

For further information, visit [www.thedock.ie](http://www.thedock.ie).

*The titles of the artworks appear in either Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and/or English.  
Clockwise from entrance.*

## **List of Works — Gallery Two**

### **1. Tìr Breac Tìm is Uisge /**

#### **A Speckled Land of Time and Water**

*(2022) Three archival pigment prints on Hahnemühle fine art fibre-based matt paper. Handmade American walnut frames.*

Images taken in Uig, Isle of Lewis, during research for the 'An Lanntair' residency, 2021/22.

Pabaidh Mòr island cave with mineral deposits on gneiss, accessible only by boat. The Tooth Well at Riof is a traditional site of healing where water is collected for tooth-related problems.

Mangursthadh beach showing the confluence of seawater and fresh bog water.

### **2. Spioraid Gealaí / Moon Spirits (Samhain)**

*(2022) 19 pearlized glazed bowls, blackthorn twigs (Draighneán Donn), steel frame, sand.*

Clay from Co. Leitrim; blackthorn twigs from the townland of Buckhill Barr, Co. Leitrim; sand from Riof and Bearnaraidh Bheag, Uig, Isle of Lewis.

### **3. Grian / Bláthscaoileadh (Lughnasadh)**

*(2026) Hay rope, encaustic paint with red ochre pigment, steel banding.*

Hay grown on Gerry Bohan's farm in the townland of Aughadrumcairn, Co. Leitrim; beeswax from Cork; damar resin from Istanbul; Sennelier red ochre earth pigment.

### **4. Alltar (Imbolc)**

*(2026) hUath (hawthorn), bog oak, encaustic paint with earth pigments, steel rod. Uilleann pipe composition by Pádraig McGovern.*

Fallen lone hawthorn half tree from the townland of Shancarraig, Co. Leitrim, found in 2021; bog oak from Crossdrumman bog, Co. Leitrim. Commissioned uilleann pipe composition and recording by Pádraig McGovern.

### **5. Céad agus a hOcht Rún / One Hundred and Eight Intentions**

*(2026) 108 forms carved from a single trunk. Sisal string, flax from Germany.*

Bog oak tree trunk from Crossdrumman Bog, Co. Leitrim, found in 2021 while walking the land in South Leitrim with Gerry Bohan.

## List of Works — Gallery Three

### **6. Cailleach Bhealtaine**

*(2022) Hay rope, copper banding,  
Draighneán Donn.*

A transformative Cailleach in Bealtaine form. Hay grown on Gerry Bohan's farm in the townland of Aughadrumcarn, Co. Leitrim; blackthorn twigs from the townland of Buckhill Barr, Co. Leitrim.

### **7. Claochlú / Becoming**

*(2026) Flax, burlled oak with bog oak.*

150 metre ball of handmade string made from bog oak dyed flax, material for future forms.

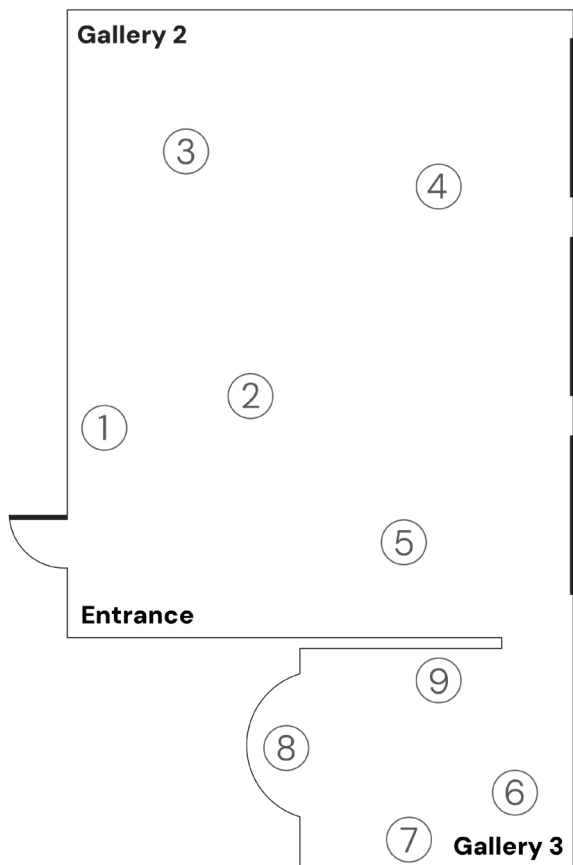
### **8. Caddisfly Staffs**

*(2024) Seven cast aluminium sculptures based on Caddisfly nymph cases (order Trichoptera) will be activated during Uisce Sionainn / Flora Liatromensis performative walking event in May.*

### **9. Slánú / Calf Birth**

*(2026) Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle fine art fibre based matt paper. Handmade frame, American oak with Irish bog oak inserts.*

Photograph taken at Gerry Bohan's farm in the townland of Aughadrumcairn, Co. Leitrim, 23 March 2021. The tradition of placing 'the clainings' from the birth of a calf are documented in Gerry's 2023 publication, *'The Clainings Tree'*.



## Biographies

**Anna Macleod** is a Scottish-Irish visual artist, researcher, and educator based in the Northwest of Ireland. Her work mediates complex ideas associated with contemporary, historical, and cultural understandings of land and water through a variety of visual art media. She has been awarded the International Atlantic Artist Residency Exchange in Newfoundland with CRUX and Artlink in 2026.

Anna has exhibited extensively in Ireland and internationally since the 1990s. Recent awards and residencies (2021–2024) include Centre Culturel Irlandais, France; Reach Scotland Residency Award, Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop, Scotland; International Artist Residency Award at Pasaj in Istanbul, Turkey, and at Interface in Connemara, Ireland.

Anna received the Platform 31 Award from the Association of Local Authority Arts Offices in 2021. She was awarded the Visual Arts Bursary Award (2021) and Agility Award (2023) from the Arts Council of Ireland, and the Individual Artist Bursary (2025, 2026) from Leitrim County Council. Anna Macleod was an invited artist to the 194th RHA Annual Exhibition in 2024, receiving the ESB Moran Award for an Outstanding Sculpture.

**Pádraig McGovern** is an uilleann piper, composer and teacher from the Cavan–Leitrim border, now based in Co Monaghan.

He has recorded and played with many artists and bands including Lúnasa, Dervish, Téada, Gatehouse, Steve Cooney, Dónal Lunney and Ryan Molloy. He has worked as a researcher/performer on many projects including 'The Leitrim Equation 4' and 'The Pipes, The Pipes', a show devised by Dónal Dineen and produced by Siobhán O' Malley. His compositions have been recorded by many traditional artists including Angelina Carberry, Eoin O'Riabhaigh, and Garadice.

Pádraig has taught many pipers over the years and continues to teach at many recognised festivals such as The Joe Mooney Summer School, Scoil Acla and the PJ Flood Piping Festival in Belturbet.

An uilleann pipe composition from composer Pádraig McGovern was commissioned for the hUath sculptural work, *Alltar*. The composition will be performed live by Pádraig McGovern at the opening reception and a recording of the piece played once a day throughout the run of the exhibition.

**Gerry Bohan** is a traditional farmer and storyteller and farms a 40 acre farm in the townland of Aughadrumcarn near Mohill, Co. Leitrim.

In 2023, Gerry published his first book, *The Clainings Tree and Other Stories from the Heart of Leitrim*, a collection of eight short stories ([www.gerrybohan.com](http://www.gerrybohan.com)) four of which were commissioned by Anna Macleod as part of a year-long collaboration throughout 2021, exploring time and heritage based farming practices in the Celtic calendar. *Behind the Wall*, a short story from *The Clainings Tree* collection, was awarded the 2024 MJ McManus Award.

Gerry was selected for the Farm Walks partnership residencies 2025, and has collaborated with researcher and traditional singer Fionnuala Maxwell exploring the cures and superstitions, legends and songs associated with cattle lore in Co. Leitrim funded through an Agility Award from the Arts Council of Ireland. Gerry is currently working on a novel.

**Katie May Anderson** is a freelance textile artist and designer based in Glasgow, Scotland. Katie works on various community arts projects across the UK, primarily in the heritage sector. Throughout all her work, collaboration and

co-production are crucial, with participants empowered to engage in creative and collaborative expression, building connections and skills development. She has worked in numerous heritage sites in Scotland including Stirling Castle, Castle House Museum, and co-ordinated the Charabancs and Cadillacs project, a community quilt for Community Transport Newham. In 2025 she worked with communities on a textile banner for the 'Grace' project at Stirling Castle and a textile map for the Edinburgh Deaf Festival.

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