

An extensively illustrated bilingual publication with a foreword by Fiona Bradley, essays by Johnny Gailey, The Fruitmarket Gallery's Children and Young People's Programme Manager, a conversation between the artist Julie Brook and Johnny Gailey, and poetry written by the children accompanies the exhibition and is available from the Gallery bookshop priced £12.95.

**For full details** of the programme of talks, events and workshops, pick up a leaflet.

This exhibition will also show at  
**Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Skye** 5 June – 25 July 2010

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# Air Iomlaid

**Exhibition** 10 April – 9 May 2010

Mon–Sat 11am–6pm, Sun 12–5pm

*Air Iomlaid* (pronounced *air im-lich*) is Gaelic for 'on exchange' and is the name of an ambitious education project in which pupils from Bun-sgoil Shlèite, Skye and the Gaelic medium unit at Tollcross Primary School, Edinburgh, were led by artist Julie Brook and a team of supporting artists in an intensive process of art tuition. The project was conducted in Gaelic, the language in which pupils at both schools are taught. The results of the project are on display here: sketchbooks, worked-up drawings and paintings, and large-scale artworks capture moments in the project's process, which started with individual sketches made outside, and led on to complex, reworked collaborative compositions. The works on display cover a lot of time and a lot of ground.

The  
Fruitmarket  
Gallery

Project partners Lasair Ealain, Edinburgh Napier University  
and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig

/  
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Julie and a team of professional artists worked with pupils from Skye (P4–P7, with some P1–P3 pupils) and Edinburgh (P6–P7) over an eighteen-month period. In the summer term of 2009, they took the children out every week, teaching them to draw and paint outside. In the autumn, the children took part in two week-long exchanges, visiting and hosting children from their partner school and learning to engage with an unfamiliar landscape through drawing and painting. The exchanges were the most intense parts of the project, and were the points at which the development of the children’s drawing skills was most marked. In early 2010, they started work inside on collaborative large-scale drawings of their own environment and the one they had visited on exchange, as well as working with poets and film-makers to broaden their range of artistic responses.

Tuition took place in stages. First, Julie and the other artists encouraged the children to gain a better understanding of form and space by working in pencil and charcoal to depict tone and texture. The children then moved on to paint to learn about colour: how colours work in relation to each other, as cool and warm, light and dark, how undercolours create depth and richness, and how this understanding underpins a more expressive realisation of form. Julie describes this teaching method as a process of ‘getting fit’ artistically.

The sketchbooks represent the heart of the project. The children drew and painted in these outside, in the urban and rural landscapes of Edinburgh and Skye, learning to look at the landscape in unconventional ways, and gradually gaining the confidence to produce complex compositions. Over time they developed different ways of responding to their environment, in their own styles, some children choosing to focus in on a specific part of the landscape, and others tending to capture a broader expanse of land and sky.

After drawing and painting in sketchbooks outside (regardless of weather conditions), the children then scaled up their work to larger compositions either on site or inside. Sometimes it was difficult for the children to achieve the same level of spontaneity achieved in the sketchbooks, at other times the increase in scale gave the children a chance to retain all the richness of the directly observed work combined with the freedom of their own individual expression. At the end of each day everyone came together to discuss the work, and the children could choose a drawing and explain why they liked it. This was an important time for them to learn from each other and become more confident in speaking about their work.

Having developed their own individual works over a substantial period of time, the children then had the opportunity to work on a much larger scale. First came four large-scale charcoal drawings, in which each group of children drew a version of their own environment and the one they had visited. Julie and the team of artists went through the children’s sketchbooks, selecting elements from this rich source material to structure four monumental compositions of the landscapes of Edinburgh and Skye. Each collaborative work is composed differently, presenting a particular approach to the landscapes of Skye and Edinburgh. The children drew their own landscape in a markedly different way from one they had visited for a relatively short period of time.

The charcoal drawings are in many ways the culmination of *Air Iomlaid*. They nevertheless do not represent the end of the children’s artistic investigations, or the project. In the later stages the children worked with poets, animators and film-makers, to explore further their engagement with landscape, finding that animation in particular is an effective way to express the experience of drawing and painting outside in changing light and weather conditions.

Julie describes the process of learning to draw as ‘really concentrating, along with a combination of the way you observe something, and the way you use your hands, your head, your heart (...) everything comes together in an expression of what is going on inside you as well as what you are looking at.’ The Fruitmarket Gallery has been delighted to work with Julie, and to see the effectiveness of her approach in engaging children with the practice of drawing. *Air Iomlaid* is an ambitious project that enacts The Fruitmarket Gallery’s commitment to education in practice and policy. The Gallery’s wider education programme offers children and young people the opportunity to learn through active, experiential learning processes by participating in activities that augment schools’ delivery of the curriculum. Central to the Gallery’s commitment is the belief that understanding comes through doing as much as through listening, and that memorable, interactive experiences lead to effective learning. *Air Iomlaid* is an emphatic demonstration of this belief in action.