

THE MAJESTIC BEAUTY OF CLAN MACNACHTAN LANDS

(AS INTERPRETED BY SCOTLAND'S BEST ARTISTS OVER FOUR CENTURIES)

By James Macnaughton

Living as we do in the digital age of the 21st century, we are wont to take it very much for granted that there are many thousands of stunning photographs of our Scottish Clan Lands available for us to admire. However, we tend to forget that the camera was only invented in the closing years of the 19th. century, around 130 years ago. Prior to that, over many thousands of years, mankind had to laboriously draw pictures on stone, vellum, wood or paper, and landscapes were not of any interest, because depicting animals or other people or buildings was much more important. The landscapes were always there, as a permanent background to people's lives. Of course, the big difference between photographs and paintings is that the latter allow much more scope for the artist to imbue them with his/her own interpretation of the subject matter, thus creating something much more atmospheric and sometimes almost magical.



LOCH GARRY - BY ALEXANDER NASMYTH.

In the late 18th century several artists were born who provide an introduction to my theme. Two of these were portrait artists – Sir Henry Raeburn and Allan Ramsay – who had a big influence on the first of my chosen landscape artists – Alexander Nasmyth (1758-1840). They all lived in

Edinburgh and both Ramsay and Raeburn took Nasmyth under their wing and helped him with his start as a portrait artist like themselves. Then Nasmyth had the opportunity of travelling to Italy, where he spent two years, and began to develop an interest in landscape painting. On his return to Scotland he gave up portrait painting altogether and became a successful landscape artist. He was employed by members of the Scottish nobility in improving their estates, and this provided the opportunity for depicting the beautiful landscapes involved. His painting of Loch Garry, just West of the Great Glen, shows his skill in creating a very moody reproduction of that isolated Highland loch, cradled between the majestic peaks of Inverness-shire.



GLENCOE - BY HORATIO McCULLOCH.

The second of my chosen artists is Horatio McCulloch (1805-1867), who started his career by painting the ornamental lids of snuff boxes and illustrations for a book of British birds. However, influenced by Alexander Nasmyth, he changed to landscape painting and often visited the Western Highlands to paint from a close study of

nature. His aim, he said, was to “paint the silence of the Highland wilderness where the wild deer roam”, and he soon became the best known and most successful landscape painter in Scotland. He portrayed the Scottish Highlands with all their romance and dramatic grandeur in paintings which live long in one’s memory.

HIGHLAND STAG - BY HORATIO McCULLOCH.

Interest in the Highlands had been aroused by the writings of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), whose popular historical novels like - *The Lord of the Isles*, *Rob Roy*, *Quentin Durward*, *The Fair Maid of Perth* – brought the Highlands vividly to life, and, particularly after the visit of King George IV to



Scotland in 1822, encouraged people to travel North to experience the magnificent scenery of the Highlands for themselves. The interest of these travellers, and of the wealthy landowners, created

a market for more Highland landscapes, and another skilled artist of that period was Peter Graham (1836-1921). Like Horatio McCulloch, his paintings portray the ever-changing Highland climate, and he succeeds in depicting the awe-inspiring magnificence of the scenery.

A contemporary of Graham, William McTaggart RSA (1835-1910), was the son of a crofter born



on the Mull of Kintyre. He studied in Edinburgh, and his early works are mainly figure paintings, often of children. Later he turned to landscapes and particularly seascapes inspired by his childhood love of the sea and of the rugged Atlantic coast of his birth. He was fascinated with nature and the transient effects of light on water. He is regarded as one of the great interpreters of the Scottish landscape with a style similar to the Impressionists.

THE SPATE - BY PETER GRAHAM.



HIGHLAND SCENE - BY PETER GRAHAM.



**SEASCAPE – BY
WILLIAM
McTAGGART RSA.**

Quite a contrast with the much deeper range of colours used by Peter Graham and Horatio McCulloch, giving McTaggart's painting a totally different atmosphere.

**LANDSCAPE - BY
WILLIAM McTAGGART
RSA.**

Many of the Highland landscape paintings were commissioned by wealthy estate owners, and my next artist was himself a Scottish laird, with a family estate at Finzean in Aberdeenshire - Joseph Farquharson (1846-1935). He studied under Peter Graham, already mentioned, who became a close friend and had



considerable influence on him as an artist. His works were inspired by his rural surroundings and he is most famous for those portraying sheep, often in snowy scenes, and usually including the men and women of Scotland going about their everyday labours. He was very skilful at capturing the delicate light of sunrise and twilight. To enable him to work in the open, given the harsh Scottish climate, he constructed a painting hut on wheels, complete with a stove and a large glass

window for observing the landscape. He painted so many scenes of sheep in snow that he was dubbed “Frozen Mutton Farquharson”.



We are fortunate enough to have an etching of this wonderful painting among our family heirlooms, and it, along with an etching of Peter Graham’s “Spate”, were instrumental in inspiring me to research this article.

**THE SHORTENING
WINTER DAY
DRAWS TO A
CLOSE - BY JOSEPH
FARQUHARSON.**

Moving on to the late 19th. and early 20th centuries, our next chosen artist is John Duncan Fergusson (1874-1961), one of the famous “Scottish Colourists” school of painting along with Samuel Peploe and Frances Cadell. He studied in Paris and mingled with artists such as Matisse and Picasso. His sense of colour was exceptional and his paintings embodied his immense love of life. He moved to Glasgow at the threat of War in 1939 and founded the new Art Club there. In 1992 a permanent gallery was founded in Perth to house his popular works. His painting “Looking over Killiecrankie” illustrates very clearly his love of vibrant colour, and is quite different in atmosphere to those of earlier Scottish artists



HIGHLAND SCENE - BY PETER GRAHAM.



LOOKING OVER KILLIECRANKIE - BY JOHN DUNCAN FERGUSSON.



Samuel Peploe (1871-1935) was a friend of Fergusson as mentioned, and the two of them went on painting trips to Northern France and to the Hebrides. Like Fergusson, he was inspired by bright sunlight, and experimented with bold use of colour. The influence of the rustic realism of French painters shows clearly in his landscapes, many of which depicted sea shore views, particularly on his beloved island of Iona, where he spent several summers. His works achieve high prices at auction.

GREEN SEA, IONA - BY SAMUEL PEPLOE.

Moving on chronologically, one of my own favourite Scottish artists is James McIntosh Patrick RSW (1907-1998). He studied at Glasgow School of Art and in Paris, and became famous as a highly skilled landscape painter, who really brought the Scottish countryside to life in his watercolour and oil paintings. There are meticulously detailed, and by incorporating lanes, roads or waterways they lead the viewer into the picture- as for example in his:-



SHEEP FARM ON THE BRAES OF BREADALBANE - BY JAMES McINTOSH PATRICK.

McIntosh Patrick lived and painted mostly in his native Angus, but my next choice of artist, Joseph Maxwell RSW (1925-2915), lived for the latter part of his adult life at a farm near my own home village of Aberfeldy in Perthshire, and my wife and I were friends of Joe and his family. A real larger than life character, he first trained as a cartographer and joined the RAF in 1943 flying in De Havilland Mosquitoes on photographic reconnaissance missions. These provided aerial photo evidence before and after bombing raids. He always had a great sense of the ridiculous and developed a reputation as an accomplished cartoonist, providing witty drawings for an RAF magazine. After the War he studied at the Sir John Cass Art School in London and then at Edinburgh College of Art. Teaching art at various Edinburgh schools followed, and, after marrying his second wife Christine, they moved to Dundee where he headed the College of Education Art Department.

His landscapes, carefully composed, have a clarity of line and of detail which he attributed to his earlier cartographical work in the RAF. His reputation grew, and he was one of a very select number of British artists invited to exhibit at the Louvre in Paris. Joe had a pilot's licence,

enjoyed paragliding in Switzerland and snorkelling in the Red Sea, so he lived life to the full!
We miss his dry sense of humour!



PERTSHIRE LANDSCAPE - BY JOSEPH MAXWELL RSW.

My final choice of artist is a young Scot – Keith Brockie (1955 - present), who reveals the Scottish countryside in a very different way to all the previous artists, by concentrating on the fauna and flora of the Tay valley. These he has portrayed beautifully in a book called “The Silvery Tay”, which pictures the birds, animals and flowers from the source of the Tay all the way down through Perthshire to its estuary in Angus by Dundee. For him small is beautiful and he dissects the landscape to show flowers on a rocky ledge, birds nesting in the trees or diving in the river or salmon leaping up over the falls, and they are all so accurately drawn that they seem to be alive on the page.



THREE COLLIES - BY KEITH BROCKIE.

As someone who was born and brought up in Aberfeldy in Highland Perthshire on the banks of the Tay, Brockie’s magical depiction of the local wildlife moves my heart. Our Clan Bird – the Curlew – features on page 129, bathing in the Tay Estuary at Tayport, and the splashing water jumps off the page at you! Keith lives with his wife Hazel at Fearnan on Loch Tay where he has a studio and gallery and they are well worth a visit.

SOURCES:

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Highland Scene by Peter Graham – paintingandframe.com
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The Shortening Winter's Day by Joseph Farquharson - Text Wikipedia, picture kingandmacgaw.com
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Three Colliers by Keith Brockie - Text and picture from his book “The Silvery Tay”.