

THE ORCADIAN

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REVIEW

Skeleton Stories

■ Vivid geometry of anatomy catches viewers' gaze at Pier Arts Centre

By Cal Flyn

BRANDON LOGAN is surely Orkney's most exciting emerging artist.

His solo show *Skeleton Stories*, on view on the ground floor of the Pier Arts Centre until November 11, is the product of an intense period of concentration during the spring and summer of 2023, and offers an excellent introduction to his unusual and immediately recognisable approach.

The show features 45 new works: what Logan calls "paintings", but which have the appearance of tapestries and vary in size from six-foot spreads to petite oblongs the size and weight of a paperback book.

To make them, Logan first creates a many-stranded warp of household string, pulled straight and taut and even. Acrylic paint is then poured, daubed, or brushed onto the threads: brightly pigmented liquid that soon solidifies, creating a structure strong enough to be cut from its frame and hung from the wall. They are, as Logan comments in the exhibition notes, "string skeletons to which colour — the flesh of life — clings".

Gallery regulars may already be familiar with Logan's *Salt Pig*, which entered the gallery's permanent collection in 2021: it is a striking, minimalist creation in which horizontal stripes of clay-coloured pigment support a lattice of pale string, and whose muted palette and enigmatic nature recalls the work of Agnes Martin.

His newest creations include bold experiments in vivid colour and geometric designs — as in *Ribcage*, a huge and

intricate work in which repeating motifs have been surgically excised from the fretwork, and *Better Done*, where careful H-shaped carvings march towards the centre before fading out, leaving half-cut tails drooping forwards out of frame.

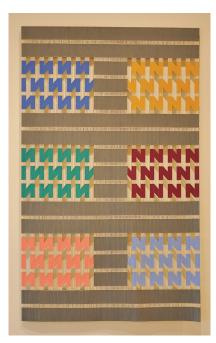
Close examination of these paintings is rewarded with tantalising insights into the process: in *Vermillion Verso*, pocked and textured blocks of arterial-red give way to reveal a veinal blue oozing in from behind.

In *Myositis* and smaller works from the same family, structural floodings of flat colour are overworked with brushstrokes in clashing tones.

One of the largest pieces, *The Creature*, is a striped mat of dull gold and an odd, almost luminous lavender. The contrast plays uncomfortably with the eyes; is it blue and black, I find myself wondering, or white and gold?

The gallery's back room features a sequence of small, equally proportioned works known as the *Kisses* — each painting couples two colours, half and half: purple and red, pale pink and buff, burgundy and pickle-green.

Logan has previously remarked on the "gestural quality" of their simplicity —the intimacy of colours brushing up together like this — despite the works' long and somewhat arduous method of creation. Logan's unusual, labour-intensive mode of working sets up a strange conflict: the loving imperfection of handmade craft repurposed to create these gridded, systematic designs.



Ribcage by Brandon Logan.

It's a strangely affecting practice, and the young Orcadian's work has already attracted significant attention — he was named Emerging Scottish Artist of the Year in 2020, and won the Royal Scottish Academy's Carnegie Scholarship and the Maclaine Watters Medal that same year.

He has previously shown solo exhibitions at Hawick's Zembla Gallery at the Ingleby Gallery in Edinburgh, which continues to represent his work.

The current show at the Pier Art Centre represents a welcome opportunity for Orkney residents to appreciate Logan's work on home turf — a fitting venue to showcase new work produced at Wasps Studios, in the old Stromness library—and, one suspects, to invest in a work by an artist with a bright, bright future ahead of him.