

Background and Context

Though the often repeated story of local folklore that sandstone was transported as ballast from the port of Annan to form part of the base of the Statue of Liberty has been laid to rest, the reality is much more interesting, revealing important links between Dumfriesshire and New York.

With the expansion in the 1850's of the Cumbrian ports of Silloth, Maryport and Whitehaven and the development subsequently of the rail- way links, large amounts of sandstone were transported from Annan's Corsehill quarry to New York. Records show that during that period Corsehill quarry alone shipped an average of 250 tons per week to New York.

Corsehill sandstone was particularly prized, as when first quarried it is soft and was found to be easily carved. But upon exposure to the air, it hardens slowly and feels like polished wood when rubbed down. This New Red Triassic stone was used for fine details in the brownstones in New York City and then extensively in the construction of the New York State Capitol in Albany, started in 1868 and completed in 1896...

The Million Dollar Staircase

In Albany, the state capitol of New York, the grand Great Western Staircase, also known as the Million Dollar Staircase due to its eventual cost, was begun. Designed by Henry Hobson Richardson and built by Isaac Perry, the staircase contains 444 steps and reaches a height of 119 feet high. It is renowned as an outstanding example of architectural stone carving excellence.

Made of sandstone from Corsehill, the massive staircase is most notably known for the intricate carvings that decorate the stairs. Over 500 stone cutters and carvers were employed at various times. Many had mastered their trade here in Scotland, stone carvers from Lochmaben Creca and Brydekirk, all in the Corsehill area worked there. Using only ladders and scaffolding, often in very uncomfortable positions, these stone artists spent years, at a salary of five dollars a day, sculpting some of the finest stonework found anywhere in the world. Their main task was carving portraits of various prominent people into the stone, as ordered by chief architect Isaac Perry. Among the 77 famous faces beautifully carved are George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Walt Whitman and Susan B. Anthony.

With the famous Americans completed, Perry decided to allow his elite group of carvers to sculpt the faces of friends, relatives and people they knew. These are referred to as the Capitol's Unknowns and comprise over 400 portraits.

Surrounded by United States notables, we find these Dumfriesshire people inspiring and celebrate them, along with the artisans who carved them and the journeys that brought them from small rural Dumfriesshire villages across the Atlantic.

Biographies

Hugh Bryden is an artist, publisher and educator based in Dumfries and Galloway. His practice involves printmaking, painting, artist's books, teaching, publishing and creative writing. Bryden exhibits his work widely on a national and international scale. In 1999 he formed Cacafuego Press with writer Tom Pow, where they produced and researched artist books. In 2002, and 2012/3 he continued his research as a visiting lecturer at Rochester Institute of Technology in New York State. In 2005 Bryden began his own press, Roncadora, to allow him to make one-off, personalized artist's books, and poetry pamphlets. He has since exhibited at numerous Artists Book Fairs and has been shortlisted several times for the Callum Macdonald Memorial Award for Poetry publishing and the Michael Marks Award at the British Library. He won the Callum Macdonald Award in 2009, 2017 and 2021. Bryden has had numerous collaborative exhibitions and cross-arts events with craft-makers and musicians resulting in performances as well as publications. Along-side his art practice Bryden was committed to his career as an art educator for a continuous 30 years. The pandemic allowed him time to return to painting. His recent series is exhibited at Torrance Gallery Edinburgh and Whitehouse Gallery, Kirkcudbright. www.hughbryden.com

Maddy Rosenberg was born and is based in Brooklyn, New York, while maintaining an active international exhibition and curatorial career. Her studio work extends over a number of media, including oil painting, artist's books, printmaking, toy theater, animation and installation. Recent endeavors include a solo exhibition at Hudson Park Library in New York City, initiating their artist's book program, and at Galerie Hadorn in Switzerland that focused on her paintings. She was the American artist chosen for a joint Turkish/German project sponsored by the US Consulate in Munich that included an award winning two-person exhibition at the end of a month-long residency. In 2009, she founded CENTRAL BOOKING, an interdisciplinary curatorial project where she could focus on her interest in artist's books, art & science and social justice issues. The CENTRAL BOOKING project *Plant Cure* and *Plant Cure/Brooklyn* included Visual Artists in Residence and exhibitions at the New York Academy of Medicine and Brooklyn Botanic Garden, with grants from Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and the Brooklyn Arts Fund. Her international project *Technology and the Evolution of the Artist's Book* in Brighton, England, won "Best Exhibition, Fringe Festival 2016." She received a National Endowment for the Arts grant for *Dialogue*, a six-venue project in New York and Paris. Additional grants include Artist's Relief, Gottlieb Foundation and Artists Fellowship. Public collections include MoMA; Cooper Hewitt Museum; Brooklyn Museum; Fogg Museum; Yale University; Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art; Tate Gallery; Victoria and Albert Museum; British Library; and Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. Bibliography includes Hyperallergic; Art and Métiers; Haberarts; Art Review. Rosenberg earned a BFA from Cornell University and an MFA from Bard College. www.maddyrosenberg.net

Desirée Alvarez is a New York based poet and painter. Her work has received grants and awards from New York Foundation for the Arts, American Academy of Arts and Letters, Foundation for Contemporary Art, and European Capital of Culture. Her second book, *Raft of Flame*, 2020, received the Lake Merritt Poetry Prize from Omnidawn. *Devil's Paintbrush*, her first book, received the May Sarton New Hampshire Poetry Prize. Her work is anthologized in *Other Musics: New Latina Poets*(University of Oklahoma Press), *Stronger Than Fear: Poems of Empowerment, Compassion, and Social Justice* (Cave Moon Press), and *What Nature* (MIT Press). She received Prairie Schooner's Glenna Luschei Poetry Award and the Brooklyn Poets Whitman Bicentennial Award. Alvarez exhibits internationally and has recently participated in CENTRAL BOOKING research based projects with Brooklyn Botanic Garden and New-York Historical Society. Her poems are published in *The Iowa Review*, *Ecotone Magazine*, *Lit Hub*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Poetry Magazine*, *Fence*, *Boston Review*, and *Denver Quarterly*. Alvarez teaches at New York City College of Technology, CUNY and The Juilliard School.

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Hugh McMillan is a poet from Penpont in South West Scotland. His work has been published widely in Scotland and beyond, and he has won various prizes, most recently the Callum Macdonald Memorial Award in 2017 for *Sheep- Penned*, by Roncadora; he won the same award in 2009 for *Postcards from the Hedge*. His book '*McMillan's Galloway*' an unconventional tour round the heritage and history of Dumfries and Galloway was commissioned by Wigtown Book Festival and has been reprinted twice by Luath Press. *Not Actually Being in Dumfries: New and Selected poems* was published by Luath Press in 2015 as were in 2018 the poetry collections, *Heliopolis* and *Conversation of Sheep*, the latter in collaboration with a local shepherd. He has featured in many anthologies, and three times in Scottish Poetry Library's online selection Scottish Poems of the year. His poems have also been chosen three times to feature on National Poetry Day postcards, the latest in 2016. In 2017 he was writer in residence at the Harvard Summer School. In 2020 he was chosen as one of 4 'Poetry Champions' for Scotland, to seek out and commission new work. In 2021 he was chosen as the editor of 'Best Scottish Poems.'

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Ben Bryden is a transatlantic saxophonist and composer combining a lyrical sound with a memorably melodic approach to composition. Born in Scotland and based in New York since 2009, he has performed with a multitude of admired musicians from the jazz idiom, (Will Vinson, Ben Wendel, Eivind Opsvik, Chris Lightcap, Kenny Wollesen and the legendary Les Paul) and at many of the city's most loved venues (Cornelia Street Cafe, Zinc Bar, The Bar Next Door, Le Poisson Rouge, The Iridium). In Europe, he has collaborated closely with artists such as Steven Delannoye (Belgium), Phil Robson, Tim Thornton (UK) Reinier Baas and Mark Schilders (Netherlands), leading a number of groups and appearing at festivals and venues such as Ronnie Scotts, The Edinburgh Fringe, Glasgow Jazz Festival. He has released 4 records to date:

Bright Noise ("A fluidly lyrical band built around two-tenor interplay" Time Out New York), *1957 Flying Scot* ("The most delightful artifact" BBC Radio Scotland) and *GlasgowDreamer: The Music of Ivor Cutler* ("Intriguing and melodically engaging interpretations" Jim Gilchrist, The Scotsman). His fourth offering, on Circa Vision Productions: *Figure of Eight* a programmatic palindrome of musical wanderlust showing far flung and seemingly disparate ideas and influences feed back into one another to create a coherent and connected whole. A collection of original compositions and congruous covers, it represents the constant pull of place, like the ebb and flow of the Atlantic - from one home in Scotland to another in New York . It gained a five star review in Mojo magazine. www.benbryden.com

Rohin Khemani is a drummer, percussionist, composer, producer and educator based in New York City Known as an extremely versatile and eclectic musician, Rohin's sound can be heard on a wide variety of projects weaving through jazz, world music, rock folk, electronica and beyond. His principal instruments include drum set, table, and an extensive collection of percussion and found objects from around the world. Rohin was a founding member of Red Baraat and co-leads the band Surface to Air Trio with guitarist Jonathan Goldberger and bassist Jonti Siman. Most recently, Rohin has produced an EP for a collaborative project, The Lore Dogs, with songwriter D B Reilly. A full length album is currently in production. He has performed for audiences at some of the world's most prestigious concert halls and festivals including Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Centre in NYC, Sauti Za Busara in Zanzibar, Tanzania, Monterey Jazz Festival, London 2012 Olympics and Peter Gabriel's WOMAD Festivals in the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Rohin holds a Bachelor's degree from Berklee College of Music and a Masters degree from Manhattan School of Music. www.rohinkhemani.com