

Christine Borland: 'Maybe she's an alternative superhero!'

- [Susan Mansfield](#)
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Christine Borland, Spirit Collection: Hippocrates (detail), 1999 / credit: Ruth Clark



For this year's Edinburgh Art Festival, Christine Borland got green-fingered for her new painting, sculpture and digital work

During the warm spring of 2020, while the world was in lockdown, Christine Borland was growing flax. And not only Borland, but a small community of flax-growers around the country, keeping in

touch about their respective crops on social media. Now their harvest has been transformed into a sculpture for Borland's new exhibition at Inverleith House (now Climate House).

The community growing project was an unintended development of Borland's plan to grow flax at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh for *In Relation To Linum*, which was originally scheduled for summer 2020. When the pandemic closed the gardens and brought a year's postponement, she decided to enlist volunteers, each growing a square metre of the crop in their gardens and allotments. 'It did take on more of a significance in lockdown than if we had done it at any other time,' Borland says. 'It made me really consider the community that would have existed around the production and growing of flax when it was a subsistence crop, how we pass on knowledge and how, in times like our own, oral tradition turns into a different kind of oral tradition.'

Borland, whose work often engages with science, history, museums and archives, was drawn to flax during a research residency in Huntly with community arts organisation Deveron Projects. The crop – *Linum usitatissimum*, which is used to make linen – formed the backbone of this Aberdeenshire town's economy in the 18th and early 19th centuries, as it did for Borland's home town of Darvel in Ayrshire.

Although she could find little trace of the linen industry in Huntly today, she did discover a few who remembered when flax cultivation resumed during both world wars, and found enduring echoes of its importance in folklore and myth. She also realised it was the ideal subject for a show at Climate House, part of the Royal Botanic Gardens' 350th anniversary celebrations, as it was one of the crops grown for medicinal purposes in the original Physic Garden.



Christine Borland, *The Flax Sower Cloaked*

In Relation To Linum includes painting, sculpture and digital work. As well as exhibiting dried specimens from many of the flax growers, Borland has preserved samples of flax in alcohol (a traditional method of storing plant specimens) from each day of the crop's 100-day growth cycle. 'But I couldn't get alcohol, because all the spirits were being used for hand sanitiser, so the specimens are preserved in the most popular brand of vodka in my local shop!'

One of the largest works is a nine-screen digital film made using motion-capture technology more usually associated with superhero movies and video games. Imagining a future in which one woman is left with the knowledge of plant cultivation, Borland had a CGI artist capture her movements while planting, tending and watering the flax. 'She's not a superhero because she's doing things like clipping and watering and weeding; maybe she's an alternative superhero!'

After a year's delay, the unveiling of the show is 'exciting', but now Borland says she requires more time. 'I need another year or two to take the whole cycle from seed to cloth. I'll be starting on the next phase of spinning and weaving research soon.'

Christine Borland: *In Relation To Linum*, [Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh](#), Saturday 31 July–Sunday 3 October, 10.30am –4.30pm, free; advance booking required.

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the information displayed here is accurate, always check with the venue before attending (especially during the Covid-19 pandemic).

Christine Borland: In Relation to Linum

Christine Borland's new exhibition explores the lifecycle of flax (*Linum usitatissimum*), evolving RBGE's 350-year relationship with the plant.

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

Wed 29 Sep

Prices to be confirmed / 0131 248 2909

Part of Edinburgh Art Festival.

- [10:30](#)

Thu 30 Sep

Prices to be confirmed / 0131 248 2909

Part of Edinburgh Art Festival.

- [10:30](#)

Fri 1 Oct

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- [10:30](#)

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