

# City gallery owner goes her own way

Castle Gallery owner **Denise Collins** chooses personal preference over postcode when it comes to artwork



**Q** How would you describe your business?

**A** Probably one of the best galleries in Scotland (to paraphrase a famous lager advert) – I truly believe this, and this is what drives me forward. I have exacting standards, both in the way I display exhibitions and in the day-to-day running of the business. There is a strong aesthetic presence running through the work on display which reflects my personal preferences. I organise four or five solo



Castle Gallery owner, Denise Collins.

Picture: Callum Mackay

shows each year and this gives me the opportunity to promote more comprehensively those professional artists whose work I admire. The gallery is well known for its extensive collection of original prints. We show only handmade prints – no reproductions – and work closely with leading figures in the contemporary printmaking world. Our changing exhibitions include paintings, handmade prints, sculpture, designer jewellery and original crafts by artists from Scotland and throughout the UK.

**Q** What led you into the business?

**A** Luck! In 1996 I was offered the opportunity to purchase CCA Galleries in Cambridge as part of a management buy-out. This highly successful gallery provided funds to purchase premises in Inverness and to open the Castle Gallery in 2001. For a few years I ran both galleries until the long-distance commute became untenable and I decided to concentrate on a healthier lifestyle in the Highlands.

**Q** What makes Inverness a great place to run a business?

**A** The local people make Inverness a great place to do business. They are friendly and have time to stop and chat – a shout out here for our postie, Nikki. Also, to our long-standing

customers L.P., W.Y., H+J C., R+T T., and many others – you know who you are! Our customer base has changed in the last few years as Inverness grows as a tourist destination. Some of these visitors ask for work by 'local artists' but the Castle Gallery does not specialise in this area. We show work by some of the most respected artists in the UK and the pieces are chosen for their aesthetic quality and craftsmanship and not for the artist's postcode!

**Q** What is your greatest achievement?

**A** Personally – my two beautiful, happy daughters. Professionally – the loyalty of my key artists and staff. Rochelle and Juliette have worked for me for 15 and 20 years. I have worked with some artists for up to 30 years and many have become good friends such as Shazia Mahmood, who currently has a spectacular solo show in the gallery.

**Q** Who do you admire in business?

**A** Artists who manage to balance business necessities and the need to earn a living with their creative needs in a way that allows them to experiment

and push boundaries as true artists rather than pandering to the market. Here, I am thinking of Jonathan Shearer, Blandine Anderson, Veta Gorner and others. If you ask the question 'what job do you do?' it is marvellous they can say 'I am an artist'. Creative people make this world a more interesting and much better place.

**Q** What's your advice to budding entrepreneurs?

**A** Have courage in your convictions, think outside the box and don't fret over necessary business loans. Set budgets, monitor them and keep tight financial control. Calculated risk is a good thing!

**Q** Can you tell us more about yourself?

**A** I am an RAF brat and as I grew up my family lived in many countries but my father was born only 100 yards from my gallery in Inverness.

The Highlands are my home and I have embraced the culture and history of this incredible place, especially through learning Gaelic. I enjoy dog walking and puppies (a new addition to our household is due in June).

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