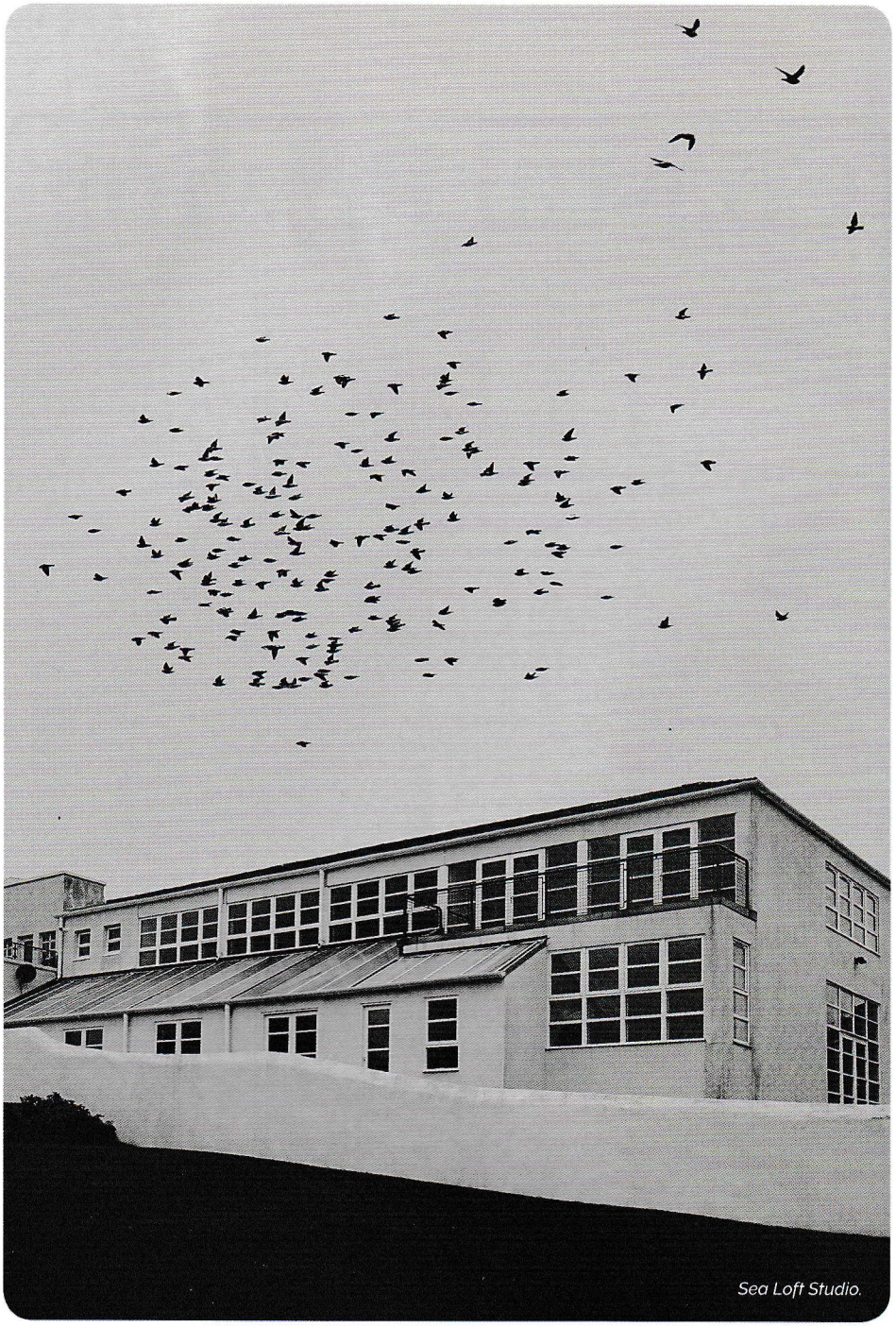
Sea Loft

By Catherine Wheaton


Sea Loft Studio.

Thirty two years ago the derelict former Regal Cinema in Kinghorn was restored and reborn as *Sea Loft* – the home, studio and inspirational space of the scottish artists Elizabeth Ogilvie and her husband Robert (Bob) Callender (1932–2011). Perched as it is high above the beach overlooking the whole of the estuary and far out to the North Sea, Sea Loft has provided a space to create art.

Bob was fascinated by the flotsam and jetsam of life that washed up on the sand at high tide, and the effects of erosion on the shore's natural shape and form. His interest was in the craft of making and in the environment – particularly the coast, the sea and those who worked on it. His *Plastic Beach* installation, created in the 1990s and curated right up until his death was an environmental artwork ahead of its time, and was shown recently at the City Art Centre. Elizabeth, whose mother's family came from St Kilda, has devoted her life's work to the sea, ice and themes related to the fluid transience of water. She continues the great cultural legacy that she and Bob created.

Many of us have been drawn in by Sir David Attenborough's wildlife documentary series *Blue Planet* and *Our Blue Planet*. We have an unquenchable appetite to learn about what lies beneath the surface of the ocean. Much of the filming and photography is informative, fascinating and beautiful, but is it Art?

Scotland is rich in vast bodies of water. We are never far from one of its lochs, rivers or burns. Throughout her life Elizabeth Ogilvie's art installations such as *Bodies of Water* at Dundee Contemporary Arts; and *THE LIQUID ROOM* at Forth Ports warehouse, Kirkcaldy have been a fusion of art, architecture and science. Water is both the medium and subject in these contemplative and enriching works. She is endeavouring to draw people in through the senses and encourage them to consider water's worth, to marvel at its visual effect and to appreciate its universal and sustaining properties.

Recently it has led her on a remarkable journey into the world of water in its solid phase – ice. In *OUT OF ICE*, exhibited in P3, London, she is increasingly drawn into its profound world. She has spent years researching ice with Inuit in Northern Greenland, and continues to be enthralled by all that she reads about the ecology and the psychology of ice, as well as its esoteric history and – crucially – worldwide issues brought about by its melting.

Her work has led her full circle and back to her first passion - the ocean. For decades, she has operated at the forefront of innovation, developing a reputation for experimenting and pushing boundaries, and has consistently challenged conventional notions. People visiting her exhibitions can really appreciate that art does not aspire to entertain: it aspires to converse. The work truly reflects our times and poses important questions at the same time as offering so many possibilities and a positive outlook.

Likewise, her collaborations with colleague Rob Page are well known for letting the majesty and poetics of the natural world speak directly to audiences and for creating powerful and reflective spaces for the public and ground-breaking creative collaborations with leading scientists.

In Glasgow for COP26 and in Venice for the *Biennale 2022*, her works *WE ARE OCEAN* and *INTO THE OCEANIC* brought the ocean to centre stage through a series of international events, offering a platform for us all to come together to discuss ocean protection, climate change and Venice as an action site. INTO THE OCEANIC is the result of cutting-edge research with Scottish Government marine scientists based in St Andrews, filmed in the Atlantic shallows of North West Sutherland and North Sea waters on the Coast of Fife. You may be touched to consider that the shallow waters off the coast here in Fife have been projected onto the Armadillo in Glasgow and henceforth around the world.