

# Macdonald show suggests a land unto itself

By Jenn Q. Goddu  
Special to the Tribune

Shona Macdonald is no Chicken Little—but she says Scotland is a place where “it almost feels like the sky is falling down on your head.” Space and landscape are the defining ideas of her artwork in “Shona Macdonald: Inscape Drawings,” a show at the Chicago Cultural Center’s Michigan Avenue Galleries through Jan. 15.

Macdonald has lived in Chicago since 1994, but she does know of what she speaks, having been born and raised in Aberdeen, Scotland. The sky is one of the biggest differences between her homeland and the American Midwest, the artist says: “The sky here always feels so giant and big because everything’s so flat.” She says she can now watch “The Wizard of Oz” and really imagine what it might be like to see a tornado come swooping in across an expansive flat space.

The drawings, watercolors and gouache on exhibit suggest maps and landscape drawings of some imaginary place. Even though the specific locations of the image in the pictures have been stripped away, Macdonald says she has a clear idea in her mind of the geographical place she is meditating on. It might be



Shona Macdonald’s “Patchwork Earth, Dark Hem of Hedge” (2004) is part of a show at the Cultural Center.

## PREVIEW

### ‘Shona Macdonald: Inscape Drawings’

**When:** Through Jan. 15

**Where:** Chicago Cultural Center’s Michigan Avenue Galleries, 78 E. Washington St.

**Tickets:** Free; 312-744-6630

her first home in Scotland, the new home she’s made in Chicago, or in Bloomington when she is teaching at Illinois State University.

Macdonald says she’d be completely disinclined to do a draw-

ing of Australia, for example, because the lexicon of images she’s working with is drawn from where she’s living now and where she has lived. “I know exactly where these places are and I feel very strongly attached to them,” she says.

Macdonald says she hopes the viewer doesn’t need to know the background or recognize the specific location that inspired a work to be able to understand its themes of memory and place. “I think the personalized part of it isn’t really that important for other people to get.”

For instance, the work “Unfurled Illinois” is reminiscent of

Lake Michigan or a farm field downstate, but it’s actually composed of a drawing of the Scottish coastline traced repeatedly.

Show curator Sofia Zutautus describes Macdonald’s work as “almost like journaling” in its creation of a personal landscape of maps, memories and time. Yet it still invites viewers to reflect on their own sense of place. “It looks familiar but then the closer you look at it, the more you pay attention to details, you find a different perspective, different symbols and you discover it’s almost like traveling to those landscapes that she is presenting to you,” Zutautus says.

In fact, the artist says she is relying on a shared sense of space and geography. After all, she’s not the only person to live one place and work another. “It’s almost the curse of people’s jobs now that they have to do a lot of traveling to get there,” she says. She hopes the otherworldliness of some of her illustrations will help jog a viewer’s own recollections of feeling displaced or looking at a place from the outside.

“Every day when I’m here living in the States, I feel reminded of the fact that I’m not from this culture,” she says. “The sense of space and the sense of place is very different in this country.”

[onthetown@tribune.com](mailto:onthetown@tribune.com)