

Faclan - my favourites, by Katie Macleod

As a travel blogger, it's unsurprising that I'm a bit of a travel addict. But what most people don't know is that there's something I love even more than seeing the world: books.

If you asked me to choose between travel and books – but please, don't – I doubt I would hesitate over my answer. It would be books, every time. Besides, books make armchair travellers of us all, something that this year's Faclan, the Hebridean Book Festival at An Lanntair, proves very well.

For four days this November, Faclan is sweeping audiences off to the shores of the North Atlantic or Western Ocean - An Cuan Siar, as it is called in Gaelic. There are films and musical performances, book talks and Q&A sessions, drawing classes and writing workshops. The schedule takes ticket holders on a geographical tour from North Rona to Russia, Orkney to Arran, and back to their own doorstep in the Outer Hebrides.

If I was at home, I'd have to buy the All Festival Pass at £60; there are simply too many events I want to attend, too many inspiring writers I want to listen to. One would be Stornoway's own Kevin MacNeil, who gives the Royal Literary Fund talk on November 3rd as part of the Atlantic Cabaret #1.

It would be a fitting nod to my eighteen-year-old self, who was star-struck at hearing the author speak at An Lanntair on the publication of his first novel. Imagine, I remember thinking, an author from the same place as me – it is possible, after all!

I would also be in the audience for Amy Liptrot's session on her award-winning, critically acclaimed memoir, *The Outrun*. The pages of the book follow her descent into drink in Edinburgh and London, and her recovery at home on the cliffs and shores of Orkney. For any islander, Amy's writing will hit close to home, as she describes the experiences of island life with lyrical clarity.

I would be interested, too, in Mallachy Tallack's insights on *The Undiscovered Islands*, Madeleine Bunting's journey through the Hebrides, and Finlay Macleod's historical findings from North Rona. I would learn a bit of folklore from Lily Greenall, and practise my sketching skills with graphic novelist Nick Abzadis. Given the recent discovery that the two of us are neighbours, it would be bad manners, at the very least, not to attend the latter.

For me, Faclan has always been the highlight of the Hebridean arts calendar, but I won't be in the audience this year: I'll be here, in my adopted home of New York City. Instead, I'll be making use of the power of books, and reading the work of the artists at Faclan, in order to travel via armchair - and imagination - to An Lanntair this winter.