



THE FIVE ARMS



PHAIDON



# THE F I F E A R M S



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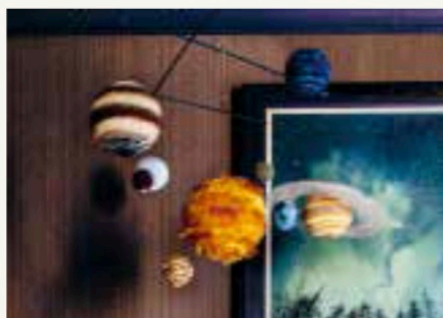
# A R M S



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## ART & COMMUNITY



Works by the local collective the DEESIDE KNTWITS in The Family Room and the Astronomy room.

by Iwan and Manuela Wirth typically sees artists spending between three and six months in Braemar, getting to know the village and the region. Many of these artists have found their inspiration within either the community or the landscape, or both. They include Paris-based artist Orlando Mostyn Owen, who produced a series of landscapes during his time in Braemar, and Gideon Summerfield, a graduate of the Royal Drawing School, who produced the portrait drawings in the pub during his residency in 2018, as part of a collection known as 'Characters of Braemar'.

Summerfield took time to get to know his sitters, preferring to sketch in situ and then finish the final image in a studio, provided by The Fife. Subjects include the young gamekeeper Lewis Falconer, the French-born local Michel Brat, who settled here over ten years ago to realize his dream of living in Scotland, and the fiddler Paul Anderson.

'Paul was inspired to play the fiddle when he discovered the instrument under his grandparents' spare bed and has been playing since the age of nine,' says Summerfield. 'I met him just once and he played the fiddle in front of me, which was an incredible and inspiring experience. I was trying to create drawings of him at the fast and energetic pace that he was playing and the final drawing is not quite as refined as the other portraits, as it's one of the thirty drawings that I did while he was playing. But I loved the idea of showing the movement, as if he's still playing while you look at the drawing.'

One of the very first Fife residencies was by the Scottish poet and artist Alec Finlay. His ambitious 'place awareness' project to map the Highland landscape and its Gaelic place-names grew to encompass a book of poems and essays, *Gathering*, published by Hauser & Wirth, as well as annotated maps and artworks. Finlay became a guest curator for a number of bedrooms, particularly the Croft and Nature and Poetry rooms, collaborating with Russell Sage Studio on pieces such as the carved headboards inscribed with 'name poems' of his choosing.

'The book, the artworks and the map are three parts of one thing,' says Finlay. 'I wanted to use place-aware philosophy, which is similar to what some people call ecopoetics, to map an entire region poetically from the perspective of folk culture, but using the material in a contemporary style. I think the Cairngorms are one of the most exciting and contemporary regions in the UK, as they contain the dramatic meeting of hunting culture, Green Lairds and rewilding. I was excited by those clashing ideas.'

Another visitor who played an important part in the evolution of the hotel, particularly the pub, was the American artist, writer and naturalist James Prosek, who passed two months in Braemar in the summer of 2017. Prosek spent some time walking, foraging and heading out into the hills with the local gamekeeper before starting work on a substantial series of drawings, watercolours and paintings capturing the landscape and its wildlife, but also exploring the theme of heraldry. The two interests combined in his painting *Flying Stag, Cairngorms, Scotland*, depicting an animal with the wings of a ptarmigan and the body of a stag. This was then adopted as the name and mascot of the hotel's pub.

'The hybrid stag symbolized, for me, the efforts of Iwan and Manuela Wirth to marry hospitality with art,' says Prosek. 'What they are creating is a wonderful hybrid organism, not simply a gallery but a space where you live and eat, which brings together human creativity and the local ecology. While I was there, Iwan and Manuela came up to the gardener's cottage, where I was staying, to see what I had been up to and I showed them a few sketches of the coat of arms with the flying stag and they were very positive.'

'Over the next couple of months, it actually became a real thing and I worked with Ben Carter – a master hunter and forager – on putting together the taxidermied flying stag in the bar. It is a great privilege to have my work in such a gorgeous setting where people might stop and appreciate it. That's the hope.'

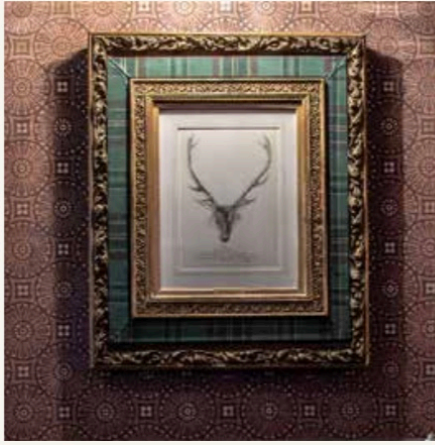
Prosek's flying stag is indicative of some of the more 'organic' ideas that fed into the evolution of The Fife, and underscores the way everything ties back to the setting and the surroundings. Even



The keys to the guest rooms are adorned with a solid bronze Scottish freshwater pearl mussel and hidden inside a specially crafted 'book'.

the heavy key rings for the guest bedrooms have a story to them, with the cast bronze mussels referencing the endangered freshwater pearl mussels in the River Dee. Pearls in Peril (Pip) is one of the many community projects supported and encouraged by The Fife and its founders, which add to all of these layers of craft, design and art. At The Fife Arms all of these ingredients combine very naturally, tied together by a strong vision, and become something unique that is far more than the sum of its parts.

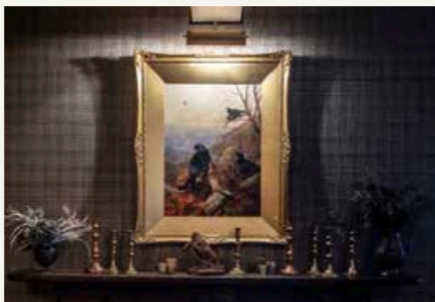




HRH QUEEN VICTORIA (1819–1901), *A stag shot*  
by John Brown, October, 1874  
pencil and watercolour, 25.4 × 19 cm / 10 × 7½ inches  
Reception



SUBODH GUPTA (b. 1964), *Chandelier for Fife Arms*, 2018  
Stainless steel structure, stainless steel utensils  
190 × 410 × 440 cm / 74¾ × 161 ⅞ × 173¼ inches,  
Fire Room



ARCHIBALD THORBURN (1860–1935), *Blackgame*  
*in the glen*, 1911  
Pencil and watercolour heightened with bodycolour  
and touches of gum arabic on paper laid on board  
76.3 × 55.3 cm / 30 × 21¾ inches, The Snug.

THE Fife Arms is a storybook. Every room tells a different tale about the lives, loves and achievements of Scotland's greatest sons and daughters and her most distinguished visitors. There are explorations of the Highlands's unique history and traditions as well as celebrations of its animals and ancient landscapes. These stories are brought to life through the 16,000 objects and works of art assembled for the hotel over several years by Iwan and Manuela Wirth and the contemporary pieces they commissioned from living artists.

They started this immense collecting project by "doing a deep dive into the history books," says Iwan Wirth. "We wanted to create a hotel that is intricately connected to its location and that could only exist as it does in Braemar." An early inspiration was Tillyproonie, a sporting estate in Aberdeenshire, which the Wirths visited when it still belonged to their friend Philip Astor. "Tillyproonie was the blueprint for what we envisioned at the Fife Arms. It was the ultimate Scottish home."

With its vast holdings of sporting and bird pictures, its Regency furniture, China, delftware and Victorian silver, among many other objects, Tillyproonie exemplified the way country homes accumulate their contents over time, "the tactile evidence of generations past and present" which add "layers of personality to their interiors," as the author James Knox writes in *The Scottish Country House*. "Our ambition for the Fife Arms was to make it feel like it had been filled with its collections over two centuries," says Iwan. So when Philip Astor sold Tillyproonie's contents at Christie's in December 2017, the Wirths jumped in. "We were able to secure about half the lots for the hotel."

The purchases include a drawing of a stag's head by Queen Victoria, an accomplished amateur artist, and a large group of watercolours by an artist she loved, Archibald Thorburn, the acclaimed bird painter of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras who returned to his native Scotland regularly throughout his life to sketch fowl and game birds in the wild. Recognised as an innovator in his lifetime, Thorburn "broke away from the stereotyped fashion of treating birds for illustrations as merely scientific maps of plumage; and instead, while keeping strictly to scientific accuracy, imbued his illustrations with such artistic values as to make each subject a high-class work of art," as the artist's obituary in the monthly journal *British Birds* put it in 1935. Thorburn's direct observation of nature and his love for the beauty he found in every thicket and patch of moorland changed the way we chronicle the natural world around us and had a profound effect on the artists who followed him.

Other historic collections at the Fife Arms assembled by Iwan and Manuela in partnership

with the interior designer Russell Sage include sporran, Scottish swords and dirks (short daggers), taxidermy and natural history specimens and a stunning group of Jacobite goblets and drinking glasses. Dating from the mid 18th century, each of these glass vessels is engraved with a white rose and buds on a thorny stem, symbols of the Jacobite cause to restore a Catholic Stuart king to the English throne. Drinking to the health of the Stuarts was a treasonable offence so the Jacobites would meet for their toasts in secret, sometimes smashing their rose-engraved glasses afterwards.

The Jacobite glassware is shown in the Fire Room of the Fife Arms underneath a sprawling chandelier created for the hotel by the Indian artist Subodh Gupta. Constructed out of the stainless-steel cooking vessels and food containers used every day by hundreds of millions of Indians, Gupta's chandelier monumentalises the everyday ritual which binds us all together. The reflections of the chandelier's coloured bulbs on the utensils' shiny metal surfaces create a dance of light and colour which gives the room a festive, celebratory quality.

This interplay between historic collections and new art runs throughout the hotel. The Wirths wanted the Fife Arms to feel like a welcoming Scottish country home filled with objects connected to its history, but they also wanted it to be contemporary and to tell new stories. Consider, for example, three works on display in the hotel's sumptuous reception room. "If you were arriving in a grand country hotel you might expect an imposing staircase, a chandelier and a piano in one corner of the room. We have all these elements in the reception area but with a contemporary, creative twist so the space feels familiar but completely new at the same time," says Lorraine Grant, the Fife Arms's cultural programme curator.

The Steinway piano in the centre of the room is a work by the Los Angeles artist Mark Bradford who plastered the entire surface of the instrument with small, paper squares that he bleached and singed, creating the impression of roaring flames against a black sky. These papers, the same as those used by hairdressers to protect hair while it is being permed, are a key material for Bradford who spent many hours as a child in the Los Angeles hair salon run by his mother. Using them and other found materials such as advertising posters collected from the streets, Bradford creates subtle and poetic abstract canvases which often allude to social and political unrest. The flaming piano at the Fife Arms, which entertains guests in the evenings by automatically playing a score composed by the Jazz pianist Robert Clasper, also hints at urban turmoil and the violence it unleashes.

Hanging on the walls of the hotel's grand, original staircase is another deceptively simple



contemporary work, a large Still Life of flowers by the British artist Keith Tyson. The canvas is divided in two halves, each painted in a radically different style which suggests that the flowers themselves are not the point of the picture; what Tyson is exploring are the different ways flowers have been depicted over the ages. This is a reflection on the nature of painting itself, the infinite ways in which it can approximate reality but never recreate it.

The third contemporary work is a neon chandelier by the Los Angeles artist Richard Jackson hanging in the stairwell. Made specifically for the Fife Arms, this swirling mass of interlocking coloured lights is constructed from glass replicas of deer antlers and bagpipe drones, each one pulled and blown by hand. The antlers are based on those of the red deer local to the hotel and their elaborate arrangement in Jackson's playful chandelier nods to the Highland practice of displaying deer antlers in ornamental patterns. Like all of the new art commissioned for the Fife Arms, this is a work directly inspired by the hotel's location.

This sense of place and landscape, an important theme of the Fife Arms, was partly conceived in collaboration with two artists. Alec Findlay, a Scottish poet and artist, was one of the first people Iwan and Manuela consulted when they started planning the hotel. "We bought the Fife Arms and wanted someone to start researching its location before we hired historians," says Iwan. They turned to Findlay who embarked on a mammoth, five-year project mapping the local landscape in granular detail and chronicling the Gaelic names of its rivers, hills, ridges, pastures, clumps of trees and "other ordinary places that might have been forgotten," says Findlay. The names he explores reveal lost histories: a remote patch of turf and flowers, for example, is called Māghan na Banaraich or Milkmaid's Field, suggesting that there were once women working on lonely summits long before the arrival of mountaineers and climbers. The names also contain traces of the lost language of the Picts, the ancient inhabitants of Scotland who halted the relentless advance northwards of the mighty Roman army. They left behind no written words but echoes of their speech can still be heard in the place names handed down from one generation to the next over hundreds of years.

Snippets of Findlay's poetry of place names have been carved into headboards in several hotel bedrooms while his immense mapping project has been organised into a series of walks in a book entitled *Gathering* which is widely available at the hotel. This important celebration of local knowledge and folk culture with its stories of the hunters, shepherds and milkmaids who once roamed the Cairngorms "serves as a counterpoint to the many Royal stories which are told so well at

the Fife Arms," says Findlay.

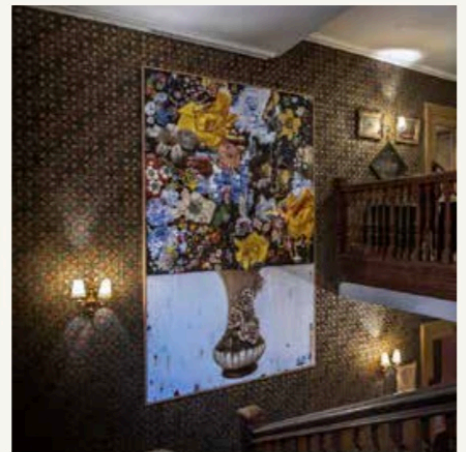
The second key person who helped steer the themes explored at the Fife Arms is the American artist and naturalist James Prosek. "When we met James, it was love at first sight," says Iwan. In 2017, Prosek spent several weeks in Braemar as a guest of the Wirths walking in the hills, fishing, joining grouse shoots and painting a series of watercolours of local wildlife for the hotel. Then the Wirths asked him to take on an additional challenge. "Before we met James we had been struggling for two years to come up with a coat of the arms for the Fife Arms. We felt that a great hotel in Braemar needed a great emblem but we hadn't been able to find one," says Iwan. Prosek's solution was to combine a stag from the low Dee valley with the wings of a mountain ptarmigan which lives at the highest elevation of the Cairngorms. His painting of *The Flying Stag* is now the symbol of the Fife Arms and has also given its name to the hotel pub where a taxidermied incarnation of Prosek's magical creature is frozen in time leaping over the bar.

"What I wanted to communicate by uniting the body of a stag with the wings of a ptarmigan is that these two animals are connected, even though they live in different parts of the ecosystem. We divide nature into pieces and put labels on everything. We give different species different names so people understand nature as if it's made of units that fit into boxes but really it's not, it's an interconnected continuum. In an ecosystem everything is interacting with everything else in an infinitely complex relationship which ecologists will never be able to fully comprehend. The Flying Stag is an acknowledgement that nature is not fixed and not nameable," says Prosek. It also serves as a subtle admonishment for us to preserve the natural world because destroying even a small part of it can wreak unexpected havoc elsewhere. "Nature is our ultimate instructor, the source of our awe and creative inspiration, and this is perhaps the best reason I can think of for protecting as much of it as possible," says Prosek.

The shapes, sounds and stories of the landscape surrounding the hotel also influenced the work of three other artists who travelled to Braemar to create new work for the Fife Arms. Guillermo Kuitca, who lives in Buenos Aires, spent months at the hotel painting a dramatic, all-encompassing, abstract mural in the Clunie Dining Room. "There are two views from the room, one to the Clunie river and the other to a distant mountain. I wanted to bring both into my work. When I was painting I could hear the sounds of the water all the time so the mural on the walls closest to the river is much more fluid, there are echoes of the flow of water in the rhythms and patterns of the paint. The longer wall tries to echo the mountain in the distance. I like to think of this work as a landscape," says



MARK BRADFORD (b. 1961) / ROBERT GLASPER, (b. 1978) *Apollo/Still Shining*, 2015  
Steinway Spirio player piano programmed with ROBERT GLASPER's score, 'Still Shining', mixed media, 101.6 × 146.6 × 170.1 cm / 40 × 57 3/4 × 67 inches (closed), 75.2 × 146.6 × 170.1 cm / 69 × 57 3/4 × 67 inches (open), Reception.



KEITH TYSON (b. 1969), *Still Life with Rose Vase and Seashell*, 2015–2017  
Mixed media on aluminium  
320 × 198 × 2.1 cm / 126 × 78 × 7/8 inches  
323.5 × 202.6 × 4 cm / 127 3/8 × 79 3/4 × 1 5/8 inches (framed),  
Main stairwell 2nd floor





*Flying Stag, Cairngorms, Scotland (2018) by JAMES PROSEK, from which the pub takes its name.*



THE FLYING STAG



## THE FLYING STAG

WITHIN a Highland community such as Braemar, the village pub is a place of special importance. It is a space for gathering, often compared with the local church in terms of its status as a social linchpin. But it is also a place devoted to pleasure—food, drink, conversation and sometimes darts and music too. The pub at The Fife Arms is, therefore, a fulcrum of Braemar that belongs not only to the hotel but to the village as a whole.

Such thoughts were key considerations during the planned renaissance of the pub—previously known as the Robert Louis Stevenson Bar—which was approached with both sensitivity and provenance in mind. The intention was to create an accessible, inviting village pub within The Fife, while also offering a more informal alternative to the hotel restaurant and dining room. Its position within the hotel, facing the village, is another signal of its openness and hospitality.

The name of the pub, The Flying Stag, was the result of an artistic connection. American artist James Prosek was one of the first to take up a residency at The Fife Arms, while the hotel was still being completed. Captivated by the landscape and natural history of the Cairngorms and Deeside,

Prosek produced a significant body of work during his visit, including drawings, watercolours and paintings that celebrated not only the hills and mountains but also its creatures—the animals, birds and fish that spawn in the rivers.

Many of these pieces populate the corridors and hallways around the ground floor of the hotel, including landscapes such as *Corndavon on the Gairn Burn*, *Old Bridge of Dee* and *View from Honka Hut on Balmoral* (all 2017). One of the most arresting Prosek pieces was an acrylic-and-oil painting entitled *Flying Stag, Cairngorms, Scotland* (2018), which splices two of his favourite Highland creatures. The dancing stag in the picture is lifted by the white wings of the ptarmigan, while red grouse surround it. Just as The Fife Arms is a kind of hybrid of home and hotel, of art and design, the *Flying Stag* is also a creative fusion, which was adopted as the name of the pub.

The design of the pub, too, is a kind of hybrid—of new and old, of contemporary art and tradition. The *Flying Stag* features bare timber floors and a mix of large oak dining tables with smaller, more intimate seating and eating areas, while the spherical, custom ceiling lights were made

by blacksmith Richard Drescher in Somerset. Designed by Russell Sage Studio, the bar is a key focal point and features a long wooden counter top handmade by Tom Addy. An array of antlers from the Braemar Horn Shop are complemented by a 'real' Flying Stag, springing from the bar, while regional whiskies and spirits are proudly presented behind the counter.

Given the importance of The Flying Stag within the community, the artwork here also seeks to reflect Braemar, with a whole sea of faces arranged around an oil painting entitled *The Cardsharps*, by a follower of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (undated). The Scottish artist Gideon Summerfield was commissioned to create a series entitled *Characters of Braemar* (2018) and these portraits can be seen throughout the pub and along the corridors. They are subtly blended with photographs of the Braemar Mountain Rescue team and photographic portraits by Steven Rennie, who lives in Braemar and works as a local guide but is also an exhibiting photographer. Sitting in The Flying Stag, then, you are surrounded by more than sixty images of the people who live here. You will never be short of company.



Locals and visitors enjoy the pub, which faces the village and has become a fulcrum for social life in Braemar.