

IF ON- WE HAD THE SPACE

FEATURING

Jeni Allison
Jack Brindley
Fionn Duffy
Deirdre Nelson



THU 17-SAT 26 OCTOBER 2024

platform, EASTERHOUSE, GLASGOW

If only we had the space is curated by Rachel Ashenden, Soizig Carey, Jemima Dansey-Wright and Murray Marrant. Delivered in association with Craft Scotland, as part of **COMPASS: Emerging Curator Programme**, and Katy West, Programme Lead. Supported by Platform, Inches Carr Craft Bursaries and Creative Scotland.



Craft SCOTLAND **platform**



00:01:45

Exhibited objects and portraits
photographed by LAURA PRIETO MARTIN

 **National Library of Scotland**
Leabharlann Nàiseanta na h-Alba

CON- T E N T S



00:03:01

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This exhibition takes inspiration from Glasgow's housing redevelopments and movements that span from the 1960s to the 1990s. Through contemporary craft, *If only we had the space* responds to modern and contemporary politics of housing, property rights and access to 'space'. →

We found 'IF WE ONLY HAD THE SPACE' in the depths of the Moving Image Archive, held at the National Library of Scotland. This promotional documentary was produced in 1974 to demonstrate how improvements to Glasgow city tenements could be made with the aid of Home Improvement Grants. These grants came in response to a total lack of adequate housing in Glasgow at the time and 'to provide the ordinary citizen with help and encouragement to make his existing home and its surroundings a more pleasant place to live.'

The phrase 'If only we had the space' implies making do with what you have and how you can inhabit the space within the existing walls around you. Although taken from the 1970s, it feels particularly connected to our contemporary conditions today, with another housing crisis exacerbating the wealth gap between renters, landlords, property and land owners, and an economy in recession.

In a hyper capitalist society, many artists and makers experience job and housing insecurity, and are priced out of adequate studio or making spaces. Homes become the space where they create and produce work. We have been asking artists and makers: how does this impact or restrict what and how you create? Does it change how you inhabit or perceive your home?

We commissioned artist and textile designer Jeni Allison to create two responsive and vibrant tapestries. 'Don't you think Vaila needs a garden?' and 'How are you going to manage the stairs with a pram?' deal with her experience of tenement living, motherhood and societal expectations. Fionn Duffy's ceramic works 'ev'ryday, a little cataclysm' and 'rooting delightfully' are artworks and also habitats. Some have been used in dairy production, some have never been fired. Now they hold things that grow. Deirdre Nelson presents 'SURPLUS', a knitted money box created in 2011 in response to Irish craft and ghost estates in Ireland. Jack Brindley, of Pavillion Pavillion presents stained glass works

which he aptly describes as 'Art to live with, rather than art to look at'.

Contextualising these works in the exhibition, are selected records of Glasgow's housing activist movements and redevelopment schemes from Glasgow Women's Library and the Moving Image Archive. The 'Woman-house' project began as an idea for a collaborative artwork which would, by its context, address historical and contemporary notions of women's creativity, within and outside the home. Women artists from all over Britain worked alongside women and children from Castlemilk. During the summer of 1990 four flats in an empty tenement block became a huge living (room) artwork and a meeting place for women and children in the neighbourhood.

'Take Root', a women's self build group in nineties Glasgow, spent years working towards the dream of building their own homes. They fundraised, learnt to build and negotiated land; they went to training camps and worked directly with architects. The project got close, but was eventually dropped by the housing association.

'Places...or People', is a short documentary from the 1970s illustrating the planning and construction of improvements in the housing and industrial landscape of the city of Glasgow. Efforts are made by the council's Department of Environmental Improvement to lift the poor condition of tenements built in the early 1930s in Possil, previously blamed on tenants rather than the severe lack of adequate investment and unfit for purpose design.

Through the craft of the four exhibiting makers and these significant moments in Glasgow's housing history, we can see the through line of creative inhabitation, the changing role of homes as places of production as well as domesticity, and negotiating the right to space.

RACHEL ASHENDEN, SOIZIG CAREY,
JEMIMA DANSEY-WRIGHT AND MURRAY MORRANT
Co-curators of *If only we had the space*



00:06:23



00:02:21

The Advantages of CASTLEMILK WOMANHOUSE



Perfect
Cleanliness.
Exact
Results.
Saving of
Labour.
Most
Convenient.
Improved
Quality of
Cooking.
Less loss of
weight in
Cooked Food.
Greater
Comfort.
Saving of
Money.

By Using *Castlemilk Womanhouse* you get all the
above advantages.

Can be obtained from almost all Gas Undertakings, Ironmongers,
Plumbers, &c., in the Kingdom.

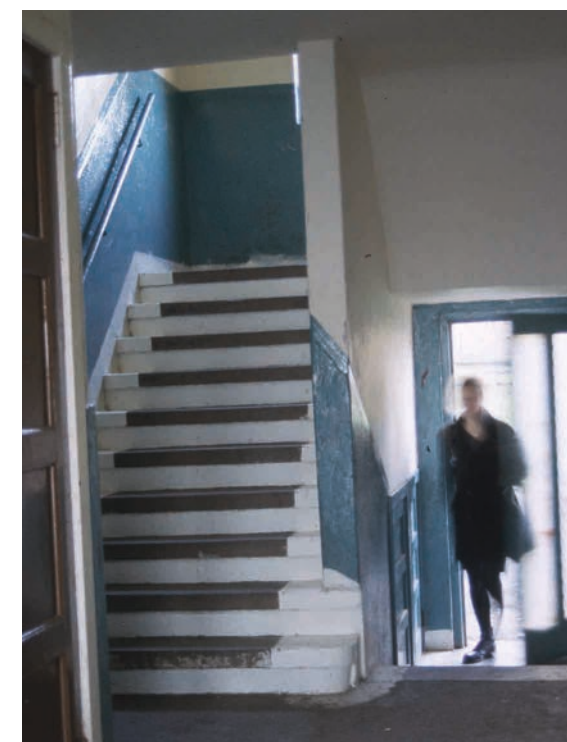
Descriptive Booklet on application to

CASTLEMILK WOMANHOUSE

Showrooms 39 Glenacre Quadrant,
Castlemilk, Glasgow



B - 'A Sense of Purpose'
Castlemilk Womanhouse, Annie Lovejoy, 1990



C - Castlemilk Womanhouse Stairwell, 1990

What will my three beautiful children be when they grow up? Some of the simple questions my children ask have frightening answers.

For so long my only thought for their future was for them to be happy and healthy. It suddenly dawned on me, while trying to answer their questions, that before our children could be healthy we had a whole lot more to do than simply treat the symptoms of a disease. We had to tackle the cause.

It was then I began to realise that no matter how hard I tried to look after my children – no matter how much I loved them – their health and their happiness were not really in my hands. Neither were they in

'There is a fear of facing up to the reality of the times we live in'

God's. Our children would love to 'Be All They Can Be' but the powers that be won't let them. God's plan for our children, I realised, was being corrupted by the politicians.

Most people believe that if you educate children about the dangers of drugs, they will all stop and become well behaved. These people haven't yet realised that knowledge is only a tiny part of people's minds. They haven't realised that there is a more important part of the mind. The really important part is the part of the mind which thinks, feels and wills – the emotions.

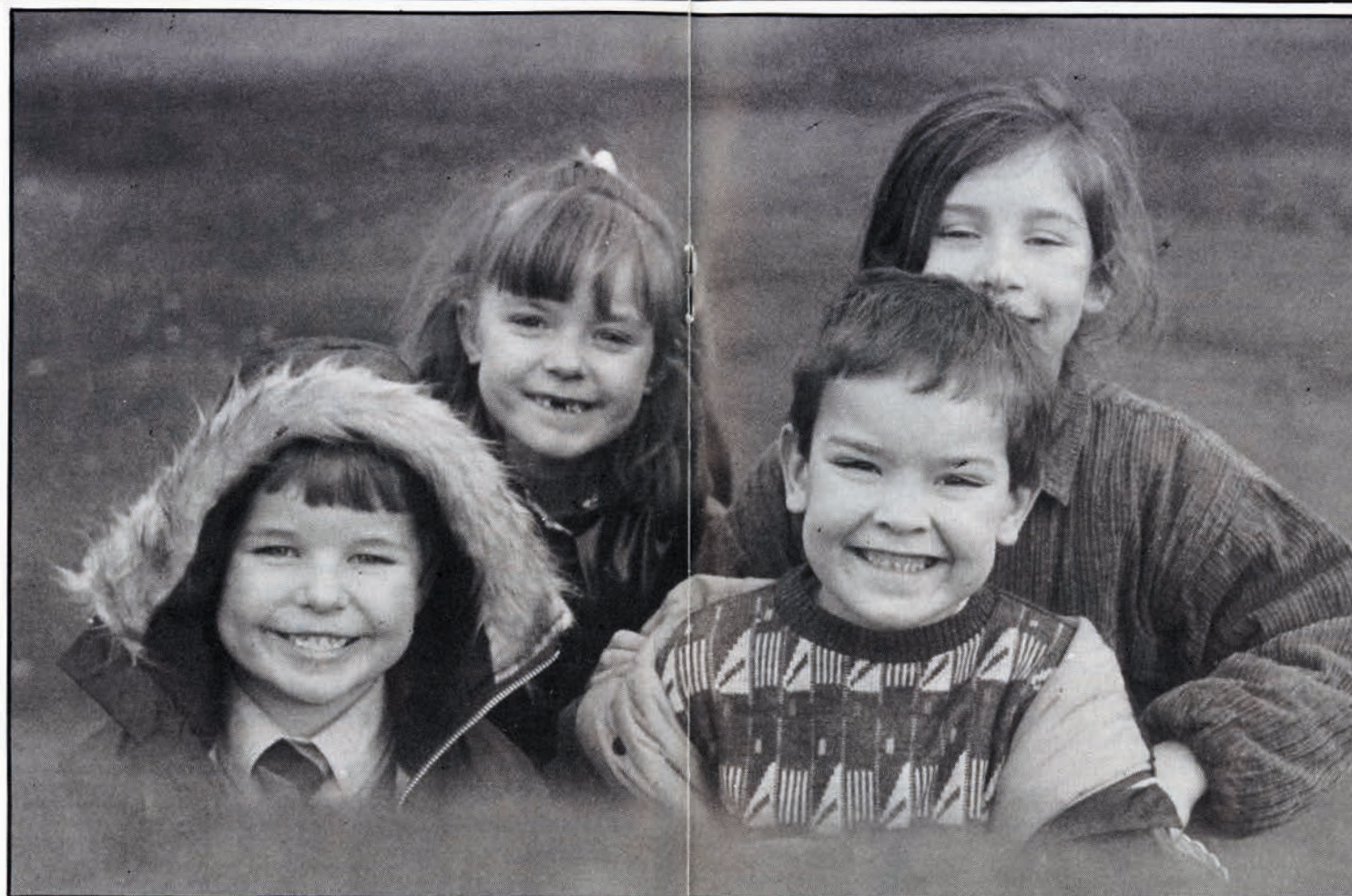
What of the sufferings in a society where the rich and powerful do what they like to promote their own welfare, regardless of who they hurt, who gets killed, or who they make poor in the process? How are people's emotions affected?

One of the conditions of a healthy body is surely a healthy mind. One of the conditions of a healthy mind is for it to develop in a healthy environment. One of the conditions of a healthy environment is hopefulness. Without hope for better times,

'Our children are the experts at living with the problems which the so-called experts created for them.'

our children are not really interested in the dangers of smoking or drug abuse. Without hope for better times, most drug addicts are not really interested in being supplied with clean needles. Without hope for better times, our children have difficulty accepting what schooling has to offer them.

Emotions are closely linked to instincts. Especially important is the instinct of flight, which has something to do with fear. For many in our society, especially in Glasgow and Edinburgh's large outer cities, like Greater Easterhouse, there is a fear of facing up to the reality of the times we live



Roddy Christie

Human beings can only take so much. What happens then if you are growing up in a world where achieving these hopeful longings is outwith your control? People can **give up**, accept defeat, and lead an animal existence. People can **adapt** at even greater cost to their health, by smoking, drinking, or taking drugs, especially tranquillisers and antidepressants. Or they **rebel**, with riots and vandalism and unsociable behaviour. Other alternatives are to **despair** of living, or to turn to crime, and decent people can be forced into such a position. Alternatively, people can **fight** for justice.

I used to think I was daft, but then I started to realise that the people who designed our living conditions must have been insane. They not only blame the victims of their ideas, but they continue to persecute them as well. When I started to see what was happening, I became aware of the blindness all around. The people who think they have sight – the experts who want to tell us what is good for us – are also blinded by fear.

The fear facing the experts is that the truth might be told. They are not daft either and deep down they know the misery and suffering they have caused other people.

'I used to think I was daft, but then I started to realise that the people who designed our living conditions must have been insane.'

They just can't accept, or cope, or couldn't care less, so they turn a blind eye, and hope that everyone else will do the same. Are their minds so crammed full of knowledge that there is no room left for common sense? Surely true knowledge is not found in books, but is built on people's personal experience. Our children are the experts at living with the problems which the so called experts created for them.

Whether you live in Buckingham Palace, Easterhouse, John O' Groats, Lands End, or anywhere in between, you cannot wrap yourselves in a wee cocoon and pretend that what happens to our children doesn't have an impact on yours. Our children are not only the responsibility of their parents. They are the responsibility of the society we all live in. Treat the children well, and they will show the way. Show them the goodness they are capable of developing inside.

It takes courage to open up one's mind and speak the truth. It takes courage to listen to it. It takes courage to print it. But our children are the future. They need the truth, for it is only the truth that will set them free. Free to build a world which everyone wants to live in. A world where every human being has a sense of their own value, which does not depend on the knowledge they have. A world that will have no need for badness or blindness. ■

LETTER FROM A HOUSING SCHEME A MOTHER'S THOUGHTS

Preached to and patronised, families living in the working class housing schemes of our cities have a lot to put up with. **Cathie McCormick**, a **Scottish Child** reader from Greater Easterhouse, turns the tables on those in power and asks who's really to blame?

in. For many this fear has come about from banging their heads off so many brick walls. This fear leads to a lot of people who couldn't care less anymore. It is a fear which if removed would make people demand a better future for their children. A fear which makes a lot of people more afraid of living than they are of dying.

It is not that our children want to become drug addicts. It is not that our children do not understand that schooling will be of use to them as adults. It is not that our children do not want to improve their lives. Rather it is because they are not daft. They know that knowledge doesn't guarantee them a means of earning a decent standard of life. They

see that people with knowledge are the cause of all their frustrations.

Of course our children want to grow in knowledge, to use that knowledge, to work, to strive, to long for a better world, to create better living con-

ditions, a better life and greater happiness. It is in man's nature to search for the truth. Without these longings, are we no different from other animals? Without these longings they would as well have been born a dog or a cat. These hopeful longings, when crushed, make humans behave in a way no animal would.

EXHIBIT OBJECTS



‘How are you going to manage the stairs with a pram?’

(2024)
Wool
90 x 103 cm

Jeni Allison is an Edinburgh-based textile designer who enjoys combining technology and traditional techniques to make something new. She began working in the textile industry in the Scottish Borders, developing knitwear for luxury brands including Chanel and Sonia Rykiel. She then set up her own studio, where she often works directly with clients to design one-off textile pieces and garments. ‘How are you going to manage the stairs with a pram?’ and ‘Don’t you think Vaila needs

a garden?’ were specially commissioned for *If only we had the space*. These tapestry-like textiles respond to the way Jeni lovingly relates to her home (a top-floor 1960’s flat) versus familial and societal expectations of what her home should be to bring up her daughter (a house and a garden).

‘How are you going to manage the stairs with a pram?’ is a pattern bursting depiction of Jeni’s flat at the top of a staircase, referencing the many colourful images and stories it holds for →



'Don't you think Vaila
needs a garden?'

(2024)
Wool
89cm x 132cm

her and her family. The word 'stair' comes from the old English words stigan (to climb) and staeger (riser). This is how she sees it, not as an impractical place but a joyous home to rise up to. 'Don't you think Vaila needs a garden?' is equally vivid, however it is in contrast a fantasy narrative, an imagined garden. It takes reference from the local Basil Spence brutalist concrete drying areas, and transforms them into a giant paddling pool for Jeni's daughter to play in with her favourite monkey, Haha. Both works are a loving dedication to Vaila.





‘Tokonoma (a proposal)’

(2024)
etched glass, larch, indian ink
on mulberry paper, cast glass, oak
120 x 60 x 45 cm

Edinburgh-based artist Jack Brindley works almost exclusively in ‘architectural-glass’ (or, stained-glass) under the alias ‘Pavilion Pavilion’. He creates art to live with, rather than to look at. ‘Tokonoma (a proposal)’ is inspired by an alcove in a traditional Japanese reception room.

It houses a small selection of aesthetic objects, such as a painted scroll, a flower arrangement or a ceramic vessel. As the rest of the walls in the house are often left bare, the

importance of this alcove is heightened as it becomes an ever-changing curation of specific objects. Each object has its own artistic importance, yet it is their restrained combination and arrangement that is particularly interesting. Jack has produced a low-level plinth akin to a coffee table and populated it with three elements from his practice. He sees this work as an invitation for us to treat spaces in our homes as a site of contemplation.





‘ev’ryday, a little cataclysm’

(2023-)
soil, spider plant pups, clay
from Bragar, Lumsden, Sandend
and reclaimed stoneware
19 x 13 cm (x3)

‘rooting delightfully’

(2022-)
soil, sapling, glazed
reclaimed stoneware, clay
from Barvas and Bragar
26 x 14 cm

Fionn Duffy is an artist from Glasgow. Her work focuses on historically neglected practices of creation and disposal and addresses the transformation of social and ecological environments. ‘ev’ryday, a little cataclysm’ and ‘rooting delightfully’ are made from wild clay that was gathered in Lewis and Aberdeenshire. On Lewis, Fionn researched pottery fired in a hearth from unprocessed clay, otherwise known as Barvas Ware. In Aberdeenshire, she investigated milk cultures, which she has used as a glaze. The ceramics

have a porous quality, which absorbs the water each time the plants are fed. Slip is washed away and cracks open during this process. Both works have been exhibited, however never with plants before.





‘SURPLUS’

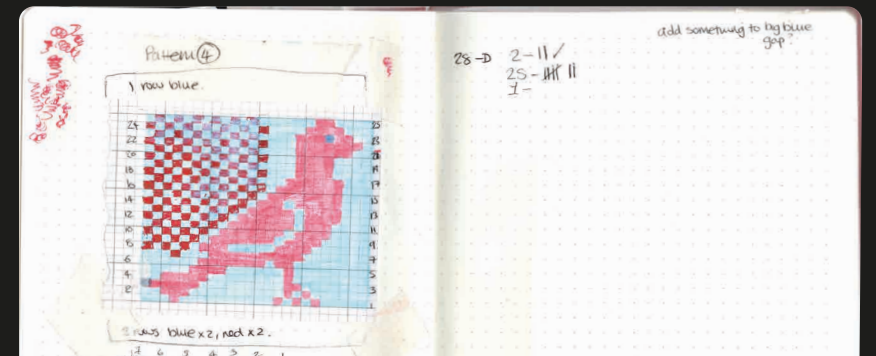
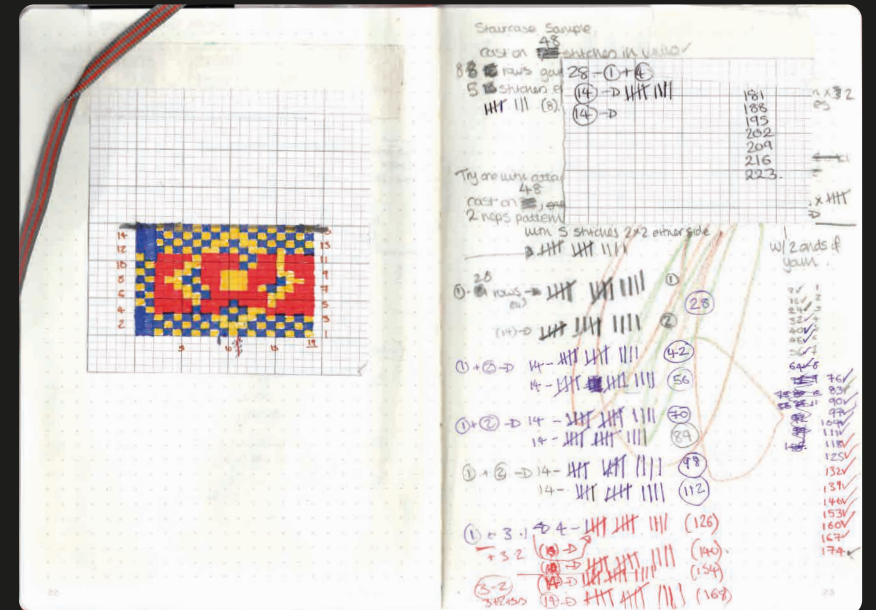
(2011) wool
22 x 15 x 12 cm

Known for her ability to translate social commentary into textile art, artist and designer Deirdre Nelson grew up in Northern Ireland and is now based in Glasgow. Through experimentation, she combines traditional techniques with contemporary processes to create works that cross the terrains of art, design and craft. ‘Surplus’ was made for *Modern Languages*, an exhibition dedicated to Irish vernacular interpretations, curated by Katy West. This bright red knitted money box depicts a new-build house.

It was created in response to Irish ghost estates that exist as a result of the 2008 property crash. In 2023, it was reported that 75 ghost estates still haunt Ireland, either unoccupied or in varying states of disrepair or dereliction. ‘SURPLUS’ also takes inspiration from thatched-cottage souvenirs and the Monopoly houses.



MAK-DIARIES

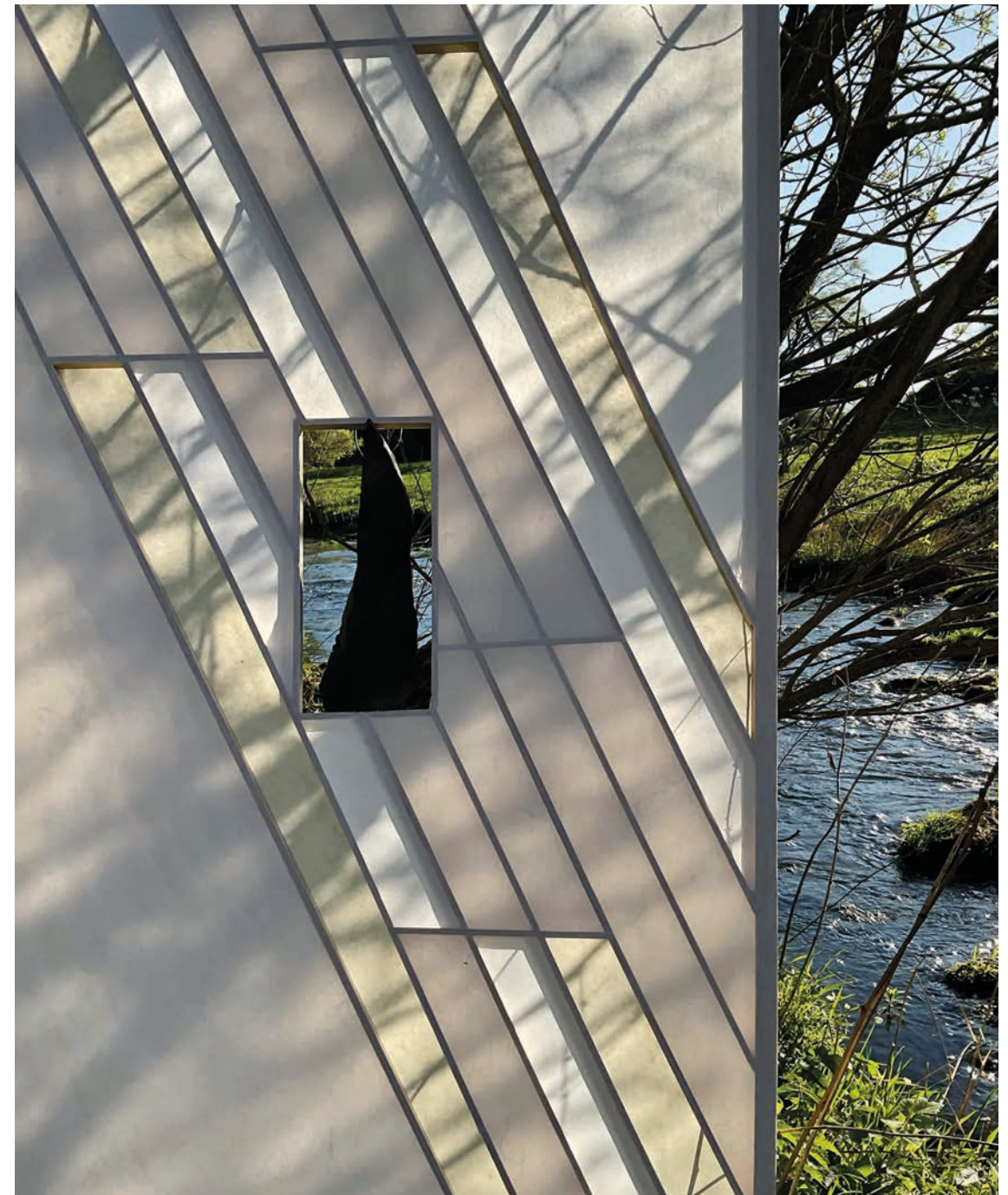




It's been essential to work on this at home, mainly due to the availability of child-care. This has led me to exploring lots of different ways of making at home - in lots of different places. I've knitted on a big blue beanbag in the living room, on the sofa by the window (in particular to utilise the daylight when doing close up work), on my daughter's play coach...I've also had to think about where all my materials live, they have to be out of reach of my dog and child, but not properly away as then it would be a chore to get them everyday.

Working at home has meant I can pick up and put down the work really easily too.

I started this project mostly making at night, but then started to make more during the day with my daughter which has been really fun. She's very good at drawing next to me and knitting (throwing balls of wool). I'm really pleased she's been involved as she can describe what her dad does for a job (paints on walls) but I felt like I couldn't articulate my job to her as much - but now she's seen it.



I made this rice paper screen whilst on a residency in Duns. The screen is about how light and lightness can be handled. There are different layers of paper creating different opacity, and an internal cut out which frames a stone. Rice paper screens, often found in traditional Asian houses, create a soft boundary between rooms.

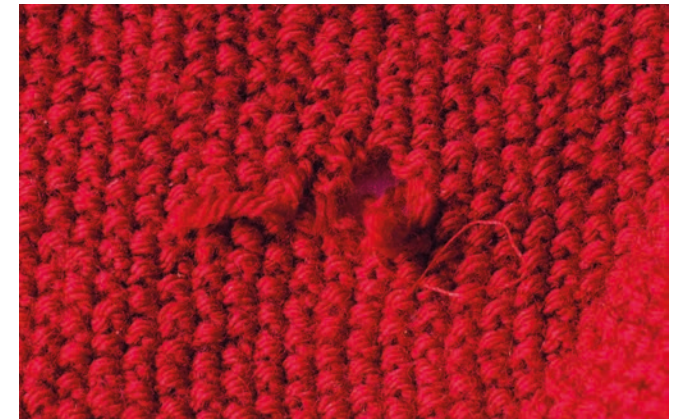


Over the past 4 years I've watched the sapling grow from between the sandstone lintels outside my window. The bikes have left dark grazes on the eggshell hallway, there are shallow indents on the floor where my bed has been. I tell the letting agents that the mark burned into the plastic windowsill was there when I moved in. They point out a scratch on the laminate floor. It's a comprehensive pdf, red rings around my mess. I get a bit of my deposit back.

I watch the video I'm sent about the "improvement" of tenement housing. I'm seduced by scenes of new bathrooms, the narrator's praise of "common-sense" & "neighbourliness"; some very nice copper pipe too. I notice the punctuation of "as long as you own the flat you live in", or, "can convince their landlord". I think of evictions in the name of "renovation". I wonder whose responsibility the ceiling

falls on when Victorian dust settles into cracks in the skirting board (mine, I realise, after receiving the bill for a cleaning job post-move). Having control over how and why our spaces are altered is a privilege generally reserved for property owners, so I've been turning to plants for lessons in defiance. I can tell you it's a joy to see them settle corners and thrive, rent-less.

I think about the cycles of adoption, creation and destruction involved in the practice of just living in a space. It's a reel we're all swept up in. Roots wind their way through sandstone, loosen grains, let wet in; cracks insist on cutting the ceiling, dancing across walls. I water my plants, spaghetti steam blooms across the window, the building shakes when a truck rolls by and the clay pits below us shudder.



During a clear out at my home (which also serves as my studio), it has been inspiring to revisit 'SURPLUS' and the ideas surrounding the work. It seems apt that the work needed roof repairs after a spell in storage in my Glasgow flat.

13 years on from making 'SURPLUS', nothing seems to have changed as so many ghost estates still exist in Ireland and homeowners are affected by incompletions in the estates where they live. There has been a decade-long housing crisis and housing is the number one concern for the Irish public. New build housing supply is expensive and is often an investor-funded build to rent.

While making 'SURPLUS' I explored ideas around the performa-

tive nature of ripping out the house and reknitting it: a knitted money box which needed to be taken apart in order to retrieve your coins. It played with ideas of house as a 'money pit': negative equity and souvenir money boxes from mortgage companies.

In my practice, I often work from project to project exploring new ideas as each project arises. Revisiting 'SURPLUS' reminds me of the many ideas left unexplored and invites me to reconsider them in a different sociopolitical context.

LIVING RENTWWW.LIVINGRENT.ORG

Scotland's tenants and community union. They are a mass-membership union of tenants, carers, workers and residents, rooted in working-class struggle. They organise collectively to build the power to secure material improvements to our daily lives and put power back where it belongs: in the hands of ordinary people.

UNDER ONE ROOFUNDERONEROOF.SCOTABOUT-US

Scotland's only charity dedicated to providing free and impartial information to the more than half a million tenement flat owners, and housing professionals, on issues related to tenement maintenance, common repair management, and retrofit.

GLASGOW HOUSING STRUGGLE ARCHIVEGLASGOWTENANTSARCHIVE.COM

An ongoing project to establish a collective resource for the city's tenants' movement in its fight against landlordism and bad housing.

VOICES OF EXPERIENCEVOICES-ARCHITECTURE.COM

An investigation into women working with the built environment in Scotland and beyond. The aim is to recognise contributions, document and record intergenerational conversations, and share knowledge and inspire.



RACHEL ASHENDEN is a freelance arts writer and researcher, specialising in the feminist avant-garde. Her exhibition reviews and artist interviews can be read in Scottish magazines, including *The List*, *The Skinny* and *Scottish Art News*. Alongside writing, Rachel hosts events and interviews for galleries, universities and bookshops. Rachel co-founded *The Debutante*, a magazine dedicated to illuminating the lives and legacies of women surrealists with an international readership. With Cinetopia, she co-curates a film exhibition UK tour called 'Electric Muses'.



SOIZIG CAREY is a maker, curator and cultural producer. Her contemporary jewellery practice is rooted in slow design and making, creating modernist and long-lasting works. In 2024, Soizig was awarded the Inches Carr Craft Bursary Established Maker award. As a cultural producer working across arts, cultural activism and human rights, Soizig is interested in creating opportunities for connection, knowledge exchange and innovative engagement practices. Her curatorial interests focus on 'slow' design and making in contemporary craft, social equity and intangible cultural heritage.



JEMIMA DANSEY-WRIGHT is a maker-curator, interested in making processes and people. She specialises in textiles and has a personal practice that blends traditional craft methods and screen print techniques, this work is concerned with ephemera, wearables and functional objects. She is a curious and enthusiastic skill sharer, and her curatorial projects are designed to be playful and collaborative. Her focus is on finding accessible ways to share craft with audiences.



MURRAY MORRANT is a designer, maker and curator with a background in architecture. Having worked in architecture studios in Copenhagen and Glasgow, Murray's creative practice now has an interest in materials, anthropology, and landscape explored through research and hands on making. His craft practices encompass a range of making, from traditional timber Scottish boat building to model making for film and TV. You can see more of his work at LANDSCAPESOUP.COM.



An exhibition by **COMPASS** curators

ABOVE: 00:08:34
BELOW: 00:01:56