

Inhale, Exhale
Alice Channer
16 April – 8 May 2010

His hOles

Like all the best objects, Charles Rennie Mackintosh's The Glasgow School of Art is full of holes. This part of the art school has a substantial hole in the middle, and around the hole, a gallery. What is it for an art school to be made up of what language calls gaps, spaces, openings and closings? What do these things in the fabric of his building do? What is it for an art school building to be made porous in this way, and how does the gallery work within it?

The façade of the art school is not a simple representation of the structure of the building within; it would never claim that kind of transparency. Neither is the outside entirely an exterior. From street level, it appears to be occupying its own field, moving backwards, up, down and along – every direction simultaneously. It is accessed through a wide aperture that recedes upwards into a modest door. Entering the art school at this new level, the entrance hall does not immediately announce to me what the rest of the building is like. It wants me to continue moving through and with it. Like another human being, it has layers of personality and secrets. Some of these, depending on my relationship with it, will be immediately apparent, others will reveal themselves over time, and yet more I will never know. As beings in the world, we are immediately on parallel footing.

From the beginning, Mackintosh's building is alongside me, with me, never entirely outside of me, and vice versa. The wide metal arch at the foot of the stairs from the pavement circles above and around me. Ascending, my movement across the steps curves, as they narrow to the top. From this moment, these circling movements of the building orbiting me, and then me orbiting the building, are repeated throughout my course with it. Every solid surface is punctuated. On the staircases, interior windows slip down beneath the stairs. This is a building that allows space for movement; that pushes me in and pulls me out of its orbit. Being inside this art school creates a heightened sense of myself in relation to it, and of it in relation to myself. In this way, the building itself operates independently as a teacher of sorts, a kind of art school in and of itself.



The contract between an art student and an art school is complicated and shifting, and a significant but largely unspoken part of art school education. An art student has to be willing to give up part of herself to the place she has entered, whilst training her awareness of what the institution is, its limits and edges. She has to be alert to the way it is shaping her, resisting it in some places and letting it form her in others. Moving through Mackintosh's art school, I sense and feel exactly this exchange. For every movement the building sets up in one direction, it makes an equal and opposite movement in the other. I enter the gallery, for example, from the dark wood of the light filled stairwell below. My movement into it continues to spiral vertically up the beams that continue from the stairwell to its high, open ceiling. The wide stairwell sits open at the centre of the gallery, reversing the pull of the field opened up above further back down below floor level. It is significant that it does this at a level of feeling and sensation, rather than symbolically. This is an art school that trains me to be alert on a sensual, immediate level.

At either side of the building, twin stairwells open up multiple and multiplying perspectives. My movement up and down these staircases is countered and punctured by arches cut through the stairwell. These open up a view backwards to the flight I have just taken but that I expected to be no longer visible, and forwards to the underside of the steps I am about to turn a corner onto. The stairs themselves make different moments in time present in my movement with them. They do this with an exhilarating sense of vertigo and risk, and in real present time. This makes it impossible to successfully fix their architecture into an imagined past. The way that Mackintosh's art school works creates a particular kind of immediate time. This is the building itself countering any attempts to historicise it.



It is significant that Mackintosh made his art school with a gallery describing the centre. Art makes the present felt and visible, and can only do this in time and in place. My first view of the gallery is up and through the multiplying beams and banisters of the stairwell. In this way, I am looking through and with Mackintosh's building, in both of our time and place. This is a room that leaves its own centre apparently empty, so that it can be entered from the middle, not the edge. This is a risk for both of us. It asks a great deal of me, whilst risking leaving itself unsaid. This is a building that from the outset demands a strength of engagement. Because it does this by making itself porous, and at the level of lived sensation, my guess is that it would be very difficult to resist responding to the challenge it presents.

This text is Alice Channer's response, following her first site visit, to the Mackintosh Gallery and Mackintosh Building at The Glasgow School of Art. Her solo exhibition 'Inhale, Exhale', 16 April – 8 May 2010, is part of Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art.

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Mackintosh Gallery
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(T) 0141 353 4500
(E) exhibitions@gsa.ac.uk
www.gsa.ac.uk/exhibitions
www.gsaevents.com

Opening Hours
Mon – Fri: 10:30am – 4:30pm
Saturday: 10:00am – 2:00pm
Sunday: Closed

THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART

The Henry Moore
Foundation

The approach
Raven Row

16.04.10 – 03.05.10

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VISUAL ART



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Inhale, Exhale**

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Free admission to gallery

Preview Fri 16 April 2010 6-8pm

Exhibition runs 16 April– 8 May 2010

Alice Channer's first solo exhibition in Scotland sees this London-based artist create an exhibition especially for the Mackintosh Gallery.

Channer's works often take the form of concentrations of material, particularly fabric, which she pleats, stretches and folds. Through exhibitions, she explores the potential for her works to inhabit a physical place and to have the feeling of being inhabited, paralleling the way clothes are worn on the body. The exhibition does not claim to be 'site specific' – for her the work is responsive, but not a response. Her show will in essence 'clothe' Mackintosh's work, moving with it in some places, and away from it in others. As the gallery is part of Charles Rennie Mackintosh's architectural masterwork, with the style and features of a museum, Channer would like to use the immediate and intimate time of the worn garment in an attempt to make both her own and Mackintosh's works exist in the present.

She says:

"The exhibition title 'Inhale, Exhale' refers to a phenomenon in the work where it expands and contracts – as static forms repeat themselves, they change and move. The aperture they make opens and closes from one object to the next. This is a process that mirrors the dilation and contraction of the paired organs of my body, especially my eyes and lungs. This both expands my body beyond its apparent limits, and makes the gap between it and the object it apprehends apparent. Can I claim the work as a kind of figurative sculpture, and if I do, where is the body? The individual works are not, as is to be expected from figurative sculpture, bodies themselves or equivalents for bodies. Instead, in 'Inhale, Exhale', the body is everywhere that the work is not. It is implied in the apertures that the works open up, and in what exists around and between them. The body becomes the beams, banisters, floor, ceiling, walls and volume of Mackintosh's gallery.

My response to the historical, ideological and political associations of Mackintosh's building is to simply position my own time and place alongside them. I can do this because for me the gallery is another body, person, entity or being, alongside myself rather than above or below me. In this way I have approached 'Inhale, Exhale' as a two person show. If Mackintosh's work was carried out in an age of industrialisation and mass production, I place next to this my own works, made in a post-industrial, dematerialized time and place. 'Dematerialization' is a term that is both seductive and problematic for me. It describes my own relationship to a materiality where nothing is neutral, nude, invisible or empty. Instead, everything is material. I want to make work that is present now. I am asking: What is materiality for me now? What is it to make an object present in a dematerialized time?"

A new publication, 'Exhale, Inhale', has been commissioned as part of the exhibition, supported by GSA, Henry Moore Foundation and The approach.

The exhibition is supported by GSA, Glasgow City Council and Raven Row.