

A Sense of Place

During the 1920s the population of Glasgow reached one million and the city faced an unprecedented housing crisis. The overcrowding that characterized the tenements of the city's most economically deprived areas was intertwined with acute public health problems. In response, Glasgow Corporation embarked upon an extensive new housing programme. Land was acquired beyond the city's existing boundaries and radically new housing schemes, founded upon the garden suburb movement, were developed. Led by the city of Glasgow, but dependent upon and answerable to UK national government subsidy and policy, this dramatic expansion and re-visioning of Glasgow was publically endorsed by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. In 1925 he travelled to Glasgow to inaugurate the city's Housing Welfare Scheme and this high-profile association was duly commemorated when a street was named after Baldwin in Knightswood, Glasgow's largest interwar housing scheme.

Like many comparable early twentieth-century housing schemes, Knightswood now reflects both its garden suburb origins and the impact of decades of urban development and social transformation. The comparatively quaint designs of the original two-storey cottages and cottage-flats, laid out in spacious crescents, circuses and avenues, have been reconfigured by a seemingly endless variety of extensions, windows, doors, lean-tos, garden layouts and the often ingenious means by which we all choose to transform and make personal our own environment.

It is the landscape of contemporary Knightswood, and the interplay of its planning, architecture and the historical and personal imprint of its population, which interests Dawn Youll. Having moved to the city to study ceramics at Glasgow School of Art in 1996, Knightswood has been her home since 2012. The work she has developed for this solo exhibition is not only a development upon existing theoretical concerns and technical approaches within her practice, but also the result of her astute engagement with the specific context in which she now lives.

Earlier works by Youll, such as 'Primed' and 'Life Support' (both 2011), express her longstanding interest in her immediate, urban environment. 'Primed' includes a blue oil drum, poised horizontally upon a red wedge; 'Life Support' presents the form of a pink mattress propped up against a brown I-beam. The placement of the separate forms within each piece creates both a subtle tension between the work's individual elements and the distinct sense of a movement or action that has just taken place or is about to happen. These placements also evoke familiar images of

discarded industrial and domestic objects, displaced from their intended contexts and given alternative roles and meanings within their new environments.

The twelve ceramic sculptures presented here for 'Locale', and produced in 2013, employ the bold colours, the close attention to placement within an individual piece and the play between abstract and figurative forms, that characterizes the artist's recent work. Individual pieces, such as 'Polite Conversation', 'Creature of Habit' and 'Vennel' also demonstrate her skilful employment of a range of ceramic techniques and glazes to create a variety of textures and finishes. However, the shapes, textures and glazes of these pieces refer frequently to quite specific external and internal architectural forms and details of the 1920s and '30s housing estate in which Youll now lives: the shape of the arched pend – a passageway between semi-detached homes from the street to the rear gardens – can be seen in 'Vennel' and chimney ladders have informed 'Household'. In this way, Youll draws our attention to architectural detail that is simultaneously familiar and largely overlooked.

This approach is developed further in pieces such as 'Regular Arrangement' and 'Civil Unrest', referring to the ubiquitous wheelie bins common to streets and estates everywhere. These works heighten our awareness of the commonplace and bring, through the use of glazes and the placement of individual elements, a new dimension to otherwise mundane objects. The titles alert us to our own direct and physical interaction with these objects and to the wider social context in which they exist. 'Regular Arrangement', which initially might suggest purely formal considerations, points also to the weekly collection of refuse; 'Civil Unrest', in which the bin is positioned as if it has been pushed or kicked over, has connotations of other, darker dimensions to urban life, ones perhaps unforeseen by those planners who imagined our city's estates and schemes in relation to the ideals of the garden city movement.

Lucy Lippard, in the introduction to her 1997 book 'The Lure of the Local', states: 'Artists can make the connections visible... They can expose the social agendas that have formed the land, bring out multiple readings of places that mean different things to different people at different times rather than merely reflecting back some of their beauty into the marketplace or the living room.' It is this awareness of the historic and the human aspects of our environment, and her ability to convey the complexity of our relationship to the places in which we live, that makes Youll's new work so compelling and relevant.

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