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AND LUCY MCEACHAN
(PANEL)

THE
PARLOUR –
BURRELL'S
FOURTH
HUTTON
CASTLE
ROOM

The Parlour

Part exhibition, part historical inquiry and part commission, Panel propose ‘The Parlour’ – an encounter between The Burrell Collection and the temporary display, between the public museum and the private room.

‘The Parlour’ is our response to an open brief set by the Contemporary Art Society and is informed by our practice as design curators and organisers.

Through the creation of a specially constructed environment, incorporating new artworks and designs by interior decoration company Atelier E.B. with selected works from The Burrell Collection, ‘The Parlour’ looks to the idea of layering histories and offers an imaginative context for the re–interpretation of objects from the collection exploring structures of class, identity and style.

The reconstructed Hutton Castle interiors pay homage to the Businessman and collector William Burrell and represent his concern for the display and experience of objects within the intimate setting of the private room. We would like to adapt this model to fabricate a complete custom fit environment in which to display a variety of works – furniture, textiles and decorative painting – into an integral art/design installation.

Referencing the Hutton Castle interiors ‘The Dining Room’, ‘The Drawing Room’ and ‘The Hall’, our proposed environment will be assigned its own function and designation – ‘The Parlour’. In Britain, throughout the nineteenth century the achievement of a parlour was a marker of social status. The parlour was the room in which the larger world encountered the private sphere of middle and upper class life, and as such its purpose was to display a family’s best furnishings, works of art and other status symbols, acting as a signifier of the division between social class, consumption and taste.



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By presenting a selection of objects from the collection within and at the side of newly commissioned works, the fourth Hutton Castle Room intends to explore class-systems and particularly the prosperity of Glasgow’s expanding middle classes during the 1800s.¹ In proposing a new domestic room for Burrell we wish to uncover and/or imagine his persona, one that is articulated through traces of his collection as well as the highly crafted furnishings and fittings he commissioned. Furthermore, the presentation of our invented interior will honour the pursuit for a definitive ‘showroom’ scheme, as was Burrell’s ambition for the remodelled Hutton Castle² and will consider the reasoning behind such schemes for the display of collections within the domestic setting.

The concept of the proposal focuses on wider notions of style, taste and the creation of cultural identities in Scotland. Our area of interest lies in the examination of how such ideas can be understood through objects and artworks amassed from across the empire, through the collection of one individual and then through such a collections’ presentation within the institution.

Within this context, we intend to make associations between the design and display of ‘The Parlour’ and British nineteenth century design theory. Specifically reform that led to the rationalisation of the decorative arts, and its role within the interior and exhibition setting, enabling audiences to read rooms and display, for example The Hutton Castle Rooms, with a reasoned accuracy.³

As a part of this process we will explore the conflict between such reform and Burrell’s own ambition for the display of his collection. Between a desire to present his growing

collection within a personally realised private setting (one which played with notions of the country house) and his bequest to Glasgow Corporation of a public building, within rural parkland, that would present his collection ‘so far as possible...as it would be if in a private house, with as little resemblance to a formal museum as possible’.⁴

The Temporary Exhibition

‘The Parlour’ will temporarily exist inside the Burrell Galleries, positioned within, and alongside the current display. Its structure will directly follow the design of the Burrell building in the sense that it will be specifically tailored to house the objects selected as a part of its installation.

The Burrell Collection (exhibited and stored) will be utilised as a site for enquiry in the development of ‘The Parlour’. Working alongside the Burrell curators we will investigate material from across the entire collection, exploring a range of disciplines, periods and places.⁵ ‘The Parlour’ will form an eclectic collage of these ideas and fragments, with borrowed objects and artworks selected as furniture, decoration and ornament. Displacing their conventional hierarchies, each object will be displayed instinctively, layered, covered or grouped as they would in a private or domestic setting. Existing in this new environment, set apart from their historical origins and serialised categorisation, they will become possessions of the room and those that inhabit it.

The designs and motifs of chosen pieces will be appropriated, sampled and synthesised by Atelier E.B. to inform the conception of new work including the interior scheme, objects, furniture, painting and accessories. The new work will be exhibited within the installation, alongside its collection counterparts.

Shown together, within the walls of our staged tableau, the objects and artworks will suggest a non–linear and disordered truth concerning the history and chronology of Burrell’s acquisitions, one that sits in opposition to the more



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conventional systems of display adopted throughout the museum. The presentation of authentic artefacts within ‘The Parlour’ will serve not only to provide legitimacy to our historical, albeit subjective narrative, but will also help to create a story for the room to activate its practical use within the context of the public museum and its audience.

A programme for ‘The Parlour’ will be considered by Panel and Atelier E.B. to further develop research presented within the display. For example, we are interested in its employment as a set in which to stage a series of photographs for the Atelier E.B. fashion collection, highlighting the role of interiors, within design and fashion photography, in the creation of narrative. We are also interested in developing its use as a staged forum for discussion, to explore themes such as the influence of the interior design magazine⁶ on the taste and fashion of the collector during the period of Burrell’s lifetime.

Panel and Atelier E.B.

Panel are interested in collaborating on a curatorial proposition with Atelier E.B. because of our shared interest in the construction of frameworks that examine ideas of Scottish style and taste through the investigation of archives, collections and histories.

Previously Panel and Atelier E.B. worked together on ‘The Inventors of Tradition’, a subjective study of the history of the textile industry within Scotland.⁷ ‘The Parlour’ is an extension of this model and explores further Atelier’s work as an interior decoration company.

Atelier E.B. was formed in 2007 by the fashion designer Beca Lipscombe, illustrator Bernie Reid, both living in Edinburgh, and fine artist Lucy McKenzie, originally from Glasgow, based in Brussels. The company was founded to bring fine art criticality to the realm of commercial design and by extension apply the expertise and practicality of the applied arts to exhibition and object making.

Their work to date includes commissions for public and private spaces, temporary and permanent display, design objects and publishing. Specifically suited to each context, everything is realised with modest and often traditional techniques executed by the artists themselves and local industry. They use a variety of media; draped fabric, decorative painting such as marbled and wood grained faux finishes, silk-screen and digital printing and stencilled motifs.

Conceptually, their partnership is rooted in a common interest in artisan and specialised production, especially in the vernacular, applied in challenging and inventive ways.

Previous work includes the design for an exhibition of prints and paintings by Lucy McKenzie in the MOMA collection. In conversation with curator Christophe Cherix, McKenzie discusses the created space:

It could be a library, or it could also be the walls of a club – a space that could be private or semi-private. I wanted to underscore the fact that the majority of art that is bought is hung in private rooms, but we see it in museums on white walls shown to beautiful advantage. I’ve been very impressed by how good certain things look that in other circumstances I would never really have thought about. I wanted to show my own work in this over-determined room, as I said, to underscore that the prints and paintings are out of their original environments. But they’re meant to be decorative, and they’re meant to be lived around, and they’re meant to be shown on people’s walls...when the exhibition is finished I hope to keep the paintings. I’d like them to be used for things like film sets, or I want other artists to borrow them as a portable context to show their work.”⁸

Our proposal for The Burrell Collection seeks to expand these ideas juxtaposing the diversity of chosen and new objects against the



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seriality of the collection as a whole, emulating the language of the domestic interior within the context of a public museum. Within our contemporary interior scheme, we mean to propose a memoir of mercantile and industrial Glasgow and the middle classes that sprang from it, whilst considering the role of the interior as an expression of the self and, by extension, of a particular social and national character.

Notes

1. Mercantile and industrial strength led to the swelling of Glasgow’s population during the nineteenth century, and it was that, which moved the middle class westwards and southwards into new and aspirational quarters of the city. Such suburban areas were designed to attract this burgeoning group, denoting their wealth and status as the city transformed from Georgian and mercantile into Victorian and industrial.
2. Burrell’s concern with an authentic setting for the presentation of his collection within constructed ‘period’ environments led to the complete remodelling of his familial homes, firstly at Great Western Terrace, Glasgow and then at Hutton Castle, near Berwick. Burrell initially collaborated with the architect Robert Lorimer and later with interior decorator Frank Surgery on the realisation of these commissions.

3. Owen Jones’ contribution to the colour scheme and interpretation of The Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851, and to the formation of the Victoria and Albert Museum in his advisory role on its foundation collection is a significant example.
4. Point B.2.3.4 within the Burrell Collection Architecture Competition Brief presented by Glasgow Corporation. (c 1970)
5. Our areas of research will be broad and expansive emulating the scope and breadth of Burrell’s collection, one of the largest and eclectic by an individual of his time.
6. Examples of which include ‘The Connoisseur’ and ‘Country Life’.
7. ‘The Inventors of Tradition’ was presented as an exhibition, held from 22 January – 26 February 2011 at 21 Stockwell Street, Glasgow, a film screening, shown at the Glasgow Film Theatre on 24 February 2011 and a publication, launched at The Glasgow School of Art on 16 September 2011.
8. Projects 88: Lucy McKenzie. The Museum of Modern Art. Excerpt from the transcription of a conversation between Christophe Cherix, Beca Lipscombe, Lucy McKenzie, and Bernie Reid, 2008.

Images

1. Reconstructed Hutton Castle Dining Room, The Burrell Collection
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- 2, 3, 4
Atelier E.B.
Beca Lipscombe, Lucy McKenzie, Bernie Reid
MOMA, 2008
Design for Lucy McKenzie’s exhibition of prints and paintings in the MOMA Collection, Autumn 2008. Includes draped printed silk and faux suede, stencilled Neo Gothic rug on vinyl flooring and oil and gilded copper on canvas mural with tromp l’oeil walnut panelling.