

STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY

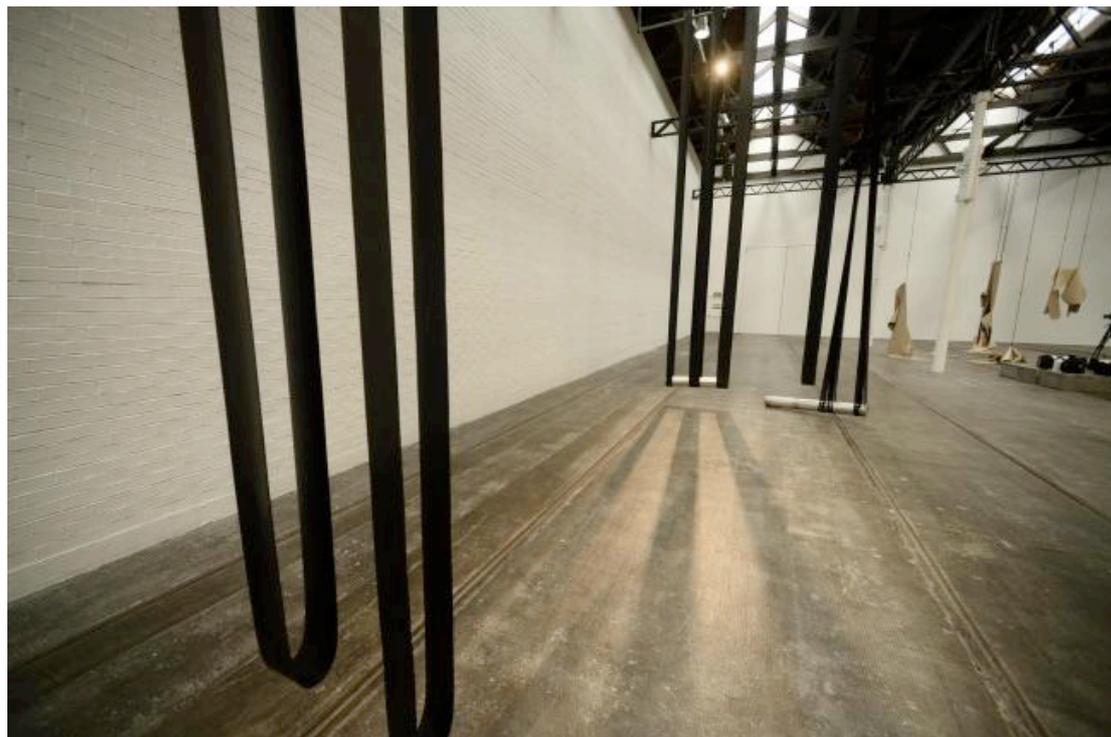
Herald Scotland

Galleries: Claire Barclay on exhibiting at Glasgow's Tramway 2

11 February 2017

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Glasgow, Scotland - February 09: a general view of Yield Point, a major new solo exhibition from Glasgow-based artist Claire Barclay at Tramway on February 09, 2017 in Glasgow, Scotland.

CLAIRE Barclay is an artist who is known for using the space in which she exhibits as a studio in the run-up to its opening. But there are spaces. And there are Spaces. Glasgow's Tramway 2 falls into the latter category, with a capital S. It is huge. No doubt about that. Tramway 2 housed four separate shows for the 2015 Turner Prize very nicely, thank you.

Some artists would have been daunted by this challenge but Barclay isn't one of them, even though this is the biggest space she has worked in during a stellar career spanning three decades.

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For the last four weeks, the Paisley-born graduate of Glasgow School of Art's (GSA) famous environmental art course has been quietly working away in this space, creating and assembling what is a beautiful – and strangely uplifting – collection of new work.

When I walked into Tramway's giant hall, which once rattled and rolled to the clank of trams being serviced, I was struck by an almost overpowering feeling of calm. At various points around the hall, are sculptural works which look like they have always been there. Using a mix of metal, steel, dyed canvas, latex, ceramics, cement, textiles, thread, soot, engine oil, grease and other materials, Barclay has created a Zen-like landscape. Her colours-scheme is at once muted yet tempered with zest. Orange, rust and mustard mingle happily with monochrome.

Barclay has long been interested in the relationships between the human body and places where hard manual labour takes place so as a space with a bona fide industrial heritage, Tramway is a perfect fit. She has made a virtue of what is effectively a giant hanging system by using Tramway 2's rafters and support columns. As you walk in, a giant mustard-coloured canvas with rusty metal fringed panels along the bottom hangs between two of the rooms existing columns, draped over ceiling joists from a great height. At the far end of the hall, there's a massive orange canvas bubble hanging from the ceiling. Inside, at various points, clumps of black worm-like thread lie silhouetted against the light.

Elsewhere, swathes of carefully-cut latex the colour of Donald Trump's skin hang limply from the rafters – suspended in mid-air over either blocks of concrete or giant clean cut pieces of canvas painted with what looks like fingers in manic coffee-coloured swirls. Other latex pieces are being prodded by shiny oversized rivets – as if they are being tested for signs of life. Like disembowelled body parts in a spotless abattoir, they all look like they are melting. The question of what they are melting into remains hanging in the air. It is up to you, as a viewer to make up your own story.

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Barclay is known for inhabiting some notable spaces; including, in April 2016, the Kelvin Hall, as part of Glasgow International and in 2015, at Vienna's Kunsthalle Wien gallery for the first Vienna Biennale. In 2003, ten years after graduating from GSA, she represented Scotland at the Venice Biennale.

I find the artist quietly walking round and round two white metal columns, winding black thread as she goes, keeping the tension just so. The thread is being 'woven' prior to being removed and draped over a nearby steel structure which Barclay has made with the help of a Coatbridge-based fabrication company.

This structure is adorned with sections of mustard-coloured fringed suede and shiny precision-cut brocade. Shiny domed metal columns line up like bullets atop the suede, while other "interventions", such as golden cones (think Madonna's cone-bra) jut out from small rods on the structure and small combs lie close to – or on top of – the fronds of black thread which Barclay is still in the process of making.

"I might not use this one but I am making it anyway," she tells me as she walks round the poles. For Barclay, making and discarding is all part of the process. Even if it entails walking thread for 3.7 miles around two poles.

"I have a cupboard full of things which didn't make it into the exhibition next door," she laughs. "The whole exhibition has changed a lot in the time given," she adds. "I am used to improvising but I've felt very comfortable in this space. The minute I got into it about a month ago, I relaxed. Usually in the weeks leading up to an opening, I'm like a project manager, but that hasn't happened here."

Barclay never works with found objects, preferring to make and shape the work herself. "I like it when there is an interesting relationship between the materials I use. I am using soap and grease in this exhibition and I find that interesting because soap breaks down grease."

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Claire Barclay's art it feels to me like a door opening into a parallel world I didn't know existed. As I was leaving, I asked the artist about the small shiny metal combs scattered around the metal structure at the heart of the exhibition.

"They're combs," she says, "but the scales are all wrong so you start to imagine all sorts of purposes."

Sometimes it can be hard to analyse in words why art makes an impression on you. Claire Barclay's work is beautifully crafted and beguiling in its presentation. Nothing and everything is left to chance. Riveters and welders in the shipyards took pride in making the finest metalwork as part of the bigger picture. Barclay takes the same workmanlike approach laced in with Shaman-like purpose.