

# Claire Barclay

## Ideal Pursuits

### Exhibition Information

One of the most intriguing artists in Scotland today, Claire Barclay (b. 1968, Paisley) lives and works in Houston, Scotland. She studied at Glasgow School of Art. She has also had solo shows at, among others, CCA Glasgow; The Showroom, London and Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Her work has recently been included in important group exhibitions, including: 'Early One Morning' at The Whitechapel Art Gallery, London and 'Zenomap,' the Scottish Project for the 50<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale.

Exhibition supported by:

The Henry Moore Foundation

The Hope Scott Trust

Locally produced jute was provided by Nutscene Ltd., Forfar.

#### **Claire Barclay would like to thank the following for assistance in the making of works for Ideal Pursuits:**

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#### **Gallery Talks**

All talks free, tickets from reception

#### **Saturday 6 September, 2pm**

**Wendy Gunn**, research lecturer at the University of Dundee.

#### **Thursday 11 September and Saturday 27 September, 6.30pm**

**Gallery Staff** give a walk-through and answer questions about the exhibition.

#### **Saturday 13 September, 2pm**

**Francis McKee**, curator of the Zenomap project for the Venice Biennale, offers his view of Claire Barclay's art practice.

#### **Thursday 2 October, 6.30pm**

**Claire Barclay and Katrina Brown**

A conversation about the exhibition with the artist and DCA's Chief Curator.

#### **Saturday 4 October, 2pm (meeting room)**

**Moira Vincentelli**, Senior Lecturer in Art History and Curator of Ceramics at the University of Wales, presents her talk 'Women Potters, Transforming Tradition.'

For more information about the work of Claire Barclay, please visit the **Information Room** just outside the gallery entrance where you will find books, articles and reviews of her work.

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Claire Barclay's 'Ideal Pursuits' manages to both highlight and blur distinctions between craft, sculpture and installation. It draws our attention to different processes of fabrication and the specific properties and associations that each material possesses. Jute, aluminium, terra cotta, wood, steel, leather, cane and various fabrics come together in a series of abstract sculptural tableaux that involve the viewer in determining whether they are simply decorative or perhaps bear more unsettling implications. While the works' various textures, hues and lines hold a sensuous attraction, a vague sense of unease arises from their encounter as well.

An object's potential function is hinted at, but undermined in Barclay's compositions. The arrangement of natural materials and industrially produced components into hybrid constructions make any conceivable practical use impossible. Weaving, sewing and joinery have produced decorative and structural elements

**23 August to  
12 October**

rather than serviceable objects. This fusion of handcraft and machine-made pieces results in an exhibition that speaks to the desire for authentic experience in the contemporary world.

It is difficult to distinguish whether the natural or the industrial exerts the stronger lure here. It is a confusion that Barclay is keen to promote.

**'I aim to achieve ambiguity in the work. For me, it echoes the paradox between idealism and human dysfunction. My work always tries to present both, by an effort to master a degree of perfection in the objects I make, coupled with the futile or eccentric nature of the task, or in the conscious flaws which can be discovered on closer inspection.'**

A concern for ecological balance is coupled with an awareness of the exploitation of nature for the supposed benefit of society. Industrially produced elements of the exhibition seem threatening in contrast to the organic objects that surround them.

**'I have used timber, clay, wool, polythene and other ubiquitous materials in installations, in order to evoke a sense of the everyday.'**

This everyday quality underlines a concern for the domestic that influences Barclay's approach. The use of organic materials fosters a sense of comfort in contrast to the hard surfaces and sharp angles of the gallery space. Evidence of the stitching, weaving and sewing involved with the natural objects' fabrication illustrates the careful attention to small, imperfect, details that often serve to provide a person a specific sense of place.

However, the presence of natural materials may not be so reassuring as they at first seem. Although her materials may be familiar, the objects Barclay makes from them appear increasingly strange when compared to their factory-produced counterparts.

**'In a way, I'm interested in the consumption of craft, as distinct from the active involvement in making things. Making things has become a hobby or pastime rather than part of daily life for most people. I'm really interested in the way that such diverse schools of thought as Shaker ideology, William Morris and the Bauhaus seem to share some notion of craft as something that is functional, but also sets itself against methods of production that are wasteful or indulgent.'**

In contemporary society where consumption is a way of life, Barclay manages to emphasise the dynamic conflict of craft as one that is both accessible and exclusive.

**'On the one hand, you've got this idea of craft as a very ethical position, on the other hand it is also associated with a kind of decadence and opulence and with the individuals who can afford to buy it or collect it. There's a contradiction there and it's that contradiction I find interesting and which I try to explore through the work I make.'**

Barclay embraces this contradiction by her use of craft techniques to alter selected pre-fabricated objects. The actions of her own hand now influence machine made materials and vice versa. A series of industrially produced steel rings is enveloped with hand-stitched black leather sleeves. Networks of bent aluminium poles seem ready to climb the very walls that contain them with sharp metal spikes. Woven cane is enmeshed with free-standing, grill-like cages. Machine-cut pine timbers are assembled by hand into armatures by mallet and dowel. In effect, decoration becomes structural. A telling example is seen in Barclay's own efforts at macramé, where locally made jute yarns are fashioned into connecting elements between points of the gallery's architecture and the wooden structures. Though macramé serves no practical function, the pattern

of its weave is essential to its construction process.

**These elements are not intended to be read as kitsch but rather as a trigger for one's own experience of making objects and acknowledging an understanding of process.'**

Guided by a sensibility of order and place, Barclay has redrawn the patterns of movement through the DCA galleries to form a poetic landscape that questions our relationship with nature. At the same time her efforts also reveal the extent to which factory-produced items now influence our concept of the world and of how one lives within it. Ultimately, the idealism implied in the endeavour of craft is tempered by the works' dependence on elements that are machine made.