

Asian women's centre Jagonari from 1985 to 1987, which includes pictures of traditional Asian buildings taken by women. A flyer about the Kumoke Nursery from 1986 to 1988 describes the different tactics deployed by Matrix to increase the workers' understanding of the project, from sessions on construction processes to using ribbons marked like a ruler to measure their existing spaces.

The Barbican exhibition, however, doesn't accord the same attention to how technical language is interpreted. If the choice to include plans, elevations, sections and architectural specifications reflects the intention to unveil the process, then the history of the collective and their peculiar mode of working teaches us not to confuse knowledge with immediate access. The technical documentation preserves all its opacity to the non-expert visitor (who is likely to be the main audience of a show hosted in the foyer of the Barbican). A further unresolved aspect is the attempt to 'actualise' the legacy of the 1980s cooperative by including a few contemporary works of art which are largely overshadowed by the archival material. In spite of these minor curatorial drawbacks, the exhibition remains an occasion to gain an insight into a feminist collective which sought to redefine the contours of architectural practice by dispensing with the words 'practice' and 'architecture' altogether.

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Karla Black: sculptures (2001–2021) – details for a retrospective

Fruitmarket, Edinburgh, 7 July to 24 October

After a £4.3m redevelopment, Edinburgh's Fruitmarket opened its doors again on 7 July after a two-year break (double the intended length). Christening the newly enlarged complex is Karla Black's 'sculptures (2001–2021): details for a retrospective', which combines a non-chronological survey of the Scottish artist's work over the past two decades with a large-scale commission for the gallery's cavernous new warehouse, adjacent to the existing two storeys.

Black's sculptures form a luminous counterpoint to the industrial grammar of Reiach and Hall's design for the new space, whose joists and beams have been retained at ceiling level while the upper flooring around them has been removed and reused as an inner wall, creating a single, vaulted interior. But that's to jump to the end. In the old Fruitmarket gallery spaces on the second floor, majestically illuminated by a skylight, the artist's forms find an easier affinity – or perhaps a rather less noticeable foil. Like Joseph Beuys in powder pink, Black's chief concern over the past few decades, including at her 2011 show for the Scottish Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale, has been to capture in perpetuity the passing moment of artistic creation, working with unconventional materials to maximise tactile and sensuous effects. The heritage of this work (the attempt to articulate a moment of unrepeatable aesthetic experience, loaded by the artist's commentary with a liberatory language of release or excess) seems to lie in the 1960s and intermedia performance art. The exhibition blurb paraphrases Black's desire to create almost-sculptures or not-quite-sculptures: like trying

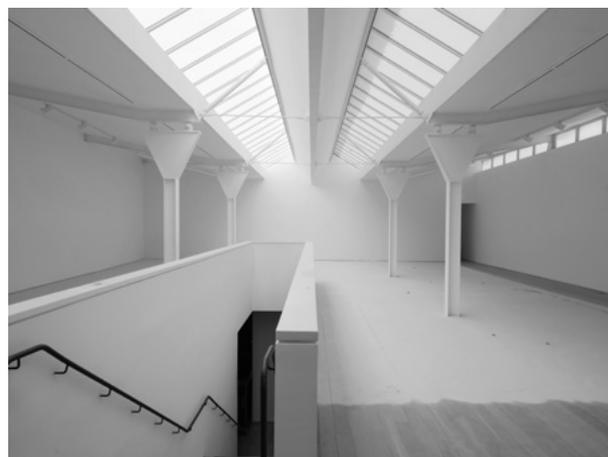
to freeze in time the climax of a happening, or one of Gustav Metzger's acid-on-canvas actions – a moment of sensuous discovery, decay and dissolution.

The result is a set of works, including some hanging, frieze-like constructions made with warped paper and teabags, and often other commercial detritus, that seem to be endlessly forming themselves out of their constituent materials. *Lasts as Forecast*, 2010, *Don't Depend*, 2011, and *What Others Ask*, 2011, are human-sized, layered wedding cakes of soil, polystyrene and plaster painted in pink and brown, at once seemingly edible and repellent, overly fecund in some way. Elsewhere, hangings of cellophane, polythene and Sellotape, such as *Traps Take Practice*, 2011, and *There Can Be No Arguments*, 2010, seem suspended in impossibly unstable positions, as if captured mid-flight on a cross-breeze. Others, such as the series 'Division Is', 2008, obfuscate a sturdy architectural base with paper wrappings in crooked and tenuous postures, giving the illusion of fragility or a structure that cannot hold.

Elsewhere, the work bears the markings of the artist's interaction, as if in lieu of Black's typical evanescence in the materials. In the upper gallery *Punctuation is pretty popular: nobody wants to admit to much*, 2008/21, is a floor coated in a thick snow of pink powder paint, across which rolls of yarn have been tossed and unfurled, while a scribbling of dig-it-marks traces the artist's movements like winter fox tracks. Reflected off the brightly dusted floor, light, dyed pink from the aerial windows, appears as an inhalable mist of pigment.

Over in the new warehouse, the large-scale work *Waiver for Shade*, 2021, and accompanying pieces offer a different kind of sensuous encounter – and, in some respects, struggle to bring vibrancy to bear against the sultry gloom of the brickwork and metal. Smudged finger-print patterns in Vaseline against the insides of the street-facing windows appear as mucky stains. The most successful elements of the piece, however, are also the most prominent: a big mound of earth is covered in evenly patterned gold foil squares; differently sized and spaced quadrilaterals, outlined in soil, divvy up the surrounding floor. On the walls are little primitivist daubings in pink and yellow, and balls and gobbets of wettened toilet paper – on the more engaging side of the grotesque or abject interventions on offer.

The question of what it all means is one that has vexed and sometimes angered Black's critics. The artist's assertions that she wants to avoid all tendentious or symbolic explanations of her craft is both



Karla Black, *Punctuation is pretty popular: nobody wants to admit to much*, 2008/21, installation view

confirmed and belied by the mischievous complexity of her titles, which offer up illustrative suggestions with an abandon verging on randomness. Labels such as *What To Ask Of Others* seem to bear no relation to the pieces they frame, as if artwork and name formed two arbitrary points in space, between which the viewer is invited to map their route. Then again, the hints furnished by phrases including *Opportunities for Girls* and *Looking Glass number 16*, coupled with Black's often stereotypically 'femme' colour schemes and ostentatious repurposing of beauty products, suggest that some of these routes might take us through the thickets of feminist theory.

This show delivers an immersive celebration of the transient fizz of creativity, offered up in a structure whose lifespan will hopefully be far longer.

Greg Thomas is a critic and editor based in Glasgow.

Tarek Lakhrissi: My Immortal

Mostyn, Llandudno, 3 July to 19 September

There is a chill in the air. Perhaps it comes from Tarek Lakhrissi's nine aluminium panels slickly engraved with text, their mirrored surfaces carrying the solemnity of gravestones. But if this is a cemetery we are walking through, it is one of splendour. The texts by the artist are deeply personal, largely summoning past encounters with love, desire, anger and doubt. Some are filled with regret while others are romantically sweet, such as 'Possibly maybe / I stole this heart / and I didn't expect / being in love with / blue Grass / your pretty butthole / and a cold sun / this tastes like / eternity / where have you been / all this / time?'

The title of the exhibition is taken from the titular pop song by Evanescence, which recounts pain that time cannot heal. This teenage, kitsch and doom-laden invocation is followed by Lakhrissi, who engraves memories so that they, too, become 'immortal'. From the poems, we construct the difficulties of creating relationships, alliances or kinship, we deduce constructive and destructive experiences of impermanence and the unsteadiness that intimacy provokes.

The projected video work *The Art of Losing (Love Scene)*, 2021, is purposively indulgent. From a computer-generated pool of gold and silver liquid, two glossy anthropomorphic figures with dinosaur heads and exuberant muscles hug each other tenderly. The duration of the film is less than two minutes, tightly compressing the gleaming bodies and the excessive imagery to suggest another form of tactile contact.

Throughout the exhibition, the dichotomy between tender and rough persists, such as in *Unfinished Sentence II*, 2020. Lakhrissi's sculpture, sound and light installation extends through the spacious galleries. Suspended horizontally across the vaulted ceiling are metal spears, so that when gazing upwards they appear as a defiant drawing in outline of a battle scene. In the accompanying exhibition text, we read that it references Monique Wittig's 1969 novel *Les Guérillères*, which is an account of female warriors engaged in bloody battles against the patriarchal order and losing, again. We might imagine that each spear belongs to a female fighter, yet the weapons that loom over us are bent in soft curves and impossible to use. Floating in a soothing purple light, we learn that the colour is connected with the French Women's Liberation Movement of the 1980s, which Wittig belonged to,

reviving the colour – typically used alongside green and white – that is historically associated with feminist struggle since the early 20th century's women suffrage movement and the Women's Social and Political Union.

The accompanying soundscape loops suspensefully, as if stuck announcing an action that never arrives. Devised in collaboration with Ndayé Kouagou, the work takes inspiration from the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, 1997–2003, and *Xena: Warrior Princess*, 1995–2001, drawing links between Wittig's warriors and mainstream culture's depictions and fantasies of feminist fighters against an underworld of evil. Buffy and Xena are millennial pop culture phenomena; for a generation of early 1990s kids – the artist was born in 1992 – stumbling upon such references is similar to rediscovering objects of past desire and identification.

Throughout the exhibition there is an ambivalence between longing and belonging, which is placed under further tension in *Gay Angel 1* and *Gay Angel 2*, 2021. Both comprise two thin, metallic sheets, cut to resemble angel wings and suspended high in the gallery spaces, as if guillotines about to fall. Inspired by the myth of Daedalus and Icarus, Lakhrissi's metal wings also appear as costumes, hinting at cosplay in which fans wear elaborate outfits and make-up to embody various fictional characters, an activity to do with toying with identity, but which is also a tight subculture united in bringing fantasy into the material world.

Gayle Greene writes in *Feminist fiction and the uses of memory* from 1991 that 'in a nostalgic mode, the referent is seen "as an authentic origin or centre from which to disparage the degenerate present"', adding that, 'Textual feminists subvert "nostalgic rhetoric" by mining the past to discover play rather than place'. The playfulness of recuperating previously overlooked materials is manifest throughout 'My Immortal'. Less than a yearning for yesterday, Lakhrissi's exhibition fosters the continuity of identity across time – fictional or otherwise – suggestively constructing new communities of warriors and lovers. However, it also remains rooted in the artist's own community and networks, and is one made of complicated longings, of pain and pleasure.

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Tarek Lakhrissi, *My Immortal*, 2021, installation view