

## Curators Text Francis McKee

CCA's largest gallery houses a newly commissioned work within a fictional abandoned chapel. Using dark humour and pathos, Maclure's large stained glass installation *The Soil* laments our disappearing countryside and its distracted, fragmented communities, but celebrates nature's extraordinary ability to revive abandoned places, with the help of grassroots activism.

In an accompanying text Maclure cites a quote from the singer and comedian Bette Midler:

*My whole life had been spent waiting for an epiphany, a manifestation of God's presence, the kind of transcendent, magical experience that lets you see your place in the big picture. And that is what I had with my first compost heap.*

Pinkie Maclure did not set out to become a stained glass artist. She discovered the medium through her work assisting her husband, who worked with stained glass professionally. Gradually, she was drawn more to the medium, but recognised that it was a medium that desperately needed to acknowledge the contemporary world.

The roots of stained glass are closely intertwined with Christian church architecture, which historically used colour and light to create a sense of transcendence, a spiritual manifestation that had little to do with reality. Maclure introduces a down-to-earth vision: feminist, political and unafraid of life beyond the church. Speaking on the piece *Beauty Tricks*, she describes how she approaches this process:

*I decided to explore the way the beauty industry affects us and our environment. The central figure is based around a classic Madonna, but she has liposuction lines on her torso and hypodermic needles and scalpels adorning her halo. Her nipples have been censored. Two little girls gaze up at her beautiful pink frock from a grey world of abandoned plastic containers. Above her, medieval scales traditionally used to symbolise the 'weighing of souls' refer to the long-running L'Oreal ad 'Because You're Worth It'.*

*A woman fires a gun at a mirror, smashing it to smithereens. To her left, a 'kindly' grandmother knits a web of Barbie dolls and to her right is a bulimic Rapunzel. The palm trees refer to the palm oil industry, the roses symbolise feminine beauty. At the top, Satan is hopping across the towers of Oxbridge with a pile of books heaped on his back, stealing all the knowledge while the women are distracted.*

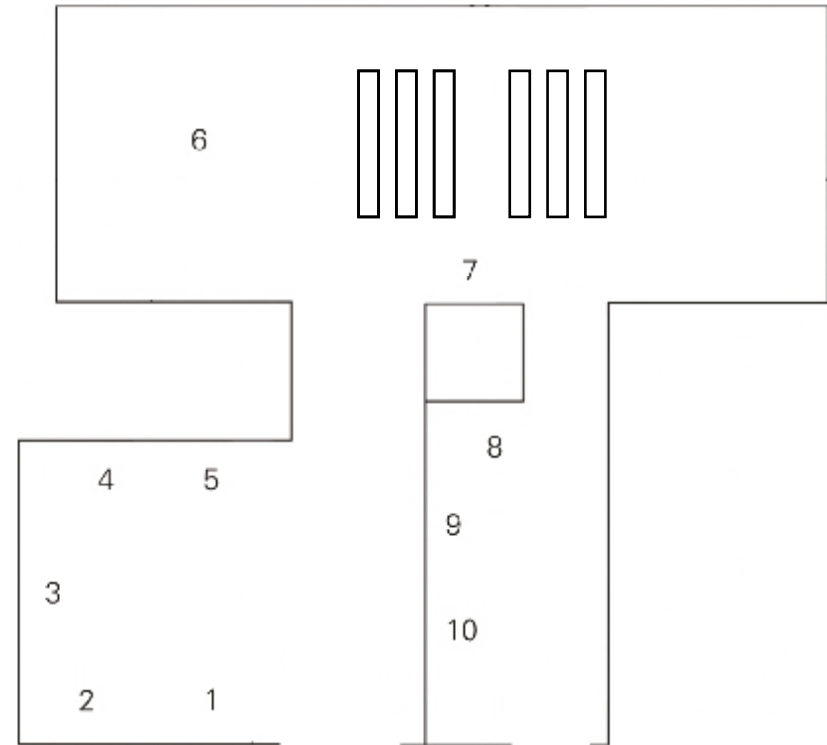
This is not stained glass as we historically know it. Stained glass was initially housed in monasteries as early as the 7th century, and had evolved by the 12th century into a sophisticated art form for decorating churches and conveying biblical narratives to a mostly illiterate congregation. The stories, of course, upheld the authority of the church and its patriarchal system, striving to elevate the viewer's mind from the everyday concerns of life, using light, colour and beauty to encourage transcendence, reflections on God and spiritual life.

Much of the stained glass in Scottish monasteries and churches was destroyed during the Reformation (recently however, monks have re-established these lost skills in Pluscarden Abbey, where a new workshop was founded in 1948). Over time, stained glass craftsmen turned to domestic interiors: Victorian houses in the 19th century and Art Deco windows in the first half of the 20th century. Perhaps because of its association with Church scenes and domestic décor, stained glass then fell out of favour with contemporary artists. All of its previous incarnations linked it to the medieval world either consciously or subliminally. Its most spectacular re-emergence in recent time has been in Cologne where *Cathedral Window* (2007) was designed by the German artist Gerhard Richter for the south transept of the city's cathedral, which consisted of 11,500 squares of glass in 72 colours based on medieval samples. In 2020, Richter also completed a three-window commission for a gothic monastery in Tholey, Germany, the last of his large-scale artworks.

On a wholly different level (secular and in Partick...), Glasgow designer Randal Maccoll commissioned artists Yvonne Smith and Joe Boyle to create a series of stained glass windows in The Lismore pub on Dumbarton Road. The windows graphically narrate the transit of one highland family to Partick during the Highland Clearances.

Pinkie Maclure draws on some elements of all three of these traditions – the contemporary, the monastic and the secular graphic narrative. Her exhibition spans earlier works and newly completed commissions such as *The Soil* (2023) which dwells on ‘the land, disappearing rural communities, climate change and ultimately hope’. Earlier works touch on addiction, feminism, power, the power of consumerism, isolation, self-perception – a spectrum of issues and images that have not inhabited the medium of stained glass before.

Maclure’s work often relies on the fragility of this medium, relating the vulnerability of the materials to the ideas and subjects she deals with in each piece. She also embraces the complexity of stained glass, enjoying the possibilities that emerge from a deeper, longer engagement with the process, striving for the levels of expertise that informed the medieval craft.



## Notes on the Work Pinkie Maclure

### 1. **X-Ray Eye** 2023, stained glass

The twisting of words and fragmentation of social interaction - how can you decide between two sides of the argument, when one always seems to shout louder?

### 2. **Black Friday & The Ghosts of Thrift** 2019, stained glass

A nostalgic look back to the days when Mum used to save up for years to buy herself a lovely new winter coat. Luckily she was a dab-hand at darning and invisible mending, so she wore the old one until it fell apart. She would make a day out of it and meet her friends for a nice cup of tea from a china cup and saucer.

After Christmas, we go to the January sales. Somehow these days, though, I just can't cope with all the plastic, the 'bogofs' and the closing-down sales.

### 3. **Pills for Ills, Ills for Pills** 2018, stained glass

In my youth in the 80s and 90s, I witnessed the tragic loss of many friends to addictive drugs, especially heroin.

According to the Sunday Telegraph on 7 Sept, 2019, "Britain is now in the grip of a growing opioid crisis, with middle-aged women fuelling a 60 per cent rise in the numbers of heavy painkillers, anxiety medications and antidepressants prescribed in the last decade.'

Opioids are suitable only for short-term use, but have been regularly prescribed for chronic pain, leading to addiction.

The UK has the highest consumption rate of prescription opioids for pain management per capita in the world, according to research published in The Lancet in December 2021.

### 4. **Two Witches (Knowledge is Power)** 2021, stained glass

Education is symbolised by a crow (using a hooked tool, which humans can't use until the age of 8) and a winking owl, which is defecating on a freemasonry emblem. Secret societies such as freemasons are intended to exclude women and keep them ignorant.

The girl on the right is holding a torch which has attracted tiny moths, symbolising enlightenment through studying the natural world. She also has a flagpole with a condom flying from it, symbolising women's right to choose. On her lapel, an image of a road to a stepped mountain symbolises ambition and exploration.

The girl on the left has an electric guitar and is writing the words 'Knowledge is Power' in seven of the world's most commonly-used languages - Arabic, Portuguese, Russian, Hindi, Spanish, Chinese and French. Many English speakers don't bother to learn other languages.

### 5. **Beauty Tricks** 2017, stained glass

The beauty industry - Satan escapes across the towers of Cambridge with the knowledge piled on his back, while the women are distracted by botox, Barbies and bulimia. In frustration, a woman shoots a mirror to smithereens.

### 6. **The Soil** 2023

This installation is a collaboration with 3D sound scenographer John Wills. Like a church haunted by its lost congregation, *The Soil* is about the land, disappearing rural communities, climate change and ultimately hope, through nature's extraordinary ability to reclaim abandoned sites and grassroots activism. Made from 70% salvaged glass from a Victorian greenhouse which collapsed in a storm, with thanks to Aaron McCloskey for the greenhouse glass.

Due to intensive farming methods and climate change, the world could run out of topsoil in 60 years, according to the UN. Without topsoil, the earth's ability to filter water, absorb carbon, and feed people plunges. Human urine is beneficial as part of a composting system as it has a high nitrogen content along with containing potassium and phosphorus, the main nutrients that are essential to healthy plant growth.

### 7. **Somehow We Mend** 2023

### 8. **Future Daysies** 2023

This work imagines the landscapes that await us.

### 9. **Totally Wired (Self-Portrait with Insomnia Posy)** 2020 (generously loaned by Sally Orson-Jones, Ilse Orson-Jones and Antonia Bunnin).

At the heights of the pandemic, I woke in the night filled with horror at the unfolding tragedy, the waving hands of my friends on Zoom still imprinted in my mind. My posy of sedative herbs was not working.

10. **The Gathering** 2020, stained glass

A tea party with pals was the cherry on the cake.

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**Performances**

Meet us in the gallery space for special performances throughout the exhibition's run. Pinkie will sing original songs, laments and chants, manipulated in 3D by sound scenographer John Wills, creating an atmosphere of windswept longing and hope.

**Performance times:**

16 June 7.30pm

15 July 5.00pm

5 August 5.00pm