

## REPEAT PATTERNS

New work by Helen de Main & Mandy McIntosh at the Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow. Review by Catherine Spencer



Helen de Main, installation view, GoMA, 2023. Photo: Catherine Spencer



Mandy McIntosh, installation view, GoMA. Photo: Catherine Spencer

In a video contextualising her exhibition with Helen de Main, Mandy McIntosh describes how their practices had 'orbited each other' for a while, before finally uniting in *Repeat Patterns* at

GoMA. Both McIntosh and de Main have previously shown work at Platform in Easterhouse and Glasgow Women's Library in Bridgeton. The connection between these three organisations is instructive, highlighting shared concerns with socially engaged, research-based modes of working and feminist praxis. Although developed separately, de Main's and McIntosh's contributions to *Repeat Patterns* together engage with the construction of social fabric, particularly in relation to gender and class. The resulting combined statement celebrates the strength and potential of community and activism, but also vulnerabilities at the hands of both state and private power.

McIntosh presents a multi-layered response to, and memorialisation of, an estate in Springburn and its communities. The 'Family of Ten', depicted in a large wall display of the same name (2023) in the first room, was a post-war scheme comprising blocks of flats which housed over 1,000 people, including McIntosh's extended family. McIntosh has used a range of print-making techniques to interpret the plans and patterns of the flats from the geometric order of their overarching design to the stone reliefs that once adorned their entranceways. Braiding form with function, emulating architectural thinking, McIntosh created a block print to replicate the ten buildings. These modular shapes overlay painted and printed collage fragments referencing the Caledonian Railway and the St Rollox Works which prior to its 2019 closure provided jobs for many people living in Springburn, and also the green grass and sepulchral headstones of the Victorian Sighthill Cemetery which predated, and outlasted, the scheme.

'The Family of Ten' commemorates the demolition of the flats during the 2010s and of Springburn Public Halls in 2012. Along the adjacent wall, six posters entitled 'Condition Reports' (2023) reference another lost community resource, the Springburn



Museum, which opened in 1986 inside the old Springburn Carnegie Library. Although a library has been incorporated into the new Springburn Leisure Centre, which opened in 2023 after a £1.9 million refurbishment, the Springburn Museum collections are now scattered throughout Glasgow Museums and the National Library of Scotland. Despite a rich history of public sculpture, what remains in Springburn is neglected and dilapidated. The poster unfolding this history features a linear depiction of 'The Bringer' (1991) by Andy Scott, a sculpture of a herald blowing a trumpet. In contrast to Scott's celebrated 'Kelpies,' 'The Bringer' stands forlorn outside the new leisure centre, testifying to the forced amnesia of reconstruction, while McIntosh's posters question who gets to care for shared, and especially working-class, cultural heritage.

De Main's work, in contrast to McIntosh's focus on specific sites, is rooted in the histories of feminist campaigns for equal pay and childcare provision, gleaning from campaign slogans, manifestos, and sociological studies. 'We Want the Moon' (2023) references a placard wielded by the second wave feminist Sheila Rowbotham during the 1971 Equal Pay campaign. The two parts of Rowbotham's assertion, 'equal pay is not enough / we want the moon', run across the bottom of two midnight-blue banners lining a corridor-like room branching off from the first. Against a thick constellation of stars, a small pearl-like moon waxes and wanes. The gossamer-thin panels of material move gently in the breezes created by passers-by, creating an impression of weightless beauty. Closer inspection reveals they are suspended from ropes and pulleys reminiscent of washing racks and lines. Between the banners a noticeboard, also painted deep blue, provides support for found text fragments. Referencing both an established mode of community information exchange and detective investigations, the pinboards prompt the viewer to join the dots between misogynistic cartoons, 1970s protests, the 2018 Glasgow equal pay strike, and photographs

documenting the making of 'We Want the Moon', which reveal the painstaking labour of stitching and ironing underpinning the ultimate effect.

The third and final room combines works by both artists: it is here that the focus on community space and its vulnerability becomes pronounced. De Main's 'Childcare Now' (2023) is a group of square prints. Each overlays found texts calling for greater nursery and creche provision onto images of children's toys and a dressing table adorned with baby pictures. McIntosh's 'Tale o' the Feegie Flood' combines photographs and scripts from a performance developed in 2022 at Ferguslie Park Library with local artists, schoolchildren and community members, re-telling a story which had passed into collective lore. Although very different works, both vividly demonstrate de Main's and McIntosh's belief in the importance of physical spaces for communities to form. They also register the repeated threats to sweep those spaces away.

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*Repeat Patterns is at GoMA, Glasgow 4 Mar-15 Oct, 2023*