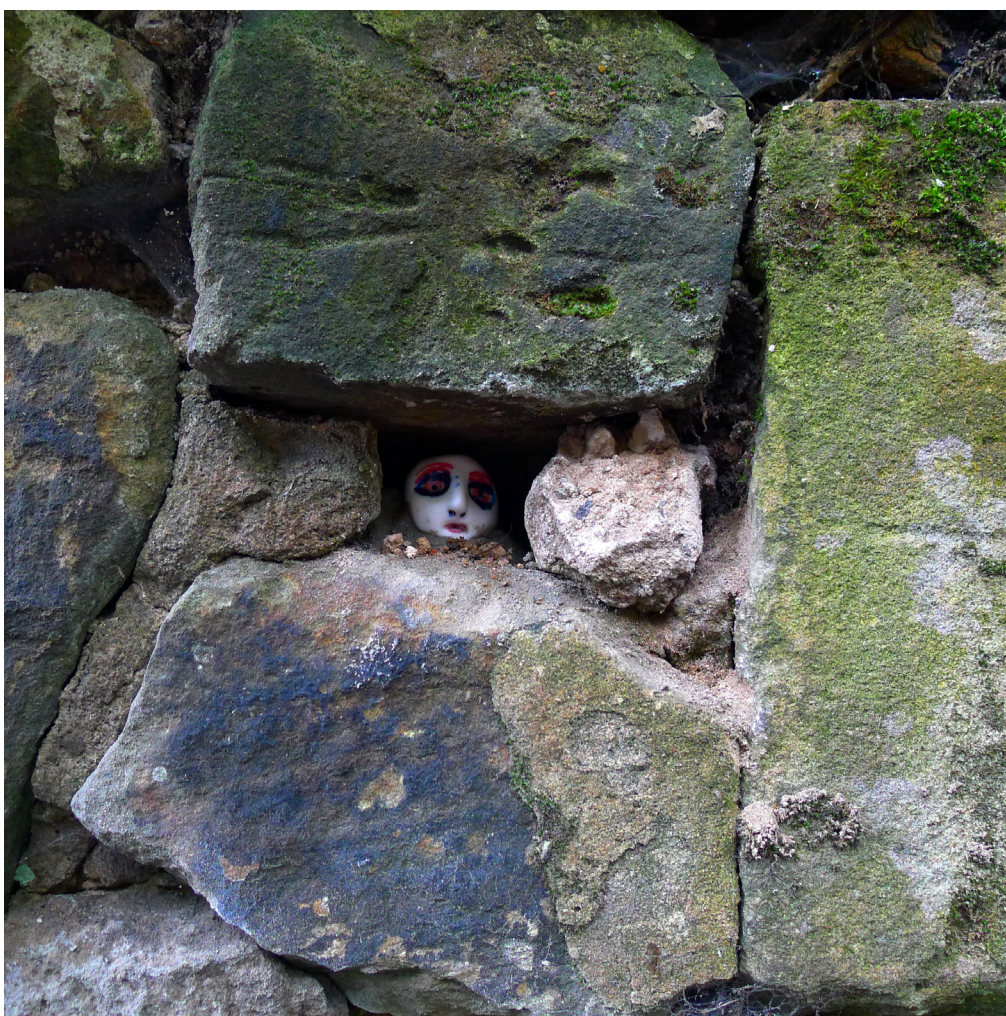




HEAD ON PUBLIC ART Nicola Atkinson©

5 May - 20 July 2014 A fictional approach to writing about in public spaces.

HEAD ON

Created and curated by

Nicola Atkinson

READING WALKING SCULPTURE

Inspired by the city of Glasgow and the wee

porcelain heads as the point of view.

Eleven writers fictional approach
to writing in public spaces.

Martin MacInnes

Philip Miller

Katy McAulay

Shirley Whiteside

Richard W. Strachan

Tawona Sitholé

Julie Fraser

Ross McCleary

Emily Munro

John Binnie

Gary McNair



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|----|---|----|---|
| 01 | Shirley Whiteside - Bridewell
40 Drygate, Glasgow, G4 0XY | 07 | Philip Miller - From the Glasgow Book of the Dead
Wall on Kersland Lane, Glasgow, G12 8BN |
| 02 | Ross McCleary - "...a moment, in the twinkling..."
55°51'45.2"N 4°13'57.0"W - Glasgow Necropolis, Glasgow, G4 0UY | 08 | Gary McNair - A Bridge Without a View
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HEAD ON was an public artwork created and curated by **Nicola Atkinson**, encouraging writers to take a fictional approach to public art in the summer of 2014.

Each writer has chosen a tiny, hand painted porcelain head made in Glasgow by **Nicola Atkinson**. They will then create a story of 500 words inspired by the character they imagine for the porcelain head and set it in the City of Glasgow. The story must include a generic location which each writer was assigned from a lottery.

The locations are: Bridge, Shopping Centre, Side Street, River, Main Road, Public Park, Bus Stop, Graveyard, Private Flat, Motorway, Public building & the Subway.

In 5 May, 2014, one story per week was posted along with a photo of the heads installed at the chosen locations around Glasgow. Readers could discover them by means of a map.

The aim of the **Nicola Atkinson** public artwork **HEAD ON** - was small in scale, intimate in design but large in concept - is to engage writers and the public with art through storytelling and the creation of new characters in familiar and unfamiliar corners of the city. Public art, writers and the public meet **HEAD ON** in Glasgow.



Public Park

Martin MacInnes

Each day 70,000 cars pass at 40mph. The park is the shape made by the cars' noise. The park is pollinated by the windrush from the vehicles as spores and seeds blow through the city on weather and wheels and breathing bodies. The park is distributed across the city, into clothing and interiors and odd areas including cracks between paving slabs where weeds bloom and break the ground.

The park is not a destination but an island between motorway lanes, a recreation made of grasses and plants and weeds including wild madder, its soil aerated by black-headed and rosy-tipped worms and its bark broken, digested and rebuilt by a dozen ant species.

Cities are up to 2°C warmer than the hinterland, intensified by traffic, electricity, skin and breath. A walking human radiates 300 watts. The plants, grasses and bushes of the parks and gardens shade and cool the streets in summer. They dampen noise and filter pollution, absorb carbon dioxide and generate oxygen. Through vegetation it's easier to breathe, hear, and think in the midst of 600,000 people.

Parks are reminders of savannah, and lulls, and of not having anywhere to get to.

A park is a relief, a place to think in before moving onwards again. Wilderness is encouraging.

The head is in the ground with the animals. A stone, or a fallen eye-ball. The space is a wild forest. There is movement and generation and loss and new form. The head can look anywhere and see a new world but it has to settle on one thing.

The detail of the ant's eye is like television static. A sharp angular pattern is written across the ant's face like an outline of a mountain row or an ECG recording.

The major part of the brain, sitting directly behind the eyes, is a mass of spilled ink, drawings of trees, hand-prints, children's art. The roof of the brain is a swinging curve of packed nerve cells. At either end a fungal growth emerges like nesting foetal shapes; these listen to the world.

The heart is long, thin, viper-like, lining the whole of the body. The dufour's gland - releasing a vocabulary made of scent - is wishbone-shaped. Beyond this there is nothing.

The head is stunned. The ground is made of old life turned. There is an inconceivable torrent of detail and nothing has been explained. The traffic sound is like wave concussion. There were people and cities and then wilderness again. We live for 67 years. There is so much of everything and it is enough just to be able to look, in passing. The head dips into the ground – a stone, an eye - and is transformed.

Date: 05.05.14

Location: Island on A804, near North Street, Glasgow, G3 7DN

All words copyright MARTIN MACINNES 2014

From the Glasgow Book of the Dead

Philip Miller

I was dead for more than a hundred years before I was brought back. I would be glad of time in that place again. But it is my fault for listening, when they tell you not to listen. My fault for hearing, when we are told not to hear. Not to prayers or dreams, and not to pleading. Not to any invocations and incantations. In the silver fields

I was resting until I heard the voice, a voice with codes and keys.

And in a sudden suck I was here again. From the sea of suns I was pulled to this pale spot in this pale city. I was held suddenly by their words, his words. I was combed, like a louse down a hair, down the line of those chanted syllables to this space and this place.

Who knows how it works and why. Nothing has told me how.

But suddenly, warm and wet, there was a body for me, and soft, shivering lights around, and a wide red bed. Oil paintings and a heap of cleared furniture. Five high candles and a closed curtain.

The sweating young man, eyed closed, intoning. And the naked women, all outside the circle he had drawn. The circle around the crossed swords, the robe and the chalice, the wine, fluid and the blood, the splayed toad and the bird struggling in the bottle.

To them, I must have suddenly appeared. Inside the robe I was, the strange materials of the Earth around me again, its luster and heaviness, its lightness and impermanence. Such poor light, and such soft edges. I had been so used to where I had been, I had forgotten the smudged blue of veins beneath skin, or the way they squeak when they give way under hard teeth.

How loud the world that lies in the unfolded galaxies is, and how empty.

For them, it did not end well. It was noisy and messy for a short while, especially for his friend, who died such a short time later. After my feeding the infected man relented. He tried, in his way, to send me back. Since, I have heard they think he was some kind of fool. Or a fraud. But no, he was skilled. But not skilled enough, or strong enough, to send me back to the place that we all enter only once.

I was not small, before or after. This head you see is not a head but a knuckle from her finger. He burned the bodies, my new one too. This city accepts easy deaths. Under the pyre I found a new home, and I hid and waited.

I burned eyes. I ate bone to make my mouth.

And now you have found me.

Look around, look at the stones, and remember when they flowed molten, look up at the clouds and remember when they were your sweat, see the pavement below: life in its ash once moved, sleek, through the blue clean seas.

Beyond daily sleep and final death is a landless land where my murders are held slight and small. Knock your fingers against your head. There is more space in this white ball than in your temporary locked enclosure. Look in my eyes and mouth. This finger bone skull holds the memory of infinity.

Date: 12.05.14

Location: Kersland Lane Glasgow City G12

All words copyright PHILIP MILLER 2014

Don't touch

Katy McAulay

The success with which a person experiences a piece of art may have as much to do with the way he or she is guided to it, as the actual item on display. In museums and galleries across the world, barriers – both physical and psychological – are a vital part of this process.

There are many ways to create a boundary. Popular materials include glass cases and Perspex sheets. Sometimes a small wooden fence can suffice, or a network of ropes strung between brass stands. Their purpose is more than simply to keep curious visitors out. A good barrier will not only protect an object, but it also draws a line, literally, between those items which a visitor should be looking at, and those which can be ignored. Research has shown that psychologically, the effect of a barrier is remarkably strong in determining this.

In one evaluation, a sculpture was removed from a pedestal and the result of this action observed. The pedestal had itself been protected by a barrier consisting of four lengths of fine metal chain supported by a post at each corner. When the sculpture was absent, a significant sample of the museum's visitor population was still observed to devote not inconsiderable chunks of time to examining the empty pedestal. It can only be deduced, therefore, that a barrier or cordon of some kind draws attention, because it suggests something worthy of protection. The more expensive or robust a barrier may appear to be, the higher the level of curiosity it can ignite in an audience.

The psychological power that a barrier wields creates a tension. It not only incites attention and respect for whatever it protects, but also a desire to step beyond. In this way, a barrier has the potential to create a duality in every gallery visitor – the opposing forces of reverence and rebellion.

On the 17th of May 2014, a sculpture created by Nicola Atkinson was installed without permission at the bus stop in front of the Kelvingrove Museum & Art Gallery on Dumbarton Road, Glasgow. As it has no barrier to protect it and no pedestal to raise it out of reach, it can only be deduced that this piece of art is not worthy of your interest. I can only apologise for having brought it to your attention.

Date: 19.05.14

Location: Bus stop in front of the Kelvingrove Museum & Art Gallery

All words copyright KATY MCAULAY 2014

Bridewell

Shirley Whiteside

I can hear the tapping on the pipes, the other women using Morse code to talk. I tried to learn it but there wasn't time before my first mission to pick up enough to hear what they are saying now. I like the rhythm, it helps me to block out the occasional scream. I'm still picking glass out of my dress from when we smashed the windows. I'd never felt so alive before and even when the police came I wasn't frightened. My arms are sore now from where the officers grabbed me and pulled me away, fingertip shaped bruises starting to bloom. Men were jeering at us calling us unnatural and even whores. Some women stood there looking disgusted but some cheered us on our way into the Black Maria. We laughed and sang songs, so pleased with ourselves and our day's work. We were suffragettes and we were changing the world.

At court I asked an officer where they would be taking us after sentence. Bridewell, he said, smiling. It sounded lovely, like the name of one of those fancy new villas being built just outside the city. When we arrived from the court I realised the officer was making fun of my ignorance and we were at Duke Street Prison. It is huge and blackened and smells like a sewer. I was put in a cell with an old woman who works the streets of the Trongate. She smells almost as bad as the prison and snores and grunts in her stupor. At least she isn't bothering with me. The walls are damp and the mattress I've been given is stained. I'm sure I saw something move on it. There is a chipped brown potty under the bed that might once have been white. I know I will have to use it soon but for now I am trying to ignore the urgent messages my bladder is sending me.

My father wouldn't come to court, said I had shamed him and my family. My husband didn't even answer the message I sent to him. When I was being taken down I thought I saw my mother, huddled in a corner, her hat pulled low and a scarf up around her face but I could see her eyes, pinched and worried. I hesitated, smiled to let her know I was okay and an officer pushed me so hard down the steps I almost fell. One of the other women caught me and helped me get my balance back. It was then that I realised I wasn't going back to my nice, comfortable home. I was going to prison.

We are all under strict instructions to refuse food. I don't know if I can do that. I've heard such terrifying tales of women who've been brutally force fed and how it has broken their health. Am I that brave? I don't know. I can see the dawn rising through the little window in the cell. In a few days time I may find out just how much courage I can muster.

Date: 26.05.14
Location: 40 Drygate Glasgow G4

All words copyright SHIRLEY WHITESIDE 2014

Motor -Way

Richard W. Strachan

At various times in the past, the human head had ritual importance. These heads were placed on open display in a prominent place - the boundary ditch, enclosing a fortified settlement. They may have belonged to enemies killed in battle. Such obvious trophies would have been powerful symbols of domination.

(Taken from an information display in the National Museum of Scotland.)

We have many ways to begin. We could yoke these two elements together and make a narrative, starting with a figure as he stumbles across waste ground into a lightless landscape, haunted by the memory of his ship as it founders on the rocks. He might see ahead of him an unexpected stream of amber, where the darkness has made of the motorway a moat of fire. He comes closer, pulling himself up the incline. He looks and suddenly sees the grey skin, the tattoos or facial markings, swirls and cosmological patterns painted on the scalp - the stern and unforgiving head of a Polynesian islander, straight from the pages of Moby Dick, or a Celt on the brim of his homeland, out of time. The man would look back and see the waste ground transformed. His ship is moored by the chrome and steel of the museum, the great curved shell that has risen up in the space he has just crossed. Beside him, cars hammer down the road. He is adrift, on an unrecognisable tide.

Or we could have the setting as a metaphor, with no narrative to contain it. See it instead as a ‘motor-way’, the lights of the passing cars pulsing like neurons in a spinal cord. A mind is the body and the brain in aggregate, connected by that segmented span of bone. What does it mean if they are severed? A beheading transforms a subject into two incommunicable objects, and there is nothing to join them together but the memory of their severing. The flow of time has been interrupted to one marked and particular moment. When Marie Antoinette met the guillotine, her head was lifted to the mob. The jaw unclenched, the eyes swivelled madly in their sockets, blood draining to the feet of her executioner, that rational machine. The mind creates both the past and the future, through memory and the imagination.

And then there are other ways to begin, other possible perspectives. Nothing here is fixed. Think of the motorway as it tracks the river, in parallel. Both are boundaries of a kind. The head here is mute symbolism on the bridge of a stockade, marking a point that says ‘Here you enter strange territory.’ Its eyes are the surveillance cameras above the motorway, black eyes sweeping from left to right, east to west, all-seeing. To look up and see a severed head impaled on the sweep and span of the overpass as you drive below it, the car slowing imperceptibly as your foot disengages. A beheading is a public act; it makes a relic, a warning.

But behind all this is really something else - the search for ekphrasis; the practice of one art commenting on another. In the Greek, ekphrasis means ‘To speak out of.’ But then the grey head’s mouth is black. By the screaming motorway, what can be said if it is forever sealed?

Date: 02.06.14
Location: Castlebank Street / A814 motorway,
with the Riverside Museum on the right.

All words copyright RICHARD W. STRACHAN 2014

shapeless forms

Tawona Sitholé

It was the eyes – melancholy but not sad; the mouth – half open as if about to speak.

She frowned at her frozen phone screen, that indelible face staring back at her, pale, pleading, compelling. She hadn't been able to delete it from her phone, nor shrug it off her curious mind.

Underneath the face, black graffiti on the trunk of a silvery lamp post:

the dead of night on the birth of winter

She glanced at her watch, as if that would confirm if this was 'dead of night'. Still, it was deadly quiet out here, as she hurried across the bridge, turning left onto the street. Several nervous paces away from the traffic lights, she stopped between the crest of two trees. Shaky hands clutching the white railing, she peered all the way down the stems to the bank below, where they emerged amongst the discarded traffic cones, plastic bags, cans and other rubbish that had gathered at the base of the twin trees like some urban waste mulch. Not sure what she was looking for, her gaze searched across the bridge. The archways, like giant raised eyebrows above two streaming eyes pouring an uninterrupted flow of cold tears that washed away to worlds unknown. On the opposite side, the wind whistling nonchalantly through giant silver skeletons, arms outstretched into the unnerving dark.

Then the wind picked up, ripping shiny patterns onto the black fluid canvas, bending and twisting the trees, and angrily dismantling the rubbish mulch. Her yellow scarf zipped away from her, writhing as if possessed by nature. On the bridge, the orange and white polystyrene life-size, life-saving doughnut flew off its perch, sucked into the frenzy; chinks blew into chunks of steel splodging into the blackness below. Ghosts of ships sprung from the haze and floated away into worlds unheard of. A stench of tobacco smoke choked the air, and a sickly sweet taste engulfed her mouth, causing her to wobble back from between the two trees, eyes catching a last glimpse. .

“ . . . it appears like someONE or someTHING someHOW . . . I suppose you could say . . . cut through this wall; solid steel wall that runs the whole length of the bridge, cutting out these rings or wheel designs. If you take a closer look at each individual wheel, you will notice the repeated design - four heart shapes within each ring, touching; each heart with what looks like a tree growing out of the centre, absolutely beautiful, I have to say . . . but even more so . . . crowds continue to gather here on Albert Bridge, to witness what can only be described as a complete and utter mystery . . . “

She checked her phone - normal screen! Then she started to remember, the last thing she had seen on the water . . . it was the eyes – melancholy but not sad; the mouth – half open as if about to speak.

Date: 09.06.14

Location: The river bank railings between the two trees where the Albert bridge meets Clyde st.

All words copyright TAWONA SITHOLÉ 2014

Albert and Dolores

Julie Fraser

Our eyes met over a cup of hot peas in Giovanni's in Merkland Street. The café was handy for the subway and did a roaring trade with the boys from Yarrows. Giovanni's was the place to be after a shift at the yards. The place to be to sit on someone's knee before heading home to the Southside under the Clyde.

But my Albert was different from all the shipyard bunnets and banter. He was as white as the flour he baked the morning rolls with, and his eyes were as black as a single-end grate.

Whenever the droning noise came from the sky, or when the all clear sirens wailed, Albert's gaze was drawn upwards.

Dolores is the most exotic bird I have ever seen this side of the Clyde, with eyes of the deepest yellow sketched in Woolworth's blue. Her face is like a Sunday best teacup, smooth to the touch. 'Aye, she certainly stands out from the crowd', my mate Davy laughed. 'Looks like a flaming budgie with a mouth to match!' They can say what they like. She is my girl from the Singer factory who makes my heart sing.

The thing I miss the most about Albert is his smooth shiny head. 'Baldy, baldy! Baldy as a coot! came the cry. The girls can hoot all they like. He twirled two halfpennies into the air and caught them, plop! into his pocket. He was always doing funny tricks like that.

'We'll make the 1.30 showing at the Lyceum if we get a spurt on', Albert said.

'Oh goody'! I thought. 'Greer Garson and Walter Pidgeon in 'Mrs Miniver'.

It's the smell that hits you first, then the cool rush of stale air sucking all the Partick folk down into its bowels. It was our thrill on a Saturday. The inner platform to Govan. We could be who we wanted to be. Underground.

'Hoi! Eggheads! We were always getting in trouble from the guard. 'Stand clear! Then here it comes! The crimson dragon spitting fire and soot emerges from the tunnel. We scream with delight. 'You two crack me up! 'A blow of the whistle and we're off.

Albert and I wished we could go round and round forever.

Together.

Then the wailing and squealing. The rattling and the rolling. The silence.

They laid my Albert down beside the track in the bright cold air.

It was a Luftwaffe bomber the papers said. He must have had us in his sights all along. Skimming the river. Aiming for the shipyards but flattened the tunnels under Merkland Street subway instead.

If you are ever on the inner circle from Partick, as it crosses under the Clyde to Govan, and you look closely where the tiles turn to brick, you might just see me in the flash of your eye, on my way to a matinee. In all my brightness.

Round and round.

Forever.

Date: 16.06.14

Location: Merkland Street, Partick, Glasgow, G11

All words copyright JULIE FRASER 2014

...a moment, in the twinkling...

Ross McCleary

She wakes at 3am far too conscious of her heart. It speeds up and only with deep, deliberate breaths does it return to a resting rate. One day it will stop altogether whether she likes it or not. As her mind and body align, her febrile heart races again. She remembers that it is five years to the day since Katie disappeared.

Unable to sleep, she slips on jeans, a woollen jumper, Doc Martens, and her winter coat. She throws a thick scarf around her neck, and tucks it into her jacket. Rummaging in the pockets, she identifies keys, cigarettes, lighter, torch then leaves the house.

She stumbles up the hill on Wishart Road and jumps the fence onto the Bridge of Sighs. Tungsten light stings her eyes, guides her. In spite of the cold, a bead of sweat carves a fault-line down her back.

She winds her way up the Great Grey Rock across furled, mossy ground, along half-conceived paths, tilted granite steps, past decapitated headstones and crumbling crypts. By the roof of the Aitken Mausoleum she splays the earth in two at a specific point in the earth. She digs down into the earth and pulls out a box.

Katie's parents chose not to hold a memorial. There was no body, no suspicious circumstances. They do not believe she just left. They do not believe she is dead, either. As each lead disintegrated into nothing, her books, CDs, clothes transformed from persona to object. Having lived together and being forced to confront this, Janet returned almost all Katie's possessions to her parents. It was evidence that she once was and hope that she still is. For Janet, their permanence underscores the incremental decay of her memories.

She shimmies across the roof and dangles her legs over the edge. Procuring a cigarette with her free, left, hand she lights it, inhales, sighs. She moves the box from her right hand onto her knees. Closing her eyes, she tries to picture Katie's face. Her hand glides across the clasp and, still not looking, she pushes the lid back. Katie went to America – Christ, ten years ago – in her third year of university. They sent each other letters.

She looks down. Nerve endings turn to lightning. Her left leg spasms and the box spins off her knees and falls to the grass below. The cigarette follows it. She gives chase.

Reaching the entrance, she plants the torch in the ground and clicks it on. Her heart is a kickdrum hammering the centre of her chest. The chips on the lid; the letters 'KG' scratched into the oak; the coffee stained pages; the suggestion of Chanel that scented them. Gathering the pages strewn before the mausoleum, there is no mistaking it. This is the same box and the same pages she buried four years ago.

The pages are blank. Her words gone.

Date: 07.07.14

Location: 55°51'45.2"N 4°13'57.0"W

All words copyright ROSS MCCLEARY 2014

Jacinta's blog

Emily Munro

I met Jacinta at the yard. I said yes, I collect doll's heads. She seemed surprised. Just the heads, I said, and explained how I like to stuff notes in them. She said I was like her dear friend Jonathon Lastcrofte, the famous author. I said I hadn't read any of his books and Jacinta said I would love them and that they are beyond. She said the word many times and I think this is a good thing. Jonathon Lastcrofte has only two fingers on his right hand but that doesn't stop him from writing and he also plays accordion. Well, I said, I put money in there and then I stick them down on the shelves. That way I know if I need money I can get it and no one can steal from me. Jacinta said I must ruin the heads cracking them open. I told her about the special glue and knife trick and she let it drop.

Jacinta has a blog. It's called Timeless Answers. She finishes each part saying happy whateverday. So, she says Happy Tuesday if it is Tuesday and Happy Friday if it is Friday. She's written seventy happys but only four of them are Saturdays. I think she is too busy with the kids on Saturdays to write. She took some pictures of my heads and I think she might write about them but she has a couple of features to do first, one on doorknobs and another on reclaimed industrial lighting. Jacinta says that reclaimed industrial lights are everywhere now, even in the Hinchcliffe hotel, but no one uses them in nurseries and that's what she's going to write about. I told her we don't sell many light fittings and she said that was a shame and maybe we could do something about that.

Jacinta talks a lot about her life partner on her blog. He is really muscular and fit but not very good at D.I.Y. and this makes Jacinta mad but she loves him. Today he came to the yard with her and I have to say that he is muscular and he was wearing running shoes. They had a look at a mantelpiece I was stripping back and he said it must be rewarding work. He wanted to see the heads but I've taken them down because of Jacinta's blog. I don't want people to steal from me. Jacinta said that was a shame because the value of the advertising was probably more than what I could fit in those heads. I said that some of the heads were quite big, actually, and left it at that.

I have started on Pinterest and I'm going to make a board for my heads and another one for the yard. Jacinta says she will link to it on her blog so that I get followers. She has two-hundred-and-forty-three followers so if I can get half of them that will be over one-hundred. I don't care if Jonathon Lastcrofte is one of them but he made 'serum for the soul' one of the most googled terms on earth so I will follow him. I am not going to keep money in my heads now because it just isn't secure anymore.

Date: 07.07.14

Location: 1394 South Street | Albion Industrial Complex G14

All words copyright EMILY MUNRO 2014

Side Street

John Binnie

A homeless head watches the world.

Dirt.

Side street.

Me.

I'm stuck here.

Literally glued, connected to a wall, watching.

I'm all alone. Marginalised.

There are cobbles, there are puddles (this is Glasgow after all) -And dirt (I said that already!)

The lane is prettified, gentrified.

It wasn't always like this.

It reminds me of other back streets that I've been in over the years.

Side-streets,

Side streets where one is marginalised.

It's because of my colour

My hue

My pointy nose.

I've a terrible profile.

I stand out.

Not in a gym-5 –days –a- week- kinda way!

As a society we're not obsessed by looks, are we?

Well we are!

I am.

The world is.

It makes me self-conscious.

Under the cover of darkness

Folk don't realise that I'm odd.

It can happen.

Clandestine meetings,

Not relationships

Cos we don't know each-others names.

Bodies are exchanged

Or presented. "Here is my body. Take it. Do with it what you want. Within reason"

All is possible. As long as it's safe.

Penetration is overrated.

But now, Touching is harmless

Is positive.

Is life-affirming.

To touch

To caress

To squeeze.

We find a way of connecting, even in this

Side street

Or especially cos it is a side street.

Touch

Caress

Release.

Mop up.

Wipe up.

Go home.

If only I had one.

I'm on the street.

I see how I got here.

There was no alternative.

My parents used

I used.

My education was erratic.

I'm un-schooled.

They kicked me out.

The strain on social work services was intense.

Nobody could help, not teachers, not police, not social workers, not child protection units, not

juvenile remand home, not prisons, not probation services.

They were all scared,

Of my look, my pointed nose, my jaw.

I never thought I'd end up here.

Up a lane

Searching out the company of strangers under the cover of darkness.

They pay me occasionally.

Or I rob them.

There's supposedly equality for all, but that's a lie

If you are here cheating on your wife, your partner, your church, your golf-course,

You're not going to tell the old bill that a green ceramic head that you had sex with, has robbed you.

Who would believe you?

How would you ever keep your head up high?

What name would you report as the thief?

I am not "that" way.

I refuse to say the term out loud!

I am just..... what?

I am on a side street, hidden away, marginalised

Waiting

Hoping,

Beyond hoping,

Enduring,

Being,

Waiting (I am repeating myself!)

Hiding,

Sidelined

Side-streeted

Voiceless.

I'd like you to touch me.

Feel me in your hands.

Caress me.

I am soft. My exterior might be hard, but I am so soft.

Date: 30.06.14

Location: The Hidden Lane, Argyle Court, 1103 Argyle Street, G3

All words copyright JOHN BINNIE 2014

HEAD ON PUBLIC ART Nicola Atkinson©

5 May - 20 July 2014 A fictional approach to writing about in public spaces.

A Bridge without a view

Gary McNair

I grew up in a town full of bridges. I can count from memory at least 20. My morning paper round took in six of them. The walk home from school took in another three. That might sound idyllic. You might have an idea of the little town I grew up in being filled with streams, burns and rivers. This is not the case.

The bridges all went over roads. Roads that were there to connect roundabouts to other roundabouts. They were made of steel and tarmac. The bridge nearest to the school was where all the fun happened. It would host a range of games, from weird to dangerous. I remember one game where you would drop a two-litre bottle of Safeway Savers Cola onto the path below and see who could get it to bounce the highest. That was banned pretty quickly for a whole host of reasons.

There was another ongoing game, a dare really, or maybe more of an urban myth created to get people to risk their lives, where we were encouraged to walk on the railing of the bridge like a tightrope, from one end to the other. I never saw this happen, but apparently the sixth years did it all the time.

What I did see happen - what everyone got involved in - was a game that never got old. No-one ever decided to play it, it always just sort of happened out of a kind of collective instinct.

It was simple. Around 20 pupils would line up on each side of the railings, grab them and shake the bridge back and forth until it wobbled with great vigour. They would get a rhythm going and then as people rounded the corner from behind the trees and the bridge came into view, they would find themselves running the gauntlet. The options were: travel across the bridge without falling over, or run back down the path the way you had come and be labelled a weedy wee shitebag.

The first time I experienced the game, I was with my pal and when we rounded the corner to see the shaking bridge he instantly ran away, leaving me to soak up the abuse for both of us. It felt like the challenge had been doubled.

I wanted to run but I couldn't, so I slowly and pathetically made my way onto the bridge. I was trying to look nonplussed, like this terrifying ordeal was in fact no more than a minor inconvenience, but my unsteady feet buckled and sent me flying almost immediately.

As my arms flailed in the air, I found a grip on the railing, hung on for dear life and waited for the laughter and abuse to begin as I was dragged back and forth with the rhythm of the other shakers.

A strange thing happened. As time passed and still I hung grimly on, it became hard to tell if the bridge was shaking me, or if I was shaking the bridge. With the railing in my hand, I couldn't help but be swept up in the madness and join in. Even better, everyone appeared to willfully misinterpret my actions as bravery.

It was exhilarating - just the right combination of fun, danger and stupidity. We shook the bridge harder and harder, moving together as one, soundtracked by a rhythmic and intimidating chant that built as the danger rose. But now I could see in the eyes of some of the boys that their fear was rising. The mob's unified front was wavering and all those little cracks of fear in their eyes became the overwhelming feeling on the bridge and the roars of the shakers were knocked out of sync and replaced with an almighty shriek.

Suddenly we were all weedy wee shitebags. We knew it - the truth hung there in the air for long enough to be acknowledged by everyone - but as the bridge swung back up and corrected its rhythm, reassuring us that it would not drop, the fear was replaced with nervous laughter and then a massive cheer. It was a cheer that said that was terrifying, a cheer that said if we all agree not to say anything, we'll have more fun tomorrow, and a cheer that said let's go again.

I was scared, but at least we were all scared, we were all together.

Date: 14. 07.14

Location: The little bridge over the River Kelvin next to Glasgow Botanic Gardens, dissecting the 'v' in the river.

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