

Weekend Arts Review

Can we have one of those in our close?

THE
MAIN
EVENT

THE GATEKEEPER

Its heaving mass provides Britain's only suspended artwork, while its

gently swaying form marks the embracing of public art by the people

WELL, IT'S certainly big enough. A ton-and-a-half of bronze and lead suspended from a single chain above the massive five-metre-square picture frame which stands on its own twin five-metre columns. And it

moves. The flying figure oscillates gently in the evening breeze. There is a barely visible staying cable at the back to stop it flying around too wildly when the wind gets up (as it has been known to do in Glasgow, occasionally), but for something so massive it has a paradoxical and pleasing lightness

about it. It is not unknown for sculptures to move. Mobiles are, after all, a kind of artwork all of their own. And one-offs, like George Rickey's disappointingly named *Excentric VI*, outside the Dean Gallery in Edinburgh, ceaselessly twisting and turning its shining lances in the wind, can be mesmerising. But the Heisenberg team, Matt Baker and Dan Dubowitz, who dreamed up *The Gatekeeper* to the Gorbals, in conjunction with the architects at Hypostyle, say they only know of one other suspended sculpture in Europe. And no-one is going to argue with theirs being the biggest sculpture in Glasgow. I can't say I warm to the photographic part of the installation; even when it is explained that it is some woman in a shift under a roadway in Brooklyn, I am still struggling. Public art should surely give you something straight away – even if it's just a smile – without needing to be explained. Deeper resonances can come later. You do not need to know anything about David Mach's *Big Heids*, alongside the M8, or even

Patricia Leighton's funny grass pyramids in West Lothian to get something from them, nor does that prevent there being more to be had if you choose to stop and think.

On the other hand, the little crypt which you can see through the glass panel at the bottom of the pillars, full of the remains of a bonfire of

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symbols of the old Gorbals, is oddly moving. A lot of people in the area put a lot of thought into what to throw away and leave in the past. For them, that tiny piece of ritual emphasised the sense of moving forward, which is such a vital idea

to hold on to in this particular piece of urban regeneration.

It also reminds the rest of us how much public art has moved on from the days when a lump of distressed metal was simply dumped in the middle of the street. Remember the *Concept of Kentigern* they finally took away from Buchanan Street after 22 years? What a mercy that was. We have reached the stage where the integration of some sort of artwork in a major new building is hardly a surprise. But now there is usually some sort of discussion with whichever community is likely to come into contact with it, some way of "bestowing ownership", in the jargon.

Newer still, is the spectacle of a hard-nosed commercial operator holding out for the full Per Cent for Art philosophy (the idea that a percentage of the cost of a development is kept back to be spent on complementary artworks). Full marks to Redrow Housing for doing so and may the Barratt Homes of this world please note that Redrow has found prospective buyers actually preferring the properties with the art

attached (the whole work includes the *Attendants*, a series of flying heads above the close entrances along Malta Terrace flanking the main building). And let's not forget that an artist's intervention does not necessarily mean sticking something on the side of the building, as Ken Currie has also done on the New Gorbals Housing Association properties, just across from the Redrow project.

ON THE re-opening of the old Highland Printmakers gallery in Inverness, now art.tn, everything from the door handles to the coffee cups had a designer or artistic eye passed over them.

Maybe you might have expected that from an art gallery. But there is a newish tenement in Bellgrove Street in the east end of Glasgow, where the idea proposed by the artist called in there, Alison Turnbull, was simply to flood each stairwell with coloured light. I should declare an interest here in that I am part of the management committee of Molendinar Park Hous-

ing Association which commissioned her, but plenty of other people, including those who live there, have commented on how the installation animates the front of the building where each coloured stair is visible behind tall glass panels.

Per Cent for Art is still voluntary in the UK, though it is compulsory in a number of European countries and, surprisingly, in the US. The newer American cities, such as Seattle, absolutely drip with artworks (and also with competitively exuberant architecture). Not all of them are great triumphs, but it stands to reason that if you have more work being done you are likely to get more good stuff, if only by the law of averages. And, naturally, the agencies which broker these kinds of deals, the likes of Art in Partnership or Visual Arts Projects here in Scotland, aim to do rather better than the law of averages. It will be interesting to see how *The Gatekeeper* grows, or not, in the affections of Glaswegians. But, as far as articulating the entrance to the new Gorbals is concerned, she is already doing her job.



BRONZE BEAUTY: artists Dan Dubowitz and Matt Baker in front *The Gatekeeper*, in the Gorbals. Housing companies note: flats next to works of art are now preferred by customers. Picture: Angela Catlin