

SCOTT MYLES

Scott Myles (1975) is a visual artist who lives and works in Scotland. His inspiration stems from a variety of sources often referencing society and culture at large. Periods of thoroughly conducted research develop into a diverse body of work including sculptural installation, prints and performance.

AMBIT spoke to Scott Myles in the run up to his solo exhibition at The Modern Institute in Glasgow (June to August 2014). The following interview consists of segments of the conversation covering a few of his works: from *Ice cream paperweights* (2002) to *Potlatch* (2014), due to be unveiled this summer at Galleries Lafayette Maison in Paris.



HOT SAND, 2009

Unique Screenprint on paper

2 parts each 72 x 102 cm

Courtesy of The Artist and The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd, Glasgow. Photo: Ruth Clark



Ice cream paperweights (Brown, Pink, White), 2002
Cast bronze, enamel paint
5 x 7 x 7 cm each

Courtesy of The Artist and The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd, Glasgow. Photo: Matthias Herrmann

AMBIT: It seems fitting to start the conversation talking about the work on AMBIT 217's front cover. *Ice cream paperweights* are painted bronze casts of ice cream scoops. Can you talk about it?

SCOTT MYLES: I was interested in the idea of a scoop of ice cream functioning as a paperweight. It is ironic because ice cream melts. Around that time I'd seen David Hammond's work *Bliz-aard Ball Sale* (1983). It is a photograph of him standing in the street with snowballs of different sizes laid on a blanket. I was interested in the nature of dematerialisation as the snowballs disappeared. I observed that the performance had been photographed and these documents of a beautiful and poetic performance, in turn became solid – that they became like versions of the snowballs – only permanent and commodified.

I thought casting ice cream in bronze would add weight and gravitas to the object. I liked the idea of making a functional sculpture but it also being candy for the art market. *Ice cream paperweights* are part of a museum collection but equally could exist on someone's desk as a paperweight. They have a kind of pathos connected to spilt childhood ice cream. I also like the connotations of the brown scoop as I always thought that it could be chocolate or equally shit – often connoted with childhood development and creativity.

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Above: *Untitled (smoking)*, 2001

Performance

Courtesy of The Artist and The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd, Glasgow

Right: *DOING*, 2012

Three unique screenprints on aluminium

141 x 317 x 11 cm

Courtesy of The Artist, Meyer Riegger, Berlin and The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd,

Glasgow Photo: Gunter Lepkowski

Next page: *The Past From Above (ELBA Pink, Purple, Red)*, 2010

Screenprint on paper

99 x 285 x 8 cm

Image courtesy of The Artist and The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd, Glasgow

Photo: Ruth Clark

AMBIT: Your reference to David Hammond's *Bliz-aard Ball Sale* (1983) is interesting as there are similarities to the performative nature of some of your own work.

SM: Around the time of *Ice cream paperweights* I made the work *Untitled (smoking)* where I employed someone to join other workers having their cigarette break on the street in a business district in Glasgow. I was inverting the usual way work occurs, i.e. I was paying someone to take a break.

We conducted interviews and the guy who got the job happened to be called Scott too. He was a smoker and had previously worked in a call-center, so in a sense he had 'previous experience'. I liked the fact that we shared the same name; it created a sense of doppelgänger. On the day of the performance I was teaching in Edinburgh, but quite liked that I couldn't be present. A kind of logic of remuneration occurred.

AMBIT: You tend to abstract functionality, as in your more recent series of Elba folder works. The use of folders, a familiar object, is distorted by making them impractically large. The work is both absurd and playful. What was the inspiration behind the work?

SM: The Elba folders are containers. They're portraits of the studio because they describe how I work. I categorise the research and exhibitions I am working on into similarly coloured folders. It's how I collect and keep information. The second set of Elba works I produced were my height, so they hint at performance in that they relate to my body. I'm also asking the viewer to 'get into my folders' – and I like the multiple levels on which this operates.





AMBIT: You spend time carrying out research before executing a piece of work. Can you talk about how context influences your more gestural, or painterly work?

SM: I made a whole body of work with marbling. It is related to *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* written by Laurence Sterne (1713 – 1768). His long and humorous novel was published in 9 volumes and is really influential to many people because of its non-linear narrative structure. It is also very interesting in terms of typography.

The novel has a marbled page within the narrative. I became involved with the novel because I was interested in using marbling as an idea of determinism and chance.

Laurence Sterne's novel is a paradox. It's about a fictitious character called Tristram Shandy who tries to narrate the story of his life. But whenever he begins he digresses and goes off on a tangent. The whole story is a kind of farce.

I responded to this novel by taking a first edition copy of the book to the Geology Department of Glasgow University. We photographed the final full stop, from the final volume of the story, under a microscope. The resulting artwork is titled *Full Stop, (The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman)*.

Left: Scott Myles, Installation view 'Contemporary Scottish Art: New Acquisitions & Loans',
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, 2009
Courtesy of the Artist and The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd, Glasgow
Photo: A. Reeve

Below: *Full Stop (The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman)*, 2006
Colour photograph
126.5 x 126.5 cm
Edition of 5
Courtesy of The Artist and The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd, Glasgow



AMBIT: You are conscious about how the display in an art gallery/museum alters meaning. Perhaps you could talk about this in relation to your recent project *Potlatch*?

SM: Yes, I'm interested in display. I've recently been invited by Foundation Lafayette in Paris to carry out some research and develop new work.

I've always been interested in Guy Debord and the radicalism of the Situationist International. I went to Champot, and took photographs of the former house of Guy Debord. Afterwards, I went to Paris and walked around the different Lafayette department stores. I became interested in the 'non-area' – the till, the check out, the gift-wrap area. I struck me it would be great to create an artwork within the department store itself.

There are 12 full colour images I took of Debord's house which have been printed on bible paper and stacked up in the wrapping area to pack the goods purchased in the department store. It's a collision of two opposing things. It is somehow problematic but I find it fascinating. For *Potlatch* I wish to initiate a subtle intervention that involves the wrapping and containment of objects, and the gifting of an artwork within a situation of commerce. It's like I'm trying to make a connection between 'Lafayette Maison' and 'Debord Maison'.

The project's title *Potlatch* is both a journal, which Guy Debord was involved in, and also the name given to a Native American gift exchange tradition. Native Americans host these events called 'potlatches' where they give things away. The more they give away the more prestige they receive. It's also called 'burning wealth'. When someone gives you something there's an obligation to respond, and this reciprocal exchange interests me greatly.

AMBIT: It is like you are 'burning wealth' by giving away your artwork to the customers in the store . . .

SM: The shoppers who come to Lafayette to buy things end up participating in the project. Most aren't there for the artwork; they get that for free. There's a good quote from Clegg and Guttmann which is '*we believe that good art should function like a Trojan horse: formally alluring enough to be brought in, but subversive enough later.*'

It's a brilliant statement. Of course, how do you make truly subversive art? How does it function with visibility? Felix Gonzalez-Torres talked about the need to have visibility within the commercial art world otherwise your work will be invisible. It's a trail that's difficult to navigate and I probably contradict myself all the time, but then again, I'm a human being. As an artist you try to live the questions.



Potlatch, 2014

A project for Lafayette Maison, Paris (in collaboration with Foundation Lafayette)

12 offset colour prints on bible paper. Each image 75 x 50 cm

Courtesy of Studio Scott Myles

Scott Myles' exhibition *MUMMIES* is currently showing at The Modern Institute in Glasgow. The show will run until 30 August 2014 and is part of GENERATION – an extensive programme of works of art by over 100 Scottish artists over 60 Scottish galleries celebrating the development of contemporary art in Scotland over the last 25 years. The text from this feature has been taken from an interview between Scott Myles and the Ambit Art Editors in June 2014.