



The work of Susie MacMurray, a British artist who lives in Manchester, England, ranges from drawing to sculpture to site-specific installations. An engagement with materials—hairnets, feathers, barbed wire, shells—is central to her alchemy. To “tease out cultural and physical resonances between materials and place,” says MacMurray, she blends form and context in architecturally significant spaces, from stately homes to industrial settings. Her interventions in these spaces reference their historic identities and can be a laborious process involving teams of volunteers. “Working on a large installation in this way has parallels with an orchestral performance,” she says, “but also with the tradition of women gathering together to weave or sew, sharing knowledge and wisdom as they work.” Trained as a musician more than three decades ago, MacMurray turned to art in the late '90s and has been exhibited widely in galleries and museums. “Making art has for me become a richer, more natural language than music for exploring what it means to be human.”

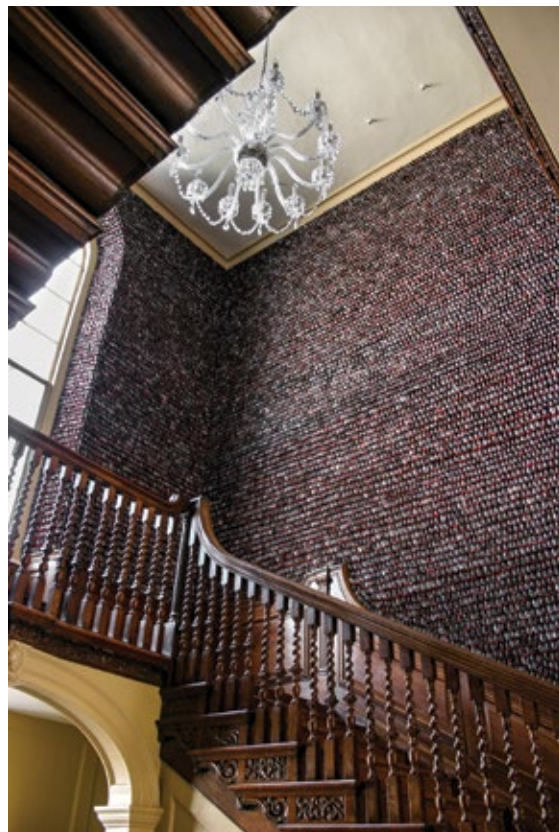
AFTERLIFE

SHELL (2006/07)

20,000 mussel shells, red silk velvet
Pallant House Gallery, Chichester

The shells are “crow-black, with an oily sheen, each a tiny death, a *petit mort*, and each stuffed with a deep burnt-red scrap of silk velvet. The elegance of Pallant House is expressed in the composition and creation of the fine oak staircase. [Its] profound references to *memento mori*, to mourning, to gender and class, its impenetrable façade, its representation of the rhythmic passage of time, or sadness and loss are intense, emotion-ridden, and pungent.”

CATHERINE HARPER
University College for the
Creative Arts at Epsom, England
Photos: Courtesy of the artist



ECHO (2006)

10,000 hairnets containing strands
of used violin bow-hair
York St. Mary's, Castlegate

The netting "normally restrains human hair. [Hair] from horses provides the stuffing of the droplets. It has already been used to form the bow strings of violins. Unlike the marble, stone, and glass of the church, which has stood for hundreds of years, the hair netting and coiled bow strings will decay. MacMurray likens it to our own mortality: 'How can we be here, so strong, powerful, full of life and energy, so confident as a species and yet so desperately fragile?'"

CAROLINE WORTHINGTON

York Museums Trust installation essay
Photos: Susan Crowe





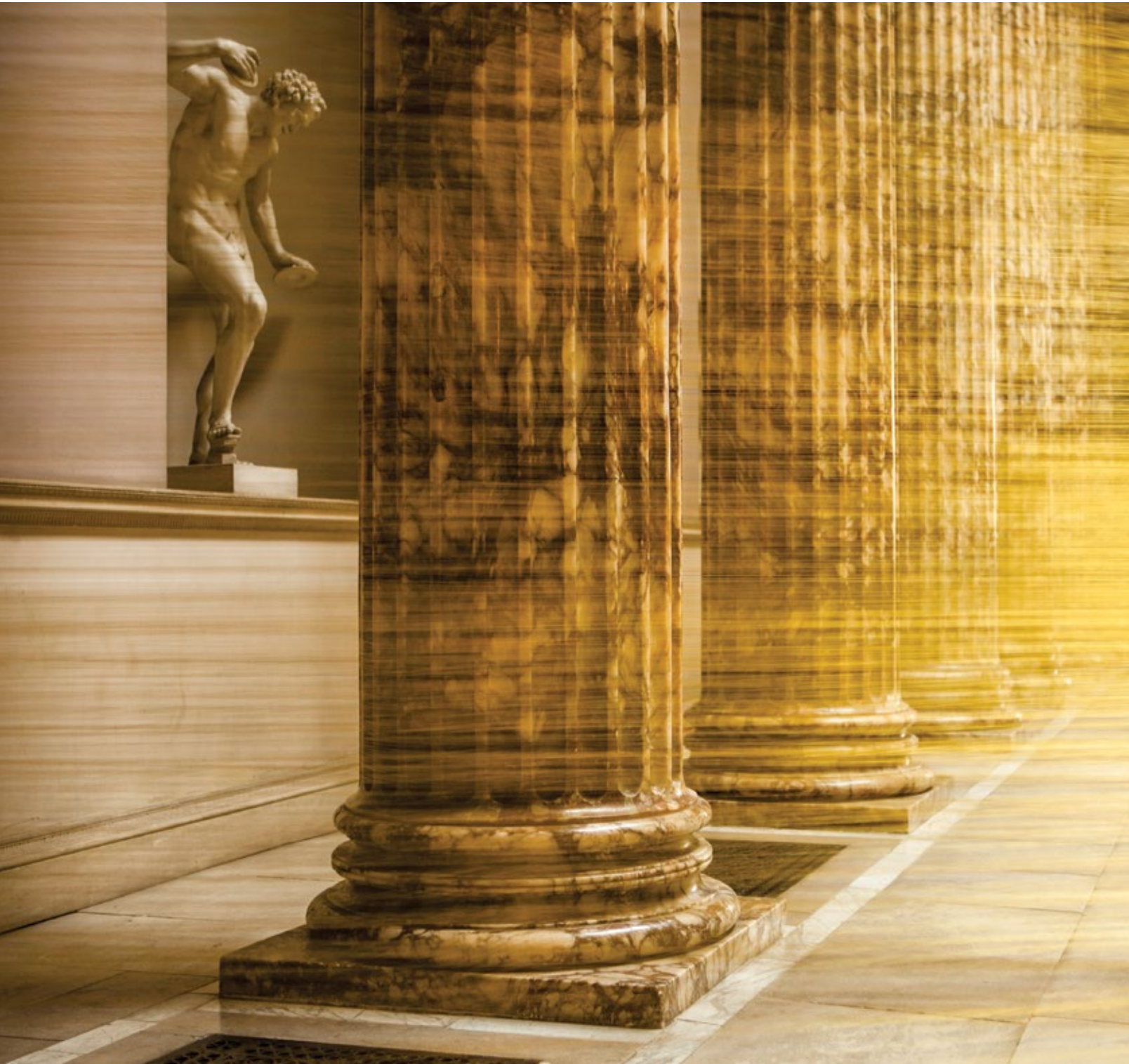
STRATUM (2012)

*80 kilograms of white feather down
Islington Mill, Salford*

“White feather down coated the floor of a Salford Mill like a virgin snow-pelt, simultaneously a comfort signifier, a poetic evanescent mirage, and an unsettling absorbent layer for the blood, sweat and tears of years. . . . A whispery soft counter to the crusted layers of pigeon-droppings in this abandoned mill, and a sublime and luminous ‘other’ to the hard industrial site, MacMurray used this seminal work to articulate her creative essentials: location, materials, history.”

CATHERINE HARPER
University College for the
Creative Arts at Epsom, England
Photos: Courtesy of the artist







PROMENADE (2010)

*105 miles of fine gold embroidery thread
Kedleston Hall, Derbyshire*

“Robert Adam designed a Roman-style atrium featuring innovative skylights letting the light in from above and flanked by twenty fluted columns made of alabaster mined from the family’s quarries. The golden thread weaves between the columns to create a web that ensnares the downward-spiraling light, ... a reference to the Peacock Dress [made for] Lady Curzon, [as if she] has wandered through the Marble Hall whilst her dress has caught and unraveled behind her.”

FRANCES GUY
The Hepworth Wakefield gallery,
West Yorkshire, England
Photos: Matthew Andrews