

Karla Black's material ambush at revamped Fruitmarket Gallery

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Art | 2 days ago | By Harriet Lloyd-Smith

Turner Prize-nominated Scottish artist Karla Black has staged a full-scale material takeover of Edinburgh's Fruitmarket Gallery, which has just reopened following an expansion by Reiach and Hall Architects



All images, installation view Fruitmarket, 'Karla Black: Sculptures (2001–2021) details for a retrospective'. *Photography: Tom Nolan*

As blank canvases go, the revitalised spaces of Edinburgh's Fruitmarket Gallery offer more potential than most. The artist responsible for inaugurating the new space is Scottish Turner Prize nominee Karla Black. What she has created is less of a show and more of a full-scale material ambush.

For 'Karla Black: Sculptures (2001-2021)', opening on 7 July, the artist is 'reimagining a retrospective' armed with 30 existing sculptures and new commissions that respond directly to the Fruitmarket's rejuvenated spaces.

It was summer 2019 when the Edinburgh gallery last welcomed visitors. Some £4.3m, a doubled footprint and a sustainability driven reimagining by Edinburgh-based Reiach and Hall Architects later, and the gallery has once again opened its doors.



The gallery's transformation doubles its square footage but also brings the Fruitmarket's historic building – a former fruit and vegetable warehouse – into active cultural use. In the original structure, the innate rhythms of the rooms and the natural light that floods the upper floor remain intact.

Continuing the theme of curious past lives, the gallery has also expanded into a second historic warehouse, which most recently housed the Electric Circus nightclub. This steel-framed, brick-lined building maintains its rawness and the architects have opened it out by removing the upper floor, reusing the joists and floorboards rather than bringing in new materials. The resulting space will lend itself to theatre and music, spoken word and visual art exhibitions.



Black's show is a lesson in materiality, and these sculptures are constructed from her signatures: cardboard, sugar paper, polystyrene, polythene, Cellophane, Sellotape, glass, mirror, net, Vaseline, plaster powder, powder paint, medicines, cosmetics and thread. The works, both large and small scale, sprawl across brick walls, appear in gallery windows and spill across floors. The existing works set the stage for the pièce de résistance, *Waiver For Shade*, a major commission Black created within the new warehouse space in the weeks before it opened.

As Fiona Bradley, director of the Fruitmarket Gallery, says of Black's show, "there is a defiant force to her work – it is demanding and disruptive as well as beautiful and inspiring. It is because of this that we invited her to be the first artist to work in the newly reopened Fruitmarket: we value artistic

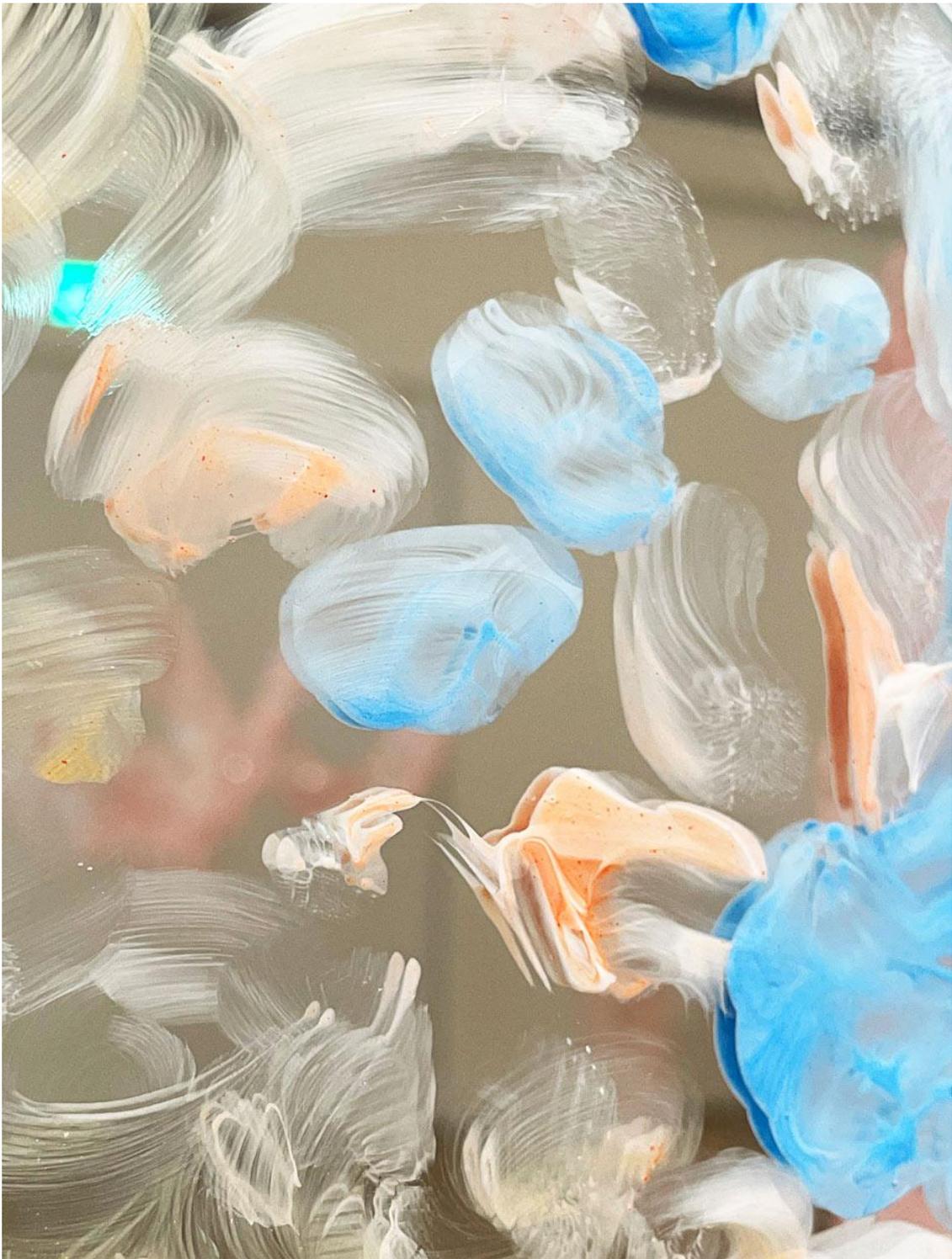
experimentation and we want her to really challenge the new space.'



The show comes a decade after the Fruitmarket curated Black's presentation for Scotland in Venice at the 54th International Biennale. But 'Karla Black: Sculptures (2001–2021) details for a retrospective' marks their first collaboration on home turf.

For Black, her materials are not just a means to create, but, when activated, form their own vocabulary. 'I prioritise material experience over language as a way to understand the world or move through it. And I try to make sculpture that, within itself, accepts the fact that the object is a fallacy – that material in this world is only ever either flying together or flying apart,' Black says in a new book published to coincide with her show at the Fruitmarket. 'I use both natural and cultural materials the same, for their physical properties. And I use them to keep hold of what I think art really is – a raw, animal creative moment.' §







Photography: Neil Hanna

Information

'Karla Black: Sculptures (2001–2021) details for a retrospective', 7 July-21 November 2021, fruitmarket.co.uk

Address

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