

CatStrand Marches

Will Levi Marshall's *CatStrand Marches* conducts a conversation with Architecture. Architecture declares its concern with the exclusion of water, the defence against damp, drip, flood and rain. The *Marches* invites in the burn. Windows open to light and space. The *Marches* glazes the floor like a glass bottomed boat and makes visible an artificially illuminated undercurrent.

Marches are boundary lands, borders between one territory and another, the spaces of negotiation. Literally here the artwork occupies the space between the old and new parts of the building, the corridor that adheres to and renders interior the previously external stone wall of the old school. The artwork is purposefully in between inside and outside, in between architecture and sculpture, in between geometry and expressionism, between the water table and the sky.

Geographical waterways form the borders of human territories and conversely the paths and identities of streams and rivers are shaped by human behaviour –



by canals, reservoirs, landscape gardening, industrialisation. Here the Cat strand has long run in a culvert beneath the school. The art centre borrows its name from the strand and building works have altered its route through the site. For logistic reasons the stream running along the corridor is the image of the Cat strand and not the strand itself. Twin streams run underground, the Cat strand and its aesthetic double. Heraclitus said that one cannot step into the same river twice. The identities and routes of all waterways are contingent and fluid. The thickness of glass underfoot imparts to the stream the glass-green colour of the ocean.



Panels of coloured tiles are recessed into the otherwise white surface of the wall on the new side of the corridor, and at intervals between Caithness stone and the glazed burn on the floor. Flush with the surfaces of the architecture, the tiles do not physically impose themselves but they carry in their stoneware glazes the traces of great flurries of energy and activity. Each rigid grid of tiles is overlaid with an image of fluidity and motion made by pouring and sweeping one colour of glaze across it. They are choreographic and recognisably human – here exuberant sweeps and flourishes, there broken repeated dragging movements, elsewhere hops and turns and twiddles. The glazes are rich and contrasting, each with its own tactility and surface and spectrum of component colour. Like other complex and fluid instances, such as flames or clouds, these liquid images reward idle speculative gazing. One sees the smears of a mopped floor the

moment before evaporation, the crest of a great wave, turbulence, waterfalls, hair-dying misadventures, inky signatures and pirouettes.

Above, the roof of the corridor is a long skylight divided by glazing bars spaced in the proportions of the Fibonacci series and etched with the random criss-cross of thrown sticks. The Fibonacci series is the mathematical progression 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13... in which each term is the sum of the previous two. Widespread in natural structures – seed growth, shells, pine cones – the series also tends towards the proportions of the golden section – the ratio classically considered the most aesthetically perfect. Thus the sunlight, falling on the corridor walls, is patterned by both the most intentional and accidental of systems.



As well as a material ecology – the use of local stone and local water - there is a conceptual ecology at work in Marshall’s practice. The artwork takes up no room. It does not suppose itself into the space: rather it takes possession of the architecture working with and through its fabric. It pursues contemporary sculptural preoccupations with site, intervention and architecture as sculptural material.

In the school yard an isolated door sized section of white and tiled wall rises up against the old stone boundary wall. It is the one element of *CatStrand Marches* which does not observe the given surfaces of the architecture. Like the doubling of the stream, this is a double wall – a piece of interior wall which has escaped to become lido-esque in the outside world. At the other end of the corridor, beyond the old yard wall, the burble of the open Cat strand is audible.

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