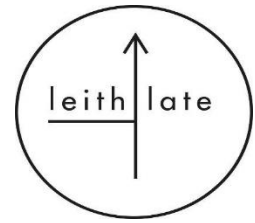


Speaker: Kirsty Whiten (Artist)

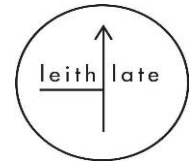
Mural: Wronger Rites

Audio 00:04:34



My mural in Dalmeny street was commissioned by Leith Late festival during the time I was making my series of imagined rituals called **Wronger Rites**. As Cameron said, there were originally three characters, two animal-headed dancers on either side and a central high priestess. It was very satisfying to place these characters in the street, close to the church and the community of Out of the Blue on the other side. The experience of painting the mural was so great. I had a constant stream of people passing or visiting from the flats across the road, giving me the good chat and offering me cups of tea, food and even wine (I probably looked like I needed it after a few days). This was not a mural that engaged with the community and responded to anything local, it was definitely a piece of my work placed in the public way, but I hoped I was getting at something universal, and the feedback has always been overwhelmingly positive (except for that one person who wrote in politely small letters with a marker pen next to horseman, “this is not my thing” which seems like reasonable feedback).

Wronger Rites came from my fascination with ritual objects and costumes from all world cultures and I think I’ve been caught up by the melding and evolving of ritual culture within art in the past decade or so; scenes from the burning man festival to Nick Caves big hairy richly decorated costumes, to Grayson Perry’s teddybear fetishes hammered with nails and keys. I became really interested in Shamanism and Animism, which seem to be present in every place there are humans, although their influence has often been squashed by later, organised religions.

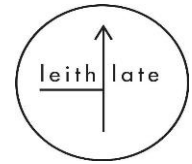


I felt that secular, multicultural society denies us the shared belief in a universal narrative that many peoples have had in history, and lots of us miss out on performing rituals that mark our life stages and transformations or handling objects that contain power and wisdom. I was making images to try to link us to our ancestors and far-flung brothers and sisters, drawing new archetypes from the language of myth and costume. I try to be realistic and contemporary and even domestic in this new mythology. Sometimes the masked dancers in the paintings are animal-headed deities; sometimes a ceremonial phallus is just made from a pair of tights and a cardboard tube.

I am always concerned with picking apart the social norm, and celebrating other possible identities, particularly in relation to gender and sexuality, highlighting and criticising the accepted social behaviour and expectations.

In the rituals I created roles for the men, women and people between, to allow more freedom of expression for their bodies and drives than we give our civilized selves. I borrow from so-called 'primitive culture' and intense ceremonial catharses from around the world. I also depicted things I saw in the new genderfuck drag culture, where identity is explored raw and ravenously.

My inspiration is just as likely to come from pop culture, fashion or science as from the history of art. Mostly it comes about by watching people, which maybe makes me seem like a bit of a creep! But I was raised by a human anatomist and an evolutionary psychologist, and I was instilled by their fascination with human behaviour and physicality. When it came to making the Wronger Rites paintings, I worked with various



models, all friends of mine, spending time building costumes and playing with shameless, liberated poses, or alternative power stances – my Quing character (the central figure of the mural) is played by an exquisite Edinburgh character called James Robert Faulkner, who was performing genderqueer drag at the time, applying makeup around a majestic beard. When they were robed up, staff in hand, they felt like they were wearing invisible high heels and that teetering foot position gave the whole pose it's power. I take hundreds of photos during a play session with a model and build my images from them.

It was sad when part of the wall was demolished, but I'm really glad the horseman has lasted so long. My other street art works in the entrance to the Bongo club in the Cowgate and in Union street also lasted years apiece, which I would never have dared to hope for. I love the feeling of putting the art in people's way, for free, unasked for. People get attached to the murals. They often seem to become sort of emotionally charged urban plot-points. I think we need more of them.