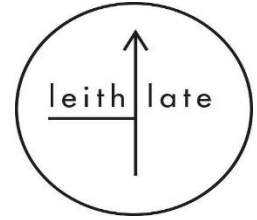


Speaker: Fraser Gray (Artist)

Mural: The Leith Aquatic

Audio 00:02:49



Hi, my name is Fraser Gray and I'm another one of the artists that worked on the Leith Aquatic mural.

We kept the scaffold in Reith's garage round the corner, and would take it down every night and put it back up again in the morning. Due to the weather being terrible that week we were still painting it during the opening event of the mural. I think people presumed it must have been planned like that - like it was some sort of performance, but it wasn't.

The boat in the picture is the SS explorer.

It was painted mostly by Martin McGuinness. There was actually a guy who served on the SS explorer who lived on Halmyre Street. He would walk past and stop for a chat while we were painting most days. He seemed to like the mural but didn't recognise the back of the boat - the stern. We had been working from early plan drawings of the ship which must have been different from when he was on it. It seems that throughout its life the boat was constantly being adapted and changed. Because of this it made sense to paint it from the plan drawings, as the boat had no definitive image. This might be a bit indulgent of me, but I like how it's painted from the plans - makes the boat read more figuratively, like it is an idea of this place.

In the mural the boat is deliberately sailing out of shot - an abstract reference to Leith changing and moving on, plowing on whether good or bad.

The flag at the end of the boat is 'I wish to communicate' in the International Code of Signals for vessels. It seemed to resonate quite clearly with us at the time, but honestly, I forget exactly why we chose that particular flag. I think it was the one that felt the most poetic. At the time this choice of flag did bug a few folk though, as we were willfully breaking Maritime law by not flying the 'red ensign'. We



weren't going to paint a Union Jack on the mural even if it is Maritime law so cashed in with artistic license. I've heard that it's been interpreted by people as the Ukrainian flag (as the 2 flags look the same). I do quite like that a myth could build around the meaning of that.

I'm pretty sure the head was a last minute addition to the mural, and something we decided to do during the install.

As well as the being a reference to the Life Aquatic poster that Rab mentioned, I also saw it as a little nod to Paolozzi, one of Leith's famous sons. He has a screen-print print called *Wittgenstein in New York*, which features two giant heads in the middle of a city. The shape of the heads are internally divided up into what looks like little rooms, or little windows. We incorporated the cracks in the original render to be seen as a little reference to that. The cracks also create the look of a phrenology illustration - a Victorian pseudoscience where people believed the shape of your skull dictated what kind of person you were.

What I really like about the head is that a lot of people don't even notice it. We did what we thought was this big, risky thing with the design in the 11th hour and when we had finished it just subtly blended into the noise. If you are struggling to see it, the head also creates a rising (or setting) sun behind the boat. The porthole in the boat becomes the figure's eye and the lips fall between the two L's of Wha'll.