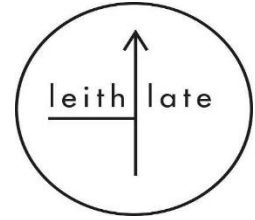


Speaker: Cameron Foster (Guide)

Mural: The Leith Aquatic

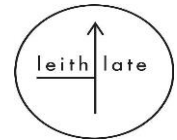
Audio 00:03:20



Here we are then folks, may I present to you “The Leith Aquatic”! This mural was installed by Blameless Collective back in 2013, here on Halmyre Street and represents the first mural to go up in Leith since the 1980s. And it was those murals, especially the Leith History Mural next to Leith Theatre, that provided a certain amount of inspiration for what we see here not least with regards to the methodology behind it. Artist Collective, who were responsible for the work that went up in the 80s, put public consultation at the heart of their process and so it was Blameless who had several sessions with local residents gathering stories and suggestions which they then worked into their own composition.

Interestingly enough, this isn’t the first mural to go on this wall. The area round here was originally part of Leith Central Railway Station which closed in 1952. The derelict station was not demolished until the 80s by which time it had become so notorious for drug use that it was used as the setting for a key scene in the Irvin Welsh’s book *Trainspotting*. It was replaced by what is now a Tesco and a soft play but you can still see the remnants of the station in the Tesco carpark, the clock tower on the corner of Duke Street and the ever lively Central bar round the corner.

In order then to, I suppose, honour this area’s past, back in 1984 or ’85 David Wilkinson painted a spectacular mural here of a train rocketing down a tunnel towards the viewer. It didn’t last long though because, mysteriously, one night Wilkinson himself came down and whitewashed the whole wall leaving only the cat that you can see in the top right-hand corner. Some say it was over a dispute about payment others that David was upset that the render on the wall started to crack very quickly, which in fact you can still see on the mural we have here today. Whatever the reason the white washed wall became a graffiti hotspot and the Police’s anti-



graffiti unit decided, with the help of LeithLate to pay some graffiti artists to paint the wall in order to discourage graffiti. There's a logic in there somewhere, it's cool.

The result though, I'm sure you'll agree are pretty impressive. The boat, which is central to the image is the SS Explorer one of the last surviving sea-going vessels registered to Leith and is slowly and lovingly being restored down at the harbour. The waves upon which it sits are a reference to Leith's famous "Persevere" crest and dotted about are various, kind of, iconic representations of the stories and themes that at the artists and residents wanted to reflect. Plus of course, up there, David Wilkinson's wee cat which the artists were told in no uncertain terms, had to stay!

You can hear a bit more about this on the other audio track where we have some of Blameless Collective discussing the piece but I would say that one of the notable things about some of the murals in Leith, not all of them, but some of them, is the way they try to deal with the kind of nature of place-making. One of the traditional criticisms of public art like this is that as soon as you try to start to define a place especially through a single piece of work, you inevitably and immediately start to exclude some sections of the community. It doesn't always help that a lot of examples of this type of work lean in on the traditions of realism and y'know can kinda often be quite literal. By leaving room for a little more interpretation, Blameless offer a way round that predicament and it's one of the reasons why this is such an interesting mural.