

[Image]

[Image]Early Works

Perminder Kaur: When I was at Glasgow [Art School] I started to work quite large, make large installations.

I did my first for a show called Four x 4 at the Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol; that's the first time I worked really, really big, on a very large scale. I quite liked that, so the projects I did afterwards were quite big. And the work was very technical.

[Image] The Glasshouses [were] the first large work I had ever did. A lot of the work plays with scale. Even my large installations: going into an installation, it's always better if you can experience it, like with the Glasshouses, where you have to enter them, and actually you're inside this glass container, walking round the Glasshouses with all the reflections.

[I was doing an] MA Fine Art. I've never actually studied sculpture, I've always been general, but mainly worked in sculpture and installations. I like working with photography, but I have a stronger feel for materials in some ways. I'm more confident with materials.

At Glasgow School of Art you could move across disciplines. There were ten of us; me and two other sculptors, artists who worked mainly sculpturally. If we wanted to use a different medium we would go to a different department and find out what we wanted and work in those departments. That was the whole point, that it wasn't an MA specifically for one area.

When I started there the whole idea was to have time to experiment and explore and develop - not mainly to work towards finished things, but to play a lot and try different things, and to take in a lot of information.

[Regarding space and the object], sometimes it's like that work Innocence, with the orange dress. Sometimes I come back to that; it is always there. I was showing work inside a chapel, to do something about trying to create a different kind of religious space or feeling within that chapel and to contrast this very cold stone space by placing a white marble floor in it. The ceiling was very decorative. It was also interesting because I'd been reading a lot about what Spain was like under the Moors, and how the Moors ruled the Spanish and how it has changed now.

They still have the two influences there. And I had also been to the Great Mosque in Cordoba - they have this huge mosque and right in the centre they have just built a cathedral. And when you have the two architectures, the two forms contrasting each other so drastically, the two do not like each other, do not get on well. But the whole idea of having to build a cathedral inside, so you have to walk through the mosque to get to the cathedral...

The contrast is startling, it's just so stark. That wasn't what I was dealing with, that idea, I was just interested to do something, to create a different feeling, a different sort of space within a church.

The BBC commissioned eighteen artists to produce an art work for a [Image] billboard and there was a documentary on TV. It was in I think seven cities, and because I was based in Glasgow I did a sculptural work on a billboard there.

I used two billboards in the centre of Glasgow and they were facing each

other. They had these huge gramophones, but made out of copper.

In the billboard there was a hole cut so they looked as though they were coming through the billboard with the empty space behind. I wanted to create this feeling of a private conversation with these symbols. It was like each gramophone had its own little persona. But you couldn't tell, or you didn't really know, what it was. So it was an obscure private conversation going on in a very, very public space. People are walking by and usually they want to understand what is going on in a billboard because it's advertising. And it's the complete opposite. They were made out of copper; if they were made out of steel or iron it would be like Big Brother.

It's like trying to make something private public in some ways.

[With the BBC Billboard Art Project], the whole reason that I used those signs was that I wanted to use signs that people didn't really understand, I wanted to make them obscure. That's why I purposely put them in a very public space; to draw attention to them. People didn't know what the signs were.

[The fact people don't know where objects in my pieces come from], I think that used to be more important before. Even with the Glasshouses; there were lots of objects I made in there and often you couldn't tell, or you wouldn't know what the objects were used for. They were made in clay so they looked like they could have come from a museum somewhere, and not like everyday common objects.

But the later work I don't think plays with that, or it does on an even more subtle level. Like Untitled, the green felt man in copper armour: you are not actually sure where that armour comes from. A lot of people said it has a very strong Spanish feel to it, but they don't know why.

[While at Glasgow Art School I collaborated with a fellow student]. He saw me making things and we just got talking about our ideas. I think initially we started because we were actually asked to do a piece of work together. We were asked to work on a poster project for the streets of Barcelona, and we started there, by creating a poster.

[The Posters] are quite large. They are of my hands and of his hands, and on the hands are these very, very small garments, - a pair of socks, a shirt, but very small. I was working with the idea of size and of small garments for children, and then they got smaller and smaller. His work is more about surfaces. It became about power in some ways. The hands could just crush these little garments, or protect them.

[Image]

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[Image]

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[Image]

[Image]Cot

[Image] Permindar Kaur: [There's a] tall cot, and it has eight mattresses inside this quite deep strong red fabric. In between the layers are garments, children's garments made of the same fabric, and the cot's on little wheels. It's quite a bizarre object, drawing from lots of different sources, but not really being positioned in one.

I've been taking lots of photographs of beds in strange parts of the house. I want to create an installation where in every room there is a bed with a white sheet over. A very basic metal bed. So there would be one in the kitchen, one in the bathroom, one on the landing, one in every single room - the idea that you have the opportunity to sleep wherever you are. But I want it to be a house where people are still living normal lives, so there are still the normal things going on.

The desire to sleep, or having the opportunity to sleep [anywhere], but it could also be about a lot of other things, like displacement. Why would there be somebody sleeping in the kitchen? Or why is somebody sleeping in the bathroom? [There are] lots of different associations or connotations; it's just this idea of escape in some ways.

When I go to India and I stay with my family, there are no set bedrooms; there are certain rooms they sometimes have as bedrooms, but often they have these portable beds, very basic. In the summer you'd sleep outside, or in winter you could move the beds and sleep in different rooms. So there the function of the room changes; it's not important that there is one set room where you sleep. And during the day the beds can be moved away.

There would be set hours [this installation would be open, and] it's going to be here [in Britain].

The original idea [for 'Cot'] - this using eight mattresses, it immediately draws you back to that story [of the Princess & the Pea]. I think the importance of the narrative is getting stronger and stronger in my work. Like these little stories where you don't know exactly what the story is to do with, and it's quite open. Like that cot, maybe [Image] because it is quite a bizarre shape. I don't think that the colours and materials are particularly Indian, but I think maybe it has those elements. Even with the Glasshouses [project], a lot of that work then was to do with protection and defence. Like that idea of glass houses protecting, but also being quite dangerous, because to walk around them and be around glass is quite unnerving.

In this work it's the idea that having eight mattresses would somehow provide more protection for the baby in some ways while, in fact, the baby would fall out, and it would be more dangerous. There's this ambiguity. Even with work like Innocence, where there is a child's dress, and the child's dress is carrying a knife. That works on quite a few levels. When I first showed that in Barcelona quite a few people didn't know much about Sikh culture. I think here people know a bit more. There they just read it purely as 'why would a child carry a knife?' Or found it quite funny. While here it may be seen more that this is maybe a Sikh dress in some way. So it works on both levels. I don't want the work purely to be seen as about being a Sikh child. It's also open, so you don't need to know

that history.

[These images come from] an interest in childhood - but not necessarily my childhood. It's playing with scales, the idea of who has the power and the controls. But it's not even that. I find this sort of work very difficult to explain, because it works on a very simple, direct level. A lot of the work plays with scale.

For a lot of my work, the space it's shown in and the relationship it has to the space is quite important, though I think that's coming from working with installations. The small beds were actually shown in [the Galleri Amidol, in Goteborg,] Sweden.

They had a few spaces and one of them was very small; it was like walking up to the attic, you had to walk to the top, and the ceiling was so low that you had to bend your head when you went in there. There was a little spotlight with these little beds. It was a little white room and it created quite a dream quality. It functioned so well in that the work plays off the space, feeds off the space in lots of ways.

In my work, I am interested in transforming environments to construct a 'home'. These have become imaginary, distorted and unnerving sites that offer comfort that is ultimately deficient and ambivalent.

The work is often transformed articles of domestic furniture, like beds, cots and chairs. Others are toy-like cloth figures and items of home-made children's clothing which are displayed as wall pieces.

I would like to develop these ideas to continue transforming environments, to create spaces intended for rest.

Permeja Kaur