

The Talbot Rice Gallery: A hidden gem



How many Universities can claim to have a world-class gallery as part of their campus? Student Ambassador Osanna visits Edinburgh's, the Talbot Rice Gallery.

I cannot remember which I fell in love with first: classical art or contemporary art. Though I have chosen to study Classics, I have maintained a great interest in contemporary art. After all, contemporary art often draws on historical themes and artistic styles, and challenges how we see and study them.

Barely two minutes away from the HCA building (the William Robertson Wing) is the hidden gem that is Talbot Rice Gallery, the University's contemporary art gallery. Part of the University's famed picturesque Old College, the gallery includes its own Georgian hall, which has been transformed into a cinema for the current exhibition.

I had recently began volunteering at the gallery as an Information Assistant, and I was exceptionally excited about the new exhibition, displaying the works of video artists Rachel Maclean and David Claerbout.

I believe myself destined for this post, as I have happened

upon Rachel Maclean's exhibitions not once, nor twice, but THREE times in three different cities (Edinburgh, Manchester, and Venice). Edinburgh-born Maclean is a graduate at our University and had recently represented Scotland at the *Venice Biennale*. It is an understatement to say I admire her deeply. Her work currently on display is titled *Spite Your Face*. It is based on the 19th century tale of *Pinocchio*, yet its message is evidently modern, reflecting on the questionable reliability of politicians, consumerism, and the media. Placed in the context of Brexit, controversial presidential issues in America, and ongoing battles for rights around the world, Maclean's work is an honest, if brutal portrayal of the darker sides of society. It is vivid, dynamic, and begs reflection, and viewers are unlikely to forget it in a hurry.

I had never before encountered David Claerbout's work, and I was indeed in for a pleasant discovery. The pieces on display were very different from Maclean's work, but compliment it wonderfully. Claerbout's work centers around exploring space and time. One particular piece which caught my attention is named *Radio Piece (Hong Kong)*. I do not wish to ruin the piece for you, as I believe one should be able to experience it however they wish. But as someone from Hong Kong, I believe it reflects the feeling of being entrapped within a clustered space, both physically and mentally, and reflects consciousness of Hong Kong's colonial history and how it still affects us today.

I volunteered at the exhibition on its preview night and was overwhelmed by the influx of eager viewers. I was initially nervous, but quickly found my feet with help from a fantastic team of volunteers, who are also mostly students from the University, and a group of helpful gallery staff. It was truly a rewarding experience, and I was very glad to be able to witness it.

But the best was yet to come! After the preview, I recognized, swarmed by enthusiastic viewers, the artist Rachel Maclean

herself! Like any fangirl, I could barely contain myself, but was too shy to approach her. After much chickening out and a lot of encouragement from my new friends at the gallery, I finally managed to greet her. She turned out to be the nicest, most approachable person one could possibly meet. I shook her hand, and muttered something unintelligible, which she somehow responded positively to. I managed to get a photo with her, which concluded perfectly a fantastic and fulfilling evening.



Osanna and artist Rachel Maclean

The opportunities for cultural enrichment and volunteering at the University of Edinburgh are fantastic and I cannot recommend them enough.

(The exhibition runs from 24 February 2018 – 5 May 2018)