

Lucy McKenzie
Talbot Rice Gallery
Edinburgh

In *Ten Years of Robotic Mayhem (Including Sublet)* the temptation for McKenzie to play with the odd collegiate feel of the Edinburgh's Talbot Rice Gallery has proved irresistible, and it is the quasi academic reframing of her practice past and present that makes for a clever narrative game. As if it were some sort of extra honorary degree the gallery makes much of the fact that this is McKenzie's first solo show in Scotland for years, something that I'm sure has been choice on her part rather than an arts council oversight. Her euro meandering is something that has become as essential to the work as the play with Glasgow as some kind of mythical Taggart-land. These two elements come together in the main space where the video segments from film and television dismantle the city and reorganise its geography in order to suit the pseudo gritty fiction. In most instances it's Glasgow 'City of Murder' rather than 'Scotland With Style' (yes, woefully, the latter is a real council slogan) and it all sits studiously at odds with the arts and crafts pathology of the rest of the room. Likewise we have facades drawn in a scholastic/architectural mode, the idiosyncratic surfaces of pubs and markets studied as if they were great icons of design in *Glasgow* (2006). These are all pinned to grey upholstered display boards, which, like the vitrines on the upper level, play with expectations about study and the museum.

Striking startled looking alphabet poses, McKenzie appears in the 'sublet' of the title. A white booth houses Beca Lipscombe's autumn clothing collection and a calendar on the wall presents McKenzie as big-booted clothes horse, making a different shape for every month. The interdisciplinary, collaborative element, so defines this artist. Justifiably she seems to long for some sort of league of the arts, a former time where artists and makers actually thought things through and worked hard to develop a total world for the work. The Greek key design that runs through McKenzie's and Lipscombe's work is one of many devices that takes on a new life in the ambiguous iconography of re-imagined commercialism that McKenzie dismantles so carefully. This discourse spills into the excited pub ravings that spawned the spasmodically marvellous *One O'Clock Gun*. Her drawings for it are generated in a dizzying array of styles, from commercial art to GCSE to Tintin. The influence of Hergé's work (and his compatriot, but not contemporary, Joost Swarte) appears in the shorthand pen squiggles that she has used, a loose spiral for a character's dizziness for example (distinct from a drunken Captain Haddock's bubbles).

Pop group Erasure make for odd subject matter on the mezzanine. McKenzie's drawings for their *Union St.* (2006) album are hung next to location drawings from the studio environment that begin to turn Andy Bell into the aforementioned Belgian detective. None of these make the final cut as the carefully orchestrated displays demonstrate. The mutation of the cover art into mouse mats and key rings shows how a single painting gives birth to bastard record company offspring. Again the artist's delight in all this is clear, she has removed the need to be at the centre of her own work. The street scene of the cover draws some more odd assumptions. The desire to populate the empty steps of the painting with something contrary to the image's stylistic pointers is an irrepressible. The centre of the image is not, after all, the equal opportunities stair of Sesame St., it is cut off halfway in favour of a smaller entrance with a 'trash can' replacing the pot plant above. The city blazes crazily in the background.

Taken together the whole show becomes a trade fair for the imagined new Europe. A central tactic is a derivation from designs for 'Great Exhibitions' and the 'mockintosh' chairs that the invigilators gamely sit on bring another layer to the whole tottering confection. The 'after' so-and-so homage of each element of this designful quadrilateral is another nod to the journeyman and master era, the honing of a craft in a punishing training environment. By the time you reach the designs for her own *Decemberism* record label exhaustion takes over, like any esoteric collection there is overwhelming microscopic detail. The emaciated Romanian gymnast of previous works has been exiled to an Olympic orphanage somewhere but the images of the new female Volk marching across the poster for one of the albums will surely take care of her from the heart of the union.