

Helter Skelter

Martin Creed's Work No.1059 is situated in The Scotsman Steps at the exact point that Google Maps used to get confused with the layered dynamic of Edinburgh's North Bridge and Market Street crossing; where the driving directions would attempt to throw you over the bridge's walls to continue your journey on to your destination below.

The close is only really used if you know about it; from the top end it's hidden up a walkway, which appears to only lead to The Scotsman Hotel. From the bottom, the entrance is on a slight angle shying away from the Market Street exit of Waverley Station, thus, even when aware of its existence, upon exiting the station it doesn't catch the eye to jog the memory of its passage to the upper level of the city. I quite often forget it's there, but upon remembering, thoroughly enjoy the possibility in directly moving between the upper and lower layer of the city in one immediate helter skelter.

I walk towards The Scotsman Hotel entrance, for a moment anticipating that I'd remembered the location incorrectly. Then in the shadows the algae-ridden sandstone walls open-up to reveal a submerged gathering of marbled steps.

In 2011, Martin Creed replaced the original 104 steps with various marbles sourced from around the world. Alternating from subtle greys and blues to vivid pinks and oranges, the installation presents a rare opportunity to appreciate the broad visual range in the construction of marble. The array conjures images of dissolving organic matter from Google Earth's satellite imagery of the fragmented and dissolving Antarctic ice shelf, to aging skin, palm lines and varicose veins, presenting vivid snapshots as these visions are morphed into the hardest of stones.

The walls are lined in pale yellow tiles, providing a simple background for the acrid combination of urine and rainwater, leaving behind a mottled vein like patina as the tiled edges blend in to the marbled floor. Some tiles are decorated with carefully framed graffiti tags. Marked out in a purple pen, the repetition suggests a test pad of identity development, or the evolution of a relationship as the signature evolves over time. As I descend lower into the close, more litter lines the corners of the hard surfaces, mainly expired train tickets discarded after use. After what seems like a flight of stairs too many, you're finally ejected on to the street, confronted with the sweeping underbelly of North Bridge as it hops, skips and jumps across Waverley Station.

Appreciating the form, usefulness and urban evolution of this marble spiral made me think of a short story my Mum told me about her time growing up in Huddersfield, which ended with;

“And then someone got stabbed down my favourite alleyway”.

I think this is my favourite alleyway.