



Rachel Crooks, *The Mackintosh Ruinscape / Forensic Map / Post 2014 Fire, Longitudinal section and Condition Analysis.*

# The Mackintosh Society DSB travelling scholarship

*'Ascendancy over minds have the ruins of our stupendous past... romantic melancholy engendered by broken towers and mouldered stones...'*

In: Rose Macaulay, *The Pleasure of Ruins*, 1953



Rachel Crooks  
Photo: ©Stuart Robertson

Being awarded the 2023 Charles Rennie Mackintosh Travelling Scholarship after graduating from my Diploma in Architecture at MSA, has provided me with the invaluable opportunity to

take a moment of pause and to reflect upon my journey so far.

My final thesis entitled *Memories, Metabolism + Mackintosh* was inspired by a brief encounter with the Mackintosh Building [the Glasgow School of Art] in 2013. It was during this time that the dual vistaed corridors which rooted the circulatory passageways in the building imprinted themselves on my memory:

*'I recount the walls, dark and ominous... rhythmically punctuated by high level windows - which illuminated ghostly busts as glowing spectres standing at attention. The staccato created by the contrasting black and white materiality was further emphasised by the metal crafted spotlights, highlighting the beauty of the sculptures within enfiladed moments of pause.'*

This evocative impression was to be tragically short lived. It was recomposed in my mind as the makings of a film-noir in May 2014, when news reports showed the iconic sandstone blocks slipping away beneath a vengeance of flames. And so, a 'ruin-lust' was unlocked within me as a I came to realise that the iteration of the building I was once captivated by, was now forever fated to remain my Pandora's box of unresolvable intrigue.

Inspired by the 'broken towers and mouldered stones' of the Mackintosh Building, I made the decision to go on to study Architecture at Glasgow School of Art. What with the Mackintosh ruinscape as the backdrop to my studies, it seemed inevitable that my final year thesis *Quarrying the Ruinscape* would revolve around such a theme. I spent the year investigating ruinscapes and spolia through the lens of the Palais de Justice in Brussels, looking at how we can use 'salvaged materiality' to create a circular connection between both materials and intangible culture. Placing my thesis in the context of the climate emergency, I speculated on how the construction industry could be realigned for a future that encourages material reuse whilst enabling the layering of historic storytelling within our built environment.

To allow me to develop this thread, it was agreed with the scholarship panel that I would travel to Berlin to study Chipperfield's 2006 restoration of the Neues Museum as a particularly successful example of maintaining history and respecting material legacy throughout the process of

reconstructing a ruin. During the week I spent in the Neues, I gained an understanding of Chipperfield's ability to 'narrate the ruinscape' at a human scale through mapping and forensic analysis of fragmented building elements.

To achieve this, he used a combination of CAD based drawings alongside tactile pen-and-paper-hatched annotations. This resulted in a reconstruction that both repairs and respects the building and renders history alongside contemporary additions which 'reflect the lost' without imitating it.

The insights gained from my time at Chipperfield's Neues Museum gave me the lens through which I now view the Mack. I have begun to 'narrate' the Mackintosh building in its ruined state following the methodologies of Chipperfield's drawings. I now believe that this analytical technique should accompany all future adaptive reuse projects.

I feel that the process of documenting the Mack in this iterative form, should serve to emphasise how significant the devastation has been from the fires and how the time the building has spent as a ruin is as integral to the building's timeline as the time it spent as an art school. The Mackintosh Building's narrative has changed; we will never experience it the same way again. I feel this should be reflected in the form that will emerge from the material memories, 'broken towers and mouldered stones' of Glasgow's School of Art.

Rachel Crooks