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Art

Edinburgh Art Festival reviews: Grayson Perry | Lindsey Mendick

Grayson Perry's Edinburgh Art Festival show may be the most impressive use of the Royal Scottish Academy building since the major Paolozzi retrospective of nearly 40 years ago, writes Duncan Macmillan

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By coincidence, Lindsey Mendick, showing at Jupiter Artland, is also a ceramicist and hers too is an art of issues, although perhaps more a confession of a personal issue. The show is called SH*TFACED and is an account of the artist's binge drinking. That maybe sounds like solipsism, the enemy of good art, but that is not at all the case. The show is expansive and reflective, an astonishing display of glazed ceramic sculpture all framed in Stevenson's classic dichotomy of Jekyll and Hyde: Dr Jekyll sober and Mr Hyde drunk.

Two parts of the show are in the steading where the walls and floor are painted in a pattern of black and white tiles, but the squares quickly deform into swaying, drunken curves. A comical, table-top panorama of a pub/club scene with tiny ceramic figures is arranged like Dante's vision of Hell, with fiery gates and circular levels descending like the bowgescorrect of the Inferno to a monstrous Satan at the centre; not the Divine Comedy perhaps, but a dark human comedy. Like Hieronymus Bosch, too, some of the figures have turned into half-human monsters. She herself is recognisable by her green hair.



Work by Lindsey Mendick at Jupiter Artland PIC: John Mckenzie

Further down the room and on a different scale, is an assembly of mostly white-glazed ceramic sculpture. Without being precisely scatological, the installation is certainly lavatorial; the centrepiece is a nightmare vision of the mirror and basin in a ladies' loo. Site of confrontations with your drunken self, perhaps, the mirror is decorated with snakes, poisonous frogs and plants. The piece is also two-sided. On one side the basin seethes with octopus and jellyfish, on the other with evil-looking snakes. Nearby in an anguished self-image, echoing Caravaggio's self-portrait as the head of Medusa, the artist's own face and fingers emerge through a lavatory seat. There is much else and some of it is pretty startling, but the delicacy of execution overcomes the unpromising subject matter touching it with wit and irony; as with Jekyll and Hyde, both sides of the dichotomy are human.

The beauty of execution is even more remarkable in the part of the show set in the ballroom. A row of vases, all in white ceramic and in the form of elaborately costumed, life-size sculptured busts, are arranged along a table like a dinner party of Victorian ghosts. There are bottles, glasses and cigars. As vases, the figures are hollow and also headless – in Scots, out of their heids, perhaps – drunk. The glazed white ceramic is delicate and visibly fragile, as fragile perhaps as the boundary that separates Dr Jekyll from Mr Hyde. The detail of the costume chimes with the elegant, rococo-style plaster ceiling and suggests Victorian respectability, but the headless, upholstered bosoms and straining waistcoats suggest something quite other. The whole ensemble is surreal, ironical and darkly comic: black comedy in white china.