

The logo for Whitechapel Gallery, consisting of a solid blue square with the text "Whitechapel Gallery" in white, sans-serif font centered within it.

Whitechapel
Gallery

Max Mara Art Prize for Women: Corin Sworn

20 May - 19 Jul 2015

Large print labels and interpretation

Gallery 2

Max Mara Art Prize for Women

Corin Sworn

The biennial Max Mara Art Prize for Women enables one UK-based artist to produce a new work resulting from a six-month residency in Italy. Corin Sworn was chosen as winner by a panel of four judges chaired by Whitechapel Gallery Director Iwona Blazwick, OBE; gallerist Pilar Corrias, collector Candida Gertler, artist Runa Islam and curator and writer Lisa Le Feuvre.

Corin Sworn's new work draws from her research into the legacy of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, improvised plays and theatre troupes that originated in Italy from the 16th century.

The immersive installation presents moving image, sound, props and hand-made costumes in a scenographic display. (continues on next page)

Interested in how mistaken identity has been used as a literary device in early theatre, Sworn plays with ideas of fixity, guise and costume to address social anxieties around status and recognition.

Taking as a point of reference the writing of Flaminio Scala, an actor from one of the most pre-eminent theatre companies of the renaissance, Sworn has written a script from which the film work has developed. Working with two acrobats, an actor, a choreographer and in collaboration with former Max Mara Art Prize winner Margaret Salmon, this lyrical film and performance weaves the viewer through Sworn's contemporary costume drama.

The surrounding still life of props, unpacked and stacked throughout the gallery space, offer clues to identity however also themselves hold illusionary riddles.

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Props have been hand-made by the artist together with scenographers at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

Also concerned with circulation of fabric and costume at a time, Sworn collaborated with the craftspeople at Max Mara in Reggio Emilia, Italy to produce bespoke costumes for the performance and work.

Born 1976, Sworn lives and works in Glasgow. She studied at University of British Columbia, Vancouver, the Institute of Art & Design, Vancouver and at The Glasgow School of Art. Recent exhibitions include a solo exhibition at Inverleith House, Edinburgh (2014), 19th Biennale of Sydney: You Imagine What You Desire at Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (2014) and The Rag Papers at Chisenhale Gallery (2013).

Extended A4 label:

Corin Sworn

Silent Sticks

2015

Film, Sound, Mixed Media

The new work of Glasgow-based artist Corin Sworn is a direct result of a research-led approach to scenographic installation. Centre stage is given to the tale of a 16th century imposter, a famous tale and court case that epitomised shifting notions of the self in the rapidly changing society of Renaissance Europe.

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As part of her residency spent in Venice, Rome and Naples, the artist combed the local libraries and manuscript repositories for contemporary accounts and the material culture of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, such as costumes, written plays, or stage instructions. The very nature of the popular street theatre in the 16th century leaves behind very few remaining records. Almost no original costumes remain in existence; plays were not recorded, as they were of an oral tradition; the lack of copyright protections led playwrights to jealously guard their original notes instead of publishing them.

Sworn collaborated with costume-makers, actors and acrobats to create a narrated film work, highlighting aspects of this famous story of mistaken identity. The costumes use Italian Renaissance painting as their inspiration. Sworn designed the textiles, which were then hand-made and tailored by traditional master artisans in Italy. (continues on next page)

During the narration of the film and sound work, the actors repeatedly exchange parts of their costumes, taking on parts of the costume of the other.

As part of her research, Sworn discovered a 16th century list, enumerating the different objects kept by one of the travelling troupes. It is unknown for what play they were used, but the list served as a guideline for the artist to complete her scenographic installation. The objects on display were created by Sworn herself and in collaboration with students of the MA Scenography at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London. Together, they created props: objects that have no actual use, but look like they could. Props simulate functionality. Pretending to be a real dagger, they are just shaped plastic; simulating to be a loaf of bread, they are just papier mâché. In Sworn's installation, objects too are imposters, pointing towards the artifice of their on making.