

CAMPLE—LINE

**CLAIRE BARCLAY
RAWLESS
06.07 - 08.09.24**

RAWLESS | 2024

Steel, wool fabrics, lanolin, rust, polythene sheet, red oxide paint, gorse, combed wool and yarn, forged steel, machined brass, sheepskin, leather



But how does it feel?

– Lizzie Lloyd

She pricks and combs and collects and cuts and winds and stretches and hangs and quenches and threads and stains and presses and wraps and pounds and hooks and drapes. She works on a table, at a fire, and on her lap. She works whilst looking out of the window, or standing at the kitchen sink, or perusing a local museum. Textures abound: they stand firm, they yield, they sag, they absorb, they criss-cross, they are slippery, they are coarse, they are soft. Between these four walls they resonate, they dampen, they pierce, they obscure, they interrupt, they rumple, they insist, they link, they sever. Knowing something of the rules of engagement, you circumnavigate – taking note of how your body feels as you duck, sidestep, peer, crane, cower, withdraw, and desire... resisting at all costs the urge to touch. You watch yourself watching. Despite your best efforts (you really should know better), lists suggest themselves as you note how RAWLESS accommodates the paradoxical, where seduction and disgust, warmth and aloofness, austerity and excess, connection and separation, protection and entrapment, support and independence coexist.

A welded construction of steel loops suspended from wooden roof beams, a frame from which hang an array of further appendages: more loops – the start of a chain link that never quite gets going – which are sometimes partially and incomprehensively bandaged by a sleeve of shorn sheepskin. As if to undercut the possibility that things might be getting too tasteful, a sheet of ugly polythene is draped across the room, stained with rusty forms where it has come into contact with oxidised steel shapes. Elsewhere a bundle of gorse is swaddled in a woollen blanket of sorts; it stands awkwardly on four steel legs. There's an expansiveness to all this, because each form, shape and material is at once itself and an echo of something else, something recognisable outside of the domain of art. They are, in other words, resonant. As you cast around to orientate yourself, your own points of reference (more lists!) emerge: a toddler's bead maze, a fire poker, hanging saucepan racks, weed suppressants, pipe insulators, sausage casings, make-shift dens, butcher's hooks, baby bottle cleaners, heads of bulls, feather dusters, playground fences, towel rails, lint combs, heraldic banners, turnstiles...

One way to approach work like this by Claire Barclay is to see these resonances as evidence of the 'non-art' contexts from which it has evolved, since lots of her materials speak the language of cultivated, and lived-in landscapes, or history, heritage and ancient crafts. Barclay, for example, is voraciously curious about how things work, how they are made, where things come from, who uses them and why. She thinks about the history of textiles and trade routes and pageantry and heritage and agriculture and psychology and anthropology. From here we might surmise that Barclay's work is about female labour or the history of Sanquhar knitting or migration. This would prove useful as we try to intellectualise her work, to fit it into a lineage of artists or histories we already know, and to demonstrate its indisputable relevance because of its social and political commentary. But Barclay is deeply resistant to this line of argument. Indeed, to foreground such commentary in order to better apprehend Barclay's artistic process and production would be reductive, and risk rendering her artwork little more than a consequence of other non-art contexts. In fact, these non-art contexts are, she would say, incidentals; these are things that Barclay picks up along the way, things that seep into her consciousness and that slip into her work through a process that is far more urgent and compulsive: material and sensational – by which I mean, of or related to the faculty of sensations – exploration.

In RAWLESS, sensations are everywhere. This might seem a ludicrously obvious thing to say but Barclay's elicited sensations are worth auditing, bringing awareness to how those surfaces take hold in your own body: you feel the muffle of a woollen blanket without touching, you taste the savoury tang of rust without licking, you hear the crinkle and thwack of polythene hanging and lying motionless. You discern a distinctly sheepy smell permeating the room; it is the result, you soon realise, of lanolin that pierces lines of perforations in steel – golden, oozing and vermiform. You sense your own edges abutting with her surfaces: the smell catching in your throat, the desiccated gorse, the bundling of which would, you imagine lead to scratches and scrapes, as skin is pierced and blood is drawn and dried. What's going on here? David Abram might call it evidence of 'the diversity of my sensory systems, and their spontaneous convergence in the things that I encounter'. This he would argue, after Maurice Merleau-Ponty, brings about an 'interpenetration or





interweaving between my body, and other bodies – this magical participation that permits me, at times, to feel what others feel’ (1997, p. 127). You are neither inviolable nor absolute; you become also steel, also wool, also fabric, also rust, also plastic.

Barclay’s materials, and the nature of their specific configurations, induce this feeling. Modes of relation and attachment between one substance and another appear in various guises: the weave of cloth fibres is sometimes open, sometimes tight; rows of taut stitches run and run; railings and loops and hooks and links carry the weight of each other and are sometimes inserted into a sleeve or hidden under a fold of fabric. Tufts of frizzy sheep’s wool, like trapped bugs wrapped in sticky spider’s silk, dangle on decisive rods of cold-hard matt-black wrought iron. Knots and ties ensure that Barclay’s conglomerations could, on a different day, be endlessly resituated in different combinations. They are open to the possibilities of ‘otherwise’. Somehow the possibility of alternative gatherings brings you closer, making you more receptive, more sensitive to her materials, not just to how they are now, but how they might have been, or might yet be. Through them you are amplified.

Often in research, work that concerns itself with feeling, emotion, affect, mood and tone is criticised for being ‘woolly’, that is, too vague and imprecise to be reliable or useful and too caught up in itself to be broadly of interest. But Barclay is in the business of unapologetic wooliness. In her hands, materials that manifest in aesthetically considered ways create and make reference to sensations that are inextricably linked to the world and its inhabitants. There is no danger of disinterested detachment; her visual language – colour, form and texture – references, often indirectly, the world outside itself. These references manifest as an indistinct resonance, a synchronous mood that you can’t quite put your finger on, or not exactly. Before the wider acceptance of feminist, black and queer cultural studies there was a pressure to ensure that the articulation of one’s aesthetic experiences demonstrate rigour and precision, which might have encouraged us to keep such nebulous intuitions to ourselves. Not so, Barclay, who revels in ‘fuzziness’ (a favourite word of hers). Her insatiable enthusiasm for imprecisely absorbing new knowledge, working in her own way to manipulate new materials, and learning new crafts, is infectious. It generates connections that stem from a curiosity to understand how it feels to be connected to the things that we do, the things that we see and the places that we live in ways that are awkward and energising, brutal, and seductive.

Lizzie Lloyd is a Bristol-based art writer and researcher. Her writing has been commissioned by numerous arts publications and galleries, including Bosse and Baum, Workplace Gallery and Temple Bar Gallery and Studios for Venice Biennale (2022). She is Senior Lecturer in Fine Art /Art & Writing at UWE Bristol.

Some related reading

Sara Ahmed, *Leading a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017)

David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997)

Brian Dillon, *Affinities* (London: Fitzcarraldo, 2023)

Rita Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2020)

Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing and Criticism* (MIT Press, 2022)

Daisy Hildyard, *The Second Body* (London: Fitzcarraldo, 2017)

Daisy LaFarge, *Lovebug* (London: Peninsula Press, 2023)











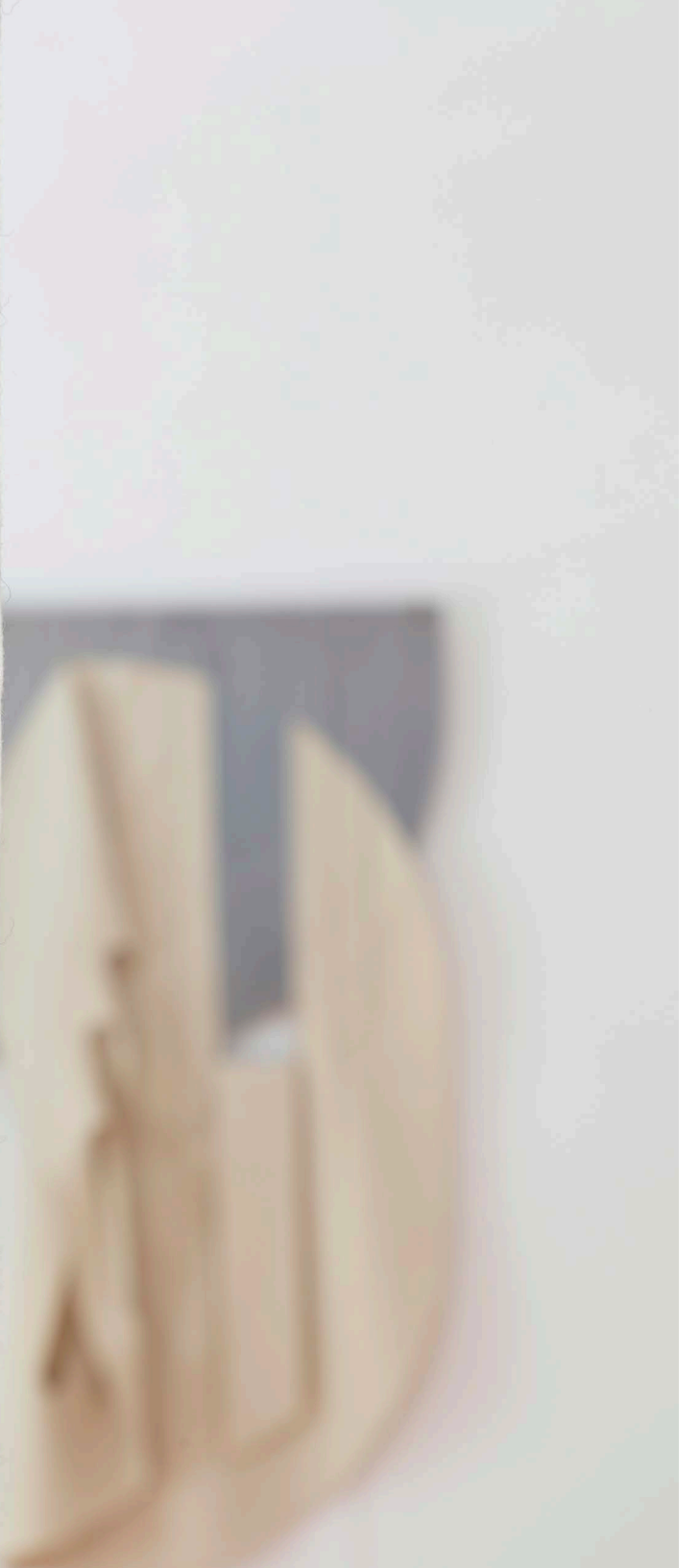










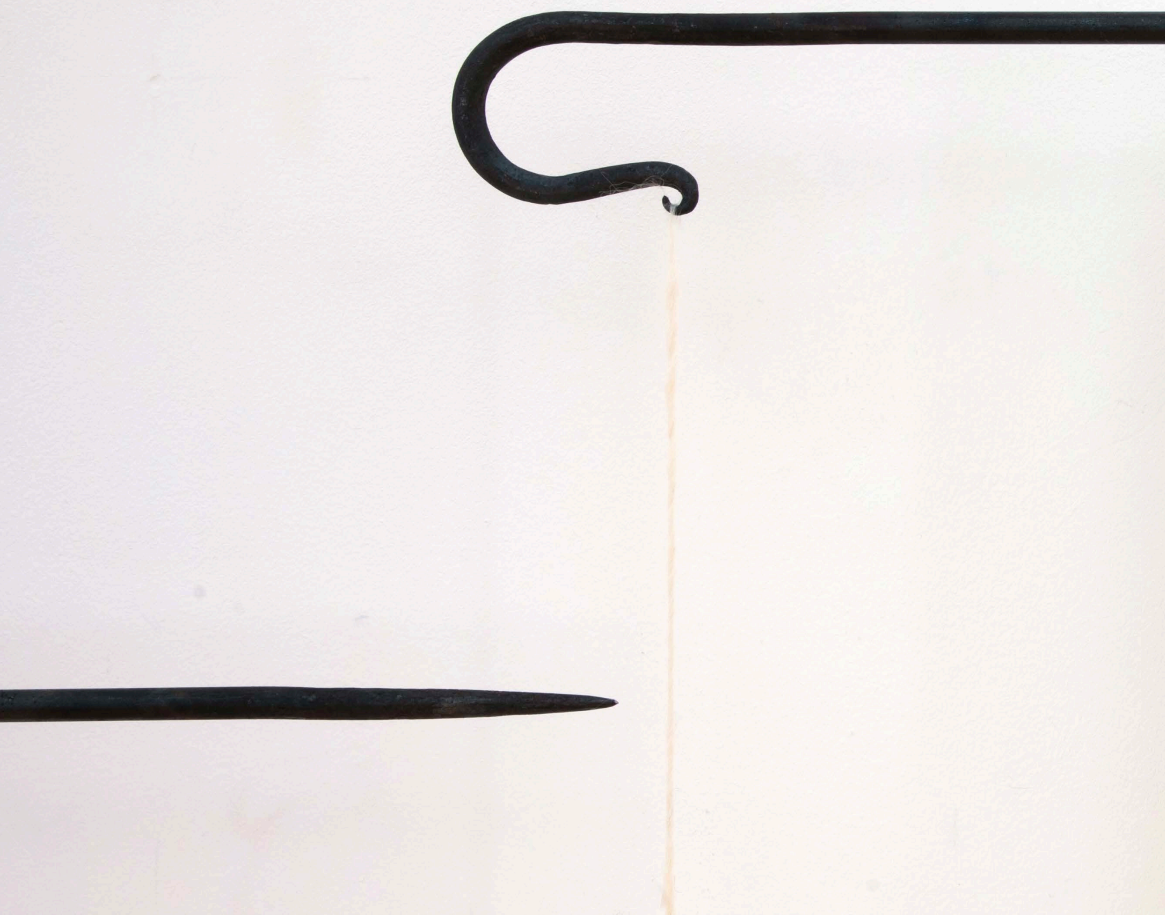


Claire Barclay (born 1968, Paisley, Scotland) lives and works in Glasgow. She is a leading figure in a generation of graduates from the Glasgow School of Art in the 1990s, who rose to prominence in the contemporary art world. She has since been the subject of numerous solo presentations including Tate Britain, London (2004); Camden Art Centre, London (2008); MUDAM, Luxembourg (2009); Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2010); Tramway, Glasgow (2017) and the MAC, Belfast (2022).

In 2020 Claire was commissioned by Tideway, London to create a series of artworks for the new public realm site at Putney, London, which was unveiled in 2023. She presented new work as part of *Human Threads*, an Artlink project for Tramway, Glasgow in 2022, Glasgow International, Scotland in 2017, and the 2016 Gwangju Biennale, South Korea. She represented Scotland as part of the Scottish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, Italy in 2003.

Other notable solo exhibitions include *Deep Spoils*, Mission Gallery, Swansea, Wales (2018); *Claire Barclay: Overworkings*, Touchstones Rochdale, Lancashire, England (2015); *Longing Lasting*, Stephen Friedman Gallery London (2015); *Claire Barclay, Another Kind of Balance*, Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland (2013); *Reading off the Surfaces*, Skulpturi, Copenhagen, Denmark (2011); *Claire Barclay*, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland (2009); *Fault on the Right Side*, Kunstverein Braunschweig, Germany (2007).

Claire's works are included in prominent collections including; Scottish National Galleries, Edinburgh, Scotland; Arts Council Collection, London, UK; British Council, UK; Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow, Scotland; Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden; Tate, London; MUDAM, Luxembourg and Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts, USA.

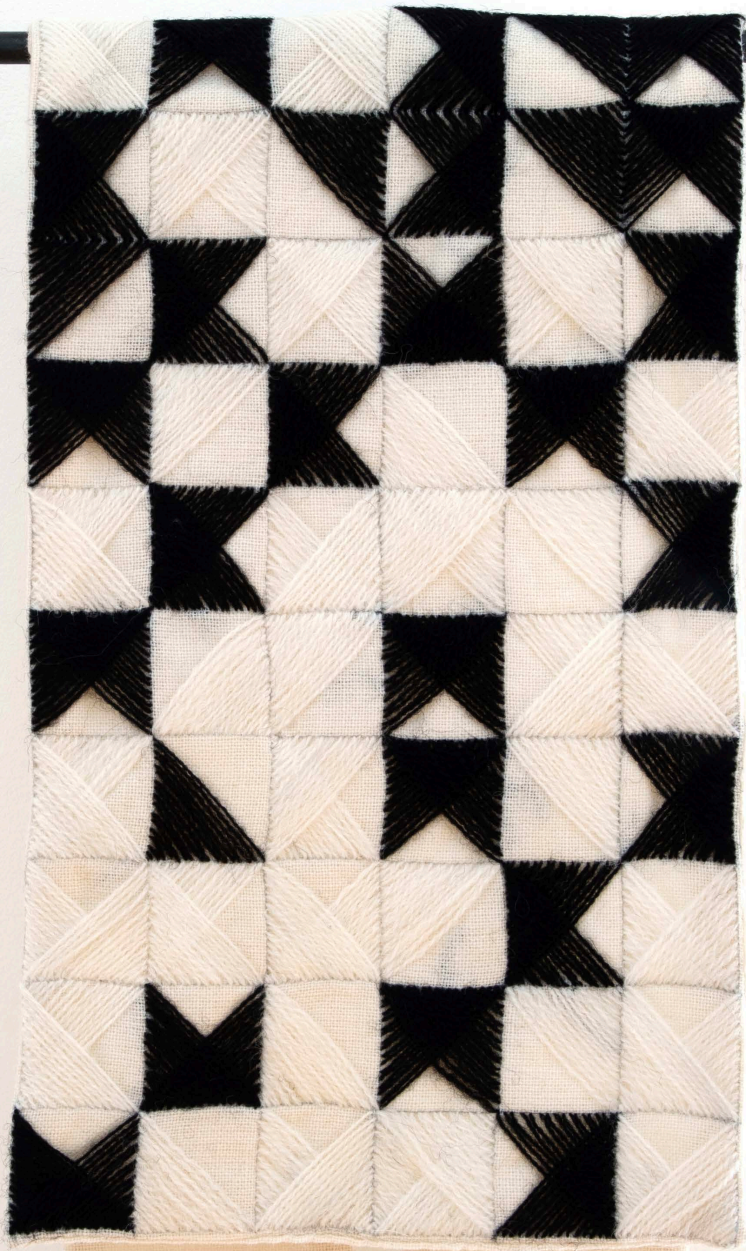


Published on the occasion of
Claire Barclay
Rawless
CAMPLE LINE
6 July – 8 September 2024

Text: Lizzie Lloyd
Layout: Briony Anderson and Tina Fiske
Artwork photography: Mike Bolam
978-1-0687092-1-0

CAMPLE LINE is a registered Scottish Charity no. SC047031
CAMPLE LINE, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, UK, DG3 5HD
www.campleline.org.uk

Printed on recycled paper by Solway Print, Dumfries, Scotland, UK



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WITH THANKS TO:

Claire Barclay, John Gibson and J&G Blacksmiths,
Bar Knight Precision Engineers Ltd, Kevin Reid,
Lizzie Lloyd, Paul Tait and Stephen Friedman Gallery

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