



Art is the Flower, Life is the Green Leaf

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## Contextual Review and Concept

*Submission context.* Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928) was a Scottish architect, interior designer, and artist who designed the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) building (Macaulay, 2010). The GSA as an institution of higher education and as a building made a major contribution to a unique visual movement known as the Glasgow Style, which was characterized by forms found in nature such as roses, seeds, and leaves as well as by its emphasis on linearity through vertical lines, elongated forms, and repeated squares (Euler, 2008; Wood, 2004).

Nearly a century after Mackintosh's death, his design, buildings, and artwork continue to inspire fashion designers, fabric designers, and fiber artists. Within the past 10 years, collections by Giorgio Armani, Christopher Kane, and Issey Miyake have featured garments influenced by Mackintosh and the Glasgow Style (Blank, 2010; Blank, 2015; Mower, 2018). Campbell (2008) created a kimono from digitally printed fabric that was inspired by Mackintosh's fabric designs and the GSA building. In terms of fiber arts, Wood (2004) demonstrated how the major motifs of Mackintosh's work could serve as inspiration for embroidery designs.

I studied, lived, and worked in the Glasgow area for five years and was granted library privileges at the GSA as I studied for my master's degree. These experiences led me to form an intellectual and emotional bond with the GSA building that moving back to the United States did not break. A portion of the GSA was damaged by a fire in 2014, and nearly the entire building was lost in a much more devastating blaze on June 15, 2018. This quilted triptych represents my struggle to comprehend the loss and my hopes that the GSA will be rebuilt.

*Design concept.* The rose is the most recognizable motif in the Glasgow Style (Euler, 2008), and therefore, it plays a central role in this work by representing the GSA building. Each panel is individually titled based on a portion of a quote attributed to Mackintosh, and the transformation of the colors across all three panels represents the passage of time. The first panel, "Flowers That Are Not Dead," portrays the immediate aftermath of the fire when the debris of the school was still smoldering. The roses were charred by the fire, but they are not dead. "There is Hope in Honest Error," illustrates the transition from debris removal to fundraising in order to rebuild. The rose is still tarnished, but its traditional pink coloring is beginning to return, and it has swelled in size with the outpouring of support from around the world. Green leaves appear at the right side of the panel to depict new growth. Finally, "Art is the Flower, Life is the Green Leaf" represents the reconstructed GSA building. The roses have returned to traditional shades of pink, and the green leaves symbolize the building's new life.

This creative scholarship is guided by the theory of Art and Agency that advocates for treating works of art as if they were people: alive and capable of generating or accepting social agency (Gell, 1998). The rose travels on a journey through each panel from after the fire to an indeterminate date in the future when the GSA is rebuilt. The rose becomes a symbol of survival, hope, and rebirth that elicits an emotional reaction from viewers, demonstrating its social agency.

### Aesthetic Properties, Visual Impact, and Cohesion

This design incorporates multiple aesthetic properties of the Glasgow Style. Long vertical quilting stitches emulate Mackintosh's work by maintaining simplicity of design and emphasizing linearity, while curved quilting stitches on the second and third panels integrate the style's organic, flowing lines (Euler, 2008). Repeating squares support the transition of colors and represent a design element commonly used by Mackintosh (Wood, 2004). The changing color of the roses across the panels portrays healing and recovery and reflects a living motif representing the GSA (Gell, 1998). Visual impact centers around the transitioning color palette and the balancing of refined Glasgow Style design elements with chaotic fabric manipulation. The triptych story of my emotional reaction to the GSA fire combined with repeating design elements and coordinating colors from one panel to the next creates cohesion.

### Process, Technique, and Execution

Figure 1 shows the final iteration of sketches for each panel. Each quilt top is comprised of eight strips of fabric and accent squares that were machine pieced. Some of this same fabric was also used to make the back of each panel and the hanging sleeves. Binding was not added in order to preserve the ombré effect, and the panels were turned inside out and finished with a top stitch. The top and back enclose batting and each panel was machine quilted by stitching in the ditch. The hanging sleeves were attached by hand with a blind stitch, and the quilting stitches of the panels were mirrored on the sleeves to maintain visual continuity.

Two panels were embellished with fabric slashing to create the debris. Approximately five layers of gray, black, magenta, and red fabric scraps were sandwiched between two layers of black fabric, and diagonal lines were machine sewn 1/4" to 1/2" apart. The space between the lines was cut open and a stiff-bristle

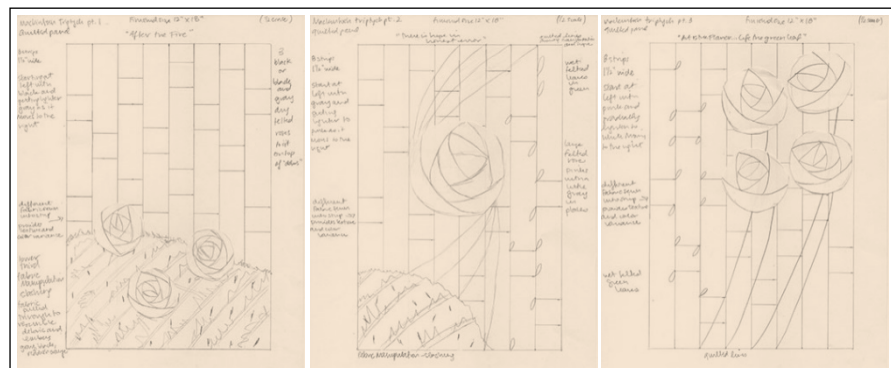


Figure 1. Process sketches.

brush was rubbed over the area repeatedly to distress the cut fabric. The debris field was then cut to shape and machine sewn to the panels.

All three panels feature roses that were needle felted by hand from wool roving, and they were attached with sewing thread after quilting. The green leaves on the second and third panels were also needle felted by hand from wool roving, and they were attached with embroidery floss prior to quilting.

### Design Contribution and Innovation

This quilted triptych acquaints viewers with the devastating 2018 blaze that resulted in the incredible loss of an iconic art institution that stood in the Glasgow city center for more than a century. While fashion designers have created garments inspired by Mackintosh, this triptych builds on Wood's (2004) demonstration that needlework can be used to celebrate his designs. Quilts are constructed by layering and connecting multiple parts, analogous to the way in which buildings are constructed, and therefore this medium in combination with needlework was chosen to advocate for rebuilding.

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