

Revitalised Fruitmarket opens following £4.3m Reiach and Hall-designed revamp

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The Fruitmarket in Edinburgh opens its doors today for the first time since summer 2019, with its existing galleries refreshed and expanded into a large adjacent warehouse.



A £4.3 million capital development, it is the first project and renovation of its kind to open in the UK since the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic.

A major exhibition of over 30 works including major new commissions by renowned Scottish sculptor Karla Black inaugurates the newly expanded Fruitmarket and spans the entire building comprising two gallery spaces, the new warehouse space and linking walkway. Access into and around the building has been improved, with an emphasis placed on equality of experience for everyone.

The new spaces and redevelopment have been designed by Edinburgh-based **Reiach and Hall Architects** and prioritise re-use and sustainability. The resulting transformation doubles the footprint of the gallery and brings the next door building – like the Fruitmarket's original building, also a former fruit and vegetable warehouse – into active cultural use, as an expansive, inspirational space.



In the original building, the essential rhythms of the rooms and the natural light that floods the upper floor have been preserved. The spaces of the Exhibition Galleries have been simplified and their material finishes and facilities upgraded. There's a brand new Learning Studio; an enlarged Information Room, Café and Bookshop; and a simple yet commanding new main staircase.

New, and to be revealed for the first time in July, is an expansion into a second historic warehouse, most recently the Electric Circus nightclub. This steel-framed, brick-lined building has been kept as raw as possible. It has been opened out by removing the upper floor and reusing the joists and floorboards rather than bringing in new materials. The resulting space will lend itself to theatre and music, spoken word and dance as much as it does to the presentation of visual art. The redevelopment will ensure that the Fruitmarket can continue to operate at the forefront of contemporary culture for decades to come.

The Fruitmarket curated Black's solo presentation for Scotland in Venice at the 54th International Biennale in 2011 but Karla Black sculptures (2001–2021) details for a retrospective marks their first collaboration at home and is the result of an invitation to Black to play to her strengths and "force a raw creative moment" into the Fruitmarket's pristine new gallery spaces.



The renovation and expansion offers Karla Black inspirational, materially resonant spaces in which to make and site her work. Inspired by the interplay of the new, double height warehouse with its raw brick and rough wood, and the refurbished conventionality of the exhibition galleries, she has worked with the Fruitmarket to reimagine what a retrospective exhibition can be.

A selection of sculpture made since 2001 will fill the ground floor galleries with standing, hanging and low-lying volumes and planes. They are constructed from and worked on with some of Black's signature materials – cardboard, sugar paper, polystyrene, polythene, cellophane, sellotape, glass, mirror, net, Vaseline, plaster powder, powder paint, medicines, cosmetics and thread.

Works – some large and some small – are installed in the gallery spaces, brick walls, gallery windows and across floors. The existing works set the stage for the major new commission *Waiver For Shade* – made by Karla Black in the new warehouse space in the weeks before it opened.



Fiona Bradley, the Fruitmarket's director, said: "We are open! We can't wait to welcome everyone to the new spaces, and to one of Karla Black's most ambitious and beautiful exhibitions to date. Our redevelopment breathes new life into our building, and to another of Edinburgh's great old warehouse spaces, which many of our visitors will remember fondly from its most recent past as a nightclub. We're looking forward to working with artists and in partnership with other cultural organisations locally, nationally and internationally to help audiences experience the wide-ranging generosity and inspiration of the artistic imagination."

Neil Gillespie, director, Reich & Hall Architects, added: "The original galleries are seen as a series of white spaces, abstract and precise. Surfaces are smooth and continuous while detail and material expression are suppressed. The palette in the warehouse, by contrast, is dark and sensual. It is a space

that relishes the directness and crudeness of the existing steel frame, the strength and texture of the brick walls and the industrial timber floor. The mood is intense, almost visceral. As an ensemble they offer the artist, curator and their audience remarkable contrasting and complementary spaces for art and performance.”

All images by Ruth Clark
