

Tracy Edwin MACKENNA & JANSSEN

MERCHANT'S HOUSE GARDEN

Kirkcaldy, Scotland, 2007

Site: One of the oldest buildings in Kirkcaldy, the 16th-century Merchant's House was originally home to mariners and merchants. Restored and converted by the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust, it is now occupied by small businesses working in the creative sector and Kirkcaldy Tourist Information Centre. The outbuildings have been developed as a base for school and community group activities. Hidden behind the Merchant's House and enclosed by high stone walls, the garden is 10m wide and slopes upwards for 50m. Archaeological surveys suggest that the long walls were used to house bee boles, implying the cultivation of flowers and fruit. It is likely that the garden would originally have supported livestock, fruit trees, vegetables and herbs to supply the needs of the Merchant's House.

Art: Commissioned by Fife Council (in partnership with Fife Historic Buildings Trust and Scottish Enterprise Fife) and working in collaboration with landscape architect John Richards, Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen transformed the overgrown garden into a contemporary public green space. The garden is a site for public use and aims to contribute to the fostering of a new sense of community as part of a long-term regeneration plan for Kirkcaldy town centre. Referring to its historical function as a productive garden, rare and specialist vegetables, herbs, flowers and fruit are being grown in organic allotments, managed by the 'Friends of the Garden'. Events related to the contemporary and historical role of food production; cooking and eating will take place around a large, permanently sited table. The garden's main elements include a circular events podium, organic allotments, fruit trees and a 6m long oak table with benches. The ambition for the garden is that it will function for local users on a daily basis as a green pleasure garden that also provides a platform for cultural and social activities of local, national and international importance. The Merchant's House Garden is a progression from Tracy Mackenna and Edwin Janssen's earlier projects that focussed on temporary environments for production, presentation and exchange.

Network: The garden project was part of the international network 'Changing Habitats', that links projects in urban spaces from different European regions. The particular focus is on the integration of artistic thought process in the development and planning of European cities. The publication 'Changing Habitats, Art Experience and Urban Development', documented an exhibition and the findings of a conference that addressed the integration of art practice in the development and planning of European cities and the role of public participation in the development of projects in the public domain. Network partners: GAK, Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen, Germany; Art in Partnership Edinburgh; Beyond, Municipality of Utrecht; Centre for Contemporary Art Gdansk; Centre for Contemporary Art Sevilla; Hints Institute Budapest; Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art Riga; Stadtraum.org Düsseldorf; Fife Council Scotland (in partnership with Fife Historic Buildings Trust, Scottish Enterprise Fife and Fife College).