

# Edinburgh Printmakers to open in April

Edinburgh Printmakers will open to the public on Saturday 27 April 2019 with the art exhibition *The Politics of Heritage vs. the Heritage of Politics* by German printmaker Thomas Kilpper.

Established in 1967 as the first open access studio in the UK, Edinburgh Printmakers is an arts charity specialising in printmaking.

It has a brand new home at Castle Mills on Dundee Street. The former North Edinburgh Rubber Factory has been renovated in an £11m project.

The building houses an enhanced open access print studio, traditional and digital processes, a dedicated learning space, artist accommodation, art galleries, a shop, a creative industries hub, café and print archive.

Castle Mills is set to be one of the largest printmaking facilities created for artists in Europe. The new building is 2194m<sup>2</sup> compared to 939m<sup>2</sup> in the present Union Street base.

German installation artist Thomas Kilpper is known for his critical social and political interventions. He studied with Alfonso Huppi in Düsseldorf. The Tate Gallery in London houses the largest collection of his works in the UK.



### New home for Edinburgh Printmakers

Chief Executive of Edinburgh Printmakers, Shân Edwards commented: "Opening Castle Mills with a European artist, signifies our vision for Edinburgh Printmakers in the future. Edinburgh Printmakers is an arts charity with printmaking at its heart.

"By 2023, our spaces will be creative communities that lead with our knowledge and heritage, innovate through our practice and ambitions and welcome the wider world to art.

"Artist Thomas Kilpper's exhibition will reflect the history of the building through his chosen material and portray a view of politics relevant today to mark this moment in history."

American businessmen and bootmakers Henry Lee Norris and Spencer Thomas Parmelee bought the canalside building Castle Mills Silks in 1856 and made it the headquarters of the North British Rubber Company. Their company soon grew and Castle Mills, the present building, was created in 1870 in Gilmore Park. The main entrance is now from Dundee Street, Edinburgh.

By 1900 Castle Mills had become the largest industrial unit in Edinburgh, employing 3,000 people. With the start of the First

World War came a demand for a durable, rubber-soled boot for the trenches. Commissioned by the Ministry of War, the Wellington boot was conceived in 1916. The North British Rubber Company set to work 24 hours a day, producing 1,185,036 pairs of boots for soldiers in the trenches.

After the war the product catalogue ranged from sink plugs and domestic flooring, to golf balls and automobile components. In 1955, under the Hunter brand, two new boots were launched, the Green Hunter and the Royal Hunter, becoming a firm fixture in fashion for the next 50 years. Princess Diana famously wore a pair in her engagement photos in 1981, and the boots surged in popularity again after Kate Moss was seen in a pair at Glastonbury in 2005.

By the 1960s the North British Rubber Company remained one of Edinburgh's main employers, with almost every family in the local area having a family member employed at the mills. After a disastrous fire hit the factory in 1969, much of the production was transferred to other sites at Newbridge on the outskirts of Edinburgh and Heathhall, Dumfries. Four years later, most of the factory complex was demolished, leaving only Castle Mills on the site.

Scottish and Newcastle Breweries took over the site and built one of the world's most advanced canning complexes, with Castle Mills being used as a store and accounts office.

"The people of Fountainbridge are justifiably proud of their industrial heritage and thanks to players of the National Lottery, this important part of it has an exciting future back at the heart of the community. Once open, Castle Mills will be a contemporary hub of creative enterprise benefiting people living and working nearby, bringing a sense of pride to the people who call this area home, and offering an exciting addition to Scotland and Edinburgh's cultural scene." said Riona McMorrow, Acting Head of the National Lottery Heritage Fund in Scotland.

Artist Thomas Kilpper has, throughout his career, developed artistic interventions that reveal hidden or obscured political and social significances. He works with local communities and people's stories, using his research to create a picture of hidden histories. He conceives his works as installation to achieve large-scale visibility that provokes public dialogue.

With many of his print projects, his carving in situ is a model of literal resistance; Kilpper uses different tools to cut his images into the different materials and then makes large prints that are installed in the gallery space or public realm. His work expands political dialogue, not only to include previously excluded voices at a local level but also to integrate these stories into an international history of resistance and work for social justice.

Inspired by a research residency at Fountainbridge in 2018, Kilpper proposes to carve a giant linocut into a temporary surface covering the gallery floor at Castle Mills and subsequently take a series of unique prints – depicting politico-heritage themes reflecting the context of the site and pointing to its new function as a hub of creativity – generated from the very site-specific artwork. This commission has received support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Hope Scott Trust and Sylvia Waddilove Foundation.

Artist Thomas Kilpper commented: "I am thrilled to take on the challenge and do the first exhibition in the newly redeveloped Castle Mills building that Edinburgh Printmakers will open this spring. I am very much looking forward to working on the spot and hope to be able to dig deep into it. Right now across the world decisions are being made by politicians that need to be tackled or at least highlighted as wrong. Our society is getting polarized and shifting back to unfair times – with many other artists I share the urge to voice our concerns. Whether it helps to secure a brighter future is another question – but art definitely has the potential to make the

future look not too bleak”.

Saturday 27 April 2019 will be the first time that Castle Mills will be open as a public building. In the three-floor building, the general public will be able to enjoy the two galleries, shop and café. Members of Edinburgh Printmakers will have access to the top floor studio and printmaking facilities and visiting artists will be able to stay in the flat for residencies.

Amanda Catto, Head of Visual Arts, Creative Scotland, said: “We’re very much looking forward to the opening of Edinburgh Printmakers at Castle Mills – a world class centre for printmaking that will extend a warm welcome to all. Supported by the National Lottery through Creative Scotland the new, state of the art facility will deliver programmes, classes and courses to suit people of all experiences – from the absolute beginner through to the established artist/ printmaker.

“The completion of the building development is a tremendous achievement and looks set to generate significant, artistic, social and economic benefits for Edinburgh Printmakers, its members and the communities it engages with locally, nationally and internationally. We are excited by the creative vision and ambition of this project and would like to congratulate all those involved. We encourage everybody to visit and explore this great new resource.”

A City of Edinburgh Council building, the conversion of Castle Mills began in 2012, it is part of the Council’s redevelopment plans for the area of Fountainbridge and has been supported by the Fountainbridge Canalside Initiative (FCI) as well as the surrounding businesses.

Councillor Donald Wilson, Culture and Communities Convener, said: “An exciting future lies ahead for Edinburgh Printmakers when the Castle Mills conversion completes. The new hub is transforming what was a derelict listed building into a brand

new arts facility, in keeping with the character of the building and the area. I'm sure it will provide huge social and economic benefits for the local community and greatly enhance Fountainbridge's cultural offering.

"The project has long had great support from the Council, which has worked hard to help Edinburgh Printmakers take this building forward to regenerate the area. This has involved us providing the land and helping Printmakers secure necessary support from the Scottish Government. I'm delighted to see this partnership reach the next stage with news of the very first exhibition."

Page\Park architects design to ready the building for public use prioritises the importance of preserving the historic fabric as well as the industrial character. The building is a rare surviving example in the area of 19th century polychromatic brickwork. Conservation works included carefully cleaning and repairing the unique brickwork, fully refurbishing the original timber sash and case windows as well as restoring the slate roofs. Internally, remnants of a 1916 interior were restored including timber wall panelling and decorative plaster ceilings.

New architectural elements are light of touch and stem from an understanding of the heritage. Central to the architectural concept was to make precise interventions to facilitate new use while still allowing the existing building room to breathe. The bold new entrance with the lovely gates opening onto Dundee Street provides a public face for Edinburgh Printmakers offering views directly in to the galleries, reception and shop.

The new extension to the rear shifts the centre of gravity of the building to create a central courtyard around which all building users can meet and interact. A simple, effective new circulation strategy ensures that all six levels and half levels of this complex historic building are accessible to

all.

A spokesperson from Page\Park Architects commented: "It is critical we conserve, occupy and reimagine our built heritage to ensure it remains in use for many generations to come. Edinburgh Printmakers ambition for this project has been an inspiration from the start. It has been our privilege to work with them on such a fascinating, unique and important building which will provide a key cultural anchor for Edinburgh and Scotland."

The resurrection of Castle Mills was possible with kind thanks to National Lottery Heritage Fund, Creative Scotland, Scottish Government, City of Edinburgh Council, Historic Environment Scotland and all individuals who supported the fundraising campaign along with The Gannochy Trust and Robertson Trust. Printmaking courses and artist residencies will start in April 2019, full details are on the website [www.edinburghprintmakers.co.uk](http://www.edinburghprintmakers.co.uk).

Thomas Knowles, Head of Grants at Historic Environment Scotland, said: "We are pleased to support Edinburgh Printmakers with the Castle Mills Regeneration Project through our Historic Environment Repair Grant funding programme. This provided £598,000 of investment to support the regeneration of this culturally important Edinburgh building into a multi-use state of the art print facilities and transforming the local area into a creative hub".