

## Mary Maclean: Somewhere Fast

Belfast Exposed, Belfast  
13 August – 24 September

Reviewed by: [Gavin Weston](#)

Mary Maclean's works provoke an unsettling ambivalence, given that the objects themselves are so fixed, so physical, so right; while their subject matter – forensic-like considerations of the minutiae of guest houses – is deeply tinged with the melancholic transience that is found only in spaces through which individuals pass fleetingly.

Skilfully utilising photographic emulsion, large format, monochromatic studies of interiors and veiled views from anonymous windows have been transferred onto hefty aluminium plates, a process which imbues the exhibition as a whole with a cool austerity, while also pandering to Maclean's fascination with the tat and opulence of doilies, voile net curtains, William Morris-type wallpaper and velveteen cushions.

Often Maclean cleverly places the viewer within these tired bedrooms and threadbare lounges – the walls of which, one feels, are permeated with the secrets of a thousand faceless souls – by appropriating the natural compositional tool of the window frame. Always, these images offer simultaneously tantalising and infuriating shrouded exterior views, the net curtains playing with one's sense of perspective and goading one's sense of the acceptably aesthetic. And yet these are beautiful objects: objects that work, here in the gallery – as they would in just about any corporate lobby, or indeed any vaguely minimalist and good-sized living room.

Maclean's studies of interior details are similarly impressive. In Members' Dining Room the viewer is presented with a photographic treatment of a print of a landscape painting (hung on a possibly damp wall) which, curiously, reads more like a formal still life. A companion piece depicts a large expanse of bare wall between a bed headboard and a small painting entitled Arthur's Seat from the Braid Hills in which, interestingly, some staining on the actual aluminium plate pervades the image. This, however, does not detract from the piece. Nor is it mere happy accident. Instead – as in much of Maclean's work – it lends the object an almost painterly quality not often found in photographic exhibitions.

Writer detail:

Gavin Weston is an artist, writer and lecturer.



[\[enlarge\]](#)

Mary Maclean, 'Leeds'.