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Nathan Coley  
*Appearances*



# Nathan Coley

## *Appearances*



### Who?

Nathan Coley was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1967 where he lives and works. The artist graduated from Glasgow School of Art in 1989 with a BA in Fine Art. He is interested in the built environment, particularly public spaces and the meanings that are placed on civic buildings and gathering places.

### What?

Coley uses a variety of different media, including sculpture, installation and video work to explore the symbolism in architecture and urban environments.

He investigates how these buildings, monuments and public spaces come to represent values, beliefs and ideals of the society that builds and uses them.

Coley is an ideas-driven artist who conducts extensive research before creating his works, including visiting sites, library research, interviews and photographic documentation.

The materials he chooses to use in his work have significant meanings, however Coley prefers to provoke discussions rather than to make statements in his work. He doesn't reveal his opinions in the themes he explores.

# Why?



Palace, 2008.



Camouflage Church, 2006.

## ARCHITECTURE

Coley often references buildings in his work to examine how the values of a society are reflected in its architecture.

Civic buildings are given importance and significance by their social history and the communities that populate them. Social, political and religious doctrine, or rules dictate how humans behave in and around these spaces.

Coley draws our attention to the symbolism in architecture, encourages the viewer to reflect on the values that underscored the construction of civic buildings and to consider their transformation over time.



Coley once spent four months building 289 cardboard scale replicas of every place of worship in Edinburgh, Scotland. These included churches, synagogues, mosques and Salvation Army Halls.

The Lamp of Sacrifice (286 Places of Worship, Edinburgh 2004)

### What do public buildings mean to us?

Make a list of buildings that communities use and how they shape our behaviour. What are their influences? Think of examples (eg being quiet in a library, following the layout of an exhibition, queuing at the bank etc). Think of ways to change the way people behave in these buildings. How could you disrupt behaviour patterns in these buildings?

Building	Symbolism	How it influences our behaviour
Library	Freedom of information, equality, education centre	Quiet at all times, must return books, must look after and treasure books. Place of gathering, place for protest
Court of Law		
Church		
Art Gallery		
Shopping Mall		

## TEXT

Many of Coley's works include written text, as can be seen in his seen in his message sculptures. The texts he uses are appropriated from history, literature and popular music.

Because the text is appropriated, then illuminated and placed in different locations, the original context and understanding of these phrases are gone. The viewer is left to make their own meaning.

Coley chooses to use globes rather than neon to illuminate the text, because neon is associated with advertising. Light globes have a theatrical and nostalgic appearance, and are reminiscent of fairgrounds, fun and play.

The playful material undermines the authoritarian tone of the statement, which is written in capital letters and placed on 6x6 metre scaffolding, creating an imposing sign.

Statements can have different meanings depending on tone, case, font or social, historical and physical context.



*There will be no miracles here*  
Mount Stuart parkland, Isle of Bute, Scotland



Tate Liverpool

### Notice how the meaning changes when the location of the work changes?

Make your own text work – take a statement from a song or story.

Try spelling it out in different materials.

How does the appearance alter the interpretation of the words?



*Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens*  
ACCA forecourt December 2010

*Heaven Is A Place Where Nothing Ever Happens* is a message sculpture Coley exhibited last year in ACCA's forecourt. Illuminated with 480 globes, the text was taken from a pop song chorus, though for Coley the phrase seems to pose questions. Is there a heaven? What is heaven like? What does it mean if nothing ever happens there? Is that a good or bad thing?



Camouflage Bayrakli Mosque, 2005

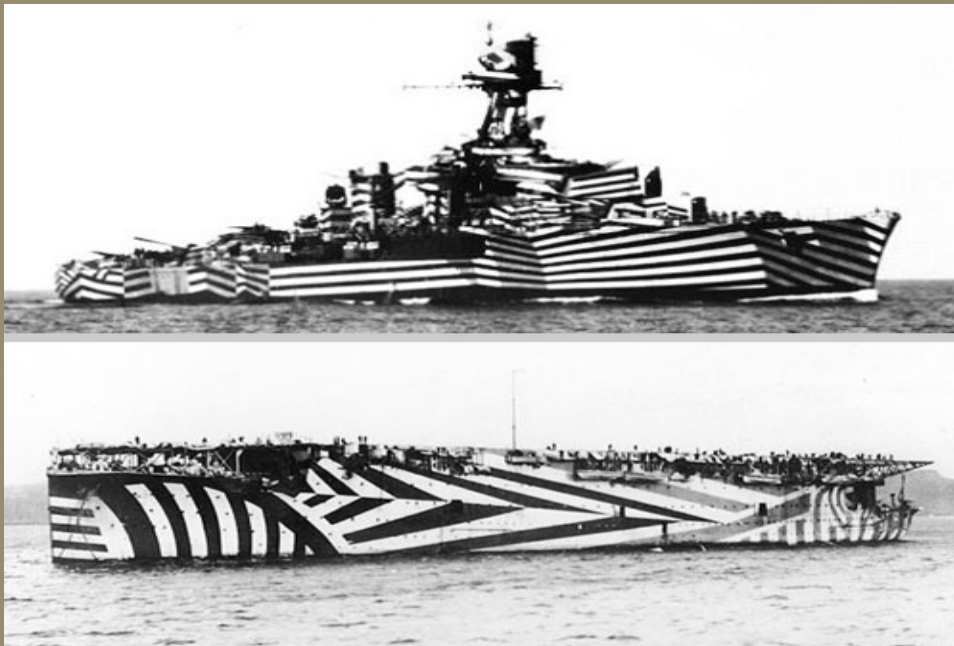
## FAITH

Coley is fascinated with faith, and the way that religious buildings hold great importance for our cultural identity, even though their spiritual significance may have declined.

Coley's 'Camouflage Mosque' (2007) is a model of the Bajrakli mosque in Belgrade, Serbia. Built around 1575, the mosque was turned into a Catholic church during the Austrian rule 1717-1739. It was then turned back to a mosque when the Turks returned. Today it is the only remaining Muslim place of worship in Belgrade.

Made from simple painted hardboard, Coley has removed any defining symbols and characteristics. It represents a generic building for faith. The stripe pattern is appropriated from 'Razzle Dazzle' camouflage which was applied to navy ships during both the World Wars. While the horizontal patterning did not blend the ship into its surroundings, it disguises the vessel's size, type, speed and heading.

By camouflaging places of worship, Coley poses questions around the increasing loss of authority that religious institutions have in our society. Using wartime camouflage brings up ideas around conflicts of different religious beliefs.



### Did you know?

From the middle ages, until the advent of skyscrapers, churches were the tallest buildings. Their height reminded people to cast their eyes upward to the heavens where God is enthroned, and the grand architecture symbolized the wealth and power of the Christian church, for example.

In a video work *14 churches of Münster* (2000) Coley references orders issued to allied bombers to target the churches in Munster, Germany.

Why do you think churches would be a target for bombers?

What do churches and places of worship represent in our society?

How does being inside a church make you feel?

# THE EXHIBITION

## GALLERY 1 'PUBLIC SPACE'

Coley has been commissioned to make a major new project for ACCA. In the largest gallery he will create a continuation of the street or public plaza.

Coley has created a series of cast concrete platforms inspired by the designs of Oscar Niemeyer for Brasilia, the capital city of Brazil. Coley visited the city in 2003 and was interested in the way the concrete platforms sit strangely amidst the modernist architecture. With nothing atop the platforms, they raise questions about whether they are unfinished plinths, or sculptures themselves. The audience is able to sit and walk on top of them, creating an interesting way to position the viewer in the plaza.

The gallery also contains a tree sculpture with colour fairground lights, remixing his illuminated signs with a particular structure he saw at Luna Park. The tree marks the space as being outdoors but in a particularly abstracted, magical way.



*The Square of the Three Powers, Brasilia, 2011*  
Gold Leaf on Giclée Print

## GALLERY 2 'GALLERY'

One of the platforms continues from gallery 1 into gallery 2 through the doorway. A model of Melbourne's Scots' Church will be exhibited on the platform here along with a series of text based light box works.



The Scots' Church, Melbourne.

## GALLERY 3 'HOME'

Coley redefines the shape of the room by painting the 'Razzle Dazzle' style bold horizontal stripe pattern directly across the gallery walls.

The pattern creates an optical effect, making the reading of the room more difficult, pulling and stretching the walls into a new shape.

## GALLERY 4 'SCHOOL'

Architects often hold presentations, showing pictures of buildings and projects they have designed and talking about them. In a 20 minute video projection, Coley creates a funny and ironic version of these architectural lectures, set up with seating for the audience.

Actress Cate Blanchett becomes the architect, narrating a 'slide show'. However instead of seeing buildings, the images are of usually overlooked, incidental built structures, urban brokenness and rubbish that Coley photographed around Melbourne and Scotland. Blanchett talks about these images as if they were serious and outstanding building designs, laden with meaning.





## GLOSSARY

<b>Appropriation</b>	To adopt, borrow, recycle or sample something from another artwork.
<b>Architect</b>	Someone who designs buildings.
<b>Architecture</b>	A general term to describe buildings and other structures.
<b>Camouflage</b>	Clothing or materials used to disguise or hide.
<b>Civic</b>	Belonging to a city or town.
<b>Commissioned</b>	Given an order for the production of a work of art.
<b>Documentation</b>	Evidence of something.
<b>Generic</b>	Having no particularly distinctive quality or application
<b>Illuminated</b>	Brightened with light
<b>Installation</b>	Site-specific, 3D artworks, that can be temporary or permanent.
<b>Material</b>	The tangible substance that goes into the makeup of a physical object; “coal is a hard black material”
<b>Urban</b>	Relating to or concerned with a city.

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