

7th June 2020

Dear Tosh,

Please forgive the informality. I feel like I know you already. To grow up in Glasgow is to grow up with you, watching your rose petals bloom beside our shopfronts and your fine-line flower stems frame our city's skyline. No detail is too small to escape your gaze, and no ambition so lofty that it cannot be improved further by art. The idea of the total artwork has always been important to you, so I hope you'll like the way Glasgow looks today. The whole city is your artwork now.

And yet I know that the years you are living through are not easy ones. To anyone who values creativity and compassion, it can feel infuriating when society's progress seems not to be a straight line, but a circle. I can only imagine your frustration as the world you've known – a world of beauty, nature and hope – is shattered by the ugliness of war, sickness and prejudice. But what is it that you always tell us? 'Art is the flower - Life is the green leaf.' Regardless of the winter storms we have to weather, your artwork reassures us that spring will come again.

Please pass on my compliments to Mrs Mackintosh. Mrs Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, I should say. One of the many reasons I admire you so much is that you respect her so deeply. As you are fond of reminding your peers, 'Margaret has genius, I have only talent'. You have more than that, of course. You have love. Passionate and pure. The red rose and the white. Writing to you from the future, I have to say that there will be times when she needs your love, as well as your respect. You think of yourselves, together with Frances and Herbert, as the glorious Glasgow Four. It might surprise you to find out that for many years you become the Glasgow One. Artworks like Margaret's 'Seven Princesses' will become her 'Sleeping Beauties', hidden and dismissed by those who can't handle the power of a paintbrush wielded by a woman. You write that we will only truly understand beauty when we can see it in a blade of grass: recognising that every living thing has value and, if we live wisely, there is space for us all to flourish. I guess the world around me is still trying to learn a lesson that you began teaching more than a century ago.

For now, I must bid you adieu, sending my love through the years as we return to our respective Glasgows. The midsummer sun is setting as I look up towards the silhouette of your Art School, a picture of elegant resilience that glows bright like an ever-rising phoenix. Soon I will travel along Rose Street – one can never have too many flowers! – before Sauchiehall Street where, thanks to you, willows no longer symbolise sadness, but strength. Here in the future, we take pride in the way that our city helped to make you. Even more important, I think, is the way that you made us.

Aye yours, Kirsten