

Mac Birmingham (Midlands Arts Centre)



Cromwell Diamond Sawn Yorkstone

Challenge

The £15m regeneration of mac is a major regeneration project, which has been carried out to meet the needs of artists and the region's vibrant local community.

An iconic building and well before its time, mac was established in the early 1960s by Birmingham residents Mollie Randle and her husband John English, who had a vision to create an arts centre for young people locally. Birmingham City Council granted them land in Cannon Hill Park and The Midlands Arts Centre for Children and Young People, as it was then known, opened its doors for the first time.

The regeneration of mac has been carried out to renew and extend its facilities, which means it can now offer an even wider range of events and activities. The new building includes a purpose-designed galley, a completely new visual arts education suite and a dedicated audio and visual media studio. In addition, the existing visual arts, crafts and performing arts studios has also been refurbished. The existing theatre has been completely stripped out, refurbished and re-equipped, making it the best and most flexible theatre space of its scale in the region. In addition, a completely new Performing Arts Studio, The Foyle Studio, provides a rehearsal venue, which is also equipped for theatre and dance performances.

Mac invited international proposals for artists work to be commissioned for inclusion in the building. One of these commissions provided a major opportunity to incorporate a piece of original artwork within the interior paving system, designed by Birmingham-based artist Dr. Myfanwy Johns and a group of ladies from the Bosnian Cultural Centre Midlands (BCCM).



Marshalls

Creating Better Landscapes

Cromwell Diamond Sawn Yorkstone



Solution

Working closely with Myfanwy Johns, Marshalls' technical team identified not only suitable materials but also the parameters of manufacturing outputs, so as not to compromise the vision, but to deliver an outstanding piece of work.

The artwork was required for the foyer of the arts centre, covering an area of approximately 25m² within the internal paving system. The architect specified Marshalls' Cromwell Diamond Sawn Yorkstone for internal paving on the ground floor, to retain a natural feel and provide a seamless progression from outdoors to indoors. This stunning paving type from the natural stone range features an attractive fine sawn texture and was perfectly suited to creating a stunning, prestigious entrance to the building.

The artist, Myfanwy Johns, and the group of women from the Bosnian Cultural Centre Midlands (BCCM) produced a piece of artwork, which they named 'Sijelo' – which is a Bosnian word meaning: a collective of people coming together to engage in crafts and making.

The history of the group is that they had come to live in the Birmingham area in the early 1990s as medical refugees from the war in Bosnia. Many had spent time at mac during their early days in the UK, as part of their recuperation from the trauma they had suffered.

The artwork has its origins back in Bosnia, when the group used to hold regular get togethers with friends and family to weave carpets or to crochet tablecloths. Sijelo was therefore inspired by a traditional crochet pattern, combined with the recurring design feature of a hexagon – which linked to mac's unique Hexagon Theatre. This geometric form is also widely used in Islamic and Bosnian traditional crafts, such as carpet weaving, crochet, embroidery and woodcarving.

The crochet pattern that the group created was scanned into the computer and then translated into CAD drawing, which Marshalls' technical department interpreted into a style that could be integrated within the Yorkstone paving. Through close co-operation and in-depth discussion between the artist, the group and Marshalls' technical team, a final detail was agreed and approved for construction.

Attention to detail was critical on this project to interpret the design accurately and to be able to replicate it within the internal Yorkstone paving. The design led to major innovation within the manufacturing process, pioneering water jet cutting techniques and effectively meeting the challenges of the project.

The fact that Marshalls was able to reproduce this intricate design to represent Sijelo is testament to the company's extensive design and technical abilities, as well as its manufacturing expertise. Sections of the Yorkstone paving were replaced with flamed black granite, which provided a striking contrast to the subtle buff hues of the paving. The overall effect is a stunning entrance for visitors to the building and is particularly effective when observed from the first floor gallery.

Artist Myfanwy Johns explains: "The whole process involved a perfect fusion of modern manufacturing techniques and traditional crafting skills. It was important that the crochet pattern retained its authenticity in terms of any irregularities, which Marshalls ensured remained in the reproduction on the Yorkstone. This artwork holds great meaning for the group and will provide a point of interest for the many thousands of visitors to mac."

Other visual representations of the same design are displayed around the building using different forms, which was one of the reasons why accuracy and attention to detail was so important. This included a wood routed image on the xawall and a carpet manufacturer was asked to reproduce the same pattern on the first floor carpet.

Robert Newton from Architects Chetwoods in Birmingham said: "Yorkstone flooring helped to create a natural feel to the ground floor of the building. It was also a material that could be etched to integrate granite to enable the recreation of the image. The effect is very striking and it co-ordinates well with the other complementary images within mac."

To make the whole process of installation as easy as possible for the contractor, Marshalls created a huge jigsaw puzzle with the paving slabs individually labelled to ensure they could be laid right first time. This method worked extremely well, as it meant that the installation did not take any longer than normal and the contractor was able to complete the job to meet their deadlines.

Mick Lymn from contractor Thomas Vale explains: "This project was completely unique, because of the need to incorporate artwork into the internal paving design. Marshalls made this easy and we were impressed with the abilities of their technical team, which has provided a stunning effect to the Yorkstone and helped the artist to meet her aspirations."

In addition to providing technical support, Marshalls provided an innovative sealing process to the materials to protect them from daily usage, as well as in situ spillages, to maintain the visual integrity of the material for years to come.

Dorothy Wilson, Artistic Director and Chief Executive of mac, commented: "We are delighted with the wonderful designs created by Myfanwy Johns and the ladies of the Bosnian centre. The execution of the whole Sijelo design scheme has been a triumphant success, thanks to the combined efforts of artists and manufacturers working together. The finished piece is a testament to teamwork and excellence in execution."

Flamed Black Granite/Cromwell Diamond Sawn Yorkstone

Benefits

It is appropriate that the architect specified Cromwell Diamond Sawn Yorkstone, which is one of the most popular natural stone choices, due to its predominantly buff finish, with subtle veining which means it is well suited to both contemporary scheme designs and traditional landscapes. This popular paving type is also renowned for its quality and durability. Diamond Sawn Yorkstone benefits from an attractive fine sawn texture, which offers excellent slip resistance and therefore reduces the risks to pedestrians, staff and visitors to the building.

This whole project demonstrates the versatility of Marshalls' paving and the technical capability that the company offers. The impact that this paving scheme will have on mac and its visitors are far reaching. It is very significant for the group from the Bosnian Culture Centre Midlands and will provide a talking point for visitors to the arts centre for years to come. Marshalls is proud to be associated with such a culturally important building and this project gives a clear demonstration of how modern techniques and traditional skills can be combined to great effect.



Client:

Mac Birmingham (Midlands Arts Centre)

Contractor:

Thomas Vale

Architect:

Chetwoods

Artist:

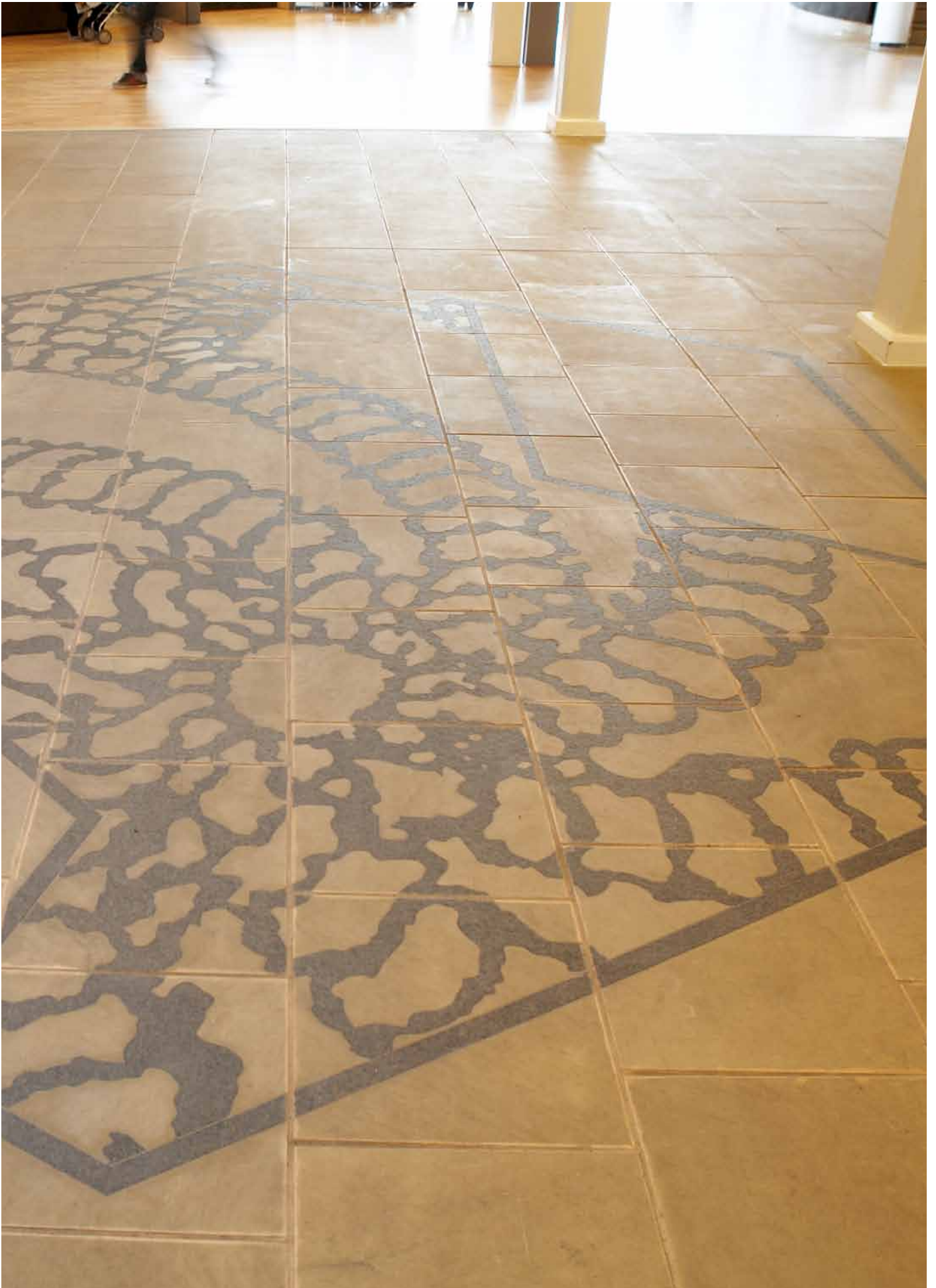
Dr. Myfanwy Johns – 'Sijelo'

Marshalls Product Used:

- Cromwell Diamond Sawn Yorkstone
- Flamed black granite

Specialists Involved:





Cromwell Diamond Sawn Yorkstone