In 1971 Camden Council acquired 22 acres of land off York Way, London from the National Freight Corporation and built the Maiden Lane Estate. 200 years ago the site was farmland, with ‘Midden Lane’ running through it. This route into London from the north became notorious for highwaymen and footpads until the Midland Railway took over the area and used it as a depot for coal, cattle and sheep.

The Maiden Lane estate, designed by architects Benson and Forsyth, was a visionary, modernist scheme which included plans for 400 new homes, shops, sports facilities, a community centre, a primary school and gym spaces. Due to financial pressures in the late 1970s the plans were not fully realised, resulting in a split site and years of practical and social challenges.

During 2019 Steffi Klenz spent time at Maiden Lane talking with residents and immersing herself in the architecture of the space. Tensed Muscles explores the relationship between the architectural promise of modernist living; of equality and opportunity, and the reality of living in Maiden Lane in the 40 years since its inception. Klenz layers images of the neighbourhood, mixed with architectural plans, archive material and hand-drawn medical illustration to unearth what is hidden beneath the surface of the site. Klenz is interested in the entanglements of the poetic, political and socio-economic aspects of the neighbourhood and uses the metaphor of the ‘phantom limb’ to present this. Medical drawings and images of Maiden Lane residents’ disconnected limbs signify something missing – something missing in society relating to inequality and social-economic trauma, represented through bodily trauma.

The use of the body in her work connects us with the site, animating modernist architectural plans which use the body to merely populate the space. Illustrations of tensed, spasmodic muscles suggest the thrust towards Modernism that money and politics might mean is dysfunctional because of inequality in society. These images are separate and disconnected from the modernist body politics through trauma, but are presented as a metaphor for this stagnation. In the hip hop and rap scenes of trauma and narrative and as presented in Tensed Muscles, capable of vocalising though sign language by shaping an alphabet. Klenz further explores communication by making correlations between Scriptio Continua (continuous writing), an early style of writing without spaces or punctuation which was performed either from read and the fast-paced transmission of ideas through rap and hip hop.

Klenz’s complex abstract collages of images, photographs, newspaper cuttings, graphs and charts challenge the politics of underclass as a monolithic complex and creates images that draw from human agency, expression and the rhythms of the urban social scene.
Leave my friends on the streets ‘cos that’s where they met me.

Had patience as a kid but all this changed when I was 16.

I’m destined for greatness – for greatness I’m destined.

Going jail was my detention, had to learn my lesson.

but I was only young and I fell victim to the streets.

Nearly died twice but I prevailed – it’s a blessing.

Got abused by the system but little did I listen.

I knew it from a distance that I was gonna pop!

By the age of 13 I knew money was all I need.

No TV in my yard, so I was out in the streets

I’m a leader, not a follower.

From a young age I’ve been active – I know what’s going on.

I can’t believe I got this far - must be the law of attraction.

Melanin that’s in my blood - divine energy from up above.

You know Camden had love, but watch out for the hate.

Yeah I’m still righteously giving, I’m still righteously living.

From a young age I’ve had a mind rate of a grown up.

It was bad then, but that’s where I met the Mandem.

I’ve spent years on the Lock - 10 years was enough.

I had a dream of performing in front of thousands,

Music was just a hobby - I fell in love with rapping.

20 years later this place was a home for me,

the ones to bring peace where it’s gone.

I give thanks, ‘cos we’re the ones to make a change.

This life’s the only one you’re getting.

2003 I moved up to Camden.

I’m from Camden but I don’t know N-Dubz.

And they still talking, just cease to exist. You fight women - I can see through your deviousness.

And youngers growing up, fully trying to match it, or take it further ‘cos they don’t know no better.

I ain’t one to say I’m as real as it gets, ‘cos my actions speak louder – bruddas know what it is.

So keep your opinions - I ain’t bothered if there’s 2 or 3 people throwing shade,

Everyday it’s grind, grind. Can’t get left behind, Lord knows I try.

Look into my sleep deprived-always-getting-high eyes on.

You just need to be yourself so you can free yourself.

But you lot are buncha liars- talking like Danny Dyer’s,

Make your own sh*t. Why you always gotta cat shit?

Hold the mic beautifully - taking it to new degrees.

When it comes to choices I only control mine.

And right now I can only help you to get high.

So I free my mind on the instrumentals, see.

Motorway tips, white girl in the driver.

Before I help anyone I gotta help I,

because I’m ‘bout to bless these I.

2003 was the birth of my estate.

They say nothin’ ain’t changed

1982 was the birth of my estate.

Maiden lane they say nothin’ ain’t changed.

Now in this life I’m not saying there’s a right way,

I’m giving you the missing speech,

Always going hard nothing came easy.

All my life I’ve had to keep it greezy!

This whole game’s monopoly.

Point blank things where hard!

Always had it in my heart,

I tried it for better things.

My mind is the weapon,

C’est la vie, Mama a dit

C’est la vie, c’est la vie,

C’est la vie, c’est la vie,

Kids outside the shop tryna get someone to go buy them a Benson.

Shout out to the real ones, the weirdos, they be standard.

Strap is in the hedges, bunch of rough neck rough edges.

They can’t do that so they out skanking with a migraine,

I’m from Camden - there’s not a lot that I find strange.

it was one road from Kings Cross to Highgate.

In this life I’m not saying there’s a right way,

I’ve got African roots but I’m a Camden lad,

Started on a Thursday finished on a Friday.

I’m from Camden but I don’t know N-Dubz.

But man get greedy and they want more.

I’m from Camden, I know about random.

But, boy how have times changed.

But back to the matter at hand -

Yeah, I swear we’re going clear

London Borough of Camden

I’m African so

(Chorus)

(Chorus)

(Chorus)