

# City Art Centre David Mach – Signs and Wonders



David Mach, Precious Light exhibition, Edinburgh City Art Centre, 30 July - 16 October 2011

Asked how it feels to be back in Edinburgh, David Mach replies, jokingly:- “The biggest sin a Scot can commit is leaving Scotland – but actually I feel like I’ve never left.” And in fact the Dundee born artist’s latest visit to the capital is an extravagant one. He more than atones for any absences with his exciting new exhibition, ‘Precious Light’ at The City Art Centre, which opens on Saturday. The massive collages and enormous metal sculptures of Golgotha which fill the ground floor of the gallery are awesome, in both the new and old senses of the word. While the giant crosses play chunky spatial games with the actual columns of the building, the Baroque scale photo collages draw you in, to reflect on the disparities between how people live in different parts of the world. As usual Mach’s work manages to be very serious and a lot of fun.

The exhibition celebrates the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible, the first version of the Bible to be produced on a mass scale. In 1611, 47 of the most learned scholars in Britain, after years of study, compiled and published the book. Large 16-inch pulpit bibles were printed and sent to every church. Shortly after, the production of smaller Bibles began, and for the very first time everyone could have their own copy of the holy scriptures.

Mach commented:- “The King James Bible provides all the inspiration an artist could wish for, struggle, pain, love, death, it’s all in there. No single text has had such a profound affect on our language, culture and thoughts as this

book. I want people to take another look at the King James Bible and see this work, in its 400th year, from a fresh, contemporary perspective.

He has managed to achieve this. There is a watery version of 'Hell' set in Dublin, and another version located in Disneyland. "I think of hell and heaven as fleeting moments, not things that last forever," he said. Heaven is portrayed as innocent pleasures, like playing in the snow, which takes place in natural surroundings, pictures where the seasons are depicted so vividly they also seem to be protagonists.

Edinburgh's dramatic Salisbury Crags and Arthur's Seat provide the backdrop for the construction of Noah's Ark . The storm is near, and the activity to round up each pair of animals frenetic.

"I took these pictures of the Queen's Park almost 12 years ago," said David. " I had the idea and then came the anniversary, so I decided to use them for this exhibition. It has evolved over a long period." David explained that the work on show at the City Art Centre is just the start, that the exhibition is an ongoing project. He wants to continue adding to it, to double or triple its size.

"This is my most ambitious project to date," he said. "The work is entirely self-funded and there is no sponsorship."

At the heart of the exhibition, the entire third floor of the gallery will be transformed into a working studio where visitors will be able to view Mach and his team as they work on a colossal decoupage 'The Last Supper.'

"I am very controlling about the whole process," he said. "I'm going to use photos of a group of French art promoters I know for the disciples. They are kind of market traders turned art entrepreneurs, very dynamic and just the sort of guys you would want to get your message out."

The finished work will be unveiled on 20 September at a Last Supper event, along with a burnt match head sculpture of Jesus.

"I'm happy it's being shown at the City Art Centre because it's a people's gallery. I approached it with the idea. We had a model of the gallery and so planned how to use the spaces. It helped the assembly go very smoothly," adds David.

The fourth floor is a word space, dedicated to the history and language of The King James Bible. It is given over to excerpts from the Bible, perhaps just a little too long for an easy reading and good appreciation of them, and their presentation, from a visually aesthetic point of view just a little neglected. However the projection of the many idioms in our everyday speech that derive from the King James Bible interspersed with modern quotations, for example from a Byrds' song or a statement of Obama or Gandhi, works extremely well, taking up many of the themes presented in the collages and sculptures. A range of historic bibles, including Tyndale, Geneva and King James versions, which chart the development of the English-language bible, are also on show.

The space will be used for a programme of activities which will accompany the exhibition. They start on Thursday 18th August at 1.30 with a talk by Gordon Campbell, Professor of Renaissance Studies at the University of Leicester, on the influence of this version of the Bible on literature.

In fact this world-changing book originated in Scotland, in the humble fishing town of Burntisland in Fife. Rosemary Goring in [The Herald Scotland](#) explained:- "Here, on May 12, 1601, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland convened for its annual clamjamfray in the presence of King James VI. Plague in Edinburgh had forced the Assembly to head out of town, and since the king had an injury from a hunting accident, they chose a location close to Rossend Castle where he was recuperating.

On that day it was agreed that a new translation of the Bible was necessary, and, remarkably, should be in English rather than Scots. Two years later, when James fell heir to the English throne, the matter was returned to with urgency, and a team of the finest biblical scholars in England took up the reins of one of the most fiendish, but rewarding, tasks of their age, making this labyrinthine work accessible and acceptable to all. When, in 1620, the Pilgrim Fathers sailed to America carrying copies with them, the global spread of the Christian message and the English language, as found in this most modern version, not to mention the poetry of its expression, was assured."

`Precious Light`, [David Mach](#), City Art Centre, 30 July-16 October