

Baldwin & Guggisberg: The Cathedral Collection

'We are migratory creatures; the history of our species is about journeys, departures, leaving and arriving, starting over. And none more so than ourselves.' (Baldwin and Guggisberg, *The Arch of Glass*, in *La Revue de la Ceramique et du Verre*, 2011).

✘ A boat stands full of bottles; a mobile sways gently in the breeze; in a frame of steel, glass ellipses seem to fall like rain. **The Cathedral Collection**, Philip Baldwin and Monica Guggisberg's new installation at **St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral**, Palmerston Place, speaks of movement; travel, journeys – and the end of journeys; of our quest for adventure, and of our quest for home.

Baldwin and Guggisberg create their work around certain ✘ themes. Mobiles interest them; suspended shapes that are 'sober, colorful, quivering in their fragility and sense of self, moving, turning, making their way in the world'. Here in St Mary's **Birdfeeder**, an elegant, almost surrealistic, arrangement of spheres and circles, floats peacefully above the nave, leading the eye towards the High Altar.

Boats feature large in this collection; slender steel kayaks filled with bottles; vessels within vessels. The largest, ✘ **The Long Voyage**, extends to 9 metres. Clear, green and gold bottles, all hand blown, are set in a bed of sand; around them cluster smaller bottles in dark greens, orange, black and white. *The Long Voyage* could be a Viking longboat, a slave galley – or a refugees' raft. Viewed front-on, the bottles/people lean out to each side, anxiously scanning the horizon. Every bottle faces upwards; alongside thoughts of uncertainty and fear there is also a sense of solidarity and hope.

The Cathedral Collection has been carefully planned to engage with St Mary's unique and atmospheric environment. Works have been placed at key locations in the building; in ***Under the Umbrella*** the wide funnel tops of red, white and black bottles reach out like the mouths of baby birds, or the bells of trumpets. In the stained glass windows above, heralds trumpet back:

'The Glory of this house shall be greater than that of the former'.

On the High Altar the boat of ***Gilded Journey of the Egos*** holds bottles whose variously shaped tops have been gilded with 22 carat gold, shining out beneath the marble of the reredos above, offering up their own 'still, small light'. The bottles, like the wings of the angels above, all point upwards, heavenwards. Gold symbolizes the presence of God – but the title of this piece is enigmatic. Are the people in this golden boat a little bit too full of themselves? Above them the crucifixion shows us that Christ gave up everything He had to save us. Showing off will not, according to the Scriptures, get you into the holy good books.

In the Cathedral's Resurrection Chapel we find a fine example of another of Baldwin and Guggisberg's themes: ***Guardians***. Fourteen elongated spheres stand upright on steel poles, their tops tapering away into wisps of curled glass. They could be flamingos. The artists began making these pieces in direct response to an invitation to participate in the first *Aperto Vetro* in Venice in 1996;

'Our idea was to recreate the powerful courtesans and courtiers of the era of the Doge, prior to the arrival of Napoleon and the fall of Venice as an independent state.... They are people, they are flora and fauna, they are long-necked and extravagant birds; whimsical, amused, fleeting and delicate. They are companions, fellow travelers with a different perspective.'

Here, however, the graceful black and gold forms seem to reflect ideas of war and remembrance, of youth cut down in its prime, lives never reaching their full potential.

✘ Two of Baldwin and Guggisberg's signature frames are exhibited in the Collection. In ***A Cappella Amphores*** red spheres interspersed with gold hang close together in vertical lines. Seen from the nave they curtain two windows of simple coats of arms. 'Each piece', say the artists, 'tells a story from sphere to sphere, a conversation as in a musical score.'

Moving into the King Charles Chapel, ***Green Frame*** is a ✘ sparser arrangement of tubes and spheres in muted, softer colours. This exceptionally calming work stands in front of a small altar guarded by four angels – facing a case containing the warrant for the execution of the king. Violence and peace; earthly death and celestial life; all are present in this small space.

In ***Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*** we are confronted by three glass boxes. The first is filled with sand and broken bottles – ✘ fragments and shards, old stoppers, shreds; the second contains intact bottles and vials in a chaotic pile, and the third nothing but white polystyrene packing chips. This piece is a new departure for the artists and echoes, perhaps, themes of transience and decay. If Baldwin and Guggisberg's boats can be seen as 'a metaphor for life and life's journey' (David Eichholtz, Director, David Richard Contemporary, Santa Fe), what does *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* represent? A suggestion that life is short, that we have only a limited time before we all return to dust? Or an affirmation that life is cyclical, that tomorrow will again become yesterday and yesterday today?

'There is no distinction really between an idea and its manner of expression...the whole point of this trajectory (was) to do something that allowed mind and body to merge in intention.' (Baldwin and Guggisberg, *The Arch of Glass*).

In **The Cathedral Collection** Baldwin and Guggisberg have not only created a spectacular exhibition in its own right, but also one that perfectly reflects and communicates with its setting;

'Grains, seeds, wine, oil, gold, silver, artefacts, all the ballast of our millennia-old civilisations, are transported down through the ages, and with them the stories themselves, the wandering of people across this magnificent planetary landscape. People just like us. Seeking, questing, looking for new horizons, and carrying their culture, their history and stories on their backs, in carts, and in boats. It's our story. It's humankind's story.' (Baldwin and Guggisberg, *ibid*).

Philip Baldwin and Monica Guggisberg have been making glass together for over thirty years. They learned their craft in Sweden before working and living in Switzerland and France; in 2015 they moved to their new studio in Wales. This is the first time they have exhibited in Scotland. Curator **Paul Musgrove** is a glassblower and printmaker; Paul is also the owner of Edinburgh's **Gallery Ten**, a contemporary & applied arts exhibition space. Representing established and emerging artists alongside master printmakers, the gallery specialises in promoting print in all its various forms alongside studio glass makers and other applied arts. See www.baldwinguggisberg.com and www.galleryten.co.uk for more information.

The Cathedral Collection is at **St Mary's Cathedral, Palmerston Place, Edinburgh** until 19th September 2016. Images marked *The Edinburgh Reporter* © John Preece; other images of glass © Helen Hood.

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