

EVENTS REVIEWS

'Stained Glass in Contemporary Culture – exploring creative partnerships to generate and sustain new work': Discussion Day, Wednesday 1 June

Helen Robinson welcomed everyone on behalf of the BSMGP and Caroline Swash gave an introduction to the first speaker, Helga Reag-Young. Helga trained in architecture and art and is a part of the women's international glass workshop (WIGW). She began talking about buildings with interesting stained glass, mentioning John Piper and Patrick Reyntiens (without whom John Piper would not have realized his work), Jane Gray's work with acid etch and stain and new technologies used by Martin Donlin and Adam Balenshenko using glass to clothe the interior of buildings. Helga spoke of the limitless opportunities, citing Brian Clarke's work at 33 Jermyn Street, a mirrored wall extension, painted and acid etched to produce clever and effective work, also Harry Cardross's work at Goddard & Gibbs working with other cultures' dialogues, Johannes Schreiter's work in the medical college library in the Whitechapel campus where the imagery came from the medical professionals and the glass was fabricated at Derix studios in Germany. So, she said, that is what we have to do: small is wonderful, big is wonderful!

Helga then spoke about the WIGW: an international informal group of 20 women artists in glass whose intention is to learn from each other. Since the founding meeting with 14 members in 1988 they have held 12 workshops in 11 countries. The first was in Reykjavik where they hired some big vans and went sketching in the countryside. Needing time to absorb what they saw, they agreed to meet every 2 years with work inspired by the previous trip. Each host decided what she will show her colleagues during the workshops and they have all learnt a lot from each other seeing and experiencing the same things.

Artistically they are all very different, as seen in their 16 pieces exhibition in 2010, from which each kept a set of everyone's work. Helga reported that the group is loose as there is no-one to tell them what to do and they enjoy the biennial gathering for discussion of new techniques and exchange of ideas, moral support and new experience. Helga encourages others to do this with their colleagues. They are self-financing as arts funding is not always available. They try to finance a catalogue to prove they were there, they rely on the organization of the host, spend as little as possible and see as much as possible. Helga ended by saying 'Art is for friends. Share it. The work we make is our treasure – don't give up.'

Three Teepee Glass group members followed. Brett Manley spoke about the current members, who mostly met at Central St Martins' glass, fine art and architecture course taught by Caroline Swash when Amal Ghosh retired and had self-funded exhibitions at the neighbouring Cochrane Gallery. They have also had regular exhibits in Zest Gallery, London and a show at the de Morgan centre, inspired by its collection. In 2015-16 a 10-year Teepee glass anniversary exhibition at Ely Cathedral was organized by Wendy Stone. These makers also help and support each other with their other skills, for example with framing and website development. They take turns to organize exhibitions, seek advice on projects from each other and with work enquiries can sometimes recommend a colleague. Brett ended with the news that Teepee babies are now being born, with three recent additions.

Maria Fagan, also of Teepee glass, then re-iterated how important working within a group can be for inspiration, interaction and support. Setting up alone is daunting and sourcing sponsorship and organizing exhibitions is much easier as a group, as well as giving the potential to exhibit together in bigger galleries. The wide range of skills and expertise, information sharing and support they have gained from belonging to the group has been worthwhile and she urged students to stay in touch with their colleagues, be generous, ask for help if you need it and stay passionate.

Wendy Stone described the Teepee group as 'glass friends with benefits'. While at Central St Martins she had won the Stevens competition and felt this validated her as an artist. Alf Fisher and the Burson award helped to start up her own glass career. Her advice with any big commissions was to assume nothing, e.g. who has responsibility for what and when, and to take pictures and file them on a computer. Keep in the glass loop: join BSMGP, CGS, keep informed and get involved with online exhibitions or lectures. Check local Facebook groups and arts pages, arts trails and open studio weekends. Take opportunities when they come up; set up your own pop-up exhibitions.

Sasha Ward talked about the dialogue with people who are clients, and when working on joint projects the importance of keeping your own individuality and doing your bit well whilst also letting other people do their bit also. She advised embracing the subject matter and if clients wanted to make a change then to think about what is the most important thing in your design and what can you let go. Take notes about the use of the space around any commission and consider working with people who live near or use the building, for example meeting the artist or setting up art workshops. She advised that there is always a way to say yes. It doesn't necessarily influence what you are doing – you can explore other people's creativity. Ways you might approach the groups could be to associate with the material, answering technical questions or making a model of the building so they can see to prepare them. She advised not to go wild with a colour palette and to be able to show all the design processes.

The next speaker Andrew Moor, an art consultant, is about to publish his fourth book on glass and architecture. He sometimes does his own designs and describes himself as 'an egotistical businessman who brings people together and controls the project'. He discussed some of the artists he has worked with over the years including Jochem Poesgen, Graham Jones, Kate Maestro and Martin Dylan. He likes to see glass work designed to work with the architecture, to express the language of the architecture, and said you can always tell glass artists who were architects.

Andrew spoke about how glass is used in major new projects now: 'Everyone's an artist'. Public art is a fantastic way to circulate money and it is possible to make a great impact on a building at relatively low cost, e.g. in bus/railway stations or at airports. He mentioned glass screens in Bridlington which had external frit and looked much nicer in reality than expected.

In architecture the planning department is the enemy. Every form of mass production has reduced quality but people like quality so there's still a market. In future he expects that even larger pieces of glass will be used in architectural developments. They are laminated so are completely safe. He bemoaned the fact that a lot of Brian Clarke's glass has been removed from buildings when they were taken over and the new occupier wants to stamp their own identity on the building. He posed the question: 'Is this the death of the small artist in their shed?' The answer is definitely no, as there will always be people wanting small commissions. He also advised that learning to draw on the computer was useful and advised glass artists to look for commissions using social media networks, e.g. artquest/artjobs.

At the end of the formal presentations, Robert Christ from Lamberts glass offered to say a few words about the state of the 2 main American glass manufacturers, who have been in financial difficulties in part due to additional emissions rules required by the US government. A big problem has been the short amount of time they have been given to meet the new requirements as well as the cost. When asked whether the problems were good news for Lamberts he said no as their products complemented one another. Lamberts themselves had invested in robust systems to minimize emissions over the years. (Note: since the Discussion Day, Spectrum has been bought by another US company and production will be moved to their manufacturing plant in Tijuana, Mexico. Bullseye has installed new systems to control pollutants and is currently able to manufacture 80% of its product line. Additional colours containing chromium should be back in production in early 2017 after installation of additional pollution controls.)

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