

A former resident of Bath, Mark Angus has latterly been based in Germany, but works and exhibits in both countries; in the last 3 decades he has designed over 300 windows for churches, other public buildings and private houses, as well as many autonomous pieces. Originally trained as a chartered surveyor, he later studied architectural stained glass at the Swansea in the late 70s; his early works, influenced by Johannes Schreier, displayed an innovative and expressive use of lead, utilized striking tonal combinations with extensive use of Hartley Woods streaky (see Durham window), and were frequently abstract or semi-abstract in form. Since then he has been concerned increasingly with achieving painterly effects using freely etched flashed glass with hot wax resist, and freely drawn human figures. His recent work includes many more autonomous exhibition panels and paintings; last summer Victoria Art Gallery in Bath staged an exhibition of works on glass and paper entitled 'Flying figures', which showed these freestanding glass figures in public for the first time. The autumn lecture given at the Art Workers Guild focused on these works, and explored the themes behind them.



The first part of the lecture set the context, with different examples of angels in historical glass. There were the windows in Malvern Priory, which he had first visited in 1975; these were of angel hierarchies – but what did angels look like? And what gender were they? At All Saints in Orton, Cumbria, Campbell Smith & Co. (1880s) had depicted them as feminine, comforting figures. In contrast, Douglas Strachan at Winchelsea, Sussex (1929) painted them aggressive, masculine and defending. They also appear variously in the Biblical stories: the stern banishing angel in the Garden of Eden, the powerful angel battling with Jacob, the gentle ones announcing the Nativity, the terrifying ones at the end of days. He argued that each historical epoch depicted the angel according to its own purpose. Nowadays, New Age angels abound – ironically, at the same time the established church is experiencing a certain difficulty in explaining them!



Mark then took the audience on a lightning tour of his recent work on this theme, showing more than 60 images, in rapid succession, of commissions from the Emmanuel Church in Islington (1988), to autonomous work including rough-sketched male and female figures in a multitude of animated postures. As well as flying figures and figures falling through air, there were diving, swimming, running, dancing, figures, some with flapping arms as though about to escape the earth – some in multicolour, some of a single hue – large and small blue figures, red figures, black and white figures, silver-stain figures – and not only panels, but wall lights, amphora figures, plates, as well as drawings – in all an exuberant outpouring, an unfettered exploration of the movement of the human figures through the different elements in multiple media.



Top right: Mark Angus at the AWG.

Centre left and right: Flying figures from the Bath exhibition (2011).

Bottom left: One of four angels by the west doors of Oundle School chapel – detail (2005).

Bottom right: Early work: 'Holy Bread' – the Last Supper seen from above. Durham Cathedral nave (1984).

These images, Mark then elucidated, were his attempt to explore several themes. First, he was recurrently drawn to the idea of 'being between' Heaven and Earth, of having 'power' and influence, but without exertion. The second theme expressed was one of 'aloneness' – of autonomy, but also of isolation. Behind this, and explored particularly through body gestures and facial expressions, was the archetype of the 'Eternal Youth', the type who remains as a '16-year-old' throughout life, who is at times pensive, doubtful, afraid – and who may be Peter Pan or Icarus, who may fly, or may dive or fall ... if he leaps, he may fly – but can he land safely, can he strike a balance? Mark said he redrew this figure with a compulsion to get close to the essence of the type. It also posed a conundrum, however, as he feared he might catch up with it and find he was looking into a mirror. Was he chasing himself? He felt it was also a common figure in today's society – charming, selfish, ungrounded, boyish, touching when young, but perplexing when no longer so. The third theme, exhibited along with the glass in Bath, he called his 'Flying Diving Book' – in which he had tried to combine the psychological and narrative perspectives. This illustrated text concerned a character Luke, and his attempts to fly, until he was finally forced to come down to earth. Mark regarded this as a chance to provide a narrative on his glass.

In the final part we looked at some of the latest commissions. These included (2010) four blue 'Pascal Lamb', choir windows in St Raymond, in Breitenberg, Bavaria, which had entailed a lengthy fight with the listed building authorities, who thought that only yellow glass should be used behind the golden baroque altar! At St Jacobus in Berg were two 'Annunciation' choir windows in subtle hues of tranquil pinky-blue mauves, over which he had also had to argue for 2 years too insist on the correct colour. In 2011 was a window at Berkamsted School, Herts, between the chapel and refectory, which was laminated so it could be viewed from both sides. In the same year he had submitted a design for Hexam Abbey (though not accepted), on the theme of 'Hospitality'; here was Jacob wrestling with a stranger (considered in most accounts to be his angel) – with the idea that, by extending hospitality to strangers, and 'wrestling' with the risk attached to this act, we might, as did Jacob, effect a transformation ...

Chris Wyard