

Review: Summer lecture

The summer lecture was given by Martin Donlin, who was introduced by Derek Hunt and Caroline Swash as 'one of the great pioneers of modern glass'. He began by outlining his training and early work on the Swansea Architectural Stained Glass course, where Tim Lewis helped him with technical issues and found him his first two jobs. His early pieces included a window for a Birkenhead Priory, and another for the Ferry Terminal there, which featured the Birkenhead Ferry and for which he obtained a grant to build an acid bay as the 4' high panels required extensive etching.

He soon found, however, he had insufficient space in his studio to make his own windows, so began to work with David Proto, a decorative glass manufacturer, for etching and printing with enamels. One project was at Euston House (1995) – a 3 m high enamelled screen, which Proto told him would fall over so he had to build a steel base for it, and which ate up his profit! Another project was the 18 m long enamelled 'bridge' in Manchester Tib Street based on the theme of Horatio, who had held the bridge across the Tiber, and with images from the Street past and present.

Proto moved into new premises giving Martin new opportunities to experiment, with its extended facilities for glass bending, acid etching, toughened float glass, and silkscreening of lettering and shapes. A 6 x 10 m altar screen (2001), at St Joseph's RC Church, Epsom, was made in curved and toughened acid-etched glass, held between stainless steel uprights that resembled organ pipes. The glass surface was etched with the symbols A and Ω, plus text inspired by The Song of Songs from Solomon. Other projects from this period included a 2002 glass wall connecting buildings at the Empire Theatre, Liverpool, based on the theme of torn theatre tickets fluttering down.

By this time, Martin was beginning to miss antique glass. So that year he returned to it, with a suspended glass screen in Landmark Place, Slough, made by Derix Studios. In 2005 his new entrance for



Hammersmith Hospital (detail) ©Martin Donlin



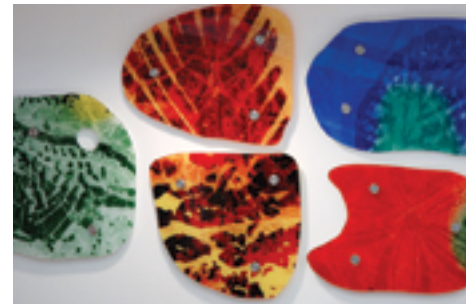
Gosport Discovery Centre was made entirely of handblown antique glass, bonded to toughened glass with resins, and then sealed into units.

The speaker then elaborated on sources. For the new Indianapolis Airport concourse windows, he knew nothing about the area so asked to work with a writer, resulting in panels on the themes of 'sometimes in dreams' and 'midnight flight', with poems by local writers etched into the surface. At over 500 m², it is one of the world's largest stained glass projects. The local 'air poets' read poetry in the concourse, and Martin says it is lovely to see people engaging with the artwork.

As well as airports, there were a number of windows in hospitals. A 2006 suspended glass work on several levels of the Renal Unit at Hammersmith Hospital was based on microscopic images of the body's internal systems (left). In a 2009 project in the waiting areas and corridors of Portsmouth Hospital, over 50 pieces of 12 mm toughened glass were cut, drilled and polished, silkscreened with ceramic enamels then bolted to the walls. For the shapes and forms, Martin used the theme of beach pebbles decorated with seabed images (top right).

Another recurring theme is community. At Spar Und Bauverein in Paderborn, a housing development and holistic health centre, the work references community, family and well-being. The glass cladding fills the main entrance and continues around the corner to cover the original stairwell and lift lobby, and run around the doors. For the main entrance of Manchester Police HQ (2012), the glass is triple glazed, and features a huge image of Sir Robert Peel formed from lines of text, together with quotes from his biography and a history of policing. The staff entrance has a line of police officers showing the evolution of police uniforms from the

(left) Belfast City Hall; (below) Portsmouth Hospital (detail); ©Martin Donlin



1850s onwards. Both are digitally printed, and the staff corridor screen is an LED lightsheet mounted an inch from the wall – which is relatively cheap to produce. Wall-mounted lightboxes also featured in a scheme at 1 Heddon Street, London.

In 2012 Martin returned to tradition with leaded antique glass for a window at Belfast City Hall (centre). This was based on Celtic myths, specifically The Cattle Raid of Cooley from the Ulster Cycle, in which Queen Medbh of Connacht and her men attempted to steal a great bull from the men of Ulster. The central figure is Cuchulain, protecting Ulster from Medbh's army. Irish text on the glass is from the 12th Century Book of Leinster.

A 2013 window at Dallas Lovefield Airport saw him return to using poetry by local poets, on the theme of 'man's desire to fly'. The central figure is the pioneering aviator Moss Lee Love, who gave Lovefield its name, with local plants and birds, and maps of historic Dallas and modern day flight paths. The text was etched on both sides of the glass to get a parallax effect giving contrast between sharp, legible text and vaporous trails.

At The Great Hall at Coleridge College Cambridge, a window linking the old school building to a new arts block, on the theme of the Nine Muses, was based on sketches of the students dancing. To achieve a sense of movement, the design was screenprinted and hand painted in enamels, each colour on a different screen.

At Raleigh Durham Airport, North Carolina, a glass wall on the theme of flight patterns, also trade winds and the area's crops of tobacco and cotton, had its lower half against a solid wall and its upper one along a corridor. The bottom was made in cast glass, and to achieve a visual unity the glass was painted on all four surfaces and laminated on the front surface.

A recent project in the grounds of a villa in Astana, Kazakhstan, owned by horse breeders was a backlit screen for an engineering plant room. It was made in glass cast in a fibreboard mould, hand painted on the reverse with an image of horses in movement and laminated to create a very strong resilient glass wall, encased in powder-coated steel frame.

To finish, the speaker showed details of a future project, at a law centre in Boston, with the figure of Justice at its centre. Many questions followed.

Chris Wyard