

Reviews:

'From Wales with Love' with Catrin Jones Friday March 25

RC Cathedral, Swansea; photo Peter Hildebrand



Thanks to the competence of our redoubtable Hon Sec, the online system worked beautifully and to time. Indeed, old friends were lurking there (Ginger Ferrell and Sally Pollitzer) who would not have been able to attend in person. Support for Ukraine was touched on by Steve Clare (BSMGP's acting Chair) with Oksana Kondratyeva's generous offer of help, prior to Catrin's arrival online from her studio in Wales.

Today, well known as a brilliant practitioner in the world of architectural enrichment for new buildings, Catrin's skills and vision had been developed in Wales, at Swansea School of Art. There she was trained in the basic skills of art and stained glass in the 1980s, under the tutelage of Colwyn Morris, John Edwards and Glynis Cour within a course led by Tim Lewis. During that time, Lewis succeeded in arranging for two of the most important post-war designers in glass, Ludwig Schaffrath and Johannes Schreier, to stay and teach at the College. Their radical vision for post-war German churches and other buildings vastly refreshed both staff and students at Swansea. Nothing like this occurred anywhere else in the UK. As Catrin herself put it 'As a 19 year old, I was lucky enough to study there, Wales really was at the centre of the international glass world'.

Her own studies had included jewellery (in the basement) but she found herself becoming attracted by the possibilities of the raw material of glass itself. Her favourite artist working in this direction was Georg Meistermann (1911-90) whose work 'helped her understand scale ... just working with glass and lead ... for line and colour ... no paint used'. At that time, a truly radical approach.

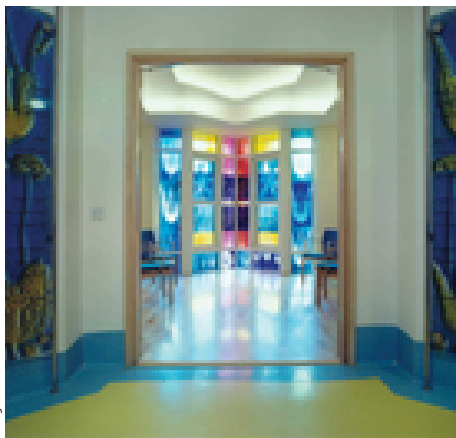
Catrin recalled that the other major influence was the new 'Coventry Cathedral' with its very special stained glass, commissioned by architect Basil Spence. This included the Piper/Reyntiens window and the series created by Geoffrey Clarke, Keith New and Lawrence Lee, working together at the Royal College of Art.

So far as her own artwork was concerned, she felt frustrated by the 'design' process, loved playing with ideas in collage, enjoyed working directly with bits and fragments of glass. She spent time at the V&A looking carefully at the old, treasured glass there. She enjoyed 'life drawing' at the School of Art and started to use acid etch quite freely for texture in her work.

Commissions began coming her way, once she had her own studio! There was Pontypool Swimming Pool, Oldham and Sunderland Libraries and Heverill Arts Centre. Catrin found that she enjoyed researching the background and activities linked to these locally important shared spaces, using the glass work to create an 'area of interest' within them. Some years later, while designing an installation for 'Haverill Arts Centre', Catrin began working with David Proto at his studio in Pewsey, Wiltshire. There she could really expand her range of visual possibilities including the 'positioning' of imagery to give a sense of movement to the space. This she implemented in her piece for Bristol Children's Hospital and she described the pleasure of working with Proto, of having 'my hand on the work'. Indeed, like Matisse, she reused, recalled and played with visual ideas, gradually developing her own unique language in glass, while confidently continuing to experiment with colour, light and imagery.

For the refurbished market at Newport, she created a series of silk-

Prayer room



2nd Floor, Lyceum Theatre (detail)



screened images of fruit and vegetables. While for the Riverfront Theatre, she enjoyed depicting the river Usk in all its tidal variety. Images included references to the swift current of the incoming sea in contrast to the rusty shopping trolleys trapped in the sand. Catrin also enjoyed creating shapes that changed as people moved, an illusion that gently altered the perception of the space. Indeed, her range of commissions over the years was and is, wonderfully wide. There were 'odd, angular windows' for a Church in Northern Ireland, a series of enamelled panels that mustn't be seen through, for a Hospital in Crewe, a Bus Stop in Cambridge, an RSPB Nature Reserve and a panel for a 'Chivers' jam factory.

Catrin described the enjoyment of using Dichroic film, mirror and other reflective devices in her work. One of several hospital commissions featured different landscapes in Gwent, using both sides of the glass - a process that Catrin summarised as 'bringing the outside in' and this is the aspect that she most enjoys. Pausing for a moment in her colloquy, she murmured 'All my work gets impossibly detailed!' However, she carried on, showing us a painted mirror in a double-glazed unit with silver details which somehow also included a view of Wales' Jurassic coast floating across the composition. Towards the end of her lecture, Catrin mentioned the pleasure of taking part in exhibitions, describing the fun of being involved in small-scale pieces and enjoying the relationship between drawing and glass, the pleasure of painting on glass, working on both sides, perhaps even adding silver and gold!

The joy of this lecture was Catrin's own enjoyment of her work. 'I absolutely love it' she said 'I really am an official workaholic!' That's good news for us all!

Caroline Swash