

‘Retrospectives’ issue of *Agenda*: Web Supplement

Along with the sonorous chosen poems, we are focusing here on the art work of **John Hacker**. John has his own studio in East Sussex. He studied painting at the Royal College of Art, London, and art at Kingston School of Art. He has lectured and taught for many years and in 1964-65 worked for Chicago University on Archaeological Drawings of Ramases III Temple in Luxor.

He says of his work, ‘Although my work appears abstract, I paint what I see. I Ching and the Book of Changes has been a starting point for me – the movement of light coming through dark, and dark through light which is especially apparent on the mono gallery and to a certain extent on the colour gallery pages shown on this website.



Furthermore, what also is of great interest to me is the balance and imbalance of these light patterns and different energies which change throughout the seasons, and how this affects colour – from the winter months when the light is at its lowest to mid-summer when intensity reaches its peak.

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Roy Marshall

Arm Wrestling with Nonno

My mother told me how he altered
the river's course, how those muscles
were forged in the icy torrent where
he shifted boulders.

An alpine soldier of the first war,
later self-announced target
of Fascist batons and castor oil;
Fireman, climber, hell-raiser.

I knew him in a wheelchair,
his demijohns of red turning
to vinegar under the stairs
as he sipped Orangina,

half-frozen and turtle-slow,
weighted by a stroke
that had cramped
and furled him.

It was my face that brought light
to his pale eyes, and it was me who,
before he died, was the one
he allowed to win.

Triumph

When his army mates leave we hug
and she hands me the keys.

The door swings open to oil scent,
gleaming rims, exhausts blued by heat.

I wheel into autumn sunlight, the engine
thumping steadily. His helmet fits

but this leather isn't me; *Triumph*
across the back, forever him-creased.

Inheritance

I'll take it now, that look you gave me,
the one I saw yesterday,

as you passed an old man's hand
over an oak-framed table,

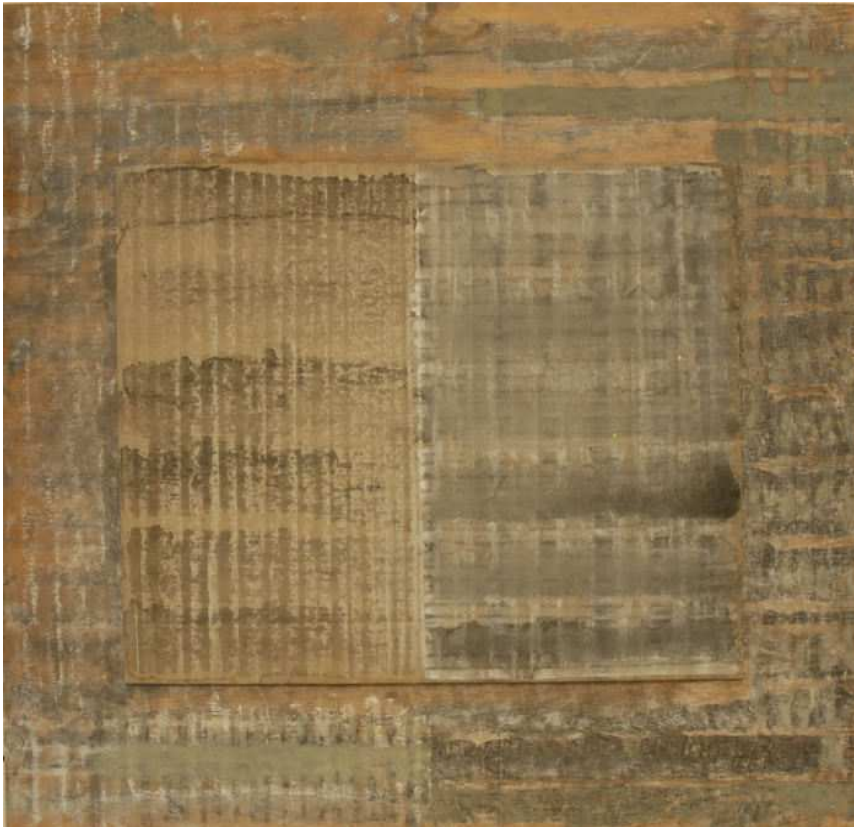
remembering how we lifted it from
a roof-rack and into family history

when I was twelve and you
were only forty-seven.

I'll keep that look with me,
like the knowledge that geese will return

to land beyond a screen of reeds.
All you felt and didn't say was in your steady gleam.

I turn to my son; his time now not to respond,
to move beyond, out of reach.



Michael Henry

Go As A Pilgrim

X marks the spot in a Kentish lane
where the wind winnowing in from France is frisked
and told to blow on the left-hand side of the road,
shivering the tops of trees, rustling through the hedgerows.
Where the silence is broken
by the ack ack of a startled pheasant,
the brogue of a tractor-driver's brakes,
a motorcycle clearing the ignition in its throat.

There's a pillbox in a farmer's field,
topped-out with clover, nettles and oxeye daisies
where rust distresses the lost blooms of elderflower,
where shadows of soldiers at a loose end play games
and where the virtual silence is broken
by their singing heads mouthing Flecker's *'Go as a pilgrim'*.

A cross marks the spot
where a Kentish lane crosses swords
with the ley lines of an inner fear.
I walk on with all the other pilgrims along the pilgrim way.



Mandy Pannett

‘Stopping a Bunghole’

A man may sing of love but never
know it for himself, plot a murder yet
not lift a knife.

Who would claim experience is wisdom’s only key?
A one who’d write of suicide and think
to try it first?

Too many niches are precise, uniform
in nook and alcove, sprites and threads of air
will drift away ...

Why talk of dreams as fancies lost?
This imagination game is no more arduous
than a doodle, only needs a cloud

with humps and we see camels or like Fools
recruiting elves we blink and find our sudden selves
aboard a stormy sea. Enticed to forms

of things unknown we trace the dust of Alexander
to its final stopping point – the bunghole
on a barrelful of beer.

Peter Rawlings

The School Kiss

On a great stone like nature's bench
or a Druid's chair in the making
they sat during their vacant minutes
cut-off from the swirl, cut-off from the hurly-burly
of being moment to moment
while each in a pristine uniform as if lifted out of history
spoke what they could from the scant
collection of their combined years
while her hand rested on his back, shoulder, white sleeve
so gently he could not have imagined it,
and his hands inert on her shirt wondering if
this was correct or bold or pleasurable
and they kissed so quietly and long
their thoughts mainly about their thoughts
in the imperative present of the now
their mouths sipping through seared lips.
She knew her touch pierced his shirt, how warm
it was to him, all nerve ends. He knew only
the stripping of his lips and a current
unwilled as breath engrossed his groin.
He tilted away from not knowing,
his brain confined humming to the kiss
violated his singleness.
Their great stone fixes them to the earth.
His current runs through him from her down
down into cold stone to earth like a bolt
fixing her to him to immemorial dimension
as the kiss purges the passing minutes like the dead.

Robin Houghton

When my sister is old

I will wait at the door with flowers
if she greets me at all it will be brief
and cold as the Guildford house
where the stairs stayed uncarpeted
and the kitchen unmodernised,
names and numbers taped on walls,
coats and boots crammed under stairs.

Her back will be bent like our mother's,
she will start in the middle of a sentence
half scolding, half pleased, tired of TV
and itching to get out walking with sticks
she will bring up that time on the Isle of Wight
when my legs gave way and she carried on,
fitter than me and needing to travel.

We will have tea and talk about church
or someone's baby, there will never be
enough hours for all she must do or has done.
I will tease out family secrets and remind her
of twenty years she thought she'd never have,
if she comments at all it will be brief,
like the moment before sleep.

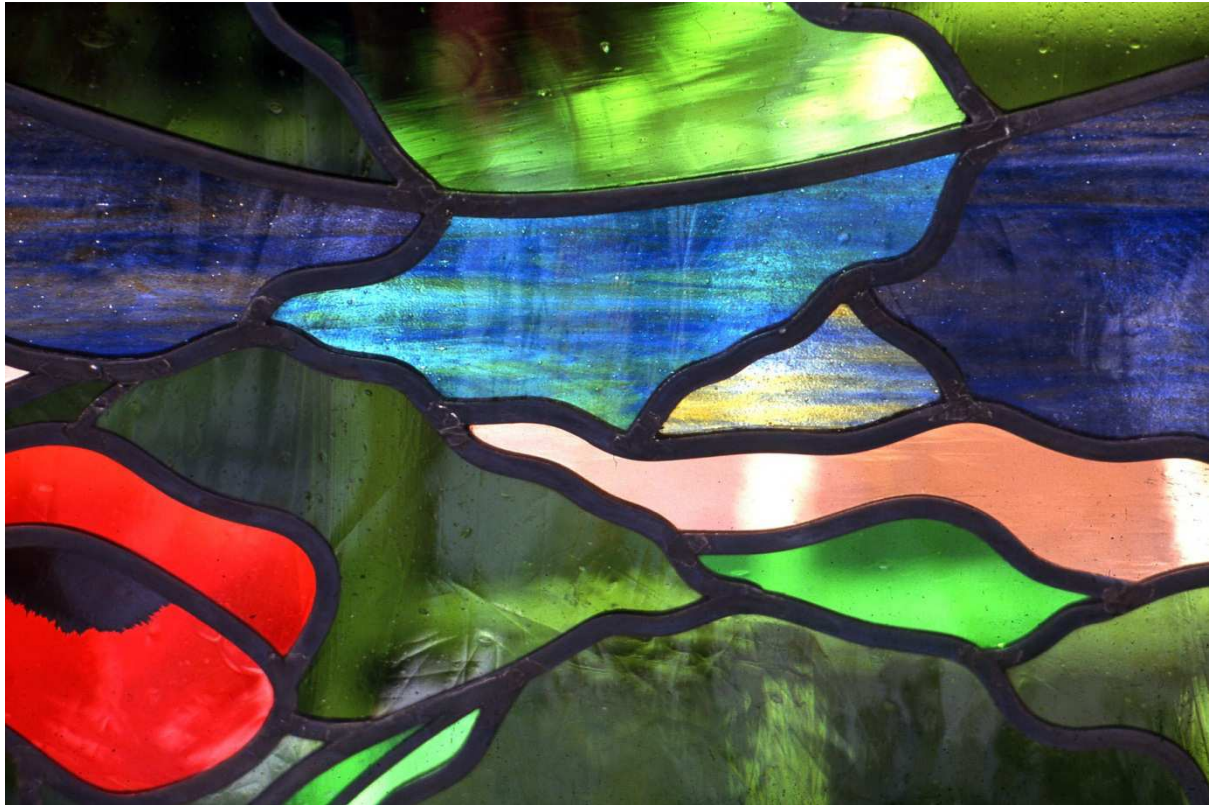


Robin Renwick

Prism

Take this piece of glass. Place it between
your words and mine, and those you hear me say.
See how reflection and refraction change
their meaning.

I did not begin the day
with the intention it should end this way.



Stoney Parsons is an architectural glass artist with a strong sense of design and aesthetics. She believes that glass is an exciting and contemporary art form and she exploits its colour and light to powerful and inspirational effect.

She makes dynamic windows and panels that enhance their architectural settings and complement the interior design. She is particularly interested in creating work that enhances healing environments.

www.stoneyparsons.co.uk

John Gladwell

Recall To Witness

Recall to witness to isolation and to song
Where the cage of our past still waits

In absence
In this place of uncertain praise

Where to think without thinking
Takes all the energy I have left

Marooned in silence
With too many seasons and too much time

I have become your skin now
I want to become your breath



Clare Best

How they are in the wind

*For weeks it toils around the house, slamming windows,
dimming lights, dangerous with the scent of rain.*

Overnight, a wild night, her mind
bursts its cage in a Force 8 gust.
By morning she's all eye and beak, a falcon
winging the room.

He waits, knowing the postman always comes
at eight. On the mat: four brown envelopes,
three padded white. For him.

When he lets her out
she drops on a mouse by the shed,
rips through fur and flesh, steals its heart
before it dies. Sated by blood,
the taste of blood, she perches on a garden chair.
No motion but the cocking of her head.

He sits beside her, fills out forms.
Two ticks here, three crosses there.

Her shadow rises, dark. A sudden squall—
knot of claw and feather as she soars.

Number of curtain rails, sockets, taps;
is the boiler working as it should?
Details he can't recall.

Will Stone

FIR FOREST

Rising up too darkly for men,
they sow confusion in their coldness,
haul their gradient into the ravine.
Always enough space for a hanging
over the off-cuts of scattered huts,
swallowing dust, thickly painting
over the impertinent sound of saws.
Canopies are dense but seem poor,
monotonous sap and needle speech
that draws foreboding in towards you.
Bombed cathedral, gutted house,
abyss of whispers, forbidden barn
of casually blackened wounds.
Stolen bird calls sifted, counted.
A grey procession of faith
that moves on without you,
hoarder of the stream's silver
the cowbell's gold, but forbids
passage through the un-trod cloister,
where only the lonely one passes,
sees sky through rents of branches,
recognises the full moon as the face
that appeared at the window,
unconsciously drawn, like the rest
to the screams of a new birth.

Robert Smith

Shutters

Closed after twelve
on a strong voltage of cicadas,
arc of the bay, and roofs piled up
like dishes careering the slopes
of their own dazzle;

sealing in the lines
of hills, a stunned mule,
descending through the orange groves
switch of a road cracking its whip
across the retina;

the walls thickened
as if to offset with whitewash
the rutted patterns of the afternoon,
a scoring behind the eyelids
the breath of junipers.



Shanta Acharya

Hunger

The gecko's progress across the ceiling,
scaly limbs defying gravity,
eyes fixed on its prize hypnotised

Is matched by the speckled moth's nervous
fluttering against the fluorescent bar light.

I watch mesmerised waiting for a taxi
to take me to the Siddhi Vinayak Temple.

Dark, sunken, hungry eyes peer at me
behind the closed, tinted window screens
each time the car stops at traffic lights;

Long enough for mother and child to gesture
for alms, palms rising in unending salaams.

When I hand out ten rupees, my car is
mobbed with myriad hungry eyes.

Across the road a life sized poster sells dreams
an actor gazes enchanted into the eyes
of his beloved, lips barely touching.

Near the temple an emaciated devotee
crawls across the tarmac penitent for his sins –
a caterpillar crossing from leaf to leaf
declaring eternal hunger for His love and mercy.

I join the evening queue for *darshan*,
my hands laden with flowers, earthen lamps, offerings.
It is Divine hunger, this Creation...

I overhear a conversation about Darwin and evolution,
origin of the universe, Hadron Collider and the Magician,
the meaning of life, religion, Higgs boson,
in answer to the question: *What is maya, illusion?*

Just for Today

Just for today I will not squander
my time on things of importance or of no importance.

Such decisions carry the illusion of grandeur,
of being the chosen one, placed in a position of power

To alter destinies just because it seems plausible.

One thing leads to another, a sigh turns into a hurricane.
years later you look back at lives not lived, times gone.

Just for this morning I will let everything be
just as it is – knowing nothing in this world is just
or true. I'll ignore the past, the future –

Stop worrying about all I don't have or what I do.
I will not hanker after eternity or God's eye view.

Just for this hour I'll fly free, see things for the first time,
sketch new horizons with colours of my imagination
stretch the limits of my perception.

Just for this moment, I will be everything, nothing –
light of the universe, its energy, its darkness
the silence, the words, opening my eyes.



Tobi Cogswell

Two Gentlemen Discussing Beauty by Mail

Farm-girl beauty is
like an old coastal
church, stark to the eye,
but strong as wheat grass,
and hidden in a
field between yellow
daisies and the eyes
of those who don't see.

A prairie woman
has skin older than
the plains, a peaceful
countenance, a child
by the hand and one
on her hip. A smile
plays about her sense
of hard work. She is
a woman you want
to know, to learn from
and love completely.

Broken beauty can
go either way. You
can see what she once
was, cannot be now.
The palm of her hand
on your cheek will tell
stories worth dreaming,
a bit crinkled and
worn like bedsheet marks
across the stomach
of a lover, but
not forgotten when
you write your list of
who captures your wants...

Shadows of each glow
like rekindled flame.
Careful, they will burn.

D.V. Cooke

Under the Glass Dome

Among the tea-cups and scent of oranges,
Sunday lunch or afternoon early
Papers strewn open at the literary page,
The day takes its sound and ease.
Mozart or a Haydn Mass on the C.D.
Player – a music heard but then heard
As by one on a farther shore,
Who turns back and gazes on all
That he had lost and gained
And lost again. Or as one
Who sends out a thought which
Travels and returns but changed,
Transfigured, which reveals itself
But slowly, gaining in depth and fixity
Until it becomes as air. Between
These idle consequences the radio
Heaves its torpid news into
A slight communal prayer.

What now shall we do? Open a book, close
An eye? Settle into our individual pain?
A flourish of trumpets as the Mass departs.
Into these ironies of departing spring
The unfussy symmetries of hell coil down.
Afternoon moves to lethargy
And tediums. Outside small doves
Swoop and feather the stained-glass pane.
Our lives fill and empty out.
The years fall and in between
Sleep slips in at the window
And enters through an eye.
We are here, alive, below
The surface ease, suffering
An action and its consequence,
While the afternoon brings to mood
Female voices, slanted,
Coiled into some part-kept room.

*And here, she said, here is Endymion
Sleeping under a glass dome – a small dog
Curled at his feet. Time roosts in such
Perplexities yet brings us here*

*For talk of you and me.
What now after all this time, after
All this time should I call you?
That antique leviathan? A hummingbird
Kept in a cigar-tube? Yet that voice
Is it really you, after all this time
Really you, returned from exile
As some Polynices? Here, she said,
Here I put on a performance
All for you, and here you made
A renunciation of slight regard.
Here we undid the Florentines
And you played Peter Abelard
And I your Heloise.*

And here we ate oranges, here by
The colonnade and flowering urns, then
Settled to watch the stippled dark descend.
Or among the sunken garden at noon
Where the engraved heads whispered
And returned a hollow sound.
And here, here is the door where
She who would have played Portia
Walked into the inviolate room.
- *Not the individual expression.*
- *Nor even the collective imprint.*
Through the iron gates in the distance
Of lawns, late into the evening,
Chestnut trees swell and bud. And here
Among the aroma of oranges
Talk undid her distance –
Yet as between Masaccio
And Giotto a hundred year absence.

And here she who was Portia was favoured
By some small cruelty. Here by a wall about,
Where plainsong quietened doubt –
Among these flowering urns and tombless
Gardens, the colonnade where light descends,
I have remembered everything
And nothing, yet among
The rigidities of afternoon,
Caught in some curve of memory,
Have attained such suppleness of mind.
My mind was unstill, trapped
In its monologue, silenced
Yet alive inside the room
Where a solemn music moved.
Only at noon without shadow
Among the rose garden I found quiet.

*- Yet who was it who accompanied you?
- In those days there were always two of you.*

As one peels the orange of the self.
As one with quite empty hands
Peels the layers of the self –
In some portion of the mind
As yet unravelled, a music room
Where wooden panelling holds
The dry aroma of cedar wood.
Among the memories the room unfolds,
A malachite table where
An engraved lute consumed a consequence.
All this I remember. That solemn music
Stolen from our lips that it took
Four or five virtuosi to unravel
Some lost impulse refracted
On our sensorium. At three p.m.
I step again into the room.
At six I rise and take tea.
You should at that hour visit me.

Who is it whispers and visits room
To room – that constrained voice which being
Constrained urges restraint, which searches
Alongside, in the sunken garden's
Undergrowth or veering off – the mind
Confirms these hollowed victories
And swirls among laurelled trees
And takes the path where the small stream
Fills with shade and subtleties,
Where an unassuming English voice,
(Too unassuming for me, of course,)
Questions the names which endorse
The things that were, and wears them
Till they blend quite new. Carved in those
Elms and oaks, those undiscovered lives,
(Too anonymous - too certain
Of all the strengths of living
Quietly, for me, of course).

Here something unassuming seeps.
The past rises and keeps those undiscovered
Lives. Now, grown older with less need
To categorise the past, the achievements done,
Accomplished, finished, sealed-off, almost.
Among such gardens and forbidden rooms
They become a voice, an elegy –
A music heard but then not heard,
Which moves as from a farther shore.

The feelings now become refined,
Yet that language did it equal
Your desire, or did it fall into
The exactitude of prose? Only at night
The moon floods and rings the hollow dome
With speechful light, and from the garden
Brings a voice to a room. *There is
No way back, it seems to breathe, begin again.
Meanwhile, rehearse your life, wait, refrain.*



Stoney Parsons: stained glass

Stephen Yeo

Bus Pass London

i

*Et alors je vis bien des choses
Au dedans de ma memoire...*

No overalls.

On every corner
more choice, more chains.

More couples out of wedlock:
too many rings to tell.

More thin young men:
hands
which seldom work outdoors.

More signs of diaspora.
More smells of deodorant.

More smart women
with jobs senior
to the thin young men.

More plastic,
less bakelite.

No smoking upstairs.

More big people,
too fat for one seat.

More people not quite there,
talking to people not there at all:

to know where their eyes are looking
really would be telling,
more than a poem.

Arthritic fingers?
Seems like the same number

on strong women
carrying child-carriers, children
and awkward bags.

A rococo age, not in rouge
but in brands and in nails.

No conductors.

...
Remuer
S'eveller

Suitcases on wheels.

Un risorgimento:
everywhere's natives.

State-seekers and guerrillas,
without a Mazzini, as yet.

From Wood Green
along Green Lanes,
change for London Fields.

Where Huguenot weavers camped,
Somalis are selling umbrellas.

Stop. A church, apostolic
for endists and saints,
'of the Fourth Watch'.

Oysters, passes and seasons,
bikes and tabloids fold.

Wheelchair access.

Uno, First Capital, Arriva
(North) *Arriva* (South).

Private? For boarding
not booking or hailing.

Move down inside:
Blake's city of Golgonooza
is more than a poem.

Digit (silent)digit
digit digit digit....

Unvocalised God:
YHWH,
text become verb.

Numbers play:
Nought is not One.

Drivers wanted.

Note: the header quotes are from Ezra Pound, 'Dans Un Omnibus de Londres', in *Poems from Lustra* (1915).