

Art and Christianity 89

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The quarterly journal of Art & Christianity Enquiry (ACE) ISSN 1746-6229 Spring 2017

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Helen Maurer, installation view 're Composing', 2016
Photo: Oskar Proctor
Courtesy of Danielle Arnaud and the artist

Helen Maurer: re Composing

Danielle Arnaud, London
12 November – 11 December 2016

Helen Maurer uses glass, mirrors and natural materials in combination with different light sources and overhead projectors to create large ephemeral images and site-specific environments. *re Composing* is the continuation of a commissioned work, *re Connecting re Creation*, which was made for the 12th-century Holy Trinity Church at Goodramgate in York. Maurer was inspired by a small vignette of a secret garden hidden high up in the 15th-century East window of the church. Different in style to the rest of the window and barely visible from the ground, it is thought to have been inserted at a later date by an artisan employed to repair the glass. Maurer transposed this secret garden to the nave and chancel of the church, using her signature materials to create a rich eco-system of projected and reflected flowers, plants and skies. This garden has now been re-imagined or 're-planted' within Danielle Arnaud Gallery.

Maurer skillfully upholds the tension created between the paraphernalia of her work and the poetic end result. The line between prop and art object is often blurred, requiring viewers to look carefully to identify whether something has agency and if so, what is the effect? As you move around the space, the answers to these questions are concealed and then revealed. You turn a corner and recognise the electric fan directed at miniature wind chimes to be the source of the tinkling soundscape; or, as you move to stand behind a lamp directed at the folded back pages of a book, casting what appears to be the silhouetted head of a flower onto the wall, the image aligns with the projection of a stem lying amongst the dried flowers, weeds and hand-made glass flowers on the bed of the projector.

You enter another room where LED lamps illuminate fragments of dichroic glass, producing reflected constellations of coloured stars across walls and ceiling. Another book with its pages folded back on themselves and placed on top of an overhead projector throws the image of a giant chrysanthemum onto the wall. The image is scaled to fit within the plaster arches of a recessed Georgian alcove.



Helen Maurer, installation view 're Composing', 2016. Photo: Oskar Proctor

The exhibition is redolent of the language and imagery of the metaphysical poets. In the entrance hallway, a large blue glass bell hangs on a rope supported by a step-ladder, positioned beside a window overlooking the garden. It brings to mind John Donne's *No Man is an Island* while Maurer's metaphors of the garden, and of light shining through windows, resonate with Andrew Marvell's *The Garden* and George Herbert's *The Windows*. Even though the science of how the work is made is laid bare, the exhibition, considered as a whole, appears to be questioning what lies beyond the parameter of our physical (created?) universe and by what means we might 'know' or access it.

The boundaries of the garden become a metaphor for these perceptual parameters. On the ground floor, a small LED lamp directed at a vintage folding chair with caned seat and back, casts a silhouetted image suggestive of

the lattice of a garden fence or trellis. In both the church and the gallery, significance is attached to the physical windows of the architectural space and also to the view of the churchyard and the garden that lie beyond. Maurer appears to be questioning how to transcend the limits of the physical garden in order to reach that which lies beyond. When does a mirror reflect reality back to us, and when does it function as a portal?

The image of the garden is, of course, also central to Judeo-Christian thought, referencing the prelapsarian Garden of Eden and the heavenly recreated state to which the book of Revelation alludes. That Maurer deliberately occupies this religious-philosophical thought-space is confirmed by the choice of texts she incorporates in the work. Upstairs, a large installation involving two projectors, glass, natural materials, a glass cylinder full of water and a linen modesty

screen, creates a dioramic view of a garden, and a skyscape complete with a rainbow. Exhibited alongside this is a small occasional table on which is placed a copy of H Tomkinson's *My Prayer Book for Women and Girls* and a music stand on which rests the Book of Revelation. Within this context, the rainbow takes on the symbolism of the promise of redemption, while prayer and devotion are offered as a means to revelation, or perhaps even to the redemption of creation – *re Creation* and *re Composition* as a means of re-connecting with the divine?

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