

*Brittle Crazie Glasse*  
21.09.12 — 4.11.12

.....  
*Brittle Crazie Glasse*  
Islington Mill,  
James Street,  
Salford, M3 5HW

curated by  
Lucy Newman Cleeve

*The Windows*

LORD, how can man preach thy eternall word?  
He is a brittle crazie glasse:  
Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford  
This glorious and transcendent place,  
To be a window, through thy grace.

But when thou dost anneal in glasse thy storie,  
Making thy life to shine within  
The holy Preachers, then the light and glorie  
More rev'rend grows, and more doth win;  
Which else shows watrish, bleak, and thin.

Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one  
When they combine and mingle, bring  
A strong regard and awe: but speech alone  
Doth vanish like a flaring thing,  
And in the eare, not conscience ring.

George Herbert  
1857

'Brittle Crazie Glasse' brings together work by Richard Bevan, James Brooks, Sophie Clements, Mark Dean, Pip Dickens, Pippa Gatty, Alistair McClymont, Simson&Volley and August Ventimiglia.

The title for the exhibition is taken from George Herbert's poem 'The Windows'. Usually understood in spiritual terms, the poem also works as a metaphor for how materials are simply 'brittle crazie glasse' until they are animated by some other agent or phenomenon such as light or sound, so that 'life, colours and light in one, when they combine and mingle, bring a strong regard and awe.'

Many of the works in this exhibition explore the use of light as an activating agent. Others recreate, describe or subvert natural phenomena, or create the appearance of a concrete physical object from the record of a temporal event. In doing so, they seek to transcend the limitations of their base materiality and draw attention to the distinction between phenomena, or things as they appear to us, and things as they are in themselves. This distinction can be described using the relational language of 'immanence' and 'transcendence', although the terminology requires clarification.

There are a number of areas of philosophy in which these terms are commonly used.<sup>1</sup> The first is in the area of subjectivity. If 'immanence' refers to the sphere of the subject, then 'transcendence' refers to what lies outside the sphere (or the consciousness) of the subject, for example, 'the external world' or 'the other'.

The second use is found in the area of ontology or the 'field of being'. An 'immanent' ontology would be one in which there is nothing 'beyond' or 'higher than' or 'superior to' Being. By contrast, a 'transcendent' ontology would make allowance for the Christian 'God', or for the Platonic 'Good', both of which may be used to judge or to account for Being.

A third use is found in the area of epistemology or 'the field of knowledge and understanding', and is often associated with the

1. Daniel W. Smith, 'Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence: Two Directions in Recent French Thought' from 'Between Deleuze and Derrida', ed. Paul Patton and John Protevi (Continuum, 2003)

philosopher, Immanuel Kant. Kant assumed a distinction between the faculties of understanding and sensibility, and between cognition that is determined by reason alone, independent of the senses (*a priori*), and cognition that is derived from experience (*a posteriori*). According to Kant, transcendental logic is restricted to *a priori* representations as opposed to sensory representations: "I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be possible *a priori*."<sup>2</sup>

Kant argues that it is impossible to have cognition of things as they are in themselves, and that things as they appear to us are 'mere representations' limited to human comprehension. The things that appear to us, to which our knowledge is limited, are objects in space and time, which causally interact with our senses. Thus Kant argues that we cannot have knowledge of non-spatiotemporal things, such as God, and that objects in space and time are in some sense representations that exist in relation to human cognition.<sup>3</sup>

The works included in 'Brittle Crazy Glasse' all variously explore these different notions of 'immanence' and 'transcendence'. Climbing the stairs to the exhibition, one first encounters the unsettling melodies of James Brooks' collection of seven audio works, 'Nocturnes from the Headlines of the Evening Standard'. The clean notes of each composition punctuate the ambient noise of the stairwell, creating a disconcerting sense of anticipation, which is heightened by the titles given to individual compositions. These include 'Fire forces expats from Spain homes' and 'Tories attack lazy Britain.'

James Brooks' practice often uses radio, film, television and paper-based media sources of varying cultural status, as starting points to make works within drawing, print, audio and video. In this instance, he has taken the main headline from an edition of the Evening Standard newspaper as a starting point, and searched within the headline for letters that correspond to the seven notes found within a C major scale. Brooks' has allowed this 'system' to

1. Immanuel Kant, 'Critique of Pure Reason', A12

2. cf. Definition of 'Transcendental Idealism' in 'The Continuum Companion to Kant', ed. Gary Banham, Dennis Schulting and Nigel Hems (Continuum, 2012).

generate the selection of notes, and the position of the 'notes' within the word to dictate the velocity and the meter of the composition. The tempo for each composition is 60 beats per minute *lento*, an aspect intended to accentuate the relationship to a human heartbeat and elicit an introspective response similar to that produced by Chopin's piano *Nocturnes*. The written composition then forms a melody to be performed on solo piano.

Brooks' systemized process of art production results in seven elegant solo piano pieces, generated from news headlines, that explore the extent to which an objective compositional method can produce meaning that transcends the sphere of its original subject. The recording of these compositions also results in an opportunity for daily renewal (reminiscent of the daily repetition of *Nocturnes* within the night office of the Christian Liturgy of the Hours) that arrests the obsolescence of the disposable, free daily newspaper.

The nocturnal theme is continued in Pip Dickens' charcoal drawings from the *'Space Race'* series, which depict silver birch trees at night — some standing tall and reaching up to the moon; others crashing to the ground. The drawings were produced to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the first moon landing, and against this background the silver birch tree has a number of symbolic associations: The birch is one of the national trees of Russia and provides an allusion to Soviet participation in the Space Race. In Siberia, the silver birch is used in shamanic initiation rituals, during which the aspirant shaman will carve nine notches into the trunk of the tree to represent the nine steps to heaven of shamanic folklore.

In both respects, the silver birch tree references a human desire to transcend the boundaries of our known physical world, and to reach beyond to the 'heavens'. The fact that Dickens chooses to depict some of these trees in free fall (*'Crash and Burn I & II'*, *'Fall Out I & II'*) is perhaps a comment by the artist about the hubris, and ultimate impossibility, of humanly initiated 'transcendence'. And yet, there is something irrepressible about the pioneering human spirit and its yearning for that which lies beyond, which is reflected in the silver birch tree. Indeed, the birch is often referred to as a 'pioneering' species, due to the fact that after the last glacial age, birch trees were one of the first species of trees to start growing again. There is also something cyclical about the way in which the

drawings are made using charcoal, itself derived from silver birch trees, which suggests the perpetual cycle of life and death or perhaps the necessity for something to die in order to 'transcend' this life and to find new life.

*Ich Bin Der Welt Abhanden Gekommen*

*Lost To The World*

Ich bin der Welt abhanden geworden,  
mit de ich sonst viele Zeit verborden.  
Sie hat so lange nichts von mir vernommen  
sie mag wohl glauben, ich sei gestorben.

I have lost touch with the world  
where I once wasted so much of my time.  
Nothing has been heard of me for so long  
that they may well think I am dead.

Es ist mir auch gar gestorben daran gelegen,  
ob sie mich fur gestorben halt.  
Ich kann auch gar nichts sagen dagegen,  
denn wirklich bin ich gestorben der Welt.

Indeed, I hardly care  
if the world thinks I am dead.  
Neither can I deny it,  
for I am truly dead to the world.

Ich bin gestorben dem Weltgetummel  
und ruh in einem stillen Gebiet.  
Ich leb allein in meinem Himmel,  
in meinem Lieben, in meinem Lied.

I am dead to the bustle of the world,  
and repose in tranquil realms.  
I live alone in my heaven,  
in my devotion, in my song.

Friedrich Ruckert

A yearning for transcendence is also central to the large installation work by Simson&Volley. The work was inspired by a recording from the 1940s of Kathleen Ferrier singing '*Ich Bin Der Welt Abhanden Gekommen*' from Gustav Mahler's '*Three Ruckert Songs*'. The visual elements consist of a gilded circle, 6ft in diameter, laid on an alizarin crimson ground and applied directly onto the wall. This circular image is echoed in the space in front by excavating a circle of the same size into the ceramic tiled floor. Into these spaces an image of a landscape is projected, which evoke the landscapes of German Romanticism and accord with Mahler's Ruckert Songs. The clearly demarcated territories that these gilded and reflected circles beget, reinforce the physical boundaries of human existence within space and time. And yet, they also create a new kind of

space that opens up possibilities for reflection and ‘transcendence’ in a subjective sense. The layering of the projected light image onto the reflective, gilded surface confuses the retina and creates a new dimension somewhere between the projected landscape and the boundaries of the projection space. The lyrics of *‘Ich Bin Der Welt Abhanden Gekommen’* are a meditation on the power of music to enable an escape from the external world, and the gilded circle becomes a portal to another realm. In spite of the immersive quality of the work, the mechanisms of its production are always exposed, inviting a logical interpretation of what is visually mysterious and reinforcing the distinction between things as they appear to us, and things as they are in themselves.

The distinction between the physical composition and spectacle of a work is also explored in Alistair McClymont’s recent *‘Phenomena’* series. In *‘Everything we are capable of seeing’*, McClymont has reproduced a rainbow using a horticultural mister and a 2.5Kw light that replicate the role of the rain and the sun in producing naturally occurring rainbows. When a beam of light collides with a falling drop of water it is refracted by the surface of the water. The light beam continues into the raindrop and is reflected from the back of the drop to the front. As the beam strikes the front it is refracted again and splits, emerging from the drop as the color spectrum that we see in a rainbow. The water drop acts like a prism to separate the light into its different wavelengths. Human beings are only capable of seeing a tiny fraction of these wavelengths. We can only see light ranging from blue at one end to red at the other. Different animals will see different rainbows depending on their eyes. Dogs will see a much smaller rainbow — only the blues and greens — whereas some animals will see a much wider rainbow, from ultraviolet to infrared. The colours produced by this installation represent every hue that a human being is capable of seeing.

McClymont’s impetus for making this work came through reading *‘Lamia’*, a narrative poem written by John Keats in 1819. The poem includes a discussion of the pernicious effects of “cold philosophy”:

“Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?  
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:  
We know her woof, her texture; she is given

In the dull catalogue of common things.  
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,  
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,  
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine  
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made  
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade."

McClymont made his work in riposte to the poem, to demonstrate that knowledge of optics and of the relationships between visible light and color does not "unweave a rainbow" or undermine the sense of wonder and awe it can effect. This view of science and philosophy is much closer to the one put forward in Herbert's poem, according to which it is the *combination* of "doctrine and life, colours and light" that produces awe. Mysteries are not *conquered*, but rather *enhanced*, by an awareness of "rule and line."

McClymont picks up on some of these epistemological themes in '*The Limitations of Logic and the Absence of Absolute Certainty*', in which he recreates a tornado using a humidifier, and fans strapped to a simple scaffolding structure. McClymont had to master the science behind the production of tornados in order to be able to make this work, and the way in which the work is installed reveals the science behind it. At the same time, the work acknowledges that there is something inherently unknowable and uncontrollable about the way in which naturally or artificially induced tornados move and behave.

McClymont documents this fact by using the work to produce a series of drawings on paper that track the movement and path of the tornado. The drawings are influenced by hurricane tracking charts that use grids to map the path of a storm. Each drawing starts as a grid of ink drops, placed beneath the installation. The fans are turned on for a set period of time in order to trace the path of the tornado. As the tornado is completely unenclosed, it gets buffeted by the random, chaotic forces of turbulence within the room. These make the vortex snake around the floor, giving the tornado its own anthropomorphic character. This new series of drawings capture that character, each telling a unique narrative of a few minutes of the tornado's progress across the paper.

The drawings are either made with Parker Quink Ink or with indian inks. The Parker inks are used to make simple blue and black



drawings that capture the movement over time. Other drawings are made using the colours of the Beaufort Wind Force Scale reproduced using indian ink. This scale is used to measure wind speed from 0 (blue, calm) to 12 (red, hurricane force). The grid is divided into a rainbow of stripes of each colour. As the ink drops are of different colours you can see where they have sprayed ink as the tornado moves across the paper, more accurately tracking the progress. The colours of the Beaufort scale give a different kind of beauty to the drawings, whilst tying them into the language of weather charts, and experimentation.

An interest in the physical laws that govern our material world continues in Sophie Clements' videos, which are interspersed throughout the exhibition. Clements is interested in the tension between our perception of matter in space and time, and the limitations of human knowledge concerning the true nature of matter, with particular reference to ideas in nuclear physics. In Kantian terms, this places us firmly in the realm of transcendental logic, which is only knowable *a priori*, and each of Clements' works may be understood as a poetic meditation on materiality as a vehicle to transcendence.

The large triptych *'There After'* grew out of a series of discussions and research fora with particle physicist Elisabetta Pallente and organic chemist Ryan Cheichi. These discussions were focused around 'Lines of Belonging' — what is it that keeps human beings and the physical world together? How are these connections understood, scientifically and personally? In this work, Clements re-contextualizes different materials making it possible to observe them in an unnatural state, both visually and sonically. This is achieved by filming different repetitive actions and then selecting and re-assembling single frames in order to create temporal sculptures. The physical 'performance' of making the work is of central importance, as is the tension between Clements' control over her materials and her loss of control in the process of making. The resulting videos provide a metaphor for the fragility of human existence and the bonds that hold us together, whilst still celebrating the joy that may be found in simple, temporal moments.

The works on the 5th floor seem united by a shared sense of longing to transcend the physical boundaries of the material world. Moving up to the attic space, the focus of the work shifts slightly to

encompass a shared sense of meditation on what might lie beyond. As with Clements' work, August Ventimiglia's '*Untitled*' drawings are concerned with the tension between artistic control over materials, and the loss of control in the process of drawing, as well as with creating work that provides a record of a temporal event. The works explore the potential for mark making with a snap-line, a common construction tool used for making long straight lines on construction sites. The chalked line is pulled and then released onto the surface of the paper, leaving a precise line from which emanates a dusty chalk field on the surface when the line snaps onto the paper. Each of the resulting blue lines evoke a horizon, and in this respect they imply the macro-scale representation and demarcation of space. Kant portrayed the domain of the understanding as a demarcated 'territory' or island (immanence) surrounded by a vast ocean of metaphysical illusion (transcendence), and Ventimiglia's drawings provide a visual illustration of the boundary between these two realms.

Richard Bevan's work explores the tension between film as a medium and light as its agent. For this exhibition, Bevan has recreated his 2008 film '*There must be happy endings*' in the attic space at Islington Mill. The work is an archive of a particular event in a specific location, projected back into the same location at a different time. It provides an almost literal illustration of Herbet's poem, combining "colours and light", both at the point of capture onto film, and at the moment of release through the projected moving image, thereby animating the space in a manner that delights and surprises. The 'windows' of the poem, and those which Bevan has committed to celluloid, provide a metaphor for looking out to an external world, or to what lies beyond, and in this respect they also play with ideas of transcendence. The work also plays with ideas of transcending time, through the archival footage of a specific event recorded and replayed in the same location at a later date.

Pippa Gatty's work also plays with ideas of infiltrating an archive to create a domain in which memory and narrative can be altered and retold. '*Drawing Nebulae and Interstellar Matter*' is a part of a larger and on going series of drawings that were originally inspired by images of late 19th century astrophotography, particularly the photogravures of the American astronomer James Edward Keeler (1857 – 1900).

The drawings are made using a graphite pencil on white paper that has been primed with gesso. This produces a drawn-surface with a high sheen that Gatty is able to excavate with a blade to produce areas of bright white. The graphite pencil and primed surface behave like a camouflage, allowing her to tease out the forms that are concealed within that surface. Gatty describes the repetitive, and often obsessive, process of making the drawings as capable of producing a 'phantasm', or moment of subjective transcendence, and this resonates with the subject matter of the work in its depiction of what lies beyond the Milky Way.

Mark Dean's work presents a lone voice in its exploration of the themes of 'immanence' and 'transcendence' in specifically theological terms. His film *'The Veil of Veronica (offset Halo)'*, appropriates a short extract from *'This Gun for Hire'*, the 1942 film directed by Frank Tuttle, starring Veronica Lake. Dean has slowed down, overlaid and offset two identical layers of the same scene that portrays Veronica Lake's character performing a magic trick with a large fan made of feathers. The soundtrack to the work is provided by the 1997 single *'Halo'* by the band Texas. Dean has EQ'd the sound to remove the vocals (although their echo remains), the guitars and the drums, thereby bringing the harmonic undertones of the orchestration to the surface.

The resulting work has a mesmeric quality that is heavy with allusion. At times, the feathered fan produces a veil that obscures the figure of Veronica Lake, but which also connotes angelic wings. The pseudonymous title of the work alludes to the 1st century Saint Veronica who, according to legend, offered Jesus her veil to wipe his forehead as he carried his cross on the way to Golgotha. Jesus accepted the offering and, after using the veil, handed it back to Veronica with the image of his face miraculously impressed upon it. In some Medieval traditions, effigies of the face of Christ are referred to as 'Veronicas'.

These religious allusions are extended by the title and lyrics (albeit removed) or the audio track *'Halo'*, which seem to echo the life of Veronica Lake, who was burnt by her own success and struggled with mental illness and alcoholism after the decline of her acting career:

“Bright light city  
You're her religion  
Superstars in their own private movie  
Play just like children  
Lies that take her  
Places she's never seen  
The kiss and tell of it all  
To her it seems so obscene  
She's so pretty, her hair is a mess  
We all love her, to that we confess....  
She believes in everything  
She believes in nothing, in everything....”

Working through these many layers of allusion, *The Veil of Veronica (offset Halo)* seems to contain an exploration of ‘immanence’ and ‘transcendence’ in all three areas of subjectivity, ontology and epistemology. The character of Veronica Lake veils or removes herself from the frame, as if to transcend the external world. The faith of Saint Veronica is juxtaposed with the uncertainty and demise of the worldly Veronica who believes in ‘everything’ and ‘nothing’, as if to acknowledge our own longing for proof of something higher than being in which to believe. And the image of the face of Christ left imprinted on the veil of Veronica questions the proofs upon which we base our knowledge of God, suggesting perhaps that ‘a posteriori’ knowledge of divinity is made possible through the incarnation and miracles of Jesus. This interpretation of Mark Dean’s film returns us to Herbert’s poem in its suggestion that transcendence is possible through the touch of divinity, reaching in to us from beyond the boundaries of our material world, in order to become imminent with us.

This exhibition does not seek to put forward a definitive view as to whether ‘transcendence’ is possible within a subjective, ontological or epistemological framework, but rather to explore some of the ideas that have inspired the artists whose work is included. My written introduction may indeed “vanish like a flaring thing”, but I hope that the work included in the exhibition will impress upon you “a strong regard and awe”.

Lucy Newman Cleeve, September 2012