

Whilst still at college in Norwich, Breeze had discovered the stone-carving workshop of David Holgate. Always fascinated by lettering and typography he began to work for David, and it was there, in a craftsman's workshop, that he felt for the first time he was beginning to get to the root of how letters are made. The fact that he had also trained as a graphic designer may explain why today his work stands out from many other lettercarvers as strong on concept, as well as letterform.

The structure of this show is elegant. The idea of the imaginary museum and its collection unites the various works into a whole. It gives us a way of making sense of explorations that might otherwise seem fragmentary. Instead they come to hint at a greater pattern underlying 'the collection' and we find ourselves being drawn into our own pattern-making among the fragments. In reality the greater whole behind the work is of course Breeze himself; his interests in classicism and the vernacular, and in translation in its widest sense: birdsong into stone, English into an ancient language and sometimes back again. He has a keen ear for dialect and an enchantment with the particular names of things. Hedge betty, king harry, stonerunner, summerlamb,/callerbot, chatterpie, laughin' goose, summersnipe; all local names of birds from the East Anglian countryside.

The collection of work shown in MUSAEUM raises many questions. What is the underlying reality behind inscribed words? To what extent is any object something new in its own right or simply a reference to another, apparently more real thing? Questions like these lie close to the origin of all language but especially when the objects concerned are written artefacts. Plato criticized writing in *The Phaedo* because it kept saying the same thing again and again and could not be interrogated, but by placing words in or on objects, Gary Breeze shows that written or carved artefacts are in fact open to questioning and not so clearly defined in their meaning. Like David Jones, he uses his artefacts to evoke more complex associations. A stone sphere with the names of nine flowers refers to something delicate but the material, the tone, speaks not of transience but of something eternal and, like the sphere inscribed with the names of five birds and beasts, its very shape is pregnant with a curious transformative potential; the egg, the seed, some kind of metamorphosis seems imminent. the meaning here is part work part stone, just as it was in that first piece I saw, *Large Shipping Forecast*.

Metamorphosis is a recurrent thought. A poem by Gary Breeze in East Anglian dialect is transformed here into classical Greek, becoming a kind of vernacular Rosetta Stone. Words from Ira Gershwin and Cole Porter, Johnny Mercer or Duke Ellington, are rendered in Latin metre. In making these works Breeze is playing with another central feature of written or inscribed words. Such artefacts can carry words over vast distances of space and time, far beyond their original context. So vast are these distances that the object's original connection to the life of an individual author becomes less apparent and a more universal quality seems to infuse them. So when Breeze uses words from a very particular era of jazz or 'the musical' whose context, the scene, the singer, we know, and translates them into classical latin, suddenly we have the particular and the universal in one visual statement and the inscription becomes numinous. But paradoxically this effect works not only on the words but back in the opposite direction, on the stone itself. When we see these jazz lyrics in English carved in stone, the stone then seems to offer up some of its timelessness to become more immediate, of the present moment and full of feeling. This is startling and energizing. The stone and the language are alive

again and detached observation seems impossible. I feel involved, moved, and my feelings come to be validated by the fact of the stone itself. It's a strange communion!

The fragment carved with the word 'resurgam', captures this thought for me most perfectly with its blend of the personal and transcendent. As the notes to The Collection explain, this artefact refers back to an incident during the rebuilding of St Paul's Cathedral after the Fire of London. Sir Christopher Wren sent for a block of stone from the ruins to act as a station on which he could base the setting out of the measurements of the choir and dome of the new structure. The workman came back with a fragment from a tomb, and on it was carved this word "resurgam" "I rise again". I wonder what happened to that stone? Perhaps this is it, lost and neglected in the Museum, detached from its label? A stone that built a cathedral, a stone that remembered an individual life, a stone that inspired at a precise moment with a voice speaking from eternity, a stone whose legacy we still see about us, a stone that is made from the innumerable creatures of an age eons before ours. And in fact, if you look at the South Porch of the cathedral today you will see this word carved about the lintel and above it a phoenix rises from the metamorphic flames.

When I read the catalogue of works that accompanies this essay I feel an excitement. It is as if a secret casement has sprung open and an extraordinary room is disclosed, full of fascinating objects: a stone sphere inscribed with the names of five birds and beasts, five slate 'touchstones', a series of lead plaques listing the five senses, a slate plaque inscribed with sound of bird song, a pierced bronze sphere made entirely of letterforms and forming the words "In a sense human flesh is made of stardust".

If I had to date my idea of this secret room it would fall somewhere into the period of the early seventeenth century, that moment when the engravings we have of universities and places of learning change from showing us 'The Library' to showing us also the university's botanic gardens, dissecting theatres, geological and animal collections and the astronomical observatory, full of extraordinary curiosities and exploratory potential. This was the period when the power of the book was coming to be supplemented by the idea that knowledge could also be learned from contemplation of the natural world around us, not simply by contemplation of the knowledge of the ancients. This was a moment of transition and confidence. Thinking about transition and metamorphosis is the gift this collection seems to offer me and I value it, for we live in transitional times and for us lettering artists, as we contemplate the transformative power of new media, a reflection on the mysteries we already handle is timely.

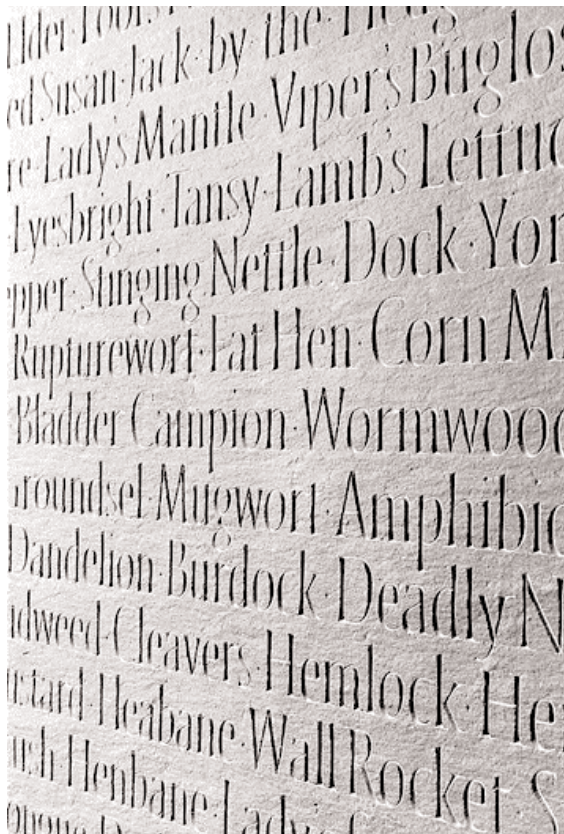
But then I have another thought - maybe this secret room is not a 'collection' after all, nor even a museum. Perhaps we are looking at a hidden craftsman's 'workshop' and the craftsman himself is today an explorer, a researcher who, through seeking certain primary things, helps our explorations as a society to be more grounded? Craftspeople make processes and live in them, their knowledge is embodied and tangible, the word inscribed in the sedimentary and metamorphic world of stone speaks of this. This is a knowledge our society thirst to experience. Perhaps this 'secret room' is in fact a laboratory for the twenty-first century where our 'virtual' world is being balanced by a more sensate experience - for this, I discern, is the craftsman's gift to our times, the gift of embodiment, of felt and experienced understanding supplementing and realizing the merely intellectual.

This felt understanding is the 'philosopher's stone' at the centre of any craftsperson's life, our transformative alchemy. We know that an understanding of the world can be expressed not only in the realm of ideas but also in movements, processes, felt interactions, translations, pressures, tones, sweetnesses, denseness and transparencies, rhythms. We are continually engaged in this kind of decipherment and the patterns we come across and discover within ourselves have a history that is larger and greater than our own; all this MUSAEUM says to me.

As I was finishing up this essay Gary sent me an e-mail. He had just discovered some lines from TS Elliot and they seem to say something about all this ...

Home is where one starts from. As we grow older
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated
Of dead and living. Not the intense moment
Isolated, with no before and after,
But a lifetime burning in every moment
And not the lifetime of one man only
But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.

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Gallant Soldier (detail). Welsh Slate: h.82cm, w.82cm, d.2.5cm. 1998