

The Burgundy Years 2015 - 2020

When I enter one of Elaine M. Goodwin's mosaic exhibitions I always experience a feeling of joy, an atmosphere of a passionate love of art and of life that is so characteristic of the artist herself and her work. It's to do with the gold and silver and colour and the light which are such a feature of her mosaics. She has often said, "My work is about light", so maybe that's what it is!

À la recherche du temps perdu (Marrakech) [9,9a], with super-subtle shading from light to dark, in antique copper gold, mirror glass and copper gold glass, doesn't refer us to Proust's novel as such; it was inspired by Goodwin's time in Marrakech, where for fifteen years she had a beautiful house (riad) and studio. But this mosaic was made when she'd moved to Burgundy and was thinking about what she'd left behind... So perhaps it embodies a progression from dawn to dusk? Or might it be saying that over time memories inevitably fade? Or could it be read as an evolution from darkness to light? Great art has layers of meaning.

Certain it is that Goodwin has come to love Burgundy: the two mosaics here called *Reflecting Burgundy* [16,16a, 17,17a], diamond shapes in gold, copper and purple, are proof of that. And looking at them how could one fail to think of Burgundy wine and Keats's "purple-stained mouth"? The grape means much to our artist, as in *Vine Kisses* [18], *Ode to Bacchus* (triptique) [21], and *Bacchanale!* [20], though interestingly in these the palette is mainly restrained shades of silver, grey and black.

The Burgundy Years 2015 - 2020

Vines are cultivated by nature; nature as a whole we find in *When the Sky meets the Sea meets the Sky* (Venice) [11,11a], a symmetrical design using tesserae of pale blue golds, indigo blue, silver and black. There is more nature in mosaics of the four seasons: *Printemps* (serié de vigne) [12,12a], *L'Eté* [13,13a], *L'Automne* [14,14a] and *Hiver* [15,15a], each superbly delineated in appropriate colours. The basic form in each member of this quartet is a vertical cross, each different (Roman, Greek, etc.), another example of Goodwin's love of symmetry. This is an instance where it could be argued that the use of symmetry is way of imposing order on nature, which has a tendency to run wild, as anyone with a garden will testify. The Pre-Raphaelites spent ages painting every single leaf, if leaves featured in a subject, as in *Ophelia* by Millais. Goodwin prefers to seek out the essence of a subject, expressed as variations on symmetry. In the Middle Ages that essence was expressed as *quidditas*, the literal translation of a Greek term used by Aristotle. "Thisness" is a modern equivalent, along with "quiddity", which is indeed the title of one of mosaics in this exhibition. It's worth noting at this point that in her work Goodwin makes extensive use of a pattern which mosaicists call *opus palladianum* (a sort of "crazy paving"), in which each tessera has its own individual "thisness", while still forming part of a whole. Note also the use of serpentine slivers of mirrored glass, examples of remarkable cutting skill.

Quiddity (blue) diptych [8,8a] has a whole range of shimmering blues. It is a colour which clearly means much

The Burgundy Years 2015 - 2020

to Goodwin; in 2018 she had an exhibition at her Couches gallery of her mosaics called *Bleu*. The colour symbolizes many things to many people – sea and sky and infinity among them, which leads me to think *Quiddity* explores the mystery that, try as we may, the meaning of existence will always be beyond us.

Quiddity is one of a group of mosaics exploring aspects of thinking: *Imagining* [19], *An Enlightenment* [1,1a,1b], *Mind Coupling* [2,2a] and *Beyond Being* [4,4a]. They are indeed thought-provoking abstractions in a variety of silvers, with some golds and black.

Which brings us to *Fragments of Gold* [7,7a], perhaps the most spectacular mosaic in the exhibition. It is a bravura display of different kinds of gold tesserae. Gold has always had a special place in Goodwin's work and indeed in the human story: think of Tutankhamun's mask, Philip of Macedon's tomb treasures, and the Incas' "sweat of the sun". It's to do with the fact that it is incorruptible, infinitely malleable and yes, it reminds us of the beauty of the sun, the source of all life and of all that is luminous...

Paul Bentley, actor/writer; editor of the Mosaic Matters website