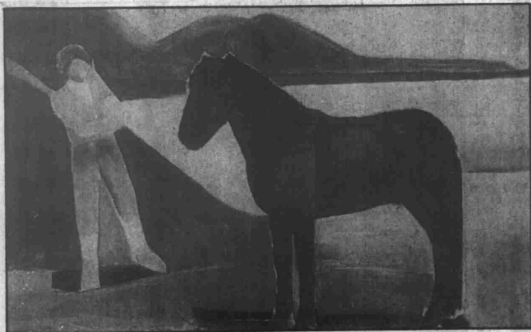




Girl with a horse by Louisa Matthiassdottir

Craftsman true to his nature

●Richard Jaques looks at the latest work of one of Britain's foremost silversmiths and an exhibition of Icelandic landscapes

THE latest in a line of prestigious applied art commissions by the National Museums of Scotland is now on view at the Royal Museum of Scotland in Chambers Street, Edinburgh.

The commission, for a standing cup and cover, has given Malcolm Appleby, one of Britain's foremost silversmiths, now resident in Scotland, the opportunity to demonstrate his talents, particularly in the engraving and piercing of silver.

Standing 23 inches high and weighing eight kilos, the cup is comprised of some 16 separate component parts each meticulously designed and set down in the red enamelled tonals of its supporting feet.

Basically conceive in outline

and contrasting a pierced lowered skirt of incredible art nouveau complexity with an absolutely plain top, the climax of the design is its ball top or stopper, some four or five inches in diameter, which sports a decorative split conical crest of sculpted profile.

Accompanying photographs and drawings (the latter being works of art in their own right) supplement and disclose what the exigencies of museum display must inevitably conceal.

Within the lower half of the cover project three rock crystal prisms like the stamens of some exotic flower. This analogy with the forms of the natural world is not forced to home out by Appleby's statement that "the conservation of the natural environment is the primary con-

cern of one who draws most of his inspiration from the Kincardineshire countryside. The motifs on the cover are all taken from nature and include feathers, scaly claws, birds, bats, nasturtiums and leaves."

If, finally one may have certain qualms about a work which is by its nature a museum piece and must remain so, this should not detract from our appreciation of the exquisite quality of its design, the skill of its execution or the credit due to the Museum of Scotland for commissioning it.

It should not, perhaps, but does come as something of a surprise to find that the art of Iceland, as revealed in *Landscapes from a High Latitude* at the Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh, shows as many facets as does our own.

This collection, covering the years 1909 to 1989 spans the whole spectrum of 20th century visual art from the realism of the early years through Cubism and Impressionism to the wilder shores of symbolism, conceptualism and abstraction.

The attractive de-Staël-like colour blockings of sheep and cattle by Louisa Matthiassdottir are known through publication, but to see these paintings in the national context is revealing indeed, demonstrating as it does that the simple shapes and outlines are a fact of that environment, a low sun and long shadows transfiguring the ordinary in magical ways.

The Lútsafla Islands have provided inspiration for many of these artists, Thorlaksson in the 1960s finding in them great

repose and serenity, leaving it to later artists such as Jonsson and Kjartan to delve below the placid horizons and explore the harsh realities of the landscape or to Julianus Sveinsdottir to find resonant simplicities of form and colour that remind us of the works of our own John Houston or Earl Hall.

Also to be found in this interesting and comprehensive show are some powerful sculptures in wood and cement by Ásmundur Sveinsson and tapestries both traditional and modern from the Icelandic Tapestry School.

There is something about folk art, particularly after a surfeit of more sophisticated art, that recharges the spiritual batteries and makes the whole world kin. These thoughts were very

much to the fore while visiting *Folk Art From Nova Scotia, 1769 To The Present Day* at the City Art Centre, where in a beautifully presented exhibition a life-size red-coated Minnie and black-clad fisherman stand guard over many delightful artefacts from that other maritime Scotland.

Inevitably, perhaps, it is the sculpture which packs the biggest punch, and none more so than some modern examples. Donald Manzer's witty *Cat With Bagpipes* and *Cat And The Fiddle*. Beautifully but simply carved in polychromed wood, figures which with rapid expressions of concentration might certainly have been responsible for the strains of folk music which so appropriately filled the

gallery spaces while I was there.

Almost as engaging as the above are Eddie Mandagglo's lugubrious *Cow's Head* (no reminiscent of Picasso's *Sadler's* and *Handiebars Cow*) and Leo Naugler's splendidly silly *Flying Pig*.

Chairs, tapestries, board games (these last being lovely objects in their own right in burnished reds, greens and browns), duck decoys, a golden ship's keel of 1865, a 1910 painting of the five masted Preussen, its stacked sails gleaming against a pewter sky, an 1863 Rocking Horse with the sparseness of line one associates with a William Scott abstract — these are only some of the delights to be found in this lively and informative exhibition.

Reflections on human values

●Murdo Macdonald rounds the galleries in Glasgow and Edinburgh

Transmission Gallery in Glasgow are showing paintings and drawings by Peter Thomson who is one of the most thoughtful figurative artists to have come out of Glasgow School of Art in the 1960s.

In images which range from a surreal view of the baroque arsenal of the Holy Loch to dreamlike definitions of the religious flaws within Scottish identity and a reminder that "democracy" on the UK model will not necessarily make Eastern Europe "free", Thomson develops a density of symbolism which resonates with the sixteenth century painters of Holland, Flanders and Germany, above all Matthias Grunewald.

From more recent times there is the strong influence of painters of class conflict like George Grosz and Otto Dix. Thomson is not interested in

the history of art with its associations of dutiful connoisseurship and the inanities of the saleroom, what concerns him is the history of artists. For him, what others artists have done is a legitimate part of his visual language, not just a source of ironic, post-modern quotation.

Artists throughout history are part of a community of which Thomson is a member not people to be competed against; implicit in this view is the assertion that the artist is a creative being not a cog in an economic machine.

Consistent with this is the other fundamental strand in Thomson's work namely his intense explora-

tion of his own working-class identity.

In one of his most recent paintings he takes Orwell's essay about shooting an elephant as a starting point for reflection on human values undermined by social hierarchy and the unwitting collusion of the oppressed.

The interplay of class struggle and the history of artists in Thomson's work gives it a distinctive vitality and tension. The paintings of Claude Lorraine or Paul Nash are historical events as real for the artist as nuclear deterrence or Orange marches.

These are impressive and thought-provoking paintings

which deserve to be seen more widely.

In Edinburgh at the City Art Centre Wendy McMurdo marks the end of her period as artist in residence with *Still Lives: Images of Beauty and Advertising*, a large display of photographs each of which is a subtle reflection on the psychology of appearance.

In this display McMurdo uses close-up photography of carefully constructed tableaux of objects and images to make works in which layer upon layer of meaning can be discovered.

The classic points of worry exploited by the beauty-product

advertising industry — everyday imperfections of skin, non-conformity to the ideal, getting older, etc — are given symbolic and actual representation in these still lives through hour glasses, uneasily composed images of part of the body, old powder compacts and lipstick.

The viewer is confronted with a sort of cluttered dressing-table of the mind. Juxtaposed with these objects and images are sumptuous fabrics which have the paradoxical quality of being completely physically real yet at the same time representative of an ideal and necessarily unattainable state.

Drawing one into each work are repeated images of eyes, sometimes heavily made up, often looking directly at the viewer. Frequently these eyes appear on mirrors but as images stuck to the glass not as reflections. The mirror thus has a psychological significance. It is an access point into a world where appearance is the reality.

It is clear that McMurdo is both critical of this world and positively interested in it and that advertising imagery is just a starting point for an investigation of the construction of self.

Some of the images here are more successful than others and

in general the smaller cibachrome works have a concentration of purposefully positioned signs which is not matched by the larger limited-colour photographs with their somewhat obvious references to jigsaw-like fragmentation of meaning. But overall this exhibition is thought-provoking and effective.

The Art of Lego which can also be seen at the City Art Centre at present is much more than a collection of building blocks. A number of serious contributions come from engineers so much so that "the science of Lego" would have been an appropriate title.

Not least of these are a model of a reasonable bridge for St Katherine's Dock in London by John Walden of Ove Arup, and a model of a model for concrete shore defences by Bill Davies of McAlpine Construction.

Artists chip in for Demarco

AN AUCTION to raise funds for the Richard Demarco Gallery in Edinburgh is being supported by many artists and other Scottish galleries. About 150 works will be auctioned on Thursday at the Demarco Gallery in Blackfriars Street which no longer receives an annual revenue grant from the Scottish Arts Council.

"We are having to go directly to the public for funding" said Richard Demarco, who has raised over £25,000 since launching an appeal 10 days ago. The auction at 7.30 pm will be followed by a cullish organised by Hamish Henderson.

PAINTINGS by Mattise, Dufy, Derain and Braque are among 38

Fauvist works going on view this month at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery, Glasgow. The exhibition, *Sounds of Colour* also includes an outstanding group of paintings by Kandinsky spanning 30 years of his career. The exhibition will be at Kelvingrove from 14 July to 26 August.

OPENING this week at the

Burrell Collection, Glasgow, is the first major retrospective of the life and work of Joseph Crawhall (1861-1913). Among more than 100 works on display will be a gouache for which Sir William Burrell paid £750 in 1928. The last notable work by Crawhall to come on the market, *The Spangled Cock* was sold at auction last year for £160,000. In the first half of Glasgow's year as European City of Culture, the Burrell Collection has had over 376,000 visitors.

PREVIEW

A MAN who was born in Lebanon and educated in Kuwait, and at the Universities of Moscow and Edinburgh, has been appointed the first Multi-Cultural arts officer of the Scottish Arts Council. Youssef Al-Khashi, who is now studying for a Ph.D. at Glasgow University, will spend a year developing the council's policy of cultural diversity across all art forms.

THE Scottish Arts Council is offering £4,000 to a photographer "to record and reflect the exciting developments in dance in Scotland." Photographers hoping to gain the commission are invited to submit portfolios to the council.

THE Glasgow-Irish artist, William Crozier, is having three exhibitions of his work this summer. About 30 of his paintings and drawings are on view this week at the Leeds Polytechnic Gallery as part of the Leeds Festival and from 26 July a major survey of his work will be presented in Cork. In September the Scottish Gallery in Cork Street, London, will be showing new paintings and watercolours by Crozier. Next year his work will be seen in Dublin and Edinburgh (at the Talbot Rice Gallery).



GARY WEBSTER (above), who is studying sculpture at Edinburgh College of Art has completed a stone carving to grace the entrance to the new James Gillespie's Primary School which is being built at Whitehouse Loan, Edinburgh. Commissioned by the school's Parent Teacher Association to carve the emblem of a unicorn from the school's crest, Webster used a slab of pink sandstone selected from a West Calder stoneyard.

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