

The Review

Art

AFTER THE STROKE

After the Stroke: I

*Her eyes scan
the room
like a waking child
surprised
by the morning.*

*The shapes of words
form on her lips
but
fall away
unspoken.*

Like snowflakes,

*caught
in my hand
and brought
to my mouth.*

Like bread from the altar.

*They tingle my tongue
with
the forgotten
fizz
of sherbert.*

*As I speak her words for her.
With her.*

After the Stroke: II

*When you popped round
I had prepared
a pile of prints,
a fan of photos
spread
between my chair
and hers.*

*You've been busy,
you said,
in the day since she died,
and built a mosaic of memories.*

*A monument? Yes.
But not a wall,
I said,
but a bridge.*

After the Stroke: III

*Five weeks on, I faced
the perfume of the wardrobe
and cleared her clothes
from my room.*

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QUENTIN BLAKE: DRAWN BY HAND

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
12 February–12 May 2013

The hand-sketched ink drawings with a splash of lively watercolour are instantly recognisable as the work of Quentin Blake. Known best for his illustrations of children's books and in particular, his work with Roald Dahl, it was his sketches that brought the characters to life. Blake has illustrated *Matilda*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *James and the Giant Peach* along with over 300 other children's books. *Drawn By Hand*, an exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge brings together a wonderful collection of some of these illustrations, alongside other Quentin Blake drawings and lithographs from the last decade. Accompanying these pictures are the tools of his trade: a display of his paints, brushes, inks, etching boards, and pens, giving us a sense of the artistic processes involved in the making of these colourful artworks.

It is also apparent from the 17 pictures on display that Quentin Blake is much more than a children's illustrator. His art tackles a diverse and interesting subject matter from the lighthearted anthropomorphised insects and birds, to the mysterious

underwater swimming mothers and babies produced for display at the Rosie birth centre in Cambridge, and the maternity unit in Angers Hospital, France.

The artwork in this exhibition also seems to have a more adult theme, compared to Blake's usual and familiar illustrations for children. He experiments with the nude female form in the intriguing *Women With Birds* and *Big Healthy Girls*. The former depicts a nude female clutching a large black bird in her hands, while the latter is of plump women dancing outdoors, free and frivolous. There are also other themes involving women including the uncomfortable *Women with Dogs II*, where a female is on her knees in front of a large threatening dog. The use of his black ink pen with splashes of bloody red paint is both emotive and unsettling.

What would Quentin Blake like us to consider from these drawings? He offers very little explanation. As it is with all of his artwork, we are invited to let our imaginations loose.

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