



Chris Day (United Kingdom 1968 -)

Reflections of Resistance II

'Reflections of Resistance II' is a unique sculpture by the British artist, Chris Day, created from handblown & sculpted glass with micro bore copper pipe, recycled electrical wire, reclaimed pine and cowhide.

The artwork explained by Dr Emma Park:

Reflections of Resistance is a group of three sculptures inspired by images of African shields, particularly those once made by tribes in Nigeria and by the Zulus. Their pinewood backing and cowhide covering at the base reflect materials that were used in traditional shield-making, which in turn are set in dynamic contrast with the industrial copper wire and blown glass characteristic of Day's wider oeuvre.

A shield made from a fragile material like glass would be useless as a means of defence – but that is the point. On one level, these sculptures, like many of Day's earlier works, allude to specific stories from the history of the conflicts between European colonialists and Africans, which he argues are still insufficiently well-known by 'normal people' in the UK. The shields recall both the punitive Benin Expedition undertaken by British troops in 1897, which ultimately resulted in the absorption of Benin into the former colony of Nigeria, and the Battle of Isandlwana in Southern Africa in 1879, in which invading British troops were massacred by Zulu warriors. In both cases, Day observes, the Africans 'faced Gatling guns and ammunition, and they had nothing but shields and spears' – despite which they displayed great 'resilience and resistance'. The latter qualities are evoked in the shield sculptures by the way that the glass tries to 'break through and free itself' from the copper cage confining it, even though it is always at risk of being shattered as it cools.

On a more personal level, the shields also allude to the protection mechanisms that Day surrounded himself with, growing up in Britain in the 1970s and '80s, at a time when being mixed race was strongly stigmatised. Rather than admit the truth – that his absent father was a Jamaican who had been rejected by his Anglo-Irish mother's family – for years Day told people that he was dead. 'I denied who I was to try and fit in,' he remembers. 'I wish I could have been stronger and fought it. But I wasn't.' Only recently has he been able to acknowledge and celebrate his paternal heritage in works like Reflections. For him, 'the shield represents a defence, but with the defence mechanism taken away, because it's a glass shield': in other words, it symbolises his act of shaking off past inhibitions. The glass pushing through the copper cage further embodies his internal struggle to break free of the taboos under whose shadow he has lived for so many years.

The artist can also create pieces to commission, please contact the gallery for further information.

Artist description:

Growing up in the West Midlands, Day has become Britain's only black glassblower, or certainly the only one that the artist is aware of. He creates highly personal works in glass and mixed media and his intention is to discuss and investigate the treatment of black people in Britain & the USA, with much of his research focussing on the history of the slave trade in the Eighteenth Century and the events leading to up & during the Civil Rights Movement.

A self-confessed 'arts enthusiast' Day's creative career comes after more than two decades as a plumber. Initially feeling that his life had taken him on a journey that significantly detoured away from his early love of the arts, Day is now able to reflect on the fact that many of the skills he has developed in his earlier career have directly transposed to the creation of his artworks.

Combining materials used in both heating and electrical systems into his creations, Day finds he able to create the perfect marriage of his artistic path and technical knowledge, both of which rely on dexterity and high levels of skill and craftsmanship.

A reoccurring and signature theme are 'copper cages' which enclose his glass, representing the restriction of movement both physically and mentally that traders possessed over other human's lives that were viewed simply as 'commodities'. These are created from simple copper tubing and wire but to dramatic effect. The glass, by contrast, Day compares to the human spirit, attempting to break free despite the restrictions that hold it in place.

In the artist's own words;

"Like the glass I have pushed my approach in how I work with glass and ceramics in both traditional and experimental methods, to create contemporary artworks that represent my passion for this part of our history. As a black glassblower, I am one of few and on a quest to find and inspire more. My main purpose, however, is to engage the audience on issues that are hard to confront on many levels, using art to help overcome some of the traumas that haunt our collective past"

An emerging artist and a recent graduate from Wolverhampton University, Day received a special commendation at the 2019 British Glass Biennale held in Stourbridge, UK. He has not only become a leading voice within the contemporary British art-glass scene but also with the continued conversation surrounding Black Lives Matter and racial inequality, giving his time for numerous interviews for both TV, radio and social media.