

I recently spent a lovely afternoon in a backyard gazebo in the atmosphere of an English garden tea. The lunch was delicious on handsome pottery dishes, and the conversation was excellent. Craftsperson Peggy Hawkes and poet Robert (Bob) Hawkes had invited me and Marian Leaman. When we were about to leave, Bob said he wanted to give us copies of a newly revised poem. I asked him to read it to us—he reads very well in his distinctive voice. But he declined. When I got home and read the poem, I realized why. The poem was in the voices of various people who participated in the beheading by the Nazis of six members of the White Rose Group. It's a solemn and moving poem and certainly would have spoiled the carefree genteel mood!

"Their Final Days" is in twelve parts in two line stanzas in the voices of the victims, their interrogators and prosecutors. Robert has written other long poems in the voices of historic figures—among them Bishops Laud and Cranmer. The interrogator of Alexander Schmorell says, "At first we dismissed/your treacherous behaviour//as springing from/misguided Christian faith.//But when we learned/you are the whelp//of a Russian mother/and a German father//we knew we need look/for cause no further." "Whelp", the perfect word to express disdain.

Sophie Scholl's mother Magdalena says, "Sophie used to listen/to the Trout Quintet//hour after hour,/and at the andantino//she would wish/to be a trout".

Two photography exhibits on upper Queen Street, one at the Playhouse and one at Gallery 78, form two ends of the photography gamut. Those in Gallery 78 are quiet, meditative, beautifully rendered, technically perfect. Those at the Playhouse are experimental, brash, full of fun.

The twelve artists of the Silverfish Collective at Gallery 78 use several printing techniques: silver gelatin, pigment print, archival inkjet--all on paper--and on aluminum plates. Pigment print, I was told, is the use of actual pigments, what painters use, in the ink, ensuring stability. Peter Bjerkelund has several aerial pigment print photos. An especially dramatic one is "Octopus" of a white rock outcropping. In two by Peter Gross's, "Visions of Mark Rothko", Rothko's horizontal patterns and colours are further enhanced by a texture not available to a painter. The aluminum plates of Lori Quick glow, something oil paint can produce but photographs on paper usually don't.

Karen Ruet has a series of the interiors of an old house, abandoned it looks like, and thus poignant. In one of the outside Ruet has captured the geometry of abstract art with the real physical, a work inspiring me to see geometry in the everyday. The old gray clapboards of the house form a rectangle on the left, and on the right are horizontal bands of colour: dark green grass, golden hay field, and three layers of sky.

In the exhibit at the Playhouse, "Out of Balance" by the seven artists constituting the Emerge Collective, some of the technical hi-jinks are mind-boggling. Michel Doucet's "Vitamiet Morten Perceptio" (maybe I don't have the title exactly right) is of white photographs printed in 3-D of five skulls, a newborn baby, and a fetus. You have to see it to believe it. The irrepressible Biff Mitchell has "Shop and Toss", photos of abandoned shopping carts, paper doodles, garbage bags, all caught up in chicken wire. Tanya Thompson has printed photographs on canvas, stark angular forms, the result an eerie mixture of painting and photo. Mark Cameron has a digital photo of a fire, "Birth of the Phoenix" and then the Phoenix itself, I am supposing, a strange steel wire construction presumably shaped in the fire.

I hadn't been in the West Gallery of the Playhouse for quite a while and had not remembered that it's attached to the new convention centre by an entrance and a courtyard.

This upper part of Queen Street is a visual feast these days, with the ever-changing construction of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery addition—first in concrete, then in steel, now with bright blue on one side, orange on another, with hints of its sandstone phase. Two new works are installed in the sculpture garden, one on the street, the other in back.

Above the foundation of the new hotel, a high-tech sculpture—an eight-story white crane—shines in the sun. Gallery 78 not only has the Silverfish Collective but also the thought-provoking acrylics of Moon Joyce. Across the street someone has painted illustrations on the surround protecting the fountain.

One evening Lynn Davies read a masterful poem to our writers' group. I've been thinking of it ever since because it demonstrates for me what poetry can do—miraculously turn one object into another, in this case a crack in the sidewalk into a twig being blown by the wind. The poem is metaphorical but doesn't contain a metaphor, the language used in a more complex way than that.