

DOMOBAAL

In 1998 I was one of the panel appointed by the Royal Mint and the British Art Medal Society to choose a design for a Millennium medal. We sat in a large room working through a very large number of drawings, various in approach and quality, anxious to make progress, keen to get on, slightly daunted by the size of the task. Then one of the entries stopped us in our tracks. It was beautiful and simple and poetic and right. A dandelion clock, the full head on one side, the dispersed seeds flying outwards on the other. How elegantly it evoked the passage of time and the evanescence of human life and history. Blown away in an instant: a reminder that a millennium is of as much account in the infinity of time as the passing of a second to a child on a summer's day. Yet at the same time it seemed to speak of continuing hope for the future as the seeds of this, the most resilient of plants, trodden under foot yet golden flowered, common piss-in-the-bed and noble lion's tooth, would take root in the new millennium and flourish there. That design became a beautiful medal, and its smallness and its circularity, its simplicity and availability to so many people all around the country could almost have been taken as a silent reproach to the large and empty circle that was the Dome.

When I first saw that design I did not know that it was Felicity Powell's work, and in any case I did not know her work well at all. It was only later that I began to understand how the themes of that particular piece grew out of and echoed the rest of her work. One piece in particular made an early impression. It was a bowl, spun in steel, circular and slightly reflective, holding within it small drops of glass, glistening in and reflecting the light. They were tears it seemed, frozen tears, bittersweet tears of childhood born of the moment when consciousness of sadness and its expression becomes a kind of pleasure. As tears become glass they are arrested in their descent towards the bottom of the bowl, saving forever the moment marked by each one from merger into a single salty pool. In shape they might also be sperm swimming competitively towards the egg that would grow new life, moving towards a beginning not an end.

Interest in the passage of the moment, in ambiguity and transformation, in the completeness of the circle are continuing themes in the new work shown here. The Two Spheres* , are twins, alike and yet profoundly different. On one tears roll down the smooth exterior of this large and pregnant ball. On the other hair, or is it flames, flowing down or flaring up. In both the activity on the surface seems to emanate from a hidden life within. These perfect forms seem self-contained yet dominant, filling the space around them with their presence. In Twinship I and II the intricate and restless patterns on the exterior curling and twirling, combining and interlocking; the crowded drops distinct yet on the point of merger, again suggest interior life within their egg-like forms.

Works like these invite touch. Lightning Cone almost requires to be held in the hand, to be rotated from side to side, from the silver streak slashing through the bronze to the plump and ponderous drops of rain that follow on, recreating that long and pregnant moment that follows the lightning's flash, heavy with expectation of the downpour to come. This sense of related moments, of companion forms, is present again in Lightning Tree. The flash, the tree and its roots, so similar in outline, so utterly different in duration. One rooted in the past and growing on into the future, the other gone the second it is seen, sensed more in the afterimage than at the moment of immanence. And yet the lightning can find its way to earth through the tree and the tree is nourished by the rain to come.

Touch is invoked directly in Hand Cone. The viewer's engagement comes as much through touch as through sight; through feeling the thing, weighty in itself yet lightly and seductively modelled on the surface, evoking the maker's engagement with the wax, malleable and responsive as it is rolled and pressed into shape. In other works those hands become autonomous in silvered bronze, delicately open in a gesture of offering and acceptance. Transmuted at the wrist into blooms of glass they seem to be drawing fragile life from the inchoate forms of the unconscious.

Felicity Powell's work is mysterious and lovely in its duality and singularity, in its delicacy and weight, in its powerful resonance and its elusive grace-notes. Each piece draws on and refers to the others creating a sense of journey and of pleasure, of significant moments captured in space. And each invites the viewer in.

Mark Jones, Director V&A, 2001