

When I was a child, someone told me stained glass windows were made of blood, bird feathers, rubies, sapphires, woman's milk - and some pomegranate seeds.

Every time I looked at stained glass windows, I knew they were alive. Alive like the dreams I had at night - and owls and secrets and midnight feasts.

Unrepentant, unforgiving, their splashes of colour said something about another world - so close it made you shiver.

Their very thickness, the weight that oozed from their dim brightness, made them even more alive than skin that hurts when you burnt or grazed it. Eyes that peered and flashed were only shadowy in comparison.

Stained glass windows are thresholds. They have a sway on two worlds. Not a shadowy ghostlike one, but a more than real, more than flesh, more than sight, two way grip. They could see inside and outside. They could let you in and let you out.

In cathedrals, they filter the light of day in such a way that whether it's midday or late afternoon they have the same tapered intensity of brightness. It's the light of an in-between world, a light for understanding what you can't see in the brash sunlight. Yet it's a brighter experience altogether.

I couldn't say a word about Anna White's work except it reminds me of stained glass windows.

You can still see people - yet they have just left. Or when they are there, you can feel the space that their absence will fill.

Sometimes presence is eerie when someone is on the doorstep. She or he seems still there, yet they are phantoms or clones, their real selves are already on the bus or at their job.

Sometimes in the middle of a conversation, they can also disappear. Half of their face is gone, eaten away by strange, weaving thoughts. Or sunlight can play tricks on their bodies and hide and seek them away from you.

Sometimes they have really and truly left but their boots are there, which have kept every crease, every angle of their stride or the particular way they stand. The boots have captured some essential part of them. So you walk around the boots because you don't want to break the charm. They contain a world; in the same way an atom contains the entire bodies' information.

Sometimes reality crashes around our ears. What have we got left, what have we got to choose from? Pieces, fragments that say how alone we are.

Yet, sometimes a lonely fragment can speak only of love. John Mackinnon paintings have captured that feeling for me.

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