

Intercontinental London Park Lane, at No 1 Park Lane is exhibiting the work of different craftspeople in their 'Cookbook Cafe' in conjunction with the Crafts Council. In November Mick Paine had the opportunity to exhibit his work in the cafe along with the ceramicist Vivienne Foley. Mick's work consisted of a series of wall mounted panels using paint, collage and lettering together. It is great to go into a venue in a prime position on the corner of Park Lane, in a restaurant that has many patrons, and see makers' work shown in this way. The exhibition changes regularly giving a showcase for different craftspeople. But this is not an upmarket Craft show - it is about exhibiting excellent work in a contemporary setting which gives a presence to the functionality of the Cafe's purpose. At least, that was my impression when I went to see Mick's work. After the initial excitement of seeing the work of a calligrapher in that setting, I thought how good it looked. Mick's work sits well in a modern environment as its presentation has a simplicity to it, so the panels on the neutral walls above the unfussy dining furniture were both striking and yet not intrusive. I wasn't able to stay to eat unfortunately, because I would have liked to sit and look and think; the pieces wanted me to do that.

The colours, materials and methods that Mick uses interweave and combine to produce pieces of 'thinking' work. On his website he says that he aims 'to produce quiet presences that encourage a prolonged contemplative engagement' and that was the message that came over to me from his work on the walls. Quietness and prolonged contemplative engagement are not entirely possible in the busy setting of a cafe but the works have a gentle presence of their own that seems to make themselves noticed despite the activity around them. The tables prevented me from getting close to read all the words on the panels and the captions about them and that was somewhat frustrating as I felt the pieces need that to begin the contemplative process. Some of them had something happening on the other side of the panel which affected what the viewer saw and that could not be shown because seeing only one side was possible. Unavoidable in this setting, but a shame nonetheless.

Mick is using techniques and methods that are very much of today, incorporating calligraphy and lettering in interesting ways. He is not only skilled with the tools he uses but he knows about letterform and how to use that knowledge as a springboard and not see it as a constraint for his work. And underlying all he produces is a careful and precise craftsmanship that enables him to create beautifully constructed work that leaves nothing to chance and yet gives space for an intuitive response both from him as the maker and from the viewer.

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This review appeared in the Spring 2008 edition of the Society of Scribes and Illuminators Newsletter.