

Alison Kinnaird

Working with Light and Color



Alison Kinnaird, *Psalmsong*, 15.75" x 10' 10" (40 cm x 330 cm), 2003. Photo by Simon Hollington.

by Shawn Waggoner

Scottish artist and musician Alison Kinnaird MBE has just completed the Donor Window at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh, Scotland. Beginning four years ago, Kinnaird designed the window and has drawn and engraved the donors' portraits in glass. She is recognized as one of the world's leading glass engravers with work in many private collections and museums/art galleries, including all the major Scottish galleries, the permanent collection of the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, Scotland; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England; the Corning Museum of Glass, New York, New York; and the Tutsek Foundation, Munich, Germany.

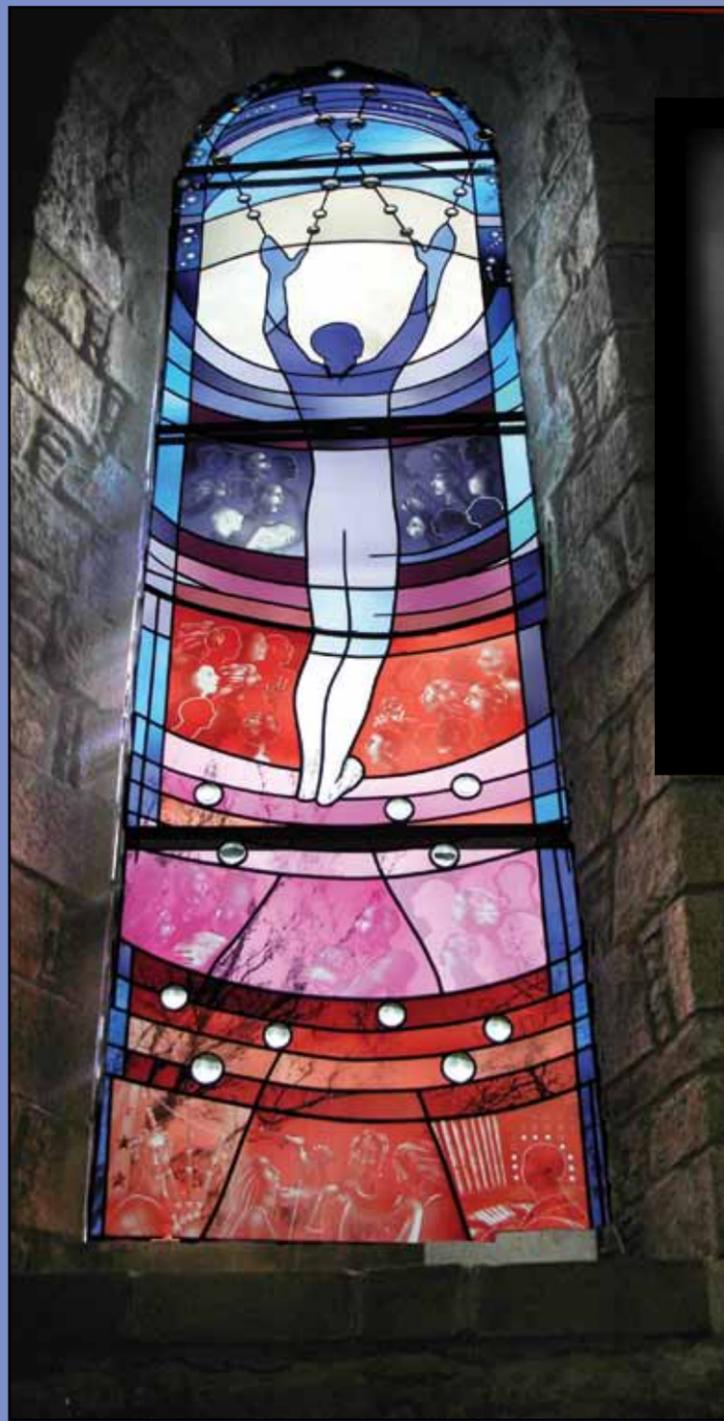
A short film was recently made about The Donor Window, looking at this project and Kinnaird's career. Part 1 of the film traces her development as an artist, and Part 2 examines the Portrait Gallery project in some depth and gives insights into the skills and work involved in its creation.

One of the foremost exponents of Scottish harp music, Kinnaird plays both gut- and wire-strung Scottish harp. In 2010, she was inducted into the Hall of Fame at the Scottish Traditional Music Awards. These awards are made to individuals who are judged to have made a major and lasting contribution to the world of Scottish music.

As part of The British Library's *Crafts Lives* series of oral history, Kinnaird was selected to record her life in a series of in-depth interviews for the Archive Collection. Interviewer, Frances Cornford, encouraged her to speak about her life in art and music in interviews that lasted 10 hours and were spread over three days. She discussed her experiences from earliest childhood through her career as an established artist and musician.



Alison Kinnaird, *Flightpath*, 10.25" x 15.75" (26 cm x 40 cm), 2009. Photo by Robin Morton.



Alison Kinnaird, Prase Window, Dornach Cathedral, 16' 4.75" x 3' 3" (35 m x 1 m), 2005. Photo by Robin Morton.



Alison Kinnaird, Streetwise 1 & 2, 19.69" x 8' 6" (50 cm x 260 cm), 2004. Photo by Robin Morton.

Glass Engraving in Scotland

Many fine painters and sculptors contribute to the active art scene in Scotland. The Edinburgh Festival in August 2013 displayed many fine examples of the country's best, including work by painter Peter Doig. International artists are relocating to Scotland to work, such as American artist Jeff Zimmer, who creates lit and painted glass boxes, and Japanese artist Keiko Mukaide, who works with dichroic glass on large installations. North Lands Creative Glass in Lybster, Scotland, attracts many artists seeking master classes, conferences, and residences. "North Lands is a tremendous asset to Scotland with an international reputation in the glass world," says Kinnaird.

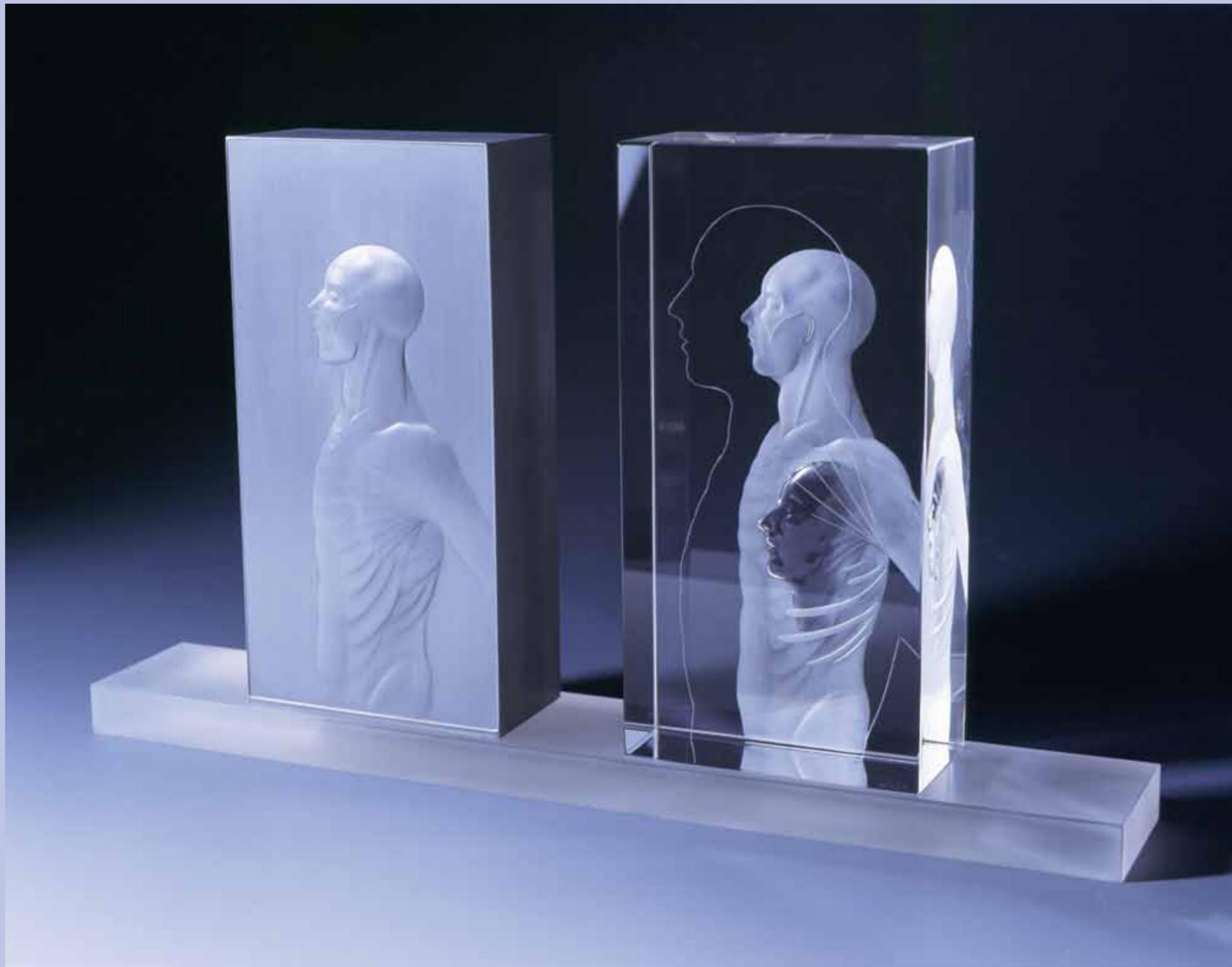
Although the art scene is thriving, wheel engraving itself is fairly rare. Once common in Victorian times, glass companies employed stables of engravers to embellish decorative items. But the technique is no longer regarded as commercially viable, as the process is meticulous and time-consuming. It is, however, being kept alive by the artist engraver, and there were a number of engravers in Scotland influenced by Helen Monro Turner when she taught at Edinburgh College of Art in the 1950s. "She was a well-regarded engraver who taught a number of people including my mentor, Harold Gordon."

Kinnaird continues: "My inspiration is firmly rooted in Scotland, though the references may not be literal or specific. The starkness of the landscape, the relationship of air and water, and recurring images of standing stones and boats all carry symbolism on a number of levels, both personal and universal."

The purity of glass engraving adds a spiritual dimension as its transparency and mirror surfaces provide different insights on the human condition. "In more than one way, we can see through the images engraved on its surface. Often I use the glass in its character of a window or a doorway, sometimes to suggest isolation or entrapment, sometimes with the figures poised between two worlds. Sometimes they confront an opposite or a mirror image. Glass is a surreal material. It is there and yet not there."



Alison Kinnaird, Unknown, 19.69" x 6' 3" x 6' 3" (50 cm x 190 cm x 190 cm), 2010–2013. Photo by Robin Morton.



Alison Kinnaird, Glass: Fragile, 8.66" x 14" x 2.36"
(22 cm x 36 cm x 6 cm), 2005. Photo by Ken Smith.

Light and Color

Since 2002, Kinnaird has been making work that utilizes engraved crystal panels with dichroic color, optical fiber lighting, digital photography, printed textiles, and music. She was astonished by the affects of combining colored light and engraved glass. Many glass artists were curious to know how she was accomplishing this look.

Flighpath was created two years ago and is currently on display in The Gallery, Johansfors, Sweden. The work addresses issues of immigration and people having to leave their homes while simultaneously referencing bird migration. This piece, like many others, includes a shadow banner that Kinnaird creates by photographing the engraving and digitally printing its shadow on a 4.5-meter-long banner that is hung behind the glass to add dimension. In this case, her shadow banner includes star patterns that birds use to migrate. This work, made for the Scottish Glass Society's 2011 traveling exhibition on the subject of migration, demonstrates Kinnaird's love of combining contemporary subjects with the ancient technique of wheel engraving. In another example, *Streetwise*, Kinnaird brings to life contemporary images and urban settings, allowing the colors and lights to work with the figures and the graffiti in these small dramas.

Light and color have added a new dimension to Kinnaird's glass engraving. "I have found that the use of sandblasting with copper wheel engraving gives a freedom and immediacy to the treatment of the subjects, giving the engraving a painterly quality. Combining small elements into a larger whole means that pieces can have an architectural scale without sacrificing the sculptural quality or delicacy of details that is characteristic of wheel engraving. After 30 years working in this field, I still find excitement and challenges in the potential of the medium and the messages that it has to offer us today."

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Find out more about Alison Kinnaird's history, process, and work in the November/December 2013 issue of Glass Art.



Alison Kinnaird MBE
www.alisonkinnaird.com

Additional Resources for Alison Kinnaird

Reflections . . . The Art of Alison Kinnaird, Part 1

www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Ip8cV1glrIQ

Reflections . . . The Art of Alison Kinnaird, Part 2

www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=TQs7s2XM4xw

The British Library Crafts Lives Series

cadensa.bl.uk/uhtbin/cgiisirs/x/0/0/5?searchdata1=CKEY7388912&library=ALL

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