

The GLASS Quarterly Hot Sheet

BY JASONCGUTIERREZ | APRIL 8, 2011 · 2:45 PM

OPENING: Julie Oakes's crashing glass birds at the Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery on Sunday



Julie Oakes' Sparrows

In the literature for her new gallery exhibit, artist Julie Oakes notes that, “one of the most difficult concepts to deal with is the correlation between a loving omnipotence and the reality of violence and death.” “Swounds: An Installation in Glass,” opening this Sunday, April 10th at the [Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery](#), a nonprofit outside of Toronto, attempts to visually address this disconnect.

Oakes is no stranger to the infusion of religious overtones into her art, and here biblical themes inform the pieces on display. It's a shift in focus from the Eastern religions that influenced her recent series, “The Buddha Composed.” “Swounds” is a seven-part installation that explores the delicacy and fleeting nature of an

individual's life. The exhibition's centerpiece, entitled *Sparrow Swounds*, is a flock of over one hundred glass sparrows suspended from the gallery's twenty-five foot ceiling. The flock consists of two sets of birds — a background set, designed by Oakes and made in Toronto by glass artist Alfred Engerer, and a more ornate foreground set, each individually blown and hot-formed in Italy's [Berengo Studios](#). Every day one of the less intricate, background birds will fall from its perch and shatter on a polished concrete floor while the hymn "God Sees the Little Sparrows Fall," plays. The glass shards remain beneath the flock, creating a glass carpet that serves as a constant reminder to those left floating above of the fragility of their existence. The birds are gorgeous. Their kinetic energy and the combination of music and shattering glass makes for an interesting gallery experience. It's not very often that an installation needs to facilitate its own destruction to make its point, even if the shattering sparrow as metaphor for the fragility of life is a bit obvious.

A more effective piece, *Unlucky Bunny*, is in the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery's Bierstock Circular Gallery. A large porcelain sculpture of a female rabbit hangs from the ceiling, suspended by a silk cord. A small trickle of red, glass blood runs from the mouth to a pool of glass blood on the floor. The piece, in its evocation of a Dutch still life celebrating a hunt's bounty, reminds that in order for one life to continue a life has to end. This reflection of life's cyclical nature calls to mind the Eastern religions Oakes explored in her previous work.



Close Up of The Weeping Monkey

Similarly, *The Weeping Monkey*, a bronze and glass fountain sculpture, is a piece first composed for, "The Buddha Composed" series. The titular monkey sits weeping in a pool of his own tears and reminds us that suffering is as much a part of life as happiness, and indeed one cannot exist without the other.

The pieces that have more conceptually nuanced and complex visions of life really make this exhibit an exciting event. The pieces are all visually arresting, though, even if some are conceptually stronger than others.

Watch a video on the creation of the glass sparrows in the studio:

IF YOU GO:

“Swounds”

Julie Oakes

April 10th and runs through June 26th

(Opening reception: April 10th, 1 to 5 PM)

The Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery

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