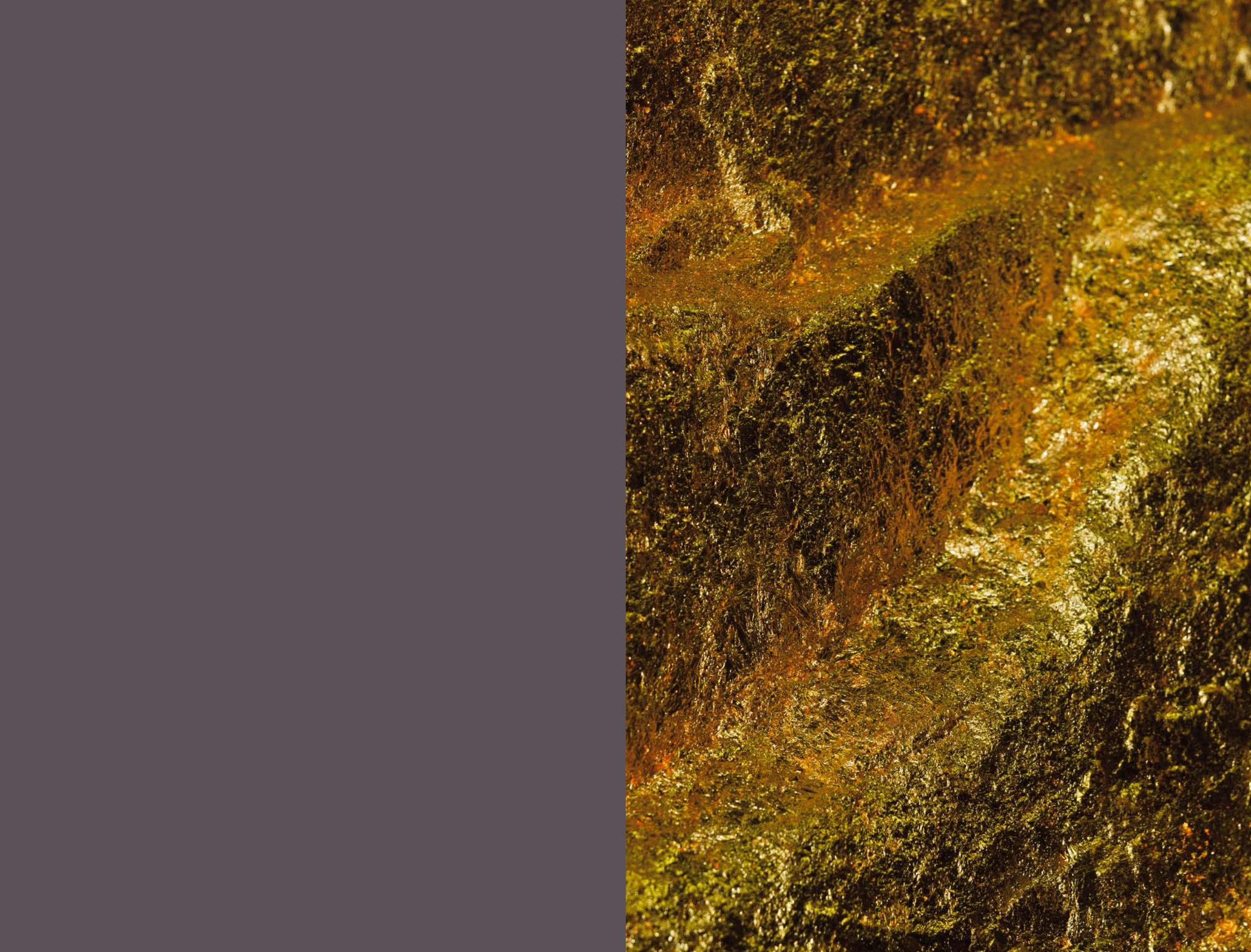


Lin Holland : Jane Poulton

site  
material  
object





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## introduction

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In November 2007 Lin Holland and Jane Poulton began a year-long residency in the two cathedrals of Liverpool. The project arose after Holland had completed an earlier work as part of Liverpool Cathedral's centenary celebrations in 2004, during which she observed that the audiences' response to the work was significantly different from that usually elicited within the context of an art gallery. This raised questions about the relationship, not only between artwork and site, but also between artwork, site and audience and, furthermore, the influence of venue upon audience.

With these questions in mind Holland and Poulton embarked upon the residency with a three-month period of research and development. Over the remainder of the year six temporary site-specific works were made and installed sequentially between the two cathedrals. A further work, *Earth and Æther*, was made in 2010 for Liverpool Cathedral as part of its programme for the Liverpool Biennial.

Audiences visit cathedrals for many reasons and are drawn from a broad spectrum of society. From the beginning the artists discussed the position they would take in relation to the roles Liverpool's cathedrals play in the lives of those who visit them, including regular visitors and the transient tourist population. They agreed they did not want to disrupt the contemplative spaces the cathedrals offered, nor to make work with religious intent; rather they wished to create work that enhanced the reflective spaces with possibilities of plural views and multiple readings, offering a diversity of levels through which the viewer might engage. Uppermost in their minds was the desire to make work that was relevant to the contexts in their broadest purpose and, whilst they recognised that meaning is not contained solely within any given form, but exists within a network of relationships, they also aimed to place the work firmly within the discourse of contemporary art practice.

# Art in Sacred Spaces

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Holland and Poulton's year-long residency in the two cathedrals of Liverpool culminated in a series of six works that had in common the exploration of themes and ideas including identity, the purpose of life, the role of ritual and the importance of community. As part of their residency the artists were given studio spaces within the cathedrals and this provided the circumstances for them to become familiar with the buildings' interiors and daily routines. Whilst each work was site specific, its content did not necessarily uphold or support religious doctrine but served to provoke searching questions.

Some works were personal, in the sense that they related to the artists' biographies. One such work, *Two Seas : High Water*, was a film of the seas on the east and west coasts of Britain: the North Sea and the Irish Sea. The work was filmed at Filey (east coast) and Hilbre Island (off the west coast), these locations evoking in Holland and Poulton ideas of origin and belonging. The cropped format of the film prevented identification of the locations, however, the elemental nature of the imagery enabled the work to resonate with the audience. The continuous loop action of the video, its relationship to the High Altar of the Metropolitan Cathedral and its screening throughout the cathedral's opening hours added to the suggestive power of the work. The metaphorical possibilities of water are immense: in literature and culture it is considered to be the female principle capable of engulfing and purifying<sup>1</sup>, it also marks the point of departure and homecoming, and is a liminal space where the finite becomes infinite. Water is deeply symbolic in many religious traditions, where it symbolises cleansing and signifies rebirth. The calming influence of *Two Seas : High Water* was noted by the Dean of the Metropolitan Cathedral who observed that, "The reflection of water on the High Altar... had a considerable affect on visitors – leading to a greater sense of stillness with more people sitting reflectively..."

This work communicated on a number of levels, ranging from the literal to the evocative. The fluctuations in environmental changes to the seas, for example, can be interpreted as alluding to the changing rhythms of human life. Another work, *Three Vessels : Love's Labours*, can be viewed on a figurative level as a reflection (or, more accurately, as a projection) of three important activities that occur in the daily life of a cathedral: the polishing of sacristy objects, the lighting of candles, and the conducting of sacred music. These everyday activities were filmed and projected into three large vessels. The three acts underpin liturgy and worship and are fundamental to the running of service, however, the routine and repetitive nature of such activities means that the ritualistic act is often overlooked. By drawing attention to the simple actions projected in the vessels, the artists are highlighting invisible, but very present, aspects of cathedral life. *Three Vessels : Love's Labours*, then, can be read as a meditation on the importance of ritual.

<sup>1</sup> See Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae*, Vintage: 2002, for an exploration of the metaphorical possibilities of water.

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'Ritual' is a key term in relation to Holland and Poulton's work. A ritual is a routinely performed practice with strong conventional (often socialised) elements. Religions use rituals within their frameworks to structure behaviour or to mediate between what is profane and everyday, and what is sacred and, therefore, 'set apart'. The actions in *Three Vessels : Love's Labours* are at once commonplace because of their regularity, and yet sacred because of what they represent. The accentuation of the activity and its dislocation from real time and space paradoxically draw the viewers' attention and we start to look at the ritual as if for the first time. Furthermore, by focusing on these actions the artists are articulating the interface between external manual acts and internal spiritual thoughts.

In the above analyses I have discussed some of the complex dimensions of the work, from literal readings, referring to its iconography, to the more metaphorical and spiritual interpretations, where 'spirituality' is meant as an inclusive term encompassing conventional religious beliefs and practices with non-religious perspectives. By stripping back the work further, other levels of interpretation, or non-interpretation, are revealed. As well as being able to read the works within a sociological or theological framework, it is possible to approach them not from the perspective of what readings they might generate but as merely opening up a space for reflection, or providing the opportunity for contemplation. For example, *Two Seas : High Water* serves to instil a sense of calm in its audience; the film does not have a message or narrative to impart but is an exposition of the hypnotic rhythm of the sea. Similarly *Journey* features a small-scale, white model of a church (Teampall Bheanain) situated on a black-tiled floor. The black tiles describe the actual footprint and orientation of the real church and anchor the placement of the model church, but they also serve another purpose; their high-gloss finish provides a reflective surface that metaphorically operates as a void (or non-space) for reflection in which to find oneself.

*Heartsounds* is a further work prompting reflection. The ten canticles of this sung piece are based on ten short audio recordings of a human heart – that of Elsie Price, Poulton's mother – approaching the end of life. The recordings were developed into a musical score for unaccompanied solo female voice by composer Robin Hartwell, while the lyrics are an arrangement of a prayer written by Elsie Price and a eulogy written by Holland. *Heartsounds* was sung from the Corona Gallery of Liverpool Cathedral as a live ritual every morning at 11 o'clock from 18th September to 18th October 2008. The work is a powerful embodiment of emotion, referencing the union of the material with the spiritual: the transformation of the breath of life into song.

It is possible to view these six works as independent pieces but also as part of a collective body of work; individually they do not reference one another but have overlapping themes such as identity, reflection, ritual and dialogue. A distinct feature common to all these works is their sensitivity to the specific locations for which they were made, paying heed to the surrounding architecture in its form and function. This was evident in the case of *Three Vessels : Love's Labours* one installation of which was sited in the quiet darkness of the South Choir Aisle of Liverpool Cathedral. If the work had been situated in a busier location then due attention might not have been given to the simple actions projected in the vessels. Similarly, *Untitled : Unknown*, an installation in Liverpool Cathedral's Chapter House, occupied a great amount of space without impeding the function of its site. The work demonstrated an 'absent presence', achieved by its use of transparent materials, creating a visual experience that was not imposing but which did open up questions to the viewer. This absent presence was also apparent in *Journey* where, once again, the work had been integrated into the extant space without imposing its difference upon the audience.

In order to assess the aesthetic and cultural impact of this body of work, I would like to focus on what I consider to be two of the most powerful and dynamic pieces in the series: *Ring of Roses : Paper Falls on Stone* and *Untitled : Unknown*.

Firstly, *Ring of Roses : Paper Falls On Stone*, which consisted of two halves, was pertinent in this pluralistic age of multi-faiths and mixed communities, in that it embodied a spirit of fellowship. The work was commissioned by Liverpool Hope University for the opening and closing ceremonies of The Big Hope, a week-long International Youth Congress, for which the artists devised community workshops, and processional and interventional events. These involved the making of ten thousand paper petals and three hundred paper flowers produced in collaboration with members of the Youth Congress, The League of Welldoers and The Rotunda Community College. This communal activity conveyed a high level of cultural and inter-generational action. At the opening ceremony of the Congress at the Metropolitan Cathedral the flowers and petals were used in a processional act and, at the end of the closing ceremony at Liverpool Cathedral, a spectacular event was staged whereby the ten thousand petals were dropped from the Corona Gallery to fall among the congregation one hundred and seventy four feet below. These symbolic acts of coming together, which occurred throughout the duration of the work, adhere to the meaning of 'church' in the original sense of the word, which refers to a *body of people* rather than to a physical building. This project involved the artistic endeavour and contribution of a number of people of different races, creeds and age, and these collective activities seem to me to be deeply religious in spirit. Furthermore, the flower (a motif chosen by the participants) is a symbol that transcends national and geographical boundaries.

Secondly, *Untitled : Unknown* consisted of a circular glass disc, some six feet in diameter, with seven large glass vessels strategically placed on its surface. The edge of the disc was inscribed with symbols from the Periodic Table, a list of chemical elements that form the building blocks of matter. Each of the vessels was engraved with an extract from the opening verses of the Book of Genesis. Six of the vessels contained water upon which floated a layer of carbon; the two principal chemical constituents of life. The seventh vessel signified God's day of rest, and was empty. The glass disc, which appeared to hover at table height, was suspended from the vaulted ceiling of the Chapter House by nine steel hawsers aligned with a nine-pointed star in the tiled floor. The Epistle to the Galatians (5:22, NIV) lists the nine characteristics of the Holy Spirit. The scripture reads as follows: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control; against such things there is no law." The work can be read as a debate on the theory of creation and its location is apt; a Chapter House is a space where meetings are held and in this particular meeting we have a discussion between three different realms: creation, science and morality. This is an open debate and although the work is located in a cathedral it does not prioritise the religious reading.

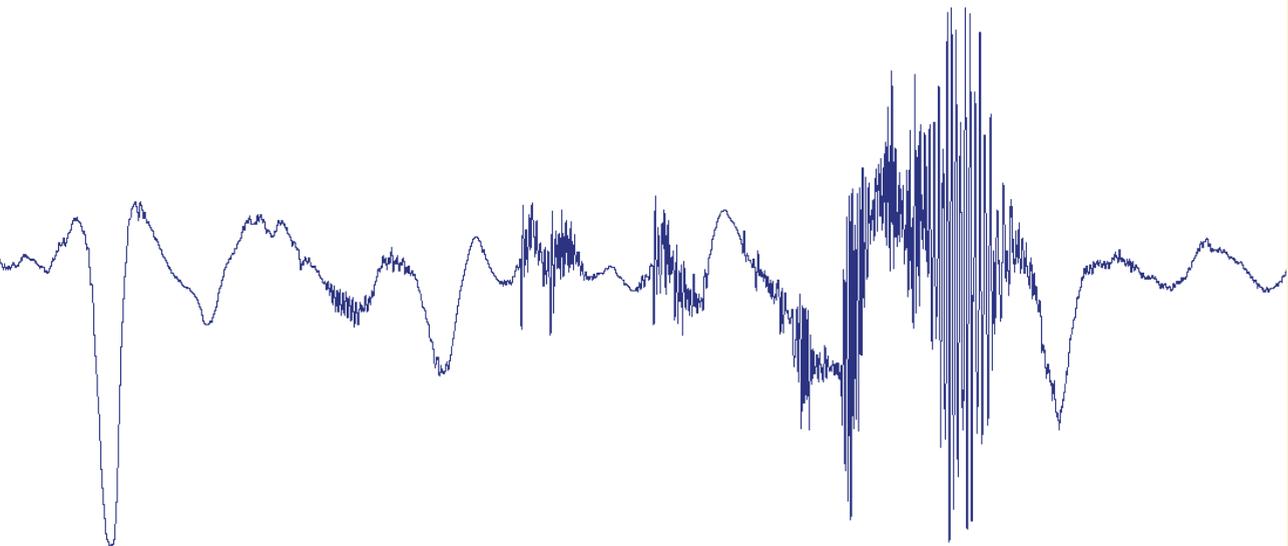
These six works represent Holland and Poulton's first collaboration, and the result is a synergy of ideas and practices. Interestingly, the works often have two titles, or are comprised of two halves. What is striking about the titles and the artworks themselves is their simplicity. Simplicity is meant in a two-fold way – as in *elemental*, and as in *the distinct lack of ornamentation*. Holland and Poulton do not distract with ornament but remain entirely focused on the simple formality of the work, which invites the contemplation of issues that are of incalculable importance to the human condition: the significance of rituals, ideas of belonging and the sociological ramifications of communal activities.

The use of installation, film and sound enables the viewer to immerse him/herself in the work instead of adopting a detached and dispassionate perspective. One of the artists' objectives during their residency was to respect the significance the cathedrals have to those who visit them. The sacrality of the space enables the visitor to experience feelings of a qualitatively different nature to the profaneness of everyday life, and this indisputably added to the challenges for the artists, whilst simultaneously adding to the distinctiveness of the venture. In their collected works they have not only protected the sanctity of the sacred space but have opened up unexplored areas of inquiry and generated a real dialogue between art and spirituality.

**Dr Rina Arya**  
Reader, University of Wolverhampton



**Two Seas : High Water**  
Moving image projection  
Continuous loop  
310 x 71 cm



air through all the changing scenes air  
 joyful singing of my life  
 changing scenes of my life changing scenes my life  
 joyful joyful singing air

prayer circle eternal and new experiences  
 prayer circle and new experiences  
 new eternal and new experiences  
 prayer circle

human to the surprises human of the Holy Spirit  
 youthful spirit human youthful spirit youthful spirit  
 to the surprises the Holy Spirit  
 human

home new thoughts home  
 new thoughts sense of humour  
 new new thoughts home humour  
 sense of humour

70 **E** ♩ = 66

S. Solo Air, though all the chan - ging scenes, air,

76 joy - ful\_ sing - ing\_ of my life, chang - ing scenes of my life, chang - ing scenes,

81 my life, joy - ful, joy - ful\_ sing ing, air.

86 **F** ♩ = 88

S. Solo Prayer cir - cle, e - ter - nal, and new ex - per - i - en - ces, prayer cir - cle,

95 and new ex pe - ri - en - ces, new, e - ter - nal, (L) and new,

104 **G** ex - pe - ri - en - ces, prayer cir - cle.

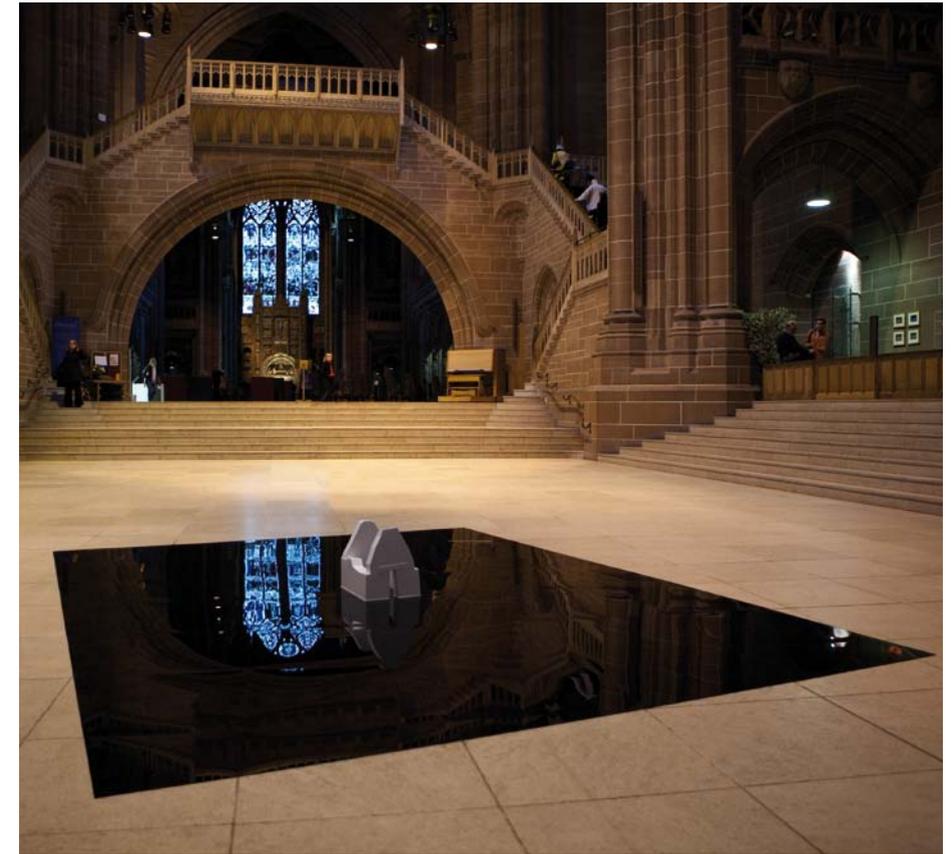
113 Hu - man, to the sur - pris - ses, hu - man, of the Hol -

121 - y Spi - rit, youth - ful spi rit, hu -

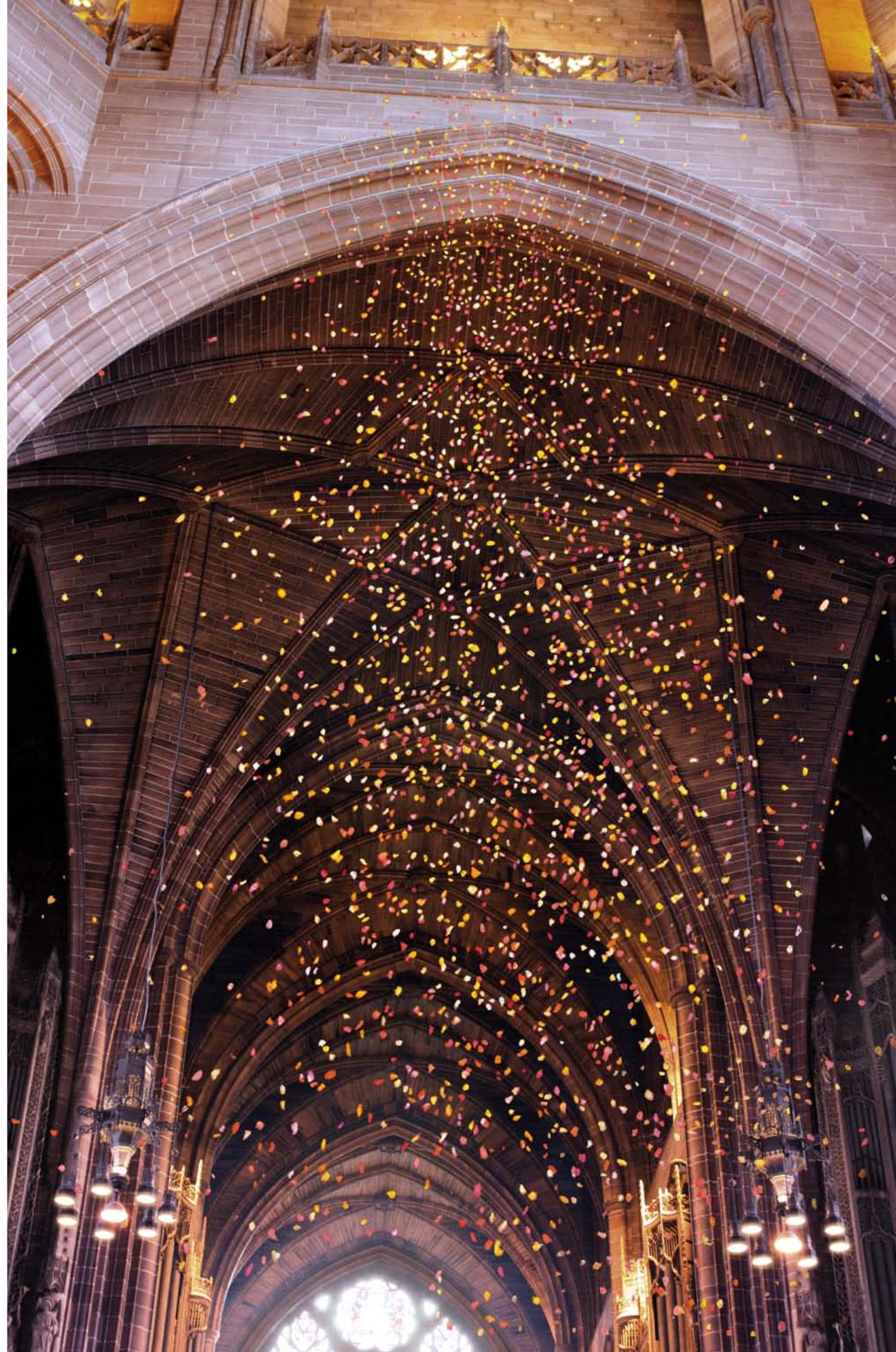
130 - man, youth - ful spi rit, youth - ful spi rit, to the sur - pris - ses, the Ho - ly **H** pi -

138 rit, hu - ma - (N). Home -

146 (M), (N) ew thoughts, home (M), (N) - ew thoughts, sense of hu - mour, (N) - ew



*Journey*  
Perspex, architectural model  
350 x 450 x 50 cm



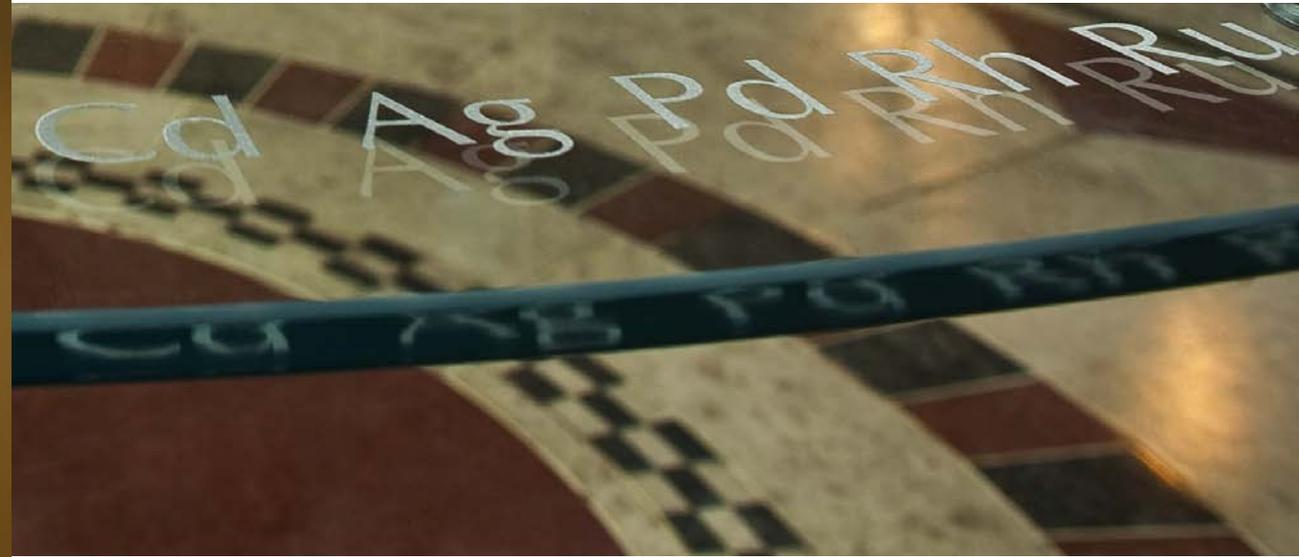
*Ring of Roses : Paper Falls on Stone*  
Paper, processional performance and intervention



**Three Vessels : Love's Labours**  
Moving image projection,  
mirror, acrylic, steel  
Height 240 cm, other dimensions variable



*Untitled : Unknown* (detail)  
Glass, water, carbon, steel, inscribed text  
183 dia x 5000 cm



*Untitled : Unknown* (detail)  
Glass, water, carbon, steel, inscribed text  
183 dia x 5000 cm

## Earth and Æther



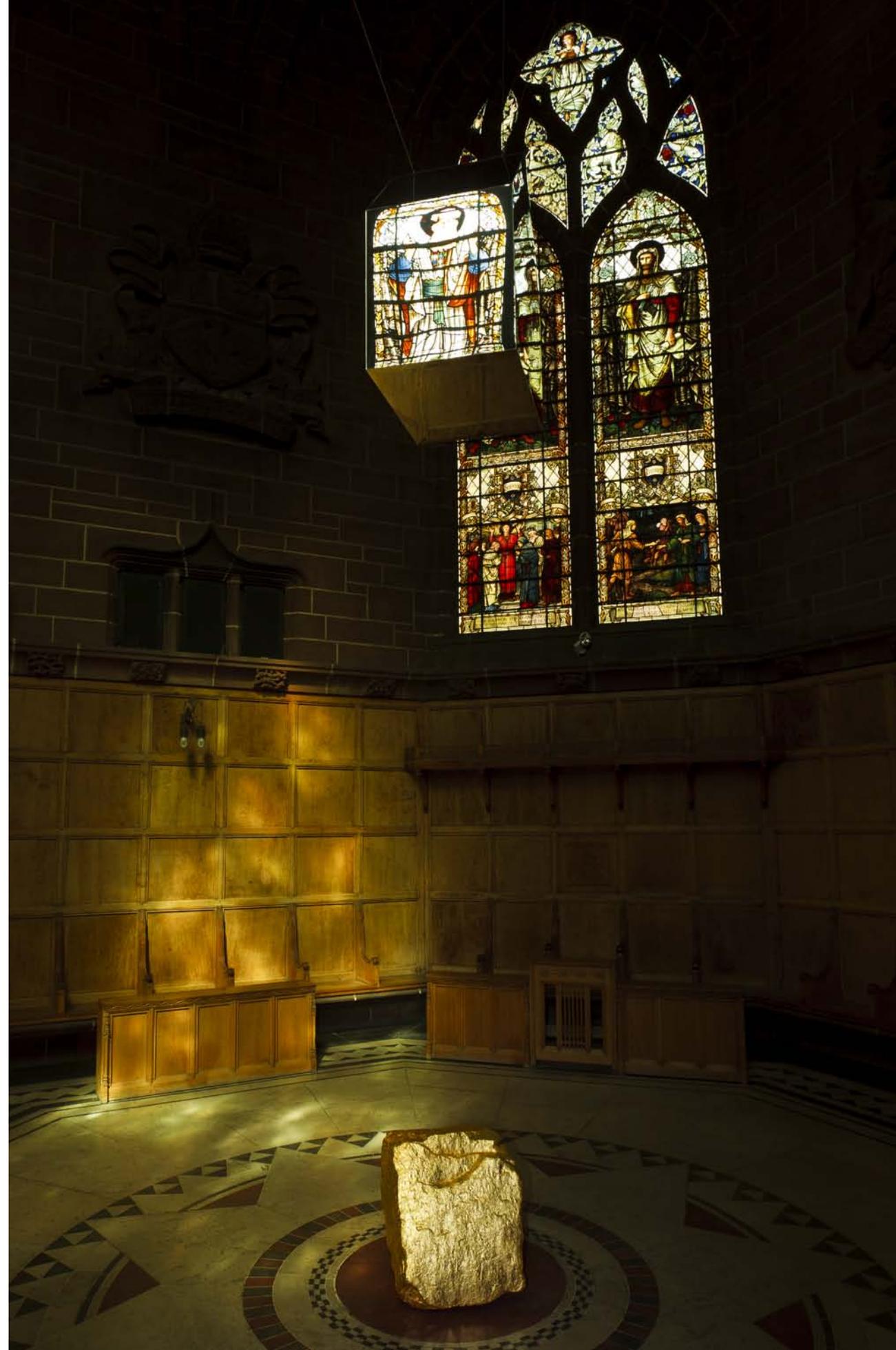
After completing their residency, Holland and Poulton were invited to continue as artists-in-residence at Liverpool Cathedral and to make a new work for exhibition during Liverpool Biennial 2010. They were asked to consider the Chapter House as the site for this new work, building upon the success of the previous installation, *Untitled : Unknown*.

The resulting work, *Earth and Æther*, explores mans' attempts, through the imbued sanctification of earthly objects, to approach a sense of the sublime.

As with the previous work, the installation responds to the fabric, decoration and spatial volumes of the Chapter House, utilising its height, floor space and shifting polychromatic light.

*Earth and Æther's* materials and forms – stone, gold, mirror, and 'house' – have aesthetic, symbolic and physical relevance within, and beyond, a religious setting. These elements, together with the contextual siting of the work, combine to explore variable contemplations on universal themes including substance and space, reality and faith, permanence and transformation.

***Earth and Æther***  
Red sandstone, gold, Perspex  
Dimensions variable



## Lin Holland biography

Lin Holland was born in Liverpool and now lives on the Wirral Peninsula, Merseyside. She is Head of Sculpture at Liverpool Hope University and Director of Coast International Artists Limited, part of a global network of artist-led events.

### Education

1982-85 Manchester Metropolitan University: BA (Hons) Fine Art Sculpture

### Selected Solo and Group Exhibitions

2010 *Global Studio* Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool  
 2009 *Tales From The New World* 10th Havana Biennale, Cuba  
 2008 *Next Up – Liverpool Art Now* Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool  
 2007 *Do As I Say Not As I Do* Cornerstone Gallery, Liverpool  
 2002 *Made in Liverpool Found in Cologne* City Hall, Cologne, Germany  
 2001 *The Hill* Site specific installation, Igniz Gallery, Cologne, Germany  
 2000 *Access/No Access* British Council Gallery, New Delhi, India  
 2000 *Brief Encounters* Melbourne Station, Australia  
 1999 *10th Open* Oriol Mostyn Gallery, Llandudno, Wales  
 1998 Castlefield Gallery, Manchester  
 1998 *White Form* Tumpike Gallery, Leigh, Lancashire  
 1998 *Hold Grimma* Cultural Centre, Dresden, Germany  
 1997 National Gallery of Nairobi, Kenya  
 1995 Touring exhibition of 11 Lancashire venues  
 1995 *Full The Door* Gallery, Perth, Australia  
 1994 Grand Central Gallery, Melbourne, Australia  
 1994 *Vessels and Planes* The Art Centre, Lancashire  
 1992 Bolton Municipal Art Gallery  
 1991 Comerhouse Gallery, Manchester  
 1990 *Home Base* Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool  
 1988 Oldham Art Gallery, Lancashire  
 1987 BBK Gallery, Cologne, Germany  
 1987 *Artists At Work* Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool  
 1986 *New Contemporaries* ICA, London and The Hatton Gallery, Newcastle  
 1985 *Young Contemporaries* Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, Prize Winner

### Residencies / Artists' Workshops

2010 Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, Pakistan  
 2007 Coast International Artists' Workshop, Liverpool  
 2001 *Cyfuniad* International Artists' Workshop, Wales  
 2000 *Khoj* Residency and Workshop, New Delhi, India  
 1999 *Cyfuniad* International Artists' Workshop, Wales  
 1997 *The Ruth Project* Kunstlergut Proszitz, Leipzig, Germany  
 1997 *Wassani* International Artists' Workshop, Kenya  
 1995 Western Australian School of Art & Design  
 1990 HM Prison Walton, Liverpool  
 1987 *Artists At Work* Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

### Collaborative Work

2004-2007 *Belonging And Beyond* Commissioned by Liverpool Cathedral – travelled to three venues in UK and Germany  
 2006 *L'enfant Et Les Sortileges* Production of set and costumes for the Ravel Opera – travelled to five countries in Europe  
 2001-2004 *Three Halves* First exhibited at Cornerstone Gallery Liverpool, then travelled and re-made using location specific materials for Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai, India, and Bolton Museum and Art Gallery, UK

### Recent Awards

2010 Bluecoat Gallery Research Award  
 2010 British Council  
 2010 Liverpool Hope University Research Grant

Work in private collections in Africa, Australia, Britain, Europe and India

## Jane Poulton biography

Jane Poulton was born in Manchester and now lives and works in Filey, North Yorkshire. In addition to her visual art practice she is a writer and is currently working on her second collection of poetry, *Breathing On The Mirror*.

### Education

1985–1986 Manchester Metropolitan University: MA Textiles  
 1982–1985 Manchester Metropolitan University: BA (Hons) Textiles

### Selected Solo and Group Exhibitions

2009 *Wetpaint* Gallery, Cirencester  
 2006 *An Unfamiliar Place* Scarborough Art Gallery  
 2005–2006 Godfrey & Watt, Harrogate  
 2002–2003 *Contact* Elm House/Folly Gallery, Lancaster  
 2001 *Distant Landscapes, Still Lives* Shire Hall Gallery, Stafford  
 2001 '6' Bergen, Norway  
 1995 ongoing CCA Galleries, London  
 1995 *Out Of This World* Crafts Council Gallery and national tour  
 1994 Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester  
 1993 & 1994 Bankfield Museum, Halifax  
 1993 Norwich Arts Centre  
 1993 Shipley Art Gallery, Gateshead  
 1992 *Out Of The Frame* Crafts Council Gallery and national tour  
 1992 The Commonwealth Institute, London  
 1990 & 1991 *Images* The Association of Illustrators, London and national tour  
 1990 The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh  
 1990 *British Design* The Design Council, Mitsukoshi Store, Tokyo  
 1990 *Collecting For The Future* Victoria & Albert Museum  
 1989 *Beasts Of The Field, Birds Of The Air* Stafford Art Gallery  
 1988 *New British Embroidery* national tour  
 1988 *The Heat Of The Moment* Anna Bornholt Gallery, London  
 1988 *Surface and Symbol* STOV Gallery, Amsterdam  
 1986 International Exhibition of Miniature Textiles, Savaria, Hungary  
 1983 International Exhibition of Miniature Textiles, Strasbourg and European tour

### Residencies / Artists' Workshops

1999 *Cyfuniad* International Artists' Workshop, Wales  
 1997 International Artists' Workshop, Montenegro

### Public Art / Commissions

2004–2008 Design and production of multi-format scheme of artwork for Malton Hospital commissioner: HAFNEY  
 1998–2002 Town Centre Artist, Stockport MBC  
 1993–2003 Book jacket designs commissioner: Macmillan Books  
 1996–1997 Bowlee Park commissioner: Rochdale MBC  
 1995–1996 *Centenary* commissioner: North British Housing Association  
 1995–1997 *Flame* commissioner: Bury MBC  
 1994–1995 *The Secret Garden* commissioner: Bury MBC  
 1994–1995 *Signs Of Life* commissioner: North British Housing Association

### Collections

Victoria and Albert Museum  
 Macmillan Books  
 Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester  
 Stafford Art Gallery & Museum  
 Embroiderers' Guild Collection  
 Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester  
 Sterling Hotel Group  
 Equitable Life Assurance Company  
 Rachael Kay-Shuttleworth Collection, Gawthorpe Hall

Work in private collections in Britain, Australia, Japan, Scandinavia and North America

# Acknowledgements

Lin Holland and Jane Poulton would like to thank:

David Lewis, Brendan McCormack, Elsie Price and Owen Weston

Funders:

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Arts Council England, Liverpool Cathedral, Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, Liverpool, Liverpool Hope University and The Foundation for Sport and the Arts



Sponsorship-in-kind was also received from the following:

Transpennine Express and Northern Rail



Lin Holland and Jane Poulton would also like to thank the following sources for their kind permission to reproduce the photographs in this book:

Bary Hale: *Earth and Æther* 1, 4, 24, 25. *Two Seas : High Water* 10, 11. *Untitled : Unknown* 22, 23  
David Lambert & Rod Tidnam: *Journey* 14. *Three Vessels : Love's Labours* 18, 19  
Brendan McCormack: *Ring of Roses : Paper Falls on Stone* 16  
Jane Poulton & Lin Holland: *Ring of Roses : Paper Falls on Stone* 2  
Graham Rodger: *Journey* 15  
Photographer unknown: *Ring of Roses : Paper Falls on Stone* 17

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ISBN 978-1-898749-08-0

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Lin Holland and Jane Poulton were nominated for the Northern Art Prize 2009 for their six residency works.