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Elliot Walker

Surf 'n' Turf

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Elliot Walker's new series of works, *Surf 'n' Turf*, radically revises the notion of the Still Life in art.

Walker elevates glass - often seen as utilitarian or merely decorative - to the realm of high art, using his unrivalled technical skills to transform classic domestic objects in still life

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paintings - goblet, bottle, apple, pear, fish, lobster - into ethereal, sculptural cameos that both echo the past and reflect on our own bounty.

'I want to elevate the mundanity of glass and the consumables of the still life to becoming everlasting, crystallised and vitrified,' he explains.

'I have been thinking about how idealised our idea of food has become and yet how sterilised and preserved it is.'

Dubbed 'the Bad Boy of Glass' for his irreverent and daring distortions of a medium regarded as fragile and pretty, Walker often touches on themes of mortality and the passing of time.

He uses almost every conceivable technique in making his glass sculptures; complex and subtle colouring along with cold processes like cutting and polishing, surface decoration and texturing, to add depth and dazzling intricacies to the forms.

After studying psychology at Bangor University, Walker completed an MA in Applied Arts at Wolverhampton University. He has exhibited widely throughout the UK and is a member of the glassblowing demonstration/performance team, *The Bandits of Glass*.

'The works in this show are an ironic take on Dutch 17th century still life paintings when glass objects like bottles and carafes were painted because they were so revered,' said Johnny Messum. 'In that respect these works are a double-negative in a contemporary idiom.'

He added; 'They also close the distinction between art and craft. In the 19th century there wasn't a gap and in these works we can see how craft is critical to good art.'

Walker draws on many painters from the past and says it was an exhibition of prints by the Dutch artist M C Escher with its exuberant use of optics, reflection and refraction that imprinted themselves on his memory before he started making the works in this show.

'As in Escher's work, glass is often a key element in still life painting and usually acts as a demonstration of luxury and, on a more practical level, a demonstration of the painters' skills' he says.

He also admires the still life paintings of Cezanne and Morandi as well the Dutch 17th century masters.

Two of the largest pieces Walker has ever made are in the exhibition, both of seafood.

Called *Surf and Turf* one features a lobster made of transparent, iridescent glass and a towering bowl of exotic fruits as well as a cornucopia of corncobs, meats and tableware; the other features three delicately wrought, transparent shrimps in a cocktail glass containing ice. The lobster, lying on a table measures more than one metre across and is the largest and most challenging work of art that Walker has attempted.

Like Dutch master, Jan Davidsz De Heem's *Still life with a Lobster*, it focuses on the importance of light in 'leading the eye,' as well as brilliantly exploiting the optical qualities of glass.

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Each component was first sculpted and then held in the furnace at 500 degrees centigrade until being welded on the body.

'It's a dance and at any point the entire piece can detach from the blowing iron to smash on the floor,' said Walker. 'Eight hours of heavy concentration and heat can seem like days.'

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