

Andrew James Ward

Night Walks

Night Walks, Part I, 1st – 19th June 2021
Night Walks, Part II, 2nd – 24th July 2021

Vases are more than just pretty vessels that you use to decorate the living room, whether brimming with flowers or not. Instead, vases are full of magic – something Andrew James Ward learned early on at the age of 6 to be exact. That year, his grandfather brought home a Chinese vase he had acquired on a business trip. What intrigued young Andrew was not so much the fine sheen of the vase's cool surface or the milky transparency of the porcelain, but its spirit. Inside the vase, his grandfather had told him, there lived a genie. The boy was hooked.

Four decades passed before Andrew James Ward succumbed once again to the seductive power of porcelain. This time it was he who was traveling in Asia. In a museum in Taiwan, he was instantly enchanted by an exhibition of Chinese vases from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Ward was powerfully moved by their beauty, symmetry and naturalness – or was it perhaps the genie that had once mystified him as a boy? Whatever the reason for his fascination, he has remained a fervent devotee for years.

Ward started painting vases himself – and still paints them to this day. Gigantic vases, on canvases over two meters high. He paints them using oils that he applies directly, with hands and fingers. To do this, he reaches deep into the paint and, like a potter, designs the vessels on the canvas, his entire body a quiver, as if the vases take shape from a dance. This technique creates structures that give the painted vessels an impressive plasticity and spatial presence. They are expansive in the truest sense of the word, and yet at the same time they create mysterious spaces, making you wonder: What could be inside them? You want to pull up a chair and take a look inside...

Andrew James Ward's vases are beguiling vessels that bring culture and nature together. When he adorns one of his vases with a dragon motif, it is not just a fang-gnashing monster that you see on the shapely vessel. The mythical creature seems to be composed entirely of gnarled branches and storm-driven waves. Through this painting style, Ward is in fact recalling his childhood in Scotland, where as a boy he spent many hours at the seashore, awestruck by the sea's mighty vastness and experiencing storms whose thundering power deeply shaped his psyche.

More peaceful in appearance is his series of seven vases highlighting a traditional chrysanthemum motif. Here, Ward has chosen this classic décor to pay homage to the beauty of Chinese porcelain, depicting thick, symmetrically arranged flower umbels and sinuous arabesques. At the same time as he follows this classical approach, Ward also fits into the long line of western artists who have elevated this motif to the level of a concept, from Claude Monet to Andy Warhol. Again and again, it's the same subject, but one that results in a completely different image each time, depending on the color, the light, the mood. And Ward varies the color combinations from vase to vase, from picture to picture. His chrysanthemum vases are a dialogue conducted in oil between the two worlds of Europe and Asia.

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Ward paints his chrysanthemum vases in festive red and gold. Against a bright blue background, he sets yellow-orange flowers that sparkle like the sun. In the image Merope, he combines a serious, autumnal violet with a fresh springtime green. In Taygeta, he paints turquoise blue flowers in a turbulent network of lines reminiscent of Keith Haring. When giving names to his images, Ward calls upon appellations from the starry sky and ancient mythology: Merope and Taygeta are two of the seven Pleiades, companions of Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt. In terms of color, Ward likes it intense, powerful, sometimes even wildly psychedelic. His images are created in a process of searching, layer by layer, until the final color combination is found. The arabesque structures between the thick flower umbels remind you of endlessly meandering paths that you would follow, filled with passion as you stroll onward, or – taking inspiration from the artist – dance through a labyrinth that is teeming with beauty and surprises.

The surface structures of Ward's images are inscribed with a vital rhythm that arises from dance and music. He paints to music and accompanies his second series, Night Walks II, with a sound collage composed from what seems to be sounds emanating out of the universe like female voices that speak of the fullness of life, voices that swirl around the vases, sliding over them and into them. But tell us, please: What is inside the vases? Andrew James Ward responds with a laugh. He can't say for sure himself; it's a great mystery, he says. But he can take a guess: "The fullness of emptiness."

Andrew James Ward was born in Cheadle Hume near Manchester in 1954 and grew up in Scotland. He has traveled extensively throughout Africa and Asia, and from 1982 to 2005 he lived in Switzerland. Today he is at home near Frankfurt. His works can be found in numerous international collections and have been shown at a number of exhibitions around the world, including at the Eden Court Arts Centre in Inverness, at Georgetown University in Washington, at the National Museum in Manila, and several times in the sculpture park of the Schönthal Monastery.

Alice Henkes