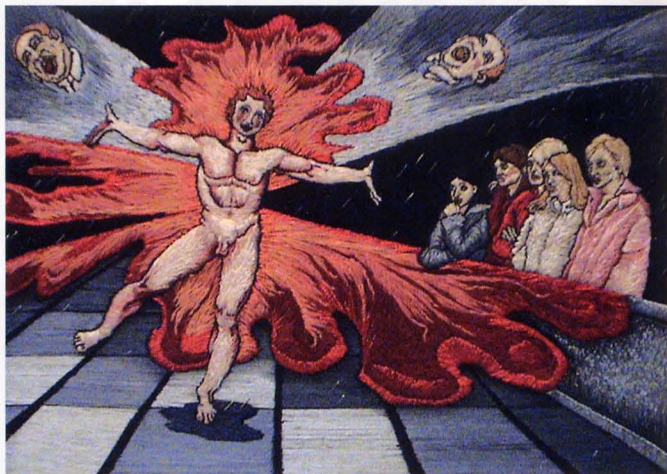


Cloud and Vision



ANNIE WHILES, *Rain on the Parade*, 2005. Embroidery on canvas, 30 x 40 cm. Courtesy of Danielle Arnaud Contemporary Art.

William Blake (1757–1827) believed in incongruities: “Without contraries,” he wrote, “there is no progression,” and there are plenty of contraries to be found in this small but ambitious exhibition. Not least in its location: the corner of a converted church in Lambeth, now the Museum of Garden History, is not an obviously enviable venue for a show. Ambience askew with ringing cash tills and chatter, it feels at odds with the building’s original vocation. Lambeth has changed since Blake lived there in the 1790s, and the 12 artists and writers brought together here are responding as much to this fact as to Blake’s artistic output.

Scholarly texts provided factual information about Blake’s life in Lambeth and its place in his works, while many of the best

works in the exhibition riff against their ecclesiastic environment. Andy Harper’s suspended *Orrery for Other Worlds* looks marmoreal, a dark, engraved orb like the memorial stones it neighbors. Closer inspection reveals a lighter touch: the marks on its surface resemble grass and it’s made out of polystyrene. Annie Whiles’ embroidered lectern relocates the naked man of Blake’s *Glad Day* (1794) as a contemporary scene watched by cynical on-lookers. Out in the churchyard, Ecuadorian artist Manuela Ribadeneira grew grass into lush ampersands — the ‘&’ form that litters Blake’s poetry, linking his contraries. Formed out of England’s green and pleasant land, the sculptures droop more than she’d anticipated, pliable and subtle rather than spectacular.

—Gair Boase