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Michael Rogers and Richard Hirsch summon a haunting Recollection at the Pittsburgh Glass Center.

BY SAVANNAH GUZ

There is something both darkly haunting and obscurely sacred about the collaboration between glass artist Michael Rogers and ceramicist Richard Hirsch, both professors at the Rochester Institute of Technology's School for American Crafts. Twenty-five works, created during their simultaneous residency last year at the Pittsburgh Glass Center, appear at the Center's Hodge Gallery, under the title Recollection. The work gives the space an almost palpable sublimity that is occasionally disrupted by mesmerizing, if baleful, aesthetic undercurrents.

Rogers' arresting glass installation "Five Crows" is one example of Recollection's more disquieting forces. Its character and placement, as one of the first works to greet visitors, artfully unsettles the gallery's transcendent stillness. Suspended from nails hung at varying heights, five large birds, whose bodies have a leaden luster, hang nose-down against the white gallery wall. Their wings are bound by what looks to be honeycomb-patterned packing tape, but is actually a seamless part of each casting. Tiny, highly detailed flies sit on the birds with a disturbingly authentic pearlescence. On closer inspection, the birds' partial translucence becomes obvious: glimpses of grayish, almost glacial light pass through their bodies, making them glow from within. Both beautiful and eerie, the work makes an almost inauspicious symbolic statement.

Directly in front of the crows -- and lending an additional sense of unnerving hoodoo through its ritual associations -- is "Ceremonial Vessel #1," one of Richard Hirsch's many larger-than-life-sized ceramic works. An avid collector of Asian artifacts, ritual containers and stone tools, Hirsch has created ceramic sculptures that set the gallery's overall spiritual tenor. By increasing the size of his various subjects, he imbues them with a quasi-totemic significance. Hirsch's "Ceremonial Mortar and Pestle" series, which plays on a utilitarian object often associated with pharmacology (and sometimes culinary arts), suggests a cycle of pagan icons -- or perhaps Hinduism's linga and yoni, which signify a symbolic coitus that both gives and sustains life.

A gorgeous collaboration is "Locked In," located at the very center of the exhibition, along the axis created by two of Hirsch's ceremonial vessels. Like many of the collaborative pieces, it's confined to a bell jar that complements the elements inside. Here, a handle-shaped ceramic wand, recalling the pestles in so many of Hirsch's works, serves as the pedestal for a combination lock. From the gallery's entry point, the lock looks deceptively metallic. When it's viewed from the opposite side, the light passing through it reveals a series of bubbles suspended in the glass.

Rogers' use of found objects and glass castings of pieces from his own toy collection imparts a fascinating, if slightly sinister, Victorian flavor -- with results reminiscent of the stop-action-animated films of The Brothers Quay. His fascination with reproducing text is evident in works like "Portrait of Meitner," in which a tall, lidded glass cylinder is etched so that its contents -- a smoky glass...
bust of Austrian physicist Lise Meitner, her head topped with a pin cushion from which a profusion of hat pins radiate -- can be viewed only through the tight, poetic lace of repeated phrases. For the woman who discovered that atoms could be split -- ultimately leading to the development of nuclear weapons -- Rogers has created a beautifully disturbing, voodoo-worthy depiction.

In these collaborations and juxtapositions, the artists achieve an unparalleled sublimity with two sides: a disquieting Victorian-style Gothicism and a primordial spirituality that appeals to something deeply seated in the human consciousness. It is an impression that lingers long after the visitor has left the gallery.

*Recollection* continues through March 30. Pittsburgh Glass Center, 5472 Penn Ave., Friendship. 412-365-2145 or [www.pittsburghglasscenter.org](http://www.pittsburghglasscenter.org)

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