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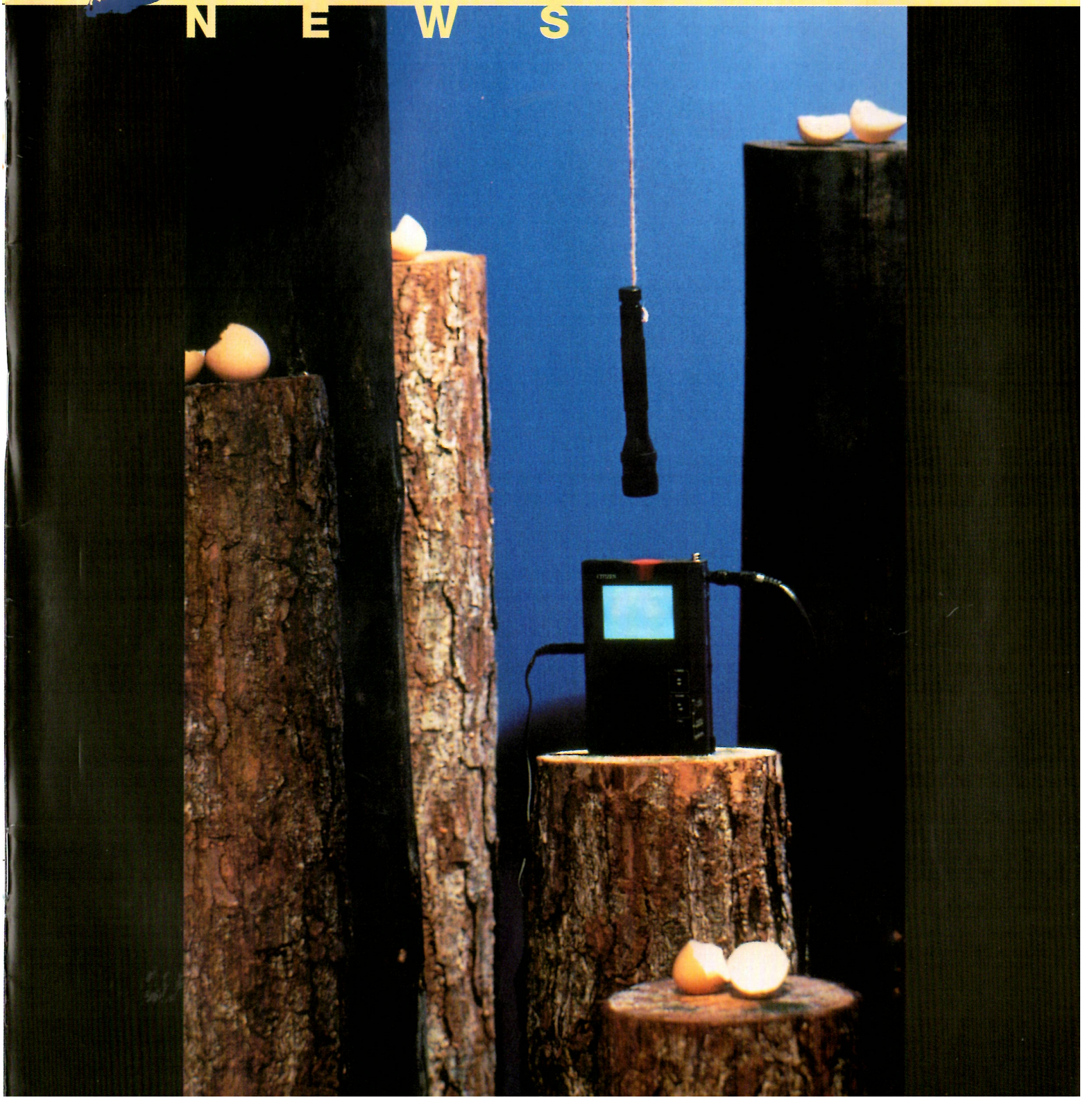
Liturgy

NEWS



SEBASTIAN DI MAURO

IMbalance

(Harvested logs, video, torch, batteries, egg shells
Ipswich Regional Art Gallery, 1992)

OUR COVER

In the great mystery of Jesus' birth,
the God we cannot see
has now appeared in human form.
The one begotten before all ages
begins to live in time.
He has come to raise a fallen world,
to make creation whole again,
and to lead humanity from exile
back to your heavenly kingdom.

(from Preface for Christmas, revised Sacramentary)

IMbalance, one of Sebastian Di Mauro's early installation art works, addresses some of the same themes which confront Christian people as they celebrate the Great Jubilee of the birth of Christ: birth and death, time and eternity, the brokenness and restoration of creation, humanity's path into the future.

The work is constructed of twenty-one logs, representing twenty-one centuries. Some are charred, signifying (in Sebastian's work of the period) destruction, transformation, purification and regeneration. The cross cuts through the logs expose the rings which show the trees' life and growth, but ultimately speak of its destruction. The rings reveal not simply the passage of time, but also the succession of good seasons and tough, the cycles and balances of nature.

On each log is a broken egg shell. The symbol of the egg evokes new life, the cycle of life, the creation and transmission of life; the broken egg shell presumes that the birth has taken place. The embryo has become a living creature.

On the log for the twenty-first century is a 'virtual egg', a whole unbroken egg shown on a TV monitor, illuminated by a suspended, battery-powered torch. The role of technology in the twenty-first century is at once brought into play and poses questions about our future. The spotlight is turned onto the egg of the next hundred years. To what or whom are we giving birth? As the batteries run down and the light becomes dim, we ask ourselves about the renewal of life, energy and natural resources. Who will save the world and how?

The installation is placed against a deep blue background. For Di Mauro as for Yves Klein (an important French conceptual and minimalist artist, 1928-1962), blue denotes calmness, infinity, eternity and the absolute. It is the colour of space or pure spirit. It provides the context in which we are called to meditate upon birth and death, life and time.

At one level *IMbalance* is a work about ecology, deforestation and care for the environment. But the political and didactic are inextricably linked to the metaphysical. The work does not only deal with the imbalance between conservation and consumption, nature and technology, and the alienation of human beings from the world in which they live. At the threshold of a new millennium, it also provokes a profound meditation on the cycle of human history as it turns into our future.

For the Christian, the meditation will inevitably centre on the place of Jesus Christ whose birth we celebrate in the Great Jubilee 2000. He is called the 'first-born of all creation' (Col 1:15) and the 'saviour of the world' (1 Jn 4:14). The logs remind us of the tree of the cross, the egg shells of the tomb split open on Easter morning. We recall with joy the life and growth given in the name of Christ through 2000 years, and remember with shame the death and destruction dealt out in the name of Christian civilisation.

IMbalance is an unsettling and challenging work but finally optimistic. The very multiplicity of egg shells documents the enduring process of rebirth in the face of adversity and destruction. The next century is open with hope and possibility. For people of faith, the birth of the Saviour is an eternal present: *the God we cannot see has now appeared in human form; the one begotten before all ages begins to live in time.*

Tom Elich

The Liturgical Commission $6

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