

'Bringing a Painting into the world'

A Christian perspective on the process of painting

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Abstract

The following is an exploration of the process of painting within the context of Christian community. As a Christian artist, I will consider how the three stages of bringing a painting to life - its conception, creation and reception – represent a collaboration with God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and with the created world and its people.

In contrast to the common perception of art as a solitary pursuit, I assert that the process of painting is entirely relational, and hence in line with the community emphasis of the Christian gospel. The Christian artist paints from the intersection of dynamic relationships between artist, social context, God as trinity, and subsequent 'viewers' of the painting

I will also suggest that the theological significance of the act of painting reaches beyond its illustrative role as a reflection of God's creative process to a performative one. Painting does not only enhance understanding of the faith journey, but can be the journey itself – a journey which is shared with all humanity. As such it can be considered a form of prayer and worship in its own right - a sacramental activity, for the believing artist.

At each stage I will consider some ways in which the process of painting reflects the unfolding story of the Christian community: drawing parallels with creation, incarnation; revelation; grace; worship; sacrament; healing; redemption and transformation.

In exploring this theme I will refer to my own experience as a Christian artist, and also the experiences of eight contemporary Christians who paint.

In my conclusion I will reiterate how both divine and earthly influences contribute to the conception, creation and reception of a 'godly' painting. In the stroke of a brush, I believe, the immanent and the transcendent can meet, uniting artist, public and divine trinity in an encounter beyond the two dimensional image.

The Nativity

*No man reaches where the moon touches a woman.
Even the moon leaves her when she opens
Deeper into the ripple in her womb
That encircles dark, to become flesh and bone.*

*Someone is coming ashore inside her,
A face deciphers itself from water,
And she curves around the gathering wave,
Opening to offer the life it craves.*

*In a corner stall of pilgrim strangers,
She falls and heaves, holding a tide of tears.
A red wire of pain feeds through every vein,
Until night unweaves and the child reaches dawn.*

*Outside each other now, she sees him first,
Flesh of her flesh, her dreamt son safe on earth.*

John O'Donohue, from Conamara Blues

Introduction

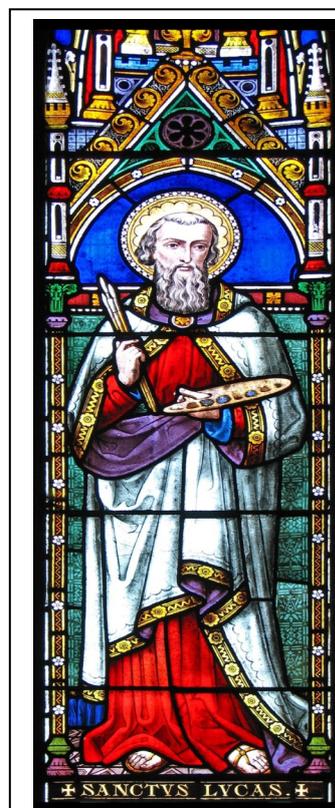
Before considering which are the key relationships affecting the journey of the Christian painter through the creative process, it is useful to clarify what is meant by 'Christian' Art.

In its narrowest sense, I take Christian art to be that which comes from the hand, mind and soul of someone who consciously recognises her relationship with God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) as the source and the life blood of all she does, especially her creative activity. Having said that, I believe that God can use the artistic skills of any of his created people, his earthly children, to connect them with himself and with each other – whether His presence is recognised or not.

In the words of Calvin Seerveld: *'Art that fashions materials to present imaginative, nuanced meaning, opening us up to the providing, redeeming Lord of the Universe, is art the way art was created to be by God and was given for human hands to work with'*. Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves, 2000, p.27

This does not mean that all creative activity is 'Christ-like' and pleasing to God. From Seerveld again: *'There is art that straightforwardly praises God and cheers one's neighbour, and there is also art adulterated by deeply held vanities, by highly sophisticated idolatries, so hard-bitten by pride, that it affronts and demeans your neighbour, frequently wrapped up in a high-gloss sheen that dazzles you out of your wits'*. P. 28. (ibid)

Artists are humans who get things wrong, whether they hold to the Christian faith or not. Later I will explore some of the background 'values', from which an effective artist will paint – values such as authenticity, integrity and grace.



Paintings as windows..

Luke the Painter:
St Mary's Church,
Melton Mowbray

Appendix 1

For me, painting is not two dimensional, but three dimensional, containing aspects of height (it **directs towards God**); width (it **includes all humanity**) and depth (it **stirs the soul**). I am reminded of the apostle Paul's description of God's love in his letter to the Ephesians (3:18): *'how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ...'*

Of course some might refer to earlier Bible passages, to question whether 'Christian art' does, or should, exist at all. God's second commandment to Moses forbade making an *'idol in the form of anything in Heaven above or on the earth beneath..'* (Ex 20:4). Certainly the veneration of 'holy images' was strictly forbidden in the iconoclasm of the eighth century. But the Eastern Church argued then, as now, for the place of images, or 'icons' in Christian worship, on the grounds that the images are tools to worship, not the subjects of worship themselves. It is a stance which I believe can also apply both to the act of painting and to its result today. Painting can take us beyond the here and now: offering a window of opportunity 'the heavens' to 'espy' (George Herbert: The Elixir).

It is, furthermore, my belief, that, whether consciously or unconsciously, such painting involves human and divine collaboration at every stage.

What are the 'parents' like?

In bringing a painting to life, I believe that artists, like everyone else, bring certain inherited characteristics from God the Father to the act of painting. It is a collaboration to which we can also hope to bring some of the qualities of God the Son – perhaps a small reflection of his grace, compassion, truth and humility. Finally, I believe, we carry the living Spirit of God in our every breath, and this, too, will shape our work.

Below, I will suggest six ways in which artists, in common with all humanity, reflect aspects of our divine maker - aspects which can shine through in the 'DNA' of 'godly' paintings.

Firstly, I believe that artists, as all people, are the creative offspring of a Creator God. God is the ultimate creator, creating the world from nothing. The metaphor of God as artist is an ancient one. St Augustine is credited with describing Jesus, God's 'Word', as 'in a way the art of the almighty and wise God'. *The Word – Jesus Christ – is God's supreme work of art: if you like, his self portrait* (Mayne, Sunrise of Wonder 1995, p.253). Mayne goes on to point out that, 'Every work of art is a form of incarnation: the spirit of the artist uniting with matter' (*ibid*).

Secondly, a glance around the wonder and variety of nature, the science of the universal and of the microscopic, reveals the imagination of its creator, to my mind. We are the imaginative offspring of an imaginative God, whose Spirit brings us new life every day. Thirdly, I suggest we are the relational offspring of a relational God. It was Thomas Merton in the last century who wrote of the 'mysterious cosmic dance' of God. My Christian understanding is of God, in three persons – a God of loving interrelationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Made in His image, I believe we carry this inclination to community.

Fourthly, I see human beings as the 'discovering' offspring of a revealing God. We share a human delight in searching and responding to God's ongoing call and revelation. Our painting is one way of indulging our God-given curiosity and increasing our awareness of God. Fifthly, we are the responsive offspring of a responsive God. I believe painting is a particular means whereby we seek God, and through which God seeks us. The act of painting, or looking at a painting, can be, in

itself, a response of worship to God. Finally, I would contend that artists, in common with all humanity, are the gifted offspring of a gracious God. As a Christian artist, I hope that aspects of grace may be reproduced in my work.

2. Conception: Family Planning

No man reaches where the moon touches a woman.

Even the moon leaves her when she opens

Deeper into the ripple in her womb

That encircles dark, to become flesh and bone.

John O'Donohue, The Nativity

You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together

in the dark of the womb

Psalm 139 v 15, NLT

Where do Paintings come from?

'Imagination: the no man's land between art and theology'

(Austin: Explorations in Art, Theology and Imagination, 2005, p. 3)

As a Christian artist, I see the conception of a painting as a combination of human imagination, divine inspiration, and God-given revelation. For me, the question of where and how a painting starts, reflects the great metaphysical question of where a life can be said to begin. Is there a divine spark, a moment when a painting starts, or is it a more 'human' process of sifting through thoughts and experiences, making space to allow one to grow above the others.

The Biblical description of the incarnation of Christ in John's gospel talks of the Word becoming flesh. In a similar way, I believe a painting can translate something of God's nature into a tangible form, through a period of 'gestation', and often human struggle.

From my qualitative survey of eight fellow Christians who paint today, none has a problem in locating the source of their ideas squarely in the spiritual realm – God the Holy Spirit inspires, and the artist is a channel for God. Indeed, many artists over the years have written of the spiritual nature of their work, whilst not claiming any particular religious affiliation: *‘Art is a collaboration between God and the artist, and the less the artist does the better?’* (Andre Gide). The term ‘collaboration’ is a good starting point, implying that there is human work to be done, in cultivating any God-inspired seed. My painting

‘Heliotrope’, appendix 2, is a good example of a work which grew gradually, without a conscious plan.

Sometimes paintings can result from subconscious promptings of dreams or feelings which are not explicit. As fragile humans, our imagination can sometimes take us to places we would rather not go. As a Christian painter, I would offer my painting, even from the point of inception, back to God as worship, and strive to keep my imagination subject to His grace. The writer of Psalm 7 says of the ‘wicked’ that they *‘conceive evil; they are pregnant with trouble, and give birth to lies’* (v. 14, NLT). I would strive to achieve the converse of this in my painting – a painting conceived from the Source of goodness giving birth to something containing God’s truth.



Heliotrope

“The Light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it” John1:5

“I began this painting with no real idea what it was going to look like. It began with a desire to paint expressively with colour, and went through many metamorphoses over a long period of time, before coming together in its final form. The resultant layers of colour give it depth. Now I see it as the journey of a seed to become a plant coming up through the soil. It speaks to people of moving towards the light of God’s love.

Ironically this painting did not begin with the ‘seed of an idea’, more an intention and a mess of feelings. My inspiration arrives in different ways.”

Shuna George

Appendix 2

Our imaginative capacities carry a responsibility to heal, every bit as much as they carry a responsibility to depict angst’, thus writes Makoto Fujimura, a post 9/11 painter in New York in Refractions: a journey of faith, art, and culture, 2009, p.125.

In Matthew's gospel we find the imagery of illuminated vision as follows: *'The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.'* (Matt 6:22, NIV)

I believe that having such a 'sound eye' is important for the artist – as poet John O'Donohue writes: *'The imagination has retained the grace of innocence. This is no naive untested innocence. It knows well the shadows and troughs of the world but it believes there is more...The innocence of the imagination is willing to see new possibilities in what appears to be fixed and frame. There is a **moreness** to everything that can never be exhausted'* (*Divine Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*, 2003, p. 155). For me, as a Christian, this describes well, the unending, undeserved, redemptive grace available through God's self portrait, Jesus.

Exactly how the idea is imparted is often unclear to the artist, but at some stage it enters their imagination. What is certain, however, is that any 'new' ideas, will be the result of an individual's exposure to innumerable influences which have gone before, both conscious and unconscious, so that we might be tempted to conclude that there is in fact *'nothing new under the sun'* (see *Eccl 1:9-10, NIV*), when it comes to creative concepts . As Donald Winnicott, psychologist, wrote *'we are creative on the basis of tradition'* (1967: *The Location of Cultural Experience*),and as such we can see that even at the point of its inception, a painting is more than a solitary



In the Presence of the Light

An example of inspiration through prayer and revelation.

"During my daily time of quiet prayer, my spirit was filled with the image. The desire to paint it was utterly consuming and did not abate until the piece was finished". **Kate Austin**

Appendix 3

endeavour. The process of making time and space to consider what, whether and how to paint, usually demands, in my experience, an effort of quieting the soul, of setting myself apart. It is a time of receiving and contemplation - as a Christian I would equate this with prayer, though others may not give it that name. The painting '**In the Presence of the Light**' by Kate Austin was directly inspired through prayer – a process which she describes further at appendix 3.

Of course creative ideas do not always arrive on time. An idea for a painting may just as likely come directly from my experience (both good

and bad) of interacting with the world around me, from my conscious thoughts, than 'unbidden' from the blue. Graham Kendrick, the contemporary Christian hymn writer expresses a similar sentiment in his book 'Worship' "*Inspiration in my experience does not so much float out of a clear blue sky as get washed up on the beach in a storm*' (p.125, Worship)

Often I will have a good idea of what I intend to paint – 'seeing' what I want to portray 'in my mind's eye'. Planning my work is literally the process of 'making the invisible visible'. Within Christian theology, the understanding of God the Son as the visible form of the invisible Father (and Spirit), provides a cosmic precedent for this human activity, as does the understanding of the world around us as a tangible witness to the unseen Creator. The apostle Paul writes: '*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made,*' (Romans 1:20, NIV). Of course it is important not to over-emphasise the importance of sight - in both physical and spiritual senses. The work of blind theologian John Hull explores in depth the Biblical motif of spiritual and physical blindness in coming to a theological understanding of his own disability. He points out that seeing as God wants us to see is not a matter of good eyesight, but rather a matter of the soul. '*When it comes to loving God, we must remember that in God's presence everyone is blind. ...God, we are told, 'dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see' (1 Tim 6:16 NIV)... There is darkness visible and there is brightness invisible'* In the Beginning There was Darkness, Hull, 2001, p.147. The words of the apostle Paul as he prays for the Ephesian Christians describe well, even today, the relationship between sight, imagination, and faith. '*May the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which (the Father) has called you'* Eph 1:17-19 NIV). The painting The Face by Robyn Robertson at Appendix 4 is a good example of an unplanned, god-inspired, creative moment.

To summarise my understanding of how a Christian artist might 'conceive' of a painting, I believe, she must seek to open her imagination, under the transforming grace of God, to divine inspiration. If God chooses to reveal Godself, this most often happens, in my experience, gradually - perhaps almost imperceptibly throughout the whole creative process. The 'birthing' of a painting starts with a divine spark, which needs to be noticed and carefully fanned into life (2 Tim 1:6). Its gestation and

nurture continues as a mindful struggle of faith over uncertainty, a collaboration with the Spirit of God.



The Face

God's surprising revelation.

"I got my canvas and ruled it in half and started to paint the top half black and was going up and down on the left hand side and then got bored as I only had a relatively small brush so just started to randomly paint the black paint from the right hand corner....then this face appeared!!!" This changed the way I thought about painting from this point on because I realised that God can paint through you if you let Him. I don't paint all the time anymore, I just paint when I am inspired to do so. It is not about painting for painting's sake, it is about being obedient to God. The Face is my most favourite painting because it makes me know God lives inside me. " **Robyn Robertson**

Appendix 4

Who/What will the painting look like?

Content

The choice of content, or '**subject**' of a 'Christian' painting is an interesting question. Are certain subjects more 'spiritual' or even more 'Christian'? For many people the first thought invoked by the phrase 'Christian Art' would be of epic biblical scenes, painted by 'Old Masters' over the centuries, and hung in prestigious galleries around the world. Logically, and indeed intuitively, it seems to me that the scope of subject matter for a Christian painter is actually as unlimited as is God's creation, though how we interpret a subject will be shaped by the context of our faith and life experience.

An important consideration for me, is that our art should reflect something of the mystery of God. In my own painting, even if my starting point is a traditional Bible story, or an experience related to my own faith, I enjoy interpreting and developing ideas and themes beyond 'obvious', culturally conditioned depictions. This feature is part of the very definition of art offered by reformed theologian and teacher of aesthetics Calvin Seerveld. *'Art is an object or event conceived and structured by human design to be perceived by our senses, and characterised by an imaginative and allusive finish that affords the piece its own independent identity'* Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves, 2000, p.8).

Richard Harries, retired Bishop of Oxford warns, in Art and the Beauty of God (2005) that *'religious propagandists must always beware of using the spirituality inherent in art for their own purpose.'* (p113). He goes on *'True art always has a spiritual dimension. Yet if religion tries to turn it into propaganda the spiritual could slip away. Works of art inescapably witness by their truth and beauty, to their fount and origin in God himself'*. (p. 113, *ibid*). It is a view with which I agree. The purpose of a successful painting, for me, is to bring something new into the world by which relationships are changed for the better – things are seen and understood in a new way. The emphasis is not so much on novelty as on transformation: *'Behold I make all things new'* (Rev 21:5). Such a relationship cannot be simply replicated or forced. This is one difference between authentic art and commercial marketing. I am

reminded of Isaiah's prophetic voice of hope in God in the Hebrew scriptures: *'See, I am doing a **new thing!** Now it springs up; do you not perceive it'* Isaiah 43:19, NIV.

In exploring this theme, Gail Ricciuti draws the parallel between allusivity in art, the Bible and pastoral practice. None of these does *'ALL the cognitive work for the one who beholds (or hears) it. 'Good' art also destabilises us in the same way that powerful liturgy or the authentic hearing of the word (or skilful therapy or pastoral counsel) does.'* The Bible and the Arts, in Ballard & Holmes; The Bible in Pastoral Practice, 2006, p.297.

In some ways this 'allusivity' mirrors Jesus' use of parables to teach. Each listener needs to make the connection between the story and the implicit personal application. *'This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand'.* (Matthew 13:12, NIV).

Certainly, I have often been asked about the 'meaning' of my paintings – for example the pieces 'Hide' and 'Seek' (see appendix 5). The starting point of these paintings was the

retelling of Jesus parable of the 'Prodigal Son', as it related to my experience. The

Allusivity? An interpretation of Luke's parable of the 'Lost Son', which has prompted many 'theological' conversations!



Hide

"If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast." **Psalm 139: 9-10**



Seek

"But while she was still a long way off, his father saw her and was filled with compassion for her; she ran to his son, Threw his arms around her and kissed her." **Luke 15:20**

Shuna George

Appendix 5

paintings allude to this interpretation, but it is not immediately obvious. I have often been asked about them and on one memorable occasion I had a long ‘theological’ conversation about the paintings with a mechanic in car park! He was struck by the images and drawn to them. When I explained their background for me, he exclaimed that this was his favourite story in the Bible, and his delight was evident and infectious. Such exchanges have always been fascinating, personal, and, I believe, God – inspired.

In making space for imagination and intuition, the subject or content of a painting can help us to look at the familiar in a new way – just as Jesus used parables to ‘open the eyes’ of his followers. Ricciuti writes of the Christian artist’s vocation *‘to intrigue (people) into the realm of God, feeding the hunger God has planted in all our hearts for beauty, fascination, liveliness, colour, mystery, adventure, risk, and surprise’*, (2006, p.303). In my experience, the choice of subject matter – or content – does undoubtedly arouse questions – for both painter and viewer, the simplest and most complicated of which is ‘Why paint that?’. In attempting an answer, as an artist, I agree with Ricciuti that we are often taking steps in the direction of God.

Returning to the question of which subjects are most ‘suitable’ for a Christian to paint, I would suggest it is those which have a universality about them: big questions of life, death and suffering; matters of truth, love and beauty; but sometimes also the smallest details of our humanity. If theology is ‘talk about God’ then painting for me is an equivalent activity – painting about God, of which the best results contain hints of their divine provenance and encourage communication with God and each other.

Survey

As part of this exploration of painting and faith, I approached various internet groups of Christians who paint. I sent a questionnaire of five questions as follows:

- **What inspired you to paint this piece?**
- **What was significant about the process of painting?**
- **Did your ideas / feelings change over time?**
- **What impact has the work had on your life & faith?**
- **How have others been affected by it?**

Eight Christian painters who responded to my request to offer a piece of work for this study, and summaries of their responses are contained in the appendices attached.

Six artists sent figurative pieces, one sent an abstract work and one sent examples from both genres. The painting titles submitted were as follows:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| In the Presence of the Light | Kate Austin |
| Rabbouni | Janet Driver |
| Ballad of Tears | Keith Elliott |
| Rainbow Jesus II | Glenda Gibson |
| I am with you | Sue Newham |
| Lazarus | Graham Pigott |
| The Face | Robyn Robertson |
| Christus Aneste | Antonia Winsor |

Six of the eight pieces concerned specifically 'Christian' themes, with only *'The Face'* and *'Ballad of Tears'* being open to interpretation in a number of ways. This narrow focus apparently

reflects the artists' perceptions of the type of work in which I would be interested in this dissertation about painting and God.

The paintings are also referred to individually below.

Who/What will the painting look like? Form

'Form', according to Hilary Brand and Adrienne Chaplin, 'is what you are left with when you turn the painting upside down and screw up your eyes. It has ceased to be a virgin with child, a view of the Thames or a Brillo pad box. It is shapes, lines, areas of light and dark.' (Art and Soul: Signposts for Christians in the Arts, 2007, p. 142)

As the term suggests, the form of a painting gives a shape and a 'feel' to the subject matter. Form is about HOW the subject matter is treated – how it 'weaves its aesthetic magic'.

'Wholeness, Harmony and Radiance'.

In attempting to define beauty, Harries begins with the three characteristics suggested by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century: wholeness; harmony and radiance. There needs to be a coherence between these aspects of form, and the form needs to fit with content for a painting to succeed as more than the sum of its parts.

Simplicity of form is often most effective.

Harries takes up the point, however, that beautiful works of art 'often include that which is disturbing and ugly, dark and disruptive'.

He stresses the need for wholeness and harmony, to be present, for beauty to be more than 'skin deep', along with radiance – by which he means 'illumination of all kinds: intellectual, moral

and spiritual. Works of art not only satisfy the senses, they bring insight and challenge'. (Harries, 2005. p. 23)



Tsunami

Shuna George

Appendix 6

From my own experience, it is evidently true that well-received art can contain the ugly and disturbing. Six years ago, the world was shaken by images of the great **Tsunami**, devastating much of the coastline of South East Asia, and killing many

people. At that time I felt compelled to an urgent creativity – an emotional response to feelings of helplessness. The resulting image at appendix 6, which included broken wood slivers and torn fabric, is certainly ‘disruptive’, but appears to have something aesthetically appealing about it, according to its favourable reception. I believe it has a ‘cathartic’ or redemptive value, beyond that which it represented for me as the artist.

In Christian understanding, God chose the humble form of a human as fitting his plan of salvation. *‘.. being in very nature God,, he made himself nothing by taking the very form of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:6-8, NIV)*

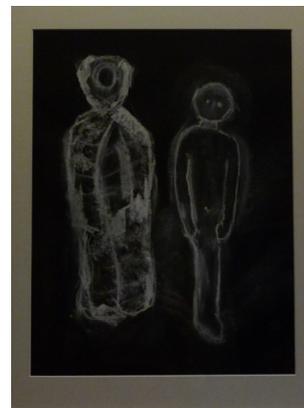
All expressions of form carry meaning with them - some of which seem universally understood. One ‘self-conscious’ formal tool is the use of **symbol**. Symbols require particular knowledge in order to access meaning. Much of the teaching of Jesus, and worship of the church today relies on symbolism – for example of water; bread; light and wine among others. Nicholas Wolterstorff, American Christian philosopher, explores in his book Art in Action (1996) the universality of certain artistic forms in the concept of ‘fittingness’. Fittingness is about how certain aspects or qualities drawn from our human experience relate to other aspects and qualities. For example, most people will identify a jagged line with agitation and wavy one with tranquillity. Artists are ‘*workers in fittingness*’ according to Wolterstorff, and when the subject they choose and the strokes they use work in harmony, then there is a wholeness not only on a visual level, but on the level of meaning. It is a wholeness which, for me, reflects the unity of God.

Likewise in Christian teaching, there is often a neat fit between, symbol and value – for example salt with freshness and light with revelation. Sometimes, however, as in painting, a paradoxical contrast is most effective – for example the Biblical assertion that ‘the meek shall inherit the earth’, from Jesus’ ‘Sermon on the Mount’ .

In considering the 'harmony' of a painting's form, we must look to concepts such as symmetry and balance. Whether abstract or representational, it could be argued that the artist's work is to bring order to ideas through paint and canvas. From a Christian worldview, such orderly activity would seem to reflect God's creative ordering of the world, as we read of God bringing structure to the earth which was '*formless and empty*', separating light from darkness, water from land, and day from night (see Genesis chapter 1).

A painting gives 'shape to the shapeless' in an echo of the pattern of divine creation. Such orderliness, however, appears somewhat ironic, given the sense of freedom and possibility which I experience as I paint, especially when I start a new piece. The freedom to search for new forms of painting, has been, in itself, a characteristic of artistic creativity over time. The chalk drawing, **Lazarus**, by Graham Pigott at appendix 7 is a good example of a carefully chosen form fitting content, as the artist explains in some detail in the appendix attached.

Different forms of painting – for example, still life, portraiture, expressionism etc encourage different kinds of response in a viewer. I believe these different forms can emphasise different aspects of our relationship with God. An intricate still life can heighten our attentiveness to the present moment; an engaging portrait might bring us closer to our own humanity, invoking empathy and compassion; a landscape view could remind us of God in creation, and an abstract expressionist painting can sometimes jolt us into spiritual self-awareness. It is often a matter of seeing, or being enabled to see,



Lazarus

Form fitting content. The hesitant marks of this work really reflects the vulnerability of its subject.

"The drawing was done with my left, least dominant, hand, which meant my usual mark making facility was scrambled and my tentative, hesitant searching with the chalk became uppermost as I tried to draw what the two sculptures expressed. I was feeling after, with less control, and found images that seem to encapsulate and express the essence of my outer and inner selves that were in conversation through exploring being Lazarus in deadness and the moment of new life. I was experiencing and translating the words of the poem into an image." **Graham Pigott**

Appendix 7

beyond the obvious: *'So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen'* (2:Cor 4:18, NIV).

One aspect of form which is pregnant with meaning, is that of colour. Warm and cold. Restful and aggressive. Happy and sad. Colours carry emotional weight and can affect us at a spiritual level, I believe. Some of our response to colour is culturally conditioned - an obvious example being the connotations of death carried by the black of mourning in Western Europe, or white in many Asian countries. Blood red, can be universally linked with life – but could also mean violence, or indeed felicity.

Andy Goldsworthy is a contemporary sculptor who works outside, using only natural materials found in the local environment. Much of his work is temporary, its transience being part of its beauty. In a film about his work, he is seen experimenting with dust ground from rocks from a river bed, which are rich in iron ore. He releases the scarlet powder into the stream, to breathtaking effect. The colour of blood has a special energy, for him - like the lifeblood coursing through our veins. The relationship between the form, the content, the artist, and the world is complete and unique. In his imaginative exploration of the colour of the ironstone, Goldsworthy brings to light both the beauty of God's creation hidden in the very stones of the earth, and also our relationship to it and to each other. We are connected by the colour and flow. He expresses his sense of wonder that *'something so dramatic, so intense...could be so hidden..underneath the skin of the earth'* (Rivers and Tides: Andy Goldsworthy working with Time, 2001 (DVD). Goldsworthy's role as an artist is as a kind of liberator – revealing concealed treasures in a surprising way. For me, Goldsworthy acts as 'co-creator' with the divine in his art. In his choice of materials, setting and timing he enables God's hidden glory to be revealed.

The symbolism of colour is familiar from the Christian scriptures – from the purple robe given to Christ at his crucifixion, to the green pastures of rest offered by the Good Shepherd. The prophet Isaiah gives a visual image of forgiveness: *"Come now, let us settle the matter," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.* (Isaiah 1:18, NIV)

Awareness of contrast is vital in painting – the interplay of dark and light with positive and negative space can echo keenly our experience of living in a complex

world as well as our sense of ourselves as individuals striving to balance our impulses and inclinations towards good and bad. Even if we choose to work with only one hue, we can even then celebrate the variety and diversity of our existence: ‘*..to portray the world truthfully as it really is to an adult audience, the artist must learn to create a complex weave of dark and light. It means learning to use the full palette of shades, confident that in hands – that have learned their craft – they will not all merge into muddy grey.*’ (Brand and Chaplin, 2007, p. 55).

From a theological perspective an interesting aspect of colour is that as humans we can only see part of the spectrum. Infra-red and ultra-violet light are ‘hid from our eyes’ we have to infer it from the evidence we have. All colour is the result of reflected light. From one true light source every colour a painter can ever imagine can be refracted. As we observe an object or a painting, the source of light is always behind us – the light-giver gives us the gift of light. The symbolism and representation of light in a painting is by far the most powerful allegorical tool for the painter whose work looks to God. The writer of John’s gospel uses light as an allegory for the love of God in Christ: ‘*Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.*’ (John 3:19, NIV)

For Harries, the ‘luminosity’ of a painting is more than a mere symbol of God’s light however; rather it is the evidence that God’s light is present. He writes that: ‘*the luminous element in beauty has its source in the uncreated light of God himself. In the visual arts this luminosity takes shape as the play of light and shade, and in the rich variety of colours.This light is fundamental to art, for genuine art shifts our perceptions and shapes the way we see the world.*’ (2005, p. 104).

From this consideration of content and form, I am clear that there each painting, born of human hands, is a result of a multitude of human ideas and interventions, combined with aspects of divine design.

3.Creation: a *family activity*

*'Someone is coming ashore inside her,
A face deciphers itself from water..'*

John O'Donohue The Nativity

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.*

Psalm 19: 1-2

As in the creation of the world; in the incarnation of Christ; and in every human birth, I believe God is present in the creative spark, which may catch into a painting. To mix metaphors, like the sower's seeds of Jesus' parable, many human choices and interactions then have an effect on whether the painting reaches its godly fulfilment, or withers and dies. The journey from the artist's imagination to the canvas can be a long and complicated one. In considering the process of creation, I will draw mainly on my own experience of painting, drawing on the reflections of other Christian artist's where relevant.

Painting as Collaborative Play?

Brand and Chaplin suggest creativity consists of three elements: sensual awareness; imaginative thinking and manual skills (Art & Soul, 2007: p.46). These they refer to as '*God-given tools*' for cultivating the earth – but also '*gifts given simply for our delight.*' Painting can be useful for self expression, for relaxation, for 'sabbath' re-creation. But equally it can just be a pleasure – a gift from God which reflects the glory of the Giver. So how does the process of transferring an idea into a painted reality begin? How is the invisible made visible via the artist's hand and eye? As we have seen the incarnation of imagination into painting involves choices in two main arenas – **content and form**. Some artists deny much sense of where they're heading – just know when they've arrived – whilst others plan meticulously. All bring their own frame of reference – much of which influences unconsciously.

Some people who paint will plunge straight in to a full-body immersion experience of creativity. Children do this instinctively, producing very authentic results. This creativity as play is a goal to which adults, and Christian adults in particular, often aspire. *“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”,* Matt 18:3, NIV.

A recent BBC television programme *‘Art is Child’s Play’* in the *‘Imagine 2010/11’* series, considered the effect that childhood play experiences had had on a number of contemporary artists. In an interview with artist Tracy Emin, she talks of children being able to see things in ways which are different, more imaginative, than adults - a quality which she strives to nurture as an artist – to ‘shake up’ how she sees things – and so surprise herself and others.

Thomas Merton, 20th Century catholic writer and Trappist monk, also recognises the playfulness of God’s creativity in his *‘Seeds of Contemplation’* *“If we could let go of our own obsession with what we think is the meaning of it all, we might be able to hear His call and follow Him in His mysterious, cosmic dance. We do not have to go very far to catch echoes of that game, and of that dancing. ..”*

Theories of child development suggest that children’s play develops from a self-contained to a relational activity as they mature. A recent experience of participation in a creative ‘mandala’ art workshop produced some interesting insights about how adults and children ‘play’ creatively – and how they relate to each other. The workshop was facilitated by the respected Christian artist and theologian, Jyoti Sahi, *‘theologian with a brush’* (Faces of Vision, 2008, p.5) who works in both India and England, in a multi-faith context.

The workshop, in Leicester, was attended by both adults and children, and all 6 of the resulting paintings are attached together later (see appendix 8 at the end).



Mandala is the Sanskrit word for circle. In Buddhism and Hinduism, sacred circular art forms, or mandalas, are created and used in meditation and worship, to symbolise Divine wholeness and harmony. In this workshop, Mandalas were produced by small groups of adults or children working together, an exercise which I observed to be much more difficult for the latter than the former. The adults tended to be either very tentative or quite forceful. The children, perhaps as a result of their school experience of collaborative working, found painting together much easier. The results are telling. All the adult groups had divided their mandalas into sections, which were worked on individually. The results, I suggest, were relational, but not 'communal'. The children's images, on the contrary, were coherent pictures in their own rights – each person's contribution within another's. This simple exercise serves to illustrate the collaboration involved in bringing a painting to life, which may involve other humans, but always involves God for me, as my relational Creator.

Embodiment: the human physicality of painting

So what is it that is happening during the process of painting? I would suggest there are at least three concurrent processes, which we could categorise as body, heart

and mind. What might appear as a very individualistic activity, actually depends on interactions between materials, human ideas, and the divine.

On a physical level my hands and eyes are engaged in a constant process of interpretation and adjustment of colour, position and scale. The paint has a smell which feeds my creativity and anticipation of fresh beginnings. There are even small sounds of which I become aware which literally fill my heart with joy – the tinkling of a brush on the side of a jam jar – or even the sound of the brush sweeping paint over the canvas. It is very much about attentiveness.

Stillness: attentiveness: Prayer

Simone Weil, (20th century Christian philosopher) wrote that “*..prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable towards God.*” Waiting for God, 2009 P. 57

For me the concentration and focus involved in producing a painting is well captured by this concept of attentiveness. As a Christian, such attentiveness for me is shaped by a hopeful anticipation that all creation looks forward to fulfilment in God. ‘*I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest*’ (John 4:35 NIV). Weil’s stance is similarly optimistic: “*Quite apart from religious belief, every time that a human being succeeds in making an effort of attention with the sole idea of increasing his(sic) grasp of truth, he acquires a greater aptitude for grasping it, even if his effort produces no visible truth*”. (p.59, *ibid*)

Although I may be alone to paint, the absence of distractions can help me to be aware of the presence of God and other influences in my work.

A similar, but not identical, theme is explored by Harries. In seeking to define what is ‘spiritual’ in art, he describes one of three important aspects as ‘*The capacity to attend to what is before us, to attend to the quiddity – the very essence of a thing as it makes itself visible to us – is basic to the artistic enterprise*’. (2005, p.106)

Concentrating on the reference to ‘quiddity’, Harries’ point is that art is able to ‘*put before us what simply is, in all its uniqueness*’, and in so doing it arouses big, metaphysical questions in the viewer about what it is to be, about values such as truth and love as well as beauty; ‘*And this activity, this attention to the quiddity of what is before us, coaxing it into visibility brings us up against the mystery of existence itself.*’ (*ibid* p. 107).

Working with God's materials: involvement with God's world

In his book *Art in Action* (1995), Nicholas Wolterstorff writes about craftsmanship as the combination of knowledge, skill and respect which the artist brings to her materials. He suggests that today's artist is less interested in 'god-like mastery' over tools, media, techniques, than a way of working to an approach where the artist works WITH his media in dialogue. This is easy to see in the plastic arts, and music, but also in abstract painting today. The biblical image of God the potter springs to mind (Isaiah 64:8) – in this picture God is the creator not only of his people, but also of the very clay from which they are formed. We might imagine that God respected – loved even - the media as well as the end product, since he made it too perfectly



suited to its great purpose. In Isaiah 45:9, we are asked 'Does the clay say to the potter, "What are you making?"'. As a practical, hands-on artist, I would answer that the media often does, indeed, suggest its own use – all drips, cracks, and mishaps can be accommodated. In the painting on the left, **'I will pour out my Spirit Upon you'**, I used gravity to ensure realistic, vertical drips!

Wolterstorff gives an illustration of a contemporary printmaker – for whom we could easily substitute painter – who starts with one idea, but adapts it as she goes according to how each line she gouges turns out. *'...a conversation between herself and her material, leading her along, not quite ineluctably, toward an outcome that she never clearly had in mind.. possibly an outcome that fits well within her original vague idea but possibly also an outcome that she never anticipated, perhaps even one that surprises her'* (Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 1995 p.95).

This illustration resonates with my experience of life as a Christian is clear. God who is the source of life does not beat me into submission, but rather there is an ongoing conversation between creator and me, his creation. There are tensions and times of

resistance (Paul in Romans 7:19 ‘*For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing*’), and moments of harmony and common direction - Romans 8:16 – ‘*God’s Spirit joins with our spirits and confirms we are children of God*’.

Without any explicit reference to the Divine, Wolterstorff notes that ‘*The potter loves clay, not so much indeed for what it is as for what it can become; he or she longs to nurture it into pots.*’. He then continues ‘*And the painter loves paint, wanting to assist it in finding its fulfilment in paintings.*’ (p.95 *ibid*) For me this is true. In painting there is both a freedom and a limitation in committing ideas to canvas. Creating a painting involves a step of faith. It is an incarnational activity which moves towards spiritual fulfilment.

Choice of materials

I enjoy working with mixed media, which allows for extra layers of symbolism. My painting Spirit at appendix 10 is a good example of using materials to emphasise particular meanings – such as the use of salt. In her book, Icons of the Imagination (2008), contemporary artist Sophie

Hacker writes about her use of ‘found’ materials. ‘*I can’t predict what defines a piece*



Spirit

“This painting has many layers – literally and figuratively. I like the idea of painting one colour over another, so that parts are concealed and parts are revealed.

On one level the painting is about me, and my desire to find my true spirit amongst all the thoughts, experiences and emotions which get in the way (the ego). These are the layers of different colours and lines. I wanted to give a feeling of bursting out – or perhaps dancing out of things that tie me down.

It is also about God’s Spirit shining through me – joined with my own, and making me who I am. God’s Spirit is like light to me – hence the Gold paint – but it is also life and breath. On one of the layers I literally blew the wet paint around to create an interesting colour effect– it reminded me of God’s breath (Spirit) in Creation.

The golden lines also remind me of the wave patterns of ‘lifelines’ on medical monitors – and I like the idea that my spirit resonates with God’s Spirit to make a strong ‘pulse’

I was also thinking about God’s light shining out in the world as well as within myself, and I added some salt to represent God as salt and light to the world.” **Shuna George**

Appendix 10

worth taking. *Sometimes I know instantly what it will become...what all found objects have in common is that they bear evidence of some past history...it excites me to give new life to these rejected elements' (p.3).* This is a good example of media perfectly suited to the message of the work, as Sophie produces modern 'icons', on which people can meditate to find their own renewed source of life in God. Her recycled materials are sacramental signs of redemption.

The contemporary Christian artist Makoto Fujimura, working in New York, paints with great attention to his materials – often choosing the finest and most expensive metallic elements like gold, as the substance of his work. He is particularly attentive towards the provenance of his media, and how it sets the artist's endeavour within the context of his history. Of the traditional paper he uses, he writes: *'The result of more than a millennium of Japanese stewardship of nature is reflected in the layers of fibre of the cloudskin paper that I use' (Refractions 2009, p.121).*

The meaning is in the waiting

Fujimura also writes of watching his paint dry – literally: *'Recently, I started to make videos of my paintings drying as part of my exhibit. I increasingly find this act ...to be healing. I watch the subtle movement of the surface of the water, and the watermarks made progressively as the piece dries. Beauty often resides in the peripheries of our lives. We walk past such humble miracles, such as the babe in the manger in a little village of Bethlehem, all the time....Artists are..like the shepherds , often the first to notice the miracles taking place in front of us' (2009, p.27) .* For me, the care with which Fujimura attends to bringing his creation to life, brings to mind the nurturing God of Psalm 139: 13-16 *'For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body'.*

Many great artists have truly suffered in their creativity, struggling to bring their work to life and carrying their wounds into their work – not unlike the story of Jacob struggling with the angel for God's blessing in Genesis 32.

Every artist I know acknowledges the apparently 'non-productive' interval between inception and execution of a painting, as an essential part of the process. There

seems always to be a gestation period, during which intention and motivation align themselves into a course of action. Perhaps a lot of the ‘meaning is in the waiting’- that it is making time to stop and listen for God’s guidance, which is important above all. Such is the thought captured by RS Thomas in his poem describing a man at prayer alone in a stone church, ‘Kneeling’ (Appendix 19)

*When I speak,
Though it be you who speak
Through me, something is lost.
The meaning is in the waiting.*

As a Christian I have been able to draw parallels with the pre-Creation description of Genesis 1:2 ‘*Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*’ (NIV).

Making/taking time

There is no doubt that painting needs **time**. ‘*It is only when we have the patience to ‘listen’ to what our medium and our subject matter are saying to us, rather than imposing our requirements on them, that we will begin to create something authentic.*’ (Brand and Chaplin, 2007, p.162).

The question of where to start is an interesting one. A street portraitist will usually start with the eyes – probably to establish the focal point of the work, and a sense of scale. Beyond this I assume that a person’s gaze gives the best indicator of the sitter’s character and personality – a window to the soul, of course.

Whatever the proposed subject of a painting, I would always begin by covering the canvas in a wash of one colour, literally setting the background tone upon which the story will be played out. The background colour will show through subtly, affecting the foreground colour, especially at points where the applied paint is thin. For me this is the literal equivalent of how the artist’s worldview imbues all she creates; or how the Christian’s faith shines through all he does.

In my experience a blank canvas or paper is often a source of intimidation for adults in a creative situation – the fear being of spoiling it, of making a mistake. In the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God has demonstrated that life and faith are necessarily messy, and that truth is only to be found in engaging with the messiness. Mistakes are not only inevitable, but useful for growth. Simone Weil, in her reflections on

school studies and the love of God, holds that engaging with a problem, investing effort into it even if we can't get it right, is a necessary condition for growth into the love of God. Writing of problems of geometry (and we might substitute drawing or painting or composition etc) she writes: *"If we concentrate our attention on trying to solve a problem...and if at the end of an hour we are no nearer to doing so..we have nevertheless been making progress each minute of that hour in another more mysterious dimension. Without our knowing or feeling it, this apparently barren effort has brought more light into the soul. The result will one day be discovered in prayer"* (Weil, 2009, p.58)

Worship: Painting as sacrament

By concentrating on the present moment in painting, it seems, we are able to access the spiritual world beyond space and time. Indeed painted icons are often used in worship, as 'windows' to the spiritual. Writing of meditating on an icon of Christ, Rowan Williams writes in *'The Dwelling of the Light'* (2003) *'The point is simple: face to face with Jesus, there and only there, do we find who we are'* (p.78). This is the psycho-iconographical aspect of beholding an image: *'We look at (Christ) looking at*

us, we see both what we were made to be, bearers of the divine image and likeness, and what we have made of ourselves.' (p.79 *ibid*).

The painting **'Rabbouni'** by Janet Driver, is clearly the result of a slow, deliberative meditative process, described in more detail at appendix 10. The painting process is bounded by certain limitations (of media, scale, colour palette, technique, time), even, perhaps, 'rules' (composition, harmony), the very presence of which, ironically, appear to allow the painter freedom to access God and, indeed, access to God's freedom. *'..in the same way that the Christian discovers the*



Rabbouni

"I had to become still & attentive, risking that it might not "work", but just do a little every day & then wait until the next step became clearer. I painted in layers...the reds needed several glazed layers to build up into a deep rich glowing colour. Each layer needed leaving to dry for about 12 -24 hours, so it was a long meditative process....always underlying everything else I had to do...thinking of that word "Rabbouni"...again & again".

Janet Driver
Appendix10

seeming contradiction of perfect freedom within God's moral law, so the artist discovers within the natural laws of his or her medium a safe place to be free'. (Brand and Chaplin, 2007, p. 161)

Sometimes I have painted expressively – ‘straight from the heart’, with little conscious planning, beyond a plan to paint expressively!

Often the emotion wanting to be expressed might be considered ‘destructive’ rather than ‘creative’ – such as anger, fear or sadness. The underlying purpose of such painting activity is essentially therapeutic – to gain a new emotional balance and perspective – and essentially ego-centric. This is the kind of work a creative friend of mine would call ‘gutsy’, and, interestingly in my experience, often draws the most attention from others. People are drawn initially by its impact and resonance for their own situation. The painting calls to them and they respond. Although not painted from a ‘God-focussed’ starting point, such paintings can be seen to express the heart of the artist, and in this expression, I believe, viewers can respond to the heart of God. They express truth and reality, and challenge the viewer to respond – not unlike the challenge of Jesus to many people ‘*Who do you say that I am?*’ (Mark 8:27-29, NIV). **Ballad of Tears** by Keith Elliott is one such expressive, challenging painting. He describes more fully in Appendix 11 how painting it was both a healing and a transformative exercise.

On some occasions I have no conscious ‘spiritual’ or emotional agenda in painting – just a sense of curiosity about something (a cabbage; a bowl of strawberries) or a sense of wonder (a tree; a sky) and these excite in me a

sense of urgent adventure to explore them with paint. I always feel a sense of excitement at the prospect of starting a painting, of giving birth to a new creation. This sense of anticipation feels spiritual in itself – as Paul expresses in his letter to the



Ballad of Tears

“...painting expressively. I did a background of blues and greens, because that was how I was feeling. Then I used reds, and the orange became dominant. The shapes come from the colours underneath. There are hearts, linked with brokenness and frustration. My feelings were the starting point.”

Keith Elliott

Appendix 11

'For we know the whole of creation is groaning together in the pains of childbirth until this hour'. Romans 8:22 (NIV).

Of course sometime the intended content changes as the works progresses - or sometimes one can start to paint without any clear final image in mind. People who paint in this way rely heavily on the qualities of the interaction with the media and with the imagination, as if the paint is saying *'Come, follow me'*. It is a more spontaneous than rehearsed conversation between painter and paint. Sometimes when I have painted in this way the results seem to capture a sense of vitality and intensity, which I have sometimes lost through over planning.

Painting for me is sacramental. A sacrament is often defined as a sacred action which contains the grace it signifies and confers the grace it contains. For me, painting is both the expression and the realisation of God's grace in my life – and can thus be considered sacramental . Cezanne famously described painting as 'a coloured state of grace', a description which is as simple and beautiful as it is true to my mind. Painting, like Holy Communion, is for me an 'efficacious' sign: meaning it produces or intensifies the thing it signifies. For me, painting increases my awareness of God's Glory – His love, beauty and truth.

Wholeness: Redemption; Healing

In his book simply titled *'Beauty'* (2009), philosopher and writer on aesthetics, Roger Scruton, writes of the reconciliation of reason and the sensory in creative play, which facilitates 'wholeness'. *'In play, elevated to the level of free contemplation, reason and sense are reconciled, and we are granted a vision of human life in its wholeness'* (Scruton, 2009, p.127). Such a vision, I believe, necessarily involves connection with other people and the world.

It is certainly true that a painting is often a struggle towards wholeness, completeness. The question of when exactly a painting is finished is often a difficult one - it can undergo many changes. As I paint, I am constantly assessing and re-evaluating the marks on the canvas, close up and from a distance. Mistakes are an important and unavoidable part of the process – again in painting as in life. Some of my 'best –received' paintings have started badly. Some have needed a complete

'paradigm shift', accomplished by literally turning them through 90 or 180 degrees and carrying on from a different viewpoint.



Falling

"This painting began as a consciously therapeutic exercise – a release for fear and frustration. It grew from a confusion of colours and brushstrokes and was turned through 90 degrees at some point – perhaps reflecting the feeling of life turned upside down. It has come to represent an important point of transformation for me – a reconciliation with God and life experienced.

Shuna George

Appendix 12

My '**Falling**' painting is an example of this (Appendix 12). This work is my response to God's call to have faith in turbulent and uncertain times. It grew from reading Hebrews 2:1 '*Faith is being sure of what you hope for and certain of what you do not see*'. In this case, my 'heart' was consciously oriented towards God as I painted, and the brush strokes are my searching for words to God, as well as attempts to transcribe His response. Painting as sacramental prayer and healing for me.

The painting is about leaning back, trusting and being held by God. I did not know this, however when I started to paint expressively about

my doubts and confusion – it just developed, and my 'negative' feelings were transformed, as I was able to accept them, and recognise God's acceptance of me and my emotions. Throughout a period of illness, painting offered me a way to heal emotionally, to integrate my mental, physical and spiritual struggles.

One of the satisfying qualities of using acrylic paint for me is that it is easily painted over, so that mistakes can always be put right, and paintings often redeemed. I re-use canvasses too – painting on top of old work and transforming it into new work. The old is still there, of course, the necessary background for the new. Occasionally patches of colour or texture which I like will be allowed to show through and influence the new work. There is thus for me a hopefulness and a synthesis in the process of painting. The analogy between the artist's and the Christian's faith is clear. Quite literally, artists '*hope for what we do not see*' (Romans 8:25), and God's

'Spirit helps us in our weakness' (8: 26) to believe that *' all things (will, eventually) work together for good'* (8:28). As Christians we are God's created works in progress in a similar way. My painting connects me to the experiences of my past.

The full stop at the end of creating a painting is often the choice of a frame – although it is also true that decisions about the scale and 'boundaries' of a picture are made right at the beginning of the creative process. The physical frame (if there is one) is symbolic of the conceptual frame of reference which we bring, in accordance with which we make our judgements. *'We enter a painting only via the frame that shuts out the world in which we stand'*, Scruton, 2009, p. 105).

Many of my paintings are unframed. One aspect of form with which I experiment, is that of scale. I like to produce images which 'spill over' the sides of the canvas – as if it is too small to contain them. For me this encourages the viewer to continue the picture, beyond its edges in his/her imagination. I am reminded of the abundance of God's blessings – as symbolised in the imagery of the great banquet and the overflowing cup of Psalm 23: 5. My painting is a collaboration with my limitless God.

4. Reception: *beyond the family of origin*

*Outside each other now, she sees him first,
Flesh of her flesh, her dreamt son safe on earth.*

John O'Donohue

*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. **Gen 1:31**
His father and mother were amazed by what was said about him. **Luke2:33***

Receiving the gift

If art is a gift then the question of how that gift is received is a matter of interest. The artist herself is always both giver and receiver, creator and perceiver – the reason and the means of the paintings existence. We are reminded of the description of God in Hebrews 2:10 and elsewhere: *'God for whom and through whom everything exists.*

A painting does not, however, usually exist only for the artist. Many, if not all, artists are interested in how a painting is received by a other people. If a Christian believes, as I do, that a painting is directly or indirectly a gift from God – then the question of its public reception has a theological element. How a painting is received is indubitably about meaning and interpretation. As Michael Austin writes in *Explorations in Art, Theology and Imagination,* *'The meaning of an artwork finds its destination in my experience now'. (2005, p.14)*

In talking of art *'finding its destination'* in the viewer, Austin goes further in a theological direction, drawing parallels with *'the way the gospel is heard as good news and the sacraments are received'* (p.15 *ibid*). Can it be that there is something sacramental about viewing art – about this aesthetic experience, as well as about creating art, as suggested above?

I have often been privileged to hear firsthand how others have 'received' – and have been affected – by my paintings. The piece entitled 'Splash' (Appendix 13), for example, has spoken to people very strongly about being raised up – about

resurrection to new life, although my starting point was in the opposite direction – about falling back and trusting.



Splash

How I use my God-given imagination is usually guided by my conscious mind, which itself is shaped by my Christian worldview. The painting below was inspired by a newspaper photograph of a boy leaping into a muddy lake during a drought. The photograph inspired a painting, which for me symbolises trust in God and joyful abandonment to His care and it also connects with my understanding of Christian baptism. Other people have found it inspiring in a different way – seeing it also as a depiction of resurrection – that the subject is coming out of the water, not falling into it. Shuna George
Appendix 13

Much has been written about profound ‘religious experiences’ for which viewing a particular painting was the catalyst. Henri Nouwen, for example describes the first time he set eyes on Rembrandt’s Prodigal Son as follows: *‘Its grandeur and splendour made everything recede into the background and held me completely captivated. Coming here was indeed a homecoming.’* He continues: *‘As the evening drew near, the sunlight grew more crisp and tingling. The embrace of the father and son became stronger and deeper, and the bystanders participated more directly in this mysterious event of reconciliation, forgiveness and inner healing.’* The Return of the Prodigal Son, 1994 (p.9).

Interpreting: Lenses/ meaning/ revelation

Another example of a work which has been received in ways quite different to the artists original conception, is Glenda Gibson’s Rainbow Christ (Appendix 14). As a Christian, she acknowledges the role of the Holy Spirit as the ‘interpreter’ between painting and viewer. Whether seen as being in the hands of God’s Spirit or not, it is clear that there are two unique sets of ‘worldview’ lenses involved in the ‘reception’ of a painting. Where the ‘lenses’ enhance each other and the viewer ‘connects’, there will be points of great clarity and intensity. At other points the ‘lenses’ may work against each other, leaving the viewer puzzled and unimpressed.

Artistic ‘success’ may indeed lie at this point of intersection, where the eye of the beholder and the eye of the creator meet – but is it also true that this is where beauty is found? Or joy? Or even truth?

Just as producing a painting involves both mind and spirit (and, indeed, body!), so too its reception can involve us both emotionally and intellectually. Austin specifies a range of ways a painting might ‘speak’ to him ‘*art excites me, thrills me, heals me, judges me, touches me at a depth which nothing else can reach.*’ (2005, p.16). Many art lovers would agree with much of this – the exciting, thrilling, and touching

properties of effective visual art. What he describes, of course, is a range of RESPONSES. It is not that ‘the art’ is doing these things to the viewer, but rather that the viewer is responding to what he sees in the art which is **meaningful** to him or her. What meaning a painting carries to each viewer will vary greatly – so value judgements will be subjective to a certain degree. We should not be too hasty to condemn or embrace the opinions of others – we may well need to ‘*first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye*’ (Matt 7: 5).

When Austin mentions, healing, and judging, it seems he interprets his emotional response, within the parameters of his own world view, ie his Christian faith. His beliefs are summarised in his statement, that ‘*Art for me is salvific.*’ (p. 16, *ibid*). He goes on to explain what he means by this, which is that art is ‘*capable, by God’s grace, of making us what we are created to be as sons and daughters of God.*’ (p.51, *ibid*).

The underlying assumption here is that art and religion stem from the same Source, ie God, and that they reveal God’s Truth to us in different ways. Christianity is, of course, a revealed religion. A painting can be a source of ongoing revelation for both artist and viewer.



Rainbow Christ

“Someone else could ‘see’ a lot of complex metaphors that were not mine, but I have found the Holy Spirit takes my offering and multiplies it and uses it for the sake of those looking at the image.” **Glenda Gibson**

Appendix 14

For me, though, the claim that art is 'salvific', is rather too extreme. I do agree that through exercising our creativity we are able to experience, and enjoy, more fully who we are as children of a creative God. I believe, however, that to enjoy the entire fullness of divine relationship with God, demands a conscious move away from our (self-) destructive inclinations, in order to receive God's fullest gift of creative grace into our open hands and hearts. Art does not make such high demands of us, nor can it offer, by itself, such perfect assurance. Again, I move away from any suggestion of an individualistic or self-serving aesthetic, towards an understanding of 'reception' which involves others.

Moments of revelation are intrinsic to both the creative and the 'receptive' processes. Indeed the 'eyes of the heart' of both painter and beholder seem to be opened in a rhythmic interchange, akin to the perichoretic relationship of the Trinity. For the artist, passive contemplation and imagination can lead, through active creation, back to passive contemplation and so on. Likewise for the viewer, passive contemplation can lead to active imagination, contemplation and even action. Over time we can always see something new in a great painting – it has a depth and a relevance which attracts and endures close scrutiny over time- like God's love, it can be *'new every morning'* (Lamentations 3:23).

Evaluating: Beauty, Truth, Goodness....and Love

Is the key to understanding how a painting connects artist, viewer and God to be found in a consideration of some of the classical, Platonic 'universal' values of goodness, truth and beauty? This question is at the core of a vast area of philosophical debate the remit of this consideration. For me, however, beauty is indeed tied to values of truth, goodness and love in my painting.

In his short book, Art for God's Sake (2006), Philip Graham Ryken (contemporary, evangelical Bible scholar) calls for Christians to recover art for God – essentially by rediscovering God in art. Ryken considers beauty to be a God-given, 'absolute' value, in line with Platonic philosophy. Beauty is that to which nothing can be added or taken away. Drawing on Biblical precedent, Ryken explores four principles to emphasise the divine source and nature of artistic endeavour: firstly, artists are

called and gifted by God; secondly God loves art, thirdly God has high standards for art and finally art is for the glory of God.

For Roger Scruton, however, beauty is not an absolute but a relative value. For him, *'Beauty is not about things in the world but about a particular experience of them and about the pursuit of meaning that springs from that experience'*. (2009, p. 195). It is Scruton's belief that our concept of the beautiful is rationally founded, being based on our analysis of our own experiences of life, and the conclusions we draw from these experiences. It is all about how we receive a particular object, but this reception is more than just a matter of subjective preference, rather it depends on matters of individual reason and value.

My own experience as a viewer and exhibitor of paintings suggests that Scruton is nearer the mark. Though I believe that there are certain 'family values' shared by all people, which means that there is often a 'convergence' of approval about art works which encapsulate these values (perhaps, for example, paintings which speak of the sanctity of life, the futility of war, the innocence of childhood, the power of love among many, many others).

Scruton, likewise, suggests that there is a level of 'community reception' of what is beautiful, which goes beyond the individualistic. He points out that a universal interest in matters of beauty appears to affirm our membership of the human race – our 'extended family'. This aesthetic interest, he writes, stems from *'Our metaphysical condition, as free individuals, seeking our place in a shared and public world. We can wander through this world, alienated, resentful, full of suspicion and distrust. Or we can find our home here, coming to rest in harmony with others and with ourselves. The experience of beauty guides us along this second path: it tells us that we are at home in the world, that the world is already ordered in our perceptions as a place fit for the lives of beings like us.'* (2009, p.174). In bringing a painting into the world, I agree, we offer a point of connection between people and with God. Being an artist for God is not something we can do in isolation.

It is worth noting that the Christian emphasis on beauty, traditionally relates to the unseen 'inner beauty' of a person rather than what is necessarily visually attractive: the *'unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit'* (1 Peter 3:4). For a biblical yardstick with which to evaluate a painting, I feel that the values of light indicated by Paul to

the Church at Ephesus, are a good starting point: ‘...the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth’. (Eph 5:9)

Evaluating: Authenticity, Integrity and Grace

Perception of beauty for me is intrinsically linked to other values such as truth and love – and from my Christian perspective, I would suggest a painting should aim to encapsulate values of, integrity, authenticity and grace, which can be passed on to and recognised by its viewers. Artistic integrity is described by Harries as a moral quality, consisting of ‘the attempt to get at the truth of things’ (2005, p. 49). Clearly, however, an artist whose work is full of integrity may no more live a morally perfect life, than any other Christian who is similarly striving after truth. In other words, the artist, as the Christian lives by grace. Both believing and painting could indeed be described in the words of Cezanne as a ‘coloured state of grace’.

I believe most people would agree that aesthetic attractiveness of itself is not the whole story. The beautiful has both a physical and a spiritual element. Beauty is connected with other values such as truth. As Ryken points out, some so-called Christian artists have tended to concentrate more on the beauty than the truth in their work – denying the dark

side of the world: ‘such a world may be nice to imagine, but it is not the world God sent His son to save.’ (2006, p.43). We seem to have an innate ability to recognise where such artistic endeavours lack authenticity. Both Scruton and Ryken appear to recognise how people simultaneously reject and work against the beauty to which we are attracted. As St Paul wrote: *1 Cor 10:23-4: Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial....* ‘Ryken refers to major and minor themes in art –



The Storm

*Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
and he brought them out of their distress.
He stilled the storm to a whisper;
the waves of the sea were hushed.*

Psalm 107: 28-29

An ‘authentic’ painting, born of troubled times

Shuna George

Appendix 14

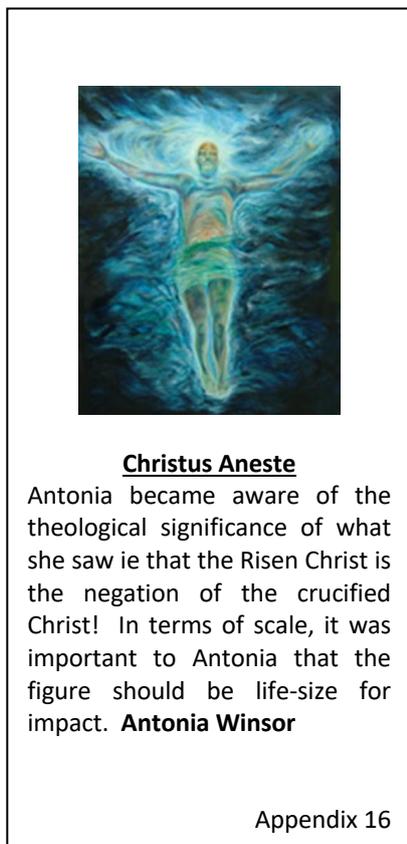
approximating to God's glorious perfection and people's frail imperfection. Scruton writes of '*beings like us (becoming) at home in the world only by acknowledging our fallen condition*' (2009, p.175). I agree with Ryken that, some modern and post modern art '*seeks to offer truth at the expense of beauty. It tells the truth only about ugliness and alienation, leaving out the beauty of creation and redemption*' (2006, p. 43). A work needs integrity, but, for me, also needs to offer hope. My painting '**The Storm**' at Appendix 15 reflects the difficulties which sometimes upset us. God's offer of grace is present, however, in the light, depicted in gold paint. The painting also carries the texture of an earlier work beneath it, which I see as being 'redeemed' in its contribution to the new piece.

'Truthfulness demands complexity' state Brand and Chaplin (2007, p.53), and to complexity we might add 'depth'. Ironically for a two dimensional art form, successful paintings are often seen to have a depth. We feel we can enter into them, and they can enter into us – touching us deeply. *'Art is an incarnation of the truth. It penetrates the surface of things to portray them as they really are'* (Ryken, 2006 p.39)'. But sometimes when we dig deeper – to find out things as they really are, our value of beauty changes.

Take for example the worth of a 'blood diamond', arriving in its setting at the cost of human exploitation, even a person's life. Is that still beautiful? In a similar vein, the ruby, today, provides an insightful illustration. There is presently a plentiful supply of physically flawless rubies, whose value any knowledgeable viewer would discount. The reason for this, like the 'black diamonds', is due to their provenance. The rubies are perfect because they have been produced synthetically. They are perfect but not authentic, not true. Ironically it is the flawed ruby today which is held to be the more beautiful and valuable, because it is 'real.' The ruby's 'real' beauty is in its visual flaws.

To me, this illustration is useful in considering the life of Jesus himself, and in particular the pivotal moment of Christ's crucifixion, the subject matter of many religious paintings.

In researching for her 'life-size' painting '**Christus Aneste**' (Appendix 16), Antonia Winsor was struck by the paucity of traditional depictions of the moment of resurrection, compared to that of the crucifixion. This painting itself followed



Antonia's own depiction of the crucifixion, and was partially inspired by looking at the photographic 'negative' of the image of Christ crucified. In this negative, Antonia recognised the theological significance of the resurrection as the negation of the crucifixion. The painting shows life flowing back into Christ's resurrected body.

We have no clues about Jesus' physical appearance at any point in time. Christians regard him, however, as the fulfilment of Isaiah's 'servant' prophecies of one sent by God to bear people's sins and intercede for them (Isaiah 53: 12). Here this saviour is described as having '*no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ...Like*

one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.' (Isaiah 53:3). At the worst part of his suffering as an incarnated human, in the ugliness of his death on a cross, people nevertheless find a beauty, which many artists have sought to 'embody' in paint. The beauty of Christ's suffering, I believe, is that it is the evidence and the manifestation of God's love and grace.

I believe that nature of the interaction between art, artist and viewer is creative in itself: '*art needs its observers. We the audience are actively involved in a work of art. We participate in the creative work begun by the artist.*' (Austin, 2005, p.48). This mirrors very closely for me the how God continues to work out His creative purposes through Humankind – moving towards the day when: '*The whole earth will be brimming with knowing God-Alive, a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide.*' (Isaiah 11:9, The Message).

But to what extent can participating in the creative process of painting – be it 'doing' or viewing, really affect us? Beyond an emotional response, can a painting be a

source of transformation, of thought, behaviour – even belief? If so, then such changes could be either for the better or the worse – hence there is an ethical dimension to the artist’s work, and to what makes art good.

Challenging: Accountability: Social Responsibility

‘My role as an artist is never accomplished by executing a painting. My role begins there, but it extends into the earthly reality of the broken and beautiful world around me’. (Fujimura, 2009, p.16). For a Christian there are some clear limits – it is clear that a painter cannot contravene God’s second commandment, to paint an image which is to be the object of worship itself. Likewise a Christian painter has an obligation, I believe, to pay attention to moral principles embodied in the Bible. It is for each artist to engage with the inclinations of her own conscience in decisions about subject, form and even display of her work. Christ’s two guiding premises of putting God first and loving one’s neighbour give a simple frame for a complicated process. As we have explored above, a distinctive feature of the Christian painter is often a **conscious** attentiveness to God. The artist who prays as she paints should not stray too far from God’s will and goodness, even if she might play creatively at their edges on occasions!

So, attention to God: Father, Son, Spirit, and to the Bible may contribute to the measure of a painting’s ‘goodness’. Moreover, I believe, Christian artists have a responsibility to invest their very best skills and efforts into their work. Excellent work combines the best of human creativity with the best of God’s creation (of which human creativity is obviously part). As Ryken writes: *‘What constitutes excellence in (forms of art) is inherent in the art forms themselves, and thus it comes from God as part of his general revelation. The difference between good art and bad art is not something we learn from the Bible, primarily, but from the world that God has made’* (2006, p. 39).

Does art carry with it a social, or even moral responsibility, of which an artist, especially one painting explicitly from a Christian faith perspective, must be conscious? Or is art beyond such social norms – *‘l’art pour l’art’*, as in the famous phrase of Theophile Gautier, nineteenth century Romantic poet.

I believe art has a moral value, without needing to be ‘moralising’ - which can so easily become propagandist. In this, I agree with the stance taken by Scruton, in that the true moral value of paintings ‘lies in (their) ability to open our eyes to others and to discipline our sympathies towards life as it is. Art is not morally neutral, but has its own way of making and justifying moral claims.’ (2009, p. 132)

Transforming

The theologian and artist Paul Tillich wrote much of the ‘expressive power’ of art. He identified that effective works of art contain aspects of reality which give it universal meaning and power. A powerful painting challenges us to change. It can unsettle us, in a way that a sentimental depiction will not. As artists we should expect our creativity to express the power of our omnipotent creator. As Austin writes: *Picasso’s art, and Bacon’s art, Manet’s and Michelangelo’s art serve my restoration and wholeness by compelling me to face up to my ambivalence, my two-facedness, my hypocrisy. The light illuminates my wickedness’.* (2005, p.165).



I am With You

Paintings can have a place in therapeutic settings

“The painting has been bought by a vicar and it hangs in her counselling room. It is often commented on and used as a starting point for pastoral ministry.” **Sue Newham**

Appendix 17

Our actions are the result of how we think. How we think is shaped by how we see. In other words, our ethical acts stem from our epistemological understanding, which can be influenced by a visual aesthetic – albeit ‘filtered’ through human freedom and divine grace.

Painting can also challenge us in a gentler way in a therapeutic setting both through engaging in the activity of expressive creation, and through exploring our reactions to a painting, in order to illuminate our own situations. The painting ‘**I am with you**’ (Appendix 17) by Sue Newham has successfully been used in this way.

At the deepest level, I believe art can also serve to reconnect with our created world and our creative brothers and sisters. Through sharing the gift and the fruits of our

human creativity, we are often drawn together spiritually, towards God, source of our creativity, although we may not consciously recognise this movement for what it is. As an activity which combines imagination and matter, I see that painting can help us form and transform our ideas, feelings and experiences of life. It not only reflects, but helps to shape our own meanings . As Rowan Williams writes in *Rowan's Rule* (2008): *The forging of art 'is an image of how human beings use TIME and the things that live in time (bodies, sounds, stories, textures) to make SENSE – that is, **to make a world that can be shared by other beings with mind and feeling...*** (p. 71, my emphasis).

I believe that art, and particularly art produced from a God-centred perspective, offers a particular transformational challenge to our individualistic, 'post-modern' world today. It offers a re-discovery of belonging to the creative family of God. In the words of Makoto Fujimura , art can offer a kind of homecoming: *'We have today the language of waywardness – but no language of bringing people back home ...my art moves towards this'*. (From the media clip: www.makotofujimura.com/four-holy-gospels)

5. Conclusion: Reality, Relatedness, relationship

Reality

In drawing together the many strands of this consideration of painting, we might ask ourselves how the act of bringing a painting into our world actually impacts practically on the day to day lives of most people. We might agree that painting, like treading the Christian path, is a faith-filled process, involving teasing out *'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen'* onto a canvas.



Trinity

"In this painting I have tried to challenge our traditional 'Trinity' images ie God the Father = old man with beard, God the Son = Jesus on the cross and God the Spirit = dove.

I wanted to try and paint something where it wasn't obvious which was which 'person' of the Trinity – a challenge to our human thinking, as we always like to categorise things, and people!

Of course our minds are too limited to really perceive what our Trinitarian God is like. 'He' is beyond gender and race of course – so I have tried to make these aspects unclear.

The aspect of the Trinity which is important for me is that God is relational and dynamic – ie the three aspects of God exist in community with each, a perfect loving relationship to which we can aspire. I have attempted to show this in the 'breath' which is shared by the three figures.

Moreover, God is not remote, but interacts continuously with his creation – represented in the painting by the 'breath' and the finger reaching out to earth.

The painting also suggests the creative Word of God speaking life into existence, and the inspiring wind of the Spirit.

I consciously used only the three primary colours, plus black and white in creating the painting". Shuna George

(Hebrews 11:1). But many might contend that paintings have little to do with the 'real' world, although they may provide a welcome escape from it at times. In an interview in Third Way Magazine, Andrew Rumsey (vicar and satirical writer) emphasises that we do, however, increasingly trust and depend upon the visual information that surrounds us. *'Culturally we are dealing with a massive loss of confidence in the possibility that creative forms can say anything real, while at the same time we rely ever more heavily on imagery rather than text to communicate'* (3rd Way interview, Sept 98 Andrew Rumsey [www.http//books .google.com.thirdway](http://books.google.com.thirdway))

I believe that, in the best paintings, we can actually meet reality through visual representation, thus enlarging our understanding, and expanding, rather than reducing, our relation to the world around us. Creating, or appreciating a painting is for me no solitary pursuit.

'In the metaphorical world of a poem, painting or song, you are lifted up out of the ordinary and in this suspension your reality is transfigured, added to, so that on your return you have been 'met', and meaning has been enlarged' **The Genius of Creation**, Third Way Vol 21, no.7 Sept 1988, Andrew Rumsden. I believe that, in this way, exploring our creativity is part of the reciprocal relationship of living in God and of God living in us – of experiencing life in all its fullness (John 10:10).

Relatedness: Related through God the Son incarnate

For me, painting is about struggling in and with our world, not escaping from it. Like the Christian faith, it is, in its very essence, incarnational. Just as we, as Christians, are offered intimacy with God through Jesus, I believe that *'art enables us to see more deeply into ourselves and therefore more deeply into our relationships with the universe of people and things'* (Austin, 2005, p.140). Similarly in terms of 'receiving' the art work of others, I concur with the view of Brand and Chaplin *'Our appreciation of a work of art should not depend on whether it happens to share our worldview. Rather art is about a shared experience of what it means to be human'* (2007, p.146).

Relatedness: Related through God the Father, Creator

As a Christian, I believe that we are all connected through God, as creative Father of all, through the creative gifts which all people possess, and through the material world of created matter around us, with which we interact creatively. Dr Sara

Savage, researcher in psychology and Christian ministry, wrote recently of the role of creativity in helping us *'to see the openness of our emerging universe with new eyes and to re-envision the material world with the presence of our God who is both transcendent and immanent.'* She goes on to identify art as one of the *'new 'probes' by which to deepen religious knowing.'* (*Fresh Expressions, the gains and the risks, in Evaluating Fresh Expressions, Nelstrop and Percy, 2008, p.66*)

Relatedness: Related through God the living Spirit

My understanding of God as Holy Spirit, helps to explain how a painting can touch and move an individual deeply. I can imagine God's Spirit as the sort of interpreter between the immanence of a painting and its transcendent effect. God's Spirit is like the bringer of transparency – so that a solid image can become a window to the divine. In his book *'Living as The Beloved'* (1998) Henri Nouwen, describes this effect of embracing God's Spirit into his life: *'Everything changes radically from the moment you know yourself as being sent into this world. Times and spaces, people and events, art and literature history and science, they all cease to be opaque and become transparent, pointing far beyond themselves to the place from where you come and to where you will return'.* (P.105)

Relationship

Contrary to the 'romantic' view of the artist – with self at centre, and independence more important than belonging – I conclude that the work of a Christian artist in bringing a painting to life is 'relational' at all stages of conception, creation and reception.

In terms of **conception**, human relationships are involved in the sourcing and developing ideas. We have our own imaginations, but we share a common birthright. As Michael Mayne puts it in *Sunrise of Wonder, 1995: 'But if it is true ...that we are each made in 'the image of God, that we are bodies and we are also spirits...then 'human' and 'Christian' are not mutually exclusive terms. Each of us is unique, yet the story of any one of us is in some measure the story of us all. What a Christian claims to have is a different frame of reference' (p. 8).*

In terms of **creation**, there is an intense relationship between artist and the created world, which provides both inspiration and media. There is also a physicality in the act of painting which affirms the wonder of our human embodiment.

In terms of the **reception** of a painting, I believe paintings can bring us closer to God, by presenting humanity's big questions, which reach beyond individualism. Moreover, I believe that the visual provides a common language – beyond cultural divisions. Finally, I believe that paintings can challenge and change us, both artist and viewer, affirming our common humanity and pointing us towards our Heavenly Father.

Rowan Williams writes of the relational nature of art as follows: *'...the artist is always concerned with things as they are in relation to something more and other than the artist. This holds true at both ends, so to speak, of the process of artistic labour. The artist perceives the material of the world – visible things, patterns of sound, texture – as offering more than can appear in one moment of encounter and so begins to produce a further thing in the world that will allow that unseen or unheard life to continue itself in another mode. But that further thing itself has to be set free from the artist's mental world to relate to unimagined observers or listeners in present or future'*. *Grace and Necessity, 2005, p.149*. In summary, I believe that bringing a painting into the world is a relational activity, which reflects a relational God.

On a practical level, whether creating or observing, an effective painting can enable the kind of seeing which connects us to the divine. I believe there is room for more **looking** and **making** in our contemporary church culture, where, the emphasis is usually on the spoken word, rather than the visual or manual.

To bring a painting to life is to take a risk which enables growth. To make time to look and really receive a painting, is to risk seeing in a new way – seeing through it, to its divine source, God, who calls us to change and offers us healing.

'At the deepest level creativity is holiness', writes O'Donohue in *Divine Beauty :The Invisible Embrace (2004)*: *'...everything we think, feel and do...expresses and unfolds the dream of God. No human presence is neutral for there is some deeper, hidden level at which all creativity comes together...This is the realm of ultimate creativity...now we only see in a glass darkly, then we shall see face to face...'* (p.152).

To bring a painting to life for me is to approach a point of Holy connectedness. In time and space, on earth and in heaven, we are somehow joined to each other through God. Like bringing a baby into the world, I believe that creating a painting is impossible to achieve in isolation.

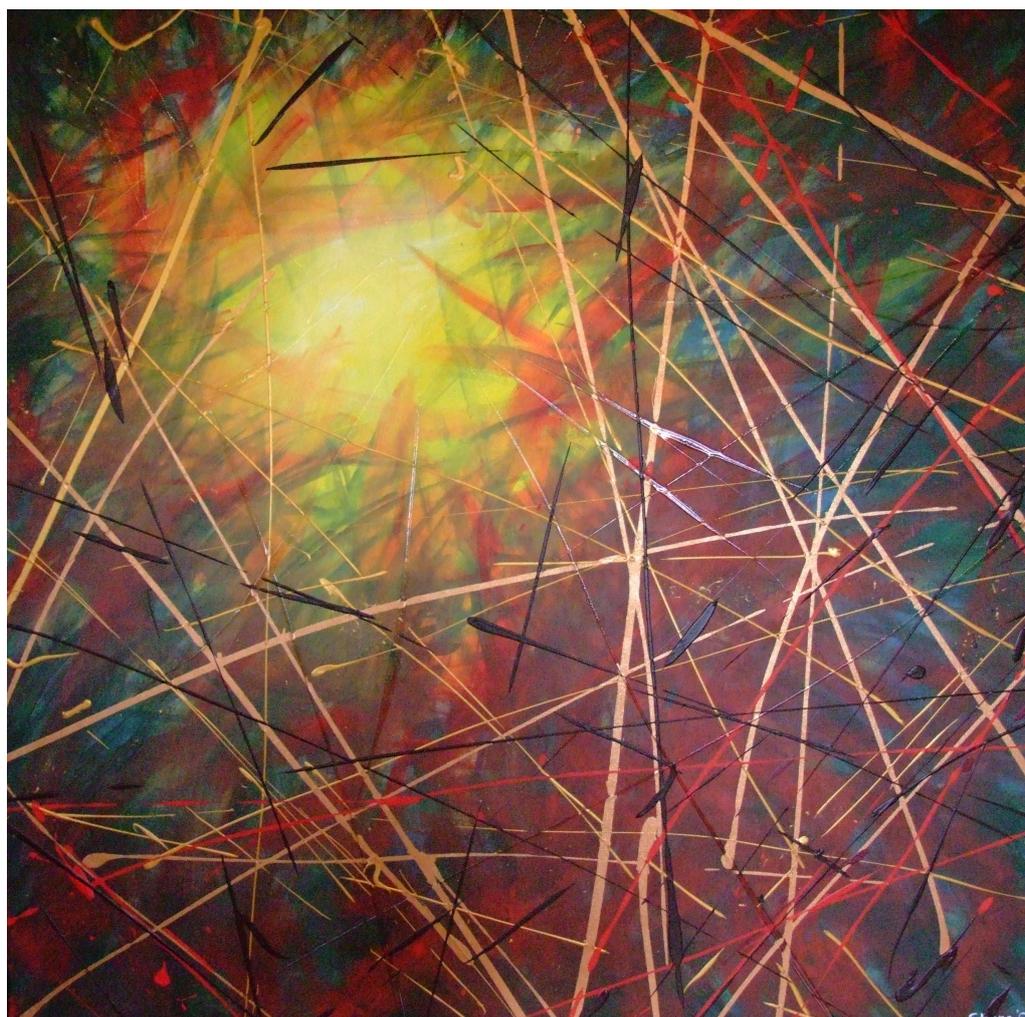
Appendices:

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| 1. St Luke the Painter | |
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Luke the Painter:

St Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray



Heliotrope (*Sunseeking*)

Shuna George

In the Presence of the Light Kate Austin



1. What inspired you to paint this piece?

I have always enjoyed art, especially art with a spiritual message. I had been a contemplative Christian for several years and developed a relationship with God as an intimate friend and father. During my daily time of quiet prayer, my spirit was filled with the image. The desire to paint it was utterly consuming and did not abate until the piece was finished.

2. What was significant about the process of painting? (did your ideas, feelings change over time etc)

I had some experience of painting but never before had the presence of God been so tangible as I worked. As I abandoned myself to the Presence, it was as

though He painted through me. The image burned within me and as I painted it was transferred to the board. When I had finished an intense peace overcame me. When I look at the piece now, it is as fresh in my spirit as when I painted it fourteen years ago.

3. What impact has the work had on your life/faith?

This particular piece was my first painting and as such it holds me to my calling, to paint the unseen and reveal the mysteries of God through artwork. It was the beginning of many other 'visions' and inspired paintings. It has given me a direction with which to express my faith. I began to exhibit the pictures, in themed prayer walks. From this grew the ability to inspire others in prayer and paint workshops, quiet days and silent retreats.

4. How have others been affected by it?

Many are inspired by the silence of this piece to prayer and stillness, something we often lack in our lives. The following is a quote from someone I have never met but who was affected by this piece.

'Dear Katherine, much goes by in this life and remains insignificant due to the fact it has no lasting impression. However, there are rare moments when something surfaces to become a beacon in the darkness of life. For me, your painting, IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LIGHT resonates as such, a powerful and liberating healing force. As I have battled a near fatal illness, those whom I trusted have abandoned me. Alone I stand in the rubble of my life but you have imparted to me the strength, the courage and the wisdom to never give up. I pray your relationship will deepen so many more lives will be touched by your outpouring of love for your fellow being, with every blessing.'

The Face Robyn Robertson



“I was asked to do a children’s story for the Sunday school and the children were 4 – 6 year olds. I decided to do Creation and how God bought light into the darkness. I had the idea that I would get a canvas and rule it in half and paint the top half black and paint the bottom half in glow in the dark paint. Then we would get under a blanket and have some fun with dark and light.

I got my canvas and ruled it in half and started to paint the top half black and was going up and down on the left hand side and then got bored as I only had a relatively small brush so just started to randomly paint the black paint from the right hand corner....then this face appeared!!!”

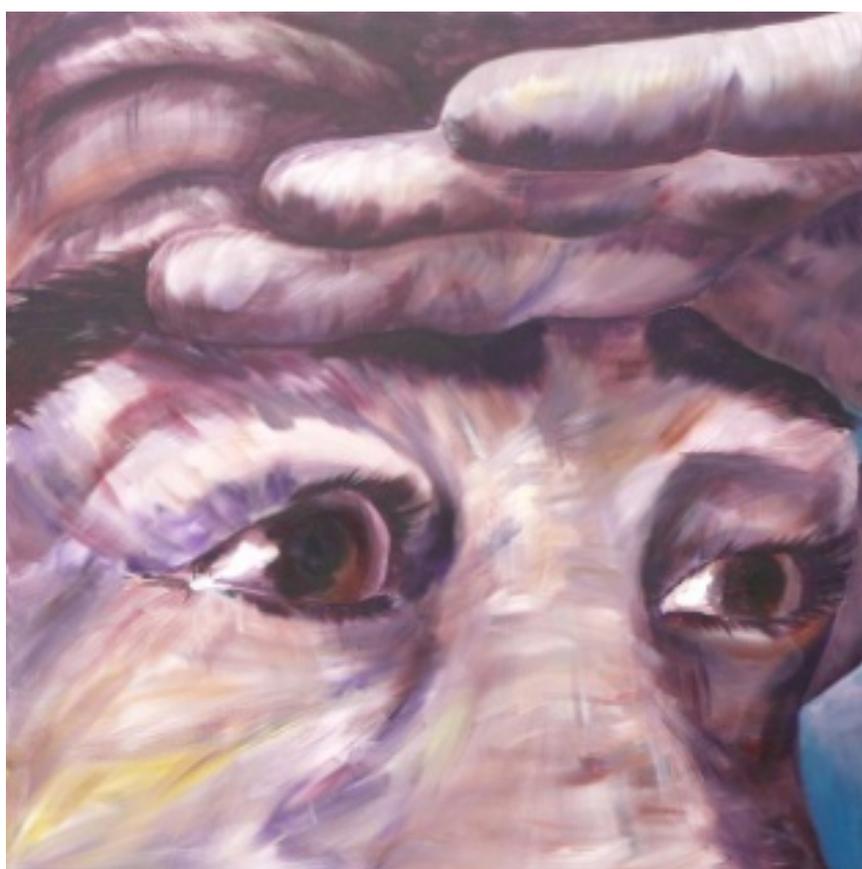
This changed the way I thought about painting from this point on because I realised that God can paint through you if you let Him. I don't paint all the time anymore, I just paint when I am inspired to do so. It is not about painting for painting's sake, it is about being obedient to God. The Face is my most favourite painting because it makes me know God lives inside me.

Appendix 5



Hide

Shuna George



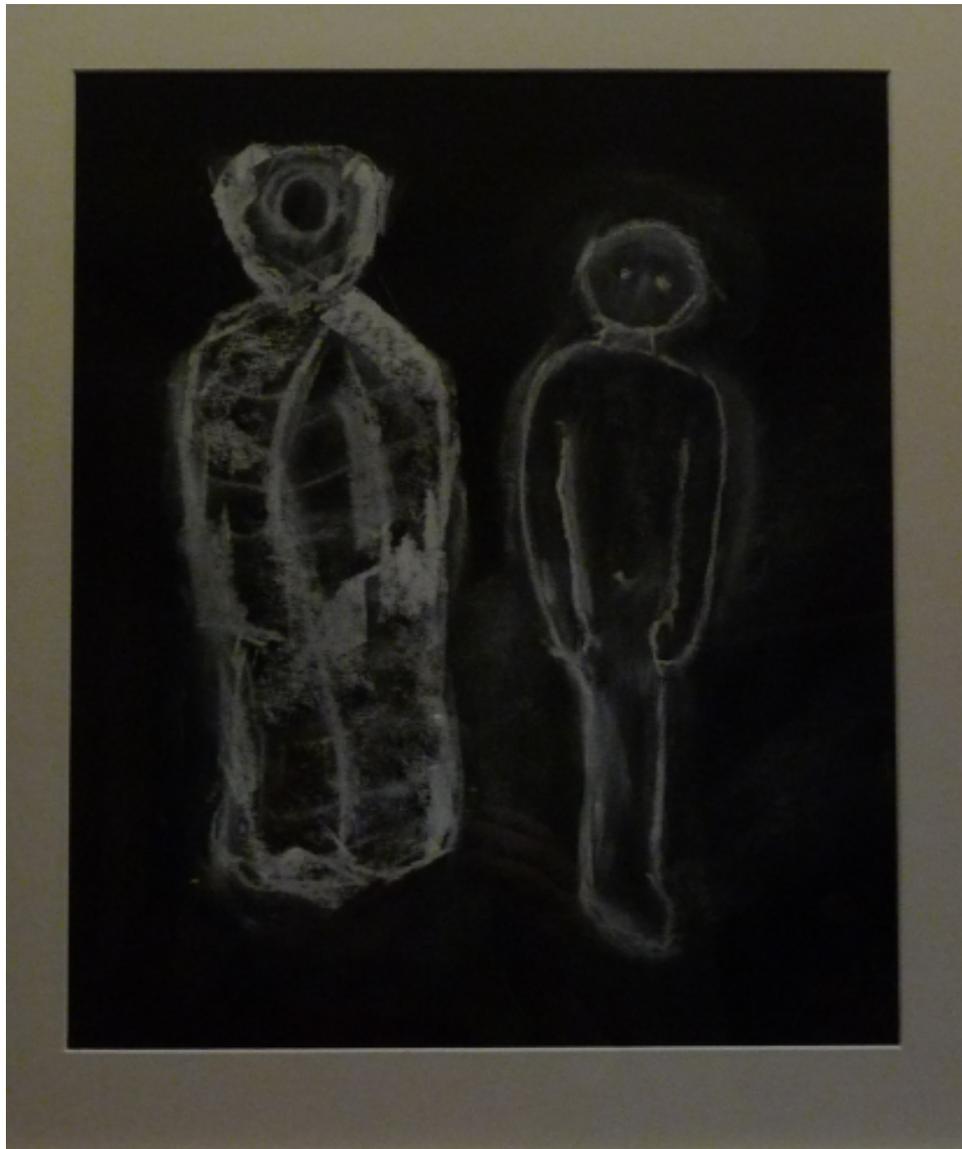
Seek

Shuna
George



Tsunami

Shuna George



Lazarus Graham Pigott

During a led meditation in an art retreat at St Beuno's, North Wales, in November 2009, I heard a voice within me say, 'Come out!' I was suddenly and powerfully in the story of Lazarus in the moment of being brought back to life after death and burial, an important overall theme for me during the previous 2 transitional years as I prepared for, moved into, and discovered retirement.

First, I explored my response in clay, and the image of the two terracotta figures shows the cocoon of Lazarus and his naked and vulnerable self hesitatingly standing,

having responded and come out. This was a deeply helpful process as it touched both my protective layers and vulnerability in ways far beyond words both through the making of the forms, the contemplation of them, and the sharing of both with the religious sister accompanying during the retreat. This led to two further responses. First a poem and then the chalk drawing.

The drawing was done with my left, least dominant, hand, which meant my usual mark making facility was scrambled and my tentative, hesitant searching with the chalk became uppermost as I tried to draw what the two sculptures expressed. I was feeling after, with less control, and found images that seem to encapsulate and express the essence of my outer and inner selves that were in conversation through exploring being Lazarus in deadness and the moment of new life. I was experiencing and translating the words of the poem into a image.

The impact of doing this has been to have an 'icon' of these selves which hangs in my studio as a reminder of the vulnerability of the very process of seeking to be deeply creative, of stepping out of darkness into light, of letting go of that which is deadening to respond to the what is a call to live in all its unlikelihood, uncertainty and unknownness.

| | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Standing now; | Summoned | Silent now; | Suspended |
| no longer laid | now; | head tilted, | now; |
| wrapped, | to life and air, | quizzically | naked in new |
| inert, | light and | questioning; | creation; |
| lost to all but | sound, | even arms and | hollowed chest |
| one | to open eyes | hands | yet to take full |
| who wept as | on love's | attentive | breath, |
| well. | eternal gaze. | in anticipation. | waiting..... |

Mandala workshop paintings

Adults' Mandalas

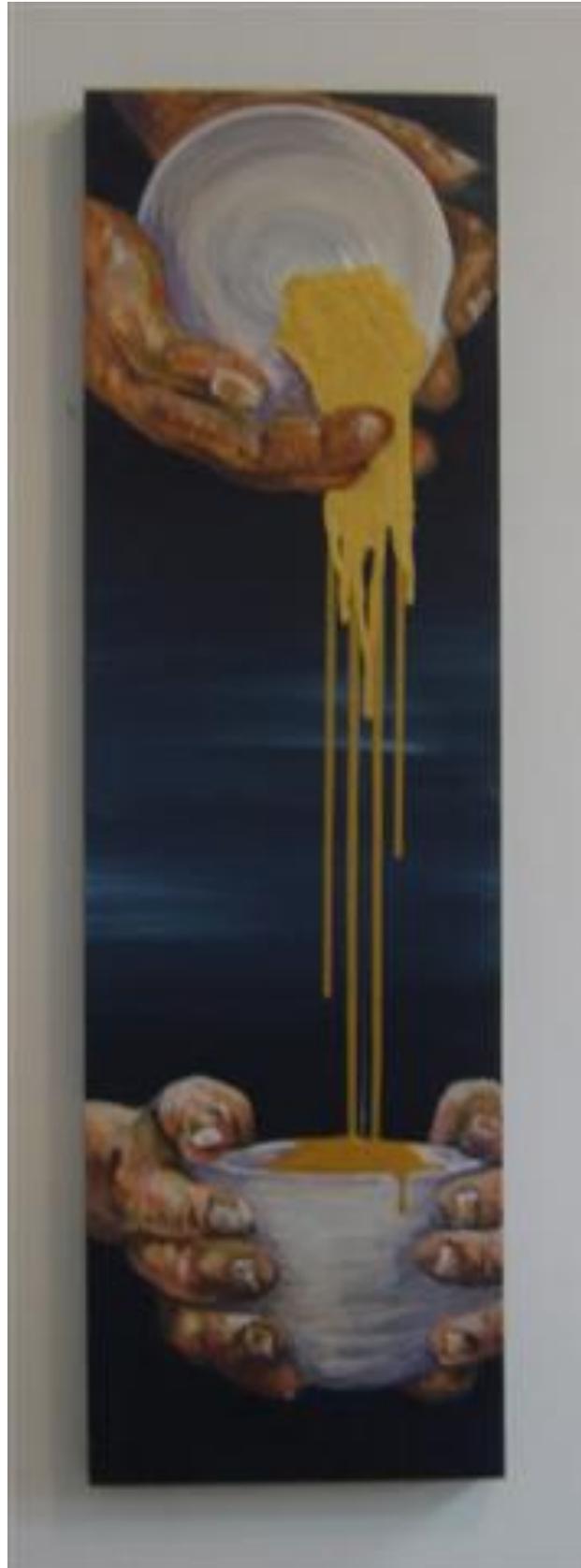


Children's Mandalas



I will Pour Out my spirit Upon You

Shuna George

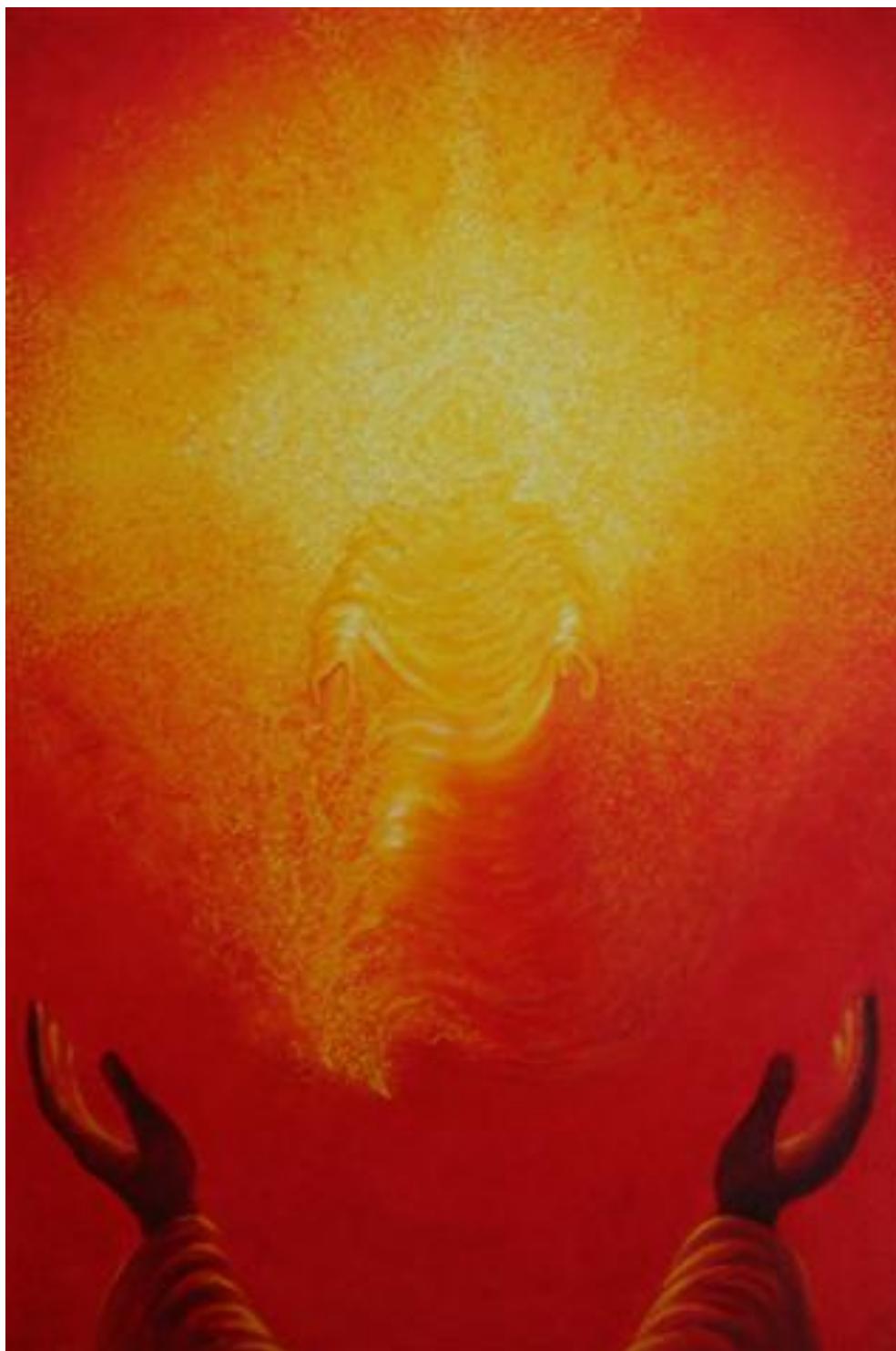




Spirit

Shuna George

Appendix 11



Rabbouni Janet Driver

1.What inspired you to paint this piece? I was inspired by the way in which the Gospels portray the Risen Christ as lovingly meeting with different people in a way that was so sensitive to their deepest need. I began with a series on Mary of Magdala..... I put it off, at first, feeling “how can I possibly even think of painting this?” ...but then, I realised I just had to do it... And so I began.

2.What was significant about the process of painting? I had to start straight in & see how I was led. I knew it was to be joyful & filled with light...yellows & oranges over a red background seemed both joyful & dramatic & reminiscent of dawn. Elements of the composition only emerged as I painted and I tried to discover the inner prompting of how to do this picture...I had to become still & attentive, risking that it might not “work”, but just do a little every day & then wait until the next step became clearer. I painted in layers.... Each layer needed leaving to dry for about 12 - 24 hours, so it was a long meditative process....always underlying everything else I had to do...thinking of that word “Rabbouni” ...again & again

How have others been affected by it?

...A number of people have stood and looked at it silently for quite a time...as though something speaks to them through it....without particularly wanting to talk about that experience;

What impact has the work had on your life / faith?

It has helped me become a little more open & vulnerable...more ready to wait, become more still... I must just trust that it may well speak to someone.....and if even that doesn't happen, then it has been a deepening of my inner journey...a visual interaction / exploration with God...and it's that process that matters more than the final picture.

Ballad of Tears Keith Elliott



What inspired you to paint this piece?

It is an abstract painting from a time of struggling. I started with a blank canvas and just started painting expressively. I did a background of blues and greens, because that was how I was feeling. Then I used reds, and the orange became dominant. The

shapes come from the colours underneath. There are hearts, linked with brokenness and frustration. My feelings were the starting point.

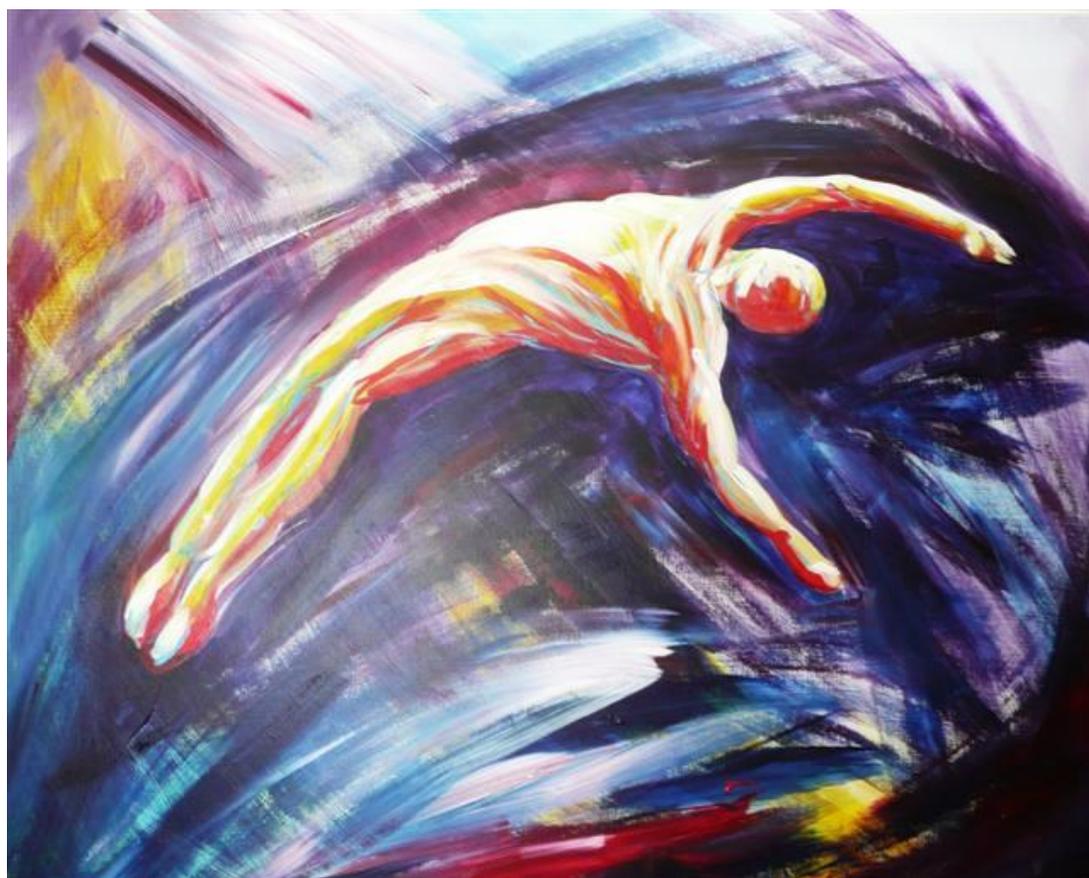
What was significant about the process of painting – did your ideas, feelings change over time? My feelings did change. The dark original colours got brighter as hope set in. There was a movement towards reds and oranges. It is as if putting the paint onto canvas transmits the emotion into the paint, to alleviate the feelings. It was painted in one 6 hour session at night.

What impact has the work had on your life/ faith?

It is an affirming painting. I enjoy looking at it and it reassures me that through pain there is hope. It is like the experience of Jesus at Gethsemane – through the tears there will be joy and light.

How have others been affected by the painting?

Some people find it overpowering, while others find it gentle. Some say it makes them feel angry. There are lots of different responses to it. Some identify with it and some don't. I like people to find their own meaning.



Falling

Shuna George



The Storm

Shuna George



Splash

Shuna George



Rainbow Christ Glenda Gibson

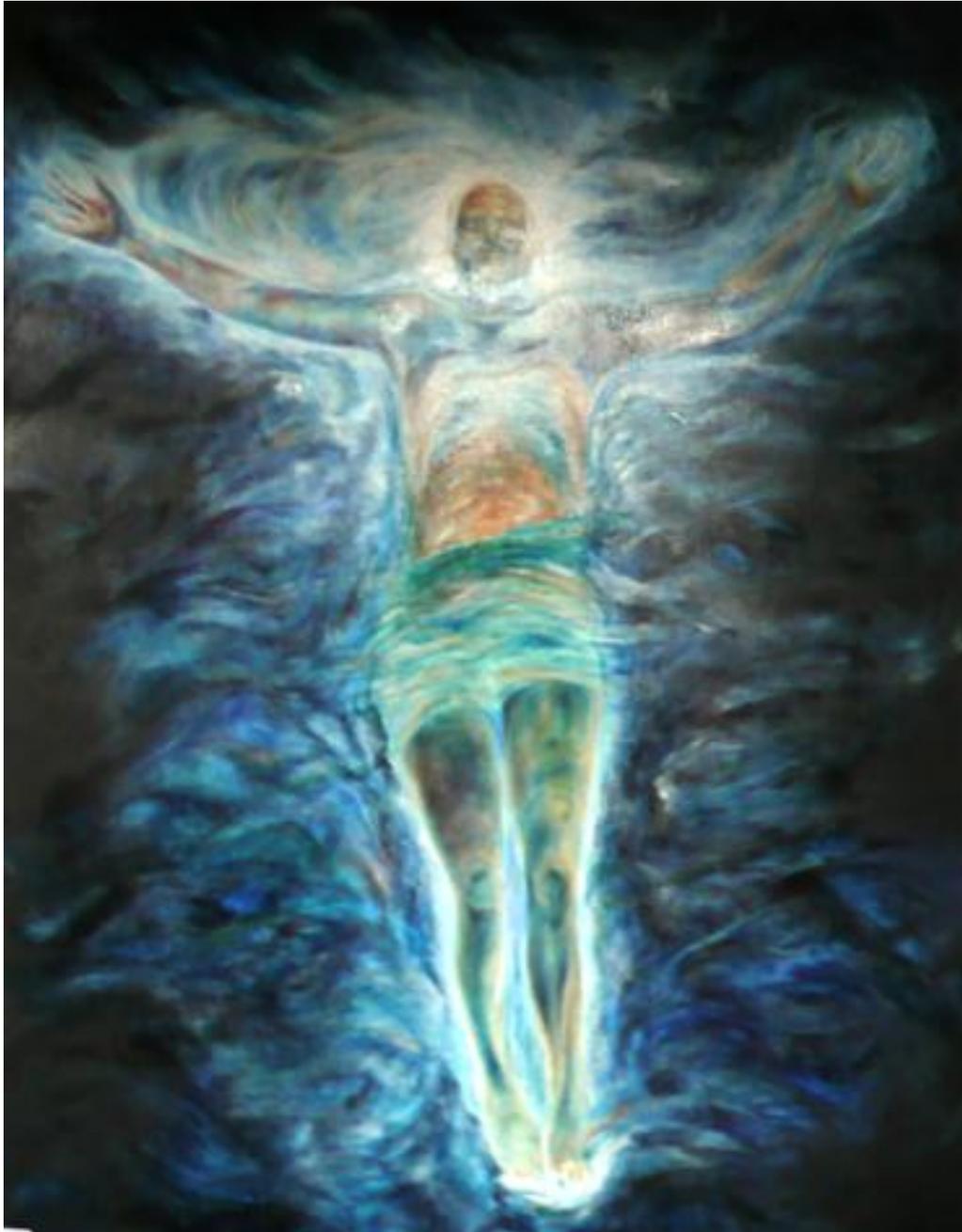
_With God I decided to make friends with colour and started with the rainbow. I did several simple water colours experimenting with colour and the characteristics of each pigment. At some point I decided to paint Jesus in a rainbow. Not sure where this idea even came from! The painting worked. I was able to carve Jesus out of a rainbow using tone. I wasn't happy with the drawing skill in this painting but it was

one of my first painting to sell to a lady who had trouble praying and used the painting to help her talk to Jesus.

I am very humbled that my work of art has been used in this amazing way. I talked to Jesus as I painted His picture. It was very moving and intimate.

The reaction to this picture was varied. Some found it garish and others loved it for the colours. One chap found it so moving he cried. Someone else could 'see' a lot of complex metaphors that were not mine, but I have found the Holy Spirit takes my offering and multiplies it and uses it for the sake of those looking at the image.

I find painting for God and with God very exciting because I never really know how I am blessing others and often only in faith do I know that I am.

Appendix 17

Christus Aneste Antonia Winsor

The title means 'Christ is Risen!', an amazing moment when Christ's body was brought to life by the power of God. A unique event in time of transformation and

transfiguration. *The painting followed on from a painting of the crucifixion, completed after Antonia had returned from a visit to the garden tomb in Jerusalem.*

Antonia was thinking about the reactions of those present at the crucifixion to the event of the resurrection. She was interested in describing the moment of God's power going into Christ's dead body – how the skin tones would change as the blood flowed in with new life.

The actual form of the painting evolved accidentally from looking at the negative photographic image of the earlier crucifixion painting. This crucifixion painting had become very dark, so that much of the detail was hidden under layers of paint. When Antonia viewed the negative, all was revealed, as the darkest areas became the lightest. It was a literal and metaphorical revelation. Antonia became aware of the theological significance of what she saw ie that the Risen Christ is the negation of the crucified Christ! In terms of scale, it was important to Antonia that the figure should be life-size for impact.

The passage of time is an important theme explored in Antonia's work. In particular she likes to use media which reflect elements such as transitoriness and permanence – for example using old dust from a particular place.

As a Christian the idea of time, the passage of time and what we leave behind us is a favoured subject.



I am with you Sue Newham

What inspired you to paint this piece?

The starting point was a desire to be expressive with paint – hence the swirls around with colours. I did the background first, not knowing how it would develop. I felt God would direct the picture.

What was significant about the process of painting?

I sat and reflected. I thought about a previous painting I had finished called 'Refiner's Fire'. It is about God's presence with us in difficult times. I reflected on God's words, spoken through Isaiah, 41:10 'So do not fear, for **I am with you**'

What impact has the work had on your life & faith?

When finished – I felt it was a strong image with impact. It has been displayed at Chichester cathedral, where one viewer described it as scary!

How have others been affected by it?

The painting has been bought by a vicar and it hangs in her counselling room. It is often commented on and used as a starting point for pastoral ministry.



Trinity

Shuna George

Kneeling by R. S. Thomas

Moments of great calm,
Kneeling before an altar
Of wood in a stone church
In summer, waiting for the God
To speak; the air a staircase
For silence; the sun's light
Ringing me, as though I acted
A great rôle. And the audiences
Still; all that close throng
Of spirits waiting, as I,
For the message.
Prompt me, God;
But not yet. When I speak,
Though it be you who speak
Through me, something is lost.
The meaning is in the waiting.

R. S. Thomas, "Kneeling" from *Not That He Brought Flowers*. Copyright © 1968 by R. S. Thomas. Used by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Ltd.

Source: *Collected Poems 1945-1990* (Bloodaxe Books, 1993)

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