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for your encouragement and inspiration.

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GOD IS...





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a prayer

'My God, my God ... You are a figurative, a metaphorical God ... a God in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages ... to fetch remote and precious metaphors, such extensions, such spreadings, such curtains of allegories ... and such things in your words ... you are the Dove that flies.'

John Donne

Devotions (alt. to reflect modern English)¹

FOREWORD: GIFT

I feel tremendously privileged to present the artwork and writing contained here to everyone who buys or receives a copy of book two in this series.

Lives have altered in so many ways with the arrival of COVID-19, and it has thrown us into unknown territory within ourselves.

The upended society in which we now live raises many internal questions.

Today it is even more important to give voice to diverse creative expressions on a subject key to many – their spirituality. The varied artwork in this book represents a hand-picked selection of the 700+ artists who entered these awards on the theme 'God is...' Some share my faith, some come from different faith backgrounds, some are exploring the subject and others have no faith at all, but each artist has shared their imagination, their creative talent and their unique response to this theme.

As you rest awhile with each piece and the thought-provoking poetry and prose which accompanies each section, my heartfelt prayer is that you will encounter the God who knows you, loves you and waits to reveal the mysteries of life, love, pain, suffering and joy.

From all at Chaiya Art Awards, this is our gift to you.

CHAIYA TRUST

Katrina Moss, Founder, Chaiya Art Awards



LANDSCAPE

In 2020, our world changed. For many it became a world of lamentation, fear, separation, anxiety, social distancing, economic depression, need, loneliness, mental and emotional distress, uncertainty, disruption, debilitating illness and widening social and racial divide. For others a world of pause, time 'to be', communing with nature, learning fresh skills, becoming the fittest we had ever been, a fresh and grateful renewed perspective on family and relationships. For some, their job brought them to unknown depths of fatigue. For others, their job became hazardous. Those who delivered to our homes, drove emergency vehicles, deep-cleaned premises, became vital. Together in 2021 we survey an irreversibly altered landscape as the spectre of COVID-19 remains, affecting not only our country but also our planet.

A sphere of noise and time-struggle straddled our activities before lockdowns peppered our lives. Lockdown separated siblings, grandparents, extended family, children, grandchildren, lovers and friends, and we complied, wanting deliverance from all in this uncharted territory, despite its underlying cruelty. In the first lockdown kindness mushroomed – when the NHS (National Health Service, UK) asked for volunteers to augment their services, 400,000 of us stepped up. Neighbour discovered neighbour, and help was on hand. A testament to a hidden culture that cared. Family, in its broadest sense, highlighted connection and amplified disconnection. A third lockdown, occurring just before and continuing over Christmas and into the New Year, found a nation wearied.

Fissures of inequality and poverty opened, increasing need for foodbanks and meals for children. Perhaps the greatest illumination occurred in racial inequality; angry voices against endemic racism and questions about the disproportionality of Blacks and Asians dying from the disease. Governments struggled to find clarity and perspective amid the overwhelming scientific data. Their task? To navigate a pathway of wisdom through a catastrophe most global leaders were ill prepared for. We will nurse and rehearse the story of the pandemic over decades, but one thing we recognise, the decimation of 2020, leaching into 2021, ongoing until vaccination takes full effect, will reveal itself as devastating as war. Its seismic eruption must affect our children, our children's children, and beyond. May they forgive us for the havoc wrought through our many failures.

'Today, in a world full of conflict and shocks, art bears witness to the most precious part of what makes us human ... At a time of global disorder, art embraces life.'

Christine Macel²

For some, a touch of myopia in this unprecedented time permitted us to leave in order to return as we sought nourishment for our heart and soul and spirit in the natural world. For others, the anaesthetising properties of filling our lives with online entertainment soon left a dissatisfying emptiness. We wanted to eat, chew, swallow and digest that which nourished our well-being.

This theme-based competition is food for the soul, worthwhile to devour, devoted as

it is to addressing a higher consciousness; to travel a path of wonder; to seek the immaterial mystery of the numinous or 'Spirit'.

In the silence and stillness of contemplation we unlock ourselves to fresh experiences, for which, perhaps, we have no language. Pondering God and the concept of His being is heady and surprising. If God is real, then expect Him to reveal Himself.

The artists featured in this book invite us to muse with them about their journey, laying before us a heartland of fullness. They reduce, simplify, purify and attempt to align themselves with that which is beyond complete expression.

Historically, art has narrated stories with relatable images to our story-absorbed history. Some curated images here are figurative; others abstract. Abstract art reaches into uncharted territory, like a wind we cannot see but feel.

The work is a variety of mediums – canvas and paper; photographs; cloth and stitch; 3D metalwork and pottery; bronze and stone sculpture; glass and pipework; a movement-sensitive robot alongside an interactive sign with sonic sensors. All the pieces cry out for time and patience to mine the artists' ideas.

What does the theme 'God is...' ask? Our understanding of life is individual, but we are all damaged, we all cry out in pain and pleasure, we all crave connection and something more... Grasping the opportunity to explore spirituality will enrich, sustain and offer adventurous hope.



JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Daphne Stephenson / Acrylic / W: 110 H: 140cm

Inspired by memories as a six-year-old, living in Pakistan, taking my first Holy Communion. I felt honoured to receive Jesus, and hope I have conveyed His extraordinary love, strength and bravery. I remember the lightness and joy I felt in my spirit. This painting depicts wholeness, freedom, peace, joy and rest.



GOLDEN ALGORITHM

Mark Osborne / Gold leaf paints, acrylics on folded cardboard mounted on MDF / W: 117 H: 116cm

The piece is abstract. It deals with materials, surfaces, reflections, shadows, and, because of its 3D quality, it engages with the light and changes all through the day. This is the stuff of existence for me.



CONSOLATION

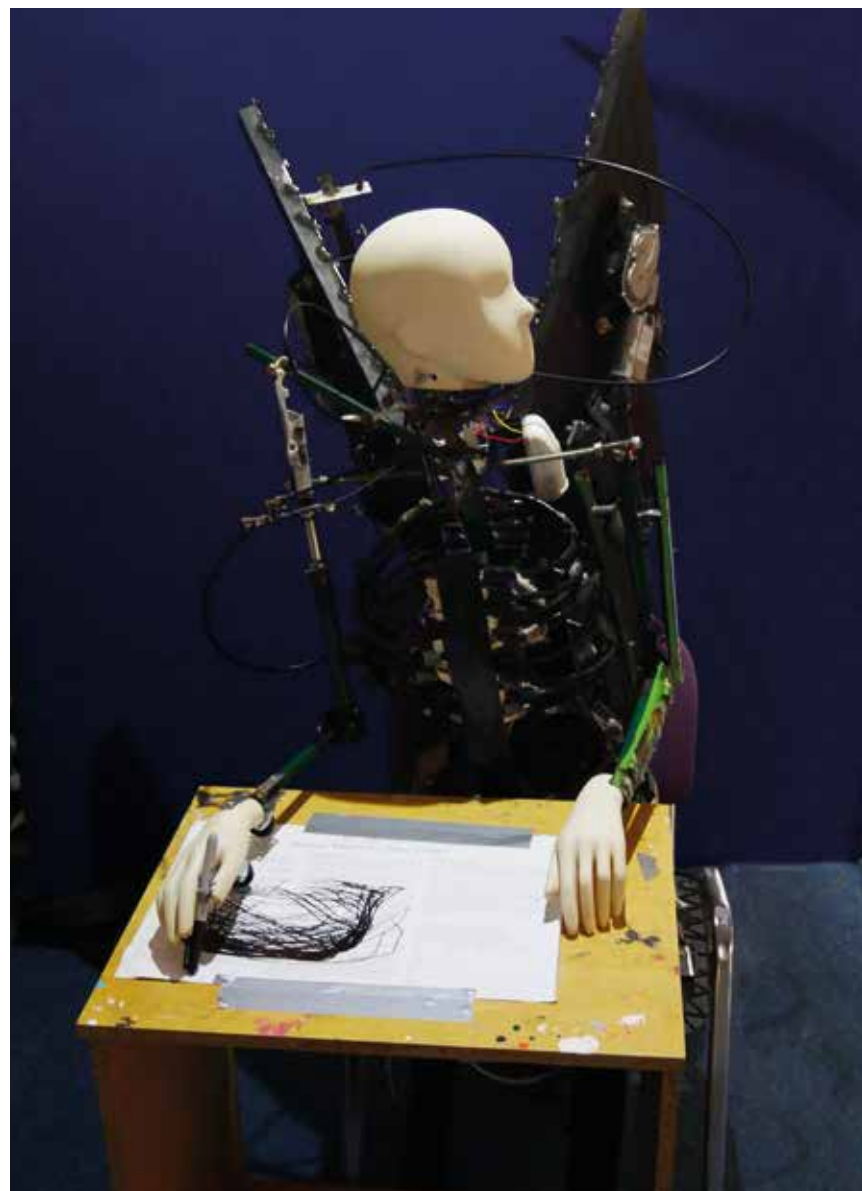
There are times
when we want
to be filled with
something
we cannot
explain; to be
comforted and
stilled; to look
beyond what
can be seen
to explore that
which cannot.

New beginnings

The heart begins a tiny, unformed
wandering craft,
waiting, listening, garnering.
A child-sized information-gatherer
tethered by numerous teachers.

It grows
and weighs anchor.
The mists of seas encircle,
the pleats of darkness blind,
storms gather, batter and becalm.
Within the unquiet soul
arise the ghouls of fear.
Alone
in an unstable boat
it longs to return
to sound harbour,
but its cries, heard,
reveal the secret space
of faith.

As the mist clears,
a new-minted spirit
now navigates
to a different wind called trust –
adventure's tack.



DELETION

Myles Mansfield / Kinetic steel sculpture built from scrap metal / W: 60 H: 200 D: 100cm Weight: 40kg

A robot built from scrap materials that scribbles and destroys my original artwork when alone. When someone enters, it stops and turns its head to look at them. Its chest rises and falls, imitating breathing. It has wings to symbolise our god, 'technology', as the solution to our unhappiness.



RADIANT

Philippine Sowerby / Local cherry wood from Powys / W: 35 H: 40 D: 22cm with the stone base Weight: 14kg

God is radiant through all of creation living in harmony. A ring made of rays connected by a central core. We are called to communion with God, and unity not uniformity with all of humankind. When this happens, God can be present and visible, radiant like the sun, Light of the World.

i can't breathe

So simple
Life... living... breathing
In two three, out two three
In two three, out two three
Lungs threatened,
Body fouled
By virulence –
Spreading, filling,
Taking,
Sucking life.
Nano second by nano second
Body shelled
And we, the onlookers,
Watch and wait
In fear
For our breath-less intubation.

George Floyd
Another name, another man,
Another emptying.
A human being imaged in the Divine
Like us
A man of dust returned there
By a knee.
How great our shame that
Inalienable rights
Again prove sectioned,
Where white clammers on black
Without mercy.

Two viruses
The difference –
One could be eradicated
By a vaccine.

June 2020

"Not everything
that is faced can
be changed,
but nothing can
be changed until
it is faced."

James Baldwin³

another's shoes

When African–American George Floyd died at the hands of the police in Minneapolis, Minnesota, it galvanised an entire Black Lives Matter protest over many parts of the world. Caught on film, on 25 May 2020, white police officer Derek Chauvin pinned George Floyd to the ground by placing his knee on his neck until he died, despite Mr Floyd's repeated cries that he could not breathe. Charged with second- and third-degree murder and manslaughter, the court granted Mr Chauvin bail while awaiting trial. The three other officers present at the incident are also facing charges, and the department has since fired the four officers.

The effect of George Floyd's death has been dramatic among black and diverse ethnicities worldwide. Huge numbers marched against racism in the USA, UK and other countries.

The banner 'Black Lives Matter' encompassed the dynamic world movement which mushroomed in protest. Accompanying these three words, written and spoken many times in multiple ways, are many heart-rending stories of endemic racism.

Listening and learning during COVID uncovered the racism in my own heart, and I recognised I was part of the problem. As a white person speaking to white people, it seems to me we each live our own story into which we place ourselves as hero, which allows us to disregard, dismantle and denigrate any other story that disagrees with ours. If, with humility,

we replace ourselves as hero in order to step into the shoes of others to learn, a radical change in us and therefore society becomes possible. If we listen to the heart cries around us, we will understand how vital it is to stand against racism, in all its forms, wherever we find it.

'No-one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.'

Nelson Mandela⁴

'Jesus and I don't agree on all matters. I can't, for instance, go along with Mr Christ's idea that to think a crime is as bad as to commit one. But when he talks about first taking the great plank of wood out of our own eyes before presuming to criticise the tiny speck in other people's he has a point. So perhaps it might be illuminating, instructive, or at least entertaining to look at something very inward and personal that almost never gets looked at these days. Usually when we look inside we are encouraged to congratulate ourselves on our beautiful, underappreciated and cruelly misunderstood personalities, but I want to take away the jewel encrusted stone of our shining selves and reveal the nasty squirming slimy creatures that crawl beneath – our sins.'

Stephen Fry⁵

Freedom Prayer

God, we stand before you
without shoes.

Shoes are symbolic of the many things racism has trampled upon

to diminish black women, men
and children in every way.

We have called this world 'ours',
and as 'superior' beings

not accepted the equal
voices of others.

We continue to shun, laugh,
pour scorn, dismiss, incarcerate,
traffic and enslave,

believing we have the right to do so.

We see ourselves as
loftier in every way.

We deride, insult, belittle,
fail to allow space for

each to take their
rightful place, and for all this,

we are ashamed.

Forgive us.

Make a way for truth, reconciliation
and justice to stand in our country.

Change our hearts,

fill us with your humility,

help us root out this accursed sin

in all its diverse forms,

and replace it with a love that is
positive, active

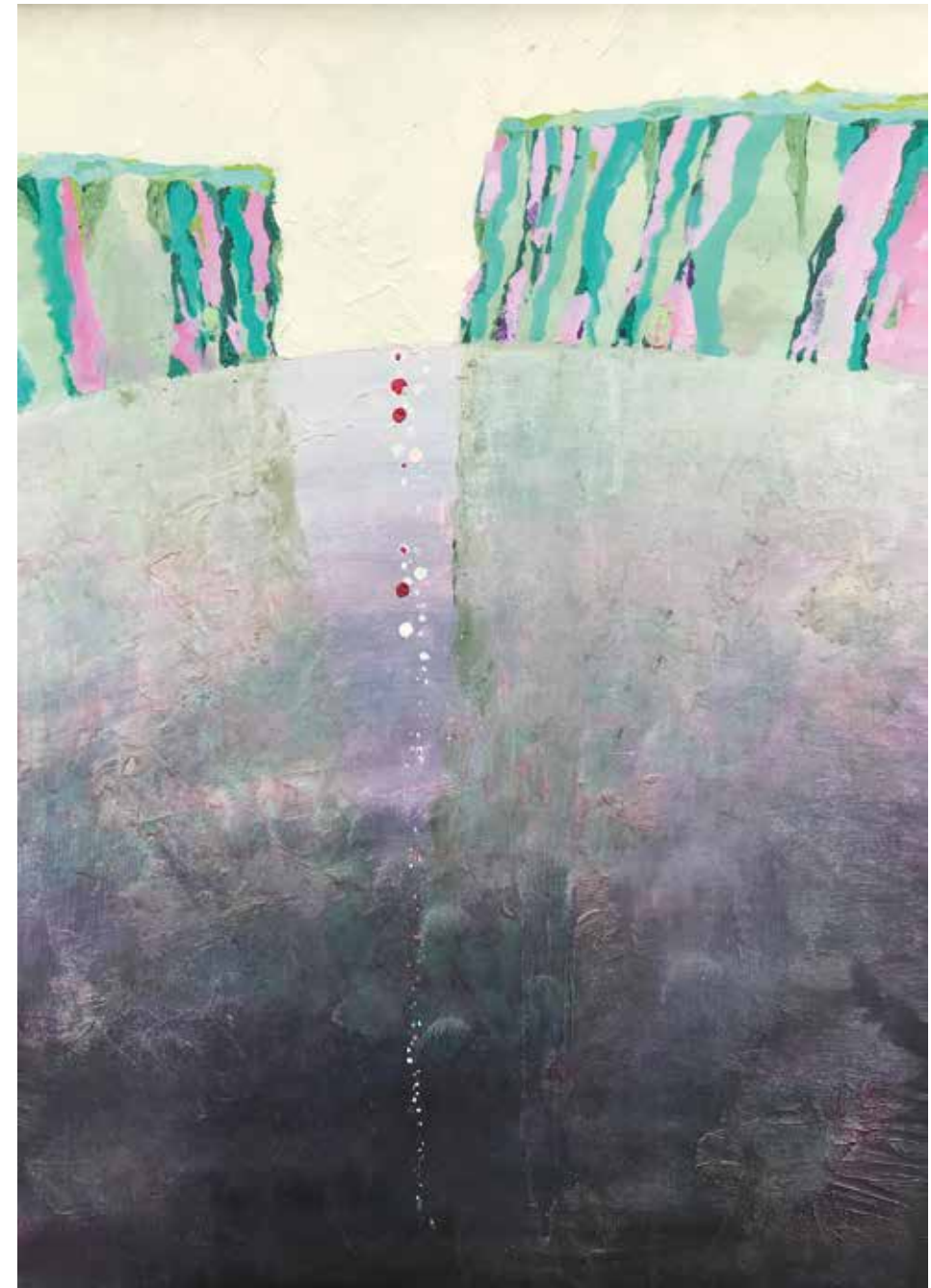
and change-making.



WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND?

Christy Burdock / Acrylic on canvas / W: 100 H: 150cm

A painting based on a Quaker meeting and its prevailing narratives and discourse. It talks about a poem, 'Who Has Seen the Wind?' by Christina Rossetti that was referred to during 'ministry' by a member of the praying group.



FISH IV #1 THE SEA IS DEEP

Chris Wilmott / Oil on board / W: 50 H: 60cm

The work represents water, air, life and changing climates. It is one of a series exploring the stanza 'the sea is deep and full of fish, but maybe this is not a wish'. It focuses on the first four words. The viewer may ask: are there fish, where are the fish and where are the people? Considering loss is part of the human condition.



living too thinly

Being human

Have we lost the sense of our true identity on this beleaguered planet of ours? We thrash about in a deeply uncomfortable and disturbing soup, the ingredients of which include global conflict and care, beginning and end of life, artificial intelligence, identity politics, immigration and integration, social care for all, economic divisions, internet regulation, tribalism and nationalism, and so much more.

What does it mean to be human? Is this question one of the most contested arenas in our current culture today?

There are so many competing narratives trying to structure and systematise who we are, what constitutes each individual human, and to deliver an understanding of personal identity.

Do we buy our story from the most compelling bidder of the day?

Historically, beginning several centuries ago, the formation of our values in the UK matured from the crucible of Christianity from which the God of the Bible defined the highest view of what it meant to be human. This narrative explained we were made in His image. God endowed great dignity and honour, unearned by us, to His human creation. Unpacking this endowment included dwelling on this earth, contributing to all through an active loving, a sacrificial living, a commitment to reconciliation, a positive nourishing of both the community of fellow human beings and our physical environment – our world. Many initiatives for the good of the poor, anti-slavery, etc, were begun because of this narrative.

As Peter Lynas and Jo Frost say in their article 'Being Human',⁶ 'we are "storied" creatures'. If we bend without question to the strongest story, our own narrative about our humanity will disintegrate as we trust one imperfect storyteller after another. Deprived of genuine substance and sustenance, our lives become thin and friable.

Do we need the sustenance of certainty? Can ongoing cohesion and harmony reside without it? Derided absolutes founded on a personal God who became human and walked the earth have become transportable, malleable values and beliefs. Have we lost everything, been stripped naked and left quivering in our vulnerability? Into whose storied hands would we place ourselves? Which hands do we trust to hold us as a newborn baby, expressing a parent's heart of love and unequivocal self-sacrifice?

Whether we believe in God or not, many of us long to mark-make somewhere, somehow in our society. To leave a remembrance of ourselves, to not be forgotten. This deep-rooted desire perhaps draws on a profound sense within us that we were born as a human being for a purpose. It unsettles, jostles and discombobulates. What that purpose is might be as mysterious as the depths of the ocean, but does not invalidate the sense. It is like the desire for eternity exemplified by the Elon Musks of this world and their pursuit, through artificial intelligence, to conquer death, the final frontier.

Consciously or unconsciously we are all guided by a story or stories. Being human – which story do we choose to live?

'God is dead,
that I cannot
deny.

But that my
whole being
cries out for
God: that I can
never forget.'

Jean-Paul Sartre



SHELTER

Rachel Ho / Porcelain paper clay (ceramics) / W: 8 H: 13cm each shelter Weight 100g

Each porcelain paper clay shelter is embossed with an old Irish proverb, alongside its translation, 'It is in the shelter of each other that the people live.' Each imperfect shelter is glazed with gold lustre on the cracks and tears, speaking of new beginnings and renewal. Shelter is solace, hope and transformation. John O'Donohue reminds, 'in the kindest of care, the divine comes alive in us'.



GOD

Jo Fairfax / Acrylic, MDF, sonic sensors and Arduino / W: 63 H: 44 D: 10cm Weight: 24kg

'GOD' is a result of my considering the position of God in relation to a mechanical universe. I have been wondering about this question for the past forty years and this is my first artwork about the topic.

GOD IS... an invitation to
look beyond, to discern what
cannot be seen and grasp
what cannot be described.
A liminal space where life's
pain and pleasure dissolve,
where questions and answers
fade into shadow, where the
indefinable lies, a treasure
waiting to be found.

God is... a mystery explored
by fifty visual artists, their
bold works bound together by
luminous text, taking us to the
threshold of understanding.

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