



WHERE IS GOD IN OUR 21ST CENTURY WORLD?

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WHERE IS GOD IN OUR 21ST CENTURY WORLD? ANN CLIFFORD



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HISTORY

CHAIYA TRUST

Katrina Moss, Founder, Chaiya Art Awards

In 2016 my mother, Sylvia, was dying of pancreatic cancer. At the hospice I repeated to her a story that had been told at a friend's funeral, called *Water Bugs and Dragonflies* by Doris Stickney. Written to teach children about death, it resonated with my mum. However, what spoke to both of us was its vision of something beyond our comprehension and imagination. The story gave her a picture to align with her belief that death was not the end, but the beginning of another journey, one from which she could not return.

During that difficult and emotional time I yearned for a fresh vision for what I should do with the next stage of my life. The Chaiya Art Awards were the answer to my heart cry.

As with all big projects, it has been shaped by many people, for which I am hugely thankful. My aim through the Awards was to engage with artists to encourage them to create art that expresses faith and spirituality. Art has the ability to convey an idea, emotion or experience of God which is of immense value.

'Where is God in our 21st-century world?' is a challenging question in these difficult times. In the world today we see so much conflict and war; inhumanity; lack of care towards the young, the elderly, the disadvantaged, the vulnerable; neglect of the environment, and countless other concerns.

It is easy to think these issues reinforce the argument that there is no God, but I suggest that, in these often desperate situations, God is there to be found.

This book expands on the art showcased in the original exhibition and encourages us to go on a journey with this question. How will artists in our century, across many different mediums, engage with this subject: those with faith in God, those with none, and all those in between?

My prayer is that you will discover art that resonates with you and be blessed.



REALISING DREAMS

Katrina and I have been friends for thirty-five years. During that time we have embarked on many adventures. There's the one about the ugly sisters, the Cannes Film Festival, the short film starring the chicken, and the feature film, to name but a few. Our friendship has been the seedbed of much. Along with the encouragement of our husbands, it has endured painful disappointments, fabulous highs and the extremes of stress. There is something wonderful about friendship that withstands the best and the worst that can be thrown at it.

This project has been a labour of love for us. We have sought to encourage artists and all the Arts for as long as we can remember. Over the years we have brought practitioners together to sustain and embolden each other and, of course, in the process we have been enriched ourselves.

We rejoice together in the opportunity to realise a dream, to encourage excellence and the creation of resonant, spiritual work. From the small place of friendship anything can happen. May practitioners in the Arts be loved, accepted and revitalised.

EXPLORE

When I was seventeen and working in London as a secretary, I saved my money to leave England and embark on a course to learn French in Montpellier, France. For me it was a bold decision. I teamed up with a fearless Dutch student, and she and I determined to stay on after the course and found work picking grapes. Eventually we both sought work in a Paris full of student unrest. At any moment you could turn a corner in the Quartier Latin and come face to face with a squad of riot police. Not for the faint-hearted. Heady times.

She and I embarked on a trip to Amsterdam. We had little money so we hitched our way from Paris.

Through my friend I discovered the Rijksmuseum, and there I had my first visceral experience of an original painting. I turned a corner in that wonderful museum and came face to face with a painting most of us know: *Sunflowers* by Van Gogh. It literally took my breath away. I had seen numerous copies of it. I ‘knew’ it. But now I experienced it. The sunflowers seemed to extend out of the painting. There was something disquieting about them as if hope-filled beauty contained undercurrents of menace. I stood transfixed. This was what life felt like to me. The charisma of the actual painting was unforgettable. At that moment it was as if scales dropped from my eyes and I became an explorer. We hope this book excites the ‘explorer’ in us all.

‘One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time.’

ANDRE GIDE¹

Where is God in Our 21st-century World? seeks, through art, to uncover where and if the sacred inhabits the ordinary.

Let us be humble seekers and, whatever our beliefs, explore. Let us take a moment from the activity and turmoil, the stress and responsibilities of our daily living and engage our hearts and minds in a different way.

We ask, can art and faith impact everyday lives? Can art open up fresh conversations about life, about spirituality?

In this book the artists display vulnerability, brokenness, lostness, wilderness and the ‘Deeper Magic’ first posited in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Together, perhaps, we may choose to look beyond ourselves and acknowledge both doubt and faith.

The different headings throughout this book are an attempt to provide some bridges on a multifaceted exploration. The art, of course, will speak for itself, but the words also ‘paint’ pictures that reference the theme. I hope they will inspire fresh thoughts and new perspectives, and provide ‘glue’ to enhance and display the talented contributors.

Together we can wander and wonder, allow space for unknown questions to rise within, to release the need for answers, to encounter mystery.

QUESTIONS

For some of us, looking at modern art creates a heart and mind confusion. Panic sets in:

‘I don’t recognise anything.’

‘What’s it about?’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘Do I like it? I don’t know.’

Learning to look takes time. The artist began with nothing so every mark made, every form created, every shape honed has been done with purpose. Notice everything. Often we ‘scan look’ because we are frightened we won’t understand. We feel small and inadequate so we race on to the next piece. We hope to find something we recognise and can respond to..

Take a deep breath. Trust yourself. Look.

Read what the artist calls the piece and what is written about it

Look again and then interrogate yourself, because art can evoke all sorts of things within us if we let it.

‘The artist’s mission must not be to produce an irrefutable solution to a problem, but to compel us to love life in all its countless and inexhaustible manifestations. If I were told I might write a book in which I should demonstrate beyond any doubt the correctness of my opinions on every social problem, I should not waste two hours at it, but if I were told that what I wrote would be read twenty years from now by people who are children today and that they would read and laugh over my book and love life more because of it, then I should devote all of my life and strength to such a work.’

LEO TOLSTOY²

Does it evoke a mood? Is it a mood you recognise?

Do the feelings of the artist emerge? Are they enraged, hurt, compassionate, playful, still, faith-filled?

Does it access spirituality?

Art can be ambiguous but perhaps the piece suggests an idea or several ideas. Like a many-faceted jewel, does it depend upon how it is held to the light?

Is the artist referencing a particular event or memory? This could be a memory in the public psyche or a personal one that tugs at one of our memories.

Perhaps the piece bypasses mental thought and slips straight into the subconscious, viscerally speaking to us.

Has the piece broken boundaries within us, with its form, its voice?

How do you feel about the craftsmanship it displays?

Is it beautiful?

Do you like it?

Or perhaps it doesn’t look like art to you and it evokes nothing. That’s okay. Turn the page.

OUR STORY

I began in my introduction with a snapshot of the story of Katrina and myself. We all have a story. Our lives, reflected in our faces, hearts, minds and bodies, outline a map that mirrors our journey.

How would we tell our story? Would we display a ‘perfect’ and enviable life on social media, redacting any sense of isolation, loneliness, friendlessness, disappointment or gut-wrenching pain?

We struggle in relationships, to be vulnerable, to trust. We are terrified of someone knowing everything about us. We remain sure, should we reveal our faults, our foibles, our deepest selves, that we would find ourselves alone. Most of us believe we are unlovable, so we paddle, like dogs in deep water, struggling to keep our heads clear and hoping to find somewhere to land and stop.

We search for safety, for companionship, for a shared experience of life, for love. The complexities of learning to live as independent, self-resourcing

**‘Man now realises
that he is an accident,
that he is a completely
futile being.’**

FRANCIS BACON³

human beings are huge. Our world, now shrunk, has many delights, but the economic reality is tough and we must work. For some, work is a delight; for others, it is an accepted necessity; for others, a stark and difficult reality that eats the soul.

Is life about work? I mistook it for such.

Is life about experiences? About fulfilling that long bucket list?

On our deathbed will we wish we had spent more time at work, visited more places, or reach out to hold the hand of a loved one?

What is your story? If a dynamic screenplay were to be written about you, what would it include? In film, the prime question for the protagonist – ie, me or you – is, what do they want? They may fail, but the want propels the story forward.

With a strong want, obstacles occur to stop the protagonist achieving their goal. A turning point takes the story in a completely different direction.

More hurdles and struggles, the distractions and diversions of 21st-century life. Choices disrupt direction. The choices of others dislocate life into something unforeseen. As you find yourself becalmed and in jeopardy on an unforgiving sea without a life jacket with nothing to hold on to, what twist could a screenwriter incorporate to save you?

Some may say our stories reflect that life is meaningless. We humans are of no importance in our struggle for existence on this tiny pinprick of a planet moving in a vast, ever-expanding universe.

God can become the ‘whipping boy’ on to whom we hurl all our pain, confusion, hurt and discomfort. But we are frustrated at the notion that our lives mean nothing. Something within us kicks against Bacon’s assessment.

Most of our stories display extraordinary resilience and we find tender meaning in our lives.

**‘The poet’s eye,
in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from
heaven to earth,
from earth to heaven;
And as imagination
bodies forth
the form of things
unknown, the poet’s pen
turns them into shapes,
and gives to airy nothing
a local habitation
and a name.’**

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE⁴

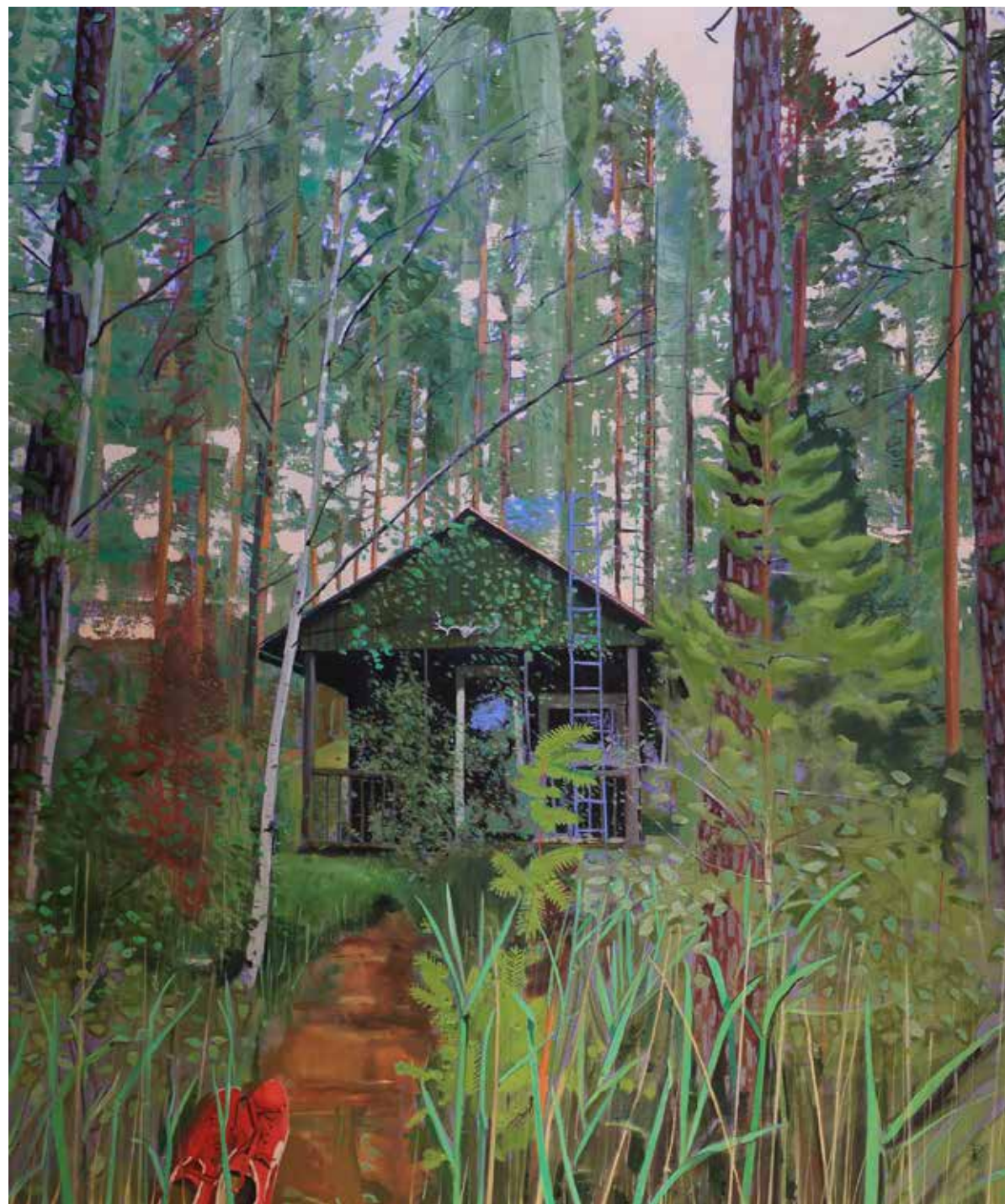
Love, we discover, offers coherence. It opens the door to an enchanted realm.

As we discover how to give and receive, love reveals fresh vistas. Love riffs on notions of peace, of home, of comfort, of belonging. Human love is a portal to something much bigger.

This book invites quest. There is a saying, ‘There are no atheists in foxholes.’⁵ Pinned down in a bunker, you might cry for your mother or to God.

Where is God in Our 21st-century World? is a collection that cries from the heart.

Some believe, finding solace and love in the God they cry to; others do not.



SEEK AND YOU SHALL FIND

Karl Newman
Oil on canvas
H:140cm W:118cm

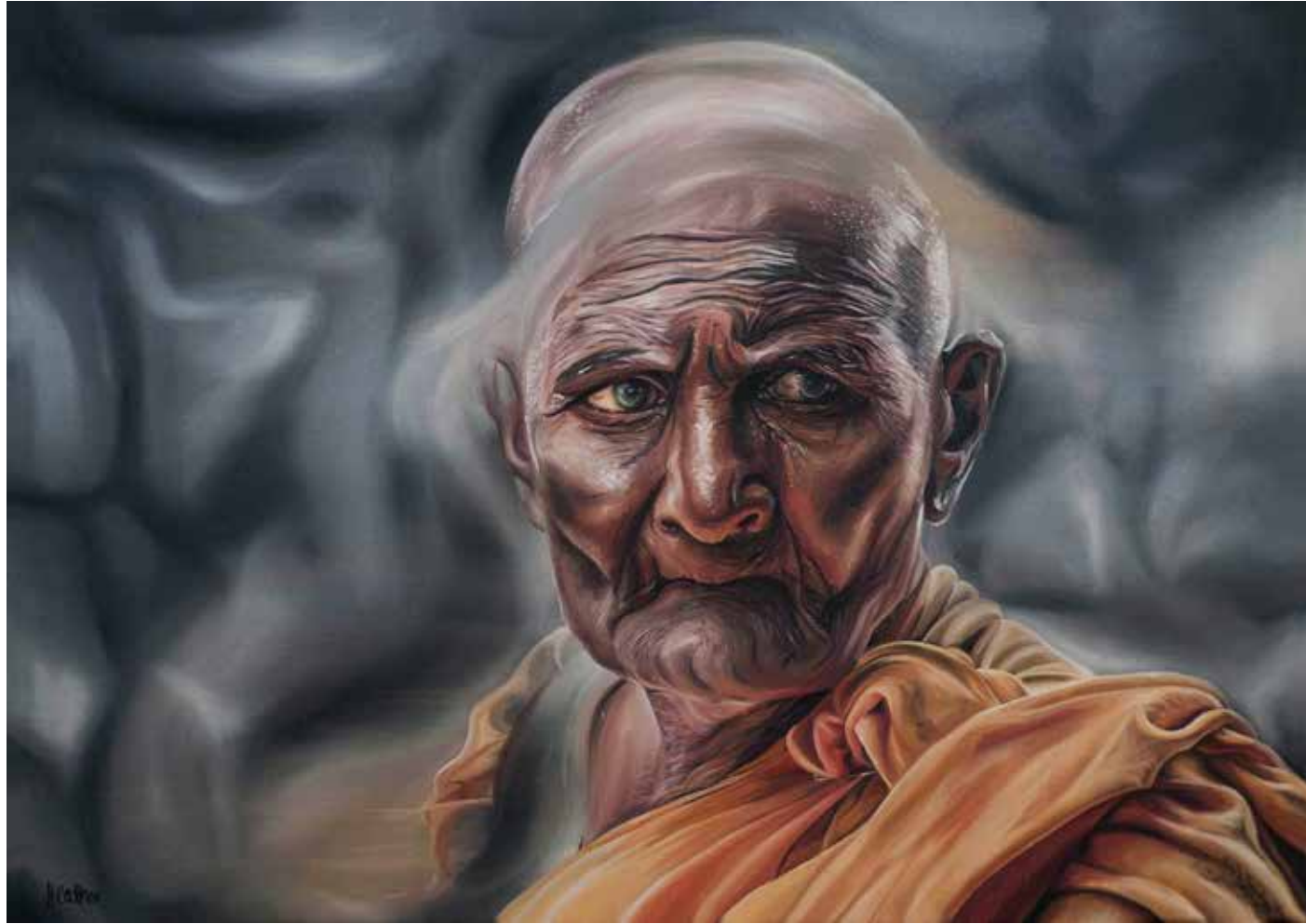
Pressures compete within our busy and confusing world demanding our attention, time, money and resources. In the ancient forests of north Sweden lies an isolated, rudimentary fishing hut accessible only by foot. There, deep peace is made manifest in stillness; the unpolluted light revealing the star that leads.



THE EXILES

Louise Davis
Screen print
H:52cm W:37cm

A silk screen re-sets an iconic image of spiritually charged and vulnerable motherhood, deeply familiar to both modern and ancient Mediterranean religions. Made for all those who search for safety and sanctuary and those that aid them. God is to be found with the most vulnerable.



ENLIGHTENMENT | The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism explain how suffering comes from being attached to the things we do not/cannot have. The more we have the more we want. The disintegrating monk reflects the transience and impermanence of life.
Heather Christie
Oils
H:50cm W:70cm



BEYOND THE EDGE OF GONE | Profound and constant change is a feature of our 21st-century world. Blind to the direction and future, can we trust unconscious collective humanity or is there a greater unseen plan? In the midst we are powerless. Can we trust there is nothing to be feared?
Andrew Crawford
Digital photograph giclee printed on Fotospeed
Platinum Matt fine art archival paper
H:53cm W:53cm



WILDERNESS | A personal narrative of coming to understand that God calls us 'differently to each one' and we are called to seek out others because he sought out us first.
Hannah Campbell-Wharam
Oil on canvas
H:110cm W:70cm



PATHWAYS | Intense colours and textures map a version of the cosmos and animate our choices of movement through it. Has science superseded belief in faith? The work describes a multiplicity of routes and intersections through which, with our freedom of will, we may choose our own path.
Karen Weatherbee
Resin, Acrylic, Metallic Embellishments, Collage on MDF framed
H:64cm W:94cm



ROAD TO TOMALES POINT
Richard Stott
Oil and acrylic on canvas
H:74cm W:104cm

A road trip along the Pacific Coast of California meditating on the ocean and wilderness. As the fog rolled in, the artist experienced a moment of transcendence – of connection to God and place and deeper understanding of self.



OUT OF THE SACRED SPACE 2
Joy Hillyer
Acrylic on panel
H:40cm W:40cm

Through abstraction, this image explores the rugged and isolated landscape on the way by boat to the Rainbow Bridge, Utah (a sacred site for five Native American nations). Colour and form seek to convey a sense of the numinous which can be experienced by the 21st-century traveller.



ARK
Robert Koenig
Painted wood construction
H:154cm W:100cm D:39cm

194 permutations of coloured sails portray movement and change as fundamental human processes. The cost of such searching remains implicit and unfulfilled: if the goals of our movement are both an escape and an arrival, how do we recognise a destination when we have reached it?



PEACE OWL
Tim Warnes
Spray paint, collage on canvas
H:100cm W:70cm

The owl, a symbol of wisdom, perhaps a mascot for the 21st century. In these days we need those who observe; who speak of love; who tell of the things of God in contemporary and accessible ways. Here is a Peace Owl paste-up as the artist recreates a placement from the Leake Street Graffiti Tunnel, London.



NATURAL ORDER

The sound of beauty in the natural world

**A thundering manifests,
sensible only to the
keenest ear. The
sound of impossible
tiny thread-like feet
battering the casing
which enfolds it.**

**A resounding crash
heralds the split which,
once begun, tears open
and from the pupae a
head with expectant
antennae, explores,
tastes, smells, the fresh
environment into which
it will propel itself.**

**The tearing and
groaning reveals a
glorious iridescent
blue morpho butterfly
expelling itself into
space. Magnificent
wings beat as resonant
jungle drums.**

**Freedom echoes.
A new creature birthed.**

LAMENT

There was a time
when beauty
spun around you
three –
golden threads
twinkling
on breathed-out life.
You could not be confined
so great was originating energy.

We walked together
Man and Maker
our oneness moved and lived
within and without.
Delight etched itself in the
slivers of laughter –
sounds breaking like tinkling
bells
among and contained by loving
loveliness.

Wonder rotated above and
below
without measurement or equal,
number or notion,
a being content within an
unnamed order
through which they danced.
The dance of love turned on
an axis of simplicity.
There was no remembering
because nothing had yet been
forgotten.

Why did we stop our ears
to the music?
Create steps
never meant to be danced?
Our fumbling self-
determination
choreographed for each a solo
path
to our dance of death.
Perhaps knowledge demands
opposites.
The easement and embrace of
love
remains unfulfilled,
misunderstood,
an untimely puzzle
without proximity to hate?
The one grows fat and bloated
eating living flesh.
The other parcels sacred offal
dipped in humility.

Released the monster gorged
Ripped children from their
mommias’ arms,
Spread my grandmothers’,
mothers’, sisters’, childhood
legs
Sank knives, bullets, bombs
to rip apart my
grandfathers’, fathers’, brothers’
flesh.
Befouled the black skin of my
family –

tortured, hung and quartered
them.
Sank its teeth into the ocean;
Squatted, soiled, dug and
desecrated;
Insatiable, execrable, defecating,
perpetual motion.

We lament our voraciousness
our deep remembering
becomes a ghost
that haunts.
We cast our net of hope
on empty seas.
Our condition makes no sense
Meaninglessness a sombre
bedfellow

Our wakes attach themselves to
oblivion.
What of Love
stood in the pathway of such
intransigence?
Devoured,
disfigured,
dishonoured,
decoupled,
downgraded to an earthly
ugliness.

Embodied Love defies
everything.
Eaten it becomes a Socratic
cup

and the monster’s limbs
fragment.
Life blossoms.
Hearts strain to hear
the long-forgotten creation
music.
Hearts yearn to live forever,
eternity beckons,
but where is the portal?

Hope is the mould of faith
created by a Messiah/man.
Each moment of his life
imprinted on the cast
within which to throw our
trust.

Time reverberates backwards
and forwards –
a pendulum of life
upon which to place our
courage
in the face of rampant unbelief.

The rewards of faith are
beyond imagination.
The simple solace –
an unadorned,
vulnerable,
naked,
beautiful creature
in harmony with Creator.

**‘Millions all around us
are living the tragedy of
meaningless life,
the “life” of spiritual
death. That is what
makes our society most
radically different from
every society in history:
not that it can fly to
the moon, enfranchise
more voters, have
the grossest national
product, conquer
disease, or even blow
up the entire planet, but
that it does not know
why it exists.’**

PETER KREEFT⁶

PRICELESS

As the Queen celebrated her coronation and recounted details of the day in a BBC interview, before her sat the Coronation Crown: the Imperial State Crown, existent in various forms since the 15th century. Her father had worn the current version, constructed in 1937, at his coronation. Made of gold, silver and platinum, it weighs 1.06kg. Its most notable stones are the Cullinan II Diamond and the St Edward’s Sapphire. Many other precious stones adorn this crown, fit for a well-loved queen. It is priceless. Only royalty will ever wear a bejewelled crown.

Although my personal world is comfortable, I see many people who are homeless, hungry and struggling to maintain a life for their loved ones. I walk the streets in the early hours of the morning and find the disenfranchised living on the edge, with social care withering around them. How much are they worth?

We pass the marginalised all the time, and more people than we think contribute in their way. I have been witness to boxes of food bought and stacked up beside a street person. Provided with food, many long for company and a listening ear. Their stories are often horrendous. They own up to frequent bad choices and much loss. To touch or to hug them, offering a moment’s empathy, brings tears to their eyes. And yes, there are those who swear and shout and want no contact. Do they have any value?

‘Solitude is not something you must hope for in the future. Rather, it is a deepening of the present, and unless you look for it in the present you will never find it ... We have thinking to do and work to do which demands a certain silence and aloneness. We need time to do our job of meditation and creation.’

EDMUND DE WAAL⁷

Foodbanks rely on the kindness of ordinary people. We give to charities. Most of us care. The urge to contribute into our society is greater than we, the cohabitants of this island, are often given credit for.

There was a prophet named Isaiah who talked of a priceless crown. This crown different to the Queen’s. This crown is available to all – ‘a crown of beauty instead of ashes’.⁸ The writer means that all lives can be infused with loveliness through faith. But there is also a custodian of such a crown. Someone who can make beauty manifest. The artist.

Many artists desire to contribute into a hurting world. They do not necessarily bring actual food. They may have little money to give, but they can bring beauty. Loveliness is a different food. It is food for ‘the soul’. Food the natural world delivers time and time again. It is food we cannot live without.

We human beings cannot survive on ashes – the ‘things’ and ‘stuff’ of our consumer society: horror, abuse, degradation, isolation, sickness, objectification. Or social media with its poisoned ashes of language that defame and destroy the chosen offender. The murmur of electronic clutter, while essential, overtakes and dulls.

We need food that empowers, food that causes us to lift our eyes beyond the material, beyond the constant soundscape; we need beauty. It reminds us of our best selves, of the human spirit that can

dance on the creative wind; explore, laugh and remember what it means to be truly human.

Perhaps ‘beauty’ is an unfashionable word, but reflecting on loveliness and rising to its banner will cause us to despise the things that degrade, tear down, abuse, break and dehumanise which assault us every day. It is about seeking a quality of life, about human flourishing. Dallas Willard writes that beauty is ‘goodness made manifest to the senses ... Nothing is more meaningful than beauty’.⁹ Is that so?

If I stop and reflect on beauty, my list includes a seaside sunset, a laughing child, a vista of fields, a bird feeding its young, a mountaintop, a snow-covered slope, a pet, a symphony, a ballet, an elderly parent and so much more.

Beauty enlightens, envisions, empowers, emboldens. It affirms the loveliness within our humanity and reaches out beyond the earthly to a hovering spirituality, a ghostly remembering of something greater. A half-hope in the possibility of God.

Contribution into our common humanity is in our DNA. The artists, with their eyes straining, stand on the ‘edge of the inside’.¹⁰ They stand on the boundaries, the bridges and the entranceways. They gain critical insight into the human condition and remind us of our best selves. They see and think in ways that can effect culture change.

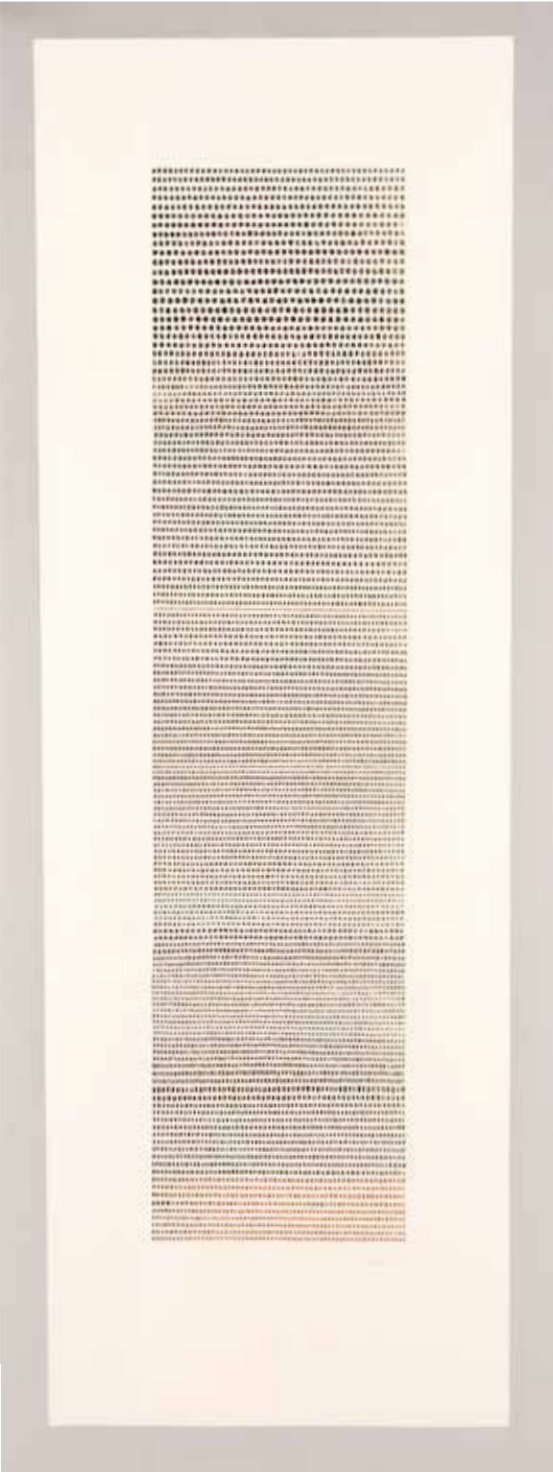
The noted journalist and theatre critic Benedict Nightingale wrote:

The arts are a trade which can change hearts, mould minds, worry the entrenched, upset the tyrannical and nudge history.

It takes courage and authenticity to be an artist, as well as a deep sense of responsibility. The artist needs a language that does not

reek of commercialism, of lies, and a cavalier ‘so what does it matter’ attitude. The artist needs to see their contribution not as money-making only, but as a sacred charge. ‘The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper.’¹¹

Truth-telling in a false world requires a generosity of heart, a deep sense of thankfulness for the gift given, a refusal to offer a commodity, and an open-handed desire to hunt and create beauty. We need to find new ways of seeing, and go beauty-hunting.



SEQUENTIA
Susan Lawty
Natural stones on gesso
H:137cm W:47cm

In a varying grid, uncountable fragments of rock are distinguished only by variations in their natural colour. Each speck of stone, lovingly collected, bears witness to the vastness of geological time rendering humankind the actual speck.



'I KNOW ALL THE BIRDS OF THE HILLS, AND ALL THAT MOVES IN THE FIELD IS MINE'. PSALM 50:11
Elisabeth Rutt
Original dry felted fabric with screen print and hand stitch
H:46.5cm W:31cm

White chalk lines left by both natural geology and our impact on the environment are the starting points for this work, whether strata, ploughed fields or paths. We have a fundamental responsibility to care for our world, and evidence of our impact can be seen in references to buildings and agriculture. Meanwhile, birds soar free over open country.

CITATIONS

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