

ARTIST STATEMENT

“Who are the greatest benefactors of the living generation of mankind” Toynbee asked; and answered: “Confucius and Laotze, the Buddha, the Prophets of Israel and Judah, Zoroaster, Jesus, Mohammed and Socrates.”

(Smith 14)

“The inherent need in human nature to express itself in visual images is the essential reason art and religion have been inseparable since earliest times. From the great cave paintings of the prehistoric age to the Parthenon of Athena (432 B.C.), Western Civilization has stated its religious tenets through the creative talents of artists.”

(Achte-meier113)

These are works about religion, and they are made to be prayers. If that does not seem so farfetched, then it is possible to understand how carrying water and chopping firewood can also be prayers. It would be possible to make images of all that can go wrong with prayer and religion. It would also be possible to include all faiths and beliefs in those pictures, for all have been used as justification for evil at some point. I am not painting that. I am painting why we can believe, not why we should not. I am painting those aspects that are common to many different faiths, even though some of my imagery comes from specific wisdom traditions.

I did not come to this point, to this place as a painter out of a conscious consideration of rational evidence. It has been the mystery and the drama in the rational that has pulled me along this footpath. The facts of the world, as set forth by our many sciences, confirmed my feelings that we, and all that we know to be, are incredibly interesting and extremely enchanting. This includes all those things we enjoy, and all that which we fear and are repelled by.

For most of my life, I have feared religion, for I grew up in a muddled mix of

Christianity, agnosticism and atheism. As a man, I was accidentally introduced to Insight Meditation. My positive experiences with meditation led me to conduct further research into Buddhism and religion in general. That research included painting works that narrated my journey and discoveries. Often what I painted guided me as to where I next should walk. I cannot say that what I paint is by intention nor is it original. Intention implies that I have some control over what happens, and that is certainly not true, although I still persist in pretending that I do. Original implies that I discovered it, which is certainly not true, for I am following maps that others have left for us. Original also entails uniqueness, which I have never wanted to claim that I was. I have wanted to believe that I belonged, that I was supposed to be here, that I was an Everyman. Religion has provided me with an understanding about, with the means to maintain, and with a faith in knowing that I am supposed to be here, and that I am to do the things that I do.

However, faith does not exist without doubt. My paintings, for years, were about my strong doubts and skepticism concerning anything I could not see or lay my hands upon. Now the depictions of doubt have been diminished to no more than a supporting role in the chorus. Center stage are symbols of joy, of wonder, of strong convictions, and, in this divine theatre, in the lead, faith is dominate.

The original content of some of the symbols that I employ are of Buddhist and Christian origin. As they are combined in these narratives, they take on additional roles. Some of these additional roles are born out of my personal experiences. This does not alter their content, but enriches it, for cross cultural (universal) and culturally specific meanings are born from the personal.

The symbols that I use have layered meanings. The fabric hanging from the overhead pipes is in stark contrast to the nudity of the figures. Its presentation as a theatrical drapery also points to its role as an prop for revealing an event, as well as possibly concealing it. The overhead battens refer to a invisible supporting structure of some sort. Perhaps it is the same one that will fly in a Deus Ex Machina, and

resolve everything for the viewer. These things tell us that we are possibly within the Divine Theatre. The parable, or story telling, is used, as in the theatre, to convey tradition, history, morals, and guides for how to live our lives.

Other guides are presented in books or laid out as maps. The reclining figure is gazing at a book of star maps, overlaid with the Alpha and Omega Greek letters, which are recognized by some people as symbolic of The Word of God. The star maps are also a way to find the morning star that shown when Siddhartha was awakened.

Traditionally, one thousand origami cranes are given to wish well to the recipient. The making and giving of them can also serve as a communal act, which expresses connection and support. The origami cranes represent our experience of paper folding as a type of prayer and as an activity which addressed concern, grief, and eventually, celebration. The mass of cranes is also the river of life that we are all a part of. The individual crane paintings are distilled from the larger works. They are similar to Buddhist precepts, which are each a smaller but very important part of the larger whole.

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I have realized that I must focus on the moment, when working. As long as the process is my focus, then the result is already taken care of. These are layered paintings, completed indirectly over a period of sittings, rather than all in one sitting. I follow one of the traditional paths, which was laid down, figuratively, as a map, by artists before me.

To work out the composition and the feel of the finished painting, I first make a full scale charcoal drawing of it. This allows me the freedom to attempt things that I think are beyond my abilities, to see things that I have never seen before, and to explore ideas playfully, without worrying about the results. Next, I start the painting itself. The first layer of paint is the grisaille, or dead color stage, in which the entire composition is painted in whites, grays, and blacks. Color is then introduced by glazing and scumbling. Over a period of weeks, by working one area of the painting and then the next, sections are brought slowly up together to a finished point. The painting is finished when it decides it is finished, just as a tutor will decide when the student can learn no more.

This activity of making art is a religious activity. Faith brings me back to it time and time again, regardless of the presence or absence of any extrinsic rewards associated with it. The jewel is here already, just as is explained by the Dharma. There is no need to go anywhere else to look for it.

“ If you can't find the truth right where you are, where else do you think you will find it?”
(Kornfield 17)

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