



BREATHING LIGHT

EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS
by

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PALMERS GREEN
UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
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SIGNS OF SPRING,
SIGNS OF HOPE

WISDOM DOVE SPEAKS 1992

Oil on sewn canvas, tied and stretched on a wooden window frame, framed in rough oak



This is a combination of Jim Hansford's shed window frame, Steph's raw oak outside frame, fine woven cotton and rough canvas, variously tied and stretched.

It was painted in 1992 when I was Artist in Residence for the United Reformed Church Forum conference. Themed 'Roots and Branches' the conference was planned to look at the roots of the URC; I couldn't help but go back to the roots of our faith altogether. To me, the right side is rather like the knowledge of God as shared before Jesus Christ and the left, that knowledge as made human in the world. The Spirit (Wisdom Dove) is everywhere.

It hangs in this exhibition as a statement of that which I have always felt held me and as a statement of what I always believed. Indeed, the detail of the Holy Spirit/Wisdom Dove speaking into the human ear is so meaningful to me that it gave rise to the name of this exhibition and is now the image I use as an artist's logo.

This is a profoundly personal exhibition. It must start with my own roots.

BRAINSCAPE 1999

Oil on tied and stretched canvas with copper strips



I have always described my brain as a series of filing cabinets which hold information, closed away until needed. This painting was created when I was on ministerial sabbatical before I left the full time pastoral ministry; a time when I was reflecting on who I was and what I was to do.

Just a way of describing what made so much sense to me, it grew to something with far more information than I expected. It shows the dancing I have always loved, the falling of symbols showing what inspires me, and the position of my life somewhere in the clouds. My ethereal dance floor shows both the foundation I feel in what could seem like heaven, but also my frequent feeling of isolation from earth.

The frame was purchased years before, the copper offered to me by Pete, and the canvas (two weights) sewn together when I had a studio at the Ark-T Centre in Cowley, Oxford. I had to 'Trinity' it by painting a strip of copper on the cabinets.

DARKNESS IS AS LIGHT TO YOU 2007

Oil on Board



This painting begins to touch the deeply personal. It is a triptych, the panels created for a commission which never quite happened, but about which I am delighted to have the panels. I had no idea what would be here.

I painted the centre first, catching my shadow against the panel as I stood in my old studio which was a conservatory. The left hand panel came next, with the little girl sheltering herself not from the night, but from the darkness heaped upon her. She found her occupations and her source of light.

The right hand panel was the last, evoking the faith message of harvest from grains. Gold glows all around.

The title is from Psalm 139, always my companion: "If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me, even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.'"

THE STONE WAS
ROLLED AWAY
2007

Oil on canvas with cotton gauze and ribbon

I woke one morning with this picture on my brain. I could see the vaulted ceiling of a huge cathedral and I could see a small person - in a corner, apparently ignored by the immensity of the institution of the Church. But as I painted, I couldn't manage the person in the bottom right hand corner and realised that s/he shouldn't be there.

Suddenly fabric burst forth with colour and movement and shape. As I watched this grow, it became a statement of my distance from, yet attachment to, the institutional Church. The Church and its core creeds have told me of love when I wished particular people might have. I have been ordained and upheld by the Church, even with my own deep critique of it. I both belong to it and fly out of it.



THAT YOU MAY
HAVE LIFE
2007

Oil on canvas mounted on

Rainbows are huge for me. I love them because I have to find the dark to see them. With my back to the light, pursuing the search in the dark clouds, there they are - all the colours in the universe arching in one (or two) shining bows, reminding the dark that it is only vapour.

I tried so often to paint rainbows, finding two results. This just catches a moment. The glass mount is just that, glass. See through to whatever, reflecting whatever. The rainbow is the light, the glass almost water. The title is from the gospel of John, my favourite theologian, who has Jesus say, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly".



BEHOLD, I AM DOING A NEW THING
2007

Oil on canvas with boxes

I had no idea what this would be. The stretched canvas came from Oxford. My MSN messaging name is 'Red shoes are lovely' and I have a thing about red shoes. One day I noticed the progression from red boots to red shoes and realised there was a liberating element to the change. Another day, I sketched out a woman coming out of a person shaped cupboard, the woman's body being more or less clearly seen, the cupboard shaped as voluminous clothes, hiding the human shape. It became an emergence from what was (for so long) to what was beginning to be.

So here it is. The boxes are all sorts of symbols and reality. The painted box in the middle always held vitamins, the boxes on either side, jewellery. All ways of managing. They are open here, as the things they stand for are now.

The title comes from another favourite Bible passage, Isaiah 43.19: "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland."



HOLY
SATURDAY
1991

oil on tied and stretched canvas

This was the beginning of so much. The canvas started as fabric stretched across a frame with a soldier facing horrors - a Remembrance Sunday image, still seen if you look at the back. Not needed for worship any longer, it became a mount for something else. Compelled by a dear friend in 1991, I painted what I felt angry about.

The hand, out-stretched and touching a rainbow of fabric could not be painted closed in to the body, no matter how much I tried. The sheer process of trying to close it in while it tried to reach the light was hard work indeed. So I gave up and it does what it wanted - touches the rainbow.

The name indicates the time between the death and resurrection of Jesus. Death is known and life is not quite there yet, but there is a hint somewhere. This is my version of that in-between time.



AS DYING, SEE
WE LIVE
2007

Oil on stretched canvas with slub silk

I suspect this image may be hard for some, but not for others. For me, it is another painting of reality, but also of beauty. I chose a classical style of

painting and pose - Greek, Roman, Renaissance - to deliberately use the historic symbolism of beauty. I wanted to show through this painting that though bits of us may not be quite what we want them to be, beauty is present and it is deeper than a surface.

After all I did to remember and to come to a new and liberating place, breast cancer felt a body blow in all the ways that can be interpreted. I realise that I managed my cancer because it was just a different form of all I have been through in the past. But oddly enough, I didn't feel diminished. Both the kingfisher fabric and the kingfisher bird in the top left are a colour and a simile attributed to me by others over the years. They seemed right here.

The title is again from scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:9, "as dying, and behold, we live."



THE ARTIST
Elizabeth Gray-King

Growing up as an artist and ballet dancer in the United States, Elizabeth received a fine arts degree from George Washington University in 1975. Moving to England in 1977, she was a professional commissioned painter and illustrator before becoming a United Reformed Church Minister in 1988, having been trained at Mansfield College, Oxford. At many individual times, she has designed clothing, from ballet costumes to clothes for women clerics; hence, her use of fabric in her works.

A further degree in Education from Westminster College, Oxford, coincided with her setting up a social enterprise with her husband, Pete - Gray-King & Gray Ltd. When not painting, she project manages for the company and is employed part-time as the Post Ordination Training officer for the United Reformed Church. Her work comes out of all this context - life, faith and design.

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