The Promise comes from faith

Darlene Knies Earls
The Promise Comes from Faith
by
Darlene Knies Earls

7.26.93
Approvals

Adviser: Leonard Urso
Date:

Associate Advisor: Mark Stanitz
Date:

Associate Advisor: Edward Miller
Date:

Special Assistant to the Dean for Graduate Affairs: Philip Bornarth
Date:

Dean College of Fine And Applied Arts: Dr. Margaret Lucas
Date:

Darlene K. Earls hereby grant permission to the Wallace Memorial Library of RIT, to reproduce my thesis in whole or in part. Any reproduction will not be for commercial use or profit.

Date: 7.26.93
I received a letter from a very dear friend of mine a month or so after she had seen my completed thesis work. In the letter she wrote “I finally understand your body of work, it is one continuous prayer and conversation with God.” After reading her letter, I had the words to describe and write about my work. This body of work is a depiction of me intertwining with God in stories of faith.

My work is religiously based in the sense that I have taken religious images from the church and bred them with my individual icons to derive a personal visual language. The source of religious imagery that I use as the base or core image is the sacred heart of Jesus. I distorted, distilled, embellished, abstracted and linked it with a shape derived from my childhood. The childhood shape was built from a story that I constructed when I was young. I used this story to make sense of the word “soul”. Growing up I heard phrases such as; “When you die your soul goes to heaven,” ‘God looks into your soul and sees if you are good or bad’ and ‘He sold his soul to the devil.”’ These passages brought me to the conclusion that the soul was an actual physical object and more precious than gold. The soul took on characteristics and attributes of physical organs such as the heart and lungs. And since the devil was so eager to get my soul, much like the witch was eager to get Dorothy’s ruby red slippers in The Wizard of Oz, the treasure must be hidden and guarded. Mine was kept behind the shin bone in the calf area. The soul was placed secretly there by God, and no one was to know about it. It was safe from physical danger because the shin bone was there to guard it. It was also safe from the devil and death because it was hidden in a very imaginative place, no one thought to look. Since my soul’s cave remained a secret, I would stay alive and safe from the devil. Because my soul’s home was in the calf it took on the calf shape or fleshy triangle. The soul or combination soul/sacred heart of Jesus is the lead character in this series of work. This hybrid shape plays the key role in each canvas and story I am trying to tell the viewer. The same way God planted my soul into my calf to enable me to live I placed this shape into my canvases to depict the spirit of life.

My thesis is a series of short stories or chapters in a book about the souls travel in and out of spiritual healing. Each canvas deals with the illustration of biblical passages or the mimicking and transforming of religious ceremonies into relief sculpture.
Chapter One
The promise comes from faith.

Luke 7:47-7:48. "I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, listens to my words and acts on them. That one is like a person building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on a rock; when the flood came, the river burst against that house but could not shake it because it had been well built."

I will explain this relief from the outer edge and progress toward the center. The rock is a literal translation. It is the base or foundation for the rest of the metal illustration. A flagstone pattern has been etched on the surface of the stone to represent building. The layering of one stone on top of another is to give topical evidence of man constructing a dwelling on and in the rock. A piece of this stone was broken up and removed to make a secure area for the metal structure to be implanted. The outermost metal wall mimics the wall of the dug out foundation and the shape of a womb to give the feeling of extra security and strength. The center shape in the structure is characterized as an abstracted fetus. This is the depiction of a soul who had just been conceived and planted in to the solid earth. Around this womb swims triangle shapes. These symbolize the trinity and embody the word of God. They voice out teachings to feed and give strength to the individual.

This relief is 10"x 5" and weighs about five pounds. When held it takes on an intimate feeling like looking into a doll house. The weight enhances and magnifies its sturdy strength and enables the viewer to give credence to its power of protection. I needed to incorporate these characteristics to illustrate the final sentence of the above passage. To illustrate my title. The promise comes from faith. The promise is strength. The strength comes from leaning and growing on something stronger than yourself. The faith is God’s word and it is the foundation.
1 Corinthians 3:16. “Do you not know that you are the temples of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”

When I reflected on the word temple, I visualize the churches that I have attended my whole life. I see the pews circling one main altar handsomely decorated with tapestries, paintings, silver, gold and bright sun light filtered through stained glass. I set this painting up like a church. The close fitting flag stone pieces mimic pews set up to circle the altar. The flag stone has the dual responsibility of representing the congregation of cells in the human body. Working next to each other the cells are responsible for the maintenance of one system such as the skin on the eye lid or the heart, but they also work for the good of the whole and greater system. In the center of the painting, I built the altar out of brown wool and paper fibers to create a tactile, earthy, rooted quality. My aim was to bring spirituality into the realm of the physical, and make it something comfortable. I remove the highbrow distance some altars resonate, and made it primitive and alive through the energy extended from the supporting cast. Cradled in the earth altar are two images. The three dimensional triangular metal piece has a silver center covered with gold leaf and a outer edge copper shell. The gold center radiates the purity of the absolute core of the soul inhabited by God. The copper edge of the shell is a representation of the part of the soul that contains doubt and is susceptible to oxidation.

The final piece within this painting is a flat triangle with sun ray like fingers extended out toward the flagstone. This is God’s Spirit. This shape is subtle and quiet, yet reaches out to the congregation and supports the center soul literally and figuratively.

This piece measures 28”x 22” and is to hang at eye level to entice the viewer to feel apart of it. Yet its formal rectangular format and gold frame causes the viewer to feel like they have walked in on a ceremony already in progress.
Chapter Three

*Entrusted*

Jesus tells a story about a land owner who entrusts three of his servants with gold coins. The first servant took the coins and invested them and earned double the amount given to him. The next servant also invested the coins and made interest. The third servant took the coins and afraid of losing them buried them in the dirt and made no profit.

This piece is about the coins that were buried in the ground. They represent faith that is ready to seed, plant and grow but is unable because of doubt. The seeds need the courage to germinate. The first two servants took their “faith” and shared it among people. They and the people around them grew happy and prospered. The last servant hid his faith and kept it away from others and himself. Thus, his faith did not grow or prosper.

The two center convex gold leafed triangles are the coins. I have represented them in full “soul” costume. The repoussé pieces conjure images of eggs, bulbs and other vessels that hold life waiting to hatch or sprout. The center of these two seeds is gold like the coins in the story but their edges are languishing to tarnishing copper. This represents the deterioration of the once strong flushing faith. The bulbs are held away from the vehicle they need to germinate by a copper barrier. A mock womb. This womb is hypocritical. It holds the two souls safely but fosters isolation not growth, by caging them away from nourishment. The tendrils or roots growing and winding out of the womb are depicting the womb’s needful search for nourishment for the dormant coins.

The womb holding the two souls was placed in a shallow opening in the canvass. This is a direct reference to the dig the last servant did. He placed the coins in the ground. I placed them in a pocket of earth made of dark hand made paper and wool. This brings attention to the hollow they are laying in. I surrounded the nest with layers of stone, brown thick paint and paper to imitate the layers the earth exposes when excavated.

This painting measures 22” x 24” and is 2” deep. It can be hung or laid flat like sod.
Chapter Four

A Moment

This painting was created to express the sense of time on hold. This is one long peaceful moment or prayer between God, the father and child.

The two center copper forms in the upper right are illustrations of the child’s soul in the presence of God the father. The father figure is the bottom section. In the center of the father I edited an opening approximately the same shape and size of the “soul” figure hovering above it. This hollow is to suggest that the above soul was cut from the bottom cloth. This excavated site also represents the lap in which the daughter can settle into safety. The flag stone on the Father signifies genetic building blocks and his ability to produce life, spiritual life as well as physical.

The daughter soul echoes the father with similar characteristics, such as shape, color and materials. Gold was plated around the edges and the center of the top figure to depict the fire of life the father has passed on.

I built a cloud nest in the middle of mud colored stones. The white billowed sanctuary represents heaven and God’s quiet safe territory. The stones and textures surround it symbolize our world of soil and earth. Leading to the moment is a tunnel of light. This tunnel acts as a passage to the Father and a birth canal when exiting.

This piece is intended to inspire quiet and peacefulness in the viewer. It measures 22” x 24” and is 2” deep. It is to hang on the wall like a photograph of a father holding his new born daughter.
Matthew 4:16. "The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."

The base of the piece is a mound of hand made brown paper and paper found on the ground around my home. I molded these elements into a mound because when we view a mound we think something dead has been buried or something has been planted. One has the possibility of life, the other does not. In the center of the mound one element with two parts is lodged. The center character has a thick sturdy outer case that can be seen as a casket or the outer shell of a seed or bulb. The inner shape is the heart of humanity awaiting its outcome. Is it an egg anticipating birth or is it awaiting deterioration? On the mound outside of the soul and the souls cage an army of gold triangles push forward. The traveling triangles mimic the travels of Jesus to different cities to spread the word and the light of God. These spermatozoa filled with salvation swim toward the dormant soul dwelling in the shadow of death. Gold leaf on the soul and the shell portray the flooding of the holy spirit into the soul and the reflection of light.

This piece measures 12” x 9” and is to be looked at from a bird’s eye view, very much the way we look at newly planted gardens.
Chapter Six

John 12:27.

John 12:27. "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour? No it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"

The triptych depicts three stages of faith traveled through during spiritual awakening. The first paper piece on the left hand side represents the soul in a state of desperation and despair. The left most piece shows souls nesting in jagged brass. The soul is being attacked by spears of negativism that want to divide the soul against itself and bring destruction. To the right of the nest, triangular gold tadpoles carry redemption toward the suffering soul.

In the center panel the soul has been reached by the tadpoles and has ingested God's grace. The soul takes in the nutritional words of the Lord, has gathered strength and becomes strong enough to take on the confining barriers. The brass nest has transformed from a crippling handicap to the soul's greatest resource.

The third panel depicts the soul after going through the transformation. These are souls that are full of life, strength and are ready to embark on the world with new gifts. Once wounds in the spirit mend, they are stronger than ever. The heart of the past victim is now a heart that is ready to venture out to love and aid others. The final souls are large without need of a womb. They emit bright gold light like a lighthouse for others to see. The spirit transformed, because it was weak. It was the weakness that brought it to the very hour it received its greatest strength.

The triptych is 30" long and 12" high It is to hang just above eye level and in a spot light, this will give the piece a display quality.
Chapter 7
Where Life Begins

The soul planted itself in the New Testament. This seed or egg is ready and receptive to the fertile words. The paper pages as well as the white handmade paper creates a new protective body to be sheltered in. The small triangles with tails, are God’s energy and words running to penetrate the soul and give it life.

The main character in this piece is bright, shiny and echoes the sacred heart of Jesus. It imitates its creator. The gold on the pages expresses the energy, excitement, wisdom, and life that is present in the New Testament. This piece is the most literal and was to encourage and pull the reader into the New Testament. I wanted the viewer to question why the artist concentrated so deeply on the New Testament and why such valuable materials adorn it. This final piece is a celebration of the life and peace at last found in the Lord and the words he offers us.

This piece is 13” x 10”. It should be laid flat on an altar like base or on a podium.
This thesis is a very personal exploration of the saving power of God. I recognize that not everyone has the same understanding and faith as I do, so one might find my thesis just bible thumping. I hope the work has encouraged the viewer to see past the glittering gold of the born again and into the layers of thought and feeling. Vladimir Nabokov writes in the preface of Lolita and I quote, “For me a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm.” I have painted a novel in which I have lived a single moment and a life time in aesthetic bliss, by connecting with God... another state of being. I have indulged myself in the opportunity to share this connection with a captive audience, one I expect to role their eyes but hopefully will yield to the raw curiosity, tenderness, kindness and ecstasy that is present in all art regardless of the subject matter.

“When the mountain was high
I did falter
When the river was deep
I could not swim
When the valley was long
I did not walk
But I knew He was waiting
I knew he was watching over me
So I shut my eyes and listened with my heart
and I closed my mouth and opened my soul
and my father lifted my burden and gave me peace"