Not a Word

Consider for a moment
the image that is loud
with sound, yet it must wait
in silence. Explain

the wall so daily dense
with words and rhymes,
it could mouth the alphabet
into the lap

of a listening hand? Observe
the heart that is alive
with language, yet there is
not a single adjective

or verb to be found. No
joining words, no clever nouns
lining up for the taking. Notice
the ear resting, as it does

on an outer edge, leaning
against the dark in a place
older than speech. Listen.
Do you hear that rush of sound

rising? It is climbing through
the walls, thickening the air.
The room is humming now
groaning with temperament.

Imagine. All that sound
and not a word out of it.

Claire Beynon, 2004

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Interview: Allie Eagle

What role do you think that artists working from a Christian perspective will contribute to the dialogue of contemporary art practice in New Zealand?

Quite a big one...if they want it. They always have had a contribution...if you think of Baxter and McCahon for starters. I think now that Christians might be beginning to perceive themselves to be not the moral majority anymore, so it could mean that there is more of a mature decision to think long and hard about how they position themselves. There is a challenge always for the Christian to not be tyrannised by moulds that are incompatible. But also there's a need to be savvy to speak in the language that they are most attracted to, and it is important for many art school trained people to speak with the aesthetic language of the day.

'dumbing down' in art school

When I have taught at a number of tertiary institutions I have noticed how the Christian art students have been encouraged to dumb down their Christianity. I have seen some students experience an oppressive loss of creativity and/or a pressure to "say very little". A student I knew was encouraged to be so minimal that she stopped painting altogether and then did photographs of corners of walls...the emptiness of art school..she got A+ for those final works...very savvy...while in some ways this is good...to use the minimalist and ambiguous formats that are the currency mostly in use..the student felt absolutely drained of any art making impulse for a long time after leaving art school. I think it is time to bring back the mana back to the language that we love...and there is a rich life the heaven-bent Christian can contribute to the art world.

isolated from their calling

I have seen some extraordinary things happen to the lives of artists who have been isolated from their calling through using the framework that is determined by a contextual base that is way outside of their own faith. So...getting to work with artists in Chrysalis, having exchanges with one another, stirring each other up to be "living creative stones jointly knit together" as makers of objects d'art that can withstand the heat of heavenly critique and encouragement... could just mean some pretty amazing art. I expect to do better and better myself as I apply these principles and I have a huge confidence that I am not the only artist in this land that is having a heartbeat tuned like this.

Wendy Grace Allen