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 ... we're all looking for the same thing.**



Interview: Helm Ruifrok

Wilhelmus C. Ruifrok is a talented Christchurch artist, painter and penciller (a finalist in the 2003 Cranleigh Barton Drawing Award) with a deeply reflective almost mystical interest in the metaphysical and temporal world. It is a perception that permeates his art. Recent works include: *Angelic Multiplicity*, oil on aluminium, 900 x 600 mm, "when groups of people, simultaneously feel uplifted in spirit, a benevolent, adventuality, giving rise to acts of understanding and kindness. A wide view of history, ancient cities remembered, remembering angelic multiplicity"; *Crucifixion*, oil on canvas, 460 x 560 mm, Easter 2003 depicting the moment Christ surrenders his spirit to the Father. If I had to 'box' Ruifrok, which I don't, stylistically I'd say a 'Rembrandt' with a contemporary eye.

Do you perceive yourself as a Christian artist?

Not directly, but I have a deep need to know. I'm interested in the dream world of humanity. What is it that people want, I think it's peace and harmony. I seek deep insights into that, the human condition. Gauguin and Van Gogh all asked the big questions. That's what my art is about. That I am a Christian, since I was seven, is there. My mind is obsessed with finding out the big questions. My painting is secondary, superfluous to that.

What are the big questions for you?

What do each one of us (in our heart of hearts, in our deepest being) want?

What are we yearning for? A little piece of paradise. There are differences, but we're all looking for the same thing. The Bible has answers, and other religious books. Hinduism and Buddhism have some of the same themes.

It's amusing that in the 1400s a painter [Bosch] was able to show the *Garden of Earthly Delights* with black and white people living in harmony. I am touched by that vision of paradise.

What else motivates you?

Life itself. It's not perfect on earth, but when the sun shines it's almost brutal with humans here. If we lived alone, could paradise emerge? When we're sitting in the garden with friends, what element is missing? Rushing seems counter intuitive to things. Preparing *The Fall* [one of five large epic works completed over the last fifteen years] it dawned on me that 'reason' was the crowning glory of humanity, but also our curse. That painting focuses on the shift that occurred when, according to the Old Testament, human kind ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge, a subject that has always interested me. Before humans came along, animals were the highest consciousness in the form of sentient creatures. Having instinct and ultra senses they knew inwardly how to interact with nature, they in a sense are nature.

Is grace an important theme to you?

I'm studying it, looking intently at it, like Da Vinci did. He birthed that interest, which was not apparent before. I'm writing a lot about grace, where and how, grace is present. I'm also interested in light and I'm researching its origins and effect on humanity. We know that human beings enjoy light very much. Not only for warmth, but for the full colour of life itself. Colour therapy has been around for sometime, some days you could consciously be drawn to a particular colour - particularly if you are deprived of that colour. From green foliage to a blue sky, they all have an effect on the human psyche.

Ruifrok on light

"From Stonehenge (3000 BC) to 1500 later when the Egyptians linked the sun with God, calling it 'Ra'. The Maori people coincidentally also called the sun 'Ra'."

"The myths of ancient Greece refer to Helios, but he became absorbed into the central figure of Apollo - Son of Zeus."

"In 500 BC the Greeks and Chinese took a keen interest in the physical world of light - from Empedocles, to Aristotle and Plato; then Leucippus and Democritus devised the almost prescient concept, that everything was made up of indivisible particles, atoms. From Euclid to Archimedes - light was considered as something to understand. From Alhazen to Ptolemy, each scholar made their contribution - in understanding light. Isaac Newton, more recently, did experiments which showcased how white light can be broken down into the seven colours - scientists today can take a spectrograph of a distant star, and through analysis of the colours present, find what elements exist in that star."

"Some progress in understanding light has been made but I am particularly interested in how light has a direct affect on human beings. The paintings that I will create will look at this relationship."

"But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings." [Malachi 4:2]

John Stringer

Light

If you had thought back
to the empty darkness
at the very beginning
if you had remembered
the very first instruction
and then remembering
had looked up
into the clear arc of sky
shining its brightness
you might have shivered
in your heart's deep
if you had

Diane Neutze

Reproduced from *A Routine Day*
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Hazard Press 2004 p. 48

