

Clear Light

Dr Richard Coldicutt

The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak.
(Hans Hofmann.)

We sit and converse across a broad white workbench. Centred in Ian de Souza's studio, the walls appear to reverberate with the dance of his most recent production; '*Clear Light*'.

With youthful exuberance Ian animates the intricate process of transforming various painted layers of delicate tissue veneers into the robust tensioned surfaces pinned across the surrounding walls.

As we trace the journey of inks through the successive layers in a movement from strong pigmented gestures through to ephemeral whisperings, Ian remarks "this is the invisible supporting the visible¹" ... thus revealing an essential philosophy currently driving his creative practice. In an echo from the past one may hear Mozart sing out an accord... "*The music is not in the notes, but in the silence between.*"

This oscillation from the real and tangible, to negative space and the 'unseen' slides seamlessly into the realm of spirituality; the grist that has kept philosophers and theologians deliberating and debating over millennia. Questioning our own existence lies at the core of what defines us as human beings and art is the vessel that brings form to or makes tangible such questions of the heart.

Clear Light (or Luminosity) heralds its etymological connection to Vajrayana, Tibetan Buddhism and Bon². In this context it is believed that all human beings entering into the first moment of death briefly experience *clear light*.³

With the knowledge that Ian is not a practitioner of any specific religion I am still not surprised by the title of this latest series of works; he is a deeply spiritual person. Indeed his early artistic bearing owes much to the Catholic Church. As the youngest of six children, his mother offered Ian, at birth, 'back to God' and the Church to study in the priesthood. Ultimately the foresight and great wisdom of a senior member of the Mission saw Ian sanctified to leave his theological pursuits to follow his natural talent for music and the visual arts.

¹ Power of the Myth' 1988 Joseph Campbell

² Also spelt as Bön this is distinct from Tibetan Buddhism although it shares the same overall teachings and terminology.

³ Budda's are understood to exist continually within this state and is also accessible to advanced yogic practitioners in the highest states of meditation.

As the circles of life turn, it is by no coincidence that a painting produced by Ian at sixteen years of age; *'Passion of Christ'* has become a seminal work, and particularly relevant to his current production. Indeed the technique of painting through multiple layers of fine tissue that Ian has developed over many years was discovered working over this original image. Here direct parallels connect his seminary training and the laying out of ceremonial vestments for the Holy Sacrament with similar ritualistic processes intrinsic to the production of his rice-paper works.

Whilst the title *Clear Light* directs the viewer to perceptions of death, these bare little connection to the *Vanitas* movement of the 16th century, a movement distinguished by a realist abundance of metaphorical representations of objects that sought to highlight the fragile boundaries that exist between life and death. *Clear Light* instead may be seen to dance to the celebration and the essence of life in a bid to connect to our deepest consciousness. Void of realistic form, these works resonate to an energy at once carried by the metaphysical action of painting but also by the corporeal action of ink particles as they trace and distil their unpredictable pathways through the layered surfaces.

Like the Shroud of Turin, these surfaces are embodied with a powerful sense of memory carried on figurative gestures of the human form. These fluid workings speak simultaneously about the *act* of creation as they serve also to pay homage to the *essence* of creation. It is at this intersection Thomas Merton offers ... "Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time."

How we connect to these enigmatic scriptings is at once personal as it is primal. Like the futility of on-line meditation these are works that need to be *experienced*. The spirit of the creator is carried within the flesh and craft of each surface; these are physical constructions and function not as prints or pixelated representations. In the presence of these paintings it becomes clear that scale and volume contribute greatly to the transformation of the space. Here, immersed within the colours as they merge and overlap, one may hear also the silences sing passages to the rhythms of life and death.

As I sit in the silence of these works in the company of this special friend I reflect on the relevance of Henry Ward Beecher's belief;

"Every artist dips [their] brush in [their] own soul, and paints [their] own nature into [their] pictures." (1868)

We are indeed the benefactors of such a fundamental creative human act and one so profoundly relevant in our inherently cybertized digital world.

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