

Translation of Parola di Vita

Bruce Atherton's painting has entered the Vatican; thirteen commissions realized.

Living my Art with faith.

The Anglo-Saxon artist, through his art has given a face to many saints. He painted the portrait of Pope John-Paul II. He lives in London, but his love for Calabria is without bounds.

By Debora Ruffolo.

Bruce Dalzell Atherton is a great artist of international fame, and his links with Calabria are very strong. The 44 year old artist, of Anglo-Saxon origins has produced works for many countries, among which Brazil, Croatia, Germany and England, and naturally he has worked extensively in Italy, from the Vatican City to Calabria, from Lazio to Sicily. In 2001, Bruce began collaborating with various Postulators painting thirteen official images of neo-canonized saints and official portraits, among which a portrait of Pope John-Paul II. In the last weeks Bruce paid a visit to Calabria, and we met up with him to discuss many aspects of his work and not only.

Since early childhood you cultivated the dream of becoming an artist. This dream has been realized beyond your expectations. Bruce, throughout your life, what would you say were the things that helped you to realize this dream?

Ever since my childhood I was sure that I would follow an artistic path. Both of my parents were from medical backgrounds, but my father besides being a surgeon was also an amateur painter with a great passion for both art and the human being. Whenever he saw me drawing with great intensity he would always encourage me. Unfortunately my father died when I was only fifteen and I found myself under great pressure to follow a more concrete and practical career. At that point, however my vocation and personal vision had grown so strong that for me there really was no alternative but to follow my artistic dream. I have always been inspired by the great Italian painting masters, and my father had made me understand that to follow an artistic path required great discipline and devotion, and in this regard I was prepared to pay whatever price was necessary.

Along your working path came a precious collaboration with the Vatican in 2001. Your hands have given faces to several witnesses to the Faith as well as many official portraits, among these Pope John-Paul II. Do you think that art, and in particular your art, has a spiritual nature?

Art for me has always been profoundly spiritual in nature. I have always looked at life as a miracle. To my joy I discovered that by painting the beauty I saw I could somehow capture its energy and communicate how I felt to others. Art for me was a doorway to truth.

Along your life's path you had the opportunity to meet Pope Wojtyla. What do you remember about this experience, and what memory do you hold about a man who is to be proclaimed a saint in a few months' time?

The first commission I was asked to paint was of Gaetana Sterni in Bassano del Grappa. I was so determined to give it my all as I truly understood how important the painting would be. The sisters were so moved by my dedication and so happy with the final piece that they did me the great honour of asking me to read the *Pregghiera dei Fedeli* (prayer of the faithful) of the beatification ceremony. It was a wonderful experience to be in the presence of the Pope, reading the prayer on television in front of so many devoted souls with my painting enlarged and hanging on the front of Saint Peters. Truly the realization of my dream.

How does your spiritual path influence your painting and drawing? Does the splendour of Art manage to communicate the beauty of Faith?

The power of art is that it allows a manifestation in physical terms of an inner vision which does not need a tangible model. This vision can be either a personal artistic vision or can summarize the shared understandings of the many, and I have no doubt that art created with the right spirit and intention can communicate the beauty of Faith.

How important would you say technique is to making art poetic?

For me technique was always a fundamental necessity. I am self-taught, and this is because when I went to art school at the age of eighteen, technique was hugely stigmatised. I would look at the paintings that truly touched me, by artists whom I love, such as Michelangelo and Caravaggio, and I would ask myself how it would ever be possible to reach these levels or understand these works without first reaching a profound level of technique. Now I have come to understand technique as simply a language, and Art is its highest expression, that is poetry.

Your long collaboration with the Roman Curia, even led you to work in Calabria on the realization of witnesses to the Faith, among these was Gioacchino da Fiore, Arcangela Filippelli, Elisa Miceli. How do you manage to give a likeness to a saint without ever having seen them?

This proves always to be an incredible challenge. Sometimes there are still photographic references, but very often they are very old images and very small, which requires me to somehow enhance what I can see and what is recognizable into an image that feels alive, but then I need to go farther and put the spiritual feeling that I perceive into these truly intense beings. Other times as was the case with Gioacchino da Fiore I would spend time in the places where these holy souls lived their lives, and try and capture the spirit by reading about their lives and seeing the impact they left, and also by looking acutely at the generations that have followed them to give me a clue as to what their physical traits may have been and then I do my best to combine all these factors into an image that attempts to capture their divine energies.

Today you live in London, but have your links with Calabria remained strong?

A few weeks ago when I returned to Calabria, even though I live in London, I was very happy to realize that I will always have very strong and unexpected links with Calabria. I fell in love with a wonderful girl with Calabrian roots, from Carlopoli, therefore I will be spending a great deal of time in the future in beautiful Calabria.

Do you have any large projects yet to realize both in your professional and personal lives?

This is a moment of great change for me. A few years ago I returned to London after having been diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, and I began to collaborate with large art production companies. Once again, however, the calling to dedicate all my time to my own personal research has become the core of my life, and I am currently preparing a series of new works for a large show in London.