



REGIS COLLEGE
PRESENTS AN EASTER EXHIBITION
4-18 APRIL 2014

PAINTING SPIRITUALITY

NATURE ABSTRACTION EMBODIMENT

I am delighted to welcome this year's Spring Art Exhibit at Regis that has been curated with care by Claude Meurehg with the great help of Gordon Rixon, our dean, Michele Clemo, our director of development and Adrienne Pereira, who is assisting with the event coordination, and many others—including the artists themselves. The exhibition, entitled *Painting Spirituality: Nature, Abstraction, Embodiment* brings together works by Paul Fournier, Katharine Lochnan—AGO Senior Curator, Special Exhibitions and The R. Fraser Elliott Curator of Prints and Drawings, as well as student and friend at Regis College, Emmaus O'Herlihy and Paul Roorda. The styles of these artists are clearly diverse, but resonances of Easter yearning in an unfinished world are present in the works of each of them. As we approach Holy Week and Easter Sunday at Regis College, I am very pleased that we have these contemporary works of art to offer us companionship, challenge and encouragement as we journey with the Master towards Jerusalem.

Jack Costello SJ | President of Regis College



PAINTING SPIRITUALITY

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The exhibition *Painting Spirituality: Nature, Abstraction, Embodiment*, and Regis College wish to thank the following donors for their generosity: George Yost, DesTech, The Art Gallery of Ontario.

Special thanks to Miriam Shiell and Paul Fulton from Miriam Shiell Fine Art for the loan of Paul Fournier's paintings, and Charles Kettle and Iain Hoadley from the Art Gallery of Ontario for donating the table case for the display.

Regis College also wishes to thank the artists for their valuable insights and help in organizing the exhibition.

For their dedication to making this exhibition a reality, Regis College thanks our own: Gordon Rixon SJ, Gilles Mongeau SJ, Adrienne Pereira, Michele Clemo, Arnel Aquino, Laura Nolasco, Zane Chu, Abbey Kitane.

Painting Spirituality: Nature, Abstraction, Embodiment was curated by Claude Meurehg, PhD candidate, Regis College, University of Toronto.

Design by Emmaus O'Herlihy O.S.B.

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The exhibition *Painting Spirituality: Nature, Abstraction, Embodiment* was conceived for the annual Regis College Easter Exhibition with the intention of exploring diverse kinds of spiritual awareness and their particular expression through painting.

Each of the artists of the exhibition has devoted their art to the quest for something greater and beyond themselves. Moreover, the artists have sought to understand, become closer to, and even enter into union with that which has nurtured their desire to paint.

The exhibition proposes to unravel the nature of the artists' desire and assist in articulating the object of their quest by drawing from personal conversations with the artists themselves. Moreover, the exhibition provides a context within specific art historical and theological perspectives that are rich in meanings and have informed, directly or indirectly, the production of their art.

Claude Meurehg



NATURE Katharine Lochnan: A Romantic Search for the Mystical Component The early decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a genesis of ideas and philosophical responses to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. By then, all beliefs and institutions had been intensely subjected to the scrutiny of reason. The role of religion, the Church and social structures had been challenged in ways that produced unprecedented and lasting changes. Religion had ceased to be a public matter. The display of religious symbols risked being perceived as an attempt to make a political statement.

The powers of reason, on the other hand, had been shown to have their own limitations. The conclusions reached by Kant pointed towards a human inability to know anything beyond what is presented by immediate experience, implying that it is not possible to rationally know anything within the realm of metaphysics.

Within these sets of religious and philosophical constraints, a group of German literary figures, intellectuals and artists, moved forward on a different path. They were the initial force behind German Romanticism. A leading theologian among them, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) sought to reconcile the intellectual environment of the time with the still present need for a religious way of life. He did so by developing a philosophical system in which *feeling* became the grounds on which the realm of the transcendent could be discerned. Since the transcendent lies beyond the world of experience and therefore cannot be known by reason, it must be *felt* through intuitive contemplation.¹

In painting, Romantic artists such as Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) explored new ways to express the ineffable.² For Friedrich, painting landscapes became the idiom that conveyed his ideas and allowed for an emotional response to nature. The experience of nature became associated with the experience of existence itself, and his artistic pursuit became associated with the task of revealing the spiritual symbolism of the landscape.³ Thus, although a landscape would be devoid of religious symbolism it could nevertheless function as a devotional image.⁴

Katharine Lochnan subsumes the values and qualities of Romanticism into a contemporary life that is rich in artistic and intellectual influences. Her own journey developed into a search for her roots and identity that led her to the west of Ireland, where she found her origins on the Burren of County Clare. Her intense affinity to the natural landscapes as well as the Bronze Age sites that evolved into the ancestral lands of the O'Lochlainn clan, her ancestors, made her feel that somehow the geography had always been a part of her life. In those lands, she experienced a serenity suggestive of the *eternal stillness* that embraces even the past tragedies of battle. Through feeling, she discovered and nurtured her relationship with nature.

Lochnan seeks private moments of intuitive contemplation of nature. Hers is an active contemplation, a conscious choice to enter into a relationship with the landscape that is accompanied and followed by an act of artistic re-creation. She strives to imbue in her works the elements that express the sense of *presence* she experiences in nature. She speaks of nature being infused by the divine, a notion that she shares with the ancient Druids that inhabited the island in pre-Christian times.



PAUL FOURNIER | 1
Nocturnal Overture, 2008
Acrylic on canvas
48 3/16" x 36 1/8"

PAUL ROORDA | 2
Rise and Balance, 2013
Crushed stone, gold leaf, rust,
beeswax on paper board
44" x 22"

Lochnan longs for a relationship with nature, just as the Romantics did. It is in the maturing of that relationship that the intuition of the divine suggests itself.⁵ In the encounter emerges what she describes as "an ineffable spiritual phenomenon," which induces a variety of feelings such as playing a role in the many layers of history that the landscape has witnessed. This spiritual phenomenon opens the door to the realm of the *mystical*.

Her artistic endeavour is to imbue her paintings with elements that convey her mystical experience. Such elements may be the particular manner in which the light bathes the land, for instance, or the dimming spark of the sun surrounded by the ever-darkening landscape during a sunset. Being able to recreate the visual relation of elements that are associated with the emergence of the feeling of presence is what permeates her paintings with the "mystical component."

ABSTRACTION Abstract art calls for a shift in perception and thinking. It is usually perplexing, tending to call into question the purpose of a work and even the entire definition of what can be considered art. Since the meaning of abstract art is not readily apparent, its explanatory notions diverge considerably. Notions range from an understanding of abstraction as the expression of deep fundamental meaning, to simply the result of arbitrary gestures better suited for the decorative arts.

Recent scholarship in the philosophy of art supports the idea that abstract art does convey a distinctive kind of visual meaning, different from the one obtained through representational art. Such meaning results from the relation between the physical properties of the work—the qualities of the paint and the elements of line, shape, colour, tone and texture—and the rules followed in working with them. This view states that because an abstract painting follows the same display and presentation formats as representational painting, the viewer presumes that the work is about something or that it must have some kind of meaning.⁶ Abstract art is already approached with a set of expectations dictated by the forms of life and contexts of the artworld.

To approach the question of meaning in abstract painting, it is helpful to consider that the development of this art form did not follow a linear trajectory, nor did it develop in one single place or moment in history. It is the result of an organic conceptual and pictorial evolution nourished by streams of artists

from different places and at different times. A 2013 exhibition, *Inventing Abstraction*, at the Museum of Modern Art, further supported the notion of abstract art being a product of a network of thinking and visual cross-fertilization.⁷

Today, the work of contemporary abstract artists is informed by an infinite combination of visual, cultural, artistic, religious, philosophical and emotional influences that may integrate and go beyond the initial pictorial proposals of seminal figures of the early twentieth century such as Kandinsky, Mondrian and Malevich, or the abstract expressionist artists of the post-WWII era.

Elucidating the meaning of a work of abstract art calls for the active participation of the viewer. It requires becoming acquainted with the visual vocabulary of the painting and in turn becoming acquainted with the visual grammar of the artist. When possible, the exercise is deeply enriched by an acquaintance with the rest of the series to which a work may pertain, and ideally, the greater oeuvre of the artist. It calls for an active and open questioning that willingly engages the viewer's intellectual and emotional resources. Most importantly, it requires time.

Paul Fournier: Transcending Modernism Through a Vocabulary for the Unknown The abstract works of Paul Fournier find their source in nature and the artist's spiritual concerns. His works are related to the world of experience and therefore seek to speak to our inner selves. The encounter with nature and his fascination with the universe elicit in him different kinds of experiences that Fournier seeks to contain in a canvas. He does so by inventing the visual language that connects with an intuition of the original experience.

The art of Paul Fournier grew out of Modernism, the art-historical process that Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) described as the progressive becoming shallower of the surface of a painting, where the backdrop of the stage created by the perspective ended up being one with the curtain.⁸ With this notion, Greenberg referred to the gradual collapse of the illusion of space, a process that started in the late nineteenth century, when artists like Paul Gauguin sought to move away from the depiction of the world as we see it and pursued ways to convey meanings beyond the visible world. Gauguin did so by creating symbolic images that depicted flattened spaces, figures out of proportion and unrealistic colours. The

3 | EMMAUS O'HERLIHY
Archangel Michael, 2014
Oil on canvas
72" x 60"

4 | KATHARINE LOCHNAN
Sunset on Galway Bay, County Clare, 2013
Oil on canvas
15 1/2" x 19 3/4"

process continued toward abstraction, eventually offering the viewer an encounter with a flat work of paint, with no illusion of depth, and no pretense of reference to anything other than itself.

Fournier transcends this notion of Modernism through his organic development as an abstract artist. In his search for a visual vocabulary, he uses everything at his disposal to apply the paint on a surface. He applies flat layers with brushes and knives; he squeezes paint directly; he uses cloths to apply dabs of paint; he drips and lets the paint run; uses sponges, plays with different viscosities, textures and colour saturations. Notwithstanding his gift as a colorist his works seeks to go beyond the effects of colour and into the expression of elements that range from the simple to the complex. As he fine-tunes his visual grammar, he arrives at a recognizable original language, usually occurring in a series of paintings. He has worked with different idioms throughout his career, not changing his pursuit as a painter, but simply seeking the forms that create an *aura* or an *atmosphere* that cultivates the experience. His canvases offer a perception of depth and space—an embracing atmosphere—that is achieved through the relationships among visual elements.

Fournier approaches the generation of meaning through a narrative that is modeled as visual poetry. The phrasing and rhythm is determined intuitively by pursuing a sense of *organization* in the image. In terms of content, he wants to express ideas that are beyond humanity. From the start, his career has been informed by a Christian worldview, drawing inspiration from biblical passages.

Fournier feels a great deal of sadness when he thinks of humanity and how poorly some humans treat nature and others. Therefore, his chosen artistic challenge is to express admirable spiritual traits.

In his new paintings, Fournier feels that he is achieving a greater sense of connectedness with the divine, experiencing very deep feelings and ideas of spiritual significance. He is now seeking to imbue more spirituality into his work, going back to his apocalyptic roots and moving beyond his own previous language into an integration, or synthesis, that could perhaps involve less abstract, more recognizable forms.

Paul Fournier wants to get closer to the unknown and in his latest works the visual elements approximate references to the universe, the astrophysical, the celestial. This new vocabulary works toward creating a sense of the mysterious, the unexplored and the heavenly, which in his words, “is right next to us in another dimension.”

Paul Roorda: Seeking Truth as Ritual Through the creative process, Paul Roorda seeks to determine Truth. He does so by questioning the “Truths” handed down by institutions, by Christianity and by science. Roorda is fascinated by the dialogue between the rational-scientific mindset and the body of ideas of truth based on faith. He strives to participate and play a role in the dialogue that sometimes yields ways to complement each side and other times lays the ground for conflict and tension.

Roorda’s Christian background and inquisitive nature have required him to struggle to discern the beliefs and values he is to appropriate as well as the manner in which he must do so. His struggle is accompanied by anxiety and surrounded by the difficulties of engaging in a dialogue that may be perceived as dangerous and antagonistic. Through his art, however, Roorda finds a vehicle for sharing his quest and for engaging others through gifts of art, which allow him to assume his responsibility, placing himself in an open and vulnerable position.

Ritual is the central aspect of the creative act of Roorda. For him, the ritual way in which he approaches the creation of his works provides the means to address anxiety by entering into a rhythm that appeases the fear of the implications of questioning, working toward creating a painting or sculpture that has an established order and that, in its process of becoming, offers reassurance and comfort. The creative ritual actually seeks to heal with hope, as Roorda applies symbolic materials that carry active connotations of transformation and renewal.

Through his use of materials, Roorda participates in a type of alchemy that transforms deep existential concerns by externalizing and ordering them while intuitively directing the process toward a resolution that rests in harmony and empathy. Roorda explores the ambiguity of materials and processes such as burning, which can be seen either as destructive or as purifying. He works with these contradictions, adding layers of meaning to the works. Roorda also likes to work with found objects, which he sees as a rich way to create an art that tells a story. Visual art, in Roorda’s view, is not as limited as the written word. Art can offer multiple layers of ideas and meaning simultaneously.

Roorda explains the purpose of the works in the exhibition as seeking an interplay of walls and horizons that create a tension between surface and depth. He speaks of distressed and aging surfaces, or walls containing the markings of history, and the openness of a sky offered in contrast and representing something beyond. Rust, ashes, crushed stone,

beeswax and gold leaf tell the story and invite the viewer to contemplate the symbolism of the work as well as its process of becoming. Roorda’s intuitive artistic process proceeds in the direction the materials dictate and as things “feel right.” He listens to comments about his work to further understand the possibilities of meaning he has offered. For him art is dealing in a communal experience.

EMBODIMENT Emmaus O’Herlihy O.S.B.: The Human Body and the Promise of the Eternal Emmaus O’Herlihy has a relationship with art that is fundamentally informed by a theological perspective. His painting, strongly tied to his academic research, is the result of a life’s journey that has led him to the surrender of asceticism. His interests are oriented toward the Church Fathers and figurative art. Painting for him is an act of exploration in which the body is the vehicle for inquiry and expression.

O’Herlihy’s notion of the body stands against Neo-Platonic conceptions that presuppose a separation of the body and the soul. Nor, for him, does the glory of the body reside in Greco-Roman notions of physical beauty and perfection. The central role of the body is, as he understands it, related to the *shared experience of being in the flesh*. O’Herlihy’s understanding of the flesh embraces pain, struggle, and vulnerability. He explores the latter condition through the contemplation of the feminine within the masculine.

O’Herlihy’s research on the Church Fathers and his artistic emphasis on the body helps to visually articulate theologies such as the one of Athanasius (c. 296-373 C.E.). Athanasius affirmed the Christian concept of creation, the divine act in which God created everything out of nothing, choosing to make humans in the image of the divine. Athanasius taught that because only God is eternal, the corruptibility of the body brought upon by sin and death is necessarily intrinsic to human nature. Nevertheless, Athanasius believed, God gave humanity the gift of incorruptibility. He did so through Christ, by assuming a human body and sharing in the same corruptible nature. In sharing death with humans, and through his resurrection, Christ was able to bring humans into communion with God.⁹ In O’Herlihy’s art, therefore, despite the evidence of struggle and pain, the promise of a new life is always present.

His interest in the Church Fathers stems from the theological, spiritual and religious issues that they addressed during the first five centuries after the Crucifixion, most notably the Incarnation. Through his art, O’Herlihy strives to address this issue, bringing the discussion into our own times and tending to the needs of the post-modern intellectual horizon by investigating what it means to be human today.

He assumes the responsibility of his role as part of the post-modern quest. O’Herlihy deals with questions such as how the carnal image is portrayed, with identity, and with the experience of life. He acknowledges some negative implications of technology, but above all, he believes the advantages of the instruments of our times cannot be ignored. In his artistic process, for instance, O’Herlihy makes good use of the wealth of images on the Internet. He finds an abundance of models and artworks of a great number of artists in various types of media. The richness and variety of visual resources provide fertile grounds for the imagination and for the generation of ideas about composition. O’Herlihy regards these times as precious. He understands them to be a gift from God.

O’Herlihy’s focus on embodiment is echoed in certain current approaches of psychology and cognitive science. There is a recent approach that explores human cognition known as Embodied Cognition. This approach, through increasing experimental evidence, supports the notion that the interplay between human sensorimotor capabilities and the environment is what shapes the nature of perception and thinking, therefore bridging the traditional duality of objective versus subjective cognition. In embodied cognition, abstract concepts and even moral reasoning are grounded in the body, since the mental simulation of physical events is what allows us to apply reason to other domains by metaphorical extension. The understanding of others is similarly grounded on the ability to mentally simulate the bodily conditions of their situation.¹⁰

The exhibition includes the painting *Archangel Michael*, a commissioned work to which O’Herlihy brings his artistic treatment of the subject of angels. His treatment is based on the belief that the divine message they come to deliver is found in the manner of their corporeal manifestation. Thus the painting explores the physical dimension of the Archangel, who shines with strength and authority through the corruptible substances of the world that are allusive to struggle, and that in this case are represented by the incidental textures of the paint. The admonishing gesture of the Archangel seems to remind the viewer of the promise of a new life and the reason for hope. The use of the colour red draws its purpose from the tradition of icon writing.



Endnotes

- 1 Christine Helmer, "Schleiermacher," in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 31-55.
- 2 Jens Christian Jensen, *Caspar David Friedrich: Life and Work* (Hauppauge, N.Y.: Barron's Educational Series, 1981), p. 92.
- 3 Helmut Börsch-Supan, *Caspar David Friedrich* (New York: Prestel, 1990), pp. 7-8, 84.
- 4 Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*, 2nd Ed. (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), p. 96.
- 5 Julia A. Lamm, "Romanticism and Pantheism," in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 180.
- 6 Paul Crowther, *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (Even the Frame)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 119.
- 7 *Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925*, Edited by Leah Dickerman (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2013).
- 8 Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 580.
- 9 Thomas G. Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), pp. 29-32.
- 10 Stephen Flusberg, Lera Boroditsky, "Embodiment and Embodied Cognition," in *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Psychology*, <http://www.oxford-bibliographies.com>.

BIOGRAPHIES OF ARTISTS

Paul Fournier Born in Simcoe, Ontario in 1939, Paul Fournier studied a variety of art techniques at the Central Secondary School in Hamilton under local watercolourist Jean Wishart, then went on to study printmaking at McMaster University (1967), where he was invited as the guest of Professor George Wallace. In 1969-70, he was artist in residence at Waterloo Lutheran University. Since 1961, Fournier has exhibited extensively in both solo and group exhibitions in Canada, the US and Europe.

His works hang in the Art Gallery of Ontario, the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, the Art Gallery of Hamilton and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., as well as in many university and private collections across Canada and the US.

In 1996, Fournier was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws from Sir Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario.

Fournier has lived in Toronto since 1962. Previously associated with the Pollock Gallery, the David Mirvish Gallery and the Klonaridis Gallery until its closing, Fournier is now represented by Miriam Shiell Fine Art in Toronto.

Paul Roorda lives in Waterloo, Ontario and makes art using discarded books, vintage medical objects, and found materials. His work investigates changing belief systems, the construction of knowledge, and the practice of ritual in religion, science, medicine, and environmentalism. He has exhibited extensively including solo shows at the Dadian Gallery, in Washington DC, the Doug Adams Gallery in Berkeley, California, the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, and Wilfred Laurier University. He was the Artist in Residence for the City of Kitchener in 2007 and has been the subject of an episode of "The Artist's Life" which aired on Bravo TV. Paul Roorda has been a finalist for the Blake Prize for religious art in Australia and has been awarded grants from the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts. His work is found in numerous collections including the Donovan Collection at the University of Toronto. Paul Roorda has been a member of the City of Kitchener Public Art Working Group and has recently served on the board of CAFKA, the Contemporary Art Forum of Kitchener and Area. New work will be shown in a solo exhibition in Hilsbach, Germany, in July 2014.

Emmaus O'Herlihy O.S.B. is a monk from Glenstal Abbey, Ireland, presently studying Theology at St. Michael's College, TST. His work is fashioned by the Christocentric, scriptural and prayerful speculation experienced in monastic life and allows him an opportunity to share in fellowship with the contemplative, prayerful exploration of others. "Looking at the human figure through an incarnational prism is to embrace our human nature as indispensable in our relational experience with God and each other, liberating us to our essential goodness. It is in our human nature that we find the desire drawing us to want exactly what God has created us to want." The 'Archangel Michael,' begun during the Christmas term break 2013, is his first work painted in Toronto.

Katharine Lochnan is Senior Curator, Special Exhibitions, and The R. Fraser Elliott Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Art Gallery of Ontario. She has been in the curatorial department of the Art Gallery of Ontario since 1969. After spending a year at the British Museum in London, she was appointed the first Curator of Prints and Drawings in 1976. Under her watch, the AGO has built a collection that covers all major European schools and continues to grow on a solid foundation.

Katharine is an art historian by training, having earned her first two degrees from the University of Toronto, and a Ph.D. from the Courtauld Institute, University of London. She has written or edited several books and many articles on 19th and 20th c. European and North American artists. She has organized many exhibitions including Turner Whistler, Monet which was shown in Paris, London and Toronto in 2004-5 drawing the record number of visitors for the year: 1.1 million. She is currently at work on The Mystical landscape from Claude Monet to Emily Carr which will take place at the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Musée d'Orsay in 2016-17. This has grown out of her studies in the DSD programme at Regis College.

Katharine was born in Ottawa and grew up in London, England. She moved to Toronto to attend university in 1965. In 1986, she and her husband bought an old farm on Georgian Bay which she regards as home. In 2005 she travelled to Ireland in search of her roots which she found on the Burren in County Clare. Her painting and sketching has been largely inspired by these and other landscapes. Katharine continues her training in painting under Ewa Struylik at her Project Art studio in Toronto.