



Louise McClary : 'Stations of the Cross' by Dr Richard Davey

Louise McClary's Stations of the Cross combine the innocent vision of a child with the sophisticated techniques of an adult. Her works have a playful exuberance that echoes the sense of wonder and amazement with which a young child confronts the world. Like a child, her feelings lie exposed on the surface of the work rather than hidden behind layers of learnt restraint.

The innocence of this vision is perfectly suited to the subject matter. In peeling away the layers of learnt technique and adult cynicism these images echo the surrealist search for a true expression of the unconscious human spirit. For McClary, however, it allows space for the spontaneous working of the Holy Spirit to come through. It is unsurprising therefore that her paintings have similarities with Medieval art, for both are concerned with expressing a spiritual reality.

Scale

McClary's use of scale does not reflect the ordered and rational perception of things that greets adult eyes, but rather the more chaotic vision of a child who sees only partially. Things which are important are inflated, whilst peripheral objects become small and insignificant. This does not only affect the relationship between different forms, however. It can also be seen in her portrayal of the objects themselves, where the proportions are distorted for emotional effect. In 'Christ is Nailed to the Cross', the right hand and head take on supernatural proportions as the focus of our attention, while the rest of the body seems squeezed into insignificance. The forms themselves are exaggerated since they are an important tool in the artist's expressive grammar. Unnatural poses, elongated forms, and elegant curves all contribute to the emotional landscape of the works and carry us along with Christ on his dramatic journey to the Cross.

Colour

The real drama is provided by colour. McClary's colours are bold, otherworldly and expressive. They have an intensity that draws us into their ethereal world, which then holds us entranced once we have entered in. Layers of paint contribute to the richness of the work. Where McClary once used metallic paint to evoke light, she now uses veils of colour that produce an incredible inner luminosity. The golden yellow background to the Crucifixion seems to fall apart into nothingness to echo the rending of the Veil of the Temple.

Throughout the journey Christ's body is a shimmering white form that stands out against the background, and serves as a constant reminder of the Resurrection. The light is passed on to other characters as they encounter him on the journey. When Simon of Cyrene takes the cross, the darkness of his body is transformed by the radiance of a face, which like Moses on Mount Sinai, has seen the form of God.

Colour is also used to create the space in which the drama takes place, with areas of colour serving as containing vessels for the various characters.

In the Crucifixion we find Latin words that have been taken from the text of Bach's St. Matthew Passion, a work which enveloped McClary as she painted. Whilst the paintings are usually to be seen in silence, the presence of these words serves as a reminder that they were created as multimedia, synaesthetic events, in which music and colour were integrally bound.

Magic, innocence and faith

These Stations of the Cross are magical, innocent works in which colour, line, and form are not the servants of an external reality, but an exuberant expression of the artist's feelings and Quaker faith. Divorced from the restrictions of learnt means and methods, they are an expression of the infinite horizons of the human imagination.