SHIFTING GROUND: an investigation into an aesthetic of change in the form of a cycle of mural paintings.

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Documentation and commentary on the body of practical work presented for the degree of Master of Fine Art at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town.

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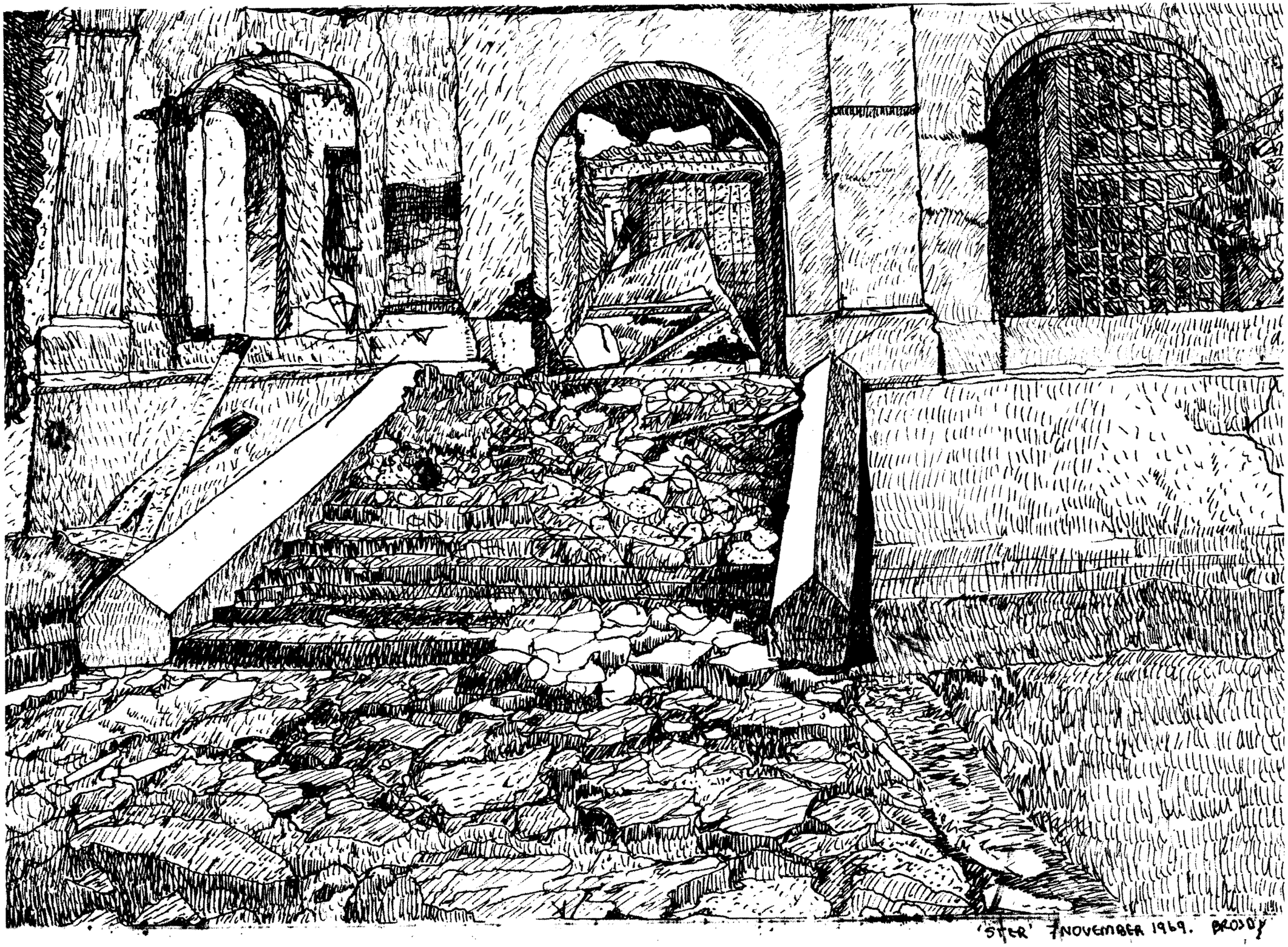

Drawing made from archival sources, Tulbagh Earthquake Museum.

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Acknowledgements

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.

Proverbs 3: 5 & 6

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1. Preface

When my family started a new life on a deciduous fruit farm in Tulbagh, Western Cape, it was a dramatic change from my urban childhood in Cape Town. I was expected, as is the custom for farmers' sons, to work on the farm. This included harvesting fruit in the orchards in the heat of summer. I was unaccustomed to this and resented my new role.

At the same time I was developing as a painter and I felt a strong urge to formulate imagery from what I was seeing and experiencing whilst I lived and worked there. It was a formative period for me and provided much of the inspiration and subject matter for this body of masters work. In this project I have brought together this developmental experience as a social being with my growth as an artist, and an individual.

There is a sense in which the political and religious history of Tulbagh affects everything that happens in the present time. The cracked and disintegrated foundations and structures that were left in the wake of the earthquake that occurred in Tulbagh in 1969 are an analogy for the instability of the foundations upon which society stands. The tremulous political and religious history also presented a challenge to me and I refer to them in my work. The overall instability of Tulbagh's fragmented and fractured society entered into the aesthetic form and handling of the work.

Extensive subject matter in the mural was drawn from a missionary journey to Mozambique, which was another period of questioning and growing for myself and was an experience of great spiritual significance to me.

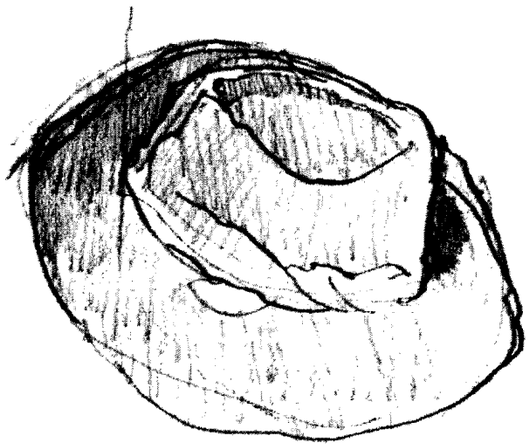
My experiences in Tulbagh and Mozambique comprise the primary sources of the subject matter for this body of masters work, because of the reasons outlined above as well as the many exciting visual possibilities they offered.

The mural cycle which forms the practical component for this MFA degree is part of an investigation into the relationship between Christianity and art, within the present and within a subjective experiential context. At the outset I wish to state that my life experiences have formed the necessary starting point for this enquiry (as well as being the starting point for the murals). This work is my response, through the means of painting, to witnessing some central Christian concepts enacted, or 'coming alive' within everyday existence.

It is difficult to summarise in one paragraph what I have aimed to achieve and what, in the end I have actually achieved since the proposal was perhaps too broad in the beginning. There has been an enormous amount of journeying throughout this project therefore intentions in the beginning are different to what actually transpired in the end. I would like to say that I have aspirations for society, for art and for the place of art in society. These have been upset, overturned, challenged and also reinforced in some cases. The mural paintings have large physical

dimensions and the sheer scale of the paintings resulted in an artistic engagement that was intense, slow and that was continually changing. This should be seen as helpful to the overall aims, which are artistic and religious. I draw courage from Vincent van Gogh, who believed in a process of flux and development. In a letter to his brother Theo, on 3 November 1881 he wrote:

> But in erring we sometimes find the right path, and "il y a du bon en tout movement" "Every shift brings some sort of benefit." (a propos I accidentally heard Jules Breton say that, and remembered the comment). (Roskill 1963: 128)



2. Introduction

I moved to Werda, a deciduous fruit farm situated on the slopes of the Groot Winterhoek mountains in Tulbagh, at the age of sixteen. I lived on this farm for four years, working during the harvesting season for the first two years while completing my schooling and studying at the University of Cape Town.

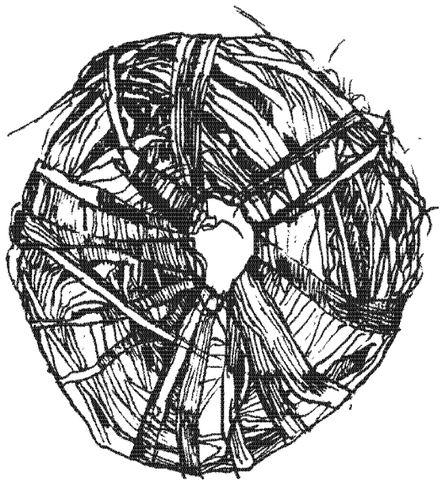
Here was a place of contrasts. On the one hand lay the beautiful countryside with its blue-grey mountains forming a protective valley for cultivating peaches, apricots, nectarines, grapes, pears, apples and wheat. On the other hand was the ugliness of society with considerable suspicion and mistrust between farmers and labourers. On the side of the farmers there was the tendency to view the labourer as less than human and a lazy worker who needed to be threatened for things to get done. Farmers knew that Monday would be unproductive due to excessive drinking on weekends followed by 'babbelas' episodes. Weekends were often violent with fighting between workers sometimes resulting in death. Farmers felt justified in their attitude toward their workers and did not expect much from them, yet demanded work to be completed. What the workers did in their own time was seen as terrible but inevitable. On the side of the worker there was also mistrust. Workers lived in fear because many farmers would resort to violence when a job was done poorly. As a result false respect was shown toward the farmer and the worker would use the term 'Baas' in front of the farmer but behind his back he used derogatory terms. Indeed feelings of suspicion and mistrust on the side of the worker were the outcome of a people who were constantly reminded of their status as second rate citizens. One often wondered how the worker must feel seeing a farmer occupy his large, comfortable house on the estate whilst he and his family were crammed into a tiny, ill-maintained cottage and paid minimal wages.

This was the context in which I found myself in 1995 when beginning to help with the harvest for the first time. My father had acquired the farm the year before so the problematic relationship alluded to above did not exist because he was new in the valley and his approach was different - this is not to say his approach was correct. I was labelled as 'die Baas se kind' and was treated differently by the other workers on the farm. The legacy of ill feeling outlined above affected me even though I felt I had done nothing to deserve it. Due to the great amount of time spent in the orchards with picking teams I learned what the workers thought and felt about a certain farmer or what had happened on the weekend. I have drawn on memories of some of these conversations to formulate the passages above.

While at work on the farm, it was disturbing to be asked frequently 'where you got those shoes' or 'what do you eat for breakfast?'(The man who asked this question wanted to know why I was so big). Such questions revealed the hiatus that existed between all the workers and myself. Most importantly, these questions indicated the vast difference in material circumstances that existed between us. Being placed in positions of authority over workers who were older and more experienced than me must have only increased the rift between us. It aroused guilt on my part and probably resentment on their part. I often experienced feelings of alienation and isolation at this time.

By speaking first about the general problem of mistrust between farmer and labourer, and then explaining how it impacted on my own experience, I hope to have outlined a social and personal context that is the departure point for the production of this body of work. The context can be understood as a wounded, social landscape in need of repair. Eight years after my experience of farm work, there are signs of change but the wound remains open and the inequality great. Healing is needed on an individual and a corporate scale. The next two paragraphs describe personal experiences from which the spirit of my work arises and which I understand to be 'moments of transcendence'. Amongst widespread social trauma and personal feelings of alienation and despair, these moments have come to represent the potential to overcome. Although this body of work explores many things, I have constantly returned to these moments for inspiration. They were pivotal to the development of this project.

The first of these 'moments' occurred during the years I worked on Werda farm. In the sweltering midday heat, with picking bag around my shoulders the task of picking apricots lay before me. The weight of the bag and the heat of the day slowed me down. My inexperience at knowing which fruit was properly ripe slowed me and I lagged way behind the group. Samuel Haartse, a worker, who had seen this happen to me many times before, began to help fill my bag. One would have expected him to take pleasure in my discomfort and mock me because of it. He probably deserved to see this. Instead of enjoying the fact that the privileged farmer's son was suffering he reacted with compassion and kindness. The corollary to this description is that if all farmers and all workers acted in this way toward one another, then society would be in a more hopeful position.



The second 'moment' refers to a group of experiences that occurred on a missionary journey to Mozambique. In 1998, I visited a small, rural settlement called Mphatso, which is situated in the Angonia district in the Tete Province. A journey to Mozambique is made annually by Tulbagh's Dutch Reformed Church and I was able to join them on this occasion with a group of about twenty others. The first visual impressions of the place were startling because the starkness of the landscape and the abject poverty of the people were immediately obvious. This was not a mission in the sense that we went to 'convert the heathen'. Rather, our role was to teach, encourage and pray for an already-established congregation. However, I would suggest that we learned more from them due to their humility. It was common for members of the Mphatso congregation to travel one hundred kilometres by bicycle or on foot to attend church on Sunday morning. On Saturday night we heard the choir practising until the early hours of the morning. One wonders whether any of the missionaries would have displayed equal devotion in their own church context. The fact that people could be so poor yet so devout was remarkable. The smallest gift we had to offer them, whether it was dried fruit, second-hand clothing, etc. was received like some precious treasure. That someone could be grateful for something so small was incredible. 'Is this not true Christ-likeness?' was the question I began to ask myself.

Amongst many other valuable lessons in these two rural contexts the greatest was that of humility. I am convinced that for all to display humility is the only way for society to move forward. The production of this body of work rests on that conviction and it tries to give visual form to what I understand to be the enacting of Christian concepts in everyday life.

Thus to summarise, in this mural cycle there is an acknowledgement of a traumatised society and then a positing of 'a way forward' by interpreting, through visual and aesthetic means, personal experiences which are seen as reconciliatory. Aesthetics occupy a vital role in facilitating a process of remembrance and then reconciliation. In relation to the museum exhibition which aims to memorialise and remember the District Six community that was uprooted through forced removals, Peggy Delport argues:

> ...an appropriate aesthetic dimension is productive in any process of active remembrance. It facilitates a fuller retrieval and is conducive to a broader scope of interpretation. If this is not achieved then the assimilation of experiences recalled, particularly negative ones, can be incomplete, or even perverse. Guilt and responsibility are apportioned without a clear rationale, and the reconciliation is frustrated. (1995: 44)

The aesthetic, artistic dimension of the District Six Museum accomplishes a fuller scope of interpretation enabling retrieval and also healing. This would not have been possible had only cold realities been laid down. Instead, the Museum encourages an emotional and ethical journey with images, tactile and physical objects, colours and stories as catalysts for interpretation. Aesthetics thus play a major role in the mission of the museum, which is ultimately aimed at the restoration of humanity.

I would like to endorse the belief in the vital function that aesthetics can have in society and emphasise that my mural cycle has been painted with the idea of creating a kind of sanctuary which is accessible, and complex, which can face up to negativity and move beyond it. I wanted it to hold the viewer and engender a visual journey involving reading and interpretation. This was meant to fill a void: firstly in a traumatised society and secondly in a visually barren church complex with many bare, white walls and sterile spaces.

3. Aim and chief concerns

When this study began I had the broad intention of exploring and furthering my understanding of the relationship between Christianity and art within the discipline of painting. The relationship between the two has been problematic in the past. Byzantine iconoclasm and much later, the huge wave of image-smashing that swept Europe during the Reformation are historical reminders of the antagonism which has plagued this relationship. Instead of having a positive role in religion art was seen as damaging to the life of faith. This was also so within my own Reformed tradition and particularly the Protestant tradition. Trevor Hart explains the predicament:

> In theological terms, far from artistic creativity being viewed as an evident gift or even echo of God's own creative goodness towards us, it has frequently been viewed negatively, as a source of untruth and idolatry. Within the Protestant tradition in particular, where the products of human imagination have been tolerated and embraced at all they have been shackled and rigorously subordinated to the allegedly superior judgements of reason and experience, these being held to be necessary bulwarks against a tide of human fancy which might otherwise sweep us away into all manner of intellectual, moral or spiritual confusion or worse. (2000: 3)

This problem troubled me. My enquiry proceeded based on the strong belief that fine art should be a necessary and vital dimension of Christian practise, and that it can give depth to and contribute to the growth of that belief for those who view and who produce it. The aesthetic barrenness of many Protestant, Reformed and charismatic churches today is almost certainly due to the legacy of the suppression of the imagination and a narrowing of the conceptual, philosophical and interpretative scope of religious belief. It is possible that this legacy has also hampered the creative output of artists at present even whilst their contributions are being encouraged and valued by the church. When this study began much enthusiasm accompanied a kind of revival of the arts in my own Reformed church context. Little direction existed however and there was no important work in the field being produced as far I could see. The question was thus 'where to from here?'

The focus of the proposed study is contained in Hart's assertion that products of the imagination have been 'shackled' and 'rigorously subordinated' in the past with negative implications for the present. The masters work had the intention of enriching both my own religious and aesthetic practise and contributing to a field which needed development.

A too widespread scope of study existed at first. When I accepted the mural commission it helped to focus and narrow the field of study. The desire to work with images and concepts from my experiences in Mozambique and Tulbagh was in place before the commission but the iconography seemed too removed from the broader nature of the initial proposal. Prior to the commission work was experimental and tentative, spanning two disparate geographical sources, Tulbagh and Mozambique. Iconography sourced directly from the Tulbagh context seemed appropriate for the commission and later, imagery from Mozambique resurfaced. Finding links between Christianity and the practice and producing of art can be understood as the primary motivation and the overarching question in this project. It should be emphasised, however, that this intention became subject to the demands of the work at hand. By this I mean that the practical work grew and developed its own impetus and in the process it made demands that pushed and pulled the artist in many directions. In the act of producing the mural cycle and

then explicating it in a written document, theory surrounding the production of religious and sacred art began to suggest how it might be best applied to the work. In other words, theory was chosen in order to back up and explain the work that was already being produced.

The mural project had its own aims and concerns. The cycle aspires to reach out to as wide an audience as possible. At the same time it aims to satisfy the needs of the artist. When the work started it was intended that a religious message would be communicated. This primary intention was stretched and the aesthetic process became one of remembering, recovering and reinvestigating personal narratives. *I was essentially examining my own faith rather than trying to convince a viewer.* Aesthetic form shifted and changed according to the changing needs of the project. At times the aims were purely visual, spatial, material or aesthetic. There were aesthetic decisions made purely in response to the site, the context and then also to the emerging conceptual content and interpretation of religious texts. The initial proposal comes together with the body of practical work in the following way: the act of painting became synonymous with the act of learning and growing, and the creative act became one with the spiritual struggle.

The commission

In December 2000, Dominee Martin Smit, pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church in Tulbagh requested that I produce paintings for a defined space in the Centre for Missions, which is part of the church complex.[1] Tulbagh was the epicentre of a major earthquake in 1969. It is also a place of significant learning and experience for me. The commission presented the opportunity to work with images that had been evolving for some time, since the episodes on Werda farm and my travels to Mozambique. All decisions regarding the work were left to the artist. The space was shown to me, and I could do with it what I saw fit. The choices made about the format were personal and will be outlined briefly below. Reasons behind the choice of iconography will be touched upon.

The idea of producing murals was generated within the first year of Master's study in which there was experimentation with painting and drawing and the relationship between visuality and text. The work began to demand a large-scale format and monumental and complex images were implied. Later I studied the *Sandham Memorial Chapel*, 1927-1932, by Stanley Spencer on site at Burghclere, Hampshire, in the United Kingdom. The paintings were the fulfilment of a design he conceived while on active service as a medical orderly in 1914-1918. Spencer's cycle is an autobiographical story sequence in which biblical texts and concepts are translated through the contemporary experience of the artist. The interpretation of biblical texts within subjective experience was a major interest in my work. The chapel's completely enclosed mural environment that teemed with images from floor to rafter absorbed and surrounded me when I was inside. The oneness of architecture and painting was also noted: arched and rectangular panels are carefully crafted and fitted into exact spaces. The chapel was built especially for the

[1] Dominees Martin Smit and Chris Eksteen, the ministers of the Church, initiated the project and have remained supportive and interested throughout its production. It was announced publicly during a service in January 2001 that I would be producing the works. The Church authorities indicated a desire for the depiction of certain themes in the paintings such as 'The Kingdom of God' and 'The Second Coming of Jesus Christ'. However, these were not strictly enforced and I was granted total freedom in the creative process and interpretation.

Detail of Painting Four: preliminary stage.

murals as specified by Spencer, hence the precision with which the ensemble fits together. In pictorial arrangement, iconography and conceptual approach this cycle was highly influential to me.

After the commission occurred the empty space at the Dutch Reformed Church was examined and I resolved to cover it with images of a monumental and narrative nature, the influence of the Spencer chapel playing a major role in this decision. Later, it was more realistically decided that mural paintings corresponding to the exact architectural features of the space but not covering the entire space would be executed.

Early experimentation indicated an affinity with large-scale work and the formal possibilities it offered. Later in the year when I visited Spencer's mural cycle at Burghclere it provided a model that continued to be influential to me in many ways. The decision to plan murals for the Tulbagh site was based on these early affinities with monumental and cyclic work. Other theoretical reasons for this decision are discussed under *Description of the space* below.

The mural site and its audiences

The mural cycle is situated in the new Centre for Missions. Originally the Sunday school building, the uniform classrooms inside were used for childrens' religious instruction. Plans were drafted in 1960 and construction of the building was completed in 1967. Unlike the much older main church it survived the devastating earthquake on 29 September 1969 which destroyed ninety per cent of the buildings in the Tulbagh valley. Tulbagh is an earthquake epicentre and tremors are experienced frequently. I have been advised that one can never be certain when the next devastating earthquake will occur. With this in mind the mural panels, though seemingly permanent fixtures, are transportable in the event of disaster.

The commission of the mural paintings coincided with a change in the function of the building. The under-used Sunday school was changed into a temporary living space for a youth team that performs voluntary ministerial work in the Tulbagh community for a year, with a different group arriving at the beginning of each new year. Every June, this team departs for mission work in Mozambique and it was the 1998 team that I joined and with whom I had the experiences already described in the preface. The emphasis in this period is on the learning and spiritual growth of each individual in the team as well as ministerial duties. I have noticed that each year the team consists almost entirely of 'white' Afrikaans-speaking youths who will be expected to reach out to 'coloured' or 'black' communities during their year of service. It would not be fair to assume that these people are completely comfortable with what they are expected to do. The fact that this group will be challenged and growing a great deal during this period is important to the work I have made. That the work may *contribute* to the challenging and growth of this group has been a major concern.

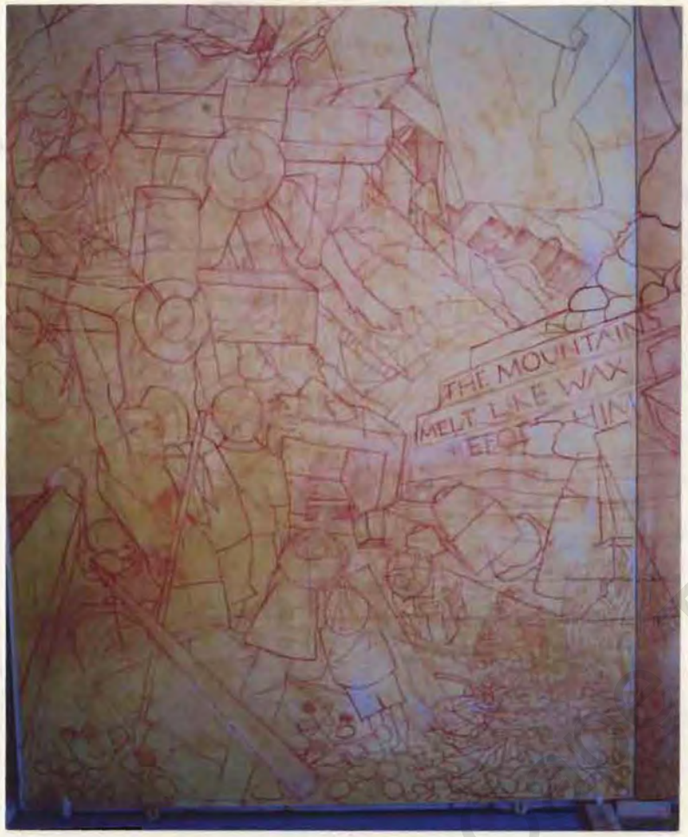
Another role of the building was its use as a place for travelling missionaries to stay overnight. Since some of these travellers would be from Mphatso in Mozambique there was an urgent need to produce convinced and recognisable iconography sourced in Mphatso and particular to my own experience in that place. This could then function as a way of acknowledging the visitor's presence. Situated in the entrance hall of the centre the inclusion of recognisable iconography of people and objects may be viewed as a welcoming gesture and a linking of the sites of Mphatso and Tulbagh.

When this project began, it was envisaged that the murals would be a way of democratising the space. In other words, it was imagined that a site belonging to an exclusive sector of the community would be opened up to a wider populace including those who have been historically excluded from the sanctuary on racial grounds. The murals were painted with this wider audience in mind, particularly those with whom I worked on the farm. It is my wish that the murals become accessible to them. Many of the decisions surrounding the choice of iconography have been made with this potential viewership in mind. Some comments about the Dutch Reformed congregation are necessary since this conservative congregation forms an important part of the audience. Many have left the church recently because of disagreement with the changing format of the services. The present ministers or dominees are viewed as liberal and are seen as treading dangerously close to heresy since they encourage new forms of worship which are of the order of charismatic Christianity. What is relevant to my work is that much unpopularity surrounding Dominee Eksteen is due to the fact that he is considered and labelled by some racist church members as a 'kaffirboetie'. He has been instrumental in encouraging racial tolerance in the church. His most controversial move in recent years was allowing a black preacher to minister from his pulpit, an action he was restrained from repeating. Thus, a resistance to change still plagues this congregation and it was impossible to ignore this when making the mural. When on-site painting began, it was crucial to consider this in a way that was both sensitive and clear. The difficulty in producing this work can be attributed in part at least to the thorniness of the issues around which I began to tread.

Description of the space

Diego Rivera, a leading figure of the Mexican mural movement said 'monumental painting does not have as its objective to ornament, but to extend in time and space the life of the architecture…'(Bloch 1986: 106). This statement is particularly relevant to the project I took on. The mission centre is small and mundane. It contrasts with the spacious and elegantly designed sanctuary that stands next to it. The spaces within the centre are poorly lit and ungenerous and therefore the mural project provided a primary challenge to enhance the limitations of the space. The space needed opening up and it needed light. It needed to be transformed from a place of passage to a place of reflection. I wanted to change the nature of the space. This could not be done structurally (changing the building) therefore visual means became the sole vehicle of transformation. Much care was taken to ensure that the panels corresponded to the architectural features of the walls so that integration with the building could be achieved. This integration between wall and painting could then be seen as 'extending the life of the architecture' and could not be read as ornamental flourish.

Two large walls stand on either side of the entrance hall. A passage separates the walls from the staircase that is opposite the entrance. A flight of stairs ascends to meet a halfway landing. There is a wall on the left of the staircase and a wall on the landing below the windows. Mural paintings were planned for each of these walls.



Series Two – work in progress

4. Overview

This mural cycle is a journey of time and place, as represented through traces of things and people seen and remembered in a simultaneous weave. The compositions are less concerned with full and connected imagery than with the bringing together of seemingly disparate fragments drawn from documentary material as well as from my notebooks. The cycle attempts to integrate traces of events from different periods of time including that of my own experience. The large-scale format allows multiple formal possibilities: massing of elements, multiple planes and viewpoints, and simultaneous different narratives.

At one point the work was quite didactic and then it changed into a process of eroding the boundaries of things in order to find meanings. They are not neat, closed images but challenge the viewer to interpret. Towards the end of the project, on-site work initiated many new developments but also facilitated integration and resolution of the cycle as a whole in its architectural, spatial and social context. I am interested in the role of painting in a site-specific context. Where a work is seen and by whom, where the site is a fixed location, informs the way it is seen.

The actual creative process represents an experience of growth and learning for myself. It is imbedded in the compositions within every aspect of the aesthetic decision making. In the creative process growth always takes place, form and thinking come together. I want the creative act to become integrated with the spiritual struggle.

Drawing is the thread that links these paintings together. It was not merely preliminary but integral to the way in which the works were made. It was also the way in which they were changed, linked and concluded. The walls or panels are expansive interfaces for visual forms. Drawing is a metaphor for journeying through time and place, between scripture and experience and through the self.

In this text *Series One* refers to the work on the left-hand side of the entrance to the Mission Centre, facing into the building. *Series Two* is opposite *Series One*, on the right hand side. *Series Three* refers to the work on the staircase and *Painting Four* is situated under the window on the staircase landing.

Mural sites visited

The mural cycle of Stanley Spencer in the *Sandham Memorial Chapel*, 1927-1932, in Burghclere, England, and the mural cycles of the Cyrene School Chapel, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, were examined on site.

5. Theoretical concerns

Theology and art

This section describes studies that were made into the relationship between Christianity and art. The ideas described here have been useful for grounding my project. However, these theories could also be applied to most works of visual art and other branches of aesthetics and ideas relating to more specific aspects of my work are discussed further on.

In this paper I would like to suggest that visual art is a vital dimension of Christianity. It can be understood as having an essential role in penetrating and exploring its mysteries and depths. Dillenberger recognises that there are no leading cultural perceptions today, but rather multiple, plural perceptions. Therefore, the church need embrace the possibility that '...many of the perceptions needed and absent in the church are being formed afresh by the artists themselves,' (1979: 196). Father Marie-Alain Couturier spearheaded the *Art Sacre* movement, after World War II, the most serious attempt to reintegrate religion and art in the twentieth century. Couturier was committed to spiritual regeneration in the Catholic Church and he believed great art was a means of achieving it and he enlisted leading modernists in the service of sacred art. The Rothko Chapel, commissioned in 1964, in Houston, was an offshoot of his mission. But according to Sheldon Nodelman who writes about the chapel, its attempt to bring art and religion together in a mutually beneficial, functioning way was unsuccessful. He said that '...this renewed attempt at the reintegration of what had become over the last two centuries culturally and ideologically distinct and potentially or actually rivalrous paths of transcendence would not succeed,' (1997: 34). The commission, including the paintings and the specially designed building was displaced from its original site and role as a functioning Catholic chapel. Noldeman asks whether the failure was because the requirements and paths of religion and art had become so different and incompatible. On the contrary, Couturier believed these paths were directly linked and that 'all manifestations of artistic genius are manifestations of God's glory,' (Schneider 2002: 15). If it is accepted that Christianity and art can join hands, some fifty years after Couturier, it has been necessary for the purposes of this dissertation to ask 'why?' and 'how?'

John De Gruchy has recently tried to bring Christianity and art together. He links his argument to social transformation in South Africa and therefore his objective is similar to the one that occupied Father Couturier last century (the renewal of sacred art and its role in spiritual regeneration). De Gruchy observes that the estrangement of art from religion can be attributed to the modern worldview that elevates the spiritual above the material and perceives art as not useful to spiritual matters since it is material and 'fallen':

> The modern world-view was essentially dualistic, separating matter and spirit, form and content, idea and history. This was a reflection of a Platonic hierarchy of values (the spiritual is more important than the physical) and of gnosticism, the ancient enemy of Christianity. (2001: 106)

In his study, De Gruchy brings art (the physical) and Christianity (the spiritual) together by referring to theologians that anticipated post-modernism's rejection of philosophical dualism. Balthasar, for example argued that beauty, truth and goodness are all part of God's revelation and being. It is beauty and by implication aesthetics that attracts humanity to goodness and truth. Without beauty, truth turns into dogmatism which fails to attract and convince. Another theologian, Barth, argued for the importance of beauty saying that it is an explanation of God's glory and can lead to a better understanding of God. If beauty (art) can lead to goodness and truth, as these theologians suggest, and if all three interrelate, then art has an important role in human salvation and transformation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer also felt 'aesthetic existence' was lacking in the church. He wanted an affirmation of the grittiness and physicality of the Bible (especially the Old Testament), meaning that earthiness and materiality are part of the life of faith. By integrating material beauty into faith, social relationships could be enriched (by embracing life on earth and celebrating it). Bonhoeffer's theology also clearly implies practising art.

De Gruchy goes on to say that beauty alone is not enough and that it need be theologically defined, particularly if art is to be placed in churches and used as part of worship. He uses the term 'holy beauty' to describe artworks that meet criteria of appropriateness (2000: 47). Such work resists triumphalism, pure didacticism, sterility or beauty that is merely superficial. 'Holy beauty' does not attempt to depict God in which case it would compromise God's transcendent mystery. Rather it appeals to the senses reminding one of the ugliness of sin and then the beauty of the transfigured reality that is promised by Christ. Such beauty may convince and attract and therefore lead to the transformation of those who view it.

The above arguments in De Gruchy, which are heavily summarised, are helpful to me in terms of understanding the place of aesthetics in a contemporary church context. They clarify the possible role that aesthetics have in transformation of society from a theological point of view and within the social and historical context of the present. For instance, I have produced my murals in response to what I perceive as ugliness in society (see *Introduction*) and I have tried to paint images representing a transfigured reality, attempting to find a visual vehicle to explore these concepts with the aim of reaching out to a particular viewership. The term 'holy beauty' may also illuminate the way in which my own work seeks to be multi-layered, avoiding any simple definition of beauty. It might also describe the manner in which my murals are concerned with a sense of a mystery rather than depicting an idealised notion or picture of salvation. The following statement, which was quoted in relation to works that are perceived to 'awaken fundamental questions of human existence' (Rahner in De Gruchy 2000: 43), describes a way in which I would like to begin to position my paintings:

> Such art avoids didacticism. Like a great icon it provides a window into mystery and transcendence rather than stating the obvious. (De Gruchy 2000: 43)

Theologians, Bonhoeffer and C. S. Lewis affirm the importance of the material in Christianity. Lewis writes, 'Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body - which believes that matter is good, that God Himself once took on a human

body, that some kind of body is going to be given to us in Heaven and is going to be an essential part of our happiness, or beauty and our energy,' (1943: 81). Jeremie Begbie and academics from the current 'Theology through the Arts' project at the University of Cambridge explore artistic practise from the same perspective. Their ideas have shaped my view of the theological importance of fine art. Theologian, Francis Schaeffer and the philosopher Iris Murdoch have also encouraged me by their observations that scripture itself has an aesthetic dimension. What I am trying to prove here is not only that art is 'right' from a Christian perspective, but also that Christianity itself has an aesthetic dimension or that ethical principles are embodied in aesthetic principles.

Other important concepts concerning theology and art

E. A. Mare seeks to prove that religious art is often hackneyed and unimaginative when he asserts that 'ecclesiastical art is the concrete counterpart of religious dogma; it may also be designated "visual dogma". This implies that dogma is first formulated in language and is then, in certain denominations which allow visual images, transformed as validatory evidence, or illustrative evidence by artists and artisans,' (2001: 101). While it is my personal opinion that very interesting work may be produced when the artist tries to faithfully interpret portions of scripture, an illustrative or didactic result is most often the outcome at present. Dillenberger says '…the pressure of the church and the synagogue led to an internalisation in the psyche of the artist to the extent that artistic freedom and creative competence diminished when faith issues were involved,' (1984: 196). These pressures were significantly reduced in my case but it is still necessary to locate my work outside the problematic category of 'visual dogma' in order to explain how religion has enriched rather than curbed or dogmatized my practise. It is also necessary to address an imagined audience who would perceive my work to be 'too unconventional' and therefore not religious.

An individual search

The following statement by E. A. Mare is a response to the question of how the truths of a particular religion may be expressed in artwork without that work becoming formulaic or dogmatic. It relates to the way in which I approached my work:

> The answer appears to lie in the fact that the faith of the artist has to interrelate with the pursuit of religious truth. J. A. Buijs reminds us that: "Faith…is not an abstract, general matter; it is at the bottom an individual, existential matter. It arises only within the context of concrete human lives."… it is clear that artists who create religious works do so within the context of their individual lives and individual faiths. (2001: 113)

Thus there should be a spiritual search embodied with the creative process on the part of the artist. The content of that search arises from the life and experience of the artist. This theory supports the way in which I examined two major life experiences in the Tulbagh cycle and looked for spiritual meanings. It also supports the way in which I interpreted some pertinent biblical texts in the context of these experiences and the

Detail of Series One.

way the meanings of these texts were explored through the individual framework. Thus a work process involving a search, a struggle, and a process of growth is emphasised.

Chagall's struggle

To draw closer to an understanding of how the artistic battle and the spiritual search for transcendence may be regarded as an integrated process it has been helpful to refer to the work of Marc Chagall.

Chagall's stained glass windows for the Hadassah Synagogue in Jerusalem, depicting the twelve tribes of Israel, can be understood as the 'arena of a struggle with the angel.' This struggle was with the splendour and richness of the stained glass through which the sacred might shine. The richness of the glass needed to be held back by the artist's labour. Chagall scratched, scraped and thinned out the colours of the glass. He also painted onto the panes with black pigment creating areas of minute, figurative detail. Thus the windows contain evidence of a battle everywhere. According to Schneider 'these rubbings and scrapings, these "peckings" as the specialists call them, particularly enable us to grasp how Chagall killed the "richness" of the whole by means of the "psychic,"' (2002: 19).

Why was this battle necessary? Chagall was fascinated by the richness of the stained glass medium but refused, at the same time, to accept its ready-made splendour (Schneider 2002: 16). It had mystical qualities (the angel) but it was too rich on its own and it made the artist's work and thought unnecessary. Therefore through artistic intervention Chagall 'killed richness' and created channels of meaning. The struggle of the creative process he underwent can be related to a spiritual search as he was trying to 'penetrate into the light of full day ' through this 'struggle with the angel'. The glass alone did not satisfy the search so 'penetration' by the artist's hand and mind were needed.

At a late stage of this project, I made a connection with Chagall's process of scratching through and labouring so that the sacred could penetrate and manifest. There had been an intense artistic battle with the materials in my own work, my paintings bearing evidence of that battle such as scratches, carvings, drawings and areas that had been intensely reworked. Chagall's 'struggle with the angel' helped me to understand the significance of my own struggle. Following him I would like to think of my work process as one that aspires to extract something greater or higher out of the materials and paintings through intense engagement; a moral process giving rise to the creative process and aesthetic decisions. My search for the sacred was not through splendour but through effort, like Chagall. He claimed that 'the window is the relation between the interior and exterior world, the point where man becomes one with the created'.

Series Two: early stage.

Freedom of imagination

Chagall offered an inspirational statement regarding the interpretation of scripture: "'I did not see the Bible," he said, "I dreamt it,"' (Schneider 2002: 15). There was an imaginative freedom and perceptual openness in his approach, which encouraged rich and layered work. I cannot claim to have taken such profound liberties while producing the Tulbagh cycle. However, the Bible *was* used as a source for feeding my imagination rather than a rulebook or guide that dictated how imagery should be painted. And imagination was used to gain a greater interpretative depth and further my understanding of the scripture.

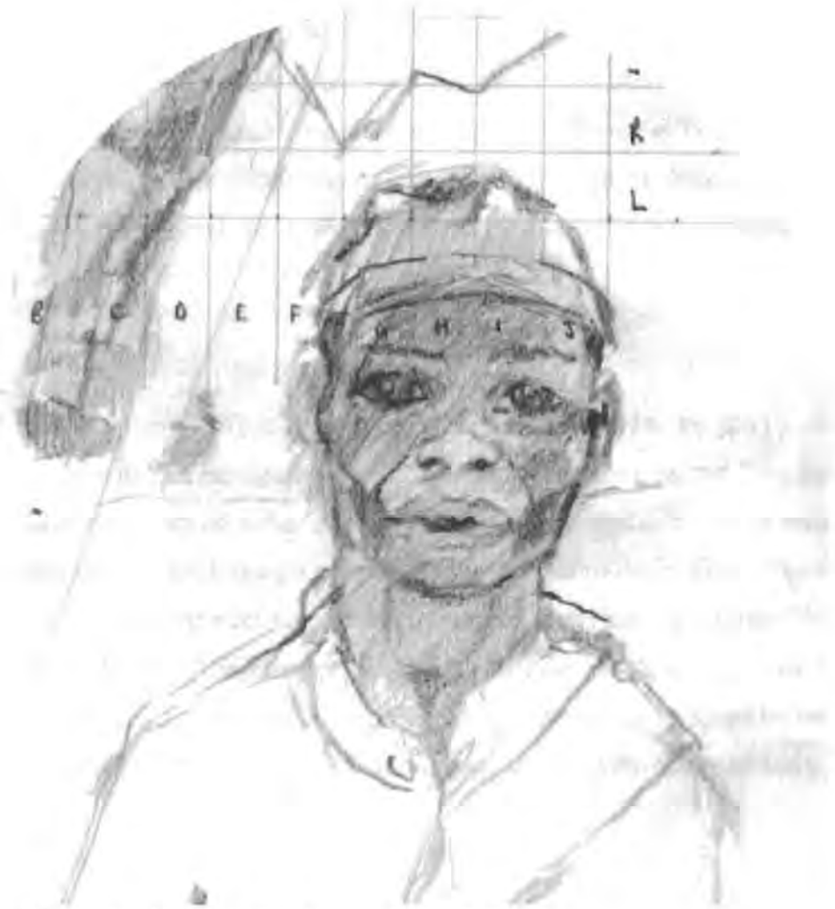
Allegory

Allegory uses that which is fragile, incomplete and fragmented. This is the nature of the source material that comes together in this mural project. According to Craig Owens, what is most proper to allegory is '…its capacity to rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear,'(1980: 1052). The images I have worked with in this cycle were 'threatening to disappear'. Firstly, the personal experiences I have examined and used for source material and subject matter may have been memories, existing as snapshots that would be looked at from time to time. Now they have come to exist in and represent concerns for the present. Secondly, I have used archival imagery obtained from files in Tulbagh's Earthquake Museum and imagery that was studied and documented by sketching while visiting the Oude Kerk Museum, also in Tulbagh, and one feels that few people attempt to study these files. In addition, the odd passing comment or the more intimate story heard, while painting, on site has entered into my work. Thus the act of producing the murals facilitated a process of unexpected storytelling. These stories are ephemeral since they are memories and perhaps arise occasionally in conversation so I needed to concretise them. There is a possibility that these elements would be ignored and forgotten had my working process not been 'defensively recuperative', a posture which is common to allegorical work (Owens 1980: 1054).

I wish to think of the visual interpretation of historical, archival material as part of my desire to examine its significance for the present in order to fill a kind of gap or lack of understanding. According to Owens, allegory emerged in response to an estrangement from tradition, and it functions in the gap between the present and the past which need be reinterpreted (1980: 1052). As allegory, my work is involved in recuperating fragmented material and reinterpreting it with the intention of understanding the links between present and past, which in South Africa are particularly estranged.

Owens also describes how in allegorical artwork, a sense of critique may reside within the artistic form. A fragmented or seemingly incomplete work of art may have the ability to reflect upon itself, its means of production and on art-making in general. 'In allegorical structure, then, one text is *read through* another, however fragmentary, intermittent, or chaotic their relationship may be; the paradigm for the allegorical work is thus the palimpsest,' (Owens 1980: 1053). My mural cycle corresponds to the form of the palimpsest since it appears to be a surface upon

which traces of erased early work may be seen under more recent work. The images within it are also fragmented and 'broken'. If the Tulbagh mural cycle may be seen to house a critique within its aesthetic form, designating another allegorical dimension in it, then that critique relates firstly to the means of producing religious art and the questioning of those means within my process. It also relates to the overall sense of questioning and critique of society because the eroded and fragmented images of people may lead to understandings about the transience of life or the fragility of earthly existence. Lastly it is hoped that the painted and drawn lines which exist alongside one another will ask questions about entrenched perceptions that are held about drawing coming first and painting coming last in the artistic process.



Observational notebook drawing from Werda fruit farm.

6. Media and methodology

6.1 Beginnings

The mural paintings are executed on gesso-primed wooden panels which form resilient and stable working surfaces.[1] The media were chosen for their flexibility as well as their formal qualities. By flexibility I mean that the ground will resist cracking when the panels bend while being moved or when they expand due to changes in temperature (the gesso emulsion ground will flex but the pure gesso ground is more brittle). By flexibility I also mean that the flat wall-like surfaces gave me the freedom to investigate some central concepts because they could take the impact of re-working and changing. A process that can move and change becomes a metaphor for change in a wider sense.

The panels can be unscrewed and removed from the walls in the case of an emergency such as an earthquake or a fire. I was thus free to do much of the painting in the Cape Town studio and install the panels in the Mission Centre at Tulbagh when *Series One* to *Three* were at an advanced stage. *Painting Four* was executed almost completely on site. The final stages of *Series One* to *Three* were completed on site keeping in mind the interrelationship and continuity of the whole, as well as the spatial particulars of each individual location.

Designing the panels

First I drew pencil designs for the individual series of panels making up each wall. The two opposing walls of the entrance hall are similar in size and shape and panels were designed with this contiguity in mind. For each of *Series One* and *Two*, three panels were joined together, the largest in the middle with two panels of equal size on either side. With each wall divided into smaller sections the paintings may be moved or transported. The panels in the entrance were aligned along a groove running parallel to the ceiling on the left-hand side and electrical cables on the right hand side thus forming architecturally coherent surfaces. The stairway mural painting, *Series Three*, was divided into three sections to accommodate the unconventional shape of the wall and transportation. The top edges of these panels were also made to reach the groove in the wall. A single large panel, *Painting Four*, was designed for the landing, fitting into the whole space between the windowsill and the floor. It was essential for the panels to form an integral part of the architectural space so they were designed and measured to fit each wall exactly.

Measurement of the space

The walls were measured with a fifty-meter measuring tape. The measuring process required two people, one to read off the measurements, another to stand at the opposite end holding the tape's coil perpendicular to the axis of the wall (vertical or horizontal). The length and height of

[1] See under the headings *Preparation of the surfaces*, *Preparation of the grounds* and *Materials and procedure*, detailed discussions of the gesso grounds.

the walls in the entrance hall were measured and the dimensions for the individual panels were calculated afterwards. The staircase wall had to be measured section by section, as each panel design had a different shape. Using a spirit level, perpendicular lines were dropped onto the wall surface to indicate the divisions between the panels to assist the measuring of individual panels. Lastly, I took length and height measurements for the landing's panel.

Construction and installation of the panels

The panels have 3mm universal plywood surfaces supported by pine struts at the back. The pine struts were formed into strong frames, fitted and glued together with biscuit and groove joints and clamped together with large cabinetmakers' clamps. Uneven joints on the frames were electrically planed then the plywood surfaces were glued down and nailed with panel pins.[2]

I was able to achieve the complicated and irregular diagonal structure of the staircase panels using a crosscut saw which saws large pieces of wood at any desired angle. These frames, without plywood sheeting, were taken to the Missions Centre and fitted to the wall. This was to facilitate the correct positioning on the walls whilst sizes were corrected. An electric skill saw was used to cut the edges of the panels, allowing them to correspond with the walls. Once the frames were correct, they returned to the workshop where they received their plywood surfaces.

In the interests of 'wall-likeness' and architectural coherence I took much care to ensure that the panels corresponded with the walls and with each other. When all panels were complete they were transported to the centre for the last time where they were fitted and cut and placed on the walls, until they were transported to the studio in Cape Town.

The frames were joined together with biscuits (not glued) to prevent warping. Each panel was screwed to the wall and the skirting. To ensure even height, the panels that were too low were lifted with screws. The landing's panel (which fits under the windowsill) was built up on either corner with pieces of wood to attain the height of the other panels.

The construction and fitting of panels is a time-consuming and laborious task and the muralist working on panels should be prepared for this. I recommend that great care be taken to preserve and protect the wooden edges and corners of the panels carefully by never placing them on the floor. I always placed them on wooden blocks when they needed to be stacked against a wall. During transportation the panels were wrapped in protective materials such as bubble wrap and blankets.

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[2] These frames were made at a sawmill/furniture workshop in Tulbagh, a short distance form the mural site at the Missions Centre. A professional carpenter generously assisted me with the major practical decisions and the more challenging aspects of the frame-building process. The workshop was replete with the necessary machinery for cutting the pieces of wood for the large-scale mural panels.

Preparation of the surfaces

The panels were transported to the studio in Cape Town where the surfaces were prepared. The larger surfaces, not as sturdy as the smaller ones, were primed with a gesso-emulsion ground. Because of the linseed oil content it is flexible and resistant to cracking. According to Ralph Mayer, the flexibility of an emulsion ground is greater than a pure gesso ground and it may even withstand stretching, re-stretching and rolling when it is in on a canvas.[3] The smaller, more rigid staircase panels, which were painted in an egg tempera medium, received a pure gesso ground. Each raw panel was sealed with a coat of hot gluesize before priming.

Preparation of the grounds

A gesso-emulsion ground consists of calcium carbonate and white pigment (titanium white or zinc oxide), animal glue and boiled linseed oil. It forms a hard, stable and absorbent working surface that receives oil paint very well. A pure gesso ground contains the same ingredients except that there is no linseed oil. It is hard, stable, brilliantly luminous and ideal for the reception of egg tempera. It can be sanded and polished to a marble-like surface. In both cases the primer is applied in firm 'dragged-out' layers, usually not less than seven. Unevenness is sanded between the application of new layers.

Materials and procedure

Materials and equipment: zinc oxide (white pigment), calcium carbonate, glue size[4], boiled linseed oil for the emulsion ground, two double boilers[5], wooden spoon, cotton rags, fifty millimetre pure bristle brush, cling wrap and hot plates.

Method: The zinc oxide and calcium powders were placed in an aluminium pot in a ratio of one to three.[6] The dry glue particles and eight parts of water were allowed to soak in a pot overnight. Soaking softens the glue and allows it to dissolve easily when placed over heat. It is crucial to use a glue solution that is neither too strong nor too weak. Very strong glue may crack the ground while very weak glue will result in crumbling of the ground.[7] The glue solution was heated as hot as possible without boiling (boiling will also affect the glue strength and therefore the stability of the mixture) and gradually poured into the pot containing the chalk and the pigment, while stirring continuously. All the lumps

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[3] Ralph Mayer, 1982 *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques*, pp 288-9.
[4] I used a crude glue size made from pearl glue of hides and hooves origin, however a fine rabbit skin size is ideal, especially for a pure gesso ground.
[5] Due to the large quantity of gesso that has to be made, a large aluminium pot was used, with a slightly smaller one inside that contained the mixture. When properly mixed, the gesso was transferred to a small double boiler that was easier to carry.
[6] Ralph Mayer advocates the use of an equal ratio of powders. I have become accustomed to using one part zinc oxide to three parts calcium.
[7] Ralph Mayer recommends this test for glue strength (which I used): prepare the glue and then allow it to cool down and form a jelly. Use your finger to break the surface of the jelly. If the surface breaks easily and crumbles the glue is too weak. If it is difficult to break and comes apart in a clean line it is too strong. Glue of the correct strength will break evenly with a coarse texture inside the break.

should be dissolved and it should be checked that there is no aggregation of material at the bottom of the pot. The consistency of the mixture should be that of a light coffee cream, thus it should not be too thick or too runny.

The pure gesso ground contains no oil. Glue strength must be absolutely correct, as it is more susceptible to cracking, because of its lack of oil, than the emulsion ground.

To make the emulsion add a quantity of boiled linseed oil comprising twenty-five to fifty per cent of the total volume of the mixture. The oil combines with the protein in the glue to form an emulsion which is both water and oil soluble. I found it most effective to add it slowly, drop by drop, while stirring thoroughly until all the fatty droplets disappeared. It is a similar process to making a mayonnaise. Hard particles formed inside the mixture when it was left overnight and I found it necessary to strain the mixture every morning through stocking material. Covering them with 'cling wrap' during application can prevent dehydration of the mixtures and formation of lumps.

Application

The application of the gesso emulsion ground and the pure gesso ground was the same. Before priming, the raw panels were coated with a layer of hot glue size to seal them. The glue was brushed into lather and then spread out evenly to be absorbed by the wood. The first layer of hot gesso was rubbed into the wooden surface with a rag to ensure a strong adhesion of the ground to the surface and of the subsequent layers of gesso. The second layer was applied in even, parallel strokes with a fifty-millimetre brush and the next layer was applied in perpendicular strokes to the first and so on. Many layers of thinly applied ground are preferable to thick layering that might crack. During priming, lumps and thick areas of gesso should be smoothed out with the thumb or rag or they may be sanded if already hard. Between ten and twelve layers of gesso-emulsion were applied and eight layers of pure gesso were applied to the appropriate surfaces. Each layer was allowed to dry completely before the application of the next.

The gesso-emulsion panels needed two weeks of drying before I could start working on them. The pure gesso panels dry very quickly but should be left to dry thoroughly for a few days and checked to see that there is no cracking. Any cracking that may occur in gesso surfaces will happen in the first week.

After drying properly, the uneven surfaces need sanding. My emulsion panels, which added up to roughly 21 square meters were initially sanded with an electric sander and then by hand with coarse 50-grain sandpaper. Particular care should be taken not to sand through the ground, exposing the wooden panel, especially when using the machine. Gentler sanding by hand followed the coarser initial sanding. The pure gesso panels were *sanded by hand only* with a finer 80-grain paper because they are softer and are reduced with greater ease. Sanding is done in circular movements and without great pressure.

When the gesso-emulsion surfaces are sanded to one's satisfaction, they must be wiped and polished with clean rags. Using oil pigment diluted with pine turpentine, I made the surfaces extra receptive by rubbing the paint in with a rag until no more absorption occurred.

When sanding was complete, the pure gesso surfaces required little treatment. After sanding them to an ivory finish they were polished with a damp rag until mirror like when viewed from the side.

Series Two: preliminary stage.

6.2 Drawing

Although the (final) form of the works is in the medium of painting the role of drawing as a central and continual element of the work process need be emphasised and discussed. Drawing was central to the realisation of this whole mural project. On 20 January 2001, I noted in my second journal that drawing in my sketchbook had liberated me from the inability to design the mural paintings in a completed preparatory form.[1]

Media

Graphite pencil, pen, pen and ink, conte crayon, brush with oil paint and egg tempera.

Observational drawing/s

The subjects were people, landscapes, buildings, foliage, animals and anatomy.

Observational drawing was a necessary starting point and a continuing habit throughout the project. It helped me to gain contextual knowledge and it saved my images from the possibility that they might be based on guesswork. This was often the case for me in the very early stages before drawing from life began. Van Gogh reasoned that drawing from life was a vital discipline because it resulted in the development of an artistic language that was based on reality. Speaking of his own work he said:

> But after all I find in my work an echo of what struck me. I see that nature has told me something, has spoken to me, and that I have put it down in shorthand. In my shorthand there may be words that cannot be deciphered, there may be mistakes or gaps, but there is something in it of what wood or shore or figure has told me, and it is not a tame or conventional language, proceeding less from nature itself than from a studied manner or system. (Roskill 1963: 167)

What is emphasised here is that subject matter should be directly studied from the primary sources. This was an important part of my own procedure. If a visual 'shorthand' is developed in response to a subject while drawing it (including an emotional response) then it proceeds from reality and avoids the possibility of being 'tame' or stereotyped. It was crucial for me to engage directly with the physical world in the beginning and I continually returned to it when the imaginative processes of painting became confused.

At first I made observational drawings in Tulbagh of various elements of the physical environment and this led me to return to Werda farm to draw the workers in the fruit season. I had recently studied Stanley Spencer's drawings of the shipbuilders at the Clyde in Glasgow shipyard. I

Details of Series Two: preliminary stage.

was aware that although Spencer was an astounding recorder of physical exactitudes, he was interested in more than the recording of physical appearances and he searched for spiritual resonance in his subjects too. Spencer, adhering to Augustine's theology that deemed all activities equal in the eyes of God, constantly sought the religious in everyday life. According to Robinson 'his visual diary is arranged as a symbolic narrative, as what he described as "a mixture of real and spiritual fact",' (1991: 8). Although 'visual diary' refers here to a cycle of paintings, Robinson's assertion applies equally to many of Spencer's drawings. With this influence I began to think, through the process of drawing, about how the pragmatism and dedication of the harvesters on the farm might embody a Christian concept such as humility.

Through drawing I tried to locate significance within the subjects around which I wanted to grow my thoughts and ideas. An example of another artist who did this was Ingres, for whom drawing was not simply a matter of reproducing shapes but it was 'expression' and 'internal form' (Rosenburg 2000: 94). Although his drawing was not directly influential, I would like to describe my process as one that aspired to grasp the internal structure or reality of things seen. This would explain the profusion of lines in some of my drawings as I searched around for what was 'inside' whatever was being observed from outside.

While I was producing these murals there was regular reversion to the making of observational studies in the sketchbook. This was either due to a lack of satisfaction with the integrity of the forms I had produced in the paintings (this was the reason for anatomical studies made in 2002 and 2003), or it was to apply lessons learnt *from the painting process*, to the production of additional drawings. Van Gogh highlighted a two-way relationship between drawing and painting when he said in a letter from early August 1882: 'I certainly believe that if I paint for some time, it will have a great influence on my drawing,' (Roskill 1963: 163). A dynamic relationship between drawing and painting began to develop at this stage. Drawing became both a preliminary and primary voice, and remained important throughout this working process. Drawing came before painting and it followed. It was also part of the act of painting itself.

The observational drawings instilled in me the necessary confidence to imagine with more authority in the paintings and develop central ideas. Although I made many 'preliminary' and working drawings, the act of drawing became a central and key element within the total visual process.

Planning and composition

Drawing was used to solve spatial problems in the mural paintings. Initially, planning and compositional drawings were made in graphite on A3 paper, using very rigid methods. For instance, the pages were squared up and images were directly transferred from the sketchbook to the scaled up surface. Like van Gogh, who said that painting would greatly influence his drawing, the act of painting on the large-scale surfaces helped me

[1] The journal had an important role during this period of study. It was where I could freely write, draw and think. Thus it was central to some of the developments that took place in the work process. In addition, three sketchbooks were used.

to break with rigidities and in turn, plan and draw with greater freedom both on the final surfaces and in further compositional and iconographic drawings.

As work progressed, drawings became bolder and more numerous. Instead of taking on large compositional designs as before, compositional sketches and drawings were made in the sketchbook in conjunction with the painting process. The one fed the other. For instance, as painting became bolder, the drawings became bolder and vice versa. Compositional sketches were processed rapidly and boldly, and eventually enabled me to work with confidence directly on the mural paintings. On the final surfaces, drawing and redrawing with the paint and shifting and changing elements, became an essential part of the final processes.

Designs [2]

Small-scale designs or mini cartoons were composed on Fabriano before painting on the panels started. In retrospect, they were produced in rather a rigid manner, nevertheless they were important for the development of content and a useful indication of the complex structure I required of the work in its 'final' form. These designs were photocopied and colour wash (watercolour and oil) was 'dropped in'.

Initially on the first panels the drawings were carefully executed on a grid with conte and pencil. Immediately the dynamic potential of the large-scale picture plane became apparent and I began to stray completely from the original Fabriano designs. This was reflected not only in compositional changes but also in changes in application and media. For instance, the grid was abandoned, as was the graphite pencil. On other panels my preferred media for making the compositional designs were conte and brush and then finally just the brush. Instead of using a grid, the open expanse of the panel was negotiated. The reality of the final scale opened up creative possibilities that were unforeseen on the small scale. For example pictorial elements could soar at the top of the picture plane above the head of the viewer or sit at the base, forcing the eye to look right up and then down again. Other possibilities such as compositional sweeps, rhythms, cycles, series, massing of elements, contrasts of scale and numbers and progressions were possible on the large scale in a way that was not possible on the small scale. Also the scale of elements needed to be changed continually, particularly in relation to the architectural realities of the mural site. With this change of scope in the proportions of the final surface, it was much more useful to develop a designing methodology that was fluid and open to change.

[2] Mayer (1982: 351) explains how the mural painter usually uses a complete set of plans. According to him, the plans may change slightly on site. Although he speaks here of fresco painting, I believe that strict adherence to an initial design may be a limiting factor. Goya's fresco cycle in San Antonio De La Florida, Madrid is an example of transcending the limitations of design.

Archival drawings

Various visits to the Tulbagh Earthquake Museum and the Oude Kerk Museum culminated in a series of pencil and ink drawings. Stories and records of destruction and reconstruction were studied and used as a source for drawing. The earthquake history of the area provided an important thematic element and also guided practical decisions. Further interpretation of these drawings occurred in the murals.

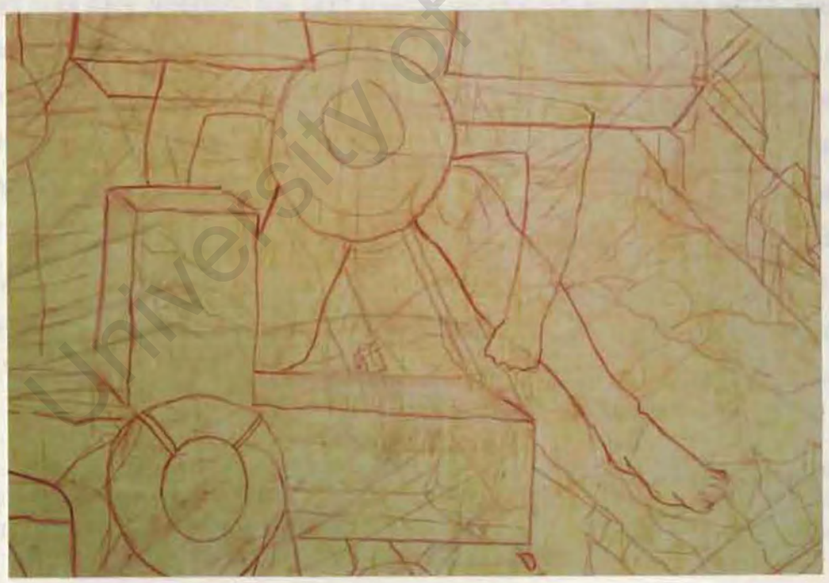
Problem-solving drawings

These were made in my sketchbook, my notebooks and any scrap of paper that was accessible at the time. They were specifically geared to solving visual problems of form, detail, juxtaposition, and composition within the paintings. For example, with these drawings I could quickly establish dynamic planes and viewpoints, i.e. the angle of a gable or the relative size of a hand or person or tree or rock. They were also used to determine the location and the position of elements within the pictorial space. I would ask myself whether something should float above the viewer or sink below into the earth. Should it occupy a whole panel or shrink into a tiny corner? Problem-solving drawing allowed me to think flexibly in the final visual stages.

In the beginning of this section it was mentioned that drawing liberated me from my struggle to make completed mural designs on paper on a small scale. At the point where the drawing became fluid and confident, such as in the problem-solving drawings, the drawing act and its medium became primary. When I was strongly occupied with wanting to communicate or 'say' something, the creative process became frustrated. When I began to celebrate the media and the spectra of creative possibilities that were available there was a kind of a breakthrough. After this, lines, movements and expressions originating in the acts of painting and drawing took over. It is possible that this was the beginning of finding a religious aspect in my painting. While there was a spirit of celebration of the media in this new way of working there was also dissatisfaction shown in the reworking, taking away and drawing over that occurred. There was a sense in which the medium eluded me and this led to more and more work. This procedure found echoes in Helen Cixous' essay 'The last painting or the portrait of God' in which she describes an abandonment to the painting process as well as a critical mistrust of the media with which one creates. The title of the essay suggests the spiritual dimension in what she describes. She wrote:

> Following himself without turning back. One after the other letting himself go. Always being the future. Being the follower. The next one. Being one's own next one. The unknown one. Surpassing oneself. And yet not preceding the self. Abandoning oneself. In words. In curves. Abandoning one's names. One's signatures. Giving oneself entirely to rediscovery. (1986: 594)

The abandonment of myself to being an artist led to my creative epiphany. The epiphany or realisation is that there is always more work to do. The painting is never finished. As far as the religious dimension of the work is concerned perhaps the journey becomes the content. Possibly the 'final state' of the work is one that holds the concept of change and growth within its form. I believe that van Gogh was saying a similar thing



Details of Series Two: preliminary stage.

in many of his letters, when he spoke at length about his struggles, hardships, how he could never get enough work done, worked day and night. When I read about his struggles I felt that there was a process of redemption occurring because he used every hardship to learn and to develop. As I look through the many drawings I made during these masters studies the connection to Van Gogh can be made, albeit in a microcosmic way. This is because I moved from a posture of restriction to alleviating that stance by trying just about anything. Paul Ricouer alluded to what is discussed above when he said that the author/artist is contemporary with the signification of the work as a whole. He argued that 'the singular configuration of the work and the singular configuration of the author [artist] are strictly correlative. Man individualizes himself by producing individual works,'(Ricouer in Mare 2001: 116). Therefore the artist sculpts and builds his identity while he is producing work. In a similar way, as my paintings and drawings were produced, so was I. The fragmented and then reconstituted images in my murals may reflect who I am or a state of becoming.

Drawing on the panels

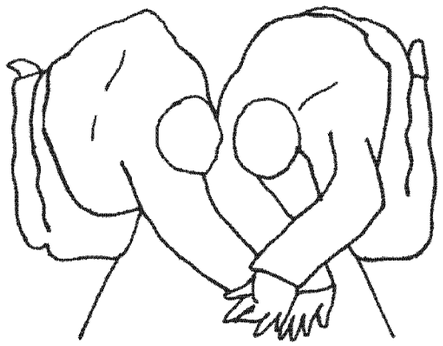
At the start, I began mapping out a design on *Series One* in Indian Red conte based on the earlier Fabriano design. Yet this changed when I returned to it and painted and drew over it with brush and oils, making major changes. In January 2002 I began the second mural, *Series Two,* drawing again with conte and reinforcing with an inky oil wash. Drawing remained as a major means of application throughout the production of these paintings as well as in *Painting Four.*

The egg tempera series, *Series Three,* required far gentler technical handling therefore preliminary graphite line drawings were used as the basis for the composition. While I was executing the paintings with egg tempera, conte crayon was used to link some forms and strengthen others. The clarifying role of drawing, particularly of line was important to this series which was based to a greater extent than the first two panels on imagined form. At this point I was usefully reminded by Kathleen Raine of William Blake's statements that 'a spirit or a vision is not "a cloudy vapour, or a nothing" and "he who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light, than his mortal eye can see does not imagine at all,' (1958: 24).

Line

If I had not quite achieved this Blakean certainty in the tempera paintings, then it became all-important in the others. *Painting Four* and *Series One* were completely revisited with the intent of employing line with more of Blake's certainty. Theo van Gogh expressed his view of a Hokusai work in a letter to Vincent. Vincent replied in mid August 1888 saying 'Hokusai wrings the same cry from you, but he does it by his line, his drawing; as you say in your letter..."the waves are claws and the ship is caught in them, you feel it,"' (Roskill 1963: 89). I began to discover the expressive potential of line when it became a major means of articulating the images because it offered an immediacy and intensity that was unrelated to the descriptive aspects of the iconography.

Detail of Series Three.



Texture

The textural and tonal elements of drawing were also harnessed. Often, painted images were broken down by rubbing or sanding and then reformed with the conte crayon, particularly so in *Series Three*. Line that had been degraded severely was revisited with pencil, brush or conte. Images were shaded, drawn or redrawn until they held more satisfactory values of light, colour and intensity. Drawing aided the conceptual processes of erosion and breaking down of rigid imagery and then led the processes of recovery and reconstitution, particularly in *Series Three* where I was not working from a basis of observation. Like Chagall I felt the need to 'kill richness by means of the psychic,'(Schneider 2002: 15). Through the processes of erosion and recovery I tried to come closer to the content.

Drawing served to start the works, to strengthen and to realise them. Towards the end the drawn line was used to link and reinforce. Drawing was both a practical and metaphorical process of binding, tying, linking, connecting, defacing, recovering, unifying, breaking and mending.

Iconographic drawings

Black ink was used to generate small, simple line drawings with clear and explicit iconography. In a sense these were thumbnail sketches. A series of eight dry point etchings was also made in which I explored the less fluid qualities of line in this medium. These drawings came at a late stage of the project and they encompassed various ideas in a single, simple iconographic form. For Fragonard 'finished' drawings often came *after* the painting. Rosenberg said that 'his paintings are sketches' (2000: 71). Due to the fact my iconographic drawings harnessed several ideas in single images, they are also in a sense 'finished' products or postscripts of the entire process. Some of these brisk iconographic developments were carried through into the murals when on-site work began in 2003.

6.3 Paint media: general note

This is a general note about the paint media that were used. The qualities I desired from the paint were those appropriate to murallism. Thus the approach was that of a mural application seeking to retain a smooth wall-like quality of form. The paint lies in flat, non-physical, flexible layers avoiding the possibility of it gathering dust, cracking or being chipped off. Paint was thoroughly worked into each flat, marble-like surface and it formed a close union with that surface to further ensure lasting adhesion. The principle of 'fat over lean' was applied; meaning that the first layers were greatly diluted and each subsequent layer of paint was less diluted and therefore contained a greater proportion of oil.

The primary medium was oil paint while egg tempera was used in *Series Three* only. The desire for wall-likeness and a mural-like quality means that these media were tested beyond their conventional applications. Instead of thick, lustrous layering, the oil paint was 'dragged out' and its appearance is matt rather than shiny. This has the effect of reducing the glare when a wall is viewed from the side and is helpful to the overall mural environment. Egg tempera is common for its use in small-scale work and the primary challenge was to apply it to a large scale. At first, fresco was investigated as a possible medium but portable mural panels, movable in the event of an earthquake, were chosen instead. Fresco, with its luminosity of tone and colour was perceived to be appropriate to my aims but the form not suitable. There is a fresco-like use of colour in parts of my murals and in all of the Series a fresco-like connectedness with the painting surface is retained.

Detail of Painting Four.

Detail of Series One.

6.3 a. Oil painting

Oil was chosen as the medium for the majority of these mural paintings. It was chosen because of its great flexibility and the ease with which it may be manipulated and the wide and varied range of applications that it encourages. A technical advantage was the greater flexibility of the emulsion surfaces and the oil paint. The challenge was to use the paint in a flat non-tactile way. These technical properties were crucial to a process of investigating and studying, while I negotiated the experience of a faith which is a dynamic thing. Oil paint allows change and erasure and the combination of transparency and opacity and layering, in full range in the same painting. A number of varied marks and applications may be obtained by a simple and direct technique. Oil paint was robust enough to withstand the harshness of the many changes in my methodology. Its *executive* function allows the colours to be spread out due to the presence of drying oil. It's *binding* properties are also due to drying oil, which locks the pigment particles into a film, protecting them from atmospheric or accidental mechanical forces and from being disturbed by the application of further coats of paint (Mayer 1984: 129). On a purely practical note, I found the medium very economical because it can be diluted without losing too much intensity.

The oil paintings are situated on both walls of the entrance hall (*Series One and Two*) and on the landing wall at the mural site. Preparation of the surfaces with strong and durable gesso emulsion grounds was crucial as they were subjected to various means of working including addition and reduction of materials and media such as erasure and corrosive processes. The grounds were prepared and polished to a marble-like smoothness and they encouraged and sustained my working methodology. Some of the processes used were sanding with a fine sandpaper, rubbing with a cotton rag, carving with woodcarving tools and drawing with graphite pencil and earth conte pastel. The resilience and toughness of the surfaces allowed a freedom of application and infinite physical changes so that it was possible to apply any medium that I saw fit in any way that was necessary. This was appropriate to the questioning and searching that took place while trying to find the connections and links between the texts and the images with which I worked. At times it was necessary to break down painted areas. Perhaps an assumption had been made about the person/subject represented, or the relationship of the person/subject to the text or to me. Had I made undue conclusions about the land, the people? If the question was not sufficiently addressed *within* the form it was re-asked through visual means. Linking and strengthening was then necessary to consolidate and re-formulate and forge connections. Additive painting processes facilitated this process. Addition and reduction are ways of simultaneously recovering and challenging rigid applications of the medium. They are also ways of narrating and documenting aesthetic struggle and growth, the subverting or deconstruction of many certainties and the addition of new possibilities.

Before any figurative painting began, I prepared each surface by rubbing into it with a cotton rag a large amount of oil-based pigment diluted with genuine turpentine. Thus ensued an intensive engagement with the materials. While I was trying to explore an idea that was rooted in a belief system, a material struggle was necessary to provide a particularity in terms of visual and material synthesis so that an abstract notion of religious faith attained material form. However, in the working process, the particularity of the medium began to teach me about that faith. As

Series Two: early stages.

Guite says, 'the "thisness" of the medium with which we struggle, has something new to teach us about the abstract truth we were in the first instance trying to embody,' (2000: 32). The large scale of the paintings in particular, constantly reminded me of my finiteness, inadequacy and that I could not save myself.[1]

Painting with rags

Painting with the rag was necessary in the beginning to ensure a primary union between the paint and the slightly absorbent surfaces. The smoother a surface the more important becomes a degree of absorbency. This knits paint into the surface, paint and surface become a unit and an insecure and superficial layer is not formed.

Rubbing was also a reductive strategy. Areas of paint were gradually rubbed away to expose underlying layers, or to provide fresh areas for work. Towards the end of the project, 'rubbing in' was employed again. At this stage some areas were rubbed with pigment until they held an oiliness or verisimilitude. It is possible that some of the elements that were painted in this way belong within Paul Tillich's definition of *numinous realism,* the artistic mode that corresponds to the sacramental religious experience. In this mode, ordinary things are perceived to have a divine quality.[2] Tillich says 'it depicts them in a way which makes them strange, mysterious, laden with an ambiguous power...We are fascinated and repelled by it. We are grasped by it as something through which ultimate reality shines,' (Tillich 1961: 223). Painting with a loaded rag should be seen as contributory to developing this form of expression, in creating a mysterious quality which simultaneously fascinates and repels. This way of working came right at the end and it was the exception rather than the rule.

The geography and quantity of colour

The use of colour and its elements of quantity, locality, juxtaposition such as high/low, more/less and here/there became a central concern in the production of my work. Pigment was mixed and stored in separate glass jars. Thus there was immediate access to a range of colours in sufficient quantities at any one time. I began to apply colour in different quantities in various positions throughout the painting. In *Series Two*, for example, a chromatic grey is situated in the image of shoe soles at the bottom, on the roof of a rural church building - a small image in the middle of the composition - and in the large jacket of Reverend David Chikakuda, located near the top. A small boy's shirt is painted blue, as are the clothes of the three men painting the roof and the shorts of a Tulbagh schoolboy. In this whole cycle, colour is painted in large and small massed elements and is located strategically throughout the compositions.

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[1] According to the Christian faith, God has provided salvation through his son Jesus Christ.
[2] Tillich (1984: 224) noted the danger of idolatry in this mode of expression; when sacramentally consecrated reality is made into the divine itself. My intention was to show the holiness, not the divinity of various people I had met.

Details of Series Two: early stages.

I found Rivera's fresco *The Agitator*, 1926, which is situated on the West wall of Chapingo chapel at the Autonomous University of Chapingo, particularly useful as a reference for how I might handle the quantity, locality and juxtaposition of colour in my own work. In Rivera's painting, luminous yellow proceeds along an arc of peasant hats of different scale from the bottom left to the centre of the composition. Black, which has a particularly interesting relationship to the saturated oranges, is dotted around the left hand side and also occupies the central focal point of the panel. It then reappears on the top right hand side. According to Rochford 'at one level, the decoration of the chapel of Chapingo can be seen as a hymn to the earth,' (1993: 69). At first the narrative, poetic qualities of Rivera's colour were of interest and later the language of abstraction suggested its relevance to me.

Artists such as Rivera use a strong, integrated, language of simultaneous figuration and abstraction whereby each area of the surface is treated as an equal concern and there is no hierarchy of figure and ground. When colour is placed in varying quantities in a mural and the artist thoroughly engages with the entire architectural space, there is a similar attitude to Rivera's since each area of the wall becomes important. This, an abstract 'geographical' usage of colour, becomes part of bringing colour to every area and transforming the entire space. The site in which my mural cycle is located is ordinary and uninteresting. Colour located in dark and ignored spaces could open up these dull architectural areas and give them another kind of life. There was also no hierarchy between figure and ground when I was painting and each area was treated as equally important.

In the Tulbagh murals, colour is located in different quantities in various positions because every area is of equal concern. Colour is also narrative and symbolic and assists the possibility of a poetic and lyrical means of expression. It was important to develop the freedom to paint a whole area or limit it to a single fragment if the possibilities of colour were to be fully realized, as these kinds of shifts are vital to a dynamic composition and transformative engagement with the space.

Application and modulation of colour

Initially colour was laid down thinly (firmly scrubbing it into the surface), with the main concern that each area should be the right size and that all areas of colour relate to one another in terms of their 'bigness' or 'smallness' (as described under the previous heading). In many areas the colour was modulated and worked until it held the right key. When a chromatic grey became too heavy it tended to 'kill' the other colour relationships in the work. In Goya's work, on the other hand, 'the greys are there simply to make the other colours "sing,"' (Stolz 1955: 140). This observation refers to the cupola fresco at San Antonio de la Florida, in Madrid, where grey exists to boost the other colours. In my case it was decided that grey should never interfere with the other colours by being too heavy and it was modulated until having a thoughtful, pensive, quiet and light-providing role. The exception is *Painting Four* which is essentially monochromatic. Here, grey becomes aggressive, although the painting remains fairly luminous.

Detail of Series Two.

In a letter to his brother in mid August 1888, Vincent van Gogh wrote of his desire to paint a portrait of a dear friend. This passage reminded me of the reason for my own desire to depict some of the people in the Tulbagh cycle:

> I should like to paint the portrait of an artist friend, a man who dreams great dreams, who works as the nightingale sings, because it is his nature. … . I want to put into the picture my appreciation, the love I have for him. (Roskill 1963: 277)

Van Gogh then described how colour assisted him to paint the portrait of this remarkable man. Although the palette and the richness of paint application is different to my working methodology, the following statement by Van Gogh resonates with what I struggled to achieve with colour when making images of significant people:

> Beyond the head, instead of painting the ordinary wall of the mean room, I paint infinity, a plain background of the richest, intensest blue that I can contrive, and by this simple combination the bright head illuminated against a rich blue background acquires a mysterious effect, like a star in the depths of an azure sky. (Roskill 1963: 277)

An individual character for each wall

Once all the works were installed at the Tulbagh centre they were re-examined and it became clear that an individual character existed on each wall. It was felt that this particularity should be developed further and pushed in each series of paintings. In the studio, each series had developed distinct from the next and there was a deliberate decision to set each one apart (yet let it be integrated as well) on the actual site. One series might be different from another in emotional and semantic key, while remaining integrated with the paintings surrounding it. I began to work into *Series One* with the intention of evoking a slightly darker mood and atmosphere to *Series Two* opposite. In *One*, a man reaches heavenward and a large, horizontal emancipated figure spans the entire length of the wall. A pear tree has lost its leaves while another tree is fruitful. A half-man, half-grave form reveals what lies within the belly of the church that is its head. Paint application is more vigorous throughout, line becomes stronger, forms are distorted and the palette is more intense. Facial expressions are troubled. At the bottom, two strange questioning birds cock their heads.

Series Two, by contrast, is permeated by an even luminosity. The paint application is smooth and homogenous - apart from the rubble image at the bottom. The general mood, especially in the upper regions is light and breezy as opposed to slightly unsettling. The figures within it are simple and undramatic and there are no jarring gestures as is the case in *Series Two*. This is a transformed world as opposed to one that confronts its problems.

Series Three, which is painted in egg tempera, is similar in character to *Series Two*. It is also permeated by an overall luminosity and the feeling is light and ethereal. It was changed little on site, as opposed to *Series One*, since its character was already established in the studio.

Painting Four, on the landing, has a similar feeling to *Series Two* with its agitated mark-making and drawing-like handling of the paint. It is more 'otherworldly' than all the others are and it represents a phase in which I was imagining with greater freedom. There are images such as a sword proceeding from the mouth of a large face and a cracked gable looming on the left-hand side. A threatening snake is perishing at the base of the painting. This, to some extent, refers to the book of Revelation. It is the only monochromatic work, one of the formal reasons for its individual character.

Rhythms, cycles, series, progressions

The scale of the work suggested compositional devices and possibilities that are not usually possible in easel painting or paintings on a smaller scale. Greater contrasts between big and small, few and many were possible. Other devices are *rhythms*: in a group of leaves, a group of colours, the *cycles* of workmen, picking, painting and digging, the *series* of mortar, rubble and debris and the *progressions* of elements, flying upwards, falling down or travelling on their own axis in the compositions. These devices are metaphorical for processes of growth, renewal and change as well as referring to instability and ephemerality. The topography of a large surface makes more important what is high or low, to the right or left. It invites more physical engagement from the viewer.

Metaphor

In the First Psalm the 'Blessed man' is 'like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruits in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.' (Psalm 1v 3) That image of the supple young tree, the peach tree in the newly planted orchard next to the river becomes, in my imagination, a metaphor for the church, the believing community that is not rigid, ideological and dry. It shifts from withered fruitlessness to fruitfulness, the bounty of spiritual life.

Biblical text is rich in metaphor and the oil paintings (as well as the tempera) borrow from the tradition of utilising physical and environment elements. Trees, buildings being rebuilt, light and earth were used as metaphors for processes of spiritual growth and renewal. The theme of earthquake, the shifting of the ground, is a constant metaphorical allusion throughout.

Layering, transparency, carving, sanding, fading and patterning

Oil paint suited my wish to move between transparency and opacity. Within the compositions, there was a process of covering what was unnecessary (opacity) and retaining what was important (transparency). There was a need to simultaneously obscure and recover/uncover. This was especially so in *Series One*, which was drastically reworked when on-site work began. The layering of one image over the next, without

Detail of Series One.

completely removing the earlier, was achieved with translucent/transparent films of paint so that 'one text could be read through another' so that procedural change became evident as part of the content. The intense optical qualities of the paint allowed decisive acts of new painting to semi-obscure original areas.

I found the tough, a*dhesive* qualities within the oil paint – attaching colours to the ground – very resistant to sanding and fading (Mayer 1982: 129). This suited me because sanding and fading were important conceptual processes, and while I was enacting this the forms managed to retain their integrity in spite of being so vigorously worked into. Sanding and fading are critical reductive painting processes that question the means of making paintings because they break down rather that build up. Scouring processes also create 'tooth' which enables the new layer to lie securely. They also challenge the way in which the works are interpreted, as fragmented imagery will destabilise certainties and question assumptions. Sanding and fading are material manifestations of individual struggle, search and questioning.

Carving was a way to engage with and enjoy the solid gesso ground. Patterning developed out of the process. It is an idiosyncratic preference and I see it as another way to challenge conventional handling of the medium because of its rapidity and spontaneity.

Painting as drawing

A brush loaded with diluted oil pigment provided the means of drawing with finality. Such drawing was undertaken to strengthen imagery that became nebulous or timid. Separation of painting and drawing disciplines broke down and integrated at this final stage.

Extending and transforming the space

The paintings aimed to extend and not be contained by the space. The painted surface needed to constantly push the borders of wall, ceiling and floor. Thus images sit right at the bottom or stretch from one side to the other. While restarting work on *Series Two*, the eye wished to travel fluidly from the entrance to the staircase and then proceed upwards through the slanting tempera paintings. I began to apply paint in a manner that unified the surfaces. Brushstrokes swept up, down and across. When viewed through the passage doorway, I thought that large images should immediately engage the person exiting the first room. Viewers should be drawn into the space and be allowed to move through it looking up and down.

Monumental figures, small figures, harrowing images and images of calm were all used. The other works were generally well under way when they were brought to the site, so *Series Two* is possibly the most successful in this regard because the site specificity was vital in seeing how the paintings worked in relation to the space as a whole and to each other. Yet some of these devices are present and important in the other works:

sweeping compositions, multiple viewpoints, dynamic planes, massed elements, located colour, changes of scale give the work a complexity and aim to challenge the viewer. The pure gesso and gesso-emulsion grounds helped to open the space by sheer virtue of their luminosity.

6.5 b. Egg tempera medium

The egg tempera medium was used for *Series Three*, the first of the staircase murals, located on the left-hand wall of the stairs.

The pure or classic method of egg tempera painting was practised in Italy from before the fourteenth century, finding perfection in the works of Giotto and later Botticelli, until oils took over in the fifteenth century. The exact techniques of the early Italian tempera painters may be found in the treatise of Cennini which are gathered by V. and R. Borradaile (Mayer 1982: 250). This method traditionally refers to paint made with pure egg-yolk as the medium combined with pure water and colour pigments in a tight, systematic application. I have used this method to paint *Series Three* in the Tulbagh cycle although the *handling* of the paint in my work deviates from the traditional conventions.

I wished to understand the tempera medium and explore its potential as a mural medium for the following reasons. The use of traditional media and techniques such as tempera and fresco painting has been lost with exceptions in twentieth century exponents such as Ben Shahn and Hopper in America. The lack of toxins in the medium means it is safe and ecologically appropriate. It also has a good measure of physical endurance, is concentrated and economically advantageous.

Materials and equipment

- Plastic palettes with recesses for mixing and temporarily holding paint.

- Brushes: Bristles - red sable bristles are ideal but cheaper brushes with hog's hair or synthetic bristles are also appropriate provided they are soft and have lots of 'give'. Shapes - the round, pointed watercolour brush is a necessity whilst I also used large, blunt brushes for parts of my work. Sizes - large and medium brushes were used for gestural work and a smaller brush for details and finer handling.

- Egg yolk (free range).

- Panels: In addition to the three large wood panels made to fit the staircase in the mission centre, small panels were primed with a pure gesso ground for the purposes of experimentation.

- Light-fast pigments and mask due to the toxicity of the dry pigments.

- Distilled water.

- Glass muller and a large sheet of heavy glass for grinding colour.
- Hard graphite pencil.
- Earth colour conte crayon.
- Fine sandpaper for reducing paint.
- Small glass jars with tight screw-cap lids for storing the colour-paste.
- Palette knives and plenty of clean cotton rags for cleaning the surfaces.

Preparation of the paint

Pigment was ground in distilled water into a paste similar to the consistency of tube oil colours, on a heavy glass palette. The pigment must be thoroughly ground and this is achieved by keeping it in a small spot under the muller so that all the particles can rub against one another and come apart. After grinding, the colour-paste was stored in glass jars. Egg-yolk binds the pigment because it contains lecithin (a fat-like substance) which is an emulsifier or stabiliser and the protein albumen which coagulates when the yolk is spread out becoming adequately insoluble, tough, leathery and permanent. Following the pure egg-yolk method, I separated the yolk from the white by passing the yolk from hand to hand until dry and then holding the membrane until all the yolk dropped off into a container without any trace of egg white entering into the solution. The best technique to use is to pass the yolk from hand to hand wiping each hand on a cloth. The membrane is then punctured and the yolk collected in a jar. To make the paint, the colour-paste was mixed with the yolk with the same amount of each substance. When painting, equal amounts of pigment and yolk must be used so that the pigment is correctly bound.[1] When painting with broad brushes began, this equal ratio changed and I found that a large amount of paint could be mixed up using a lot of egg and comparatively small amount of pigment, assisting qualities of transparency.

[1] These technical methods were found in the chapter on tempera painting in Ralph Mayer's *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques*, 1982, pp. 228-54. See also Colin Hayes *The Complete Guide to Painting and Drawing Techniques and Materials*, 1978, pp. 80-97.

Painting

Mayer wrote of the egg tempera medium saying '...it is favoured by those whose work is deliberate and planned,' (1982: 236). This is seen in the precision of artists such as Giotto, Botticelli and recently Tooker whose work is made up of small, hatched brushstrokes in even layers. In the most precise examples of the technique, a specific colour (such as flesh tone) is obtained by the optical effect of one thin translucent layer over another. My challenge was to break away from tradition, in a sense, since I worked on a large, sweeping scale and I wanted to test a range of applications. Shahn used a free non-traditional application of tempera in contrast to Tooker. During the working process the technique was adapted to my changing and shifting methodology. However, much of the solid technical advice in Mayer's book was valuable because while I wanted the medium to suit stylistic and conceptual needs, there was also the necessity of producing lasting paintings.

At first, the paint was diluted liberally with distilled water and built up in layers, making a strong base upon which I was able to work with slightly thicker layers, i.e. denser applications of pigment and egg-yolk. Dilute strokes reduce the absorptive action of the gesso ground so that the binder of a thicker layer will not be totally absorbed, leaving insufficiently bound pigment. The tempera medium required gentle handling. It is best to lay the paint down in even strokes in one direction since numerous back and forth strokes damage the film. This is different to handling of oil paint, which may be 'scrubbed' in.

The development of an individual working methodology

The small test panels were important to the development of a range of tempera applications as there was no need to adhere to composition and anything could be tried. Here I experimented with different kinds of marks and brushstrokes (patterning, line, stipples) and different consistencies of paint. The thick layer with minimal water dilution produced a strong line but it was unstable and it usually cracked, while the very dilute layer needed painstaking building up and this did not suit the directness I needed for processing many ideas. I began to favour the semi-opaque mark with its stronger film and greater hiding power. I also started exploring 'corrosive' and scratching techniques. These lessons were applied and extended on the mural panels. The test panels were often returned to while I was painting the murals so that further experimentation could be done.

Freshness of paint application

I studied Goya's cupola fresco at the San Antonio de la Florida Church, Madrid, 1798, a late work, which he painted without a sinopia drawing or a cartoon. It was revolutionary for its time because the fresco medium necessitates even greater control than tempera and Goya appears to have used it with no inhibitions (also, due to the style, there are not the usual appeasement of sentiments that usually goes hand in hand with religious painting). I saw this as a good example of what must be done in order to recover a traditional technique and apply it to one's own

needs, and I was influenced by the aggressive and swift drawn-like quality of the individual brushstrokes. I admired the way in which he suggests an ear or a hand or a foot by means of a single dab of the brush and this made my wish to render every detail seem spurious.
In my own work I started painting with 75mm and 25mm pure bristle brushes, making wide and bold strokes. At this stage I was obeying the brushmark, rather than trying to control it, and the medium, which wanted to be laid down in a single, smooth stroke. This way of working generated an unplanned abstraction and this stage of my work represents a significant move away from narrative and an exploration of the purely visual, non-figurative qualities of paint. The sweeping strokes that were painted during this stage are important unifiers of the three panels. Mark-making such as patterning and stippling is also related to the following of what was most suited to the materials and procedures. When the work became muddy or thick, the paint was broken down with the edge of a palette knife or with fine sandpaper.

Scraping, scratching and sanding

I was also interested in the North American painter Andrew Wyeth's melancholic and desolate tempera painting *Christina's world*, 1948, in which the completed painting of a field is partially scratched away to reveal a space in the luminous gesso into which the figure is worked. The result is that the solitary figure is eerie in the desolate landscape. In my own work, I used scraping and sanding techniques to expose the luminosity of the pure gesso ground to generate visual qualities that could be a vehicle to explore and embody non-physical concepts.

Reductive techniques in my working process can also be linked to dissatisfaction with the material.[2] Therefore these are 'corrosive' techniques associated with the wider allegorical concerns in this dissertation and also the process of 'scratching through' in Marc Chagall's windows. Questions like 'couldn't this area be better occupied by a more readable image?' would occupy me when I observed that the non-figurative paint occupied too great a section. In retrospect, I would ask whether it is sufficient to indulge in the qualities of the paint alone when there is an audience to communicate with, which is a question concerning the role of public art in general. When a painted area became unsatisfactory, I scraped away layers of paint and in certain areas, sanded with fine sandpaper to recover the whiteness of the pure gesso ground (struggling to penetrate into the brightness).

The scraped paint had a graphic quality in certain areas and was retained as such. The aesthetic unfinishedness related to questions of allegory and of the human need to continually interpret and reinterpret. Sanding was used in other areas as a drawing technique such as the bottom left hand side of the mural, like in the form of a donkey which was rendered using a combination of sanding and conte crayon. The point of a palette knife was used to critically scratch into some of the thicker abstracted areas to create lettering on the left and middle panels in order to provide 'channels of meaning' in Chagall's sense of the expression.

[2] The process represents a struggle between the physical medium and surface and a content rooted in the invisible.

The role of drawing

This section should be seen as a continuation of the last because drawing was directly connected to displacing the non-figurative areas and creating 'channels of meaning'. There was possibly the greatest amount of iconographic change in *Series Three* because it was a time during which concepts were developing very quickly. The initial, simple graphite outlines of the original mapped out composition were not at all strictly adhered to and after several weeks of painting, I was unhappy with the appearance of the work, feeling that it needed more detail and clarity. My story was getting lost and the potential of the unusual shape of the mural was not being fully exploited. It was here that I entered a crucial phase of my working process. I began to draw with conte crayon and recover some of the lost narrative (such as the form of the donkey). I started also to use pictorial space in a more considered way by reaching up into spaces with conte drawings.

At this stage, the three panels of staircase mural became more unified. The graphite pencil was again employed to draw the clusters of ladders and crosses at a fairly late stage of the work. Although some of this clarifying work was painted with egg tempera, conte and graphite were more suitable for this purpose.

Synthesis of forms

It was possible, due to the simultaneous transparency and opacity of the tempera, to work over the upright figure of a woman with another kneeling figure without losing one or the other. The result is that two figures interlocked and combined in a kind of synthesised form. The synthesis may represent a change or transition. It could be interpreted as the spiritual transformation of the individual in Christianity.

There is another synthesis between the celestial being and the kneeling figure in the right hand corner of the mural. The combination of the forms presents a sweeping compositional device or arc and refers to heavenly comfort in the midst of earthly suffering. A particular visual language emerged in this series, through the overt interrelationship of figurative and abstract elements. Also notable in this regard are the recurring synthesised man/tree forms and double figure forms.

In conclusion, I was interested in the application of the pure egg tempera method as a large-scale technique. It is typically a very precise medium but I was interested in a free application in this case. This process was about the recovery of a traditional procedure and its application to a present situation. I was not interested in 'throwing out' the rules. In the USA this tradition has never been lost, seen in the work of Shahn, Tooker and David Tindell more recently in the UK. It is environmentally safe, since there are no solvents and economical due to the intensity of the pigments. It can travel because of the simplicity of the ingredients, provided there are eggs available. It is an appropriate mural medium because although it is more difficult to manipulate than oil paint, its film is equally flexible and tough and can be used in a flat wall-like way.

7. Art Historical Context

Introduction

I have developed affinities with works that are pertinent without being social documents. When an artwork is beautiful it is often made with a sense of the present, a sense of where it is made, as is the work at the Serima Church. My art historical references range from the early Renaissance, to Mexico and Southern Africa. In terms of its scope, this context is not limited to mural painting. Neither is it limited to religious art. Through the development of my work I began to make connections with rather different examples. My influences began with the Mexican mural renaissance and Stanley Spencer. My own discoveries and emphases led me to locate importance in other artworks. Sometimes the connections are multi-layered; at other times there are certain elements of importance. The quiet, reflective mural environment became very important. This section represents a search for qualities in which syntheses of elements encourage contemplation and interpretation, not social realism but the powerful synthesis of all elements of form. I am interested in holding the viewer, through a synthesis of iconography, content and form. The image must be a catalyst for thought. Little or no religious art is made without a social context. It is the synthesis between the religious and the social that interests me.

European religious paintings

The first art historical examples I referred to were Raphael's *The Liberation of Saint Peter*, 1513-14, and the Sistine ceiling frescos, 1508-12, by Michelangelo. Partridge writes concerning the Sistine ceiling, 'the entire ensemble is given archetypal conviction and cosmic force by Michelangelo's heroic style grounded in the naturalism and classical revival of the Renaissance,' (1996: 110). In *The Liberation of Saint Peter* Vecchi says 'light is the protagonist of the story,' (1966: 107). The dramatic qualities of light in this fresco suggest the miraculous with an immediacy that I particularly admired.

Although remaining helpful to me in terms of their strong elements of design, composition and the way in which the artists incorporated the visual elements into the architectural spaces of the buildings, the influence of these works became distant during the development of my work.

The miraculous effects of light have become commonplace in religious art and something of a convention. Deterred by this, I began to work towards an overall luminosity, not literally painted, as in Raphael's work, but physically attained through a struggle with the materials including the actual ground itself. Also, the heroic style, particularly of Michelangelo, was something I wished to deliberately avoid.

Arena Chapel, Padua

Giotto's fresco cycle at the Arena Chapel, 1306, in Padua was closely influential during the production of my work. Both Rivera and Spencer based their own chapel sequences on the Arena Chapel and this interests me because I have found their work influential. I see the chapel's enclosed aesthetic environment, with paintings completely surrounding the viewer in the small interior, as a near perfect example of what my work aspired to in the beginning. The overall environment is conducive to reflection and thought, reinforced, I believe, by the simple, narrative style in which it is painted.

In one section, *Girl spinning wool,* a kneeling figure is simply and plainly painted with subtle colour giving it solidity and weight and therefore importance. Levey writes '…the girl spinning wool in a porch is genre transfigured out of the trivial into dignity,' (1992: 12). Here the qualities of humility and dignity are very important to me. Due to the fact that the experience and observation of nature has been a major concern in my masters work it is also relevant to me that Levey writes 'in Giotto's scenes the houses, the rocks and trees are simple enduring forms, as dignified as the people,' (1992: 12).

It is necessary to acknowledge, especially in *Series Two* of the Tulbagh cycle, my indebtedness to the simple, robust and unadorned style of Giotto at the Arena Chapel which dignifies but does not glorify man and the natural world.

San Marco, Florence

The *Annunciation,* 1450, is situated in the North corridor of the San Marco monastery in Florence and is part of the extensive cycle of religious frescoes painted there by Fra Angelico. The spaces holding the frescoes are mainly enclosed monk's cells – small contemplative spaces made intense by the frescoes which dominate the space. The *Annunciation* depicts the moment when Gabriel announced that Mary was chosen to be the mother of God's son, the Saviour of the world.

Hood explains that the *Annunciation* would have functioned as an aid to religious devotion (1993: 272). The viewer would 'enter' into the sacred drama, identifying with the local references to architectural features and the vegetation that Fra Angelico painted. Then, the inscription at the bottom instructed the friar to repeat Gabriel's words and he would also be expected to bow in the Dominican custom, like the angel does in the picture. Hood writes 'thus the friar's entire action - the action of the body and the silent action of his mind as he prayed – exactly imitated the angel's action in the painting,' (1993: 272).

The symbolic interchange with the actions of the angel, through the mind and the body, made the friar a living witness to salvation history. Today, it is hard to imagine images in a religious context having the same impact as they did for Fra Angelico's audiences when there was such

Francisco di Goya. Detail of cupola fresco, San Antonio de La Florida Church, 1798, Madrid.

a degree of shared belief. Nevertheless, it would be ideal if audiences could enter my paintings in the same way, identifying with what they recognise and then symbolically travelling through the narratives and texts in acts of prayer or thought.

I find the *Annunciation* strongly religious and it has qualities that I desired in the Tulbagh cycle. Levey wrote about Fra Angelico saying 'in directness of telling the Christian story he rivalled Giotto, but with more charm and it is difficult to avoid the word "sweetness,"'(1992: 30). To this end, in the *Annunciation*, the figure of the angel stoops and Mary bows in humble acceptance. Also, the architectural arrangement under which they meet is ordered and graceful. Light and colour are treated with beauty and sensitivity.

I was especially interested in the quiet religiosity in this work and also the sense of agreement and peace between the two figures. My use of colour and stooping, lowly figures can be connected to this inspiration. The fragmentation and disruption and the 'muddying' and reduction of colour in later stages of my work was not a way of discarding this influence but of sharpening my thematic and conceptual intentions.[1]

Other influences

Francisco di Goya began a cycle of frescoes at the San Antonio de La Florida Church, Madrid, in 1798, in which he perpetuated the style he had developed; '…a vigorous technique of his own, all in slashing brushstrokes and expressive touches that instantly recorded his visual and emotional experiences,' (Ferrari 1955: 110). Goya's style stands in sharp contrast to the mannered art that was favoured in the 18th century and it deliberately broke away from the idealistic, heroic religious work that was starting to decline in Europe at the time. The freedom and freshness with which he executed his fresco paintings is as revolutionary now as it was then because traditionally and to this day it is a precise medium.[2] I was challenged by the way in which Goya's use of the medium upsets the assumptions and expectations one might have for religious art. At the San Antonio church we see this happening. Ferrari writes:

> "The Magic of ambiance," this is what Goya sought to render in the cupola; he had no wish to illustrate an incident, to produce a pious art for the gratification of true believers of a sentimental turn of mind or to commemorate an ancient legend cherished by the populace of Madrid. The unity to which he aspired was not merely one of a linear order, envisaged from the descriptive point of view and linking the figures each to each; nor yet that of an emotional communion, unambiguous and unbroken, between the various personages, a communion in which we would be invited to participate not only with our eyes but in our hearts. It is the unity of execution, of technique, that makes the entire fresco throb…. (1955: 25)

After seeing the San Antonio frescos in excellent colour reproductions - both slides and prints - I began to question my own controlled use of media which ultimately resulted in a too easily readable form (particularly in *Series Two*) and I approached the tempera medium especially with much greater freedom than before. In retrospect I wish to suggest that the vigorous application of paint that began to occur in my work at a late

[1] Chagall in his working journal published as *Chagall on Chagall* wrote of 'muddying the blue of the sky with countless thoughts'.
[2] The unique aspect of his fresco technique is the free and confident approach in which no cartoon or sinopia drawing was used.

Detail of Series Three.

stage is in response (unintentional at the time) to earlier work which was perhaps made with a 'sentimental turn of mind' or the will to make an 'emotional communion'. This is said because I wish to locate my cycle as a whole and my intentions outside the bracket of work which aims to 'gratify the true believer' or which aims to be easily viewed and digested.

In a cycle of Romanesque relief sculptures with the Spanish title *El Claustro de Moissac* Christ, standing on his own, holds two large keys between thumb and forefinger. When I first saw the sculpture in a large photographic plate, it immediately evoked the scripture in Revelation 1v18, which talks about Christ 'holding the keys to death and Hades'. This means that Christ 'locks' the door of death and gives access to eternal life. Although knowledge of the scripture is required to understand the visual message of the sculpture it successfully transmits an idea through its simple visual form. Its certainty was helpful to me at a stage of painting *Series Three* when the egg tempera was building up too much and the painting was becoming very unclear. The result was that I developed the form of a large hand. This was not the hand of Christ but the hand of the worker, holding the symbols of his sacrifice, white ladders. Through this I wanted to make an unambivalent statement about the suffering he has to endure. The Romanesque example almost certainly remained with me later on when I was making the simple, little iconographic drawings that began to develop over the next few months of painting.

Stanley Spencer

Spencer's work engaged me on a number of levels. I connected with his idiosyncratic, solitary intellectual habits which caused him, whilst in Todorova, to '...seek out some lonely gully where among the harmless rocksnakes and lizards he could be alone with his thoughts, his letters and books,' (Pople 1991: 146). His detailed paintings, in the form of complex narratives interpreting biblical subjects within the context of everyday life, and then his war experiences, were highly influential to me, as well as his custom of drawing from life. I have also found links in the metaphysical questioning and searching that inhabit many of his works. Spencer's influence was primary and continuous during this period of study.

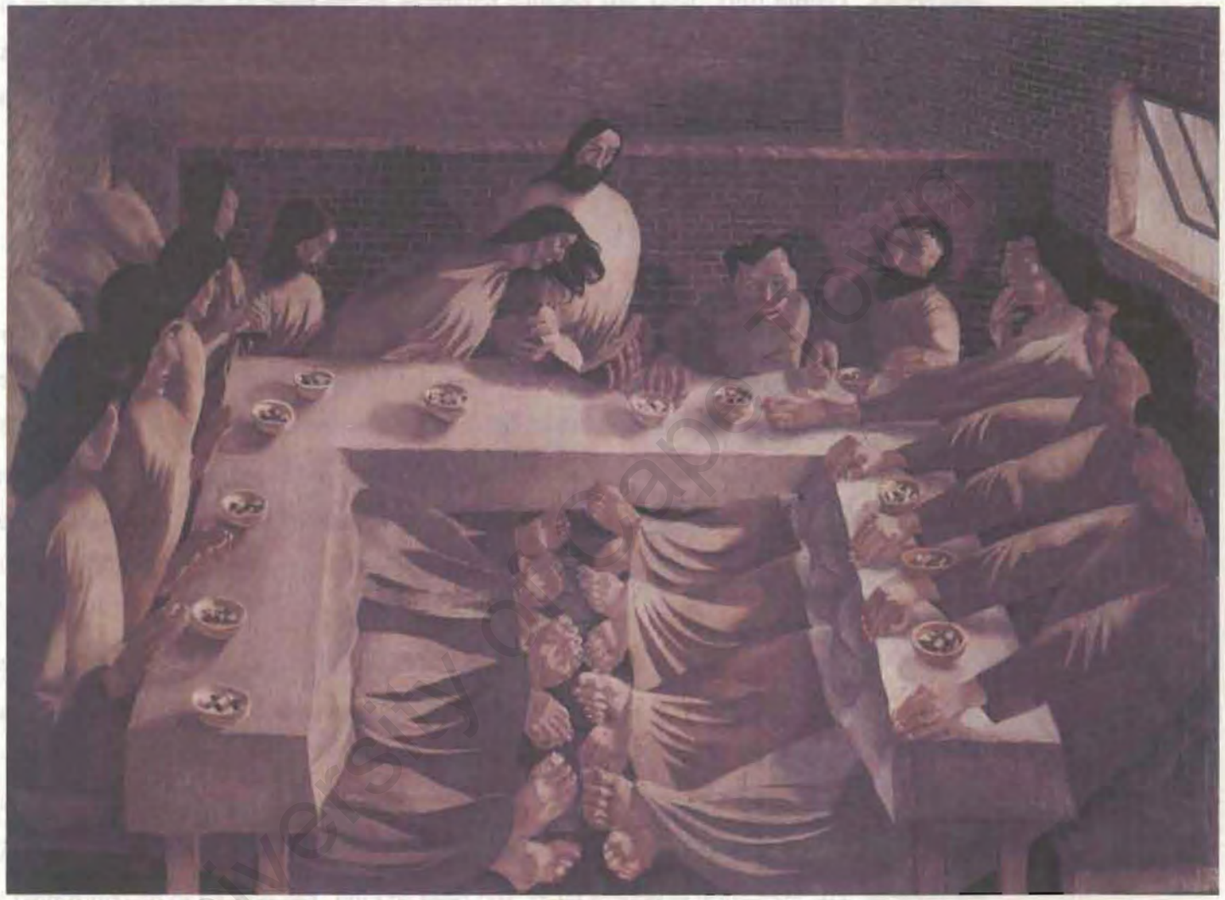
The artist

Stanley Spencer was a highly energetic and religious English artist who wrote, drew and painted prolifically in the first half of the twentieth century. His earliest paintings are crisp, figurative works interpreting religious subjects through the experience of everyday life in Cookham village, Berkshire. Military service and its inherent trauma, including front-line combat, 1914-1918, led to a loss of the clarity of his early vision, followed by important and monumental works such as the cycle of paintings in *Sandham Memorial Chapel,* 1927-1932, at Burghclere in which he interpreted his war experiences. Afterwards, marital crises resulted in drastic alterations to his painting yet the exploration of metaphysical concepts through the vehicle of the physical, mostly the body, remained.

After much of the work in the Tulbagh cycle had been completed, I identified with Spencer's statement concerning the huge mural cycle he had painted after the First World War; 'the Burghclere Memorial redeemed my experience from what it was; namely something alien to me. By this means I recover my lost self,' (Spencer in Robinson 1991: 10). Although his self-recovery was from the hugely traumatic experience of a world war, in a much smaller way there was also a type of redemption that I looked for while revisiting my early experiences and searching through fragments of Tulbagh's history. I sensed a war-like trauma and alienation underpinning this history that filters through to most experiences in the present. The alienation experienced as 'die Baas se kind' has needed to be confronted and interpreted. However, there were also surprisingly humane and beautiful moments remembered which made me feel accepted. This period of study has led to a process of recovering and remembering these positive moments while I negotiated the ruin-like negativity of the past.

The particular relevance of Spencer's work

Concerning an early work, *The Nativity*, 1912, Spencer wrote 'the painting celebrates my marriage to the Cookham wildflowers,' (Pople 1991: 39). This work is not simply a celebration of the holy birth as the title suggests. Rather it displays a wider religious concept that Spencer was developing at the time based on his ecstatic response to the physical world. Pople says '...Mary and Joseph are not simply the figures of



Stanley Spencer. *The Last Supper*, 1920.

accepted recognition, nor are the pairs of lovers those of poetic romance. The whole must be God,'(Pople 1991: 39). In a similar way, I wanted to take elements from my subjective experience and form spiritual meanings because I had sensed that important theological concepts were coming alive through people and the real world. Spencer greatly valued the potential of experience to provide revelation. As Pople shows '...it was his unsolicited destiny...to take the elements of experience and fuse them into an assembly of spiritual meaning,' (1991: 75). Similarly this body of work aims to be an assembly that fuses the elements of experience into a spiritual and compositional whole.

At the Millennium Exhibition at the Stanley Spencer Gallery, Cookham, I saw many of Spencer's visionary works including *The Last Supper*, 1920. In this painting Christ and the disciples are symmetrically arranged around a white table, eating the sacramental meal inside a sandy coloured Cookham Malt-house in front of the red wall of the grain bin. When Spencer saw the malthouse in Cookham it had religious importance for him and this was transferred to the paintings to convey the importance of the theological moment. I admire the way the religious content is evoked by what was seen in reality by the inclusion of the mysteriously lit details of the building. The disciples are simply and flatly painted but they also twist and surge toward Christ creating the tension of the moment before sacrifice. This may indicate the battle that Spencer was fighting internally when friends were persuading him to convert to Catholicism. I viewed this painting before I had started the murals but it continually interested me because of its simplicity and religiosity. Later, I admired the work as a site of personal, internal struggle.

Christ carrying the cross, 1920, interprets the moment of Christ's preparing for the final agony of the crucifixion, in the context of Cookham village. Spencer interpreted the moment as his own relinquishing of artistic destiny to army service. As Pople states, 'Stanley too is entering an agony with the same inevitability. He will endure whatever befalls him in the implicit trust that he too must find redemption in his own purpose and creativity,'(1991: 91). Although not an exact conceptual model, I admired the intensity and spirituality of this autobiographical painting, which is suspended between the material and the metaphysical. For instance, brickwork and a tree are painted in scrupulous detail and are bathed in an intense and mysterious light. The figure carrying the cross is Christ-like as are the two workmen behind. This figure is the young man going off to war but he is also Christ on his way to Calvary. One is not sure whether men or angels fill the street and windows to watch the scene.

The *Sandham Memorial Chapel* was designed and built to hold Spencer's interior mural cycle. It is also a place of worship. It was commissioned in memory of Lieutenant Henry Willoughby Sandham, who died in 1919 during the Macedonian campaign. The primary influence of this work lies in the powerful aesthetic experience it generates in its totality. I remember seeing it in August 2000 and being engulfed by narrative cycles and friezes. I was forced to almost kneel down in order to see the predella or base images and then crane the neck to see the top vistas. The complete aesthetic environment is knitted to the architecture and I visualised a similar quality for my body of masters work.

All the paintings inside the chapel were generated from Spencer's war experience and show soldiers performing the mundane activities necessary for staying alive rather than engaging in gruesome conflict. Spencer believed that these ordinary tasks were redemptive and holy according to Augustine's theology that all activities are equal in the eyes of God. 'The left wall predella and arch paintings extol the Augustinian notion of "fetching and carrying",' (Pople 1991: 264). This was very important to me because I sensed something holy in the rhythmical way in which the best harvesters in Tulbagh worked and my paintings sing a hymn to their dedication. Spencer's religious interpretation of his war experiences, namely the redemption he saw in the mundane was formative to my general approach.

Many of my experiences were underpinned by the negative base of a plethora of disturbing realities in rural life, both in Mozambique and Tulbagh, with which I wanted to come to terms. While attempting this, I referred to the central wall of the chapel, *Resurrection of the Soldiers*, through which Spencer was able to imaginatively transcend the horrors of what he had seen (this wall is also a transcendent experience for the viewer). He recalled the sight of a dead Bulgarian mule team and in the chapel the animals are changed into massive, luminously painted forms that are also being resurrected with the soldiers. The imaginary nature of the entire wall, with dead comrades that rise from their graves out of the dark war-torn landscape, presenting their crosses to Christ influenced me. Robinson says '…they confront the viewer as undeniable presences…'(1991: 10). It would be useful if the labourer-forms in my work also confront the viewer like this, since the labourers' access to the building in which my murals are situated has been denied for so long.

Recently, the Burghclere Memorial has been distinguished for its importance in comprehending the complex and unresolved nature of the events between 1914 and 1918. It is not romantic propaganda that affirms the necessity of war, neither is it a work that condemns the war and silences viewers. These two approaches in much war art after 1914-1918 foreclosed the meaning of the war instead of encouraging the viewer to arrive at its meaning. Instead, the Burghclere Memorial promotes searching and reading through its narrative form and the way in which Spencer painted it and thus the possibility of arriving at the meaning(s) of the Great War is not prevented (Malvern 2000: 183). Some of the themes I flesh out in my own body of work, such as the history of schisms in the Tulbagh congregation and the earthquake disaster of 1969, will touch the nerve-ends of serious issues within its context yet the meanings are never emphatically declared or forced. Instead, in my perspective I believe that transcendence is needed and is possible. I focus, in the content and impulse of my work, on the creative act as a means of transcendence and of finding meaning.

My own process: links and comparisons

Spencer drew heavily from his surroundings to form his religiously interpretative works through his ecstatic response to the physical world (religious feelings), hence the importance of rendering the intricate patterns of leaves or the shiny surface of a zinc pot or the minute bricks in a wall. His paintings are usually filled with people. There also an insistence on detail in my works because of the importance and subjective significance I find in trees, picking bags (signs of pragmatism), fruit palettes stacked up in perfect symmetrical columns, buildings and people.

This body of work is autobiographical, as is much of Spencer's work, including *The Sandham Memorial Chapel*. These paintings may be an allegory of self-discovery and identity as Malvern suggests:

> The loss and regaining of innocence might refer both to the passage to carnal knowledge and the experience of loss of innocence as a soldier through witnessing and participating in death and suffering. Aspects of the narrative often refer to the body and a sense of touch – painting on iodine in *Ablutions* or treating frost-bitten feet – where the skin and the surface of the body might function as a metaphor for the interrelationship of the self with the outside world. (2000: 199)

In a sense the Tulbagh murals, which bring together my experiences, are allegories of my loss of innocence through witnessing and beginning to acknowledge the hard realities of rural life and then the regaining of innocence through moments of transcendence. Unlike Spencer who illustrates the transition from child to adult with meticulously painted metaphors, I view my entire body of masters work as a metaphor or allegory for my relationship with the outside world. It is like a skin which is scratched, built up and broken down. It is the breaking down of innocence and also the building up and nourishment of spiritual life.

I have laid down luminous colour in a deliberate manner as in Spencer's *The Last Supper* and *Christ Carrying the Cross* in an attempt to evoke the spiritual intensity Spencer achieved. In *The Last Supper*, the disciples' feet are interlocking and distorted, their faces are angular and they twist and turn. Many of the forms I have painted are distorted to seek a Spencer-like sense of internal struggle.

During the war Spencer found moments of transcendence in the mundane activities of the soldiers. In the frieze of the North wall, *Camp at Karasuli*, at *The Sandham Memorial Chapel*, he painted his recollections of the 68th and 66th Field Ambulances. There are men carrying stones for the Serres military road, men emerging from rows of bivouacs and others cooking breakfast. In *Scrubbing the Floor,* a predella painting at the chapel, he was evaluating the usefulness of polishing the Beaufort Hospital floor for spiritual contemplation. Many of these activities are ambiguously painted so that the spiritual relevance is suggested. When I painted images of harvesters and other images of people performing practical tasks I wanted to suggest not only the action but also contemplation, much as Spencer did in many if his works. In the Tulbagh cycle, workers are reaching upwards for fruit in trees but they are also reaching toward heaven. They are climbing trees to reach fruit but they are also Zacchaeus of the New Testament who climbed a tree in order to see Christ.

Stacking of ladders, piles of rubble, multiples of subjects and groups of people are imaginative devices inspired by *The Resurrection of the Soldiers*, especially the white military crosses that are piled up, thrown into the foreground or pushed up toward the ceiling. I have enlarged and monumentalised many forms, influenced by Spencer's treatment of the mules and soldiers, and their 'undeniable presences'.

The Chapel at Burghclere encourages remembering, reading and interpretation because its artistic form is that of an astonishingly detailed story sequence. The Tulbagh body of work is also a detailed narrative, wanting to remember and preserve experiences and communicate these experiences to facilitate a process of reading and searching for meaning.

The Resurrection of the Soldiers, East Wall, *Sandham Memorial Chapel*, 1927 - 1932, Burghclere.

Mexican mural renaissance

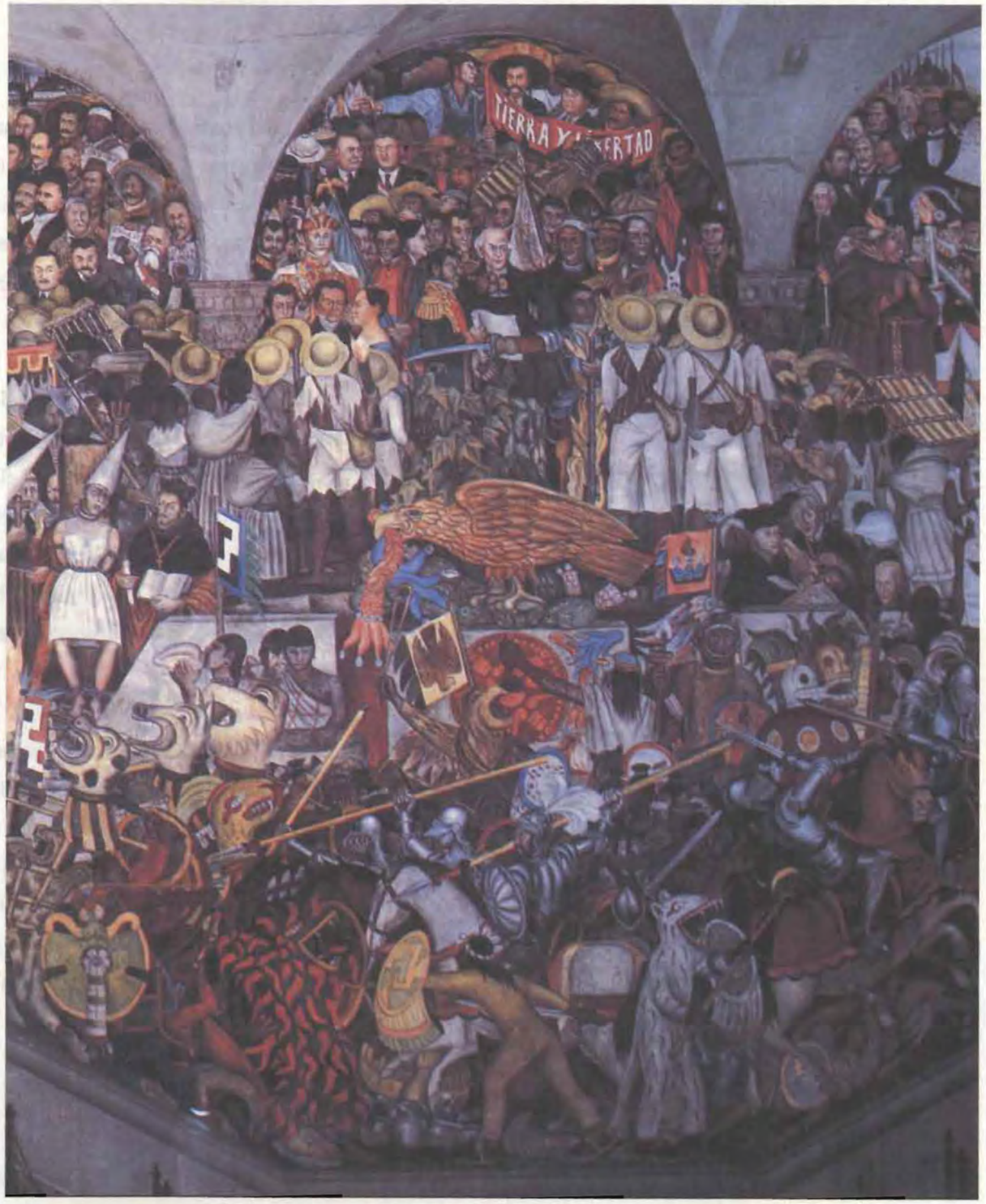
The Mexican muralists worked in the charged social and political aftermath of the nationalist revolution, 1910-1917, which saw the end of the Diaz dictatorship. Rivera and Orozco, together with Siquieros were main figures in the movement, and gave visible form to the cultural renaissance in the 1920s. In this renaissance, the indigenous and pre-Hispanic traditions of Mexico were reasserted in attempts to redefine a national identity while the country was recovering from bloodshed, war and centuries of colonial oppression. The mural movement, starting in 1921, attempted to provide visible expressions of a newly constructed identity. The murals take the form of social and political commentary but transcend the normal didactic intentions of the genre.

Under Diaz's rule, 1876-1910, an aristocratic minority owned much of the land while the peasant classes were subjugated. In response to this legacy of inequality the muralists wanted to make art accessible to all and they rejected the idea of housing it in galleries where it was the privileged possession of the bourgeoisie. They also rejected art for art's sake and believed that art should have a role in shaping society. Large-scale murals were produced on the walls of colonial buildings, the sites once inhabited and owned by those responsible for the domination and oppression of the indigenous Mexican people. The murals, on the whole, were figurative and accessible and came to embody the convictions of the artists, the spirit of the revolution and a visible reconstruction of the identity of the nation as one rooted in its indigenous and pre-Hispanic origins. The concept of fusion of indigenous origins and post-Hispanic history into an integrated whole became a predominant visual theme and symbol in Mexican painting.

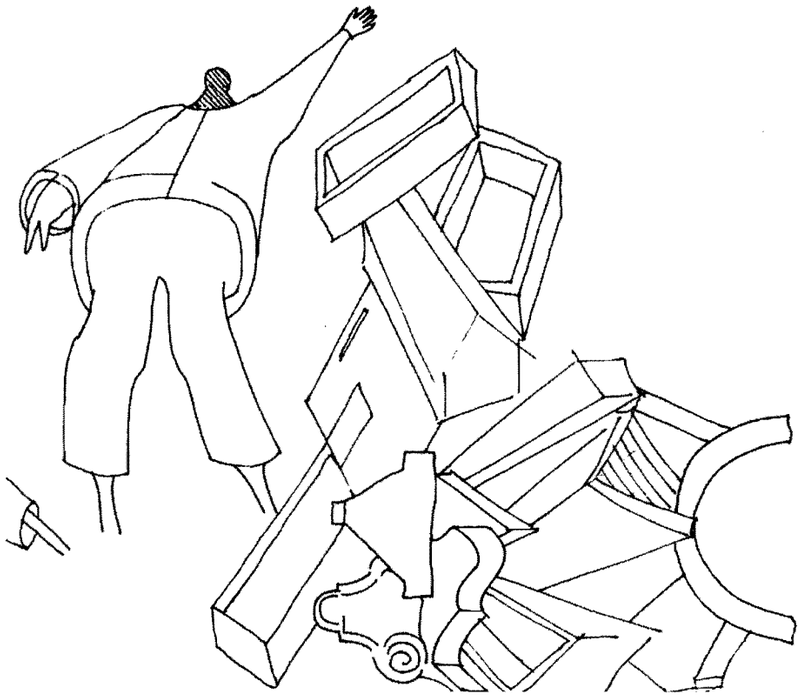
I have connected strongly with general stylistic aspects of the Mexican murals such as contextual appropriateness or what Delport has termed the 'historical rootedness of form and content' (1991: 64). The powerful formal qualities of these frescoes were influential to me as well as the high level of craft and formal and technical rigour applied during their creation. The major works of Rivera and Orozco have endured into the 21st century with continued significance. The work of Rivera and Orozco influenced me during this project. Rivera, for his detail, compositional complexity, the unifying of fragments, the interpretation of historical events, the clashing of cultures, the focus on labour and visions of transformed society and the synthesis of abstract and figurative values. And Orozco, for his individualistic interrogations of history through dynamic compositional and formal arrangements and sober, emotive colour. These artists and the movement as a whole represent an important departure point and a continuing paradigm for the Tulbagh cycle.

The work of Rivera and its particular relevance

Rivera's murals in the 1920s show a people emerging from the revolution. *The Embrace*, 1923, which was painted in the Court of Labour at the Ministry of Education in Mexico City, conveys a remarkable sense of solidarity between those who have suffered. Qualities of optimism and also its lack of victory or triumphalism were of interest to me. According to Rochfort '…the unity expressed in the embrace of the peasant and



Diego Rivera. *The History of Mexico*, West wall, detail of central arch, National Palace, 1929 – 1935, Mexico City.



Notebook drawing.

the industrial worker, with the peasant's sombrero resembling a halo and his serape a religious cloak, conveys all the religious passion of a secular annunciation, visiting the figures in a spirit of human brotherhood,' (1993: 53). This work, with its interlocking forms, painted against a sombre black sky and grey mountain, suggests to me how the oppressive past, the solidarity of those who have suffered and hope for the future might be encapsulated in visual form.

In the 1930s Rivera examined Mexico's past, including the pre-Columbian world and the Spanish conquest which was the beginning of colonialism. In *The History of Mexico,* 1929-35, at the National Palace, Rivera examined this past along with the present as well as offering an ideal vision of the future. This work was both a departure point and a continuing influence in my work. In these murals, the synthesis of different time spans, the recovery of things past, the clashing of different cultures and the incredible amount of visual interest generated on each wall whilst yet retaining formal coherence indicated how I might begin to tackle my project. Also, the way in which the whole work holds together, in terms of its abstract and figurative elements, the synergy of form and content, the use of colour as shape and the integrity of craft on such an enormous scale taught me a great deal. *A History of Medicine*, 1953, by Rivera at the La Raza Hospital, was also an important example, showing me how elements of the past might be pulled back and brought into the present within a pictorial reality.

There was a particular connection to be made with Rivera's interior mural cycle in the chapel at the Autonomous University of Chapingo, 1925-1926, which is a remarkable example of the transformation of architectural space. Rivera painted the cycle after Chapingo's land had been nationalised and turned into an agricultural school. It commemorates the revolutionaries who lost their lives in Mexico's agrarian revolution and it also celebrates the fruits of their sacrifices. Therefore it is close to my own theme which makes connections between harvesting, ethics and transformation. Chapingo Chapel is different to Rivera's public, exterior murals since it is private and interior. It offers something of a visual and spatial experience, generating a sense of awed contemplation in its viewers as well as intimacy: It is not a grandiose space. This was of concern to me.[1]

The panels of the East wall show geological processes and the fecund earth bringing forth ripe fruits and harvests. The West wall panels show the revolutionary transformation of the land. These opposing walls act as thematic mirrors. 'The social and political evolution is therefore presented as the counterpart to the process of the natural evolution of the earth,' (Rochfort 1993: 71). On the vaulted ceiling, Rivera painted monumental peasants holding sickles and sheaves of wheat. In the arched vaults, huge hands break out of the earth. The cycle concludes with *The Liberated Earth with the natural forces controlled by Man*, 1926.

[1] One who has studied the Chapingo Chapel first hand described it to me. I have also studied slides and other reproductions.

Jose Clemente Orozco. *The Spanish Conquest of Mexico – Portrait of Cortez*, North nave, Hospicio Cabanas, 1938 – 1939, Gaudalajara.

My own work: links and comparisons

Artist-writers, Bloch and Dimitrov, who were apprentices to Rivera while he was painting his murals in the United States, provided valuable records of Rivera's working process. These include his preoccupation with perfection resulting in the demand for rigorous craft which ultimately resulted in the success of the formal qualities in his murals. Knowledge of this and the thoroughness of his other procedures, such as the grinding of pigments and the plastering of fresco, not only influenced my methodology but also the way in which I approached each mural surface in my own work. In a more recent publication Hamill explained how when Rivera was a child, he needed to see the inside of a mountain (tunnel) before he was able to draw its form (1999: 13). The influence of Rivera's lifelong preoccupation with studying through drawing shaped my working process.

The integration of all pictorial elements - including colour as shape and the purely abstract areas with the figurative - into a balanced composition in *The History of Mexico*, suggested how I might successfully realise *Series Two* in the Tulbagh cycle. I admired the interlocking human forms, shapes, colours and historical fragments in Rivera's painting. It is strongly allegorical through a recovery of things past in the most amazing formal and pictorial synthesis.

The relationship of my mural cycle to Rivera lies in my concerns with the transformation of the space through luminosity of colour; agricultural metaphors for spiritual growth; thematic mirroring on opposite walls; monumentalising of workers and an iconographic relationship to an agrarian site. Even though the scale and number of my works are far more modest there are a number of common concerns with Chapingo Chapel.

The work of Orozco and its particular relevance

Orozco's murals, of extreme emotion and pessimism, influenced me at a late stage of my work. In two panels at the Hospicio Canabas, Guadalajara, 1938-9, he made a sharp satire on modern demagogy, intensified by his use of restricted colour: 'in deathly grey colours modern demagogues gesticulate menacingly and people march in a faceless, spiritless mass against a foreground of barbed wire, presided over by a torso carrying a whip,' (Rochfort 1993: 112). The apocalyptic nature of many of the frescoes at Guadalajara, intensified by colour and vigorous brushwork, began to influence me.

Other works, *American Civilisation – Cortez and the Cross*, 1932 and *Modern Migration of the Spirit*, 1932, both at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, were produced away from Mexico but nevertheless relate to Orozco's previous commentary on Mexican society. I was influenced by their compositional arrangements in which elements pile up, suggesting a '…mechanical underworld….a world dominated by giant pieces of machinery in which the human presence and spirit are conspicuous by their absence,' (Rochfort 1993: 106).

My own work: links and comparisons

At a late stage of my work, the images of fragments and ruins representing the earthquake at the base of *Series Two* were innocuous and they were revisited with chromatic greys in order to explore the more tragic nature of the event. Here there are links to Orozco's intensified brushwork and use of greys and the piled-up compositional arrangements at Dartmouth.

The potential of the drawn quality of black at Guadalajara became an interesting avenue to explore when *Painting Four was revisited* on site. The certain amount of uneasiness it generated furthered my conceptual intentions for the whole cycle. These were the influences, but Orozco's harsh critique of society however certainly did not provide an exact model.

Ben Shahn

Shahn experienced the effects of the stock market crash in 1929 and the most serious economic depression ever in America. He was a fervent supporter of Roosevelt's New Deal which attempted to uplift the poor and he aligned his art to this cause. In 1931 he devoted a series of paintings to the trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two working class men who were wrongfully condemned because of the biases of Judge Webster Thayer and the Lowell Committee. Shahn was involved in protests against the trial and when the sentence was passed he was bitterly grieved by the injustice perpetuated.

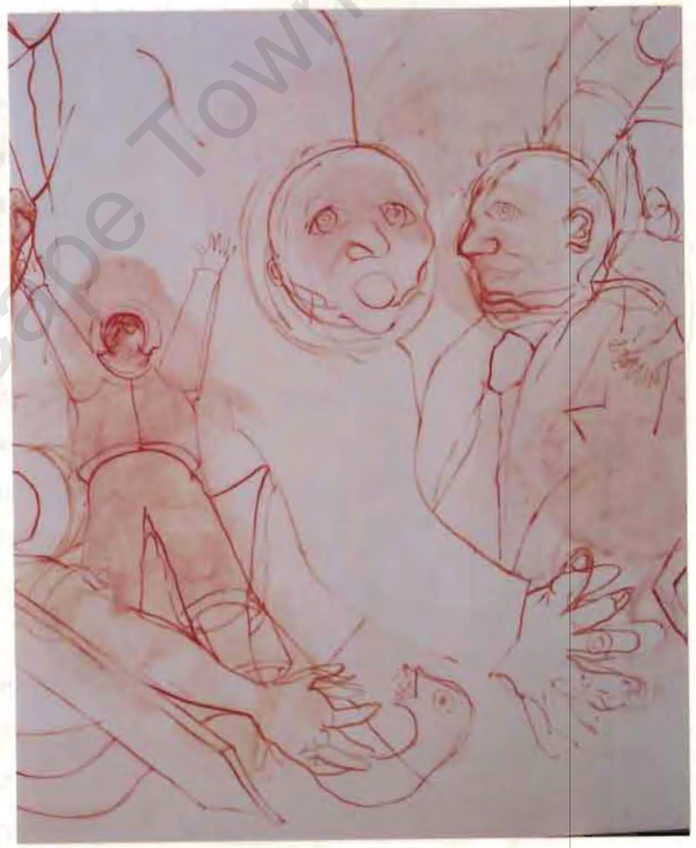
The tempera montage, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, 1932, contains an emotional edge yet is painted in an apparently free and relaxed way. The gouache-like application of paint is nevertheless terse in an essentialization of image and medium. The application is free, yet precise, not laboured, and almost playful. The 'directness' and 'unselfconsciousness' of folk art influenced Shahn's style (Pohl 1993: 13). His work suggested to me how I might handle the tempera medium more freely than its traditionally accepted method. It also suggested how to retain an emotional intensity when my brush became wider and my painting looser.

The Guernica

The influence of Picasso's *Guernica*, 1937, came when the Tulbagh cycle was at an advanced stage. *Series Three* was well on its way and *Series Two* was nearing completion. *Series One*, already installed at the centre, was in need of much work and *Painting Four* had yet to be started. At this point I wanted boldness. Picasso's use of the brush in *Guernica* was particularly inspiring to me at this stage because of its defining, linear, drawn quality. This way of working was deliberate and convincing and I saw in it a helpful model for much of the work I would continue to do.

In *Guernica*, the iconography of victims such as the mother with her dead child and the massacred horse were painted in a harsh and violent style that speaks strongly of the pain that all experience in times of war. Picasso invoked '…with overwhelming compassion and devastating and mordant imagery, a universal experience of anguish and torment,' (Chipp 1988: 69). His brushstrokes are lacerating, facial features are angularized, there are great contrasts between light and dark and cubist geometry enhances the stridency of the whole painting. At no stage was I interested in evoking the kind of terror that was Picasso's achievement in *Guernica* but there was a sense of urgency in the work that I wanted in my own cycle and I allowed great distortions to enter into my style after studying the work. The role of grey, in *Guernica*, as a major colour element rather than tone further fuelled the use of grey as an emotional and conceptual key in my work.

Drawing was relevant throughout the process of *Guernica's* realisation. Picasso made numerous small studies before he started painting, while he was painting and he drew onto the canvas as well. Chipp refers to Picasso's development of the image of the horse as 'a constant



Painting Four: preliminary stage.

metamorphosis' where he was moving 'toward a form that will richly realise its emotional possibilities and at the same time function as a part of the whole composition,' (1988: 78). The shifting of form in the final stages of my work to convey certain ideas and emotions became more deliberate after studying *Guernica*. This resulted in increased drawing as an element of painting. This stage also saw the development of small iconographic line drawings which were applied and further developed in images on the mural surfaces, such as the animals, hands and enlarged human figures.

Ken Currie

In Ken Currie's cycle of history paintings at The People's Palace Museum, Glasgow, 1986, black is used as a persistent link throughout and as a foil for minimal placements of colour. The image is paramount whereas colour is minimal. *Painting Four* of my work finds a link to Currie's cycle because in it the black line becomes the primary means of binding, linking and strengthening all the compositional elements.

Examples from Southern Africa

At an advanced stage of my practical process I began to connect with the work of certain artists in Southern Africa. The works I have found to be of particular relevance are the mural cycle of Cyrene, biblical narratives interpreted through an experiential and local context, and the incisive iconography of the printmakers Azaria Mbatha and John Muafangejo.

After being concerned with colour, shape, texture, imagery drawn from observation, documentary sources, and the form of painting in quite a complex way there arose the need to formulate very simple, incisive iconography, on a small scale in black and white. The necessity arose for a simple image to hold a whole concept, a concept generated by the painting process but which had not quite been successfully communicated. At this point I became interested in the iconographic quality of these two printmakers in particular and the way ideas would be translated in such simple terms.

Azaria Mbatha

The early foundations of Christianity, Zulu tradition and a rural upbringing in the Mahlabatini region, Kwa-Zulu Natal, influenced South African printmaker Azaria Mbatha's narrative style. Hence, '…his life's experiences have helped shape in him a sense for thought, for structure, for composition,'(The Sunday Independent 1999). As a visionary and a commentator on the social condition in South Africa, many of his subjective interpretations of Biblical texts contain lucid statements of hope, particularly, within what was the 'troubled hour' of the last two decades. He was active at Rorke's Drift, Kwa-Zulu Natal, before immigrating to Sweden as a political exile in 1967.

The work and its particular relevance

Mbatha's prints seem to demonstrate the belief that the whole of life is sacred and is to be cherished through their narrative, vibrant and lively visual form. A recent retrospective exhibition revealed that his work is a 'narration of a people realising the essence of their humanity, through trials as confirmed by the history of South Africa,'(Sowetan 1998).

Mbatha's *Jonah and the whale*, 1984, interprets the Old Testament narrative from a present perspective. In the biblical story, Jonah rebelled against the voice of God and was swallowed by a great fish until he repented and was spat out of the giant mouth. In Mbatha's work Jonah represents a nation-wide estrangement of people from God and from one another. The extreme loneliness of a people who are alienated from God and one another is the loneliness of Jonah in the belly of a whale in the depths of the ocean. In the work, Jonah is portrayed as a lonely figure assuming the postures of prayer and repentance. Yet Mbatha offers optimism because even there, Jonah feels the presence of God. Jonah sinks into the depths of despair but then rises up into the radiant sun. The implication is that the healing of the land will happen by turning back

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to God and each other. Eichel states 'Mbatha's sombre visions do not conclude with pictures of downfall. He consciously resists pessimism and attempts, through dialogue with God and with others, to come to terms with the present situation,' (1986: 53).

My own process: links and comparisons

In the Tulbagh cycle, the proliferation of prosperous trees on the one hand and of dead trees and rubble on the other may be interpreted as the regenerating and transforming community. The biblical image of the fruitful tree as the new community, as I have interpreted it, might well be the opposite of Mbatha's huge black whale and abyssal sea, the alienation and despair of state-enforced segregation. Yet Mbatha's allegorical interpretation of Jonah's story is similar to the way in which I have interpreted the first Psalm because the ancient truth of the Bible is adapted for the present and the message of hope predominates.

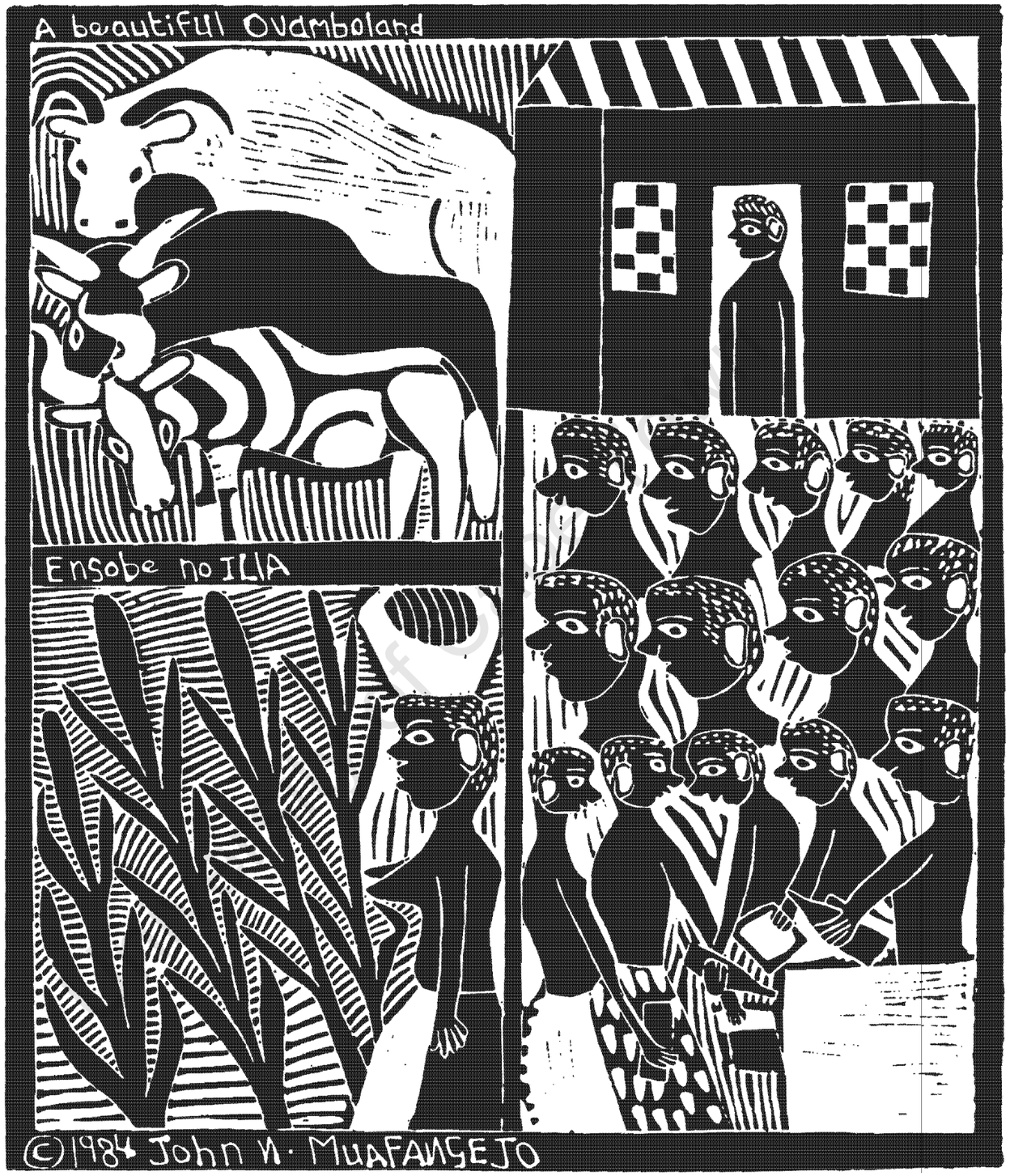
Mbatha's simple, direct, narrative style achieves clear social and religious commentary. His chosen linocut medium lends itself to the production of strong iconographic form and I was attracted to this quality which is achieved through the strength of line and shape.

John Muafangejo

Muafangejo was born near Oshikango, in 1948, a village on the border of Namibia and Angola. He entered Namibia as an adolescent and attended the St Mary's Anglican Mission School. In 1968 he studied at the Rorke's Drift Art and Craft centre in Natal. His artworks reflect both a yearning for the purity of rural life and an appreciation of the Western values instilled in him by Christianity. Some works are acutely political such as the seminal *Death of a Chief, Mandume*, 1971. Here, the anxiety that beset the artist due to extreme feelings of alienation is revealed. Yet his later work moved towards resolution and celebration. He worked in linocut.

The work and its particular relevance

Like Mbatha, Muafangejo responded to the alienating feelings that surrounded the experience of a black person during white rule. However, the experiences of Muafangejo were more complicated due to his geographical displacements and first-hand witnessing of the political developments during Namibia's fight for independence. There is a disturbing intensity in some of his early work, amplified by an extremely nervous disposition.



John Muafangejo. *A beautiful Ovamboland*, 1974.

Although my own experience is very far removed from that of a black artist undergoing exclusion at the hands of white authority during apartheid, there is searching and examining through his works with which I identify. Arnott (1977) identifies '…a merciless introspection, which scrambles attempts to relate outward phenomena to an elusive and fractured identity,' in his work.

After 1981 Muafangejo attempted to resolve the contradictions of experience through images of hope and warmth. As Timm writes '…this testimony of agonised passage culminates in commitment to resolution through faith,' (1997). Some of his prints from this time show black and white reconciling. There is utopian yearning for rural life in other works such as *A beautiful Ovamboland*, 1984, in which he seeks transcendence through beauty and simplicity.

My own process: links and comparisons

Muafangejo's prints are usually violently handled suggesting the psychosis that caused him to break down. Lucie-Smith says '…there are no intermediary tones, and the artist is often at pains to stress the way in which the surface has been violently slashed or ripped,' (1992: 316). On the contrary I have worked with thin layering of paint, using soft bristle brushes. There is a similarly intense engagement with the media through sanding and rubbing but there is a tendency to recover the softest, faintest images and produce the greatest range of tones. Despite this the clarity of iconography remains important in my work.

I found particular affinity with Muafangejo's prints that examine rural life. Works like *A beautiful Ovamboland*, 1984, and *Field of mielies*, 1981, which are simplified and articulated with black line, have the qualities of essentialisation to which I aspired.

Cyrene Chapel

I visited Zimbabwe in January, 2003 to study the Cyrene Chapel mural cycles first hand. The chapel belongs to the Cyrene school near Matopos, 32 kilometres from Bulawayo originally the mission school founded in 1940 by Canon Edward Paterson and planted for the education of rural schoolboys, many of whom were in fact adults when they began classes.

Paterson painted the first mural in the chapel behind the altar and designed its flanking panels, leaving the students to fill the interior and exterior walls with paintings over the next decade. In the 1980s some rather derivative murals were painted on the exterior which were painted over in later restorations.

The Ascended Christ Blesses his Disciples, 1939, Edward Paterson, East apse (centre), Cyrene Chapel, Bulawayo.

The Prodigal Son, Elliot Dhlulah, South wall, Cyrene Chapel, Bulawayo.

The work and its particular relevance

The interior of the chapel extends the Matopos environment because of its blazing colour and contextually specific imagery. The paintings within interpret familiar scriptures in terms of the rural context in which they were made and the lives of the artists who painted them. Delport writes '…biblical themes are interpreted solely through the experience of the artist; that is their social and spiritual life, beliefs, folklore, history and minute observation of their environment, so that the form itself is infused with subjects and insights drawn from these sources,' (1991: 69). Some of the iconography inside the chapel includes details of the Matopos hills and animals: goats, pigs, cattle, birds, antelope, groups of people engaged in various activities, rocks, trees, rivers and fields. The students came from their rural homes to study at the school and they interpreted the scriptures according to their own understanding. I identified with the synthesis between the religious, the social and the physical world, encapsulated in visual form in the chapel.

The chapel assumes the architectural form of a small rectangle with a curved apse on the eastern end. Paterson's paintings and designs occupy the apse wall. Conventions in European religious painting influenced their style and form whereas the other murals painted by local artists in the chapel are unique. Inside the chapel, on the South wall, proceeding from just outside the apse, are *The Prodigal Son* by Elliot Dhlula and *Consider the Lillies* by Livingston Sango followed by *The Lost Sheep and Good Shepherd* by James Rutumi and *The Parable of the Talents*, 1945 by Silvester Chibayo. On the opposite North wall is *The Good Samaritan*, then *The Martyrdom of Stephen* by Stephen Katsande and *The Woman of Samaria*. These are followed by The *Sower* and *The Call of Zacchaeus*, 1946 by Livingston Sango and *Christ commissioning the Disciples*, 1943 by Joseph Ndlovo. John Mhlaba painted *The Last Judgement*, 1942 on the Western entrance wall. A series of large-scale saintly figures in works such as *Christ carried across the River by St. Christopher* are situated on the exterior walls. Livingston Sango-Moyo painted *The Blessed Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus,* c.1949 on the Eastern apse.

I noted stylistic and iconographic differences between Paterson's work and the student work at the chapel. Paterson's work utilises elements of Romanesque art such as conventional static gesture and decorative insignia. In a somewhat contrived way the figure of Christ is represented as an African priest. The student work, however, breaks away because it is vibrant, dynamic and compositionally crowded. The story-like quality of the student work is assisted by a dense, flowing narrative structure. I was interested in the dynamic juxtaposition of perspective, where a birds-eye view of a landscape contrasts with a flat, two-dimensional rendition of a person or an animal. This has the ability to convey specific knowledge of that person or animal while setting an overall environment in which the narrative unfolds. Paterson's mural is painted in rich gold, red and black while the use of colour in the student work is preoccupied with that which can be seen in the Matopos.

While I feel there is much to be admired in European religious art, especially the clarity of design in Romanesque art, which Paterson was clearly interested in when he started painting the chapel, I responded to the lively interpretations of the African artists, which show an aesthetic connectedness with the experiential context. They naturally broke away from the rigid religious stasis in Paterson's earlier work and this

The Good Samaritan, North wall, Cyrene Chapel, Bulawayo

challenged me. Mkosi Dominique, principal of Bulawayo's Mzilikatsi Art Centre, told me the artists 'did what they thought.' His statement indicates that the students freely interpreted the passages of scripture. I believe the sometimes humorous or playful spirit of some of the Cyrene work is reflected in this description of *The Good Samaritan*:

> The traveller is attacked by a band of *tsotsis*, the term widely used in this part of the African continent for young African hoodlums. He is then carried by the Good Samaritan to an African hotel, "Hotel La Bantu." The priest who refused aid is an obese African country preacher, who rides jammed into a small donkey cart. The Levite becomes an African schoolteacher in a long white dustcoat.

I visited the chapel in January 2003 when my work was at a fairly advanced stage, but the experience of seeing it allowed me to return to my paintings with a renewed vision, wanting to make the compositions vigorous and spirited as opposed to mannered, rigid or static.

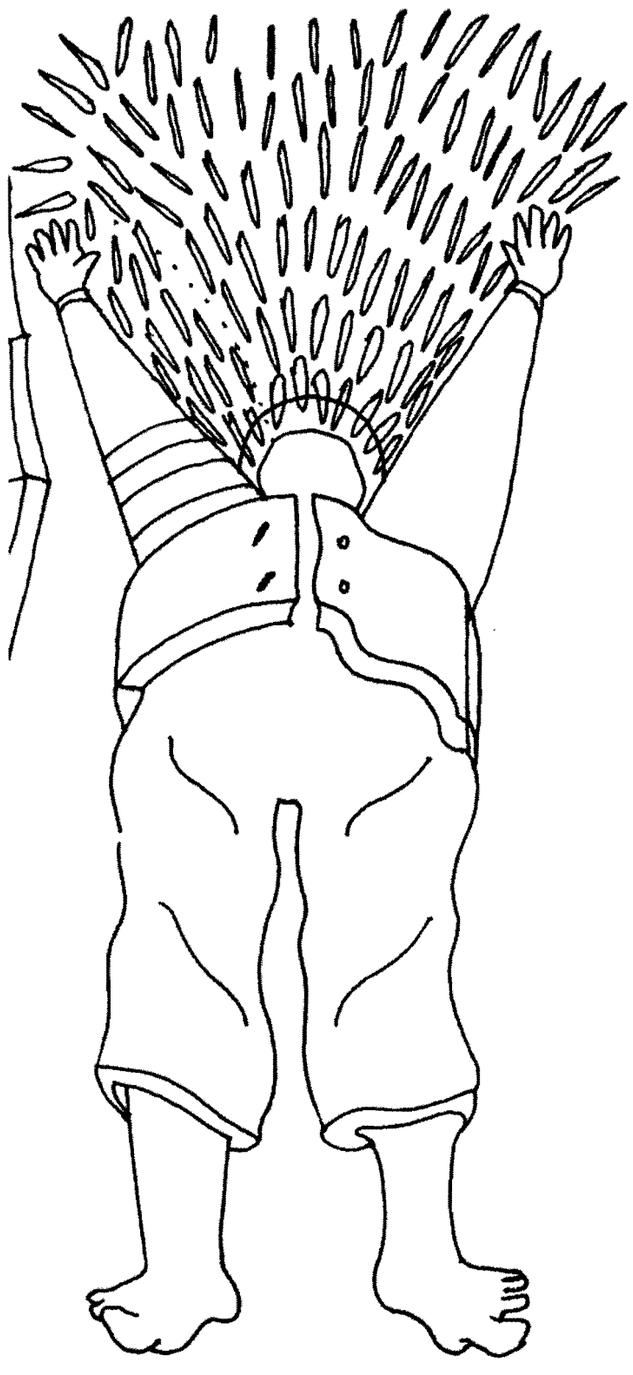
Unfortunately the poor and unreliable technique used in the execution of the paintings has resulted in deterioration and a gradual loss of these significant works. Various attempts at restoration were unprofessional and unsuccessful.

My own process: links and comparisons

The mural cycles at Cyrene prove the conceptual point that the Bible is always alive. Like the Cyrene artists I have interpreted scripture through my own experience, however different it may be from theirs. Thus, like the chapel, my work draws colours, objects and impressions from the immediate context and I see a link between the chapel and my work in the way I have focused on particular aspects of the environment with which I have become familiar. Like the Cyrene Chapel my work contains busy and packed narratives and there is similar tendency to focus on the daily activities and routines of people – because I am similarly interested in the contemporary application of scripture to society. I was influenced by the extreme freedom with which the murals were composed. The changes of scale, different perspectives and the compression of detail into every last corner are devices I have followed to a certain degree. In terms of what may be achieved in a complete mural environment, this chapel was also instructive to me.

Another example

The murals in the Serima Church at Serima Mission in the central region of Mashona-land are also instructive to me in terms of their concise and explicit iconography. Particularly, some of the figures which have quirky, turning heads and other figures which interlock in long narrative strips.



8. Discussion of practical work

Sources

The primary sources for the iconography and thematic ideas of the mural cycle are located in selected Biblical texts and themes of place. The two geographically distant rural places situated in Tulbagh and Mozambique remain sites of significant experience and development for me and continuing sources of documentary, archival and conceptual source material.

Biblical texts used as references

In these paintings I am interpreting Scripture with the idea of finding for myself vital, new meanings that are alive, within the context of the present: that are not anachronisms and that relate to the things I know and have experienced. I am also exploring the capacity of old and familiar texts to continue to generate new meanings and connections and to challenge comfortable assumptions.

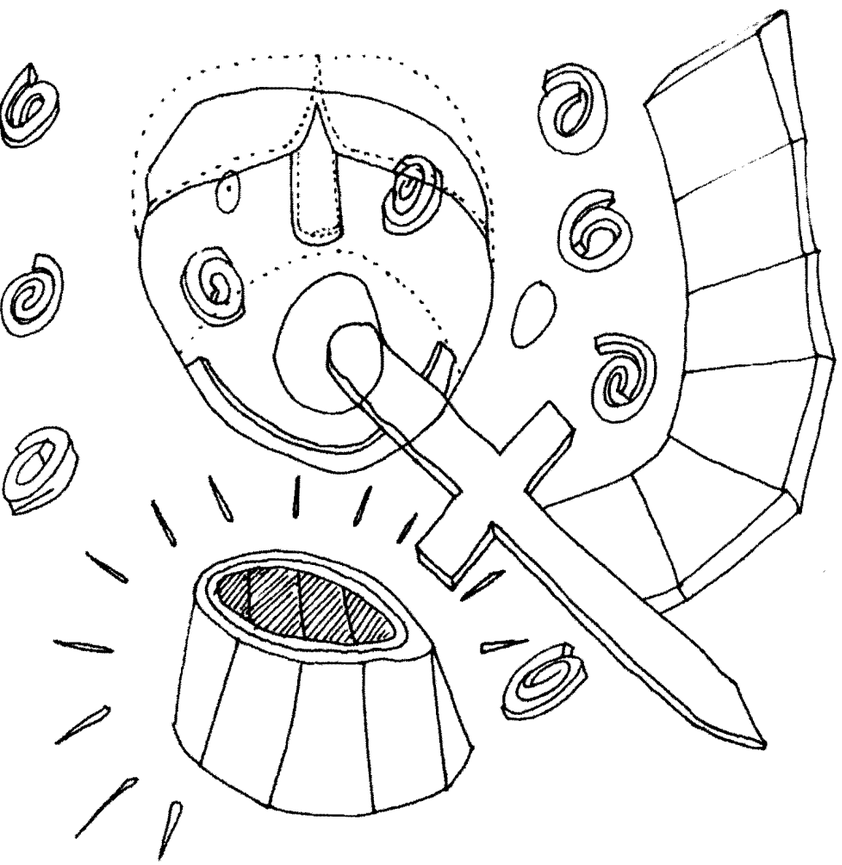
In the process there was a struggle between freedom and constraint. The tension lay in the need to communicate with an audience versus the desire to interpret these texts finding significance for myself, connections with my experience and a source for new iconographic vehicles. There is a tension between the creative and philosophical experience of the individual and the consciousness of a public audience.

<u>Psalm 1</u>

1. Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the
counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.

2. But his delight is in the law of
the Lord,
and on his law he meditates
day and night.

3. He is like a tree planted by
streams of water,
which yields its fruit in
season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.



4. Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.

5. Therefore the wicked will not
stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

6. For the Lord watches over the
way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will
perish.

2 Corinthians 5: 17-18

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God who, reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

2 Korintiers 5: 17-18

17 Iemand wat aan Christus behoort is 'n nuwe mens. Die oue is verby, die nuwe het gekom. 18 Dit alles is die werk van God. Hy het ons deur Christus met homself versoen en aan ons die bediening van die versoening toevertrou.

Revelation 19 v 11-16: *The Rider on the White Horse*

11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Archival Sources

Archival research occurred at Tulbagh's Earthquake Museum and the Oude Kerk Volks Museum. Pen and ink and graphite drawings were used to record visual imagery. I found particularly useful stories pertaining to the earthquake in newspaper clippings. They were used to generate an emotional understanding of the event.

The exhibition at the Oude Kerk Museum is stale and undynamic, but of great interest to me were the stories (listened to on tours of the museum) about the schisms in the Dutch Reformed congregation from the earliest days of its existence. Much of my work is concerned with the inability of the Church to accept new members into the present day from outside, (particularly the local (labouring) coloured and black community). But there is also a historical fault line *within* the congregation which persists up to the present day (see *Aim and chief concerns*). I also found this to be a quiet space in which I was able to draw, think and make connections.

Tulbagh and Mozambican sources

I needed to return to Werda farm several times to make drawings. Photographs from Mphatso assisted my memory of specific imagery. The Mphatso experience was not a 'once off ' trip. The place is constantly spoken about within the Tulbagh congregation, many having their own equally profound experience there. It is expected that I will return to Mozambique soon. The 'Nkata' is a round grass wreath, used to cushion the head while carrying a pot. It is used both as a symbol of practical everyday use and of transcendence in this cycle.

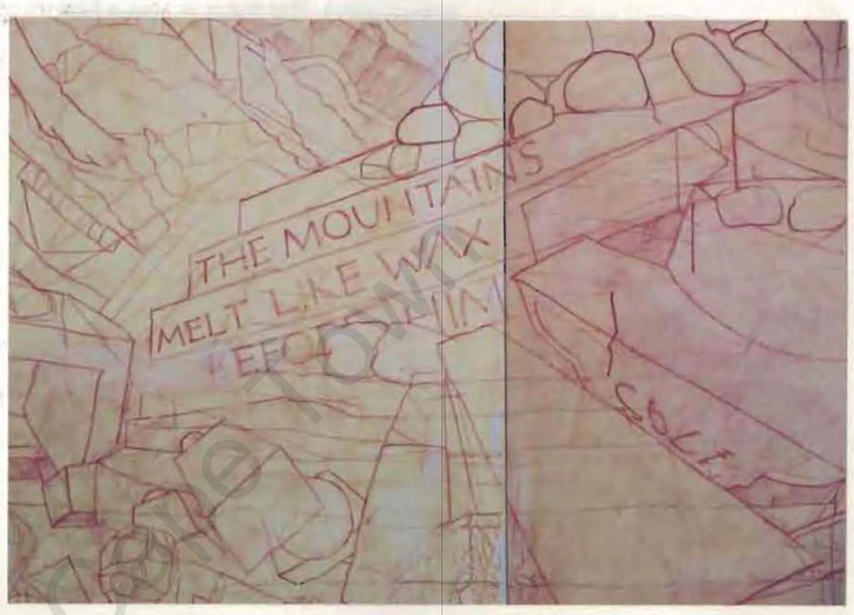
The Tulbagh cycle

Title: *Series One*
Comprising three plywood panels

Total dimensions in millimetres: 2353 x 2560

Medium: oil, conte crayon on gesso emulsion ground

The initial intention in this first work was to project an image of a triumphant and reconciled Tulbagh community. After a long period of work the painting lacked the definition and clarity I expected. It also lacked rootedness within my own experience. The work was installed at the Mission Centre and returned to almost a year later after I had advanced technically and conceptually in my process. In January 2003 work resumed on it and iconography from the sketchbooks entered into the work. This time drawing with the brush was central to the process. The form of the monumental worker's hand was developing at this stage as well as thinking about how the figure of the harvester might embody humility. This work may be understood as my harshest response to the site on which it is situated evidenced by the image of the corpse of the church. I am also using the scripture, 'Die oue is verby' as a means of challenging perceptions that are entrenched in the past, associated with religious intolerance.



Details of Series Two: preliminary stage.

Title: *Series Two*

Comprising three plywood panels

Total dimensions in millimeters: 2612 x 3520

Medium: oil, conte crayon on gesso emulsion ground

From the start this work had the intention of being very detailed and something of a visual journey. I consider it a challenge to the way things are seen in a media-driven age with every slice of information 'served up' with its meaning, forcing you to listen and pay attention. On the contrary the painting could be viewed in a way that is similar to listening to a story. The type of activity described by Walter Benjamin is pertinent:

> The most extraordinary things, marvellous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks. (1969: 89)

Stories from Mozambique and Tulbagh are interwoven with fragments from the earthquake archives. The onus of interpretation lies with the viewer who is invited to make sense of the composition. Here, drawing first began to assert itself as a major means of compositional realisation.

Title: *Series Three*

Comprising three plywood panels

Individual dimensions in millimetres: 2255 x 1367, 1177 x 1550, 1415 x 1434

Medium: egg tempera, conte crayon, graphite on pure gesso

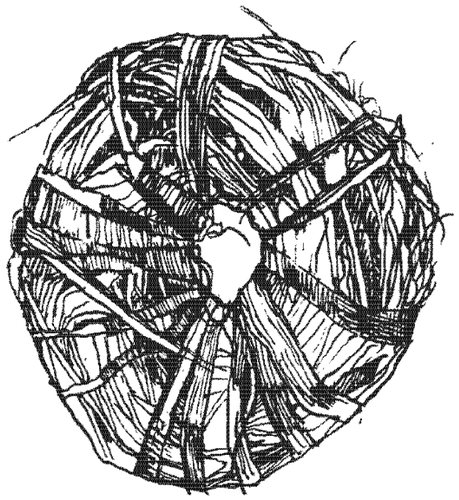
This work indicates the phase in which I was moving away from narrative into an exploration of the media and a shifting and disruption of form in order to convey ideas. The image of the farm worker became enlarged while activity of harvesting became emotionally connected with spiritual importance.

Title: *Painting Four*
One plywood panel

Dimensions in millimetres: 1408 x 2868

Medium: oil on gesso emulsion ground

The scripture from Revelation had much visual potential and the monochromatic colour range of this work reflects the apocalyptic theme. *Painting Four* came last and it utilises some of the developments I made in terms of form, material and process carrying the idea. It also attempts to engage the architectural realities of the space in a more deliberate way. This was facilitated by most of the work taking place on site. The work process differed from the earliest paintings in that there were no preparatory drawings or cartoon. The beginnings occurred directly on the final surface.



Notebook drawing of Nkata (from Mozambique): a round grass wreath used to protect the head whilst carrying water in heavy pots. It is tied together with strips of bark.

Detail of Series One.

9. Plates

Series One
Detail
Total dimensions in millimetres: 2353 x 3560
Medium: oil, conte crayon on gesso-emulsion ground

Series One
Detail
Total dimensions in millimetres: 2353 x 3560
Medium: oil, conte crayon on gesso-emulsion ground

Series One
Detail
Total dimensions in millimetres: 2353 x 3560
Medium: oil, conte crayon on gesso-emulsion ground

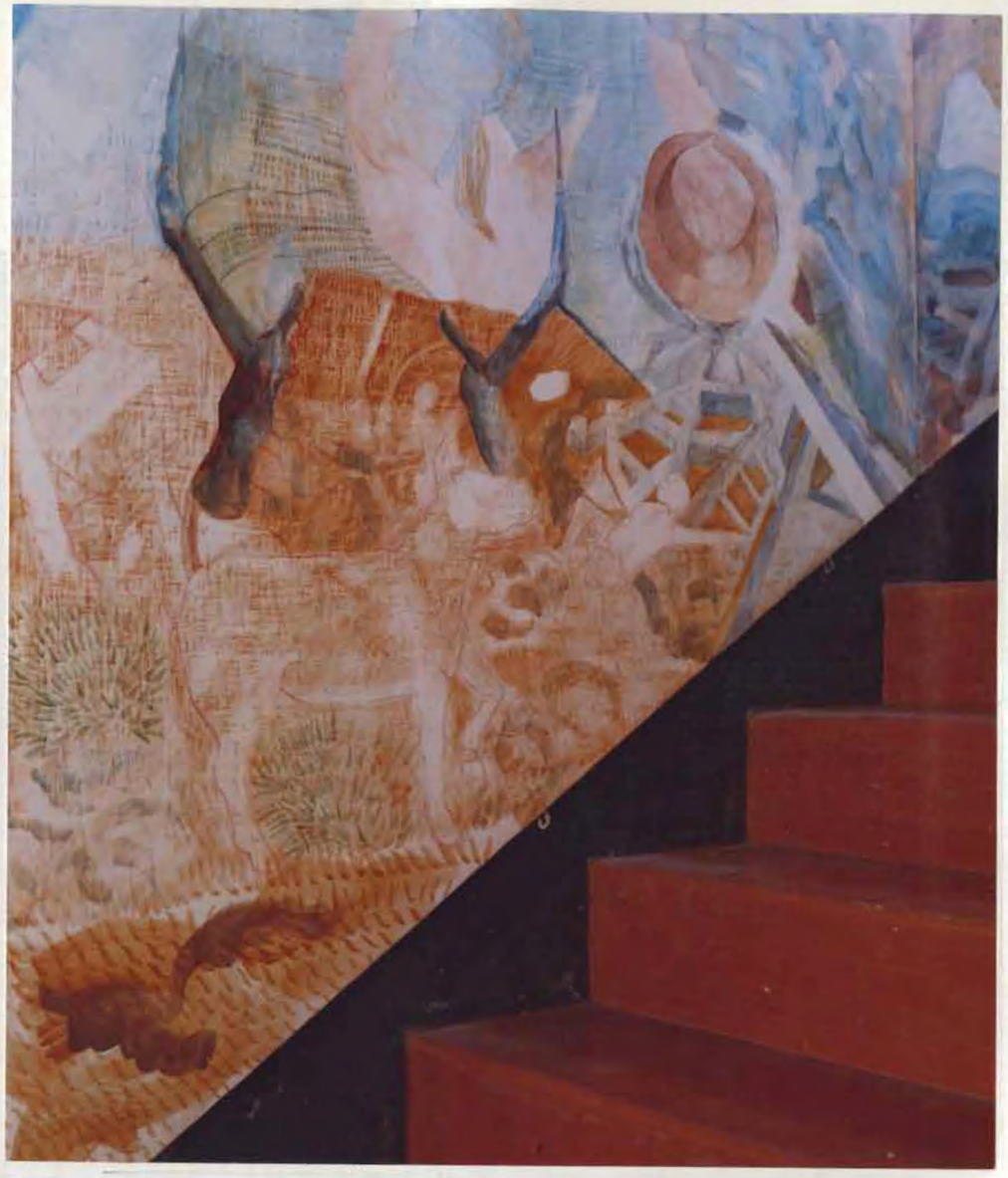
Series Two
Detail, left and complete work, right.
Total dimensions in millimetres: 2612 x 3520
Medium: oil, conte crayon on gesso-emulsion ground

Series Two
Detail
Total dimensions in millimetres: 2612 x 3520
Medium: oil, conte crayon on gesso-emulsion ground

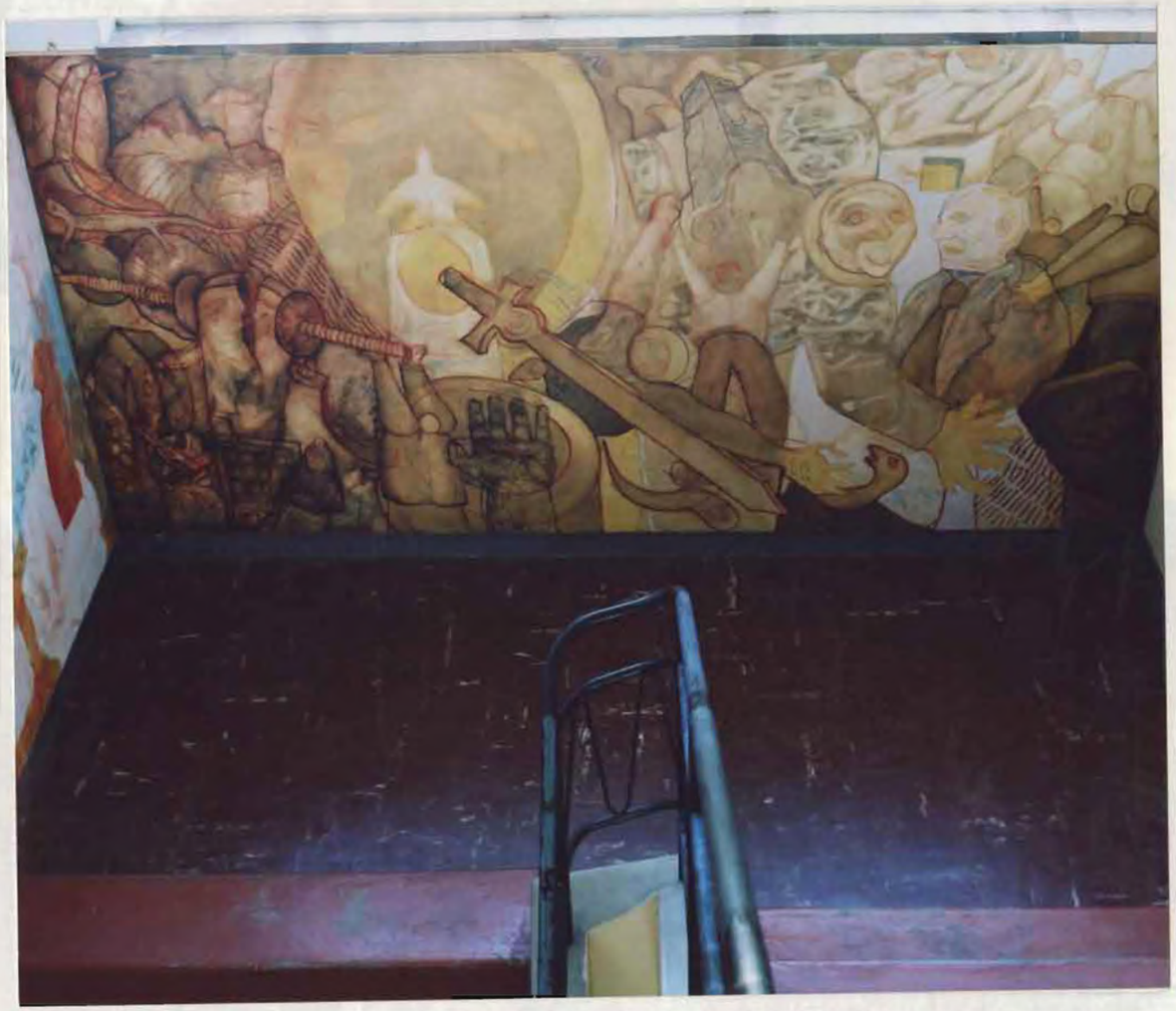
Series Two
Detail
Total dimensions in millimetres: 2612 x 3520
Medium: oil, conte crayon on gesso-emulsion ground

Series Two
Detail
Total dimensions in millimetres: 2612 x 3520
Medium: oil, conte crayon on gesso-emulsion ground

Series Three
Detail
Individual dimensions in millimetres: 2255 x 1367, 1177 x 1550, 1415 x 1434
Medium: egg tempera, conte crayon on pure gesso ground



Series Three
Detail
Individual dimensions in millimetres: 2255 x 1367, 1177 x 1550, 1415 x 1434
Medium: egg tempera, conte crayon on pure gesso ground



Painting Four
Detail, left and complete work, right
Total dimensions in millimetres: 1408 x 2868
Medium: oil, conte crayon on gesso-emulsion ground

Staircase at Centre for Missions, DR Church, Tulbagh

Series Three

Series Two

Series One

Painting Four

Series One

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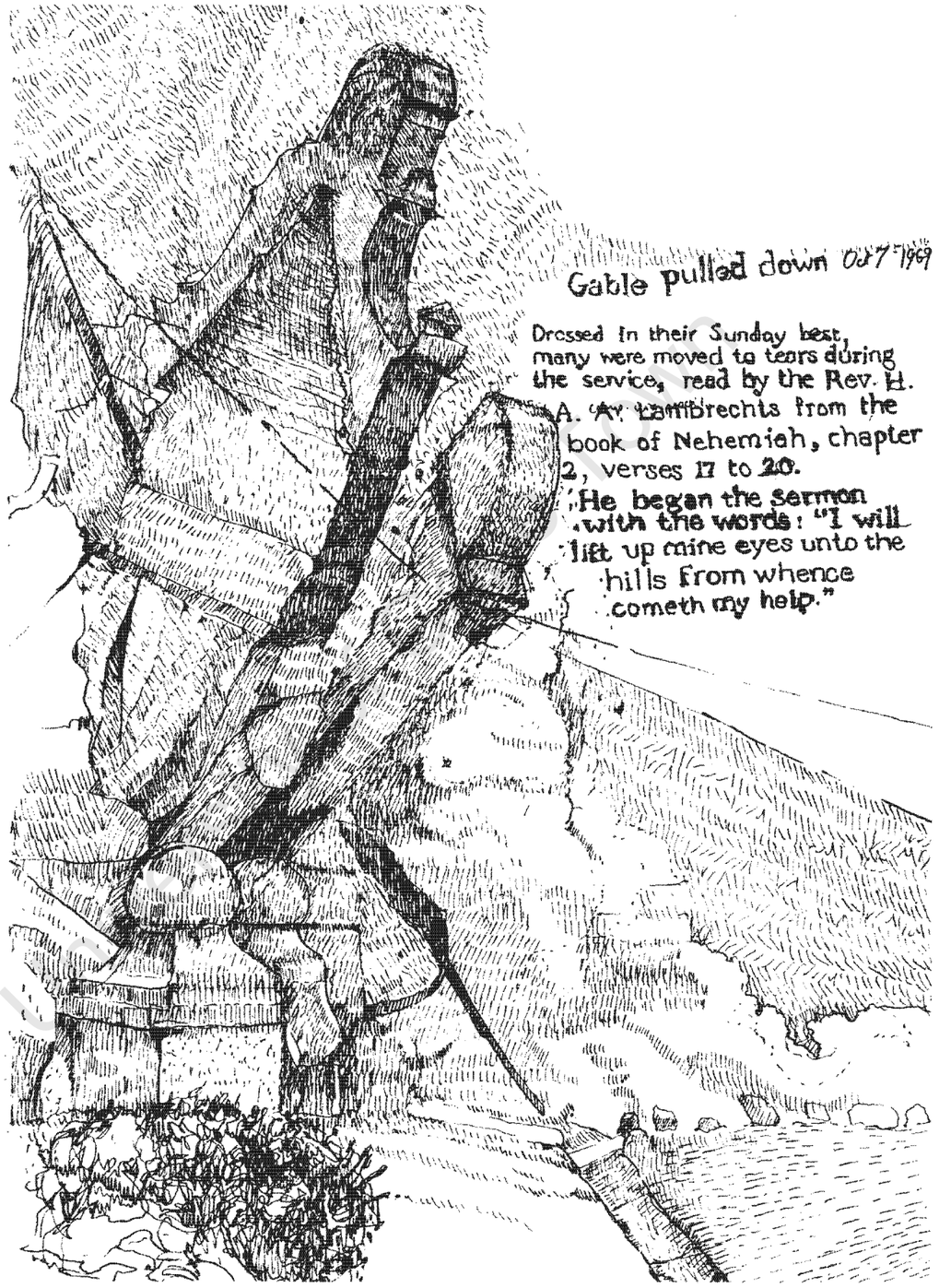

Drawing made from archival sources, Tulbagh Earthquake Museum.