

7-1-2009

A Patrick Pye Retrospective

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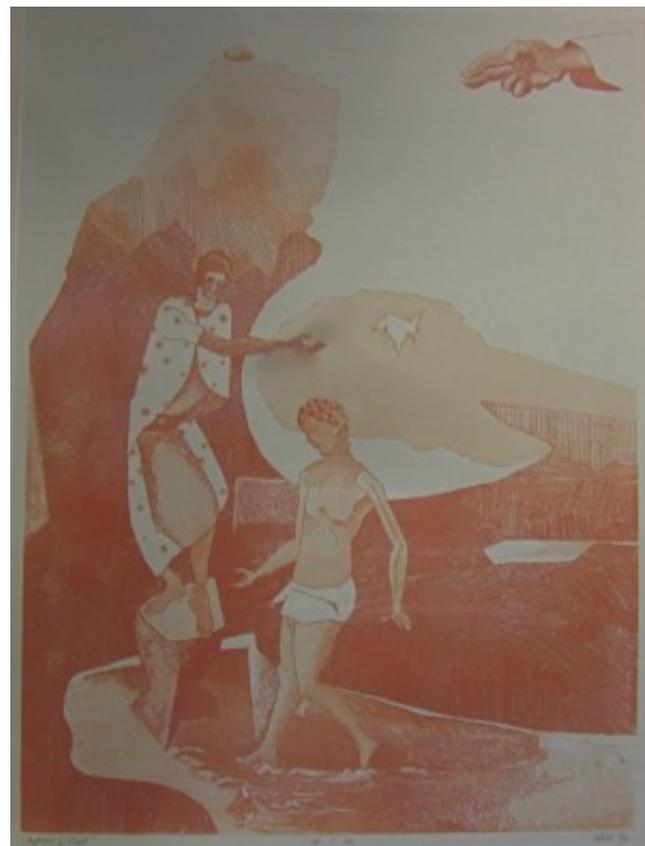
Exhibited at the Marian Library: July 1 - September 11, 2009

A Retrospective

This exhibit presents works and paintings by Patrick Pye. They are part of a collection of etchings by the same artist owned by The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute. The etchings and paintings presented in our gallery have been selected to highlight the two pillars of the Christian faith: the Incarnation and Redemption in Jesus Christ. The exhibit is a retrospective in more than one sense. Looking back to the life of Jesus Christ, we are reminded of our origin with God (Creation) and return to him (Salvation), both of which we owe to Jesus Christ, his Incarnation and Redemption. At the same time, this exhibit takes another look at Patrick Pye's work, the origin and motivation of his art. Looking back we take the measure of our present challenged by the works of the artist (see: *The Age of Unbelief* immediately below), his commitment to the Catholic Church (see: *'Salvation in Tension'* below), and his vision of holiness (see: *'We are Holy!'* at bottom).

Vita Brevis

Patrick Pye was born of English/Irish parents at Winchester in 1929, the year of the Wall Street crash. His mother, a music teacher, returned to Dublin in 1932; since then, Dublin has been his home. He began painting at school under the sculptor Oisín Kelly. He attended the National College of Art in Dublin, and in 1957 won the Mainie Jellet Scholarship for painting in Ireland. Under this sponsorship he traveled extensively in Europe. It was the prevailing influence of Romanesque Catalan art, seen at the National Museum in Barcelona, that finally turned his attention to Christian iconography. Pye studied stained glass in Maastricht under Albert Troost and has done many windows for churches in Ireland and England. In 1973 he took up etching at the Graphic Studio Dublin where he has continued to work at this medium ever since. He has done important commissions for schools, churches and banks. He was elected to Aosdána in 1981 and to the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1991. His publications include *Apples & Angels* (Veritas, Dublin 1980) and *The Time Gatherer* (Four Courts Press, Dublin 1991), a study of the Sacred in the work of El Greco. At one time, a long time ago, interested in Palmer, Blake, Sutherland and Nash, Patrick Pye now calls home Mediterranean humanism and its portraiture in Italian art before 1500, the iconographers of the West. Here, he found the key to painting, his painting and any painting, a key he labels, "act of transfiguration." In his words: "the beauty of the representation does not consist of its faithfulness to nature but in the beauty of another world which is somehow more real than the visible world" (*"Vocation and Vision,"* 73).



**The Baptism of Christ
Signature Piece
by Patrick Pye**

At 80, and enjoying a quiet fame, Patrick Pye is ever eager to capture some of the transfiguration he discovers in the art of the past to give it the intensity of his own meditative penetration for the present.

The Age of Unbelief

Pye is a witness to the saving grace of religious belief. Years ago, this is what he had to say: "The believer (artist or not) finds himself born into an age of unbelief. We cannot find in this disposition anything other than the sickness of the age. We cannot, however, put our heads into the sack of our own belief as though all were well with the world, as if unbelief were someone else's problem. We must suffer this sickness ourselves in such a way that the infidel (our neighbor) realizes that it is his own. The artist suffers this sickness in a special way. Everywhere the language appropriate to the faith has been whittled away. There are no longer the words to talk of spiritual things; indeed, the absence of the words has become a habit that people no longer notice. In this Rouault seems to be the exemplar for our generation of artists. He brought the faith to this point: where does man suffer? We have to begin again by pointing to that area in man where, in his solitude and pain, he becomes aware of the 'disrelation' in his own self. Men will naturally work to dull the pain and we can expect men to call it 'morbid' and 'anti-life', but the believer will work to keep the pain awake, to kindle the spark of desire that is concealed therein. I do not know if this is what I do or even worry at my failure to do it. I recognise it as what waits to be done. This is our tuning fork."

Salvation in Tension

Witness to saving grace, Patrick Pye has found a spiritual home with the Catholic Church: "I have found the Church, which I was educated by, to be a sort of second education. Then, I had to read - there were tasks to fulfil - the Bible. I had to form my vision. I discovered things with other Catholics; but I took my time in becoming a Catholic. It was not until my mother was dead that I discovered that I had to be a Catholic. It was the way of growth for me. The decline in faith might have irritated me into a greater opposition to the secular culture! Cardinal Newman remarked that when we look at the evil of the world and the failure of other cultures, it was something of a mystery in itself. There's an awful grandeur in it. So I have come to accept the tension between salvation and non-salvation. But vision is uncannily haunted by meaning and that is why I am a painter." ("Vocation and Vision," 64)

We Are Holy

He is a strong believer in the universal call to holiness: "We don't feel particularly holy, but we are holy! This is really a mystery. We have to live with this. When I was a young fellow I was frightened by the tensions in life. I had a nervous breakdown when I fell in love with a certain young lady, but I have learnt that tensions are a part of life. With the Italian Primitives it was their un-naturalism, their naivety that I responded to. If art becomes too technically sophisticated, it loses an element of humanity. I don't like the High Renaissance. Michelangelo, Leonardo and Raphael are not my friends, though I am impressed by them. There is greater true feeling in the Primitives. I also responded to the kind of colour that they used. One of my favourite paintings is Fiorentino Rosso's *The Deposition* (1521). It's hypnotic, being outside of time and history. He never did anything as good as it." ("Vocation and Vision," 70)

From Abraham's Sacrifice to Christ's Transfiguration

The theme of this exhibit recalls the famous prayer attributed to St. Patrick (c.390-c.461): "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me...." An important *leitmotif* of the Pye etchings is expressed in Abraham's Sacrifice of which the artist once said: "The only way that I have been able to come to terms with it is through the perceptions of the inner dialogue of prophecy and fulfillment of the two testaments, Old and New." The whole exhibit ought to be read as a counterpoint of this etching. We are led into Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection by some of the key stations of his early existence (Annunciation, The World Within, Adoration of the Child Jesus), his journeying with people (Mary and Martha) and the Transfiguration, the second *leitmotif* of this exhibit. An attempt to make a contemporary equivalent to the icons of this theme in old Russia,"

the Transfiguration connects with Abraham's Sacrifice and transcends it, pointing toward the Resurrection as ultimate answer to human tragedy and senseless agony. The bulk of the series deal with the Passion event, contemplating its various facets, 'graphically' suffering with the Servant of the Servants and at the same time gravely rejoicing in the new life flowing from Jesus' heart. Etchings celebrate the victory over suffering and death, especially expressed in *The Redeemer* and *The Maid of Israel*. The latter is a summary of human existence and meaning. It portrays the unknown "Maid announced to by the angel in the mists of the world," and her personal fulfillment as "Queen of Heaven enthroned in glory."

The Art of Engraving

The etchings here exhibited were all hand-printed at the Graphic Studio Dublin either by the artist or by Stephen Lawlor, his colleague, and a printer by profession. Most of them are worked with a steel needle on copper plate with a wax ground. Submerged in a bath of nitric acid, the acid bites into the copper wherever the needle has removed the 'ground'. For printing, the plate is covered with etching ink which is then gently wiped away leaving the ink in the intaglio lines (Brian McAvera, "Vocation and Vision," in: *Irish Arts Review* (Spring 2009), 69-75).

The Marian Library has an extensive collection of Pye's lithographs. Exhibit is open 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and on Saturday and Sunday by appointment.

Open parking is available in single-letter lots after 7:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday, after 4:30 p.m. Friday and all-day on the weekend. A parking permit is required at all other times and can be obtained at the main visitor center on the University circle or parking booth at Lot C on Evanston Avenue.

Location: The Marian Library gallery, seventh floor of Roesch Library on the University of Dayton campus

Cost: Free

Contact: 937-229-4214

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