



Stéphane Ruault
Wondrous Desert

HENRY LUCE III
CENTER
for the
Arts and
Religion
DADIAN GALLERY

August 31– October 7, 2016
Reception & Artist's Talk:
Thursday, September 15, 2016
4:30 - 5:30 p.m.

Artist's Statement

The more I work, the more I realize how attracted I feel to the domain of sacred art. This does not exclude any tradition, but as a Christian, I am deeply touched by the mystery of incarnation that invites every believer to hold together two contradictory elements along the way to sanctity: the certainty of the Presence of the Divine in the world and inside every human being and, at the same time, its inability to be felt.

“Grace is everywhere” said the 19th century French mystic, Thérèse de l’Enfant Jésus. I try to reach that point of presence where silence is inhabited by the Verb that expresses itself in its own mystery.

The Glass work: *Inversion*

For this exhibition at the Dadian Gallery, I am happy to show a series of “unstained” glass panels called *Inversion*. It was created for an exhibit in Paris whose theme was *Time and Eternity*. Save one piece, which is now part of a private collection in France, the series is shown in its entirety. In order to address the theme, I had felt the need to invert traditional elements; to speak of time and eternity felt impossible without what could be seen as a mental trick.

The title *Inversion* comes from an unusual use of glass and lead for the structure of the piece. It is no longer glass, surrounded by lead, that is the subject, but the lead itself. Johannes Schreiter, whom I admire very much, had opened the way in the 60's, using long lines of lead that extended over the glass they held, thus no longer serving a structural function but becoming a pure element of composition. Further, in my series, I have inverted the habitual lighting pattern of stained glass. Instead of gaining transparency from a backward source of light, light comes from the front, causing the glass to project the shadow of its texture and the shape that has been imprinted into the glass onto a white backboard.

The glass conducts its shadow in its transparency like a parable evoking an echo of the Presence in eternity. The lead becomes the event held by the Presence in time.

The drawings: *Psalms* and *Granum Sinapis*

Through my drawings and paintings, I pursue this quest of the Presence by delineating space with strict black lines. I nourish a passion for lines. The traditional arts of the icon and illumination are my main sources of inspiration. I aspire to create work in which contemplation takes the viewer to a space beyond representation. Contemplation leads to adoration. The image is never adored, but the truth that is revealed through it is.

The pen and ink *Psalms* series depicts mountains as the place of theophany (divine manifestation). “Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place?” asks the voice of Psalm 24. The mountain is the place of meeting with God. In the first Book of Kings (19-11), Elijah is called to go and stand on the mountain: “The LORD said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.’” In this series, I hope to offer a possible place of meeting with the Presence where all who wish may spend some time and experience something of the Divine.

The second series is an illustration of Meister Eckhart’s *Granum Sinapis*, a medieval poem, and in fact the only poem the spiritual Dominican master ever wrote. I have chosen to present diptychs, showing on the one hand, the text and a geometrical composition in black and white, and on the other, a color portrait of Christ. In recent years, Meister Eckhart’s writings have grown in visibility and success in Western countries and have been quoted in books whose authors would reject Christian tradition. Underlying this trend, Meister Eckhart, as a master of apophatic theology, may be seen to have kept the figure of Christ in a remote place. But it cannot be disputed that he could not have written a single word without Jesus-Christ in the centre of his theology as well as of his spiritual experience. For this reason I have decided to show faces of Christ to represent the other side of the apophatic coin, the incarnate nature of God, that gives it its coherence for contemporary perception and understanding.

Granum Sinapis - (The Grain of Mustard Seed)

Meister Eckhart (Translated by Karen Campbell)

Verse 1

In the beginning
high above comprehension
Is the word, eternally.
O rich treasure,
Where the beginning eternally bore
The beginning!
O paternal bosom,
Out of which, in bliss,
The word flowed forth eternally.
Yet the womb still
Held fast to the word, truly.

Christ face title: *Sin no more*

Verse 2

Of the two, one flowing forth,
ember of love,
binding both,
known to both,
so flows the sweetest spirit
incomplete symmetry,
inseparable.
The three are one:
do you know, what? No,
it alone knows itself completely.

Christ face title: *Christ teenager*

Verse 3

The enmeshment of the three
harbors deep terror.
No reason has ever
comprehended this circle:
here is a depth without bottom.
Check and mate
to time, to shapes, to space!
The circle of mysteries
is a source of everything;
its point of origin rests, completely
immutable, in itself.

Christ face title: *Gethsemani*

Verse 4

Leave your doings
and climb, insight,
the mountain of this point!
the way leads you
into a wondrous desert
which extends wide
and immeasurably far.
The desert knows
neither time nor space.
Its nature is unique.

Christ face title: *Smile #1*

Verse 5

Never has a foot
crossed the domain of the desert,
created reason
has never attained it.
It is, and yet no one knows what.
It is here, there,
far, near,
deep, high,
so that
it is neither the one nor the other.

Christ face title: *Smile #2*

Verse 6

Light, clear,
completely dark,
nameless,
unknown,
without beginning and also without
end,
it rests in itself,
unveiled, without disguise.
Who knows what its dwelling is?
Let him come forth
and tell us of what shape it is.

Christ face title: *Crucifixion*

Verse 7

Become as a child
become deaf, become blind!
Your own substance
must become nothingness;
drive all substance,
all nothingness far from you!
Leave space, leave time,
Eschew also all physical representation.
Go without away
the narrow foot-path,
then you will succeed in finding
the desert.

Christ face title: *Noli me tangere*

Verse 8

Oh my soul
go out, let god in!
Sink, my entire being,
into God's nothingness,
sink into the bottomless flood!
If I flee from you,
you come to me,
if I lose myself,
I find you:
O goodness extending overall being.

Christ face title: *In majesty*

Works in the Exhibition

In the Dadian Gallery

Virgin, glass/lead, 2005

Granum Sinapis #1 – Sin No More, ink/acrylic on paper, 2015

Granum Sinapis #2 – Christ Teenager, ink/acrylic on paper, 2015

Granum Sinapis #3 – Gethsemani, ink/acrylic on paper, 2015

Granum Sinapis #4 – Smile 1, ink/acrylic on paper, 2015

Granum Sinapis #5 – Smile 2, ink/acrylic on paper, 2015

Inversion 1 – Point of Origin, glass/lead, 2009

Inversion 3 – Geometry, glass/lead, 2009

Inversion 4 – Sacred Time, glass/lead, 2009

Inversion 5 – Reversal, glass/lead, 2009

Inversion 6 – Life, glass/lead, 2009

Granum Sinapis #6 – Crucifixion, ink/acrylic on paper, 2015

Granum Sinapis #7 – Noli Me Tangere, ink/acrylic on paper, 2015

Granum Sinapis #8 – In Majesty, ink/acrylic on paper, 2015

Quest, glass/lead, 2006

Psalms #1, ink/pen on paper, 2015

Psalms #2, ink/pen on paper, 2015

Psalms #3, ink/pen on paper, 2015

Psalms #4, ink/pen on paper, 2015

Psalms #5, ink/pen on paper, 2015

Psalms #6, ink/pen on paper, 2015

Psalms #7, ink/pen on paper, 2015

Psalms #8, ink/pen on paper, 2015

In the office of the President

Psalms #9, ink/pen on paper, 2015

Psalms #10, ink/pen on paper, 2015

Curator's Statement

Some years ago, Stephane Ruault began a search for a way to “live a real life infused with the Spirit.” He studied theology, prayer practices and the history of stained glass; in this art form, he found a metaphor for his quest for Light. He began to work with molten glass, learning the traditional craft and exploring innovations in materials and structure. The resulting art reflects his religious preoccupations with time, eternity, contemplation and seeking the presence of God. This exhibition presents his two and three-dimensional work from the past decade.

Granum Sinapis is a series of works on paper inspired by Meister Eckhart's medieval poem *The Grain of Mustard Seed of the Most Beautiful Deity: Small in Contents, Yet Great in Power*. The ten diptychs might be small in size--20 x 41 inches-- but they teem with imagery. Portraits of Christ in ink and acrylic paint are paired with text and abstract compositions that convey the artist's theological reflections on the poem's apophatic theology. Ruault describes it as “a way of singing the Meister Eckhart poem in space.”

Austere black and white images made of numberless marks evoke angular, craggy mountains in the *Psalms # 1-10* series. These large-scale pen and ink works on paper are meditative collections of lines offered as a path to contemplative experience. The artist began these drawings “as a prayer in doing and observing.” Viewers are invited to meditate in front of the image as a way to open to the presence of God.

Two of Ruault's figurative stained glass windows hang in the gallery: *Virgin* and *Quest*. His contemporary piece *Inversion* is also on view. Unlike traditional stained glass, where windows are illuminated by light entering a building, these modern panels are shaped like windows with the back blocked. The glass provides the structure with lead as a design element surrounded by the black wood frame. When light grazes the front of the glass in a contemporary work, it illuminates the texture and folds of irregular material, flowing like water or rippling like wind on a pond.

Ruault's work combines his appreciation for the ancient art of glass with innovative structures and his own vision drawn from his religious practice. Through this, he offers a contemporary view of sacred art.

Artist's Biography

Stéphane had been working for several years as a graphic designer in his own studio when he came to the point where he had to make a profound change in his life. This turning point took place in the context of deep personal and spiritual evolution. He was in search of light, so he would go and look for it as much in his professional life as in his personal one.

He started by studying the art of glass in Paris, France - the city where he was born and raised. After training for one year full-time in a Parisian glass studio, he continued to learn, improve technical skills, and gather inspiration during an eleven-month travel study with his wife through India, the Middle East, and Europe. He practiced traditional and modern glass techniques as a guest artist in studios and university settings. Once back home in Paris, he started his own glass studio with his wife where they produced work for exhibit and commission. During this period, he won a competition for the creation of all the stained glass windows of a modern church located in Issy-les-Moulineaux, a suburban town of Paris. At the end of 2014, he moved to the USA.

Since settling in Massachusetts, he has dedicated his time to prayer and his art.

www.viavitro.com/StephaneRuault

The Henry Luce III Center for the Arts and Religion is a program of Wesley Theological Seminary. The Center sponsors a variety of cultural events which explore the intersection of art and religion. All contributions are tax-deductible and gratefully accepted.

To be added to the gallery mailing list please send an e-mail with your name and email address to agray@wesleyseminary.edu. In addition to receiving gallery announcements you will also receive the Henry Luce III Center for the Arts and Religion's quarterly newsletter.

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The Dadian Gallery
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