

The art of devotion

Our mural and its artist



The vision for the Sanctuary started with seeing a space – it was a profoundly visual beginning. The floor was covered with the world map, there were churches representing many denominations painted round the walls, the whole place was lit from above by a cross and windows looked out into the beauty of God’s creation.

When we received our building, we wanted to take this vision and make it flesh, paint and colour for all to see – as closely as it was possible to do in the space available. As we are in a town centre location, the images of nature were painted. The most important one of these is a mural which dominates our worship space – and conveys in both scope and detail a visual song of praise to God for the way he is expressed in creation in the Sanctuary’s home of Ilkley, West Yorkshire.

The Artist who created and gave us this beautiful, bespoke work is Alison Hodson – an incredibly precious friend and member of the Sanctuary’s community. Here’s a few thoughts from her about art, worship and what inspires her in both:

“I feel most at home when I’m in the outdoors and see the beauty in all creation – and that beauty points me to the creator. I find it easiest to praise God when I’m outside. So in my paintings I’m not necessarily trying to replicate but to capture, praise and express that wonder.

I didn't ever set out to be a landscape painter (actually I thought those kinds of paintings were quite boring) – I don't know if I am one now... but since we moved to Ikley, I've been so inspired by the landscape and wanted to reflect it. Not necessarily literally – but by capturing emotions and moods.

Although the mural was painted for the Sanctuary – in many ways it was about me and God. Right at the start when we were praying about it, Liz sang a song over me about knowing the Father's love and freedom from fear – (You can listen to *Show me your perfect love* at- www.thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/show-me-your-perfect-love.mp3) - and the painting went on to be part of God's healing for me in this area.

It was difficult to do on a number of counts and took some bravery but it felt right. I really was worshipping the whole while I was painting – even when I was bored of doing bracken! – and the energy in the sky still draws me. I think it's some of my most exciting sky.

I'm always worshipping when I'm painting – reflecting God's beauty back to him – but I was more conscious of that with this one. I was conscious it was going into a holy space. It mattered what I listened to while I was painting because I wanted to be able to listen. I was praying... I was thinking about the Sanctuary and its future, praying for All Saints' (my church and the owner of the building the Sanctuary uses) and praying for the painting itself.

I find it hard talking about art. A lot of it is quite selfish I suppose. In the broadest sense I am trying to say wow, look at this – look at the beauty. But when I'm doing it, I'm thinking about the awe factor of God's creation.

A number of years ago, when I was living in Kent, I painted a whole chapel with mural paintings. One day while I was doing it I saw a tramp and he was really touched by it. He said something about it must be wonderful to do something that made you so alive and that he could see the joy in my face. I didn't really even know that was there.

At art school, I worried about being 'pigeon-holed' into Christian art... in that context at that time I wouldn't have been allowed to paint a landscape under that category and religious art didn't do anything for me. I was still quite new to a living faith – and in my church context everyone was so narrow and unimaginative about art's role in worship or mission... it was almost as if being at art school was almost like being aligned with the devil.

Sometimes that's made me paint things I didn't want to paint that other people felt were 'right' but that didn't make me come alive.

But I feel that's changing now and I'm getting free-er to reflect God's beauty in worship back to him – what could be more Christian than that? To inspire and prompt people to follow this sign-post to *the Beauty*.