

literary
arts

Porcupine

magazine



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Kelly Reedy

Portfolio



An attraction for singular images began in my childhood. Painted high above our parish church's altar was Christ, arms stretched wide on the cross in final glory. The intense expression in his eyes conveyed a sense of love, pity— and guilt.

Years later, while studying art history at university, I realized this stylized, flattened image was done in the spirit of Byzantine art. After completing a BFA in painting and drawing in 1985, a long anticipated move to Paris, France, allowed me to further my education. Instinctively, wherever traveling in Europe, I sought out Byzantine and Medieval art. Many of these works were created by anonymous icon painters, mosaic and stained glass makers, cathedral builders and sculptors. Some were done by the workshops of renowned artists like Cimabue and Duccio. In my own studio, I began painting on wooden panels in the form of triptychs and diptychs, striving to create contemporary— yet timeless— images.

Upon moving to Singapore in 1997, this love of icons and sacred art would be found in the realm of Asian folk art on paper. After discovering little bundles of printed papers stacked to the ceiling in a small shop, I learned they were Taoist ceremonial papers to be burned for the well-being of dead relatives in the after-life and for the good fortune of the living. A collection of these gold and silver-leafed papers began. Further investigation led to research on early Japanese Buddhist prints, Chinese paper cuts, and Indian popular paintings. Unlike Western sacred icons, these pieces are seen as ephemeral. The act of making the image is a form of prayer, more important than the piece itself. The makers do not consider themselves artists, but worshippers. These images on paper are to be burned, rolled and stashed into religious sculptures, or pasted on windows and walls to slowly decay. The papers serve their purpose in the moment and are continuously being renewed. In comparison, Western sacred treasures are often locked away, only to be used on rare occasions.

My own work changed as I began to paint, cut, and collage these "found papers" onto larger sheets of scrolled rice paper, creating my own "prayer papers" while developing a personal iconography. At the same time, my preconceived notion of the timelessness of art works was turned upside down. The attraction to these papers used as prayers is their transient quality, yet I have not relinquished the idea of making enduring images. The value of works of art lies not in their physical permanence, but in the ideas they invoke and the mark they leave on our imagination.

For more information on the artist, please visit: www.kellyreedy.com