

Advent in Art 2010: Symbology

Jan Hynes was born in 1944 in Merridin, Western Australia and presently lives in Townsville. Her work ranges over a variety of media and frequently deals with current Australian and International issues.

All are orderly, neat, urban, urbane, everyday settings. All are set in actual recognisable locations in the Australian city of Townsville, Queensland where the artist lives.

The artist often references very traditional art imagery from the past.

These notes are my personal reflections and not necessarily definitive or what the artist had in mind.

Mark Pierson,
Christ the King Sunday, 2010.

1. *It's come back positive: the Annunciation in Townsville*

2002. Oil on canvas. 120 x 150 cm

Symbolism to reflect on

(This strongly references 'Mary Reads Up...')

3 potplants = trinity

star = guiding shepherds

ibis = holy spirit, directly above, alighting, wings protecting, hovering

Hang glider = Archangel Gabriel, Telstra (Telecommunications company)

worker = equivalent contemporary messenger with Annunciation.

Water sprinkler = fertility, purity, life gushing up, narrow source/broad effect, gentle spray, creation of life = power and gentleness, external fertilisation.

Mary = exhausted? Confused? What does she feel? On phone telling Elizabeth? Her friend? No, Telstra guy is on the phone to her!! Blue dress = spirituality, traditional colour of Mary in Renaissance paintings.

Fence = enclosed garden, containing inner purity from evils of outside world

Island = beyond, beckoning

Shadow = metaphor for Spirit hovering, overshadowing Mary, presence, = in wrong place?

Easter lilies/Christmas lilies in border = Christ's future

Christmas decoration = star of Bethlehem

Waiting, attending on new life

Sacred time

Enclosed space = conventional image of virgin – sealed womb, luscious, full of life, ready to burst

Picture shows Mary well pregnant! – denial? Virgin. "This doesn't fit with my plan."

Happens despite her fatigue, exhaustion etc

Spirit overshadows her

Shadow of Mary not consistent where is light source?

Chair = squatters chair used in tropics. In colonial times men would sit on them and air would circulate.

Telstra + phone – medieval paintings and sculptures indicate Mary made

pregnant by ear! le WORD became flesh.

Fra Angelico Renaissance picture of Annunciation, Mary on right, Garden = protective, angel on left, lily = purity, border between inside and outside worlds, fence/garden/borders inside/outside.

Sprinkler + external impregnation

Manicured plants = mans attempt to control nature

2. *Mary reads up on home birthing which proves to be a good thing.*

2002. Oil on canvas. 120 x 150 cm

Symbolism to reflect on.

Mango tree= pregnant, ready to burst, hanging like Christmas tree decorations, abundance, central to painting, in every North Queensland garden, prolific, saturated.

Lilies = fertility and Mary's purity

Joseph = outside the garden, yet watering lilies, supportive presence, not anxious. 'King Gee' work clothes = carpenters uniform in Townsville. Watering garden = sexual reference.

Fence = enclosing garden, Mary is a special woman = main character but not central in painting.

Powerpoles = 3, Trinity

Looking down on scene from a distance, from parrot/Gods perspective

Parrot (Rainbow Lorikeet) = Holy Spirit

Orderly scene, prepared.

Golden Palm tree = portending Palm Sunday.

How does Mary get into the hammock?

Annunciation ie formal bit is on front verandah. Now in backyard. Behind scenes.

Mountain of life in Mary, below ripe mangoes

Rainbow Lorikeet feeding on mangoes

Joseph watering lily bed which doesn't need watering. Man needs to have something to do! Keeping his distance, not intruding yet present.

Water gushing

Lilies = symbol of virginity

Palm = like fountain, Palm Sunday

Trinity of crosses

Not fenced strongly or invincible ie vulnerable

3. *The Visitation: Elizabeth meets Mary at the C-bar over skinny decaf cappuccino and carrot cake.*

2002. Oil on canvas. 120 x 150 cm

Often overlooked part of story

Mary has a friend. Relationship. Female support.

Not talking

Older woman longed for a child/Younger one not yet ready for one.

1st century Palestine, worst fate for a woman was to be childless.

Barreness = sign God was punishing.

Patronising comments from those around her when not pregnant.

Eliz – sunshirt underneath, hat, sensible shoes, doing it all properly. Grateful.

Mary = no sunscreen, shirt, no hat. Not happy to be pregnant.

Mary/Eliz are in different places.

Orange = very hard colour to paint.

Eliz touches Mary on the elbow, leading her to the table, nourishing her.

Jan Hynes writes, 'The painting was part of a series I did in 2002-3 where I depicted stories from the New Testament and set them in Townsville in contemporary times. The C-Bar is a restaurant located on the beach looking out to Magnetic Island. Elizabeth and Mary wear clothing the local women would be wearing here in Townsville. The food and drink they have ordered is what I considered two conscientious mothers-to-be would have bought.'

There are many symbolic references within the painting. The seagull represents the Holy Spirit. The gestures of the women are appropriated from a famous Renaissance painting (Raphael. *The Visitation*. <http://www.fineartprintsondemand.com/artists/raphael/56297>) There are several other iconic references: Mary wearing a cross, pre-empting the cross on which her son was to die: the light in the foreground, symbolic of Jesus being the Light of the World; the table number 4, indicates two mothers and two babies.'

4. Bonding time: the Nativity in Townsville.

2007. Oil on canvas. 80 x 100 cm

Symbolism to reflect on.

Lilies = 3 x = Holy Spirit, (they refer to purity and miraculous, but 3 = Trinity)

Angel = announcing Good News to shepherds (star), symbolising supernatural event

Wise Men or Shepherds = conflating, service station attendants = low status but who is it that recognises the significance of the event? Different ages, suggestive of different races ie all humanity.

Light = light of world (Gold?)

Oil = anointing (frankincense?)

Nail Puller ? = pain/ suffering? (myrrh?)

Mary = standing, bread/wine/blood – keeping things in her heart, anticipating, knows what is ahead, whats going on, anticipating the passion, his life gives life to us

Shed = stable, where would Jesus be born today? Travellers, in transit

Pot plant = fertility

'The Way' = points the way, don't get stuck, move on, pilgrimage, journey, following the drama in our lives, beginning of a journey, not arrival.

Joseph = is holding the baby, male nurturing in our society

Flowers in guttering = 3 crosses.

Ibis Bird = Holy Spirit

Shell = seaside, sexuality, fertility, symbol of compostella – ancient symbol of pilgrimage – travel, journey, halo. like Piero Della Francesca Madonna

Plastic chair

Paper towel roll

Bernard of Clairvaux 12 century - Gold = money; Frank = perfume for smelly baby Myrrh = medicinal, protection, nappy rash!

Mary's buttons = red heart shaped = bleeding heart of Jesus ie his love for us.

Who are the humble, lowly, wise from foreign lands?

Oil – anointing, Lamp – light, Forceps – delivery (nail remover?)

Hint of cross in guttering and crown of thorns.

Shell - baptism paintings of John Baptist have him w/ water in shell;

- pilgrimage/journey, service station...

-Virginity – oyster shell opening to reveal pearl of great price

-Aura/halo embracing family.

Figures darker than angel cf Lotto's painting

Figures = earthy, angel = messenger from sacred realm.

Bonding – Joseph and child, all being invited to step in and nurse the child

Gown open – birth, ongoing, cf Renaissance pix