

Research Proposal

By Candice Sampson

A Hope for Heaven

Research Problem Statement

Art History is rich with visual symbolism. This fact becomes very apparent when studying art throughout the centuries. The use of symbolic elements was such an integral part of the art during times such as the Renaissance that entire languages were seemingly developed by way of symbolism. Unfortunately, much of this visual language has been forgotten by the populace at large, rendering us a generation that is illiterate in this visual language compared to those of times past. Though today we are very much visual consumers on a mass level, the substance of that communication is comparatively exceedingly simple, exchanging intricate meaning for directness and clarity. But these two aspects of visual communication should not need to be mutually exclusive. I do not think that we should, or could entirely revert back to the times of old when an entire language of symbolism was more widely used and employed. The visual media today is very much a natural occurring reflection of the culture we have developed thus far, and has in many ways been formed to meet the present state of our modern world. But I think that there is much to learn from the past, and that their use of symbolism can be used to strengthen our own visual media and communication today.

Communication Objective

I wanted this piece to be a visual image that was deeply rooted in symbolism. Intricacy of thought, and simplicity of presentation was my goal throughout the entire project. I wanted this piece to also be multi-faceted in meaning. My first communicative objective was to address what transpires when a viewer has their first reaction to a work; how it makes them feel. I wanted to be mindful of my audience's impression of my work, and use it to better inform the concept behind it. On this first level of basic communication I wanted to convey a sense of peace and serenity. A second layer of communication was achieved through the use of symbolic elements. Through the use of florography (the language of flowers) I was able to employ a specific set of symbols and utilize my compositional placement to visually communicate the following sentence: "On Earth we have a hope for heaven, that through God we will attain glory above." This imbedded message in my piece, coupled with the serene nature of the composition, calls the viewer to the lasting peace, and eternal life that is to be found in a relationship with Christ.

Visual Solution

My final product was a pen and ink spot illustration of a three-trunked bay tree surrounded by reed flowers. In fluorography, the reed flower is indicative of “a hope for heaven,” and the leaves of the bay tree represent glory. Because of the natural compositional arrangement of these elements, the meaning of the peace was further defined. The reed flower is naturally on the ground, which -when accounting for its meaning- quite literally means “a hope for heaven on earth.” The bay leaves, which represent glory, are held aloft, becoming “glory that is above.” Even the trunk of the tree was used as a symbol. The three trunks of the one tree are representative of God in his triadic nature. The three trunks also establish a visual and physical connection between the reed flowers and the bay leaves. This symbolizes God’s vital roll in realizing our hope in attaining glory in heaven. I created the composition as a spot illustration with pen and ink on illustration board. This more minimalistic approach assisted me in establishing the emotional element I had wanted of peace and tranquility. This way the world is visually faded away and all that is left is the serenity of the tree in the grass, and all that it symbolizes.

Research

At the very beginning stages of my ideation process I had decided to employ the language of flowers to illustrate a specific sentence or complex phrase. I very much intended to collect these symbols like words pulled from a dictionary, and draw them out on the page as if writing the words of a sentence. Originally I planned to compose a bouquet of flowers, informed by their meanings, to do this. But as I embarked on my research into fluorography, I was surprised to find that there were symbolic traditions tied to a variety of flora, including fruits, trees, seeds, and even grass. As I continued to explore, I realized that an entire landscape could be composed solely using elements of fluorography, and never contain a single flower. This discovery opened a slew of new possibilities in way of creative freedom. I began my research by going through books and online resources to make a list of every flower meaning that I thought to be relevant to my topic. My biggest source was “The Miniature Language of Flowers” by Mrs. L. Burke, 1865. I also studied the use of symbolism in historical paintings, such as the Arnolfini Wedding Portrait and the Merode Altarpiece. For my visual research I compiled photographic, and live references.

How it was produced

After deciding on the basic elements of my composition, I began to ideate how to visually present them in an aesthetic way that best communicated my intended meaning. After settling on the arrangement of the composition, I created a pencil drawing of the piece, which was then transferred onto tracing paper. From there I took the image on the tracing paper and transposed it onto the illustration board that I had already trimmed down to the specific

dimensions I had chosen. After I had laid out the image lightly with pencil (by using the transferred image on the tracing paper) I began work on the final imagery of the piece, creating an ink drawing over the light pencil markings. I used a black micron pen for the base of the drawing, as well as a grey and white pen to further add to the variation of value within the piece. I also used hatching, and cross hatching to create value within the work. I used photographic references throughout the entire process, and tried to work from life when possible, bringing in pieces of grass or reed flowers.