

## Look at the World: *Living with Courage*

Chaher



*The Forest on Fire*

“LAUDATO SI’, mi’ Signore” – “Praise be to you, my Lord”. In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs”.

These beautiful words sum up indeed a reverie, which depicts a harmonious abode that serves as a bridge among all living creatures. Yet, the reality is becoming far from the idyllic world shown by St Francis. Pollution, waste, climate change, wars and the breakdown of societies are significant themes, which Pope Francis discusses in detail in his encyclical on care

for our common home. LAUDATO SI’ is a profound study, which not only raises awareness about the state of our environment but also an urgent call for people to engage and to act at once.

In May this year, and while reflecting on the above issues from both environmental and spiritual perspectives, I wondered how many people have read LAUDATO SI’ especially in today’s fast-paced world when reading is declining more than ever. “How could I help in conveying the message in different way?” I asked myself.

Generally, our thoughts and senses are provoked by audible, sensory, and olfactory elements. However, the visual aspect remains unrivalled for most people.





### *Work*

Visual art can often serve as a connecting bridge between the artist and the viewer on both the general and personal level. Art can take many forms of course, and it is not always sweet with happy themes. At times it must provoke to alert us or perhaps to awaken something within. And so, a journey filled with enthusiasm, dedication and rivers of inspiration commenced, so after a short period of time, I managed to produce seventeen works of art highlighting the various themes of LAUDATO SI'.

As we live, nowadays, in a use and dispose era I wanted to show people that even junk or rubbish can become a new landscape in itself. Therefore, throughout the process of realising this project, I kept two core aspects in mind and heart. The first was rejecting the throwaway culture, and the second was giving a new lease of life to the various objects and materials I could get hold of. Practically, every piece was made from recycled or unwanted materials, such as glass, wood, stones, foam, plastic, fabric and the like. In the end, each one of them helped in weaving a

canvas, which was a symbol of resilience and finding beauty in imperfection.

Every chapter of LAUDATO SI' was perused in order to interweave a story that related to the raised environmental, cultural, and ethical concerns. It almost felt like writing a cinematic scenario or a TV Drama. So, at times, it was not that straight forward though with continuous reflection and asking for guidance, the spirit worked in mysterious ways and the rest was history.

Here, I share with you a reflection on one of the pieces Living with courage and the motive behind it. During my recent travels I have witnessed a lot of suffering and injustice, but one scene has imprinted itself in my mind forever. A mountain filled with tons of waste and filth - just exactly how Pope Francis outlined in LAUDATO SI'. I recalled the image of the little boy I saw on that mountain of rubbish collecting something to eat and perhaps other items to sell. Somehow, the theme of pollution and waste awakened a sense of



gratitude in me. And so, through the lens of that little boy I tried to depict a piece that not only raised awareness about the destruction of our environment, but also to highlight the art of gratitude.

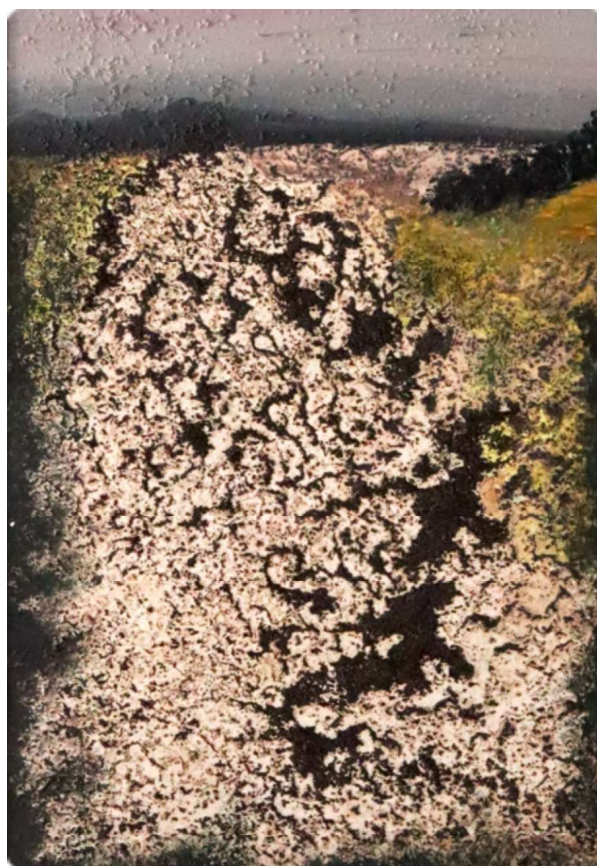
Gratitude is a non-tangible term that often sounds foreign to many in our modern societies, especially when encountering challenges and changes. All the memories of doubts, confusion and despair make it harder to find the delight on our path. When gratitude is embraced, we awaken an excitement, an energy full of hopes and visions with focused fires of determination and commitment. Ungratefulness is destructive—physically, emotionally, and spiritually (Romans 1:21). But thankfulness takes us to a better place with God and with the people in our life.

As you can see, to create such a theme, I used cuts of unwanted fabric and plastic, which resembled those heaps of waste. Then broken pieces of glass as high-rise new buildings on the other side of the city - Complete two opposite worlds. Though, the focal point here is that little boy standing in the middle

surrounded by white light. He is also faced with challenges and insecurity, yet amid all those moments of doubts and depression, he stood there with courage and hope trying his best to adapt to the severe circumstances of hunger, homelessness, and the uncertainty of his own existence. He was grateful that he had something to survive on even if it was not the best of all.

Now, reflecting with art often provides an outlet to express ourselves in different ways. We do not need to have a special skill to do art, just an open mind and heart. In fact, you can express yourself through endless ways, be it through colours, collage, pottery, wood carving or simply splashing paint aimlessly. The point is to let go and be in the present moment. And so today, as you hear the echoes of the above-mentioned apprehensions, I invite you to ponder this canvas *Living with Courage*. Where in the image are you drawn to? Do you journal your appreciation? What are the things that you are thankful for?

*Chaher is a self-taught Syrian artist living in London. His genre ranges from Abstract to Expressionism and Realism using acrylic, ink, oil, and watercolours. Though his signature is interweaving stories using botanical, coffee, and other materials. Formerly trained in Communication & Management as well as French & German. But most recently, in Healing with the Arts & Spiritual Direction. Since 2018, he has been facilitating art workshops & retreats across the UK and Europe.*



*Do Not Die, Beautiful Nile*