



Something New to Enjoy – An Oasis in The City

Located in such a very built-up part of London, the Oblate Retreat and Spirituality centre, Tower Hill, known as De Mazenod House offers an oasis of quiet and peace to anyone seeking respite from their busy lives. Unfortunately there is no garden space, no trees or shrubs to bring a touch of nature to the surroundings.

However, there is one small courtyard enclosed by the high walls of the Church and surrounding hotel. There in that once forlorn space, a magnificent scene of nature and creation has emerged and it has become a place of contemplation and peace. This painting measuring 5m x 3.5m is titled 'Laudato Si', a reference to Pope Francis' great encyclical on the care of our Common home.

There couldn't possibly be a more suitable title than 'Laudato Si' to name this recent completed work of art. As a matter of fact, this title stems from Saint Francis of Assisi's canticle 'Laudato Si', where we are reminded 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.

These beautiful words sum up indeed the theme of this reverie, which depicts a harmonious abode that serves as a bridge among all living creatures. Of course, this environment is our precious home, and it is our task to keep this harmony alive. This work does not only celebrate nature and life, but also resonates with deep meanings. Here, I ask the viewer to direct your attention inward, in a contemplative way to explore the spiritual and the temporal, and the relationship between them, in a thought-provoking way.

Originally, the idea was to simply sketch a scene from the lake district, but over time and during the long period of lockdown with the freedom to experiment, new ideas emerged replacing what was initially conceived.

In simplest terms, art can often have a positive factor, if not a stimulus in our development and consciousness. Hence, I envisaged a sprawling space to draw on imagery as well as allegories to instigate a new realm of the viewer's imagination.

Practically everyone feels connected to a place of nostalgic or sweet memories of some happy time in the past to which one returns in one's mind, picking particular moments to cherish. And this, in fact served as the objective when I embarked on painting such a large and unusual canvas. In a way, this rural setting crafted some of the imagery, a symbolism of an idyll home that can be revisited whenever one feels the urge to, even virtually.

At first, the project seemed daunting, too immense and inconceivable for any artistic work to fully capture or express. Yet, in a providential masterstroke, the work went underway and the rest is history. I experimented with the perspective, angles variation and explored a myriad of colours and hues. Then each day, I would take photos and reflect on the overall scene as well as on ways to improve or discard things.

In summary, capturing an ordinary scene from life around us made me realise and discover new aspects about myself and my relationship with nature and others. In fact, behind these elliptical explorations of unspoiled nature, a new canvas was radically offered unlike our modern landscape of busy schedules, dilemmas and never-ending doubts, fear and worries.

Only a few people saw the work in situ prior to or just upon completion; I was able to see their reaction and listen to their riveting interpretation. To my surprise, the composite story that I interweaved on this wall transported those individuals to a place they had a bond with, whether the hills of Kashmir, the stone walls of the west of Ireland, the Bavarian valleys, the Czech countryside and even a coffee farm high up in the Colombian mountains.

The question now, is where do you see yourself in this painting?

– Chaher Rhomaei

