"Repentance"

43" X 55" Acrylic and gold leaf on canvas
Poem by Valerie J. Hasson

This painting came about as an interpretation of the poem "Repentance". Some calligraphers may remember that this poem was presented as part of an evening presentation at the 1998 International Calligraphy Conference "Discoveries".

Although the poem speaks for itself, I wanted the artwork to symbolize the idea of a timeline from ancient traditions of each culture to the present. Another poem of Valerie's says *"I recognize your kingship and that ancient way about you..."* , and so this was my starting point: to research the aspects that represented each ancient civilization and that would be recognizable to the viewer.

I started with a background pattern that represented each the African, Indian and Mexican cultures, and these patterns are alternated throughout the painting. Then the ancient cave paintings and drawings and glyphs were researched and placed in a pattern that wove it's way trail-like from top to bottom. Excerpts from the poem were then lettered along this pattern. Next, I took a representative carving from each culture and stacked them on top of each other to make a "multi-cultural" totem. As totems historically were made as a symbol of protection for each family, the faces of each carving are "watching over" the head of each portrait. Gold leaf, representing the royal and glorious aspects of each heritage, was laid along the totem.

The background now complete, the portraits of each cultural "representative" were laid over or in front of the historic elements to symbolize the peoples of the present day. Finally, and most importantly, her words were written over the completed background.

From an artistic perspective, the viewer is first attracted to the portraits and or the gold, and then wonders what the painting says. As the words are read, the elements of the background begin to show themselves and be recognized, as well as the excerpts from the poem. After the poem is read, the viewer will hopefully understand that emotions of these portraits are intended to hold the viewer's gaze so one can meditate on the sentiment represented by Valerie's words.

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Wherever I travel-
I hear the screams of your people-
African man, Indian man
Mexican man and woman.
I see the blood on the ground
where you first walked before me.
I smell the sweat of your labor,
the tears of your pain and confusion.
And my spirit mourns for you!

What words can I say to you
that will bring back your people,
your culture, your spirit, your pride?
How can only one pathetic voice make any difference
to your masses of dead and wounded and oppressed?

Would it matter to say that if I could-
I would paint my face with war paint
and darken my skin with mud,
rip off my clothes and wear sackcloth
and die with you?

That is easily escaped,-
in our comfortable world,
with our pseudo freedoms
protecting the masses
and cloaking your weeping souls.

I am as prejudiced as the next man.
I am as afraid.
Fear is the evil here.
Man of every kind simply
carries out their terror of each other-
attempting to control that which
often exist only in their mind.

And yet- my people are the chief offender
in these modern times.
And I am therefore ,to my shame,
a perpetrator of you all.

I see your eyes seek repentance from our "leaders".
I turn my head in shame
at their unwillingness to extend to you

what is rightfully yours -
Acknowledgment of truth...
of a history our forefathers created.
It is difficult to get huge integrity out of small men

Know that the earth cries out on your behalf -
and God - even the horribly misrepresented
God of the white man -
always stands on the side of the oppressed.

I am only one miserable white woman -
haunted by the voices of your people - all of them.
I am small and insignificant...
but I can validate your reality.
I can tell you the truth.
And I can repent.

I am so sorry for what my people did to you.
Stealing your land, and breaking their vows,
ripping you from your people
torturing you with slavery and oppression.

What can I do to lessen your generations of Pain?
What can I give to you?
Though I do not understand your ways -
how can I show you respect?
How can I show you Love?

Can I give you my seat at the front of the bus?
Can I stand beside you or defend your cause?
Can I share your pipe of peace
and listen to your ancient stories?
Can I learn your music and meet your gods?
Can I dance with you?