

Martin Lawes – Oil Paintings

<https://www.musicimageryhub.org/martin-lawes-artwork>

Creating art through 'becoming music'

Painting title: Lupetu

Music used: Britten - *War Requiem* (ending)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fvL8HZSJWog0WHK7CmpET9Fu-9-iW-Pb/view?usp=drive_link



This was painted listening repeatedly to the final one and a half minutes of Britten's *War Requiem*, the text of this seminal composition compiled from poems by Wilfred Owen and the Latin Mass for the Dead. The piece represents a personal response to the horror and tragedy of war, resonating also with collective and even transpersonal (spiritual) dimensions of experience as does all great music and art. I'm reminded of Picasso's great painting *Guernica* and of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* written just before the outbreak of the first world war, these works illustrating how artists and composers are attuned not only with their own inner process but with collective experience, the light, dark and truth of which they help us all dream and bear at least to some extent beyond what may otherwise be possible, affirming life just as it is in the process.

Towards the end of Britten's piece, after what Simon Rattle suggests is a nuclear catastrophe (the climax of the *Libera Me*), comes an imagined reconciliation between enemy soldiers in death. Following this the choir and soloists sing "let us rest now" interspersed with the Latin "*In paradisum deducant te Angeli etc ... Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis* [Into Paradise may the Angels lead thee etc... Lord, grant them eternal rest, and let the perpetual light shine upon them.] ...".

The final words are "*Requiescant in pace. Amen* [Let them rest in peace. Amen]." It is the setting of these words where the chorus sings alone very quietly (apart from the tolling of a bell) that I used for the painting, the same music having previously been heard at two other key moments in the composition, acting as a kind of quiet, reflective punctuation. The harmony is unsettled, with the first phrase ending on an augmented fourth (the so called 'devil in music'), the music finally resolving with a sublime, transcendent peace as the tonality slips unexpectedly into F major.

In the painting, which was not intended to represent the theme of the music but emerged from listening deeply to it, the light of the setting sun (or is it rising?) illuminates the scene.

General background information about my approach to painting

As a creative arts psychotherapist and practitioner of Music and Imagery (MI), a psychotherapeutic approach which involves supporting clients to create art-work whilst listening to music to explore their inner experience, I have developed my own practice as an oil painter using a similar technique which integrates art-making with music listening.

My paintings involve my being intuitively drawn to music which I then listen to repeatedly whilst I paint. For this I use short extracts of music that is especially meaningful to me, each extract lasting around a minute and a half. I typically repeat such an extract for several hours at a time as I work on a painting, the process often repeated on many different occasions over a period of weeks and sometimes months until the painting is finished. Repeating the music never feels like repeating the same experience. Rather it is a way of ever deepening into the present moment experience of the music until I feel that I have 'become the music' in a way that transforms my state of consciousness. It is only out of this that the painting emerges authentically in the way I work. 'Becoming the music' involves feeling immersed in it as though I am living within the music, continually aware of its transformative presence.

Titles and meanings

The titles of my paintings are intended to be both evocative and ambiguous, so as not to convey a precise meaning but be open to many possibilities of interpretation. I don't consider the paintings to represent the music but to arise from my having 'become it' in a way that is personal to me as I explore universal human themes. There is often a connection with the music's meaning for the composer, or a connection with the text set, though this may not be immediately obvious. It is in any case for the viewer to create their own possibly very different meaning.

I will end with a favourite quotation about meaning in art which gets to what is most essential I believe. This comes from Ken Wilber's 2001 publication *The Eye of Spirit: An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad*:

Let me return to what art is finally all about. When I directly view, say, a great Van Gogh, I am reminded of what all superior art has in common: the capacity to simply take your breath away . . . you are changed somehow, maybe just a little, maybe a lot; but you are changed. No wonder that for the East and West alike, until recent times, art was often associated with profound spiritual transformation.

. . . When we look at any beautiful object (natural or artistic), we suspend all other activity, and we are simply aware, we only want to contemplate the object. . . In that contemplative awareness, our egoic grasping in time comes momentarily to rest. We relax into our basic awareness. We rest with the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. We are face to face with the calm, the eye in the centre of the storm. We are not agitating to change things; we contemplate the object as it is. Great art has this power to grab your attention and suspend it: we stare, sometimes awestruck, sometimes silent, but we cease the restless movement that otherwise characterises our every waking moment.

It doesn't matter what the actual content of the art is; not for this. Great art grabs you, against your will, and then suspends your will. You are ushered into a quiet clearing, free of desire, free of grasping, free of ego, free of self-contradiction. And through that opening or clearing in your own awareness may come flashing higher truths, subtler revelations, profound connections. For a moment you might even touch eternity; who

can say otherwise, when time itself is suspended in the clearing that great art creates in your awareness?

. . . Great art suspends the reverted eye, the lamented past, the anticipated future: we enter with it into the timeless present; we are with God today, perfect in our manner and mode, open to the riches and the glories of a realm that time forgot, but that great art reminds us of: not by its content, but by what it does in us: suspends the desire to be elsewhere. And thus it undoes the agitated grasping in the heart of the suffering self, and releases us - maybe for a second, maybe for a minute, maybe for all eternity - releases us from the coil of ourselves.

That is exactly the state that great art pulls us into, no matter what the actual content of the art itself - bugs or Buddhas, landscapes or abstractions, it doesn't matter in the least. In this particular regard - from this particular context, great art is judged by its capacity to take your breath away, take your self away, take time away, all at once.

And whatever we mean by the word "spirit" - let us just say . . . that for each of us it involves our ultimate concern - it is in that simple awe-struck moment, when great art enters you and changes you, that spirit shines in this world just a little more brightly than it did the moment before. (Wilber 2001: 122-124)

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It is the setting of these final words where the chorus sings alone very quietly (apart from the tolling of a bell) that I used for the painting. The harmony is unsettled, with the first phrase ending on an augmented fourth (the so called 'devil in music'), the music finally resolving with a sublime, transcendent peace as the tonality slips unexpectedly into F major.

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