

Transformations

Lena Sjöstrand

Booklet text in conjunction with exhibition
"Transformations" at the crypt in Lund
Cathedral, Lund, Sweden

During the summer of 2017, we had the pleasure of presenting the exhibition Genesis with paintings by Erla S. Haraldsdóttir in the crypt of Lund Cathedral. The artist created these works in the crypt itself, inspired by one of the creation stories of the Bible. The Bible story of the seven days of Creation also played a role in the structuring of the paintings. In the spring of 2020, Haraldsdóttir will present a new exhibition.

Since 2017, the artist has been exploring Biblical and visual symbolism that occurs throughout the history of Western art. This symbolism includes pomegranates, palm leaves, the dove and the lamb, the wings of angels, as well as details of the wounds of Jesus Christ. These symbols exist as miniature paintings in medieval manuscripts and in contemporary art.

In 2017, discussions about a second exhibition began and this led to the crypt becoming a constituent element of the creative process. Haraldsdóttir views this place as a secret, holy and mystic underworld, with many layers of history embedded in its architecture. The columns of the crypt are reminiscent of a forest; the Romanesque vaults evoke the crowns of palm leaves. The processes of the life and death of vegetation are inscribed in the architecture and thus are themselves part of the process of transformation.

"The crypt and my associations of it have also influenced the work. The space makes reference to the mysteries of birth and the Resurrection. The image of the seed planted in the earth that grows into a plant and becomes a tree that today gives us life evokes death and the Resurrection", said the artist.

The exhibition will be shown in the crypt during the transition from Lent and Easter when the crypt takes on a special role as the site of transformation. It will represent the tomb of Christ and one of the Good Friday services will be held there, when we reflect on the burial of Christ. The crypt will be locked and, like the tomb of Christ, sealed with a stone during Holy Saturday. The congregation will make its way down to the crypt during the Easter Vigil and the Paschal candle will be lit. The Gospel and the greeting "Christ is risen. Truly he is risen" will be read at the empty tomb.

"I have this composition in my mind when I am painting. I read the stories in the four Gospels of how the women went to the tomb; it is fascinating to see how this event is told in different ways. Throughout history, many paintings have depicted the three women who go to the tomb of Christ and see an angel there. The work that I have studied most closely is a miniature illustration from the 12th century. It portrays the three woman carrying herbs and incense, standing before the angel, next to the open tomb. The Biblical texts and the miniature illustrations were the inspiration for my work, as well as the crypt itself," said Erla S. Haraldsdóttir.

Normally, she applies certain artistic restrictions as tools for beginning the creative process. In this case, she has focused on the pictorial symbolism she visualises when she reads the texts from the New Testament. She draws inspiration from metaphors and similes.

"I am fascinated by the magic that can be found everywhere in our everyday lives, in the commonplace. If, we take the dove, for example, also known as a pigeon, and in cities

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often described as a flying rat. When I see these birds now in an urban space, I am struck by how beautiful they are. The sounds they emit, or that of their flapping wings, the way they never give up and how their wings remind us of the way the wings of angels are represented in art. There are some wonderful stories in the Bible about doves, like the one Noah sent from the ark to find dry land. The dove returns bearing an olive branch; this image has become a symbol of perseverance and hope. The dove of peace. Simply by looking at a pigeon or a dove, you can bring magic into your daily life".

Erla S. Haraldsdóttir's has been working on the series Family Patterns since her first exhibition in the crypt. This series consists largely of figurative paintings depicting her ancestors, framed by a geometric, abstract pattern evoked by the patterns of the Ndebele people in South Africa. The paintings were shown in a solo exhibition at Reykjanes Art Museum in Iceland in the summer of 2019. It was largely made up of paintings whose visual inspiration came from studio photographs of female members of the artist's family, taken in the years 1890 to 1950. In many of the images they wear Icelandic folk costumes. The paintings' backgrounds allude to the Ndebele patterns, which are part of women's cultural heritage in South Africa. In this way, the cultural heritages of women from the north and south of the world are brought together.

Haraldsdóttir spent three months as artist in residence at the Bag Factory artist studio in Johannesburg. During this time in South Africa, she met and interviewed many Ndebele women. In doing so she learnt about the complex nature and political significance of the patterns. A

project catalogue was published in connection with a smaller solo exhibition at the Marniere Noir Gallery in Berlin in November 2019. This spring, Erla S. Haraldsdóttir will again be working at the Bag Factory artist studio in Johannesburg and will travel directly from there to Lund for the exhibition in the crypt.

Översättning: Eileen Laurie