

EDEN BLEEDS

Eden is bleeding her colours into a toxifying world. Oceans are corroding, mountains are scorched as the darkest abyss. Forests have become raging infernos, while the vision of paradise is left carried on the winds by messengers who are barely able to breathe. If there was an original sin, it’s plagues weren’t solely to be borne by humans alone. Eden is bleeding and the humanity she homes is also part of the fall. Yet there is beauty in the horror, vibrant majesty in the recoloration of a planet that still somehow manages to give despite all that has been taken from her. And so we must once again learn to be witnesses to the original flows of life – the abstract power of colour and imagination, which is as true to nature as it is true to the original gestures in art.

What appears in the colours are disappearing life-world systems. What appears in the ferocious lines are the misguided energies of extraction and depletion. What shadows the contrasts is a planet so oversaturated it’s only a matter of time before all the colours bleed into a perilous hole, a darkness so consuming it threatens to destroy everything and put nothing in the place where Eden once stood.

Showcasing 13 works from the acclaimed Mexican painter Chantal Meza, this exhibition deals with the ravages of ecological collapse and the weaponisation of our life world system. This is the first time these works have been exhibited in public. With the church focusing its Lent programme on the issue of ecology, a suite of events will be organised to open conversation in an art-led way between artists, experts, and broader publics on our shared planetary concerns. The exhibition will provide a contemplative meditation on the subject in a fitting spiritual setting. Leading thinkers from pioneering organizations like The Eco-Leadership Institute, Alameda Institute and Centre for the Study of Violence will participate in a series of public talks and workshops. Tours of the works will be held to inform publics on the importance of art and how we might reimagine social responses to this collective planetary issue, and bring new attention to the multiple ways ecologies are endangered.

1.VISCERAL ECOLOGIES

Location: North and South Transept

How do we truly imagine the worlds we inhabit? What would it mean to properly describe the feeling of its colour? How might our thinking of the world change? should it to be framed by its blues, greens, reds and blacks? Just as much as we can write of ecologies of meaning and ecologies of thought, so we must also consider ecologies that make us feel every range of emotion. The trees we walk through, the air we breathe, they are part of the visceral ecologies of life. And just as the abstract teaches us, such ecologies are defined by the complexities and poetic movements they reveal. They belong as such to the spirit of the world.

Visceral ecologies always touch us, just as they are always traversing landscapes of hope and neglect. Yet what appears in the colours we see today are also disappearing life-world systems. Hence, while visceral ecologies continue to invoke within tremendous feelings of wonderment as the sublime touches something deep within as the magisterial and the intimate, the eternal and the finite collide, what we are witness today are wounded landscapes that seem to be bleeding before our eyes turning what falls from the heavens into a chorus of tears.

Moreover, as the ecologies that sustain life are now subject to a slow catastrophe – a new kind of witnessed disappearance is occurring, which we can barely make sense of with theorems and words. So how might we learn to feel this world’s beauty and pain? This series of artworks is inspired by this very question, as the challenge of reimagining our complex relationship with ecology is considered, and the liberating potential for art in the face of devastation explored.

2. WILDERNESS OF DOUBT

Location: St. John’s Chapel

“Midway upon the journey of our life”, Dante begins his Divine Comedy, “I found myself in a dark wilderness, for I had wandered from the straight and true. How hard a thing it is to tell about, that wilderness so savage, dense, and harsh, even to think of it renews my fear! It is so bitter, death is hardly more – but to reveal the good that came to me, I shall relate the other things I saw. How I first entered, I can’t bring to mind, I was so full of sleep just at that point when I first left the way of truth behind”. As Dante imagines, there are moments when we find ourselves in places full of darkness, where the reflection of our presence is so vague that our gaze loses the clarity of its image. Metaphorical and literal, human lives continue to walk through wild forests, sometimes majestic and sometimes in darkness. On that path there are encounters with others like us, as well as with the elements that are part of life on earth, including nature and its wildlife. They all converge, and they give us the sense of having a centre point. They are what indicate to us a sense of balance or a stability of things.

When these structures break, we find ourselves full of trepidation, we are exposed to a “wilderness of doubt”, to a cycle that from time to time makes itself present. We find ourselves uncomfortable, lost and confused. We understand that life is difficult, and that it is not easy to weave a social fabric without respect and care. Yet to be immersed in different worlds is necessary, since its combination provides us with the dynamism of life. We might be in dark woodlands, or in inspiring ones, but regardless of the situation the elements that will bring us the answers will always be in there.

3. REMEMBERING HIROSHIMA

Location: Lady Chapel

As the year marks the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the realisation of systematic policies of annihilation, it also continues on to mark the yearly commemoration with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, which was both an epic spectacle of disappearance and devastating assault upon a liveable environment. Confronting this horror and asking why it still concerns us today, the two artworks in the chapel explore the subject through “Dreams of Total Annihilation”, and “In the Dust of New Mexico”.

Dreams of Total Annihilation

Annihilation begins in the minds of men. It also begins in the minds of men who wish to replace the power of God. “Now I become Death” the architect of the atomic bomb, Robert Oppenheimer famously declared. “the destroyer of worlds”. Annihilation is a dream of total destruction. Etymologically derived from the medieval Latin annihilatus, the word denotes a “reduction to nothingness” and shares an evident relationship to nihilism—stemming from the Latin nihil, the discursive realm of absolutely nothing. But what is the order of this nothingness with regard to its conscious destruction?

What is actually being vanquished when the aim of violence is to ultimately leave no trace? And how does this further expose the terrifying immensity of the void, which, in the process of carrying



out the dream of total annihilation, reveals fully the brutalities of the technocratic mind? What we can say is that in order to dream of nothing, we must be capable of dreaming of everything, to liberate the violence of movement so that there are no limits to what humanity can achieve in its push for collective suicide and its ability to reason itself back into the dust of the earth. The infinite possibility that everything under wounded skies can be destroyed, where matter and antimatter collide in full homicidal glory, where the tears of every violated body bleed from life all the colours of existence, to produce not just the death of material things but a total extinction event that forces time itself to crack and be swallowed by the vortex and all will be revealed as if nothing has ever happened.

In The Dust of New Mexico

New Mexico is home to a valley of death. A place where all faith is tested and evil often feared. A location that seems barren to sense of civilisation, yet where the most advanced scientific thinking conducted a terrifying experiment that had devastating consequences. We stand on grounds beneath an unforgiving sun, where a meteor is said to have arrived and caused the first major extinction event of prehistoric life. Within these scorched and isolated depths, the recurring motif of death is an ever present. Yet as the red dust swirls across these landscapes, so the memory of atrocity returns. Hiroshima and Nagasaki here are not just memories. The dust that was sent up into these tested skies also migrated across the world, so their contaminated particles land elsewhere and serve as a reminder to the disappeared of history. And still the tragedy continues. How many migrants make the journey North into these unforgiving deserts of La Jornada del Muerto to continually vanish without a trace? How many follow the journey of the dead man, where the missing is seldom found? In this valley of death named by the Conquistadores who ravaged indigenous Mexico, and where so many Native Americans were later mercilessly killed, Robert Oppenheimer also led the Trinity tests. These connections between the disappeared and the annihilated continue to haunt us. The dust of New Mexico is perhaps red because it’s where Eden is bleeding the most.

4. THE BURNING EMBERS OF HOPE

Location: South Transept

Having been affected in 2023 by a devastating fire at Underfall Yard, Bristol, Chantal Meza approached trustees with a very special offer of support; an original painting, inspired by the ongoing recovery of the historic boatyard. Her finished painting, ‘The burning embers of hope’, reflects the yard’s industrial heritage and the ongoing restoration process in the aftermath of the fire.

The inspiration for this work actually came about following a meeting on a summer’s afternoon, which Chantal had in the early stages of discussion for this exhibition at St Mary Redcliffe. As she walked back home along the harbourside, she was consumed by images of ecological destruction and disappearing worlds. And there, in Bristol, was a space, marked by the ravages of the elements brought about by the irresponsibility of a man. For this piece, Chantal also wanted the work to symbolise the timelessness of Underfall Yard, and the outpouring of support that it received in the aftermath of the fire. “This painting reflects the devastation of the fire”, Chantal explained, “but also the positivity and hopefulness that shone through during this dark time. After all, the colours of a rainbow are only visible on rainy days. Bristol is a very special place. I’ve been embraced by the community since moving here, and I’ve been able to give back to the city by creating this artwork.”

Sarah Murray, the Director of Underfall Yard Trust, said: “Chantal has brilliantly captured the hope and resilience that’s kept the yard on its feet since last year. We’re so grateful for her support, and for crafting something so beautiful to support us on the road to recovery.” Boat-builder and Underfall Yard tenant Joe de Tisi offered to craft a frame for the painting, made from reclaimed timber taken from one of the fire-damaged buildings. Joe said “Seeing Underfall Yard damaged by the fire was heartbreaking, not just for the loss of the historic shed and workshops but for the devastating effect on the people who make this place truly remarkable. This frame is made from timber salvaged from the shipwrights’ workshop where I spent many hours learning my craft. It honours the history, resilience, and the people who have shaped the yard into what it is today.”

The artwork has kindly been loaned by Underfall Yard to feature in this exhibition.