

## Enfleshed Word – Triptych - by Anne Grebby 2023



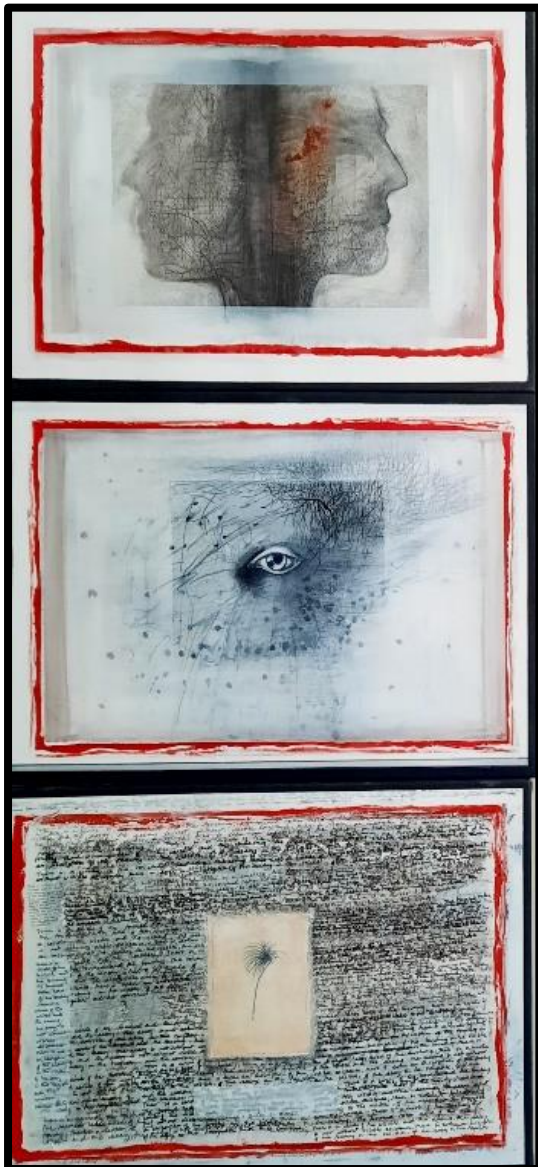
The Triptych, originally made and sited in the Chapel of Saint John the Baptist, Chichester Cathedral between January and April 2023, not only represents the baptism of Jesus, but also explores the invisible occurrences beneath the surface. Initially, I wanted to emphasise the human nature of Christ, recalling that the physical bond between the two men, which was evidenced when the embryonic John leapt in the womb of Elizabeth on his first encounter with the unborn Jesus. Here, at this pivotal moment of baptism, the water of the river Jordan surrounds them just as the amniotic fluid held them suspended, each in his embryonic state. As John cups his hands and pours the baptismal water onto Jesus' head the vertical cluster of directional paint lines touches on and holds the two together. The painting is divided in half creating a tension which will be broken when this connective instant ceases, the two men part, and each goes to his separate death.

Throughout the painting, this emphasis on tactility provokes a visceral response in the viewer. John's hands offer the water with great delicacy. Jesus receives in a calm, but nonetheless participatory way. Many viewers have remarked on the feeling of tenderness aroused by the depiction of Jesus receiving the gift of baptism from John. 'Touch' predominates throughout the work. The river touches Christ's immersed body and, He, who has no sin and therefore no need of baptism, purifies its waters.

Christ feels and hears the air move as a wing of the descending dove brushes against his cheek. The Holy Spirit can be sensed hidden in or beneath the heavily worked wax surfaces of the cloud. The interplay between weighty and light gestural marks, thick paint and thin glazes, the juxtaposition of opaque and transparent areas, precise figurative description and contrasting abstraction, definition and implication engage and carry the eye across and into the pictorial field of the canvas. None of the illustrative narrative devices complete themselves. The space behind John's hands simply *implies* that his body exists. Jesus' face looks almost photographic (and therefore suggests a contemporary context) but there's no edge to the represented image. The single dove's wing function as a vehicle of movement. The cloud extends beyond and is cut off by the canvas edge. The work is not intended to be contained within itself, rather it aims to open up connections and diverse experiences of

reality in us by prompting new depths and dimensions of thought. One heart suspended above John's hands beats for both men. Two hearts beat as one at the implications embedded in this moment. The abrasive relationship between the raw blood-red sky and the stark white clouds evokes the 'Ruagh' of God's voice. All these known, identifiable finite elements are elevated in the baptismal act. Place and time are consecrated through this experience of the holy, the point of contact made between the finite and the infinite.

The side panels, comprised of six canvases, are regarded as the margins, archival notational images, which record some of the thoughts underpinning the central image.



1. The Spirit in the blood can be read as either two heads or one, opened, book-like, to reveal parallel inner workings, (blood system, nervous system), echoing the shared heartbeat of the central painting. This presence in the life-giving blood of human beings indicates levels of inherent spiritual potentiality in each human being.
2. The Spirit in creativity opens us up to the depths of our individual state of being. Our perceptive faculties, relating to outer world impulses, transmit via the senses to the brain. Thus, powered by creativity, connecting to the individual or collective unconscious, they unlock as yet unexperienced levels of reality.
3. The Spirit in the seed promises regeneration. The seedling is temporarily held in a wax timeframe, surrounded by words, overwritten to the point of losing meaning.

*“There is a circle of the touched and the touching, the touched takes hold of the touching, there is a circle of the visible and the seeing, the seeing is not without visible existence, there is even an inscription of the touching in the visible, of the seeing in the tangible – and the converse.” Merleau Ponty*



4. The Spirit leaves the tomb. As we look down into an Italian tomb, the dust of the world seeps from the individual coffins. It is the beginning of mass resurrection. The molecular dust echoes the swarming mass of the previous text and re-affirming the circular movement of life and death.
5. Spirit in matter. The natural world, in this instance the cellular structures in coral, suggest universality. Trees and a directional line can be discerned in the ghostly landscape of the small frame below, where my own father's ashes were distributed.
6. Spirit in the world. A fragile world paired down until it appears to be embryonic. The earth, eroded, in every way, but still held in a sacred place, ready for restoration and rebirth.