



NOTES ON THE PAINTINGS

The following notes provide a background to Graham Lupp's fascination with religious buildings. They are intended to provide some idea of the complex mix of history, religious use and the architecture of these buildings.

Notre Dame, Paris, 2009

The cathedral of Notre Dame on the Île la Cité in Paris was built between 1163 and 1250 and stands on the site of two earlier Christian churches and an earlier two thousand year old Gallo-Roman temple to Jupiter. For a short time during the French Revolution it became the Cult of Reason and later the Cult of the Supreme Being with Lady Liberty replacing the Virgin Mary on a number of altars. The cathedral has over the centuries been modified and restored many times, probably most controversially in 1845 when Eugene Viollet-le-Duc, an expert in the gothic, was engaged to restore the building. His restorations of gothic buildings frequently combined historical fact with creative modification. Under his supervision, Notre Dame was not only cleaned and restored but also updated, gaining its distinctive third tower.

The Great Mosque at Cordoba, AD 784-987, 2010

The site on which the Great Mosque at Cordoba stands has long been a sacred space. Initially it was the site of a Roman Temple dedicated to Janus. In 600 AD a Visigoth cathedral dedicated to St Vincent of Saragossa was consecrated. In 784 AD construction of the Great Mosque commenced and continued for 200 years. In 1236 AD when Cordoba was captured from the Moors by King Ferdinand III of Castille it was converted without modification to a Christian place of worship and became the Cathedral of Cordoba - Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption. In the sixteenth century an impressive but unsympathetic architectural oddity, a Baroque choir was inserted into the mosque.

Ayasofya, Istanbul, 2010

The church of Ayasofya (Hagia Sophia) in Istanbul is a masterpiece of Byzantine architecture built for the Emperor Justinian by the architects Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus between 532 and 537 AD. It sits on the ruins of two earlier basilican churches. It was once home of the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople. In 1204 it was attacked by the



Crusaders who replaced the Patriarch with a Latin bishop which cemented the schism between the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic churches which had begun with the Great Schism of 1054 AD. Most of Hagia Sofia's riches were looted and scattered to churches in the West including St. Marks Basilica in Venice. It remained an Eastern Orthodox Church until 1453 AD when Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror seized Constantinople once again looted the church and converted it into a mosque. It remained a mosque until 1935 when the first Turkish President and founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, transformed the building into a secular museum.

Temple on the Ganges, Varanasi, 2010

Varanasi, sited on the banks of the Ganges River, is believed to be about 3,000 years old making it one of the oldest continuously occupied cities in the world. It is also the most sacred of all Hindu cities and is a major city of pilgrimage. Hindus have long believed that bathing in the Ganges or dying in the holy city of Varanasi circumvents reincarnation and hence provides a permanent place in the Swarg (Heaven). The Ghats (platforms) which line the river are the site of public bathing and also where corpses are cremated before they are pushed into the holy river. It is interesting how Hindu places of worship are integrated into the architectural fabric of Indian cities, unlike other faiths where religious buildings are separated by auxiliary buildings or placed in associated grounds.

Kom Ombo, Egypt, 2010

The Temple of Kom Ombo lies on the banks of the Nile, 65 kilometres south of Edfu. The temple was started by Ptolemy IV in 221 BC which makes it relatively late in Egyptian history. The temple is unusual in that it is dedicated to two deities, the Crocodile God, Sobek and Haroeris, or Horus the Elder (the Healer). Shown in the painting is the Hypostyle Hall, concealing the twin sanctuaries, that of Sobek on the right. The massive columns, which symbolically support the sky, also symbolise life-giving water as reflected in the rich surrounding marshland along the Nile.

Herbecourt cemetery, The Somme, 2010

The town of Herbecourt lies in the Somme and is surrounded by a number of British and

Australian war graves from the First World War. Lupp has interestingly chosen not to record these memorials to national sacrifice in "the war to end all wars" but to paint the small local cemetery at Herbecourt with its moss covered family mausoleums. In these relatively modest buildings the magnificence of a cathedral gives way to something more personal in scale. In these mausoleums families seek to perpetuate the memory of their grandparents, parents and children as well as expressing in bricks and mortar their personal belief in the hereafter.

Monk as a Gargoyle, San Juan de los Reyes, Toledo, 2010

Founded by King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile to commemorate their triumph over the Portuguese in 1476 AD, the Monastery of San Juan de los Reyes in Toledo was started in 1476 AD with plans by the architect, Juan Guas. The monastery complex was finished in 1504 AD and dedicated to St. John the Evangelist and used from the beginning by Franciscan friars. In 1809 the monastery was severely damaged by Napoleon's troops when they occupied Toledo and was abandoned in 1835. Restoration commenced in 1883 and was completed only in 1967. In 1954 the monastery was once again entrusted to the Franciscans. This drawing of the same gargoyle from three different angles, represents a Franciscan monk leaning in permanent penance over the balustrade, somewhat comically he also acts as a drain pipe when it rains.



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GRAHAM LUPP: BUILDING FAITH
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For more information about Graham Lupp and his work visit: www.grahamlupp.com.au

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Left: Graham Lupp sketching in the Ribat, Sousse, Tunisia, March 2008. Photo: Mona Lupp. Above: Graham Lupp Notre Dame, Paris 2009, acrylic on canvas, 190 x 190cm. Cover: Graham Lupp Kom Ombo, Egypt 2010, acrylic on canvas, 145 x 145cm

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GRAHAM LUPP: BUILDING FAITH

*And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen?*

*And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?*

*Bring me my Bow of burning gold;
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire.*

*I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green & pleasant Land*

William Blake from the *Preface to Milton, A Poem in Two Books, 1804-1808*

It has been eleven years since Graham Lupp has had a major exhibition at Bathurst Regional Art Gallery. The last time was in 1999 when BRAG presented Lupp's mid-career survey *Persistent Memories*.

In 2010 BRAG presents *Building Faith* Lupp's exhibition of religious architecture from around the world. *Building Faith* is Lupp's fiftieth solo exhibition in a long career, a remarkable achievement.

Lupp was born in 1946 in Bathurst and in 1969 graduated with a degree in Architecture from the University of NSW. From 1972 to 1977 he lived in London where he undertook study in Fine Arts at both a graduate level (Hornsey College of Art) and a post graduate level (Chelsea School of Art). In 1978 he returned to Australia to teach art history, visual art and photography at Bathurst's Mitchell College of Advanced Education and in 1984 retired from teaching to devote himself to full time painting and travelling the world.

In 2009 Lupp won the \$35,000 Country Energy Art Prize, Australia's richest prize for landscape painting with his work *Hen and Chicken Lane*.

The fifty plus works in *Building Faith* is Lupp's personal response as an artist to religious architecture and as such it purports to be neither comprehensive nor academic. The works span:

- four continents including Africa, Europe, Asia and Australia
- thirteen countries including Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, France, England, Italy, Malta, Spain, Russia, Greece, Turkey, India, Australia and

- nine faiths including Coptic, Eastern Orthodox, Ancient Egyptian, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Islam, Hindu, Jain and Jewish.

Building Faith embraces buildings in a wide variety of architectural styles including Gothic, Islamic, Ancient Egyptian, Romanesque and Baroque.

The Greek poet Constantine P. Cavafy in his beautifully understated poem of 1912 *In Church* provides a suitable introduction for Lupp's *Building Faith*:

*I love the church: its labara,
its silver vessels, its candleholders,
the lights, the ikons, the pulpit.*

*Whenever I go there,
into a church of the Greeks,
with its aroma of incense,
its liturgical chanting and harmony,
the majestic presence of the priests,
dazzling in their ornate vestments,
the solemn rhythm of their gestures-
my thoughts turn to the great glories
of our race,
to the splendour of our Byzantine heritage.*

The exhibition reflects Lupp's mastery of painting and drawing techniques, his abiding interest in travel, and his profound love of history and architecture.

From Lupp's early training, the practice of architecture has been a pervading interest not only in his depiction of buildings but also in his carefully structured compositions. His subject matter is invariably realist, viewed directly with little use of perspective. This approach coupled with his deliberate omission of the human figure gives his work a detached stillness and avoids the inherent sentimentality usually associated with the picturesque landscape.

Lupp's realist approach to his subject matter reflects a number of influences. The first is photo realist artists such as Richard Estes (born 1936) and Ralph Goings (born 1928) whose work he encountered in London in the 1970s.

However more importantly and most surprisingly is the influence of artists working in northern Europe in the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Lupp cites the artists Jan van Eyck (c1394 – c1441), Rogier van der Weyden (1399/1400 - 1464) and Hans Memling (c1430 – 1494) as being influential in his development. Of importance in this regard are two specific works directly experienced by Lupp, van Eyck's

Adoration of the Holy Lamb 1432 (Ghent Altarpiece) in the Saint Bravo Cathedral, Ghent and van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross* c1435-38 in the Prado Museum, Madrid. These works at the time of their creation represented a distinct break with the past. Gone is the idealisation of mediaeval art in its place a new concept in which precedence is given to an exacting observation of nature.

Lupp is also drawn to realist artists working in the nineteenth century in northern Europe. These realists famously led by Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) sought to present the simplicity of human endeavour and the essential truth of the human condition. They strenuously avoided the sentimental story telling prevalent in much of nineteenth century "Victorian" painting. For this the work of the realists was often decried as ugly.

Courbet's influence was wide ranging and included the German artist Wilhelm Leibl (1844-1900) and much later the American realist painter Edward Hopper (1882-1967). Both Leibl and Hopper are held in high esteem by Lupp for their compositional skills and their use of stillness to create states of emotional being.

Both the nineteenth century realists and the photo realists of the 1970s used photography extensively as an important tool in the construction of their work. There is substantial documentation of how the French realist artist Pascal-Adolphe-Jean Dagnan- Bouveret (1852-1929) used photography in the construction of his works e.g., *Bretannes au Pardon* 1887'.

Similarly Lupp works his paintings up from photographic images manipulating them to provide maximum emotional impact. The advent of digital photography has opened up a whole range of creative applications and solutions to what had been with film photography a largely mechanical process.

However the use of photography is a tool and not an end in itself. Lupp's paintings are not slavish copies of photographic reality, but an obsessive search for the defining essence of his subject.

In the act of painting Lupp thoroughly explores his subject often over weeks and months slowing building up the surface of his paintings through complex and minute brush strokes. It is through this painstaking labour intensive process



Graham Lupp *Temple on the Ganges, Varanasi* 2010, pastel on museumboard, 69 x 48cm



Graham Lupp *Monk as a Gargoyle, San Juan de los Reyes, Toledo* 2010, compressed charcoal on museumboard, 25 x 35cm

by which Lupp becomes imbued with the essential nature of his subject matter.

Lupp's paintings clearly reflect his affinity with Hyperrealism however when drawing or working in his favourite medium, pastel, his work often becomes looser and more expressive (see the drawing *Monk as a Gargoyle, San Juan de los Reyes, Toledo* 2010 and the pastel *Temple on the Ganges, Varanasi* 2010).

Lupp's work celebrates well known world monuments unlike the photo realists whose subject matter explores the surfaces varieties of the often banal and the anonymous e.g., aluminium caravans (Ralph Goings's *Airstream* 1970) or public telephone booths (Richard Estes' *Telephone Booths* 1968) or the nineteenth century realists whose work explores humble human existence e.g., workers stripping the veneer from a timber floor (Gustave Caillebotte's *The Floor Scrapers* 1875) or women praying in a church (Wilhelm Leibl's *Three Women in a Church* 1882).

By painting famous and immediately recognisable buildings artists can run the risk of creating paintings that are merely picture postcards. Lupp triumphantly circumvents this pitfall by using a series of formal devices: by

increasing the scale of the work; by viewing the building square-on with little use of perspective; and by presenting the building from a less well known angle (see the gouache *Ayasofya* 2010).

Lupp works easily across all media moving with expertise between oils, gouache, acrylics, watercolours and pastels. When drawing he prefers compressed charcoal or coloured pencils. While travelling he sketches in pen and ink and watercolour. *Building Faith* includes examples of his expertise across all these mediums. The earliest work in this exhibition dates from 1993 while most works were specially created for this exhibition in 2009 and 2010.

Lupp defines himself as a spiritual rather than a religious person. He has a strong belief that there is an overriding creative force but it is a force not allied to any particular faith.

At an earlier time Lupp wrote: *My series called the Meldings, for example, was triggered by a great deal of travelling in the 1990s. I was reminded of the differences between our European culture and that of Islam, with its wonders of art, architecture and mathematics and how both of these differ from the unfathomable mysteries of the Indian subcontinent.*

This fascination with different cultures and by extension with the religious architecture associated with them continues in *Building Faith*. Lupp is clearly drawn to the skill and passionate faith of the master craftsmen and in most cases unknown architects who designed and constructed these monumental religious buildings be they mosques, cathedrals or temples in a pre-industrial revolutionary time.

Lupp says of his work: *As a painter I am continually drawn to the world's art to experience its power. To marvel at the absolute perfection of the Taj Mahal for example, or to feel the resolute, stoic confidence in Rembrandt's self portrait in Kenwood House, or to experience again the eerie, eternal stillness of Michelangelo's Medici Tombs in Florence.....these and other experiences are the essential forces that drive me to create my work.*

The exhibition *Building Faith* arose out of a conversation between Lupp and Richard Perram, Director Bathurst Regional Art Gallery about the relationship between buildings of faith and the religions that construct them as eternal places of worship to a supreme being.

Ezra Pound in his poem *Envoi* (1919) hints at the impossibility of such an endeavour:

*....I would bid them live
As roses might, in magic amber laid,
Red overwrought with orange and all made
One substance and one colour
Braving time.*

The concept of a faith is central to religion. It is that belief in an eternal supreme being that is neither based on logical proof nor material evidence, but on trust.

Faiths are largely preserved in two ways, by their architecture and through their religious writings, be they Bible, Koran or other religious tract. Belief systems and religious tracts may pass from memory but the physical form of the faith as described through the symbolism of its architecture often remains as the only record.

Lupp says: *I believe that religious architecture, from all parts of the globe, from the gothic cathedrals of Europe and Britain, the temples of Egypt, Greece and Italy, and the marvels of Islamic culture such as found in the Great Mosque of Cordoba, represent the pinnacle of human creativity.*

Lupp continues to be drawn to painting religious buildings in the belief that he can pay homage to the skill of the master craftsmen and architects who gave tangible form to religious faith.

Building Faith celebrates religious architecture as human creativity, as well it celebrates the work of Graham Lupp a remarkable artist at the peak of his creativity.

The world is scattered with the remains of deserted religious buildings erected to eternally honour a civilisation's supreme being e.g., Stonehenge in England (around 2500 BC), Kom Ombo in Egypt (180 BC), Teotihuacan in Mexico (200 BC to 8th Century AD) and the ancient Khmer monuments in the Angkor region (late 9th century AD to 1431 AD) including Angkor Wat (1200 AD).

Many histories, guide books, movies, artworks and musical compositions have been inspired by these deserted sites, their buildings of worship and their long disappeared civilisations.

Our fascination with the histories and religions of past civilisations is our fascination with how we attempt to create in our lifetime memorials for all eternity while fully cognisant of our own mortality.



Graham Lupp *Ayasofya, Istanbul* 2010, gouache on museumboard, 35 x 25cm

Percy Bysshe Shelley in his poem of 1818 *Ozymandias* sums up this dilemma:

*I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

Richard Perram
Director, Bathurst Regional Art Gallery
November 2010