

Apocalypse: The Tapestry of Light; History into Futures; Designs and Light Weavings

Irene Barberis

The iconography of 'Last Days' has spanned the ages, from the newly debated beginnings of Christian Art found on the dank, dark walls of the Roman Catacombs, to the mega fast visuals of the latest 21st Century, end of the world cinematographic spectaculars.

In most cases, the movies for the 14th century person were the radiantly colored stained glass windows of the local churches and cathedrals, which were located centrally in medieval towns and cities. Here the great cycles of Biblical narratives shone out and onto the persons below, encapsulating the Apocalyptic idea of the 'New Jerusalem', the heavenly city that would come down to earth from the skies above, which shone as a diamond, and offered protection against enemies intimate and vast; it was a sanctified place owned "by God". The windows depicted many books of the Bible, and in nearly all cases had at least one image of the 'Book of Revelation', or St John's Apocalypse as it is known more commonly today. The populace would come in, wonder and 'read' the windows in light; great beasts with seven heads and horns, and angelic beings from another time and space, natural disasters and great resurrections of the ones dressed in white, heavenly scenes amidst chaotic disasters, images of kings eaten alive by the carrions of the earth - in these representations politics were alive and booming.

The turn of centuries and indeed millennia generated many representations of the Apocalypse. Not only were the fin de siècle images seen in the windows of Medieval Europe, St John's Apocalypse was found in a multitude of visual forms; illuminated manuscripts, prints, paintings, woodcuts, wall frescoes, mosaics and tapestries. The production of illuminated manuscripts from the monasteries and scriptoriums, ordered by the aristocracy, were, in the fourteenth century, starting to become available to the working classes who relished the new proximity of the written word and accompanying illustrations. Many illuminations of the Apocalypse were made during this time and one of these small Anglo-French manuscripts became the exemplar for the French masterpiece known as the "Tapisseries de l'Apocalypse", a remarkable tapestry spanning 140 meters in length by 6 meters in height. Not only is this a masterpiece in the art of weaving, it is one of the best examples of the transposition of the miniature into the monumental.

The 'Angers Tapestry' is a series of six tapestries with 84 sequential scenes from the Book of the Apocalypse. Louis 1 of France, Duke of Anjou borrowed an illuminated manuscript from his brother, Charles V's library and ordered a tapestry to be made from it. History tells us that the artist who designed and made the cartoons for the work was Jean Boudolf or Jean Bondol, the court painter of Charles V around 1377-1379, and that the tapestry itself was made in the Paris workshops of Nicolas Bataille and Robert Poincon. From its creation its existence caused fascination and astonishment; 'value, beauty and nobility' sounded from the

fourteenth century, and the fifteenth and sixteenth century still bode well for it, until 1643 when it was cut in half for exhibition purposes, and then in 1782 it was put up for sale. With no buyer it was stored and eventually it was used to protect orange trees in the Abbey of St Serge. It continued to be a forgotten treasure until it was resurrected in 1848, and after restoration became recognized again in the early twentieth century. In 1954 it was returned to its original home, complete with a new gallery to house it. Now, seven centuries later, it hangs in the Chateau Angers as one of the world's artistic masterworks.

The current site of the Apocalypse Tapestry relates to the 'sacred space' of the cathedrals. One is hushed and literally taken aback when entering the darkened space, for before one is an overwhelming, panoramic, medieval depiction of the end of the world.

The word *Apokalypsis* is a Greek word meaning 'uncovering' or 'unveiling'. The first words in the Book of the Apocalypse are self descriptive, declaring that the book is the Revelation or Apocalypse of Jesus Christ; it is the complete unveiling of Jesus Christ, thus the common understanding of the Apocalypse as the catastrophic end of the world is only a partial view of the text. Much of the book is filled with heavenly beings trafficking from the world unseen into the realm of terra firma, loud sounds and voices, deep silence, judgments, savings and ultimately the ushering in of a new time where eternity overrides the parameters of our science and life. It is a visual feast; a reflective word in a current fractured, developing global world.

'Globalism' is central to the Apocalypse. 'The whole world' is a phrase continually found in the text In this global context one third of the world's rivers turn to blood, there are wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, mighty waves which make men faint, a third of earths population dies, the sun shines seven times in one day, all the green grass is burnt off the earth, the seas and their creatures die...

So with this in mind, I continue my work into the futures of the historical forms and iconographies of the Apocalypse in Western Art: In this project, the exemplar for the new work 'The Apocalypse in Light', is the Angers Tapestry.

Street culture and the art of its reading in contemporary times, mirrors medieval reading of the windows and tapestries. Everywhere in every city posters are hung on walls, on buildings, off fences, and down alleyways. In Melbourne, there is a fine array of continually changing designs alerting one to the latest musicians and bands playing around town.

In order to make the designs for the 'Tapestry of Light', I went to 'Rock Posters' the hub of street and rock poster production in Melbourne. Here they would turn the hand-worked and computer generated, altered designs of the figurations in the Anger Tapestry, into a poster format and sensibility. Hung as a large coloured grid, the 150cm x 100 cm printed posters revisit my panel paintings, but also replicate the potential scale of the new tapestries, which are 'woven in light'. During the first trials of light weavings, the consensus was that the images could be embroidered or woven into the colored light fabric in black

thread, the figurations would thus appear as a positive form during the daylight and a negative line at night. The idea of black images on highly coloured backgrounds resonated accordingly with the printing process. Originally, densely fabricated pvc meshes were used to make screens for the designs, however the images coming from these were suited to the paintings which will be exhibited after these current prints, so the many screens made for this set of designs are constructed from the actual screens on which the rock posters of Melbourne are made.

I have taken highly fluorescent, punctured PVC to make collages for potential weaving designs. The patterns of the perforations are subtly overlaid to make floral and geometric designs which often mimic the medieval backgrounds moving between the Apocalypse narratives - tiny flowers, diamonds and squares. I use this form of PVC in my work not only because of its highly pigmented pink, referencing contemporary manufacturing with female associations, but for its quality of emitting light when it is distressed. Each puncture radiates light.

Woven Light is seen in the fluorescing threads used in the small piece of Apocalypse tapestry textile and the hanging light work of luminescent threads woven at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in Melbourne. Ultra textile technology is also informing this project through Professor David Manwarring and his team, who are producing innovative scientific textiles for the global market.

The art of the Apocalypse and the history of its ideas are relevant today, and are a prime example of 'transdisciplinary' art in Western Culture.

* Barberis

The project on exhibit at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in Melbourne, 2009, engages with the history, technologies and iconography of these marvelous Medieval tapestries. Dr Irene Barberis is well known for her work on the Apocalypse, a focus for over twenty years, forming the basis of her Ph.D., which investigated the "Abstract and Figurative Elements of the Apocalypse and its Representations". In April 2009 she exhibited her ongoing visual research on the Apocalypse in *Apocalypse, Room of Light*, at the RMIT School of Art Gallery. There her light forms carved the darkened spaces, hovering and sweeping as hanging light drawings, to reference the Medieval principles of colour and light. A small panel of woven light brought the viewer into close encounter with her subsequent research for *History into Futures* and the technological innovations with new materials.

Gaining funding support from the RMIT Design Research Institute has enabled Barberis to extend her research into these new arenas and to extend into the second phase of her work with Victorian Tapestry Workshop. The Design Research Institute supports projects that are transdisciplinary and collaborative. In this case the crossing of the disciplines comes with, Dr Irene Barberis, an artist and Apocalypse scholar, known for her innovative approaches to the Apocalypse, in painting, drawing, installation and new media and in working with a philosopher/historian, Professor Elizabeth Grierson, known for her research and

publications in the politics and philosophy of art and aesthetics, and a scientific investigator in molecular technology, Professor David Mainwaring, who has pioneered technological innovations and computer-based design protocols for high value sports garments for elite international competition.

The broader project, of designs and light weavings, involves further investigations into technological innovations in PVC and meshes, electroluminescents, fibre optics and digital technologies in textiles and materials to reference the Medieval tapestries' woven cloth, and further historical and iconographic analysis. Throughout the project Barberis approaches the subject matter of the Apocalypse with a passionate commitment to its living place in historical and contemporary life. Her creative aim is to bring the scale and potential of the Tapestries of the Apocalypse into an aesthetic relation with our quotidian lives in a global age where faith, belief, the Alpha and the Omega are so easily overlooked in the economies of globalisation with their fast transfers of capital, finance and information. This project reinscribes the accumulation of centuries of symbolic significance in apocalyptic thinking as an uncovering, disclosing and revealing. Through this work we may glimpse a way of thinking through the ends to think the beginnings, through histories into futures as a way of being in a technological age.

*Grierson

Science is spectral analysis [while] Art is light, wrote Karl Kraus a foremost German language satirist from last century. Having researched the science underlying functional nano-particles, that is, small particles less than 100 nm or one ten thousandth of a millimeter and able to demonstrate specific functions such as magnetic and optical properties, we embarked upon the study of phosphorescent nano-particles and particularly those able to provide long persistent after-glow. Since many of our products found applications when incorporated into plastics or polymers forming microdevices and sensors, incorporation of these fascinating fluorescent particles led us initially to consider new safety and security products not needing external power supply. Achieving further useful and higher value products required new synthesis techniques to remove the need for grinding and its deleterious effects. Over the last three years, we have been developing high brightness and long persistence phosphors capable of photoluminescence in the green and blue visible ranges for up to 48 hours.

Photoluminescence of these tiny particles occurs by the absorption of daylight's photons which promote electrons in the outer shells of atoms such as Europium (Eu) up into excited states. Such Eu ions and their co-dopant ions Dysprosium (Dy) need to be held in specific geometrical environments which are supplied by a spinel strontium aluminate host matrix having a tridymite structure belonging to the quartz family. Electron transitioning back down from the excited states are held up by the Dy ions that act as storage traps providing a long after-glow up to two days. Since such transitions are influenced by the electronic

environment, various emission colours can be produced in a controlled way. A high degree of phase purity is required in the crystal host to achieve high luminescence and long persistence times.

Increasing interest in these new materials has expanded their potential application widely from our original concepts of improved safety and security markings and signage, especially since we have demonstrated their ability to be incorporated into spun polymer yarns. This has opened opportunities in large architectural infrastructure such as flexible coverings for public spaces like cafes and amphitheatres. But it is in the visual arts and particularly in tapestries where the greatest opportunity lies to explore the transformational aspects of photoluminescence. Here, brief exposure to daylight reveals one image while in darkness the image or its emphasis is revealed transformed. Such transitions and transformations recollect Paul Cezanne's commentary that Art is, first of all, optical. That's what the material of our art is: in what our eyes think.

* Manwarring

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