Stanley Spencer Gallery

Everywhere is Heaven: Stanley Spencer & Roger Wagner

9th November 2023 – 24th March 2024.

This document is available in other formats.

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The Gallery

You are standing in the Gallery. You may hear sounds reverberating around you. This is because it is primarily a single room with a wooden floor. It was originally a small Methodist Church with rafters holding up the roof and no ceiling. The narrow church windows are still in the wall to your left as you enter the Gallery. The Gallery is about the size of an empty double-decker bus. You may hear the lift in the background taking visitors who are unable to use stairs to a mezzanine floor. You may also hear the automatic entrance doors to the Gallery opening and closing. There are narrow benches in the middle of the Gallery so please take care as you move around the Exhibition. The stairs have ribbed edges, light blue paint between the metal strips and are illuminated by side lights. There are no carpeted areas.

Stanley's mother was a key member of the Church congregation and Stanley would attend the Church as a boy and is his 'formal' spiritual home but no doubt bible reading at home also played a part. His father was the Organist at Hedsnor Church which is nearby.

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Introduction to Exhibition: Amanda Bradley Petitgas (Curator)

Extract from catalogue

This exhibition is the first collaboration with a contemporary artist at the Stanley Spencer Gallery. The cycle of artistic inspiration is an important aspect in the study of art and history, helping us to understand how forms and symbols are used and understood through time. Just as Spencer's own work was informed by Early Renaissance Italian 'Primitives' like Giotto and Masaccio, Roger Wagner's works, in turn, echo Spencer's visionary canvases. The Gallery is honoured to work with Roger, and explore how Spencer's artistic legacy is still relevant today.

Both artists have forged a unique artistic identity, their work determinedly figurative amongst a sea of abstraction and installations. In Spencer's time, the artist and critic, Roger Fry, led the charge against photographic realism, representational work being considered by some as inward, provincial, elegiac, or anti-modern. While Bloomsbury artists strove to convey 'significant form' and many of Spencer's Slade contemporaries tended to shy away from their classical training, Spencer did not stray from his figurative and naturalistic vision. Equally, Roger

Wagner has found an eloquent and individual voice, at a time when artistic practice has often shunned the brush and canvas and striven to shock rather than console or elevate. For both artists, the human form, expressed through the medium of paint (each to very different effect) has best served them to express the complexity of the human condition.

There is a fragility in Spencer's work, determined in part by two seismic life events: his service in the Great War; and his tragic divorce from his first wife Hilda Carline (to whom he remained devoted for the rest of his life), followed by a disastrous second marriage to Patricia Preece in 1937. His artistic reaction to the horrors he encountered on the Macedonian front found expression in his monumental canvases he painted for Sandham Memorial Chapel (1927-1932), which show a spirit of reconciliation, rather than the despair of his contemporaries. He was deeply influenced by St. Augustine's *Confessions* (a copy of which had been given to him by Desmond Chute in Beaufort Military Hospital), which taught him to find God and solace in everyday tasks and routine – 'ever busy…. yet ever at rest.' On his return from war in December 1918 he was shocked to find 'how little my Faith has stood in my stead to help me.' Thereafter the concept of a personal God became complicated: for him the joy of religion and God was to be

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found in biblical narrative and the everyday things that he loved. What was formerly a conventional Christian belief became suffused with Eastern religious and philosophical thought. The *Christ in the Wilderness* series, painted in 1938, mirrored his own emotional exile and breakdown following his divorce. In spite of his avowed reticence about Christianity, he stated that he 'loved it all because it was God and me all the time.' In typically Spencer fashion he merged in these pictures Christian iconography with that of Hindu and Buddhist temple sculpture (he had bought a book on this subject in Munich in 1922).

When Spencer contributed to *Sermons by Artists*, a book published in 1934 in which artists wrote about a selected piece of Holy Scripture, he chose the verse 'He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love (I John 4.8). He wrote about the fusion of sacred and profane love:

"The love of God includes all our instincts and desires. Secular love gets very little respect from those who should be its champions; they don't mind a 'little bit' of it now and again and on bank holidays or at cinemas…"

And also the symbiosis of art and faith, specifically the Bible:

"After steeping myself in the Bible I began to realise certain things equally inspiring to love, outside the Bible.

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This was the point when the holiness of things began to strike me, the first of the thousands of celebrations of matrimony that were to take place between me and everything else…. I became extremely busy, first at the front door and then at the side and back entrance of the Kingdom of Heaven, a place long familiar to me, but not in this new and significant way. I had no special feelings for art, but art seemed the only thing which revealed Heaven."

Wagner's art similarly 'reveals Heaven'. His divine happenings often take place in Suffolk where he holidayed as a child, or in Oxford, where he studied and now lives. In this respect he follows the tradition of Spencer and also Samuel Palmer, whose *loci amoeni* (idealised places) – Cookham and Shoreham respectively – inspired and became the subject of their artistic vision. Unlike Spencer – and perhaps fortuitously for Wagner– his works do not draw upon such autobiographical complexity. His deeply Christian paintings are founded on iconographical orthodoxy, each one a balanced expression of quiet beauty and accessible humanity – 'heaven in ordinary', to cite George Herbert, a poet who is key to Roger's vision.

Poetry is indeed key to Wagner's artistic outlook as a whole, and to draw another art historical analogy, he works in the tradition of the visionary poet and artist, William Blake. As a published poet he uses both word and image

to explore the spiritual state of humanity. Spencer's written output was huge, and often took the form of vast tracts of Joycean prose, and although at times contradictory, these writings help us understand some of his more 'difficult' pictures. He was certainly no poet, but his life and work were informed by his deep love and understanding of the metaphysical poets. It has been argued that both Spencer and Wagner's visionary innocence and the ability to find mysticism in the natural world echoed that found in the work of the seventeenth century poet and theologian, Thomas Traherne. However, it was John Donne, who influenced Spencer's whole artistic life (even though he admitted that he had understood 'only a little of it'). His representation of biblical events on earth was in part due to Donne (even it did stem from theological misunderstanding); the title of this exhibition references Spencer's words about his painting *John Donne arriving in Heaven,* and his description of the four figures facing in all directions because 'everywhere is heaven so to speak'.

And thus it is for Wagner's very human, sympathetic, biblical figures who inhabit our own modern world; we find Peter walking on the water in front of Battersea Power station, or Abraham quietly contemplative in front of Sizewell A nuclear power station. These looming industrial edifices in Roger's work serve to illustrate the fallacies of

modern-day life, but on looking closely we understand the positive message in his paintings, something which is not always immediately obvious. *The Harvest is the end of the World and the Reapers are Angels* is not a traditional Last Judgement, filled with terror, but a quiet scene of reconciliation, similar in spirit to Spencer's *Resurrection of the Soldiers* (Sandham Memorial chapel), where the soldiers hand each other crosses in quiet acceptance. For both artists, their work is a celebration of love, mystery and courage. It is also about humanity, and a coming to terms with the human condition, which serves to console us as the viewer. Roger said of his work:

'I have no explanation for why things happen; but I do celebrate trust. There are explanations. It is not meaningless chaos that confronts us every day'.

A tonic indeed for the existential complexities of our modern day lives.

(Extract from Catalogue)

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A note from the Artist , Roger Wagner

In 1980, as a student at the Royal Academy, I remember coming up from the studios to see the great Stanley Spencer retrospective in the galleries above. From the moment I went into the exhibition my feelings were deeply conflicted. Here was an artist who seemed to be doing exactly what I wanted to do, yet who appeared (to my student self) to be going about it in exactly the wrong way.

There were some pictures- *John Donne appearing in Heaven, The Last Supper* (both in this exhibition) to which I immediately responded; and it was from these (rather than an obvious masterpiece like the *Cookham Resurrection*) that I got the first hint of the importance that Spencer would later come to have for me. The almost playful way in which he was able to bring medieval religious imagery into contemporary Cookham, seemed, I felt, to have succeeded because they were connected to an experience so deep as to be impossible otherwise to articulate.

What was this experience?

In a haunting marginal note to *The Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge describes the mariner as yearning towards the stars 'that still sojourn and still move onward, and everywhere the blue sky belongs to them and is their appointed rest, and their native country and their own

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natural home'. For the 17th century poet Thomas Traherne, the ownership of the sky, which Coleridge attributes to the stars, was a part of his own childhood experience of Hereford. Beginning with the sense that 'The Streets were mine, the Temple was mine', he ascended to the conviction that 'The Skies were mine, and so were the Sun and Moon and Stars, and all the World was mine'.

'You never Enjoy the World aright', he says, 'till the Sea itself floweth in your Veins, till you are Clothed with the Heavens and Crowned with the Stars: and perceiv your self to be the Sole Heir of the World: and more then so, becaus Men are in it who are every one Sole Heirs as well as you'.

The feeling that some aspect of the world, has become a kind of spiritual possession seems to be often associated with a particular childhood locality.

For Spencer that locality was Cookham. For me it is closely linked with a small stretch of landscape on one side of a road that winds along roughly parallel to the broadest stretch of the Alde between the Maltings at Snape and Iken church. As a boy I remember being put down here next to a rolling field of wheat on a late summer's afternoon, holding an as yet unused box of oil paints. When I was picked up in the early evening, I was clutching

my first attempt to paint a single tree that stood in the centre of that field. The picture had entirely failed to capture any aspect of the intensity of beauty that I had been staring at for the past two hours, but that failure became a driving motivation to do better. My repeated attempts to do so (one of which is the setting of *The Harvest* in this exhibition) have transformed that small area of landscape into something not unlike the vocabulary of a personal language.

It was though the summer when giant electric pylons first appeared, striding across the Suffolk wheat fields towards the new Sizewell nuclear reactor, that the possibility of another kind of imagery appeared on the horizon of my mind.

For Spencer his exile from Cookham and the sufferings he witnessed in the war could only be redeemed in his series of great resurrection paintings (a study for one of which is the last picture in this exhibition). For me the intrusion of industrial technology into the world has provided imagery for all that challenges our humanity; but also for the possibility of a strange redeeming beauty.

In *Sacred Allegory: Apocolypse* for instance, the most recent work in this exhibition, the chimneys of a steelworks stand in for the biblical Babylon 'whose cargo

is …the bodies and souls of men', while its mirrored reflection in the crystal sea shows the shining towers of the new Jerusalem.

What unites us in the end is perhaps a quest for wholeness.

While the Sandham chapel was the nearest Spencer came to realising his 'church house' project, this museum (in the building where he worshipped as a child) is a testimony of his ambition towards an art that makes sense of the whole of life. Like Spencer (and perhaps for some of the same reasons) very little of my work has ended up in churches. My window at St Mary's Iffley is an exception; and exhibiting here the working drawing for that window (which combines imagery of the crucifixion and the resurrection) is perhaps a witness to a similar aim: the idea of an art that seeks to make sense of the whole of life by pointing beyond itself.

Roger Wagner (Extract from Catalogue)

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Why juxtapose these painters? Anthony Mould

Extract from Catalogue for Exhibition

Roger Wagner's early painting was first brought to my attention when, as a recently graduated Royal Academy student in 1983, he brought to me a small group of empty landscape studies, with a view to include in a possible exhibition. Held modestly in a battered folio, I remember the moment well, struck as I was by the quiet energy of the design of the pen and watercolour studies that could somehow eerily suggest the unseen presence of a unicorn beyond the horizon. Forty years on, his iconography has evolved quite dramatically, but in some senses has changed not at all, and inherent links with work by key artistic predecessors, including Stanley Spencer, are now becoming more apparent. What Wagner perhaps shares with Spencer is a very clear grasp of the pictorial potential of the mystical; both in their own remarkable and distinctive ways have sought, and to quote Wagner here himself 'to create an art that seeks to make sense of the whole of life by pointing beyond itself'. The new exhibition here will perhaps reveal this.

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EXHIBITION

1. Stanley Spencer, John Donne arriving in Heaven

1911, oil on canvas, 37 x 40.5 cm.

John Donne's metaphysical poetry was much loved by Stanley Spencer. Here he shows the poet on Widbrook Common, Cookham, a space which here represents Paradise. Spencer felt that 'everywhere is heaven so to speak', and so Donne is shown looking at four praying figures who face the points of the compass.

2. Roger Wagner, Ash Wednesday

1982, oil on canvas, 48.5 x 58.5 cm.

Spencer's John Donne was painted when the artist was a student at the Slade, and this too is a student work, painted while Wagner was studying at the Royal Academy. Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent for Christians, a time of devotion and repentance. This painting was inspired by words from T.S. Eliot's poem, Ash Wednesday, which was written at the time of the poet's conversion to Christianity.

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Visual description for Ash Wednesday written by Pauline Elliot

Ash Wednesday **is an oil painting which Roger Wagner completed in 1982 while he was a student at the Royal Academy of Arts in London.**

It's quite a small painting. About the size of a cooker hob with four rings. It's set in an ornate gilt frame.

The painting illustrates two well-known lines from a poem called *'Ash Wednesday'* which TS Eliot wrote in 1930. At the beginning of an extended metaphor the poet writes:

'Lady, three white leopards

Sat under a juniper-tree in the cool of the day …'

Eliot had converted to the Anglican church in 1927 and the poem is about his spiritual journey at that time. He imagines that the leopards have eaten his body leaving only his inedible bones, laid bare as a symbol of his soul.

The picture feels surreal. It's macabre and unsettling. The thin, almost translucent, layers of paint enhance the image's mysterious, mystical air.

A sparse, desert landscape of pale pink sand fills the bottom third of the canvas. A few stunted bushes manage

to survive the harsh conditions. The ground slopes up on the right where there's one wall of a ruined grey-stone building and a broken pillar indented with parallel vertical grooves. A segment of the collapsed pillar lies on its side in the centre of the picture. It looks as if it's about to roll off a cliff. Above the stark horizon the sky is pale blue, grey and white and with some bubbling cloud like mounds of dirty snow. Two white birds hang motionless in the air on the right. Gulls or doves perhaps?

On the left a large tree rises out of the sand. The trunk is ram-rod straight. Stylised dark green foliage grows from the upper branches filling the top left corner of the image and spreading beyond the picture.

Half way up the tree at a right angle to the trunk is a thick, bare branch. That's where the first white leopard lies facing the ruined building. One paw languidly dangles from the branch while a sinuous tail curls around the tree trunk. The black and white markings of the pelt are stretched over a distended belly.

On the sand below the branch the second white leopard lies on its right side. Head and forepaws are set sphinx-like pointing to the left. The eyes are partly closed but the animal is certainly alert. The hind legs and tail sprawl on the sand. The bloated belly is clearly full of meat.

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The third white leopard stands with its back to the ruined wall. Balancing on strong, muscly haunches it reaches forward as far as it can with its forepaws stretching out the black spots and rings of the patterned fabric of its fur. It yawns. The black-rimmed mouth is wide open showing sharply pointed carnivore's teeth and a curled pink tongue. The beautiful creature is exhausted. It's eaten more than its fill.

Scattered on the barren desert floor are fleshless bones, picked clean and bleached white. A pelvis broken in two and a rib cage. Some of the ribs are reflected in a small stagnant pool of water. These are human bones. The hollow-eyed skull lies part-buried in sand at the bottom left of the picture. Its toothless maw gapes heavenward.

The elegant, two-tone felines are resting having completely devoured the poet.

The artist leaves us wondering what happens next.

3. Roger Wagner, Sacred Allegory: Apocalypse (Study)

2023, oil on canvas, 33 x 38 cm.

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This is a powerful modern-day allegory, with our world depicted as an industrialised Babylon. Humanity is shown shackled in the foreground, but it is on the brink of a revelation. In the background the captives have been freed and guided by angels, they can see the new Jerusalem reflected in the sea. The lamb is now a lion, a beast of strength to guide humanity not just now but for all future.

Visual description of Sacred Allegory: Apocalypse (Study) written by Amy Lim

This small landscape-format canvas is painted in tones of blues, greys and black. It is divided into three horizontal bands. In the foreground, a line of silhouetted figures walks from right to left. They are chained together, their backs bent and heads bowed with the weight of the chains and suffering. A small lamb stands to their left, observing them, a splash of crimson on its chest.

A river forms the centre ground, and behind it, the far bank and the buildings that line it fill the top half of the painting. They are industrial buildings: factories with chimneys, a cooling tower, and a pylon, and smoke rises from the chimneys to form a dense grey cloud that blankets the sky. The buildings are reflected in the still waters of the river, but their reflection is different. Instead of the grey

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factories, there are buildings of white stone, and instead of the chimneys there are tall thin trees, in full green leaf. On the far shore, diagonally opposite the silhouetted column, is another row of figures. They are angels, their wings jutting up diagonally into X shapes, and their wings are tipped with gold. The angels are holding hands, they appear to be dancing, and between each angel is a small human figure. A lion stands calmly watching them, mirroring the lamb on the near shore.

This is a preparatory study for a much larger painting, but it is still executed with much fineness. It is framed in a an elaborate gilded frame, beautifully carved with scrolling leaves and flowers. The artist Roger Wagner has described how this painting is a modern allegory, in which an industrialised Babylon is redeemed by the Lamb of God, and humanity freed from its shackles. The captives can see the new Jerusalem reflected in the 'crystal sea', and the lamb has become a lion, a beast of strength to guide humanity.

4. Stanley Spencer, Making Columns for the Tower of Babel

1933, oil on canvas, 53.9 x 48.9 cm.

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The narrative of the Tower of Babel is taken from Genesis, which served to illustrate how peoples of the world spoke different languages. Spencer's painting was done from studies for a commission to decorate the University Library in Cambridge – a project which was never fulfilled. Spencer originally intended to use this scene as part of a larger arched design.

5. Stanley Spencer, The Builders of the Tower of Babel

1933, pencil, wash and oil on paper, 305 x 533 mm.

This is a scaled-down sketch of Spencer's project for the University Library at Cambridge. Spencer has included various architectural 'languages': fluted columns, Ionic capitals, and Gothic arches, as well as hods of Berkshire red brick being carried by the builders. The Gothic archway has clear resonances with Holy Trinity church in Cookham.

6. Roger Wagner, Abraham and the Angels

1986, oil on canvas, 40.6 x 50.9 cm.

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This painting illustrates an episode in Genesis, when Abraham, the first of the Old Testament patriarchs and founder of the Hebrew nation, offers strangers food and drink. These visitors turn out to be angels who announce that Abraham's wife Sarah, long past child bearing age, will miraculously give birth. These same angels are also agents of destruction, who will then go on to wreak destruction at Sodom and Gomorrah. This diminutive group, sit in a shady glade alongside a Suffolk wheat field, dwarfed by the hulking presence of the nuclear plant, Sizewell A.

7. Stanley Spencer, The Last Supper

1920, oil on canvas, 91.5 x 122 cm.

It was typical for Spencer to locate biblical events in Cookham, a place which was for him 'heaven on earth'. In this painting he has imagined the Last Supper taking place in a Cookham malthouse. Christ is shown at the head of the table, breaking bread, with his disciples gathered around him. This final meal instituted the tradition of the Eucharist into Christian liturgical tradition, re-iterated by Spencer in his use of red and white in the composition.

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Visual description of The Last Supper written by Keith le Page

The Last Supper is taking place not in Jerusalem but upstairs in one of the Cookham malthouses that Stanley Spencer could see from his home. This is a rectangular horizontal painting, approximately 1.2 metres wide by 0.9 metres high.

Christ and the twelve disciples are sitting around tables on three sides, facing the viewer or looking forwards. The tables are covered with a white tablecloth. Behind the rear table and the disciples sitting there, a red brick wall is beautifully painted with a further sandy coloured brick wall behind. The red brick wall contrasts with the pale whites and yellows of most of the rest of the picture.

The sun streams through the window on the right-hand side of the malthouse and casts shadows onto the red brick wall.

Christ is positioned standing in the middle behind the rear table in front of the red brick wall. He is holding bread cut into two, like an open book. There is no wine to be seen, but each disciple has a small bowl in front of them, with little square pieces of food.

Four pairs of legs emerge from each side table, clothed in robes. The feet are crossed at the ankles, and quite

prominent. The feet are all very clean as Christ has washed them. They form a line like a ladder leading up to Christ. The apostles' feet do not match up with the bodies.

Disciples are sitting alongside Christ at the rear table. A disciple to the right of Christ, left of him as we look at it in the picture, has long and waving black hair, and is leaning across him. He is looking at the bread that Christ is holding. We believe this may be the apostle John.

On the other side of Christ is a disciple, hunched forward, with his hand over his mouth, perhaps already eating, who has what appears to be a grasping hand on the table. We believe this may be Judas.

To the left of Judas, at the corner of the table is a disciple with a pointed beard – this may be Peter.

And on his left is a disciple with his fingers raised to his mouth. There is space between his fingers, and the shape left there looks like a question mark against the red brick wall behind the disciples at the back of the room.

The remaining figures all have long straight black hair. Those on the right of the picture have their hands on the far edge of their table. The disciples on the other side, on the left of the picture, have their hands against the front of their table. The bags of grain stretching out behind them appear to give the disciples angels' wings.
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The painting is both intriguing and a novel view of the Last Supper.

8. Roger Wagner, The Harvest is the end of the World and the Reapers are Angels

1989, oil on canvas, 154.9 x 188 cm.

This painting refers to the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13: 40-42), which illustrates how at the end of the world, the faithful will be gathered up, and non-believers cast away. This is an apocalyptic scene with a difference; the Suffolk landscape sets the scene for the reaping of the wheat by angels with vast wings casting shadows across the field.

Visual Description of The Harvest is the end of the World and the Reapers are Angels written by Ann Danks

This is a very large rectangular painting. If I stand before it with my arms outstretched, it is wider. The upper edge is above my head and the bottom is only a foot or so off the floor. As soon as you walk in the door of the Gallery you

notice it on the wall directly in front of you. It makes a striking statement full of bold shapes and contrasting blocks of colour and texture.

Painted by Roger Wagner in 1989, the title is pretty long too: it is called *The Harvest is the end of the World and the Reapers are Angels*. This refers to the parable of the wheat and the tares in the gospel of Matthew which tells of how, at the end of the world, the faithful will be gathered up and the non- believers cast away.

The painting depicts a landscape, a rural scene, in fact a real place in Suffolk that the artist was familiar with from childhood and which has had a special significance for him throughout his life.

It is a bright summer's day and in front of us is a field of ripe wheat shimmering in the sunshine. The foreground is in deep shadow out of which on the left of the picture grow three spindly trees with thin trunks reaching upwards, the leaves appearing high up on their branches. On close inspection this dark space at the forefront of the painting contains wild flowers, the tares or weeds referred to in the parable. There is a rake lying on the ground amongst them, no doubt in preparation to scrape up and dispose of these invasive plants which encroach upon the crop. Further back within the field stands a majestic mature tree,

possibly an oak, with a sturdy trunk and thick dense foliage which catches the light and casts a large shadow beside it. To the right of the tree in the far distance the landscape appears to be flooded or made up of a series of lakes. Above all this hangs a deep blue and purple sky – a threatening sky emitting a strange light, across which streaks of thick bulbous cloud approach.

The wheat closest to us in the field is being harvested – three figures work in the blistering sun - but here the realism of the scene is abruptly challenged for those who are cutting and stacking the crop are not mortal farm labourers, but angels. They wear simple white knee length tunics, two wear hats and one a casual waistcoat but out of their backs grow the most magnificent feathered wings which immediately convey a great sense of strength and awe.

The celestial figure to our left bends over, cutting the corn with a scythe. The central heavenly being is upright; as he walks he trails a long-pronged implement behind him which gathers up the fallen stalks. On the right the third angel kneels. A dramatic figure in action, he pulls a cord tight as he ties up a bundle of cut wheat, his curly hair loose and billowing off his forehead. In the middle of the group is an upright stook of wheat, other stacks lie vertically on the ground to the side.

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Further back in the painting there is another wheat field in the distance, along the cut edge of which work a row of eight more angels. Depicted in miniature they would be hard to discern if it were not for the long, forked silhouette of their wings cast by the sun on the crop behind them. These echo the shadow created by the wings of the central foreground angel; a shape which seems eerily like a human figure with outstretched arms. An image that is perhaps meant to make us think of Christ on the cross?

You can hear the artist himself talk about the painting and the message of salvation and hope he conveys within it on https://f.io/3S2B3r9E

9. Stanley Spencer, Sarah Tubb and the Heavenly Visitors

1933, oil on canvas, 94 x 104.1 cm.

Here Spencer unites his love of Cookham with his religious feeling. He has painted Granny Tubb (modelled by her daughter Sarah) sinking to her knees at the sight of a sunset caused by Halley's Comet, convinced that the apocalypse was nigh. She is presented with 'emblems of what she is like' and 'all those things she loved' by heavenly beings.

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Visual description of Sara Tubb and the Heavenley Visitors by Dennis Jeffrey

Unusually, this painting is almost square, and is approximately the size of my body and outstretched arm.

It is displayed at eye level in the Gallery. The painting is presented in a large frame. It is oil on canvas and was bequeathed to the Gallery as part of the Barbara Karmel bequest.

Stanley believed Cookham was 'Heaven on Earth' and, like many painters before him, set biblical scenes in either their, or the Patron's, home town which in this case is Cookham. This isn't a 'biblical scene' but does integrate memory, religion and Cookham into a single subject which is a concept Stanley used quite frequently.

The painting is dominated by the principal character, Sarah Tubb. She literally visually occupies the centre of the image. She is kneeling on the pavement, her eyes closed and her hands in her lap as if she is praying. Her head is tilted slightly to her left. On her head she has a black bonnet with lace at the front under the brim. Her clothing

is dark and sombre. She is wearing a dark brown blouse top with black spots and a black skirt tucked under her legs. In front of her she has number of embroidered objects in frames.

Why is she depicted like that? Well, in 1910 the tail of Halley's Comet created an exceptional sunset – which Stanley does not include in his painting! Granny Tubb, as she was known, believes the phenomena signals the end of the world and goes outside to her gate and kneels to pray.

To Granny Tubb's right, Stanley has painted a green-grocer. His eyes are also closed. He is wearing a cap, an open brown shirt over a white vest and a pair of brown trousers held up by brown braces. Stanley's brush strokes look as if it is the weave in the material. He is wearing long grey woollen socks with pink flowers on the top and has brown boots on his feet. He is depicted leaning slightly backwards against his shop with his left hand drawing his left shoulder braces forward. At his right hand side, Stanley, has shown a box of fruit, probably apples - essentially occupying the left foreground as you look at the painting.

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To Granny Tub's left, Stanley has painted his cousin, Annie Slack in front of her shop in the cottages on the High Street. She is holding a red wooden rack displaying 8 postcards, primarily of the village. Some commentators have likened the postcard rack as a ladder because it is approximately the length of a person.

In the right foreground, Stanley has depicted two figures in white with their backs to you. The one on left is in front of Sara and is lying on her stomach with her torso raised and with her arms outstretched as if she is doing yoga! Her left hand appears to be resting on the back of a small wooden chair. Her right hand appears to be supporting one of the paintings/embroidery pictures and presenting it for Sara to see. The other figure is probably on her knees and her hand is open and touching the postcard depicting the village Church.

Behind Sara in the background is a third figure in white. She is kneeling down with one hand holding up a framed embroidered picture and her left arm is stretched behind Sars and is holding onto the open metal gate to Sara's house. The open metal fnec from the gate leads the viewer

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past the scene into the background and in doing so leads us to another ‘villager’ or ‘visitor’ dressed in a long gown or clothing similar to our perception of males in Biblical times. The remainder of the background simply shows the edge of a wooden fence attached to the metal fence with a brick building and part of a tree in front of the building.

Despite the ‘terror’ created by the comet which prompted Sara to fall on her knees in prayer outside her house, the scene is calm and tranquil.

Are the three figures depicted in white, ‘angels’ in Cookham to reassure Sarah. Who is the fourth figure in the background coming toward Sarah but not wearing contemporary clothes. Is he a biblical character? Is the postcard rack a symbol for a ladder linking heaven and Cookham?

We clearly don’t know but this theme of merging spiritual and biblical characters with contemporaries living in Cookham and life in the village is one Stanley focuses on in a number of paintings. Stanley’s perception of Cookham as heaven on earth is consistent with this

argument. The picture was originally conceived by Stanley as one of a series for a project to construct a building to house his paintings on love and Cookham which unfortunately was never built. Commentators have expressed the view that 'Sarah Tubb was intended for a Pentecostal series in which angels and saints visit Cookham.

10. Roger Wagner, Walking on Water III

2005, oil on board, 76.2 x 101.5 cm.

This painting is based on the part of the River Thames where the artist grew up. He shows Christ and Peter reaching out towards each other at low water. These main figures are diminutive in scale, compared to the monumental cranes and Battersea Power Station behind. Images of faith set against towering, overwhelming constructions, which represent the follies of mankind, have been described as 'the bedrock of Wagner's painting.'

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11. Stanley Spencer, Study for Christ carrying the Cross

c.1920, oil and pencil on paper, 355 x 320 mm.

Here Spencer uses tonal blocks of colour to explore form for this miraculous event which takes place on Cookham High Street. Spencer's vision of the road to Calvary is not one of impending death, but rather a positive vision which looks forward to his resurrection. Christ is depicted as one of us, a man on earth, carrying his cross in the same way that the Cookham workmen carried their ladders. The finished canvas is in Tate.

12.Stanley Spencer, Study for Christ Robed by Soldiers

Pencil on paper, 273 x 21mm.

Before his journey to Calvary, Christ was stripped, dressed in a scarlet robe and mocked. Spencer here shows Christ being roughly handled as one of the soldiers fits Christ's arm awkwardly into the robe. This was a sketch for a canvas of the same subject now in Tate, which was paired with The Disrobing of Christ (Tate), when the robe was

removed and his own garments returned to him before his final journey.

13. Roger Wagner, The Flowering Tree

2014, acrylic and oil pastel on paper, 2300 x 800 mm.

This is a working drawing used in the making of the stained glass window for St Mary's church, Iffley. Christ is crucified on a flowering, springtime tree, thick with blossom. It is as if the wood of the cross has been reborn, a mirror of Christ's own resurrection. The tree also serves as a metaphor for Christ's descent into hell and ascent into heaven; its roots descend deep into the earth, but it's branches arc into the sky, merging with the heavens. A river weaves its way through the lush landscape, symbolic of baptismal rites, and a flock of sheep - Christ's followers - stand at peace below their Saviour.

14. Stanley Spencer, The Angel, Cookham Churchyard

c.1936-7, oil on canvas, 70 x 50.8 cm.

Cookham was an earthly paradise for Spencer, and for him its churchyard was heaven's 'holy suburb' – a phrase which derived from the poet John Donne. It was somewhere Spencer walked often, and ultimately came to

rest on his own death. The picture was painted for Spencer's close friend and fellow artist, Gwen Raverat.

Visual Description of The Angel, Cookham Churchyard, written by Amy Lim.

The painting is set in the churchyard of the medieval Cookham church. In the foreground, the view is framed by a stone monument in the form of an angel, shown in profile from the thighs up. The angel is very close to us and fills the left hand third of the painting. It leans forward, head bowed, hands clasped in prayer. The angel's hair waves back onto its shoulders, leaving its face uncovered, but cast in shadow. The stone is white but is slightly dirtied and weathered, and there are patches of green lichen on the angel's robes. The top and right hand sides of the painting are framed by trees, with the branches of a fir tree above the angel, and the broad leaves of a deciduous tree on the right. The church fills the space beyond. It has a squat, square tower with crenelations and is topped with a flag pole from which a St George's flag flutters in a light breeze. Twin red-tiled roofs extend to the right of the tower. There is a void of cloudless sky above the roofs, painted in a leaden grey. By framing the picture with the angel and the leaves, Spencer makes us feel as though we are in an enclosed space, looking out at the church beyond. The

angel leans protectively over us. The atmosphere is calm and still. Spencer painted this in 1935—6 for his friend Gwen Raverat when he was in financial difficulties, as she had promised to buy a painting or drawing from him if he needed help. He suggested he might 'do that angel landscape again'. He had already painted the same view two years earlier. Although this second version is almost identical to the first in composition (although slightly smaller), Spencer utilised a different palette, changing the painting's mood. The shaded blue sky of the first version has been replaced by monochromatic grey, and the fresh tones of green leaves and lichen and red roof have been subdued, giving the scene an austere simplicity. The mood is sombre and contemplative.

15. Roger Wagner, The Burning Fiery Furnace

1989, mixed media on blue paper, 53.4 x 38 cm.

The book of Daniel describes how three Jewish men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace by the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, because they refused to worship his image. The three men do not perish in the flames, and are joined by a fourth

heavenly figure – ‘one like a son of the gods’. The scene is set in Lucy’s ironworks on the side of the Oxford Birmingham canal.

16. Stanley Spencer, Shipbuilding on the Clyde: Burners 1941,

coloured lithograph on paper, 680 x 990 mm; printed on mount, lower left, ‘STANLEY SPENCER. SHIP BUILDING ON THE CLYDE. BURNERS’, and lower right, ‘published by the National Gallery Crown Copyright Reserved / The Baynard Press’

Burners was one of four works by Official War artists from which prints were commissioned. Spencer was the master of elevating the everyday to the celestial, and here welders using oxy-acetylene torches to cut metal sheets into shape exude powerful energy. They are set against an abstract jigsaw of metal sheets, which fan out dynamically, and are viewed from above, as if by God.

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17.Stanley Spencer, Christ overturning the Money Changers' Table, 1921

oil on canvas, 99.7 x 88.2 cm

This painting illustrates John 2:15, 'And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables.' It formed part of a triptych, which hung in a private chapel belonging to Henry Slesser, a patron of Spencer's. The subject matter was an apt choice for a man averse to capitalism.

18.1 Roger Wagner, Elijah and the Angel 1996,

acrylic on Nepalese paper, 245 x 245 mm.

A series of three illustrations depicting an episode from the Old Testament book of Kings. The prophet Elijah has fled from Queen Jezebel, who is determined to kill him. In the desert, he sat beneath a juniper tree and asks God to die. An angel is sent by God, who brings him bread and water to sustain him on his subsequent journey of forty

days. At the end of his travels he encounters God on the Holy mountain as a 'silent voice.'

18.2 Roger Wagner, Under the Juniper Tree

1996, acrylic on Nepalese paper, 245 x 245 mm.

18.3 Roger Wagner, A Silent Voice

1996,

acrylic on Nepalese paper, 245 x 245 mm.

19. Stanley Spencer, St. Veronica Unmasking Christ

1921,

oil on canvas, 75 x 60 cm.

St. Veronica mopped Christ's face on his way to Calvary, resulting in Christ's features being retained on the linen. St. Veronica subsequently became a symbol of Christian charity. Her bold pose, with uplifted arms mirrors Christ's in Christ Overturning the Money Changer's Table. The

story of St Veronica is not found in the Bible but is drawn from the apocryphal Acts of Pilate.

20. Stanley Spencer, The Betrayal

oil on canvas, 39.5 x 50.5

It was typical of, and logical for, Spencer to paint Christ's arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane in Cookham. The scene takes place in the back garden of Fernlea and The Nest in Cookham High Street, behind Spencer's school room. Over the walls are the malthouse buildings, which he had painted in Mending Cowls, Cookham in 1913. He depicts two soldiers seizing Christ's robes, and at the same time Simon Peter cuts off the ear of the High Priest's officer, Malchius. The naked figure alludes to a figure fleeing the scene, described in St Mark's Gospel (15:51-2) – 'And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body: and the young man laid hold on him; and he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.'

21. Stanley Spencer, Study for the Resurrection: Port Glasgow, 1949

pencil on paper, 375 x 965 mm.
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This study shows the man and woman who meet in the centre foreground of The Resurrection: Port Glasgow (Tate). Spencer identified the figures as himself and his first wife, Hilda Carline, who was to die the next year in 1950. The drawing was probably made in February 1949 when Spencer added an extra seven feet of canvas to the left-hand end of the painting.

22. Stanley Spencer, Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta

1952-9, oil and pencil on canvas, 205.7 x 535.9 cm.

This vivid evocation of Spencer's childhood places Christ at the heart of Cookham regatta, a highlight of the village year, which involved races, a concert and fireworks. Christ sits in a basket chair, dramatically lunging forward as he preaches to the villagers, who are all dressed according to their status. It was perfectly natural to Spencer that Christ should appear in Cookham, it being his own heaven on earth. The canvas is squared in preparation for the transfer of these sketches onto the canvas.

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Thank you

We hope you have enjoyed your visit. We are very keen to receive your feedback about your journey here, your experience at the Gallery and any suggestions you have on how we can improve your experience at the Gallery. If you would like this document in a different format, please contact me and I will try to arrange that. You can contact me, Dennis at access@stanleyspencer.org.uk. We can also try to arrange a group visit if you are a member of a group for visually impaired people.

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