

THE AUTHORS SHOW – Authors of Spirituality/Religion

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I am a visual artist, but what I see within the spaces between lines and shape or upon the landscape of color and texture, is a means of communicating ideas, and with ideas, stories. The visual arts become just another way of storytelling and it's a language that I know very well.

We often hear the cliché that a picture can speak a thousand words, but what does that really mean? What is happening between the audience and the image? What is being communicated? How is it being communicated? This is what I explore in my work, endeavoring to create this invisible bridge between what I put on the canvas and what the audience perceives. It is like a secret message that is being exchanged between myself and the viewer, and in each piece, I extend a personal invitation to have this hidden dialogue with my audience. It's not merely asking for observation and admiration of the craftsmanship and aesthetics, but a call to have this interchange where the image becomes the catalyst for thoughtfulness and awareness. This awareness could be of the self, in contemplating internal worldviews or perspectives, or it could be the awareness of beauty - of outside realities perhaps not readily apparent by all. So, in essence, my images tell the stories of patterns, namely the patterns of ideas whether they be from without or within.

ELIJAH is my first self-published graphic novel, and is based on the story of 1 Kings 18. Elijah is a prophet of God who challenges the false religion of his countrymen, wherein the God who answers by fire would be proven to be the one true God of Israel. It's a small and perhaps unusual story to adapt, but I found it to be full of evocative concepts and powerful imagery. There were also meaningful and applicable ideas within its telling and so I crafted my interpretation of the story to accentuate these patterns.

My graphic novel approach, then, is nothing like what would be typically considered a "graphic novel" by the common definition. Where most graphic novels or comic books use a more literal visual interpretation of a story through the systematic structure of paneling, I broke out of those borders, seeing the whole page and each and every page of the graphic novel as my

canvas. Much of my inspiration did come from Japanese art, whether of anime or manga, so you can see a kind of marriage between Eastern and Western approaches to the visual medium, but mostly I ignored all conventions and structured my images in the way that would best convey the hiddenness of my visual language.

In this way, everything is very intentional – why I chose to show this image the way I did or why I composed the placement of that image in the way I did. My choice in colors, the juxtaposition of the conversations between the characters vs the images shown, even the inserts of blank pages, all of these things are part of the pattern I'm expressing.

So, for example, on the opening page, it reads:

"After many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year saying,
'Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth.'"

Up until this point there had been no rain in the country of Israel due to the Lord's disfavor with the people worshipping false gods. So, I wanted to express the parchedness of the land, its arid and desolate reality of having no life-giving rain to infuse it. There's a gnarled, dead bush or tree at the center of the page and it spreads outward, extending beyond the boundaries of the panels. Your eye is lead around its branches to the cracked earth, dry grass, and empty mountains. The images feel wilted and dried up through the delicate, wispy use of pencil and sepia color tones. Yet I also wanted to express the feeling of isolation. In each panel, there's just one focal point: the landscape view with the dead tree at its center in the top panel, the up-close shot just of the branches at the center panel, and then the tuft of dried grass in the third panel. This conveys two meanings behind the concept.

The first meaning becomes a foreshadowing of Elijah's confrontation. The Lord calls Elijah to stand before King Ahab, and in so doing the entire country and its legion of false prophets. Elijah is just one man against a people, a government and a religious institution. So, there is this idea of set-apartness, of Elijah's separation from his countrymen in order to be the lone voice in the wilderness that speaks against the grain of current thought.

The second meaning lies in the overall feeling of the page. The remoteness of the images combined together conveys a hushed atmosphere. There is nothing moving and all is still. This silence is like the setting of the stage for a great event to unfold. It is true that the land at this moment appears dead with no chance for life, but God has just told Elijah ""I will send rain upon the earth."" With these words juxtaposed with the images, suddenly what was once dead is now full of promise. Something is about to begin. The silence of this death has become pregnant with potential – an awed anticipation that we are about to witness the miraculous and the divine.

This is just the first page, but you can already see how the composition of images paint meaningful concepts within the mind. As my story unfolds, more is revealed within this visual matrix of ideas, and the conversation between myself and the viewer continues. Yet there is even more to be discovered, the dialogue isn't supposed to end once you turn the last page. It is my intent that this story of pattern and image would remain and become generative within the heart and mind of the viewer, where our secret discourse could open up hidden dimensions that one could explore - and in so doing, perhaps finding something of great and eternal value.