



Easy Answers [slide]  
by Alison Lovejoy Spain

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
Montana State University  
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Abstract:

For religious man, nature is never only "natural"; it is always fraught with religious value.- This is easy to understand, for the cosmos is a divine creation; coming from the hands of the gods, the world is impregnated with sacredness...(The gods) manifested the different modalities of the sacred in the very structure of the world and of cosmic phenomena. The world stands displayed in such a manner that, in contemplating it, religious man discovers the many modalities of the sacred and hence, of being.? Mircea Eliade in *The Sacred and the Profane* My work often deals with my own struggle to understand the disparity of suffering faced by others. The mental illness of a family member forces me to ask if mental illness is a disease or is it a sense of dis-ease in one's surroundings? Witnessing violence cycle through my family has caused me to wonder about its root causes. War, atrocities, environmental destruction and exploitation of third world peoples is regular fare on the nightly news. One must almost live in a state of constant denial in order to function. This denial creates great discomfort for some people. I believe that to work through this distress is both a powerful and healing experience.

I choose imagery based on the way my body reacts to visual stimulus. I cannot articulate the discomfort I feel at times, so I ask how that discomfort would manifest visually. I often notice patterns, forms and signs in the outside world that seem to capture some unutterable feeling. It might be the way a branch bends to the weight of snow, against a sky electrified by neon. In this fleeting moment exists both the aspiration to be divine and the burden of being human. These are the bittersweet and tender spaces that move me. I want viewers to feel unsettled and explore the painting's meaning for themselves on an intuitive level.

Tree. Mountain. Horizon. Grass. Birds. These are the forms that are the departure point for much of my painting. Landscape derived subject matter provides for both the emotional and formal qualities that move me. Natural forms use line, hue and mass to arrange themselves in space. These arrangements evoke something very visceral. I find that I can use external landscapes to map internal consciousness. Words are absent in this type of understanding and it is this experience that I seek to recapture on canvas. Within each of these forms lie infinite juxtapositions, orders and relationships.

I often use tree forms in my work due to their ability to symbolize so much. Trees are the most obviously cyclical of the plant world as they change with the seasons. They are figurative, with limbs and veins. Trees scar, age, break, bend to pressure and grow towards light. Formally, tree branches define compelling space, consistently, whether it is through the effort of a lone snag piercing a dull sky or a front yard ornamental in need of pruning. The fashion in which a limb twists, or where a node changes and creates arthritic knuckles, creates in me a response that strikes me on a gut level. It is as if some primordial knowledge resides within the specific pattern layed out by the intertwining of branches. I do not feel that I am representing literal trees, but rather the symbol of a tree. What does that tree represent? When does a symbol become so potent that it becomes a living symbol? Natural forms that evoke particular emotion usually instigate my paintings. The painting *Redemption* was inspired by a neighbor's tree that I observe every night when walking my dog. I experience a sense of calm each evening as I become lost in the rhythm of the bare branches. The bird forms are drawn from

other observations; thus the paintings are not an isolated event but the continuity of experience.

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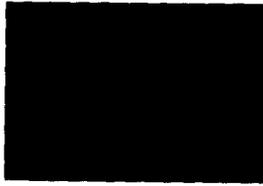
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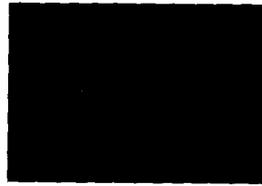
1. *Shock & Awe*, Oil on Canvas  
40" x 30"  
Alison Spain, 2003



2. *Redemption*, Oil & Housepaint on  
Canvas, 68" x 137"  
Alison Spain, 2004



3. *V-Bomb*, Oil on Canvas  
72" x 108"  
Alison Spain, 2003



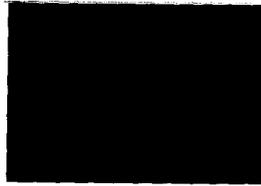
4. *Sink or Swim*, Oil & Housepaint  
on Canvas, 67" x 133"  
Alison Spain, 2004



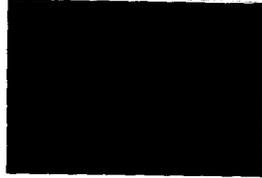
6. *Unfortunate Casualty*, Oil &  
Housepaint on Canvas, 68" x 56"  
Alison Spain, 2004



7. *Bound for Glory*, Oil &  
Housepaint on Canvas, 68" x 56"  
Alison Spain, 2004



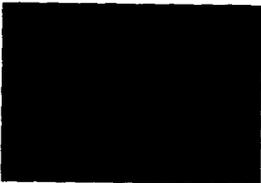
5. *40 Days*, Oil & Housepaint on  
Canvas, 68" x 137"  
Alison Spain, 2004



8. *Spilt Milk*, Oil on Canvas  
64" x 94"  
Alison Spain, 2004



9. *Crown of Thorns for Haiti*, Oil &  
Housepaint on Canvas, 68" x 137"  
Alison Spain, 2004



10. *Nightwalk with Cody*, Oil &  
Housepaint on Canvas, 67" x 105"  
Alison Spain, 2004





