

PAINTING OUR DUAL NATURE

Scott Samuelson—English Department

We discover who we are by examining the most basic impulses in us. I am continuously reminded that I am a dual being. Deeply ingrained in me—I think in all of us—are the desire to stay and the urge to go, the comforts of home and the adventures of the road, the impulse to affirm the known and the pull toward the new and untried, the longing to believe and the tendency to doubt.

We negotiate this duality with art.

We paint, or write, or build to understand how it is that these deep urges often war within us, often frustrate us, but just as often invigorate us and lead us to do and be our best. We celebrate our complex impulses by creation.

Paintings, for example, are essentially sensuous: they appeal to the appetite of our eyes to see afresh and our hands to touch anew. Pigment is literally of the earth. The architectural temple on the Rexburg hill is built of the earth's finest materials—stone, glass, wood. But make no mistake—sensuous, earthy constructs yearn for spiritual dimension. Thus, our structures, artistic and architectural, echo our own double nature, our longing for the transcendent, eternal, spiritual *and* our groundedness in the here and now, in bodies that see and touch. We also call the body a temple. And with it we seek to affirm, celebrate, and connect to the ethereal, non-tangible world of light and love.

One expression of this dualism is symbolism. Symbolism takes the concrete and familiar and uses it to stand for abstract, even spiritual, concepts. It is no wonder that the temple is a primary place of symbolic teaching. The pamphlet, *Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple*, page 8, quotes Elder John A. Widtsoe:

We live in a world of symbols. We know nothing except by symbols. We make a few marks on a sheet of paper, and we say that they form a word that stand for love or hate or charity or God or eternity.... No man can come out of the temple endowed as he should be, unless he has seen beyond the symbol, the mighty realities for which the symbols stand.

My paintings move beyond the literal to the symbolic in hopes that they will motivate viewers to see beyond the symbols to deeper realities. Paintings so designed strive for beauty of image and composition, but they are not content to merely present an attractive, realistic view. A painting is the artist's response to an image or idea. I feel joy when I think of the temple. And I feel challenged when I think of the deep symbols and "mighty realities" in the temple. I want to communicate that joy and that

My paintings move beyond the literal to the symbolic in hopes that they will motivate viewers to see beyond the symbols to deeper realities.

awe through symbolic reference to basic shapes: Circle, Square, Triangle, Golden Spiral, Eternal Grid, and Cosmic Cloud.

I have consciously sought my images to provide variety from literal, “pretty picture” portrayals of the temple. I do not object to such portrayals, but they are already plentiful. They emphasize beauty and order, and I desire to emphasize the temple as protection from the turmoil of the chaotic world, paintings unashamedly exuberant in their rejoicing, and others that emphasize the temple’s connection with eternity.

One of the scriptural synonyms for temple is *sanctuary*. A sanctuary is a sacred place. Obviously, that word is a reference to the role the temple is to play in our lives. But another meaning of “sanctuary” is a private place where one can be safe. In this sense, my paintings represent my private place of response to the temple. My paintings are my individual, personal musings on the many things the temple means to me. The temple invites me to contemplate my dual nature. If art and creation are the realm where I negotiate my duality, the temple is a place where I strive to understand it as it reaches toward eternity.

I share my personal temple images in hopes that your own temple meditations might be the richer, that you might, perhaps, be drawn in new ways—through your own sanctuary—to the House of the Lord. ☯

**My paintings are
my individual,
personal musings
on the many things
the temple means
to me.**