



Christ's College Chapel Unveils Its First Commission of Art in 500 Years

Easter Sunday (the 24th April) 2011 will be a very special occasion for Christ's College Chapel in Cambridge University, as it unveils a new altar reredos by the current Leverhulme Artist in Residence, Tom de Freston. This will be the fruition of an exciting and developing collaboration, first imagined by Christopher Woods and Pablo de Gandia (Tablo Arts) at the end of 2008. The paintings were conceived to mark the 500th anniversary (2010) of the chapel's consecration.

The service will be an Anglican Choral Evensong with special choral music by the College Choir. There will be readings from the Authorized King James Version of the Bible which is 400 years old this year. A sermon will be preached by the College Chaplain. In the course of the service, there will be an unveiling and dedication of the altarpiece and a short conversation between the Chaplain and Tom de Freston about the work of art.

This publication provides insight into the making, meaning and wider context of the works, showing de Freston's studies and works on related themes. The range of figures who have contributed writing to this catalogue is testament to the significance of the project. Nicholas Serota provides a foreword, Rowan Williams considers the spiritual relevance in de Freston's altarpiece paintings, Graham Howes considers their relationship to the context of Christ's Chapel, Ruth Padel puts them into an art historical context and Jaya Savage gives insight into two other paintings of de Freston's which tackle religion in a Miltonic form. Alongside this is a conversation between de Freston and Sir Anthony Caro, two interviews by Pablo de Gandia with de Freston, and a specially-commissioned poem responding to the chapel paintings by Kiran Millwood Hargrave.

Tom de Freston is the current Leverhulme Artist in Residence at Cambridge University and Artist in Residence at the Leys. He has previously held the Levy Plumb Award at Christ's College, Cambridge. He is currently working on a body of paintings for the British Shakespeare Association to be exhibited at their annual conference in September 2011.

In 2011 Tom will have solo shows with HRL Contemporary and Tablo Arts in London. In addition, Tom will be curating and participating in a show at the RCA.

This year Tom has also launched a new academic website:
www.tomdefreston.co.uk/tragedy.

All works by Tom de Freston unless otherwise stated.

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This Page:

Detail of *Deposition* (a study), 2009, Oil on Canvas, 72 x 100cm

DEPOSITION: A NEW INSTALLATION

at Christ's College, Cambridge

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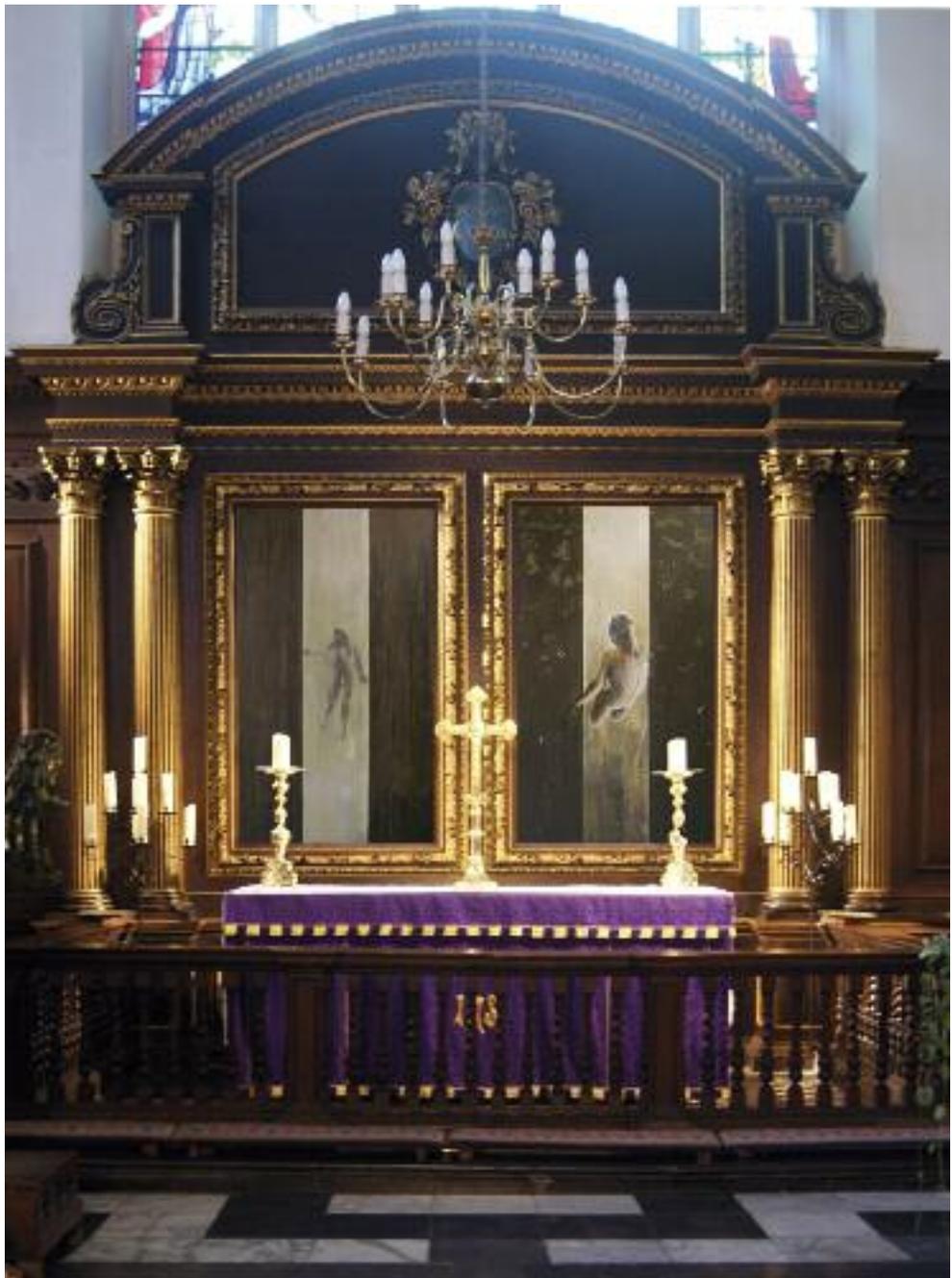
**Revd Christopher Woods
Words of commendation
from the Chaplain of Christ's College**



DEPOSITION: A NEW INSTALLATION

at Christ's College, Cambridge





DEPOSITION: A NEW INSTALLATION

at Christ's College, Cambridge



Previous Page, Left

Deposition (left hand panel), 2010, oil on canvas, 190 x 115cm

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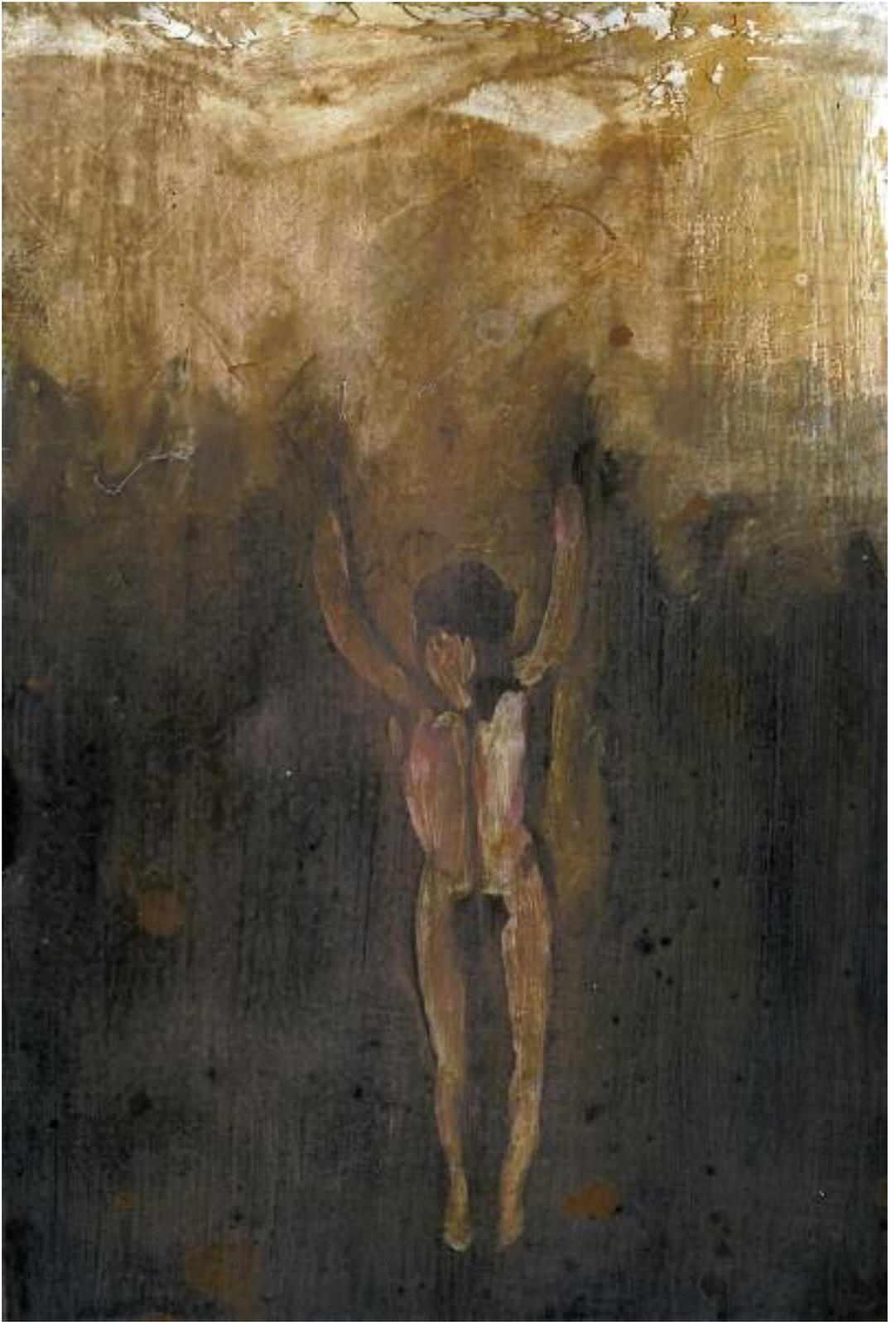
Deposition (right hand panel), 2010, oil on canvas, 190 x 115cm

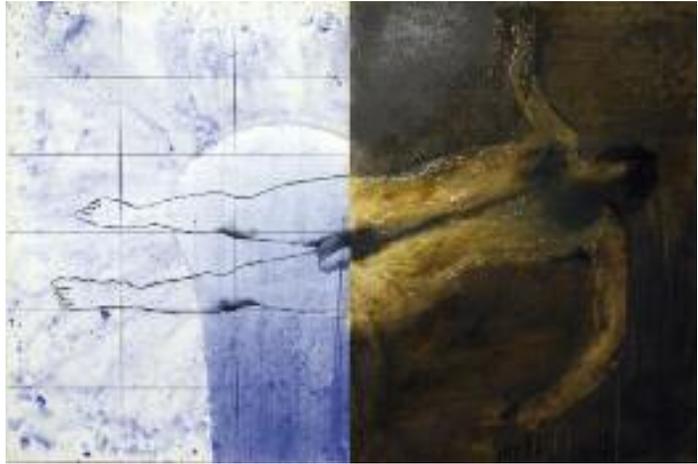
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Deposition (insitu at Christ's College Chapel), 2010, oil on canvas, 190 x 115cm

This page

Deposition (insitu at Christ's College Chapel), 2010, oil on canvas, 190 x 115cm





Foreword By Nicholas Serota

2010 marked the 500th anniversary of consecration of the Chapel at Christ's. The anniversary is to be celebrated by the installation of two new site-specific altarpiece paintings on the theme of the Deposition made by the young contemporary history painter, Tom de Freston.

The paintings have been designed to respond to the unique spatial, spiritual and aesthetic demands of the Chapel and the subject of the Deposition has been chosen to complement the presence in the antechapel of Sir Anthony Caro's sculpture on the same theme.

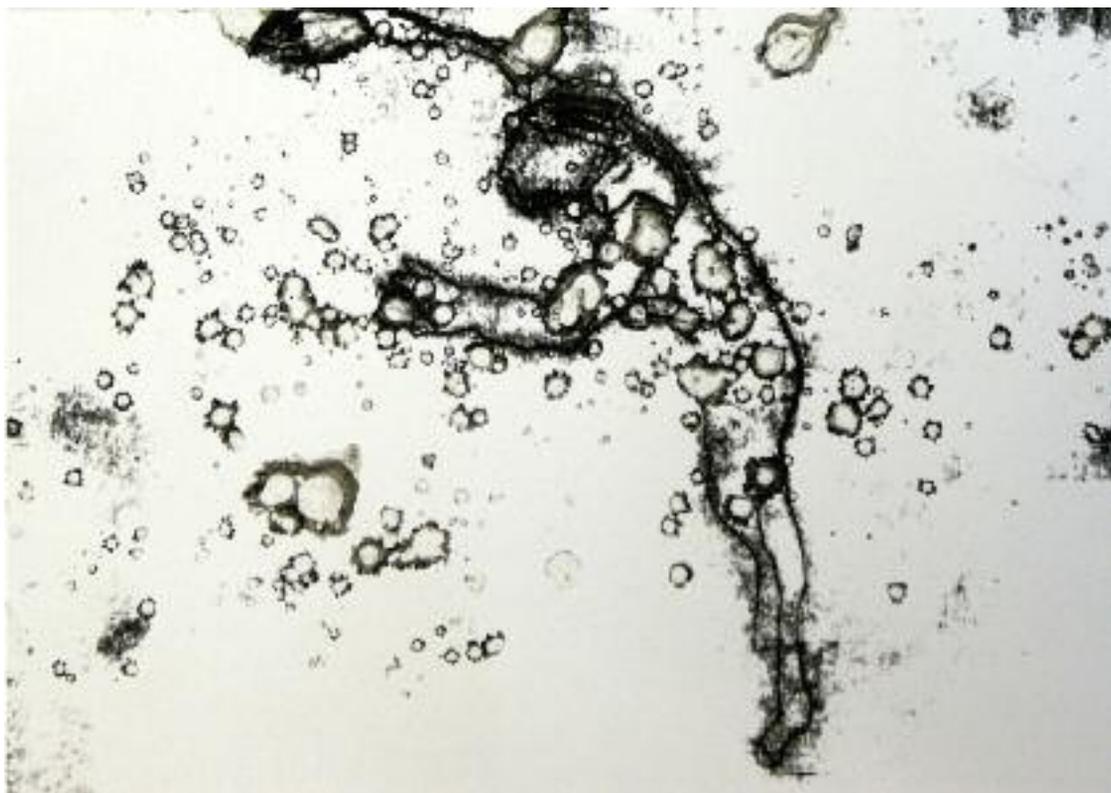
Caro is one of our country's most admired artists and the College Chapel is a space of great importance and history, both architecturally and spiritually. For a young artist such as Tom de Freston to have been afforded

such a commission is a huge credit to him, his work and the College. The way in which Christ's has embraced contemporary art in this manner is unusual, but reflects both an understanding of the role art can play in worship and the long history of the involvement of the College with the visual arts.

De Freston's paintings normally explore themes of Tragedy in contemporary painting, with his most recent body of works drawing directly from Shakespeare's plays and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In his altarpiece paintings, the multiple figures, narrative and interior space seen in his literary paintings have been sacrificed in order to create a diptych which responds to the specific challenges of the Chapel commission. Each painting shows a single figure hovering between

Opposite page:
Deposition study
2009
oil on board
30 x 20cm

This page:
Swimmer of Lethe
2010
oil on canvas
190 x 130cm



dark columns. As such, the figures seem to exist in direct relation to the space of the Chapel itself. The placing of the figures, choice of colours and the sense of self-reflexive light all disclose de Freston's interest in a history of images that were also important to Caro, notably Rembrandt and Rubens. The solid geometry of the paintings and the hovering forms show an acute understanding of the construction of space and form. De Freston's canvases, whilst structurally similar to each other, are a dialogue of oppositions, in which he explores both the fleshy, weighty pathos of the Deposition, and the ethereal weightlessness and hope of the Resurrection.

Caro's sculpture and de Freston's paintings are confirmation that contemporary art is still able to offer a new and engaging reflection on themes that have fascinated artists for centuries.

The responses to the works published in this catalogue are testament to their achievement in giving eternal questions contemporary form.

This catalogue reveals a series of conversations; between two works of art, between the works and the austere beauty of the Chapel, and between the two works and earlier works that take the Deposition as their theme.

These conversations provoke a rich engagement with faith and spirituality. That the 500th Anniversary of the Chapel has afforded an opportunity not just to look back but also to look to the present and the future is an impressive achievement. The installation of de Freston and Caro's work creates a harmonious celebration in a Chapel where art, architecture, prayer and music come together to provide a deeply moving spiritual experience.

Study of Falling, 2008
Monoprint on paper
30 x 20cm

Nicholas Serota
Director, Tate

Nicholas Serota has been Director of Tate since 1988. Since then Tate has opened Tate St Ives (1993) and Tate Modern (2000), redefining the Millbank building as Tate Britain (2000). Tate has also broadened its field of interest to include twentieth-century photography, film, performance and occasionally architecture, as well as collecting from Latin America, Asia and the Middle East. As a curator, his most recent exhibitions have been Donald Judd and Cy Twombly at Tate Modern and Howard Hodgkin at Tate Britain.



Sir Anthony Caro in Conversation By Tom de Freston

'Art is often sourced by religious themes. Art is best appreciated in quiet contemplative situations, as in religion.'

-Sir Anthony Caro (AC)

Sir Anthony Caro's recent visit to Christ's (in conversation with Tim Marlow and Dr. Caroline Vout) showed him to be an articulate, warm and eloquent speaker, but not one who feels a need to justify his work through loquacious philosophy.

'Artists make sculptures and paintings. The words about their work and their practice are unnecessary and are best answered by critics and writers on art.' (AC)

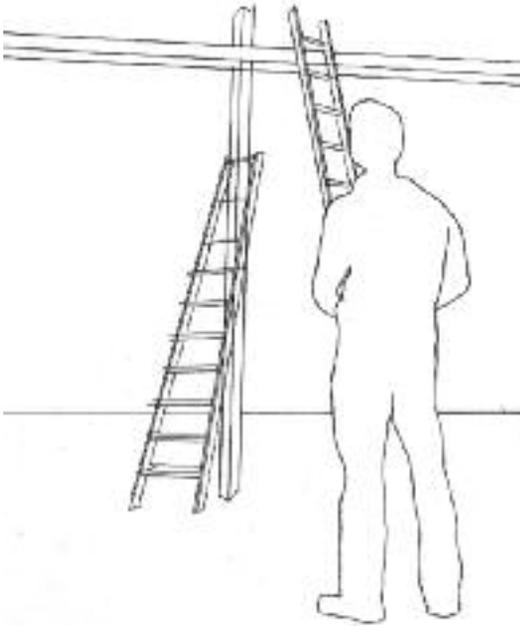
Sir Anthony Caro's *Deposition* is a masterpiece, but remains one of the less well-known works in the oeuvre of Britain's finest living sculptor. Caro was the sculptor responsible for dragging Western sculpture out of the constraints of

figuration and towards abstraction. Yet, over the past two decades his work has regularly made returns to figuration. The *Deposition* is one such work. Caro's sculpture hits you the moment you enter the antechapel, and I wanted to provide a similar visual fulcrum to the Chapel. Gushing writers and artists are tiresome, but I cannot overstate what a privilege it has been to make paintings which will exist in direct relation to this great sculpture.

'The Deposition is a tender subject and the sculpture in the antechapel speaks in a minor key. The dead body is being let down from the cross in a winding sheet and wrapped for burial. Mourners surround the scene.' (AC)

We become one of these mourners. By existing in real space and relating to our size, it turns us into a witness figure,

Sir Anthony Caro
Deposition
(In situ at Christ's College
ante-chapel)
2001
Bronze and brass



like those which exist within the frame in many of Rembrandt's Deposition images. Caro acknowledges his references:

'Rubens' great painting in Antwerp Cathedral and Rembrandt's little painting now in Munich both served as inspiration.' (AC)

It is these two painters who also had a profound impact upon my paintings. The shift from painting to sculpture (and in my case back the other way) is an interesting one. What is clear in Caro's sculpture, and I hope in my paintings, is that this inspiration is always filtered through a process which puts the unique tendencies of the artist's own medium at the centre of their practice.

In both of our cases, Clement Greenberg's philosophy has impacted upon the process (in Caro's case through a close relationship with the American critic).

Caro spoke to me of a process led by his materials:

'I work directly with the material. The sculpture is made in bronze

and brass sheet, forged and hammered in soft folds and welded together, as with all three dimensional collages. They are not cast or decided-on in advance from sketches or maquettes.' (AC)

The 'loose shapes' play against a 'geometric structure', describing the descent of the figure across space. This process is not described, but instead evoked, by the mechanics of the work. Caro states:

'The Deposition' is not a literal representation, but it suggests the subject. Such work requires the onlooker to fill the gaps as he/she feels. This is the way that poetry is read; it asks for an active contribution from the reader. Like the music in the chapel, I hope this sculpture will help to induce a mood of reflection.' (AC)

Sir Anthony Caro's sculpture certainly achieves this. I can only hope that my paintings in some way contribute to this quiet mood of spirituality and contemplation.

Sir Anthony Caro

Sir Anthony Caro (born 1924) has played a pivotal role in the development of twentieth century sculpture. After studying sculpture at the Royal Academy Schools in London, he worked as assistant to Henry Moore. He came to public attention with a show at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1963 and has had major retrospectives at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1975); the Trajan Markets, Rome (1992); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (1995); Tate Britain, London (2005); and in three museums in Pas-de-Calais, France (2008). His work has consistently provided points of radical departure for the developments of three-dimensional art. He was knighted in 1987 and received the Order of Merit in May 2000.

This Page:
Deposition study
 2009
 Pen on paper
 30 x 25cm

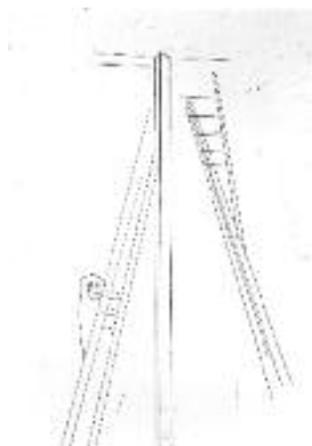
Opposite Page:
 Sir Anthony Caro
Deposition
 (In situ at Christ's College ante-chapel)
 2001
 Bronze and brass

DEPOSITION: A NEW INSTALLATION

at Christ's College, Cambridge







Ruth Padel Discusses Tom de Freston's *Deposition*

Sombre colours, the unchanging pale and dark of naked human bodies facing the shadows they must face, for a chapel whose wooden panels have hidden hollows and shadows of its own.

A ladder and a cross – and a human figure on the ground, looking at them. A young figure falling in a brown rush of air or perhaps water. Is it drowning? Or struggling up to the surface, to some light we cannot see?

Together and separately, the two panels of Tom de Freston's *Deposition*, created for Christ's College Chapel, will pose important questions for us all to answer differently, at different times, during prayer, music and service. Like Rembrandt's portraits, or Goya's figures trapped in night, they ask us to think about the way we are all, in different ways, set against the dark. In our environment; in how we look at things (like that ladder, and the leaning rungs we shall all have to climb in our time); and in how we live – headlong, falling and struggling, up and down.

Christ on the Cross is present in each panel differently, as a reminding metaphor, a future to contemplate, but also in the

struggle we have now, living our lives in our bodies and also in our psyches: a relation with the dark which W. H. Auden evoked in his *Elegy for Sigmund Freud*, when he imagined the figures of the unconscious as creatures of night:

*About him 'till the very end
were still
those he had studied, the
fauna of the night,
and shades that still waited to
enter
the bright circle of his
recognition...
but he would have us
remember most of all
to be enthusiastic over the
night,
not only for the sense of
wonder
it alone has to offer, but also
because it needs our love...*

Tom de Freston's colours here match the serene browns of the chapel. But the chestnutty tinge and bubbled texture give them a human warmth, and an energy which speaks to the Chapel's history, this building which has changed so much in five hundred years to become the tranquil chapel and antechapel of today, but which began as a much

Opposite Page:
Deposition study
2009
Oil on canvas
72 x 100cm

This Page:
Study after Rembrandt
2009
Pen on paper
30 x 20cm



larger single space surrounded by bare pink brick. And whose unique inward-looking window and secret stair, built for a woman to observe and receive mass, reminds us of crucial chapters in the Ninth Book of St Augustine's Confessions.

St Augustine describes how he stood with his mother a few days before she died, looking through a window. His words are wonderful images for what it is like, to come and sit in a chapel, to listen and think, what one comes to a chapel for – all the things which these altar pieces help us ponder.

'Removed from the crowd,' says Augustine, he and his mother were 'resting after the fatigues of a long journey.' His mother had been agonized by his apostasy and felt her life fulfilled when he converted. They discussed wisdom, 'just touching her with the whole effort of our hearts.' Side by side, looking out

of that window, they 'came at last to our own minds and went beyond them.' They imagined what it would be like, if 'the tumult of the flesh were silenced; and the phantoms of earth and waters and air were silenced; and the poles were silent as well; indeed, if the very soul grew silent to herself, and went beyond herself by not thinking of herself.'

Tom de Freston's sketches for the chapel project fulfil brilliantly what we need from any backdrop to an altar. Their images are about the flesh but also how to go beyond it. How, as Augustine says, to 'come to your own mind and go beyond'. How one might picture 'the tumult of the flesh silenced, the soul going beyond itself, not thinking of itself.' The more you look, the more there is to think about what lies ahead, how we live in our bodies and our minds, and how we deal with the dark.

Ruth Padel

Ruth Padel is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and the Zoological Society of London. She is a prize-winning poet, formerly a Greek scholar and recently Chair of the UK Poetry Society. Her latest poetry collection, *Darwin – A Life in Poems*, is a journey in lyric poems through Darwin's life and work. Her non-fiction includes books on Greek tragedy, Greek myth and rock music, tiger conservation and reading modern poetry.



Pablo de Gandia Interviews Tom de Freston

Pablo de Gandia of Tablo Arts has curated three de Freston solo shows, most recently *Exiles* at the Brick Lane Gallery. It was Pablo and the Chaplain who first formulated the idea of the chapel project. Here Pablo asks Tom some questions relating to the paintings and his broader treatment of spirituality.

Pablo de Gandia: So, the chapel paintings, I cannot recall another image which depicts the descent and rise of Christ in such a way. You have succeeded in finding an appropriate and original way of representing the full cycle and human drama of the deposition. However, the chapel paintings

are remarkable within the scope of your opus in that the irony and cynical wit is absent. So, why no socks and boxer shorts?

Tom de Freston: Context. These paintings must function in a dialogue with the aesthetic and spiritual significance of the chapel. The socks and boxers are a device to strip a character of his heroism and gravitas, the very values I want to remain present in these paintings.

PdG: In other paintings, your characters come to life spiritually because their gravitas is shattered and you only leave the viewer with a bare vision of humanity. The failure of their

Opposite Page:
Deposition study
2009

Oil on board
35 x 25cm

This Page:
Last of the seducer
2010

Oil on Elmwood
33 x 23cm (approx)



heroics is what makes them human. Why this obsession with failure; with the fall?

TdF: Painting is inherently about failure, particularly contemporary painting. In a less cynical, more romanticised way, the chapel paintings also play with the tensions present in the very structure of painting.

PdG: Your characters are often stripped of heroism and spirituality.

Is this a dimension you see in humanity in general?

TdF: At points yes; when people convert ideologies into functional structures, with an institutionalised justification, on moral or spiritual grounds. I want to present the structure but to reveal it as bankrupt.

PdG: Is there not a contradiction between this desire and that in your chapel paintings?

TdF: No. I don't want to create a body of work which is singular in its approach or reading. This work is not supportive of any institutional form of ideology but searches for pathos in the very human themes of suffering and hope.

Pablo de Gandia is a Phd candidate at King's College London (International Relations faculty). He is the co founder of Tablo Arts. www.tablo.co.uk.



Graham Howes From Seeing to Believing?

'Can then our college chapels be made still more useful for the spiritual advancement of ourselves and our pupils?' asked the Reverend C.A. Swanson, Fellow and Tutor of Christs, in 1850.

Although posed over a hundred and sixty years ago (as part of an eccentric and intemperate attack on Great St Mary's, the University Church, as a rival attraction), his question has equal resonance today. It raises not only caveats concerning the precise role of nominally Anglican college chapels within an increasingly pluralist, post-Christian, culture, but also larger questions concerning the relative marginality of Christianity within the communal and credal life of all Oxbridge colleges.

In the college which nurtured John Milton, Charles Darwin and Rowan Williams, both questions remain especially acute. Put differently, should the chapel itself primarily embody the institutional presence of the Established Church, continuing

to act as a locus for minority ritual practice, or should it serve primarily as a 'space' for personal reflection and renewal? Such questions are hardly novel, but they represent themselves with especial relevance when, as at Christs, in 2011, new art work is now incorporated into the existing fabric.

Here, the track record of most Cambridge chapels has been an uneven, and at times unhappy, one. For example, at Emmanuel, Sidney Sussex, Clare and Trinity Hall, artistic input and architectural settings have been satisfactorily elided, with Mannerism and Rococo encountering Neo-Classicism with varying degrees of success. At Queens, however, the re-setting of a mid-15th century German triptych in a late Victorian reredos is surely a mixed blessing, while at King's, Rubens' quintessentially Baroque *Adoration* remains in uneasy, even dissonant, juxtaposition to its High Perpendicular setting.

A tourist attraction can also harbour visual discord. Perhaps

Opposite Page:
Expulsion, Expulsion
2010

Oil on canvas
180 x 120cm

This Page:
Study after Rubens
2010

Pen on paper
28 x 18cm



Opposite Page:
Deposition study
 2010
 Oil on board
 36 x 25cm

This Page:
Deposition study
 2010
 Pen on paper
 30 x 20cm



only at Robinson, where Piper's glass glows numinously amid austere russet brickwork, does an artwork really seem to resonate within its own sacred space.

At Christ's, the current challenge is especially daunting. Not only is the original chapel's 'dim religious light' – that once dissolved Milton 'into ecstasies' – still further diffused and absorbed by the heavy-duty panelling (Austin, 1701-4) that now dominates both chapel and antechapel, but equally intimidating is the powerful post-Restoration reredos, adorned not only with coupled Corinthian columns, but topped with *UNUM CORPUS ET UNUM SPIRITUS* on its cornice, itself surmounted by a large green and gold cartouche dutifully inscribed *SURSUM CORDA*.

Rarely has the primacy of Word over Image (so integral to post-Restoration Protestant aesthetics) been visually articulated with such potent specificity.

A third visual complication is the 'presence' (in two senses!) of the extravagant and eye-catching double memorial of 1684, in black and white marble, to Sir Thomas Baines and Sir John Finch. This not only abuts the reredos, but its relatively overt statement of male *amitie amoreuse* provides an uncomfortable counterpoint to the unadorned chastity of the reredos itself.

Finally, the antechapel through which one enters provides a rather disconcerting contrast between its highly-ordered, near-rectangular,

space, staked out with four Corinthian columns on panelled pedestals, and the comparative disorder of its contents, which include a concert piano, a large wooden chest, and a small, undistinguished, modern icon. A homely, cluttered, communal memory bank.

Hence, both spaces seem, in some ways, uninviting, indeed unlikely, sites for additional art work, and they clearly present serious visual challenges to any contemporary artist. Yet, against these odds, something almost miraculous has taken place. Both segments of the chapel are now transformed by two distinctive, yet subtly interactive, neo-Mannerist statements for a decidedly post-Mannerist generation.

In the antechapel Anthony Caro's immensely powerful sculpture, *Deposition*, immediately confronts one directly across the crowded rectangle. Its strong trace elements, drawn from both Rubens' majestic, theatrical *Descent from the Cross* in Antwerp, and Rembrandt's tender, haunting, *Deposition* now in Munich, effectively project a dramatized Christology which somehow never topples over into gratuitous melodrama. Its power and physicality are both corporeal and subliminal.

In the main chapel the two, formerly blank, panels of the reredos now contain Tom de Freston's own reworking of two core components of Christian iconography – one (shared with Caro) of Christ's deposition, the other of His (and our)

baptism and regeneration. If one stands at the epicentre of the antechapel, both works can be viewed either simultaneously, or sequentially. The effect is extraordinary. Both artists not only give new dynamism (one is tempted to say new life) to what was hitherto a rather static, underpowered, almost de-sacralized space. The latter is now totally transformed, as is our own experience of it.

Both artists also re-invoke two of the most highly charged narrative and symbolic images in the entire repertoire of Christian iconography. Although with, one suspects, very different mindsets and using differing, yet complementary, media (the solid bronze and brass of Caro, and the delicate tempera of de Freston) they take the viewer far beyond mere nostalgia prompted by an evocative temporal narrative, and towards a confrontation with something potentially eternal.

In this sense both works relate to each other not merely by re-invoking a shared mythology, but by seizing and creating a renewed opportunity (for believer and non-believer alike) to transform an overtly aesthetic experience into a potentially religious one. The Reverend Swanson would surely have been delighted!

Graham Howes is an Emeritus Fellow of Trinity Hall, a Trustee of ACE (Art and Christianity Enquiry), and author of *The Art of the Sacred* (I.B.Tauris, 2007).

Pablo de Gandia Interviews Tom de Freston about death



Pablo de Gandia asks some more questions, this time about death in de Freston's work.

Pablo de Gandia: *Death of an Englishman*, despite de Freston-esque sock and boxers, contains a pathos that closely mimics that which is created in the chapel paintings. The naked, visceral flesh, the agile yet terminal gesture and pose, not to mention the suggested informality of the scenario all set in a framework of oppositions. Would you define this relationship as binary, is there a scale in your work in the treatment of death?

TdF: There are qualities that are binary; the semantics of the space, for instance, a dialogue between active and empty space. The relationship between the paint-

ing and the Robert Capa photograph it appropriates is also binary. But I think painting never speaks exclusively within a binary scale, it is often more fragmentary, a series of relative values.

PdG: Death in your work is often approached through a form of ridicule that could risk being interpreted as morbid. Why walk this fine line?

TdF: Ridicule is a useful device to expose the emptiness of meaning, values or pathos in an image. It is the exposure of this emptiness which, paradoxically, can open up the sign to gain new significance. It is a cynical wit which seems typically English.

PdG: You explore death from a detached perspective in

Opposite Page:

Death of an Englishman

2010

Oil on canvas

180 x 120cm

This Page:

Death of Poirot

2010

Oil on canvas

180 x 120cm

a few paintings. Is this an interplay of formative images (say, from police investigations) or is it as such the perfect death?

TdF: The perfect death or the perfect crime? A painting detaches a moment from the temporal sequence, and as such makes the cause and effect impossible to fully relocate. Some of these images appropriate police photographs, which have that strange, passive viewpoint, intended to record information free of any dramatic intention. Other images have this perspective in mind but are scenes that I stage and then record through photography. In all cases, the relationship between the photographic source and the painting is one where the de-contextualised image no longer speaks of the



narrative values held in the photograph.

PdG: Does a perfect death have to include irony and how does this relate to your treatment of Christ?

TdF: No, irony is one device. The chapel paintings lack irony, but still function on a play of relative values. The left panel has all the figural mechanics of Christ on the cross, but the cross, ladder, witness figures and spatial settings are removed. The two panels are intended to explore the two sides of death; the weight of flesh slowly descending and hope of a rise and spirituality which transcends the boundaries of the body.





Rowan Williams
Spirituality in de Freston's *Deposition*

The decoration of many Oxbridge college chapels is fairly austere, and Christ's is no exception. But often it is precisely against a muted and restrained background that an artistic work may speak most eloquently, uncluttered by the merely decorative. That is very clearly what Tom de Freston's panels achieve in this space where worship has been offered for 500 years.

The theme of the Deposition, the taking down of Jesus' body from the cross, was a regular one for the great painters of the Middle Ages and afterwards. It posed not only a technical but also a theological challenge. Technically, there were anatomical matters to get right; the sheer interest of visually managing the various physical tensions involved in shifting a dead body down from a height. Sometimes it allowed a painter – like Van der Weyden – to do remarkable things with the composition of figures, so that the drooping corpse of the Saviour is visually 'echoed' by the body of the Virgin Mary as she faints with grief. But

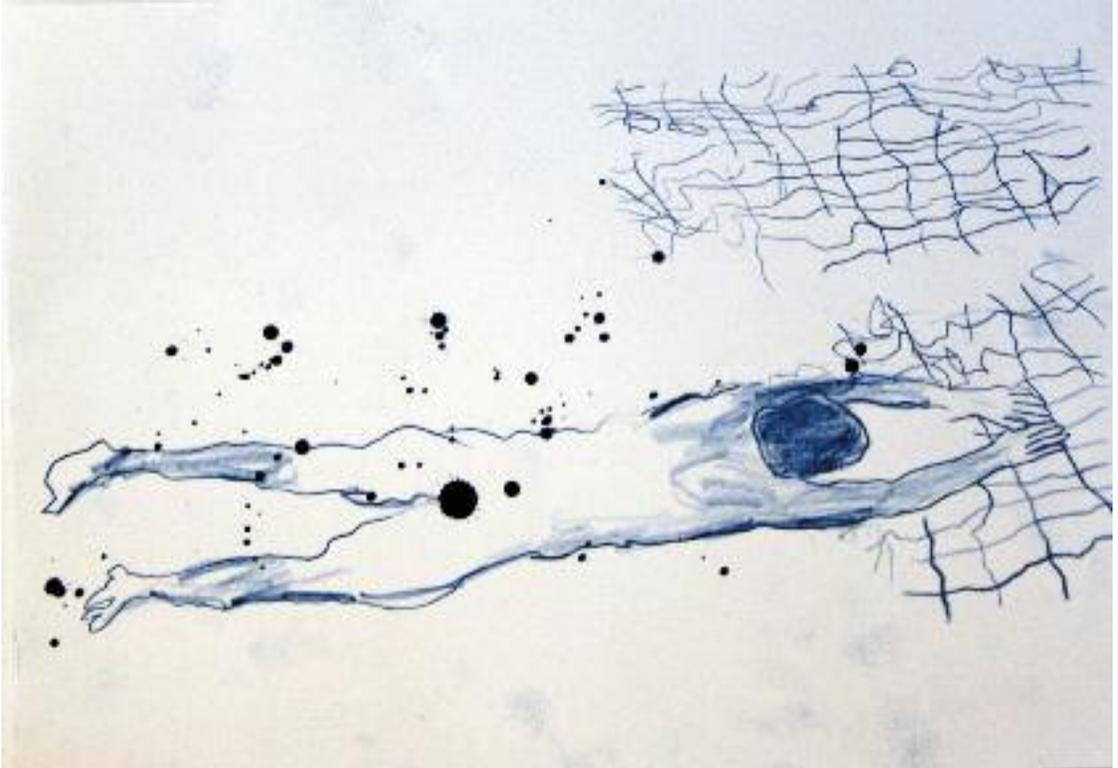
the theological challenge is no less serious: how does this particular image suggest that the dead body being handled and tidied up for burial is not just another cadaver?

Van der Weyden's 'echo' is one way, implying that the pattern established in the death of Jesus is one that shapes the lives and experiences of those closest to him, those who have lived by faith in him. But there are other ways.

De Freston's solution is a powerful and original one: it is (put very simply) to juxtapose a passive and an active image in a physical medium that seems to be like deep water. A body drops, passively, losing its controlled shape against the resistance of the water: the limbs stray, the head is down. A body rises, pushing through the depths and, as it were, shedding bubbles of breath and trails of light, moving with immense, almost agonised, energy towards the surface of the water. But the contrast between active and passive is not a crude one. The first image also evokes

Opposite Page:
 The Wait of Flesh
 2010
 Oil on canvas
 190 x 140cm

This Page:
Deposition study (from triptych)



a deliberate journey into darkness, the limbs having a suggestion of walking where you can only feel, not see, your way. And the effort and anguish of the upward thrust in the second panel reminds us that this action is inseparable from the passion, the sacrifice.

This draws on the whole historic association of the death and resurrection of Jesus with descent into watery chaos, the chaos that existed before the Word and the Spirit bring light and life, as recorded in Genesis 1 - and so too the association with baptism as our rescue from chaos by the descent of Jesus into these waters. The Church of England's baptismal service speaks

of 'the deep waters of death' where Jesus meets us.

Like any Christian shrine, this chapel is centred upon the paradox of a God who changes the world by his passivity, his suffering. Both the reality of the suffering and the radical power of the change have to be held in mind and heart, and it is this paradox that is celebrated at Easter - which is why it is right that the installation of these panels should be in the context of this festival, the heart of all Christian faith.

Dr Rowan Williams

Rowan Williams has been Archbishop of Canterbury since 2002. He was born in 1950 and

brought up in Swansea. From 1984-86 he was Dean and Chaplain at Clare College, Cambridge, and then from 1986 to 1992 he was Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford. He served as Bishop of Monmouth from 1992 and Archbishop of Wales from 2000. Dr Williams is a Fellow of the British Academy and is the author of several books of theology; he is also a frequent broadcaster. He is married to Jane, a writer and teacher; they have two children.



Jaya Savige
Discusses 'The Seat of Desolation':
Miltonic depth in the work of Tom de Freston

*[N]ot, please! to resemble
 The beasts who repeat
 themselves,...*

W.H. Auden,
In Praise of Limestone

From an elevated perspective, the figures in Tom de Freston's *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* (see next page) might be laid out on a conveyer-belt, ferried like homogenised, factory-produced bodies for packaging. Read top-to-bottom, they plummet as if down a sewerage pipe, flushed like refuse from an heavenly cistern.

Nine days and nights it takes for the rebel angels in Milton's *Paradise Lost* to plunge 'headlong from the Pitch of Heaven' through the abyss into the depths to hell, after their unsuccessful coup against God (l. 50, VI. 871; II.772). Milton's rendition of depth is what the Romantic poets might have called sublime, at the limits of human comprehensibility. The word 'deep' appears with insistent frequency in Milton's epic, where it is accompanied by a litany of enhancing modifiers that emphasise the sublimity of the fall: vast, boundless, hollow, abhorred, hoarie, frighted, foaming.

In his 2009 exhibition, *Reflections*, Tom de Freston revealed an ongoing concern with the fall – the biomechanics of the falling body, the eschatology of the fallen spirit or soul – in his *Depo-*

sition altarpieces, and in myriad other canvasses (e.g. *Icarus*, *Him Who Wanted to Fall*) and monoprints (e.g. *Study of Falling*).

In *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* and *Where the Hell Are We?* (see next page), two new works completed as part of a Leverhulme fellowship, de Freston transposes his ongoing investigation of this theme into a literary key, by explicitly responding to Milton's epic.

These canvasses form a continuum with the earlier work, but they also mark a crucial, conceptual point of departure. This can be seen by comparing them with a formally similar work, *Fast Judgement* (see image this page), a canvas dominated by an oppressive sky that clamours with copulating and falling bodies, beneath which two figures pose on a yellow road – one in the foreground, beckoning the viewer; the other facing away and prostrate in the distance.

Whereas the sky-bound motley crew in *Fast Judgement* remains essentially inchoate, carnal and haphazard, the figures in *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* and *Where the Hell Are We?* have become hermetically sealed (though problematically so in the

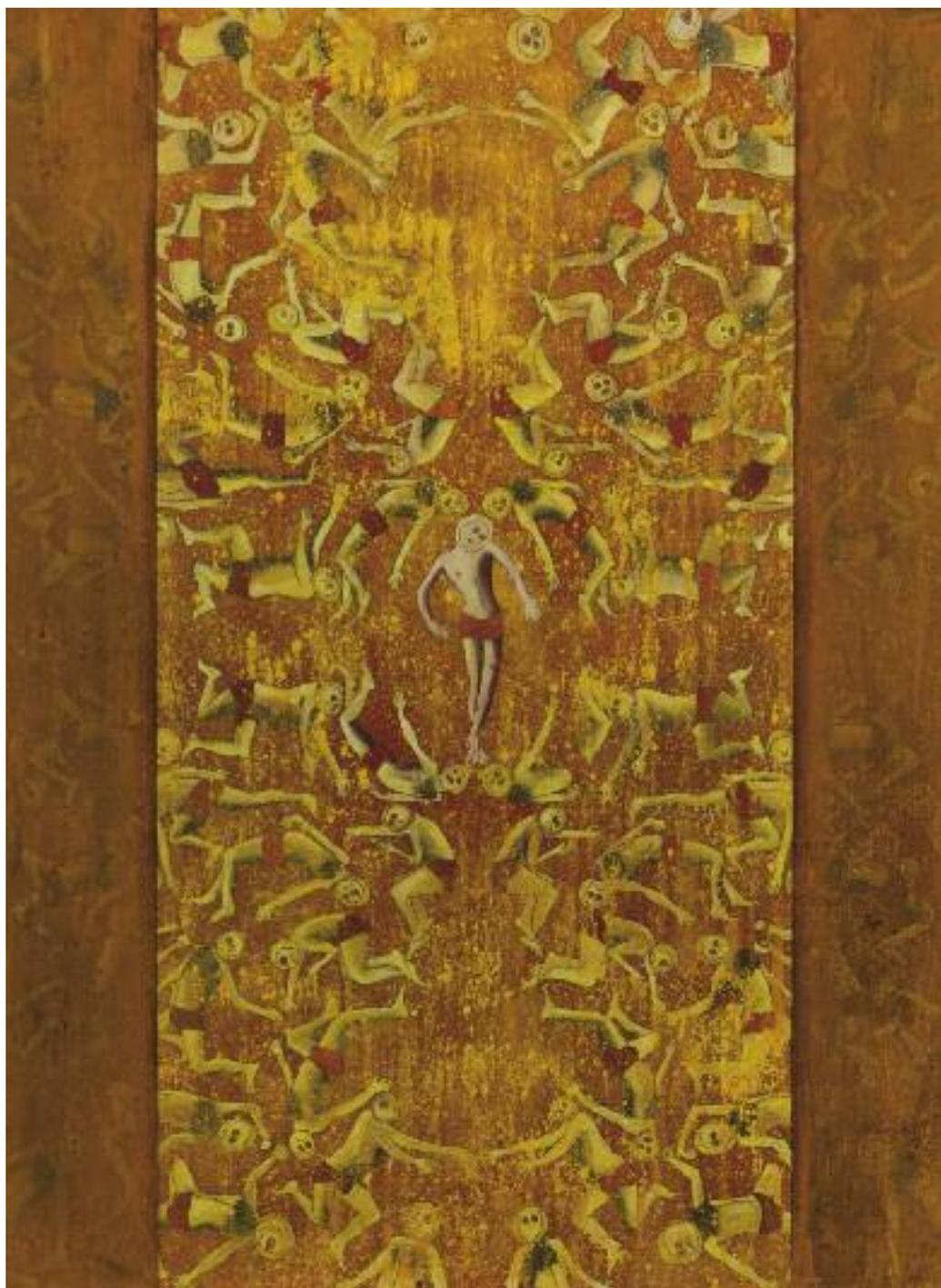
Opposite Page:
Swimmer
 2008
 Pen on paper
 29 x 19cm

This Page:
Fast Judgement
 2009
 Oil on paper
 200 x 150cm



DEPOSITION: A NEW INSTALLATION

at Christ's College, Cambridge





Previous Page, Left:
Fall of the Rebel Angels
2010
oil on canvas
200 x 150

Previous Page, Right:
Where the Hell are we?
2010
Oil on canvas
200 x 150cm

This Page:
An image from Gustave Doré's *Paradise Lost*.
By kind permission of the Master, Fellows, and
Scholars of Christ's College, Cambridge

latter), sterilised and, perhaps most importantly, serialised; replicable.

For de Freston, Milton's hell has now become 'flattened, geometrized, ordered' - to use the words of Rosalind Krauss. With a nod to the ornamental grammar of William Morris' wallpapers, and a wink at the pop-opacity of Warhol's Marilyn screenprints, de Freston's rebel angels are indeed serialised; petrified in a series of infernal pilates poses. They are condemned, like those figures of divine retribution, Prometheus or Sisyphus, to endure their abysmal lot in perpetuity; or like those 'beasts that repeat themselves' that so terrify Auden in *In Praise of Limestone*.

And yet, de Freston inherently challenges what Krauss calls 'modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse.' While he is evidently aware of what Clement Greenberg famously called the 'medium specificity' of his art - the material paradox inherent in both the fact of the flatness of the canvas and the perspectival illusion of depth - de Freston neither submits entirely to the siren song of the surface (ornament or abstraction), nor asserts the priority of illusory depth (perspective); rather, he plays upon this tension, holding surface and depth in a suspended (and suspenseful), dialectical relationship.

As we saw at the outset, these canvases can be read either perspectivally or as self-consciously flat, aware of their materiality; that

is, from side-on, or from above. In one sense, then, the idea of depth is itself the subject of these works, as de Freston transposes his concern with the fall not only into a literary key, but a painterly one. For de Freston, Milton simultaneously evokes the tyranny of the surface and the chimera of depth, a manichean conflict that defines both his vision and his art.

And what could be more aesthetically endemic, more representatively hellish in an age where the line between surface and depth has, in the eyes of many, become so utterly obfuscated by rampant commodity fetishism and political disinformation? It is worth recalling that *Paradise Lost*, which concerns a civil war (in heaven), was written during a time of civil war; and that de Freston, riffing here on the themes of surface and depth in late 2010, is doing so during a time of civil unrest and the quasi-Luciferian rebellion (in the name of transparency) of Julian Assange and Wikileaks.

Whereas the figures in *Rebel Angels* swivel in a greyish milky-blue through the darker, earthy tones drawn from the *Deposition* canvases, the palette of *Where the Hell* is altogether more searing. Here, the fallen writhe in a concoction of stinging mustard, turmeric and ginger, an eye-wateringly radioactive curry-paste built upon an autumnal ochre base (indeed the colour of *Fall*). Satan's presence, central, almost serene,

underscores his absence in *Rebel Angels*, which presents a preindividuated state. Less cadaverous than his jaundiced minions, he echoes the deposition of Christ, yet is ultimately modern, ironic, not quite shrugging but neither embracing the infernal air. These failed coupsters are truly, utterly 'vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf of 'livid flame' (PL I. 52, 182).

'The cistern contains; the fountain overflows.' So writes Blake in his *Proverbs of Hell*, and whose vision of Hell wrenches all those that have gone before - Virgil, Dante, Milton - into modernity, by exposing the nature of the dialectical relation itself. In *Where the Hell?*, de Freston's rebel angels spill out of their confines, their spectral presences haunting the pseudo-margins of the canvas. Taken together, these works comprise a meditation on the dialectics of opacity and transparency, surface and depth, so pertinent not only to the Miltonic fall, to that 'dreary plain, forlorn and wild, / The seat of desolation, void of light' (l. 180-81), but to the artist's own.

Jaya Savige is the author of *Latecomers* (2005) and Poetry Editor of *The Australian*. His poetry appears in the *Penguin Anthology of Australian Poetry* (2008) and *The Best Australian Poems* (2010). He is a PhD candidate in English and Gates Scholar at Christ's College, Cambridge.



Surfacing

by
Kiran Millwood Hargrave

The fisherman casts his nets wide
And weights them, metal glinting in golden light,
Flesh shows through fish-bone twine
As his catch sways murky deep, silverbacked in sun.

...

So too, when left too deep, the body.
Brown, flat, falling back
Sinking under the weight of the world
and all its sins.

Then
On that silent night
Holy light.

And so too, right close to the light,
Skin seems red, yellow, blue,
Or brown, falls back the darkness and
Rises up the weight of the Word.

Now
Is the time
To live naked.

This poem was commissioned by Tom de Freston for this project.

Kiran is a published poet and final year Cambridge student, who edited *Ekphrasis*, a collection of fifteen poets responding to the work of Tom de Freston. Kiran is currently working on a body of poems relating to Shakespeare's plays, commissioned by the British Shakespeare Association.

Image: *Deposition study*, 2009, Acrylic on paper, 30 x 20cm



Words of commendation from the Chaplain of Christ's College, the Revd Christopher Woods

Commissioning a new art work for a place of worship is an exciting, yet daunting, project. It demands preparation, planning and enthusiasm from many parties. The reredos, or altarpiece, which Tom de Freston has been working on for some time, in various guises, is a stark, dramatic and disturbing fruit of talent, passion and labour of love.

The implications of such a work are manifold and as so often with art, there are endless possibilities of meaning, interpretation and inspiration in the time during which the diptych is installed above the altar in Christ's College Chapel.

None of these will become apparent until after Easter Sunday 2011. From that point on, those who worship, pray, sit, read, sing, make music or visit this sacred space can engage with a new creation. A new dynamism and fresh expression of spirituality is made manifest with the installation of *Deposition and Resurrection*. There will be questions, there will be intrigue, there will be shock, there will be amazement. All of this is good and right and there is no better a place for such emotion to be borne out than in

the house of God.

The theme of the paintings engages deeply with the roots and history of Christ's: the College is dedicated to our Lord Jesus Christ and the custom of maintaining a 'feast of title' or 'patronal festival' is kept in this College on Easter Day itself - the Day of Resurrection.

Of course, Deposition and Resurrection are closely entwined. And in this Chapel, we have had the great Caro sculpture of *The Deposition* in our midst for ten years.

Now, in 2011 we have the de Freston altarpiece: new reflection for our time on the human reality of falling to the depths of despair, yet rising again abundantly to life and hope again.

Tom is to be thanked and praised for his graciousness, enthusiasm and above all his God-given talent.

Revd Christopher Woods has been Chaplain and Director of studies in Theology of Christ's College since 2007. In August 2010, Christopher leaves Christ's and will work as the Church of England's National Worship Adviser and Secretary of its Liturgical Commission.

Deposition study (detail)
2010
Acrylic on board
35 x 25cm