

All one in life and death

ALEX PURBRICK explores the themes behind PAUL BLOOMER'S series of charcoal drawings, which are on exhibition in Da Gadderie this month.

"A Prayer for the Healing of the Nations" is the latest exhibition in Da Gadderie from Shetland based artist, Paul Bloomer. A series of large charcoal drawings explore the dichotomy between the natural world and the seemingly chaotic world of humanity. Through art, Paul explores his existential search for identity in a modern world so utterly disconnected from nature, where environmental degradation and pollution prevail, and war is the rallying cry for unity amongst our world leaders.

"How then shall we now live", is a powerful attempt to address the displacement and disunity of our global community. In this drawing, a crowd of people are gathered in an almost ethereal moment in time, all races, cultures, religions brought together yet not relating in harmony or peace with one another. Inspired by Rembrandt's Crucifixion etchings, a spiritual darkness predominates this drawing with an

image of Christ crucified on the cross in the background surrounded by figures oblivious and uncaring as to the nature of the suffering and pain of humanity that Christ pleads for us to recognise. The figures are more concerned with staring at the artificial reality of their phones and iPads to notice the men in white hoods and men giving Nazi salutes or the war helicopters flying overhead. The only hint of salvation is the geese flying in the sky in the opposite direction to the warring helicopters. These geese seem to bring a vision of hope that this crowd of broken humanity will return to nature in a spirit of prayer and truth and that somehow balance will be restored.



This theme (of how we can unite the harmony of nature with our fragmented global village) runs throughout this exhibition and is beautifully captured in a drawing titled, "Return of the Light (swans)". Inspired from a midsummer in Unst, Paul recalls how a flock of swans flew overhead calling out to two whooper swans who were embracing below. The swans appeared to him to reflect the celebration of nature as light returned to the land after many months of a dark, long Shetland winter. After this winter slumber, all of nature rediscovers the magical beauty of creation and rebirth as is reflected in another "Return of the Light" drawing, this time centred on two curlews whose beaks connect and create a spark of unity and divine love which ultimately prevails over the dark, charcoaled blackness of winter in the background.

Yet how do we as humanity live in harmony with the circle of life that nature spirals around us in our daily dance of existence? When, as in the drawing, "Facebook Valley", all the figures are digitally connected, desperately wanting to connect with each other yet unable to heal and love one another or be immersed by the beauty of the natural world. Or in the drawing, "Air", based on recent photos of Beijing where many people are wearing masks because the air is so polluted that they are struggling to breathe. "When we poison our air, we poison ourselves", Paul stated when describing this drawing and others based around the theme of pollution.

These might seem very serious topics to be considering when visiting an art exhibition but ultimately Paul's drawings raise fundamental concerns about how we as people are going to heal the imbalance we have created on this earth. This imbalance stems from our disconnection to the natural world and our obsession with materiality as well as our fear of each other which has resulted in the rise of extremist politics and hatred.

"The KKK are pleased with the new President" is Paul's response to the extremism of fear and darkness which swept over the earth after Trump's election as American President. How easy it is for humanity to hide behind cloaks of fear and hatred rather than embracing the rich diversity of life and working towards peace.

This eternal antithesis of humanity is the duality of nature that we as a human family must examine if we are to find peace and restore balance to our Earth.

"A Prayer for the Healing of the Nations" is Paul's challenging response to life's play of duality symbolised by the forces of dark and light, war and peace, life and death, love and hate. His drawings do not instruct us on how we should live but rather show us how we can look to nature for salvation and inspiration, celebrate the miracle of nature's creation and remind ourselves that we are all connected, and that we are all one in life and death.

"A Prayer for the Healing of the Nations" opens on Saturday 3rd June and runs for six weeks at Da Gadderie. ■

