

The Placid Sparrow

It is unusual to find an upside down bird in the middle of a somewhat empty painting. Quinton produced a canvas tall and narrow in order to leave space for the sparrow to fall. It is only when we see a white outline of a hand above the sparrow – God – and then we understand the topic.

The image derives from a biblical passage: Matthew 10:29-31

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

In several paintings Quinton points to another dimension that is beyond the canvas, that which is unseen. Here it is the hand of God.

Shakespeare then alludes to this story in Hamlet, Act V, Scene 2

“There’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, ’tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all.”

Following along the same sparrow story we can trace this image to American history:

“And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice,” Benjamin Franklin asked at the Constitutional Convention in 1787, “is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?” Franklin invoked the sparrow in service of his argument that the convention should open each day with a prayer”

— Quoted in Timothy Pitkin, *A Political and Civil History of the United States of America*, vol. 2 (New Haven, CT: Hezekiah House, 1828), 246.

We can thank Barbara Paul for tracking even more travels of this bird

Jean MacGibbon: *A Special Providence* / Richard Yates: *A Special Providence*

Nigel Balchin: *The Fall of a Sparrow* / Salim Ali: *The Fall of a Sparrow*

Val Henry Gielgud: *Fall of a Sparrow: The Story of an Adventure*

Kent L. Koppelman: *The Fall of a Sparrow: Of Death and Dreams and Healing*

Caroline Chesbro: *The Sparrow's Fall* / Fred Bodsworth: *The Sparrow's Fall*

Terry Lane: *Sparrows Fall* / Mary Kevin O'Rourke: *No Sparrow Shall Fall*

Janet Green: *Not a Sparrow Shall Fall: Study of the Terminally-Ill Child*

George Philip Griggs: *The Readiness Is All*

Satya Dev Jaggi: *Readiness Is All and Other Poems*

— <http://www.barbarapaul.com/shake/hamlet5.html>

Going back to the painting we see that it is full of color. Although it appears that Quinton might have used an airbrush it is not so, His meticulous technique is all by hand. See the section “Quinton’s palate” for his academically inspired approach to color models.