

Helm Ruifrok

b.1952

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Vivid, theatrical and spectacular – paintings by Helm Ruifrok leap out from the canvas (or aluminium, as he sometimes uses) and grab your attention with both hands. Look at the luminous colour, the billowing swathes of paint, the ghostly figures – there is certainly something grand and apocalyptic going on in these cosmic swirls of light and movement.

Often labelled ‘visionary’ and ‘mystical’, Ruifrok’s work is not typical of contemporary painting practice. Since studying fine art at the University of Canterbury in the early 1970s he has been fascinated by that group of artists usually called The Old Masters – a rather vague term referring to those European painters working between the 13th and early 19th centuries. Three of these painters, Johannes Vermeer, Rembrandt van Rijn and Leonardo da Vinci, have been particularly important to Ruifrok. Like these painters, he has dedicated himself to the classical study of the human body, producing many highly finished figurative drawings throughout his career. And, like these painters, Ruifrok uses light to convey an intense, perhaps spiritual, reality.

Ruifrok is particularly interested in metaphysics – that branch of philosophy that tries to explain the world beyond the limits of any particular science in terms of religion, the existence of the soul, the true nature of reality and the secrets of creation. He has explored ideas about the Golden Section, a mathematical system based on the perfect balance that can be seen in art as well as in the natural world where the ratio of the parts are in perfect harmony with the whole.

After The Deluge refers to the biblical story of Noah and the great flood, or deluge, that was said to have destroyed much of the known world. It also refers to a work by one of England’s Old Masters – J. M. W. Turner. Turner seldom adhered to the conventions of landscape painting, often dispensing with the

illusion of depth, or the realism of the scene itself. Rather he focused on light and colour as subjects in their own right. In 1843 Turner completed a painting called *Light And Colour (Goethe’s Theory) – The Morning After The Deluge – Moses Writing The Book Of Genesis*. This title refers to experiments with so-called ‘after-images’ – those coloured spots produced in the eye by staring directly at a light source then quickly looking away. The work itself is a sphere of golden light that dissolves any identifiable figurative details. In Ruifrok’s painting there is a similar sense of overwhelming colour and movement saturating the canvas and glowing with an almost holographic light. Out of this great swathe of paint and energy mysterious figures float in and out of focus, as if emerging from another dimension, swimming up to the surface of the painting. Ruifrok, the shamanistic painter, has summoned them to his own mystical, almost hallucinatory realm.

Sally Blundell

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Leonardo da Vinci

Golden Section

J . M. W. Turner

Rembrandt van Rijn

Johannes Vermeer

