

14th April 2021

Tranquillity

“Il faut qu’il y ait des moments tranquilles dans les grands ouvrages.”

“There ought to be moments of tranquillity in great works.”

Voltaire, The Piccini Notebooks

The Harbour View Gallery is a small, working studio and gallery in the picturesque village of Port of Ness, on the northern tip of the Isle of Lewis in Scotland’s Outer Hebrides. A 45-minute drive north from Stornoway, the main population centre on Lewis, the gallery and studio have been the base for many years of the artist Anthony Barber (see www.abarber.co.uk). Because of the way he captures the light and colour of the islands of Scotland, he’s always been one of my favourite Scottish artists.

Among the aspects of the beauty of the Islands of Scotland Barber depicts, there is the nebulous concept of tranquillity. I have one of his paintings in my lounge. It shows a white house with a red roof reflected in a mirror-calm sea. A few yards from the shore sits a red boat, secured to a float, perfectly still on the calm water. And the whole scene is embraced by the blues and golds of a Lewis sunset. It is the epitome of tranquillity. Looking at Barber’s painting takes me back to that shoreline, where I could sit for hours, watching, waiting and just enjoying the tranquillity.

The French writer and philosopher, Voltaire, was right when he said that “There ought to be moments of tranquillity in great works.” It’s what Tennyson described in his poem *Lucretius* as “Divine Tranquillity, yearned after by the wisest of the wise.” The question for us, therefore, is this: Whatever great works we put our mind to, are we to be numbered among the wisest of the wise and yearn after such tranquillity? Prayer? Meditation? Mindfulness? Maybe ... But for me, it’s often just about being still, like a boat on a calm sea, or a house perfectly reflected by a still shore. When we find it and give ourselves to it, tranquillity is enough of itself ...

The Chinese philosopher, Confucius, wrote: “The man of humanity is tranquil ... the man of humanity enjoys long life.” Finding moments of tranquillity is good for our health and well-being, in body, mind and spirit. Can we do that? Anthony Barber, Lewis-based artist, clearly thinks we can.

A prayer for today

*Lord, if I was to speak to you now, it would disturb the beauty of this time with you.
So, I’ll just sit still, and wait, and let the tranquillity speak for me. Amen*

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