

Where are you?

The MISEREOR Lenten Veil 2019/2020

Dr. Claudia Kolletzki, MISEREOR



The MISEREOR Lenten Veil 2019|2020 "Where are you?" by Uwe Appold© MISEREOR

„Alone again!“, we lament, when we’re left on our own with something. No one feels responsible! Today we often have occasion to shout: Where are you, when the glaciers melt and the seas rise? What are you doing, when minorities are marginalised and the needy turned away? How do you respond, when indifference or hatred increase? How do you intend to shape the future?

Where are you? As the Bible tells us, these are God’s words as He calls the first people in paradise (Gen 3.9). Filled with shame and lacking direction they have hidden themselves from God after eating of the forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve wanted to decide for themselves what was good and evil. Humans turned from being stewards into lords and exploiters of creation.

Where are you going?

The world is changing profoundly and at a frantic pace. Associations of countries are beginning to come apart. Individual countries are isolating themselves, and often pursue only their national interests. The truth is degenerating into fake news and the tone is being lowered. Our societies are drifting apart.

The question of God remains relevant today. It goes right to the heart of Uwe Appold’s Lenten Veil, to the still unfinished ‚common home‘ (see *Laudato si’*, 13) that’s open on one side, open like a question mark: Where are you? Who are you? Where do you divide, and where do you bring together? Where do you stand, and what will you stand up for?

Asking the listener where s/he is now. And what new direction s/he might take. A question aimed at the core of every human being's responsibility, which is profoundly personal and collective at the same time. None of us can answer it on our own. It requires us to be open towards the world around us, and to feel empathy for those on the margins of society. The singular 'Where are you?' thus becomes a plural 'Where are you?' In a spirit of solidarity we share responsibility for our 'common home' that is formed out of earth from Gethsemane, and is embedded in it.

From hearing to responding

A promontory protrudes from the deep blue and supports the hovering golden ring. Inside the circle, the sign of God and His love, rests a house – our 'common home', the symbol of our One World. This home is unfinished. We have to carry on working on it every day. The ring is slightly offset to the left – the world is no longer in balance.

'Where are you?' Conflicts are poisoning our relationship with God and the rest of the world. My neighbour is no longer my beloved brother or sister, but someone who disrupts my life. And God asks Cain the second question: 'Where is Abel your brother?' The dream of being great like God marks the beginning of an endless chain that leads to violence on our brothers and sisters. How can we reach solutions, and find a new balance?

The artist has integrated into the picture twelve stones that he found, stumbling blocks like red wounds, which we run into and which require us to take decisions.

Mysterious lettering arouses our curiosity. The figure on the right dressed in red and blue, a man or a woman, is raising its arms in prayer, striking a balance between listening and responding. The figure is leaving its old existence behind and setting off for the margins. Its new paths take it across boundaries. Its shadow is light, and is no longer a dark burden. The bright sign of Christ serves as a compass, pointing from seeing towards listening and responding. What will I stand up for? Am I hearing God's message and the rest of the world's message, and what are they telling me? Bringing humankind's potentials together in 'the world our home' – that's what God's project is! This is what God intended for us – acting in solidarity and appreciating the world around us, loving each other on the basis of His love, in the promise of a life shared for others.

From the centre to the margins

Sometimes the cries of the poor and the death of nature prompt us to ask God the same question: 'Where are you?' This longing has sunk into the soil of Gethsemane, just like the fear of suffering that will end on the cross. At the centre of the Lenten Veil the red of martyrdom bursts forth. Jesus' com-compassion for people, which embraces both the passion of His suffering and His passionate concern to share with all who suffer, is linked to the hope of new life. God became human at a particular place: right on the periphery, among the excluded (Phil 2.6-11). By venturing outward we bring this 'out there' to the centre of our actions, and those with no voice to the place that was always theirs: in God's love.

Uwe Appold's Lenten Veil links God's question to the large question marks that hang over our lifestyle. A good picture can invite the viewer to open their eyes and ears, and see and hear things more keenly. A different home, a new heaven and a new earth can become reality! We can wait for this vision. Or we can allow ourselves to be prompted by the question: 'Where are you?' Here I am! Here we are!

The question is not
„Where is God?“
The question is
„Where are we?“

Uwe Appold

Interview with Uwe Appold

(excerpt from the Lenten Veil workbook)

Where are we – in the Lenten Veil?

This title – ‚Where are you?‘ – accurately captures what we see. When I look at the picture I have to decide what I think about it, and in doing so give a first answer to the question: ‚Where are you?‘ I can do that a lot better when I can’t see any actual people, but can see an abstract figure. This means I have to try and answer the question from my own life history. I am certain the title will lead many people to ask: Where do I stand in relation to what the Encyclical *Laudato Si’* says about our ‚common home‘?

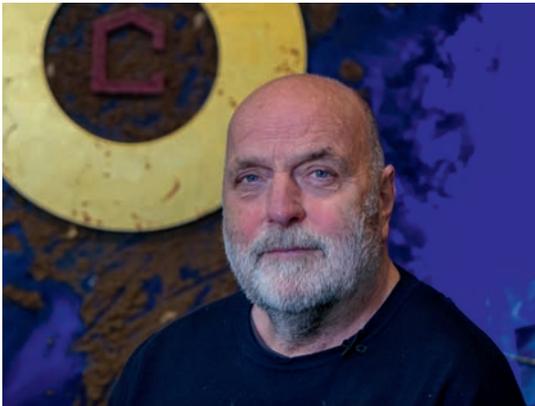
What is the Lenten Veil’s message?

For me, the message is about care for our ‚common home‘. If I place this care in the centre of the picture, then I can hear the picture’s message: I am a listener. I am called upon to put this message into practice, and then I’ll get a second chance – to find images that create hope from within the multiple crises we face.

What do you hope your Lenten Veil will achieve?

I’d like people to approach my works with their own life experience, and interpret what I’ve painted with their own stories. I don’t expect anyone to understand everything that I’ve put into the picture. After all, I followed my own path, which was mine and no one else’s. What is crucial is that everyone is open, and says: Yes, I recognise something of myself and for myself there. The image begins telling a story, and as they hear the story those who see the image then meet inside it, in a kind of a dialogue on art. I’d be delighted if that were to work.

Translation from the German by J D Cochrane



Uwe Appold, born in 1942 in Wilhelmshaven, Germany, is a designer, sculptor and painter. Until 2006 he lectured at the art college in Flensburg and in Hangzhou in China. He has designed numerous public squares, schools, official buildings, churches and works of industrial architecture in Schleswig-Holstein and beyond.

Since 1962 he has had regular exhibitions in Germany and abroad, including at the UN in Geneva and at Kirchentag events. In his cycles of images Uwe Appold explores experiences with the nature of human existence, encompassing themes drawn from antiquity to the present day.

Uwe Appold lives in Flensburg, Germany. For further information in German, please visit his website: www.uwe-appold.de