

WIDEWALLS

Margaret Morrison's New Body of Work Investigates Caravaggio's Use of Theatrical Light

Exhibition Reviews

Eli Anapur, June 14th, 2023



Among distinguished Baroque painters, the name of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio stands out for his impressive depictions of Biblical scenes and innovative use of light. Inspired by his art, **Margaret Morrison** created a new body of work entitled *Paradigm Shift*, comprising ten large oil paintings on canvas documenting Morrison's faith-based, spiritual travel through various stages of enlightenment.

"My Paradigm Shift series springs from the devastating sense of loss I felt when my belief in the "faith-promoting" history of Mormonism imploded, forcing me to build a new, and infinitely deeper spiritual foundation," she explains.

Currently on view at the Lyndon House Arts Center in Athens, Georgia, the paintings are testimonies of the artist's journey of discovery and rebuilding of her faith.



Margaret Morrison - *Processional*, oil on canvas

Paradigm Shift

In search of new truths and experiences that can rekindle her faith, Margaret Morrison traveled the inner spheres of her being and, at the same time, depicted the crucial steps of this journey in images that are full of poignant moments of personal revelations combined in an interplay of color, form, and light. The images describe various stages of her explorations, **from awakening to transcendence.**

Talking about her background and inspiration for the series, Morrison mentioned her upbringing, which installed in her the belief in unblemished **Mormon history**. However, this belief was shaken in early 2000 when an enormous amount of documents pertaining to the Mormon community flooded the internet.

"As I voraciously read everything that I could get my hands on, it became apparent that the tidy "faithful narrative" that I had been raised to believe in did not exist. In actuality, it was raw, messy, and filled with sexual intrigue," she recalled.

The narrative in each painting traces the arc of her journey from being a naïve believer, passing through cataclysmic destruction and terrible sadness, and finally reaching the reclamation of her inner peace and "*a closer connection to God.*"



Left: Margaret Morrison - *Doubt*, oil on canvas / **Right:** Margaret Morrison - *Transcendence*, oil on canvas

Caravaggio's Light

The series *Paradigm Shift* came out of the project proposed by Morrison to the University of Georgia's Willson Center entitled *Contemporary Examination of Caravaggio's Dramatic Staging and Lighting - A Collaboration between Painting and Theatre*.

In collaboration with Professor Anthony Marotta of the UGA Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Morrison created a script for Marotta's students, resulting in a stage performance that explored the use of theatrical light by Caravaggio. The performance was photographed by Gabrielle Rosenthal, and Morrison later used these photos as a basis for her paintings.

Much like Caravaggio, whose genius was foiled by his raucous temperament leading to his demise, the revelations about the Mormon community shook Morrison's belief, leading the artist to search for her personal enlightenment.

"I sifted through the ruins of my faith tradition and found the pieces that resonated with me. As I rebuilt, I began to experience deeper spiritual connections, a true sense of transcendence in my search for the Divine."



Margaret Morrison - *Followers*, oil on canvas

Margaret Morrison at the Lyndon House Arts Center

The exhibition *Paradigm Shift* will be on view at [the Lyndon House Arts Center](#) in Athens, GA, until September 1st, 2023. Margaret Morrison has been represented by [Woodward Gallery](#) since 1995.

Featured image: Margaret Morrison - *Limbo*, oil on canvas. All images courtesy of Woodward Gallery.