

WALKING THE SACRED PATH

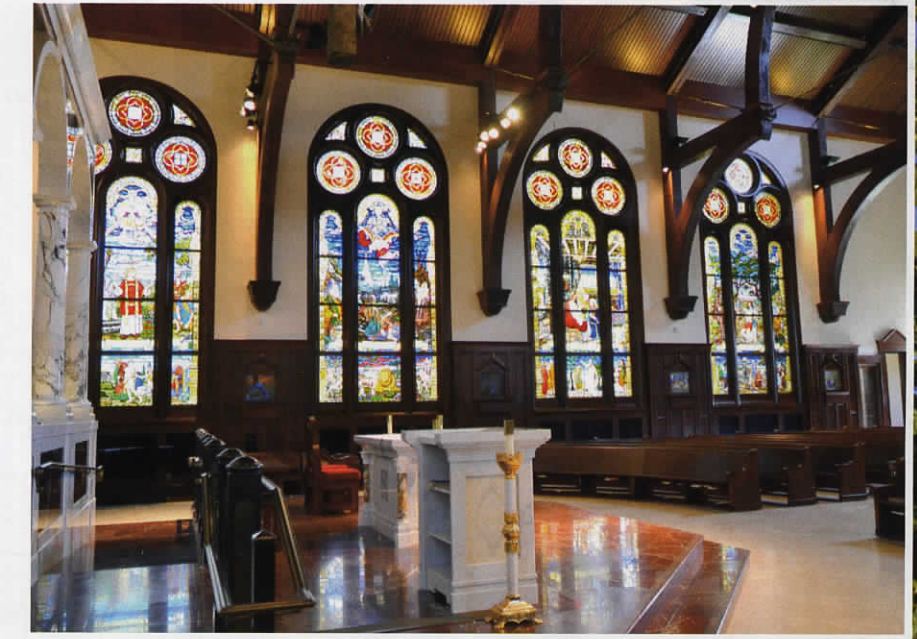
Peter Adams monumental 14 Stations of the Cross commission showcases the power of art and religion at Our Savior Church, adjacent to the University of Southern California.

By John Geraghty

My friend Peter Adams, a highly respected California artist, has been honored with a prestigious and challenging commission to create his personal artistic representations of the 14 Stations of the Cross that occurred along the Via Dolorosa ("Way of Sorrows"). The images depict the final hours of Christ's journey of the Passion to his crucifixion. The paintings will be placed within the spectacular Our Savior Church at the USC Caruso Catholic Center, adjacent to the University of Southern California campus.

The scenes represent a long history of Christian pilgrimage in which physical markers, that came to be referred to as the "Stations" were placed within churches to trace Christ's final journey. Progressively, the Stations were installed inside churches in the form of paintings, sculpture or bas-relief. Fourteen standard images emerged, beginning with Jesus being condemned to death and continuing through his crucifixion and entombment.

My personal research and preparation of this article has been a rewarding experience in



Throughout Our Savior Church are 27 sacred stained glass artworks created by the renowned Judson Studios of Los Angeles.

my faith and has provided an opportunity to demonstrate the inner connection and power of art and religion in the world of public art appreciation. Furthermore, I have come to believe that behind successful individuals there is generally someone who continually supports and encourages them—with Peter Adams it is his wife, Elaine.

Elaine Adams is recognized as one of the most dynamic and influential forces in the growing shift away from conceptual art back to the representational, figurative format. Elaine received dual bachelor degrees from the University of Southern California in mathematics and economics. She has served on numerous art committees and cultural boards, including the American Arts Council of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Pasadena Symphony, Ryman-earoll Foundation, American Society of Portrait Artists, and chaired the *Festival of the Autumn Moon* for the Pacific Asia Museum.

Since 1993 Elaine has held the position of executive director and CEO of the historic California Art Club as a non-paid



Our Savior Church is located adjacent to the campus of the University of Southern California. It is of an Italianate Romanesque style from the 13th century to 15th century. The exterior is of Italian Travertine stone selected from a 2,500-year-old quarry in Tivoli, outside of Rome. Each stone was precisely cut by journeyman stone artisans to provide a complex yet subtle visual design impact.





Station 1-*Jesus is Condemned to Death*, oil on panel, 21 x 24"



Station 2-*Jesus Carries His Cross*, oil on panel, 21 x 24"



Station 3-*Jesus Falls the First Time*, oil on panel, 21 x 24"

administrator. Peter has served as president. This prestigious organization, established in 1909, has grown from 80 members to 3,000 under their leadership. Elaine is editor-in-chief of the club's newsletter. She is a published author and lecturer on topics relating to traditional fine arts, classical art training and California's artistic heritage. Other honors include being the recipient of the Pasadena Art Council Gold Crown special award in 2000 for her contributions in the advancement of contemporary traditional art. In 2007 the Autry National Center presented Peter and Elaine with the John J. Geraghty Award for their efforts

in re-establishing the California Art Club and the advancement of traditional contemporary fine art. Elaine has an incredible personality, a marvelous laugh; she is petite, attractive, and a real mover and shaker. Among her other duties she operates a special art gallery, American Legacy Fine Arts, in Pasadena, California.

The procedure through which Peter Adams applied for this commission was similar to other art competitions and applications for public works. Peter completed a formal submission process, was interviewed by the selection committee where he described his vision for the project and submitted rough studies. At

this point, Peter has never been told what the deciding factor may have been that led to him being selected for the commission. He suspects it could have been his extensive study and preparation and the fact that he told the Liturgical Design Committee that if he were chosen he would travel to Jerusalem to study and familiarize himself with every aspect of the Stations before he commenced painting.

In the summer of 2010 Peter and Elaine set off on a one-month pilgrimage and elaborate adventure to Israel to be within the walls of Jerusalem's Old City, where Peter painted numerous plein air studies, took videos, photographs, and attended processions along the Via Dolorosa. He spent weeks consulting with the Franciscan friars, especially with Father Angelo Beda Ison who had been leading the Procession of the 14 Stations on the Via Dolorosa every Friday for the past 19 years. Through Angelo, Peter was able to secure permission to paint overnight locked inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and he and Elaine were also able to celebrate a mass inside the small tomb where it is believed Christ was buried and rose from the dead—a moving experience for both Peter and Elaine.

Upon returning home, Peter and Elaine began organizing the vast collection of information they had gathered, including personal notes, photographs, videos, reference sketches and Peter's plein air paintings.

Peter's plan was then to gather a large group of friends, artists and models and stage elaborate recreations or re-enactments of each Station at various locales in Southern California. From these re-enactments he made studies, videos, and photographs that he used as reference to create the finished paintings.

Peter states, "This theatrical component to the project related to the training I received under my longtime teacher, Theodore Lukits,



Station 5-*Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus to Carry the Cross*, oil on panel, 21 x 24"



Station 4- *Jesus Meets His Mother*, oil on panel, 21 x 24"



Station 6- *Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus*, oil on panel, 21 x 24"



Station 7- *Jesus Falls the Second Time*, oil on panel, 21 x 24"

with whom I often worked from costumed models and elaborate setups."

Peter made a list of characters that had prominent roles in the depictions of the Stations. Jesus, the Virgin Mary, John the Beloved, Mary Magdalene, Joseph of Arimathea, Pontius Pilate and several others, including soldiers, Sanhedrin, women and children—all told a cast of 40 on any single day. He contacted a friend, costume designer Beverly Crain, and commissioned her to make the costumes. Peter hired professional models, secured livestock, constructed props, including three 12-foot wooden crosses, and petitioned friends and artist colleagues to participate in the staging.

After establishing the composition, Peter prepared color studies to resolve any problems within the preliminary sketch. The interaction of the figures, their gestures and expressions were paramount. The introduction of light and shadow and the relationship of color value communicate a sense of feeling and atmosphere.

Peter used the approach of many of the past masters, developing strong compositions, sharp yet sensitive edges and bold purposeful brushstrokes to provide impact. Many of the studies he prepared were in a 21-by-24-inch format, the exact size of the final images required for the commission. These studies were presented not only to the Liturgical Design Committee for review, but also to the Judson Studios (who were creating the stained glass windows for the church) to make sure that the paintings and the stained glass harmonized.

Producing artwork in a religious context offers many challenges; one must balance their creative vision against centuries of tradition and faith. The artist must be willing to discuss alternative suggestions and, in some cases, adapt these ideas into the visual story in such a way that the work becomes even stronger. Often to narrate the story, numerous figures are involved in the composition, introducing challenges the past masters resolved by painting monumental works.

When the initial study was approved it was

transferred to a ¼-inch tempered masonite panel, prepared with two coats of gesso and primed with a gray middle tone. Peter prefers working on panel due to its texture, which provides a smooth foundation for creating detail, such as with facial features, hands and feet.

Peter then began establishing his lights and darks, adding color as developed through his studies. Often he returned to his plein air works for reference, especially when depicting light and shadow. Peter's work is a complex approach of working the entire surface, establishing multiple layers and developing textures, even within this process modifications are introduced until he is pleased with the final image.

More than two years have passed since Peter received the commission; all 14 Stations have been completed and placed within the individual alcoves awaiting the permanent installation of LED lighting specifically designed for this installation.

Peter says, "This project has been unique for me because it has given me the opportunity to study a short period of the life of Christ



Station 8-Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem, oil on panel, 21 x 24"



Station 9-Jesus Falls the Third Time, oil on panel, 21 x 24"



Station 10-Jesus is Stripped of His Garments, oil on panel, 21 x 24"



Station 11-Jesus is Nailed to the Cross, oil on panel, 21 x 24"



Station 12-Jesus Dies on the Cross, oil on panel, 21 x 24"



Station 13-Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross, oil on panel, 21 x 24"



Station 14-Jesus is Laid in the Tomb, oil on panel, 21 x 24"
 Courtesy Collection of Our Savior Parish and USC Caruso Catholic Center.

in great depth. The Via Dolorosa may have taken 1½ hours to walk, but I have spent more than two years in preparation, studying every aspect of Christ's journey of Passion. I traveled to Jerusalem and spent a month walking and re-walking every step, as well as consulting with leading scholars, theologians, and archeologists. Perhaps the most wonderful thing I have come to understand is how it must have felt to actually be in the crowd and follow Christ on his route to Calvary."

Peter is a native Californian, born in Los Angeles on August 27, 1950. He received his training at Art Center College of Design, Otis College of Art and Design, and Instituto de Bellas Artes, San Miguel de Allende. However, it was the Lukits Academy of Fine Arts in Los Angeles where he finally found the traditional

artistic philosophies he so admired. At the Lukits Academy, Adams spent seven years in diligent formal training and as personal apprentice to the renowned mural, landscape and portrait painter, Theodore N. Lukits (1897-1992). At the Lukits Academy it was typical for students to study still life compositions that consisted of original sculptures and porcelains from Lukits' personal collection. This interest led Peter to travel throughout Asia. In 1981 Peter was the first American artist to travel and paint unescorted through the People's Republic of China. In 1987 Peter was the only American artist to disguise himself to travel and paint with the Mujahideen rebels in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan.

Peter is represented in major collections throughout the country, and is a signature

member of numerous nationally recognized art organizations.

He is as a dear friend, as is Elaine. He is a true gentleman, an intellect, an interesting conversationalist and an accomplished artist. 🍷

About John Geraghty

John Geraghty, Trustee and Special Advisor to the Autry National Center's Masters of the American West Fine Art Exhibition and Sale, shares his insights on the Western art scene. Both he and wife Saralynn were afflicted with the incurable passion of collecting Western art.

