

## **Between Heaven & Earth the paintings of Alyne Harris**

*Anne E. Gilroy*

Alyne Harris makes art from a place of spiritual ease. She is in the world but not defined by it, painting from a place that, in her unshakable belief in the presence of God in all things, hovers between the earth below and heaven above.

An image-maker since childhood, Harris reiterates themes woven of matter-of-fact lived experiences and often startling divine imagery. While the mundane business of daily life unfolds – chickens are fed, cotton is picked, children play – Harris assures us that flowers and animals emote, demons rise, and angels hover over all. The artist laces the secular and the divine throughout her body of work in nearly equal measure.

Harris' documentation of rural life in the segregated, mid-20th century south stands as an unpretentious record of a time and a place. She paints without judgment a world in which lines of racial disparity demarcated neighborhoods, traditions, cultures – and opportunities. But Harris weaves no subtext of injustice into her work. Instead she offers quotidian subjects in plainspoken visual language: farms, children, gardens, portraits, church.

Of the many colorful threads in the tapestry of Harris' body of work, her paintings of churches are particularly dazzling. Rendered as two dimensional, more symbol than structure, Harris nonetheless pays homage. She rarely paints a church as background or bystander. Instead, Harris positions the church within the composition as a royal portrait subject – situated front and center, bedecked variously in flowers, snow, stained glass, and metallic gold embellishments.

In the glory of Harris' renderings, the church is a gateway to a promised land. The artist enters, paintbrush in hand, illuminating the spiritual landscape of her faith as readily as her native environment. She has painted legions of saints and martyrs, Jesus, God in heaven, bible tales, choirs of angels – and less frequently but powerfully, demons, devils and visions of hell. We are called to witness the power of her faith through the absolute sincerity of her art.

Harris imbues sunflowers, animals and insects with personality, feelings, perhaps even a bit of soul, revealing and reveling in her faith that God is present in all of nature, all of life.

For more than four decades, on thousands of canvases, Alyne Harris has steadily and quietly taken out paint and brushes at her kitchen table and made art. She is modest, shy, and understated about her achievement. Harris has chronicled the world as she sees it and a world only she can see – crafting into existence a realm between heaven and earth.

*Anne Gilroy contributes a curatorial view of the exhibition of 200 paintings of Alyne Harris.*