

## Rockweed Paintings

Paul Ryan

Paul Ryan presented his Design for an Environmental Television Channel at Bogazici University in Istanbul, The Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans, The Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City, MoMA, and a United Nations Conference. His program for a Hall of Risk in Lower Manhattan was presented at the Venice Biennial. Radical Software published his seminal writings on video. NASA published his Earthscore Notational System. An Associate Professor at the New School, Mr. Ryan authored *Cybernetics of the Sacred*, *Video Mind/Earth Mind* and *The Three Person Solution*. The Smithsonian Institution has acquired his archives.

When I was a young man of seventeen, I joined a contemplative preaching order of the Roman Catholic Church called the Congregation of the Passion. The Passionists, as they were known, were founded in the north of Italy in the eighteenth century by a man named Paul Daneo. The order was dedicated to reactivating the memory of Christ on the Cross, especially among the poor. Besides the normal vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, the Passionists took a special vow to preach Christ and Him Crucified.

Paul Daneo became a saint in the Roman Calendar; his feast day is April 28. He is known as Paul of the Cross. According to the hagiography, Paul Daneo had a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary in which she instructed him to found the order. In that vision, Mary showed him a white image of a heart with a cross above it, indicating the purity she wanted from men who preached about the sufferings of her son. To this day, black robed Passionists wear that white image over their hearts. The liturgy for the feast of Paul of the Cross quotes a line from Song of Solomon, "Put me as a sign upon your heart and a seal upon your arm, because love is stronger than death."

During my training with the Passionists, the Roman Catholic Church was in the midst of upheaval occasioned by Vatican Council II. In the 1860's, the First Vatican Council had declared the Pope infallible in matters of faith and morals. In the 1960's, the Second Vatican Council of Bishops was struggling with this legacy and trying to respond to French and German theologians who were calling for significant changes in the organization and structure of authority within the Church. In my fourth year with the order, I tried to start a student government in a monastery in West Springfield, Massachusetts.

During my fifth year, a friend of mine took me to see a visionary monk and theologian, a Passionist our immediate superiors had explicitly forbidden students to talk with. I felt privileged to be let in on the forbidden discourse. Five minutes into my first visit, the monk, my friend, and I were standing in our black robes with our white signs above our hearts, looking at a Zen painting of seven stones. The two of them were laughing a pure laugh of recognition. My laugh came out of camaraderie and uneasy learning. Suddenly, the monk said, "You know, this congregation would be a lot better off if we just forgot about the Crucifixion for a while." The laughter peeled off into a whiter shade of pure. Thomas Berry. Fortunately, his radical laughter and love of Earth have touched many people.

Shortly afterwards, I left the Passionists and went on to develop ways of using video as an artist to interpret ecosystems. I am particularly fascinated by the movement of water upon rock. I'm giving a DVD-video

composition “Rockweed Paintings” to *The Ecozoic* to be used as part of their tribute to Tom Berry. The DVD celebrates how the ebb and flow of tidewaters move rockweed along the coast of Mount Desert Island in Maine. Reversal of the color field takes place in camera so you see the same color field as the artist sees. In the edit, the orientation of the image and the direction of the tape are both changed to avoid jump cuts and create transitions that enhance continuity of perception. The speed of the tape is altered in accord with the proportions of the golden mean to better render the internal rhythms of the movement. The tape includes six series of rockweed images. It is silent, suitable for ambient viewing.



Rockweeds in the Surf