

THE ASPEN TIMES

Going beyond the surface of wall painting

Charles Andrade brings walls to life with lazure

By Stewart Oksenhorn
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It was two weeks before the bat mitzvah, and the family was having a small crisis: The front wall of the Aspen Chapel, the backdrop to the bat mitzvah ceremony, just wouldn't do. So the father asked Charles Andrade if there was anything he could do about it.

Andrade, a local painter who specializes in wall finishes, looked at the wall and knew he could make a vast improvement. Not in time for the bat mitzvah, of course. But Andrade recognized that his touch could make the wall more appropriate - more spiritual even - than the venetian plaster that had been applied just a few years earlier, and drew consistent criticism.

"The wall was a sterile bone-white. It didn't do anything for the space. Everybody thought it was a dirty wall," said the 52-year-old Andrade, who had moved to Basalt a year ago. Andrade told church administrators "it was so ghostly in color you expected a crow to fly across the crucifix. It felt more like death than life. It didn't have a sense of color that initiated a feeling of spiritual reverence."

Andrade had just the cure: lazure, a painting technique he had learned in England 25 years ago and had practiced ever since. Lazure is a combination of color theory and textural value that allows for the hues to flow, and de-emphasizes the underlying surface texture.

At the Aspen Chapel, that translates to a wall where the space above the free-standing crucifix is a pale beige, which becomes gradually, subtly darker toward the bottom and outer edges. To Andrade, the colors become a metaphor for the tension between spirituality and incarnation - an ideal metaphor, given the purpose of the space.

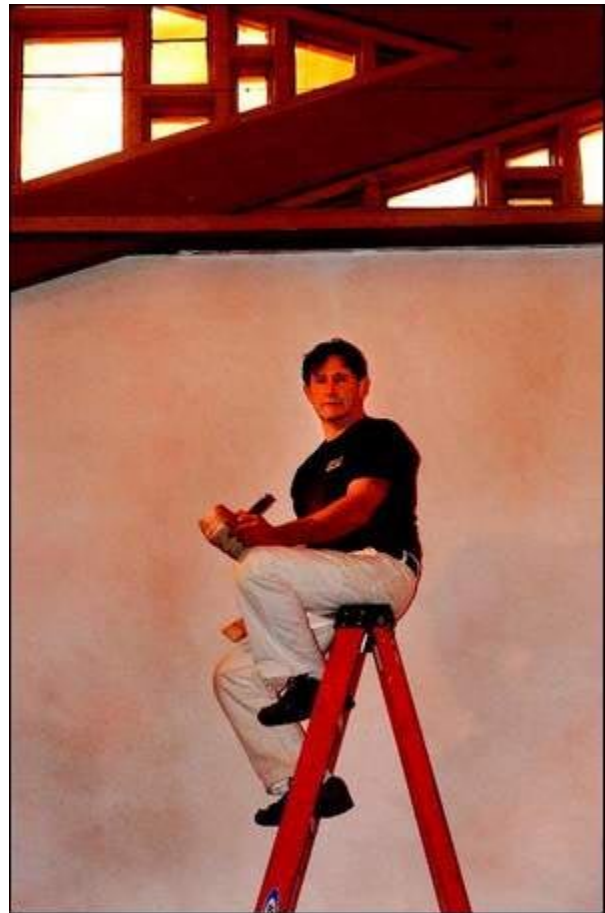
"At the top center - the metaphor for the spirit - you're moving into the light," said Andrade. "Then the light moves into the corporeality of matter, or the darkness. And that's what we're focusing on when we're in church. It's a visual metaphor for the soul's striving for balance between darkness and light, spirit and matter, heaven and



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Local artist Charles Andrade applies his lazure technique of painting to the walls of the Aspen Chapel. Aspen Times photo/Mark Fox.

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earth. It works on people unconsciously, to help their spiritual side."

Wall-finishing techniques that emphasize the surface texture, like ragging, bring too much attention to the corporeal realm. "Texture anchors you into the physical world," said Andrade (whose website is www.lazure.com). "Lazure brings you into the etheric, that light realm. Instead of feeling incarnated by the wall, the colors seem to float in the wall. So one begins to feel as if he's surrounded by color."

The theory underpinning lazure is complex, having to do with analogous colors - colors that are adjacent on the color wheel. And Andrade's descriptions of color qualities - the expansiveness of yellow, the inwardness of blues, the dynamism of red - verge on the esoteric. But lazure painting is the sort of thing that can feel intuitively comfortable, peaceful and uplifting. Andrade's finish is on the walls of the Waldorf School on the Roaring Fork, which is frequently praised for the feel of its space. After painting a room at Aspen Valley Hospital, Andrade was quickly contracted to do several more.

Andrade, one of just three painters in the United States using the lazure technique, also makes fine art, quasi-abstract color field paintings along the lines of Mark Rothko. But he considers lazure painting an artistic pursuit, as it aspires to what he sees as the central purpose of artistic endeavor.

"Art has a great role in reconnecting mankind to the spiritual world, and helps give a spiritual understanding to matter," said Andrade, a Detroit native who earned a bachelor of fine art at Michigan State University before being introduced to lazure at the Tobias Center for Art and Art Therapy in East Sussex, England. "They elevate the human soul, using the sensory world. The whole thing about lazure is its translucent quality. It's a visual metaphor for the translucent quality of the human soul."

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