

Verses, Over The Waves

“When someone is talking to the ocean it can be hard to hear them over the waves. They are talking about home...” - Jesse Wright

The books featured here were made while interdisciplinary artist, educator Jesse Wright was in the process of creating large scale paintings. Completing one page daily, reclaimed materials salvaged from the streets are frequently repurposed, and occasionally interwoven with poetry, to communicate musings often centering on the theme of moving from descent to ascension and reflections on scripture. Others were inspired by work in global humanitarian projects as well as everyday events observed locally. Several are hand made, including both the pages and cover, as the artist sought to explore the entire process of book making in various formats.

Although the earlier books in the collection were exclusively made in collage format, the approach expanded to mixed media, including painting and drawing, as the artist was encouraged to include the warmth and mark of “the human hand” seen in his paintings. Eventually the books became almost entirely painted. Likewise, the initial source imagery (newspaper clippings, magazine scraps and discarded packaging) seen in the early books was often found on commutes home between New York and New Jersey and arranged in a formal response to this content during end of day reflections. The latter books, however, are comprised of intentionally selected or artist generated imagery serving a specific narrative or theme.

The “Missions” book documents, through silk screen prints, the faces of youths and orphans met while serving in faith based humanitarian projects. These portraits are placed alongside those of the artist’s family to suggest a connection between our local and global families as well as to promote nurturing and empathy beyond our immediate community.

Another book, “Vietnam Can’t Kill Kenny’s Cloud 9” explores the crisis and eventual healing from PTSD that Wright’s father experienced following his return from the Vietnam war. This sustained investigation is told primarily through the use of two images. One is of the father as a soldier during the war and the other being from a photo taken not long after his return.

While some books respond to various socio political issues, several directly or cryptically reference biblical scripture. At times, this may be expressing a shift from despair to hope as seen in the “Ascension” book. Other times it may be an allegorical depiction of specific scripture as seen in the “Book Of Revelation” accordion book. Several of these books are paired with painting associated with them. These selected artworks present a sampling of Wright’s paintings from the last 20 years.

The first empty book the artist received was from a friend who instructed that while pages and books can be completed throughout the year, should a year come to conclusion, a new book must be initiated. This was to be the case even if the current book were still in progress. Having initially been unaware of how to attach a cover, Wright often simply hinges two framed paintings together to house the book pages. Other than with his sketchbook, also included in this presentation, he’s maintained this practice.