

Obituary – Norma Weller, 1932-2007

Back in the halcyon days of so-called ‘snail-mail’, any letter arriving from Norma Weller was instantly recognizable even from its envelope. Norma’s large, highly legible and distinctive handwriting was as individual as she was. A talented artist and art teacher, her first approach to me – it must have been well over two decades ago - was to ask for a high quality photograph of the Shroud face. I gave her the best copy of the Enrie negative that I had (it was actually my last ‘best’ copy!), and she never looked back, soon actively becoming involved in Shroud studies with her clearly characteristic energy and enthusiasm. Lively correspondence, lectures, articles, and even a full book all followed.

Norma’s strongest, though most controversial Shroud-related interests were her identification of the ‘crown of thorns’ injuries as a myrtle leaf, arising from her pioneering use of computer enhancement techniques, also her association of the Shroud with Mandeian Gnostics. These special studies were completely individual to her, and they were clearly well researched, often making it difficult for those of us lacking her insights either to agree or disagree with her. Over the years this could make for a one-sided correspondence which one sensed that Norma often found frustrating.

In recent years Norma joined the Internet-based Shroud Science Group, but towards the end of November of last year she suffered a stroke, and died on December 7th, after an illness lasting just ten days. Unbelievably, she was 75, for such was her vitality, she could easily pass for someone twenty years younger. Norma’s husband of nearly twenty five years, Sydney Vale, has kindly submitted the obituary below

Ian Wilson

Obituary by Sydney Vale

Norma Weller was a well known painter in Brighton where she lived throughout her life. She studied art from a very early age and in her late teens obtained a scholarship to study at the prestigious Slade art college in London. In her early years she specialised mainly in portraits which were highly successful, one of these was chosen to be exhibited at the Royal Academy and then the Paris Salon. She however turned away from portraits to concentrate on religious subjects. This was the result of many years of study of religions in their many forms with interest particularly in their esoteric aspects such as for example Gnosticism, the Torah and Sufism.

She wrote a great deal on these subjects with profound depth of understanding. She published for instance a book in French on the Gospel of Thomas from the Nag Hammadi which contains a commentary on the loggia or verses full of original thinking. But her main interest in recent years was the Turin Shroud. She approached the subject in two ways, the first one visual, the second in her writings. On the visual side her professional knowledge of colour led her to use this means to reveal the hidden aspects of the Image in a way that until then was thought to be obtained only by using computerised methods. She instead used colour enhancement techniques. She presented the results, a series of large photographs, to Cardinal Angelini, Head of the Institute for Research on the Face of Christ at the Vatican in 2002 who was

impressed enough to suggest a meeting with Father Heinrich Pfeiffer S.J, one of the great authorities on the Shroud in the Vatican.

In addition to the visual, writings occupy an important place in Norma Weller's thinking and work. She has suggested at least two hypotheses about the Shroud:

Firstly, that the Crown of Thorns one is supposed to see on the head is in reality a wreath of Myrtle. For this she suggested that Jesus was a member of the Mandeian tribe, and obscure sect of Jewish origin who eventually emigrated to what is Iraq today. The Mandeans still exist today, perhaps the last Gnostic tribe on earth. They left Iraq in great numbers after the two recent wars there and are to be found, mainly in the USA and Australia.

Secondly, that the body was anointed as hinted in the Bible by Mary Magdalene with oil of Spikenard. So far no proof of this has been obtained, largely because the Vatican has refused to let any further scientific work to be done on the Shroud for at least twenty years. However there is in existence some detritus or dust from the Shroud which is in or was in the possession of Professor Giovanni Riggi who died recently. This detritus contains amongst other things unidentified pollen. Norma Weller was a member of the Shroud Science internet group for the last three or four years.- and a French chemist by the name of Marcel Alonso, a member of this group, is sympathetic to Norma and is proposing an analysis of these at some stage which would prove or disprove Norma Weller's theory. He said in a recent e-mail to me when learning of her death:

Dans le Groupe Science, elle était un stimulant merveilleux, car nul Physicien ou Chimiste n'aurait pensé à tester les hypothèses qu'elle formulait
(*In the Science Group, she was a marvellous stimulant, because no physicist or chemist would have thought of testing the hypotheses she formulated*)

He added :

Elle continuera, j'en suis sûr, à stimuler nos recherches. Je ferai dire une Messe pour le repos de son âme.

(She will continue, I am sure, to stimulate our research. I will have a Mass said for her so that her soul can rest in peace)

Norma Weller's Hove Ikon Gallery at her home in Brighton and Hove will remain open to visitors, it contains possibly the only permanent exhibition about the Shroud in the UK.