

The book who runs may read

Richard Davey shares a biblical view

SINCE the early 1980s, Thomas Denny has acquired a well deserved reputation as one of the Church's most exciting and stimulating artists in stained glass. His work in Gloucester Cathedral, and for churches throughout the country, combines a lyrical vision with an almost abstract use of colour and design. The resulting windows are both intense and intriguing.

From a distance, his work can appear to be a formless mass of colours that seem to have no apparent subject. However, when the surface is studied close up, it becomes alive with small details and forms, as fossils, animals, and figures are seen to inhabit a primeval and ancient landscape.

Through Denny's exciting and stimulating play with scale, we not only see the world from a bird's-eye point of view, but also with a naturalist's attention to small details. The texts that inspire these works are frequently drawn from Proverbs, the Psalms, and Isaiah.

Denny and these texts share a vision in which the natural world is seen within the larger context of God's universal and eternal creation.

Stained glass, however, is not the only medium for Denny's exploration of God's creative presence within the landscape. An exhibition in Bath is allowing us also to see a number of his exquisite oil paintings and watercolours.

Denny's paintings are densely textured and boldly coloured works that are immediately striking in the intensity of their vision. Hot, sultry and exotic colours, including pink and purple, assault the eye. Perhaps as a reflection of his experience with stained glass, Denny uses a limited palette for each painting. He builds up the subject by using a restricted tonal range that creates a shallow sense of space that does not easily reveal the hidden depths.

But as we gaze more intently at this apparently abstract jumble of colours, it seems to open unseen vistas that lead the viewer further



Mystical grove: *Stagwood*, oil on canvas, by Thomas Denny, in the Bath exhibition

Denny uses colour in his paintings to create an atmosphere and sense of spiritual mystery that is reminiscent of the work of Caspar David Friedrich. While stained glass allows light to shine through it, paintings rely on colour itself to create a sense of numinous luminosity. The relationship of colours within the whole composition is therefore of vital importance.

In order to recreate the sense of spiritual light that is so central to his glass, Denny allows shafts of contrasting colour to break in and disrupt the tonal harmony of the paintings. The result is an evocation of external illumination and revelation that imbues the work with a sense of mystery and hope. In *Deer Park IV*, a shaft of incandescent blue light stands out from the surface of the painting like a spectral presence within the landscape, or a sign of God's presence within the world.

But we are only ever allowed to glimpse a small part of the whole picture. In each painting the landscape continues beyond the edges of the work, to tantalise the viewer with the suggestion of a larger world beyond.

The paintings themselves resemble ancient walls and rocks that have been encrusted with lichen and mosses. This suggestion of the world's ancient history and primeval past is reinforced by the subject-matter itself. A small grove of trees in an ancient Dorset deer park, and barren mountainous landscapes evoke an earlier time, in which God himself is believed to have walked on the earth. They reveal the possibility of a world in which God and his creation are one.

"Thomas Denny: Recent Paintings" is at Six Chapel Row Contemporary Art, off Queen Square, Bath, until 25 October (not Sundays). Telephone

and further into the image. At the same time, the eye slowly unlocks the interlocking shapes that cover the surface, to reveal the subject that is contained within the work. The

sense of entering a mysterious landscape is supported by the myriad of thin lines whose spidery forms cover the surface to resemble paths into the unknown.

Intermediate state

I HAVE a problem with purgatory — both the theology, and the fear it's a smoke-filled waiting-room with a grey carpet curling at the edges, people with hacking coughs huddled on chairs, and a sign above the door which lights up with a "ping" to announce "Next", writes *Catherine von Ruhland*.

That's a British perspective. In Kore-Eda Hirokazu's Japanese *Afterlife* (PG), purgatory appears to be a dingy old school where the

remiscing about their lives are actors — in a gently amusing tale that is as much a meditation on perception and the artifice of filmmaking.

Now showing at cinemas in the vicinity of the UK's Asian community, and due to gain wider

yellow of twirling kites, and the dusty golden glow of sunlight streaming throughout Lenny's home blend to a city-wide wash of earth browns and clays as hatred, fear, and revenge take hold.

It is personified in Lenny's hero, the Ice Candy Man, the Muslim

whose heart freezes when his sisters are butchered. It is only when individuals such as a fellow Muslim, the gentler Hasan (Rahul Khama), recognise a love greater than religious differences — he hides a Sikh family in his home, and is prepared to lay down his own beliefs and convert to Hinduism for the love of Shanta — that we see any sign of hope. But against a whirlwind of hatred, symbols of love are soon steamrollered into the