



'The Silence'

by Tanya Ogilvie-White

I took this photograph of the Port Hills, Christchurch on 22 March 2019 – exactly one week after the devastating terrorist attack on the city's mosques. That morning, I'd joined 20,000 others in a public outpouring of support for the Muslim community. Led by imam Gamal Fouda of Al-Noor mosque and Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, we joined the Muslim call to prayer. As we bowed our heads in silence, many of us wept. We were total strangers, holding held each other, supporting each other; people of all different faiths, beliefs, cultures and nationalities. It was the perfect response to extremist violence. Humanity at its best.

Back in my art studio, I transformed this photograph into an encaustic artwork and donated it to the Salaam Exhibition at Grafton Regional Gallery, Australia – an exhibition set up to draw attention to the dangers of extremism and to raise money for the victims of the mosque attacks. My artwork, which I titled 'The Silence', was auctioned along with the work of more than 50 other artists. It was won by Salaam exhibition organiser and sculptor, David Hickson, who grew up in Christchurch and later moved to Australia.

As we witness the rise of extremism around the world, I often reflect on the Christchurch mosque attacks. I think about the 51 people who died, the scores of people who were injured, and the many families and friends who experienced such terrible loss. But I also think about the silence in the park: that mass expression of empathy on a scale I'd never experienced before. I think about the artists from around the world who later donated their work – most of them had never been to Christchurch and had no connection to the city, but they wanted to do something to help. When I think about that, it gives me hope for humanity. It convinces me that if we peel back the layers of faith, belief, culture and nationality, most of us identify as one community, as a network of global citizens who respect our differences, celebrate our humanity and are bonded by a shared responsibility for each other and for our planet.

We need to do what we can to tap into that deep-rooted, global identity. It's our best hope of stemming the rise of extremism, militarisation and conflict, and it's our best hope of ensuring the long-term survival of life on earth. How can we tap into it? At NZCGS, we think about that a lot. It's our mission. We hope you share it, and we invite you to contribute your ideas on what we can do to pursue it.