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'The Cry II' by Wynn Jones (photograph by Kaz Takabatake).

PAINTING AESCHYLUS

Bob Doran

talks to contemporary artist Wynn Jones about his obsession with Aeschylus' Oresteia and the joys of rendering the trilogy in visual form

The images are compelling. Two eagles swoop on a pregnant hare, killing mother and unborn offspring and presaging the sacrifice of a king's daughter. A queen dreams she gives birth to a serpent that kills her; the serpent is her own son. Avenging Furies are transformed into guardians of justice and parade through Athens by torchlight.

The *Oresteia* of Aeschylus is full of these striking visions, some performed, some narrated. I find it surprising, then, that, with the exception of a bloodthirsty triptych

by Francis Bacon, so few artists over the centuries have been inspired to portray one of the milestone works of civilization. Now, however, a British artist has explored the *Oresteia* in a series of large, striking, often unsettling works.

Wynn Jones has been painting for over 50 years. His passionate interest in the *Oresteia* has surfaced as a potential subject since his student days at Cardiff College of Art, through his years as a visiting tutor at many leading colleges, including the Royal College of Art, the Royal Academy School and

Byam Shaw School of Art, and throughout his life as an artist. But it has taken him until now to deliver on his obsession. He says that the *Oresteia* is like the *Divine Comedy*, *King Lear* and the *Ring Cycle* – it's at once mythic and profoundly human. It presents a daunting challenge, one that eventually had to be faced. At last he felt ready. But he's not illustrating the trilogy like Gustave Doré and the *Ancient Mariner*. Rather, he's aiming to bring its poetry and passion into the orbit of his own journey as a painter working in the 21st century.