ONLINE

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A NOTE ON ACE

In July of this year, the organization ACE, Art and Christianity Enquiry, met in Boston for its bi-annual meeting. The conference’s theme was “Art and Christianity in Revolutionary Time” an appropriate subject for the meeting’s Boston setting. Founded in 1991 in London, ACE has met every two years as an international group that works with subjects in the area of the church, theology, and the arts. (I would recommend that you view the ACE website and consider becoming a member. It offers with its quarterly, Art and Christianity, one of the best review publications available on works being published in the field (enquiries@acetrust.org).

NOTES ON THIS ISSUE

But more to the point. In this issue we are publishing two of the ACE conference papers each of which offers us theological reflection on works of revolutionary art. One essay is by Joan Carter, a former president and faculty member of CARE, the Center for the Arts, Religion and Education at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. She examines in her essay John Hicks: Painter of the Peaceable Kingdom the life of the Quaker artist, John Hicks, and his treatment of a group of his most important works. Her essay traces the changes in his treatment of his subject from that of a work that is idealistic and eschatological to a much darker portrayal of his Kingdom in which his view of the human situation has radically shifted.

The second article is by Paul Myhre, Associate Director of the Wabash Center, a member of the sarts Board, and previous contributor to arts. His essay, Visual Art as Revolutionary Power: Street Art in Religious, Theological and Ethical Declaration in Egypt’s 2011 Arab Spring, explores the role of graffiti art in the Egyptian revolutionary Spring. The images capture the swirling mix of hope and fervor that embodied the revolution’s call for a free Egypt and how powerful
the role of art was in that experience. Both of these essays deal with revolutionary themes—one flowing out of the American revolutionary period and the second out of the modern world of the middle east.

Our third essay is by Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu who continues the exploration of theology and politics. In her article, *Building the Community of Theology and the Arts: Part 2, Bilinguality*, she focuses on the role of the theologian in the interpretation of the art of marginalized people. Her essay is the second part of a two-part treatment of her subject, the first appearing in the last issue of *arts* (23:3, 2012) as a part of the Symposium on issues in theology and the arts.

The theme of theology and politics is continued in our reprint of Sandra Bowden’s essay on *Otto Dix’s Matthäus Evangelium: Otto Dix Lithographs*. This essay, first printed in *arts* (18:2, 2007), was a groundbreaking contribution to the publication of religious art, for it was the first American printing of the thirty-three Dix lithographs of Matthew’s story of Christ. In Dix’s presentations, political power is pitted over against the religious power of Christ in a stark and unyielding portrayal of the crucifixion and the actors in that politically infused drama. Sandra Bowden, is a former president of CIVA (Christians in the Visual Arts) and a painter and writer whose works have been featured in *arts*.

This issue offers a rich group of essays that have interwoven religion, politics and revolution in an original and provocative fashion. We hope that you find them significant writings for your own work and thought.

-WY
Dear arts subscribers,

Thanks for stopping by to read our latest arts online issue. I am pleased to fill you in on our schedule of events for this year’s sarts meeting held immediately before the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature in Chicago a few weeks ago.

On Friday, November 16 at 7:00 PM we sponsored The Living News: SHELTER, A Staged Reading of a Play-in-Progress at Stage Two, Columbia College. The Living News: SHELTER gives voice to those hidden behind the headlines. A collaborative alliance of artists, journalists, and musicians is working with homeless men, women and children at Cornerstone Community Outreach, a shelter in the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago, to create a unique theatre production that shares their stories - stories reflecting the lives of over 90,000 people living homeless in Chicago this year. A discussion with Director/Editor in Chief Lisa DiFranza, cast and writing team followed the performance of this staged work-in-progress.

On Saturday, November 17 at 9:00 AM we heard presentations by our 2012 Luce Fellows:

- Elise Edwards, *Designers as Agents: Theological Interpretations of Architecture’s Ethical Task*
- Jennifer Awes Freeman, *The Opus Caroli Regis and Medieval Western Theology of the Image*
- Rev. Michael Patella, OSB, *The Hermeneutics of the Saint John’s Bible*

Then arts editor Wilson Yates moderated an open discussion of *The Future of Theology and the Arts*. The discussion was followed by a brief business meeting of the society.

We hope you will join us next year in Baltimore.

With all best wishes,

Robin Jensen
Announcing the 2012-13 Luce Fellows

*sarts* is pleased to announce the following recipients of Luce Fellowships for the 2012-13 academic year:

**FACULTY**

Lisa DiFranza  
Columbia College  
"The Living News: Shelter"

Virginia Wiles  
New Brunswick Theological Seminary  
"A Habit of Surprise: Comedy as a Strategy for Interpreting Scripture"

**STUDENTS**

Paul Ryan Bonfiglio  
Emory University  
"Reading Images, Seeing Texts: The Role of Visual Literacy and Visual Thinking in Ancient Israelite Religion"

Ada Focer  
Boston University  
"motive Magazine Recovery and Promotion Project"

Michael Brandon McCormack  
Vanderbilt University  
"The Art of Prophesying: The Prophetic Tradition, Hip Hop Aesthetics, and the Cultural Production of The Cornell West Theory"

For more information on the fellows and their projects, visit [www.societyarts.org](http://www.societyarts.org).
Edward Hicks: The Peaceable Kingdom

Joan Carter

Edward Hicks (April 4, 1780 – August 23, 1849). Painter of The Peaceable Kingdom.

An American folk painter as well as a noted minister of the Society of Friends, Edward Hicks became, through his paintings of the Peaceable Kingdom, perhaps even more than through his preaching, one of the most influential spokespersons the Quaker tradition has ever known.
In doing the research for this paper, I discovered that both his life and his work as a painter were, without question, indelibly shaped by the aftermath of the Revolutionary War.

Born in his grandfather’s mansion at Attleboro in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in 1780 - just four years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the young Edward was soon snatched from the life of luxury into which he had been born. For six generations his family, loyal to the British throne, had held a position of wealth and social prominence. Following the defeat of the British, however, all of their privilege disappeared and his father, Isaac, a well known “Loyalist” and his grandfather, Gilbert, chief justice of Bucks County, were forced into hiding. As you can imagine, it was a dangerous time for British sympathizers in general but more specifically for a family as openly vocal as Edward’s had been.

Tragically, Edward’s mother died when he was only 18 months old. His father, unable to care for his new son, the youngest of five, made arrangements for one of his wife’s closest friends, Elizabeth Twining to take over the care of young Edward. Elizabeth was a devout Quaker and although Edward’s parents were Anglican, she endeavored to bring up her new charge in the Quaker faith. While he loved to sit at her knee and hear her read stories to him from the bible, that seemed to be the extent of his interest in her Quaker principals.

Early on it was determined, much to his father’s disappointment, that unlike his older brother who was already a practicing physician, the young Edward was totally unsuited for a scholarly pursuit. Fearing for his son’s future, Isaac sent him off at the young, tender age of 13 to learn a trade from coach makers, William and Henry Tomlinson.
While Edward was with them, the Tomlinsons paid little if any attention to Edward's coming or going. Away from Elizabeth Twining's moral care, the young, impressionable Edward soon fell in with some unsavory companions. What followed was like a repeat of the Prodigal Son story, a story that Edward must have been only too familiar with.

Working all day and carousing all night, he soon fell into ill health. At a critical point, Edward decided to give up his way of living and return "home" to the Twinning farm and the more austere life he had known there.

In the Spring of 1803, he was accepted with open arms into the Friends fellowship. Soon after, he married Sarah Worstall whose family were Quakers of long standing. He and Sarah had been friends from childhood ... and as Edward put it she was "the one enduring love of his youth."

With a wife as well as himself to support, he put into practice the trade he had learned from the Tomlinsons. He started by painting simple sign boards as well as decorating carriages.

Judging from Edward's account books, in 1811 his career as a sign painter took a big jump as he began to paint more and more elaborate sign boards.
One work, commissioned by the local library, took the form of a wooden placard adorned with the face of Benjamin Franklin in its center.

![Newton Library Sign](image)

Edward Hicks, *Newton Library Sign*, 1835, Collection of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center

Another work was the sign board he painted for the Red Lion Inn, we see the first of the lions that will take center stage in Hicks’ paintings of the Peaceable Kingdom.

One of the most entertaining of his sign boards is the one he painted for Jacob Christ who owned and operated a hat shop in one of the nearby villages. This joyful jumble of hats gives us a rare view into the lighter side of Hicks’ personality.

![Jacob Christ Signboard](image)

Edward Hicks, *Jacob Christ Signboard*, 1810, Collection of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center

Detail of *Newton Library Sign*, The central image of Benjamin Franklin based on an engraving by David Martin, 1767.
With Sarah Hick’s painted chest, he provides us a sample of the highly decorative work that he was capable of. This chest appears to have been painted for his wife, Sarah.

As time went on he added easel painting to his repertoire. Some of these paintings had patriotic themes such as *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. As was common practice at the time, Hicks took his inspiration from a painting by Thomas Sully on the same subject.

Sully’s painting, now hangs in one of the American Art galleries in the Museum of Fine Arts. Having been given the wrong measurements, Sully’s work ended up being too large for the place for which it was originally painted.

It is in this painting that the symbolism which became an important element in Hicks’ future paintings emerged. To Sully’s scene, he has added a moon seen penetrating the gathering storm clouds, like the cosmic eye of God, overseeing events.
Hicks painted a number of other patriotic events like the signing of the Declaration of Independence and Penn’s Treaty with the Indians.

In this 1847 version of *Penn’s Treaty with the Indians*, it is easy to see that his painting was closely based on an earlier painting by Benjamin West.

This scene, an important one to Hicks was to show up again and again in his paintings of the Peaceable Kingdom.
As a Quaker, Hicks' artistic profession was on the edge of acceptable vocations. It was deemed all right for him to put his talents to use on wagons, signs and other utilitarian jobs, but to become too ornamental was forbidden among the Friends.

In order to quiet the criticism he was receiving from his community and his own Quaker convictions, he decided to give up his painting business turning instead to a more acceptable way to earn a living - farming.

It was a disastrous decision. He was ill equipped, either by training or experience, to become a farmer. To complicate things further, unable to come up with the whole down payment to purchase farm land, he borrowed the balance of the money from what he later described as a “usurer.” Instead of taking responsibility for this decision, he complained that “the cruel moth of usury” had eaten his “outward garment” till he had turned into a “naked bankrupt.” He further claimed that it would only have been proper charity for the lender to have given him the loan without interest. This was only the first of the financial decisions that would leave him deep in debt the rest of his life.

In the wake of the farming disaster, Edward sought the advice of a trusted friend who told him, “Thee has the source of independence within thyself, in thy peculiar talent for painting. Keep to it, within the bounds of innocence and usefulness, and thee can always be comfortable.” That advice was still fresh in his mind, when in 1816, Hicks saw something that lead him to a way to effect a compromise between his religious beliefs and his need not only to make money but to express himself visually.

What he saw was this engraving by British artist, Richard Westall, in which Westall illustrated a passage from Isaiah. (Isaiah 11:6) The passage reads, “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lay down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together: and a little child shall lead them.”

Much as he had done with West's painting of Penn's Treaty with the Indians, and Sully's painting of Washington Crossing the Delaware, Hicks used Westall's engraving as a model for his own paintings of the same subject. Between 1816 until his death in 1849, Hicks is known to have painted somewhere between 60 and 100 paintings of the Peaceable Kingdom.

Here in Hicks’ painting, we see a child playing safely with the wild animals who appear tame and utterly harmless.

When I first started looking at these paintings of the Peaceable Kingdom, I imagined the painter to be a calm, quiet, unassuming man who simply sought to share with others his vision of a peaceful world.

What I found was that nothing could be further from the truth! He was a man often at war with himself and with his fellow congregants.

Not infrequently he would be moved to speak at one of the meetings with his voice gradually rising in pitch and fervor in condemnation of someone or something he deemed in error. When he himself was criticized, he would denounce his critic with such unbridled venom that after departure from the meeting, he was plunged into suicidal despair.

Several times he actually left his own community to worship in a neighboring community. He always returned.

Alice Ford in her biography of Hicks writes, “Edward’s return to the fold found him as uncommonly dogmatical a disputant” as ever, assuming a righteous and intolerant authority and disliking all who answered or disagreed with him.”
Upon closer examination, Edward’s paintings of the Peaceable Kingdom between 1816 and his death in 1848 can be seen to chart, through the symbology contained within the paintings, the course of his inner life during those years. Filled early on with the dream of peaceful coexistence between all, his hopes were gradually shattered as he came, at the end, to see what an impossible dream it was.

The earliest paintings (1816-1828) are the most peaceful.
Most of these early works are surrounded by a printed border, usually referred to as the “Border Peaceable Kingdoms.” His experience as a sign painter equipped him to do the lettering around these paintings, which usually read:

The wolf shall with the lambkin dwell in peace,
His grim carnivorous nature then shall cease;
The leopard with the harmless kid lay down,
and not one savage beast be seen to frown;
The lion and the calf shall forward move,
A little child shall lead them in love.
When MAN is moved and led by sov’reign grace,
To seek that state of everlasting PEACE.

The animals in these so called “Border Peaceable Kingdoms” are sweet and mild, without any trace of tension or anxiety. The child has his arm gently and lovingly draped around the lion's neck. William Penn, standing on the banks of the Delaware signing a peace treaty with the Lenape Indians, is shown in the background. Hicks found in William Penn the ultimate role model he was seeking in how to reach peaceful resolutions with those with whom one was at odds. Penn, also of the Quaker faith, demonstrated for Hicks in his legendary treaty with the Indians, the way to reach a peaceful resolution. Unfortunately Hick's explosive personality left him incapable of emulating Penn's example.

The next set of paintings is more disquieting. The peaceable kingdoms painted between between 1829 and 1832, have been referred to as “Banner Peaceable Kingdoms” because of the banner of text wrapped around the figures. Upon close examination, we can see that there are signs of disquiet beginning to show. For example, the leopard now looks considerably tenser, even uneasy. While the child still has his hand around the lion's neck, it is more like it is grasping a handful of mane, struggling to keep the beast in place. The human figures are beginning to scatter, and there is an ominous split in the trunk of the oak tree.

This cleft was intended to represent the division that had taken place within the Society of Friends between the so called Hicksites and the Orthodox. The Hicksites, under the influence of Edward's cousin Elias, advocated a simple, rural lifestyle and looked askance at the prosperity of
Quakers who lived in the city. In addition, the Hicksites also resisted the authority of Scripture and opposed having elders in the church.

By 1832, when he began to paint what were known as his “Middle Peaceable Kingdoms” (1832-1840), Hicks had begun to doubt whether reconciliation was possible. In response to his doubts, many of the animals take on a fierce, even sinister look. The lion is seen baring his teeth. In a sermon preached at Goose Creek, Virginia, Hicks explained his symbolism: each animal represented a different aspect of human nature. His point was that there are qualities that even the most gentle and un-aggressive of human beings have in common with the untamed beasts of the wild. “The animal, man,” he said, “possesses the nature and propensities of all other animals.”
Edward Hicks, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 1834, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

Edward Hicks, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 1833-1834, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center
By the time he painted his final series of paintings, called the “Late Peaceable Kingdoms” of the 1840’s, Hicks seems to have completely abandoned his hopes for peace on earth.

Some of the animals—especially the leopards—can be seen in outright conflict. They are no longer grouped tightly together, but are dispersed across the canvas, representing the disunity that represents more and more his experience of the world and civilization as he knew it.

It was during this time that Hicks wrote of his former hope that, “I should live to see the society of Friends come together but . . . the ranting un[settled] spirit among friends together with the feebleness of my hold on life has dissipated (sic) that hope.” Hicks’ growing sense of fatigue is expressed most clearly in his last “Peaceable Kingdom,” in which the lion appears hunched over in what seems to be sheer exhaustion.

What Edward Hicks seems to be saying in these later paintings is that God’s peaceable kingdom cannot be established on this earth – at least within society as Hicks knows it. His experience in what he deemed as a sinful church, gradually replaced the idealism of his youth. In old age, his idealism gave way to what he believed was a more realistic view of human nature never realizing the role he himself had played in making it a contentious gathering of “friends.”
He produced these images to the end of his life; in fact, he was preparing one for his daughter when he died.

Hicks executed his last painting of the Peaceable Kingdom in 1849. It represents his final word on a theme that had governed both his life and art. Family tradition holds that he was working on this easel when he died. Although this version keeps much of the "Late Kingdom" imagery, it has many unique elements that set it apart from other versions. The focal point is now the elongated, recumbent leopard, the epitome of a being, finally at peace with the world. One would hope that through this, Hicks was also expressing the peace that can come before death and the final acceptance of what one's life has been. This tranquility is seen in each of the painting's thirteen animals, who peacefully mingle in the soft glow of the setting sun. Though many of the series' familiar scenes remain - for instance, the distant Penn's Treaty grouping - this version is distinctive in that a general exodus appears to be taking place. Also unique to the Kingdom imagery is the lone bull in the lower right corner who also appears to be exiting the scene even as Hicks himself will shortly exit the scene through death.
Visual Art as Revolutionary Power: Street Art as Religious, Theological, and Ethical Declaration in Egypt’s 2011 Arab Spring

Paul O. Myhre

Introduction

The recent explosion of street art around the globe has promoted a host of responses from outright rejection to wholehearted acceptance. As a diffuse movement it finds expression through people trained and untrained in the art of painting, drawing, and graphic design. It intentionally situates itself outside of gallery systems and commercially acceptable methods where it is regarded as a commodity to be collected, bought, and sold. Instead, those associated with this contemporary movement are concerned more about the provocation of conversation and a systemic ethical shift toward the valuation of human and non-human rights. In short it is largely about challenging human values, systems of ethics, unjust political and social realities local and global, and the rights of all things living. It is a visual revolution rising from creative hands belonging to those marginalized and oppressed by political, social, economic, and religious systems. Their collective creative output includes iconography in stencil, sticker, and spray painted form. Much of the street art is indebted to 20th century figures – including artists, musicians, and poets – who called into question accepted norms and systems of oppression, encouraged reassessments, and systematic change. People like Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Caesar Chavez, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa, and others are recognized as agents of change and architects of hope. Images of them and others can be found plastered on walls in any major city of the world. The graffiti street art movement is largely a visual ethics movement oriented toward the promotion of basic human and creational rights.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Paul Myhre is Associate Director of the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. He has a PhD in historical theology from St. Louis University, and frequently reads papers and publishes articles in the field of theology and the arts. His last article in arts was “How the Arts May Embrace Interfaith Dialogue” (21:2, 2010).
The antecedents to contemporary street art movements are manifold. Perhaps one could argue that the work of 20th century Mexican muralist artist Diego Rivera, for example, was instrumental in promoting visual conversations about disparities between the wealthy few and the poor majority. Post revolutionary Mexico was latticed with as many human rights and social justice problems as it was prior to the revolution. Mexican muralist artists recognized that greater systemic change involving shifts in ethical values was necessary. Through artistic means they labored for a more just society.

The impulse for justice finds expression through visual and auditory art forms. For example, in 1970 Beat Musician Gil Scott-Heron’s record album *Small Talk at 125th and Lenox* was released. His album wasn’t recognized that widely across American airwaves. But it still produced ripples across U.S. urban landscapes within African American communities because it struck a resounding chord of truth. The music connected with their day-to-day life experience. Scott Heron claimed, “The revolution will not be televised.” The lyrics speak poetically to disparities between political and cultural powers resident within American culture. That which was shared on television aligned with dominant white power and that which pulsed in the music and art of underground movements like his spoke to the African American shared desire for justice and change in systems of oppression in the United States.¹ His artistic gift spoke to a generation that waited for the promise of 1965 civil rights legislation to filter throughout American society in the 1970s. Justice was missing and Scott-Heron called for revolution to bring it about. Fueled by thinkers like Malcolm X, Stokley Carmichael, and Martin Luther King, Jr., who recognized the dangers inherent in power structures that sublimated and subjugated people to manageable categories, artists – musicians, poets, painters – caught their messages and produced a massive wave of artistic protest. Their art spoke truth to and about human experience and asked for justice in all spheres of life.

During the 1980s street art in both written and graphic forms gained momentum as a worldwide phenomena. With the rise of the Internet in the mid-1990s graffiti art as a means for public expression and discontent became a global phenomena. The capacity to bring into sharp focus ethical concerns, challenge contemporary values, give voice to shared anxieties, and express a desire for human justice and freedom were common. These themes have found visible

presence during the Arab Spring of the past few years. It is as if a creative impulse aimed at justice had been unleashed and would not return to a political or cognitively constructed cage that had held it.

A range of visual means was employed by street artists to communicate their ethical ideals or questions. Juxtaposing images that represented power with that of innocence spoke volumes about experiences of oppression and systems of power. Shared hopes for communal human freedom and creational flourishing through basic rights are recurrent themes. In some cases, street artists preferred to ask their visual questions by placing common and uncommon images alongside each to aid in the provocation of cognitive dissonance. This capacity to raise important human and animal rights questions often brought out a degree of discontent by political powers in the countries where the images were placed and by those who were gaining some advantage through the limitation of animal or human rights. As such, the images met people where they lived and thereby could not be easily dismissed. The art prompted conversation, resistance, and opposition. Anna Waclawek in her book *Graffiti and Street Art* speaks to the heart of the issue when she claimed, “As unauthorized art forms manifested in public spaces, graffiti and street art suggest that public art is as political as the space it inhabits.”

Beginning in 2011 the Arab world was rocked by a series of grass root movements of wide popular appeal to overthrow totalitarian and oppressive governments. Although some of it was televised, much of it was not. Governments in Libya and Egypt could not withstand the tsunami wave of popular uprising and calls for freedom, justice, and human wellbeing. One vital component of the tsunami has been the rise of public revolutionary art that wasn’t broadcast widely on television, but found expression on walls, streets, billboards, and nearly anywhere by artists who expressed their ethical ideals on public spaces and marked the public sphere with notes calling for justice and inviting discernment of what might be most true for collective human wellbeing and creational flourishing.

Four years before the Arab Spring, Anna Waclawek claimed in 2008 that street art is “…the quintessential art movement of the 21st century.” Given the events of the past three years I think she was prophetic and right. Over the past
two decades street art has emerged across the globe as a means for the powerless to provoke conversation about injustice, human rights, freedom, and a number of values often denied people by unjust governments and systems. One might claim that an art revolution is sweeping the planet that reflects common hopes, disrupts cherished opinions, interrogates mass media, and invites thick reflection about religious identity, ethical values, philosophical and political ideologies, and interpersonal relational dynamics and practices. For Waclawek, “Graffiti and street art are exceptional...for three key reasons. First, as unsanctioned interventionist practices, they challenge the art institution and commissioned public art...second, street art practices are guided by and guide a city’s visual aesthetic in that they both assimilate that environment and recreate it. And finally, graffiti writers and street artists fundamentally question the ethos of ownership through the process of creation and thus approach the city from an alternative perspective.”

In a book review of *Surface to Surface: The story of a graffiti revolution*, Eric Walberg reflects on the history of art and asserts, “…graffiti...explodes during periods of social unrest. The student protests and general strike of May 1968 saw Paris bedecked in revolutionary, anarchist, and situationist slogans – [translated as] ‘boredom is counterrevolutionary’ and ‘read less, live more’.” ...The Israeli West Bank barrier has become a site for graffiti, reminiscent of the Berlin Wall.”

In Egypt most of the graffiti is hand drawn, stenciled, or the result of spray-paint application and images.

I contend that contextually produced art – Street Art – is often, at its most fundamental level, about visual theological depictions or visual ethical convictions that aim to spark viewers imaginations about ideas, values, beliefs, hopes, and meaning making in order to open up theological and ethical reflection for dialogue about what might matter most. In Sigurd Bergmann’s recent book, *In the Beginning is the Icon: A Liberative Theology of Images, Visual Arts and Culture*, he contends, “The aim of iconology is not to establish universal truths, but rather to be a tool for articulating and interpreting visual experiences...A central question is how God, through human creation and observation of pictures, can have a liberating function in images.”

The global street art movement perhaps could be likened to an improvisational play whose stage has been set and artist actors have stepped forward to take on particular roles as the curtain rises on a contemporary visual revolution.


Act 1: Bansky

During the first decade of the twenty-first century Street Art witnessed a number of artists rise to global prominence. People such as Banksy and Alexandre Farto aka Vhils are two examples. They are fond of naturalistic portrayals of people placed in juxtaposition with other figures or images. A shared interest in communal and individual justice marks their work. Waclawek claims that “Banksy’s subversive, satirical imagery has become synonymous with stenciling as a street art technique.”\(^8\) For example, one of Banksy’s works show a young girl frisking a soldier. Peace, justice, and freedom are common value laden themes. Banksy as a global force was instrumental in bringing together global street artists to work collaboratively to protest against the Israeli construction of a wall in Bethlehem. This project known as the “Santa’s Ghetto” mural in Bethlehem was organized to protest the separation wall by painting images on it. The project gained worldwide attention and provided Palestinians with a means for voicing their discontent with the injustices they were experiencing.\(^9\) William Parry’s book *Against the Wall: The Art of Resistance in Palestine* provides numerous examples of the art created to provoke conversation and oppose the Israeli oppression. Some of the most provocative bring images and words together in one statement. Such as “To Exist is to Resist” coupled with hands raised, dogs with open mouths, and weary faces. It is hard to determine how much this street art movement of 2009 had on the subsequent revolutionary street art movements in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and elsewhere in the Mideast. Resonant tones can be discerned in the compositions and iconographic frames developed.


Banksy is perhaps the most well-known graffiti or street artist of the twenty-first century. His stenciled work can be found around the globe and his capacity to provoke commentary is laudable. The span of his work as of date has been to challenge the status quo, question the power of corporations and mass media, and challenge the merits of capitalism. He claims, “The people who truly deface our neighbourhoods are the companies that scrawl their giant slogans across buildings and buses trying to make us feel inadequate unless we buy their stuff. They expect to be able to shout their message in your face from every available surface but you’re never allowed to answer back. Well, they started this fight and the wall is the weapon of choice to hit them back.”

Banksy’s approach has been one of challenge and confrontation through visual means. Whatever the subject – restrictive governmental laws, religious positions on ethical issues, commercial advertising, environmental degradation, and so on – Banksy is intent on addressing it as a means toward speaking truth against the powers that be. He claims, “I like to think I have the guts to stand up anonymously in a western democracy and call for things no-one else believes in – like peace and justice and freedom.” Some claim that his graffiti subjects or targets include, “…war, capitalism, fascism, imperialism, authoritarianism, greed, poverty, hypocrisy, boredom, despair, absurdity, and alienation.”

Banksy is convinced of the power that one individual can wield through making public their perceptions about the world as it is and what it could be. In reflecting on the regime of President Ceausescu of Romania through John Simpson’s work for BBC News, he relates, “On December 21 the President, disturbed by a small uprising in the western city of Timisoara in support of a Protestant Clergyman, was persuaded to address a public rally in Bucharest. One solitary man in the crowd [at the rally], Nica Leon...started shouting in favour of the revolutionaries in Timisoara. The crowd around him...thought that when he shouted...it was a new political new political slogan. They started chanting it too.
It was only when he called, ‘Down with Ceausescu’ that they realized something wasn’t quite right. Terrified, they tried to force themselves away from him, dropping the banners they had been carrying. In the crush the wooden batons on which the banners were held began to snap underfoot and women started screaming. The ensuing panic sounded like booing...The unthinkable was happening. The head of security...whispered [in the President’s ear] ‘They’re getting in.’ It...was audible...on live national radio. This was the start of the revolution. Within a week Ceausescu was dead.”13 The power of one can have enormous effects.

Act 2: Visual Artists Wield Revolutionary Power

The revolutionary street art of the Egyptian Arab Spring was and is a process of creating art from a variety of vantage points for a host of revolutionary purposes. It seems that in the case of the Egyptian context artists were largely focused on the subversion of the status quo, overpowering an unjust governmental system, and raising the voice of the masses publically in ways that could not be easily suppressed. In 2009 Egypt’s graffiti revolution began in earnest with public street artists opposing the Mubarak government through various visual displays.14

In The Atlantic October 3, 2011 issue an article by Lois Pashley, assistant editor at Foreign Policy magazine, claimed, “…in Egypt, where the Ministry of Culture controlled all public expression, protest art was hard to find — at least until this January, when 18 days of mass revolts toppled President Mubarak's regime and unexpected freedoms flourished, including the right to make art.”

Only 10 months before this edition, in the January 7, 2011 edition of The Atlantic detailed plans of the activists were provided in both Arabic and English.
The 26-page pamphlet of plans entitled “How to Protest Intelligently” – reprinted in The Atlantic – provided protesters with specific instructions about how they might engage in peaceful protest and protect themselves from security forces. The pamphlet also included six demands that provided scaffolding on which the protesters could unite. These demands included:

1. The downfall of the regime of Hosni Mubarak and his ministers.
2. The cessation of the Emergency Law
3. Freedom
4. Justice
5. The formation of a new, non-military government with the interests of the Egyptian people at heart.
6. The constructive administration of all of Egypt’s resources.  

Passant Rabie, writing for Egypt Today, in his essay “Reclaiming the Streets” claimed that after the revolution, “...Egyptian youth took to the streets with the new and unfamiliar mind-set of ‘the streets are ours.’ Some had brooms while others came with buckets of paint and rollers, but all of them began to mark their reclaimed territory. From that day on, the walls lining the streets of our nation would never look the same as different styles of street art covered up that ubiquitous shade of gray that once surrounded the country’s streets.”

The street artists who had created their art under threat of imprisonment during the Hosni Mubarak regime found that after the revolution the people embraced their art. However, the current military government has been less so. Egyptian artists Ganzeer and Bakry would create stencil works of art and use stickers on posters of political leaders as forms of protest. Bakry claimed, “I feel street art is a good retaliation to all the billboards [the government] used to do with Mubarak’s face on them or for the Sinai Liberation. It’s sort of a way to reclaim the streets.” Nagla Samir, professor of art and design at the American University in Cairo has claimed that the art of the
revolution grew after the overthrow of the Mubarak government. In reflecting on the recent art movement she claimed that the people of Egypt, “...felt [public space was] ...rediscovered and regained territory, making it a comfortable domain for artists to extend their public statements.” Street art production has become a common form of expression across Egypt. How long this movement will last is difficult to determine. At present, it shows no sign of abating.

As I considered the iconography of Egyptian visual production pre- and post-revolution, it occurred to me that it could be further categorized or divided into perhaps five scenes or themes of activity in a collective play about human rights and social justice. The six demands outlined in the 26 page pamphlet outlined above form the backdrop against which the five scenes are played out. The first scene involved the theme of national identity. Who were the Egyptian people and what did they collectively stand for? It is a scene dominated by a symbol of Egyptian unity that incorporates images of the Islamic crescent moon and Christian cross – often in conjunction with images of the Egyptian flag. Hence, as national symbols they function as a rallying cry for civil unity as one people united in a common cause. Egypt is roughly 85% Muslim and 15% Christian. Second, political commentary is orchestrated through a juxtaposition of totalitarian officials and official pronouncements alongside ideas and views that are contrary to them. This scene of activity explores foundation questions of human rights, disparities resultant through the wealth of a few and the poverty of the masses, and the ever present threat of death in relation to the actions of those in power toward the seemingly powerless. Scene three occupies an idealistic space where naturalistic portrayals of “freedom” are recounted as a core value dominating visual performance. Fourth, the scene of martyrs that gave their lives for the cause of collective human wellbeing and the resultant family and communal grief are explored. The fifth scene of street art activity in the 2011-12 Egyptian revolution involves what might be called “mash-ups, mix-ups, or collage” that bring together a host of ideas into one composition to prompt reflection about Egyptian core ideals and values. Death permeates many of the scenes as an ever-present actor who is ready to take away anything gained or diminish revolutionary hopes.
Act 2, Scene 1:
Egyptian Unity in Symbolic Graphic Art

The symbol of the Islamic crescent moon was placed in close proximity to the Christian symbol of the cross to provoke conversation and stir unity among the masses. Dating from the 1919 revolution, the image symbolizes the unity of Egyptian Christians and Muslims in their opposition to the British occupation. According to Farida Makar, “the symbol resurfaced as a result of the church bombing in Alexandria on December 31, 2010 and prompted a national conversation about the rights of Coptic people, the role of religion in politics, and the risks of extremist views. He wrote, “In Tahrir Square, the symbol was visible everywhere: A young body sitting comfortably on the shoulders of his father was hear chanting: ‘The Bible and the Quran united till the end’...It was a tactical form of resistance aimed at delegitimizing the state and encouraging both religious groups to join the protest movement [against the Mubarak government].” The symbol was joined with the image of the heart along with other images to show Egyptian solidarity and unity between Christians and Muslims in Egypt. In symbolic form one could read Muslims love Christians and Christians love Muslims.
Throughout Egypt graphic art symbols of national unity became as common as dandelions on Midwestern American lawns. They expressed common yearnings for solidarity against an unjust regime. They suggested the value and power of popular unity outweighed the powers aligned with money, weapons, military might, and political clout. The form, function, color selection, and so on are not as important to the street artists and are the iconic symbols. By whatever means possible the Egyptian revolutionary artist seemed to be intent on creating massive numbers of images swiftly. Spray paint, canned paint, stencils, and so on were the preferred means of mark making. Anything that could be applied quickly and reused multiple times was appealing to artists who would need to dodge gunfire and avoid imprisonment. The simple marks and swatches of color could inspire and provide hope for those who desired a better life.

Islamic crescent moon and Christian cross

Act 2, Scene 2:
Political Commentary and Justice Ethics through Image Juxtapositions and Stencil Art

The power of stencil art is such that it can be made quickly, reproduced often, and is relatively inexpensive to produce. One wonders about the causal elements and figures behind the rise of stencil art and how iconographic themes were chosen. Little can be discerned at a distance since street artists are not keen about writing about factors that prompted them to engage in the creation of street art. They just do it. The book *Reproduce & Revolt* was created for street artists to use freely. Some of the most common images were of a raised fist,
human figures with words of protest or human figures behind bars, tanks and children, and global symbols of peace. Although the book may be of interest to some in the Egyptian street art movement, it seems the power of the Internet to provide an endless storehouse of images from which to choose may be the most widely used source.

Perhaps the most widely known street artist in Egypt is Ganzeer. His work is widely known among Egyptian artists and the general populace. In 2011 he was arrested by the Egyptian government for engaging in political protest via his street paintings. According to Egyptian law the Ministry of Culture controlled all public expressions of art and protest art was forbidden. Yet, he could not stop creating street art that opposed the unjust systems of oppression and laws that violated basic human rights. For him, the art of the street is the art of protest and revolution. It is difficult for him to see it as anything but critique. In commenting on the recent outpouring of public art he said, “If you’re going to take the time to go out on the street and paint, it makes sense to me for it to be critical... Street art is sensitive of the social situation, in which the majority of the people are being brainwashed by the media and happy with what’s going on while the minority is critical of [the current events] and keeping an eye on the political landscape.”

Act 2, Scene 3:
Calls for Freedom through Naturalistic Narratives

The cry for freedom is a common human desire and represents a dominant theme in the 2011 uprising and subsequent opposition to military rule. The use of naturalistic images connects with a media saturated populace. A human face can communicate volumes about what life experience exists behind the face. The human visage writ large can provoke and press for a conversation about whatever it might be the thing worth talking about. Selecting images from ancient Egypt to evoke national pride and unity were commonplace. Images of a mummy shouting “I’m Free,” roped fists raised in defiance with the rope severed alongside the date of January 25 and the word ‘Freedom,’ and icons of ancient Egyptian dynasties could be found within the art covering Cairo’s walls. Images of raised fists with either broken changes or severed ropes are common subjects for naturalistic narratives. As such, they share a common iconic bond with global

visual art associated with hopes for release from tyranny and oppression. Others images associated with the theme of freedom include: birds of peace coupled with rifles or guns, chessboards with more pawns than power pieces, and heads screaming defiance and revolution.

Act 2, Scene 4:  
Cries for Justice through Portraits of Martyrs

Martyr portraits show boldly the power of oppression and victimization as a result of unjust oppressive powers that take human life. The decades of imprisonment and torture that marked Egyptian existence under the Mubarek regime are widely known. Placing martyr images on public spaces pushes what may have been spoken about quietly out into public conversational space. In a way, the martyrs represent a panoply of contemporary saints who died for a cause bent on justice, basic human rights, freedom, and peace. The artists know well that the blood of martyrs stirs the human spirit to action. This was true in the 1960s street art of the United States, the 1970s and 80s street art of Northern
Ireland that pictured fallen members of the IRA and revolutionaries like Bobby Sands.25

Martyr images commemorate the dead and ask viewers about the cause of their untimely death. They invite reflection on human experience and what values one holds as sacred. They prompt people to not only remember the people, but the cause for which they died. The images are one way by which to make meaning out of loss and sense out of what can only be seen as senseless violence. Grieving mothers clutching the images of their martyred sons were common.

Ganzeer is currently working on a massive street art project. He plans to draw murals of the 840 or so martyrs who died during the January 25 revolution. According to Passant Rabie, “…he plans on honoring each one in the governorate they are from.”26 Furthermore she claimed that when Ganzeer was working on the first martyr work on the wall of the Egyptian Supreme Court he stated, “A lot of people stopped to help me out, and other people were bringing paint…I could have left and they would have finished the mural themselves.”27


Act 2, Scene 5:
Mash-ups, Remixes, and Reinterpretations of Political Images

The common movement known as mash-ups and remixes has swept the music world over the last decade. It has also become a popular means for making images in the street art world. According to Chris Carlsson -- in his essay “Timely Stencils, Timeless Meanings,” in Russell Howze’s book Stencil Nation: Graffiti, Community, and Art -- “Ours is a curious moment in history. A greater number of people are traveling for more reasons than ever before, cross-pollinating, miscegenating, hybridizing, and inventing new media, new multilingual expressions, and new art forms... The artists and agitators who are decorating our build environment [with stencil art] are simultaneously invoking millennia-old art forms, echoing pre-literate and pre-industrial signage, and jumping across the chasms of the digital divide and the complete commercialization of public communication... stencil artists are inventing a new language that resonates deeply.”

Egyptian street artists have employed this method both prior to and after the revolution. Street artists construct new sets of images for post-revolutionary contexts that combine, mix, remix, and comment on popular views even after the revolution ended. For example, the Egyptian artist known as Sad Panda – so named for his or her preference for using the Panda image as a vehicle for social and political commentary – has found the proliferation of Egyptian flags and patriotic symbols offensive. So much so that he painted a two by three meter stencil of a panda urinating yellow paint on a tunnel’s wall where a large Egyptian flag had been painted.

Class struggle and economic realities push the majority poor to question the status quo of class and economies that are built to privilege a few and subjugate or restrict the capacity of people to attain an elevated class status or economic prosperity. Taking what could be seen as a value by some and placing

next to something else valued by another can provoke reflection and thought about what ought to matter. For example, the image of a tank juxtaposed against a rider on a bicycle with a loaf of bread on his head can speak volumes to a cultural context experiencing military oppression that seeks to rob life itself symbolized in the loaf of bread. Yet, even here other images might appear alongside an image crafted by Ganzeer to make commentary on people taking it too lightly -- as with Sad Panda’s image of a panda appearing to question the whole scene and invite viewers to do likewise.

Conclusion

The Egyptian revolution was somewhat televised in the Western world and made its way to computer screens around the planet. The street art revolution that accompanied it was both a catalyst for change and a running documentary of human solidarity against injustice through visual art production. It marked the revolutionary power of street art to remind people about what they valued most, what events brought them to this place in history, and what steps are required for human rights and peace to be realized.

In reflecting on the role of street art in the recent Egyptian revolution, Sherif Abdel-Megid was bold enough to claim that Egyptian street art was “…one of the heroes of the revolution, inseparable from it, taking inspiration from it and inspiring revolutionaries.”31 One can only imagine what role street art will take in the next global revolution.

Building the Community of Theology and the Arts: Part 2, Bilinguality

*Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu, PhD*

This is Part 2 of Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu’s essay Building The Community of Theology and the Arts. *Part 1 focused on The Borderlands. It was published in the 23:3 print issue of *arts* as an essay in the symposium on Issues in Theology and the Arts.*

**PART 2: The bilinguality of A/art**

The study of “art and religion” is often described as “an interdisciplinary crossroads” or an “intersection.”1 Perhaps under what is understood as “art and religion” this is the most apt description, as its chief concern is to “advance and deepen the study of religious art.”2 Yet, Alejandro García-Rivera and other pioneers working in the field have been involved in something quite different.3 As he surveys the challenge posed by a non-reductive and non-paternalistic view of religion that sees it more “as a way of life than a view of life” Robert Schreiter describes religion as “immensely complex and inextricably woven through the fabric of human life.”4 The concerns of theology and the arts involve the engagement with what is religiously creative and creatively religious beyond “religious art”; what might be more expansively explained as “the phenomena of creation, integration and sustaining of meaning.”5 We know what crossroads look like, and even if we took those roads to get here, those of us involved in the work of studying the arts and of carrying out theological inquiry need to stay in this meeting place and create community right here in the borderland.

As we learn to speak the language of A/art (bilinguality) and embrace the complexities of another culture (bicultrality) the work of theology and the arts is strengthened. As the *New York Times* recently observed, “Being bilingual, it turns out, makes you smarter. It can have a profound effect on your brain, improving cognitive skills not related to language.”6 A borderland existence is singular; it is

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an inherently destabilized space where on either side of us we may be very conscious of our otherness in someone else’s land. There is no avoiding the uneasiness of the act of crossing borders, however, this can be greatly facilitated by inhabiting a borderland where we cultivate our abilities to be both bilingual and bicultural.

The first generation of scholars in theology and the arts made repeated and fruitful crossings, and because of them those of us who follow have some affinity with both sides of the border. The difficulty is that we must surrender any claims to belonging exclusively to one side or the other. This is an inherently painful and difficult identity to construct and at the same time, as disclosed in the experience of borderland people, it is precisely the bilingual and bicultural second generation that is able to speak to both sides and interpret them to each other.7

In one of the foundational texts on biculturalty, which he names mestizaje, theologian Virgil Elizondo discloses the contours that make up such an identity.8 The bicultural person, he tells us, feels simultaneously “pulled in two opposing directions.” This in-between place is “the meeting point and often the violent clash between two radically different civilizations.”9 Arguably, it may be easier to perceive the radical differences in this conflicted space when we are referring to actual international borders,10 yet Elizondo’s image of mestizaje provides a model for what it might mean to create a bilingual and bicultural identity for theology and the arts. What being in-between discloses is that what may be on either side of the border may change at any given point. We must imagine the borders as undulating, as in a mirage, as shifting identities, problems, and opportunities erupt on either side. The challenge is clearly, where to begin

**Dismantling the wall, some initial steps**

To actively work to disassemble the structures of legitimation, dissimulation, fragmentation and reification,11 from the borderland of theology and the arts we must first see them.12 As educator and ethicist Antonia Darder explains, *legitimation* works to present existing power relations as ethical and just, and *dissimulation* conceals all evidence of domination. To complete the

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4. Schreiter, 126.

5. Schreiter, 43.


7. “Spanish has endured through first and second generations, unlike many other immigrants’ languages, in part because of the ease in maintaining transnational relationships and identities with Latin America.” Carmen Nanko-Fernandez, *Theologizing en Espanglish* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010), 63.

8. Mestizaje is described by Elizondo autobiographically, “I was not just U.S.-American and not just Mexican but fully both and exclusively neither. I knew both perfectly even if I remained a mystery to them. And I was threatening to them since they knew I knew them, but they did not know me fully. I lived in two worlds, and the two worlds lived in me.” Virgil Elizondo, The Future is Mestizo, Life Where Cultures Meet, (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 26.

9. Elizondo, x.
process *fragmentation* foments attitudes of scarcity, whereby groups perceive themselves as in opposition to each other for limited resources, and *reification* gives a normative and permanent status to structures of power that should be seen as transitory and conditional.\(^{13}\)

When seen through Darder’s paradigm we notice that the arts often bring with them a profoundly problematic legacy as “an art of privilege, of emotional nobility, of instinctive aristocracy.”\(^{14}\) What this view from philosopher José Ortega y Gasset in 1925 makes abundantly clear is that for some the most prized feature of the arts is precisely their usefulness at building high walls not at breaking them. For Ortega y Gasset, and many like him, nothing is worse than what he calls the “undifferentiated unity” of democratic societies.\(^ {15}\) His enthusiasm for modern art brims as he discerns in it the opportunity to undermine a “profound and irritating injustice: the false belief of a real equality between all men [sic].”\(^ {16}\)

In explaining his hopes for art as a powerful instrument for shoring up crumbling class divisions, he gives us a troubling glimpse of how and why border fences are built. First, Ortega y Gasset explains appreciatively that modern art is not merely “disliked,” distaste is the reaction to a work that once viewed or heard displeases the audience precisely because of what is communicated. These reactions have no value to him as he perceives them as random and purely subjective. What is at work in the resistance to modern art (and what he finds so hopeful), is that this art is “*not understood* by the majority, by the masses.”\(^ {17}\) For Ortega, as well as artist Wassily Kandinsky some years before,\(^ {18}\) this is the key—the new art “divides the public into two classes of men [sic]: those who understand it and those who don’t understand it.”\(^ {19}\) In this way, art acts as a marker “allowing for the ‘best’ to know each other and recognize each other” and consequently to separate themselves from the “multitude” so they may learn their “mission, which is to be few and have to fight against the many.”\(^ {20}\)

What’s more, Ortega y Gasset arrives at a conclusion that undergirds every form of racism and sexism: the select group that understands this art is “especially gifted” having intellectual capacities much beyond the rest.\(^ {21}\) Thus, what builds up the border fence is this legacy of this promise of a certain kind of art that proffers an elevated status, exclusivity, and even intellectual superiority upon those viewers gifted enough to understand it and appreciate it. This division is seductive, why would anyone want to be part of the group of “vulgar men” when they can belong to the exclusive group of “eminent men”?\(^ {22}\)
Taking down the fences

For those of us developing our abilities to be bicultural, the profound history of elitism in the appreciation and valuing of Western art must be carefully noticed and problematized. Elitism in art constitutes the tallest and most inaccessible part of the wall. If, in creating a borderland community we want to effectively take down the border fence, it is helpful to know the materials that constitute it.

First, elite status and thus the main marker of art’s value has been understood as its very inaccessibility to a wide audience.\(^\text{23}\) There are a number of ways to ensure such elite status, just as there are multiple ways to build border walls. One tactic is through redefining what constitutes genuine aesthetic experience. In Ortega y Gasset’s view, “strict aesthetic delight” inheres exclusively in art that has nothing to do with actual human life. The preoccupation with life, human persons, nature, passions and feelings, is for him a sign of “art for the many” and thus antithetical to the “pure art” that can function to separate members of society into two distinct classes, the distinguished and the vulgar.\(^\text{24}\) Ortega y Gasset sees the elite qualities of art being built up from the radical “dehumanizing of art,” which means that what has to do with life must be removed, that art must be only about art, that art is to be understood as a game, that it must be essentially ironic and avoid all that is “false” through its careful production, and finally, that this art must above all “lack all transcendence.”\(^\text{25}\) This final characteristic calls for more scrutiny.

Ortega y Gasset was writing in 1925, and if the quality that made art “Art” was its innovation, indecipherability and opaqueness, we can note today that this could not be a fixed marker. Innovation will eventually erode through familiarity. In 2012, the indecipherable and avant-garde art of the 1920’s looks quaint and often dated. Even much later, groundbreaking works such as Andy Warhol’s have become ubiquitous and repeatedly mimicked.\(^\text{26}\) If “pure art” is to continue to serve its function of dividing society into elites and non-elites, how does it retain the characteristics that dehumanize it? García-Rivera points out this can only be achieved by the requirement for constant innovation, “the artist having created a novel piece of art must now betray his discovery and produce something completely different.”\(^\text{27}\) What that something different might be is

\(^{22}\) Ortega y Gasset, 19. I make no attempt to correct the sexist language here, as it is clear to me that Ortega y Gasset is not referring to the generic “hombres” for humanity here, but to the male gender as the only ones capable of such discerning taste.


\(^{24}\) Ortega y Gasset, 25.

\(^{25}\) Ortega y Gasset, 26-27.

\(^{26}\) This co-opting of what is cutting edge with the resulting banality is a major theme in Banksy’s insightful film Exit Through the Gift Shop, directed by Banksy, produced by Paranoid Pictures, 2010.

\(^{27}\) García-Rivera, 28.
necessarily a moving target, thus art that wants to build walls must continually look for ways to shock,

If artists just want to shock the bourgeoisie, it becomes pretty hard to distinguish the latest kind of art that gets written up in *Artforum* from a Marilyn Manson performance that includes Satanic rituals of animal sacrifice on stage.28

This tactic of innovation through shock seems a far cry from the “pure art” of the early 20th century, yet we might find the commonality in Ortega y Gasset’s analysis of “intranscendencia.” For the borderland life of speaking both art and the religious, this is of no small import. Ortega’s careful analysis reveals that the aim of creating art completely devoid of transcendence is a paradoxical quality that places importance on the artist through the artist’s insistence on producing art that lacks “importancia grave” or any serious import.29

García-Rivera’s analysis helps us note that without such import beyond its very materiality, the art has nowhere to point to but back to the artist.30 Art historian Cynthia Freeland seems to concur as she explains that, “Symbols of pain and suffering that are central to many religions can be shocking when dislocated from their community.”31 What this makes clear is that severing the connections to a community’s interpretative context is intrinsic, not accidental, to art’s ability to shock, and that art’s ability to shock is intrinsic and not accidental to its purpose of dividing the community into those who are “in” and those who are “out.”

I conclude with two hopes; first, as stated by García-Rivera, that the work of theology and the arts might begin to build a common ground in the beautiful(s) of A/art and in our common (mixed and unstable borderland) humanity.32 Second, and only possible if we engage the first, that the simple will not be equated with the simplistic, that what appears as naïve may be understood as the wisdom that can only come through suffering, and that to be moved and to move our hearts, will be recognized not as sentimental, but as a way to better know and love one another. In Spanish, the word “piedad” means at once, compassion, mercy, pity and authentic religious devotion. The borderland community is built when we have piedad toward one another.

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30. García-Rivera, 28-29

31. Freeland, 7

32. “Whatever the wounds of history have done to isolate and separate the theological from the historical, the spiritual from the artistic, or the textbook from the living, a new humanism, a wounded innocence, I have come to believe, can bring them together.” Alejandro García-Rivera, *A Wounded Innocence, Sketches for a Theology of Art* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 122
Matthäus Evangelium:
Otto Dix Lithographs

Sandra Bowden

Otto Dix (1891-1969) is one of the greatest German Expressionist artists of the first half of the 20th century. He was known for his work in the 1920s that focused on the margins of society. He was deeply impacted by his service in World War I and his early work reflects those experiences. His post-World War II work was largely religious in nature, and during that time he produced an important series of expressionist lithographs that depict the book of Matthew.

Otto Dix was born the son of a railway worker, and as a teenager served apprenticeships in both painting and decorative arts before attending the Dresden School of Arts and Crafts. He served in the German army during World War I and was observed drawing when a battle had begun. His visual legacy, including his Der Krieg cycle, with its relevant contemporary echoes, is one of the most powerful documents of the human community’s inhumanity that we have available to us today.

He was appointed professor of art at the academy in Dresden (1927) and was elected to the Prussian Academy (1931). After the war he was leading exponent and founder of Die Neue Sachlichkeit (The New Objectivity), which was a pseudo-Expressionist movement characterized by a realistic style combined with a cynical, socially critical stance. In the early 1930s the Nazi regime, incensed by his anti-military works, branded his art “degenerate,” confiscated 260 of his paintings and dismissed him from his teaching post at Dresden Academy.

Dix retreated to Lake Constance in southern Germany where he painted landscapes. But after World War II most of his art was devoted to religious themes. Dix had an outstanding knowledge of the Bible and he never tired of the scriptures. He had intermittently created several important biblical paintings even as early as 1912 (Pieta), then he referred back to those works, perhaps as away to
heal from all that he had witnessed. These works became the visual source for several of the thirty-three lithographs in the 1960 *Matthäus Evangulium*, printed by the Berlin publisher Klibor.

When asked about the Bible he is quoted to have said, ‘you have to read every single word. For the Bible is a wonderful history book. There is great truth in all of it. Most people don’t read the Bible, but reading the Bible, reading it as a book, you might even say it is the book of books...simply magnificent!’ A year before his death in 1965 Maria Wetzel asked him in an interview if “his roots were in religion after all.” He responded, “In the history of the Bible, there are such wonderful images in it; when I was a boy, when we had ‘Bible Study,’ I always imaged to myself exactly where that might have happened in my homeland.”

This intense knowledge of the scriptures is evident in his expressionist drawing for the Matthäus Evangelium. He beings the cycle, not with the birth of Christ, but with a look back to the story of Abraham and Isaac, understanding that the reason for the coming of the Messiah was to be a sacrifice for all humanity. The Sacrifice of Isaac points to Christ’s sacrificial work and atonement.
Then Dix begins the Matthew narrative with the Adoration of the Maji, capturing the moment when the learned men entered to worship the Christ Child. This is not a sentimental view of the scene but reflects the artist’s full commitment to realism. The three wise men are not kneeling, but come with a sense of inquiry to see “this thing which has come to pass.” Like so many artists over the centuries, Dix has chosen to depict the Holy Family at rest on the Flight to Egypt, but this interpretation also seems to be a kind of nativity, with Mary and Joseph gathered around the child as they contemplate “these things which have come to pass.” However, the tone changes immediately, as it does in the scriptures, to that of horror, as Dix has so graphically represented in the Massacre of the Innocents. These are not Roman soldiers, but executioners dressed in German military uniforms. From Dix’s perspective the Bible makes sense only if it sheds light upon the present.
One of the most outstanding lithographs of the entire suite, *Baptism of Jesus*, is an exceptional piece of expressionist art. The baptizer, dressed in shaggy animal skins is contrasted with the pale and fragile body of Jesus, who is shrouded in water as he is baptized with water and the Spirit. In the book of Matthew the work of Christ’s ministry begins with the *Calling of Peter* from his fishing occupation to that of following Jesus, and quickly moves to the *Sermon on the Mount* in which Jesus stands above the crowd that is clustered together eager to hear his words.

The next few lithographs pick up on the sequence of miracles performed in Jesus’ early ministry; *Stilling the Storm, Healing of Jarius’s Daughter,* and *Healing of the Blind.* It is interesting to note that Dix included a rather obscure passage in which Jesus answers a request for a sign that he is indeed the Messiah. He replies “no sign shall be give them except the Sign of Jonah.” Dix has composed a rather playful way to illustrate this Old Testament event, with waves swirling around a frolicking whale, just as Jonah is swallowed whole.
Otto Dix, lithograph, *Stilling the Storm*

Otto Dix, lithograph, *Sign of Jonah*

Otto Dix, lithograph, *Healing of the Blind*

Otto Dix, lithograph, *Healing of Darius’s Daughter*
The narrative then moves to the *Beheading of John the Baptist* with King Herod sitting behind Salome as she flaunts John’s head on a platter. With visual clarity Dix then chooses to illustrate another series of miracles, *Feeding the Five Thousand, Healing of the Lepers, the Coin in the Mouth of the Fish.*
At this point in the suite the images turn to the central focus of Dix’s biblical work, the Passion of Christ, recognizing redemption with its suffering and Christ’s unconditional acceptance.

Following the Matthew story, he begins Holy Week with the *Entry into Jerusalem*—Christ riding a donkey in the foreground and the palm-waving crowd faintly sketched against the distant buildings. To reference the Passover as written in the first few verses of Matthew 26, Otto Dix interestingly chose to feature the haunting image of the *Sacrificial Lamb* with feet tied together ready for the slaughter. Rather than show Jesus and his disciples behind a long table, Dix gathers the group in a circle similar to other renderings from medieval times, creating an atmosphere of intimacy and companionship. In the *Last Supper*, Jesus is breaking the bread, a symbol of the reconciliation that his broken body and death will bring. At this point the images take on a voice of darkness: Christ struggles in *Gethsemane* with is fate; the *Capture of Jesus* provides another opportunity for Dix to blend two worlds with the soldiers wearing German helmets as they arrest Jesus; and then in the deeply wrenching scene of *Betrayal*, Peter shrinks in shame from the bottom of the picture. The actual events of the Passion of Christ begin to really come into focus as He is presented to the people as *King of the Jews* with crowds jeering in *Scoffing*. Then Christ stumbles and falls while *Carrying the Cross* and is beaten this time by what appears to be the common person, perhaps you or I.
The focal point of the suite is the haunting Crucifixion which reflects Dix’s emotional despair and horror related to the torturous war. Dix was very interested in the physical suffering of the crucifixion and death and not in some sentimental view of the event:

“Then he’s hung up there, he’s put up there on the cross looking like a ballet dance, you know, pretty and polished and pretty, wonderfully anointed and pretty...And then when you read a detailed description of the crucifixion, well, that is something that is so horrible, awful. How the limbs swell up...How the person can’t breathe. How the face changes color. How he dies a horrible, utterly horrible death. Then he’s portrayed up there as a wonderfully beautiful youth. Well, that’s all fraud...And if he was a great man, then he was in the most horrible pain. He was tortured so much. He collapsed and fell unconscious, having to carry the cross like he did...It was worse than it was in the way of the war.”
But the story does not end with the death of Christ, it is really only the beginning. Dix now combined two events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus: the moment during an earthquake when the *Angel at the Tomb* bursts onto the scene, rolls away the barriers to the tomb, and frees Christ as he rises from the Dead, combined with the arrival of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary as they find the tomb opened and empty. Matthew’s gospel ends with a note that challenges all of us to go and tell the story again. It is the mission of all who believe to “Go therefore into the world, making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”
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