Established artists with successful careers, Chuck + Peg Hoffman-Carlson changed the focus of their art dramatically after a mission trip to Northern Ireland. A visit to Forthspring Inter-Community Group transformed their lives and changed the trajectory of their art and teaching. Forthspring, located on a peace line in Belfast, is a community effort to bring healing and reconciliation and break the chain of centuries of violence. The building has two entrances, on one side of the building there is a Protestant entrance, on the other side there is a Roman Catholic entrance. Forthspring is located in the middle, an organization dedicated to peace, a place where people gather with intention to be both contributors and participants in a peaceful life even as they have been surrounded by conflict and strife.

Chuck + Peg first went to Northern Ireland as part of a mission outreach project sponsored by St. Luke’s United Methodist Church in Orlando, Florida. Subsequent trips to Forthspring followed. Together they listened to stories, facilitated art and reconciliation workshops, and were given a commission. The commission was intended to convey the stories of the community members. Peg + Chuck quickly found common elements in the reflections and insights from individuals that lived on both sides of the wall. They retold those stories visually, inviting the women to see their lives as symbols of peacemaking and to understand their role as contributors and participants in a peaceful community.

The logistics of the trip meant that while they were in Northern Ireland, working on the commission, they chose to paint on the same canvas. On the way home they began to wonder if painting as a collaborative process might in fact be, for them, an expression of reconciliation. They set out to continue painting in this new style, working together on the same canvas and choosing to only paint together. They say of their process, "Our work is the result of collaboration, going beyond the conceptual sense, to include working together on the same canvas.

Creating art in this way, as in the reconciliation process, involves listening, respecting, trusting and being authentic with one another. There is also a shared balance of power. While one person may make a decision about what stroke and where, the power remains balanced.
Through this process, we have created paintings that neither one of us would have created alone. Looking at a work we see evidence of our individuality, as well as the presence of a third dimension—more than the sum of two parts. It is so satisfying that we can hardly describe it. We seldom talk during the process, but work out most issues through non-verbal communication.

One thing that we have noticed is that we don’t paint over or paint out something the other puts down without letting the idea (or stroke or color) live for a while, and then see how it fits into the whole. When we have learned all that we can from a painting we begin a new dialogue on a new canvas.

The intriguing nature of their artistic process is surpassed only by the power of the final work. Using strong colors and shapes to create commanding and insightful works their art invites us to see and understand reconciliation in new and significant ways. Each painting, done in intentional collaboration, begins with a prayer written in pencil on the canvas. They keep track of the prayers even as the works of art move out of their studio into new homes or galleries. Each work of art comes with two written reflections, one from Chuck and one from Peg.

The arc of their new work is not something that has influenced them alone. Accomplished artists, they are also exceptional teachers. Leading workshops and doing presentations, they share their insights and new models of collaboration with churches, seminaries, and religious institutions, as well as secular communities and corporations, inviting them into a deeper understanding of reconciliation, peacemaking and life lived in community. Chuck Hoffman + Peg Carlson-Hoffman are founders of the Genesis + Art Studio. For more information go to www.genesisartstudio.com.

Peg Carlson-Hoffman

Peg’s passion for art and faith includes designing worship spaces and experiential environments for others to engage the Holy. Creating cloths and banners for worship, she presents ancient symbols of the Christian church so that they come alive for a new generation of worshippers. Currently the Director of Retail Product Development for Hallmark Cards, she also teaches workshops on calligraphy, design and creativity. In her words:

*Inspired by the Creation story in Genesis and the New Jerusalem images in The Book of Revelation, I became aware of what falls ‘in-between.’ Not only the books in the Bible, but what goes on in the ‘in-between’ spaces of my life. My work of late reflects those Holy Spaces, where distance between God and me thins or narrows, and where my*
relationships become precious and transparent. Exploring the Alpha and Omega in paint becomes a form of prayer and meditation, that in-between place where I go to meet God.

Chuck Hoffman

Chuck’s passion for the spiritual in art finds inspiration in the transcending connection of art, prayer, and faith regardless of a person's cultural background or religious tradition. A painter, designer and workshop facilitator, Chuck worked as an Associate Creative Director for the Walt Disney Company. In 2009 he received the Art and Innovation Fellowship Award from Luther Seminary where he is working on his Master’s degree while serving as their first full time artist in residence. In his words:

I believe community creates a space where it is possible to engage truth. Community also presents for those who dare the possibility to become transparent and to interact with each other. This spiritual dimension in turn brings us to Holy ground where we encounter each other, beginning a dialog between the Divine, the artist and the viewer. In this creative, prayerful dialogue I not only connect with creation, but find out about who I am in it, and who I am in relationship to others. For me, making art becomes the highest form of hope.

sarts Launches New Website

sarts launched its new website, custom-designed by Keypoppy Christian Resources, in early July 2010. The new site offers a variety of resources to online visitors navigating the intersection of the arts and theological/religious studies: feature stories in arts magazine, information on fellowships, updates on sarts programming and workshops, links to other resources on the web, and a calendar of events. The new site also provides several innovative features available only to sarts members. Members can make on-line payment of dues and register for sarts programs at AAR/SBL meetings. They can exhibit their art in personal online galleries or share syllabi. The site also gives members access to the membership directory and the ability to post events on the calendar.