

VOICES TOGETHER

A CELEBRATION OF ART AND MUSIC

CURATORIAL

The publication of *Voices Together* marks a momentous occasion. During 2021, copies of the new hymnal were delivered to congregations of Mennonite Church USA and Canada, offering some measure of common experience in a time of pandemic isolation. And for the first time, this Mennonite hymnal includes artworks: despite a long history of Mennonite and Anabaptist reluctance to embrace, or even hostility regarding, visual imagery, we now have the chance to explore what both musical and visual artistic expressions might offer to our church communities and worship experiences.

The visual art in the hymnal is a secondary element, with only a dozen artworks featured alongside hundreds of hymns, so I am excited to mount an exhibition that considers the art more fully in its own right. The twelve artists highlighted here work in a range of artistic styles as well as a diversity of media, including photography, painting, printmaking, drawing, papercut, and digital illustration. The exhibition offers visitors a different view of the art than they will find in the pew: some pieces are much larger than shown in the hymnal, while others were made in color but printed in black and white. Further, several of the artists display additional artworks alongside their hymnal contribution, giving viewers greater visual context such as insight into larger series or idea development.

Mounting an exhibition for the visual art of *Voices Together* affords us the opportunity to learn more about the hymnal artworks as well as a chance to think more critically and specifically about each one. This publication, which will be available both in print and online, includes several kinds of writing that offer greater context to the artwork on display. Each of the artists share statements about their work, which address subject matter, artistic intention, or Scriptural references. Sarah Kathleen Johnson and SaeJin Lee, co-chairs of the Visual Art Committee of the *Voices Together* hymnal project, co-author an essay that describes both the process of, and the motivations behind, including visual art in the hymnal. Finally, Canadian literary scholar Dr. Magdalene Redekop contributes an interpretive essay. Her recent book, *Making Believe: Questions about Mennonites and Art*, explores intersections of art and music in Mennonite contexts. Her essay for this publication takes readers on her personal journey of discovery as she considers the particular media, historical contexts, musical and scriptural pairings, and feelings evoked by each artwork in the hymnal.

Exhibitions are always a collaborative effort and this one was especially so. From the beginning, it seemed clear that this exhibition should travel to different venues, for as wide of a viewership as possible. I am grateful to the Deans who oversee the Marpeck Fund for their financial support that will facilitate a four-venue, two-country exhibition tour. The Marpeck Fund has often provided support so that faculty, staff, and students from Mennonite sister schools may

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

gather at conferences or other in-person events. I am thankful that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Deans saw fit to support a touring exhibition so that our Mennonite communities might be joined together through a shared viewing experience, as well as through online events, rather than by gathering in a single place. At each Mennonite college host location, the *Voices Together* exhibition will be part of a larger celebration of art and music that will connect faculty, staff, students, artists, musicians, and community members near and far.

Voices Together opens at the Regier Art Gallery, Bethel College, in coordination with the Menno Simons Lecture Series, which this year features a series of presentations by Grammy-nominated church musician and educator Jan Kraybill. We had planned to coordinate also with the biennial Worship and the Arts Symposium, with a joint focus on the new Mennonite hymnal, but that symposium has now been delayed due to pandemic considerations. My thanks go to Dr. Kip Wedel, chair of the Menno Simons Lecture Committee, and to members of the symposium committee, particularly Brad Kohlman, Bethel College Vice President for Advancement, and Dr. William Eash, Professor of Music, for their enthusiastic support of the exhibition. With their financial assistance, the visual art from the hymnal has been reproduced onto fabric banners that will grant the art a prominent place in eventual symposium events, and will then be made available to area churches of the Western District Conference for Sunday services. In 2022, the exhibition will be hosted by Jerry Holsopple at Eastern Mennonite University, Paul Heidebrecht

at Conrad Grebel University College, and Ervin Beck at Goshen College, each of whom will coordinate in-person and virtual events specific to their communities. I am grateful for their collaboration and I look forward to sharing these experiences with them.

A new Mennonite hymnal offers an opportunity to view ourselves and our church communities in a new light. We will learn new hymns together and, for the first time, we will reflect on the contributions of visual artists as we sing. My thanks go to the entire hymnal committee of the *Voices Together* project, particularly to the Visual Art Committee co-chairs, Sarah Kathleen Johnson and SaeJin Lee, who so thoughtfully elucidated their process in this publication. Many thanks to Magdalene Redekop for writing an essay that reflected such careful looking and thoughtful reflection. Thank you to Oscar Gonzalez, student designer, and Bethel College Institutional Communications staff for helping this publication come to print. And finally, my sincere gratitude goes to each of the artists for their willingness to participate in this groundbreaking project together.

Dr. Rachel Epp Buller
Director, Regier Art Gallery
Fall 2021

EXHIBITION DATES

Bethel College:

Regier Art Gallery

October 29-November 19, 2021

Eastern Mennonite University:

Margaret Mary Gehman Gallery

January 28-February 25, 2022

Conrad Grebel University College:

Grebel Gallery

March 14-May 6, 2022

Goshen College:

Library Gallery

September 11-November 6, 2022

THE STORY OF INCLUDING VISUAL ARTS IN VOICES TOGETHER

Sarah Kathleen Johnson & SaeJin Lee

We worship a creative and creating God. We are called to worship God with our spirits, minds, hearts, and bodies, including all of our senses. In recent decades, Mennonite churches in Canada and the United States have grown in our understanding of the visual aspects of worship. We have become more connected with Christians in other times and places who worship in ways that engage sight as well as sound. We have become more aware of how diverse our communities are in terms of language and age, ways of learning and of expressing ourselves.

Initiating the Inclusion of Visual Art

From the beginning of the process of shaping the worship resources for a new hymnal and worship book, the Voices Together worship resources committee knew that we wanted to explore beyond textual resources. While continuing to provide a robust collection of readings, prayers, excerpts from scripture, and supports for the central practices of the church as in Hymnal: A Worship Book (1992) and The Mennonite Hymnal (1969) we envisioned a new hymnal as an opportunity to share new types of resources. We examined how a handful of other hymnals had included visual art and considered what would be suitable in a Mennonite context.

With support from Amy Gingerich and Merrill Miller at MennoMedia, the worship resources committee developed a proposal to include twelve works of visual art spread throughout the hymnal based on twelve themes that reflect acts of worship and aspects of the Christian story:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1) Gathering | 7) Holy Spirit, Pentecost, Church |
| 2) Praising | 8) Baptism |
| 3) Creation and Covenant | 9) Communion |
| 4) Advent and Birth of Jesus | 10) Prayer |
| 5) Life, Teaching, and Ministry of Jesus | 11) Service and Witness for Peace |
| 6) Death and Resurrection of Jesus | 12) Sending |

Alongside the proposal for visual art, the worship resources committee proposed that Scripture readings be selected according to the same twelve themes and presented on the reverse side of the pages with the art. Both proposals were approved by the Mennonite Worship and Song Committee in July 2017.

To facilitate the process of inviting, selecting, and commissioning visual art, we brought together a visual art committee that was chaired by SaeJin Lee (visual artist and worship resources committee member) and Sarah Kathleen Johnson (worship resources editor) and included Randy Horst (Professor of Art, Goshen College), Tom Yoder Neufeld (Professor of Theology, Conrad Grebel University College), Merrill Miller

(Senior Graphic Designer, MennoMedia), and Bradley Kauffman (worship and song collection project director, MennoMedia).

The visual art committee developed a call for submissions of visual art that was open between September and December 2017. Developing the call for submissions involved outlining three types of specifications.

First, we articulated Scriptural and theological starting points for reflection on each of the twelve themes, while encouraging artists to explore beyond these possibilities. This included providing an expansive list of Scripture references, key concepts, and existing works of art associated with each theme.

Second, we expressed our aspirations for the use of visual imagery that is aligned with God's vision of justice and liberation: "Striving for balance across the collection as a whole, the following is a non-exhaustive list of concerns and priorities that we aim to honor as we invite and select visual art. We hope to honor a diversity of human experiences including race and ethnicity, class and economic status, gender and sexuality, age, and ability. We aim to promote relationships of respect with the earth, other Christian traditions and non-Christian religions, and the global human community and church. We aspire to celebrate the theological diversity of the Mennonite church and to provide diverse ways of envisioning and encountering God, one another, and creation."

Third, we named the technical limitations of visual art printed on a hymnal page including working with two-dimensional artwork that reproduces well in black, gray, and white, with the dimensions of 5.5 x 8.5 inches.

Almost 50 works of art were submitted in response to this call. We are grateful for all of these submissions, each of which helped to clarify the possibilities and challenges of including visual art in the collection and inspired our imaginations.

Curating a Collection of Visual Art

The visual art committee reviewed all submissions anonymously and considered the merits of each artwork for its possible inclusion in a hymnal and worship book. We considered how submissions resonated with the twelve themes and how to present a diversity of media on the printed page.

Several submissions were immediately compatible with this context and format (the selected works by Rachel Epp Buller, Michelle Burkholder, and Matthew Regier) and others required only minor revisions, such as conversion from color to grayscale (including the selected works by J. Tyler Klassen and Brenton Good).

In certain cases, submitted work served as a starting point for commissioning a new work. We invited Meg Harder to employ her contemporary approach to fraktur to develop a work on the theme of praising. We requested that Gwen Stamm adapt for the printed page an image initially submitted as a fabric banner. We asked Michelle Hofer to turn her technique of reinterpreting traditional Christian iconography toward reinterpreting a classic Anabaptist etching.

While the initial review of submissions was anonymous, once a series began to take shape, the artists were identified and we considered the ways in which the emerging collection represented the diversity of the church in terms of geographic location, gender, and racial/ethnic identity. This review prompted us to invite submissions from Anne Berry, Dona Park, and Rafael Barahona who incorporated influences from African American artists and designers, Korean artistic techniques, and immigrant experiences in their artwork. It is essential that these expressions are included alongside the white Germanic arts of fraktur, quilting, and etching, as well as influences like Modernist abstraction, book illustration, and medieval manuscript illumination. When another invited artist had to step back from the process, the final work for the series was commissioned from SaeJin Lee who, having been part of curating the collection, was able fulfill a request to create a work of art on the theme of gathering that would be especially engaging for children. The Mennonite Worship and Song Committee had the opportunity to provide feedback at several points in this process and approved the final selection of visual art in November 2018.

Pairing Art, Scripture, and Song

Throughout the process of including visual art in Voices Together, we had a vision that these works of art would exist in creative dialogue with the rest of the collection, including songs and spoken worship resources, rather than stand apart from it.

Concurrent with our committee's process, the Scripture worship resources committee of Voices Together selected and arranged 78 readings for use in worship. Although largely separate, the timing of the art and scripture processes allowed for mutual influence, including artists drawing on Scripture readings, and the selected works of art influencing the choice and presentation of readings. Together, the visual art and Scripture explore these twelve acts of worship and aspects of the Christian story.

When establishing priorities for the layout and sequence of songs in the collection, Sarah Kathleen Johnson (worship resources editor) and Adam Tice (text editor) carefully considered which songs to place on facing pages with visual art with the recognition that these songs would have a unique mutually interpretive relationship with the artwork. The options were limited to songs that fit on a single page and that had already been chosen for sections related to the art and Scripture themes. The goal was to develop a balanced selection of twelve songs that included both familiar and new material. In some cases, we prioritized songs that would encourage reflection on the art, for example, through a repeated refrain or a first stanza many have memorized. In each case, the song on the facing page was chosen to be in conversation with the visual art.

Using Visual Art in Worship

Resources to support the use of visual art in worship, including the specific works in Voices Together, are found in the Voices Together: Worship Leader Edition. This resource includes an artist statement from each artist, alongside their work. In addition, there are essays related to shaping the visual aspects of worship, including:

- Using Voices Together Visual Art in Worship (WLE 44)
- Visio Divina (WLE 45)
- The Worship Space (WLE 46)
- Shaping Visual Aspects of Worship (WLE 47)
- Visual Technology in Worship (WLE 48)
- Welcoming All Gifts in Worship Leadership (WLE 7)

The visual art is also included in the projection edition of Voices Together.

We hope that the visual art in Voices Together serves as an expression of and invitation to acts of worship and as a visual telling of God's story. We aspire to share a range of visual art that encourages us to embrace the diversity of the Mennonite church in North America and around the world, and the breadth of Scripture and the Christian tradition. We trust these works will engage worshipers as a complement to reading and singing and serve as a resource for contemplation.

Most of all, we hope including a collection of visual art in a Mennonite hymnal and worship book celebrates the visual arts as an important component of corporate worship. We encourage local communities to creatively receive the gifts of visual artists in worship as together we encounter God and one another and live into God's new creation.

Sarah Kathleen Johnson, co-chair of the visual art committee and Voices Together worship resources editor

SaeJin Lee, co-chair of the visual art committee and Mennonite Worship and Song Committee member

ARTWORK FOR VOICES TOGETHER



Rafael H Barahona (Canada/USA)

Migrant Journey, 2018

Digital illustration

There is often great richness in subtleties. This is especially true when it takes us a moment to really see something. I am drawn to this notion in my work as a designer, in my appreciation of art, and in some of life's most poignant moments.

Migrant Journey is a depiction of a universal story known since the beginnings of humanity. The reasons people(s) migrate are many, but perhaps what motivates the most adventurous and even perilous of journeys is hope. While the reality of the migrant journey is too often raw, dangerous, and full of trauma, this depiction is intentionally different. This is not meant to devalue that reality, but rather to illuminate the implicit, yet powerful force of hope that drives such journeys. As is depicted in this piece, there is a hidden blessing with every struggle. This is the story of the migrant, one who has risked so much, not fully knowing what is ahead but propelled forward by a hope that is beyond one's understanding.

Scripture that inspired this artwork includes Jeremiah 29:11, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future,'" and Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."



I AM MAKING ALL THINGS NEW

WE WILL ALL BE CHANGED

Anne Hostetler Berry (USA)

Alive, 2018

Pen and ink drawing with preparatory studies

Inspired by the work of Black artists and designers including Emory Douglas, Aaron Douglas, Faith Ringgold, and Jacob Lawrence, *Alive* is an unapologetic commentary on the concepts of dark and light within the context of life and death, and the ways in which blackness often (wrongly) evokes negative, dehumanizing associations. As the focal point in the composition, the black cross/tree conveys strength, power, and beauty. Meanwhile, the supporting imagery emphasizes the scriptural themes of transformation and renewal, emanating outward from their rooted and grounded source. Dark and light result in a visual narrative that acknowledges loss while simultaneously celebrating creation, inviting us—or, perhaps commanding us—to open ourselves to change, reclaim our humanity, and safeguard the humanity of others.

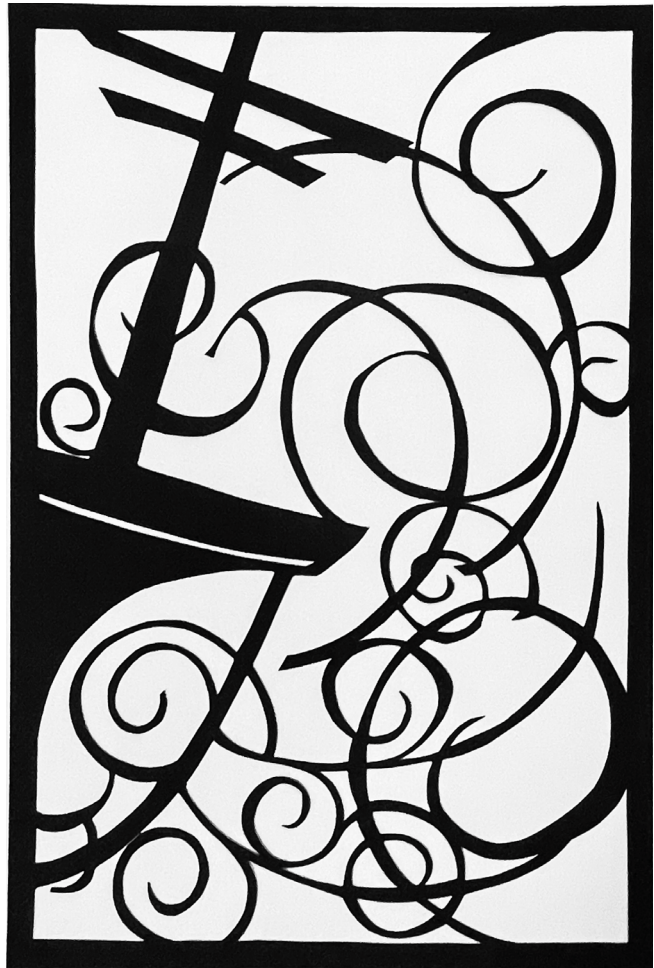


Rachel Epp Buller (USA)

We owe them a complicated debt, 2017

Scratchboard drawing

My creative practice explores shared knowledge and traditions of making that are passed between generations. This often matrilineal knowledge is not written down but is of the body—an embodied knowledge transferred between hands, in intimate settings. Traditions like stitching, crochet, or paper-cutting are quiet, care-filled, and labor-intensive. In this scratchboard drawing, I turn to repetitive, intricate mark-making as a way to echo our often all-consuming labors of care. In these precarious times, when we desperately need to change how we care for other humans and for the world growing all around us, there is value in processes that take time, that encourage us to listen, that we share through our bodies, and that might help us imagine new ways of being.



Michelle G. Burkholder (USA)

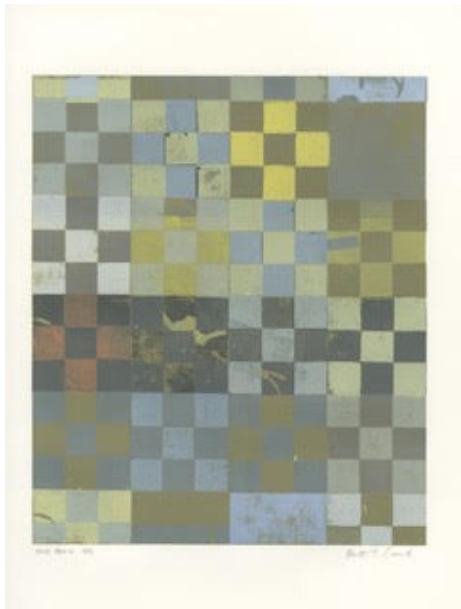
Loaves and Fishes, 2014

Paper cutout

Stormy Sea, 2014

Paper cutout

Loaves and Fishes and Stormy Sea are part of a series of cutouts exploring incidents in Jesus' ministry when Jesus responded to the moment at hand in an unexpected way. Jesus' actions in these incidents meet the basic needs of the people involved in that moment and also expose the generous and excessive nature of God's love. The images put both aspects of Jesus' ministry on display. Jesus reminds people that God is always present and able to work wonders with even meager, mundane offerings. The baskets full of leftovers, collected after a multitude of people have eaten their fill, reveal the transformative and abundant nature of God's presence.



Brenton Good (USA)

Nine Patch #8, 2015

Monotype

Nine Patch #3, 2015

Monotype

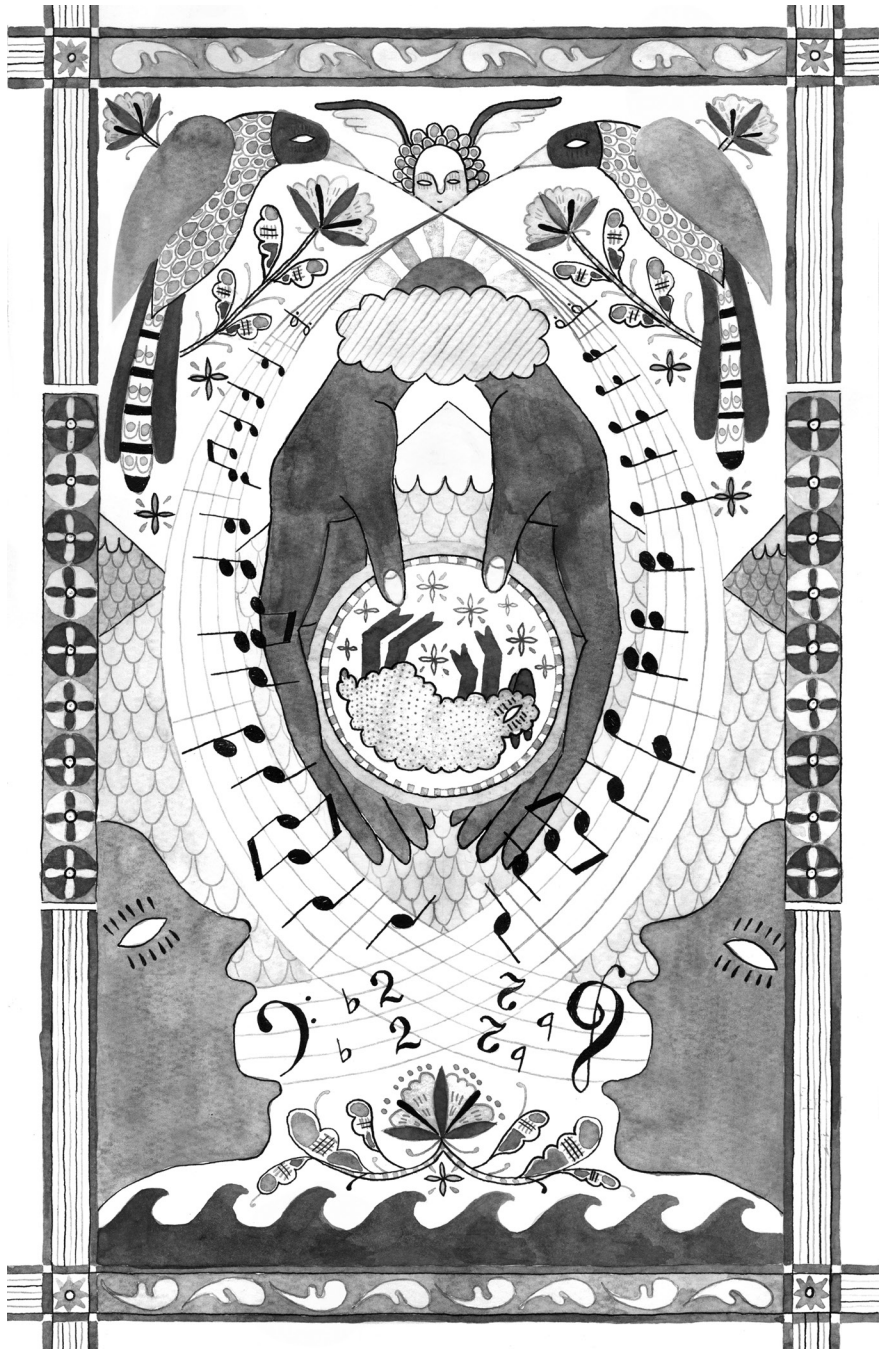
Nine Patch #12, 2015

Monotype

Nine Patch #14, 2015

Monotype

The Nine Patch series of monotypes makes reference to the geometric quilt patterns of late 19th-century Mennonite communities, specifically those from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. These severe minimal patterns relate visually to the history of Modern art, often prefiguring geometric abstraction in painting by almost fifty years. After spending many years working through my own versions of Abstract Expressionism, Color Field painting, and Minimalism, I return to patterns both regional to Pennsylvania and relational to my own Mennonite upbringing. I am fascinated by the strange way in which these forms can simultaneously reference the paintings of Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly as much as the quilts of the Mennonite and Amish communities—a duality that now includes the reverent stillness and devotion of these Anabaptist communities.



Meg Harder (Canada)
Sing the Goodness, 2018
Ink on paper

Sing the Goodness responds to passages in the book of Psalms. The Psalms describe singing praise to God with striking physical imagery. The mouth is the site of worship and also a receptacle for God's grace; the lips and the tongue are active participants as well. For this reason, prominent mouths stretch wide over lines of music that seem to occupy real space.

The maternal qualities of God are praised in the Psalms: God is described as a comforter, a place of refuge, and the deliverer of babies. In Psalm 71, metaphors of God as "rock of refuge" are shortly followed by mention of a "mother's womb." For this reason, the central motif features strong but feminine hands delivering a tiny lamb from the depths of the mountains.

Psalm 98 celebrates praise and worship that happen in collaboration with the natural world. This is shown in birds that can harmonize, waters that "roar" and "clap their hands," and mountains that "sing together" to aid the singers in their melodies.

My art practice is inspired by *fraktur*, a Mennonite folk art tradition of illuminated calligraphy employed in the production of religious, musical, and educational texts. I work to carry forward the aesthetic sensibilities of this tradition while expanding its narrative and symbolic potential for a contemporary audience.

***The artist did not lend her work for the exhibition. Many thanks to Katie Graber for lending a color variation of Harder's hymnal artwork in place of the original.*

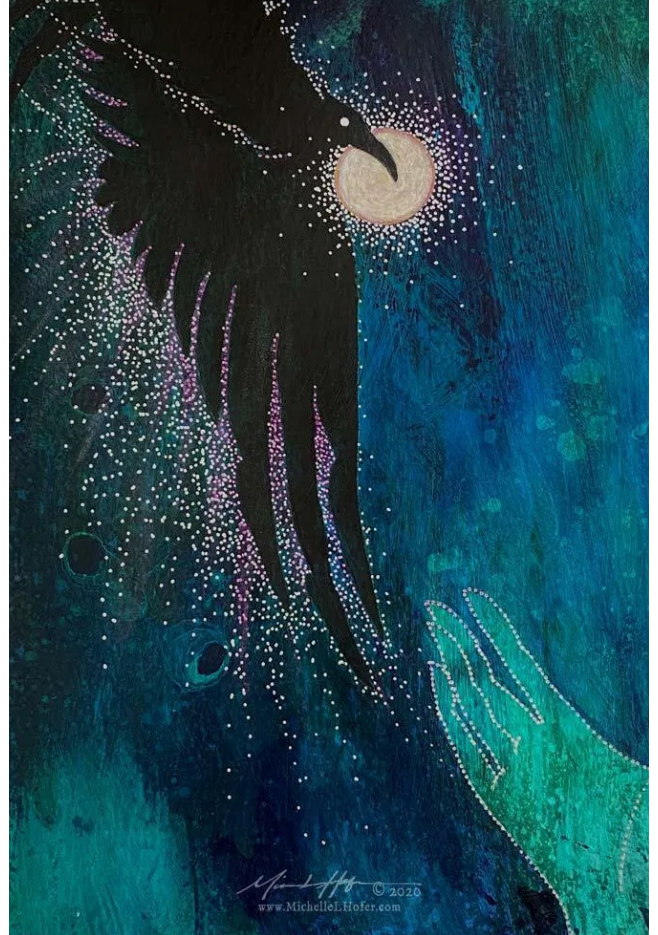


Michelle L Hofer (USA)

At the Impulse of God's Love: A Re-envisioning of Dirk Willems Saving His Captor's Life by Jan Luyken (1685),
2018

Mixed media

No other illustration from Thieleman J. van Braght's volume, *Martyrs Mirror*, has so inspired generations of Anabaptists to respond with love in the face of persecution and violence as has this print by Jan Luyken. In a swift and sacrificial act, escaping Anabaptist prisoner Dirk Willems turns around to save his pursuer's life, reaching to pull him from the chilly water after having broken through the ice. In my work, the presence of God's Spirit and love in Willems' radical effort is visually represented by dot work surrounding and flowing between the outstretched hands — a technique influenced by medieval Celtic gospel illuminators' use of red dots to enliven the Word. Additional hands in the piece serve as a chorus, allowing viewers the opportunity to enter into this moving witness of divine peace in action. May the people of God sing, as was so aptly written by Frances Ridley Havergal in his hymn, "Take My Life and Let It Be" (1874): "Take my hands and let them move, at the impulse of God's love."



Michelle L Hofer (USA)

Divine Creator, 2018

Mixed media painting on paper

This painting features the hand of the divine Creator in deep black and blue tones with metallic silver dot work. The background of this piece is a rich multi-layered exploration of color and texture on heavyweight paper. The imagery, a hand symbolizing divine creation, is an energetic combination of brushwork and stippling. The hand gestures commonly found in Byzantine icon imagery carry special meanings of blessing and comfort. There are those among us who have seen a hand or hands appear at intense moments and extremely critical/scary situations in their lives — these hands provided deep reassurance or even miraculous intervention.

Survival Mode — Elijah's Raven, 2020

Mixed media painting on paper

There are many beautiful representations in Christian icon imagery depicting the story of the prophet Elijah having been fed by ravens while hiding in the desert. In this piece, Elijah raises his hand in anticipation of receiving the bread (a disk reminiscent of a communion wafer) brought by the raven. Elijah's hand is directly in the path of the raven's extended wing — the feathers have separated and bear resemblance to knife blades. This stands as a symbol of vulnerability and the potential to be wounded as we extend ourselves into the world and towards others. Like Elijah fleeing to the desert, woundedness / rejection / pain are naturally something we seek to avoid, and yet ironically these have the potential to serve as catalysts for tremendous personal growth and maturity — a hidden gift we can receive from the Divine. The disk of bread brought by the raven becomes the representation of that possible gift in the midst of all that we receive as struggle and suffering.



J. Tyler Klassen (USA)
Mist, Sun, Morning, 2015
Color digital photograph

We are called to be light in the world. The morning star guides us into the day.

Photographs invite us to pause and look into depths beyond the first layer of the image. By sitting with this image and looking into the details – the white light on the mist and the bright burst of the rising sun – viewers might be drawn to see the beauty of God’s creation and to consider their place in that creation.

It is my hope that through the act of prayerful gazing, viewers might come to a deeper awareness of the presence of God in their lives.



Saejin Lee (Korea/USA)

Tree of Life, 2018

Watercolor paint and coloured pencils

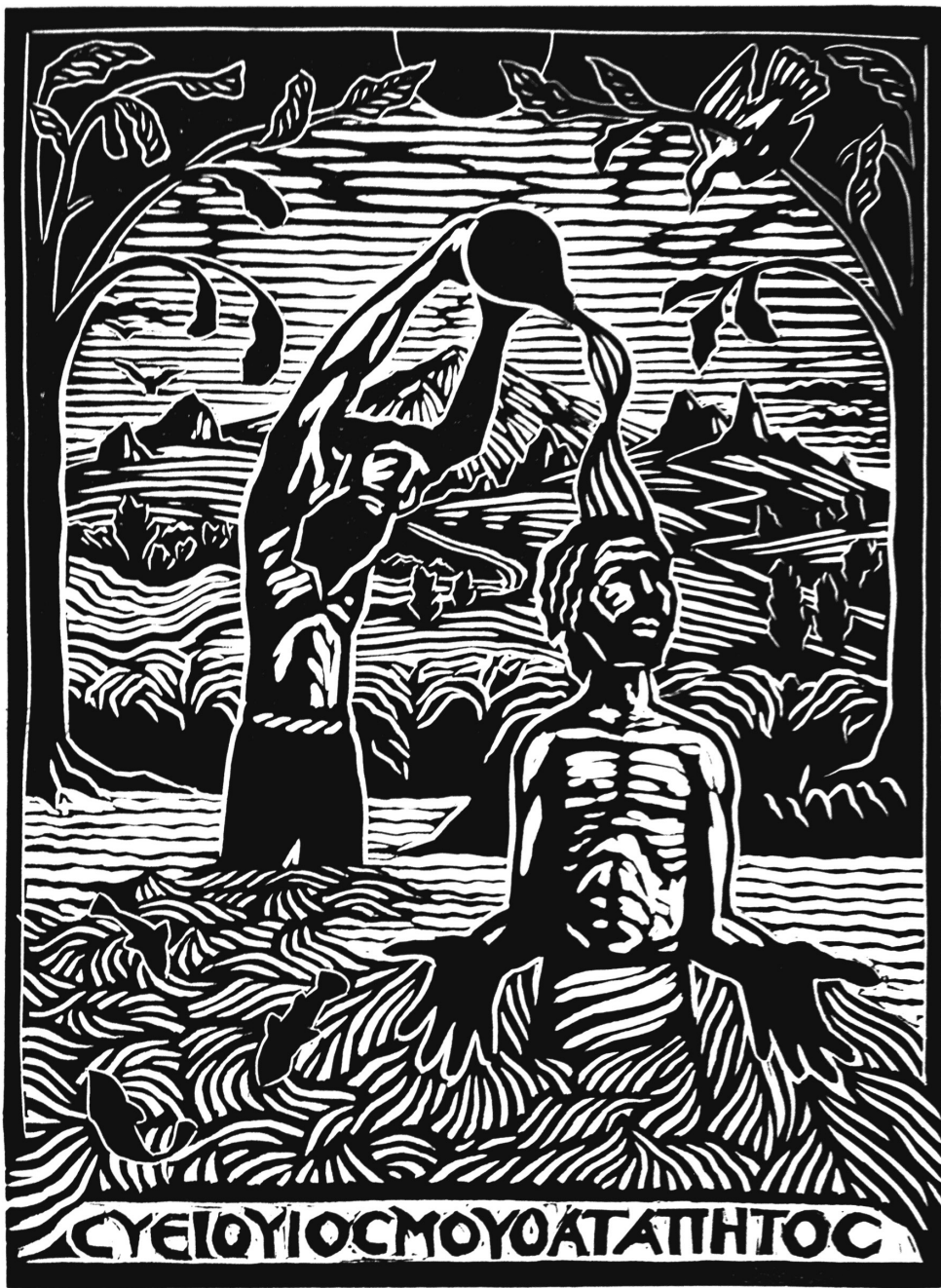
We gather at the Tree of Life, which was in the garden, and will be with us in the restored creation. Around the tree we rest and play; under its branches we belong. It is our source of wisdom, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. By the tree we need not fear, for the lamb rests in the bosom of the lion, and the child and the adder play together. By the tree we meet our friends—old and new, forgotten and familiar. And when we have gathered, we realize the tree has been with us all along. So come, friends, rest, play, and belong.



Dona Park (Canada)
Communion, 2018
Two digital illustrations

The act of eating together is sacred. It allows for jaws to loosen, fists to become relaxed, and hungry bodies to be nourished. It allows us to retain a sort of gregarious formality while being able to talk openly about politically contentious topics. Whether sharing a bowl of rice, breaking flatbread, or drinking a cup of wine, the act of eating together is a collective experience.

Within the theme of communion, I move away from a Eurocentric idea of bread and wine to include soup and rice, foods that I grew up eating while living in different countries. This idea extends to the Christian faith as well, which moves beyond Western tradition to become an international feast. From faith to food, fellowship, and communion, Christ's table extends to everybody.



CYEIOYIOC MOYO ATATHOTOC

Matthew C. Regier (USA)

From the River to the Wilderness, 2018

Linocut

The block print (traditionally a woodcut) has an almost inherently literary quality, being historically associated with book illustration and being, like text, starkly black and white. Block prints thereby have the potential to accompany and illuminate a narrative without supplanting it.

From the River to the Wilderness recalls the tradition of medieval and early renaissance printmaking with its enchanted peculiarity and startling otherworldliness. In contrast to medieval and renaissance art, the mystical quality of this image is due mostly to its perspective, rather than haloes or winged angels. John and Jesus do not appear in “real” three-dimensional space (Jesus almost telescopes in the foreground). The action is not happening in one particular place or time.

At the center of the image is the water of baptism, which is depicted in various ways evoking other biblical symbols and stories concerning water. The composition creates both a circular motion (from John to Jesus) and a propulsive momentum that moves out and forward—into the world and into our lives.

The Greek text reads: “You are my son, the beloved” (Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22).



Gwen M. Stamm (USA)

When Flaming Dove Meets Rising Waters (Moment of Transformation), 2018

Digital print of mixed media work

Utilizing a technique called Scherenschnitte (German for “scissor cuts”), I brush light-to-dark tones in gouache onto the bottom layer of paper. I then cut out many shapes from the top layer, symbols of fire, dove, and water coming to light by the background tones.

When I think of ‘Holy Spirit, Pentecost, Church,’ the symbols imply moving, celebrating, and serving. Water and fire, destructive though they can be, purify and refine. The dove imparts peace and love. I imagine a keenly-focused sense of unity within the diversity of those who experienced the first Pentecost, and ‘pentecosts’ thereafter. The Spirit-spark quenches our deepest hunger and thirst, wholly transforming us. We are most alive and at one with all of creation.

As I cut and removed each piece, the top layer progressively revealed the bottom layer, which in turn defined the top layer. It seemed as if both layers of the art and I interacted and explored together, though not certain where we were going! As a result, I underwent perhaps a small part of a transformative encounter in this free-spirited, invigorating play!

**TASTE AND SEE:
LOOKING AT THE PICTURES
IN VOICES TOGETHER**

Magdalene Redekop

My copy of the new Mennonite hymnal arrived in the mail during a global pandemic when schools, libraries, art galleries, and churches were closed. Here in Toronto, authorities issued a “stay at home” order that seemed to go on forever. It began to seem as if every package that was delivered to our door was a message from the outside world and every new book a gift. Since childhood, new books have been a sensory pleasure for me. On Christmas morning, there was always a small stack of them waiting for me at my place on the dining room table. Sometimes I would hold my mother’s gifts up to my face, savouring the feel and smell of them. That is what I did with *Voices Together*, which is indeed a beautiful gift. Swirling gold letters foreground the word *together* on the deep purple cover. The debossed outlines of a dove—an enduring and wordless sign of Mennonite identity—recede into the background. As I held the book in my hands, I thought of the Biblical imperative: “O taste and see that the Lord is good...” (Psalm 34:8).

I begin by emphasizing the materiality of this text as a reminder that we take in art with all our senses. All art is of this earth—even music. We tend to think of music as ephemeral or spiritual, but in fact it does not exist until it is performed by bodies with the aid of instruments. Archaeologists have uncovered evidence to show that the Israelites were using instruments to accompany their singing as early as the 14th century BCE. Not surprisingly, however, given the prohibition against “graven images,” the Hebrew Psalter did not contain pictures. Although there are now plenty of paintings of King David playing a harp, Jews and Christians are people of the Word, and what has endured is the verbal poetry of the Book of Psalms, which historian Irene Hesk describes as “the bedrock of Judeo-Christian hymnology.”¹

I had such historical contexts in mind when, somewhat to my own surprise, I accepted the invitation to write—sight unseen—about the visual art in *Voices Together*. Postal service was slow, so I had plenty of time to marvel at my temerity. By the time the book arrived, I was very curious to see the art. When I flipped quickly through it, however, I was baffled to find no pictures at all. Had I perhaps ordered the wrong edition? Eventually it occurred to me that the pages might be sticking together because the book had never been opened before. So I started at the very beginning and went through the entire hymnal, one page at a time, placing a bookmark each time an image appeared. It is a lesson I have had to learn repeatedly when taking in any art: slow down. Good art is a kind of miracle, and as Jesus told his disciples (Mark 8:18), quoting the Hebrew prophets, if you want to experience a miracle, you need to pay close attention. “Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not, which have ears, and hear not” (Jeremiah 5:21; see also Isaiah 6:9).

I am sorry to say that my first reaction was disappointment. I had anticipated that budgetary limits would necessitate black-and-white reproduction, but I was not prepared for how much would be lost in translation. Since I had not seen the originals, the loss was indefinable, but it was almost as if the wine in the miracle I had anticipated was instead being turned back into water before my very eyes. Eventually, with time to look and linger, I discovered riches that I will try to share with you here. Nonetheless, my initial experience of the seeming invisibility of the art left me with gratitude to Rachel Epp Buller for curating an exhibition that will make it more visible.

¹ Hesk, Irene. *Passport to Jewish Music: Its History, Traditions, and Culture*. Greenwood Publishing. 1994. 41.

matching up the details with scriptural texts, then what would make it more than a “Where’s Waldo?” exercise—adapted to ask “Where’s Jesus?”? All twelve pictures in *Voices Together* function to some extent as illustrations of texts. Deeper questions are stirred up, however, when these makings are taken out of the book and exhibited on the wall of a gallery.

Paying attention to an artist’s choice of medium is a useful basis for resisting approaches to art that reduce it to a single message. There is surely no point, however, in denying that good art can “speak” to us, often with mysterious urgency. Indeed, it is not uncommon for artists to sense a “message” coming from a chosen medium and to feel that the material has an agency of its own. The respect of an artist for his or her material is crucial to the power of any art.³ We who view the art and converse about it should follow that example. I saw myself as doing just that when I checked all the captions in *Voices Together* for information about the media chosen by each artist. Once again I was confronted by the limits of black-and-white reproduction. I strained to imagine the different textures and colours. It didn’t help that each picture is attached to words in the text—the words of hymns and of recommended scripture. I understand that these are intended as resources, a way of helping viewers to find meaning in the pictures, but I can’t help visualizing the words as strings attaching the pictures to the book, as if to prevent them from flying free of the binding. Words,

words, words. I feel strongly that pictures should be allowed to speak for themselves and in their own nonverbal language. What is the use of me adding still more words?

My dilemma felt peculiar to this assignment, but in fact there are indications that it is widely shared. Artist Susan Shantz, for example, has observed that Mennonites, if they see art at all, tend to prefer something “realistic” and nostalgic.⁴ Images that illustrate a scriptural text are least threatening, but realistic visual art is assumed to speak for itself, the best example of this being photography. Most of the images in *Voices Together* challenge that assumption by mixing representation and abstraction. There is one photograph, but grayscale reproduction unintentionally moves it, too, from representation to a kind of abstraction. J. Tyler Klassen’s landscape “Mist, Sun, Morning,” stirs in me a nostalgic memory of how light and snow could transform a field of stubble on the prairie farm where I grew up. Visitors to the exhibition will have the opportunity to see the work in full colour, but when I looked at it on the page I felt the frustration of “seeing through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

After spending time with all the images, I came back to Klassen’s photograph and realized that my first reaction to it marked the place where I began to define the limits of what I can offer here. This in-between place of seeing and not quite seeing, this place of longing to see and to see what others see—

³ I am indebted to Regina Coupar, who tells the story of how she created a commissioned series of mosaic panels for Grace Chapel in Halifax. Her thesis—that artists should have a separate ministry, not subservient to texts—is at odds with the assumptions that lie behind the illustrations in *Voices Together*. Her gripping story, however, led me to see the crucial importance of medium. It also helped me to imagine each of the artists featured in the hymnal as working passionately within the limits of a particular medium. See *The Ministry of Art: An Intrinsic Case Study* (2014) <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/67420>

⁴ Shantz, Susan. Response to Margaret Loewen Reimer, “Mennonites and the Artistic Imagination,” and Magdalene Redekop, “The Painted Body Stares Back: Five Female Artists and the ‘Mennonite’ Spectator,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 17, no. 1: 104.

this is the standpoint from which I will write about all these reproductions. Indeed, I will go further and venture to say that it is the place of all our human acts of looking. Paul the Apostle was quite right. We never arrive at final insights “for we know in part and we prophesy in part” (1 Corinthians 13:9). This place of longing and of fragmentary insights is not only where we make art of all kinds, but also where we engage with art made by others. All I can do here is tell you the story of what I saw and experienced when I opened *Voices Together* and entered this threshold zone. Mine is just one perspective. I envision a sanctuary full of people in this same in-between place, opening this same hymnal and singing together in four-part harmony. Some of us see the pictures. Others turn a blind eye to them.

You may be surprised to hear that I might be in the latter group. Blocking one sense has the effect of heightening the others, which is why I sometimes close my eyes when listening to music. Turning a deaf ear to music is a lot harder, especially while you are holding a hymnal in your hands. In order to keep my focus on the pictures, I had to resist the temptation to write about the hymns. The fascinating micro-histories of individual hymns are now easily available online, a constant lure for me, as I discovered while writing *Making Believe: Questions About Mennonites and Art*. The questions raised by the interplay of eye and ear in *Voices Together* are ones that I explored in some depth in that book. Of particular importance here are my ongoing efforts to come to terms with the legacy of Anabaptist suspicion of images. Music is a privileged art among Mennonites and songs have been part of our liturgy since the sixteenth century, when Anabaptist martyrs sang hymns that were collected in our first hymnal, the *Ausbund*. Unfortunately, hostility to images has





also been a part of our history from the beginning and continues to this day in many churches. Our iconoclastic sixteenth-century Anabaptist ancestors expressed their fear of idolatry by vandalizing and destroying images. My strong impression is that the pictures in this hymnal are created by artists who are conscious of how their visions go against the grain of this part of our history. I hesitate, however, to call the resulting art iconoclastic. My reluctance to use the term stems in part from my aversion to being associated with those of my ancestors who participated in the violent destruction of art. Another reason is that the adjective iconic is now used so loosely that it means everything and nothing. Is there any modern art that is *not* iconoclastic?⁵

We tend to think of all this as ancient history, but if I am honest I have to admit that I frequently experience twinges that make me wonder at my own residual fear of idolatry. This goes back to my childhood experience, when my father did not permit us to have a Christmas tree because he thought of it as idolatrous. The memory makes me think that SaeJin Lee's decorated Tree of Life might make a good case study for Mennonite viewers. The caption specifies that Lee created the original with watercolor paint and colored pencils. If your child is tempted to take her crayons and treat this like a page in a colouring book, will you stop her? I cringe at the very thought of such a defacing of art, but then I instantly wonder if such reverence is a kind of idolatry. Religion and art have been uneasy companions for centuries. Where is the boundary between an image as a work of art and the various ways in which it can be *used*, ranging from a distraction for children to an aid to worship?

I assume that those involved in the decision to add images to a hymnal must be in agreement with Chad Martin that addressing visual illiteracy “is vital to the livelihood of Mennonite theology and spirituality.”⁶ Let me say plainly, however, that I do not see my role here as telling you what you should see in these pictures. When it comes to the visual arts, I am an amateur, learning a little more every time I visit an art gallery. I sometimes feel myself to be on a steep learning curve, but I know I will never arrive at a height from which I look down on visual illiterates. We all learn from each other. From my husband, who happens to be a “cradle Catholic,” I have learned why stained glass windows are sometimes referred to as a Poor Man’s Bible. They once helped a mostly illiterate population follow biblical narratives. Because my response to images is sometimes intense, I have become aware of a tension between these stories and something that is like a presence. I’m quite content with vague words to describe this powerful feeling, but I understand and respect the fact that Catholics see the symbols in stained glass windows as icons.

Anthropologist John M. Janzen has recently diagnosed a Mennonite infection called “iconitis,” a reference to a tendency among Mennonites to claim that we have our own “icons.” I share his view that the term “Mennonite icon,” in historical context, is “an oxymoron—a combination of contradictory or incongruous words.” As Janzen explains: “There is no way the orthodox meaning of an Orthodox icon can be glibly transferred to Mennonite spirituality and congregational life without totally rejecting the received Anabaptist understanding

of the incarnation.” As I understand Orthodox icons, they are prototypes—forms that contain an essential religious meaning and must therefore be reproduced with literal precision. To affix the label “icon” to a challenging work of contemporary art offers an escape from confrontation with our own visual illiteracy. Janzen suggests a more productive alternative: “Visual imagery in Mennonite worship and commemoration needs to be introduced from altogether different grounds—appropriate creativity, contextual referents, and the eye of Mennonite artists.”⁷

That, in fact, is exactly what the new hymnal is doing: introducing visual imagery through the eyes of twelve Mennonite artists. Like the composers whose hymns are included in *Voices Together*, the artists were obviously chosen with cultural diversity as an aim. Although English is dominant, the multiple languages in the hymnal are true to the reality that Mennonites on this planet worship in many different languages—Korean, Swahili, Chinese, Spanish, and more. The nonverbal languages of visual art also vary across cultures, but vocabularies overlap and I have found this to be especially so with decorative art. I have written at some length in *Making Believe* about the Mennonite decorative tradition and how it resonates with the traditions of other cultures. Pictures in a hymnal offer another angle of approach to this topic because of how they encourage questions about illustration—a fascinating branch of art history.

⁵ In my thinking about icons I have been helped by the writing of W. J. T. Mitchell. See for example, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁶ Martin, Chad. “Visual Images as Text?: Toward a Mennonite Theology of the Arts.” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 23, no. 3 (Winter 2010).

A few of the images in *Voices Together* are made using methods that are particularly suited to book illustration, as was the engraving technique used by Jan Luyken to illuminate the stories in the *Martyrs Mirror*. Rachel Epp Buller's contribution is one of these. Her medium of choice is scratchboard, a method of engraving that involves scratching off black paint or ink to expose the white layer underneath. Scratchboard was developed in the 19th century, in part because it could be photographically reproduced without loss of quality. It was once used to illustrate medical textbooks and is now coming into use in graphic novels. Repetitive small marks made by hand on a page to create larger effects have long been a staple of book illustrations. There is an inherent humility in this kind of repetitive labour, and Buller associates this with women's handicraft, which she writes about as "embodied knowledge transferred between hands, in intimate settings." In the hands of this particular artist, scratchboard becomes a medium that brings the viewer, quite literally, down to earth.

An outline of a mother holding a baby emerges from what look like branches in *We Owe Them a Complicated Debt*. Not surprisingly, the hymnbook editors chose to locate it next to an Advent hymn, thus inviting comparison with Mother of God icons. The image is also "iconic" in the loose contemporary sense of being very familiar. This did make me wonder about the extent to which familiarity defines an icon, but iconoclastic is too grand a word for an

image created in this humble way. Buller's respect for the medium is part of her respect for maternal ancestors and her focus is more on the action of making marks than it is on the final form the marks take. Each minute scratch is a labour of love, miming the countless little repetitive actions of our mothers. The oblique title is like a signpost leading out of the hymnal and pointing to social contexts. When this print is framed and hung on a gallery wall, what stories will the scratches tell?

Also suited to illustration is Matthew C. Regier's choice of medium for *From the River to the Wilderness*, a linocut representation of the baptizing of Jesus by John the Baptist. Woodcut printing, which was first invented in China, has been a standard medium for book illustrations since the invention of the printing press. The decorative border of Regier's linocut and the playfulness of the baptism scene are visual reminders that we now associate such illustrations with children's books. John the Baptist's arms stretch up to the sky above a mountain top in the borrowed landscape. His baptism is like a waterfall landing on the head of Jesus, whose body language conveys abandonment. The healing hands of Christ are extended outwards—almost indistinguishable from the waves. Despite the childlike simplicity of the linocut and the neatness of the framed page, the familiar symbols (water, dove, fish, etc.) are defamiliarized by the magic of Regier's art and become more than cliché. I looked at the beautiful Greek letters and said to myself: "It's all Greek to

⁷ Janzen, John M. "Mennonite Icon—an Oxymoron." *Mennonite Life* 59 (March, 2004). accessed May 31, 2021 https://mla.bethelks.edu/ml-archive/2004Mar/janzen_john_response.php

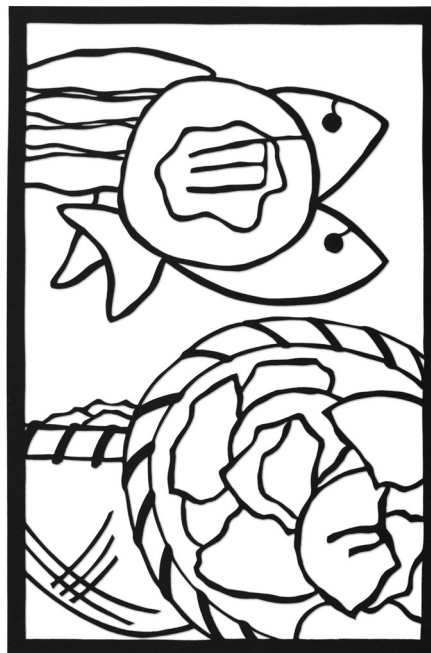
⁸ I looked in vain for a hymn in my mother tongue, Low German, or Plautdietsch. Hymns were not sung in Low German when I was a child, but they are now by Mennonites in some parts of the world. The language remains profoundly important to all my ways of experiencing art. I am indebted to ethnomusicologist Doreen Helen Klassen for her pioneering work on the music of Low German speaking Mennonites. See *Singing Mennonite: Low German Songs Among the Mennonites* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1989).

me.” The pleasure of being in that threshold space, for me, was like what I feel while singing in Latin, words that I don’t fully understand but that resonate with history. Regier’s extraordinary composition works well as an illustration, but the playfulness of the image and the push towards abstraction suggest that it will open still more ways of seeing when it is exhibited in a gallery.

Dona Park’s *Communion*, similarly, is located on a threshold that pushes beyond illustration. The title clearly identifies it as an illustration of the Eucharist, but if my grandsons were to look at this picture they would tell me about the time they made sushi with their mama. The picture could as easily be an illustration in the popular Mennonite cookbook *More with Less*. The chopsticks are, of course, a pointed challenge to North American presuppositions, but Park makes more with less on deeper levels than the surface incongruity suggests. If you have heard the Buddhist parable about heaven, hell, and two sets of chopsticks (often used in sermons), you may notice an intriguing revision. The details of the story vary, depending on cultural context, but the moral remains the same. Hell is trying to feed yourself with a very long pair of chopsticks—or a long spoon, in some versions. Heaven is sitting across the table from another person and feeding each other. In Dona Park’s revision, there is only one set of chopsticks. Two pairs of hands perform the act of communion and of mutual aid.

Michelle G. Burkholder’s *Loaves and Fishes*, a paper cutout, is a strong composition that could work as a design for a stained glass window. Like Henri Matisse’s paper cutouts, these loaves and fishes remind me of the shapes moved around on flannel board by Sunday School teachers when I was a child.

Representation blends into abstraction to the point where the loaves and fishes are barely identifiable as such, but the title ties the image to the familiar story of a miracle. On this level, the fish and loaves illustrate the hymn next to the picture, which alludes to the Sermon on the Mount and the blessedness of being poor, but the use of abstraction pushes the image beyond the illustrative role. The caption does not specify the size of the original image, but the starkness of the outlines and the ambiguity makes me very curious to find out what *Loaves and Fishes* will say to me when it is hanging on a gallery wall.



Brenton Good is an artist who works in more than one medium. In a series of monoprints called *Nine Patch*, he explores the overlap between modernist abstraction and quilt design. Good’s respect for the material of art is evident in his further exploration of the same designs with a series of paintings on

wooden panels. Fabric is, of course, the material of actual quilts, but interest in the relationship between quilt design and modernist art has grown steadily since a 1971 exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art.⁹ Janneken Smucker has recently explored the rich history of Amish quilts with relation to the abstract paintings of Warren Rohrer¹⁰. Like Rohrer, Good plays brilliantly with checkerboard patterning, which is a basic convention of decorative art. *Nine Patch #8*, the one reproduced here, happens to be the most colourful one in this series. When reproduced in grayscale, this image serves, ironically, as a forceful advertisement for an exhibition that will give people the opportunity to see *Nine Patch #8* in full colour.

Jewish, Muslim, and Christian traditions are alike in having allowed representations of colourful birds and flowers in decorative art, even during times when other representations were strictly forbidden. Meg Harder's *Sing the Goodness* is done in ink on paper, but the singing birds and the decorative frame bring to mind the rich colours of *fraktur*, a Mennonite form of illuminated writing practiced in Pennsylvania. Like the playful incongruities in *Tree of Life*, the busy details come to focus on one central image: a lamb curled inside a circle, held by human hands. The story of redemption is condensed into that single metaphor of incarnation, but the presence of the divine is dispersed in a playful way. Harder's singing birds have the honour of illustrating an adaptation of Beethoven's Hymn to Joy, but the picture positively begs to be taken out of the book and hung on a wall.

Since crosses are likely the most common trigger for iconophobia among Mennonites, it is perhaps not surprising that only one picture in the hymnal contains a cross: Anne Hostetler Berry's *Alive*. With bold black and white lines, Berry's architectural vision pushes at the edges of the page. The decorative borders common in book illustration are broken and the familiar dove of peace defamiliarized. Represented in black and white stripes, the dove is being drawn into a vortex at the centre of the cross. The image evokes in me a strong sense of spiritual presence and I take this to be because it is in the process of being broken. Plenty of scriptural texts about brokenness come to mind, but I also think of the aphorism, "Every act of creation is first an act of destruction."¹¹ I was pleased to see Berry's art located opposite the hymn, "Low in the Grave He Lay." I imagine what a thrill it would be to sing "up from the grave He arose" in a church on an Easter morning while looking at *Alive* and feeling alive. Come to think, I won't even object if you want to call this picture iconoclastic.

When I reflect on what I have learned so far, it occurs to me that what is not in the pictures is as important as what is there. This lesson about visual language is made explicit by the negative space in Gwen M. Stamm's *When Flaming Dove Meets Rising Waters (Moment of Transformation)*. A mixed media work, the image illustrates the story of a Pentecostal explosion of language. At the same time, it demands that we pay attention to visual languages. In a shadowy negative space that allows a glimpse of the texture of the paper underneath, I sense the absence of the colour red. Paradoxically, the white-on-white design can lead through the story of Pentecost to an encounter with

⁹ Whitney Museum of American Art, *Abstract Design in American Quilts* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1971).

presence. And if I feel a twinge of fear of idolatry, it is no more than what I expect when an image is so powerful.

A different kind of power comes through to me from Rafael H. Barahona's *Migrant Journey*, an image used to accompany the African American spiritual "Guide My Feet." Barahona's winding road looks childlike to me, but that may be because it instantly evoked a memory of a frightening picture about heaven and hell that hung on the dining room wall in our house on the farm. Painted by Mary Evans in about 1900, the Christian poster is still a bestseller. As a child, I often puzzled over the details that illustrate the words of Jesus: "broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction ... and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life..." (Matthew 7: 13-14). I can never read Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" without thinking of that poster. I acknowledge this bias because it may explain why I find this picture so liberating. Barahona plays with shadows that break the lines of this very broad road. Although there is a somewhat dangerous-looking cliff, the road does not split into two, separating those who are saved from those who are not saved. These are not sheep and goats. These are just people. Barahona's landscape offers a vision of community not limited to any one religious or ethnic group. The caption identifies the medium simply as "digital." The word is a reminder that in a sense we are all migrants on this earth, immersed together in a global digital culture that constitutes an urgent challenge for those who wish to create community. The digital environment that

surrounds us is saturated with images. How should a Mennonite artist with a vision of community create something in response? With humility, this picture seems to say. The very simplicity of *Migrant Journey* tells me that Barahona is under no illusions about the difficulty of trying to construct a "peaceable kingdom" on earth. No lions and lambs here. Indeed, an alternative title for this picture could be *On the Road*, the title of the last chapter of Rudy Wiebe's *The Blue Mountains of China*.¹²

Simplicity is also central to the impact of the multiplying hand prints in Michelle L. Hofer's *At the Impulse of God's Love: A Re-envisioning of Dirk Willems Saving His Captor's Life (1685) by Jan Luyken*. Until I spent time with this mixed media work, I had not noticed that hand symbols recur in *Voices Together*. Hands appear explicitly in *Sing the Goodness, From the River to the Wilderness*, and *Communion* and implicitly in *We Owe Them a Complicated Debt* and *Nine Patch #8*. The two pairs of hands at the centre of Hofer's art, however, have a special status in Mennonite history. They will act as a mnemonic for many viewers, instantly evoking the story of Dirk Willems—a story so well known to Mennonites that it is unnecessary to retell it here. Hofer's choice of this particular image from the *Martyrs Mirror* is significant because it has the rare distinction of having been designated a "Mennonite icon." A reproduction of it was presented to Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 by Nancy Heisey, then-president of the Mennonite World Conference.¹³ If you assume that the original is an icon, then Hofer's

¹⁰ Smucker, Janneken. "'Tracking the Amish Quilt': Warren and Jane Rohrer's Search for a Usable Past." *Field Language: The Painting and Poetry of Warren and Jane Rohrer*. (Eds. Julia Spicher Kasdorf, Christopher Reed, and Joyce Henri Robinson). University Park, Pa: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

¹¹ The quotation is usually attributed to Pablo Picasso but the idea of linking creation with destruction is older than that and appears in some form in the myths of all the major world religions.

art could be described as iconoclastic. I think of it, instead, as ekphrastic—a rhetorical term used when a work of art in one medium reflects on a work of art in another. In her “re-envisioning” of Luyken’s engraving, Hofer pays subtle but powerful tribute to her predecessor by isolating a detail and dwelling on it. Whereas Luyken engraved his images on copper, Hofer outlines the two pairs of hands in pinpricks. This tiny act of violence taps into the past, setting up an energy that generates more hands. The expressive hands, reaching out for each other, made me think not only of Dirk Willems but also of the hands that Michelangelo painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The multiplying hand prints, however, remind me of prehistoric cave art, such as the hundreds of stenciled hands in Cueva de las Manos in Argentina. At the same time, I remember a T-shirt that my children once gave me on Mother’s Day, covered with their hand prints in bright colours. Hofer’s “re-envisioning” invites us to be transformed, to participate in making our own hand prints “at the impulse of God’s love.”

I have barely scratched the surface of the riches in *Voices Together* that await those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. Looking at the pictures has been an oddly solitary experience for me—not always pleasant, despite the rewards of close reading.¹⁴ Mine is a sideways approach, since I have not attended a Mennonite church for many years. Like most people during this pandemic, I have missed the comforts of community, but when such things are permitted again, I will go with my husband to Church of the Redeemer, an Anglican church in Toronto. It is my hope that we will sing “Taste and See” (467) during communion. No matter where I worship, the deepest



¹² Wiebe, Rudy. *The Blue Mountains of China*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart. 1970.

joy of Mennonite community for me is when we sing together in four-part harmony. I tried to imagine what it would be like to do that while looking at the accompanying pictures in *Voices Together*. As if in answer, there appeared to me the ghost of my father, who died in 1976. I am not, of course, speaking literally, but I do often hear his deep bass voice. On Sunday mornings when my mother felt a migraine coming on, he would always say: *Na yo. Daut kaust je dü uck tūs doune*. “Well yes, after all you can do it at home.” What he meant was that she could do church by listening to hymns on CFAM, our local radio station. My father’s approval was all the more significant because he was the *Ältester* of our church.

With my father’s encouragement, I decided to continue my explorations past my conclusion by checking out online performances of hymns in *Voices Together*. I began with “Mountain of God,” the song accompanying *Tree of Life*. When I searched the name of the composer, Phil Campbell-Enns, I learned that he is a Winnipeg pastor and songwriter. Bill Derksen is credited for having composed accompaniment, but only the melody is provided in the hymnal. Much to my delight, I found a recording of Campbell-Enns singing his own song. He sings in the kind of unpretentious way that makes you want to sing along. So I did. This stranger and I sang a duet, him singing the melody in his gravelly baritone and me improvising a harmony with my rusty alto—all about walking humbly and living in a peaceable kingdom. As I sang I looked at SaeJin Lee’s *Tree of Life* and of course I wept. What else can you do when words fail?¹⁵

When I think of all the people who will lift their voices together while holding this hymnal in their hands, I am humbled to have had the opportunity to share my personal responses. I have done this in the hope that they will generate conversations in various communities. We are living in a dark time, but there is hope in remembering that we all live on the same earth and that what we make of that earth creates community. If there is any one thing that all twelve pictures in *Voices Together* have in common, it is a message of love. All the makings of our hands and voices, these images seem to say (echoing Paul, once again), are as “sounding brass and tinkling cymbals” if they are not a labour of love. In his seminal book on gift exchange, Lewis Hyde writes that a gift only becomes a gift when it is received with gratitude and consumed. “A gift must keep on moving.” If hoarded, it becomes a commodity. Hyde goes further, arguing that “it is when art acts as an agent of transformation that we may correctly speak of it as a gift.” Every song and picture in this book is potentially a gift in that sense. As copies of the hymnal change hands, the gift moves in circles so that you don’t get a gift from the same person to whom you gave one. You “give blindly” and end up feeling “a sort of blind gratitude.” *Voices Together* is a beautiful gift—a labour of love. Taste and see.

¹³ Heisey, Nancy R. “Remembering Dirk Willems: Memory and History in the Future of Ecumenical Relationships.” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. 47, no 3: 355-75.

¹⁴ I am grateful to my husband, Dennis Duffy, for his loving support.



¹⁵ James Elkins speculates about why many people cry when listening to music but few now cry when they are looking at pictures. This difference is particularly significant with relation to icons, which were originally made in aid of worship and to help people cry. *Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

¹⁶ Hyde, Lewis. *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*. New York: Vintage, 1979. 47, 16.

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