

WOMEN'S

PERSPECTIVES

Outside the Lines: Art and Spirituality

Editorial

By Carolyn Boyer

This edition of *Women's Perspectives* contains thoughts on experiencing and making art outside the lines. Laura Rattan, a new Mom who loves art, writes about experiencing art and beginning a faith journey with her one year old.

Erin Oke, a staff member at Evangel Hall in Toronto, runs a teen girls' programme aptly named *Outside the Lines*. She has contributed a description of this group and included photos and a poem.

My experience in art making and education has convinced me of the importance of art in all areas of life. As a member of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Art Guild in Barrie, Ontario, and a stained glass artist, I have discovered that art enhances the spirits and lives of those who participate in art classes, workshops, and gallery viewing.

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Carolyn Boyer is a teacher, artist, writer, grandmother, and elder in St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Barrie, Ontario.



Copper cross, geode, stained glass
By Carolyn Boyer

Outside the Lines

By Erin Oke

Outside the Lines was founded in 2003 by Evangel Hall Mission to provide a retreat for arts-oriented teenage girls, people who had been overlooked by traditional camp and recreational programs. It's a one week camp program offered two or three times each summer that gives low-income and at-risk teen girls an opportunity to get away at little or no cost to themselves. At camp, the young women participate in different arts workshops designed to facilitate self-expression, build confidence and develop creative thinking skills. Activities range from belly dancing to songwriting, mural making to comedy improvisation, photography to hip hop choreography. We also incorporate some more tradition "camp" activities, such as swimming, sports and campfires and some more intense physical challenges, like climbing on a high ropes course and volunteering at an animal sanctuary. The program is designed to help these young women realize their potential

by fostering their creative selves. The camp's natural environment allows everyone to take a break from the stress of life in the city and enjoy a safe place where they can be themselves and take artistic risks.

I have worked at Outside the Lines since 2004, and have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the transformative effect that the program has on its participants. Year after year, I've watched young women strengthen their voices, discover new talents and come away with fresh perspectives to bring back to their daily lives. The work they create is inspiring, real and honest. It's a pleasure to get to help them develop as young women and artists.

*Erin Oke, EHM Youth Program Coordinator
and Director of Outside the Lines Camp*



Thoughts about art-making in the 20th century:

In an age of concentration camps and atomic bombs religious and artistic sincerity will certainly exclude all “prettiness” or shallow sentimentality. Beauty, for us, cannot be a mere appeal to conventional pleasures of the imagination and senses.

Nor can it be found in cold, academic perfectionism.

The art of our time, sacred art included, will necessarily be characterized by a certain poverty, grimness and roughness which correspond to the violent realities of a cruel age.

Sacred art cannot be cruel, but it must know how to be compassionate with the victims of cruelty: and one does not offer lollipops to a starving man in a totalitarian death-camp. Nor does one offer him the message of a pitifully inadequate optimism.

Our Christian hope is the purest of all lights that shine in darkness, but it shines in darkness, and one must enter into darkness to see it shining.

Thomas Merton, *Disputed Questions*
(New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1960)

Dee Dee Risher in **How one justice-seeker was redeemed by beauty**, Geez Magazine Spring 2008, writes...and those of us who are most intent on justice, those of us who are activists, and those of us who stand in the barrage of steady societal critique perhaps need to drink in more art than anyone else. In our line of work, the task of stoking our vision and constantly imagining possibilities is absolutely essential.

Art, Babies and the Beginning of a Faith Journey

By Laura Ruttan

I can't deny it. I have pride. I am proud that my 13-month old daughter says the word "art". To the outside world it might sound more like "hat", but the fact that she is looking at a piece of art when she says it convinces me of her intentions. Of course, it should be noted that she says a few other words that sound remarkably like "hat". That's almost not worth mentioning. It creates pride in me because I am a lover of art. I wish I could create it, but in lieu of creation I have a true appreciation, and it is my hope to pass on my appreciation to my daughter.

God has blessed us with one perfect child. I can't claim to be an expert on parenting, but in my experience I have been enchanted with Sarah's natural interest in art. Before she was born my husband and I enjoyed selecting pieces to hang in her room. Many of the pieces were gifts or great second-hand finds. Almost from the beginning of her life outside of the womb she was captivated by a wall-hanging depicting Noah's Ark. I joke that it was her love of the piece that created a temporary flat spot on her head. When she was about six months old it dawned on me that she wanted me to carry her around her room so that she could admire the art by touching it. It was then that I realized the great opportunity that art offers in initiating a young child's faith journey.

What follows is a suggested list of possible types of art to seek out when decorating your child or grandchild's room in order to help them have a consciousness of God in their life.



Noah's Ark

It's kind of odd to suggest that the story of Noah's Ark is complementary to a young child's mind when you think of the actual story. The events are quite frightening, and it's strange to think of exposing a young child to a scary story.

The truth is that even really young kids are intrigued by animals, and animals are abundant in the ark. The best learning occurs when there is already a natural interest present. The great thing about a work of art related to Noah and the Ark is that it is a great way to begin teaching a young child about the Bible and the important lessons that we must learn as Christians through biblical stories.

Photography of your Baby

When our daughter Sarah was born her Great Aunt gave her a frame with the words "Forever held close, in the love of the Lord, from this day on." We put a picture of Sarah in it and hung it on her wall. It's a good reminder to Sarah that she is indeed loved by God. It's also a sign to Sarah that she is loved by her family and that we simply couldn't find anything more beautiful to hang on the wall than her lovely face. A child must be loved to be able to freely give love to her family, to her friends, to her church family, to her community, and to God.



Art, Babies and the Beginning of a Faith Journey cont.

Native Canadian Art

We have a print in Sarah's room called "The Family" by Cecil Youngfox who is a Native Canadian artist. It is one of her favourites. The simple lines and bright colours attract her. Putting a picture of a family on the wall is a reminder to Sarah of the importance of family – her Mom, her Dad, her extended family, her church family, and her brothers and sisters in Christ. Your family models how to be faithful people – how to serve, how to be generous and how to love.

Also the deep connection that many Native Canadians have with God's creation is an excellent example of appreciation and stewardship of God's earth. A piece of Native Canadian art would act as an excellent segue to discuss later with your child the many ways, such as taking care of our planet, that we can show our love and faith in Christ



Icons

My husband bought Sarah an icon before she was born. I have to admit that I wasn't crazy about it at first. I am a sinner as I admitted earlier with my pride. I do love the look of a cozy room complete with beautiful furniture, perfect paint colour and items that look like they were recommended by the magazine Style at Home. When he brought the icon home I didn't remember having seen anything like it in the aforementioned magazine. However, it grew on me. It's a depiction of the Good Samaritan parable. The colours are muted but interesting, and there is a lot going on in the painting. I am so glad that Sarah is being exposed to such a powerful story. We are all neighbours and we must treat each other with kindness and compassion. That is definitely a lesson that I want my baby to internalize. I pray that one day she will be a Godly neighbour.

It is my humble hope that this list offers you some proof that art is one way of opening the door to faith. Of course art alone won't ensure your child's belief in our gracious God. It must be teamed with a variety of other factors. Consider giving the gift of art to a newborn. They'll never grow out of art. At least that's another one of my hopes for Sarah.

Laura Ruttan, a member of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Barrie, Ontario, is currently trying to find her groove as a stay-at-home Mom. Some days she thinks she might even have it, but then other days she thinks she might not. In a past life she was an elementary school teacher in Brampton. She thinks that one day she'll return to teaching once her babe is more grown. She lives on a tree-lined street with her enchanting husband Matthew and her joy-filled one-year old daughter Sarah. She aspires to write more often one day, but for now she's content to admire writers from afar. Laura's passion is her relationships and she enjoys spending time keeping in touch with her friends and family. You might also find her reading a good book, keeping a record of her daughter's milestones, drinking tea or bike riding with her family. She is on an exciting faith journey and feels very fortunate to be surrounded by many other Christians who inspire her to keep moving along her path.

Spirituality from a woman's perspective: thoughts on experiencing and making art outside the lines

By Carolyn Boyer

Connecting art and faith began for me in the 70's as I linked new theological insights regarding women in biblical history and interpretation with the work of two contemporary women artists, Judy Chicago and Sister Corita Kent. At that time I embraced the women's movement and the feminism which espoused equality and inclusion in secular and religious life. I still do. As inclusive language became the norm in public life, I longed for the church to utilize it in worship and conversation including references to the feminine imagery for God found in the Bible. I became acutely aware that visual images and words, read and spoken, influence self

image and behaviour and inform an understanding of the world and faith.

The works and words of artists Judy Chicago and Sister Corita Kent profoundly influenced me as a woman and an artist. Viewing Chicago's *The Dinner Party* at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1982 was a revelation. I came to realize the importance of women's work and history and experienced "AH-HA" moments of joy and excitement related to the artistic techniques of embroidery and ceramics connecting the beauty of the female body with women of history who struggled for equality and justice.

Chicago's collaborative approach to art making, so like women's work around the world, reflected a quality of church and community life I desired. Her feminist views were controversial; her art expressions of female sexuality did not conform to traditional artistic forms. By and large, my enthusiasm for her views and art fell on deaf ears. Judy Chicago's book, *Embroidering Our Heritage, The Dinner Party Needlework* remains a great read for those who sew, create in ceramics or are inspired by creative expression, and who would enjoy a "refresher course" in Western women's history and heritage.

Sister Corita Kent (1918-1986), a teacher, artist and gentle activist elevated the art of serigraphy (silk screen) to a fine art medium and taught new ways of seeing, making, and living. She was what I would call a "free spirit." Corita's philosophy of teaching creativity encouraged artistic experiment using all mediums of art. Ronald Steen, a noted art and museum historian, described Corita's art as a reflection of her spirituality, a commitment to social justice, hope for peace and fascination with life and the world around her. Kent's posters featuring huge bold streaks of colour and words spoke to the social issues of the day: the war in

Vietnam, hunger, amnesty for prisoners. She was a quiet and cautious protester, not engaging in acts of civil



Ah, the tangled webs we weave
By Carolyn Boyer

Spirituality from a woman's perspective: thoughts on experiencing and making art outside the lines cont.

disobedience, but speaking volumes through her art. Buckminster Fuller described his visit to her art department as among the most fundamentally inspiring experiences of his life. Although Kent died in 1986, *Learning By Heart: Teachings to Free the Creative Spirit* by Corita Kent and Jan Steward continues to be a source of inspiration. (from Amazon.ca or a public library)

Lately, Sister Wendy Beckett, a contemplative nun, living in solitude on the grounds of a monastery in Norfolk, England, has been like a personal mentor for understanding spiritual insights in the world of art. She makes a distinction between “religious art” and “spiritual art”, observing that they are not synonymous. I understand what she means. I’ve observed “religious art” in church settings and art galleries that fails to inspire while some contemporary art touches me deeply.

Beckett’s years of art research and expertise are reflected in BBC produced DVD series available for purchase online and borrowed from public libraries. As an artist and Christian I have found her book *Sister Wendy Beckett on Art and The Sacred* especially helpful. Her thoughtful insights about 65 contemporary works of art are celebrative commentaries of the transforming power of art and prayerful meditations on the presence of the divine in our everyday life.

The art and lives of Judy Chicago, Corita Kent, and Sister Wendy Beckett nurture my spirit and inspire my art. The spring 2008 theme of *Geez, holy mischief in an age of fast faith*, a magazine published in Manitoba, was Art in an Age of Brutality. This issue shakes up traditional art

opinions. I commend this magazine to those who wonder about non-traditional views of church and Western culture.

For me creating and viewing art is evocative of the phrase in Revelation, “Behold! I make all things new.” Creating art outside the lines is my preference. I am thankful for the Good News that encourages new possibilities, invites us to sing new songs and enables personal transformation. That gospel gives me permission to create works of art that extend beyond traditional boundaries using a variety of media and artistic styles.

Image and the Spirit by Karen Stone is a useful book for individuals and groups seeking to renew a spirit of creativity, imagination and joy. (Book Room, PPC)



Now we see in a mirror dimly. . .
By Carolyn Boyer

Women’s Perspectives (WP) strives to keep women in touch with each other and share their theological perspectives, biblical insights, special interests, joys and concerns with the whole church. WP is published 6 times yearly. It is written by guest editors and overseen by WP Committee, in co-operation with the Women in Ministry Committee.

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