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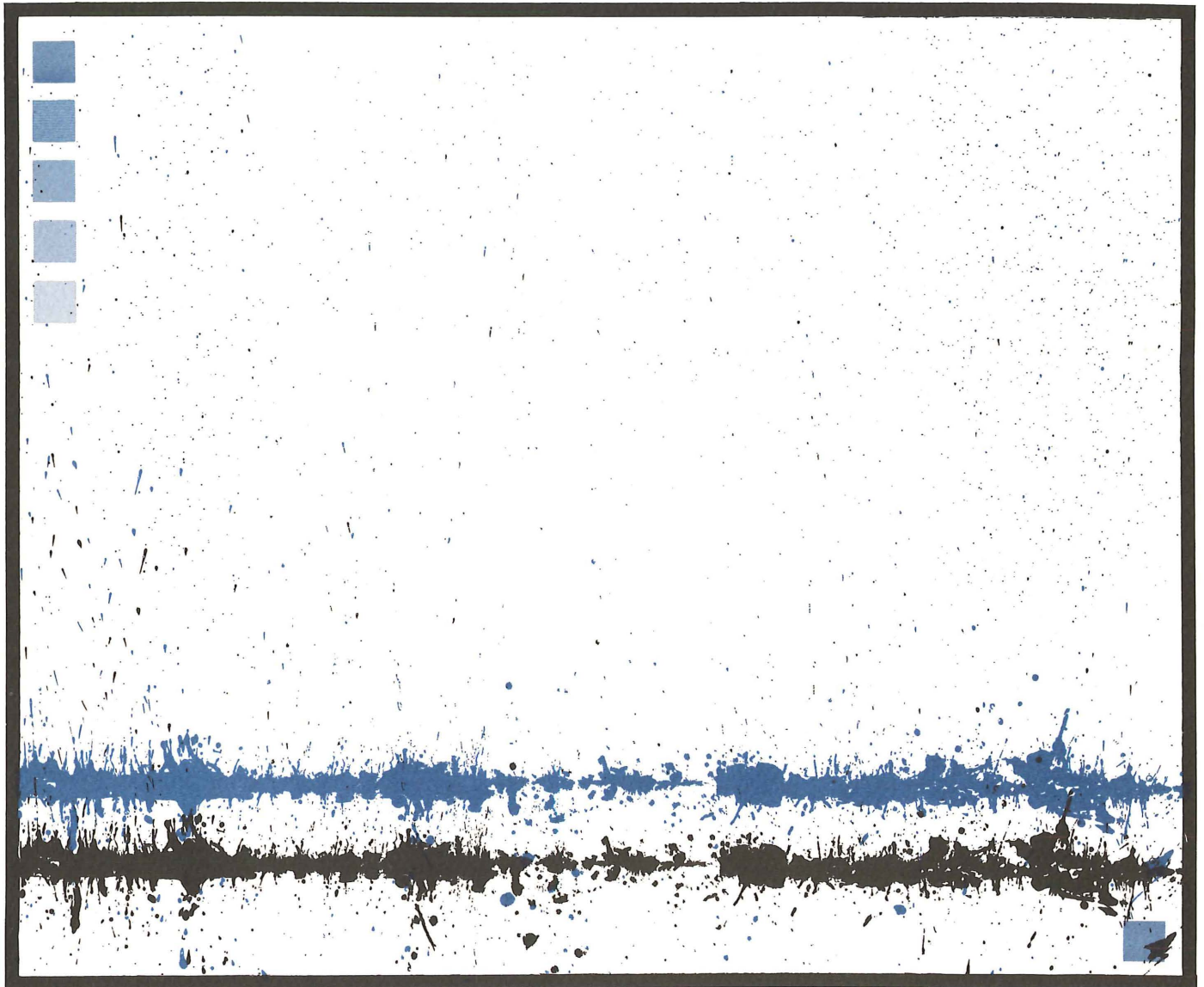
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# Dialogue

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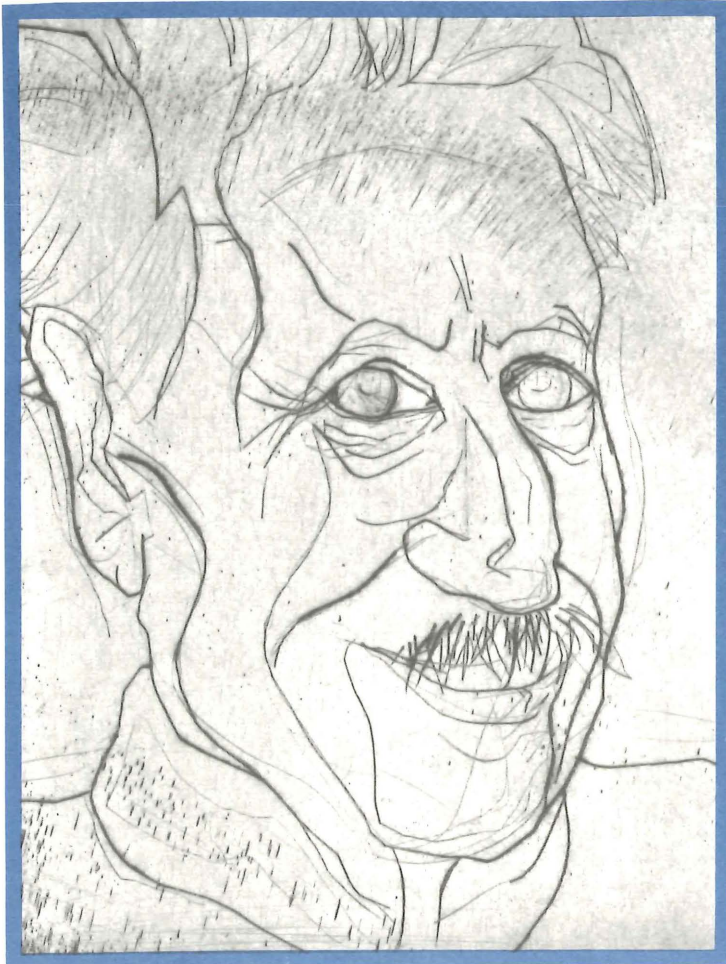
1985



A Fine Arts Issue

# Dialogue

Vol. 17 No. 4 1985



Smiling Old Man  
Lorilee Huizenga

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**Cover**—David P. Schaap

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# Editorial

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Today we meet people we have met for the past year. We know how to tell their moods in an instant. A sluggish step, and we know they are depressed. Sparkling eyes, and we smile at their happiness. We have set patterns of responses: who speaks first, what can be discussed, what goes unmentioned. We approach them knowing what to expect.

Today we go to a class in a school we have been at for the past year. We are as familiar with the conventions of the classroom as we are with our acquaintances. We know when a topic will be of interest, when it is presented for information, when it is to be criticized, when it is to be praised. And we know the grounds of the criticism or praise.

The January issue of *Dialogue* for the past few years has been dedicated to the fine arts. This year we decided to keep our usual departments but to devote the content of each to the arts. And we have tried to include a few more poems and pictures than usual.

The fine arts have much to teach us. One of their lessons is the virtue of openness. When we approach a work of art, to appreciate it we must meet it on its own terms. We must bring with us as few presuppositions and expectations as possible. And these we must be ready to discard if the work of art demands it. Art, even the most light-hearted and gentle, if it is living art and if we approach it properly, challenges us and demands of us the openness to meet the life it witnesses on its own terms. We must be willing to change ourselves if it demands.

If we receive its instruction, we can learn from art the necessity of openness. We can learn the virtue of meeting old acquaintances with an open mind, of letting them be free, not demanding that they comply with our expectations. We can also learn to accept new

ideas on their own terms, to allow them to challenge and change us and not kill them with an ever-ready set of criteria.

Many of the articles in this issue speak of the ability of art to surprise us. Art functions in a realm of possibility. Whether we are creative artists or creative viewers, art can teach us a spontaneity of life. Art instructs us in the virtue of openness, which gives us a life open not only to pain and suffering but also to surprise and joy.

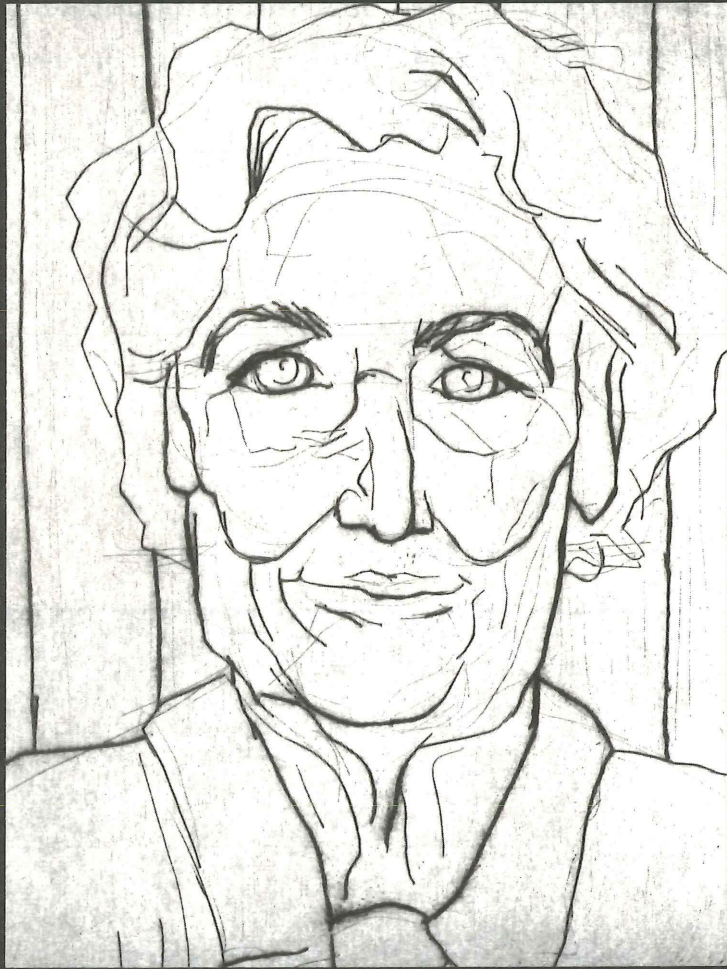
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Untitled  
Deborah Ebbers





Ada

Lorilee Huizenga



# How Terribly Strange to be Seventy

Pat Westerhof

*Can you imagine us  
Years from today  
Sharing a park bench quietly?  
How terribly strange  
To be seventy.*

Paul Simon



I read a lot of books about old people last summer, among them Madeleine L'Engle's *A Severed Wasp* and *Summer of the Grandmother*, and—my favorite—Barbara Pym's *Quartet in Autumn*. Since feminist literature and Ayn Rand novels were the most popular reading material at the group home where I worked, my reading selections attracted much comment. I decided to study the elderly as a summer project, so I read more books, lent the novels to people, and recorded their reactions. Then a letter from my friend the editor commanded me to turn whatever I was thinking about into an article for *Dialogue*, so my project became preparation for writing about the elderly as depicted in books. But last week the deadline was swiftly approaching, and, suffering from a guilt complex common to students, I felt certain that I hadn't done enough research or I hadn't thought enough about the topic or I didn't have enough experience to write anything. In my panic, I paused to reread *Quartet in Autumn*, and I decided that its characters were the only real elderly people I met last summer in my reading, the only ones who came alive.

"I just love old people," one of my co-workers bubbled enthusiastically, closing the door after the elderly neighbor who had returned a stray basketball. Well, my co-workers were all social workers, so, supposedly, people were their main interest, but I know that Donna meant that she loved the grandparent-kind of old person—someone who adores children and cats, knits scarves and slippers, tells good stories. The characters in *Quartet in Autumn* are not warm and huggable; often, in fact, they're not even likeable. Norman, Letty, Marcia, and Edwin are elderly, single people who work together in a company department that is to be phased out when they retire. Marcia, who lives alone in a big house now that her mother and her cat Snowy have died, is beady-eyed, secretive, ageing, and slightly mad. She has no friends and firmly ignores the friendly concern of a "do-gooding social-worker." Her sloppy appearance and odd habits (such as disposing of certain containers behind books on library shelves) cause most people to avoid her. Edwin, a widower, spends most of his leisure time serving on the parochial church council and traveling



around London to attend church events. The church, however, meets not so much his religious needs as his social needs. Norman and Letty both live in bed-sitting apartments. Norman, a short, tetchy little man, feels no sense of accomplishment and lashes out at blacks, grumbles continually about food prices and automobiles, subjects his co-workers to his petty tirades. Letty, whom I find to be the most intriguing character, is mousy and timid. Born of middle-class parents, she dresses fashionably and suitably, she can be counted on to make the expected remarks about the weather, etc., and she avoids all risks. When confronted by a group of Nigerian Christians and invited to join their celebration if she is a Christian, Letty is non-plussed: "How was she to explain to this vital ebullient black man her own blend of Christianity—a grey, formal, respectable thing of measured observances and mild general undemanding kindness to all?" In her old age, Letty is beginning to regret her lukewarmness in religion, in love, in relationships.

Many events take place in *Quartet*, but the plot is less important than the characters

whom the readers come to know well. We follow them through work, through lunch breaks, through vacations, through the women's retirement that threatens them all. We watch them cope and fail. We see them as they see themselves and each other, and we see them from the points of view of their contacts in society—store clerks, a neighbor, a social worker, their boss. It is this delicate balancing of point-of-view along with the careful interweaving of each character's story which creates a tone as haunting as music.

*Quartet in Autumn* is not a story that perpetuates the stereotypes of the ever-loving, cookie-baking grandmother or the heroic Hemingway-type old man. It is a story that tells, simply and skillfully, how strange it is to be seventy, a story that shows, with quiet dignity and a hopeful tone, four very human people struggling to find their niche in a society that worships what is new. ■

# On Moral Criticism

James Vanden Bosch

If we think about moral criticism at all, it is likely that we think of a mode of literary criticism that is stale and gray, stodgily correct, the province of unimaginative and heavy-handed enforcers of doctrinaire morality. But when we judge the literature we read, we often indulge in moral criticism, and enjoy it, if only it is not called by its proper name. Most of us shy away from such a label (who wants to be known as a “moral critic”?), preferring to think of ourselves as having moved well beyond that early stage of critical development. Some of us like to think that we limit ourselves to judging the work of art itself; others see the possibilities of biographical criticism, or of historical or cultural criticism; we respect those who work with the history of ideas, or those who choose to examine the history and theory of genres. But



moral criticism has connotations (and denotations) which we don't often like to have associated with us. Judging a literary work by moral or theological standards has very little obvious appeal and almost no prestige. It was T.S. Eliot who taught us to deplore the "impure" critics, and to judge poetry as poetry, and not as another thing.

But, after we have paid our *devoirs* to what passes for critical purity and orthodoxy, we often go on to practice moral criticism. In our judgment of a literary work, we regularly make some sort of claim about the effect it will (or should, or may) have upon its audience. When we commend a work of art because its moral purposes seem to agree with our purposes, when we condemn a novel because of its presumed or anticipated bad effects, or when we demand of a poem or play that it lead people in a right direction, we become moral critics even if it is not our intention to do so.

If we are moral critics with a bad conscience, it is perhaps because we are so aware of what moral criticism is when it goes wrong. For some of us, Plato figures as the type of the moral critic; because literature has the power to undercut or deny right thought, he found it necessary to banish poets from his ideal republic. Citing an "ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry," Plato would ban all poetry but "hymns to the gods and praises of famous men." "We shall be right in refusing to admit [the poet] into a well-ordered State, because he awakens and nourishes and strengthens the feelings and impairs the reason." Or, if the censorship is not external, it may be internal, as in the culture of the Houyhnhnms in Part IV of *Gulliver's Travels*: the superbly rational and moral horses of that country have followed reason and right thinking to such an extent that even their language is affected: they have almost no vocabulary for evil. And their literature contains "either some exalted notions of friendship and benevolence, or the praises of those who were victors in races and other bodily exercises." While this is not exactly an idiot literature, it is far from what we really want. Faced with

these extreme cases, in which moral criticism becomes censorship, we side with Milton, who could not praise "a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed."

But it is this imagination of extremity which prevents us from seeing moral criticism clearly enough to value it properly. Moral criticism is an option which we needn't be embarrassed to choose. For one thing, much modern literature addresses itself directly to moral and doctrinal concerns. With this kind of literature, a criticism is needed which will assess it on its own terms. When a work of literature means to direct us to a specific way of being in the world, a criticism which focuses on and weighs the adequacy of such intentions would certainly be one legitimate mode of response. But in addition to this practical concern, it is the case that moral criticism has a long and admirable history. It was a salient feature of critical theory and practice until only a century or two ago; if it doesn't today have a high theoretical prestige, it does still have the enormous power of habitual use. What is needed is a reminder of how flexible, various, and humane moral criticism can be. I'd like to recommend Sir Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* as an example of just those virtues: flexibility, variousness, and humaneness.

From the outset, one should note that Sidney's defense of literature is based upon some of the major assumptions of moral criticism. Sidney assumes that it is one of the chief requirements of literature to teach, to instruct. He defines poetry as "a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth—to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture; with this end, to teach and delight." He goes on to say that "the final end" of all learning "is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of." In fact, it is one of the notable features of this Protestant defense of literature that Sidney claims literature to be superior to history and philosophy in exactly this area—it does a better job of teaching than either of these more nearly se-



rious and respectable disciplines can accomplish.

However, Sidney does not claim that it is specifically Christian doctrine or Christian truth which makes literature so effective and valuable. He does refer to the Bible and to Christian writers in his defense of literature, but the ancients, the pagan Greek and Roman authors, are brought forward as examples far more frequently. And they are brought forward specifically to prove his point about the virtuous effects of literature. To be a moral critic and a Christian critic, it is not necessary to demand that there be a strict correspondence between the truths of the Christian faith and the truths of literature. Without invoking the doctrine of general revelation, Sidney implicitly accepts classical literature as profitable for teaching and delighting, for leading our souls on toward perfection.

Sidney's defense calls attention to another dimension of literature as well. He describes, with approval, the attractive powers of poetry, a feature of literature which may exist prior to, and independent of, the knowledge or instruction which literature communicates: ". . . with a tale for sooth [the poet] cometh unto you, with a tale that holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner." Literature, that is, speaks to our humanness; it delights us because we were created for that kind of enjoyment. There is legitimate pleasure to be experienced simply from story telling, because of mastery of words and mastery of form, because of sheer skill and the controlled expression of high-spiritedness. Sidney's assumption that literature satisfies a basic human need or exercises an inherent capability is an assumption which has the power to brighten some versions of moral criticism.

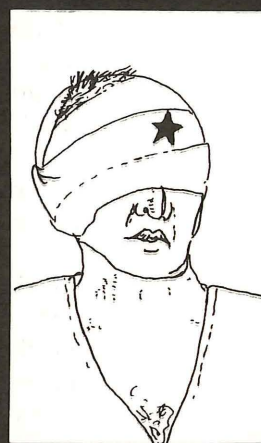
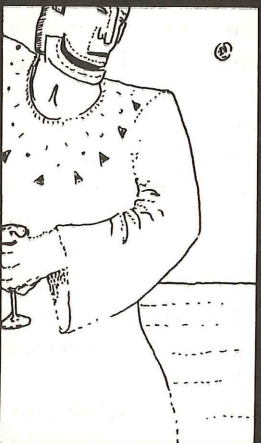
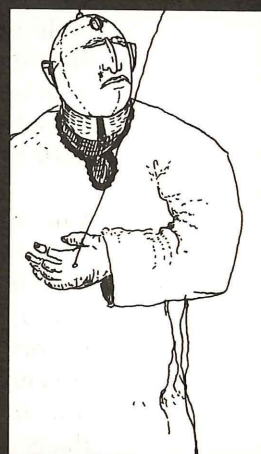
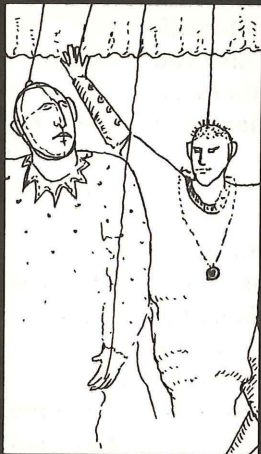
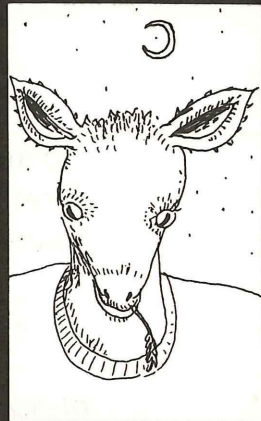
Closely related to this dimension of Sidney's moral criticism is the light touch and polished playfulness so apparent in the *Defense* itself. Critics of Sidney refer to the *sprezzatura* of his work, that quality evident in art and in life when some difficult task is done with apparent ease, with the grace and style of joyful mastery. It is a quality which

Christian critics could display more regularly in their work as well as in their lives. Even in the harsh and humorous malediction which ends Sidney's defense, Sidney sparkles and teaches—his curse on the haters of literature reasserts our need for literature by suggesting how diminished life would be without love songs and epitaphs to bolster us.

Finally, Sidney's moral criticism is based upon his high regard for the audience of literature. Literature is indeed to be judged by the effect it has upon its audience, but "audience" does not refer simply to whoever it is who may cross paths with literature. The audience affected by literature is an audience with its own responsibilities; it is an audience educated by the great literature of the past, so that it may develop a well-trained sensibility with which to experience and judge contemporary literature. To allow for a broader definition of audience would constitute an insult to new literary work. But an audience which is well educated, which has developed standards of judgment based upon the knowledge of great literature—such an audience will be the kind of audience serious literature can legitimately address. The critic who considers the effects of literature on this audience can allow for a demanding new literature, since he can assume an audience which has the depth of experience which promotes critical discrimination, critical discernment.

Moral critics come in many varieties, and they do their work in many ways. Not everyone will find Sidney to his liking. But Sidney's work may still show us moral criticism in one of its more attractive forms. Sidney is serious without being portentous, humane but not sentimental, catholic but discriminating. Even if his gifts are not our gifts, we can aspire to achieve the sense of joy which Sidney evidences in his work and promotes in his fellow readers of literature. Moral criticism which exhibits such joy is not necessarily an anomaly. ■







# Roundtable

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On an afternoon in December five student artists got together to talk about art. They were Bob Dykman, Lisa Ramsey, David P. Schaap, Dave Shaw, and Dwight Van Tol. Here is what happened.

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## *Dialogue*

**The art world is generally seen today as being in a state of flux. There is no dominant style or school. It's basically a free-for-all. How do you respond to this? Does it give you a sense of happy freedom? Or is there an anxiety felt because there are no norms to hold to?**

Van Tol

When I make an image I don't put it out thinking about how it may be received in the world, even though what I know about the history of art may go into the work. I am not concerned when I make an image for myself how it will be received by other artists or by the general public.

Schaap

I think it is very important for the artist today to have the freedom that the variety of the art world offers. A century ago no one could have done anything that is being done today. Without this freedom we would be sticking to the old forms and not doing what we are doing.

Van Tol

The impressionists broke open the art world back in France. Since then, everyone and everything is acceptable. I am glad for the liberty I have, but it does present problems.

Ramsey

It seems we have more personal responsibility as artists than before. There is no set standard for what is good art and what isn't. This is where the responsibility of the artist enters. That is one of the reasons I came to Calvin. It has helped me form a lot of those standards for my own art.

## *Dialogue*

**But don't you feel a sort of fear about this freedom?**

Van Tol

There is a feeling of "what can I do that hasn't been done already?" No matter how hard you try, you are always revisiting something that someone has tried already.

Ramsey

But you give a unique perspective because you are a unique individual.

Shaw

You present your art in a new way that will start people thinking. Your art can be successful even if it has been done before. As far as the medium is concerned, it is very hard to be original. But the subject matter can always be original, unless you are doing non-representational art; then you are limited.

Schaap

I don't think that non-representational art is limiting, because the artist has responsibility to go ahead and explore new forms. The artist is involved in the creative process. If you are stagnant in your forms, you are not being creative.

## *Dialogue*

**Is the demand of creativity the primary demand placed on the artist? Surely this wasn't always the case.**

Schaap

That's true. But I think the role of the artist in society has changed. The artist used to be the craftsman. Musicians like Bach used to be master craftsmen who put out every week a

cantata or some such thing. There is still a great need today for craftsmen. But this is no longer the role of the artist. The artist in today's society must be a creative force. One of the main things art should be concerned with is the emotions. In everyone's life there is a sensuous quality which can't be described in words and which is made up of emotions. I think the artist should portray the human condition. The artist should take the feelings that we have and present them to others.

### **Dialogue**

**Excuse the antagonism, but of what value is that?**

Schaap

Actually, when you think about it, the products of an artist are not all that valuable. They bring enjoyment to only a few people. Graphic design, I think, brings enjoyment to more people than art. One of the important things that an artist does is act as a creative force in society.

Shaw

How do you see abstract art involved in portraying the human condition? I don't mean to defend representational art or attack non-objective art, but how does abstract art fulfill the role of portraying the human condition?

Schaap

Certainly it does this in the portrayal of human emotions. There can be as much emotion displayed in Japanese or Chinese calligraphy as there can be in a painting; and that is the simple use of line rather than employing figurative elements.

### **Dialogue**

**Dave said that in some sense the artist is more valuable than the work of art. If this is true, or even if it isn't, why do you show your art?**

Dykman

Art is not art until people talk about it. A

piece of art doesn't do anything until a bunch of people see it and talk about it. What good is art in the dark?

Van Tol

My art, I think, appears almost entirely in my head. I use art for aesthetic enjoyment. I can get a lot of pleasure out of doing images just in my head or putting them down on a lithograph plate. It makes no difference to me.

Shaw

But do you agree with Bob that an artist should talk about his art?

Schaap

I think artists have a responsibility to have their art shown and to have other people respond to it. But I don't think it lessens the art's value if it is not displayed.

Ramsey

Much of the art done today can't be understood out of the context of the art world. But even my own art is a very personal expression. It is what I see. It involves a very direct contact with the medium that I am working with, and the result is quite often what I'm

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**Actually, when you think about it, the products of an artist are not all that valuable.**

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feeling at the time or an expression of a memory or a dream. In a sense I don't really care if anyone else sees it.

Van Tol

If somebody sees your painting and enjoys it, it's because they've experienced your emotions.



Ramsey

That is a good feeling, even if the people react negatively.

Shaw

Yes, but I think it should get beyond that. Art should somehow be confrontational.

Van Tol

Then you are acting as a social conscience.

Dykman

... which is an entirely different thing. Art can be viewed in a social context. But art in itself is not social. If you use art that way you are using it for something other than visual ends. This, however, should be a concern of the artist. Look at some of Picasso's art or,

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## Art is not art until people talk about it.

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better, graffiti art. That is art that is illegal. They are doing it to protest the ugliness of the city.

Schaap

Art cannot be mere technical experiments in visual design. There are a lot of craftsmen around. Art has to be something more. But it doesn't always have to confront.

### *Dialogue*

**What is the relationship your art has with the public?**

Schaap

There is a requirement of some knowledge before you can appreciate art. You can't come without anything. There are a lot of people who don't have that knowledge or haven't taken the time to get it.

Ramsey

We were talking earlier about the world of art being much more open since the time of the impressionists and that now it is open to the extreme. The artist has a responsibility of what to portray or to decide what he thinks is good. But the viewer also has the responsibility to educate himself about what he is looking at.

### *Dialogue*

**Why do you present your art? Why do you make public what you claim is private?**

Van Tol

The only way you can improve as an artist is to react to the responses of other people. The only way to do that is to display your art.

Schaap

But art also has value for the viewer. A work of art expresses the artist's emotions. The artist, through his art, can give other people insights into their own world. People can view a work of art and perhaps can see it reflecting their own lives.

Ramsey

As Christians we are all searching for how we should continue as Christians. We are looking to each other. Art is a way of communicating with each other.

### *Dialogue*

**Let's change the subject. How can you tell that your art is improving? If the art world is in flux and there really are no standards which are generally accepted, on what basis do you judge improvement in your art?**

Ramsey

It has a lot to do with comments that others make about my artwork—what they see lacking in it or what is too much. Over the years I've set some personal goals as to what I want to accomplish in my art. Right now I am attempting to master certain skills. I hope that after I get that down I can start doing more with subject matter.

Shaw

I am trying to improve my technical ability as well. I judge a work of mine to be successful partly by judging its imaginativity. But the technical aspect is a bit more important. I can improve there almost more rapidly. If you keep working, your creativity is always improving.

Schaap

I think the technical aspect is important. But that is something you can judge by your confidence in using the materials. I think I judge the quality of my work more by the ideas contained in it. One of the main ways I know that I am improving is that the more I work the more ideas I have to put into other works. That, really, is the creative process. The more you do, the more creative you become.

Van Tol

I've never worried about the technical aspects of my work; I figured it would always take care of itself. If I haven't mastered something, I can always work more on it. I feel good about a piece of art if a little voice inside me says that this work really expresses something I want to express. Making images is easy, but making something that sincerely expresses your feelings is something else.

Ramsey

Now that I've been painting for several years, I can go back to a piece and make it say something that is more important. Instead of saying, "Oh, that's neat," and laying it down, I can go back to it and improve it.

Dykman

I know how my best works come about. Oddly enough, it's when I don't think about doing them. I put my mind on hold and just do it. I guess I judge a lot of my work from the responses of others. It is very difficult for me to work in a vacuum. I like to have a lot of people around when I work. I think my work is finished and good when I get a lot of people to talk about it. When they say something

more than, "Oh, it's nice," or "Interesting," then it is successful.

### *Dialogue*

**Why are you all artists at Calvin? Do you have any ideas about what a fine arts program has to do with a liberal arts curriculum?**

Ramsey

While at Calvin you might say I discovered my Christianity, and I found that I want it to

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I get a lot of pleasure out of doing images just in my head or putting them down on a lithograph plate. It makes no difference to me.

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be a part of my art work. As the years go on I find that they can't be separate. While I am at Calvin I read a lot in addition to doing my art. Calvin gives a chance to do more than just draw pictures that are technically good; it gives a chance for developing and growing up and learning about Christianity.

Dykman

I came to Calvin with absolutely no intention of graduating from here. I came here as a devoted commercial artist. I planned on staying here maybe a year or two and then moving on to a technical school. But after hanging around the art department and being exposed to the liberal arts, I found that there is a lot more to art than getting published and putting things down on paper. This place gives you a purpose. It tells you not so much what an artist is but what an artist can be in a Christian context. I think I've gotten a better

handle on myself and on the art world since I came to Calvin.

Schaap

In regards to the place of art at a Christian liberal arts school, I think that many people view art as an easy major. In some ways it may be, since you aren't judged in an objective manner, and it is something you enjoy. But art

Christian businessman. But they do question Christian artists. Perhaps the problem is that Christian art has never really been defined.

Van Tol

James Kuiper, when he was still here and when I was a freshmen wondering why I should stay at Calvin as an art major and not go to a technical school, told me that a technical school could teach me to paint or draw well, but only a liberal arts school could teach me to compare and allude in my art, to come up with new ideas. So what if you know how to hold a pencil; a liberal arts school has music courses, psychology courses, history courses which make you able to come up with an image that is what you are feeling. ■

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There is a requirement of some knowledge before you can appreciate art. You can't come without anything. There are a lot of people who don't have that knowledge or haven't taken the time to get it.

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is, I think, one of the most important parts of society. In our world where there is a great deal of turmoil and flux, and not only in the art world, Christian art is needed as an influence on culture.

Shaw

But is our art specifically Christian?

Schaap

Well, the art may not be noticeably Christian, but the artist is still a Christian. There is more to being an artist than producing products.

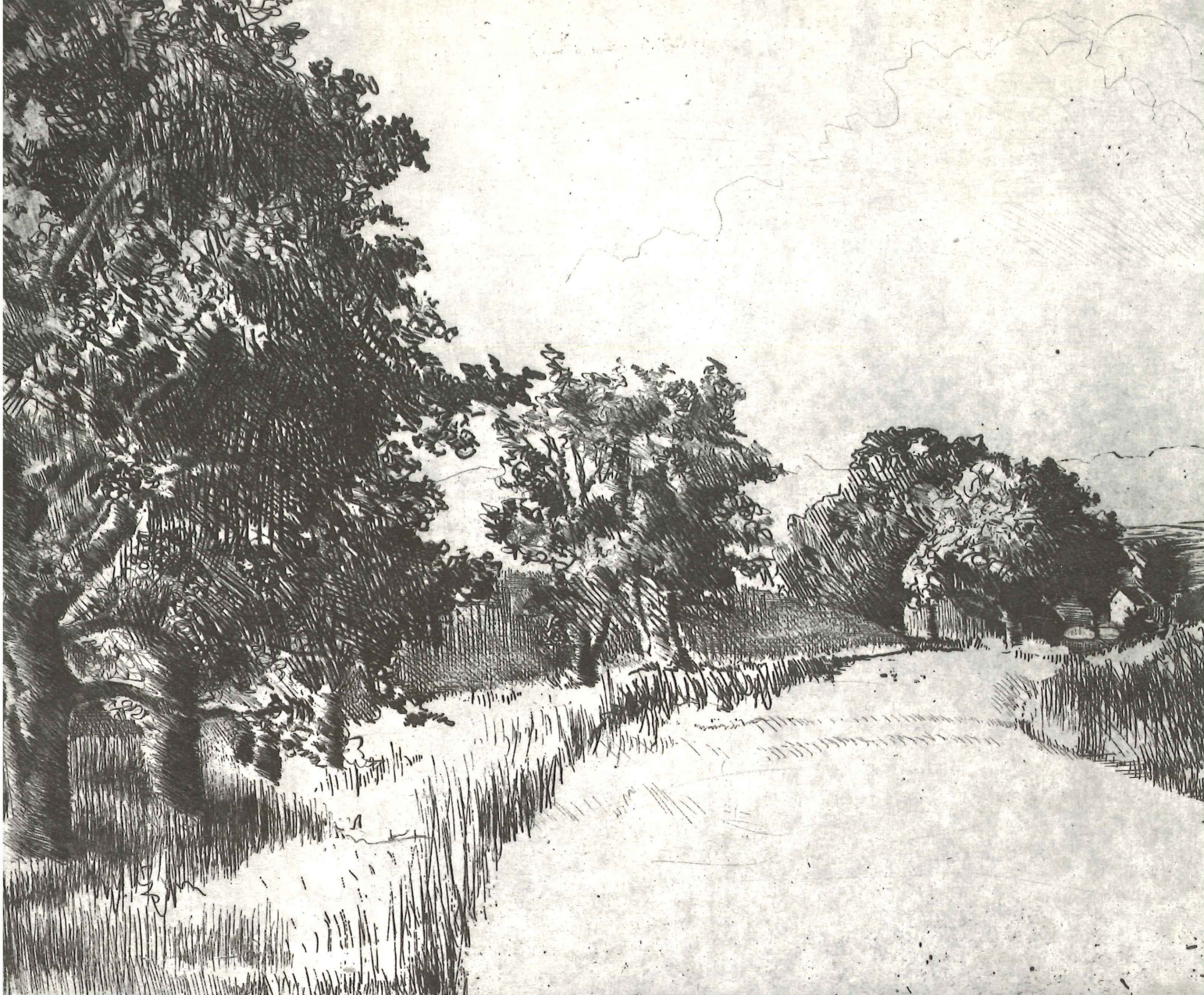
Ramsey

Christianity should come through the artist the same way it comes through a businessman.

Dykman

Very few people would question the idea of





Untitled

Deborah Ebbers

Beneath the field in which we walk, which is  
Black dirt, as black as night when we turn out  
Our lamp to go to sleep, we know there is  
An earth we do not know. This land about  
Our home is just a plot to keep below  
The vastness of the earth we do not know.

Janette Kok









Saturday Night in Pella, Iowa  
Steve Crozier



# WINTER'S SOLACE

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Reed  
sways harmoniously.

Trees  
clack cold branches.

Wind  
sounds solemn hushes

over

fences over banks

into

marshes into hedges

CAUGHT

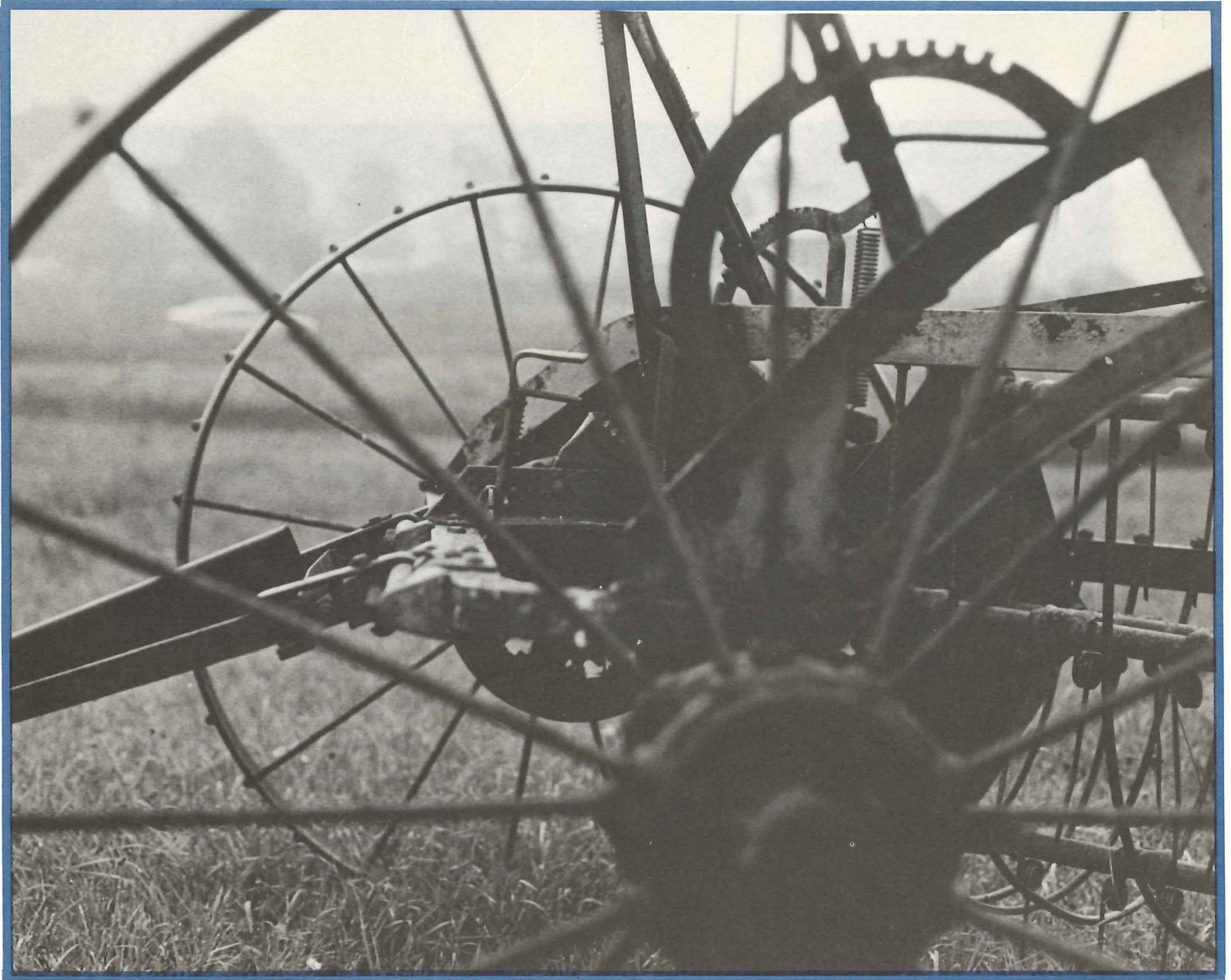
suspended reverance

anticipating earth

sound meets silence

flurries of joy.

-Francine Buis



Ferriswheel  
Tracy Van Rys



# Falling Down the Stairs on a Friday Afternoon

Marsha Plafkin



As I recall, it was probably a good thing that while growing up I had three older brothers to pull me down the road of adolescence. Without their astute judgment, strong fists, and bottomless stomachs, I may never have known, or at least have forgotten for a day, that I was a flat-chested, bed-wetting, finicky child.



I remember one summer day during my third-grade year when Ron and Phil asked me to field some baseballs. I accepted what seemed an innocent offer. Ron took the bat and moved to the plate. He was a good hitter any way; the bat was optional. I learned early in life to provoke him only when my father's pant leg was close by, avoiding Ron's threat to "push my face into my butt." Or was it the other way around? Either contortion sounded ugly. So I took measures always to cause trouble in calculated and timely ways. Knowing that a bat only increased his power, I moved to the deepest part of the field.

"Get in there and pitch," Ron said.

"But I don't wanna pitch," I replied. "Besides, I don't even know how to pitch."

"Look Marsha. The chances of you being hit are one-in-a-million. So pitch." He spoke with statistical authority.

"You mean it? One-in-a-million?"

"Yes! Now pitch." He threw the ball to the mound and waited for me to come in.

The odds sounded good. I moved to the mound. "Are you sure?"

"Pitch."

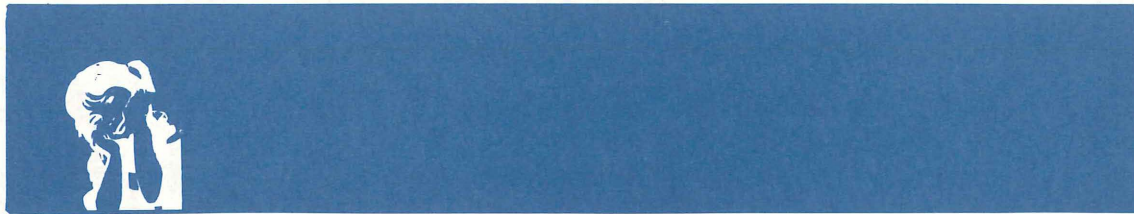
I pitched the ball and heard a crack—Ron hit the ball; then I heard another crack—the ball hit my face. As I ran screaming to the house I could hear Ron saying, "That was the one, the one-in-a-million. You have 999,999 more safe pitches."

I remember another time. Phil and I were playing house with my Easy-Bake oven set. He was the father; I was the mother. Lunch time arrived and Phil made lunch. (We had liberated make-believe.)

“Here you are, dear,” he said in his cute five-year-old voice as he handed me a sandwich.

“Thank you, honey. Mmm, what a good sandwich. You are a good cook, Phil.”

I swallowed a few bites and then ran upstairs to the bathroom. I had eaten Phil’s Soaper—two slices of bread, one bar of soap.



I also remember the compassion of my third brother, Jeff. I was heading to the basement to get some detergent for my mother. I must have forgotten that each stair in the case must be taken individually. I took them all at once, face first, only to lie at the bottom crying.

“Why did you fall down the stairs?” Jeff asked.

I had no answer, for my parents had taught me to judge the caliber of questions and to answer them on the level they deserved. I had no answer to match his insightful question.



I hoped for revenge. I asked God for a baby sister; I watched carefully along roadsides for abandoned girls; I looked in grocery stores for lost little girls. (I did find a lost little boy once at Meijer’s. But, because I feared he would be soon indoctrinated by my brothers and thus increase my suffering, I returned him to his mother.) I stood firm and determined to avenge myself. Finally, a sign—my mother was pregnant. God had listened.

I watched my mother carefully. When we visited Okefenokee Swamp, I walked on the outside of the dock to prevent the alligators from snacking on my mother or, even worse, her precious cargo, my baby sister.

Nine months is a long time to wait, even for certain revenge. But I waited as my father said I must when I asked one day if I could “pull the baby out now.” And, as I waited, I checked my mother’s stomach every morning before school, knocking for my new sister.

“Are you in there? How are you?”

She rarely answered back.

The day came. Labor pains increased in number. My father sweated. At home my brothers and I slept. And while we slept my father paced the hospital halls, or sat, or smoked his pipe. And a baby was born. My father returned home later that morning. We met him.

“Daddy, where’s the baby? What’s her name?”

“Mommy and the baby are at the hospital resting. They are both tired. They will come in a few days. Oh, and Marsha, the baby’s name is Joseph.” God had not listened well enough. ■



# Words & Works

Anna Heidamus Probes

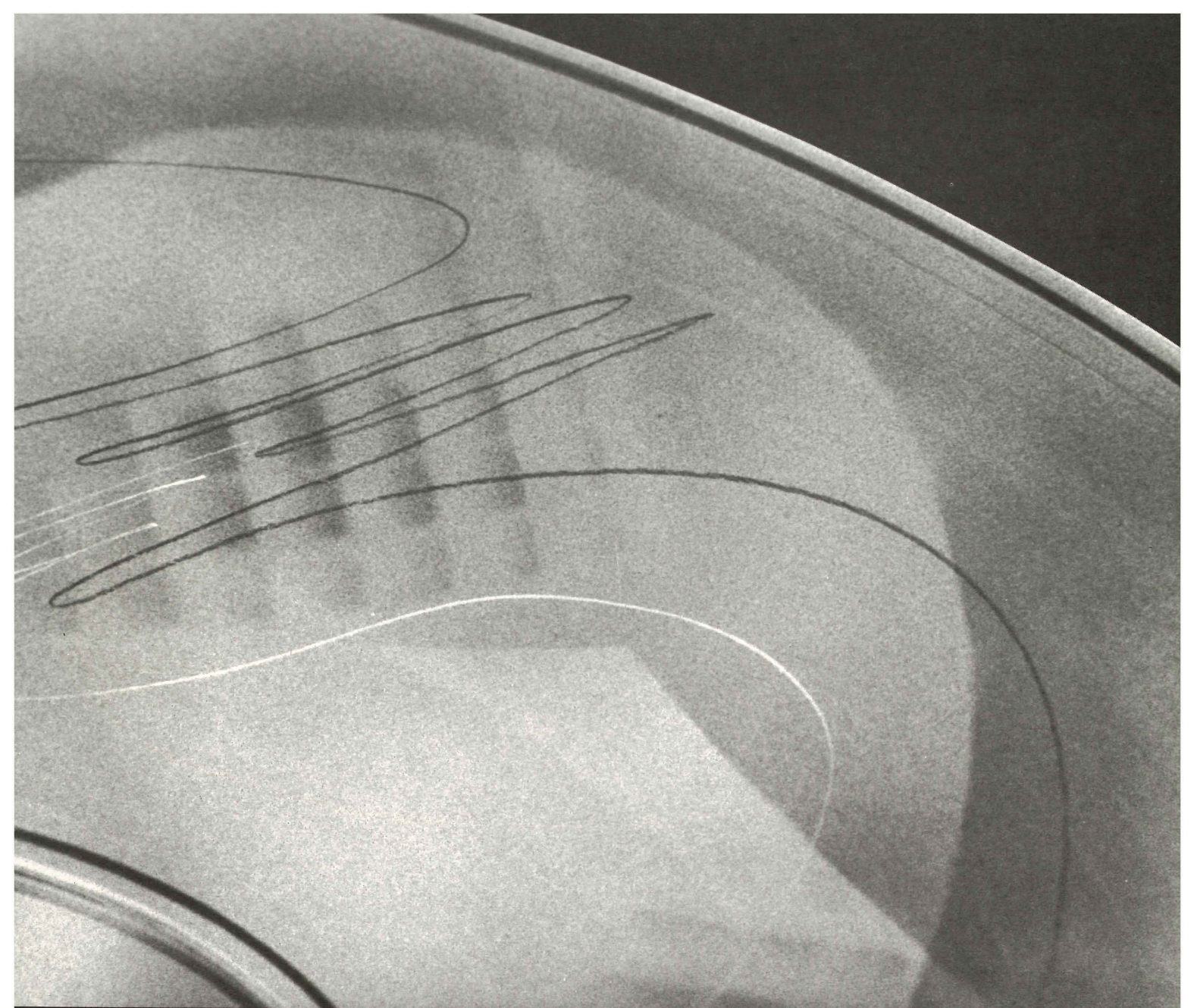


We live in a high-tech, low-touch era. Our hands rarely engage in unabashed textual exploration of the objects around us. Perhaps our general state of touch-deprivation can be explained in the context of current Western social convention. In the culture of 1984, one touches things directly with fingertips and hands only if there is a willingness to accept the consequences of social impropriety. Warning signs in stores remind us that touching an interesting or beautiful object may require purchasing it. Museums usually have their displays behind glass or out of reach. Generally, it is improper to touch prepared food until it enters our mouths indirectly on a spoon or

fork. Social touching has quite specific implications, and, therefore, most people approach each other with great awareness of appropriate boundaries. Philip Rawson, in his book *Ceramics*, states, "Most ordinary men in Western cultures have an ingrained feeling that to use one's hands to explore the things around one is at best immature, at worst indecent and even illegal."

In spite of our cultural restraints, most of us are at least occasionally surprised to discover the texture of a surface. We note the unusual stiffness or softness of new clothing against our skin. When lifting a cup of coffee to our lips, we are at least aware if the cup feels hot or cold, and perhaps





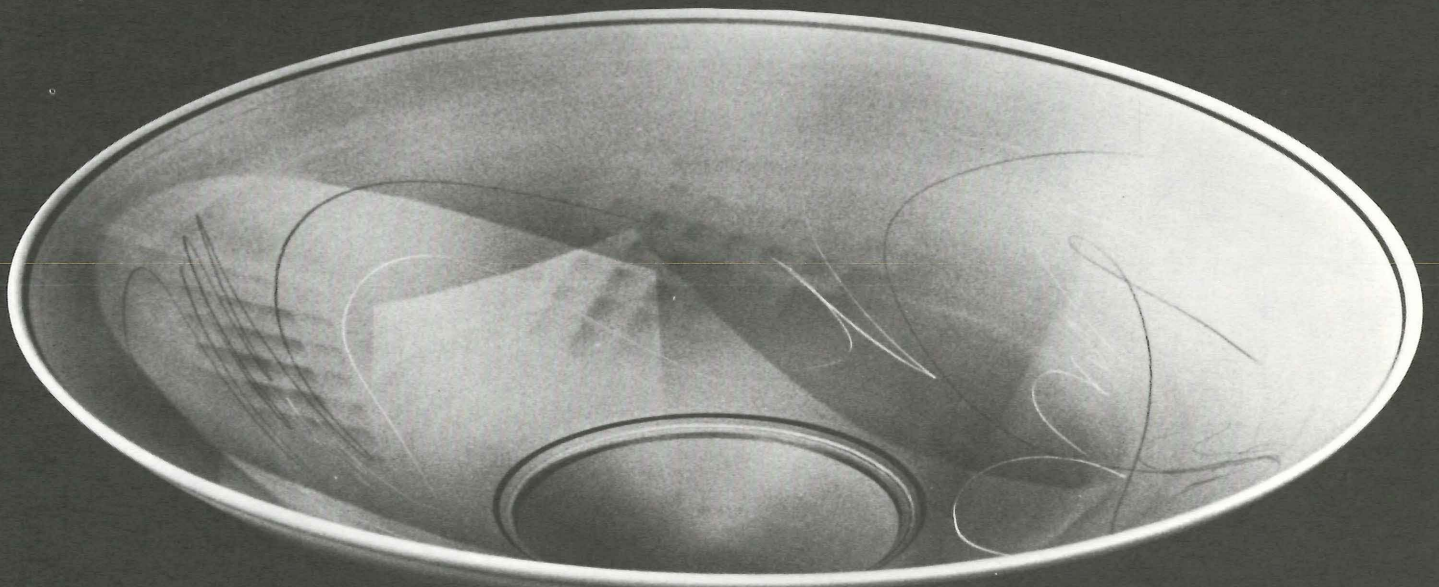
even if it is rough or smooth.

My work with clay has given me an increased awareness of touch-experience. I am also aware of the general restraint expressed by most adults with regard to touch-exploration. Despite the intimidating formality of an art gallery, ceramic objects invite tactile encounters. I enjoy observing people in this setting as they respond to my own work. Some go only so far as to verbalize the desire to touch or hold a piece while they stand looking. Others reach out, and, just before touching, pull back. The restraining impulse wins. To my delight there are also those who self-consciously steal a swift rub, or a casual caress. They may actually begin a touching explo-

ration of the form. My work is both visual and tactile.

I am intrigued by the vessel as a general form category. Recent exhibitions of my work have included bowls, vases, bottles, and large, almost-closed, vessel forms. I believe vessel forms in particular trigger familiarity even to the most naive viewer. This seems only natural when one considers that for most, if not all, a major achievement in early life was learning to hold a bottle. This vessel, bottle form, surrogate breast, provided comfort, nourishment, security, as well as a new independence. From that point on we hold and use functional vessels in daily living. Consciously or uncon-





sciously, vessel forms become meaningful outside of their functional characteristics. Their symbolism can be broadly archetypal, deeply religious, or, intensely personal. As I create vessel forms, my concern goes beyond utilitarian value.

Clay, porcelain in particular, is a sensuous, malleable, expressive material. The process of forming it alone is pleasurable and challenging. As I work toward the completion of each piece I am responding to the tactile and visual aspects of the total form. I must solve technical problems along the way. I must search aesthetically for expressive form, design integrity, conceptual content, and, yes, beauty. I experience responses to the material

and the technical processes that I can only describe as intuitive. I am concerned with integrating the different visual and tactile aspects of the form so that the work is both dynamic and pleasing, expressive and sensitive.

At times I view the vessel form as a container of interior volume. It is sculpture, defining space in three dimensions. The relationships of interior and exterior space are a primary concern. In this work one may initially identify the familiar shape of a bowl, but alterations of the rim introduce planes in space that are juxtaposed to the interior structural contours and are decidedly unbowl-like. Thus, the viewer is called to re-examine the object itself, assump-





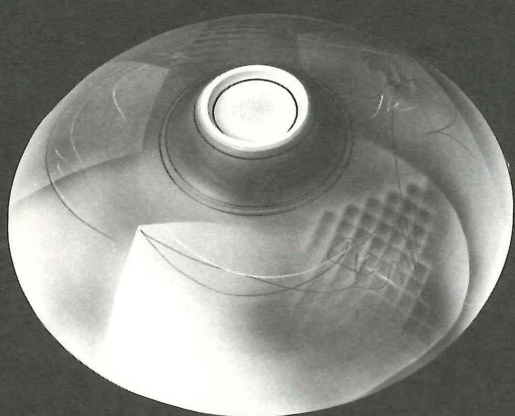
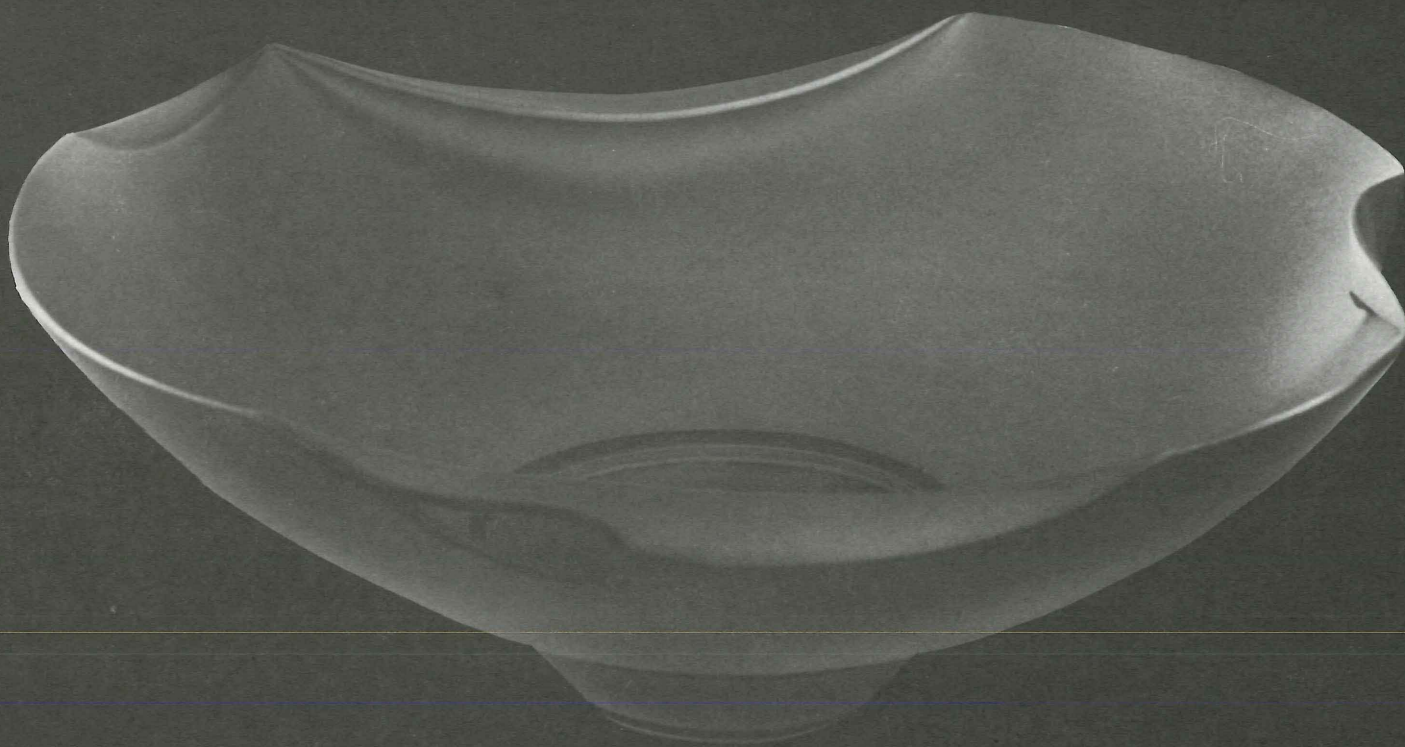
tions made about the object, and its function.

At other times a vessel form may serve my interest in graphic expression by providing a surface to draw on, as demonstrated in the series of *Surface Improvisation* bowls. A two-dimensional graphic approach on a three-dimensional object presents interesting, sometimes frustrating, technical and aesthetic challenges. I use a combination of underglaze stains applied with an airbrush and banded. Oxide pencils allow for linear exploration. Sgraffito, a technique of incising the surface after stain or glaze has been applied, is also part of the process. Essentially, the white porcelain surfaces of these bowls be-

come a playground for gesture and illusion. I join the many potters and ceramic artists throughout history who have chosen to embellish the surfaces of their forms. My methods may be relatively high-tech, but the end product is quite touchable.

I have also created works that are intentionally symbolic, as evident in the *Gynecic Vessel* series. In these large forms the vessel becomes a visual statement about female sexuality. The form itself suggests symbolic content. In the context of sexual images expressed in much of contemporary art, these vessels are strong, sensuous, nonviolent affirmations. They express a contemporary statement, but one that recalls a long

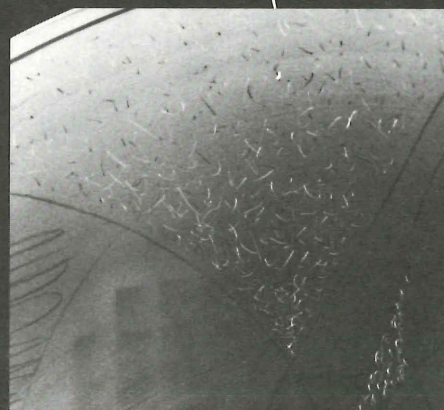
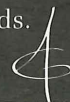




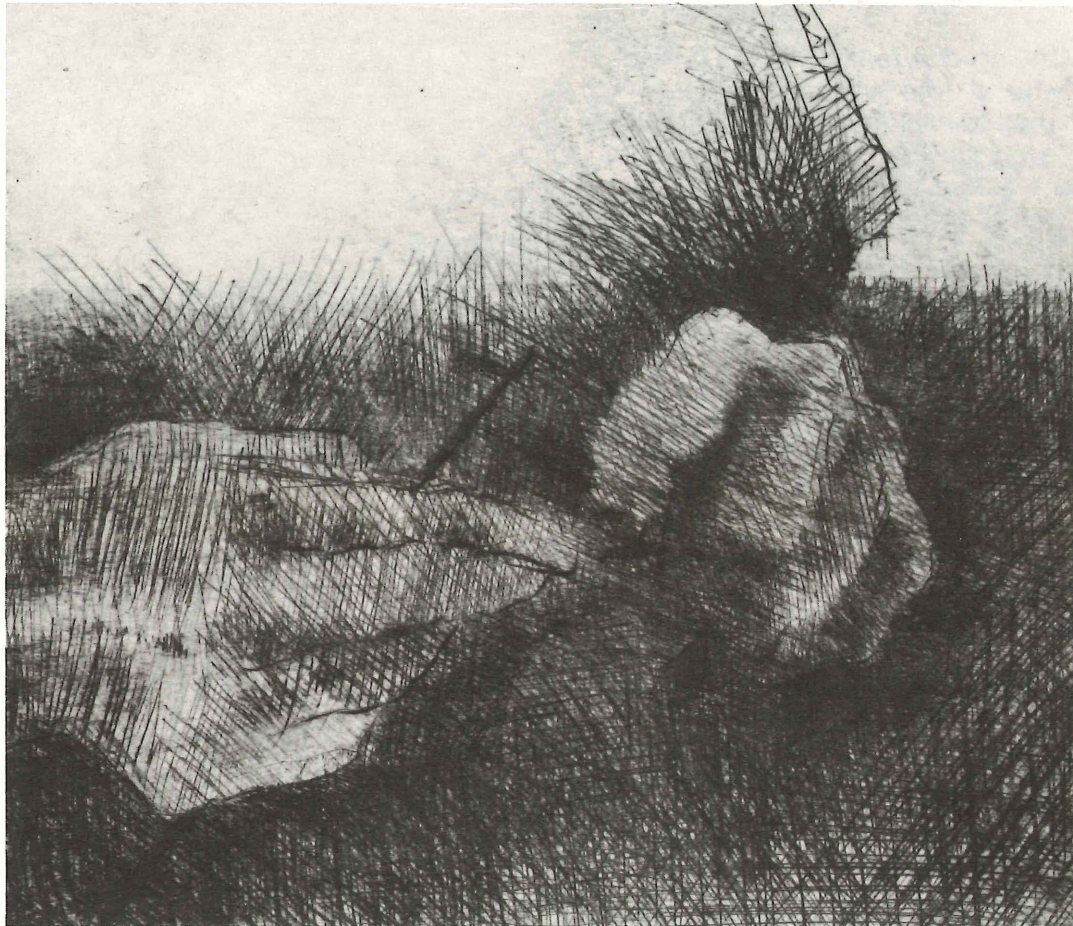
historical, multicultural tradition of vessels created for symbolic purposes.

In summary, my current works, such as those shown recently in the Calvin Faculty Exhibition, are primarily one-of-a-kind, wheel-thrown, altered vessels. They reflect concerns that are sculptural; they integrate graphic expression; they are symbolic. The work is both visual and tactile. This article is not intended to be a definitive statement explaining the meaning of my work. At best I have presented a general overview with a few specific words about works. I am a beginner in the field. There are new directions ahead. Future explorations will require new

clarification. Allow me to conclude by inviting you to look at and touch my work. Your senses will inform you beyond these words.







Untitled  
Deborah Ebbers



## The Length of Waiting

A single strand  
Drawn long to where  
It is as a spider's cord;  
Able to capture, keep and hold  
That one redeeming hour,  
Yet also soon to tense and part  
Should it strain but little farther.

Worrying constantly with this thread  
My hand carefully perseveres—  
To maintain this moment for still awhile,  
In every portion preserving hope  
For that hour's sustaining joy.  
If ever she should choose to show.

Dan Scheeres

## Inside each one there is a passion

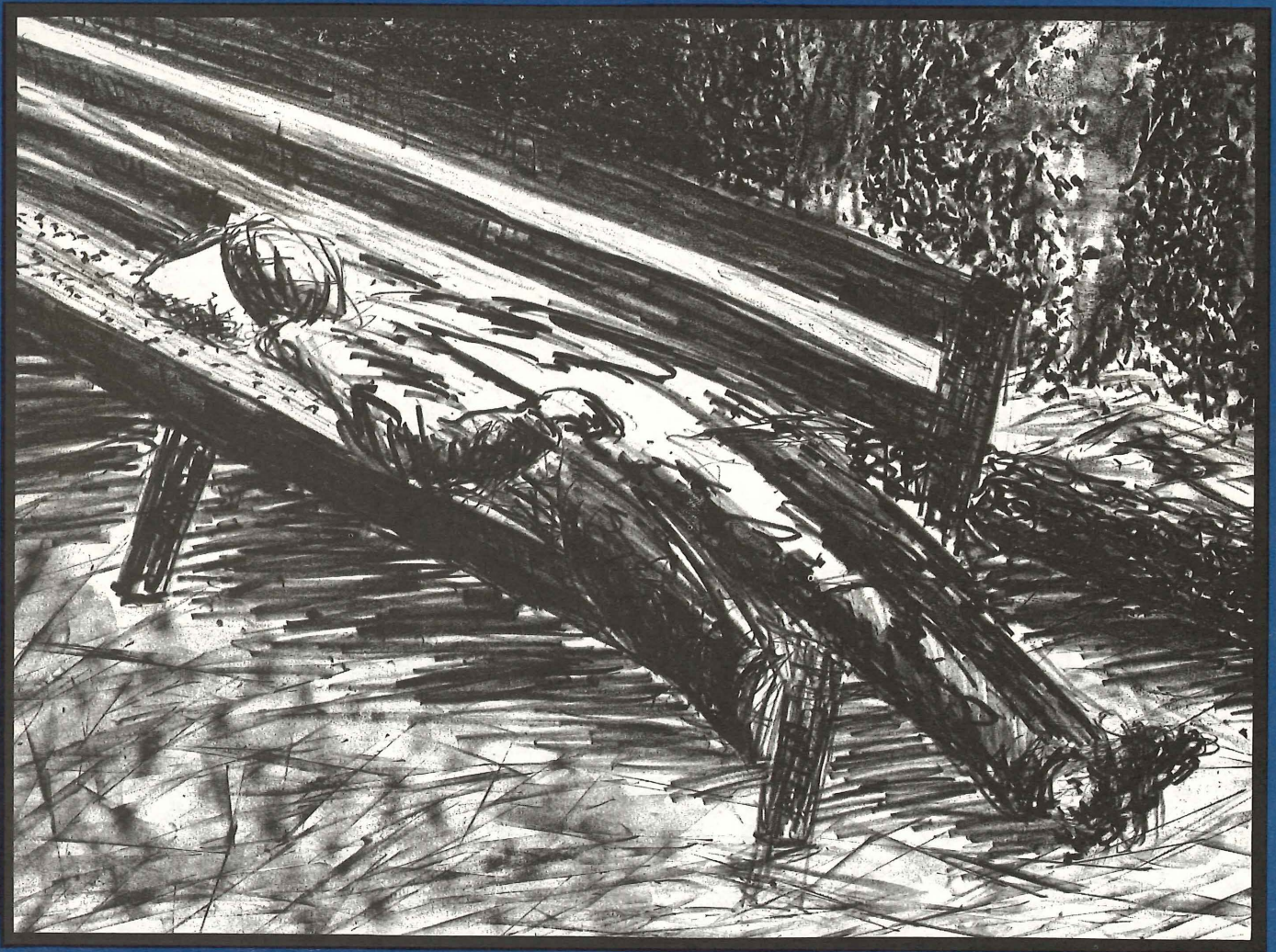
The people walk and look so cold  
Inside each one there is a passion  
There is something that makes the skin electric  
that erupts in the plastic sans-emotional  
state that is the functioning soul of the  
twentieth century  
We must see the people  
walk and look so cold  
Perhaps we can join together and build  
an eternal fire  
large enough to heat even this  
twentieth century.

Nathan Beversluis



# Portfolio - Steve Crozier

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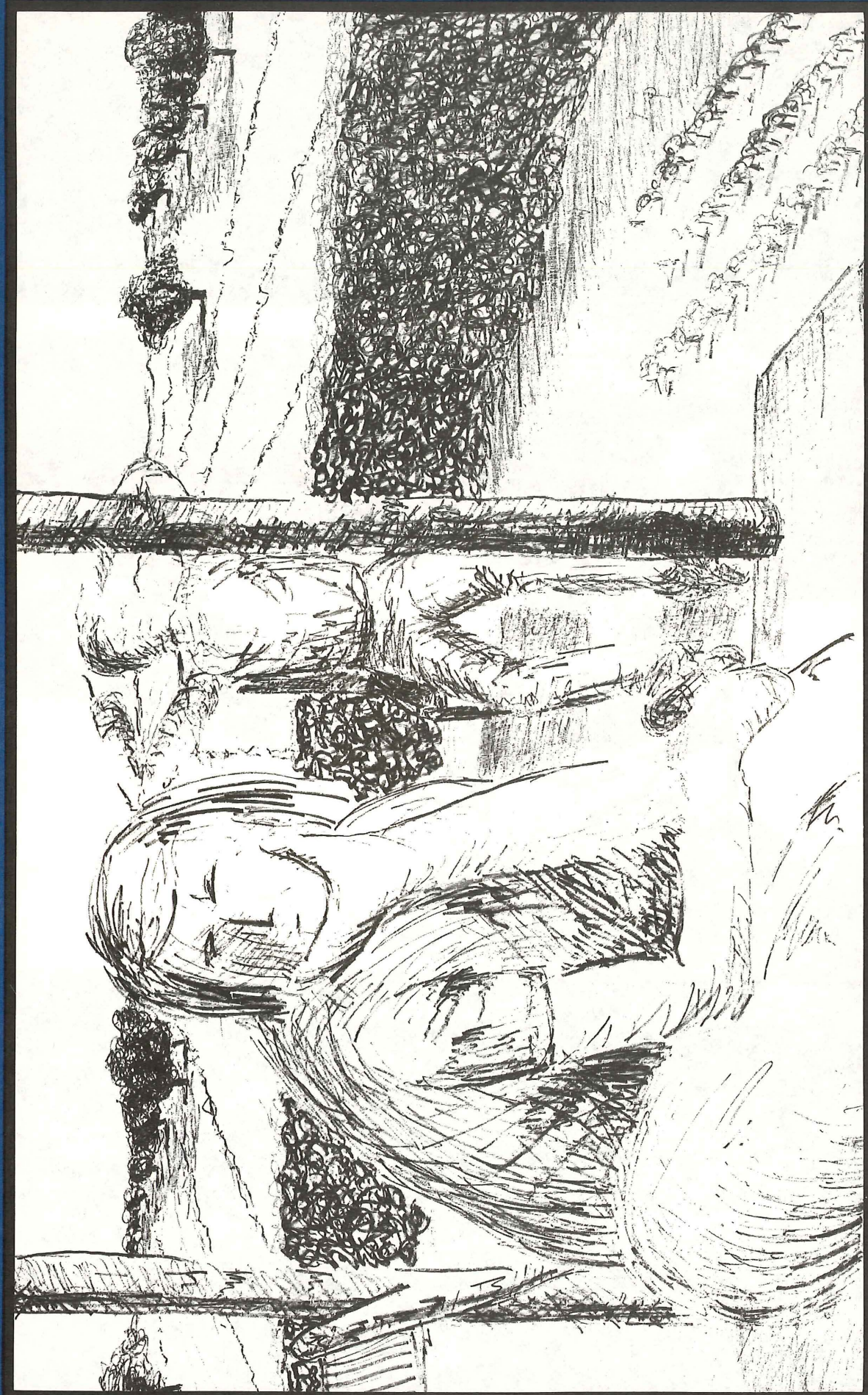
Afternoon Nap





Contemplation





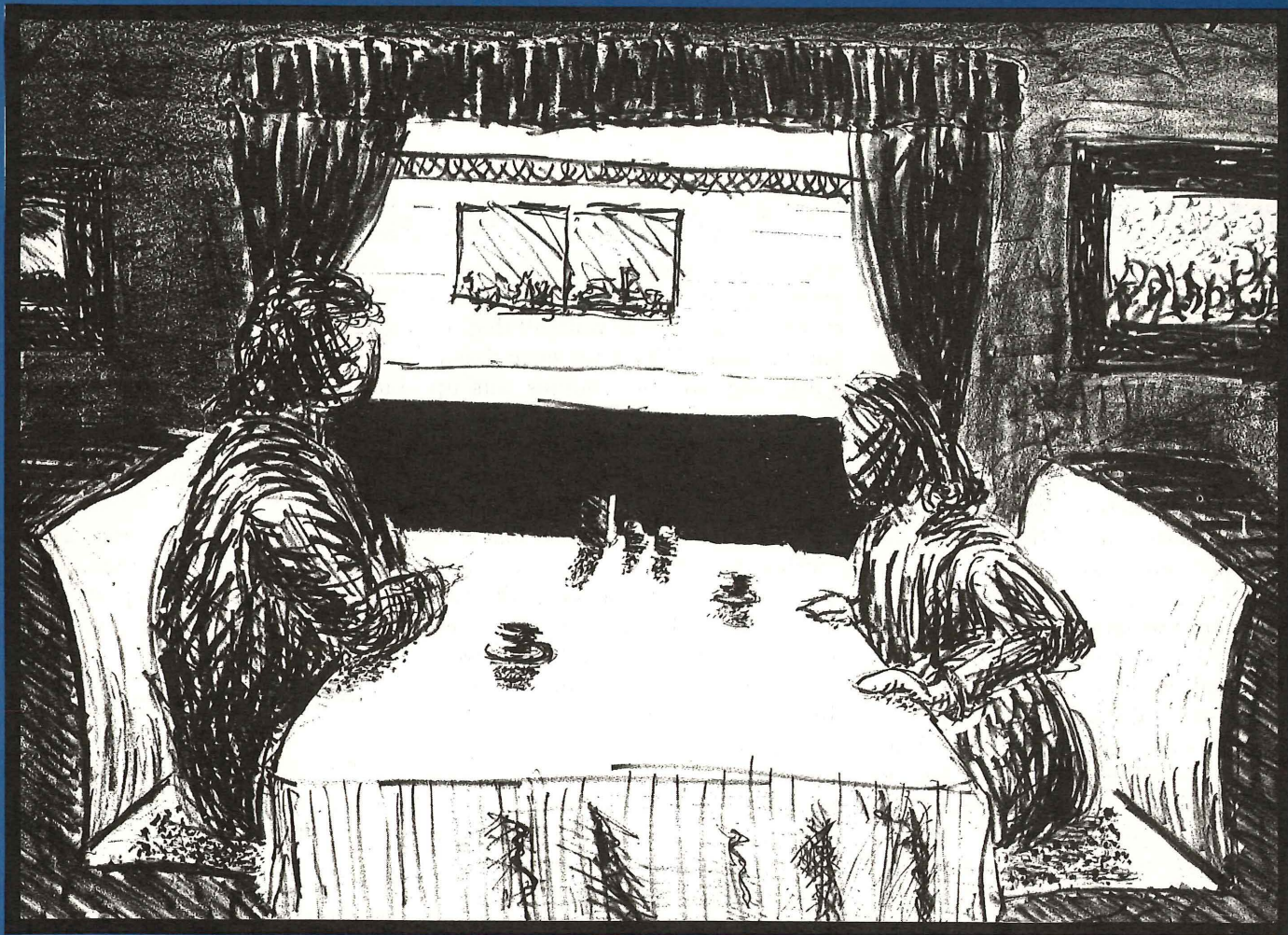
Never a Dull Moment





The Easy Life





"Did you hear the latest?"



# Meditation

Women of Canterbury:

*O Thomas Archbishop, save us, save us,  
save yourself that we may be saved.  
Destroy yourself and we are destroyed.*

Thomas:

*Now is my way clear, now is the meaning  
plain. . . .*

*T. S. Eliot, Murder in the Cathedral*

In the fifty-some times I had read Eliot's version of the martyrdom of Thomas Becket and in the dozen-some times I had taught that play, the poignancy of the lines above had never occurred to me—particularly the poignancy between the two speeches. In fact, I had never before seen the speech of Thomas as a response to the plea of the women, not until a month ago.

Thomas has been brought into despair by the tempters. If he desires martyrdom in order to escape present political conflicts, or in order to be declared a saint so that enemies will need to crawl to his shrine in penitence, or in order to enjoy his enemies' torment in hell from the vantage point of heaven—if he desires martyrdom for such reasons, he himself is in danger of hell. On the other hand, if he compromises his principles to avoid martyrdom, he is a coward, but more: he is then also saying that God and the Church are not worth pain and death. Seeking or avoiding martyrdom—either way—he is in danger of hell, within the world of *Murder*.

As I had always envisioned the play until last month, Thomas withdraws to pray about this situation, while the chorus does a ballet of de-

spair, "man's life is a cheat and a disappointment," culminating in the cry of the women: "Save yourself that we may be saved." Then, not even listening to the women, Thomas gets up from prayer. Having straightened out the divine-sovereignty, human responsibility paradox with God, and having planned now neither to seek nor to avoid martyrdom, Thomas says confidently: "Now is my way clear." A row of asterisks between the two speeches would not have bothered me in the text, and if Collegium were to suggest some Gregorian Chant for this juncture, say, the *Dies Irae*, I would have approved. I would not have gone so far as to say that the ballet of despair by the chorus is there only to take up stage time while Thomas prays—no, the ballet of despair is necessary to show what is going on inside of Thomas while he prays—but the resolution of the problem of Thomas comes only, I would have argued until last month, from God, not from the women.

A month ago I was discussing *Murder* with a freshman class on a Friday and a Monday, and on the Sunday between I was asked to teach Psalm 22 to a class of teenagers in my church: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." Like Thomas in his depression, the psalmist tries to pray: "Thou art enthroned in holiness; in thee our fathers trusted." But the prayer does not work: "I am a worm and no man." The more the psalmist tries to think of God, the

worse he feels. He tries again to pray: "Upon thee was I cast at birth. . . . Be not far from me." Again prayer does not work. Problems were little at birth but "now a herd of bulls surrounds me. . . ." Between the praying psalmist and God nothing is resolvable: "Do not remain so far away, O Lord."

Then suddenly, at verse 22, the psalmist thinks of his place among God's people; part of his problem dissipates and the rest gets a new focus:

*I will declare thy fame to my brethren;  
I will praise thee in the assembly.*

*God has not scorned the downtrodden  
nor shrunk in loathing from his plight. . . .*

*Let all the ends of the earth remember  
and turn again to the Lord. . . .*

The depression is over, the psalmist can pray, and Thomas can affirm, "Now is my way clear." In my new plan for the staging of the ballet of despair, I want Thomas not to be kneeling in prayer, but to be part of the ballet itself, and I want him to cry out "Now is my way clear" in direct response to the women's "Save us, save us."

Why had I not seen before how the recovery of Thomas is part of his relationship to the community? Certainly seeing the principle does not require only Psalm 22. When Jesus says we ought to abandon our gift for God un-



til we have made up with our neighbor (Matthew 5:23-24), is he not recommending the same cure for our spiritual malaise? And when John advises us to cool our declarations of love for God, whom we have not seen, until we are at peace with our friends, whom we see every day (I John 4:19-21), certainly the principle is the same. The principle of the priority of the love for the community over our love of God—how strange it feels for this Reformed hand to write it—is a principle established not only on the basis of Psalm 22.

The problem is how to square the priority of the love for the community of Psalm 22 and elsewhere with the priority of our love for God required in the Law: “Love God *above all* and your neighbor as yourself.” Describing what ought to be (the Law) and prescribing remedy for spiritual malaise (Psalm 22 and Eliot’s *Murder*), while not mutually exclusive, are very different from each other. Of course, love for God is more important than love for the community, but love for God is downright impossible during the weary moment (which seems forever) when we cannot love anyone or anything at all. As an accommodation to our outcast state, God recommends that we begin with the easier, lesser love. Love for God has the priority in importance, but

love for the community has the priority in time. Broken creatures like ourselves must learn what it is to love at all. We are like that other outcast who, remembering a human love, ended up singing hymns at heaven’s gate.

Let me insert a comment to the community which has shaped me, a community which, with severely qualified success, I have been learning to love for over a half-century. We Reformed Christians are rightly suspicious of a horizontal, “do-good” Christianity which values love of community above love of God; we are also suspicious of psychological realities which do not square with our theological presuppositions. Not only Bible-thumping TV evangelists and radio padres but Reformed Christians, too, recommend that the perplexed should pray, that the lonely should read their Bibles, and that the alienated should get right with God. That pattern in the Reformed community, I think, has kept me from understanding the crucial passage in *Murder* until this year. We recommend a diet of lobster thermador when the question is whether the patient is strong enough for intravenous feeding.

Whatever the limitations of the education given to Jesus Christ by the religious establishment of his day, I am glad the curriculum included Psalm 22, because in his agony on the

cross, that psalm allowed him to claim that God as his, whose presence he could not experience: “My God, my God. . . .” Yet, what broke that despair on the cross? What changed, so that he could cry out triumphantly later: “It is finished!”? Calling on God again or pondering his own birth, miraculous as it was, would have been no more effective for him than those measures were for the psalmist. The pattern of Psalm 22 is, I think, more important than any words from it. Is it unlikely, just as the psalmist thought of the brethren and Eliot’s Thomas listens to the women, that Jesus the Christ thought of Peter and John, of Mary his mother and Mary Magdelene, and of Thomas—all of them dependent on him? Is it unlikely that he thought of TP, MRZ, ND, KWK, RJA, and all of us who sometimes feel forsaken by the God we cling to as ours? Unwilling to abandon that vast company which no person can number, he could finish what he had set out to do.

By his grace, so can we.

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Stanley Wiersma



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