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The Seasons of Our Lady

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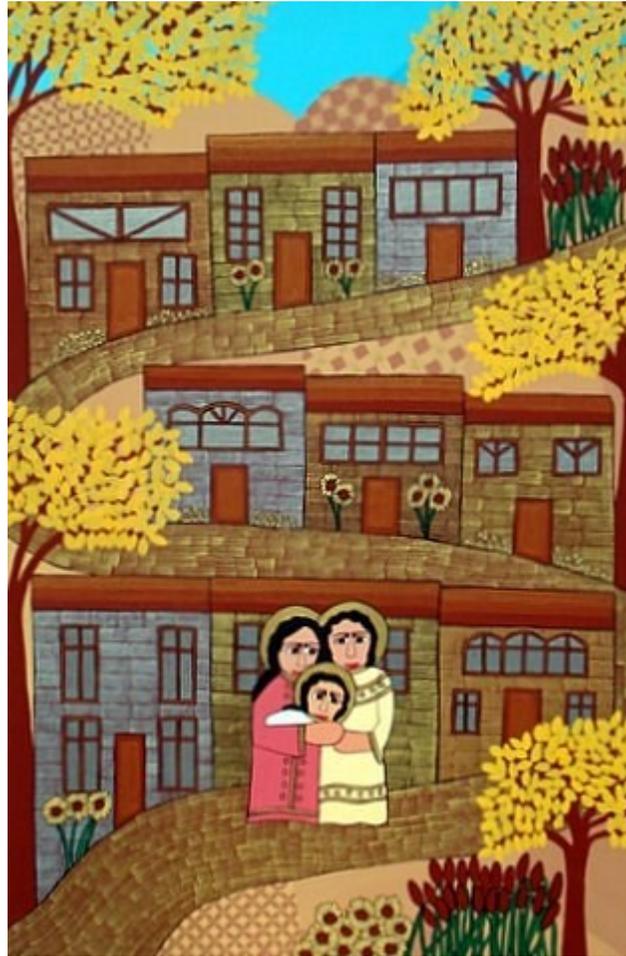
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The Seasons of Our Lady

Linda Schäpper

September 15 – November 15, 2008



Artist

Linda Schäpper, Orlando, Texas, is known for a wide range of art expressions. She's an award-winning quilter with works hanging in dozens of liturgical spaces. Her works range from a 19'x55' backdrop for the ABC-TV coverage of the Papal Mass in Central Park to being chosen among thousands for an annual UNICEF Christmas card. For the exhibit at the University of Dayton, she has gathered her acrylic renderings of the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The twenty mysteries of the rosary are also among the works on display at the Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute.

Linda Schäpper's works are inspired by Alpine Romanesque art. She has used a style known in Europe as *naïve*. She loves to blend compatible colors to create rich vistas that take one home to the deserts and oases of Israel. She says of her works: "Most of them are based on different types of eleventh century art—which I think makes it more interesting—like the eight square ones with the gold painted frames which are based on the wooden ceiling panels of a twelfth century church high in the Swiss Alps—a village called Zillis. I am trying to bring back some of those techniques."

Schäpper was born in Boston, raised in Michigan where she was strongly encouraged to develop her talents by the religious and clergy. After university training, she moved to Spain, married a Swiss architect, traveled widely in Europe, and finally returned to the US to settle in Orlando, Florida.

Artist's Statement

I started painting in my early twenties when I married a Swiss and tried to adapt to living in his home town of Zurich. It was a difficult adjustment because of the many languages to learn. I both found the way to survive and fell in love with art when my husband took me on a weekend excursion to a Swiss Alpine village called Zillis where I was mesmerized by the twelfth-century Romanesque art work on the ceiling of the church with its 156 panels dedicated to the Life of Christ.

I went home and started painting. In Europe everybody paints—art education is not needed—and it is called Naive or Primitive art. The twelfth-century Romanesque art in Zillis was also a type of naive art. It was used to tell the story of Christianity to those who couldn't read.

I painted hundreds of paintings for the next four years, until we moved to Lebanon, and were caught in the middle of the early stages of the civil war. Being stuck daily in the midst of bombing and shooting, I could paint only funerals and death. I stopped painting all together for twenty-one years. For many of those years, I lived as a liturgical artist, designing textiles for churches, including the backdrop for the Papal Mass in New York's Central Park in 1995. A year later when my pastor, Father Paul Henry asked me if I could design a Christmas card without using textiles for my parish, St John Vianney in Orlando, I went home, opened up the old Swiss paints I still had with me, did the card, and immediately fell in love again.

Since that time in 1996, I did the UNICEF card, and have made and sold hundreds of paintings, all over the United States. I often paint up to twenty paintings of the same size in a series centering around a theme and using the techniques I developed in Europe in the naive style.

Four years ago I did an exhibit at the John Paul II Library in Washington DC, and to thank me, they sent a calendar with art from old illuminated manuscripts. I again recognized my style in the eleventh century and older works and started to research the art form.

Most of the paintings in this exhibit for the Marian Library are using different aspects of the vocabulary of Romanesque art. The eight Zillis paintings (the ones with the gold frames) show

stories in the Life of Mary. I used another technique, which I call Apocrypha, that breaks down an incident into several stages. For instance, one scene shows somebody coming to tell Mary her son was being sentenced. Then it shows her traveling to the scene, etc. It's almost an older version of a storyboard breakdown.

The Mysteries—half of them are using a technique of illuminated manuscript done in many of the French monasteries. They have floral borders, and many of those are various flowers named for Mary. Each of the monasteries that did manuscripts had a different style and vocabulary. In the 24"x36" Marian stories, the one broken into three sections comes from a Dutch monastery. For the Marian flowers, I used a technique I saw in Torcello, an island off Venice, where the design is made of gold tile with bits of pattern in the middle.

The triptychs are used to tell a story. All three triptychs in the exhibit show you different stages of the same incident—so your eye follows the story like a roadmap.

I love using these old techniques because it joins me to people who loved God one thousand years ago. I think, if I met the artists of that time, we would have the same heart. Somebody told me recently that one of the most important jobs of an artist is to be a storyteller and continue carrying the story through our generation and passing it on to the next.

On days when I wonder: "Why am I doing this?" I know that I am trying to live by doing eleventh-century art—in Orlando! I remind myself that I am a link passing on what I know and what I feel to those yet to come.

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