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Past into Present: Gilded Treasures

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International Marian Research Institute

PAST INTO PRESENT: GILDED TREASURES

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Past into Present: Gilded Treasures

February 9 – April 24, 2015

These gilded drawings by Sandra Bowden celebrate the life of Mary by looking at the long and rich tradition of Christian art that has included the Virgin Mary. Each piece in the exhibition is a delicate translation in line and gold, recreating specific historical works as “icons” from the canon of Western Art.

[View selections from this exhibit](#)

About Sandra Bowden

Sandra Bowden is a painter and printmaker living in Chatham, MA. In 2005 Square Halo published *The Art of Sandra Bowden*. With over 100 one person shows, her work is in many collections including the Vatican Museum of Contemporary Religious Art, the Museum of Biblical Art, and the Haifa Museum. She is also a passionate collector of religious art dating from the early 15th century to the present. *Miserere and Guerre* by George Rouault was a show from her collection at MOBIA in NYC in 2006. Sandra was president of Christians in the Visual Arts from 1993-2007 and has curated many exhibitions and coordinated the CIVA exhibitions program since its inception. She is a Trustee of the Museum of Biblical Art in New York City. She studied at Massachusetts College of Art and received her BA from the State University of New York. For more information on Sandra Bowden go to www.sandrabowden.com.

Artist's Statement

The Exhibit

Past into Present: Gilded Treasures celebrates the life of Mary by looking at the long and rich tradition of Christian art that has included the Virgin Mary.

Each of the 29 pieces in the exhibition is a delicate translation in line and gold, recreating specific historical works as 'icons' from the canon of Western Art. This exhibit comprises an interpretation of Fra Angelico's Annunciation, including a medieval illumination of the Visitation, several Nativity and Madonna and Child images, a series of Crucifixions where Mary is present, Michelangelo's Pietà, and several delicately drawn gilded crosses. These crosses hung above the altar in Medieval churches and when people went to the altar for communion, they literally stood 'under the cross,'—a profound concept.

Together these gilded drawings help us see how Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was so tenderly and passionately embraced by Christians across nearly a thousand years.

The Technique

Each historical piece is carefully reproduced in silhouette form, painted on Twinrocker May Linen, a feather deckled handmade paper. A layer of iridescent oil crayon is added to the painted area and thin sheets of 22-karat German gold leaf are then applied to the surface. Finally, the original image is suggestively drawn using pencil, stylus, etching points or anything that will incise the somewhat soft layers of gold. Lines extend through and beyond the frame of the piece giving an almost architectural setting for the work. This art history series came about as a kind of sabbatical to Bowden's main body of work. In the late 1990s she wanted to spend some time exploring and studying art history with the intent of creating a traveling exhibition. These pieces still intrigue and interest her, and she continues to add new pieces to the collection.

Commentary

— *Father Johann G. Roten, S.M.*

This exhibit represents an original form of art. Indeed, why reinterpret and reproduce works of classical art? Why not go to the master and his work directly, without any detour and effort at recreating perfection? There are many reasons and facets to Bowden's reinterpretation of classical art.

Historically speaking, Bowden's method reflects a period of rediscovery and retrieval of classical art in the latter part of the 20th century. The return to the old masters denotes a certain saturation with the prominence of the subjective in art typical of last century's currents and schools. This new approach, however, is indebted to one of the central concerns of Expressionist art. Its aim is to penetrate details, colors, and accessory motifs in order to uncover the essential form, and thus to discover the true significance of the artist's inspiration and creation. There is still a different facet to Sandra Bowden's art. These "gilded treasures" are not only a tribute to the genius of the artist. They allow for a religious interpretation. The reference to the icon is here appropriate. Sandra's interpretation of classical art, though frequently of a pronounced anthropomorphic painterly expression, is centered on religious and Marian art. They picture what we call Revelation, the

manifestation of God in the world. They translate events of God's Revelation to his people, and to all peoples, and give them a visible and painterly illustration. This is the junction where Bowden's "gilded treasures" meet the icon, and its deeper meaning. Icons are grounded in gold, the gilded coloring, to highlight the foundation of Creation and Redemption in God. Icons are not only a window unto eternity, they are literally grounding the world in God. It could be said that Bowden's art is an attempt to return the beauty of classical paintings to their original meaning. Formally, her art centers the attention in the very truth of the event or person pictured. Spiritually, Bowden's art in its gilded form, is a pledge to the divine origin and finality of Revelation as expressed in the paintings on display.

Lending the technique used (incision of the motif in the somewhat soft layers of gold) a symbolic interpretation, it would not be adverse to say that Sandra Bowden's art shows that the whole of human history is incised in the golden layers of God's love.

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