

8-25-2009

Electronic Age Madonnas

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls

Recommended Citation

"Electronic Age Madonnas" (2009). *News Releases*. 1385.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/1385

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marketing and Communications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in News Releases by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlengen1@udayton.edu.

University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



Electronic Age Madonnas

08.25.2009 | Catholic, Fine Arts In a new exhibit of Byzantine-style icons at the University of Dayton's Marian Library, a California artist demonstrates how a centuries-old form can distill spiritual elements from familiar aspects of modern life.

"Icons of the Electronic Age" by Katherine Osenga will be on display at the Marian Library Gallery in Roesch Library from Sept. 14 through Nov. 20. The gallery is open 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday and on Saturday and Sunday by appointment by calling 937-229-4214. It's free and open to the public.

In paintings such as the *Madonna of Financial Help* and *Madonna of Aviation*, Osenga said her work grew from contemplating the spiritual aspects of contemporary life. To ensure that her work is accessible to a modern audience, she said she relies on traditional, well-known symbols, and updates them.

"Living in a culture that is based in our material well-being, the icon is a refreshing reminder of our spiritual life," she said. "My intention is to create icons for the modern sensibility. I want to make the images exciting for the modern eye."

The Rev. Johann Roten, S.M., director of the International Marian Research Institute, said the library staff selected the *Madonna of Financial Help* as the signature piece for the exhibit because it exemplified the modernity of Osenga's work and her use of symbols.

For example, Osenga's description says the image of Jesus holding a fish in the *Madonna of Financial Help* stems from a story in the Gospel of Matthew regarding St. Peter and money for tribute that came from a fish.

But Osenga added "the beautiful part about symbols is that they can be interpreted in a variety of ways."

Roten suggested another interpretation might come from a Gospel story in which Jesus performs a miracle by taking a few loaves and fishes from a boy in the crowd, and creating enough food to feed thousands of people.

During a time of financial crisis for many people, Roten said Osenga's work is a reminder that Jesus did not create the miracle by himself, but that he asked for a contribution from what Roten called, "the human side."

"In order to have a miracle, you have to make a contribution yourself," Roten said. "It's not a one-way street."

Sixteen of Osenga's works will be on exhibit, including the *Madonna of Aviation*, on loan from Andy Cresci, a California pilot who commissioned the work. In that icon, Jesus holds a Wright brothers-style bi-plane.

Osenga described the *Madonna of the Media* as a personification of the Catholic Church which traditionally might be portrayed in an icon with winged animals to represent the four Gospels.

"In past representations, the creatures held books in their hands as signs of the way in which the Gospel was recorded and passed on," she said. "In the modern icon, however, the animals hold the contemporary methods of communication; the eagle holds a computer, the winged man holds a telephone, the lion holds a television, and the bull holds the radio."

Born in Anchorage, Alaska, Osenga recently earned a doctoral degree in art history and religion at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif. She currently teaches advanced placement art and art history at a high school near San Francisco.

Her works have been exhibited in numerous exhibitions and are included in private collections in Anchorage, San Francisco, Rome and Oxford, England.

Osenga said she paints in oil on wood, with gold leaf, various beads and found objects. Following the traditional spiritual methods of icon-making, she fasts, prays and meditates as part of the creative process.

"Icons are designed to communicate unseen spiritual realities. Through their symbolic framework, they speak to us not only about God, but also about our own spiritual nature," she said. "Once icons put this unseen reality before us, they move us to respond to God's action through prayer and contemplation."

Sister Jean Frisk, S.S.M., director of art and special projects at 937-229-4214 and friskjem@notes.udayton.edu