

Boston artists express their faith in Art

“Art is our one true global language. It knows no nation, it favors no race, and it acknowledges no class. It speaks to our need to reveal, heal, and transform. It transcends our ordinary lives and lets us imagine what is possible.”

—Richard Kamler, Chair, Visual Arts Department, University of San Francisco

As faiths and civilizations clash on the international political stage, BHCC hosted an exhibit that speaks to the indisputable significance of religious belief in the world today.

“The 36 featured artists ‘agreed to agree’ to exhibit together despite their widely different religious and even anti-religious views,” Art Gallery Director Laura Montgomery commented. “At least under this one small gallery roof, on these four white walls, cultural acceptance and tolerance prevail. Here, different beliefs exist side by side, in peace.”

The 83 works assembled for the exhibit referenced a wide range of traditions. Buddhism, Islam, Roman Catholicism, main-line and non-denominational Protestantism, Judaism, Spiritualism, and Shintoism, along with Native American, Theosophical, Pagan and Goddess-centered traditions found representation, as did entirely untraditional ideas of religious seeking.

The exhibit included traditional iconographic images such as sculptural crosses assembled from artifacts, refuse and post-industrial cast-offs; poly-chromed paintings on wood and canvas of deities, saints and religious leaders; painted church steeples done with photo-realistic precision; carved stone aboriginal spirit forms; photographs of a family at worship; a detailed painting of an Islamic prayer rug with texture so realistic it begged to be touched; and cast bronze sculptures suggesting Asian Taoist forms.

While one artist in the exhibit drew her inspiration from reading the Midrashim, writings of the Rabbis that

complement the Bible, another’s attraction to Orthodox Christian icons eventually inspired his conversion to Catholicism. Yet other artists in the exhibit, including photographer Cozette Carroll, discovered the power of religious belief from the sidelines of organized religion. Carroll, who documented the daily lives of a family in Chicago, attended their three- and four-hour religious services on Sundays. “I couldn’t help but feel lifted up by the tremendous energy of those gatherings,” she said. She was yet more impressed by the young boy in the family who willingly gave a share of his own birthday gifts to children in a nearby shelter.

Like the artist and educator Richard Kamler quoted above, Montgomery believes in the power of art to change the world. “Through the arts,” she says, “people divided by race, culture, language, class and religion can communicate the deeper spiritual realities that bind us together in our common humanity.”

At a gallery talk held by the participating artists, discussion centered on the exhibit as a model for the fearless expression of deeply felt religious beliefs and, at the same time, for practicing the great religious — and secular — virtue of tolerance. The exhibit, Montgomery feels, gave the College community another important occasion to use its differences as a means of drawing closer together.

Screened image:

Modern Theology, by Matthew J. Andrade. Acrylic on canvas, 2005.

Below (l. to r.): Pianist Samuel Gomez Cardozo, artist Stephanie Angelo, Interim Dean of Professional Studies Richard Boulware with BHCC student Valerie Jackiewicz, and a guest.

