



A Human Future

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Jacquie Boughner is a professional artist living in Richmond Hill, Ontario. She has been a consultant with the Ontario Arts Council and has done curatorial work for public and private galleries. In 2011-12 she was a curator of the L'Arche Ontario Show in the suite of the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario at Queen's Park. She has been involved with L'Arche for 20 years as a friend and board member of L'Arche Daybreak and L'Arche Ontario. She often gives reflections inspired by the art of L'Arche members.

The Art of L'Arche Members An Interview with Jacquie Boughner

In recent years the art of people who are outside the mainstream arts world has begun to be more widely recognized. L'Arche has been part of this movement. Indeed, from its founding in 1964, L'Arche saw opportunities for creativity as part of having a meaningful daily life. Many L'Arche communities have creative arts workshops or craft studios. Several regularly present art show and sales, and L'Arche members with intellectual disabilities are also being invited to submit their art to exhibitions with other artists. In this issue, Jacquie Boughner reflects on the art of L'Arche members and we offer a glimpse of the work of a few of these artists.

– Beth Porter, ed.

Beth Porter: You have been drawn to the art of the people who have intellectual disabilities in L'Arche. What attracts you?

Jacquie Boughner: All art is an extension of the body, and the body is something L'Arche understands, quite simply because the people of L'Arche often live with bodily limitations or need help caring for their bodies. I heard a choreographer once describe the act of creating as “the body in a free fall and then being caught”—that sensation of letting go and trusting. We don't intellectualize this work as a narrative—we physically feel it as a gesture. L'Arche artists know and celebrate this, allowing the deepest impulse of our human reality to

happen, to be expressed in creativity. After all, to be creative is a part of being human.

Each artist has a distinctive voice and style. Kim Lageer, for instance, is a musician, with the gift of perfect pitch and talented expressive movement. Her art has a lyrical quality with colours that are jewel-like in tone, and her work sings with a freshness and clarity that evokes a feeling of awe and infinite hope. Her art is created within a community that values and empowers the weakest and trusts that in



Kim Lageer of L'Arche Daybreak and her painting, “Tree of Hearts”

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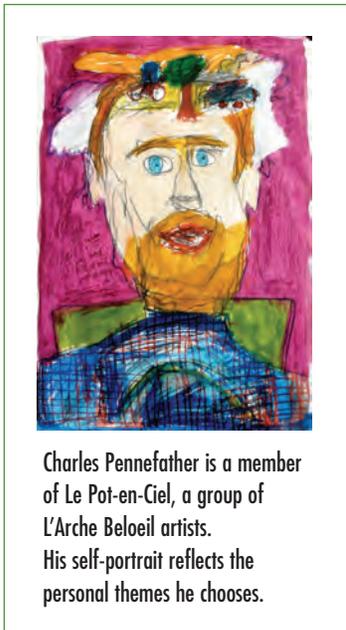
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the vulnerability of being human the treasure of community is

discovered. There is a freedom and truthfulness in the art of people with intellectual disabilities. Charles Pennefather's uncompromising self-image is very powerful. His bright blue eyes confront us with an honesty that brings to mind a Van Gogh portrait. Chagall touched into something in his being that Dora Punch also knows. Their figures float in an eternal space and time beyond logic.



Charles Pennefather is a member of Le Pot-en-Ciel, a group of L'Arche Beloeil artists. His self-portrait reflects the personal themes he chooses.

Is the art of people with intellectual disabilities different then, from other art?

Some people categorize it as "Outsider Art," but I prefer not to use this term because I would rather see it for its creativity. In art there is the indefinable that makes a work breathe. It's a kind of mysterious tension between head and heart that gives life. The art of L'Arche members with disabilities is all about this breath and life that is found in the gesture of the body, by the act of putting colour on a surface, or drawing a line with immediacy, intensity. It represents a commitment to living fully in the moment. Dennis Murphy's art, for instance, reveals a beautiful sense of colour and design. The consistent intensity of his work speaks directly to the viewer. The art is alive, and we react to what is life-giving in it.

Was there a certain moment when you began to notice the art of L'Arche members?

Yes, I remember my first reaction to this art. I walked into the Craft Studio at L'Arche Daybreak and there on the wall was a display of Tom Krysiac's ceramic

crosses. There were colorful, cartoon-like characters pinned to each cross. One looked like Homer Simpson with a big, red, bleeding heart, and another had a ten-gallon cowboy hat and a handle-bar mustache. I was mesmerized and confounded and shocked, all at the same time. My first thought was, Is this blasphemy?... Can it actually be religious art? I have seen similar art objects, in a secular, ironic context—art objects created

Dennis Murphy

Dennis Murphy writes, "I like to draw animals, boats, and ships, reptiles, fish and dolphins, whales and sharks. Amphibians and reptiles too, and stuff they eat.



I draw them out with pencil first, then I colour them in. I use special markers with paint in them. I draw them out of a book so that I get the measurements of them, like how long it is, where it lives in the world, the colours. The



Top: "Tractor"
Bottom: "Hummingbirds"

most important thing is the time I take at my pictures, that I don't make mistakes. I keep on practising, trying to get better. It makes me feel good. I'm from the Cabot Trail, Ingonish. I've been living in L'Arche for almost 20 years. I'm glad I came to L'Arche. I like being around the folks I live with."

Dennis lives in L'Arche Cape Breton



to outrage, to shock by using religious symbols in unorthodox contexts. But Tom's crosses were not done to be ironic or controversial. They came from the heart, from his lived experience.

Homer Simpson is a familiar friend, a human-like character present in our lives—and Tom presented him in a very human body experiencing the cross—a raw, incarnated, bleeding and broken body.

I couldn't stop looking at Tom's crosses, so I bought them all and took them home with me—still not knowing what they were about, nor indeed, precisely why I was doing this, but knowing they were important. It was like finding a treasure, a pearl of great value. Every few days I would unwrap them from the tissue paper and sit on the living room floor with them around me, and just look at them. Art is a relationship. You have to spend time with it. You sit with it and look at it and wait for it to tell you its story. The process of art is completed in the viewer. I would bring the crosses out to show my friends and say "Isn't this shocking!" And it was, but then so is the cross of Jesus.

What I came to understand was that these crosses were theologically accurate, aesthetically profound, and deeply confirming of the mystery of the cross—



Tom Krysiac and his ceramic cross

and of life. Perhaps the most significant religious art in this secular world, is produced by those who experience the cross everyday—the other, the outsider, the person who is disadvantaged. In our day, perhaps the religious art that will fill us with awe and wonder is the art that is an expression of vulnerability, by those who are vulnerable. Perhaps the expression of 'vulnerability' is the art of our time.

Art is completed in the viewer and L'Arche art activates and provokes our personal conscience to thoughtfully consider and respond to the changing



Dora Punch



Dora Punch is a treaty Indian of the Slavey tribe. When she was 11 she left the reserve for a residential school where she developed her art and needlework skills. She loves sketching with pen, pencil or marker. Her pictures are big, bright and expressive. The subjects for her pictures are the people and animals and familiar sites from her village in the North. She has lived for many years in L'Arche Edmonton, which she chooses as her home, but she makes periodic visits to her village. There, early in the morning she can be found outside, taking in the scene. Dora does not speak much and sometimes draws pictures to communicate or respond to questions.

Left: Dora Punch working on a duvet cover. Above: Dora's "Coloured Images"



values and scientific possibilities of our world. When this work touches us so deeply, so physically, it confronts us with the essential questions for our human survival—What does ‘being human’ mean? And how are we to live this meaning personally in our human community? We are privileged to have artists in L’Arche who have the ability to confound us. By the appearance of rule breaking, they redefine and reaffirm the gift of art and the life that it brings.

Marshall McLuhan said, “The artist picks up the message of cultural and technical challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs... and then builds models, or Noah’s arks, for facing the change that is ahead.” L’Arche artists are not referencing these challenges intellectually, but at a more fundamental level. They reveal why artists feel compelled in the first place to build these arks of survival. Their artistic communication is a way of knowing. Their work embodies the innate human response and desire to create a personal, physical mark—a prophetic gesture holding our fragile human identity in the strength of an intentional creative act. ■

L’Arche Art Shows are often announced by creative posters such as the this one on the theme of the four seasons, for a show to mark “Quebec Intellectual Disability Week” in March. L’Arche Joliette joined with members of Entraide, a local creative workshop, in contributing artwork to this show.



For Your Information

Links

- **Marshall McLuhan: The Man and His Message**, George Sanderson and Frank McDonald, eds. (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum, 1989).
- **Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, “Creation, Creativity and Creatureliness: The Wisdom of Finite Existence,”** (2005 Oxford lecture).
- **The Creative Spirit Art Centre**
- **The Intuit Show of Folk and Outsider Art**
- **Some comments on “outsider art” from FlavorWire:**

“I feel the term runs the gamut from folk artist to the contemporary artist with autism, to the studio programs to people who are self-taught. I think the boundaries of outsider art are expanding and changing overtime. Outsider artists often struggle with the ability to make their work and have their work seen by a larger audience. However, right now the Outsider Art movement is bigger than ever.”

– Pamala Rogers, Director of Pure Vision Arts

“I think it’s the most abused term at this point... It comes from the European ‘art brut,’ which is ‘raw art.’ I think that’s the best definition that there is. It was just anglicized when it came here into ‘outsider.’ They didn’t think ‘art brut’ would fly with American audiences. But I prefer not to categorize. If the viewer doesn’t see it in the work, I don’t think it matters what you call it.”

– Bonnie Grossman, Director of The Ames Gallery

- **Pierre Théberge, O.C., C.Q., former Director, National Gallery of Canada, on a 2004 exhibition of “outsider art”:**
 “This exhibition offers a chance to become acquainted with works of art whose intensity can provide a moving experience for anyone who looks at art as a way of transforming and transcending the ordinary.”

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The L’Arche movement was founded by Jean Vanier, in France in 1964. Today there are 137 communities of L’Arche on six continents, 29 in Canada. In L’Arche, people with intellectual disabilities and those who come to assist them share life together.

A Human Future is offered as a contribution to the Canadian conversation about values and the fostering of a society where everyone belongs and can make a contribution.