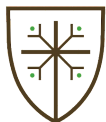


ADVENT



**Featuring artwork by
Donald J. Forsythe**



ALL SAINTS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

GALLERY • ADVENT 2021

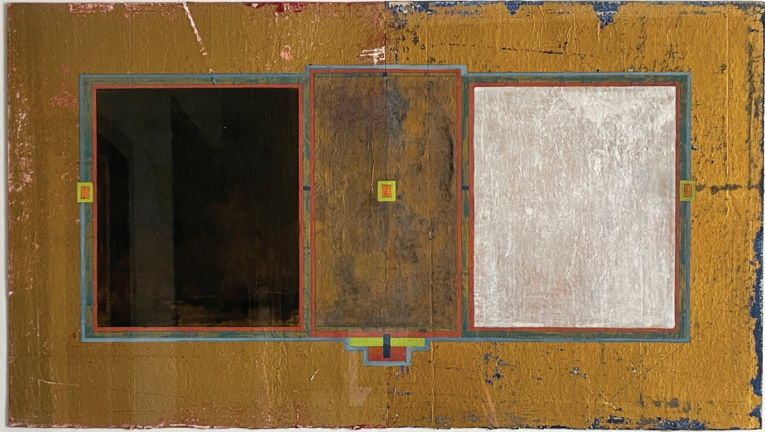
Note from the Curator

It is with incredible excitement that we share this exhibit of work by my college art professor and dear friend, Don Forsythe. I first saw a few of these pieces a decade ago in an intimate gallery near Philadelphia. I was so drawn, as I am now, to the texture. I was also captivated by the precision of marks in contrast to the abstraction of layered material, and to the depth of spaces much like gilded windows set in weathered frames.

The gold leaf stars amidst azurite blue in *Dance, 1998-1999* brought me back to a visit to the Scrovingni Chapel in Padua, Italy, just as Don describes. I also have a clear memory of being moved by the art in that tiny space, where every inch of wall and ceiling revealed the gospel story in frames and colors and textures. I don't remember the exact imagery, but I do recall the feeling I had while looking at it, and I think Don brings some of this visceral memory in his work, along with actual physical material. Layered in the work are Bible pages, plaster, turf, and ash, tangible remnants of the place.

Here we are in Advent, a time when we are waiting in hungry anticipation for substance, for a physical reminder of peace and joy and life, which for Christians is in and through the Christ child. In our waiting we experience what we see in these paintings: the gray mysteries of our faith; the abstracted view through the imperfect lens; the dark ash of turf that cruelly separates us; the creation that groans for heaven but is stuck in the "now and not yet." I encourage you to read Don's words about his pieces as you reflect on Advent, and invite you to join us in entering this season with a heart open to the work of the Spirit, who points us to the real and corporeal hope we have in Jesus.

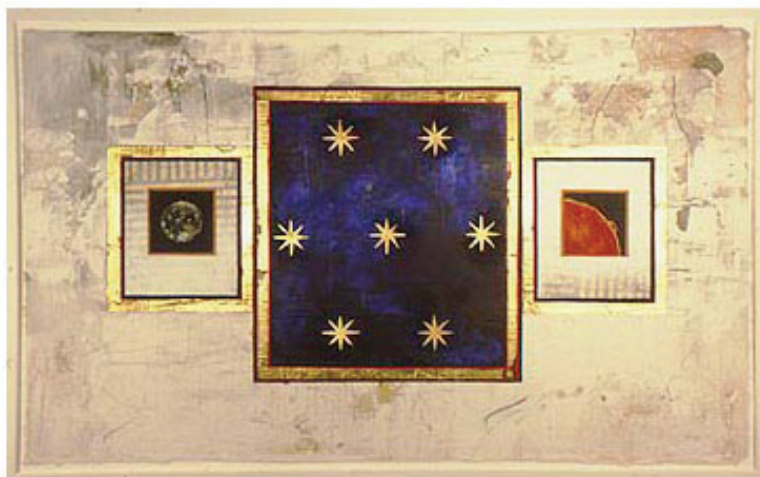
- Sonya Menges



Somewhere Between Black and White, 1998

Gouache, acrylic mediums, gesso, gold leaf, burnish clay, and interference pigment over Bible pages on Arches watercolor paper

One of my first paintings to utilize gold leaf and a design based on illuminated manuscript painting was *Somewhere Between Black and White, 1998*. I painted it for a competition at the Texas Fine Arts Association here in Austin. I was trying to express a gray area that existed in my thinking regarding the “Big Questions” of faith. The Bible pages underneath this piece and all the others in the show symbolize a foundation of Christian belief but are not intended to be interpreted literally. I don’t pick a page and then try to make a painting about it—to me it is all the “stuff of faith,” and equally important. There are Bible pages buried under much of my work over the years, but ones from this show all come from the same Schofield Bible that fell in a puddle at Messiah College and was never claimed.



Upon My Bed at Night, 1998-1999

Gouache, acrylic mediums, watercolor, plaster, graphite, bronze leaf, and 18 kt. gold over Bible pages on Arches watercolor paper

Collection of Geoff and Dawn Isley, Grantham, PA

Upon My Bed at Night was directly inspired by a skylight in an attic bedroom we owned. When we were feeling “a little cramped” by rooms in a 100 -year-old house, we decided to add a master bedroom suite on the third floor of our home. The skylight in question was situated under my side of the bed, and I got to look out at the night sky. While the sun, moon, and stars could never align in the fashion suggested in the composition, it was a place to consider the direction of one’s life, and to peer out on from a tiny place in the cosmos.



Sidereal Time, 2000

Gouache, acrylic mediums, bronze leaf, plaster, burnish clay, and charcoal ash over Joss paper and Bible pages on Arches watercolor paper

I became aware of the fact that different cultures over time used images of stars to represent aspects of their beliefs-particularly when considering the ultimate mysteries of existence. *Sidereal Time* examines a Mennonite quilt (sharing, charity, community;) A picture of stars taken through an imperfect lens (science, optics,) An invented “Matisse” (art) Pixels from a digital image of a star (mathematics,) and finally stars viewed with the un-aided eye- (human perception or experience).



Turf Painting / Ireland, 2002

Gouache, acrylic mediums, burnish clay, gold leaf, plaster, sand, County Mayo Turf, and turf ash over Bible pages on Arches watercolor paper

In the painting *Turf Painting / Ireland*, I tried to consider the country from a variety of perspectives. Literal "turf" is a plant substance built up over the course of many years (i.e. peat moss.) Persons born in Ireland are deeded an area in which they can harvest their own peat which can be burned for warmth and light. Another kind of turf can be used to explain the rift between Protestant and Catholic factions in Ireland, and the map of Ireland and its road system shows the area of turf that my wife Christi and I covered during the season in which the work was painted.



Turf/ Stars, Ballinglen, 2002

Gold Leaf, plaster, sand, charcoal ash, gesso, graphite, County Mayo Turf, and turf ash over Bible pages on Arches watercolor paper

A significant milestone in my life as an artist was being awarded an international fellowship to the Ballinglen Arts Foundation in Ballycastle, County Mayo, Republic of Ireland. I spent the time there over seven month- long residency periods making paintings, editioning printing plates, teaching, visiting museums, and exploring sites of Neolithic architecture. *Turf/Stars* is intended to symbolize everything in all creation—the Heavens and the Earth.

The paint on the right side of the work is made of Irish turf and turf ash that was ground together with acrylic polymers to become pigment.



Dance, 1998-1999

Gouache, acrylic mediums, interference pigment, gold leaf, burnish clay, and plaster over Bible pages on Arches watercolor paper

The painting *Dance, 1998-99* was the first of many pieces referencing the Scrovegni Chapel by Giotto in Padua, Italy. The chapel is considered by many to be one of the most important paintings of the Christian narrative. My family saw the chapel early in the day, and we were lucky to see it without other visitors. It's clarity and power is undeniable. Under a glowing sky of azurite, the Christian story is revealed frame by frame. The stars in the sky are reasonably static, evenly spaced, and appear to be unchanging. In *Dance*, I rotated the axis of one group of stars to imply movement.



Photo by Carolyn Lambright, 2008

About the Artist

Don Forsythe received his MFA in Printmaking from the School of Fine and Applied Arts at Rochester Institute of Technology in 1979. After teaching at RIT, and later three years at Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester, NY, he joined the faculty of Messiah College in Grantham, PA in 1982. An active teacher, workshop leader, speaker and consultant, Don has lectured, curated exhibitions, and shown his own work across the country.

Don's artwork has been seen in over seventy-five exhibitions since 1979, has won numerous awards, and been collected by many public and corporate collections. An interest in art and worship led to two commissions in stained glass design: six windows for the Cathedral Church of St. Stephen, Harrisburg, and eight windows for the Mission Hills Baptist Church in Littleton, Colorado in 1992 and 1996, respectively. A board member of the national organization Christians in Visual Art (CIVA) since 1984, Don served a term as President of that organization from 1991-93.

Don was among the first group of faculty educators at Messiah College selected to receive the Smith Faculty Development Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1985, and was later granted that honor again in 1989, 1992 and 1995. In 1987, he was awarded a grant from the Pew Foundation to internationalize the curriculum, and studied ancient art on-site in Greece. Faculty Scholarship Grants from the college in 1993, 1996, and 1999 enabled him to pursue diverse projects like the study of religious folk art in Guatemala, and the creation of several new bodies of artwork. In 2003 he was awarded a Ballinglen Fellowship from the Ballinglen Arts Foundation in Ballycastle, Republic of Ireland, and awarded the title Distinguished Professor of Art at Messiah.

Don and his wife Christi live in Dillsburg, PA.

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ALL SAINTS
PRESBYTERIAN

MUSIC & ARTS MINISTRY

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