

I don't think you can have religious art without the art work having an element of inspiration. And that can only happen if the artist truly pushes the medium, pushes the craft as far as she or he can take it.

SEEING THE CHOICES

A Conversation with Paul Jung

PAUL JUNG was born in South Africa and lived there until he was twelve years old, when his family moved to Salt Lake City. After graduating from Skyline High School in Utah. He moved to Victoria, British Columbia (where he became a Canadian citizen). Paul received a bachelors in education, majoring in art and history, from the University of British Columbia. Last year, after five years of teaching high school art in Victoria, he entered the prestigious Slade School of Fine Arts in London, where he continues his education. He and his wife, Linda, are spending this summer with her family in Salt Lake City. For those interested in acquiring work by Paul, his Salt Lake agent is Phillips Art Gallery (444 E. 200 S., 801/364-8284). This interview was conducted by Steven Epperson and Elbert Peck.

DOES MORMONISM HAVE ITS OWN PARTICULAR AESTHETIC?

Not having lived much in Utah, the extent of my understanding of Church art is from the Visitors' Center. Living in Europe and studying art history, I recognize that the Catholic Church promoted amazing advances in human artistic endeavors. I don't see that the LDS church has ever done that.

While some of the early temples have a great deal of artistic integrity, much of the more recent art and architecture the Church sponsors suffer; they are neither inspiring nor original.



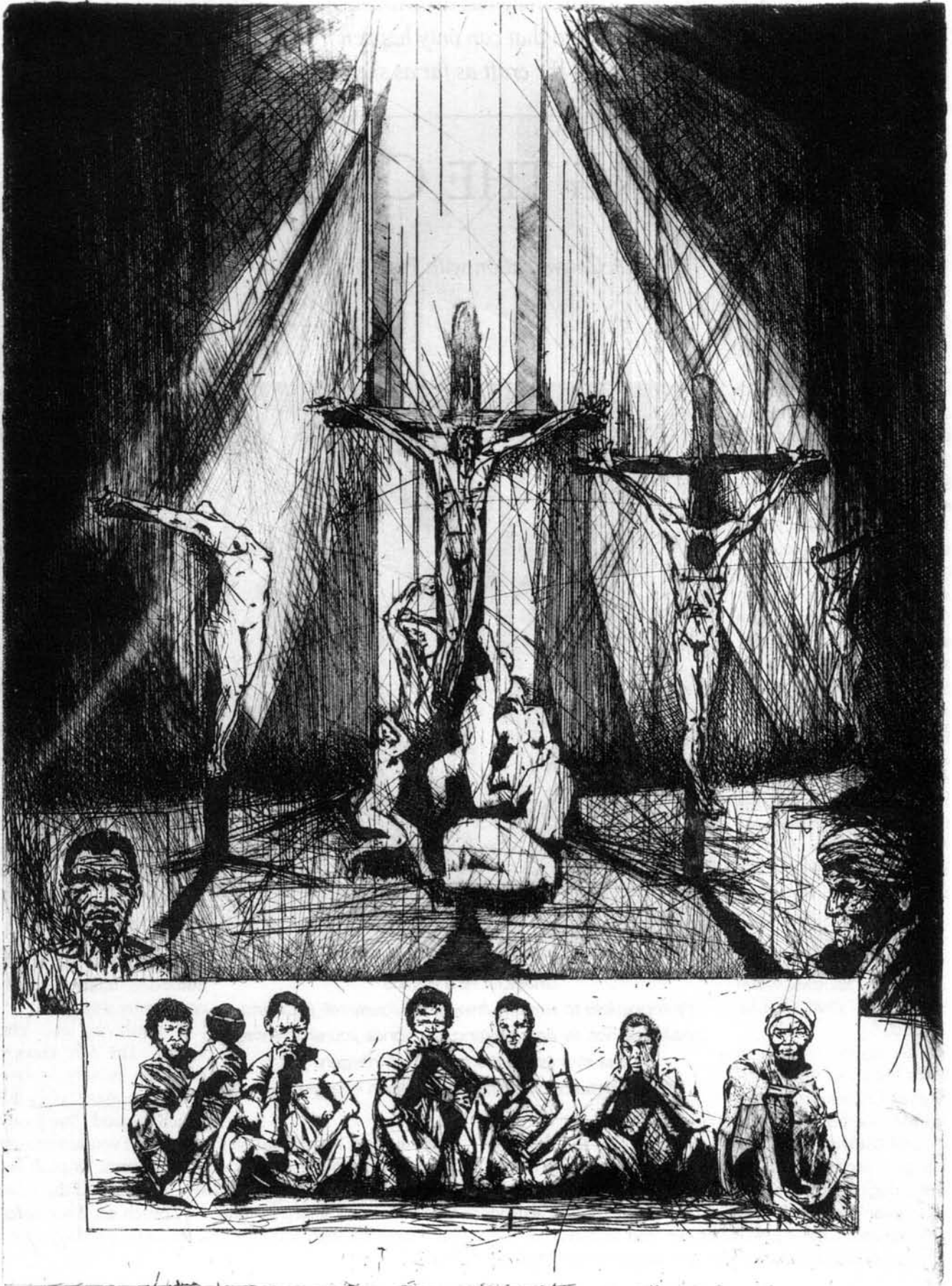
CHARLOTTE'S HANDS

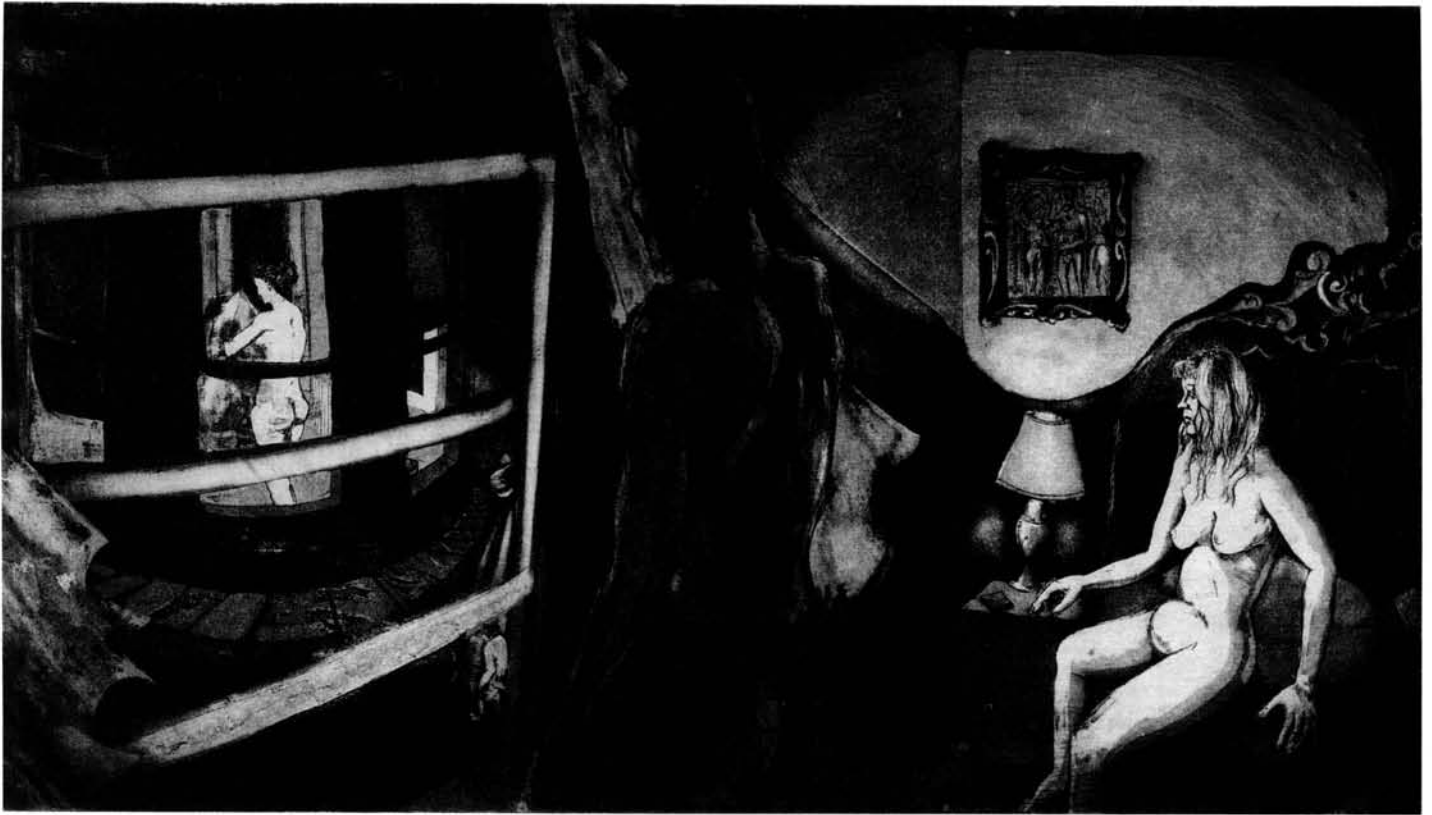
It's impossible to say one thing is obviously religious and another is not. By emphasizing the hands you emphasize the strength in the hands, an integrity. That exploration of the human form is religious.

This is particularly unfortunate as it hinders an important avenue of spiritual growth of both its members and artistic community. When I go to a cathedral, even if it's in a small village, I know that I'm in sacred space. It's amazing—you're transported out of this world. It seems that as a church, we've become so pragmatic that aesthetic concerns aren't that important.

Partly it's a reflection of the Church headquarters being situated in the American West. Perhaps aesthetic concerns aren't as important in this part of the world; we have such beautiful landscape about us that we don't worry about the city, about our interior spaces. If you want to be inspired, you go to the canyon. But if you live in a European city you don't have such access to the outdoors; interior space becomes very important.

I think it's also conservatism. The LDS church art I've seen is very representational; it's about story-telling, which is good. But good narrative art does two things: on the one hand you want to convey the story effectively; on the other, you want to push the art form further. You want to challenge yourself and the viewer to take your work a step beyond. In Church art, I see narrative, but I don't see that pushing of the art form; good art must have both.





VOYEURS

We can treat our spouses or loved ones with respect and dignity or with disregard. When you look at the sorry way we treat people in society, you can see how a police state can occur: the mentality already exists.

SOME SAY THAT BECAUSE RELIGIOUS ART IS COMMISSIONED TO INSTRUCT, IT CAN'T ALSO PUSH THE ARTISTIC BOUNDARIES; THEY ARE CONFLICTING EXPRESSIVE VISIONS.

I think the opposite. Graven images are taboo in Christian culture, yet we use them to sell religion. That's why the Catholic Church commissioned art. They had to find some way to make an impact on the people. Imagery promoted religion and educated. But the Catholic Church wanted to do more than teach Bible stories; it also wanted to cultivate belief and awe. Religious art is meant to inspire. Great art inspires; bad art dulls. The most inspirational art I've seen is religious. "David," by Michelangelo: there's no greater representation of the god-like individual. Michelangelo pushed the art form to its utmost; at the same time, he created religious art.

Michelangelo also did little charcoal sketches of the crucifixion—Christ with Mary by the cross. They're crude, but their simplicity pushes art a step beyond. In contrast, at that same time in the early Baroque period, people were making

grand, perfect representations of thousands of angels, and here is Michelangelo, alone in his studio, an old man, making figurative sketches, crude but inspiring.

I've been working on narrative pieces. To tell a story, you have to set the stage, put drama in the work. One piece is currently titled "I'll Never Forget They Crucified Jesus Christ," a line from Bob Marley. It was an early etching, but I think it's one of my most successful. It came from looking at Grünewald's tortured Christ and Rembrandt's "Three Crosses" (although in mine there's a fourth cross). The main figure is flooded with light, his hands definitely nailed. I included other figures that spoke to my South African background—black and white figures together. In this piece, you have a purely Western crucifixion image juxtaposed with South African bush people. It's up to the viewer to come up with the associations. A female figure is being crucified along with Christ, and a Native American and a bushman. To me, it means Christ died for everyone.

DOES BEING RELIGIOUS AFFECT YOUR WORK?

I can't say being a Latter-day Saint affects everything I do; being human does, and the fact that I'm Mormon is always in the back of my mind. I don't think I've ever drawn a city street without having a steeple somewhere in the background, something to do with religion.

In the small figure pieces, I'm often trying to find new ways

⇐ I'LL NEVER FORGET THEY CRUCIFIED JESUS CHRIST

A female figure, being crucified along with Christ. To me it means Christ died for everyone, a Native American, and a South African bushman.



to depict the body rather than doing anything strictly religious. But we believe that if you're religious, your eye will be single to God's glory; being religious affects your relationships and how you interact with the city. I think it's impossible to say one thing is obviously religious and another is not.

For example, I had been drawing a model named Charlotte for a long time when I finally noticed her hands. She's a dancer, but she has these incredible hands—really bony and strong—and feet as well. So I posed her where her hands became the focus. As an artist—and this is obvious to most people—you don't just depict something in front of you. You use devices to emphasize. Distortion is a way you can emphasize certain elements and downplay others; by emphasizing the hands, you emphasize the strength in hands, an integrity. It's not that one can't draw anatomically correct hands. Sometimes I'll distort and change and focus; I'll play with the human form to make my images more important, more significant. That exploration of the human form is, in a sense, religious.



THE QUILTER

There is beauty and expressiveness in the human form that you just can't get with the clothes on. To paraphrase Michelangelo, "Isn't the human foot more sacred than the sock that's over it?"

DOES YOUR MORMON IDENTITY PUT CONSTRAINTS ON HOW YOU DEPICT THE HUMAN BODY?

Not really, except it makes me self-conscious about drawing nudes—"What is my family going to think?" There's always a bit of that dynamic going on within myself. I don't know what happens with artists with other belief systems, but there's a sense of "Why am I doing this?" "Is this really kosher?" "Should I really show a woman's or a man's genitals?" And "Is that going to offend people?"

↳ DREAM

"Dream" is an example of the sad relationship between people and their church. The church is tilting away from the people; and the people are using umbrellas to insulate themselves from the world.

For my first show, as I prepared an artist's statement, I realized most of my work incorporates nudity to some extent. I knew my Mormon friends would see these works and be surprised, or offended; at least they would take a second look. So I needed some rationale in my statement. It's obvious that painting nudes is something that's part of my work. As an artist, you should do what is instinctive, and I'm instinctively driven to do nudes. Christ was nude on the cross; you can't depict Christ on the cross with all his clothes on. Additionally, there is beauty and expressiveness in the nude human form that you just cannot get with the clothes on. In "Charlotte's Hands," if you put clothes on her, that image would lose all its power. It wouldn't be worth hanging on the wall. But those strong hands over her head, and then her body sketched below—that's integral to the picture. To paraphrase Michelangelo, "Isn't the human foot more sacred than the sock that's over it?" It's part of life. It's who we are. We're nude. I use the nude for the expressive quality—shape, contour lines, the line around the shape. The power

in that line, the outside shape, has the ability to express the feelings and emotions integral to my work.

YOUR WORK DEALS WITH SEVERAL RELIGIOUS THEMES—CHRIST, RELATIONSHIPS, URBAN LIFE—WHAT EXACTLY ARE YOU SAYING IN THEM?

It's difficult for me to verbalize that which is visual because it tends to sound trite. But I do believe artists have a responsibility to help viewers enter their drawings so they can discover things on their own.

Look at the etching "Dream." At the top of the picture I added two figures. One is female, her arms, but all we really see is a contour line. We are used to having the male figure crucified, but what if a female figure was crucified? What does that tell us? Both figures, the man and the woman, are important and have to be nude; it wouldn't be right any other way. The line is soft and subtle. At the lowest level the picture says, "Don't be ashamed." Another level is acceptance of sexuality.



KING'S CROSS

We need to learn how to treat other humans with respect, to pay attention to the less fortunate in the center makes you confront him or walk by him. You can either rush by as a car or you can get involved and meet the people of the streets.



e. *The unappealing drunk man
to the commuters.*

Still another level glorifies the individual. As for the woman being crucified, women have been crucified throughout history, and it's important to recognize that they, too, carry Christ's cross. We're such a male-oriented religion; it's important to present women on the same plane.

THE CHURCH BUILDING IN "DREAM" IS PROMINENT BUT DISTANT AND FOREIGN.

I visited the ruins of Tintern Abbey where Wordsworth wrote his great poem. Here was a beautiful cathedral with no roof. It was dead, empty; it was just a facade. That building provides a metaphor for religion today. Religion has become a facade; it's no longer the center of our lives. It's a sacred space, but no one really goes into it. The church is tilting away and falling off the picture plane. I watched a movie about Romero, the archbishop of El Salvador who was killed for his work with common people. He believed the church should be rooted in the people, that if the church can no longer respond to the needs of the people, it's dead. Instead, what often happens is that churches have their own political agendas remote from people. "Dream" is an example of that sad relationship between the people and their church.

I often depict the lowest rungs of the ladder to show that these people have a dignity others often don't. The people in overcoats are covering up themselves. Hiding. A facade. (That might be saying something about nudity—the uncovering of ourselves, presenting everything we have.) They have huge umbrellas, a metaphor for the fact that they are trying to insulate themselves from the world. Street people always impress me because they are exposed to all the elements, exposed to everything. To me that was something to glorify, to look at.

WHAT DOES "KING'S CROSS" SAY ABOUT URBAN LIFE?

We need to pay attention to all people. We can learn from people who have not been successful in traditional terms. They're simply surviving. In religious terms, it's enduring to the end. To endure to the end doesn't mean we have to be successful; it just means we have to survive. There's something in these people worth glorifying.

I got the idea at Christmas. Every night I would walk to King's Cross, a major rail station in England, and draw. It's in one of the rougher parts of London. There's a dichotomy in the picture: on one hand, you have people rushing to catch trains and cabs. King's Cross is a momentary transition in their day between the suburbs and the city. And on the other side of the picture you have people who live in that neighborhood, people who panhandle, who rummage through the garbage, who sleep on the streets, who are the prostitutes.

This glorifies the people who live there, acknowledging that people need our help and have concerns we consciously neglect. I want to pay attention to that: it is our responsibility to meet people's needs. The drawing is social criticism; it's social reality. I'm criticizing the people who rush to catch the trains; to me, they're ugly, insensitive. If you look at the little family in the front, there's a degree of kindness and gentility, an empathy



ON A BUS

It's about isolation in public and private spaces. If only the people could look at one another and talk, then a relationship could occur.

in their faces that doesn't exist in the people who are rushing, the "successful" ones, the ones we usually glorify and paint pictures of. So I consistently distorted them and made them unappealing.

The can of beer held by the elderly man in the foreground is intentional, of course. We consciously judge a person by the outside appearance: "He drinks and smokes; pass him by." Yet, he still has dignity and value even if he's drunk. He's the focus of the picture and the image unfolds around him to convey the power of the individual. So the figures in the background focus on him because he stands apart from the crowd, distinguishes himself from everyone else. I'm sure you could focus on any one of those individuals and do the same thing.

He challenges you, the viewer. You look at that unappealing picture of a drunk man and might pass it off and go on to the next one. Or you could look at him, see him for what he is, and see him as something of worth. Suddenly you're confronted with a choice: you can rush away (like the people catching the trains) or you can get involved with the picture and meet the different people behind him.

WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO GET VIEWERS TO CONFRONT IN "ON A BUS"?

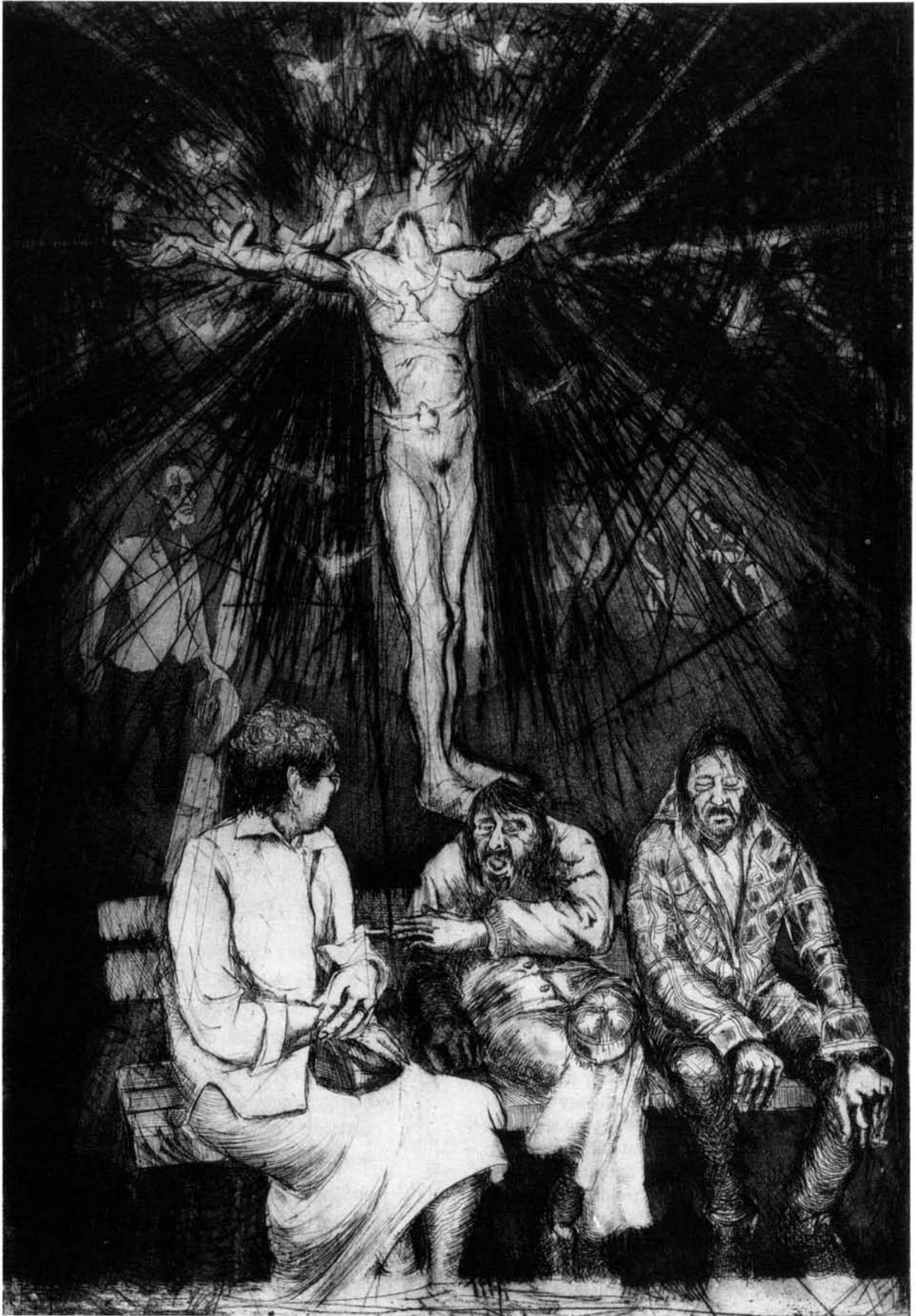
It's really about isolation. After the traveling I've done recently, I've come to believe that we are often isolated, both in public and private spaces. We have a figure on the bus looking

out the window, yet he's in a public space where there are people all around. A sort of angelic female figure is moving out of the bus. Very realistically they could have connected. Yet, either he didn't notice or she didn't. They've gone; they'll never see each other again. It's a loneliness we feel even though we're surrounded by people.

On the right hand panel is a figure you assume is the same man, at the edge of the bed, lighting a cigarette. He obviously just finished making love to a woman, and yet, although the two have been as intimate as human beings can be, still there is a sense of isolation. Everyone in the picture looks in different directions. No one really looks at each other. And you wonder, if only they would communicate! It's frustrating: If only the two had turned their heads and their eyes had met, and they started talking, a relationship could have developed. The same thing on the right panel: both figures on the bed, looking away from each other. In Edward Hopper's work, painting after painting, the figures never connect. A leg never crosses an-

BIRD MAN AND AN ANGEL ⇨

These two men always sat on the same park bench and talked to the tourists. I thought of the crucifixion, which has angels and communications from heaven. In this work, the woman and the two homeless men look like angels.



other figure's body. The figures are isolated in their environments, and there's an incredible feeling of separation and isolation. If only an arm, or something, would cut across the other person's leg, or anything to connect them in space, there would be a feeling of togetherness that doesn't exist in his pictures.

IN "BIRD MAN AND AN ANGEL" YOU HAVE PEOPLE WHO ARE OBVIOUSLY COMMUNICATING.

This is a different piece, a different mood than "On a Bus." For visual and intuitive reasons, these two gentlemen are talking to the woman in the white dress. When I lived in Victoria, these two men were always on the same park bench on the main tourist drag. In the summer, the bench was taken away so the men couldn't hang out there and the tourists wouldn't have to see them. But they always brought their lawn chairs and sat there anyway. Tourists had to confront them, and there's a connection.

I've thought the woman talking to the two men looks like an angel and they're street people. On the other hand, turn it around and they could be the angels and she could be the street person.

The other part of the story in my drawing—the crucifixion—comes from a little boarded-up church in London near our home, where the homeless tended to sit. My wife was walking by the church one day when she saw a man who had covered himself with bread crumbs and pigeons were eating off him. That image was exciting. I like the harmony with nature, birds flying around. You can even think of the Bible, the dove when Christ is baptized. I like the connections of the birds with the man. Maybe the birds are angels.


"THE ALLEGORY OF JESUS OF LONDON" (COVER ART) SEEMS TO SAY WE DON'T NOTICE JESUS IN OUR MIDST.

It's the London underground, the tube, which gets really crowded. When my wife and I traveled on it, you had to hold on to this little round handle to keep from falling down. I would stand in front of my wife and children and fall forward with my arms stretched out. My wife and I used to laugh about this. It struck me one night that this was a nice image, so I went and took some photographs for the picture.

In London I was struck by being in a city with so much inhumanity around; you don't treat an unknown other with respect because you know you'll never see that person again. You can say or do whatever you want. You can just ignore others. To me that Christ figure represents dignity and integrity in a person on the tube; yet, no one is paying attention to what is going on. The man standing in front of him might be noticing, but the people in the background are too concerned with themselves to notice. The man in the back is a priest, actually, holding his briefcase; he doesn't notice at all. Another fellow reads his newspaper. There are one or two sympathetic figures. The picture follows the convention of a triptych—three different panels. There's a figure of a woman on the left hand side that has an empathetic look. For the most part,

though, everyone has a sort of hard edge.

I used some devices, such as the three kingdoms in the advertising panels. The center, celestial kingdom panel uses St. Paul's cathedral dome as Jesus' halo. I was very impressed by primitive aboriginal drawings; the desert is the terrestrial kingdom. Then the lowest kingdom is the man with the gun. In one way, the drawing is serious; in another, it's in jest. To me, it speaks to our need to feel a common sense of humanity.

A similar theme is in "Dream," where you have people shielding themselves with umbrellas—no one else pays attention to what's going on, either. I think of El Salvador or South Africa a few years ago: the system forced people to treat other human beings horribly. In those communities, you face a very definite choice: you either contradict your values or you stand against established authority. Those are incredible decisions. I'm glad I live in a society where I don't have to risk my life in order to stand up for something I believe in. But in our communities we face the same choices on smaller scales in our relationships with spouses or lovers: we can treat them with respect, or we can treat them without respect, without dignity. When you look at the sorry way we treat people in our society—even without government coercion—you realize that should conditions change we'd easily be in the same situation as South Africa or El Salvador because the mentality already exists. We need to treat other humans with respect, to pay attention to the less fortunate. If we are like the person on the tube reading the newspaper, not paying attention to Christ, we find very little that separates our lives from those who live in a police state and are forced to reject other humans. I hope my pictures help viewers see the choices they are asked to make every day. 



INTO BREAD

In the stone chapel (cold stone
where we would later bury
my grandparents) I sat, a
child among hard, chilling stones,

to touch communion with my
curling tongue and taste its sweet
dark life. Light draped smooth shadows
over hand-cut oak-plank pews
and cropped my fingers where they
curved the small glass cup . . . stained them
dark with life and caught a thin
white fleck of Christ on my palm.

—MICHAEL R. COLLINGS