

Sanctuary Artwork at the Paulist Center

Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"; and when he had said this he breathed his last." (Luke 23:46)

Inspired by this passage from Luke's account of the Passion, our sanctuary artwork was installed in January 2004, the culmination of much community-wide prayer and discernment. There are three images within the piece: Cross, Crucified Christ, and Holy Spirit, crafted by two artists who met through this process. Randy Dixon, an architect and an artist from the Berkeley area, created the cross and Spirit images, and Chris Scala, an artist from Orlando, sculpted the figure of Christ. In addition, lighting is an essential element in this work.

Mounted on the back sanctuary wall, behind the Baptismal pool, the Cross is a Live Canyon Oak tree, 10 feet in height. The trunk is split down the middle from top to bottom, reminiscent of the torn sanctuary curtain in Luke's Passion narrative. The horizontal branches are not exactly symmetrical, so the shape of a natural tree is evident and yet the implied cross is easily detected. There are four large metal nails embedded into the cross: one on each of the branches and two at the foot of the cross.

Suspended from the ceiling over the baptismal pool, the three-dimensional Corpus figure of the crucified Christ is 6 feet tall. This part of the piece is made of bronze and gold-plated wire mesh, which is more bronze at the feet and gradually becomes more gold toward the torso and head. Despite the open weave of this material, the muscular structure of a human body is evident. Christ's face looks to the heavens above and his chest heaves upwards, indicating Christ's last breath and his willingness to give over his life to his Father in heaven. One hand lifts up to God, and one reaches out to us. The five wounds of Christ also are faintly visible.

Closest to the ceiling is an abstract sculpture made of opaque white fiberglass. Approximately 4.5 feet high and 4 feet wide, this sculpture symbolizes the Holy Spirit, with images of dove, flame and breath of God suggested by its ribbon-like swirls. The wider horizontal piece calls to mind the wings of a dove, while the narrow vertical piece hints of the body of a dove descending as well as flame reaching upwards. The delicate, woven fiberglass gives a sense of the breath of God or wind.

Lighting for this artwork is extensive and can be dimmed or brightened to reflect the liturgical season, at times casting evocative shadows.

The Artists

Randy Dixon created the images of the Holy Spirit and the Cross. Currently living in California, Randy has a background in both architecture and art, having earned a Master of Architecture degree from University of Illinois, Master of Science in Painting from Illinois State University, and Master of Fine Arts from California College of the Arts. He has taught at Illinois State University and University of California Extension at Berkeley. His early works were painted constructions, exploring painting on spatial forms. Current works include sculptures that he calls “Dream Houses” which explore dreams using architectural elements as metaphors. He has done some award-winning liturgical art for churches and has illustrated a book on the Stations of the Cross entitled Shadows of the Cross, Loyola Press, Chicago 1994.

Chris Scala sculpted the image of Christ. Based in Florida, he has been working in art since childhood. His work is found in public and private collections throughout the United States, and is more about ideas than style. Mediums include, but are not limited to, carved stone, built and cast metals, and a coral-like material that is cultivated in the ocean. The work Chris created for our chapel had its origins in the development of this ocean-generated material. Chris would like his artworks to provoke thought and introspection, and hopes the observer is willing to question his or her own perceptions when viewing his work.

Our Process – Building Consensus

In March 2000, the Steering Committee for the Centering the Spirit Campaign asked several Paulist Center Community members to serve as the Ad Hoc Art & Environment Committee for Chapel Renovations (AHAECCR). Charged with making recommendations regarding the worship space, including furnishings and artwork, the AHAECCR met regularly for more than three years. Co-chairs Pat Rutherford and Paula Cuzzo led the group. The other members of this committee were Leann Lesperance, Chris O'Rourke, and Jim Piantedosi, as well as Fr. Rich Colgan, CSP of the Paulist Center staff, with early contributions from David Flaschenriem and Marilyn Phelan.

The AHAECCR worked closely with Jean Carroon from Goody Clancy of Boston, the architect for the renovation project. During the first few months, the Committee helped to finalize the plans for the overall re-design of the Chapel, which included expansion of the sanctuary space, revision of the balcony seating, preservation of elements from the original Chapel (such as the Biblical text now found on the balcony overhang), and improved accessibility throughout. The Committee helped to select paints, stains, and floorings, and was particularly involved with the design of the Baptismal Pool, Ambry, and Tabernacle. This involvement with all aspects of the renovation process helped the Committee understand the context for the artwork, and later, to share with the artists this understanding of the “canvas” for their work.

At the same time, the AHAECCR began its discussions about the type of artwork that would be appropriate for the worship space. They investigated numerous possibilities by visiting churches and public spaces (in the Boston area and elsewhere), contacting experts in the field, reviewing architecture and church art literature, and searching the Internet for artist portfolios.

Throughout this process, the AHAECCR tried to use a “dialogos” model, each person listening and reflecting on a deeper level to come together with a new level of understanding, rather than presenting an individual opinion and trying to get others to agree with it. *The goal was to define a set of desirable attributes for the artwork, those that best reflected the faith and values of our community.* Toward this end, the Committee asked for input at various times from the PCC Worship Committee, Steering Committee, Pastoral Council, Staff, and the community at large.

In trying to define these criteria, the AHAECCR looked at pertinent theological, pastoral and canonical issues, and considered the aesthetical, financial, and practical aspects of the project. Ultimately, the Committee created a list of values and principles, and used this list when reviewing all submissions.

In the preliminary phase, the AHAECCR considered over 100 artists. After applying the values and principles gleaned in the dialogos process, they reduced that number to 36. The Committee sent each of these artists a packet of materials outlining the mission and ministries of the Paulist Center, as well as plans for the chapel renovation, and asked them to submit a portfolio or other materials for consideration.

After careful examination of all submissions and prayerful discernment, the AHAECCR trimmed the list of potential artists to four. Again, the Committee conferred with various committees at the Paulist Center to seek consensus on these selections and determine the next steps. In October 2000, the AHAECCR mailed a detailed program book to these four artists, including detail about the architectural plans of the renovated worship space, the values that formed the decision-making process, and more information about the Paulist Center Community. At this point, the Committee told the artists that the major piece of sanctuary artwork would be a cross.

When the artists' initial proposals arrived in early December 2000, the AHAECCR learned that the U.S. Catholic Bishops had issued a new document on church art and environment, entitled *Built of Living Stones*, which replaced the earlier *Environment & Art in Catholic Worship*. Drawing heavily on the revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, this document stated that sanctuary artwork [now] must include a Crucifix (a Cross with an image of the Crucified Christ). Since this requirement did not exist in the earlier document, the AHAECCR had to reopen the dialogue regarding the type of artwork that would best enhance the Community's worship in the chapel.

Based on additional discussions with various committees, community members, and the four prospective artists in the early summer of 2001, the AHAECCR revised its recommendations. They communicated these new directives to the artists; in addition to the constraint involving the Crucifix, the sanctuary artwork should include images of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity.

After several months of discussion with these artists, the AHAECCR determined that two – Chris Scala (from Florida) and Randy Dixon (from California) – should meet with the AHAECCR, Steering & Worship Committees,

and staff for further discussion. In the fall of 2001, Chris and Randy came to Boston to present their ideas, learn more about our community, and study the chapel space in person. Following their visit, the AHAECRC met with various PCC groups to consider both proposals.

Because there were elements in each proposal that spoke deeply to the values expressed by the Paulist Center Community, the AHAECRC decided to invite both artists to collaborate on this project. Despite having never met before, Chris and Randy agreed to work together to design the sanctuary artwork.

Over the next several months, the AHAECRC worked with the artists as they prepared their final designs. In April 2002, Chris and Randy returned to Boston for a weekend retreat with the Committee to present the final proposal. Consensus emerged from that meeting, and their conceptual plans were approved.

Several issues further delayed the project, including contract negotiations with the artists, development of detailed specifications to determine the appropriate lighting for the artwork, and difficulty finding a tree to meet the specifications of the artist and the chapel. Between August 2003, when the right tree was located, and January 2004, the three pieces were completed and shipped to Boston, and lighting and structural preparations were completed in the chapel. On January 10, 2004, the Paulist Center Community celebrated the installation of its new sanctuary artwork at a Mass of Blessing.

The immediate and ongoing positive feedback regarding this artwork is indicative of the great work, prayer, and persistence by all involved – including those who contributed to the Centering the Spirit Campaign and all the members of the Paulist Center Community.

Values that Shaped Our Process

Accessible

- Not representational, open to interpretation
- Something that anyone can look at and derive meaning
- Each person can connect
- ‘Simply Complex’
- Not purely abstract
- Leads us to prayer
- Uses traditional Christian/Catholic symbols in a contemporary way, e.g., corpus and cross
- Identified as part of Catholic tradition
- Identifies our chapel as a Christian place in the Catholic tradition
- Not ‘in your face’ Catholic
- Physically accessible
- Visible from all angles
- Accessible = inclusive = welcoming = social justice
- Not so accessible that it doesn’t say anything

Multi-valent

- See different things at different times of one's life
- Multiple meanings
- Multi-valent seems related to 'accessible' heading
- Textural, not a snapshot or a photo
- Possesses a healthy tension; things are in balance
- Timeless, ages well
- We age well with it- from 13 to 70 year old
- Engaging, has a sense of mystery
- Like Water and Oil the art possesses different levels of meaning; like the sacraments which offer grace
- Goes with liturgical actions
- Equally relevant in all liturgical seasons
- Embodies Hecker's vision and the Paulist Spirit, i.e., the American experience, what church needs to be, Democracy, the risen Lord and Pentecost, the Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit

- Relational: 'God with us'
- God in our midst
- God calling us out of ourselves into connection and community
- Call to prayer
- Feminine side of God
- Recalling the roots of Judaism- How God brought the world into being (Genesis)
- The Hecker/Paulist vision, the Holy Ghost chapel
- Richness, outpouring, comfort
- Fulfillment, future
- Mission, call to community
- Gifts of Spirit enlivening people
- A dialectic of peace and agitation, comfort and challenge
- Fire warms, inspires, burns
- God in each of us
- Breath of life
- We are people of the Word (Scripture)

Paschal Mystery

- No death without resurrection
- Hope
- Sense of resurrection; life and death
- Our story
- Past, present and future
- Fullness of life
- That into which we invite people
- Challenge and comfort
- Connection to suffering
- God suffering, Jesus transcendent
- Gethsemane, Good Friday, Easter
- Crucified Jesus appearing to the 12- The gift of the Spirit and Peace in His breathing on them
- Ezekiel- 'Dry bones'; Community rising, being enlivened, renewed
- Richness of sacramental symbols
- Vulnerability

Crucifix - Considerations

- Should the cross/crucifix be the central piece or should it be processional?
- How can we have the corpus suggestive or symbolic of resurrection?
- How can we have a corpus image that is inclusive of gender, race, etc., that speaks to our community?
- If Trinitarian, what images of the first and third persons of the Trinity might we consider?

People Instrumental to this Process

Paulist Center Staff

John Ardis, CSP – Director

Rich Colgan, CSP

Joe Ciccone, CSP

Drew Deskur

Barbara Dunay

Bill Furber

Patrick Letourneau

Charlie Martin, CSP

Vusi Miya

Joe Power

Susan Rutkowski

Patricia Simpson

Donna Stiglmeier

Ad Hoc Art & Environment Committee

Pat Rutherford, Co-Chair

Paula Cuzzo, Co-Chair

Rich Colgan, CSP

Leann Lesperance

Christopher O'Rourke

Jim Piantedosi

Steering Committee for the Centering the Spirit Campaign

David O'Connor, Chair

John Ardis, CSP

Sonia Caus Gleason

Sheila Connors LeDuc

Mary Lesko

Patricia Simpson

Levering White

Worship Committee

Barbara Lapinskas, Chair

John Ardis, CSP

Rich Colgan, CSP

Drew Deskur

Leann Lesperance

Jim Piantedosi

Patricia Shechter

Patricia Simpson

Levering White

Others

Jean Carroon, Architect, Goody, Clancy & Associates

Dave Toole, community member and volunteer extraordinaire

Eleftheria Themistocles (aka E. Judith Lee), who remembered the Paulist Center in her will and whose family asked that her significant gift be designated to the sanctuary art work in memory of both Eleftheria and their parents, Peter and Claire Themistocles.