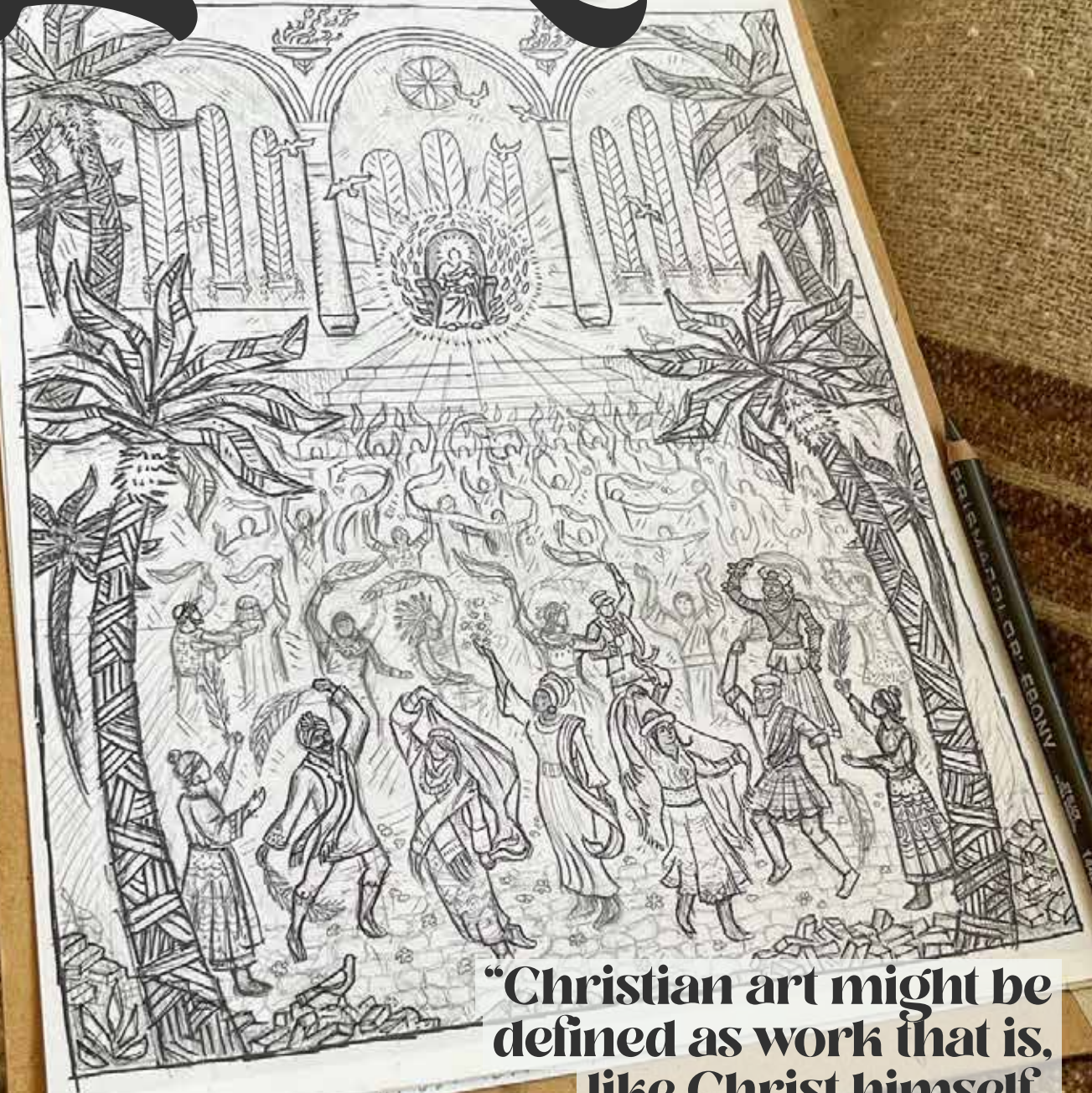


Speak out!



“Christian art might be defined as work that is, like Christ himself, full of grace and truth.”

—Andrew Peterson

There is nothing quite like watching an artist attentively engaged in the work of their craft, whether a potter throwing clay on the wheel, a painter spreading oils on a canvas, a dancer moving through the intricacies of a routine, or a pianist laboring with love over the keys of a piano. There is something spell-binding and wondrous about unfolding efforts of creativity.

Perhaps part of the reason why this is so is that we have been made by a God in the divine image to work creatively with the materials of our world. Our creativity in being and in doing offers a little echo of the handiwork of God within our souls to the world.

Salvation in Jesus Christ is also a work of God's creativity in us, as the Apostle Paul writes: "if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). In another place, Paul describes the salvation life as God's "handiwork" or "workmanship" (Ephesians 2:10), using the Greek word *ποίημα* (*poiema*), from which we derive our word for the literary artistry of a poem. In Jesus Christ, we are, in a sense, God's work of art.

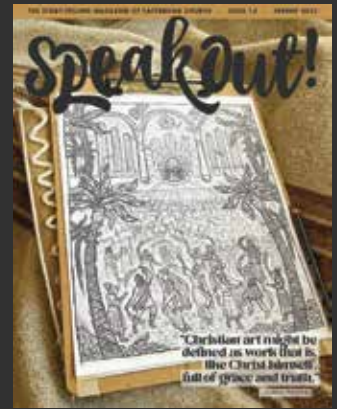
Throughout the Bible we find examples of creativity offered to God and His purposes. Notably we encounter this in the construction of the tabernacle, where God sets apart Bezalel and Oholiab for creative craftsmanship, filling them "with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills" (Exodus 31:1). Their lavish creativity was used by God for His purposes in forming a new identity for His people after Egyptians enslavement and establishing a central place for gathered worship. Creativity and artistry are there in the early days of God's salvation story.

Renowned artist and Christian author, Makoto Fujimura, writes about this connection in his book *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making*:

Perhaps, I ask as an artist, being an artist is not an anomaly to faith, but is central to faith and to the place of the church in the world; and in order to understand the fullness of the grace of God, we all must think, act, and make like an artist. (87)

While we may not all be artists in the classic sense, there is a sense in which our discipleship is a work of creativity. Through Jesus the Word of God and by the power of the ever-moving Holy Spirit and in the presence of the Father who is the Creator God we live as both God's works of art—we display His salvation handiwork—and artists of God's kingdom—we're involved in God's redemptive and restorative work in a broken world.

May this latest issue of *Speak Out!* give us glimpses of the creativity of God within the life of our church that inspires us to let the artistry of our faith overflow to God's glory!



As believers, we know that we were created to create! A part of what makes visual art so beautiful is the process that goes into the final product that we find hanging in a gallery. This Spring, our cover issue is a sketch by Jonathan Shaw based on Revelation 7:9-10 that will soon become a painting hanging in Eastbrook's Main Lobby!

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A Note from the [Guest] Editor:

This issue of *Speak Out!* looks into the visual arts here at Eastbrook Church. While there are many other forms of art (that we will get to with further issues!), we wanted to focus in on the visual arts precisely because to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ in 2023 and to find your vocational call as a visual artist is an increasingly difficult road. There are many more artists in this church than just those that we feature in this issue, but these faithful brothers and sisters here at Eastbrook are aiming to do what the quote on the cover says: to be truth-tellers in a world in which truth seems to be fiction, and to do so with grace and beauty. Their work draws people in with both grace and truth, and they see in such a way that hearkens back to 1 Samuel 9:9 which says, "Formerly in Israel, if someone went to inquire of God, they would say, 'Come, let us go to the seer,' because the prophet of today used to be called a seer." Eastbrook has always been a place that has celebrated the seers among us, the visual artists, and has given them a platform to help us see more of God and His grace and truth in this world. I pray that it will only continue to be a place in which the arts are not just accepted, but are truly celebrated. —Asher Imtiaz



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Grace Winter

by Kathy Gaillard

The Bible references *grace* as unmerited favor and love of God. Grace Winter, a member of Eastbrook Church and former Eastbrook intern, honors her name daily. Grace loves God and she makes conscious efforts to see God in all things—*especially art*—as she strives to live out her faith daily. While seeking small ways to display the love of God in the workplace, Grace is blessed that she does not have to look far to see and experience beauty and the awesome works of artists while working as a graphic design coordinator at the Milwaukee Art Museum.

Going back as far as she can remember, Grace has always loved art. She credits one of her teachers for encouraging her interest in art and helping her recognize it as a viable career path. Throughout her sophomore and junior years in the Greenfield School District, Grace took classes focused on art and visual aesthetics, thinking it might be “pretty cool” to combine her love of visual arts with design. For a time, she even entertained the notion of becoming an art teacher.



Grace was blessed to have ample opportunities to further explore and hone her artistic skills. Internships at Eastbrook and, later, the Milwaukee Art Museum enabled her to refine her skills into a career focused on graphic design. After graduating from high school, Grace volunteered as a graphic designer at Eastbrook Church prior to starting college. And, while enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, she worked as a paid summer intern at Eastbrook. During her tenure at Eastbrook, Grace’s assignments included working on weekly bulletins, illustrations for sermon series and ministry communications, and the Connect, Grow, Serve brochures. Grace also interned again at the Milwaukee Art Museum before graduating from college.

Just prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Grace earned a degree in Design and Visual Communication, and Art History. Unfortunately, the pandemic delayed employment opportunities for her as the country shut down, but it did not deter Grace from pursuing her passion. Throughout the pandemic, she stayed busy freelancing as a graphic designer. When businesses slowly began to reopen, she reached out to some of her contacts at the Milwaukee Art Museum and was soon hired as a design coordinator, a position she has now worked in for more than a year.

“In many ways, my relationship with art is influenced by my faith. They are both intangible and yet so foundational to my life.”

Daily, whether she is designing labels or constructing a maquette (a small scale model use to help exhibition designers or curators to visualize the space and layout before they curate a wall or exhibit), Grace looks for

opportunities to incorporate her faith.

“Working in an artistic setting, I am surrounded by beautiful objects, but some days I’m so busy that I don’t get a chance to appreciate them. Sometimes, when I need to clear my head, I make a conscious effort to walk out to the contemporary gallery. I see these beautiful things that are at my fingertips. They remind me how we often get so caught up in the day-to-day, that we forget to appreciate our surroundings or give God His due, value and worth. I get to interact with these awesome things (and God). I just have to remind myself to take the time to be present and to appreciate them,” said Grace.

“*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it*” (John 1:5, NIV) is one of Grace’s favorite Scriptures. The contrast between light and darkness is not lost on her keen visual eye but, more importantly, that Scripture reminds her to allow her light to shine even when it feels that the world is engulfed in darkness.

“That verse is emblematic of our world as a whole. It’s a visual representation of our world and God’s presence in it. It reminds me to let the God in me shine, even when darkness surrounds us,” said Grace.

These days, Grace enjoys her role of supporting various departments at the Art Museum. She is also grateful for the opportunity to cultivate her artistic skills. She hopes that one day she will not only support those departments but direct them by placing her own artistic stamp on projects. Given her love and passion for art, there is no doubt that she will achieve that goal. ■

Kathy Gaillard joined Eastbrook Church in 2022. She enjoys participating in the Women's Bible Study and serving with the Food Pantry.

If you are interested in becoming a Summer Intern here at Eastbrook Church, fill out the application online at eastbrook.org/internships.



A Divine Spark by Asher Imtiaz

“Art moves through us. It is colored by our individuality, but we are not precisely its origin. Or, to put it differently, a piece of art may originate with us, but we originate somewhere larger ourselves. We are, each of us, more than we seem, more than the sum of our merely human components. There is a divine spark animating each of us, and that divine spark also animates our art. When we dedicate a piece of art to something larger than our ego, that something larger becomes a felt presence. There is a breath of the divine that blows through us as artists and blows through our art as well.”

This is a quote from Julia Cameron’s book, *The Artist’s Way Every Day: A Year of Creative Living*. Jonathan Shaw reads from it every day and finds it very encouraging and motivating. The book was given to him in 2011 by his father, who is also an artist.

When Jonathan was young, he was deeply inspired by his father who traveled extensively to make films in different countries like Peru, Greece, India, and New Zealand. His father specialized in documentary filmmaking, exploring various cultures and religions, and sometimes worked on adventure and ski films. Jonathan remembers growing up and his father always bringing items home from different countries. When his father returned from India, he brought back with him Indian textiles, rugs, tapestries, and wooden carvings that Jonathan found fascinating. The intricate patterns and aromas in these objects left a lasting impression on him and greatly influenced his artistic style. Jonathan has a fondness for creating whimsical, folklore-inspired art that celebrates the beauty of nature, inspired by his childhood experiences with his father.



Jonathan grew up in a Christian home and always had an interest in Jesus. “I didn’t grow up in a home where superheroes were a big thing. I was more fascinated hearing about Jesus’ miracles. He was, in a sense, my superhero when I was young,” he explains. But he hastens to add, “I still like Star Wars, though.”

Jonathan’s artistic journey began in grade school, where he gained momentum and inspiration with the help of great art teachers during elementary, middle, and high school who encouraged him to keep pursuing his passion. In high school, he considered various career options including art therapy and art education, but his heart yearned to become a full-time professional artist.

For college, Jonathan contemplated attending Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, but he chose the liberal arts route to be around a diverse group of people. He attended several schools, including Judson University, University of Wisconsin, and a community college near Aspen, before finishing his degree at Seattle Pacific University, where he was exposed to a vibrant art and music scene.

After college, Jonathan returned to his family farm in Wisconsin to create folk art. Those post-college years were filled with an assortment of odd jobs, ranging from an arts and crafts camp director, camp counselor, handyman, custodian for Elmbrook Church, and teacher. He even spent three-and-a-half years as a mailman, but a divine spark began to stir deep within his soul. He realized that he did not want to spend another decade doing the same things. Instead, he longed to pursue his dreams.

The dream was not simply about showcasing his works in galleries, but about manifesting his ideas and turning them into reality. As he explains, he longed “to live the artistic lifestyle—to create artwork, share it and sell it.” Although he had nurtured this dream since his teenage years, he’d begun to lose interest in it.

It was while working as a mailman that Jonathan felt a divine spark reigniting his artistic flame. For a year, he cultivated this desire by seeking the mentorship of two artists online and creating art after work.

The image of Peter walking on water haunted him, and he knew that if he took the step to pursue his art, the Lord would keep him afloat. He believed that the God of miracles could provide for an artist. And so, he stepped out of the boat, into the unknown waters of his artistic journey.

For two years, he has been walking on water with God, pursuing his dream of being an artist. This journey serves as a testament to the power of faith, perseverance, and following the call of the heart.

Jonathan points to some early influence from other Christian artists. An early encounter with conceptual-based work came in high school, when he received a book, *FAITH + VISION: Twenty-Five Years of Christians In Visual Arts*, produced by CIVA that really inspired him to interact and think about such works.

Another life-changing interaction with a Christian artist came in 2009, when Jonathan encountered the writings of the artist Makoto Fujimura. Jonathan read where Fujimura was talking about the sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50, who comes to Jesus when he’s meeting with Simon the Pharisee. The woman weeps at Jesus’ feet and she brings down her hair, dries His feet, kisses His feet, and then pours out the alabaster jar of oil/perfume.

Jonathan recalls, “Makoto merged that story with artists, that artists can be seen as frivolous and as a waste. Why are you spending so much time and resources to create artwork, create all these things? And it’s like, to Jesus, that outpouring is beautiful, that offering is beautiful.” Jonathan later created a painting reflecting on the same theme (at right).

Reflecting on his process, Jonathan explains that he starts his work in the sketchbook, where he finds intimacy in the smaller scale. From there, he blows up his work onto canvas. When working on his scriptural pieces, he reads Scripture and often doodles in the margins of his Bible. He begins with small paper and then revisits notes and sketches, sometimes over a period of years, until a piece is fully realized. His process is meditative and thorough, similar to the natural world, laying down seed and seeing what takes root. “There’s a germination that happens underneath the surface that you can’t really see,” he says. “Then there will come a season where it emerges from the ground. That’s how it goes for my biblical work.” He wants to expand beyond his biblical work and connect with artists outside of the church, so he is considering portraits and naturalistic landscapes to have a place in the secular art realm. By creating work that is not as explicitly Christian, he hopes to convey gospel messages through the vehicle of naturalistic art.

“Throughout my life, I have processed my experiences through the art of drawing and painting,” Jonathan explains. “It wasn’t until I was around four or five years old that I began to speak, and my delayed verbal communication may have contributed to my enhanced visual communication skills. To me, creating art through drawing and painting has always been a place to contemplate: an ideal way to reflect on life, explore my faith, and reminisce on memories.” ■

Jonathan is currently the artist-in-residence at Oholiab’s Visual Art Gallery (see p. 7). You can find his artwork online at yehonatan-art.com.

“Judas was livid at Mary’s act, and argued that the nard could have been sold and the money given to the poor (Mark 14:5). Pragmatism, legalism, and greed cannot comprehend the power of ephemeral beauty. The opposite of beauty is not ugliness; the opposite of beauty is legalism. Legalism injures by giving pragmatic answers to our suffering. Legalism takes away life by forbidding the nard to be spilled onto our feet. Artists, like Mary, can intuitively give generatively and break open the oppression. Often, in the church and in the world, pragmatism and legalism stand in the way.” An Excerpt from “The Beautiful Tears” by Makoto Fujimura, which inspired Jonathan’s painting (below)

“Tears, Hair, Kisses, Oil” by Jonathan Shaw





GET TO KNOW AN EASTBROOKER:

Chrystal Gillon-Mabry

by Mari Reitsma Chevako

Eastbrook member Chrystal Gillon-Mabry doesn't remember when she first called herself an artist. She just remembers being an imaginative child in a household where her mother did crafts and her father displayed his creativity jerry-rigging things around the house to keep them working.

After high school, Chrystal went on to earn a B.A. in art education at Alverno College, but she realized early on that she wasn't interested in teaching. She just liked to do art.

So after working eleven years at Goodwill Industries, she went back to school, this time at Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design where she earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts. The art smells of the building and the intense atmosphere of making art was contagious and highly motivating. It was here she felt totally at home. Here, she experienced everything she could about drawing and painting, photography, silk screening, photography, printmaking and more.

After MIAD, Chrystal returned to work at Goodwill in order to pay off her student loan. She was at Goodwill for another twenty-three years. In her final eight years there, she served as the Art Facilitator of the Artistic Enhancement Program, a program Chrystal and her supervisor developed and which Chrystal ran, assisting adults with different abilities to create, exhibit, and sell their fine art. The program participants were paid for their art, which helped them develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments and their abilities.

It was alongside her growing relationship with God that Chrystal's art was incubated.

That relationship began when she was about ten years old and started attending church with her cousin. She can hardly recall a time since then when she didn't desire God. "I just remember being in church wanting more of Him," she reflects.

Chrystal's art is rooted in her faith and the questions it poses. It's also rooted in stories about her personal experiences "living while black" in America, reflections on growing up, and cultural experiences and influences that have been instrumental in shaping who she is.

Her work is sometimes whimsical, sometimes serious, sometimes satirical. It brings together the comfortable and uncomfortable, the things she likes and doesn't like.

In the 1990s, at a folk art festival in Alabama, Chrystal made her first collage sitting in a hotel room with a friend. She found the form suited her. She'd been picking up and collecting bits of things her whole life. It's a habit born of curiosity and an urge to recycle that left family members checking twice with her before throwing anything away: is it art or trash?

When you look at one of Chrystal's collages – or assemblages – you'll notice there's a lot going on. She uses conventional fine arts materials, such as pastels (dry, oil, pencil); paints (acrylic, watercolor,

house, and spray); and drawing materials (pencil, charcoal, Conté, ink, and marker). She combines these with unconventional elements: torn paper, cut paper, recycled paper, wallpaper, handmade paper, and Xerox copies on paper. You’ll also find in her pieces wood, metal, beads, Scrabble tiles, colored threads, string, and other trinkets found and recycled.

You really need to study her work to identify all the parts, and then step back and put the story together. And even without knowing much about her, her stories come through: about faith in Jesus, African American history, nostalgia for the 1950s and ‘60s, and her own preferences and tastes, like watermelons and chickens.

An April 2022 exhibition at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art called “Ain’t I a Woman” included several of Chrystal’s pieces (see image at right). In fact, the exhibition’s advertising featured a detail from one of her collages. In those pieces, we find a Victoria’s Secret model keeping company with Harriet Tubman and Playboy bunnies. We find mirrors, scripture, suns, moons, crosses, flowers, stars, and so much more that together question what it means to be a woman and how women define themselves and their worth.

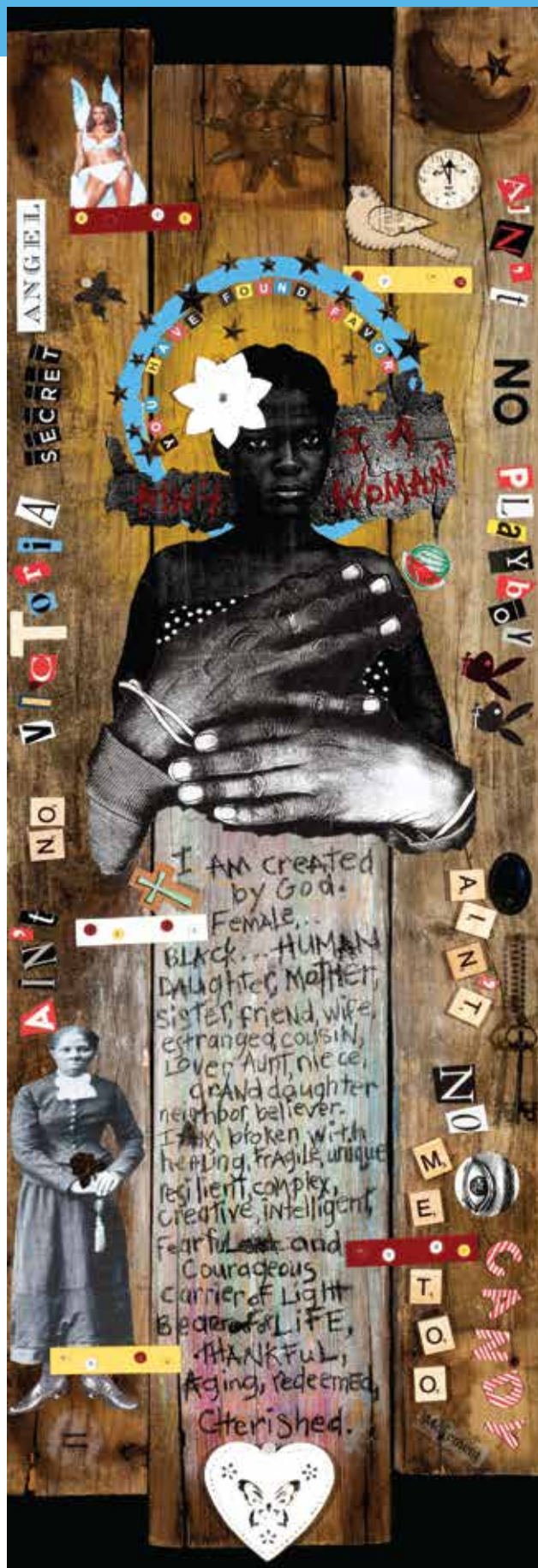
In another gallery show in early 2021 at Five Points Art Gallery and Studios in Milwaukee, Chrystal displayed a series of collages reflecting George Floyd’s death and police killings and the trauma endured by generations of African Americans. In a feature about the show aired on the PBS series “Black Nouveau,” Chrystal explains that the work in her series speaks with a stronger voice than usual.

“I came up through the Civil Rights Movement. So I want to teach in my pieces about our history, and though things have changed somewhat, the root causes are still there and need to be addressed. I want people to look at my work and question what’s in it and become informed.”

When Chrystal describes her creative process, she uses the words “wrestle” and “struggle.” At the same time, it’s a process that gives her pleasure and peace. “I’m a solitary artist,” she says. “I don’t go looking for opportunities to show my work or be an artist in the world. Opportunities come to me. I just want to create something true. I just want to express what God has put in me. And I hope my pieces provoke thought and conversation that can lead to change in hearts and minds.” ■

Mari Reitsma Chevako has been a member of Eastbrook Church for nearly 40 years. She’s active in ministries dedicated to promoting world missions and to welcoming internationals. She’s a writer and teaches composition to international students at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Chrystal’s work is currently on display at the Jazz Gallery Center for the Arts as a part of the “Word and Image” show, open now through April 15.





A Story of Redemption

OHOLIAB'S VISUAL ART GALLERY

by Megan "Mac" Littell

Artist Leslie Osborne always dreamed of opening an art gallery and studio. She talked about this dream with many of her artist friends, some of whom were fellow Eastbrookers.

Before Eastbrook Church was located on Green Bay Avenue, the church's space had a small art gallery and fellow artists supported and encouraged each other. Art has always been a part of the DNA and fabric of Eastbrook Church, says Osborne, and this was one of the reasons she liked being at Eastbrook, and why she and her husband, John, have been members since the '80s. The relationships built through Eastbrook gave her the space to dream and to make those dreams into a reality.

When the opportunity presented itself to buy a condemned building on the corner of Green Bay Avenue and Lawn Avenue, the Osbornes were excited for its potential. They bought the property. It was dirty and rundown; it took a year of dedicated work from several Eastbrook families to clean and renew the space. They renovated the upstairs apartments into

livable spaces and the downstairs became a gallery and studio.

Osborne describes the building's history as a story of redemption. The building seemed beyond repair, but became a home for renters and a place for art to be created and celebrated. The Osbornes received a grant from the city of Milwaukee that allowed them to establish a rain garden; all rainwater that runs off the roof nourishes the backyard, which is full of native Wisconsin plants. The whole building, yard included, speaks of redemption and the beauty that can come from worn down things. From hard work, dedication, and a dream, Oholiab's Art Gallery was born and hosted its first show in 2014.

The art gallery's name, Oholiab, comes from the book of Exodus. After God delivered the Israelites from enslavement in Egypt, they spent 40 years in the desert, slowly making their way to the Promised Land. During this time, God instructed Moses to have the people build a tabernacle, the place where God would dwell. God appointed artists to create the tabernacle and the

things that would fill it; two artists, Bezalel and Oholiab, were called to use their artistic skills for the tabernacle (see Exodus 31:1-6). To the Osbornes, this story of artists creating for God was inspirational and the perfect name to embody the dream and vision for the space.

Osborne says of herself and fellow Christian artists, "we are God's people wanting God's story to be told here". Often the arts community feels like a desert, but the story of Oholiab and the building of the Tabernacle took place in a desert where there were too many resources being brought by the people and they had more than enough. In the art world, this rarely happens. They loved the image of God providing for the work of artists.

Oholiab's vision has always been to create a space for artists who have a Christian worldview to be encouraged and supported. Osborne champions the artist by affirming that "being an artist is a worthy and noble calling. It's good to be an artist." In a world that sometimes views the arts as inconsequential or misunderstood, this affirmation is essential. The gallery also provides a space to bring people together around the visual arts and to help bridge the gap of understanding and experiencing the arts. The gallery hosts artist talks at the beginning of each new exhibit, which allows people to learn and connect.

The book *For the Beauty of the Church* says, "the arts elevate, deepen, and sharpen each of these basic sensory actions [such as seeing and touching] and prime them as acts of worship." In her work as a ceramicist, Osborne is worshipping as she creates. She describes her own creative process as a "dance with the Holy Spirit." God is the ultimate artist, we only need to look at ourselves and the beauty and complexity of the human body, or out in nature to see all of God's artistry. By soaking in the arts, appreciating it, and participating in it, we can engage more fully with God.

I would encourage you to step across the street and visit Oholiab's. The building has bright west-facing windows that allow a lot of natural light into the open space. Art is intentionally placed throughout the gallery and is displayed on a rotating basis. To the left of the gallery space, they have installed several branches that act as the transition from gallery to studio. The branches allow you to see the artists working; there is not a hard separation between finished products and art in the making.

Visit Oholiab's Art Gallery and engage with the beauty that God gives us through artists and what they create. ■

Find more information about Oholiab's current exhibitions, events, and gallery hours online at facebook.com/oholiabs.

