



## **The Vancouver Project Journal**

**Christen Mattix**

### **Sunday August 10**

Scott Kolbo and I drove up to Vancouver on Sunday August 10. Crossing the border was a snap even though we had a truckload of art supplies. We listened to one of Scott's favorite bands, Wilco, the whole way up. Vancouver is so green--there are sprinklers everywhere, including weird alien sprinklers that emerge out of plants and turn on when you least expect it. I have heard so much about Regent but this is my first time visiting the actual site. It is much more compact than I'd imagined, but thoughtfully constructed to conserve resources. There is a tall wind shaft reminiscent of a bell tower that provides ventilation by channeling air down into the lower level library. Duffy Lott-Gibb was waiting for us...she is a spunky, vivacious woman and greets us so warmly I feel like a rock star. (Duffy is our liaison at Regent who got us permission to paint at the Binney painting studio at University of British Columbia.) The painting studio is upstairs and is flooded with light from skylights and big windows. I am thrilled at how spacious and airy the room is--I'd been imagining that we'd be working in a dark basement. Duffy says, "The beach is straight down the hill. Unfortunately, it's a nudist beach--the world is full of interesting microcosms!" She laughs.

Scott and I have burritos at Red Burrito. We talk about the upcoming two weeks and the schedule. We are so tired that our eyelids droop.

We walk over to Gage Towers, the lodging for our retreat. The front of the building looks very international with at least 6 different natural flags. We sit in the lounge and wait for Brian Moss and Lance Mansfield to arrive from the airport. It's great to see them again. We check in for the night.

The stage is set for the retreat. It's hard to believe that everything has come together so smoothly.

## Monday August 11

We awoke to the sound of construction at 7 am. A huge condo project was in progress directly across from our tower. The artists participating in this project arrived in two's--Jen Grabarczyk and Matt Whitney, Jeremy Mangan and Scott Erickson. We are all staying together on the B wing of the 5th floor of the North Tower at Gage. It is easy to get lost trying to find the bathroom. We jokingly call it a Communist building because everything is cement and modern with a B grade, Sci-Fi movie twist. We have a comfortable, shared kitchen with two huge fridges, an oven and living room.

We spent the day getting moved into our new studio. Scott Kolbo and I went to Costco and stocked up on breakfast and lunch supplies for the gang. This was a true act of service of Kolbo's part, because he frequently made allusions to Purgatory during the shopping.

That evening, we all joined Brian and Lance at a posh Irish pub where the waitresses wore goofy little red kilts...I don't remember what we talked about, but this meal has a halo around it of easy conversation, laughter and joy. Already we seem to be feeling so comfortable being together. Later, we returned to the studio and Brian Moss kicked off our retreat with a beautiful prayer for us as artists, but first, as children of God. He tells us that the retreat is for us--to grow, to explore, to rest. He speaks of the sense of the unknown--the shape of things to come, and the hope that something good will come out of, and through us. He shares two poems. One is about affliction and the other about the quiet contemplation that evening brings.

It's comforting to soak in Brian's words and presence. We are all feeling the pressure to create something worthwhile for our church patrons. There is also a current of excitement in the room--a chomping at the bit to get started painting.

Each artist gives a short presentation of his/her own work and talks briefly about the work they hope to accomplish during the retreat. Everyone's work looks so much better than I remembered it.

After the presentations, Jeremy invited us to continue the exchange over a beer so we returned to the Irish pub. We talked about the importance of the Local. If more artists made their work *from* and *for* their unique geography and culture, it would matter more to people. Art could be as interwoven with daily life as the music scene is rather than an elitist sport. We talked about grad school and how it is not necessarily the route for all artists to take. The primary question to ask is what do you want your art to do and where do you want it to go? If you want your work to be taken seriously by the high art establishment, you either need to go to grad school or be very aware of the philosophical ideas and currents in contemporary art.

Jeremy Mangan shared his favorite definition of great art as a "moment of heartbreaking truth."

## Tuesday August 12

We started our time at the studio with a reflection. Scott Kolbo read from the end of the book of Jonah and shared how as an adult reading the account he is struck by the humor and satire in the narrative. Jonah is ticked off at God for letting his vine die, but doesn't give a hoot for the people of Nineveh. This story inspires Scott in his work which is often satirical, and almost always funny.

I shared from 1 John about how perfect love casts out all fear. I needed this reminder as I embarked on my painting today.

We all got down to work. I had a frustrating first day but this wasn't a big surprise because it takes me a while to get into my work. It has been a month since I painted and now I am trying to tackle a difficult subject for the first time. I moved to the back of the room where it's a bit cooler and quieter. There is construction going on outside the art studio too. I'm thankful for headphones.

Duffy stopped in to see the progress. There is very little to see as yet. We hoped she wasn't disappointed! I felt a bit like the miller's daughter in Rumpelstiltskin hoping to turn straw into gold.

Later, a woman with bright red lipstick came in. With her bold manner, it isn't a surprise to find out that she is an artist from New York City. She is Chris Anderson, who recently taught a portrait drawing class at Regent. Chris invited us all out for dinner on Granville Island. She wanted to make sure we did some sightseeing while we were in Vancouver instead of just holing up in the studio. We drove down to Granville Island and walked around taking in all the colorful tourist shops, the sea gulls, and the beautiful skyline. Outside a gelato shop, we took pictures of ourselves in haphazard poses by a huge ice cream cone sculpture with a sign at the bottom that said "Caution Unstable." Dinner with Chris was refreshing. She talked about her calling to be an artist, and how she converses with God about her painting as she paints. She made us all laugh and groan in sympathy when she described how grumpy she is when she doesn't make time to do her art. She said that the best way to serve the church is to be a really good artist. I felt such an affinity for Chris...partly because she is a single woman artist, and partly because she lives such a joyful life of adventurous faith.

## Wednesday August 13

Jeremy asked if he could give our reflection for the day. He read from Joshua 1:9. "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous..." He shared that we need to focus not on how we feel but on what He's told us to do. It is almost as if God is saying, "Was I not clear?" Jeremy compared God's tone to the tone of his mother who knew how to show tough love when necessary. Jeremy's reflection had a hugely motivating effect on me throughout the retreat.

Scott Kolbo presented the first concept in our triptych of themes: the Grotesque. (We hoped to build a cluster of interesting images, thoughts, and reflections around the ideas of the Beautiful, Sublime and Grotesque). He showed us the earliest depiction of a Christian. It's a piece of graffiti depicting a man worshipping a crucified man with a donkey head. The inscription reads "Alexamenos worships his God." (From our earliest days, we Christians have been viewed by the world as idiots.) We discussed the juicy text "Novelist and Believer" by Flannery O'Connor. Matt talked about how it encouraged him to just make his art as strong as possible and not worry about the audience. I shared one of my favorite quotes from the essay, "Poorly written novels--no matter how pious and edifying the behavior of the characters--are not good in themselves and are therefore not really edifying." Jeremy Mangan inserted this quote from Bill Cosby, "I can't tell you the key to success but the key to failure is to try to please everyone all of the time." Scott K. talked about the grotesque as a recombination of reality in surprising ways, often through distortion. He mentioned the horror of the animal/human hybrids in imagery such as medieval marginalia. The goal of most grotesque art in the modern era has been to punch the viewer, to shock them into responding ethically to human violence and injustice. Scott Kolbo showed some of the feeble attempts made by artists to respond to contemporary issues such as Abu Ghraib. Can paintings and drawings effectively communicate the horror of these events, or are other media such as graphic novels or film more suited to the job? Scott Kolbo talked about O'Connor's claim that art is a good in and of itself. He talked about one of the main conundrums facing us in the art world and church today. This is the problem of not being able to agree upon our definition of what constitutes "good" art. Neither the art world nor the church has any universal standards or definitions. Scott Erickson talked about a consumeristic mindset that has overtaken any higher aesthetic or moral criteria. "I like X, I don't like X." People in the church respond to art with this same consumer mindset. Worse yet, the art establishment has duped people into thinking they can't understand art. The power of the visual word has been subverted by explaining it with the verbal word. (I love how Scott E. talks about art as visual word. It gets so much closer to an incarnational understanding of the term.) We talked about ways that we can help our viewers approach the work of interpreting visual art with more confidence. We need to give viewers a few crumbs / clues to help them get started. Basically, we artists are stuck in the middle. Scott E. said that a hairball starts when 2 hairs connect. This is essentially what a corporation is. Since we can't be part of it, we have to orbit the giant hairball. I have no idea what this means, but it is hilarious and scary at the same time.

I had a great day drawing with the natural high I get when I'm really in engrossed in my work. I took two of the images that have been nagging me for a while and drew them--one depicts a woman in a burqa and one shows the eyes of a driver reflected in the rearview mirror. The rearview mirror is the equivalent of the slit in the birkah...there is a weird correspondence between the two images that creates an interesting tension.

## Thursday August 14

We have worked out a system for privacy and decorum in our shared bathroom at Gage Towers. When Jen and I use the bathroom, we put a post-it note on the door that says "Ladies in." And when the guys use the bathroom, they put a post-it on the door that says "Occupado Men."

Matt and I took the bus down to Opus, Vancouver's huge warehouse of an art store. I really enjoyed talking to Matt. He has a quiet intensity about him like a mystical poet.

One of the things I am enjoying the most about this residency is seeing everyone's unique ways of working. Jeremy's approach is slow and steady. He makes careful, precise brush strokes using acrylic paint. Once he puts his ear buds in, he is lost to the world. He sits in front of the easel for hours without taking any breaks. In fact, I barely talked to him all week in the studio because he is so focused! Matt has a similar focus, but his painting methods are the opposite. He slathers on oil paint in layer upon layer, often scratching through the top layer of paint to reveal the previous one. He uses the palette knife a lot. Scott-E moves around a lot more. He slings paint, silkscreens, talks, laughs, videotapes, works on his laptop. He has taken over one whole side of the studio, and has about 10 easels full of paintings. Scott Kolbo is more methodical and quiet in his approach. He has all his drawing tools laid out on a table in rows like specimens. He is testing out some new plastic paper that has an interesting slick surface. He uses a projector to project photographs onto the paper as a preliminary step before inking the drawings in. Jen is across from Scott. She has a piece of paper where she scribbles down her thoughts and prayers as she paints. Her process is the most like mine--she paints but she intersperses painting with stretching, walking, reading, and writing. Her work couldn't be more different though! She lays down a layer of white paint, then draws and paints abstract lines into it with a very limited palette of charcoal, sienna and ochre. Her paintings are like sutures, or songs. Jen and I both alternate between silence and music when we paint. I have been all over the place with drawing tools, photographs and paint tubes spread out all over the table. I am allowing myself to try new ways of working, something I really need right now as I explore future directions for my work.

I am now starting to find my way around campus. The last few days I have been lost most of the time, but I've been analyzing the crows that flock along the walkways. They walk like pigeons with a head bob inserted between each step they take. I've also come upon interesting things like a black stagecoach enclosed in glass parked by the side of the path. There's an Indian lodge of sorts and a big ugly clock tower made of concrete. I haven't been very impressed by the architecture so far--the main problem is that it is a hodge-podge of different things that don't seem to have any connection to each other or the landscape. There is a beautiful corridor of trees that provides a sanctuary of sorts.

Today, I gave a reflection about the power of praise based on the Jericho account, and a quote by the artist Ruscha from Hickey's article:

It would be nice if sometime a man  
would come up to me on the street and say  
"Hello, I'm the information man, and you have  
not said the word 'yours' for thirteen minutes.  
You have not said the word 'praise' for eighteen  
days, three hours, and nineteen minutes.

It was a peaceful and uneventful day in the studio. Everyone was focused. Jen has come down with the flu, but is determined to keep painting. We all feel for her.

## Friday August 15

After four days straight in the studio, we were ready to hit the galleries. There is a bus terminal conveniently located near Gage Towers. We took the bus down to the Vancouver Art Gallery, whose name is deceptive. It was actually a fair-sized museum. First we explored KRAZY! an exhibition of early animation and its progeny including manga and graphic novels. I really enjoyed the simple loveliness of an early German rendition of The Arabian Nights using jointed black silhouettes that were moved across the screen like shadow puppets. Upstairs, we took in a retrospective of the work of one of my favorite performance artists Zhang Huan. His work is so visceral and moving. There was a series of photographs of his face with Chinese writing painted directly on his skin that was pretty intense. I really enjoyed his huge paintings in which he used the ash from incense sticks to create shaded paintings of the American flag, and other political imagery. They were soft focus but photorealistic from a distance. After we had wandered through the rest of the museum, we explored a few galleries along Granville street. We found the most interesting work at Diane Farris and Equinox gallery. I was thrilled to see the haunting portrait by Nick Leopard at Diane Farris. Matt commented to me that it was probably the best painting there, and the least likely of all of them to sell. I agreed.

We decided to move our daily talk to the evening because it has been getting increasingly difficult to start on time in the morning. I summarized Dave Hickey's essay "Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty." Dave Hickey argues that the art establishment is threatened by beauty because it makes a direct appeal to the viewer who then no longer needs the wall text to help interpret the art. Beauty is subversive. Hickey also make the claim that it is praise and celebration that destabilizes the world...how do we as artists make work that praises what is truly worthy? It is the urgency of our message that makes our work beautiful. If we aren't trying to say something timely and important, our work won't be truly beautiful. Scott Kolbo talked about the difference between pretty and beautiful. Pretty things are decorative, but the beautiful is always surprising. This echoes Baudelaire's claim that the beautiful is always strange. I read a Wallace Steven's line that caused some controversy in which he says that Death is the mother of Beauty. A morbid interpretation of this line would be that death is beautiful. But it also got me thinking about seasons, and how winter gives birth to spring. In hope, we can claim that death is the mother of Beauty because resurrection lies on the other side of every death experience. "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies..."

## **Saturday August 16**

We spent the day at work in the studio. We have a running joke about making a reality show of us painting, and how boring it would be. Making art is not as sexy as it's cracked up to be.

Scott's wife Holly is in town for the weekend, and we are all doing our best not to be jealous. I have been feeling pretty lonely recently probably because my history with everyone in the group goes back less than a week. I long to hang out with someone who really knows me for a change. I'm sure a lot of us are feeling the same thing.

In the evening, we got cleaned up and changed out of our painting rags to go to Duffy and Julian's condo for dinner. We picked up two bottles of wine to bring along...It's a nice change to be in a home again. The Lott-Gibb home is beautiful and inviting, with splashes of terra cotta, gold and indigo, and an eclectic range of art from abstract work to icon paintings. Duffy and Julian take turns telling us stories...they have that charming and slightly awkward manner of a recently married couple. Duffy changes the subject before Julian can share anything embarrassing. Their kitchen is in the midst of renovations...we all sit in a circle in the living room while Duffy and Julian serve us wine and huge plates of delicious salad. Duffy told us about her dissertation on Mary Magdalene who fascinates her as an example of embodied faith. Every time Mary is mentioned in the Bible, she is doing something physical. The early church conflated Mary Magdalene with all the other Mary's in the New Testament, so it is Mary Magdalene who washes the feet of Christ, and Mary who tries to cling to Christ after he rises from the dead. For Duffy, who has a background in dance, Mary's embodied faith is a model. The early church viewed Mary as the worst of sinners who was nonetheless forgiven. Her story was held out to sinners as a cause for hope.

Scott and Holly Erickson regaled us with stories of how they met and got married. They are both really outgoing which is rare in a couple. We all came back to Gage Tower after delicious sundaes, and sat around and talked. We almost felt like family; I didn't want to go to bed. I suggested that we pray for Jen, and was amazed at how eager the guys were to lay hands on her and pray over her.

## **Sunday August 17**

After church, I decorated our dorm so that it feels more restful & aesthetically pleasing. It gave me great joy to see how much beauty can be coaxed out of the wild flowers (aka weeds), an oddly shaped piece of rusted metal, and grasses that I've collected around campus. Beer bottles and cans made good vases. I wanted to put to rest our recurring fear that our flat looked like the aftermath of a frat party.

I took a break from the studio today, and felt really rested and relaxed. Then in the evening I went and did a bit of painting. It turned out to be a frustrating experience because my painting medium was almost all gone and it was a horrible gooey consistency.

## Monday August 18

Brian arrived back today. He wandered around the gallery for a while taking pictures and chatting. Today was a rough day for most of the crew. Jen's flu climaxed. Both of the Scotts and I felt really discouraged about our work. We are all feeling the crunch now with only three more days to paint. I feel like I need to set some goals for myself.

We went to dinner at Tomato, an upscale, organic diner. The artist Erica Grimm-Vance and her husband Craig were there waiting for us. Erica talked about her new work and gave us all post cards from a recent show. She is interested in the art and the body as a kind of embodied text. She's constructing small paintings that serve as units of meaning much the way words do in a poem. Her thoughts connected with Duffy's thoughts about Mary Magdalene in interesting ways. Matt sat by Erica Grimm Vance so it looked like they shared some good words. (Chris Anderson also came to dinner but we were at opposite ends of the table. Too bad we didn't have a round table.) Matt, Scott, Jeremy and I talked about purity in art and whether it is morally acceptable to make work that many would deem kitsch in order to fund one's *real* work.

## Tuesday August 19

By Tuesday, Scott Kolbo could no longer face the idea of eating another ham sandwich. Our Costco run has served us well, but eating baby carrots and granola bars has lost its appeal. Thankfully, we have lots of other options including several Starbucks, a curry shop entitled "Curry Point," and the legendary Grounds for Coffee.

As a treat for everyone, Scott-E, Jeremy and I drove to Grounds for Coffee to pick up cinnamon rolls. Jen had heard that they make Vancouver's best cinnamon rolls so we decided to check it out under the guise of returning the beer bottles to the liquor store. (We wanted to surprise her.) At Grounds for Coffee, Scott-E hammed it up with the folks at the counter. He told our cashier about our art residency, and how we were prolific artists. The cashier winked and said, "Doesn't everyone say that?" (I think he is the type of guy that winks compulsively...but Scott-E took it as a challenge and on the drive back decides to make a cinnamon roll painting in a day to prove his point...)

When we returned to the studio, I went on a wild-goose-chase to find a Starbucks to grab coffee for everyone. We should have sent a coffee addict for this expedition. Finally, I returned with the tankard of coffee. Brian Moss gave us a wonderful devotional over cinnamon rolls and coffee. It seemed like an answer to the questions that the guys and I had been asking at Tomato last night. Brian used Nouwen's text "In the Name of Jesus" as the springboard for his reflection. Nouwen's writing for Christian leaders could have been written for Christian artists. He writes of the temptation of Christ in the wilderness as a temptation to be Important, Relevant, and Popular. He asked us two questions. First, how do you love people through your work? Second, what does reverent irreverence look like in your life? We talked about the importance of being around people who don't care about our medals and keep us real--friends, family, neighbors. We talked about being skillful artists as a way of loving people. I had a question about the word "relevant" because it seems like being relevant is important. Brian said the word's negative meaning in this context was "purely utilitarian." We talked about true relevance as a state of knowing what is going on in the [art] world, but not letting that drive you. It's a kind of authenticity--being who you are. Brian described our true calling as a calling to be irrelevant, an unadorned self, armed with vulnerability. He spoke of the worldly view of prayer as a royal waste of time, a completely irrelevant activity. However, it is through prayer that we become vulnerable and attentive to God. Brian called us to be a mystic in our work, to listen to God while we create. Brian shared Nouwen's three antidotes to the three temptations: Prayer, Community and Service. I love how Brian weaves poetry into his presentations--another completely "irrelevant" art form. He shared Wendell Berry's poem "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front." The poem is both tough and tender, and it ends with the hope-filled line "practice resurrection."

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,  
vacation with pay. Want more  
of everything ready-made. Be afraid  
to know your neighbors and to die.  
And you will have a window in your head.  
Not even your future will be a mystery  
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card  
and shut away in a little drawer.  
When they want you to buy something

they will call you. When they want you to die for profit they will let you know.

So, friends, every day do something that won't compute. Love the Lord. Love the world. Work for nothing. Take all that you have and be poor. Love someone who does not deserve it. Denounce the government and embrace the flag. Hope to live in that free republic for which it stands. Give your approval to all you cannot understand. Praise ignorance, for what man has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers. Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias. Say that your main crop is the forest that you did not plant, that you will not live to harvest. Say that the leaves are harvested when they have rotted into the mold. Call that profit. Prophecy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus that will build under the trees every thousand years. Listen to carrion - put your ear close, and hear the faint chattering of the songs that are to come. Expect the end of the world. Laugh. Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful though you have considered all the facts. So long as women do not go cheap for power, please women more than men. Ask yourself: Will this satisfy a woman satisfied to bear a child? Will this disturb the sleep of a woman near to giving birth?

Go with your love to the fields. Lie down in the shade. Rest your head in her lap. Swear allegiance to what is nighest your thoughts. As soon as the generals and the politicians can predict the motions of your mind, lose it. Leave it as a sign to mark the false trail, the way you didn't go. Be like the fox who makes more tracks than necessary, some in the wrong direction. Practice resurrection.

We spent the rest of the day painting. Brian's talk had a calming and invigorating effect on me. I had a great day in the studio, praying and painting.

Later on that evening, we set out for dinner at Suga Sushi. The sidewalks were swarming with students which seemed a bit odd given that classes don't start for a while. It turned out that Radiohead was giving a concert. My cousin Byron, who lives in Vancouver, joined us. We were tired of talking about lofty matters by this point, so the guys entertained us by swapping childhood stories of playing with fire, fireworks, etc. Later, after green tea ice cream courtesy of Jen, we returned to the studio to think about the sublime. We gathered around the projector instead of a campfire. I shared some images of the sublime in art. The conversation became more interesting as we discussed our personal experiences of sublimity. Scott-E talked about experiencing his own smallness when he was surfing and sank under the churning waves, wondering if he'd ever come back up again. He showed us a beautiful music video on YouTube of Sigaros that evokes the sublime. (It is this kind of rare, vulnerable moment in group conversations that I live for.) Kolbo asked whether we thought Mel Gibson's film "The Passion" was successful in communicating the beautiful, sublime and grotesque. Does the avant garde strategy of shocking the viewer into deeper reflection still work? Was "The Passion" successful primarily because Christian audiences aren't accustomed to seeing a lot of violence in films? Are viewers too jaded to be moved? Kolbo shared how his feet have left the ground several times at concerts or films, but he is hard-pressed to name a similar experience in front of a painting. I think a painting has a cumulative effect on me over time...it's impact is usually too small to measure like a face that haunts me, a face that I return to over and over.

The conversation was rich, and I don't want it to end. But some of the more driven among us were hoping to paint again tonight. I walked Byron back to the bus and he told me that he enjoyed the evening...that it was a good change of pace. I doubt he will ever find himself surrounded again by a group of young people discussing the sublime. The rain was falling as insistently as a tropical rainstorm. By the time he got on the bus, he was soaked through. I went back to the studio and saw Scott-E and Matt wearing makeshift plastic tarps that they crafted in the hopes of catching the tail end of the Radiohead concert. They looked really goofy and we all had a good laugh. Unfortunately, the concert had already ended. I went to bed feeling full and content with the goodness of the past day.

## Wednesday August 20

Scott-E, Jeremy and I went down to Grounds for Coffee to deliver the completed cinnamon roll painting. The white paint is applied thickly so that it looks just like the creamy and delicious white glaze on top of the roll. Above the cinnamon roll is a red banner that says "glory." Thankfully, the winking provocateur was there along with his sidekick from yesterday. Scott sauntered up to the counter, and told them that he made them a painting in honor of their delicious cinnamon rolls. At first his words didn't sink in. Then the workers' faces all lit up and they smiled from ear-to-ear. We heard them yelling back to their manager and the other workers in the kitchen about the painting. The young provocateur looked at Scott and said with a hint of sarcasm and a wink: "It looks like you've been busy at this conference, eh?" We wished we'd caught the whole episode on film. With our mission accomplished, we headed into the studio.

We had a slow start today. No one seems to have slept well last night, and we are wearing a bit thin. I shared a passage from the Nouwen book "In the Name of Jesus" about being led like a child into the unknown. We had a really good prayer time. Jen led our closing prayer. She made us all hold hands in a circle and pray her unique rendition of "The Deer's Cry" (also known as the Breastplate of Saint Patrick). I think the guys were a bit embarrassed to hold hands, but they were good sports.

No one seemed in a rush to get started painting, so Scott K suggested we have a critique instead, which turned out to be a friendly conversation instead of the grueling grad school variety. For some people, it was clear what they would show in our travelling exhibit but for others (like Scott E who has created around 17 paintings), some editing still need to be made or the work needed more time for completion.

After the crit, we talked about different ways of integrating art and the church. We came up with two basic strategies. 1) Hire professional artists to make excellent art for use in worship. 2) Involve the whole community. For example, invite families to make banners for the church, or host art workshops for those curious about learning about art. The 2nd option seemed more popular with the group because it made art participatory. Kolbo talked about the artist Christo's grand projects such as Running Fence which got everyone working for a common goal, creating an almost religious experience of unity. In this kind of endeavor, the communal aspect is the focus and the end result is merely a by-product.

We talked about the challenge of getting churches to *really* support artists not just in words. Sometimes it's difficult for churches to understand that artists need a permanent space in which to work. Painting is different than pulling out a sewing machine occasionally. I am impressed by the church that has provided Scott and Jen with a room where they can paint year around. The idea of artist studios embedded in church architecture is intriguing. Providing free or cheap studio space is one of the most important ways that the church could support the work of artists of faith.

The rain pelted down today...there was a flash in the studio at one point, and I groaned internally thinking that it was one of the artists taking yet another photo. It turned out it was lightning followed by a loud rumble of thunder. The construction workers called it quits midway through the afternoon. It was actually quiet!

Duffy stopped by just before leaving to visit family in Utah. It was good to see her one more time, and she enjoyed seeing all the work we've created.

Victoria Brown, who was instrumental in envisioning this project, spent the afternoon with us. She was very relaxed and friendly. I didn't mind her poking around and looking at our work. Over pizza that evening, she told about how scientists have discovered that ants synchronize their many small activities to accomplish larger things with seemingly no blueprint. She likened it to the way human cities take shape over time with no overarching plan, yet a kind of organic structure can be observed at work. She also told how scientists have done tests in which individuals were asked to guess a number. Everyone was dead wrong, but the average of their guesses turned out to be only one number away from the correct number. I think this is a perfect apologetic for our project, and also for the necessity of church. Seeking the Truth should be a collective endeavor.

## Thursday August 21

It was sunny but cool, the first truly autumnal day. I took a long time waking up this morning, so I stayed in our Gage living room and worked on my drawing of a woman walking with crows.

Later, I started missing the gang so I headed down to the studio. At 3:00 pm, Jeremy Mangan finished his third painting, an ambitious diptych of three skyscraper barns. The degree of detail and accuracy is truly impressive. The rest of us have already called it quits, but when Jeremy finishes it is like a signal to start packing up our stuff in earnest. Scott Erickson puts on some lively hiphop music that makes the cleanup fun. Matt takes a break from cleaning by zooming around the floor on his belly on a skateboard. Matt's paintings are really wet, covered in thick oil paint. Fortunately, Jen has corners that he can use to transport the work. Later, the guys watch football, while Jen and I do our laundry. How much more stereotypical can we get?! I feel a bittersweetness at coming to the end of our retreat. The days have flown by so quickly. Several artists commented on how great it was to be paid to paint without distraction. It's also sad to see our little community split up. I'm so grateful for how harmonious our lives have been while living in pretty close quarters. However, we are all excited to return to the familiarity of our beds and families.

We set out for Pepitos to celebrate. An ugly lower entryway makes a terrific front for this wonderful restaurant...We feasted on some of the best Mexican food that I have ever had. My fajitas arrived sizzling. Afterward, Commander Kolbo treated us to yogurt sundaes. Jen is starting to feel more like herself again. She is so spunky now that she's feeling better.

We were all pretty exhausted. Last night, several people stayed up painting. Tonight, all we could do was "veg out." Scott Kolbo set up the projector and we watched "The Triplets of Belleville," a quirky animation from France about a cyclist, his midget mother, and their overweight dog. The drawing is beautiful, but we had to stop it midway through because we were all too tired.

## Friday August 22

We had already packed up the coffee maker, so Jen made a special delivery and brought us muffins and coffee. All the artists have been incredibly considerate and generous on this retreat...I found it impossible to be stingy knowing that these whole two weeks were a gift. We all hugged and parted ways, riding in the same cars in which we drove up. Scott Kolbo and I talked about the upcoming show, and how proud we feel to be part of this group of artists. Brian called to check in...We are all delighted at the success of this pilot project. Here's to many more!



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