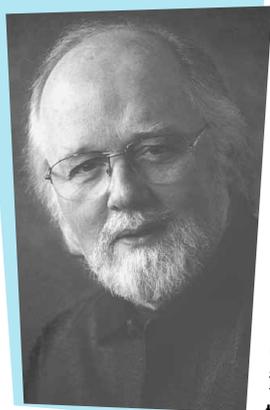


Perhaps it is my age or maybe it is the age in which we live but recently I have been hearing a lot about forgetting and remembering. I have been thinking about these two siblings not so much their presence in the daily routines of life (I can't find my keys or I have a meeting today.) but more for the insight they provide about who we are. It has been suggested that we live in a culture of amnesia – where the present looms so large that it radically diminishes awareness of the past. One is reminded of the ancient gathering in Athens noted in Luke's record, the Acts of the Apostles, – where the Athenians and the foreigners had no time for anything but talking or hearing about the latest novelty.

Memory is an important resource for life. Not just memory of the pleasantries of the past but memory which recalls both pleasure and pain and discerns something of the truth of what has gone into making us who we are. Memory is commonly linked with the notion of identity – whether collective or individual. Theologian Miroslav Volf does this in his recent book, *The End of Memory: Rightly Remembering in a Violent World*. He writes of how our self perception is rooted in what we remember. To lose or repress memory is to lose our true identity.



We are easily tempted to revise our stories in a manner that allows us to shape a more acceptable sense of ourselves, our family history, our culture or our nation. This is a temptation that draws

us into a false and unreal world. We are of course more than our memories we are also what we hope for in the future.

Planting Words

While I have been working through my latest series, images of hand and planting, I have been struck by the overlaps between the process of painting and the process of prayer. In both, there is a dance back and forth between intention and revelation, purpose and mystery, the analytical and the intuitive.

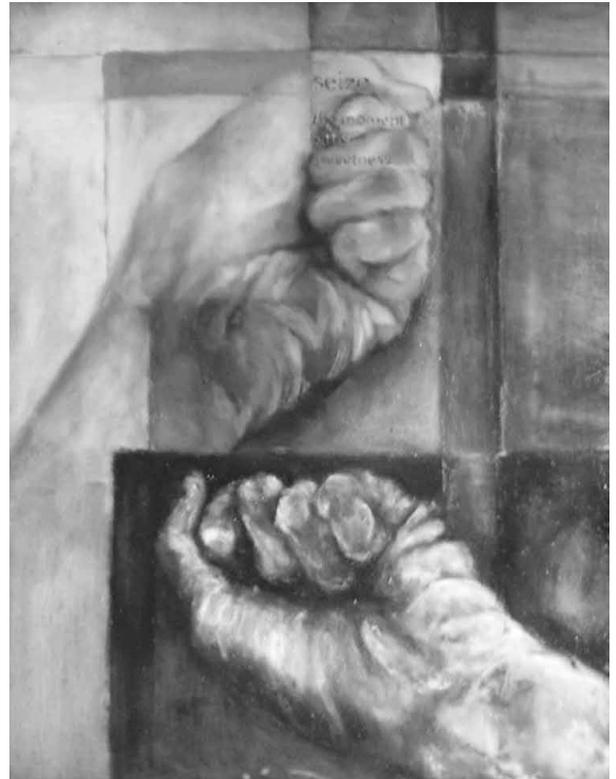
Like prayer, I come to a canvas often with vague images, half formed ideas, or sometimes just a seed, a word. Out of this grows an incredible sense of potential "fruitfulness", but I usually only have a vague sense of how that might develop.

Like prayer, this is done in hope. Hope of not just mere growth, but fruitfulness; that something meaningful, beautiful will grow out of the raw materials of lead, paper, pigment. Often, I am disappointed in what results, sometimes pleasantly surprised, but, always there is an element of revelation in the image that develops. The image bears a resemblance to the initial seed planted, but this is more often a genetic sort of resemblance rather than a strict representation.

Like prayer, this process requires weeding, pruning, the analytical, scraping away,

Volf writes, "A person with a healthy sense of identity... will let the future draw her out of the past and the present and will play with new possibilities and embark on new paths." Memory can be a context to help us interpret the present and anticipate the future.

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Seize by Sharon Helleman

questioning. While necessary, this part of the process is fraught with risk and doubt, If pushed too far, the questions simply paralyze instead of clearing ground. But without this weeding, the work unfurls wildly, while remaining "fruitless".

So, like prayer, painting requires trust. Trust that is able to enter this weeding and pruning process. Trust that whatever is real in the words that are my starting point won't be forever lost. Trust in order to give up what may seem so full of promise. Trust in accepting what does grow, even if it wasn't what was initially anticipated. Trust that there is something here, something worth putting effort into, and that in this, healing might be found. And that is enough to know in this waiting time. This is the hardest work of painting and of prayer.

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Canadian Churches: An Architectural History

By Peter Richardson, Douglas Richardson,
Firefly Books, 2007

Reviewed by Stephen Rowe.

One can appreciate Peter and Douglas Richardson's sumptuously illustrated (with 400 photographs by John De Visser) *Canadian Churches: An Architectural History* and see this as another beautiful coffee table book that has arrived just in time for the holiday gift giving season that can rest comfortably next to "Boat Houses of Muskoka" or the latest product by Robert Bateman, but this would be to sell the book seriously short. The Richardson brothers provide us not only with a comprehensive geographical and chronological survey of Canada's Christian sacred buildings but also place these monuments to faith in both a theological and sociological context.

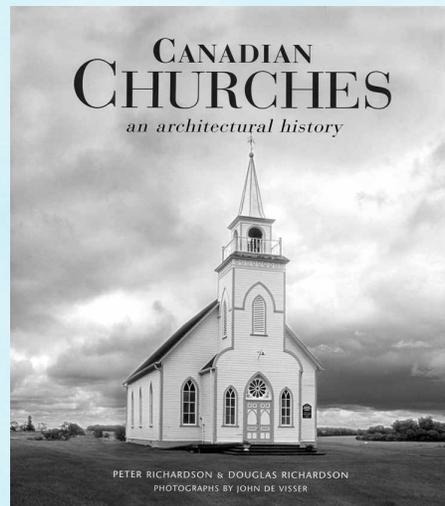
One of the book's strengths is the authors willingness tell not only the story of the Anglican Churches journey from austere neo-classicism to the romantic medievalism of the Arts and Crafts movement or the seemingly inevitable triumph of the Baroque in Roman Catholic Quebec but also to include the history of the Orthodox Church on the Prairies that begins with modest wood framed onion domed missions and ends with some of the most spectacular modern Churches to be found anywhere in Canada.

The book recognizes the importance of the humble parish church as well as the cathedral, in fact the book presents us with a dazzling variety of modest wood frame buildings ranging from nonconformist meeting houses to extravagant Victorian carpenter gothic. We are also treated to a chapter on the Byzantium revival in Ontario and the role the group of seven played in the decoration of Saint Anne's in Toronto. Space is also found for spectacular eccentric structures like the famous "Round Church" St. George's in Halifax or Ontario's majestic Sharon Temple that sit well outside our Palladian or gothic main stream.

The Richardsons do not limit themselves only to Churches (they include a lovely photo essay on Manitoba's remarkable collection of Eastern Rite bell towers). However

one does wish that the authors might have broadened their scope further to have also include a section on the remarkable monastic buildings of 18th century Quebec and although they define the concept of church broadly enough to include a fabulous prairie style Mormon temple in Alberta they include only synagogues that have been converted into Churches and as a result miss one of Canada's finest sacred building Toronto's Holy Blossom Temple.

Although architects and historians will appreciate the book's comprehensive survey of mid-century modernism (in both it expressionist concrete, rustic brick and wooden



manifestations) the casual reader would probably have preferred to see more work by contemporary architects. Scholars and practitioners may have wished for detailed plans and sections for many of the buildings. However these are mere quibbles, the Richardson's have produced a remarkable document that deserves the widest possible audience.

Stephen Rowe – is a Toronto architect with Stanford Downey Architect Inc.

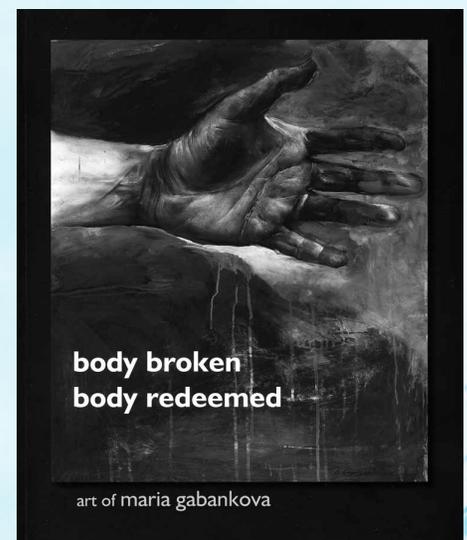
Body Broken, Body Redeemed: Art of Maria Gabankova

Piquant Editions, 2007

Maria Gabankova is an astute observer of human beings, both in the physical world of flesh and blood and in the internal realm of the spirit. The individual portrayed in her paintings is not the self-sufficient individual of modern Western culture but rather the individual isolated, vulnerable and alone, longing for something more.

This is art that unmask the pretence and hubris that so often attend human behaviour. It is art that protests against the dehumanizing influences that plague us, the violence, destruction and despair that attend the deep divisions in our social, political and religious landscapes, the battles that rage around us and within us.

Gabankova's work is philosophical; it looks for the deeper meaning of life. It probes beyond the fragmentations common to post-modern culture and searches for coherence and harmony. It acknowledges the truth about our existence as fragile and vulnerable; yet, the pain and suffering that afflict body and



spirit are illuminated by a reassuring ray which sustains hope amidst the darkness of life. There is a play of light and shadow in her depictions of the human figure that evokes not only what is seen with the eye but also what is experienced in the soul.

...The work collected here avoids the polarities of nihilism and triumphalism. Much of contemporary art leads us into a cul-de-sac from which there is no escape. ...too often the art found in religious settings is triumphalistic, naïve in its inclination to pander to our desire for joyful harmony while neglecting or perhaps avoiding the chaos of human brokenness and the dark side of our individual and social realities. Gabankova's approach resonates with the biblical story which offers us a holistic understanding of humanity, refusing the temptations of both nihilism and triumphalism.

Unveiling the Mystery

A festive week-long celebration that began with the opening of *Unveiling the Mystery: the Invisible Dignity Exhibition* at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery in Winnipeg this past September concluded with a benefit concert featuring singer-songwriters Carolyn Arends, Steve Bell and Bob Bennett. Over \$7,000 was raised for eleven year-old Hannah Taylor's *Ladybug Foundation* and Jamie McIntosh's *International Justice Mission*, Canada who both made moving presentations during the concert. "It was like being rocked gently in the middle of the Jordan River, and through the mist, getting occasional glimpses of the other side" observed one appreciative concert-goer.

And in between these book-ends was an array of events: the opening of a satellite Invisible Dignity exhibition at Booth College, a Sunday afternoon worship celebration in art and word, public lectures and chapels led by Dr. Calvin Seerveld at Booth College and the Canadian



Cherish and Protect by Yisa Akinbolaji

Mennonite University, art workshops and presentations by the Invisible Dignity artists to numerous Winnipeg schools throughout the week, and a Thursday Night ART TALK featuring presentations by the five participating artists as well as Dr. Seerveld's feature address *Turning Human Dignity Upside Down* before a packed house.

The Invisible Dignity Project grew out of discussions on the link between human-trafficking and the capacity of artistic expressions to invoke action and was the heart-child of a diverse group of individuals from across Winnipeg, Canada and the USA. In the end, it was a stirring testimony of what can be accomplished when the body of Christ in all its diversity joins together for the common good. This diversity was reflected in the five participating artists as well: Yisa Akinbolaji immigrated to Canada from Nigeria ten years ago, Jo Cooper is a

Forgetting and remembering

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There is something else at work here when we engage in recollection. Imagination engages memory to do its work. Walter Brueggemann is instructive on this matter. As he understands it "imagination is not a freelance ... operation that spins out novelty. [it is] a fresh liberated return to memory". One of the things memory is able to do is to affirm particularity something we commonly find in the Hebrew Scriptures. We are inclined to affirm sameness to preserve us from the tensions of difference. Claims such as 'all religions are the same', or 'what everyone is really after is happiness' pose

a challenge to our particularity, a challenge which memory resists.

Poets (artists) may suffer this loss of memory or they may be advocates who recognize the power of memory to inform our understanding of the present and call us to a hopeful future. This is a time when we need the poetic imagination to bring reminders of who we are and what is important for us. There is a strong thread of this kind of imagining in the biblical narrative. The Christian calendar aids us in engaging memory for the sake of the present and future.

Advent is a time to remember and the history of visual art is replete with images that take



Back row: Cal Seerveld, Steve Prince, Gerald Folkerts, Cornelius Buller, Ray Dirks. Front row: Meagan Morash, Yisa Akinbolaji, Steve Bell

Metis artist now living in Quebec, Ray Dirks (Mennonite Brethern), Gerald Folkerts (Christian Reformed) from Winnipeg, and Steve Prince, an African-American print-maker from Virginia.

And the beat goes on! Presently, selected works from the exhibition are on display at the Piano Nobile Gallery in Winnipeg's Centennial Concert Hall and at Grant Memorial Baptist Church. The King's University College in Edmonton, AB will be hosting an Invisible Dignity exhibition in February – March, 2008 and plans are in the works for the exhibition to travel to Philadelphia next fall.

In addition, a subsequent juried exhibition on the theme of 'human dignity' opened recently at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery. In January, 2008 the gallery will be showcasing more artwork on the theme of human dignity, but this time featuring the work of students, many from the schools visited by the Invisible Dignity artists back in September. For more information, visit www.invisibledignity.org ■

that story into the ordinariness of life inviting it to do its transforming work.

John.

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