

## **No Holds Barred—Inspiration from the Biblical apocalyptic genre**

*But it takes Holy Scripture to tell the truth, that the sun is a servant of the Lord speaking to all and sundry about the Hound of heaven and earth.(1) —Calvin Seerveld*

For at least a decade much of Jake Van Wyk's artwork has been art inspired by a highly symbolic and metaphoric literary element found in the Bible — the apocalyptic genre of Revelation, Daniel, and Zechariah. In this exceptional exhibition, the book of Revelation, in particular influences Van Wyk's ceramic work just as the subject did for some of the great artists of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation.

Connected with the writer of Revelation much of the substance of Van Wyk's body of work in this exhibition is drawn from the right hemispheric mode of the brain in order to translate the expression of emotions. Interestingly, Van Wyk's artwork highlights a paradox with visually-based thought and reflects what Dennis Dake, an art educator from Iowa State University, has observed that while visually based thought can be seen tangibly, at it's core it appears to be created by implied and subconscious processing and automatism. (2) This exhibition acknowledges Van Wyk as an automatist artist and this is particularly evidenced by the interchange between his clay work and his prints and drawings.

Religiously, Van Wyk grew up in the Christian Reformed Church and is grounded in the Reformed tradition. As such, Van Wyk does not approach the symbolism of Revelation as fundamentalist eschatology by trying to decode the symbolism in order to predict the end times. For Van Wyk the subject of Revelation is about visualizing and expressing an unseen dimension. And although the apocalyptic genre and themes of death, judgment, heaven and hell can be disconcerting to many viewers, Van Wyk chooses to focus on the astonishing apposition of strong images with the acuity of his unique sensory perception. This exhibition is really about the symbolic portrayal of the artist's imaginative ability.

Van Wyk is enthusiastic about the value of drawing from life and nature in order to personify the spirit and movement of the subject. This is the meaning and impact of his work. In the main, VanWyk's work is a permutation of intensity and directness that perfectly embodies this quote by the prodigious early modern French sculptor Rodin, "Art cannot exist without life. If a sculptor wishes to interpret joy, sorrow, any passion whatsoever, he will not be able to move us unless he first knows how to make the beings live which he evokes. For how could the joy or the sorrow of an inert object — of a block of stone—affect us? Now, the illusion of life is obtained in our art by good modeling and by movement. These two qualities are like the blood and the breath of all good work." (3)

This exhibition shows an interchange between clay work, printmaking and drawing. In each piece VanWyk creates life and dynamic movement through his personal style and a broad range of surface treatments, from gestural marks to highly

finished or more natural looking glazes. More specifically, the force of “The Coming” is portraying views from the front and sides in which figures meet the viewer in the round—in human scale. VanWyk preserves and sometimes exaggerates the sketch-like qualities and textures of his clay figures; the uneven surfaces come alive when struck by light.

Jake’s emphasis of shine on shine and matte surfaces of the ceramic glazes capture, reflect, and seem to originate light, suggesting a metaphor for the light. In addition, while the light in VanWyk’s sculptural pieces contrasts with the shadows, the shadows never overpower the light. Whether it’s the negative spaces of the white paper of his drawings and prints or the sheen in his sculptures and reliefs— the key to viewing VanWyk’s work is in the light. It’s the light that moves the viewer from the surface to a much deeper meaning in VanWyk’s artwork.

1. Seerveld, Calvin. *Rainbows for the Fallen World*. First ed. Downsview, Ontario: Toronto Tuppence Press, 1980. 12. Print.
2. Dake, Dennis M. "A Natural Visual Mind: The Art and Science of Visual Literacy." International Visual Literacy Association (IVLA). Ames, IA. 11 Oct. 2000. Keynote speech.
3. Auguste Rodin, *Art: Conversations with Paul Gsell*, trans. Jacques de Caso and Patricia B. Sanders (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984) 41.

Other sources:

Weima, Jeffery A.D. "How to Read the Bible for all its Worth." Calvin Theological Seminary. Grand Rapids, MI. 1997. Adult Bible Study Outline. 11.