



Lenten Reflections

A self-guided tour of
Contemporary Anishinaabe Art:
A Continuation
at the
Detroit Institute of Arts

Isaiah 35.6-8

**For water shall break forth in the desert
and brooks in the wilderness.**

**The heat-scorched ground shall become a lake
and the thirsty soil, springs of water.**

**Where a jackal's abode was, its lair –
a courtyard for reeds and rushes.**

The exhibition begins with works deeply rooted in materials found in and formed by the landscape, showing an attitude of harmony with the natural world instead of exploitation. How can being in relationship with creation, and contemplating its role in our faith origin story, enrich the sacredness of this season?

Tonawanda Swamps

As it would for a prow, the basin parts with your foot.

Never a marsh, of heron blue

but the single red feather

from the wing of some black bird, somewhere

a planked path winds above water,

the line of sky about this aching space.

Movement against the surface

is the page that accepts no ink

a line running even

over alternating depths, organisms, algae,

a rotting leaf.

Walk naked before me

carrying a sheaf of sticks.

It's the most honest thing a man can do.

As water would to accept you,

I part

a mouth, a marsh, or margin

is of containment,

the inside circuitous edge.

No line to follow out to ocean,

no river against an envelope

of trembling white ships.

Here I am landlock.

Give me your hand.

- *James Thomas Stevens,
Akwesasne, Mohawk*

Luke 9.18-20

One morning, after praying alone with his followers, he asked them, “Who do all the crowds say that I am?”

They looked around at each other and said, “Some say you are Gift of Goodwill (John) who performed the purification ceremony. Others say you might be Great Spirit Is Creator (Elijah), or one of the prophets of old come back to life from the dead.”

Creator Sets Free (Jesus) lowered his voice and spoke with a more serious tone.

“So tell me,” he asked them. “Who do you say that I am?”

Silent faces stared back at him. They began to look at each other, and some looked down to the ground. The moment of truth had come, but no one dared to speak. Then suddenly a voice pierced through the silence.

“You are Creator’s Chosen One!” Stands on the Rock (Peter) answered.

As you move through the galleries, you will encounter works that deal with a sense of identity. In the videos that are part of the exhibition, the artists also speak of their individual sense of who they are; James Baldwin noted that people on the margins, if they are to survive, must cultivate a sense of self not rooted who and what the world tells them that they are. Do any of the works or words of the artists echo how you come to the sense of your own identity as a person of faith?

Psalm 121

**I lift my eyes up to the mountains.
Where will my help come from?**

**My help comes from Grandfather,
maker of Father Sky and Mother Earth.**

**He will keep your foot from slipping.
The one who watches over you will not fall asleep.**

**Behold, the eyes of the one who watches over the tribes
of Wrestles with Creator (Israel)
will not droop in weariness or close in sleep.**

**Grandfather keeps watch over you and will shade you
as he stands close by your side.**

**The sun will not burn you as it circles the sky by day.
The moon will not trouble you as it travels across the night sky.**

**Grandfather will keep you safe from all harm
as he watches over your life's journey.**

**Yes, Grandfather walks by your side,
watching your going out and coming home
as you travel on the road of life
from now and until the sun no longer rises.**

The sense of surviving and thriving, of being a vibrant, present culture is a theme throughout the exhibition. As you near the end of the exhibit, the works also deal with hard histories, violence, and a traumatic past; what held your attention most in these works? What was most discomfoting?

Hard Times

A woman sits on a porch of weathered boards,
her skin the color and texture of the dried-apple dolls
that grandmothers gave to children years ago.
When asked about the past, she will not speak.
They were hard times.

Maybe she sits on the parched earth instead,
looks toward fields of rice, cotton, sugarcane, tobacco.
Maybe she wears a printed housedress or sarong
with hair covered or plaited, her face etched
in memories of joy snatched from her
in daylight and auctioned to strangers.

Her hands have scrubbed cities of floors, washed
the nameless dead, cooked food for armies, so little of it
hers; hands that failed to protect her or any of her children.
She believes that if she speaks, she might break apart,
the dust of her flying across stooped men
chained by their debt to the fields. She pressed both lips
together, an effort to hold her own grief in her skin.

Maybe evening wears into night. The stars that connect us
gather like sisters around her. We hear, *They were hard times*,
across the continuous land of our women, until as sun
rises above the droning flies and the garrulous chickens,
a voice speaks in our old language, which we do not know.
We sift through history with dust on our hands,
the empty rocker creaking in the breeze.

- Karenne Wood, *Monacan*

What spoke to you the most in these works? What will you take away with you? What lifted your heart? What do you want to spend more time thinking through?

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