

**From our Western Sister FQA:**

## What Is Quaker Art?

**A report by Marybeth Webster, Grass Valley (CA) MM**

*Nine answers to the above query were given at an interest group at College Park Quarterly Meeting held in May 1999 at Quaker Center, Ben Lomond, CA:*

**Marybeth:** I'm primarily an Art Therapist. I also sculpt and draw. I make collages of photos I've take of ancient petroglyphs. I've been thinking that another name for Great Spirit or The Light is *The Muse*. When I am deeply moved by an idea, emotion, or image, I'm inspired to make an art piece which in turn shows me wider meanings. Maybe this is the ongoing divine revelation Quakers abide by. Now, at almost age 70, my art, my profession, my Quakerness, and my heart are all intertwined.

**Sandy:** Is [Quaker art] an oxymoron? Quakers don't indulge in frivolous activities! Yet my book illustrations, my storytelling, my stage pieces are all about Quaker business, serious, socially significant change. I see Pacific YM as a tribal gathering. Quaker is my ethnic group. So my art is ethnic art. Does it have a pattern? What is the purpose of painting a picture, say, of a tree?

**Joan:** *Quantum Theology* says, "Dance is the first, most ancient, and most enduring form of religion." I lead Sacred Circle Dance, a dance molded to my being which is Quaker, a truly spiritual experience, very centered and simultaneously floating. I dance alone to rejoice, to grieve, or when we've had a gnarly meeting; that feeds me, but it's nothing like dancing in a circle. That takes me to my core faster than anything I've ever done. My dance is an expanded way of being Quaker.

**Eddie:** What art does for the artist is give a sense of timelessness and your own little piece of infinity. When I focus to draw, I really LOOK. I experience something beyond words. Art speaks to what is God in the viewer too. Art doesn't have to go through the logical filter. It can go straight to the heart. The viewer too can experience things in a different way just as the artist did when producing that work.

**Shama:** I'm drawn to trees, an ancient symbol, the Tree of Life. I fear my art wouldn't be acceptable to Quakers. Being female in a violent male world is important to me. What would happen if I showed a painting of a woman becoming a tree, bleeding into the ground? Not many Quakers seem *into* their bodies. Also, I'm not orderly. I start and don't finish—maybe due to my fear about its acceptability. Images move through me. I can paint them but I don't know what they'll look like. They just come out. What appears appears. In order to feel more comfortable for me as a Quaker, all of me has to be part of it. Artistic expression is a big part of me.

# Types & Shadows

JOURNAL OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF QUAKERS IN THE ARTS

Issue #14, Summer 1999

---

**Mark:** We talk of art that Quakers make. Maybe Quaker Art could be what Quakers look at. Eric Segal said, "Art is a statement by a skilled or sensitive person before a sensitive audience." Certain pieces have a quality that's very moving, cuts right into me. Art combines the artist's skill and intent, plus what the spectator is looking for. Maybe we should watch Quakers and see which kinds of art they're drawn to.

**Tom:** When I started studying theater 25 years ago I was just discovering Quakers. I wasn't seeing much connection. In acting you perform somebody else's script. That's more like other churches. Then I discovered ensemble improv theater. This is Quaker theater! I did a Masters on the parallels of the two processes: both are for that time and place only, and you don't try to replicate it. You're never sure you'll be with the same people each time. Both are concerned about truthfulness, truth and fiction. If I'm writing fiction, am I writing untruth? Fiction can connect people with truths better than factual writing—like wisdom tales, analogies. Quaker art is unritualized. George Fox spoke out against the misused art of his day trying to replace God with frivolity, to entertain without content. Only in this century have we begun to find the full range of art.

**Lisa:** I'm a songwriter. I know a few other Quaker songwriters. There's a common thread they use to talk about their work. The tradition of the Queries that influences us, either using questions or responding to repeating Questions of Life. I've been curious about FQA. I don't see the common threads across the arts. Maybe we're all seeking integrity in the creative expression to the ideals we strive to live in our lives.

**Suzanne:** Only twice in three years have I performed improvisational movement with sound in Quaker forums that invited performance. Movement is driven by impulses that come almost at a cellular level. At times it's possible to embody spirit. My painting isn't at all Quakerly; people look at my big abstracts and say "What's that all about?" It's from the Shadow side, comes from the primeval ooze we all come from.

---

*Types & Shadows* is published quarterly by the Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts. Subscriptions are available through membership in the FQA.