

From our Western Sister Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts:

"The Truth Will Out!"

by Marybeth Webster

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Graphic, right: "Living in a Refugee Camp", woodcut by Trudy Myrrh Reagan



The truth will out! While schools are cutting out the arts as "frills," Art is crying to be used and cherished in the Society of Friends. Grassroots examples of the inspiring expressions of creative vitality are showing up, faltering, rising again, growing stronger...

"Living in a Refugee Camp" by Trudy Myrrh Reagan"

Using the "Mother" FQA as a model, a movement is afoot to create a Western "Sister" FQA.

Grass Valley, CA has a women's art collective that gave art exhibits in a nearby barn/studio for three Fall Quarterlies. They sent a traveling exhibit to Chico Meeting, and to AFSC's Pasadena gallery. A viewer told them of FQA. They were invited by FQA to show at FGC last summer.

A sign-up sheet for interested artists at Pacific YM in August gleaned 20 names. Several responded to a poll indicating interest in meeting together to share work, to do art together, to help each other and find ways to deepen and nurture artistic outreach and restoring the Arts Worship Time where poets, storytellers, dancers, authors, musicians enact the spiritual / creative link.

At a visionary Interest Group October 17 at Fall Quarter, we spoke to the queries:

- How does being a Quaker impact your artmaking?

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- How would an association of Friends in the Arts support you, your work, your spirit?

Responses

"I abuse myself with the old Quaker attitudes toward art as frivolous. I'm not feeding the poor. Conflict of interest—I'm feeding me! How do I justify what I have to charge for my woodwork? It would be so useful to have a forum that feels art is not anti-Quaker. I have to work hard on my spirituality in order to be true to my art."

"We need a group who does something, brings it forth. Many would be interested if they knew about it."

"I'd like a place to show our art to each other, to encourage children—my son is an artist—to be part of putting together shows, maybe on an annual basis. There's a part inside me that tries to discourage me from doing art (my family's attitude). An art group would strengthen me."

"It's hard to sell your work for what it's worth. Old voices say art is a hard taskmaster. The same creative spirit that rises up in worship is the same in my studio—the same quieting, centering, allowing the Spirit to flow."

"There was a 25-year gap between being a youngster painting madly and the finding my way back with *The Artist's Way*. The two times I've danced in Meeting I was being encouraged to express my message for worship in movement. It would be helpful to have a group of people who would offer encouragement. Everything around us is pushing art down, trivializing it."

"My mother probably had our same artistic gush. She clawed her way into computer design, made velvet rose wreaths at home. She had to put food on the table. It was inspiring to see her do even a little. She got cancer, couldn't work, made stuffed animals for craft fairs, got press notice. The message: this is fabulous, joyous work but if it's looking good, you die. It's taking a long time to accept that I'm an artist. It's a challenge to wake up every day and say 'I'm an artist'. To spend the time and do the work, you use Quaker attributes of focus, discipline, acceptance of who you are, getting the 'me' out of the way."

This small Interest Group dreamed of joining together to publicly articulate the spiritual connections we find in our art, of becoming Traveling Friends under concern to share art, of creating Pacific YM exhibits and performances to include all ages, of

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experiential interest groups at every Friends Gathering. As way opens, we aspire to show our colors, sing out.

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