



“Daily Devotions”

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I strive to make artworks that generate significant interpersonal dialogue around points of complex cultural friction. My commitment to initiating difficult conversations through art led to the inclusion of my work in *Seriously Funny*, an innovative exhibition that opened in February 2009 at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art in Arizona. This curated exhibit investigates the use of humor and wit within contemporary artworks addressing sensitive cultural content. SMOCA specifically commissioned me to create a new installation and per-

formance series for this exhibition, including a two-hour video loop (a mash-up of digitized 16mm film and HDV projected onto the installation). In 2006, the Youth Gathering Learning Team of the ELCA commissioned me for a 2,500-square foot interactive installation in San Antonio’s Henry B. González Convention Center. I presented *The Art Rodeo*, a series of five devotional carnival games in a kitschy cowboy atmosphere. The contexts and contents of these exhibitions embody my commitment to strengthen connections between fine art venues, the academy, the church, new media out-

lets, and the communities that I make art in and for.

My artwork directly addresses my own intellectual plurality and the many-ness of contemporary churches, universities, artworlds, and cultures. In adolescence, I enjoyed eavesdropping on the debates about “crossover artists” in contemporary Christian music. I wrestled with the abrasion between secular forms and sacred content. In college, I explored the possibilities of unity and synthesis, despite being an intellectual product of the culture wars. While I hesitate to dismiss hastily the real conflicts in our polarized

Rev. Roughstock leads a revival



society, I now strive to find humor, hope, and humanity in the cacophony of today's media and academy. The tension between divergent perspectives fuels my discipline and enriches my faith. I am confident that the incarnate Word is alive and well, working mercy in the churning din of our complex culture.

At the last crossroad between art school and seminary, I came to understand culture as incarnational; I decry my iconoclastic Protestant inheritance. Things talk to me: wood almost always sounds shepherd-y. I am found by faith *in* the world. I am found by faith of the world. I am found by faith under the world, subverting this place and its law. The Christ that drowned me seems to want to help me "make belief." So I get out the scissors and the glue, cut

up the pink Kincade coffee table books again, dust them with equal parts glitter and salt (usually sea salt, not salt of the earth), pour shellac all over it a few times, and hope for an alter/altar to hold up all the stuff I hate from this world. Maybe tomorrow fire will rain/reign down from the sky and consume my offering. Either way, I will still be trying to figure out exactly what Paul was getting at in Romans 12:1–3.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual wor-

I'm
a sinner, a
father/husband/
son and a Lutheran. I
am a political progressive,
cultural critic and studio
artist/scholar. As such,
I honor, teach and
promote:

God's relentless mercy for a horrible, beautiful complex world
Jesus' redeeming work through endless self-sacrifice
An indwelling of the Holy Ghost among the Frail
Grace as sufficient and realistic means of faith
Love as the only measure of Christianity
Fresh meals with quality libations
Close friends and candid family
Richly sacramental living
Sabbath/time at home
Mercy above Law
Kindness
All kinds of fun
Sacred & Profane
Words as/in fine art
Interdisciplinary efforts
Intentional political action
Meaning-filled images/objects
Artful deconstruction of hegemony
The Actualized above Representation
Skepticism towards trendy Christianity
The Material, as means to the Immaterial
Satirical critique of polemic fundamentalism
Paleo-orthodoxy paired with civil disobedience
Art as Biblical hermeneutic and homiletic practice
Works from heathy skeptics (J. Cash & S. Kierkegaard)
Celebration of historic liturgy over hipster-friendly evangelism
Cumulative products of time, intellect, faith and labor in the art studio

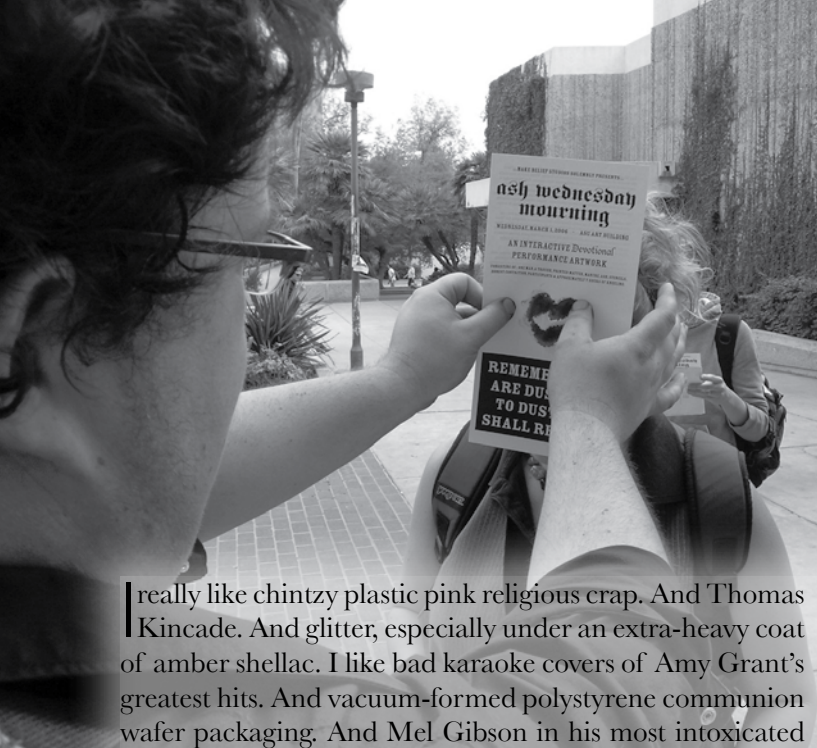
As my Christian practice, I make artworks that interrogate, celebrate, and schematize the making of religious actions and institutions. My many efforts to better understand ministry, its various intents, aesthetics, cultural conventions, and political inclinations stem from my own faith in Jesus, as God palpably incarnate. Christian community is a real and wondrous challenge, not some abstract notion or clubhouse. Some of my sculptural works use actual pages of the Bible to better embody its authoritative object-hood as Word(s) made into flesh and literal objects of text.

I take Christ seriously (especially when he cracks jokes!). We laugh out loud together in my studio, sometimes argue over politics or cultural criticism, and almost always end up feeling closer as student and rabbi than we were when that lesson started. I understand my God as wanting me to be part of many kinds of communities. Primarily, I believe in Jesus because he seems to have first believed in me. Subsequently, I believe in order to revel in mercies already provided, work for fairness, and grow Love along the corners where I live.

ship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. *LF*

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IN, OF, AND UNDER

Kjellgren Alkire

I really like chintzy plastic pink religious crap. And Thomas Kincade. And glitter, especially under an extra-heavy coat of amber shellac. I like bad karaoke covers of Amy Grant's greatest hits. And vacuum-formed polystyrene communion wafer packaging. And Mel Gibson in his most intoxicated and polemic sound bytes. I like these things because I want them to remind me of the world from which the Christ of John 18:36 might differentiate his kingdom. I want to be simultaneously horrified and awestruck by the disparity between "the worldliness of these things" and "the church triumphant." Instead, I wonder if the self-righteous indignation I enjoy when defining myself as superior to the corporate-church-kitsch-machine is maybe the first (or fifteenth) coat on my own very white-washed tomb. This same tomb, by the way, has served on the Youth and Family Ministry Committee and drunk coffee while talking to cool old guys after worship.

During the rest of the week, when I'm not drinking coffee with the cool old guys, I'm an artist. I make sculptural installations, performances, and ephemeral campaigns that I inhabit as my alter-ego, the Reverend Roughstock. Like the pitch of snake oil salesmen, akin to western-themed vacation Bible school programs, my artwork synthesizes my favorite shticks. Having been trained as both a printmaker and a preacher, I bend these disciplines into an odd alloy practice. I construct spaces where a "message" can be disseminated—verbally, graphically, and sculpturally. Most recently referential to carnival games and revival meetings, these spaces serve as sets on which I perform and as vehicles for direct viewer participation with artworks. This work challenges viewers as complicit participants through its overt socioreligious content and subsequent cultural discussions.

My printmaking, installation, and performance art combine in large-scale viewer-interactive events. Through these events, I explore the contemporary religious rhetoric and mythologies of the American West. Each project is a component within a larger framework: a fictional rodeo outreach run by my cowboy evangelist doppelganger, Rev. Roughstock. These fine art representations of an itinerant preacher's countrified revival ministry create "The Jesus

Rodeo Ministries Ink." Viewers are invited to join in as the congregation at performance art sermons and engage sculptural cowboy carnival games as if strolling through a county fair midway. The work is humorous, sincere, sacred and profane, honestly attempting to embody the paradoxical structures of love and life, religion and rodeo.

In 1994, I revelled in a university course called "Art in the Church." At the time, I was moderately familiar with some of the results and economic complexities of Rome's patronage of the arts during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. This course introduced me to other connections between Christianity and cultural production. I learned about modernist architecture's influence on mid-twentieth century liturgical renewal movements. I began to consider critically the social complexities of kitschy religious commodities purchased by my evangelical community at retail chain stores. I was introduced to scholarship investigating Hollywood's contribution to American religiosity. Most importantly I began seriously to reconcile my own sense of dual vocation.

Having interrupted my undergraduate career with international travel in a volunteer music ministry, I completed a degree in related majors (Art Studio and Community Arts). I spent many years discerning my spiritual call. For much of my undergraduate career, I was a pre-seminary student, more than dabbling in art studio courses. Eventually my art practice became a direct expression of my own faith experience.

Prior to graduate studies, I served as a trained layperson in congregational ministry. I enjoyed the parish, particularly when my work fostered community. Teaching catechism, advocating for the marginalized, and leading worship allowed me to have meaningful conversations about faith and doubt. During these years, I continued to produce and exhibit artwork. As I better understood public ministry, my own art-making improved. In response, I created opportunities for congregation members to make art at, and for, their church. These projects were well received by the parishioners and became serious explorations of my own vocation, leading me to pursue graduate studies in studio art rather than go to divinity school.

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