

Title: *Corpus et Spiritus*
Medium: Bronze
Principal Artist: Farhad Nargol-O'Neill
Commissioned By: Susan LaRosa
Director of Education
York Catholic District School Board
Sponsored By: Fred DeGasperis
Metrus Development Inc.
Student Apprentices: Nicole Cosentino,
Kylie Freeman,
Enrico Sacchetti,
Vanessa Del Priore,
Elizabeth Hwangbo
Danielle Storey

Curatorial Statement

By Elizabeth Hwangbo

Throughout history, art has reflected the culture, nationality and epoch of the artist and their society. Whether overt or subtle, religious experience is reflected in the various works of art found in the great halls of human history. From the beginning of recorded history, and as early as cave drawings, art has expressed religious belief and practice. Christian art is identified as early as 100 AD. From that time until now, art practice has reflected varying cultures, nationalities, politics and experience; each era producing works of art built upon the practices that came before them, and societal and religious beliefs and attitudes.

With the introduction of the modern period came drastically new ways of exploring religious themes in art. Religious messages that were once solely expressed by a representational approach are now conveyed in non-objective and abstract ways. In modern art there is a mathematical use of colour, a focus on geometry and expression messages rather than representations. This mental discipline exists to unify and organize an approach and set of observations, not as a virtue in its own right or to impress or confuse by heavy jargon. This curatorial statement seeks to express the thought processes of the visual artist.

The artist, Farhad Nargol-O'Neill, is a contemporary Canadian sculptor who has a strong interest in religious art and has used his skills to profoundly explain and reclaim a religious theme. *Corpus et Spiritus* is a sculpture that has been created with the skills of a modern artist to investigate and explore the beliefs and practice of a Christian faith over two millennia old. *Corpus et Spiritus* seeks to express two fundamental pillars of Christian experience: Easter and Pentecost. The Easter celebration, which commemorates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is the pivotal point on which

the Christian faith rests. The gifts of Pentecost, given by the Holy Spirit that descended upon the apostles and gave them strength to continue their apostolic mission, can be summed up by the phrase “faith in action”. Courage and endurance are therefore appropriate themes to be addressed in a sculpture made to adorn the main atrium of a major religious educational institution. It is a modern sculpture that embodies a long history of religious faith and practice.

In this twenty-first century, this is a remarkable sculpture to arise from a multicultural and largely secular democracy, where many of our faith practices have lost their religious significance. High Holy Days have become civic holidays, commercialized and largely secular. True understanding of religious practice and principles has been, to a large extent, overshadowed by the politicization of religion for political, commercial or nationalistic ends. This sculpture represents a creative effort to fight this trend, and create a dialogue between idea and viewer through visual art. *Corpus et Spiritus* portrays the essence of the Christian experience and yet can be understood by a viewer whose religion may not be Christian.

Corpus et Spiritus’ arrays of texture and construction prompt the mental faculties to feel that the sculpture is ‘right’. This rightness is what the artist means by saying that beautiful objects are purposive. One can describe this sculpture as *beautiful* because it promotes an internal harmony or ‘free play’ of our mental and emotional faculties. Though the label is prompted by a subjective awareness of pleasure or ‘rightness’, it has an objective force in the eye of the viewer in the same way that we believe that the truths behind Easter and Pentecost are not subjective but rather, represent objective truth.

Corpus et Spiritus is a sculpture that provides better understanding between Christians of different cultures. In the words of John Dewey, “art is the best possible window into another culture”; truly a universal language. To this end, the sculptor has constructed this piece in order to mystify our experience of art as a direct and wordless expression. This reflects the modern artistic search for a universal but formal quality of Idea as Icon. However, the artist does not define this art solely in terms of ‘Beauty’ or ‘Form’ but rather as “the expression of the life of the community”. He asserts that this aesthetic quality of this expression is the same for “Greek, Chinese, or First Nations Peoples”.

Corpus et Spiritus explains the fundamental pillars of Christianity, illuminating the theme of the Easter and Pentecost. It will long outlast the building in which it now resides, just as the truth inherent in the events which inspired the sculpture will long outlast the sculpture itself. The principles and beliefs represented in *Corpus et Spiritus* will continue to guide and influence religious experience and expression, both for future artists, Christians and visitors who see this work of art in years to come.