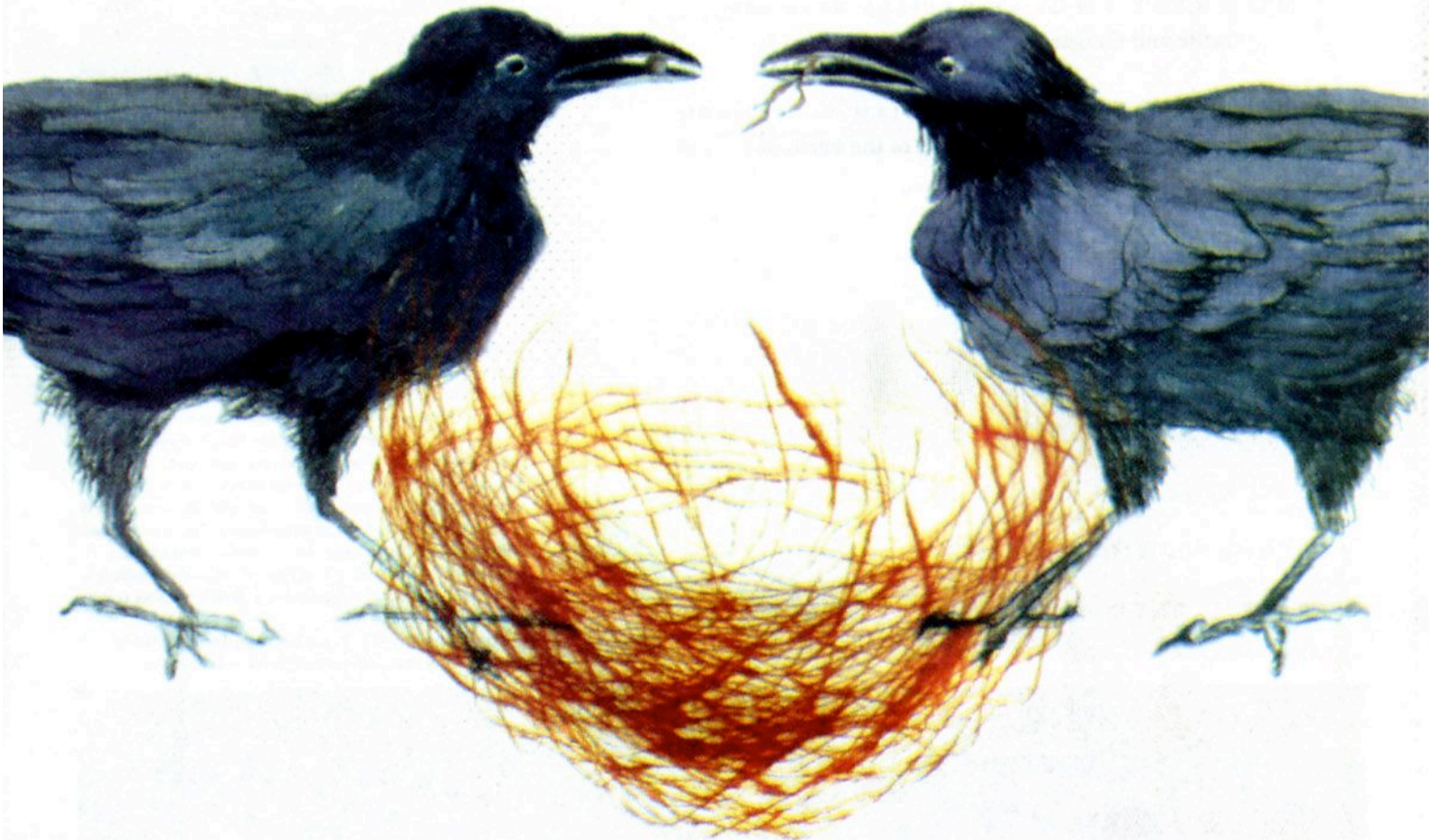
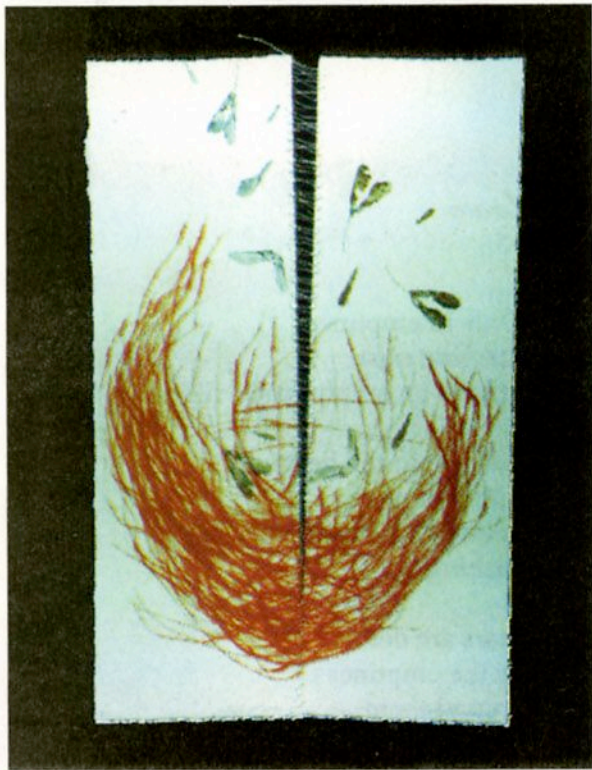


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NOV|DEC 2005





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Art, community
and social awareness

A CONVERSATION WITH ARTIST
AND PRINTMAKER CAROL MACDONALD

BY EILEEN FAHEY

A yin/yang balance prevails in Carol MacDonald's life – her steady gaze and luminous smile indicate a state of serenity, but her artwork reveals a feisty, bold interior. Her prints feature crows, which have been the focus of her work since 1999. I asked her, "So, what's up with the crows?" She nodded and smiled. "I started off drawing birds, but found I was drawn to ravens and crows. Birds fly through the air and walk on the ground. To me, they embody that bridge, which transcends heaven and earth, body and spirit. Crows are tricksters, very playful and community-minded, yet they possess a dark side, thus representing the balance of life." "I suppose my artwork is autobiographical metaphor!"

Carol landed in the town of Johnson, Vermont in 1974. These days her home studio is open to other artists who need just the right sort of space in which to make their art, for Carol is a first-class mentor, who believes in supporting the creative process. She teaches printmaking and drawing at Community College

of Vermont in Burlington, and conducts summer workshops for children.

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Carol's ideas manifest out of sketched images and are then documented in writing. She studied drawing and other forms of art at Maryland Institute of Art, and has attended various work-

shops over the years. Her studies and experimentation evolved into etching and printmaking. Books, journals, paints, and a host of completed prints fill the shelves and cover the walls of her studio. The Winooski River flows gently by outside its windows. Many of her prints are an eclectic blend of monographs, pencil drawings, rafia, oils, and string. She stated, "My work arises from whatever is going on in my life, and although a concept may have been birthed from personal urgency, I hope that my art transcends initial intent, thereby opening a space where others may access and process something of their own lives. The goal is to bring visual perspective to the psyche. I strive for wholeness." She succeeds - it is evident in her work as well as lifestyle. Her studio is cozy and colorful, an environment filled with the materials a printmaker needs to get the job done, even a homemade printing press, as well as her father's antique letter press – she seemed very proud of both machines.

Carol's "Benevolence" series was a

(cont. on pg. 17)

response to 9/11. In one print, crows lift and pull a common thread, working in unison toward a common goal. In "Accord", crows face each other from opposing mountain cliffs holding a delicate string between the vast crevice. "Accord" features silkscreen and thread – her work blends various creative ideas with not-so-subtle politics. The powerful theme of tension juxtaposed with cooperation appears repeatedly in Carol's work.

Carol stated that she processed the emotions of separation and departure a year before her oldest daughter left for college. The result was her "Letting Go" series. Two parent crows look upward as their young one flies off into a patch of blue; she's not the only one who has let go of a child or loved one. Carol's prints are often full of warm, vibrant colors, but she successfully balances her work with the softer colors of nature.

Carol's spiritual life exists in the heart of the Unitarian Church, a system where one is challenged to discuss and



Confluence, Monoprint, etching, drawing

explore personal faith. Deep respect for individuality and independent belief systems are fostered. She was commis-

sioned by Middlebury College and Bates College to design their religious banners. As a member of the Unitarian Church, Carol aligns with the bridge that exists between spiritual and societal issues.

She acknowledged that some of her views may not be popular, for she has strong convictions, and is somewhat of a risk-taker. She supported the civil union law. "It's a bend to the left, I know," she smiled.

Her work has an edge that can touch people in ways they might not even imagine. In 1988, Carol was commissioned to create an installation for one of the floors of a local hospital undergoing renovation. It was a clothesline – a testimony to women's work. There were 10 panels of continuous clotheslines, representing women's figures. She was dismayed to learn that the nurses protested and wanted the installation removed, but one of Carol's artist friends, a patient on the floor at the time, explained the significance of artis-

tic intention to the nurses. The hospital administration stood behind Carol's work, and ultimately the encounter and subsequent discussions facilitated healing – the artwork was about peace and awareness; the nurses reconciled with their initial response and acknowledged the underlying meaning of Carol's work.

Carol shares her knowledge through teaching and reaching out. She has contributed to community by conducting healing workshops for breast cancer awareness and acted as a founder of the Art's Alive Festival of Fine Art and the Women's Council for the Arts. Her exhibitions span two decades featuring group shows in Soho as well as the Firehouse Gallery in Burlington. Solo exhibit "Portraits of a Personal Space" showed at the Wood Art Gallery in Montpelier, and "Reclaiming Self" was displayed at the Flynn Gallery in Burlington.

Carol is an idealist. "I'm concerned about the polarization that exists, whether it is between the Republicans and Democrats or the disparity between our local school board and the teachers who are on strike. I believe in talk and negotiations, of course, but most importantly, effective communication is essential." Carol doesn't watch a lot of television news, but accesses VPR and the local newspaper as a source of information about world and community events.

Her most recent art embodies a newly-raised consciousness; a subtle power shift has occurred in Carol's work. The prints definitely have an edge – they are strong and hauntingly beautiful. She stated that, "she doesn't really want to offend anyone," and although it is clear she aims to consider the public's sensibilities, she claims that remaining true to herself and her art is crucial, and that sometimes we may have to "offend to make a statement that matters." She's against the war in Iraq; her art makes it clear. This new collection holds a mystique that separates it from Carol's previous work. "My hope is that people will take the time to consider these prints and how the work might stir them." She also laughed at the recurring theme of her medium – those crows. "Some people love crows and some people hate them." It's that delicate balance which Carol seems to pull off – it emphasizes her desire to create tension, which elicits change and challenge, and hopefully a new way of thinking that benefits the greater, common good.

*Nov.4 - Dec.9, 2005: A Call to Alms: new works
West Branch Gallery, Mountain Road, Stowe, VT*

*802.253.8943 Visit Carol's web site at
www.carolmacdonald.com*

Eileen Fahey writes essay and poetry, is a certified massage therapist, and works as Geology Dept. Coordinator at Middlebury College. She also serves on the Optimal Health Initiative Committee at the College. She lives in Cornwall with husband, Charlie, and their 2 cats, Bessi and Finn. Her 2 children live and work in New Jersey. She may be reached at eileen@everchangingvt.com