

FAITH AND THE ARTS

Sculpted Stations of the Cross grace Seattle cathedral

By Jerry Hames

Fourteen Stations of the Cross grace the nave of St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle this Lenten season with an invitation to the community of Seattle and parishioners of St. Mark's to interact with visual art and an ancient tradition of this season.

Guests at the opening reception in mid-February included Virginia Maksymowicz, who has described the Stations as an opportunity to apply her contemporary vision to an artistic form that dates back to the 13th century, and Vi Lynk, a parishioner and volunteer called to lead the cathedral's newly revitalized Art Ministry.



Vi Lynk and Webster Crowell hang one of 14 sculpture reliefs by artist Victoria Maksymowicz in the nave of St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle.

"At Saint Mark's there is a lot of space and support for music, and it has quite a reputation in the community as a place that supports musicians," Lynk said before the reception. "Somehow the same reputation has not been as true in terms of visual art. I wanted to change that.

As an artist herself, she often wondered why there is not more support for visual art in churches, she said. "Why aren't we, as a church, more committed to listening to these voices?"

With the support of Dean Steven L. Thomason, Lynk began planning for exhibits, including the current one, nearly two years ago. "It started as a call for submissions, but as I worked on the Sta-

tions project with the Rev. Jennifer Daugherty [responsible for spiritual formation and one of two associates to the dean], talking with artists and art critics and curators, I realized there was perhaps a longer conversation that needed to take place."

The Stations of the Cross is the first art exhibition in a plan to involve the larger Seattle community. The objective, Lynk said, is to redefine St. Mark's as a place that invites and engages both art and artist.

At the reception, Maksymowicz, an art professor at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pa., talked about ways of engaging with visual art as a spiritual practice. She shared her reflections about the Stations and suggested how viewers might interact with the exhibit. Her goal, she said, is to create iconographies that can communicate ideas to a range of audiences.

This creates space, the sculptor explained, to allow the "audience to become active participants, instead of remaining passive viewers. With the part standing for the whole — in narrative as in visual terms — the possibilities for interpretation are extended."

Maksymowicz said she felt it was imperative to work with a variety of models, 11 of them representing different ages and ethnicities. "I wanted the narrative of Christ's passion and death to be represented in a way that is tensioned between the 'specific' and the 'universal.'"

The mixture of models and the anonymity implied by the fragmented figures push the imagery toward representation of the human community in its universal aspect, often called in theological terms the "mystical body" of Christ, she said.

The sculptor said she tended to work in "a somewhat peculiar niche between painting and sculpture called 'relief.'" Each of the Stations, 24 inches square, was cast from life into a special form of Fiberglass-reinforced plaster called Hydrocal FGR95, originally developed for architectural casting.

During his visit to Philadelphia, Pope Francis visited artists in a former factory



Photos/Liz Bartenstein/St. Mark's

The 14 Stations by Pennsylvania artist Victoria Maksymowicz will be displayed for the Seattle community throughout Lent.

Left, Station V: "Simon of Cyrene carries Jesus' cross."

Below left, Station X: "Jesus stripped of his garments."

Below right, Station IV: "Jesus meets his mother."



where he saw the master "patterns" — the assembled forms from which the fabricators made the molds and cast the positives for the Stations. The patterns bear the scars of the production process, discolored by the lacquer sealants, with cracks, chips and broken fingers.

The Stations, including 14 finished charcoal drawings, originally were commissioned by St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Lancaster, Pa. Maksymowicz also cast a second set — the one currently at St. Mark's — that has been exhibited in churches and museums throughout the country.

Audio and text guides are available to visitors as they view the sculpture re-

liefs. It was first developed for use at St. Thomas by Jay Martin Anderson, professor emeritus of computer science at Franklin & Marshall, who has donated the app and several beacons for use with the exhibit at St. Mark's.

The Stations at St. Mark's will be on display until Lent ends on March 31. The second art exhibition at the cathedral, titled "I AM," will be an East-West contemporary show with 31 artists from 12 countries celebrating Middle Eastern women as dynamic individuals and guardians of peace. It will open on June 10 and run for eight weeks. A possible third show, late in the year, would feature a local artist. ■

The Stations are placed in full view of, and accessible to, the congregation. In 1997, renovations to the historic cathedral transformed the west wall's dark and constricted sanctuary into a light and open space.

