

In the beginning of this assignment we were asked to choose one of five "Picture Frames." Not actual frames but more of a way of categorizing your piece. These five "frames" are Art as Imitation, Art as Expression, Art as Significant Form, Art as Responsible Service, and Art as Sacrament or Gift. I choose Art as Sacrament or Gift, which is art produced and/or "given" in a way as to glorify God and inspire; touch those who view, receive or come in contact with it. Then we were given eight weeks to complete the assignment and we were told to meditate and pray about how we would execute this piece; what medium or media, what historical, theological or scriptural references there might be, and how this piece might serve the particular "Picture Frame" that we choose? We were given the freedom to use any medium or media.

My first reaction was that I wanted to use torn paper (magazine pages) as collage, a technique I've wanted to try for several years now, but have not found the time. I figured this would be a good opportunity to explore this medium. I also wanted to base my piece on one of Jesus' parables so that it would fit in with the upcoming exhibit Mosaic Connection has planned. I prayed and meditated on several different parables, hoping I would get inspired and receive an image to portray in my piece. I was asking God for an image that would not only be interesting and pleasant, but that it would glorify him and that the viewer would be touched by His spirit. The parables continued to be fuzzy in my head, while an image of a lion kept filling my brain. So I eventually gave in, believing this was the direction God wanted me to go with my project and I abandoned my original idea of the parables.

As I was looking for photos of lions which I could base my piece on, I quickly began understanding the symbolism. The lion has always been a representation of Jesus for me; the one who overcame death and absorbed our sin. I've always seen a sense of victory, warrior, leadership in the eyes of a lion, but yet also concern, compassion and love. Which are attributes of Christ. And the magazine pages were to represent materialism, all the junk in our lives, other idols we worship... a fallen world.

So I got busy with my sketches and I asked some local friends if they would donate some of their older magazines to my project and as always, they came through. I have some very generous friends. But one in particular gave me a huge pile of Christian based magazines such as "Just Between Us" and "Discipleship Journal." As I started flipping through the pages, I was excited by all the wonderful colors, graphics and fonts. The subject matters were perfect! I quickly started tearing out pages for all the colors I was going to need.

In the beginning of this project, I had decided to go for a more realism style, with all the pieces torn and put together to only produce an exact image. This actually created a loss of the words and graphics from the magazines, but my hope was that their fabric; spirit would still remain. And that the viewer would feel that more than actually see it. If you have followed along with the progress of this piece, you might have noticed that originally the right side of the lion's mane was covered in finely torn pieces, much like its chin and neck area. I first covered all the white area with larger pieces of magazine to help speed up the process but then went back in with the smaller pieces on top. I wanted to create a realistic looking mane, but it seemed such a struggle and I was not happy with it. All the while I kept hearing in my internal ear, "my message is lost... my message is lost," but I didn't connect it with my project and didn't give it much thought so I ignored this and proceeded with the left side. Only this time when I got all the white areas filled in with the larger magazine pieces I took a moment to step back and look at the progress. I was instantly struck when I saw the words and images from the magazine. My heart flooded. This is what God has been trying to tell me! I immediately went back and recovered the first side again using the larger magazine pieces. I did include some smaller pieces just to help give the impression of a furry mane, but I allowed the messages to come through.

Now the finished piece embodies words and graphics that depict Christ as well as words and graphics of hope, praise, and fears. You can see pieces of scripture, read pieces of other people's life stories of triumph and tragedies; loves and losses. And these pieces all come together to form this image of a lion representing Christ and his love for us. Reminding us that he is always here for us and wanting us to lay our burdens down on him.

Even though it is visually a very busy piece, I get a sense of peace when I look at it. I believe God's hand was in this work every step of the way and I pray it will bless others who view it in ways I can't even imagine.

Side Note: This large wrap around canvas, which is very expensive in the stores these days, was purchased a while back at a clearance sale for only pennies. The wonderful container of Golden's Gel Medium, which I've never owned before because it's expensive, gives this piece its professional and long lasting durability. Normally costing about \$25.00, it was purchased at an "Everything You Can Fit in A Box for \$5.00" clearance sale a couple months ago.... I believe God has had this piece of art planned for me to do for a long time now. His plans are ALWAYS superior to our own if we just listen for Him.