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De Anza gallery measures scope of Bay Area's religious art

"If the lions had gods they would have the shape of the worshippers."

— James Harvey Robinson, American historian

By Grant Harden
Religion Writer

Art gallery director Jan Rindfleisch had for years been struck by the fact that there never seemed to be any "religious art" in modern art galleries, despite the

fact that churches commissioned most classical art before the 20th century.

"Each person with a developed religious or spiritual life has visuals to go with that life," said the director of Helen Euphrat Gallery at De Anza College. "If whole groups of people, ideas or beliefs are seldom represented, we are all poorer in understanding ourselves and others."

The direction of the present exhibit, "Art, Religion, Spirituality,"

was not preordained, Rindfleisch said.

"We decided that the first exhibit on religion here should look at the relationship between art and religion today — focused on art here in the Bay Area," said Rindfleisch, who was aided in the project by artist Lucy Cain Sargeant.

The show, in fact, contains only one piece of so-called classical art, a stained-glass window of the "Virgin Mary With Mother" done by an unknown artist in the 1800s and on loan from the Archdiocese of San Francisco. It sets off the works of Roger Hogan of Felton, internationally known for his work in stained glass.

The show will continue through Nov. 4 and features paintings, drawings, silk-screen prints, wood-carvings, metalworks, mosaics, stained glass, needlework and photographs. The gallery is located adjacent to Flint Center on the Cupertino campus.

Rindfleisch said she and Sargeant sought to select pieces that reflected both a concern for academic quality and a desire to document.

"The show has continued to grow, to mature since its Sept. 21 opening as the word got out to others in the community. We quickly discovered that the surface had barely been scratched," Rindfleisch said.

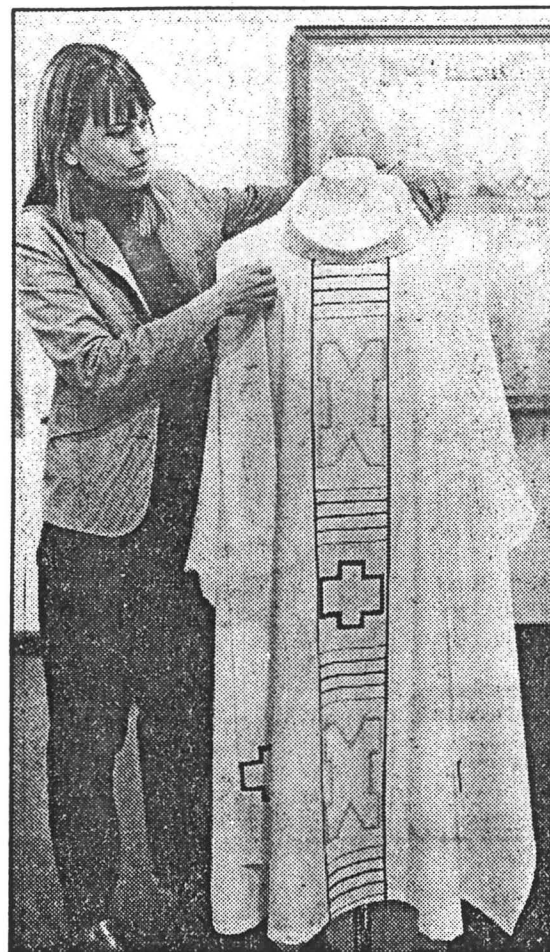
The show's arrangers found, for example, that a black Jesus decorates a King James Version of the Bible owned by an Oakland man, and that a Chinese Jesus is the dominant image in San Francisco's Chinese United Methodist Church, one of that city's oldest.

The former "discovery" is in a display on the Black Messiah Edition of the Bible, exhibited along with some of the original drawings for the special rendition of the Bi-



Cap Carpenter — Mercury News

Stained-glass work, 'Virgin Mary with Mother,' is done in classical style



Jan Rindfleisch, gallery director, adjusts wool chasuble made by nuns of a Catholic order in Santa Clara County.

Cap Carpenter — Mercury

ble by the artist. It is also recorded in a book assembled to accompany the show.

The book has proven to be almost as exciting as the show, with commentaries by Bay Area religious leaders, educators, art critics and, in some instances, by the artists themselves.

The Black Messiah Edition of the Bible, for example, was commissioned by an Oakland magazine publisher, W. Warner Beckett, who writes in the accompanying book:

"God for everyone should be a spirit, but for some reason, it was decided to put pictures of Jesus in bibles. Many of the pictures of Jesus were painted by old masters Bosch, Rembrandt, Raphael, El Greco.

"You can tell the country of the painter by looking at the picture of Jesus. Artists paint people they see. They can't paint a Japanese Jesus if they don't see any Japanese."

Rindfleisch believes it is the ear-

ly Greek philosopher, Xenophanes, who is credited with discovering that man created gods in his own image.

"We approached the project with an open mind, defining religious as an all-inclusive thought rather than in a dogmatic sense," Rindfleisch said. "We wanted to display art close to the way religion and spirituality are experienced. For example, how would a parish prefer to be visualized . . . by its stained-glass windows, by its icons or by the chasubles worn by the priests."

Chasubles, the outermost garments worn by bishops and priests in celebrating holy communion, have undergone significant change in the last decade, Rindfleisch said.

One of the displays in the show at the gallery includes the needlework of the Disciples of the Divine Master, a Catholic order of nuns devoted to prayer and the Roman liturgy. The liturgical vestments on display were handmade by the

order's sisters in Santa Clara County.

"We discovered the Bay Area to be home to many artists of international acclaim. For that reason," Rindfleisch said, "the self-imposed geographical limits were no problems."

As part of the project, religious women will gather at the gallery at 1 p.m. Nov. 1 to lead a litany celebrating women of faith.

Dressed in the vestments of their respective faiths will be Rabbi Aliza Berk of the Religious Studies Department at the University of Santa Clara; the Rev. Natalie Shiras, a member of the campus ministry at San Jose State University; and Sister Janet Welsh, a member of the campus ministry at the University of Santa Clara.

The gallery is open Tuesday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Wednesday and Thursday from 7 to 9 p.m.; and Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m. For information, call (408) 996-4672.