

# "Between Cultures"

by Lea-Ann Bigelow

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Largely ignored by popular media, Mennonites are even more elusive to the general public than their Amish offspring. They originated during the Reformation in Switzerland and the Netherlands. They were devoutly pacifist, condemned slavery, and advocated a separation of church and state. Many fled persecution to America, Russia and other parts of Europe. In the seventeenth century, the Amish broke off from the Mennonites over issues of excommunication and shunning. Conservative Mennonite congregations are recognized for "a strong sense of estrangement from the world which resulted in deliberate nonconformity to the generally accepted cultural patterns of the current society."

Don Michael Swartzentruber's Pop-Mennonite series presents carnivalesque images that manifest from cultural critique and autobiography. They evolve from a rigorous religious background juxtaposed with an early fascination with pop culture. The critical nature of these images is quilt-like, basting together layers of memory, marginalization, salvation, desire, and pop culture. "A myriad of culture issues-from women's head coverings, to the legitimacy of a wedding ring, to television ownership-has echoed through my childhood formation. The church and Mennonite school were visible from my bedroom window as a child, and we were physically at the nucleus of its social labyrinth. Feelings of alienation surfaced after my father was excommunicated, although we continued to faithfully attend and subsist in the community."

Historically, most cultures originated from religious groupings. Distinctions appeared in apparel, grooming, diet, and various other rituals. As Western society frantically scrambles toward secularization, we are forced to ask ourselves: With what are we replacing faith? What is the nature of mainstream culture (Hollywood) and religious subcultures (Sunday school), and what happens when they deliberately avoid each other? Varying between adult and child vantage points, this work holds a propensity and a disdain for both.

Encyclopedia. Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, From essay by J.C. Wenger, mid-1950s  
Referred to as a "wedding band"

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