



Swartzentruber's Latest Exhibit Is "Pop-Mennonite"

By Teresa Smith

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A Mennonite boy bales hay, while visions of Pac-Man and Donkey Kong dance through the air. Small children take comfort in a mother's arms as Supergirl powers through the air. A mournful, wheat-stalk-chewing Jesus lounges on screaming haystacks arranged like the fabled Stonehenge ring of stone. Chock full of contrasting images, the latest exhibit of Don Swartzentruber paintings and illustrations is a commentary on modern values. Swartzentruber, Winona Lake, pulls from his Mennonite background using bits of Old Order programs, doctrines and line drawings and scatters them against published comic books. No vice is left unstudied - from "innocent" adornments like wristwatches and lipstick to teen-age lust with Veronica and Archie hovering around the couple. Three naked girls run toward the city in one painting while another sits behind in traditional Mennonite hat and dress in a rocking chair. Hairy-eyed scissors cut at her clothing. The works are rich in imagery the non-Mennonite or non-Amish probably would miss or overlook. But no one has to guess the artist's meaning. Swartzentruber accompanies each piece with an essay explaining the work. Without the artist's stated intentions, the viewer would be left with their own thoughts. In the painting "Pop Tart," a boy sits atop a toilet, so he doesn't have to move, as he stuffs his happy face with food, eyes glued on Mickey Mouse. The Mouse snarls back at the

boy, unappreciative of the attention. The boy's worried parents and sister hover in the background, their feet planted in a tilled field. Swartzentruber writes: "In the painting, Mickey Mouse is symbolic of the decoys that distract the boy from God-consciousness. Mickey represents the threat of apathy to a developing spiritual sensitivity. It is an agnosticism spawned by frivolity. To the back left, a Mennonite family stands horrified as the child practices his free will and opts for the "popular-culture-tart" that Mickey excreted. The mouse washes his hands of guilt in a fountain of sacred blood. To the left of the boy is a field requiring real toil and attention. To the right, fake red turf acts as stepping-stones to the fairy tale castle. The personified fortress taunts, knowing nothing can compete with his playful diversions. The young boy is vulnerable as he happily eats and adds his own waste to Mickey's toilet. He is feasting on foolishness, as entertainment nourishes his developing world view." But there is plenty for the general population to ponder, because the show goes beyond Swartzentruber's examination of his upbringing. The work is about everyone's hard-working roots and how those roots have been corroded by superficial amusements. Swartzentruber pushes his themes with lime green skies, quilted clouds, surreal tortured figures and off-kilter architecture. The drawings treat the Mennos with soft brown hues and coal black graphite renders the comic characters. Although this collection and others are available on the Internet, the collection should be visited. The exhibit is downstairs in the Good Library on the Goshen College campus. It is sponsored by the Mennonite-Amish Museum Committee and the Mennonite Historical Library. The work is on display through Dec. 9.

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