

The Music Between the Words: The Art of Andy Macpherson

By Christa Van Daele

What did the pages of *Good Work News* look like before Andy Macpherson came along?

For most of us - new readers or old-time subscribers to the paper - that would be hard to say. Fact is, the intricate body of black and white drawings featured in *Good Work News* over the past decade's issues have constituted a full bodied "music between the words" that have expressed the heart's core of The Working Centre for a growing body of subscribers, volunteers, visitors, and project staff.

Explore a world of creative possibility by studying the "Tools for Living" graphic above. It's a touchstone Andy Macpherson drawing. Generated as a pioneer statement in 1994 in dialogue with Joe Mancini, a Working Centre founder and editor of *Good Work News*, the drawing's core themes have steadily evolved in progressive variations offering the reader "head and heart" principles on the pages of *Good Work News*. "We were thrilled with it," Joe says of that first drawing. "It was the first one I remember Andy doing, the first key drawing that got across the idea of tools."

The ideals of the "Tools for Living" drawing share a world of living and working in harmony, pursuing free motion through cycling, playing music and raking and gardening. For some, it's a world of modestly following the traces of the tiny snail's leisurely life pace, as rendered in the right hand corner of the drawing. It's a world that holds suffering as well as spirit, but one that is piercingly illuminated by the sweeping shape of a unified sunlight over all.

For me, a contributor in the hospitable environment of The Working Centre's daily milieu, Andy Macpherson's

posted drawings on bulletin boards have held increasingly tangible worlds of meaning. Like so many other people curious about The Working Centre, I had initially become engaged with his gangly long-limbed black and white figures a full decade ago by investigating Andy's art on the striking cover of *The Working Centre: Experiment in Social Change*, by sociologist Ken Westhues. It appeared to me that the cover deliberately presented a bold dialectic of ideas. Since then, I've learned that you don't take the themes and figures in all at once, but in brief pauses in a busy work day.

In addition, the artist's work is suspended in the timeless world of faith and nature. His themes have

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meditatively captured the underlying changing of the seasons, the simple reminders of what's important. Christmas time, the celebration of a new outdoor bread oven, a tribute to the gardens, the coming and going of friends—these times have all been, in *Good Work News* and in posters at the Centre, occasions for a new rendering by Andy. Reviewed at a scholarly level, Andy Macpherson's drawings express as a unified narrative the historical evolution of The Working Centre's key principles and projects in a way that little else has.

Andy Macpherson, a Kitchener based artist, math teacher, musician, and father of three, accurately refers to his work in the tradition of "illuminated text." As such, it has taken root, as illuminated texts tend to do, in the most pragmatic of origins - the design of a logo for St John's Kitchen. It was Arleen Macpherson, Andy's mother, who had long co-ordinated Kitchen activities; she had asked Andy to pull something together about ten years ago that would serve as a logo. "Somewhere in the archives is a coffee cup that has the entire information about St John's Kitchen. The original logo had the incorporation of text and the graphic all together, an appealing way of integrating text into the logo."

That was in 1989. Since then, it's been a true creative partnership that has progressively evolved in terms of

the intricate depth of the art works produced. Further dialogue between Joe Mancini and the artist over the past decade has involved the steady exchange of ideas and concepts that have, in turn, supported the creation of dozens of drawings. Many of Andy's finest drawings are created exactly to size for *Good Work News*, with exact dimensions specified ahead of time. Working this way, right up to deadline time, illuminated texts in all shapes and sizes have continued to spring from Andy's pen,



— TOOLS FOR LIVING —

wrapping words inside images, running texts in borders, pulling phrases and key word concepts into a layered spectrum of drawings.

In fact, Andy's Working Centre portfolio of "squiggly figures" has exploded with life and joy as he has increasingly responded to practical deadlines. Friends and family members have become the happy recipients of themed works created for special occasions as birthdays or life anniversaries are attained. Andy's

the work is shaped by what you are doing. I'm learning as I do it. This is how I work." Andy's habit of drawing principles out of the readings, he states, has been enjoyable: "It required me to read something on a topic that I found interesting."

Recently, 30 or so staff members got together with Ken Westhues on April 14 of this year, sharing in a two hour session both freely produced drawings and spoken metaphors to explore the virtues and habits that anchor the milieu of the Centre. My growing sense, consolidated by that exciting experience, is that the last decade's "meaning map" of the Working Centre - its most important values, ideals, and practical projects - continues in 2005 to be partially an objective reality, partly a subjective reality, with each individual contributor taking his or her part in shaping the story.

Andy Macpherson has shown us the way in the illuminated texts that are published quarterly in each issue of *Good Work News*. He has gone down many roads to offer up a body of pioneering humanist images that increasingly, in 2005, outline a "story in stages" about The Working Centre. He has rendered for our collective benefit the vibrant pieces of a redemptive narrative, offering us a coherent shaped world that many of us are delighted to absorb - and perhaps recast some day in a form of our own. This is the music between the words as we invent each day in a community of shared memory. Without an artist who can persistently continue to imagine the landscapes of "inside" and "outside", bringing interior and exterior realities together, how can we hope to tell our story to ourselves and share it with others?



handcrafted tile work with his wife Susie Fowler has also become another delightful extension of his Working Centre themes; the two create brilliantly coloured ceramic tiles together that decorate their home, become gifts for friends, or cycle back around as hotly auctioned items at each year's Mayor's Dinner. It is clear that the growth of Andy's witnessing artwork has visibly taken place in a practical parallel structure to the emerging needs of *Good Work News* - which, in turn, as a publication, began in the mid-1990s to reflect the increasing complexity of The Working Centre's environment.

How do the practical project tools and virtues consolidated at the Board of Directors' level of The Working Centre actually generate a unified thread of layered pen-and-ink ideas? A method that has served over the years for Andy's working process is the habit of specific reflection on a text by some of the thinkers that have inspired the founders of The Working Centre—Ivan Illich, Wendell Berry, Ken Westhues, Richard Rohr, and others. "When you are making art at The Working Centre, your philosophy and your understanding of

