

"Suitable Truth" Art Project Unites Disciplines

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GOING BACK TO SCHOOL FOUR DECADES LATER

Donna Naimoli graduated from high school in 1958 and first attended Dordt in the early 1980s, finishing her freshman year. Now 40 years later, she's back at Dordt taking more classes.

"I've always loved learning and don't mind studying," Naimoli says, "but I felt there was a lack in my life. I had little knowledge of the humanities, the roots of theology, psychology, philosophy, and history. All of these, I believe, are central to understanding our culture, our society, and the world around us."

Today Naimoli gets to study at Dordt with two of her grandchildren: grandson Avery Den Herder, a senior studying mechanical engineering, and granddaughter Ayda Den Herder, a freshman civil engineering major.

Last spring, Naimoli and Avery took the same core philosophy class, but from different professors. They not only were able to talk about the similarities and differences between their classes, but they certainly had more in-depth conversations about what they were learning than most students can have with their grandparents.

"My grandma's decision to go back to school has given us another thing to share," Avery says. "It adds another layer to our relationship that most people don't get the opportunity to have with their grandparents."

Naimoli's decision to go back to school, stemming from her ever-present desire to learn, is a mindset she's worked at instilling in her children and grandchildren. "At first I didn't understand why my grandmother would want to go back to college, but then I saw how excited she was to learn," Ayda says. "She has always been one of my role models, but seeing her want to continue to grow and learn at her age made me even more inspired."

Naimoli loves sharing what she's learning not only with her grandchildren but also with fellow students during class discussions.

"I am so impressed by the quality of the students in the classes I'm taking," she says. "They're bright, inquisitive, and conscientious of the cultural mandate to redeem and restore the world as followers of Christ. Our society will be strengthened as these students graduate and impact business, science, education, and other fields."

ANA TIMMER ('20)



The three students snapped a photo together on the first day of school.

PHOTO SUBMITTED

JAMIN VER VELDE ('99)



At the American State Bank Sports Complex construction site, Senior Morgan Stoltzfus modeled "Blueprint for Life," which features 16 blueprints of how to build a God-honoring life.

"SUITABLE TRUTH" ART PROJECT UNITES DISCIPLINES

In the B.J. Haan Auditorium, a group of six students and an artist sit in chairs around a large video camera on a tripod, listening to Instructor of Digital Media Mark Volkers give instructions.

"I'll say 'action,' but as you come down the aisle, walk slowly," he says. "So, you'll stand behind that white wall back there and then start walking. Sound good?"

They nod, stand, and walk toward the back of the auditorium, chatting together as they go. Meanwhile, Professor of Art David Platter makes some final arrangements of the mannequins—some wearing intricately decorated costumes—that line the back of the auditorium stage. Six digital media majors take to the stage and stand near Volkers and the camera. Volkers puts on a pair of headphones and makes some adjustments to the camera before shouting, "action!"

The camera rolls, and the students and artist begin to walk down the aisle.

"What type of tea are you drinking?" asks a student.

"It's chai," says the artist. "I drink chai in the morning and herbal in the afternoon, like clockwork every day. But I saved my tea bags for a long time. I made a dress out of the tea bags, which is a wearable sculpture. And it also incorporates in Bible verses, so it's like wearing the truth of Scripture and shows how we should be soaking up Scripture continually."

They walk onto the stage and past the camera.

That's great," says Volkens. "All right, let's run through that one more time."

The artist is Stephanie Lael Barrick, who creates mixed material wearable sculpture using content rooted in the Christian faith and Scripture. The students are senior art majors and sophomore digital media majors; they serve as actors for the film, model the wearable sculpture, or work alongside Volkens to capture film footage.

"The intent is to give our senior art majors along with sophomore digital media students the opportunity to co-create a visual narrative in video format and to immerse themselves with a practicing artist," says Platter.

Volkens, Platter, Barrick, and the students visited 10 locations in Sioux County and on Dordt's campus to model the

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— David Platter

wearable sculpture and shoot footage. The goal is to create a 10 to 15-minute video that will highlight Barrick's sculpture—including the dress made of tea bags and Scripture verses—in creative, unique ways.

Platter first connected with Barrick at a Christians in the Visual Arts conference in Austin, Texas. He was blown away by the intricacy of her work—how she sews together paper, fabric, wool, wire,



"The gallery opening reception was so much fun," says Stephanie Barrick. "We had a great turnout with lots of interesting questions added onto my gallery talk."

silk, fiber, and more to create wearable sculpture—and was interested in getting her to come to Dordt's campus. In some ways it felt like an impossible task, especially since Barrick's art would need to be driven in from her studio in Delaware.

After some brainstorming with Volkens and others, Platter came up with an idea: what if Barrick came to campus for a week to collaborate with both digital media and art students on a video project that would result in a film Barrick could use to showcase her artwork?

"Professor Volkens really encouraged us to do most of the shooting work, telling us to hop behind the camera and get involved," says Quinton Olson.



Moss: "Suitable Truth" Art Project Unites Disciplines

Platter pitched the idea to Barrick, who said yes.

"I'm tickled pink that our students have this opportunity," says Platter. "This, to me, is what education is for; it's collaborative between a practicing artist, students, and two academic departments."

Quintin Olson, a sophomore digital media major, appreciated the opportunity to collaborate.

"It was neat to be involved in something where both art forms can appreciate one another. We could use video techniques to emphasize certain artistic techniques, which was cool," he says.

Volkers reworked the syllabus for his Film and Video Production class so that his students would be able to gain professional experience while also getting graded for their work.

"This was a rare case where I was able to take something out of my class schedule and replace it," he says. "It worked well."

Working alongside Volkers was a great learning opportunity in that "he treated us as equal partners and took our concerns and suggestions into account as we filmed," says Dayna Wichhart, a sophomore. "He taught and gave us pointers as we worked, but he also let us take the bull by the horns and try it ourselves. I felt that operating in a professional manner helped me to see what my future career could look like."

Senior Emily Broersma enjoyed going through every art piece with Barrick and

JAMIN VER VELDE (99)



Senior Jayden Huisman models "Power from the Throne," a sculpture highlighting how we have been set free from sin by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

learning about her process.

"Each one of her sculptures holds meaning for what it is we are called to do as Christians," says Broersma. "Seeing her pride and passion for her work encouraged me to find that same passion for my work as a digital creator."

"When you see what she is doing—when she explains it and walks you through it—you realize how much biblical and aesthetic thought is behind her work," says Volkers. "There is nothing slapdash or haphazard about it."

For example, Barrick took a disintegrating Bible from her husband's family that

dated back to the 1800s and transformed it into a jacket that resembles both a Wensleydale sheep and a wolf. "Sheep's Clothing" was inspired by Matthew 7:15's warning to "beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

"All the details really matter in her work, and that makes her artwork all the more exciting," says Volkers.

One of his favorite shoots took place out at Sandy Hollow on a windy afternoon. A student donned the wearable sculpture called "Knowing Evil," which depicts the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Not only does the sculpture include textured brown fabric to depict the bark, but it has bits of Scripture sewn into it, and on the headpiece is "a serpent snaking through with two apples on top, to represent how the serpent has control of her thoughts," says Volkers. In the video shoot, the model wearing "Knowing Evil" stands in the woods and sways in the wind.

"It was a great experience for a more poetic form of filmmaking and gave me a new perspective on depicting art through film," says Broersma.

Platter says that Barrick's wearable art sculptures are a dynamic example of visual theology that inspires us to experience Scripture as the Living Word.

"She examines Scripture through the lens

JAMIN VER VELDE (99)



"It was fun to work with David Platter, Stephanie Barrick, and the students," says Mark Volkers. "It was a lot of work—perhaps more than we initially thought—but it was worth it because I think the end product will be good."

of visual narrative and pours herself into material exploration through her delicate and refined craft in fiber and textile arts," he says. "Her work illuminates in captivating fashion some of the ways God intertwines his covenant and grace for his people with a remarkable co-creative spirit."

Barrick says that her impression of Dordt is of "a very Christ-centered, intentionally God-honoring community."

"It was so refreshing to experience young adults who are well-mannered, sincere, and not wrapped up in worldliness. Not once did I see a student give their phone attention over a face-to-face conversation," she says. "I fully intend to recommend Dordt University to my fellow East Coasters. I feel I have discovered a hidden gem in the cornfields of Iowa."

Now that everything has been shot, Wichhart is ready to get to work on the final product.

"My favorite part of filmmaking is editing, and this project has a lot of interesting editing to work with such as voiceover, transitions, and greenscreens," she says. "I'm eager to get into the digital media lab and put together a rough cut."

SARAH MOSS ('10)



JAMIN VERVELDE ('99)

"Steeped in Scripture" is made of tea bags, emphasizing how believers should soak up Scripture continually.

CHRISTIAN REFORMED AND MUCH MORE

Dordt University...Where are you located?" "Dordt...Like the Canons of Dordt?" "Dordt...Other than the name, what's unique about your university?"

As Director of Church Relations, I hear common questions like these when speaking with people who are learning about Dordt University for the first time.

While not a denominationally owned university, when Dordt was founded in 1955 it was an institution primarily formed of and for the people of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). Over the years, Dordt's affiliation with the CRC has been of mutual benefit. Dordt has been blessed by the thousands of young people from the CRC who have been equipped by Dordt's faculty and staff to pursue God's calling in their lives and enter into the vocations for which they have been prepared.

Dordt alumni engage in the local church. They attend worship on Sundays. They also involve themselves in the life of the church, teaching Sunday School or leading a small group. They serve in leadership within the church, with some eventually serving churches as pastors. Dordt alumni get involved in their communities, seeking to embody a faithful contemporary response of being agents of Christ-centered renewal, over every aspect of life.

Today, Dordt's impact extends far beyond one denomination. Currently less than 30% of our students come from Christian Reformed congregations. While roughly 50% of our current students come from Reformed or Presbyterian faith traditions, the other half of Dordt's students come from a range of churches, both denominational and non-denominational in their ecclesiastical ties.

As I serve at Dordt, my work is to continue to build deeper connections between the university and the local

church. Dordt is a better place when it has a close relationship with local churches. Churches not only provide us with students, but churches also help anchor us to our faith foundations. In turn, Dordt helps strengthen the local church, sending out graduates who have been encouraged and prepared to serve.

We strive to be, as President Erik Hoekstra states, "hospitably" Reformed, remaining Christ centered, Scripturally rooted, and confessionally committed, while still welcoming students from a variety of traditions within Christianity to learn and grow both in knowledge and in faith.

Every day, I have the opportunity to seek out ways to continue to deepen Dordt's relationship with the local church. For those who have known us from the beginning, I travel to ecclesiastical meetings, provide pulpit supply from Sunday to Sunday, and host pastor and church events on campus. I also seek to make more connections with churches that know us a little, or those who haven't yet heard about us. Across North America, I visit churches, Christian schools, and Christian conferences.

As a 1993 graduate of Dordt and an ordained minister with 20 years of congregational ministry experience, I am keenly interested in inviting people to be followers and servants of Jesus Christ. The local church and Dordt partner well in this important work.

I look forward to visiting and hearing about your church sometime. I welcome your invitations and enjoy when you share with me how God has used Dordt University to shape you to assist in bringing glimpses of the New Creation wherever God has planted you.

REV. TODD ZUIDEMA ('93), DIRECTOR OF CHURCH RELATIONS