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Freewill

Susan VanRees
Dordt College

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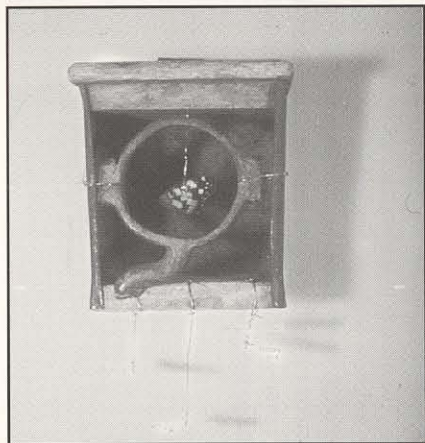
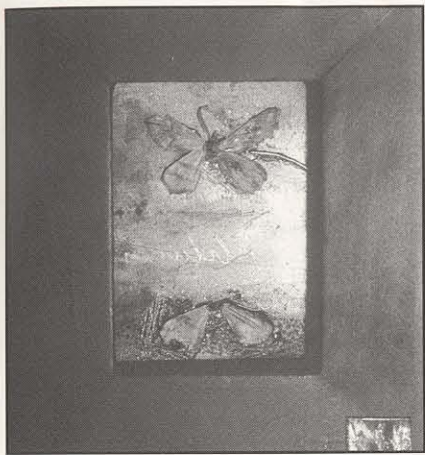
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SUSAN VANREES

(top to bottom, l-r): Of Beginnings and Endings, Freewill, Still Point of the Turning World, Judgement Seat, Judgement Seat (cushion), Judgement Seat (opened interior), Judgement Seat (box and books)

Susan Van Rees is a new faculty member at Dordt College where she teaches sculpture, painting, drawing, and art history. She recently finished her graduate work at the University of South Dakota while teaching art and art history at Northwestern College. Susan's varied experiences in the art world include a museum internship at the Tate Gallery in London, teaching and researching for the Des Moines Art Center, managing a commercial gallery (Pegasus Gallery), and designing and sculpting for Cooper Woodworking. Her artwork has been recently exhibited both locally at the Sioux City Art Center and internationally, garnering awards including the USD Faculty Award and Dean's Award, First Place Painting, and First Place Mixed Media.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I sit in seats of mercy, grace, and judgement everyday but have never SEEN where I reside. Oftentimes humans link physical experience with truth following the old adage "I'll believe it when I see it." Addressing this physical aspect of our human nature, I want to render unseen truths visible.

Physical reality is only part of truth. Through my artistic pursuits I wrestle the fullness of reality. The physical, metaphysical, philosophical, emotional, psychological, historical, and scientific realms all reflect aspects of a full, unified reality created and sustained by God—a unity in truth.

MERCY SEAT

Mercy is of heaven and earth. Historically, the mercy seat is a place where God chose to dwell among his people. In my work titled *Mercy Seat*, hands of earth raise to uphold the sitter while wings of heaven lift the entire chair. Supportive hands are cracked, strained, sacrificing to hold the sitter's weight. Christ is the meeting place; he is of heaven and earth, with arms outstretched carved in the crucifix form.

Materials hold symbolic value in my work. The human hands are of fragile clay, continually sustained by light. A leather pelt, marking the place of the sitter, contains an inherent sacrifice; something had to die for the *Mercy Seat* to exist. All the materials are worn with age, as though passed from generation to generation, a testament to the universality and history of mercy, grace, and judgement.

GRACE SEAT

Grace is a place of receiving in faith. We sit in chairs everyday without questioning if the structure will support us; we trust in simple faith. A chair is a resting place for one, a place to bring nothing but oneself to relieve our greatest burden, the weight of our self.

When one rests in the *Grace Seat*, she/he is completely supported, surrounded on all sides by the sacrificial leather. This supporting leather is ingrained in a history of grace. Biblical stories of grace are burned into the hide, each word marking an "altar" to remember our humanity and God's grace. *The Grace Seat* addresses the totality of needs we have as humans, not only through language and history, but also through spirituality and physicality evidenced by surrounding angels upholding the sitter and thousands of faces etched in copper.

JUDGEMENT SEAT

To judge requires knowledge and wisdom. Is the *Judgement Seat* a place for God or (hu)man? We recognize the ways of knowing in the chair—countless calculations mark the seat and back, books ranging from Prime Evil to Philosophy and Psychology to Love and Friendship sustain the chair's center, and the back opens as a cabinet displaying weights, measures, rulers, and timers. The search to understand such mounds of information is eternal.

To sit in a chair is to know a chair. Sitting in the *Judgement Seat* one feels the underlying straw poking through copper mesh. The exposed interior proves uncomfortable for the judge. Slowly the chair rocks back and forward, the sitter (us) unable to maintain a steady view or position. Perhaps it is only the omniscience and holiness of God which can fill the expansive task of the judgement seat.