

Paintings of Memory, History, and Light

Randall Stoltzfus

Most of my work, and *Flock* (illustrated here) is a good example, is meant to be open to interpretation in several ways. With *Flock*, even the title has a sort of triple entendre, providing permission to see either sheep, or people, or birds. Or all three. There is a fourth meaning that is important, a reference to the sort of texture found on rich velvet wallpaper or fabric. That is important, because it speaks to the material truth of the surface, which I feel I can count on even if all other meanings fail.



Flock, 2003, by Randall Stoltzfus, oil on panel, 30 x 48"

When this sort of painting is successful, viewers usually choose an interpretation and are pretty adamant about it. With *Flock* there is that black mark in the lower edge of the painting left of center that is particularly figurative. I have been asked, "Is this Jesus Christ?" I have also been accused of painting Osama Bin Laden. Personally, I am more interested in the first interpretation, but I am fascinated by the strength and variety of convictions that emerge.

Not all the images get responses that are this specific. But most have sources this specific. Often those sources are biblical. My Mennonite upbringing supplies me with source material in other ways as well. Although most art critics don't know what I am talking about when I say that the burning figure in a particular painting is a historical figure from *Martyr's Mirror*, I am glad to have a rich reservoir of both narrative and faith from which to grow these images. The audience may take away what they will.



Above
Housefire,
2002, oil
on linen,
72 x 84"



Left
Rapt, 2004,
oil on linen,
54 x 58"

—Randall Stoltzfus is a painter who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He was raised in a Mennonite household in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, and is the grandson of an Amish deacon. His evocative landscape paintings are haunted by memory, history, and light. More of his work can be seen at www.sloweye.net.

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IN THIS ISSUE

Winter 2007, Volume 7, Number 1

Editorial: From Mennonite to Anabaptist and Beyond	inside cover
Poetry	
Travis Poling, <i>She Stands, Still Weeping</i> • 2; Ken Gible, <i>Prayer Meetings</i> • 45; M. Christine Benner <i>(Un)happy, in Love</i> • back cover	
Pop Goes the Mennonite: Conversations with an Artist and His Work	3
Vicki Sairs	
Pop-Mennonite	8
Don Swartzentruber	
Books, Faith, World & More	12
<i>Farming in the City: A Review of Taking Root in Strange Soil: Hyattsville Mennonite Church</i> Daniel Hertzler	
Kingsview	18
<i>At the End of Ethnic Mennonite Life</i> Michael A. King	
Paintings of Memory, History, and Light	23
Randall Stoltzfus	
Cultural Agoraphobia: Why Young Postmodern Mennonites Struggle to Follow or Lead	25
David Landis	
Just Another Day in Paradise— or Philadelphia?	30
Steve Kriss	
Ink Aria	33
<i>What I Knew When I Was Little and Didn't Know Anything</i> Renee Gehman	
Beneath the Skyline	38
<i>Some Thoughts on Helping</i> Deborah Good	
The Chaos of God	42
Jody Fernando	
The Turquoise Pen	44
<i>A New Story</i> Noël R. King	