

Fruits of the Spirit, acrylic, c. 2015, Jen Norton, b. late 20th century

Commentary by Hovak Najarian



In choosing Paul's "fruits of the spirit" as the subject for her painting, Jen Norton did not give herself an easy problem to solve. Giving visual form to Biblical stories and events is relatively easy for a person with skills but how would an artist illustrate concepts that are well-communicated through words? Words such as those in the Ten Commandments or The Beatitudes are listed usually as wall-plaques,



and are not the subject of paintings. Often Paul's words are

displayed also in list form and sometimes surrounded with fruit.

Instead of making *Fruit of the Spirit* a simple list with a decorative border, Norton created a sense of interplay between verbal and pictorial elements. The placement of Apostle Paul's words on an apron seems like an unusual choice but Norton explained her reason for doing so was "Because [an apron] is a symbol of service, often done by the women of a family in teaching their children and grandchildren.

It is about unwavering service in the emotional education of our children that leads to the harvesting of these fruits.”

When creating a painting, one of the principles of composition is “dominance and subordination.” This is much like a theater scene in which the lead actor is in the spotlight while others on stage (the cast) are in a supporting role. Members of a



cast are important contributors, however, and not simply “background.” They interact with the lead, with one another, and support a scene in many ways; including spoken words, motions, facial expressions, and body language. The areas of the painting surrounding Paul’s words and Norton’s apron – the “supporting cast” – are filled with activity. Lines from the word *Peace* extend outward playfully to suggest apron strings. Their linear movements and colors are related to the words on the apron and are repeated throughout the painting as vines,

flowers and leaves. These lines, colors, and shapes suggest upholstery fabric; perhaps a pattern that might be found on a favorite comfortable chair of the person wearing the apron. The collective image is one of warmth.

In the Books of Matthew and Luke, reference is made to how trees are known: Matthew notes, “Ye shall know them by their fruit... every good tree brings forth good fruit” and Luke states, “For every tree is known by its fruit.” Before enumerating fruits of the spirit in his letter to the Galatians, Paul recounts some of the characteristics of unsavory human behavior. “By contrast,” he states, “the fruits of the Spirit is *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. These “fruits” are not stated as rules or laws but are manifestations of the nobler side of human inclinations.

Jesus taught, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The manner in which everyone should be treated was a message also in his Sermon on the Mount; “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Jesus’ teachings were ideals. Laws designed to regulate civility would not be required if his words were followed. In Paul’s letter to the Galatians, he listed examples of the spirit that are in evidence when we treat and respect everyone as we ourselves would like to be treated.