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POR DENTRO

The Vital Furrows of Vonn Hartung

By LYDIA GONZALES—Editor of POR DENTRO

“Jesus has risen (Luke 24) “He has been raised: He is not here!” (Mark 16)

“After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to visit the tomb ... As they arrived at the tomb an angel appeared to them and told the women: You must not be afraid, because I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here. He has been raised just as he announced... They left the tomb in a hurry, afraid, but with an immense joy at the same time, and running, went to give the news to the disciples (Matthew 28)

This was the incredible but true news that the first believers transmitted from one to another two days after they saw him dead on the cross..



“[He is Risen](#)“

wood sculpture high relief by AVonnHartung for Casa de Niños Manuel Fernandez Juncos (Miramar SJ, Puerto Rico)

A. Vonn Hartung painter and sculptor, has molded this historic fact into a moving wood sculpture carved on the sacristy door in a chapel in the metropolitan area. This work, entitled “He is Risen”, forms part of an ensemble which also includes “The Holy Cross” and “The Sorrowful Mother”.



“[La Madre Dolorosa](#)” wood sculpture (high relief) by AVonnHartung for Casa de Niños Manuel Fernandez Juncos (Miramar SJ, Puerto Rico)

In the latter you can appreciate the Virgin after they lowered Jesus from the Cross; with the crown of thorns in her heart. In her hands she holds the nails, the robe and the cords which fastened her Son to the Cross. In her face is reflected the pain of the moment. In the background the empty Cross is seen and on the right side of the work you can notice the tomb where they buried the Lord, the tomb which is opened on the third day as He Himself had anticipated it, “He is not here. He has risen just as He announced.”

Joy! The Christian world praises and gives thanks to God for this event; the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, Son of God.

Vonn is an artist who has converted into personal experience the facts of the Resurrection because he as a Christian firmly believes that “Jesus is the Son of God made man for us, and for all those who believe, there will be opened a path of life different from all that has been known until now; and they will go from revelation to revelation...”

And many are the paths that Vonn has traveled before he arrived in Puerto Rico, a place he did not know, but to which he yearned to come and make his home.

“I knew it was a beautiful place,” he admits, although he didn’t know anything or anyone on the island. So on a stormy day in 1961 he left Connecticut with \$300 in his pocket and arrived in San Juan. “I’d like to find a place to stay,” he said to an airport official. “For how long?” they asked him. “I’m going to live here,” he answered. After many phone calls they found him a place for \$3.00 a day.

Since he was very young Vonn always knew that he wanted to dedicate himself to painting and he wanted to study in Puerto Rico. The first thing he did was to go to the University of Puerto Rico. He brought a portfolio of his works. “I would like to study art, but I don’t know Spanish,” explained Vonn. “You don’t need it; you speak the language of art. That’s all you need,” they told him. They accepted him as a visiting student.

His first art teacher was Felix Bonilla Norat. He studied two semesters, returned to Connecticut to work in order to make money and return to the island to continue his studies. He painted signs. He worked at

whatever came along. He bought a motorcycle and went to Alaska to work in the gold mines; he wanted to earn money quick! God had other plans for Vonn.

After being in Alaska for four days he had a very serious accident. He crashed his motorcycle into a car. His legs and arms were severely injured. He was hospitalized for a long time. During his stay in the hospital a priest proposed a remedy for boredom: to learn to play chess or to read. Vonn preferred the books. That month he dedicated himself to studying the mystics of the church.

When he left the hospital he devoted himself to working arduously; he picked fruit in the valleys of California and also worked as a dairyman.

He wanted to finish his studies, so he enrolled in the University of Connecticut (1965). It was the time of the Vietnam War, and his convictions as a pacifist made him leave the United States.

He goes to San Miguel Allende, Mexico, and there continues his studies. Afterwards he returns to the United States and in 1970 graduates, with honors, from the School of Fine Arts of the University of Connecticut. After graduating he dedicates himself to travel in order to enrich himself culturally.

During all those years he never abandoned his dream of returning to the Isle of Enchantment, “It’s a little piece of paradise on the Earth,” as he calls it.

He met Patricia Goldman. He asked her to convert to Catholicism to marry her and bring her to “the most beautiful place that you’re going to see in your life”. They married the first of December of 1984. Ten days later they were in Rio Piedras, seated in the plaza of the university city. Papers and garbage swirled around them. Loudspeakers competed with each other announcing the specials of Christmas which was approaching. Patricia cried. A short time later Vonn returned with her to Connecticut. They planned to give themselves some time to make a final decision. After two weeks Patricia was the one who asked Vonn: “When do we return to Puerto Rico?”



“El Jíbaro“

Oil portrait by AVonnHartung

They've been here for twelve years. Vonn has dedicated himself to painting. He is a great [portrait painter](#). His creations of the farmer are extraordinary. The same is true for the Puerto Rican customs and traditions. He captures in his works with singular beauty the colors of the Puerto Rican countryside.



“Surco Vital” / “Vital Furrow” serigraph by AVonnHartung

One of his creations, “Vital Furrow”, portrays the country life in places where the oxen and plow are still utilized to cultivate the land.

“It speaks of the spiritual fulfillment attained through working and living in harmony with nature,” points out the artist, who is an environmentalist and worries about the way nature is being destroyed. His complaint is that “I have to paint landscapes rapidly, since they disappear very quickly.”

“Thy Will Be Done”*, is a visual prayer, which the artist calls “our environmental crisis” which is really an exterior sign and evidence of an interior spiritual confusion between ourselves, our creator and creation in general.

This work of art reveals two possible futures: one of evolution, harmony and continuity; the other of chaos, degeneration and destruction. The details expressed by the artist are veiled at times to motivate the imagination and participation of the viewer.

The purpose of the work is to awaken a disquiet which leads us to question our apathy about the future of creation. “The choice and the responsibility are ours. Our destiny will be determined by our beliefs, our will and our own hands,” the artist concludes.

Some of Vonn Hartung’s creations are in the chapel of the Tertiary Capuchin Brothers in the Manuel Fernandez Juncos Boys’ Home in Miramar.

***ARTIST’S NOTE:** The painting “*Thy Will be Done*” was later renamed “[*On Earth as it is in Heaven: through Him all things were made Jn 1:3*](#)”