

Just Food:

Right to Food from a Faith Perspective

RAY DIRKS¹

The *Just Food* exhibition explores the right to food, and was created by the Mennonite Committee on Human Rights, based out of Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Eighteen commissioned artists from Canada and around the world were asked to interpret the meaning of the human right to food in two pieces of original art specifically created for this exhibition. The artists were divided into six groups of three, with one Canadian and two international individuals in each group. The groups were asked to create artistic responses to two different texts—six human rights declarative texts each paired with a different passage from the Old Testament.²

The artists represented a wide range of cultural, economic, and faith backgrounds. One artist, Jossias Siteo from Mozambique, lived on the street when he was a child. The content of his art comes from a place of having known extreme hunger and need. Alejandro Aranda has worked on behalf of marginalized groups in one of Mexico's poorest states, Guerrero, for years. Bert Monterona is motivated by justice issues in his Philippines homeland. Tibebe Terffa was imprisoned, tortured, and deprived of food under the previous Mengistu dictatorship in Ethiopia. Isam Aboud comes from the Sahara Desert of northern Sudan, where temperatures hit fifty degrees Celsius in the summer. He knows the harshness of an unforgiving climate. Hashim Hannon, a refugee from Iraq, knows the affect war has on food production and security. Annelies Soomers is a Dutch artist who has advocated for the least among us for years through her art. Jairo Alfonso Castelanos, from Cuba, understands what it's like to live with ration cards. Ovid Charlette is a First Nations person of Canada, and discovered his artistic talents in prison. From a rich traditional

¹ Ray Dirks is the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery curator. The gallery is a self-funded program of Mennonite Church Canada located on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

² Works from two of the eighteen commissioned artists are featured below. More reproductions of the exhibit can be found online at www.anabaptistwitness.org/journal_entry/just-foods/ and the complete exhibit can be found at Mennonite Committee on Human Rights, *Just Food Art*, accessed June 14, 2015, <http://justfoodart.com/>.

base, he explores important issues with pain, skill, and raw openness.

The art presented in this exhibit challenges viewers to discover, contemplate, and explore food-related issues from a myriad of cultural, faith, political, and economic perspectives, sometimes in literal terms, sometimes more abstractly, some holding close to the quotes, some unveiled with broader brush strokes, but all created with integrity using the universal language of art.

Just Food exhibit sponsors included Mennonite Central Committee Canada, Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Canadian International Development Agency, Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine, and Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, among others.

Image 1: Alejandro Aranda. *La Busqueda (The Search)*

Sources of inspiration

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25

Amos 5: 11-12, 14

Artist's Reflection

My hands, your hands: our hands interconnect, brown, white, black and yellow. Weathered, hard & callused, tired and worn out hands, constantly moving, offering and working, looking for tortillas, wheat and rice.

Hands that plough the land; hands that with every seed plant life into the centre of the earth. Hands that water and care for the fruits.

Hands in solidarity that share, help, teach; that build a better world.

Hands that don't close in fists in order to punch, that don't pull the trigger to kill, that don't sign the papers for war, that don't contaminate the air, the land, the water. Hands that don't hurt others because of ideology, belief, prejudice or the color of one's skin.

Yes to the hands that come together as brothers and sisters, those who struggle together for the common good, those who organize in the face of misfortune, those who rise up before injustice, who give spirit and hope. Yes to those who place a hand on your shoulder and encourage others to keep going, who suggest that it is possible to live in a world that is different, to live in a world without hunger or thirst.



Image 1. Alejandro Aranda. Mexico, *La Busqueda (The Search)*, 2010.
Linocut, 20 x 28 inches. Artist copyright.

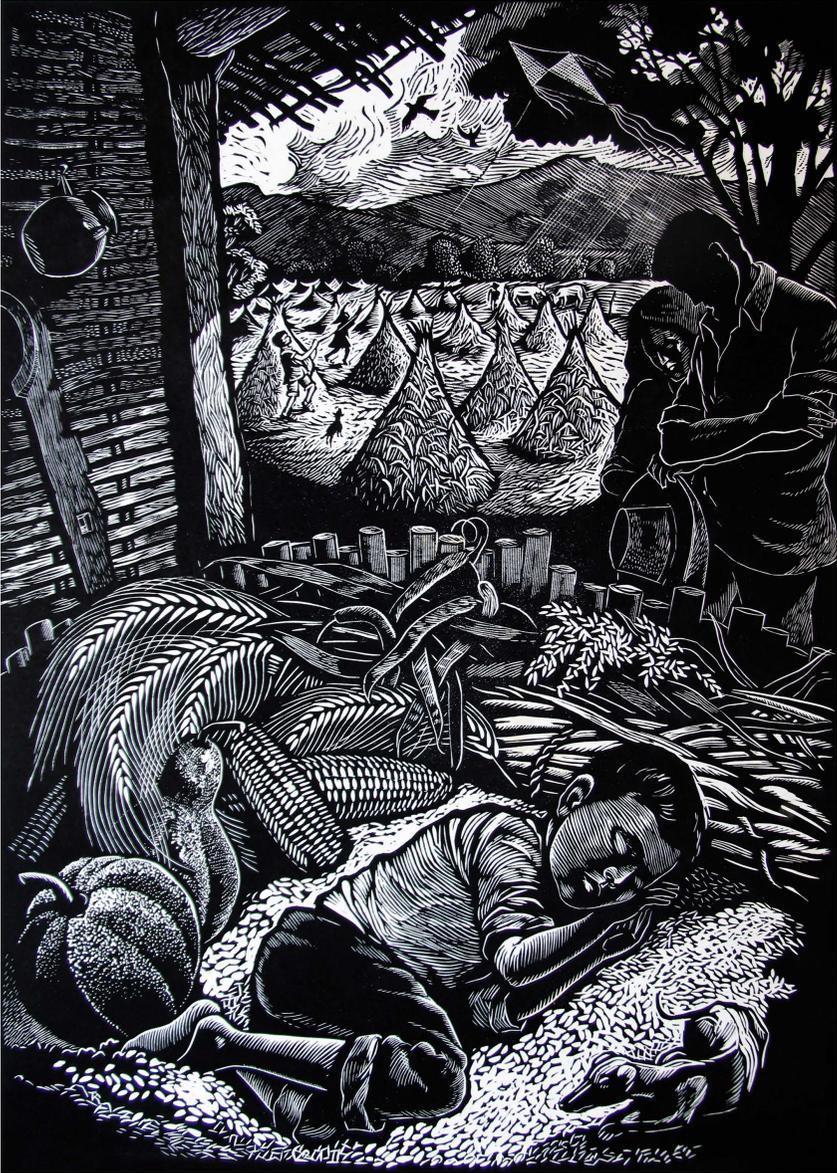


Image 2. Alejandro Aranda. Mexico, *La Oración (The Prayer)*, 2010.
Lino cut, 20 x 28 inches. Artist copyright.

Image 2. Alejandro Aranda. *La Oración (The Prayer)*.

Sources of Inspiration

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.”

-Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, 10 December, 1948

Amos 5: 11-12, 14

Artist's Reflection

In *el troje* or the barn, my feet feel the corn. I step on the corn, sink and get lost in the corn. Jumping I make pirouettes and lie down and dream that I am the corn. A child of the corn: made of corn meal, color of a tortilla. I leave with my kite tied to a string of stars, the backbone of a giant animal. Above the moon is serene.

I am not cold or hot or thirsty. I'm not envious or bitter, nor do I feel pain or hate or fear. I am nothing, naked like the first man made of corn, open to be happy.

Image 3 and 4. Gen Tsuboi. *God's Plan 1 and God's Plan 2*.

Sources of Inspiration

Hillsboro resolution

“The peace of the world may rise or fall on the solution to the hunger problem in the developing countries.” MCC resolved “to acquaint the churches of our constituency with the relationship between over-consumption on the part of North Americans and its effect upon needy people in the developing countries.”

-Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Resolution on the World Food Crisis, Hillsboro, Kansas, January 1974

Daniel 1:1-21



Image 3. Gen Tsuboi. Japan, *God's Plan 1*, 2010.
Kirie (Paper cut), 31 x 21.5 inches. Artist copyright.



Image 4. Gen Tsuboi. Japan, *God's Plan 2*, 2010.
Kirie (Paper cut), 31 x 21.5 inches. Artist copyright.