

Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus: An Homage to Olivier Messiaen



Contemplation of Silence c

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Catalogue essay: the Art Institute of Chicago, January 22 to March 15, 1981

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I chose the French composer Olivier Messiaen's piano composition, "Vingt regards sur l'Enfant Jesus (Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus), as the theme for these prints so that I may pay homage to a man and to an art form that has been a great source of inspiration to me.

In "Vint regards," Messiaen took up the same ideas of Dom Columbia Marmion (*Le Christ dans ses mysteres*) and Maurice Toesca (*Les Douze regards*) wherein they spoke of the contemplations of the shepards, of the angels, of the Virgin and of the Celestial Father. "Vint regards," according to Messiaen, is an adaptation of these four themes while at the same time an addition of sixteen new contemplations. In speaking about the contemplations, Messiaen has said that "...More than in all my preceding works, I have looked here for a language of mystical love, to be varied, powerful and tender, sometimes brutal, responding to multicolored commands." I too, in these twenty intaglio prints, have tried to formulate such a language - a language befitting the sublime nature of the subject.

The first phase of this work began with a series of pencil drawings and then was extended into the medium of printing. It was in the process of creating these images that an appreciation of the various intaglio techniques (etching, drypoint, electrically vibrated drypoint mezzo-tint, engraving, and aquatint) became a dominant factor in the series. This was especially true when I realized that if I ignored certain relationships inherent within the medium, the language I sought would be severely limited. Some of the formal elements, such as line, space, and texture, that were peculiar to intaglio, revealed new possibilities when combined with blind embossing (a depressed element printed without ink). Accepting this interchangeability as a challenge and an opportunity to explore, I found that my visual interpretations often changed dramatically from the earlier drawings. It was during this change and while attempting to synthesize idea and emotion with the process that I experienced the fine line which connects form and expression, when personal meaning and the medium function as one. It was a moment in which I was fully able to appreciate and experience a sense of the self, the medium and the unexpected.

I hope that with these twenty contemplations I have given to Olivier Messiaen the respect and the admiration that he so richly deserves, and that I have remained respectful of the medium of music which he loves. Perhaps Messiaen would agree that when J.S. Bach one of the canons in his "Musical Offering," "Quaerendo invenietis" (By seeking, you will discover) that Bach should have added "the unexpected" as well!

Daniel P. Ramirez
September 25, 1980
Chicago, Illinois

Note* A suite of twenty intaglio prints, in an edition of ten, plus five artist's proofs. The prints were pulled by the artist and Dennis McWilliams at the Chicago Center for the Print, between August and December 1980. The image size of each is noted in the catalogue; they were printed on Arches paper of approximately 565 x 760 mm. The prints in the exhibition are marked A.I.C.Proof and are the gift of Mr. And Mrs. Herman Ramirez.

The study drawings in graphite, on Strathmore paper of approximately 587 x 738 mm., are the gift of the family of Mrs. Dorothy Gomez-Schultz in her memory.

The trial proofs, on Rives or Arches paper, are also the gift of the family of Mrs. Gomez-Schultz