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Visitors view artwork on display at McGuire Hall at St. Joseph's Church in Greenwich Village. The exhibit is organized by Arthouse2B, a collective formed in 2020 to celebrate the deep spiritual value and insight of artists. The group organizes Mass for Artists, typically followed by multidisciplinary exhibit. (Edwin Lucero)



by Kevin Christopher Robles

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On a recent warm Friday night in Lower Manhattan, about two blocks from Washington Square Park and the New York University campus, Mass was celebrated at St. Joseph's Church in Greenwich Village. Founded in the 1830s, St. Joe's is one of the oldest Catholic churches in New York City; its white marble walls, built in the Greek Revival style popular at the time, serve as a center of spiritual life for many college students who live nearby. That night, a new kind of congregation gathered there.

Not far from the Village's renowned jazz clubs and piano bars that are the heart of the neighborhood's nightlife, a collective of artists followed the Stations of the Cross before sitting down for Mass on March 7. At the church were poets, painters, filmmakers, musicians and dancers, as well as a good number of non-artists, some parishioners and others there to enjoy the exhibit afterward. The Mass was organized to celebrate the deep spiritual value and insight of artists.

The liturgy at St. Joe's was the latest Mass for Artists organized by Arthouse2B, an artist community based in New York City. "When we started out we didn't set out to really create anything formal," said co-founder Erin McAtee. "It really just came out of this desire to do something that would uplift artists."



The reception after the March 7 Mass for Artists at St. Joseph's Church in Greenwich Village featured 24 artists, as well as a poetry reading, a modern dance performance and music provided by Higher Word Orchestra. (Edwin Lucero)

Born at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Arthouse2B aimed to create a community at a time when many artists were isolated from each other. Form was no

barrier; the collective includes screenwriters, visual artists, singers and more. McAtee herself is a painter and fiber artist, while co-founder Claire Kretzschmar is a dancer and choreographer. Arthouse2B is named for the apartment McAtee and Kretzschmar shared when they started the initiative.

Fr. Malachy Napier, a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, serves as the group's chaplain and spiritual adviser. Napier helped McAtee and Kretzschmar organize the first Mass for Artists in August 2020. Since then, more than a dozen such Masses have been celebrated at churches across New York City, occurring two to four times a year. The most recent Mass was the first celebrated at St. Joe's.

Mass for Artists typically includes two parts: the liturgy itself and a multidisciplinary exhibit immediately afterward.

"It was important to begin with the Mass [which is] kind of the ultimate source of nourishment and beauty," McAtee said. "It was also important for artists to be able to come in and receive [the Eucharist] together and then afterwards be able to do a reception and share artwork and performances and just have time to hang out and talk and have communal time."

The first Mass for Artists was attended mostly by friends of the co-founders and the exhibit featured about 10 artists. About 100 people attended the March 7 event. The reception featured 24 artists, as well as a poetry reading, a modern dance performance and music provided by Higher Word Orchestra.

The primary exhibit is called "De-compositions," created in the spirit of Lent, said co-curator . Lucy Rahner. "The Lenten season starts with an ashen sign of mortality on the forehead, like the smudge of charcoal an artist finds on his face after a long day in the studio," Rahner wrote in her introduction to the exhibit.

'Catholic means universal, and I don't know if I like drawing a line between artists who are Catholic and artists who are not.'

—Lucy Rahner

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The featured visual art pieces were made of graphite and carbon-based ink and collages of torn papers, among other materials. "All Shall Be Well," a mixed media

piece by Molly Broekman, depicts the Holy Spirit, in dove form, swooping downward, shining brightly against a dark background. "The Golden Hour" by Brittany Maldonado is a colorful portrait of a Black nun made from paper and acrylic. "Cared for," an abstract piece by Jennifer Ahn, was made using Sumi ink on Hanji.

Arthouse2B's artists, Rahner said, "are usually people in our lives we happen to know personally, or artists we're just aware of whose work we love — often peers from either of [my and Erin's] grad schools, people in the Catholic community, or artists we're generally fans of or happen upon in other providential ways."



A Mass for Artists typically includes two parts: the liturgy itself and a multidisciplinary exhibit immediately afterward. Organizers look for art "that is searching for the good, true and beautiful and is executed well and with honesty." (Edwin Lucero)

Not every artist featured in "De-compositions" is a Catholic artist, but she and co-curator McAtee looked for art "that is searching for the good, true and beautiful and is executed well and with honesty."

"Catholic," Rahner said, "means universal, and I don't know if I like drawing a line between artists who are Catholic and artists who are not."

The exhibit, located in McGuire Hall at St. Joseph's Church in Greenwich Village, runs through April 9.

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Arthouse2B also hosts film festivals and movie screenings as well as more traditional gallery exhibitions, makers markets, museum tours and theatrical performances.

"Our primary focus is how we are best serving the artists that we're working with and how we are continuing to guide them deeper into the heart of Christ and deeper into an experience of faith that helps shape and helps form the artwork that they produce," McAtee said.

"We try to create a space where, if you're a practicing Catholic and you're here, great, and if you're not, and if you might be anywhere on the spectrum in terms of your relationship with the church or with faith in general or religion, great, [you are also] welcome," McAtee said. "[If you] want to see what a very grassroots Catholic lay movement of artists is doing in a place like New York City, in a church basement on a Friday night, please come. We're excited to meet you."