

AFFILIATES CONNECT

Our cover story shows that as Ginny McEvoy begins her term as Affiliate board chair, she continues former chair Rich Lessard's theme of "connecting" lives on "At The Knoll." Connection is especially important when we are in the midst of "a change of eras," as Executive Coordinator Bob Short discussed with Maryknollers and shares with us. The Regional Coordinators with the Affiliate Board also dream and plan how they can better connect us, engage with Affiliates, and plan for an evolving future.

Celine Woznica and Karla Gonzales emphasize that with Climate Change and COVID, like it or not, we are connected with the broader world. Mini MAC 2 offered us ways to take action on Climate Change. As a fellow Affiliate at Caminando Por la Paz in Guatemala, Karla writes of their struggles with COVID. I encourage Affiliates to connect with Caminando so that they can feel our love and support.

What are your connections? The Action pillar of the Maryknoll Affiliates asks us to reach even farther than our chapters and other Affiliates. Connect with your neighbor, your Chapter Companion, or even a local politician. Reaching out with loving nonviolence will help us extend and reinforce all our connections.

Connect with us at [NSFAMaryknoll@gmail.com!](mailto:NSFAMaryknoll@gmail.com)

Not So Far Afield (NSFA) is a bimonthly publication of the Maryknoll Affiliates and is also available online at MaryknollAffiliates.org. The name is a play on the title of the original Maryknoll Magazine: *The Field Afar*. Affiliates share in the mission and family spirit of Maryknoll Sisters, Fathers and Brothers, and Lay Missioners.

Mission Statement: Maryknoll Affiliates, while continuing to pursue their own life's journey, commit themselves to the mission goals of Maryknoll in the context of Chapters that gather for prayer, reflection, and action. Maryknoll Affiliates challenge one another to witness to mission as a way of life by going beyond borders, locally and globally, walking with the poor and excluded, and striving for peace and justice for all of God's creation.

For further information, see MaryknollAffiliates.org, contact Executive Coordinator Bob Short, email AffiliateBShort@gmail.com, or write to:

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COMMUNITY & JOHN AUGUST SWANSON
Hugh Menton – Greater Los Angeles Chapter

"The Storm," above, graced the January/February 2021 NSFA article about racism. I had asked John August Swanson to allow the Affiliates to use his artwork for that article, and Swanson agreed because of our friendship and John's generosity. John August Swanson had many informal connections to the Greater LA Affiliates through common experiences with Pax Christi and events at the Cathedral. His work was featured at some of our gathering locations: St. Camillus Spiritual Care Center in LA and the Maryknoll Sisters Retirement Community.

Now this famous artist and friend has passed. I asked Cecilia González-Andrieu, another friend of his, for her reflections. The article and photo (p. 3) she graciously provided celebrate the life of a fellow traveler, one which many LA Affiliates identify with and recognize as reflecting the Affiliate pillars. We look forward to the Cecilia González-Andrieu's biography of Swanson, which is expected to be published by Orbis.

Not So Far Afield Co-Editors:

Mary Ryan-Hotchkiss & Paula Schaffner

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Submissions: We welcome letters to the editor, articles, photos, and suggestions for articles. All submissions are subject to editing. Please contact us at NSFAMaryknoll@gmail.com.

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RECORDANDO A JOHN AUGUST SWANSON
(January 11, 1938-September 23, 2021)

Cecilia González-Andrieu, PhD.

Sometimes when we were together, my friend, neighbor, and activist* John August Swanson would suddenly switch into speaking Spanish. This apparently simple act was very intentional and representative of many of the priorities in John's life.

First, it allowed him to make present his Mexican heritage and the complicated story of a family fleeing the violence of the Mexican revolution at the start of the 20th century in search of peace and stability. His art, his commitments, and many of the marches and events we attended disclosed this deep identification with immigrants and refugees. He knew their struggles intimately from his family's stories and carried them with him. Because of this solidarity with immigrants, the biblical priority to welcome the stranger was central to his life.

Which leads to the second reason he would switch to Spanish – he wanted to accompany the poor and vulnerable. No matter where we were, Swanson would always seek out the persons who might be invisible to everyone else. Even during his last days in the hospice ward of St. John of God Retirement and Care Center in Los Angeles, he tried to learn the names of the custodians and nursing assistants and inquire about their personal stories. This honest love for "the least" made it so the faces in his art were brown, and Mary of Nazareth worked in the fields, or swept the floor and fed the chickens. As an activist John cared deeply about issues of housing and labor rights, going all the way back to his work with Cesar Chavez and on political campaigns to stop housing discrimination.

One final reason for John's switch to Spanish was sometimes to tell me, in a somewhat private way, what was happening in his heart. A heart which was constantly breaking was a burden that Swanson carried with prayer and grace and the companionship of great thinkers and saints. Art like Swanson's that pierces our everyday reality to awaken us to a vision, which I would characterize as the in-breaking kin-dom of God, requires a depth of seeing that is costly. His heart broke at the horrific sin of war, so he spent months holding a weekly vigil on a well-trafficked street corner lifting up his handmade posters to protest the Iraq war. His heart broke at the cry of the earth and in

the last few years he had turned his attention to ecological justice producing works and posters, as well as teaching many of us through the very personal experience of his hands lovingly tending his garden.

The world is extraordinarily richer because John August Swanson lived in it. In his person, in the countless ecumenical and interreligious relationships he lovingly nurtured and in his art,



Photo by Cecilia González-Andrieu

John August Swanson in May, as he worked on his very last canvasses, about preparing the soil, planting, and harvesting.

John imagined a world completely immersed in love. His works, which beyond hanging in major museums around the world grace classrooms, community centers and countless homes, were purposefully made inexpensive or sometimes just given away, so the world that *could be* he could see would call us toward it and we would commit ourselves once more to build it. That is what he would want from us now. Build that abundant world.

Cecilia González-Andrieu, PhD. is a Professor of Theology, Loyola Marymount University. Her other articles about John August Swanson appear in *America* and the *National Catholic Reporter*. Cecilia's book, [Bridge to Wonder: Art as a Gospel of Beauty](#) (Baylor), examines some of Swanson's works and questions about beauty for communities on the margins. She is currently working on a biography of Swanson.

*Artist is a portmanteau word combining "art" and "activist," coined by UCSD Professor Ricardo Dominguez.