

Art and Meaning: a post 9/11 collision course

By Catherine G. Uffen, M.A., J.D. excerpt with permission

In these big, luxurious acrylics showing at the RedEye Studio Gallery in Toronto's Distillery District, March 2 - 13, Carol Knowlton-Dority has staked her art-making on an art of searching. Each of her paintings, both in subject matter and in formal elements, is developed around a seeking question about how we understand good, evil, justice, mercy, and the human psyche, in contemporary and controversial settings. The paintings in this show employ a kind of symbolic realism in order to find meaning. This makes her art accessible, at least at first glance. But her work isn't didactic: Knowlton-Dority juxtaposes traditional symbols to the point of collision solely in order to call to the viewer's consciousness a need to reconsider the boundaries between them and the legitimacy of their meanings. What is good? What is evil? What is justice?

Knowlton-Dority is squarely within a contemporary international trend in painting that has been emerging since 9/11 – a trend currently being examined in the 54th Carnegie International show at the venerable Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. The show and the emergence of this art of searching have been discussed by Richard Rhodes in *Canadian Art* (Winter 2004, Vol. 21, No. 4) and by Katy Siegel in *ARTFORUM International* (January 2005). Rhodes points out that this high-stakes view of art making doesn't "embed itself within a 'show' culture that believes in the manufacture of meaning: it seeks a return to the world [and realism] in order to find it."

Consistent with Knowlton-Dority's art of searching, two of the artist's paintings were presented as an invitation to discussion at the 2004 Think Tank of The Anglican Centre for Theological Dialogue (ACTD). Knowlton-Dority is currently participating in a planning committee of the Toronto School of Theology, for a visual arts show on the relationship between art and meaning, to be given at the University of Toronto in 2006.



The Daily News by Carol Knowlton-Dority; a veiled woman weeps as she is surrounded by full-colour images of battling hockey players and black and white images of the jeering crowds egging them on.