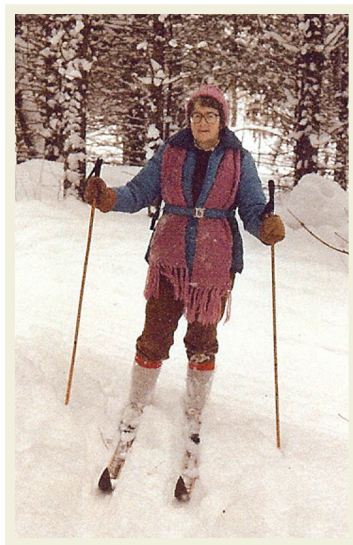


Far from being a reclusive artist, Sister Mary Charles embodied the outward-reaching principles of Vatican II and the long-standing Benedictine practice of involvement in the local community. She was a hands-on teacher of art and was active in Pax Christi, Duluth's Damiano Center, and local peace protests. Open and friendly, she easily connected with neighbors, aspiring artists, the Jewish community, and members of other Christian denominations.



Energetic and physically active, Sister Mary Charles skied, swam, hiked, gardened, and loved Minnesota's north woods environment. She was devoted to a series of cats and dogs who lived with her at the Barn. She delighted in the physical work of making art and took on some of its most demanding

media—wood carving, casting and assembling sculpture and stained glass, cutting woodblocks for printing, and working with clay.

By the 1960s Sister Mary Charles's art was known to the Duluth community, and yet she rarely had an exhibition. Most of her work was commissioned, both by private individuals and by churches, and it went into service immediately. Private commissions were in homes and known primarily to the family and friends of those who owned them. Church commissions were housed in buildings far and wide, known to specific congregations. The result was that people might see a few works here or there, but never imagine the totality of her production. It is immense.

She was adept at representational drawing and at seeing figurative sculpture take shape from raw materials. Her woodcuts are graphically crisp and offer a pleasing balance of naturalistic and abstract forms. Seen in its entirety, however, her art is sometimes a bit uneven. But to account for only what qualifies as art in secular-aesthetic terms is severely limiting to an artist whose larger goal was to be of spiritual service.

Sister Mary Charles made many works out of dedication to the church, principles of peace and justice, and a desire to share the creative process with others. In doing this she was never afraid to try new media and techniques as the demand arose. We see in her collected works all manner of fine and applied art and design—church banners, chalices and patens, graphic design, carved and cast figures, illustrations, along with drawings, paintings, prints, and traditional