

DIVINE SYMMETRY

Steps Toward Simplicity in a Church Installation

Works in 3-D watercolor, pastel, photography and other media

ARTIST: ANNE FARLEY GAINES CURATOR: HELEN DANNELLY
Forshey Gallery at the United Methodist Temple, 2nd floor

OPENING RECEPTION: Sunday, October 25, 2026
12 – 2PM

Gallery Hours: Monday-Friday 9-5pm and Sunday 8-1pm



"Divine Symmetry," 3-D watercolor
40" x 30," 2022 (original concept)



"Divine Symmetry," installation in pastel
12 sections mounded on foam board; 17"x10"
Large version designed to show full size
2023 – 2024



"Divine Symmetry," 3-D gouache, 30" x 14"
2024 (final concept)

HOW "DIVINE SYMMETRY" EVOLVED

In December 2021, Chicago artist Anne Farley Gaines was contacted by Dawn Arnold, a friend who is a member of Second Church of Christ, Scientist, 2700 North Pine Grove Avenue in Lincoln Park. The Board of that church had been contacted by a developer with the idea of building a seven-story apartment building set back from the church yet keeping the original edifice intact. Booth Hansen Associates was hired as the architect for this new building. Gaines, a fellow Christian Scientist, is known for her large works in mixed-media and collaborative murals

Although the Board members knew that being in a brand new 'smaller' structure could be a solution to not having church maintenance be such an encumbrance that spiritual inspiration was sometimes cast aside, the very idea of losing the Church Dome was indeed a sad prospect. After all, since the building was built in 1899, that dome had been its 'crowning jewel!' Realizing that Anne Farley Gaines was a Christian Scientist herself, as well as a known Chicago painter who also worked on large-scale in mixed-media, Dawn surmised that Gaines might be interested in designing and creating a permanent installation for the new church edifice for the main wall behind the lectern using parts of the Dome. She and her husband, sculptor Geoffrey Novelli, frequently collaborated on 3-D forms, and he could be part of the solution, as well.

Fast-forwarding, Gaines accepted the challenge and has meticulously documented the steps in the process. Several of these steps will be shown in a grouping of photographs in the exhibit, from the initial washing and scrubbing of each chosen section, images of Anne and others working in the studio rented on Halsted Street for spreading out the fragile pieces of stained glass in the beginning, the working process of stained glass restorers in Emily Carlson's Solstice Fine Art studio on Iron Street doing extensive repair work on the cut sections and center rondelle, and including the final installation itself in the glorious new edifice of Second Church of Christ, Scientist.

It should be mentioned here that Gaines' fortuitous meeting with Emily Carlson at a reception in August 2023 at Alma Interiors on Iron Street enabled Gaines to receive the best possible advice on the reparation of the dome parts, moving forward. Emily and her competent workers were able to professionally cut down the stained glass works in sections that Gaines had designed and to secure the exterior edges with coming, the term for stained glass leading. The rondelle, or ocula, in the center of the installation was completely re-leaded with all new coming by Carlson's studio and new steel rebars were securely attached to the back. Thus, instead of a rounded work that would be treacherously placed vertically, it is now a flat work that is in no danger of the glass falling off. It is meant to last indefinitely. All of the six extensions, including the rondelle, were framed in Baltic plywood frames formed by her very competent neighbor, Jim Bittler, who rode his bike by her rented studio at the right time!

The main works in this exhibit will be Gaines' mixed-media maquettes, shown in a grouping in this exhibit at Forshey Gallery. The most pronounced work is a 12-sectioned pastel drawing on brown paper and mounted on foam board measuring 17 feet across and 10 feet vertically. It was intended as a visualization for the Board of Second Church to view it in February 2024 so that they could see how the finished product would look on the wall at full size. The use of this multi-part work became obvious when the Board members let Gaines know that "It is lovely, but two of the major extensions need to be eliminated, as it will be too large for the wall! We also find that the top is too complex, and we do not want any words shown!"

As Gaines has done extensive commissioned murals and other large works in her career, she has become familiar with the simplification process sometimes necessitated by clients. This is often counter to the 'artistic temperament' of wanting the final result to look like one's original vision; however, Gaines has learned the importance of compromise and adaptability in most instances. That was the beginning of paring down her design and ultimately arriving at the definitive version of "Divine Symmetry," as shown in the last maquette, a 3-D gouache. It is now 2026, and the completion of this installation has coincided with the completion of the Church renovation.

The wisdom of James 1: 4 applies here – "Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

Sincere thanks go to Helen Dannelly and to the other personnel at the United Methodist Temple who make these exhibits possible.