

Mary Kent was born in 1918 and grew up in Los Angeles. At 18, she entered the Roman Catholic order of The Immaculate Heart of Mary where she took the name Mary Corita Kent. She earned her BA at the Immaculate Heart and achieved her masters degree in 1941 from the University of Southern California. It's at this point that she began working with silk screen printing. She joined the art department of the Immaculate Heart of Mary College in 1947 and became chair of that department in 1964. Corita became the order's touchstone.

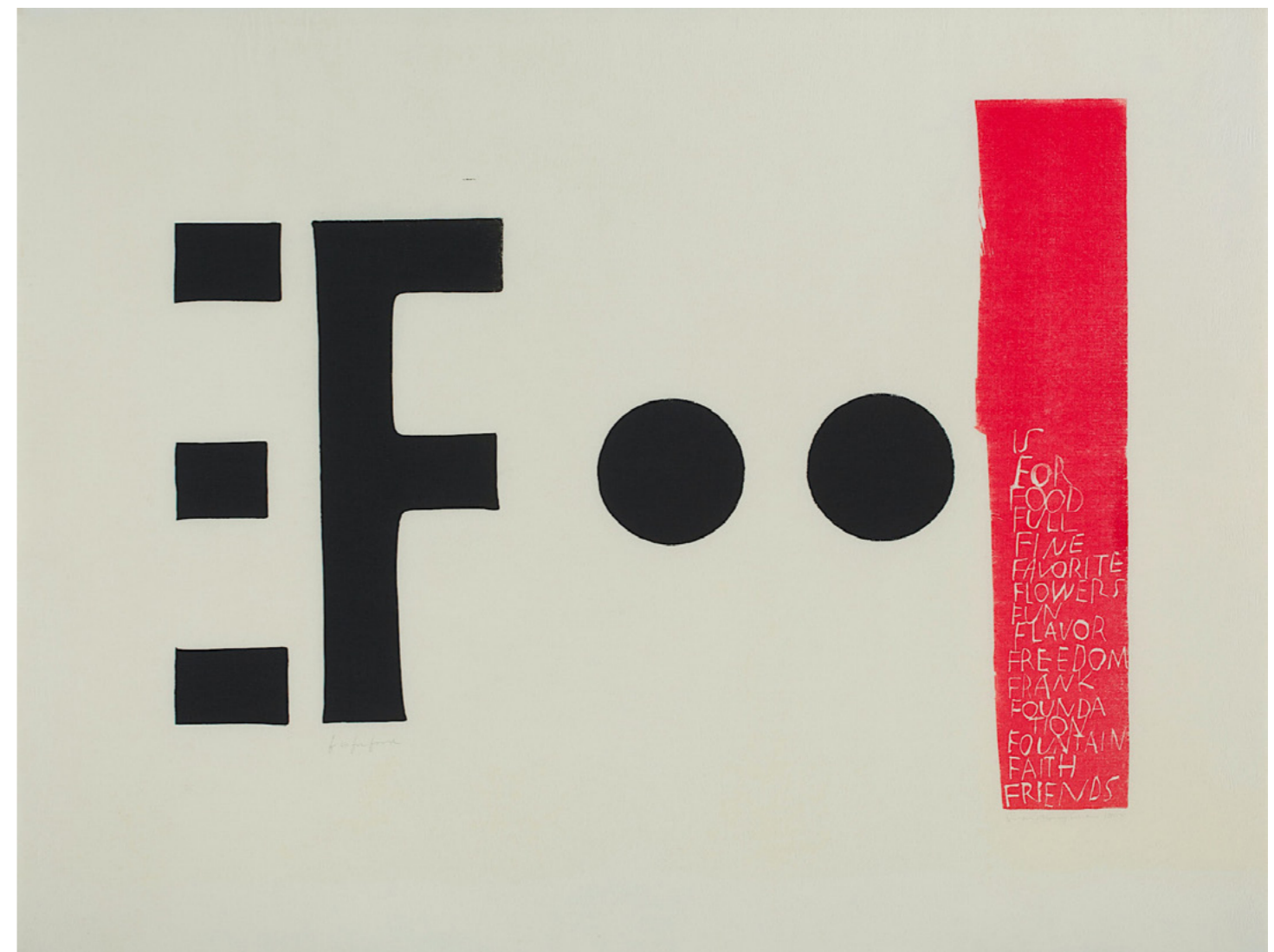
In 1962 Pope John XXIII announced the commencement of Vatican II. This was kind of a game changer and an exciting prospect for the nuns at Immaculate Heart. The goal of Vatican II was to modernise and revitalise Catholicism for the 'modern world', and the nuns were happy to have the church catch up with them, progressively speaking. The rules were relaxed around the wearing of the habit and they didn't have to be addressed as 'Sister'. They felt they could be more relatable and that a "wall would come down".

The spirit of Vatican II and Pop Art influenced Corita's evolution as a non-pop Pop artist or perhaps the outlier in the Pop Art movement.

Men dominated the Pop Art movement and Corita's awareness of artists like Robert Indiana, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol and Ed Ruscha proved she was not alone. But in a funny way, neither were they. Robert Indiana attended the Christian Science Church as a child and was directly inspired by it when creating the LOVE postcard that turned into one of the most recognised artworks in history. Warhol and Ruscha were raised as Catholics with Ruscha interested in the word becoming flesh. In contrast, Corita wore her faith loudly and proudly and managed to give God some, to use the vernacular, street cred or at least make him kinda likeable. Even to me.

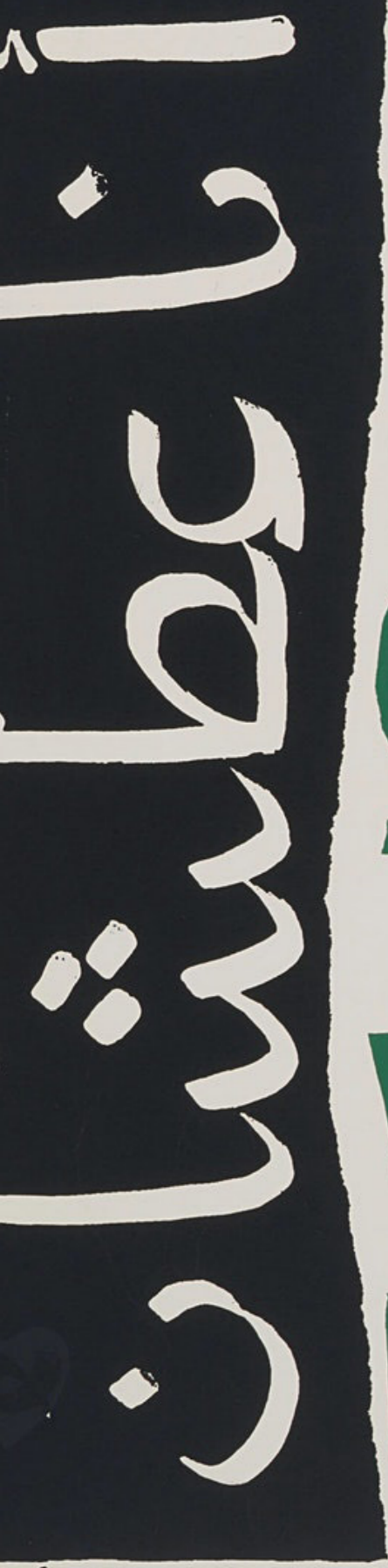
Screen printing appealed to Corita because it was relatively inexpensive, easily and quickly made and had an accessibility for audiences outside of the gallery model. Corita used her art as a means of communicating to the masses. Much like a church service, I suppose, but bigger and way cooler. I love collage for these exact reasons. You can make a collage out of anything and can reach a worldwide audience with social media. Further to that, Corita believed in "empowering people to be the artists that they are" which collage continues to do.

Corita wore her faith loudly and proudly and managed to give God some, to use the vernacular, street cred or at least make him kinda likeable.



Top: Tiger, 1965
Bottom: Look, 1965





EVERY SOUL
 IS LIKE A TINY
 DROP WITH
 OUT WHICH
 THE WHOLE
 WORLD WO
 ULD THIRST

COL
 DOLY
 CLEA
 RMP
 WELL
 WAT
 ERIA

UGO
 BETTI

Esse May 1964

I thirst



Previous page: I thirst, 1964
 Right : My People
 Left : Earth as a sign

The modernisation of the Catholic Church saw Corita's art really explode into social justice and civil rights themes in the later half of the 1960s. Corita created the screen print 'my people' in 1965, using the front page of the Los Angeles Times from August 14 of that year with three pieces of smaller, handwritten text. The headline reads, "Eight Men Slain; Guard Moves In" and details a biased view of the Watts Riots. Three days earlier a young black man, Marquette Frye was pulled over for drunk driving and failed a sobriety test. He resisted arrest with the help of his mother, Rena, and she was struck in the face with a baton in the confrontation that ensued. The riots spanned six days, 34 deaths and \$40 million dollars in property damage foreshadowing the 1992 Los Angeles riots that occurred after four LAPD officers brutally beat Rodney King and were acquitted of their charges.

In 'my people', Corita has handwritten words that condemn the police brutality in no uncertain terms. She places herself, and Christ, on the side of the oppressed. She speaks to the riots, specifically, with words by Maurice Ouellet.

“Youth is a time of rebellion. Rather than squelch the rebellion, we might better enlist the rebels to join that greatest rebel of his time - Christ Himself.”



The work is powerful, especially for its longevity and devastating relevancy. Works like this are some of her most electrifying. She is quoted as saying that she never considered herself an artist, saying, "The word 'artist' seems terribly pretentious to me. I just put words and shapes together" but she was so much more than that. During the turbulent 60s, and with a reluctant archdiocese in her rearview mirror, Corita insisted on addressing what was happening around her and encouraged her students to do the same. When I think about the collage artists I love, so many deftly provide commentary on societal injustice.

One of the most exciting things about Corita is her teaching, which really showcases her excellent sassiness. Corita considered herself a teacher first, artist second. She played rock music in her class. She worked alongside her students. Her classroom became a Mecca. She'd take her class to galleries and to meet designers. Corita happened to take her students to Ferus Gallery in July of 1962 to see the first ever exhibition of Andy Warhol's soup cans.



There are so many hungry people that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread.

Gandhi



You may say I've never had the sense of being helped by an invisible Christ, but I have often been helped by other human beings, that is rather like the woman in the first war who said that if there were a bread shortage it would not bother her house because they always ate toast.

C.S.Lewis

So much of what she did speaks to collage making and the two art practices have a distinct overlap. Corita used the stimulus she encountered in her everyday life. She borrowed from advertising and print media. She borrowed from Life magazine and even Playboy at one point. She absorbed typography and popular culture which is also stimulus for collage. Her work from the early 1960s took language from advertising and appropriated it in order to bring the divine into the everyday. She shed and reassigned meaning to words and phrases. An excellent example is her piece, Handle With Care. The text, "See the man who can save you the most" re-imagines Jesus as a car salesman. She is quoted as saying, "In a way, all the words we need are in the ads."

Her Immaculate Heart College Art Department Rules are legendary and are definitely words to live by. Numbers 4, 6, 7 are truly my favourites and I do try to remember 8 when I'm collaging. Corita truly understood the mechanics of creating but didn't over-intellectualise it and her teaching pedagogy is a testament to that. But most famously, she would take her students on field trips to downtown LA. where they all looked through 'viewfinders' - a piece of cardboard with a square cutout used in much the same way as a camera - to find inspiration.



Corita also had many impressive guest lecturers come to her classes including Ray and Charles Eames, John Cage, Ray Bradbury, Henry Miller, Alfred Hitchcock, Ravi Shankar and Buckminster Fuller who said his time spent with Corita in her class was "among the most fundamentally inspiring experiences of my life".

In 1964 the Art Department took over organising the Mary's Day parade at Immaculate Heart. What looks like a kind of protest march is actually more of a California-Peace-and-Love Happening. The students all designed their own posters and placards. People wore flowers in their hair and music was played. She was called *The Joyous Revolutionary* for a reason.

In 1966 she was the L.A. Time's Woman of The Year. In 1967 she made the cover of Newsweek. Corita was commissioned to create the banner for the Vatican Pavilion for the 1964 World's Fair. This Fair was quite special because Michaelangelo's Pietà was installed there. You actually had to walk past Corita's banner just to get to it. She up-ended what it meant to be a nun, let alone a woman in the male-dominated movement of Pop Art. She was amazing.

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**Sometimes
you can take
the whole of
the world in
and sometimes
you need a
small piece
to take in.**

- Sister Corita Kent



WE ARE CHRISTIANS...
WHAT DOES IT MEAN
TO BE A CHRISTIAN?
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?
WE SCARCELY KNOW
WE ARE LIKE SAUL AND BARNABAS STANDING
AT THE PITCH OF THE LEAVE OF THE WIND,
HEAVEN'S VOICE AS THEY DOES NOT SHOW
OUR GOD. HISTORY'S ALWAYS LARGER
HIS HAND. THE MAN WHO ARE CALLED TO LIVE
IN TIME, IT COME UNDS AND BEWILDER
THEY. IT IS TOO LARGE TO BE COMPRE
TOO DARK FOR OUR EYES TO NOT TO HANDLE.
THE LACK OF RESOURCES BEFORE THE JOB TO
BE DONE IS SIMPLY A PALLING. YET MEN
TAKE SHIP IN SPITE OF ALL MEN BELIEVE
WHICH IS TO SAY THAT THE BELIEF AND GAP THAT
SEPARATES THE TACKLE AND THE SKILLS
MEN CAN OFFER IN CLOSELY ONLY IN MEN'S
SMITH.
THE WHOLE JOURNEY THE DANGER OF LIFE
IN THE FIRST STEP. BELIEVE AFTER THOU
BY UNBELIEF. JIM BERRICK

I AM SPEAKING WITH THE TIMIDITY OF ONE WHO IS GROPING THROUGH
A MAZE OF PROBLEMS THAT ARE TOO BIG FOR HIM AND WILL AT THIS POINT USE
HIMSELF REDUCED TO THE MODEST RESOURCES OF A HESITANT COMMON SENSE.
WE WERE INDEED GIVEN A FINAL VICTORY AND TRILL. THINK SOME, BUT WHY THESE
ENIGMAS APPEAR TO MEN? AND STILL OTHER IF ANYONE OTHER COMING TO
EAR OF THUNDERING.
THEY REPEATS HERE AND THERE. AND WHY TODAY AN EVERLASTING
WAVE OF CRUELTY AND HATRED, GREATER THAN EVER BEFORE IN HISTORY?
WHAT IS THE DARK THAT HAVE WARP AND ON THE OTHER HAND, THIS RAGING WAVE
UNPLEASANT? IS THIS A PERTURBATION WHICH IN US AND IN MANY OTHERS FEELS TO
SERRAOR USELESS - TOTALLY USELESS - AND STILL FEELS IN OUR TIME TO FIGHT
AGAINST IT, BUT AT THE SAME TIME TO KNOW IT AND THEREFORE TO LIVE IT AN EXTEN
FROM A BENEFICIAL SUFFERING USELESS TO? SHOULD THE MAN THAT WE HAVE A GREAT
ARRIVED MAKE OUR JOURNEY USELESS? WE HAVE ARRIVED, BUT ARE WE SURROUNTE
THE EVERLASTING CALLANESS OF A HAVEN, BY THE STILL WATERS OF A HARBOR?
HAS THE DANGER CEASED TO EXIST? IS VIGILANCE USELESS? IS DOUBT ITSC
FORBIDDEN, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS ALLOWED SHIP? WHEN HE SAID "REMOVE TH
CUP FROM ME," OR WHEN HE CRIED WITH A LOUD VOICE AT THE NINTH HU
"ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTANAN?" IS IT ALL THEN, THE HOPE WE HAVE THAT
LIFE IS USEFUL, THAT IT IS AN A WENDING, EVENTHOUGH DIFFICULT, PAIN
TOWARDS THE EVER FULLER, MORE INTIMATE, AND BRIGHTER TRUTH?
JIM BERRICK

Jim Berrick

IMMACULATE HEART COLLEGE ART DEPARTMENT RULES

- Rule 1 FIND A PLACE YOU TRUST AND THEN TRY TRUSTING IT FOR A WHILE.
- Rule 2 GENERAL DUTIES OF A STUDENT: PULL EVERYTHING OUT OF YOUR TEACHER. PULL EVERYTHING OUT OF YOUR FELLOW STUDENTS.
- Rule 3 GENERAL DUTIES OF A TEACHER: PULL EVERYTHING OUT OF YOUR STUDENTS.
- Rule 4 CONSIDER EVERYTHING AN EXPERIMENT.
- Rule 5 BE SELF DISCIPLINED. THIS MEANS FINDING SOMEONE WISE OR SMART AND CHOOSING TO FOLLOW THEM.
TO BE DISCIPLINED IS TO FOLLOW IN A GOOD WAY.
TO BE SELF DISCIPLINED IS TO FOLLOW IN A BETTER WAY.
- Rule 6 NOTHING IS A MISTAKE. THERE'S NO WIN AND NO FAIL. THERE'S ONLY MAKE.
- Rule 7 The only rule is work.
IF YOU WORK IT WILL LEAD TO SOMETHING.
IT'S THE PEOPLE WHO DO ALL OF THE WORK ALL THE TIME WHO EVENTUALLY CATCH ON TO THINGS.
- Rule 8 DON'T TRY TO CREATE AND ANALYSE AT THE SAME TIME. THEY'RE DIFFERENT PROCESSES.
- Rule 9 BE HAPPY WHENEVER YOU CAN MANAGE IT. ENJOY YOURSELF. IT'S LIGHTER THAN YOU THINK.
- Rule 10 "WE'RE BREAKING ALL OF THE RULES. EVEN OUR OWN RULES. AND HOW DO WE DO THAT? BY LEAVING PLENTY OF ROOM FOR X QUANTITIES." JOHN CAGE
- HELPFUL HINTS: ALWAYS BE AROUND. COME OR GO TO EVERYTHING. ALWAYS GO TO CLASSES. READ ANYTHING YOU CAN GET YOUR HANDS ON. LOOK AT MOVIES CAREFULLY, OFTEN. SAVE EVERYTHING-IT MIGHT COME IN HANDY LATER.
THERE SHOULD BE NEW RULES NEXT WEEK.



In 1968 she took a sabbatical and at the end of it, decided to leave the order and sought dispensation from her vows. Not a lot is known about the reasons why, but I think it was, in part, pushback from the archdiocese that became something she couldn't be bothered with. What happened next was extraordinary. 90% of the order of Immaculate Heart of Mary order left within 12 months of Corita's departure and reformed as an independent ecumenical community and served that community with the same verve and enthusiasm for social justice with the bonus of not having the Catholic Church breathing down their necks.

Corita continued to receive commissions. She created a design that became the largest copyrighted artwork in the world (BostonGas).

The Physicians for Social Responsibility commissioned a billboard design which was titled We Can Create Life Without War and Corita spoke of it as the most religious thing she'd done. She designed a postage stamp (that's a funny story for another time). From the time she left the order and up to her death in 1986 she created around 700 works.

I'm not a religious person. I have a kind of DIY spirituality that roughly translates to: 'Don't Be an Asshole', but Corita's gentle faith and optimism, and ultimately her life, is something I find truly heartening and very inspiring. She turned the ordinary into the extraordinary.

You can see more work by Sister Corita Kent at: www.corita.org



About

Millie Bartlett

My mother was a painter. I think that, through watching her paint, I felt flow by osmosis. I saw her escaping the everyday when she painted. It seemed like a cool little world I wanted to live in. So as a kid, I would just throw myself at different creative genres hoping to find one that I would love. Grown ups thought I had a knack for creativity and that then granted some access to experiences that kind of blew my mind as a little kid.

I won a competition in year 7 for writing a haiku about how sad I was my best friend had moved away. I remember I made a pop up illustration of a girl sitting under a tree getting rained on. The prize was reading my haiku live on Japanese television on a sort of hyper Saturday morning type TV show. And in a family that was pretty broken, that felt exhilarating. And now that I look back on all of those experiences, the consequences of creativity were a bonus after the joy of being in the flow of making things. So I never really stopped. You could be creative with literally everything!

I started collaging in 2013. I love it because essentially it feels like play. I love immersing myself in the Zeitgeist of 40s and 50s America and to see that influence retroactively ripple throughout the world. I get lost in it and it's totally addictive. Then come the collages which are borne out of the subconscious and often make sense after I've made them.

I live in Sydney with my two children.

You can see more of Millie's work on her Instagram page: [@ms_millie_bartlett](#), and in Issue #9 of Contemporary Collage Magazine