

# THE DAILY GAZETTE

## On Exhibit: Violence and Christianity

Shades of red and pink at MASS MoCA's latest exhibition

By Indiana Nash | [March 1, 2018](#)



PHOTOGRAPHER: RACHEL HOWARD/BLAIN SOUTHERN

Seven towels splotted with red paint stacked on a box, by Rachel Howard, at MASS MoCA.

Vehement and varying shades of deep red and fluorescent pink greet the viewer in "Paintings of Violence (Why I am not a mere Christian)," the latest exhibition to open at MASS MoCA.

"[They] look bloody ... they do feel violent," said Allie Foradas, a curator of the exhibition.

Each of the 10 paintings and sculpture in "Paintings of Violence," were created by British artist Rachel Howard and the pieces are intense by design. As the title indicates, the exhibition was inspired by two opposing views on Christianity found in Bertrand Russell's "Why I Am Not a Christian" and C.S. Lewis' "Mere Christianity. Both reflect on religion from different (and polemic) perspectives, both of which are reflected in the installation.

Seven towels splotted with the same red paint seen in the paintings and stacked on a rugged-looking box compose the one sculpture included in the installation. Howard used the towels to clean her brushes with throughout the process of making the paintings. It's displayed beside the entrance to the installation, reminiscent of blood and bandages.

But while the pieces all echo a certain brutality, to say that it's the only aspect of the installation would do it a disservice. The first thing that Foradas, and many visitors, actually notice about the installation is that the paintings seem to glow.

"The fluorescent pink really shows through," Foradas said.

The process to create "Paintings in Violence" (which took Howard about 5 years), is in some ways as compelling and emblematic as the finished pieces themselves.

Using a T-square (which echoes the shape of the cross) and pink canvases that mirrored her height and arm span, Howard took red oil paint and carefully layered it onto three or four canvases over the course of several months. She also left glimpses of the base canvas to "glow" alongside the thick red.

There's a repetitiveness to each piece, which doesn't dull the installation it rather reinforces the disturbing idea of what Howard calls "intelligent violence." The lines in her painting reflect a sort of calculated harshness, or violence, not something created in the heat of the moment or in a flurry of ecstasy.

In a sense, Foradas said Howard also examines whether or not violence is empirically bad.

Russell's "Why I Am Not a Christian" argues that Christianity is based in fear and violence, while Lewis' "Mere Christianity" argues that the world is dark and people need to fight for goodness. According to Foradas, Howard's own beliefs are somewhere in between Lewis' and Russell's and the combination is visible in the installation.

Even without reading the label copy or knowing the backstory on what exactly Howard is reflecting on, it's a sobering exhibition for visitors.

"People absorb the heaviness of the works," Foradas said.

The exhibition will be up until 2019. For more information visit [massmoca.org](http://massmoca.org).

### **At Albany Center Gallery**

Closer to home, the Albany Center Gallery offers an intimate view of some of the area's most talented artists for their annual Mohawk Hudson Regional Invitational, which opens on Friday, March 9.

For those who aren't up on their local art history, the Invitational started several years ago as a way to showcase a few of the artists featured in the annual "Artists of the Mohawk-Hudson Region" exhibition, which has been going on for over eighty years.

ACG's executive director, Tony Iadicicco, along with a small ACG committee, invite a few artists from the expansive exhibition to showcase their work in the ACG's "Mohawk Hudson Regional Invitational" each year. It's a way to give a bit more exposure to local artists and it allows gallery-goers to view work from the featured artists that they might not have seen before said Iadicicco.

This year's Invitational includes works by artists from the 2017 "Exhibition by the Artists of the Mohawk-Hudson Region," which was curated by the Jack Shear at the Albany Institute of History and Art. Iadicicco invited six artists to join the Invitational, including Richard Barlow, Jane Bloodgood-Abrams, George Dirolf, Jeanne Finley, T. Klacsmann and Theresa Swidorski.

It's a unique mix of mediums and messages, which mainly have to do with the environment in one way or another.

Perhaps the most initially striking pieces are Barlow's large chalk installations. He perfectly captures the feeling of stepping into the woods with two large wall installations. Since it drawn in such a temporary medium, one that can be smudged or changed simply by someone brushing up against it, the installations speak to the environmental focus of the exhibition.

"After the show, Richard's chalk installation [will be] washed away," Iadicicco said.

Dirolf's pieces are smaller in scale and reflect nature's whimsical side. In one black and white engraving, Dirolf depicts a curious tortoise (or perhaps its a turtle) peeking up as a feather with the word "Love" on it seems to float towards it.

Other works, like that of Klacsmann, also have a touch of whimsy, but it's manifested in a completely different style. Klacsmann's screen prints and digital collages have a sense of mystery to them, with geometric-patterned backgrounds and birds or bunnies that seem to peer out into the viewer as if the viewing is interrupting their day.

Artist Jane Bloodgood-Abrams' work takes the viewer a bit higher off the ground and into the skies. Within "Chasing Light," Bloodgood-Abrams captures a drifting cloud in a way that seems reminiscent of the Hudson River School style (appropriate as she's from the Hudson Valley).

Each artist has anywhere from half a dozen to a dozen works on exhibition, works that intersect with one another and lend to the environmental focus of the show.

The exhibition opens on Friday, March 9, with an opening reception from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. with the featured artists. It runs until April 6. For more information visit [albanycentergallery.org](http://albanycentergallery.org).