

Brother Frank Thomas Kacmarcik, Obl.S.B. 15 March 1920 - 22 February 2004



Frank Kacmarcik was born on 15 March 1920 in Saint Paul, Minnesota, into a devout family with Slovak-Polish roots and a keen appreciation for both the visual arts and music. In 1938 he accepted a scholarship from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design (then Minneapolis School of Art) where he came under the special influence of a young professor, Alexander Masley, who encouraged Frank's sense of design and bolstered confidence in his own intuitions.

Other teachers helped him cultivate a love for painting, and graphic and book design, notably, Frank Kofron who instilled in Frank a passion for typography.

As a novice at Saint John's in 1940, Frank worked with Brother Clement Frischauf OSB, an influential liturgical artist trained in the Beuronese school of religious art. Other monks who played significant roles shaping Frank's spiritual foundation were Fathers Gregory Roettger OSB and Paschal Botz OSB.

Leaving Saint John's, Frank joined the US Army and served as a surgical technician and chaplain's assistant. After WW II, Frank studied painting in Paris at the Académie de la Grand Chaumière and developed critical skills in religious art and church decoration at the Centre d'Art Sacré. At about this time Frank began to assemble the remarkable collection of fine books, manuscripts, prints and sacred art that became Arca Artium, his fitting and noble legacy.

In 1950 Frank returned to the US to become assistant professor of art and to help establish art as a major at Saint John's University. The same year he created his first cover for *Worship* magazine. He continued to design or monitor the covers until his death. In 1953 he collaborated closely with the Hungarian Bauhaus architect, Marcel Breuer, who was engaged to design the Abbey Church and other buildings on campus. During his second period at Saint John's, Frank developed an enduring friendship with Father Michael Marx OSB, about whom Frank said, "No other person has been more helpful and more influential in my life."

Frank and the University parted ways in 1954, but he continued to work for Liturgical Press as a freelance graphic artist. He became a "city hermit," working full-time as a consultant in church design, in printing and the graphic arts. As his self-created profession flourished, he became convinced "that we are formed or deformed by the art and environment we experience around us." He defined his vocation as a ministry, a ministry of art. He was a deacon preaching visual theology, a teacher of the Word in art.

In 1981 the North American Academy of Liturgy recognized Frank's mission and achievement by conferring its prestigious Berakah Award. Later, in 1987, Frank was made an Honorary Member of the American Institute of Architects -- "in recognition of outstanding contributions to the architectural profession and to society as a whole." He garnered more than sixty national and international awards in book design and the graphic arts, as well as many awards for building and renovation projects, including six coveted national A.I.A. awards.

Frank influenced the worship life of the Church on small and large scales of design. Liturgical book projects included the design of the Roman Missal (Benziger Brothers, 1964) reflecting the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and the design of the Lectionary for the Mass published by Liturgical Press in 1998. He served as a consultant on numerous architectural projects that include: St. Patrick's Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; St. Richard Church, Jackson, Mississippi; Mepkin Abbey, Monck's Corner, South Carolina; and Sacred Heart Chapel, St. Joseph, Minnesota.

Abbot Jerome Theisen OSB acceded to Frank's request to be admitted to the monastery as a claustral oblate and accepted his final oblation in 1988. Brother Frank served, as he had since 1971, as a Charter Member of the Design Committee and gifted Saint John's University in 1995 with his invaluable collection that he continued to enhance. Frank was faithful to the common life until disability demanded his move to the retirement center.

Brother Oblate Frank died peacefully and unexpectedly in his sleep on Sunday morning, 22 February, the same date when Father Godfrey Diekmann OSB, had died two years previously. As editor of *Worship*, Father Godfrey had supported Frank in his first decade of making covers for the magazine. Frank's sometime prickly personality -- a mask for his tender interior -- did not endear him to all. His not so obvious humility was based solidly on his awareness that he had been gifted by God with a rare and genuine artistic insight and talent.

Thomas Merton OCSO wrote a prayer for Frank that concludes with a moving petition for vocations: "O Lord, send us chosen messengers and teachers, lovers of worship and of art who will restore with chaste and noble works the beauty of your house! May they teach us to see with pure heart the splendor of your Son Jesus Christ and to express what we have seen in images worthy of so great a vision."