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Judith Mehr, *Family Garden*. Oil on canvas, 42" x 56", 1981. Collection of the Museum of Church History and Art.

Quiet Acts of Religious Devotion: The Art of Judith Mehr

Richard G. Oman

The works by Judith Mehr in this issue are significant because they help bridge the distance between Latter-day Saint art and life. They remind us that Latter-day Saint identity is based upon more than faith in angelic visitations and heroic religious history. That identity is also about faithful obedience in our daily lives to prophetic counsel. Latter-day Saints are set apart from others not only by their theology and history, but also by the religious meaning that is assigned to what may appear to be rather mundane acts. Thus Latter-day Saints often express acts of religious commitment in ways that the broader world might not even recognize as religious.

Mehr depicts quiet acts of religious devotion that connect faith and action. “I was looking for ways to depict faith without being too sentimental,” Mehr said. “But it is sometimes scary to expose your inner feelings in something as public as a painting.” In two works, she also explores some of the quiet acts of nurturing, thrift, and devotion that shape a Mormon woman’s life. One painting depicts her own mother, Kathryn Mehr, standing in the middle of her food storage. The other depicts Nada Fluckiger, who is well known for her homemade bread. The third work, *Family Garden*, was painted during the period in which President Kimball advocated planting gardens. In this piece, she captures the Mormon values of devotion, self-sufficiency, and family strength. The models for this work were the Blalicks—members of her own extended family—including her cousin who was bishop of the Natchez, Mississippi, ward at the time.

A native of California, Mehr studied art at Brigham Young University with Bill Whitaker, Trevor Southey, Franz Johansen, Alex

Darais, and others. Mehr graduated with a B.F.A. in 1974 and the following year did graduate work and taught art part-time in the BYU art department. She returned to northern California, where the two works of art on the cover were painted. She currently resides in the Salt Lake Valley, where she works as a full-time professional artist.

Working primarily in oils, Mehr does portraits, landscapes, still life, genre, and religious murals. One of her best-known paintings is a huge seventy-four-figure, twenty-three-foot-long mural, *The Eternal Family through Christ*, in the foyer of the Genealogical Library in Salt Lake City. Her portraits, including one of Spencer W. Kimball, have been displayed at the Museum of Church History and Art. Her work is also found in private and corporate collections in many states and has been exhibited as part of the Church-wide international art competitions. In a 1990 national competition, one of her pieces was selected for the Art in the Parks exhibition in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

Richard G. Oman is Senior Curator at the Museum of Church History and Art.