

Nanny Vonnegut's yard is a lot like one of her paintings, littered with the stuff of family life: fanciful tin flamingos and cement ducks peek out of the gardens that line the walks; tricycles abandoned for a call to dinner; and lawn chairs perched wherever they can find a flat resting place, affording the adults an occasional view of their progeny. Vonnegut and her husband, artist Scott Prior, have given over reign of their yard to their children, Max, Ezra, and Nellie. This abdication seems, itself, a celebration of the children's mystery as well as their whimsy.

And so it is with Vonnegut's paintings. They present a delicate weave of the tangible and ethereal threads of her own life: artist, mother, wife, and spiritual person. Recently shown at Northampton's Hart Gallery, Vonnegut's works reveal the artist's fascination with the complex texture of family life. *Max Asleep*, the piece she allowed the Family Planning Council to reproduce for a special greeting card, is influenced by a growing spiritual connection.

"When I was making this picture of my son Max sleeping," she writes, "I imagined his bedroom as if seen from a guardian angel's view, with the ceiling removed and exposed to heaven's view."

Nanny Vonnegut knows that her unabashed familial references and spiritual leanings cause some raised eyebrows among her liberal cohorts. On the other hand, her more conservative church-going friends look askance at her politics—and sometimes her art.

She is reasonably sanguine about this tension, having decided long ago that she was too far flung to be categorized. "I am in the interesting position of having my hand in a lot of different parts of the community," she explains. "There's my father who raised me to be a free thinker, which I *think* I am. And then there's the church I belong to which is quite conservative. There's my children, and my growing interest in the public school system. And there's my art."

always aware of her audience, both critics and fans. "We all have an audience in our minds. I'm not always certain about who mine is....A lot of people want me to use my art as a forum to express my faith or about issues in the community, like gay rights. Those things are important to me, but I can't cover it all. I don't want to let people down, but you can really water down your art if you're worried about whether people are going to like you. I try to let things out, without editing.

Personally, I'm grateful that I've found my work...and that I can share it with the community that I care about."

Part of that community includes organizations like the Family Planning Council. Vonnegut was happy to oblige when a friend asked her to donate her work for the card. "Having children has made me think about what sort of community I want to see for them... what I would want to have available to them if I or Scott weren't available. The Council is helping to build a caring community.... Helping the Family Planning Council is a wonderful way for me to relate to that community."

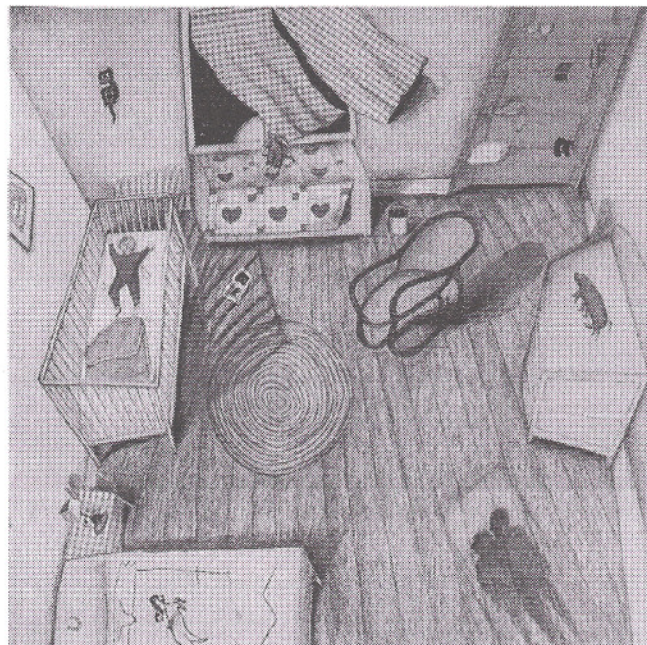
Of all her pieces, why did she choose *Max Asleep* as her contribution to FPC?

"The image covers an ideal of what you wish for your child, for *every* child: to be safe, warm, well-fed, protected, and loved.... And isn't that exactly what the Family Planning Council is trying to do?"

—Kathy Seymour Moore

(Nanny Vonnegut's "Max Asleep," center, is available on greeting cards with a donation to FPC. See page 7 for details.)

A Delicate Weave



Vonnegut is most at peace when she is in the studio. "I feel most integrated when I am doing my art. I know that no one can take away the images that come to me. They are from my subconscious....They are as honest as I can be. And I feel very good about that." In the back of her mind, she is

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