

Of Cans and Quilts

CHRIS JANZEN



Of Cans and Quilts is a painting that investigates two ways that social hospitality occurs in American and Canadian Mennonite communities. The cans represent the 700,000 pounds of canned meat that is processed and donated for distribution annually by the Mennonite Central Committee: to Burkina Faso, North Korea, Haiti, Lebanon, Ukraine, Gambia, as well as to communities in Canada and the United States. The cans of turkey, beef, chicken and pork are sent to areas where protein is scarce. They provide sustenance and supplement meals for children and hospital patients.

The geometric patterns in the painting represent the annual practice of piecing elaborate quilts that are auctioned at Mennonite Central Committee relief sales in different parts of North America to raise funds for world relief. Traditional quilting patterns are referenced throughout the composition, for example, the nine patch, the wedding ring, the apple core, the log cabin, and the windmill.

The cans and quilt patterns ebb and flow over a repeating linear pattern that creates a topography similar to flowing fabric. These coil/thread strands also function as a symbolic reminder of the interconnectedness of communities

worldwide and the fact that these connections can be stressed and reconstructed.

The rough surface of the picture plane was created out of vhs tape boxes and reused sheets of butcher paper in a grid reminiscent of both quilt patterning and the arrangement of cans as they are prepared for shipment in a cardboard box. Like the quilts, which were traditionally created from old scraps of worthless fabric, the painting is created from materials commonly tossed into landfills. In this way, trash becomes an object of value that tells a story of the Mennonite Central Committee's worldwide work of hospitality.