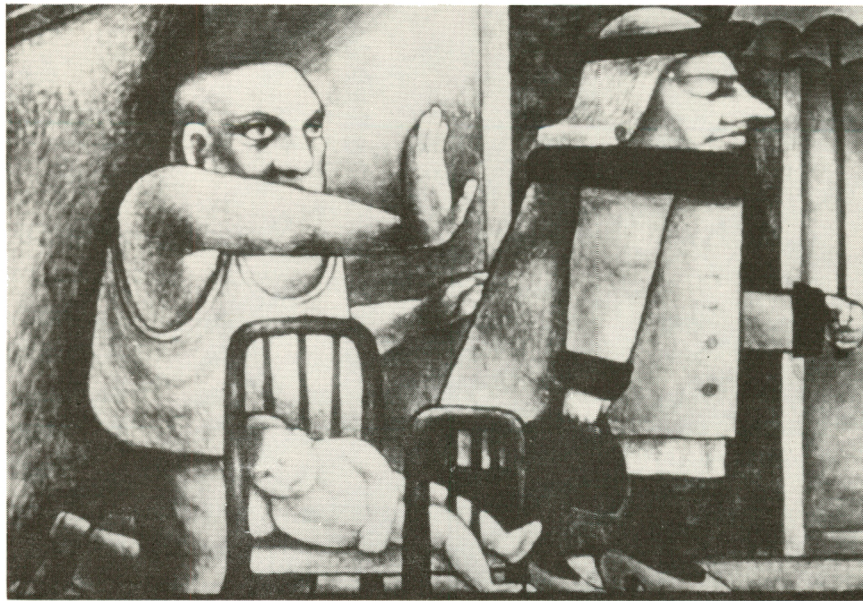

The Art of Character

by Irvin Althage



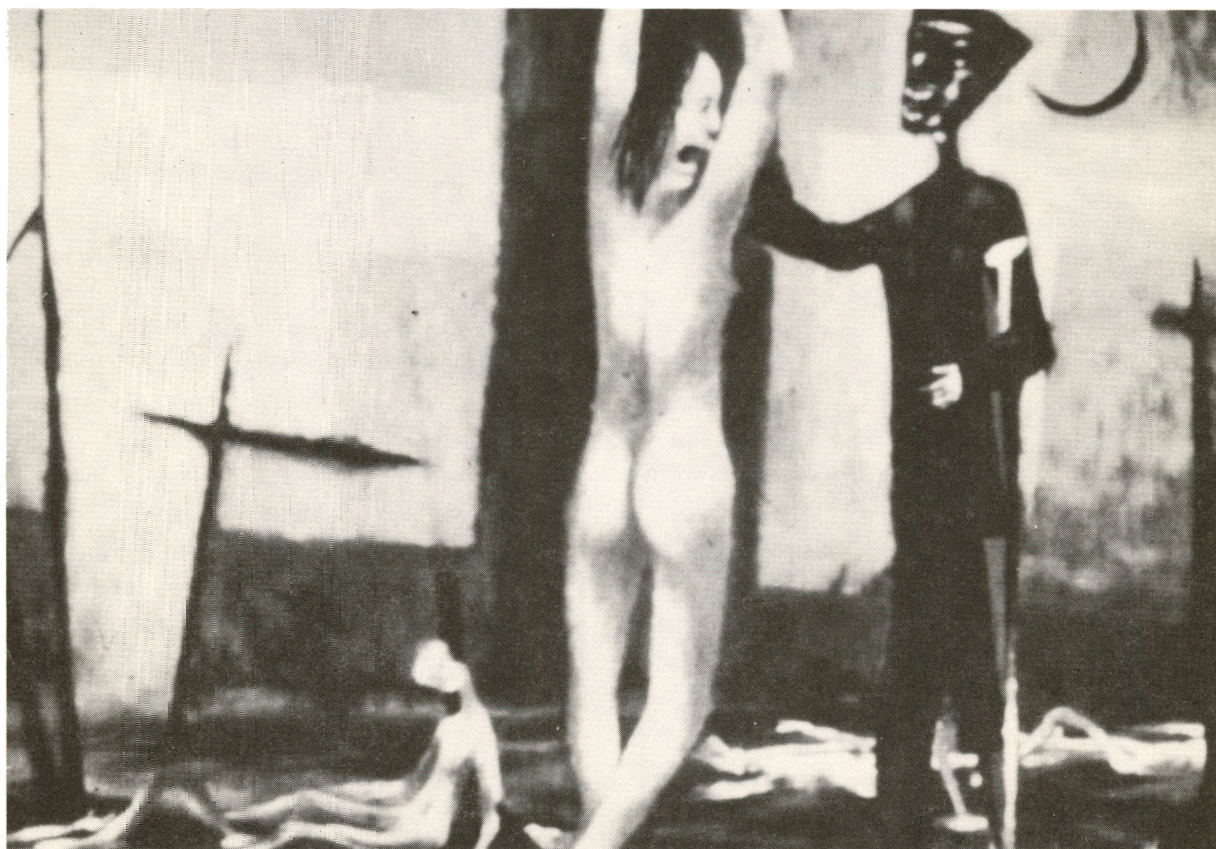
Departure, 1979

An artist's philosophy is ever changing. When I was young, I was pulled in several directions simultaneously by the traditions of the late 19th and early 20th century European schools of painting, the better illustrators of the *Vanity Fair* and *Saturday Evening Post* "schools," and the new wave in architecture and graphic design: Wright, van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier. The relentless and jumbled progress of art seemed as meaningless and unrelated as the mounting discoveries in all areas of knowledge. Recently, I have been relieved to realize that while the new doesn't necessarily replace the old, new standards do tear away old barriers. Frankly, I feel comfortable in this new atmosphere. As an artist, I am among friends.

On the other hand, being a painter, with vistas constantly opening up before me, has not liberated me from very personal obligations. It seemed to me that Adventism before World War II had a positive appraisal of the world and the proper relationship that each Adventist should take toward the future—more than it does now. With these feelings I turned my attention toward religious painting. During my last year of undergraduate studies, Max Beckmann became my teacher. His painting, wrought with riddles, cruelty, and power, conveyed to my mind a true picture of society: character, nourished by suffering. Like Beckmann, I think the most worthy, though difficult, objective of art is to integrate art with true reality.



Last Supper: After DaVinci, 1967



Barabbas, Pilate, a Roman Soldier, and Jesus, 1960



He is Blinding the People, 1950



The Victim, 1954

Irvin Althage

Irvin Althage was born October 7, 1917 in St. Louis, Mo. He studied art at Washington University School of Fine Arts, Cranbrook Academy of Art, and San Miguel de Allende. Of all Adventist artists, his teachers were the most famous: Max Beckmann (leader of the German expressionistic movement) and Philip Guston (an abstract-expressionist). Althage taught art at both Union College (1948–1950) and Andrews University (1951–1974), where he served as chairperson of the department. Althage has shown his work in many galleries and museums, including the Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C., the Detroit Institute of Arts, and the St. Louis Art Museum. He was probably the first Adventist artist to introduce the church to modern art forms.