

Discussed: ideas, challenges, overlapping images, art, Bible as a physical book, order, chaos, geometry, DNA, manuscript, story, binary code, superstition, abstraction

Redesigning Genesis: One Artist's Approach

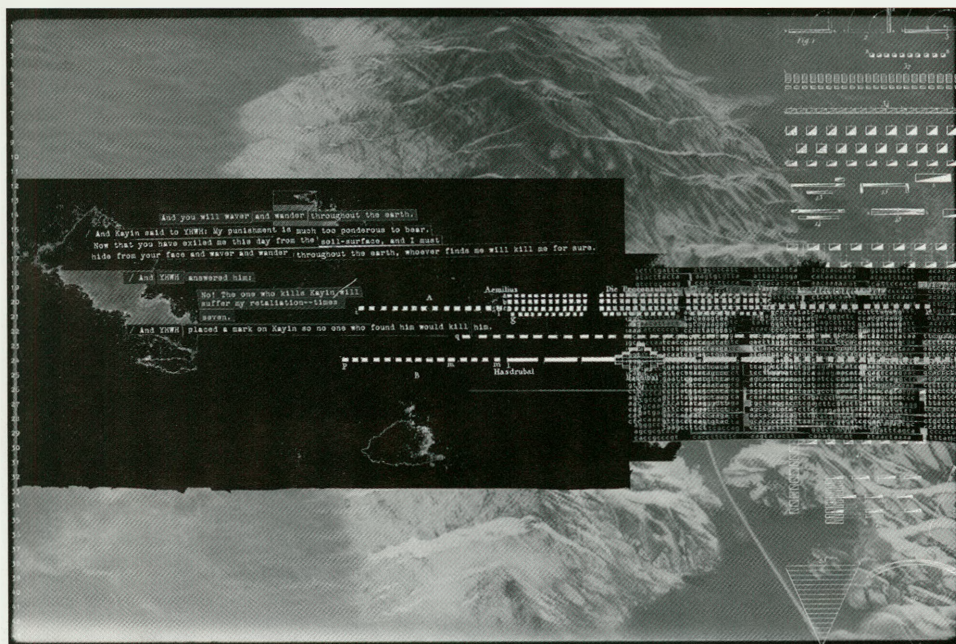
By Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson

"Some clients think they're God. What I never expected was to work for the real one. It's kind of intimidating. But the possibilities are infinite. What other client requires no formal presentations and understands your ideas better than you do? Then again, what other client can hurl lightning bolts?"

Redesigning Genesis, Rusch's visual art book and MFA thesis for the Academy of Art University, San Francisco, opens with this thought.

Rusch created *Redesigning Genesis* around writer/musician Mike Mennard's translation of Genesis, which according to Rusch, "challenges traditional inter-

pretations of the content and voice of Genesis and the various attempts to modernize the text. [Mennard] believes that the existing versions are not true to the oral traditions of the original, that they 'fix' inconsistencies, soften political incorrectness, and are out of sync with the original."



In *Redesigning Genesis*, Rusch's intention was

to parallel the new-ness of this translation by approaching the concept, design, and visual form in non-traditional ways that breathe new life into the original meaning of the text. . . . [*Redesigning Genesis*] references a wide variety of conflicting translations through the use of overlapping images, and presents Genesis as a multi-layered text that puts the reader through cycles of making sense of chaotic content. Visuals also represent the underlying order of the universe and man's form of expressing them, such as geometry, the golden section, binary code, and DNA code. In addition, the text is often presented as typed manuscript—as if God is pecking out the script as he goes, adjusting the story, making changes, and also making mistakes.

Rusch's visual interpretation of Genesis challenges us to reexamine and recreate the book we thought we knew. His rhythmic, experimental collages—so far removed from the staid leather covers and block columns of text in the Bibles we've memorized—remind us that the Bible is a physical book, "flesh," and not simply words, and that these words are alive. This art asks us to consider the genesis of a new book of Genesis.

Rusch's *Redesigning Genesis* is the kind of art that challenges us and perhaps even unnerves the traditionalist in us, because it asks questions and asks us to ask questions. Art is emancipated exploration, and when thoughtful art collides with the spiritual, we transcend the mundane, the empty, the decorative, the flippant, and we make space for growth and clarity in our faith. As Gregory Wolfe, editor of *Image*, writes, "In their highest forms, religion and art unite faith and reason, grace and nature; they preserve us from the twin errors of superstition and rationalist abstraction."¹

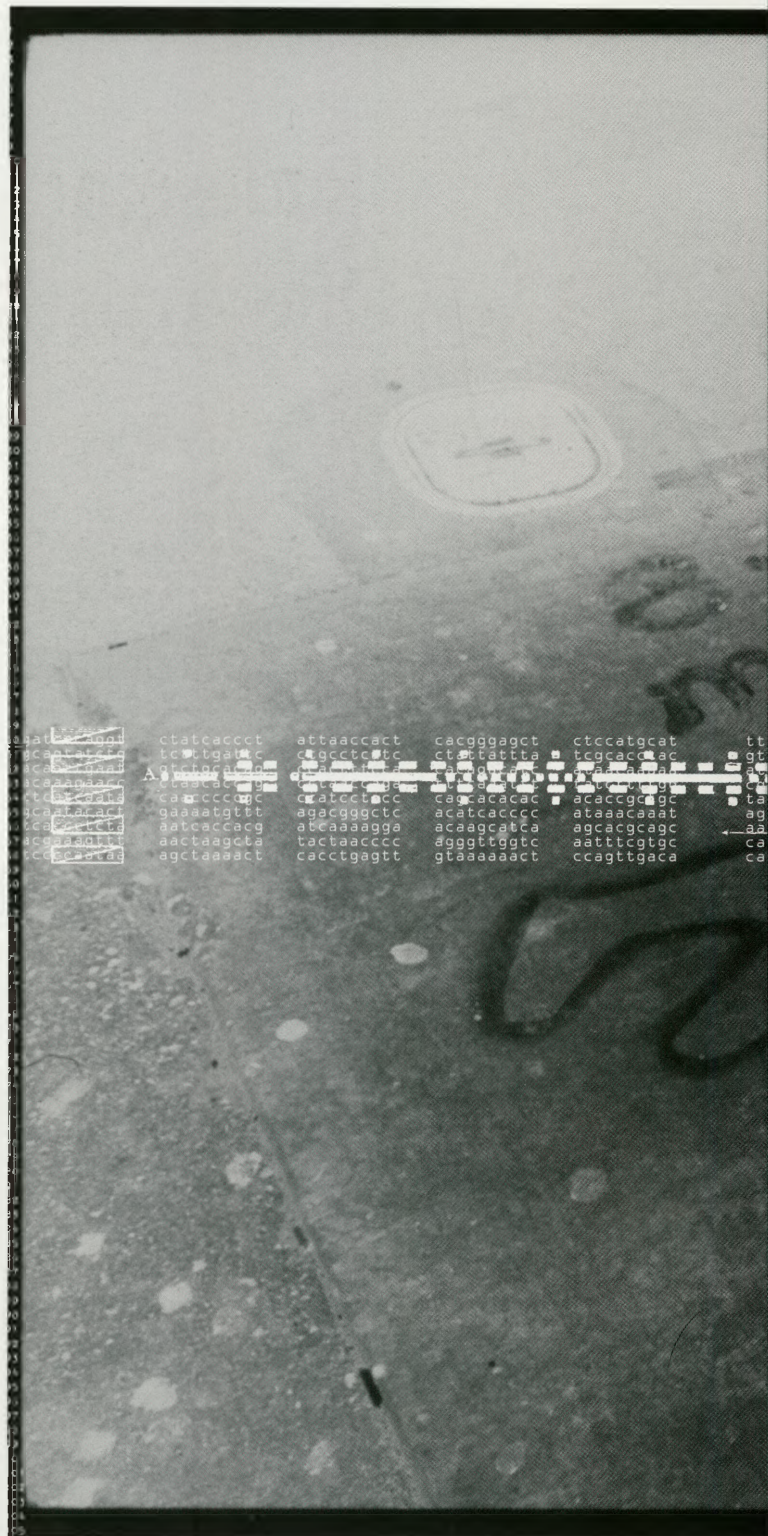
Notes and References

1. *Intruding Upon the Timeless: Meditations on Art, Faith, and Mystery* (Baltimore, Md.: Square Halo Books: 2003), 17.

Cliff Rusch is assistant professor of graphic design at Pacific Union College and art director and designer for the college's Public Relations Office.

Mike Mennard is assistant professor of English and communication at Union College, as well as a freelance writer, recording artist, children's poet, and songwriter.

Writer Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson is the translator of *Rainbow Over Hell*. She was once a student in Cliff Rusch's art classes. Sharon writes about art for the *Spectrum* Blog.



CHAPTER FOUR

And the adam had sex with Havva his woman,
and she conceived and bred Kayin [Gain].

/And she said: I have gained an adam with
YHWH's help. /

And she also bred his brother Hevel.

And Hevel became a shepherd of sheep, while Kayin worked the soil.

/ And when the time came, Kayin brought fruit from

the soil as a gift to YHWH.

As for Hevel, he brought the fattest first-born of his flock.

And YHWH acknowledged Hevel and his gift, but he acknowledged
neither Kayin nor his gift.

And YHWH said to Kayin,
whose face appeared fallen.

/ And YHWH said to Kayin:

Why be outraged?

Why is your face so anguished?

Invariably, if you do right, you will be exalted.

If you do not do right, wickedness will camp at your porch
obsession which will dominate you.

/ And Kayin said to Hevel his brother: Come with out me to the field.

/ And when they got to the field, Kayin ~~murdered~~ Hevel his brother
and he killed him.

/ And YHWH said to Kayin:

Where is your brother Hevel?

/ And he answered: How should I know? Am I my brother's guardian?

/ And YHWH replied:

What happened? A cry from the soil!

Your brother's blood cries out to me.

And you are now expelled from the soil which gulped
with a gaping mouth your brother's blood. And now,

whenever you work the soil, it will work against you.

Two panels from the Cain and Abel story in *Redesigning Genesis*. On page 27, the visual elements include diagrams of armies and troop placements to suggest future implications of the first killing of a man and DNA code representing man. Pages 28 and 29 include a background photograph showing death. Text is presented in reverse and as cut-together pieces to represent chaos, darkness, and the impact of the act of killing.

Twenty years ago, Andrew Becraft and Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson were neighbors on a missionary compound in Yokohama, Japan. Both the children of missionaries, Andrew was a “white boy” born and raised in Japan, whereas Sharon was a Japanese-American girl displaced from California. Today, they are both writers and translators. Here, they discuss issues in translation in an increasingly global world.