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The Book of Jonah

La Salle University Art Museum

Brother Daniel Burke FSC

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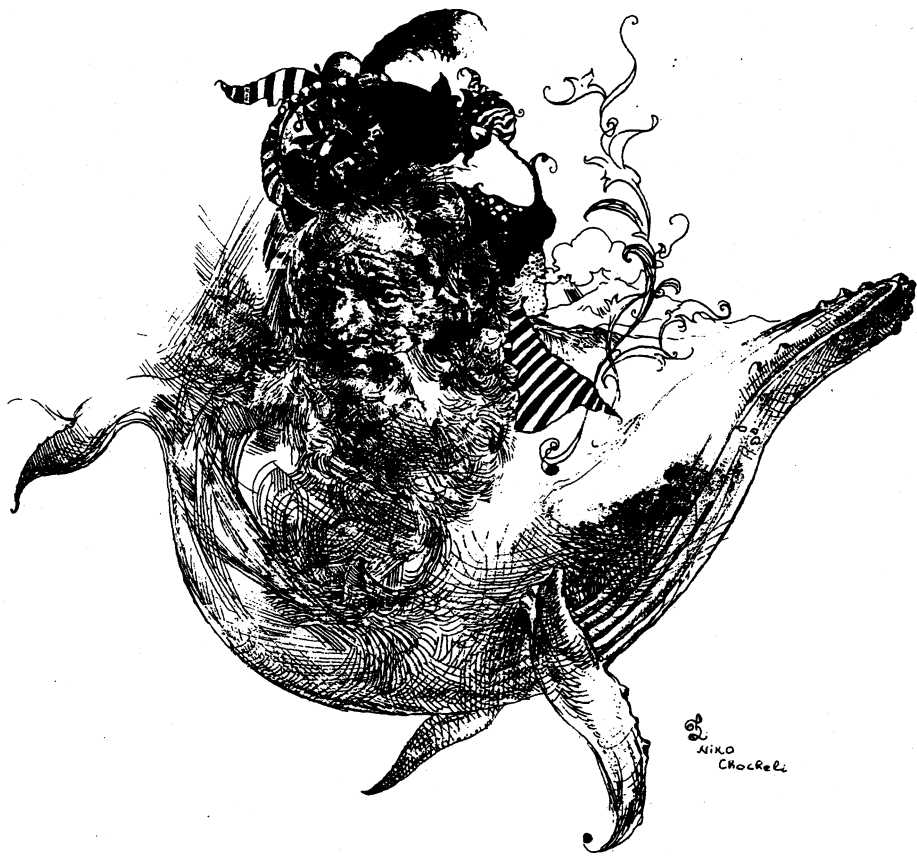
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THE BOOK OF
JONAH



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JONAH

LA SALLE UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM
SPRING, 1999

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THE ARTIST

Our current exhibition offers a suite of sixteen illustrations for the Book of Jonah. The media used are pen and ink, watercolor and gouache. They were created by Niko Chocheli, who spent the 1997-98 academic year as artist-in-residence at La Salle, and who came to this country three years ago to pursue his creative dreams. From his homeland, the Republic of Georgia, he brought not only his talent, but a stalwart faith nurtured by a people that has tenaciously held onto its religion for centuries.

When Chocheli arrived in Philadelphia, he made friends with several patrons of the arts who saw potential in his work. One, Roberta Binder, gave him free use of the second floor of her Doylestown store for his studio. And another friend, art collector Lore Kephart, introduced the artist to Brother Daniel Burke, who was struck by Chocheli's vivid imagination and eye for detail. After two years he was granted an Alien with Extraordinary Abilities green card. This type of immigration

status, which enables Chocheli to stay indefinitely in this country, is typically offered to only the most elite celebrities and artists. Here he has continued to use his skills as an artist, competencies he had developed in twelve years as a student and assistant in the local and national academies of the Republic of Georgia. During these years he was represented in numerous exhibitions and was awarded over thirty prizes.

Chocheli explains that religion is part of nationalism in his country. Throughout Georgia's history, invaders have tried first to take control of the people, and then change their beliefs. But Christianity, specifically the Georgian Orthodox faith, has been firmly entrenched there, since almost its very beginning. Aggressors tried, but failed. Even Communism, which swallowed Georgia into the former Soviet Union, couldn't eradicate the people's beliefs. Chocheli says Georgia was one of the few regions of the union where religion was still openly practiced during Communist rule. "Throughout our history, people have had to defend their homeland, and their faith," he said. "That shows their strong belief, because they had to die for it."

Chocheli grew up in a landscape dotted with beautiful and ancient, churches, some dating back to the 6th century. He was also influenced by parents who felt equal love for art and religion. Both are artists and teachers still residing in Georgia. His grandmother, a lover of literature, stirred his creativity with age-old folk stories filled with giants, little people and an assortment of animals.

Our exhibition of Niko's illustrations is supplemented, in our hall bookcases, with other illustrated editions of the Book of Jonah, especially from private presses.

Maureen Piche

THE BOOK OF JONAH

Among the shortest books in the great anthology we call the Bible is the marvelous story of a prophet called Jonah. He is certainly an engaging character but also rather self-willed, in fact recalcitrant. Because he did not see things as Yahweh saw them, he had to be brought low before he saw the light. Even then, he had to be coaxed out of some childish pouting, when things did not turn out as he expected.

The action of the book starts immediately as the Lord orders Jonah off to the wicked city of Nineveh to announce its impending destruction. But the prophet takes off in the opposite direction and, among other mysteries in the story, it is not clear why. Was he simply being willful? Was he afraid of the wicked Ninevites? Did he disdain to preach to others than the Chosen People? Did he worry that Yahweh would relent (as he says later in the story) and leave him open to ridicule or worse, after he had preached doom and ruin?

More clear is the symbolic import of his descent—from mountains to seashore, ship, ship's hold, deep sleep during the wild storm, to the bottom of the sea and the belly of the whale—and his subsequent repentance, prayer, and return to land. Centuries later Jesus applies the prophet's fall and resurrection to himself: "Just as Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man spend three days and three nights in the bowels of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). The Book of Jonah is traditionally read in synagogue on the Day of Atonement to recall Jonah's call to repentance. Jesus also commends the effectiveness of Jonah's preaching—and the faith of his listeners: "The people of Niveveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the prediction of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!" (Matthew 12:41).

Ironically, Jonah becomes a victim of unforeseen, or rather half-foreseen, consequences. After his preaching, the prophet camps outside Nineveh under a shading vine, to witness the city's impending destruction. When, after its repentance, the

city is saved, Jonah is in a tantrum about the reversal of the Lord's condemnation—as well as about the loss of his shadowing vine.

The story then ends rather abruptly with Yahweh's explanations to the petulant Jonah. The Lord's last words are of mercy and love: "Should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals."

Two important themes run implicitly through the Book of Jonah. Clearly the author was trying, like Milton centuries later in his great epic, "to justify the ways of God to man." And like an earlier epic writer, the author was urging the wisdom of conforming our errant human wills to a Creator who knows and desires everything needed for the ultimate well-being and happiness of His creatures: "In His will is our peace," said Dante, succinctly and beautifully.

Niko's appealing set of illustrations for the Book of Jonah is a

splendid mix of the serious and the playful, of ancient Eastern illuminations and modern fantasy, of accomplished academic drawing and an ingenuous folk palette. It is a mixture which is disarming on its own terms, yet respectful of the serious import of the biblical message.

Brother Daniel Burke
Director



ILLUSTRATED EDITIONS

HALL BOOK CASES

Case I

1. *The Book of Jonah*

Illustrated with wood engravings by David Jones
(Berkshire, England: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1926)

2. *The Book of Jonah*

Illustrated with wood engravings by David Jones
(London: Clover Hill Editions. republished by Douglas
Cleverden, 1979)

3. Three wood engravings from *Jonah* by David Jones

Case II

4. *The Book of Jonah*

In the original Hebrew with the commentary of Rabbi Salomon Izhaqi
(Cleveland: Hamilton Press, 1996)

5. *The Book of Jonah*

Illustrated with woodcuts by Elaine Young
(Seal Harbor Maine: High Loft, in the printing office of August Heckscher, 1981)

6. *The Book of Jonah*

(Bronxville, New York: The Press of Valenti Angelo, 1969)

7. *The Book of Jonah*

With an introduction by Chaim Potok
Illustrated with reproductions of drawings by Ismar David
(Southbury, Conn: Chiswick Book Shop, 1991)

Case III

8. *Jonah, Judith, Ruth*

Illustrated with reproductions and drawings by Michèle Forgeois

(Greenbrae, California: Allen Press, 1984)

9. *Llyfer Ionas*

Illustrated with wood engravings by Colin Paynton

(Wales: David Esslemont at Gwash Gregynog, 1988)

10. *The Book of Jonah*

Illustrated with reproductions of woodcuts by Jacob Steinhardt
(Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication of America, 1953)

Case IV

11. *The Book of Jonah*

Illustrated with reproductions of pen and ink, watercolor and gouache drawings by Niko Chocheli

Binding by Anne Krawitz

(Philadelphia: La Salle University Art Museum, 1998)

12. *The Book of Jonah*

Illustrated with reproductions of hand illuminations by Judith Anne Duncan

(Minneapolis: Scholar – Gipsy Press, 1974)

13. *Treasury of Bible Stories*

Anonymous illustrator

(Lincolnwood, Ill.: Publications International, Ltd., 1995)

14. (Outside hall case)

The Story of Jonah

(Wood engraving from the *Old Testament Series*, 1955

By Fritz Eichenberg 1901-1990)

THE TEXT

1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, “Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.” But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

*1.

2. But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep.

* Numbers in the margin here relate passages of the text to their illustrations in the exhibition.

3. The captain came and said to him, "What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish." The sailors said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this calamity has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, "Tell us why this calamity has come upon us. What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"

"I am a Hebrew," he replied. "I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." Then the men were even more afraid, and said to him. "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them so.

Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea was growing more and more tempestuous. He said to them, "Pick me

up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you.” Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more stormy against them. Then they cried out to the LORD, “Please, O LORD, we pray, do not let us perish on account of this man’s life. Do not make us guilty of innocent blood; for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.”

4. So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

But the LORD provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish days and three nights.

5. 2 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, saying “I called to the LORD out of my distress and he answered me, out of the belly of Sheol I

cried, and you heard my voice. You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me, all your waves and your billows passed over me.

6. Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight, how shall I look again upon your holy temple?' The waters closed in over me, the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the Pit, O LORD my God

7. As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the LORD!" Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land

8. 3 The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and

proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

9. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.” When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his

mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

10. 4 But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” And the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

11. The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God

appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered.

12. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." Then the LORD said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night.

And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"