

thagorean beauty hinting of the spectral lines of hydrogen or the octets of hidden symmetry groups. The blue windows at St. Andrew's, Wolverhampton, like the windows at St. Paul's, Bledlow Ridge, evoke the spirals of lepton showers in a cloud chamber. At Coventry, the bleeding Crucifixion is pleasantly absent.

Piper's windows are far less overtly "religious" than are, again, those of Chagall, who began designing stained glass several years after Piper's first windows at Oundle. But a better comparison would be to the windows of that good atheist, Fernand Léger, at the Church of the Sacred Heart in Audincourt, which Patrick Reyntiens called "among the very best that the twentieth century has seen."

Piper did join the Anglican Church, but his pagan sympathies remained clear. The Tree of Life is more common in his stained glass than the cross, and even in his paintings of rural churches one expects to see a faun peeking around an overgrown corner. So we took a train to Winchester, where a panel of twelve of Piper's foliate heads lives in the lobby of the Wessex Hotel. The hotel staff were completely accommodating—allowing me to move chairs and to take as many pictures as I wished.

Across a wide lawn from the Wessex is Winchester Cathedral, burial place of Saxon kings. When Oliver Cromwell's forces took the town in 1642, they smashed the cathedral windows. Townspeople saved the shards and, after the Restoration, rebuilt the huge windows in the west end—but placed the glass randomly, giving the windows an oddly "modern" feel.

Modernism

Modernism seems most at home in wreckage and ruins. Leonard Bernstein said that Mahler, in his last symphony, saw the approaching end of the world: the end of tonal harmony, the end of Western civilization in the coming war, the end of his own life. Mahler saw the approaching storm and knew that there was no escape. But after the storm broke, on the Somme, in the Depression, in the wars against the fascists and in the death camps of the Holocaust and the gulags and the state prisons and the incinerated cities—when the horror of the century was complete and the rubble of bricks and bodies inescapable, people began picking up the pieces. Tales of mere heroism

would seem jejune beside so many corpses, and optimism silly without the tempering of tragedy. Messiaen's "Quartet for the End of Time," composed in a prison camp, where the strains of beauty are triumphant because of their rarity, is a fine example. Perhaps picking up the pieces is what Art of the Later Days is about—picking up the pieces, reassembling the fragments as they come to hand—the road to Eleusis a patchwork of masks, bricks, lyre strings, and even some brittle plastic—seeking, if not "classical beauty," at least a dignity that can stand in good conscience beside the mockery of the rubble.

In 2007 Gerhard Richter designed windows for Cologne Cathedral. The windows are composed of 11,500 identically sized squares of seventy-two colors of glass, arranged "more or less" at random. If the idea is cerebral, the effect of the light streaming onto the columns and floor is not. Sigmar Polke responded to the challenge of the cathedral at Grossmünster, in Zurich, by reaching back to what are perhaps the most ancient windows known—the thin alabaster slabs that allowed filtered light into the temples of the pharaohs at Luxor and Karnak. Polke used thin sections of agate as well as textured glass in the figurative windows.

Toward the end of his essay, "Stained Glass: Art or Anti-Art," Piper muses on the use of new materials, such as resin and fiberglass, and surely would have recognized The Chapel of Heaven, by Finley Fryer and the Shasta Mountain Playhouse, composed of thirty-seven panels made from recycled plastic, as being within this new unfolding tradition. The Plastic Chapel was exhibited at Burning Man in 1998.

In the twenty-first century, mammon has never been more comfortably in control of the global world. The partnership of corporation and state, while not complete, is massively entrenched. Postmodernism, all too often, seems wholly at home in the new elite comfort, the label being thought of as a badge of accomplishment rather than as the disease from which we must escape.

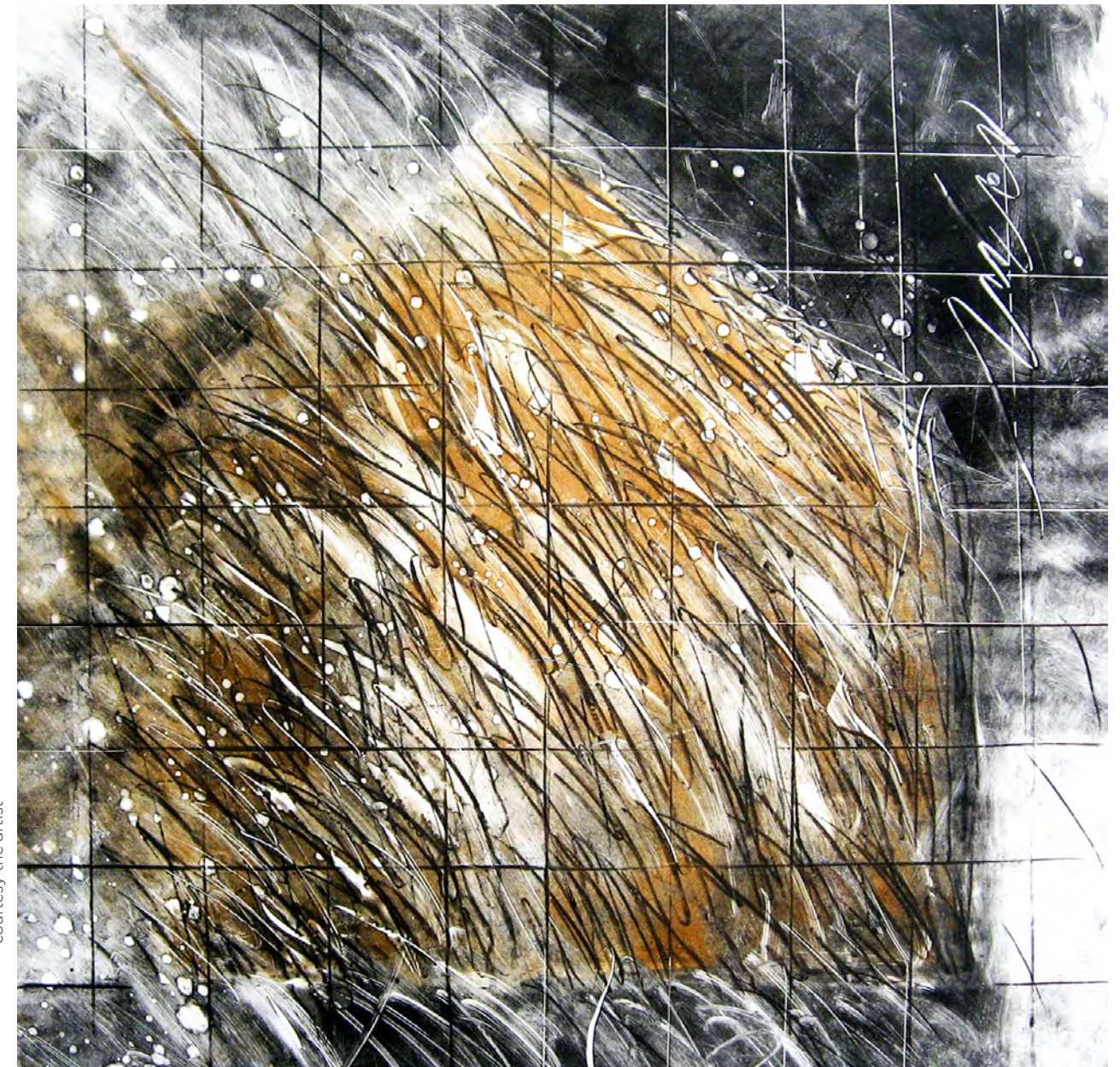
Like Huxley, Piper sought his eternity in the sensuous delight of color. Today, with gaudy flashes of color a repetitive mainstay of advertising, the aesthetic challenge has changed. Darkness, or a somber pessimistic sobriety, has been all but banished from political discourse. Modern psychology offers light and happiness in every room. Yet

Piper knew that the proper frame for light was shadow. Hope shines brightest with a touch of mourning, and the symmetries of heaven clearest when broken. The enormity of the crimes of civilized nations over the past one hundred years ought to provide any artist with plenty of canvas.

Dale Pendell's books include the Pharmako Trilogy (*Pharmako/Poeia*, *Pharmako/Dynamis*, and *Pharmako/Gnosis*); *Walking with Nobby: Conversations with Norman O. Brown*; *Inspired Madness: the Gifts of Burning Man*; and *The Great Bay: Chronicles of the Collapse*. Once a resident of Santa Cruz, he now lives in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada.

JANE GREGORIUS

Gridded Church #3, 2008
monotype, 20 X 20 in



courtesy the artist