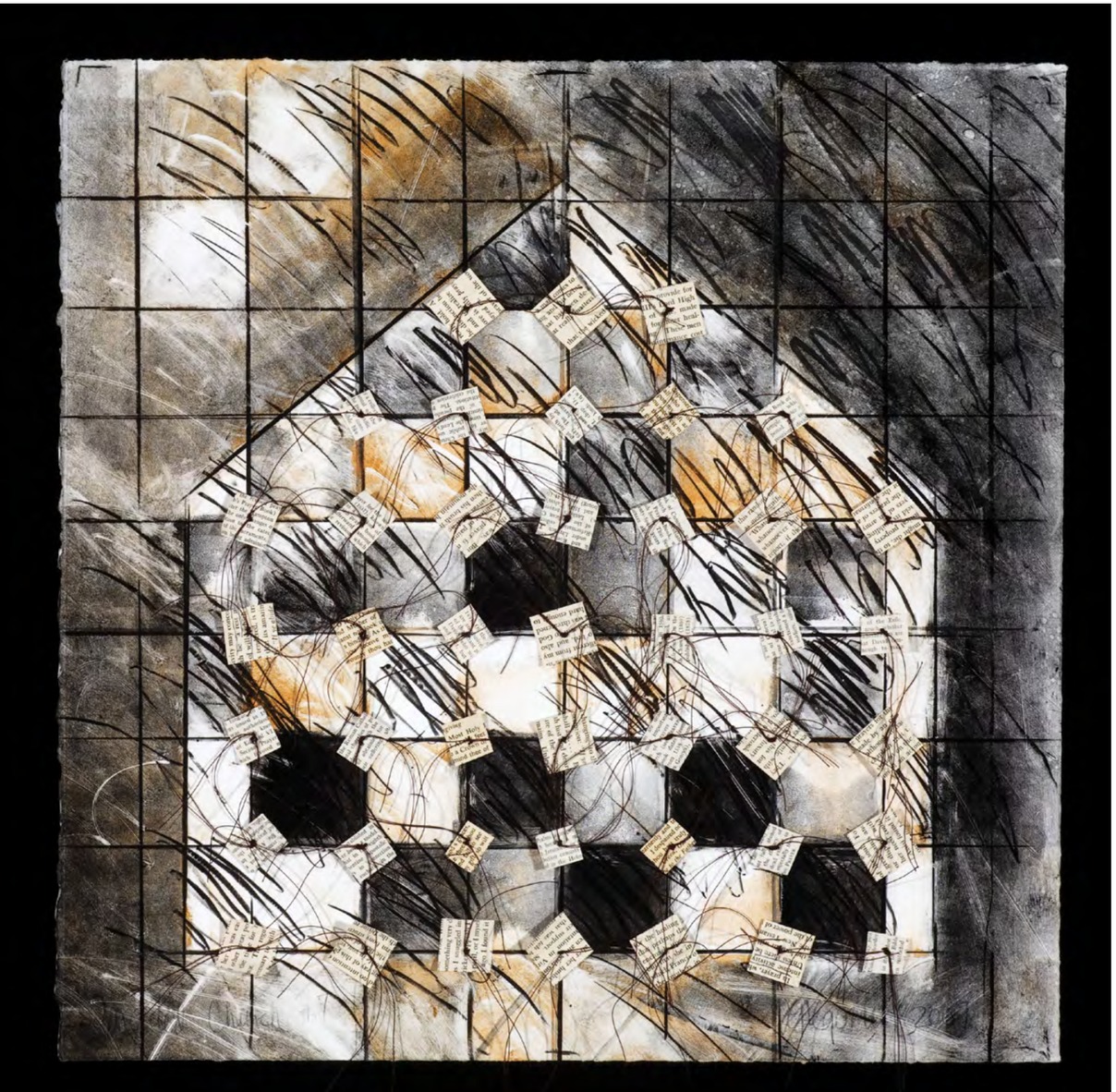
JANE GREGORIUS

Gridded Church #7, 2008
monotype, 20 X 20 in



courtesy the artist

heating, and a spectrum will occasionally cross my face and I'll see a sudden brilliant flash of color. Sometimes each eye gets a different color. Some of the colors are so rich that I track the spectrum, marveling at the manifold and distinct shades and hues: aquamarine, through royal blue, to ultramarine. Deep violet is harder to get, and is not very bright.

There are many colors not found in a spectrum. There is no brown. There are no creamy pastels, and there is no pink, though this morning I am seeing a glowing mauve-magenta from one particular crystal shaped like a teardrop, which is pretty close. It may be a mixture of two wavelengths.

Light

In the twelfth century, color was thought to be separate from light, or at least such was the theory of Aristotle. Color was a property of opaque objects, and one needed light to see color. The most widely believed explanation of vision was that objects were perceivable by a ray of light passing *from* the eye to the object. Another theory held that a thin film traveled from the object to the eye.

In his *Lectures on Physics*, Richard Feynman states that any three different colors of light can make all the others—that there are no fixed primaries. Any of the colors of spectral light (and even, under certain conditions, colors such as brown) can be constructed innumerable ways: as a single pure wavelength, or as mixtures of wavelengths, and all are indistinguishable from each other.

Coventry

I returned to Coventry in 2009. It had all started on Easter, a long way from Coventry, on the west coast of North America. With light streaming through the windows of our bedroom in the Sierra foothills of California, I told my wife, Laura, about the experience I'd had at Coventry forty years before. One thing led to another, and we decided to make a pilgrimage, giving a few readings and book signings on the way and accompanied by my mother and daughter.

I wanted to see how the building that had so deeply informed my aesthetics had withstood the passage of half a century. We entered the ruins of the old cathedral first. It seemed cleaner and tidier than I remembered—in 1965, at least in my memory, there was still rubble in evidence. Then we entered the new cathedral. It was overcast and raining lightly, but Piper's windows dominated the interior, and there was light aplenty. I felt the same hush. I parked my mother in a chair in a swath of orange light, turned a chair for myself, and gazed at the wall.

From the distance of the opposite wall, the large-scale design seems overstated: the yellow-tinted clear panels that form a sun in the center of the wall are too reminiscent, for my taste, of a hydrogen fireball. The dominance of the round, dark center panes is exaggerated by photography; the experience from the ground is far more balanced. Patrick Reyntiens says that the grand design was his idea or, rather, an idea he appropriated from Bernini—but I kept wishing there were one or two more dark panels embedded within the great sun, some hints of obscuring clouds.

Perhaps our optimism is more tempered today than in the 1960s. But all of Piper's individual colored panels were just as alive and vibrant as I remembered them. The lines and the cuts were nowhere wrong or out of place. I could gaze at any of a hundred lights and feel that something in the world had been done correctly. Or I could look at one piece of glass within a pane, and feel the soothing pleasure of a green that was like that of an olive leaf, or fall into a blue that never tired of receding into oceanic depths, or gaze at a red so rich and dark it seemed to hold the secrets of the blackness from which all light must originate.

Piper's windows are an essay on poetics, an instruction manual on line breaks and prosody—there is just enough form and repetition that a formal grammar is present by implication—evoked but not quite stated. Piper proves that there can be rhythm without repetition, that syncopation can hide structure without that structure being lost. The linkage between the individual lights is like that of the Japanese verse form *renga*, by feeling-tone rather than by explicit image. The windows do not present a narrative. There are hints of a story in them, but only hints—the way the bombed-out walls hint of a story—a not-quite-vanished world where people walked and spoke but with lacunae that we must fill in with our own imagining.

If the cathedral as a whole has a theme, it is forgiveness—a word rather out of style to our generation, who