

Book Review

Farrell, Marie T. *She Who Believed: Australian Images of Mary*. Strathfield: St Pauls 2009. ISBN 9781921472060. 42 pages with illustrations.

This is a gem of a book: well conceived, visually alluring and inviting meditation. Marie Farrell has nominated paintings and sculptures from across the continent which portray Mary under the southern skies. Her choice has been influenced by three contexts. Some works have a liturgical sensibility, belonging in cathedrals and churches. Others are indigenous in inspiration. A third context is contemporary art. This visual feast is complemented by some vivid poetry: the gallery is opened with a Kevin Hart poem and the journey through completed with a text from James McAuley. All in all the work is 'catholic' in many senses.

The collection ranges across a number of themes. As expected there are depictions of Mary as Help of Christians, Woman of Faith, Archetype of the Church, and of the Southern Cross. There are some quite localized appreciations of the Mother of God, relating her to the indigenous communities of Wadeye (NT), Daly River (NT), Bowraville (NSW) and the plains country around Moree NSW. There is Mary of the Valley, incorporating her into the life of the Hunter Valley and its vineyard traditions. Alongside these are some almost cheeky but endearing depictions of Mary and Elizabeth living the drama of our salvation in contemporary poise.

Each art work is beautifully printed, with artist's name and location identified, and accompanied by a simple text which does not overwhelm the art but leaves the viewer free to contemplate the image or access the information.

As a whole the book offers an insight into the way that the Australian context has brought to the fore a number of interpretations of this defining woman of faith and Mother of God.

Review by Gerard Moore

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