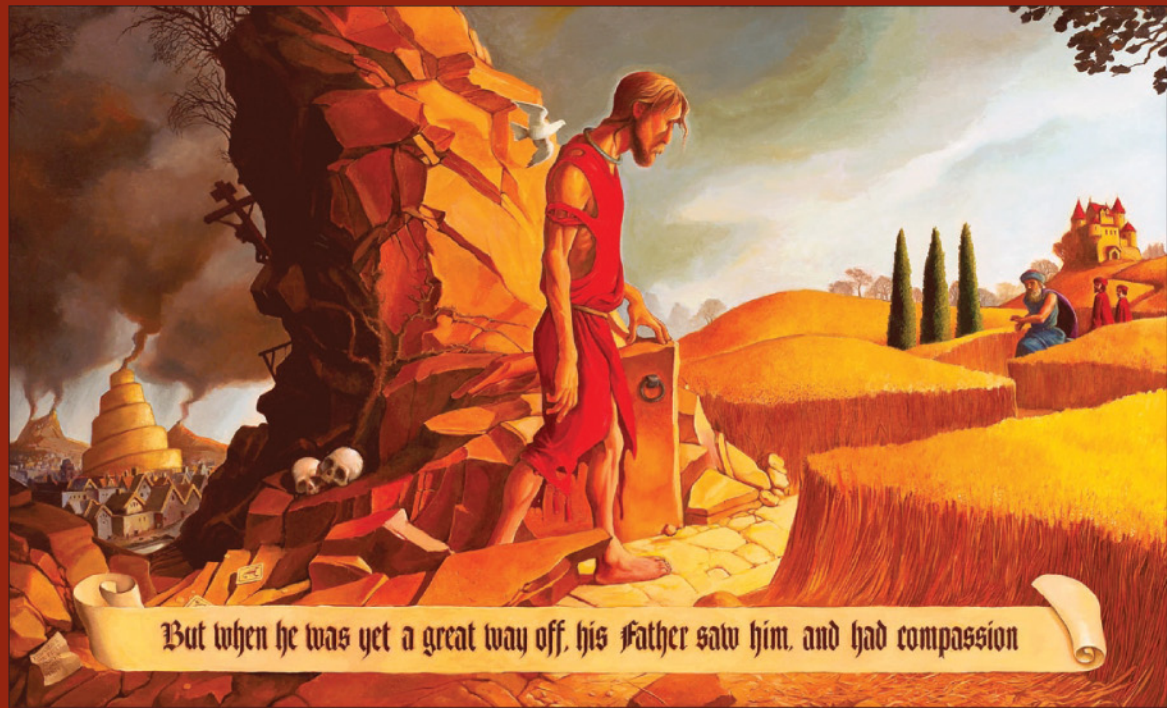


The Father & His Two Sons

THE ART OF FORGIVENESS



But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion

The Father & His Two Sons

THE ART OF FORGIVENESS



*I have been led to a inner place
where I had not been before.*

It is the place within me where God has chosen to dwell.

*It is the place where I am held safe in the embrace of an all-loving Father
who calls me by name and says, "You are my beloved son, on you my favor rests."*

It is the place where I can taste the joy and the peace that are not of this world.

Henri J. M. Nouwen

The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming

Images of the Prodigal Son from the Larry & Mary Gerbens Collection

The Father & His Two Sons

THE ART OF FORGIVENESS

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*But while he was still a long way off,
his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.*

LUKE 15:20

For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.

LUKE 15:24

The parable of the Prodigal Son is one of the most powerful and evocative stories Jesus told. Its universal themes of greed and regret, arrogance and repentance, sin and redemption, jealousy and acceptance, and most importantly, compassionate forgiveness resonate richly with each retelling.

This parable has inspired the work of artists throughout the centuries. In many times and places, using many methods and media, artists have sought to visually retell this story. Despite the differences in their work, the message of the Father's love remains constant.

In the mid 1990's, Don Prys, my brother-in-law, encouraged me to read *The Return of The Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* by Henri Nouwen. I was inspired by Nouwen's personal and introspective style, placing himself in the place of not only the younger son, but also the elder son and the father. About the same time I became aware of the serigraphs of John August Swanson; the colors and themes and the precise nature of the silk screening process intrigued me. Swanson's serigraph of the Prodigal Son from 1984 was the first piece of art inspired by the parable that I collected.

That was the start; I was hooked! From the days of Edgar Boevé's art history course at Calvin College, I was fascinated by artists and their amazing God-given talents. I now had a theme to build a collection around: forgiveness as illustrated by the parable of the Prodigal Son. I first looked at the old masters like Rembrandt for their interpretation of the parable. I found that they were not only intrigued by the parable but also that much of their work was autobiographical. With my wife Mary's blessing, we acquired Rembrandt's etching of the Prodigal Son and Tissot's five etchings entitled *The Prodigal Son in Modern Life*.

My son, the father said, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

LUKE 15:31

*But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead
and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*

LUKE 15:32

At the same time, we were becoming acquainted with contemporary artists by frequenting galleries, museums, and even art fairs. The place of works of art by artists of faith in worship and everyday life inspired me as a collector. I started to look for and acquire works by contemporary artists on the Prodigal theme. The next step was to commission artists whose work I appreciated to create original art based on the parable. Their unique styles and perspectives were of great inspiration to me. I have come to love working with artists and encouraging their artistic gifts in the commissioning process. Their works of art are their visual testimonies. In many instances, the artists have also included interpretations of their work which become their written testimonies. Under the heading of *Collector's Notes*, we tell short stories about how we came to know the artist and our experience throughout the commissioning process.

We feel privileged to share the Parable of the Prodigal with you through this collection of original art and writings. Mary and I believe this collection of art, inspired by Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son, is a creative affirmation of the great gift of God's unending grace, love and forgiveness. We are extremely pleased our collection will find a permanent home on the Calvin College campus and hope it will provide a living testament to "the art of forgiveness" for generations to come.

*Please pause for a contemplative moment
& let this timeless parable speak to you once again.*

It is the place where I so much want to be, but am so fearful of being.

*It is the place where I will receive all I desire, all that I ever hoped for, all that I will ever need,
but it is also the place where I have to let go of all I most want to hold on to.*

*It is the place that confronts me with the fact that
truly accepting love, forgiveness, and healing is often much harder than giving it.*

It is the place beyond earning, deserving, and rewarding.

It is the place of surrender and complete trust.

Henri J. M. Nouwen

The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming



Rembrandt van Rijn

Dutch, 1606 – 1669

Return of the Prodigal Son, 1636

Etching | 6.25" x 5.5"

*The embrace is so intense that it's hard to know
where one leaves off and the other begins.
What one has the other has;
mercy and need are blended into one.*



Alexei Viktorovich Korchagin
from the Village of Fedoskino
Return of the Prodigal Son, 2004
Russian Miniature Lacquer Box | 1.75" x 1.6" x 2"H



Bjorn Winblad
Danish
Prodigal Son, 1982
Parables in Glass | 12" x 12"

The Prodigal Son

by John August Swanson

Returning to the parable of the Prodigal Son, artists interpret and add insight into the human experience of family life and forgiveness. Rembrandt chose to use this image for his last completed painting "Return of the Prodigal Son", 1669 (based on the drawing he used for his etching "Return of the Prodigal Son", 1636). The author Robert Wallace, in his book *The World of Rembrandt*, observes: "In the artist's view the scripture was the beginning chapter of a narrative of Man's situation, a dramatic and continuing narrative in which Rembrandt saw himself and his contemporaries as vital participants." Rembrandt returned to his drawing from 33 years earlier to paint his last powerful work. This story inspired me also, as it related to my own family's story and my roots in Swedish narrative painting.

In 18th and 19th century Sweden, especially in the small rural villages, stories were painted on banners, or directly on the walls or cornices of rooms. Often Biblical scenes were depicted with the figures imitative of the German woodblock prints found in Bibles of the period. The Prodigal Son was a popular theme that resonated with many Swedes at this time, as mass emigration to North America was occurring. Tradition dictated that farms would be divided among sons, often making them economically unviable. The solution would be for one son to emigrate and, unlike the Prodigal, many would never return to their families. This was the story of my own father, who left his family in Sweden to immigrate to the USA, while his older brother stayed to manage the family farm and business. My father was never able to return. Seeing how my father's experience unfolds in the lives of many people, I began drawing and printing the "Story of the Prodigal Son" in 1971.

COLLECTOR'S NOTE:

I have always been drawn to John Swanson's person and work. As an art collector, I love the brilliant colors; as an ophthalmologist, I love the intricacy and precision of the silk screening process; and as a Christian, I love the Biblical themes. John is a humble man who cares deeply for his fellow travelers along life's journey. Mary and I have been blessed to get to know John personally and represent him and his art in venues throughout the country.



*The Prodigal returns not just to the father but to a place of abundance,
and not on his knees, but standing, fully restored.*

John August Swanson
The Prodigal Son, 2004
Serigraph | 13.5" x 40"



*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;
the old has gone, the new has come!*

II COR 5:17

COLLECTOR'S NOTE:

I received this postcard from Don Wilson, retired professor of anthropology at Calvin College. Don has a wonderful postcard ministry that has touched hundreds of people in the Calvin community and beyond. He has helped nurture a greater understanding of the cultural diversity of God's creation through his teaching of anthropology, and continues to mentor students in his retirement.

Vie De Jesus Mafa

The Prodigal Son
Postcard | 4" x 6"

In the Babemba Tribe of South Africa, when a person acts irresponsibly or unjustly, he is placed in the center of the village, alone and unfettered. All work ceases, and every man, woman, and child in the village gathers in a large circle around the accused individual. Then each person in the tribe speaks to the accused, one at a time, each recalling the good things the person in the center of the circle has done in his lifetime. Every incident, every experience that can be recalled with any detail and accuracy, is recounted. All his positive attributes, good deeds, strengths, and acts of kindness are recited carefully and at length. This tribal ceremony often lasts for several days. At the end, the tribal circle is broken, a joyous celebration takes place, and the person is symbolically and literally welcomed back into the tribe.

from *The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace*
by Jack Kornfield



COLLECTOR'S NOTE:

My best friend, Jim De Graaf, came upon a print of this beautiful drawing while visiting the home of an acquaintance from church. After much effort, he found the artist, Karl Kwekel, and acquired this print as a gift for our collection. Jim also discovered that Karl was a classmate of mine at Grand Rapids Christian High School. When I met Karl and asked him if the original was available, he said, "Larry, let me tell you a story." He recounted his wanderings from home and faith as a young man and his father's patient waiting, unconditional love, and constant prayer on his behalf. When Karl returned home to faith from his far country, he created this piece to honor his father. "So Larry," he said, "the original is not for sale." Karl's work and words are a wonderful testimony to the longing and patient, prayerful waiting of Our Father for the return of his wandering children.

Karl Kwekel

Return of the Prodigal Son, 1982
Ink Drawing | 10.5" x 8.25"

COMMENTARY - by Nicholas Wolterstorff

Noah Porter Professor Emeritus of Philosophical Theology, Yale Divinity School
Senior Fellow, Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, University of Virginia

It was not just out of the blue that Jesus told what has come to be called the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The Pharisees and the scribes were pious, highly nationalistic, Jews. Their piety took the form of scrupulously following the rules of the Torah for the life of Israel, including the rules for ritual purity: they avoided associating with the morally disreputable. And they viewed as traitors those fellow Jews who collected taxes for the occupying Romans. Among their many reasons for being alarmed by the increasing popularity of the itinerant preacher Jesus was the fact that he was indiscriminate in his associations. So they started an accusatory whispering campaign: "This man associates with tax collectors and sinners; he even eats with them." It was in response to this charge that Jesus told the parable.

Over two millennia of re-telling, the parable has acquired a warm and fuzzy glow. How very nice of the old man to be so welcoming; but that's what loving fathers do. And how petulant of the older brother to be so jealous and refuse to join the celebration.

Those who heard Jesus tell the parable would have found it sharp and biting. A young Jewish boy shirks his filial responsibilities by begging for his inheritance, leaving his family, traveling to a "far country," and there engaging in dissolute living. After running through his money, he is reduced to hiring himself out to a Gentile pig farmer. There he comes to his senses. Recalling that his father's servants were better off than he is now, he returns home full of shame and regret. His father welcomes him with open arms and a big celebration. His stay-at-home, hard-working, brother finds this lionizing of the scoundrel disgusting. Everybody who heard the parable realized full well that what Jesus was doing was preaching a new kind of piety: a piety of forgiveness and inclusion rather than a piety of purity by exclusion.

Over the millennia, the parable has proved to be a jewel with ever more facets to be revealed. The Gerbens Collection, reproduced in this volume, is a splendid example of the point. In the etching by Hans Beham and the watercolor by Joel Tanis, the son as pig farmer is in the foreground; in the painting by Jon McDonald, the shame of the son and the amazement of the old man are palpable; in the etching by Rembrandt, the embrace of the Prodigal Son by the father is almost painful in its poignancy; in the collage by Edgar Boevé, the embrace encompasses the prodigal; in the painting by Elmer Yazzie, both sons are embraced; in the linoleum cut by Steve Prince, "The Prodigal Appetite: Halloo," the dissolution of the young man is repulsive. The examples continue in the many fine pieces of original art in this wonderfully inspired collection.

We each have in our mind's eye an image of the scenario of the parable. If the image you have in mind is warm and fuzzy, looking through the Gerbens collection will give you a series of jolts. And whether or not it's warm and fuzzy, each depiction will open up to you a depth within, or an angle on, the parable that you had never quite noticed before. "That's not quite how I had imagined the father's response." "I had not imagined the son's dissolution as quite so disgusting." Each piece of art confronts you with a distinctly original perspective on the parable.

Depictions of the parable are necessarily interpretations; depiction is a hermeneutic activity. The Gerbens Collection is a small but rich indication of how inexhaustible Jesus' story has proven to be. It declares that the way of the Father with repentant sons and daughters is not the lash of retribution but the embrace of forgiveness.

the commissions



Edward Riojas: The Prodigal Son - Oil on Board

Steve Prince: *The Prodigal Trilogy* - Linoleum Cut

The Prodigal Appetite: Halloo

The Prodigal Journey: Exit Wounds

The Prodigal Return: Your Past May Be Stained, but Your Future's Untouched

Julie Quinn: Embrace - Ink, Oil & Acrylic on Clayboard

Robert Barnum: Return of The Prodigal Son - Watercolor

Gary Wilson: Prodigal Son - Ceramic

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Thoughts Of Home

Prayers From Home

Athanasios Clark: The Byzantine Orthodox Icon of The Prodigal Son - Egg Tempera with Gold Leaf

Charles Smalligan: Prodigal - Carved Honduras Mahogany

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Jon McDonald: Shelter From The Storm - Oil on Board

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Carol McCrady: The Prodigal Son - Watercolor on Papyrus

The Prodigal Son

by Edward Riojas

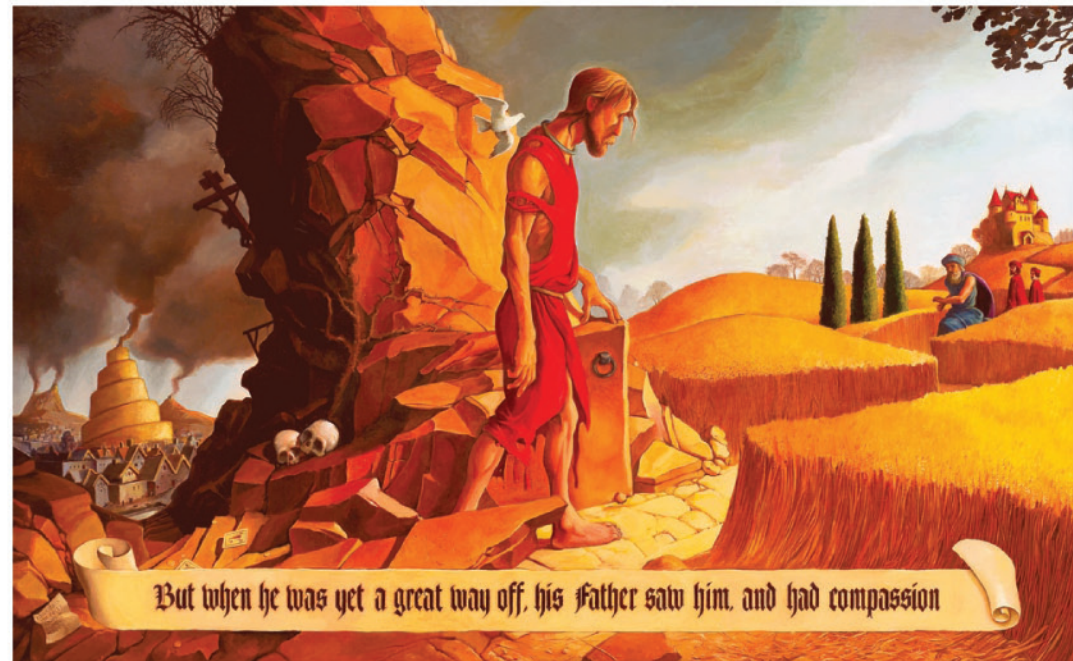
Though I am always hesitant to explain my work, believing the necessity to be a mark of poor visual communication, I will here describe the painting so that there will be no religious misinterpretation attributed to my lack of skill.

This painting strives to capture the moment from scripture when the son is “yet a long way off.” Theologically, this is a significant phrase. It does not say “when he finally got his act together.” Neither does it say “when he realized perfection.” This points to the Father’s grace – that He came to save us “while we were yet sinners.” It also points to our inability to save ourselves by our own merit.

One may ask, “Then why or how does the son walk toward home?” The painting answers this question when it is read from left to right. On the left is the foreign country in which the son squandered his inheritance – here I have taken less of an earthly approach to subject-matter in preference to a religious angle. Since Scripture clearly teaches that our inheritance is salvation from eternal death and inclusion into the body of Christ, it is no coincidence that beneath the high places of the foreign country lies a massive ziggurat. Other anti-Christian images can be seen on the cards jettisoned along the way. One card nods to the zodiac or witchcraft, while another bears a yin and yang. Scattered coins indicated worldly wealth. Gloom reigns.

Into this world of darkness descends the Son of God. By being lifted up on a cross, visible in the shadows of death, the sinful world is able to be redeemed and set free from bondage. The Prodigal Son, like all of us, is incapable of moving toward the Father’s kingdom without the aid of the Holy Spirit, depicted in the form of a dove. Though we approach heaven we still bear evidence of our sinful state, as is shown in the torque around his neck. The son’s former glory is replaced with tattered tassels, matted hair, and bruised feet. The son’s countenance bears evidence of his broken and contrite heart.

While those in darkness shy away from the true light, the Prodigal Son is brought into His marvelous light. The Father’s kingdom is ripe with the fields of believers. But even as we are in the light, we sometimes stumble into the roles of the son’s brothers, grumbling that he is allowed to enter and feast. The Father cares not that His goodness is showered on the least brother, but runs hard to his lost son.



COLLECTOR'S NOTE:

We first saw Ed's work at a one man show at Gainey Gallery on the campus of Byron Center High School. His stunning work had a contemporary/ iconic feel about it. What I was really drawn to was Ed's quiet, self effacing integrity as an artist and man. His piece remains one of my favorites.

Edward Riojas

The Prodigal Son, 2004
Oil on Board | 30" x 49"

The Prodigal Trilogy
The Prodigal Appetite: Halloo
by Steve Prince

This image shows a young man being tempted by popular culture, his environment, and the people around him. Idolatry is thriving in his world. It is embodied by the music stars he sees on television and is symbolized by the fertility statue in the top center of the format. Low riding vehicles booming with bass send a message preaching to the masses. Basketball star wannabes, practicing through the night, succumb to the call of idolatry that promises fame and fortune. Trendy clothing inscribed with demoralizing words is another accouterment of this idolatrous culture. The knife and fork imbedded in the son's head represents the consumption of his mind, the subsequent attack upon his spirit, and suggests its ultimate affect on his soul.

The world is a good teacher through its multimedia attack. The word "halloo" means to shout or call out in order to attract the attention of a person. It also suggests the cry during a hunt that urges hounds toward its game. The spirits are like the hounds in search of our youth. The Apostle Paul stated in his letter to the Ephesians "for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). This piece reveals the spirit imbued in so much of popular culture. The television becomes a prison cell trapping many of our young people in cycles of immorality. The checkerboard floor mimics the quilt design, often used to signal slaves traveling on the Underground Railroad, to suggest the potential hazards of daily decisions – if we make the wrong move, we may perish.

Standing in stark contrast to the idolatry is the grace of God, signified by the father who is steadfast in his prayer for the son to break free of the snares of the world. The father contrasts with the shadows, cut in thin white lines in the left of the format. He holds onto the Word, which is of peace and love.



COLLECTOR'S NOTE:

When I first saw Steve's Urban Epistles at the Grand Rapids Art Museum, I was awestruck. Mary and I met Steve in Washington, D.C. soon afterward and commissioned him while we were there. Steve is a talented and godly young man who "pulls no punches" in his art and concern for the current generation of young people. When Steve's commissioned pieces arrived at our home late one afternoon, I unwrapped them and laid them on the living room floor. I read Steve's interpretation and description of the pieces and slept very little that night.

Steve Prince
The Prodigal Trilogy
The Prodigal Appetite: Halloo, 2004
Linoleum Cut | 50" x 36"

Prodigal

by Charles Smalligan

When asked to create a piece of art for the Gerbens Prodigal Son Collection, I knew exactly which piece of wood I would select. Years ago, I received a piece of Honduras mahogany, partially turned on a lathe, but rejected because of a crack that ran through it. It reminded me of an old sermon on "Cracked Pots", which brought to mind an email I recently received:

An elderly Chinese woman had two large pots, each hung on the ends of a pole, which she carried across her neck. One of the pots had a crack while the other always delivered a full portion of water. At the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the woman bringing home only one and one half pots of water.

Of course the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, but the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection and miserable that it could only do half of what it was made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be bitter failure, it spoke to the woman by the stream.

"I am ashamed of myself, because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house." The old woman smiled, "Did you notice that there are flowers on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known of your flaw, so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walked back, you watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without your being the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house."

Honduras mahogany has a unique warmth, richness and density. It seemed the perfect medium to tell the story of God's enduring love and unconditional grace. The seven cathedral windows in the middle of the wine vessel tell the story of the Prodigal Son. The number seven symbolizes God's perfection, sovereignty, and holiness. The forgiveness and love of the Father, who sent Jesus Christ to save us all, counters the prodigal excesses of the son. God's love, forgiveness and grace as illustrated in this parable is a universal message that needs to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. Art is designed to engage the observer. I pray that this piece can join us as a "cracked pot" and together we can water some flowers along our paths.



LEAVING HOME

SINS OF THE SON

THE FIELDS OF PIGS

HE CAME TO HIS SENSES

THE RETURN

THE OLDER SON

COMMUNION



COLLECTOR'S NOTE:

Charlie & Sheryl Smalligan have been good friends for many years. Charlie reminded me that Luke 15 includes the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin as well as that of the Prodigal Son. A common theme in these parables is reflected in this piece - that the lost have been found. Docile, obedient sheep encircle the top of the wine vessel. Sheep tend to follow their master. The pigs on the bottom, however, need to be driven, and like the Prodigal Son, sometimes may experience the dire consequences of going their own way. Charlie, a wood carver of consummate skill, completed the Prodigal piece in the summer of 2008 between the Smalligan's stints as English teachers in China.

Charles Smalligan

Prodigal, 2008

Carved Honduras Mahogany | 15" x 9.5"