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Spirituality and Religion



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GRAFFITI, SANCTIFIED

B. J. Christofferson's *Maiden Rock Train Project*



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In the fall of 2007, B. J. Christofferson's heart opened to the tiny village of Maiden Rock, Wisconsin (pop. 121), on the western shore of Lake Pepin. She bought a turn-of-the-century house that sits between Main Street and busy train tracks that run along the Mississippi River. As she transformed the house into a home, studio, and gallery (www.secretheartgallery.com), she fell in love with the trains in her backyard.

The next year, Christofferson was invited by fellow Maiden Rock artist Celeste Nelms and a local band called The Ditchlilies to participate in the Maiden Rock Revue of Trains, a music, art, and spoken word event. That's when Christofferson began the *Maiden Rock Train Project*.

"I borrowed a camera and over three months' time made a photographic record of the public art (graffiti) that the trains display,"

she says. "I was amazed how often the graffiti seemed spiritually oriented, with words like *signs, galaxy, await*. I think they're beautiful. The ultimate public art."

Christofferson, whose work is inspired by religious iconography—especially early medieval images and Mexican icons—then combined the photos with icons from her archives, merging, she says, "what is divine with the irreverence and beauty of contemporary street art." Because she's only now learning to use a computer, the actual Photoshop work was done by photographer Tom Dolan.

"Through this work the boxcar becomes a shrine, a dwelling place for the saints and guardians of the train," says Christofferson. "Visitors to my gallery nearly always read them as straight photographs from my travels in Mexico."

Artwork by B. J. Christofferson and text by Karen Olson.

