

*Blue Jesus*, by Dinah Stafford

art selection and comment by [Lil Copan](#) in the [September 22, 2021](#) issue



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At 66, she's one of the oldest known living persons with Prader-Willi syndrome," says Gil Stafford, reflecting on his sister's life, work, and challenges. "Despite her diagnosed developmental disabilities, she has become an outsider artist." While

Dinah Stafford has difficulty communicating verbally, her artwork communicates with sure lines, color, dynamic movement, and a profound spiritual stillness, as in this linocut, *Blue Jesus*.

Stafford's art communicates with an unusual immediacy, something that comes from a deeper place she clearly owns within herself. She carries with her a sort of mystical knowing, which can as easily appear in her artwork or in a deep well of tears, as when she understands something so deeply and painfully that a sustained howl is the appropriate response. According to her brother, the immediacy of her relationship with others and her engagement with her surroundings are holistic and integrative.

Stafford created this piece at ArtWorks, founded by Sister Jeanne Carrigan of the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, who combined her doctoral work in art therapy and art education to create a program for adults with developmental disabilities. Stafford's work with Carrigan brings together dimensions of the spiritual and creative into an expressive force, enabling *Blue Jesus* to speak without language, seeing into, through, and beyond the view from the cross.