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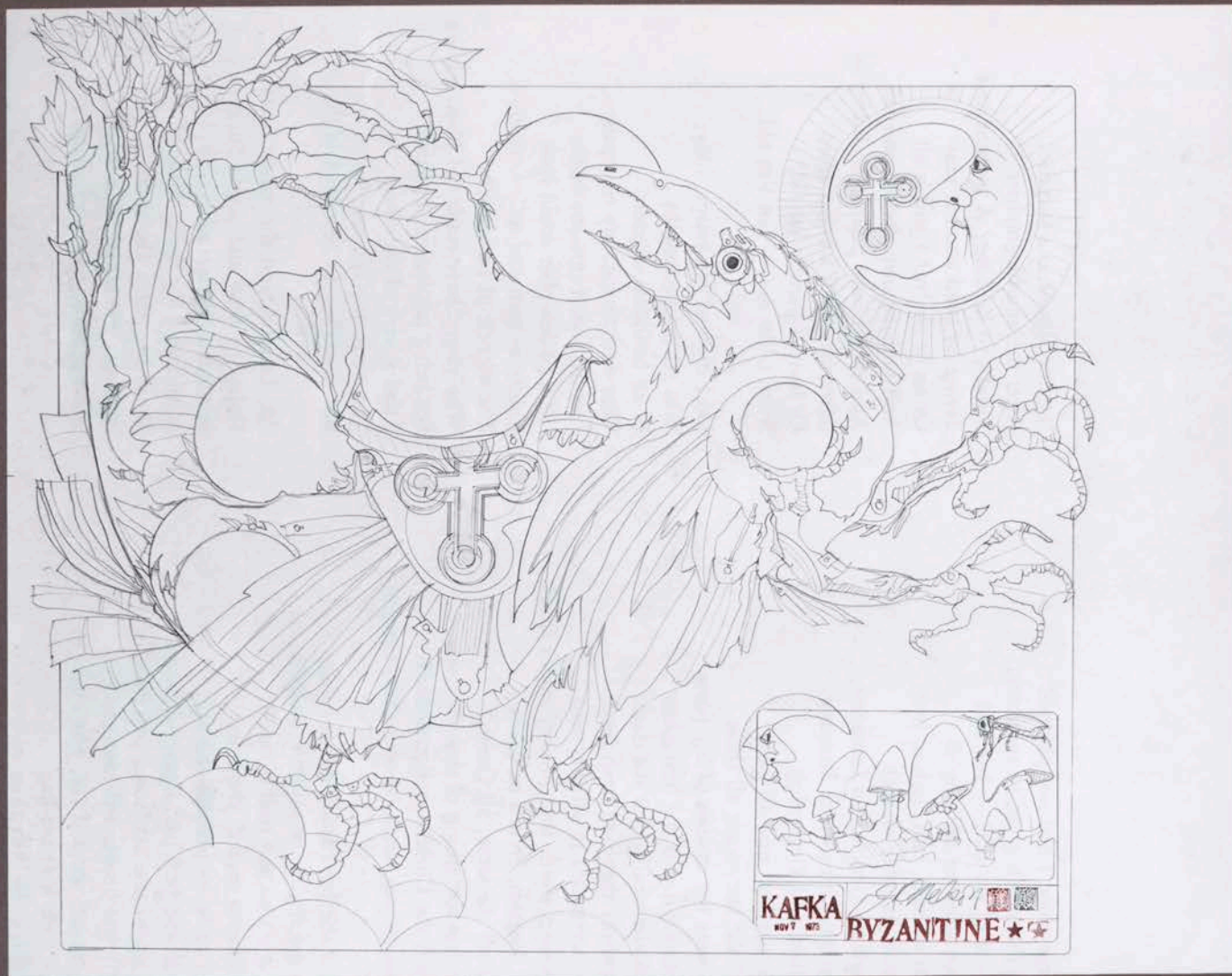


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Drawings

Jack Nelson



Jack Nelson was educated at the Art Institute of Chicago. He taught at Syracuse University from 1966 to 1973. Although his art has been exhibited internationally, Nelson nevertheless maintains that his first work is still closest to his heart: a commission for Bill Dean's Billiard Academy in his hometown of Manistee, Michigan. It is a 10' by 20' sign on the rear wall stating—in English and Polish—“These Seats for Snooker Players Only.” Yellow and blue half-moons amply embellish the brown wall.

A mixture of spiritual commitment, skepticism about the capacity of organized religion to satisfy one's spiritual needs, and biting humor informs the work of Jack Nelson.

Born into a mid-Western fundamentalist family, Nelson has pondered deeply, in his art, the distinction between reality—especially spiritual reality—and illusion. In 1939 at the impressionable age of ten Nelson was taken by his parents to a tent revival meeting on the South Side of Chicago. There he met, and was saved by, a certain Mr. Moon: “He came out on the podium dressed in an alchemist's suit—cranked up a large cosmic-looking machine—grabbed hold of some electrodes with his left hand, and with sparks flying out of his right hand—hair standing on end—he recited John 3:16.”

Family and religious upbringing soon clashed with the institutions and mores of the world outside small-town Michigan. Nelson joined the army in 1946 and not long thereafter was reprimanded by his drill sergeant for wearing a half-moon shoulder patch on his Eisenhower jacket during an Air Force Day Parade: “Crossed retorts are the symbol representing the 867 Chemical Corps, not half-moons.”

Nelson's work evolves around, or rather originates from, a special kind of introspection which has its source in grassroots religious inspiration and imagination. His art evokes two essential experiences: the itinerant evangelist or circuit rider who (like Mr. Moon) preaches teachings of the Bible with super-sane fever; and a highly personal, evolved sense of form. With it all, the drawings of Jack Nelson are not as literal as they may appear; instead they allude to the various metaphysical possibilities inherent in any selection of objects or themes. There is a repeated emphasis on the Mr. Moon subject as a characterization of art and life. Through the repetition of this and other images, the work becomes a journey through the various possibilities of adjusting or readjusting form.

