

## Ellen White Descendant Shares Family Insights

Portrait unveiling event honors both artist and subject

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Artist Harry Ahn (right) and Kathy Demsky, director of the Architecture Resource Center at Andrews University and friend of Ahn, pull the sheet away from the painting of Ellen White during Monday evening's special unveiling event in the James White Library. (Photo by Darren Heslop)

By: Danni Francis, reprinted with permission from The Student Movement

A crowd of over 140 eager spectators gathered in the James White Library on the evening of Monday, October 26, to witness the unveiling of the long-anticipated commissioned portrait of Ellen G. White by artist Harry Ahn.

Ellen White, a co-founder of the Adventist church, was a prophetess, preacher, missionary, mother and author of over 100 original and compiled books.

Ahn painted Ellen's husband, James White, a few years ago and was commissioned by Larry Onsager, dean of libraries at Andrews University, to paint Ellen White as a companion piece to the first.

An internationally recognized artist, Ahn has won numerous awards including the Michelangelo Buonarroti 500 Celebration International Award in 2008, the Leonardo da Vinci International Award in 2009 and the Grand Prize in the International Portrait Competition in 2010, to name a few. For the past 25 years, Ahn has lent his talent to Andrews University as an adjunct professor.

The program began with an instrumental and vocal prelude of early Adventist hymns, led by Marianne Kordas, director of the University's music materials center, and two students. Following the prelude Onsager welcomed attendees to the special event.

"I wanted to incorporate Ahn's works into the fabric of the library," said Onsager. "After the idea about the James White portrait, it was natural to try to get him to do something of Ellen. I wanted something of a younger Ellen White and I am very delighted that he did that, and did it exceedingly well."

Jason Shockey, senior management major and Andrews University Student Association (AUSA) president, prayed over the program. Following the prayer was the song "What Heavenly Music" sung by Wanda Cantrell, administrative assistant in the James White Library.

An interview between June Price, University chaplain and Justin Torossian, seminary student and great-great-great grandson of Ellen White, produced insight into Ellen White as a person.

"It was a pleasure working with Justin, to get some inside, personal information about who Ellen White was. It made me look at her with eyes that I did not have before," said Price.

"I'm grateful that I'm able to be on campus as a student while the unveiling of this painting is happening," said Torossian. "I'm hoping I was able to shed some light on the fact that she was a loving Christian."

Torossian shared stories of "Grandma Ellen" clipping stories from newspapers to read to her grandchildren, trying to fit into trendy wardrobe pieces from Japan, and that her favorite color was pink.

As the interview drew to its close, Torossian said, "Know that you are all spiritual descendants of Ellen White and that is infinitely more important than a biological connection. We are all descendants by faith."

"The university and the library is really privileged to have such an amazing portrait of Ellen White," said Andrea Luxton, provost. "The artist has done an amazing job of making her come alive as an individual. By looking at her face you can see her close connection with both God and humanity."

Kathy Demsky, director of the Architecture Resource Center and friend of Ahn, spoke briefly before the unveiling. "God did this," she said. "This is a God-driven program that went beyond my imagination."

On behalf of Ahn, who humbly declined to speak, Demsky said, “Harry revealed to me that he has always wanted to paint Ellen White. He has prayed over this portrait more than any other before it. He told me, ‘I’m just the painter. I don’t need to talk.’”

Demsky and Ahn removed the veil together, earning a chorus of “oohs” and “ahhs” accompanied by heartfelt applause from the spectators.

“The artwork is a serene representation of Ellen White and makes her appear very human and quite relatable,” said University student Janiel Rodriguez, junior religion pre-med major.

“There is no question that when you look at this portrait you see a very real person. She comes alive in front of you and that is the skill that Harry brings to the art,” said Luxton.

Following the unveiling, Kordas returned to the stage, leading the audience in singing “Angels Hovering ‘Round,” followed by a closing prayer of dedication by Price.

“I praise God that every time I walk into the library I’ll be able to look not only to the left and see James, but to the right and see Ellen as well,” said Torossian. “I pray that we will not only remember the great messages that God has given to his people but by His grace, we would have a clearer picture of the messenger he used.”

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