



imago

summer 2001 **NEWSLETTER** volume three issue two

We aim to engage the arts to do all that they are capable of doing

The work of **imago** has many facets, one of which is to be a support to artists. But it is also committed to getting art into venues where it can be properly seen, heard and appreciated. In a recent discussion over dinner with an artist friend, I was trying to express something of what **imago** seeks to do with respect to this latter concern and I made the above statement. My dilemma was to find a path between “art for arts sake” and art as merely in the service of something else. What I have tried to suggest in this brief statement is that the arts possess a communicative power, that, once released, takes on a life of its own. I have no wish to neglect the role of the artist, but want only to attend to how art is able to speak to us, move us, disturb us, heal us, challenge us, enrich us, or simply bring us great pleasure. I am not suggesting here that the “reader” determines all that the work of art means, but only that art has within it, the potential to communicate to, and nurture the human spirit. In a culture which offers us so much that is shallow and of little significance, the increasing presence of art is, I think, a sign of our longing for more.

I have noticed that there are many new books coming out on faith and the arts and I hope in future issues of the newsletter to profile some of those works. We plan to put together a brief bibliography that will be valuable for those who wish to engage in ongoing reflection on the arts from a faith perspective.

The past three months have been a busy time for **imago**. The visit of British



screenwriter, Murray Watts, at the end of March, was a great encouragement to many of the more than 100 who gathered to hear his lecture at Wycliffe College. In May Jeremy Begbie spoke to a crowd of about 250 at St. James Cathedral in downtown Toronto. There is a brief report on Begbie's visit in this issue of the newsletter. In addition to these public events **imago** has taken on some new projects which are detailed below. Tenor Brian Belleth has a project with **imago** which took him to New York for voice studies this past year. I had the opportunity to hear Brian in concert last week in his home town of Woodstock, Ontario. He is in excellent voice and is beginning to gain profile in the world of opera. Included in this issue is a brief introduction, to the work of Toronto visual artist Maria Gabankova and to actor and playwright Gary Kirkham.

Plans are underway for a fall event; watch for details in the September newsletter. We invite you to visit our website www.imago-arts.on.ca and to join in the discussion at IMAGOtalk@yahoogroups.com. We are grateful for your interest and support and would be pleased to hear from you. In the meantime, I trust you will have a refreshing summer break.

John Franklin, Executive Director
133 Southvale Drive, Toronto, ON M4G 1G6
416-421-8745 franklin@ultratech.net

Mission Statement

The primary purpose of **imago** is to exercise a biblically based influence upon the development of the arts and artists in Canada and upon Canadian cultural life.

Visit us on the web at: www.imago-arts.on.ca
Join in at: IMAGOtalk@yahoogroups.com



Report from a Leaking Boat

– (detail shown above) is one of the paintings by Toronto artist Maria Gabankova in an exhibition entitled “16981 km from Toronto.” It is been held at Galene Michalsky Bvor, Michalska ul. 3, Brahlava, Slovakia, June 6 – July 1, 2001.

In this show Gabankova captures something of the influences of her early life in Slovakia and her subsequent years in Canada. The impact of one's personal journey is never far from the artist's brush. The work is deeply personal in two ways. It is born out of the rich and indelible experiences in the life of the artist which speak to the stark realities of our world. It is also personal in its attention to the human condition in all of its complexity. In 30 works displayed, the theme of the human figure is used as a contemporary allegory – symbol or in stark realism – depicting the human condition with the emphasis on its philosophical and spiritual aspects.

continued on page 3



Dr. Jeremy Begbie, at the piano in Toronto's St. James Cathedral.

Music and Theology – Jeremy Begbie in Toronto

Rob Des Cotes

An important event in the area of theology and the arts took place in Toronto on the weekend of May 11–13 at a symposium on “Music in Theological Perspective.” Two public events, co-sponsored by the Institute for Christian Studies and *imago* as part of the annual ICS “Art Talks”, featured Dr. Jeremy Begbie, Associate Principal of Ridley Hall, Cambridge University and director of “Theology Through the Arts.”

The first event began Friday night at St. James Cathedral with a jazz performance by Rob Des Cotes on flute, along with Juno award winner Paul Neufeld on piano and David Longenecker on bass. Paintings by Toronto abstract artist, Paul Fournier were also featured in the sanctuary.

In his lecture, Dr. Begbie demonstrated how the arts provide unique insights to our understanding of theology. He showed how a doctrine as complex as the Trinity can be “opened up” through an understanding of music. As he demonstrated the resonant properties of sound, we witnessed how three tones can occupy the same space without losing their distinctiveness, and yet be experienced as one. As we shifted from a visual mode of understanding to an aural

one we discovered new possibilities for theological discussion.

On Saturday morning a symposium was held at Trinity College, University of Toronto, where a panel of respondents offered praise and critique of Begbie's latest book, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge University Press). The discussions that followed were the highlight of the weekend as academics and artists from across Canada debated the benefits and limitations of exploring theology through the arts.

The weekend concluded with a Jazz Vespers service at Little Trinity Anglican Church, on Sunday afternoon, led by Rob Des Cotes, accompanied by the Paul Neufeld Trio (pictured below).



Stirring Discussion, Great Company – A Meeting of Christian Artists

Ben Volman

How does a Christian's identity shape their art? Why do Christian artists have such a hard time relating to their own faith communities? Since early May, an eclectic group of artists led by John Franklin, has been vigorously considering these and other questions. Our discussions were initiated by a progressive reading through *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation Through the Arts*, a collection of essays by artists and academics on the meaning of the incarnation as expressed in art. The collection was edited by recent Toronto visitor, Jeremy Begbie and included his arresting thoughts on music and faith. Other topic areas ranged from literature to popular music and the artists, representing disciplines including dance, film, music, literature and the visual arts including sculpture, assisted our understanding in a variety of art forms.

With such a wide scope of backgrounds, the group was a striking mix of personal styles and perspectives. We soon learned of the challenges that each participant faced to “do art.” Some are parents whose art is a sideline; others are committed professionals or young people with promising talent. Everyone felt that art was at the heart of their call. We were surprised to find another common feeling: it was hard to talk about our art in our own faith communities. There was a feeling that people at church just wouldn't understand.

Beholding the Glory proved to be a stimulating source of dialogue. The essays were creative and informative. The group responded with a visceral intensity, reflecting our commitment to the artistic life and process. The frustrations and challenges of life in the arts with its limited material rewards came to be reflected in our views of Christ, humanity and the cross, and we arrived at a greater appreciation of God's incredible risk in the incarnation.

During our final meeting, everyone was given time to reflect on their experience. While most, though not all the members were evangelical Christians, some wondered if our

communities respond negatively to art in reaction to Catholicism and the evangelical insistence on certainty in faith, whereas art often reflects ambiguity and mystery, although once it's understood, good art is ultimately revelational.

There was agreement that a lack of knowledge by church leaders prevents art from taking a greater place in congregational life. Artists visualize our humanity and challenge us to dream of the divine, routinely pushing the envelope on the status quo, and this too leaves churches uncomfortable. Gregory of Nazianzus said, "what has not been assumed (in Christ) has not been healed." Those are the issues often exposed by artists. It is the clarity and power of their vision that lends such an urgency to change and perhaps equal community resistance.



Ben Volman and Marjonke, participants.

One continuing discussion concerned the relationship of artists to their community. While there was a concern that our call is to contribute meaningfully to community life, others felt that artists must stand apart in order to create without restraint. Using the metaphor of performance, another issue discussed was society's concern for "note perfect" performances – i.e. a focus on a delivery of the familiar and satisfying the audience rather than fulfilling the call to be authentic, honest and committed to a personal vision.

We concluded by appreciating that Christian artists need opportunities for theological reflection on the arts, and also to experience new forms of liturgy and worship to reflect the importance of art in the faith community. We were grateful to have found a shared sense of community in John and Marion Franklin's home. Thank you, John and Marion, for your hospitality – and Marion's gracious hosting. We have decided that we will be meeting in the future for more stimulating discussion.

Bio: Gary Kirkham

Born in Folkestone England, Gary now lives in Cambridge, Ontario. He is a playwright, actor, teacher, set builder and a member of Writer's Bloc in Kitchener. Gary was one of the original members of Motus O Dance Theatre. He has been in numerous sketch/improv groups over the last 20 years, including Mental Floss and Second City Master Class. His first full length play, *Queen Milli of Galt*, was workshopped at Writer's Week in San Diego and was chosen to open Theatre & Company's brand new King Street Theatre, September 12 to 29, 2001 (box office: 519-571-0928).

Milli and Me

I was listening to the CBC... Hmm, you know, as I'm writing this, I realise about half of my story ideas are inspired by listening to the CBC. Anyway, as I was saying, it was about Canadian cemeteries. One story just jumped out at me. It was about this strange woman from Galt. Her inscription read Millicent Milroy Wife of Edward VIII Duke of Windsor. Yep, the Duke of Windsor, the one that gave up the throne to marry divorcee Wallis Simpson. And this woman from small town Canada believes she was his wife. I'm from Galt and I've never heard of her.

So I head down to the Archive and inquire. The archivist's face lights up... "Oh you mean Milli". Before she pulls out the half dozen articles from the manila folder I know I'm going to write a play about her. The only facts I found out were: In 1919 the 24 year old Prince of Wales was on a goodwill tour of the Empire. He was in Galt for all of 4 hours. There was no record of him meeting the 29 year old school teacher. 53 years later the exiled Duke dies and then Milli, who is 82 and still very alive, has her tombstone inscribed claiming to be his wife. From that slight but intriguing information I start my story. So I've got my beginning, Prince comes to Canada, and I've got my end, a tombstone. The rest is speculation. There's a great quote "Plays are not written they are re-written. The first draft took only a few months, the subsequent drafts took a year and a half and a pound or two of flesh.

The play was chosen to be developed by Lambs Player's in San Diego. (Interesting

note: they put me up in the very luxurious Hotel Del Coronado, where my favourite comedy *Some Like it Hot* was filmed, and more importantly, where Edward and Wallis Simpson first met!) It was quite thrilling to see the play start to come alive in the actors voices and bodies. I was intrigued and a little shocked how a story about a woman in 1920 and the Prince of Wales still ended up largely autobiographical. There is a famous saying "write what you know." I think you have little choice in the matter.

I get together weekly with some friends. We were reading *The Sacred Romance*, and decided to each tell our life story, not in the testimonial-getting-saved sense but more the confessional-getting-lost sense. It was as I was telling my story I realised almost each event had a counterpoint in some piece I had written over the years... Oh my, I've been telling my life story over and over again for the last 20 years! I stole this quote from Motus O's James Croker. (He wouldn't tell me who he stole it from.) "Writing (dance) is my Religion, it's where I work out my faith."

Report from a Leaking Boat

continued from page 1

The work of Maria Gabankova speaks of the despair and forgetfulness of human existence – ever finite and fragile. Her work with light and shade alludes to the play of light and darkness in everyday life, as well as the idea that the truth about our own humanity is at the same time both revealed and hidden. Explorations of the meaning of spiritual reality in modern life permeate her work and always present are rays of meaning and hope. One discerns in her work an undercurrent which protests against the dehumanizing influences which plague us, particularly the presence of violence and destruction against humanity and the despair that attends war. However, the battles are not only external, but also internal. With integrity, she faces the dark side of humanity, but not without hope. Her paintings serve as windows into the mystery of human existence. They are born out of a sense of wonder and a hopeful spirit, and they bring the observer to look afresh at what it means to be human. They call us to nurture a spirit of hope.

Upcoming Events

Vancouver Arts Network

– Tuesday July 31 'launch party'. An opportunity to capture some of the vision for this new venture. A weekend Festival of the Arts scheduled for Sept. 28–30. If you are in the Vancouver area and would like to be notified of events you can join our e-mail list at omegapro@direct.ca

Tenor Brian Belleth

– whose **imago** project *New York New York*, took him to that city for the past 9 months to do voice studies, will perform with the seasoned Canadian operatic baritone Alan Monk at The Stone Church – Toronto, ON,

Saturday, August 11, 2001, 8 pm. The evening is sponsored by Tryptych Productions.

Ins and friends will put on a concert

– at Sheraton Hall, Wycliffe College, 5 Hoskin Ave., Toronto; Thursday July 19, 8 p.m. Ins is a Toronto songwriter, composer and playwright, as well as a theology student and actor.

Visual artist, Bruno Capolongo

– has a solo exhibition Grand Illusions, August 3–September 7 at the beautiful new Transit Gallery in Hamilton. This is a very different show for the artist because it is the first where the content is exclusively internal and external architectural works. These are very contemporary larger works

that have been raising eyebrows. For more information visit the artist's website, www.BrunoCapolongo.com

Soon to be published

– the complete works of Hans Rookmaaker. A multi-volume set of the writings of this important art historian will be published by *piquant* books. Many will have read his influential work *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* which came out in 1970. For more information about this project contact the publisher at: pieter@kwant.u-net.com

The Work of Stanley Spencer

is coming to Toronto's AGO September to December 2001. Spencer, who lived in the village of Cookham England, once remarked "I want to show the relations of religious life in the secular, how that all is one religious life."

CD nearly complete

– Jeanine Noyes is hoping to have her long awaited CD out soon, and is seeking a bit more funding. You may get in touch with her at 1050 Broadview Ave, Suite #1104, Toronto, ON M4K 2S3, jeaninenoyes@primus.ca, www.jeaninenoyes.com

New imago Projects

The following four projects have recently been adopted by **imago**. We are excited to have these projects join with the others bringing our total to 18. There are a number of current applications in process.

Art Student League – Toronto

Under the leadership of artist and retired art teacher Bruce Francisco, a Toronto version of the famous Art Students League – New York was launched on June 7, 2001. Located on the third floor of Franklin Horner Community Centre in Etobicoke, the ASL will seek to provide students young and old, with high-level professional instruction. The school will seek to encourage the development of the student's talent through studio work, under the direction of established practicing artists. There are no academic entry requirements. A three week drawing workshop is offered beginning July 2 and a full program is planned for the fall.

Imago is pleased to partner with this innovative venture as it seeks to get established as a significant artistic resource for Canada. If you wish further information about the Art Students League you may be in touch, 416-252-5432 or 1-866-853-5854

Bread – Performance Art Production

Bread is a group of three – Steve Pinney, writer, Tom Carson, director, and John Keddy, lighting designer – who will collaborate to produce a short series of shows. The first of the shows planned for October 2001, *En Masse*, will aim at "experience theatre" offering a challenge to the typical relationship between dramatist/performer and artist. The text basis for the show will be Steve Pinney's work, including *Starlight* and *Verses of a Hungry Spirit*. These productions will take place at "The Theatre Centre" at Dovercourt and Queen.

S4 Media Arts

Recognizing that entertainment is a key component of our modern existence, S4 Media Arts combines the talents of Jean Claude Paquette and Gene Alexander, who in their shared vision, are committed to searching out new ways of blending creativity with meaning in their media productions. **Imago** partnered with them to assist them in getting to the Banff Television Festival in June 2001. It is at this event that they are able to "pitch" their ideas to industry professionals. They have a number of projects on the go and hope to raise some funding to help launch this new venture.

Vancouver Arts Network (VAN)

The purpose of this project is to create a network of artists and arts groups in the Vancouver area. Consistent with **imago's** mission statement, the Vancouver team will endeavour to 'exercise a biblically-based influence on the development of the arts and artists' in this region. This will be done through showcase events, study groups, lectures, performances and advocacy for the arts.

On a national level, the project will become a vital link between the arts in Vancouver and Toronto, facilitating the exchange of ideas, resources and personnel, as well as providing a valuable **imago** presence in BC.

VAN will be led by Rob Des Cotes, a pastor and professional jazz musician who has been active in theology and the arts for many years. Rob is also the director of the ManiFest Arts Group (www.manifestarts.com). Present board members include Dale Bishop, Scott Campbell, Elizabeth Gladden and Bev Wilson.