



imago

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Efforts to tame artistic expression have a long history. The ancient agenda to forbid images of the divine, the iconoclasm of church reformers in 17th century Britain, or coercive political contexts like 20th century Russia, were movements to restrain the arts. Why does art generate such resistance?

Late in April a well-known Christian institution in Ontario, having sponsored a visual arts competition for four years, found itself in a dilemma. Five of the paintings chosen as finalists in the competition were nudes. For this institution, showing the unclothed human body would cross a sacred line. Another Christian institution stepped in to rescue the artists and preserve the integrity of the competition.

Clearly there is diversity on this matter within the Christian community but our aesthetic life is too important to ignore the attendant issues. While it would be impossible to fully explain our collective resistance to art, I would like to initiate a discussion with a couple of observations.

First, an artist is attentive to the world around her. She is perceptive and even fascinated by what is seen, felt, experienced. A work of art speaks out of that perceptiveness. Art is, we may say, an act of articulating experienced reality. But a fresh look at things may disrupt or critique the status quo. Art is at times intentional in seeking to disrupt.

Add to this the inherent persuasive power of art, whether drama, poetry, or visual art and one can conclude that art is "dangerous".

A second issue that raises suspicions about art is its engagement of all aspects of human experience. Our various cultures and sub-



Artist David Robinson speaks about 'Font'

My work shown here, was created for an exhibition at Regent College in 1999. Any comments I have about it must be prefaced by saying that I have yet to see my own intent become the sole governing force in any art work that bears my signature. I think if you ask any artist to name which are their best works, many will point to those upon which



cultures maintain that certain areas are deemed taboo, forbidden or at least inappropriate for public consumption. Artists are often uninhibited by cultural taboos. Censorship keeps at bay artistic expression judged to be unacceptable for members of a community.

Given that art may challenge the status quo, question the orderliness of our lives, or offend moral sensibilities, it is not surprising that many, including those with a Christian outlook, view art with suspicion or anxiety. When art

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they themselves have the most tenuous grasp. And so it was with this work; from early on in its realization it became apparent that it has that balance and tension that one would desire in such a charged image; between doctrine and digression, salve and subversion. This is an image with an overt Christian inflection, and yet I have seen it move behind the defensive lines of people for whom any such intimation is at worst a bald offense, at best an irritation.

*This is an image with an overt
Christian inflection...*

Speaking of irritation, this assertion that meaning could arrive so free of intent does not sit well... Indeed, this artist's statement (an idiom not to be trusted, by the way) could be read thus far as a self-appointed prophetic claim of the 'not-me-but-the-spirit-working-within-me' variety. The suggestion of something other than intent at work in the creative process is reasonably dubious to most thinking people, but how does one account when it perennially yields more than was sown? When pressed, the easy answer is for the artist simply to invoke the exalted notion of Inspiration as that sunny peak upon which he lives and tends his garden, and from which on a clear day you can see Eternity. The reality is, of course, very different. The journey of the artist is more plodding and inhabits much lower altitudes, traversing vast stretches of hard-packed and barren ground. Thus staggering along, parched and bewildered and pointing a bony finger emphatically toward the unbroken horizon, these ascetic wanderers will occasionally grab the arm of whoever will listen and exclaim "Look!... Did you see that?!... Do you see that?!"

Reading Resources



Art and Soul: Signposts for Christians in the Arts

Hilary Brand and Adrienne Chaplin, 2nd edition, IVP, 2001
– Provides thoughtful consideration of current issues linking faith and the arts. The book is focused mainly on visual arts but provides insights relevant to engaging the arts in a postmodern context. It is a valuable book for all who take art and Christianity seriously.

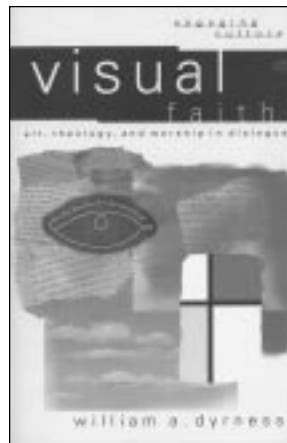


Beholding the Glory

Jeremy Begbie ed., Baker, 1999 – An informative and stimulating collection of essays by authors who are practitioners in the various arts who explore links between their art form and Christianity's notion of incarnation. The essays cover themes including poetry, literature, dance, icons, and sculpture and conclude with a provocative piece by the editor on music.

Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves: Alternative Steps in Understanding Art

Calvin Seerveld, Piquant and Tuppence Press Toronto, 2000
– This book consists of “a honed collection of lectures” given by the author to audiences around the world. It is a collection full of practical wisdom and thoughtful reflection on the place of the arts in life, particularly the life of faith. Deeply informed by biblical understanding and a wide acquaintance with art both past and present, this is a collection to be treasured by all who wish to think carefully about art in the context of Christian faith.



Imagine: A Vision for Christians in the Arts

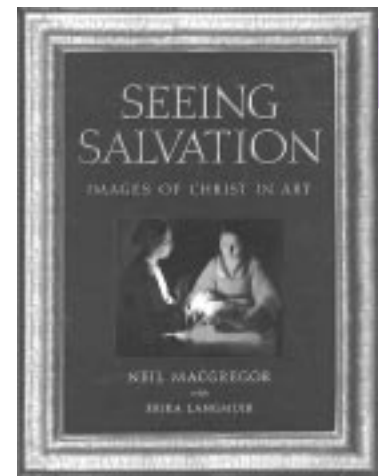
Steve Turner, IVP, 2001 – Turner is a poet and writer living in London England. He opens the way to confront the struggle many experience in faith communities that have little or no time for the arts. Turner articulates a vision which not only appreciates the arts but sees artistry as an essential component in the life of the faith community in the 21st century.

Visual Faith: Art, Theology and Worship in Dialogue

William A. Dyrness, Baker Academic, 2001 – A passionate plea for those of Christian faith to engage more deeply with the arts. It links the church's past history with the visual arts and thoughtful consideration of contemporary artistry. He documents something of the current renaissance taking place among Christians in the arts. Theologically informed, historically sensitive and fully aware of the contemporary scene, this book is a clear call for a recovery of the visual imagination as a resource to enrich the faith community.

Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art

Neil MacGregor and Erika Langmuir, Yale University Press, 2000 – Based on the show by same name that took place at the National Gallery in London at the turn of the millennium, this work treats some of the greatest treasures of western art depicting scenes in the life of Christ. Beautifully illustrated, the text picks up such themes as “Sovereign Helplessness”, “Signs and Deeds”, “From Victory to Atonement” and “Til Kingdom Come” all addressing aspects of the life of Jesus.





Monique Sliedrecht at the Franklin's

Canadian Artist in the Scottish Highlands

Monique Sliedrecht left for the far north of Scotland last November intending to stay for a few weeks. In June she returned to her home in St. Catherine's Ontario for a brief visit before returning to Freswick. Monique's adventure took seed when she attended an **imago** evening a couple of years ago to hear British screenwriter Murray Watts give a lecture. It was through Murray that she discovered Freswick. Her stay at Freswick has been artistically fruitful. She has been doing a lot of painting of the local landscape and has held a show in Caithness with good coverage in the regional newspaper and sale of some of her work. Though no Scottish accent is evident, her love for the people and the place is unmistakable. Located right on the ocean, the rugged landscape has been an inspiration for her spiritual and artistic journey.

The Complete Works of Hans Rookmaaker

in six volumes



Art historian Hans Rookmaaker, influenced a whole generation with his engaging and provocative perspectives on art. Though best known for his *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, his writings extend well beyond that work. Now, 25 years after his death, a new six volume set of his writings is being published by Piquant Books. In this series we are made aware of the breadth of Rookmaaker's thinking about the arts that includes more than the visual arts for which he is best known.

Imago funded for National Visual Art Competition

For nearly 30 years **imago** has been active in seeking to promote the arts and encourage Christian artists Canada. A few months ago a private foundation approached **imago** and offered to provide funding for an event in honour of **imago's** 30th anniversary. The Executive Director met with representatives of the foundation and what emerged from that conversation was the plan to undertake a national visual art competition.

This marks an exceptional opportunity for **imago**. The competition is open to all visual artists resident in Canada and offers substantial prize money of \$10,000, \$5,000, and \$3,000 for the three winners. The submissions are to be on the theme *A New Heaven and A New Earth* which is a biblical theme and has been well received by the arts community.

The three jurors for the competition are Sara Dobbs, curator Burnaby BC, Calvin Seerveld, Senior Member in aesthetics Emeritus, Institute for Christian Studies Toronto, and Robert Young, artist, Vancouver BC. It will be their task to look at all of the works submitted by slide and select from that number 15-20 finalists. The finalists will submit their original work which will be installed at Painted City Gallery the last week of October and from those finalists the jurors will select the winners. The three

prizes will be awarded at the celebration event for **imago's** 30th anniversary on Friday November 1, 2002 at Glenn Gould Studio. A reception for the show of finalist will take place on Saturday November 2, 2002 at the Painted City Gallery, 243 Queen St. E. (at Sherbourne) Toronto.

The activity around this event has put **imago** in touch with scores of artists and galleries across Canada from Vancouver Island to Newfoundland. Calls are coming in daily from all over the country. The current issue of *Canadian Art* magazine carries an ad for the competition, (p.72) and an ad also appears in *Arts Atlantic* as well as several artist newsletters.

A competition of this magnitude sponsored by a Christian organization is unprecedented in this country. It fits well **imago's** mandate to engage with the arts and with the culture. Though it is a one time event, the contacts made and the profile received will have a ripple effect in the months ahead. We patiently await the unfolding of this adventure, not sure at the moment where it will lead, but confident that it will have a positive outcome for the ever increasing number of Christians in the arts in Canada and particularly for the visual arts community across this country.

"Rookmaaker provides a vision of the arts that does justice both to their irreducible integrity and to their interrelatedness to other aspects of God's world."

– Jeremy Begbie, from the Forward

For details see: info@piquant.net
or: www.piquant.net

Efforts to tame artistic expression

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transverses a sacred line, our response is to put it away, send it out of sight, or destroy and neutralize the disruptive influence. The risk that art poses is one of the reasons that God's gift of creativity has suffered from well-meaning religious folk, claiming to protect others if not themselves.

The lure of a safe haven is something we have all experienced. But we are also drawn by the attraction of adventure, exploring the unknown. The tension between these two is entailed both by faith and art. Faith offers a place of belonging, but invites us to a journey that is beyond predictability. That journey entails risk and a measure of mystery. Art can be reassuring as it speaks of the familiar, but it also has the power to shock us, and draw out new awareness and understanding. Neither will allow us to dwell comfortably in the land of a prefabricated reality. Though often seen as resources for illusion, both faith and art at their best draw us toward authenticity. They nudge us in the direction of what is real, disclosing that which we have refused to see.

Through the generosity of a private foundation, **imago** has undertaken to hold a national arts competition open to all visual artists in Canada. The theme, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* offers no shield from controversy. But risk of this sort is attractive, even compelling as it invites us to extend our horizons and see a little further than we have before. We anticipate an adventure that will link our experiences to new settings. Artists from across Canada will be entering this competition. Art opens up, reveals, discloses and we may find that we are uncomfortable with what is revealed. But I am confident that the artistry will engage and challenge us to a fresh reflection on our theme.

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David Goa in conversation with Cal Seerveld

An Evening with a Curator

David Goa is the Curator of Folk Life at the Provincial Museum of Alberta, in Edmonton. Some will remember the *Anno Domini: Jesus Through the Centuries* exhibition which David curated, that drew so much interest a couple of years ago. Recently David was in Toronto to give a lecture on Art and Community to members of the Somalian community in this area. We took the opportunity to host a social evening at the Executive Director's home with David as guest of honour. As part of the evening David was asked to say a little about another project in which he is involved. A group of eight artists, including Canadian Erica Grimm-Vance, will join together for a show on the theme "Broken Beauty". The show is to be launched next spring in the Boston area and plans are underway to have it travel to a number of cities in North America – and we anticipate Canadian venues will be included. In his remarks David made it clear that in his view this show is about "incarnation." It was good to have David with us and to hear of the promise of this show. All present were encouraged by good conversation and the new possibilities evident for Christian artists.

Upcoming Events

Visual artist Phil Irish

– **August 29 to September 21**, at the Loop Gallery, 1174 Queen Street West. Reception: September 5, 7:00 to 10:00 pm. The exhibition will showcase the mural-scale commission for St. Paul's L'Amoreaux Anglican Church, which melds evocative natural imagery with a narrative sequence of the life of Christ. This painting will be shown with other contemporary artworks that engage images of faith. To see Phil's work: <http://www.philirish.com>

Film discussions with Fran

– **Fran Wong**, grad of ICS (Institute for Christian Studies) in Film Theory, and film workshop facilitator in ALL (Academy for Lifelong Learning), U. of Toronto (10 years), and in private groups (2 years), is available to guide your group in talking about one, or several, films. Fran was one of the panelists at the Art Talks in May and will lead the film discussions at the ICS summer conference in August. For details of how she can help your group think about film and its significance in our culture, call: 416-469-3425, or email: fmwong@sympatico.ca

Errata

In the Spring issue poet John Terpstra's name was rendered John Tempstra. We apologize to John and to all for this editorial oversight.

Imago 30th Anniversary Celebration

**Friday November 1, 2002
7:30 p.m.**

Glenn Gould Studio, Toronto

Tickets: \$30; Students & Seniors \$20

Reception to follow.

**Tickets to go on sale
Tuesday September 3, 2002**