



imago

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One of the most basic responsibilities within faith communities whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim, is to nurture an awareness of both the reality and the presence of God. The Christian calendar sets out a pattern of seasons that serve to keep us mindful of the story in which the faithful are called to live their lives. There has over the long history of Christianity been much debate as to whether the task of nurturing the divine presence is better achieved by word or by image or some combination of both.

The story is told of Vladimir I of Kiev (c 988) who gave time to examining Judaism, Catholicism and Islam and eventually made Orthodoxy the religion of Russia. A significant factor in moving him to take this decision was the revelatory value of religious art. He was convinced by the splendor and beauty of the Orthodox places of worship and what they revealed of the divine presence. Some time earlier in the 8th and 9th centuries there was deep conflict over the place of visual art in the church. There were those who wished to destroy images (iconoclasts) and those who wished to preserve them (iconodules). The argument of the former has a familiar ring to it. Images are incapable of revealing anything more than the material they are made from and any effort to depict the divine likeness is essentially a graven image and its presence breaches divine law. It should be noted that this challenge to the presence of images had effects that went far beyond what is allowed in church buildings. The images were common fare in the homes and workplaces of the people.

Those who wished to preserve the icons were as deeply convinced as their oppo-



Gabriel (detail), 2004, Chris van Donkelaar

nents. The pro-icon faction argued that created nature and divine nature were not incompatible. Their strongest support for this was the Incarnation. Based on this they contended that objects in the world and nature itself are capable of revealing the divine. It is a case of *the invisible being made visible*. When the conflict had ended the defenders of the icons were the victors. To this day that victory is celebrated as the Feast of Orthodoxy on the first Sunday of Lent.

The purpose of icons is not to create an environment of mystery nor is it that they are merely devices for instructing the faithful.

An icon is not simply a depiction of Christ or Mary but in some way participates in what it points to. It has been said the icons

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What do I see when I look at the Bick's pickle jar containing the once famous Conestogo Brown pigment given me by a neighbour?

I see pigment that was collected a century ago from one of the two rivers that the village of Conestogo is still squeezed in-between today; simple and plain dirt. Not a brightly coloured dust, or uniquely rare (although those certainly have their wonderful place!), but the most lowly, "Chocolate Brown".

In putting this dirt on board in order to circumscribe God, I experience something that is theologically over-whelming: We can paint God's picture! How is this possible? How can the eternal begin or the invisible be seen?

Oftentimes we strain so hard to look up in hope of finding an answer, but eventually we come to realise the solution is earth-ward, not heavenly. Christ not only descends to earth in the nativity, within the same action He raises earth up to heaven. Our experience of the Divine meets us at the level of material creation.

There is a verse in the Akathist Hymn to the Virgin which talks about Christ' incarnation in this way:

*Rejoice, height to which the thoughts of men are hardly able to ascend;
Rejoice, depth which for the Angel's eyes is very hard to apprehend.*

Perhaps that sums up what an iconographer does: plays with humble mud and finds the image of the Divine; participating in the juxtaposition between man and angel.

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The music of John Tavener has received a lot of attention in recent years. Along with Arvo Part and Henryk Gorecki, Tavener's music has become a staple in the classical repertoire offering music inspired by religious sensibilities rooted in the Christian tradition. Tavener converted to the Orthodox Church in 1977 and has recently decided that "religion is senile". In an article in the November issue of BBC magazine *Music* Tavener tells the story of his shift away from Orthodox Christianity to the more ethereal realms of "spirituality". A key influence apparently is the Sufi mystic Frithjof Schuon who died about five years ago but who, according to Tavener, appeared to him just after his encounter with an Apache Indian medicine man. Jeremy Begbie in his book *Theology Music and Time* suggests that some of Tavener's earlier music attempted to transcend time. It can be argued that a Christian understanding of music (art) invites us to accept our time-bound nature and the materiality that goes with it. Where this turns to a more pluralistic spirituality will lead Tavener's music remains to be seen (or heard).

A few months ago the Ontario Society of Artists hosted a visual art show with the theme *Worship and Adoration*. This is yet another sign that spirituality is a theme that has considerable currency. Though the show included some very fine work, for much of it the link to the theme required a considerable leap. A book that has recently caught my attention is James Elkins' *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*. The author points out how the visual art world and those within it give virtually no attention to matters of religion or spirituality. There are exceptions of course, Georges Rouault, Stanley Spencer and William Kurelek to name a few. There are current signs that the trend that has sought to sustain the disconnection between religion and art may be breaking down.

As one looks at what is happening within Christian contexts there is an energetic movement afoot advocating for an embracing of the arts. As time goes by it becomes more evident that it is a movement that encompasses the globe. One example of this would be the presence of the *Redeeming the Arts* group that met at the *Lausanne Global*



Forum in Pattaya Thailand in late September. The global Christian community is showing a new openness to artistry. Imago's Executive Director along with James Tughan of the Semaphore Institute and Phyllis Novak, Artistic Director of Sketch in Toronto provided the leadership for that global conversation and have done considerable work in shaping what will become a Lausanne Occasional Paper on the workshop theme. Though the work has been demanding we hold good hope that the efforts will bear fruit.

A compelling model for cultural engagement is the popular Irish band U2. Their music is not everyone's cup of tea, but the passion of that music and thoughtfulness of the lyrics offer a powerful combination particularly when addressing issues of human meaning and spirituality. U2 is finding its way into the life of some faith communities. A recent book edited by Raewynne J. Whiteley and Beth Maynard is titled *Get Up off Your Knees: Preaching the U2 Catalogue*, with a forward by Eugene Peterson. Three Canadians contribute to this collection of sermons, Jamie Howison, of Winnipeg, Henry VanderSpek and Brian Walsh both in Toronto.

As for the Canadian scene the *Fresh Waters* visual art competition put on by the *King's University College* in Edmonton was a considerable success while the *Vancouver Art's Network* is flourishing as is evident from their recent fall festival. Reports on both these events are found in this newsletter.

In the spring newsletter we noted the publication of *John Terpstra's* recent collection of poetry titled *Disarmament* of which it was said "Terpstra's poetry is wise without the slightest shred of self-con-

sciousness; the wisdom present here comes through experience; it is not proclaimed, but lived in and through the language." This work was recently nominated for the Governor General's award for poetry.

Singer/songwriter *Jo Anne Dell* has just brought out a new CD *Every Joy and Sorrow*. The songs express heartfelt reflections born out of a rich and varied spiritual journey. Deeply rooted in the Christian tradition the lyrics embrace key themes of the Christian identity and are always in touch with our lived reality while the music is fresh and fitting. jorthorndell@yahoo.com

Maria Gabankova recently had a retrospective show at *Redeemer College* in Ancaster Ontario. The show titled *The Body Redeemed*, offered a glimpse into the work of this outstanding artist for whom the human figure is central. www.paintinggalleries.net

Motus O Dance Theatre has a show coming up at the *Markham Theatre* on **January 28th 2005 at 8:00 p.m.** In addition to *Petrouchka* they will perform the World Premier of *Variations in Love*. For tickets, 905-305-7469.

Volume 2 of the collected poems of *Margaret Avison* titled *Always Now* is available



published by Porcupine's Quill volume 3 is soon to follow. These volumes offer a rich feast of poetry from one of Canada's premier poets.

In mid-November Imago hosted an evening gathering of about a dozen poets with special guest west coast poet **Hannah Main-Van Der Kamp**. The discussion though focused on poetry was wide ranging and stimulating. Hannah's visit to Toronto was to launch her new book of poems published as part of the St. Thomas poetry



series. *According to Loon Bay* is a fine collection of poems that manifests a deep sensitivity to nature as well as an eye that discerns spiritual truths. The words of these poems open for us fresh understanding of the world around us and of the world within us.

Pacific Theatre in Vancouver is celebrating its 20th anniversary. Congratulations to founding Artistic Director **Ron Reed** and the team with whom he has worked over the years. Those in the Vancouver area are encouraged to support this exceptional theatre company as they celebrate 20 years – of “dreaming dreams”.

The Sound of Hope conference held in Ottawa in March of this year was sponsored by **Augustine College** in collaboration with **Imago** and featured **Jeremy Begbie**. The focus was on music as a resource for theological understanding and Prof. Begbie gave lectures and a performance of Bach Chaconne (Busoni) at the Museum of Civilization. In addition to Begbie a jazz trio

comprised of Carl Merenick, (piano) Rob Des Cotes (flute) and David Longenecker (double bass) were key participants. Among other things they collaborated on an extended improvisation on the theme Sound of Hope. All of this is now available on video and DVD. These may be ordered through Augustine College. 613-237-9870 www.augustinecollege.org

Beyond is a non-profit arts and literature publication based in Calgary, Alberta and distributed across North America. Beyond



explores what it means to be truly human. Each issue of the magazine is built around a theme that highlights an aspect of the human experience.

Beyond delves into the questions and ideas that wake us up to where we come from, who we are, and where we are going. The magazine helps its readers reflect on their lives while inspiring them to be instruments of justice, compassion, beauty, and meaning. Those involved collaborate with writers, poets, thinkers, art lovers, philosophers, and readers to produce a well-designed, thought-provoking magazine. Beyond also strives to develop a community of readers and creators that continue to interact outside its pages through online and face-to-face connections. So far there have been 12 issues of this magazine. Now with issue number 13 Beyond is produced without advertising, and is reader supported by subscriptions, and can receive donations as a charitable project under Imago. www.beyondmag.com

Fresh Waters at The King's University College

By Gerald Folkerts

Fresh Waters: New Works by artists of faith and vision opened at the King's University College in Edmonton, AB on October 16, 2004 as part of the 25th Anniversary celebrations at King's. The juried exhibition presents works by thirty-one artists from across Canada, including some finalists from IMAGO's 2002 *A New Heaven and a New*

Earth 30th anniversary exhibition.

The *Fresh Waters* theme “was selected to acknowledge a powerful and recurrent biblical image of grace as a fresh-flowing stream and that grace-ful, creative acts of his faithful people are likewise, refreshing,” according to Daniel Van Heyst, assistant professor of drama and visual art at King's, and one of the exhibition organizers.

One of three jurors, Dr. David J. Goa, curator emeritus at the Provincial Museum of Alberta, observes that “this living water refreshes church, culture and civilization and the passionate dedication of these artists and their new ‘epiphanies of beauty’ teach us to see again as they invite us to drink from living water.”

Through works such as Monica Fraske-Bornyk's delicate India ink drawing *Muses on Marsh #18*, the symbolic landscape *Perpetual Spring* by Ed Loenen, John DeHaan's mad fish frenzy *Catch of the Day*, David Haggett's abstracted metaphorical *Spirit Wrestler*, Edward vanVliet's interactive installation *100 Pieces* and Jennifer Berkenbosch's playful, organic *Light and Leaves*, the artists expressed the exhibition theme in a variety of thoughtfully imaginative ways. ♣

“We have art so that we will not perish from the truth.” ~ Nietzsche

News & Notes

He's Here – CD Release Review



By Will Finlay

It was standing-room-only at the Enoch Turner School House in Toronto in mid-November as friends and

music lovers gathered to celebrate the release of Jeanine Noyes' Christmas CD *He's Here*. Flanked by her usual group of solid musicians including Toronto-scene regulars Fergus Marsh and Doug Romanow, Ms. Noyes delivered an exceptional evening of new and newly-arranged traditional Christmas offerings. From a rocking gospel rendition of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* to a roots-y country-blues interpretation of the typically sacrosanct *Silent Night* to the haunting and ethereal palindrome poem *You Are All Things Beautiful*, the effect was

delicious and magical... and not at all unexpected. With her recent successes in musical theatre, this Dora Award nominee *knows* how to put on a show. Comfortable and engaging, Jeanine's performance was capably bolstered by a string quartet and a phalanx of versatile back-up singers. *He's Here* is an imago-sponsored project and is available in select music shops or at www.jeaninenoyes.com

The Stars Came Out in Vancouver

By David F. Dawes

"As Star Differs from Star" was the theme as Greater Vancouver's thriving Christian arts scene showed its true colours November 12 to 14 at the 4th annual ManiFest event. Staged by Imago's Vancouver Arts Network (VAN), the festival utilized six different venues to showcase theatre; dance; poetry; painting; photography; film; storytelling; and classical, jazz, folk, blues and rock music.

Workshops covered everything from dancing and acting to lantern making and multicultural cooking. One of the most interesting was "The Sound of Hope", a special DVD presentation featuring Dr. Jeremy Begbie's fascinating analysis of the theology behind J.S. Bach's extraordinary "Chaconne Variations"; Begbie's penetrating insights were skillfully augmented by jazz musicians, including VAN director Rob Des Cotes.

The main focal point was the Performing Arts Showcase, at Fairview Baptist Church November 13. Highlights included an audio/visual presentation by poet Diane Tucker; an engaging set by singer/songwriter Graham Ord; "Super Anon", a hilarious "mockumentary" about a self-help group for relatives of superheroes; and an incendiary performance by Vancouver blues singer Ruth McGillivray. Other performers included pianist Nelson Boschman, with Des Cotes; English gospel singer Theo Bessem; B.C. recording artist Jeanette Petkau; and opera singers Grace Chan and Dale Thronness.

Basic responsibilities

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are not for us to *look at* but to *look through*. It is in looking through that we catch a glimpse of the divine. They are designed according to strict iconographic rules in order to facilitate an encounter with the divine presence. Protestantism has had its own form of the iconoclastic impulse and has chosen word and music over image. It has been observed that if the danger of image is idolatry the danger of word is abstraction. Protestant theology has been characterized by just such abstraction, both in its theological thinking and its spirituality. It tends to foster a non-incarnational spirituality which is no longer rooted in the material world where God entered to win our salvation.

The structure of the incarnation affirms the work of taking up earthly matter to imaginatively shape it and give it artistic form. I would not want to exclude the shaping of words as found in creative writing and poetry. These too can serve a revelatory function just as images can. Art is capable of disclosing things to us – it has a capacity for revealing and helping us to see more clearly.

If we take the idea of incarnation to be central a key question remains. What is it that is disclosed? What are we invited to see? The advent story is so familiar to us that we would do well to be open for a fresh look. Jesus who comes to us as the vulnerable babe of Bethlehem both brings a story of redemption and embodies that redemption. The infant was soon to become a disruptive presence for the culture in which he lived and continues to be for the culture in which we find ourselves today. That the invisible becomes visible means that light is cast on things we are typically unable to see, and we are invited to discover things we have been incapable of discerning. It is nonetheless an odd kind of story that he tells. It informs us that finding leads to losing while losing leads to finding, that death is the way to life and that giving is the route to receiving. That letting go is the best strategy for hanging on while possessing is a sure way to be left with nothing and yes that power is found not in strength but in weakness. It is a disruptive vision as it seems to challenge so much that we see as common sense. Essentially it is a word of both judgement and of invitation to transformation. It is a word for individuals

and for those who oversee empires or are intent on building them.

It may not be this kind of disclosure that artistic endeavours bring to us – though they do at times resonate with these things. I don't want to suggest that art is always a way to discern the divine though I don't doubt that can happen. I want only to affirm art's disclosive power, its ability to get us to see what we have not seen before. In this way it participates in the logic of incarnation. It makes the invisible visible.

Let me conclude with a word of thanks to all who are part of the Imago network across Canada and beyond. As this year draws to a close once again we are grateful for your participation and support. We look forward to the promise of the year ahead and ask that you continue to stand with us as we carry out our mandate in support of Christians in the arts in Canada.

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