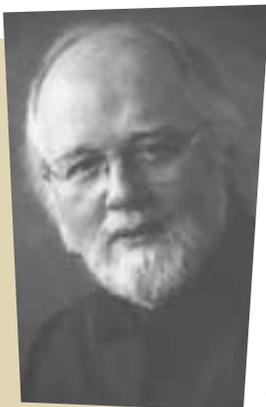


**C**urrently spirituality looms large in our western culture. A few decades of New Age activity, the postmodern shift away from religion as merely a system of concepts and the longing of the human heart thirsty in the wasteland of modern technology all converge to make the spiritual a point of focus. It is interesting to note how art and the spiritual are being linked in the process. This connection is not new but is certainly worth attending to. Promoting the arts in the context of faith, as Imago seeks to do, provides a ready opportunity to make the connection between art and the spiritual. But this is an area where lines get rather fuzzy as there is a veritable marketplace of spiritualities out there.

One of the best known efforts to make the link between art and the spiritual is found in the work of abstract painter Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944). This Russian born artist was a pioneer in non-representational art, a form he thought could best express the spiritual. In 1912 he published a small 50 page book titled *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* – a work still in print. I like Kandinsky's paintings, the splash of colour, the energy and movement. At times it is as though he is painting music.



It has been said that abstraction was the primary visual language in the 20th century for artists concerned for the spiritual. Interest in Kandinsky's work is well sustained as is evident in the recent exhibition of his paintings at the Tate Modern in London England, *The Path to Abstraction – 1908-1922* (until October 1).

## Veritas by Bruno Capolongo

This work titled *Veritas* (Latin for Truth) includes images by contemporary photographer Andres Serrano (*Piss Christ*) and Titian (*Sacred and Profane Love*). While the piece is rich with conceptual meaning it is no less concerned with beauty, which is itself meaning.



*Veritas* by Bruno Capolongo  
Oil on 2 panels, 31" x 35.5", private collection

What about this fuzzy terrain of the spiritual? The nature of the spiritual for Kandinsky was determined by his adherence to Theosophy. This could be characterized as an optimistic mysticism, confident in a human ability both to bring harmony to our chaotic world and to shift us to a new level of spiritual experience – and for Kandinsky art was the means to that end. There is a Romantic thread in this view, an idealism that invites humanity to shape its own destiny. It soon becomes evident that art takes the place of religion – or perhaps becomes religion. This is a risk that we often hear voiced when having discussions about faith and art. And there is no doubt that art has a power to draw us in and take the place of

*continued on page 4*

There are a number of principles by which I live and work as an artist with increasing conviction. I believe in the supremacy of beauty and form. The aesthetic power of an artwork is more important than any underlying conceptual or theoretical component. This is because beauty is not merely

a vehicle for meaning, but is itself meaningful, good and just. While conceptual underpinnings may abound in some of my work I maintain that the integrity or strength of the image itself is of greater importance.

In my own work I believe that all subjects – whether landscape, still-life, figurative or architectural – must be treated equally. A truly great landscape painting, then, is no less important than a Royal portrait – because of how it is made. There is really no hier-

archy of subject-matter. This is why I say it is not what you paint, it is how you paint it. Finally, it has long been my belief that the most intelligent and successful artists draw from two sources of influence, the well of history, and the fountain of modernity. The artist who ignores either may languish or stumble. This is why I study the Old Masters carefully and respectfully, while ever aware of the dangers of merely initiating the artistic ideals of a bygone era.

*Although it is still early in his career, Bruno Capolongo has established himself on the Canadian art scene. A Hamilton, Ontario born artist with Italian roots, Bruno has shown his art work in over seventy exhibitions – including 16 solo shows – primarily in Canada and the United States, but also in Japan.*  
www.brunocapolongo.com ■

On June 8, 2006 Imago held its annual general meeting a few Board changes took place at that meeting this year. Gordon McKye who has served on the Imago Board from its inception in 1972 retired from his long term of service. We are very grateful to Gordon for his loyalty and support for Imago covering nearly 35 years. Gordon will continue as a member of the Corporation. Marjonneke Grech has joined the Board as its newest member. She has had a close association with Imago in recent years and comes with a rich background in video production.



Penelope Tyndale (left), Liz Downie and the Executive Director at Imago's Annual General Meeting, June 8, 2006.

Also a new Chair was appointed for the Imago Board. Liz Downie who has served on the Board for four years became the new Chair. Penelope Tyndale stepped down from the Chair after four years of faithful leadership. We are grateful for her good work and enthusiastic interest in Imago and the arts. Penelope has had a long association with Imago with links going back to its very beginnings. She will continue to serve as a member of the Board. ■

## Theologians take note of the Arts

Recently it has become noticeable how the subject of art and beauty are showing up in the writing of those who do theology. I am not referring to authors like Jeremy Begbie and Frank Burch Brown whose special interest is theology and art. No these are rank and file theologians who are drawing on the arts to support their theological work. Cambridge theologian David Ford in his book *Self and Salvation* makes many references to the arts, particularly in the last chapter on *Feasting* where he asks: "How can the arts contribute to transformations of daily life, public life and worship?" He goes on to suggest some response to that question engaging both visual art and poetry. Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of

Canterbury has recently published a work titled *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love*. Welch poet and painter David Jones and fiction writer Flannery O'Connor get special attention in this book. He also

*theology is (re)discovering the importance of the imaginative side of human life*

draws on the important work of Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain. This is a theological work of a different kind enriched by its indebtedness to artistic imagination.

## News

### Corps Bara Dance Theatre

*Inside Out* at Calagry's Vertigo Theatre Playhouse October 27 and 28  
www.corpsbara.com

### Arts in Concert

Sculptor Heidi Brannan (www.etherworks.net) has taken on an Artist in Residence role with Too Good to Miss Entertainment and the "Arts in Concert" series based at Redeemer University College, Ancaster Ontario. Each of the six concerts offers musical genres including Musical Theatre, Singer Songwriters, Jazz, Classical and Pop. The concerts will be enriched with a multi-disciplinary feast of visual art coordinated by Heidi.

Pre-show exhibitions include:

- Stone and glass sculpture, fractals, Heidi Brannan
- Photography and writings, Gord Jones
- Painting, (Oil, acrylic, and watercolour), Laurie Wonfor Nolan, Jan Fretz
- Fibre art, Nancy Verbeek
- Drawings and portraits, Kari Mullin

The next event takes place Friday November 3rd, 2006. Tickets and information at: [www.toogoodtomiss.ca](http://www.toogoodtomiss.ca) and [stonemaiden@sympatico.ca](mailto:stonemaiden@sympatico.ca)

The well known and sometimes controversial Bishop of Durham, N.T. Wright devoted a chapter of his most recent book *Simply Christian*, to a discussion of beauty. In this case it is not just beauty found in art but beauty in nature and in ordinary life as well. Finally a new work by theologian Kevin Vanhoozer *The Drama of Doctrine* in which the metaphor of drama permeates the discussion of doctrine and its crucial role for the church offers yet another example of how artistic themes are fruitful for theological reflection. There is more but this is sufficient to show that theology is (re)discovering the importance of the imaginative side of human life and extending its reach beyond the merely conceptual formulations of theology. This is good news for the church and for the faith. ■

A new look for the Imago website! As of November 1, 2006. Come and visit us.

## Phil Irish in Kitchener

**Phil Irish** is the “Artist-In-Residence” for the city of Kitchener for 2006. The main element of Phil’s tenure has been to pursue his studio practice right in City Hall, where the public and policymakers can interact with the artist, ask questions, and see the creative process unfold over a period of months (April through All Saints Day). Phil’s project incorporates contributions from the public – namely, annotated maps wherein people share a place that is significant to them. As he follows these maps, making paintings of the places, a portrait of Kitchener unfolds. Phil has also organized a series of events, including artist-talks, and adventures where people follow a map with Phil, to make art in the field. Phil Irish’s next solo exhibition, featuring the Map Paintings, will be at The Latcham Gallery, Stouffville’s public gallery. The exhibition, titled “Twas Now”, will run from January 13 to February 17, 2007. [www.philirish.com](http://www.philirish.com)

## More news from the Executive Director

The activities of the Executive Director of Imago are varied and are not normally noted in the newsletter. I have been asked to include some details about those activities in this issue and so offer the following.

In early May **Jason Carter** an extraordinary guitarist and world traveler ([www.jasoncarter.net](http://www.jasoncarter.net)) paid his second visit to Toronto. With no time to arrange a public event Marion and I hosted an evening with Jason. About 40 crowded into our home for dinner and a chance to hear Jason play. Plans are afoot to have Jason return to Canada in May 2007 and if you can host him in your part of the country contact him through his website.

Imago was an active participant in the annual **Refresh Conference** at Wycliffe College Toronto School of Theology with featured speaker N. T. Wright, Bishop of Durham. A visual art show coordinated by Imago enlisted about a dozen artists whose work transformed the building for the conference and was very well received. The Executive Director presented a seminar on arts in the church.

The **Annual General Meeting of Imago** which occurs early in June took new shape this year. The AGM was streamlined to be

completed in just under an hour and was followed by a celebration of the arts which included 10 speaker/performers from the Imago project roster. Next year will follow a similar format.

Also in June I had the privilege of being part of a consultation at Belhaven College in Jackson Mississippi. The focus of the event was to gain input for shaping the agenda for the arts track at InterVarsity’s **Urbana 2007**. It was a fruitful time and for me resulted in plans to attend the Urbana conference this December where I will have a supportive role in the arts track. I have recently learned that Urbana began in Toronto and Imago’s founder Wilber Sutherland who was the National Director of InterVarsity in Canada was involved in the early stages of the history of this conference.

Though not directly an Imago activity Imago’s Executive Director had the opportunity to teach a summer course in July, titled *Theology and the Arts* at Emmanuel College **Toronto School of Theology**. The course drew MDiv students from several TST colleges demonstrating the need for more attention to the arts in theological education.

The **2004 Lausanne Document**, *Redeeming the Arts*, continues to generate interest. An invitation came to attend the Global Consultation on Music and Mission held at Bethel College in St. Paul, Minneapolis in July. I participated in a plenary session panel in which the Lausanne Document was the focus for discussion.

Over a number of weeks I was part of a steering committee to assist in mounting a visual art show to coincide with the **International Aid Conference**. *Fragility and Hope* opened on August 12 at St. James Cathedral in Toronto and drew nearly 300 to the opening. There were 26 visual artists in the show.

Most recently we held a soiree at our home which featured storyteller **Brad Woods** of the **Great Wooden Trio** ([www.greatwoodentrio.com](http://www.greatwoodentrio.com)). Brad and the trio will be performing at the next Imago evening November 7.



## Looking ahead...

### The Next Imago Evening

Tuesday November 7, 7:30 at Enoch Turner Schoolhouse. Artists include Carl Merenick, jazz piano; Heidi Brannan, visual artist; Jennifer Yung, classical piano; and The Great Wooden Trio, music and storytelling featuring Brad Woods.

### Art Talks 2006

The Institute for Christian Studies in Partnership with IMAGO presents Art Talks 2006. *Fantasy and Other Real Things: The Role of Religious Kitsch in Popular Culture*, Betty Spackman, author of *A Profound Weakness: Christians and Kitsch* (Piquant Books) will give a lecture on Friday November 10 at 7:30 and on Saturday November 11 at 10 a.m. a panel, including Calvin Seerveld, Mary Leigh Morbey and Chris Cuthill, will discuss *Christians and Visual Culture*, and at 2 p.m. there will be a student and artists forum with Betty Spackman. All events will take place at the Institute for Christian Studies, 229 College St. Toronto. [www.icscanada.edu](http://www.icscanada.edu) or 416-979-2331 x 240.

**Also** Art Talks 10th Anniversary visual art exhibition with an artists’ reception at 6:00 p.m. on Friday November 10 at the Institute for Christian Studies just prior to the Art Talks lecture at 7:30. ■

## Donate to Imago Online

It is now possible to make a gift to Imago by going to [www.canadahelps.org](http://www.canadahelps.org). Click on “I am a donor”, enter “Imago” in the search field and select “Imago 630 Indian Rd.” (not Imago Dei or Imago Theatre) from the list that shows up. You then select either “Donate Now” or “Donate Monthly” and fill in the donation form. You will be asked for your credit card information as well as any specific fund to which it is directed. At the moment only Imago general and Laila Biali’s Radiance Project are available. We hope that many will take advantage of this new way to support Imago. ■

## Spirituality looms large

*continued from page 1*

religion. We find that we are nurtured by the imaginative in a spiritual sort of way. And we can believe that what we experience through art captures the essence of the spiritual. This enclosed human-centred notion of the spiritual falls well short of a Christian understanding. At the heart of the gospel is a call not to turn into ourselves so much as to turn out toward the One in whom the fullness of God is manifest. In this context art can be seen as an illumining presence casting light for us so we are able to see a little better and a little more. The eyes of faith are able to discern in the arts a value that enriches life and affirms God's good creation all of which calls us to gratitude.

There is something else about Kandinsky's notion of the spiritual I find troubling. It is an understanding of the spiritual that negates the physical. It is the spiritual disengaged from the nitty-gritty of ordinary life. It echoes

## The Caves of Lascaux

We are connected  
by intangible lines  
no longer taut  
with youth  
I feel your eyes  
mocking secrets once shared  
Some things still sacred  
Respectfully unapproached  
by you  
now different  
but still longing  
for the final return  
of the stories  
once told  
throughout  
the constellations

Caitlin Thomson  
*with permission*

ancient Gnosticism – a view still popular that disparages material creation and opts for disembodied spirituality. For Kandinsky it was an escape from the materialism of the 19th century that drove him to this resistance to the material world. Art was seen as the best vehicle to directly move the human soul.

However when one considers for example, the works Canadian artist William Kurelek, British painter Stanley Spencer or the French artist Georges Rouault, one discerns a earthy sense of the spiritual. A sense, I would contend that is more consistent with a biblical understanding of the world, one that affirms creation as good. Though these artists give us religious content in some of their work, it is free of religious cliché and deeply connected to ordinary life. The idea of escaping this material temporal world is it would seem more indebted to Greek philosophy than to the biblical narrative. This same understanding of the spiritual as disembodied has played havoc among those of more conservative theological persuasion – and resulted in a diminished place for the arts. In this case the argument is just the opposite of that given by Kandinsky. Whereas Kandinsky wished to affirm art as a key in awakening and enriching the human soul setting it free from the temporal and material world, those with conservative theologies contend that art is too earthy, all too human and so does not fit with the call to cultivate a spirituality which speaks only to the needs of the soul.

Though I have mentioned only Kandinsky among abstract painters, others who adopted this genre include Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman (Abstract Expressionists) all of whom would affirm the special spiritual capacity of artists. Not all held to the notion of the spiritual adopted by Kandinsky, but all were convinced that art and artist were engaged in a saving work. This may be understandable in a century burdened by the ravages of war and an ever increasing marginalization of religious faith. But the weight of human salvation is something art is unable to sustain. Art fails as the sole resource for the spiritual and it falls far short as a substitute for religion. Spiritual life rooted in the biblical narrative adopts a very different account of human

*Art washes away from the soul  
the dust of everyday life.*

**Pablo Picasso**



Yellow-Red-Blue, Kandinsky, 1925

*The spirit that will lead us  
into the realms of tomorrow  
can only be recognized  
through feeling.*

**Kandinsky**

salvation but the journey of “working out our salvation with fear and trembling” can be greatly enriched through art in all of its forms. That there are links between art and the spiritual is evident, but for Christians the foundation for spirituality is not centred in the works of human imagination. Rather spirituality is to be informed by the great drama of the biblical narrative that both sustains the church and is intended to infuse the lives of those in the faith community. Art too must find its place in that larger story by which we are called to live.

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