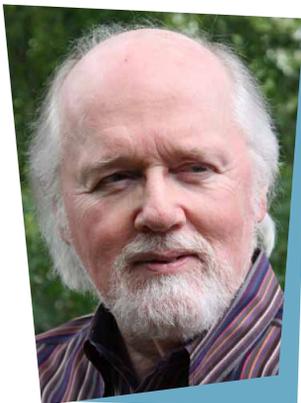


The twentieth century was a time of change and innovation. In the history of visual art in the West it was a standard expectation that the subject of any work could be recognized by the viewer. Something happened in the early decades of last century that opened the way for a new artistic language – the language of abstraction. With this new genre, representation became less important. What we have come to call “modern art” is characterized by deference to the “autonomy” of the artist. As one considers visual artwork of the past, it’s evident that the art that was done was embedded in a particular social setting with its values and practices. Art was there to serve the state, the culture, the church and the individual or family patron. With the advent of modernity there was a new focus on the artist and their autonomy. Art was shaped more from the internal life of the artist than from the external world around them.

There is a good deal of debate around the terms “abstract” and “representation”. The latter is the longstanding tradition that says that art is ‘mimetic’ and depicts in a more or less realistic way what we observe. Abstract art is commonly understood to have no connection with the external world and



to be instead an expression of an inner world of emotion, mood or feeling. Though this captures in broad terms the difference between the two styles, the line is too sharp since the division is

much fuzzier than at first appears. Emotion and feeling do show up in representative art while representation is commonly lurking somewhere in work that is abstract.

continued on page 4

Janet Read has shown her work in public and commercial galleries including a recent large solo exhibit, with catalogue, titled *Ocean as Vessel* at the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, Ontario. She also had a well-received duo exhibit at the Whitby Station Gallery titled, *Sublunary* dealing with the elements of earth, air and fire. She has exhibited her work across Canada.

Residencies in Newfoundland with the Pouch Cove Foundation and in Ireland on the Dingle peninsula have informed her love of the fluid and metaphorical nature of the sea and water. Light over water and the emotional nuances of colour continue to fascinate her and inform her work. The play between light and water provides a fascinating context for the play between colours on canvas. Water is a changing medium,

I pick up a brush and trace the path of wind and water, pick up a brush and aim towards the light.

Janet Read, 2012



Light Over The Blaskets Ireland, Acrylic, 12x12

subject to many moods, provoking thoughts of transience and transcendence. Read’s work depicts the threshold between representation and abstraction, what appears and what is experienced. The rich overflow of colour in her work draws the eye and heart into the visual landscapes she paints.

In addition to her painting she is a published author of a collection of poetry, *Blue Mind’s Flower*, shortlisted for the Gerald Lampert Award in 1992 as well as two juvenile historical novels. She has just completed a Master’s degree in Aesthetics on the work of metaphor in Paul Ricoeur and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

www.janet-read.com



The Sea Speaks To The Evening, oil on canvas, 20x60

Imago to host James Elkins for a public lecture

Thursday May 23, 2013 at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Jackman Hall, 7:00-8:30 p.m. Tickets at the door: \$12, \$10 students.

In the summer 2009 issue of the Imago newsletter I did a brief piece about James Elkins and his book *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*. At the end of that article, these words: "I find the recent conversations on religion and art an encouraging sign. . . . My hope is that we might find ways to further the conversation in the Canadian context on this important theme of religion and art."

The special lecture with James Elkins (School of the Art Institute of Chicago) will we hope be a catalyst to generate

engagement on the issues around the relationship between art and religion: for some of us the connections are obvious, for many – especially those in the "art world" – it is a link that is to be avoided at all costs. Below is an excerpt from the article that appeared in the newsletter in 2009.

"In the concluding chapter of the book Elkins articulates a view that should spark conversation, not to say controversy among artists of faith. He writes; 'I have tried to show why committed engaged ambitious, informed art does not mix with dedicated, serious, thoughtful, heartfelt religion. Whenever the two meet one wrecks the other.' (p. 115)

Elkins' contention invites response and certainly raises all sorts of questions. It is important to know that Elkins is speaking about a limited range of art. He holds to an account of art that is 'institutional'. This means that art is that which shows up in museums and galleries and is the subject of publications

whose focus is contemporary art. This way of understanding art emerged when artists began to do work that would not fit traditional forms or comply with accepted philosophical definitions. It is common for those who hold this view to take a further step and affirm such art as the standard by which all other work is to be judged. Religious art becomes unacceptable because it is indebted to another tradition, an earlier time, and fails to fit with the prevailing ideas of today's art world. Given this perspective reconciliation between religion and art seems unlikely – though perhaps not impossible.

...It has been suggested that Elkins' art world is one in which we discern the absence of God – humanity treading an apophatic path – unable to discern or accept a divine presence – but longing just the same. . . . One of the signs that the push to keep religion at bay is weakening is the so-called 'return of beauty' in discussions about art."

Recently I have re-read the eloquent and engaging work *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies*. Despite the provocative title, the book is full of grace and insight. This work began as the 2004 Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary. There are twelve chapters which provide twelve strategies for the stewardship of language. Much in our contemporary landscape has served to diminish language. The bits and bites of current communication have taken some toll on the strength and clarity of our communication. McEntyre's book is a clarion call to action in recovering and restoring losses that have been casualties of our fast paced culture. This is an insightful book valuable for the creative writer and for those who long for clarity in talk about religious faith and belief.

To the right is a brief section from the chapter *Practice Poetry*. Though the passage cited speaks about poems the author intends a broader sense of "poetry" that calls for care about how we speak and write, and to be attuned to what is beneath the surface of the words we employ.

Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies



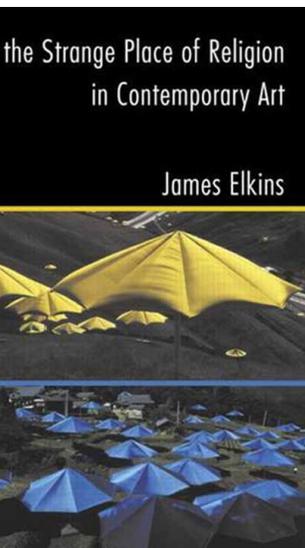
MARILYN CHANDLER MCENTYRE

"The reasons to read poetry take a little longer to articulate. The most persuasive, if one is willing to entertain it, is that reading and writing poetry are survival skills. If we learn the skill involved in reading closely, attentively, imaginatively, if we understand the demands of a poem and respond to them, we are better equipped to negotiate flexibly, distinguish what is authentic from what is false, and make discerning decisions. But poetry's demands are complex. Poems demand that we slow down, notice patterns, reckon with ambiguities, consider subtle distinctions between one term or image and its alternative, and recognize the relationship between techniques and purposes. But if we take this work on, if we practice finding paths through poems, staying with them as we tease out their possibilities, follow where they point us by allusion and suggestion, and unpack their metaphors, they can equip us to walk into any situation, look around, assess, analyze, and act. They teach us to listen more attentively to language and to reckon more astutely with the arts of persuasion. More than that, they restore to us what I believe the noise and haste of commercial culture dull and destroy:

being attuned to subtleties of sense and feeling, being awake to the possibilities of "an ordinary moment on an ordinary day." They train and exercise the imagination.

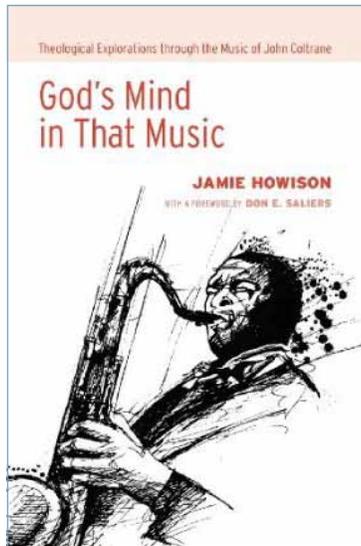
Trained imaginations are what we need most at a time like this. That is what will enable us to reach across cultures and understand each other, to think of new models and modes of organization that might work better, and to wage peace, because the love of beauty is deeply related to the love of peace. Beauty and peace are things to be learned and protected, because we see all too much evidence around us that they can be lost. Think of the wide-angle vision provided not only by the Psalms, with their great range of feeling and experience, but also the modern poems like Yeats's *"The Second Coming"* or Eliot's *Four Quartets* both of which call us to a large view of what is happening to us all and to take it personally. They invite us to find the still point in the midst of the "turning world" and look from there with horror and pity at what remains to be healed."

Marilyn Chandler McEntyre, *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies*, pp. 150-151



God's Mind in That Music: Theological Explorations through the Music of John Coltrane, by Jamie Howison, Cascade Book, Eugene Oregon, 2012.

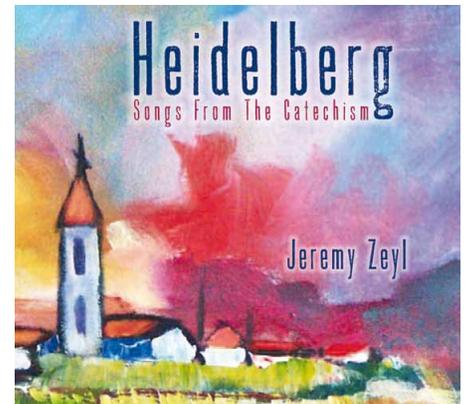
For well over a decade there has been an increasing momentum on works exploring the links between theology and the arts. Jazz is one of the themes that continues to show up in these conversations. The origins of jazz are commonly found to be rooted in Christian sensibilities and born out of struggle and suffering though never without hope.



Jamie Howison is a priest with the Anglican Church of Canada and is the founding pastoral leader of Saint Benedict's Table in Winnipeg Manitoba. In this book he opens up the spiritual context of the extraordinary music of John Coltrane. After providing an overview of how he is thinking about theological engagement with music Howison provides a glimpse into the "contested story of Jazz" which serves well as a background for the chapter outlining Coltrane's life. Each subsequent chapter provides

the reader with something like a meditation on the music of Coltrane. These are done with a spirit of great respect and care both for the artist and for the themes taken up in the various compositions.

Clearly the author loves this music and is deeply moved by the close knit connection between themes and the music. If you like jazz you will relish this work. If jazz is not in your repertoire this work might serve as an entry point for you to make some new musical as well as theological discoveries.



Singer-Songwriter Jeremy Zeyl, leader of the Folk Trio *Isobelle Gunn*, continues his solo career with a new project under Imago that sets selected passages from the Heidelberg Catechism, celebrating its 450th anniversary this year, to new music. The 11-song album, entitled simply *Heidelberg*, offers artistic and contemporary melodies which present the timeless richness and beauty of the ancient text in novel and surprisingly powerful ways. Included with the album are a sampling of liturgical passages also intended for corporate worship, written by Jeremy's wife Lara Schat-Zeyl, to accompany the songs and deepen the personal relevance of the confessional document. Jeremy will be touring the album throughout 2013. For bookings, inquiries and to support this project, please contact Jeremy at jeremyzeyl@gmail.com.



TrueCity installation

By Meghan Hers

For the past two years I have been researching the ways in which North American Protestant churches have started to re-integrate the visual arts into their congregational life, and into their church buildings. This fall, while I was doing an informal internship at Eucharist Church Hamilton as an arts pastor, I was asked by Dave Witt, director of TrueCity to do a large scale art installation on the conference theme: *A Theology of Place*. I was intrigued by the



idea of turning the sanctuary of Philpott Memorial church into a simulation of the Escarpment that surrounds Hamilton.

I love transforming large spaces using visually impactful and dramatic imagery, especially using unusual materials, and so this was an appealing challenge. We ordered 900 feet of brown craft paper, assembled a team of 30 artists and non-artists from churches across the city, and got started. The installation consisted of three parts: a 120 foot painting of the trees and landmarks of the Escarpment hung from the balcony in the sanctuary, tiny buildings made out

of cardboard to perch on the edge of the Escarpment, and coloured tape that turned the pews into a giant map of the city.

At one point in the conference all the attendees were asked to move to the place in the sanctuary that correlated to where they lived in the city where they met neighbours they did not know. The interactivity inherent to the artwork functioned to build community among those at the conference in a beautiful and playful way and, for some, produced a tiny glimpse of the kingdom of God.

Upcoming

Date Change to Thursday April 11th

The Imago evening scheduled for April 4th as noted in the December newsletter has been changed to Thursday April 11th at Enoch Turner Schoolhouse.

Featured Artists:

Joyce Gladwell, reading from her book, *Brown Face Big Master*

Joel Gordon and Ben Porter, *The Love Movement* goes to TV

Paul Neufeld, Jazz Piano

Jeremy Zeyl, singer/songwriter with new work based on the Heidelberg Catechism

Rob Hengeveld, Installation Artist

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The twentieth century

continued from page 1

I confess that I am drawn to abstract art. It is not easy to articulate why this is so but I find something compelling in the work of some famous abstract artists. Among those whose art I find attractive are the well-known historical figures Wassily Kandinsky, (whose abstract painting seem to be music on canvas), Paul Klee and Mark Rothko. Two within the Imago circle whose work I enjoy are Paul Fournier (December 2012 newsletter) and Janet Read featured in this issue of the newsletter. Abstract art invokes suspicion among many within Christian contexts. We are inclined to look for the familiar, that which we have seen and experienced in the world. Abstract work leaves us unclear, uncertain and often perplexed. We want to know what it “means”. We are inclined to want to understand the work rather than experience it.

Though there is no universal agreement about when abstract art begins many will point to Kandinsky (1866-1944) as the one who launches abstract art in the early twentieth century. He is author of a book titled *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Kandinsky was not speaking specifically about a Christian spirituality but about a more general notion of the spiritual, in his case influenced by Theosophy. The point to be made here is that there was a longing present in

those early years of the twentieth century to escape the cool logic of an industrial society dominated by analysis and measurement, and embrace the warmth of spiritual sensibility that offered a hint at least that there was more than meets the eye. There were many like Kandinsky whose art was in one way or another, a response to a diminished spiritual presence in the culture of the time. This trend is well documented in Roger Lipsey’s book *An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth Century Art*.

Hans Rookmaaker – a key figure interpreting visual art for Christians in the 1970s and 80s expressed legitimate concern about art and the influences that shaped it. In the title of his book *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* – we get a hint of where he wishes to take us in relation to artistic trends of the time. However it seems to me that things are more complex than Rookmaaker would have it.

The work of Mark Rothko is controversial to say the least, profound and deeply moving to some, bland and meaningless to others. James Elkins in his book *Pictures and Tears* tells us that it is likely that more people have wept before Rothko paintings than any other artist. Rothko lived much of his artistic life in New York and like others artists of the time sought to reach beyond a merely aesthetic experience to cross the boundary to a spiritual experience. Once told that his work showed him to be a colorist Rothko responded.

I am interested only in expressing basic human emotions – tragedy, ecstasy, doom and so on. . . . The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them. And if you, as you say, are moved only by their color relationships, then you miss the point.

There is no simple formula for interpreting abstract art, nor a clear path that will disclose its meaning. What is important is that such art be allowed to speak in its own lisping stammering way. And I think that sometimes if we look attentively and listen carefully fresh discoveries are possible.

This is a topic that calls for more conversation and I hope that Imago might foster that in the days ahead. In the meantime let me note that Imago will host James Elkins for a lecture on May 23rd at the Art Gallery of Ontario in which contemporary art and religion will be the theme. (see p.2)



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