

The self-portrait is a well-established tradition in Western art. Though it flourished in the Renaissance an age when the individual was a focus of attention it didn't begin there. The self-portrait has shown up in all periods of history of art, as argued by James Hall in *The Self-Portrait: A Cultural History*. I take up this subject because I want to give brief attention to a work that has graced my work environment for several decades. It is visual art I refer to not the self-portrait found in a poem, a biography or a memoir. There are many reasons why an artist would paint or sculpt themselves. I want only to note that it need not always be a matter of ego, pride or self-promotion. Though some believe that such motives may be present not only in art history but also in contemporary digital versions of the self-portrait. The "selfie".

In a recent book on this theme, *Self, Self, Selfies: Searching for the Image of God in a Digital Age*, author Craig Detweiler explores our obsession with images of ourselves.

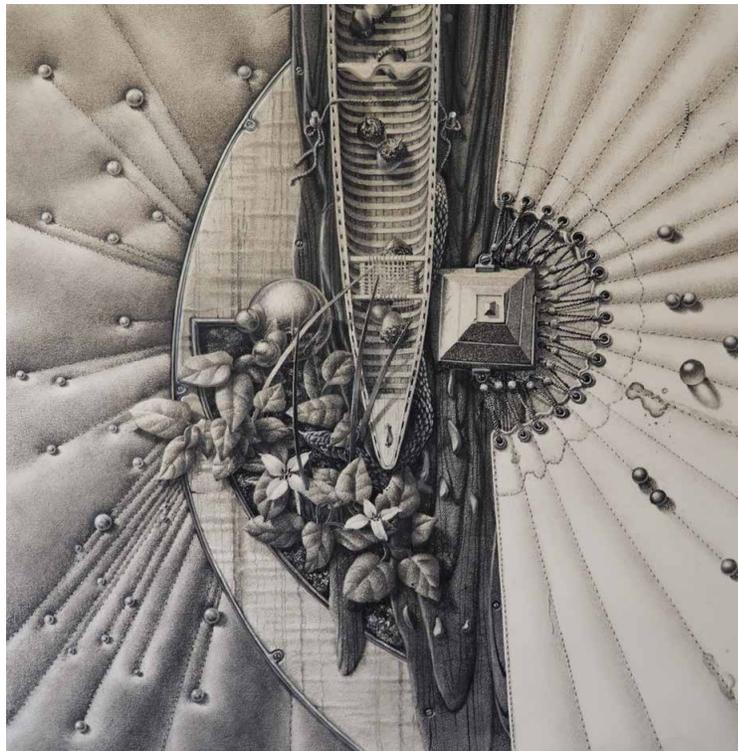
He writes: *Our smartphones serve as our paintbrush... Selfies are a more democratic form of that enduring artistic tradition, the self-portrait. They communicate "I was here" and "My life mattered".*

The contemporary selfie seems more about making a simple declaration than an effort to discern who we are as humans. The selfie may be an effort to generate memories in



a culture where memory has faded and we are enmeshed only in the present. They may give us location at a time when we feel adrift and placeless. And they may provide us with a needed sense of significance letting others

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James Tughan

In recent years, I have thought a great deal about the way creative artistry works and how it is fundamentally at the core of being human. In my own life journey that search had to a lot to do with not only the *Imago Dei* DNA wired into us all, but also the relational and neuro-psychological roots of how and why we imagine new images, new languages and new artistry in intentional design because of, or in spite of personal suffering and adversity.

We have personal access to the best role model of all in the imagination and applied artistry in Jesus, who can be shown to be the cultural initiator of all our artistic vocabularies, materials and languages. Dorothy Sayers in *The Mind of the Maker*, has argued that we understand God's creativity by analogy, backwards as it were, from our own experience of the practice as working artists. Having said that, I decided a while back to work the problem in the opposite direction, and explore how Jesus has always been a role model in artistry, and an expert in multi-dimensional, relational creativity.

I have also been deeply impacted by a question of how the most ingenious creative mind in the cosmos could risk misappropriation, betrayal and death of all that artistic power at the hands of his own creation. Having experienced betrayal in vivid personal terms, I find the suffocating implications of this almost unimaginable.

The result for me has been the creation of a series of 10 sequential, surrealist, and *trompe l'oeil* chalk pastel drawings, (the first of which is shown here) in a narrative entitled *Nine Faces of Christ*. These images, imply that He has gone before us to make a way beyond trauma to recovery and restoration. This series will be exhibited at the Canadian office of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries at the CBC Building, 250 Front Street, from September through the first week of November. ~ James Tughan tughanj@gmail.com

You have to love something to satirize it well and we are lucky that Randy Boyagoda loves a lot of things: family life, the Catholic Church, multi-cultural Toronto, university teaching and... pickle ball.

In his new novel, *Original Prin*, Boyagoda pokes skewers into all these subjects and roasts them over a gentle comic flame. The story, which Salman Rushdie commends as “richly funny”, is by turns a giddy campus novel, a sweetly humorous meditation on modern family life, and a shrewd portrayal of religious faith, doubt and fanaticism.

The novel also celebrates seahorse-shaped penises in CanLit and has a whole chapter set on a pickle ball court.

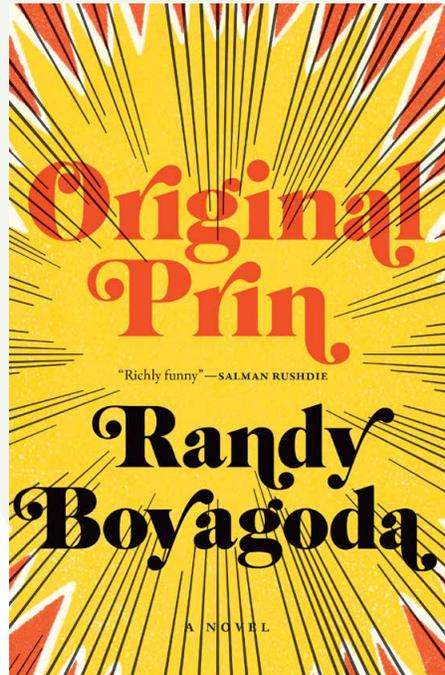
The topsy turvy world of Prin, a loveable English professor at a struggling Catholic university college, who gets drawn away from the comfortable mayhem of his Toronto family into a dangerous fund-raising scheme in the middle east, has a special resonance at a time when truth so often rings stranger than most fiction.

I could almost hear the great Catholic satirist, Evelyn Waugh chuckling from the opening sentence: “Eight months before he became a suicide bomber, Prin went to the zoo with his family.”

Boyagoda has fun with his cast of characters who include: Molly, the motherly fountain of snacks and goodness to four precociously voluble girls; Wende, the sexy, sort-of-Jewish ex-girl-friend and public relations guru; Lizzie, Prin’s wildly exuberant first-generation immigrant mother who is loudly inquisitive about her son’s prostate troubles and whose second husband is a

Muslim-raised grocer who runs a store called Kareem of the Crop. Lizzie’s ex-husband is pickle-ball obsessed Kingsley who excoriates his son with “You’re going to let yourself be beaten by Anglicans? Anglicans!”

On the way to a bloody cliff-hanger ending (the novel is the first in a trilogy), university committees, fund raising, temptation to adultery, children’s elliptical conversation, crises of faith, doubt, Can-Lit (including a novel about corruption-fighting vampires who are also Indigenous youth-leaders) are all joyfully skewered.



Boyagoda gets away with it because his writing is irrepressible - and because he gives the reader the indelible sense that his themes matter.

There is a playful pushing of boundaries that reminded me of what the great (Anglican convert!) poet John Donne identified as satire’s ability to create self-deprecating comedy that acknowledges our own complicit guilt and sin.

“We make Satyrs...when God knows that it is in a great part, self-guiltiness, and we do but reprehend those things, which we ourselves have done...”

Boyagoda dances back and forth in the space between the modern world and the Catholic Christian tradition he has known since childhood.

He joyously invents an ancient pilgrimage which survives in his fabricated Muslim-majority Dragomans; a church built around a literal Holy Seat - the marks left by the young man who fled from the Lord’s side in Mark’s Gospel and “by pious tradition” ran naked out of the garden of Gethsemane, across Egypt to the Dragomans where exhausted he sat on a rock ledge which, softened by his own tears, receives his buttock imprint (his seat) to become evermore, a sacred relic.

In my favourite chapter, Prin has a crisis of conscience about playing in a pickle ball tournament with his father, who “can’t tell the difference between Catholic and catnip” – on a Good Friday. The pounding whiffle balls sound to the weak from fasting Prin like nails being hammered into Christ’s hands – He asks, how could he make this Friday good again?

It’s a question which resonates all through the novel, which like the very best satires, means far more than it first appears.

Anna-Liza Kozma



About a decade ago I had a conversation in a local coffee shop with a quiet-spoken visionary. We knew of one another but had not met. As a result of that meeting an innovative theatre project was adopted by IMAGO in the hope it would find its footing and become an independent arts venture. That is just what happened. Under the able leadership of the quiet-spoken Joel Ivany and his very talented team, Against the Grain Theatre (AtG) has gone on to do extraordinary work. AtG is a Toronto-based opera collective presenting a wide range of classical music in unusual venues. As they noted on their website; “we have made it our mandate to exhibit fresh, daring re-interpretations of classical repertoire.” For the last two years AtG has been Company-in-Residence at the Canadian Opera Company Academy. This sojourn at COC has provided invaluable opportunities for learning that will strengthen AtG and fuel its future. Joel – Founder and Artistic Director of AtG is busy with many other projects including Directing Hansel and Gretel in the upcoming season at the Canadian Opera Company. IMAGO is pleased and proud to have played a small role in the launch of this very innovative project that now makes a significant contribution to the cultural life of the city.

Being Human: Bodies, Minds, Persons,
Rowan Williams, Eerdmans, 2018

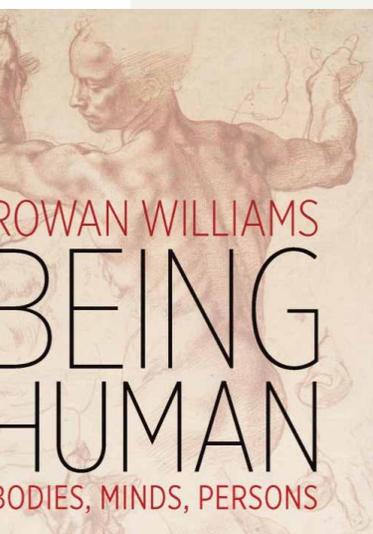
In our time the question of what it means to be human is under close scrutiny. This is partly because of the development of AI and the extraordinary advances in technology on this front. We now speak of “machine behaviour”, agency, and even the intentions of our own technological creations. Rowan Williams former Archbishop of Canterbury in his small book (111pages) takes on central themes of this vexed topic. He begins with the question; what is consciousness? – a subject that continues to elude fulsome explanation. He characterizes consciousness as located, relational, and narrative in nature. It has a past and present. It also engages a shared language and resists being reduce to mere matter.

Williams prefers the term “person” to the term “individual”. The idea of individual isolates us makes us the centre of the world – a unique thing. Person is quite different as it presupposes a network of relations and there is a theological assumption at the heart of this claim. Williams writes: “...Before anything or anyone is in relation with anything or anyone else, it’s in relation to God. ... I am already grasped, addressed, engaged with.” (pg.36)

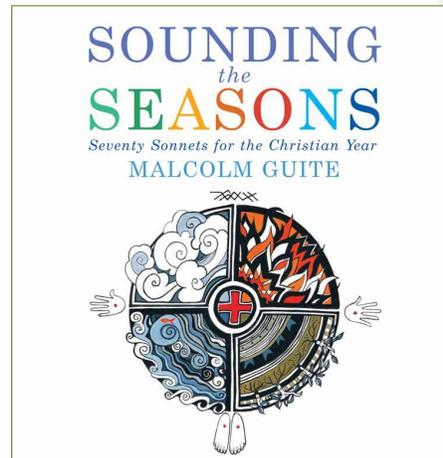
In a chapter on faith and human flourishing Williams explores the paradoxical reality

that being religious – under divine direction – is not repressive to our humanity but on the contrary enables us to flourish. We accept the fact that we are to be dependent not autonomous, receptive not controlling.

The final chapter is on silence which calls us to give up having the final word and invites us instead to listen and discover. This is a fine little book timely and full of important insights – valuable in bringing some clarity to our confusion about what it means to be human.



The Cambridge poet Malcolm Guite paid a short visit to Toronto at the beginning of April which –as it turns out – is poetry month. He was in Toronto under the auspices of Image Journal. IMAGO was invited to host an evening with him and we partnered with Wycliffe College to craft an evening of conversation with Malcolm on “poetry for the journey”. It took place on April 1 in the elegant Leonard Hall. He gave a talk, read poetry – his own and that of others and then we sat down for an interview. An audience of over 120 listened in rapt attention and then joined the conversation with questions. Malcolm drew us in through an insightful discussion of Seamus Heaney’s poem *The Rain Stick*. Guite advocates that humans are capable of double vision: what the senses perceive and what we discern in things that is beyond the senses. His commitment to the poetic is motivated in part by the belief that modern Western culture has lost vision and poetry is one way to bring some redress and balance



to how we see the world and ourselves. For Guite poetry can serve as a mirror to help us see ourselves but also as a window that allows, even enables us to see through and beyond mere appearances. Below a poem for Trinity Sunday by Malcolm Guite from his fine collection *Sounding the Seasons*.

*In the Beginning, not in time or space,
But in the quick before both space and time,
In Life, in Love, in co-inherent Grace,
In three in one and one in three, in rhyme,
In music, in the whole creation story,
In His own image, His imagination,
The Triune Poet makes us for His glory,
And makes us each the other's inspiration.
He calls us out of darkness, chaos, chance,
To improvise a music of our own,
To sing the chord that calls us to the dance,
Three notes resounding from a single tone,
To sing the End in whom we all begin;
Our God beyond, beside us and within.*



The very talented Laila Biali pianist, singer, songwriter and long-time IMAGO artist won a Juno Award in March for Vocal Jazz Album of the year. We join a host of others in congratulating Laila for this distinguished award. She continues to travel widely performing in North America and around the world. In June 2019 she will travel across Canada performing at Jazz festivals and a variety of venues. Laila can be heard on CBC as host of Saturday Night Jazz where her welcoming style draws jazz-loving listeners from across the country to enjoy their favourite genre of music.

Barbara Sutherland

January 27, 1923 – April 14, 2019

Many of those who receive this Newsletter have had a longstanding association with IMAGO and will remember Barbara Sutherland. Barbara passed away on April 14. She was a key influence for the founding of IMAGO. It was Wilber Sutherland who provided the leadership and vision for IMAGO – while Barbara his wife, was in a significant way the inspiration for that vision. She championed the arts and had a life-long love of dance. Jenifer her daughter informed me that she was raising her arms to dance up to her last hour. We are grateful for Barbara, the inspiration she was and her love of imagination and deep desire to “body – forth” her creativity in dance.

The self-portrait

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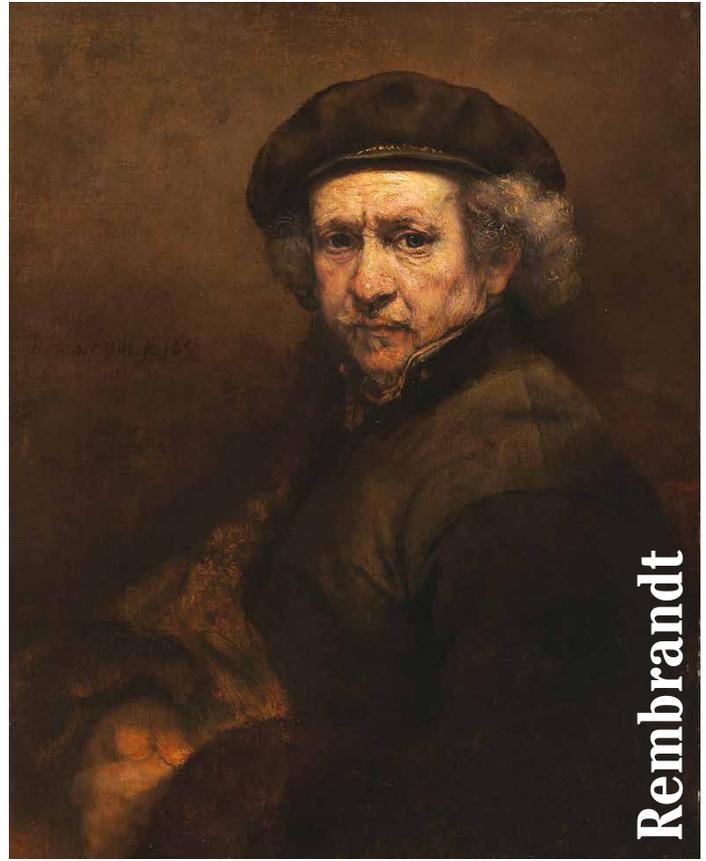
know where we are or who we are with. Do selfies reveal a narcissistic culture where we succumb to the constant call to self-interest? Or are they a means to provide us with an identity – in a world where we are no longer sure of who we are? In this way at least the selfie may be a useful step on the path toward shaping an identity – but then we must ask what identity we are shaping. The question “Who am I?” is a constant refrain in a culture that has lost its central narrative. There is no agreed upon account of what it means to be human.

Seventeenth century Holland was a quite different world. It was the Golden Age of Dutch art and the world of the great painter Rembrandt. About one fifth of his artistic output was self-portraits. At a time when I had just begun to explore art history and had recently discovered Rembrandt while on a trip to Holland, I stumbled on a reproduction of his 1659 self-portrait. I don't know what moved me to make the impulsive purchase. What I do know is that this image has provided an “icon” of humanity that has spoken to me through its silence over many decades. This year is the 350th anniversary of Rembrandt's death – his work continues to capture the hearts and imaginations of art connoisseurs and a wide public of art appreciators.

Rembrandt's religious beliefs are difficult to ascertain but his work is expressive of themes in Calvinist theology. For example through paintings, prints and drawings he explored the biblical story of Abraham and the covenant and was seemingly fascinated by the subject of divine encounter. He also did a self-portrait as the Apostle Paul suggesting his admiration for the Apostle and his important role in the shaping of Christian theology not least its Protestant expression.



Abraham's Sacrifice, Etching, 1655



Self Portrait, 1659, National Gallery of Washington

Rembrandt

In his paintings Rembrandt captures our humanity in all its ordinariness. He resists idealization of both the human and our environment. I am particularly taken by the artist's ability to depict the human face. And for Rembrandt the face was of great importance. In the self-portrait of 1659 the background has little detail while the face is the subject of extraordinary attention and profound artistic skill. It is primarily in the face that we discover the other. The face is a call to relationship, it's the visual locus of our humanity, a window into the spirit and soul of the person. It is interesting to note that twentieth century self-portraits have to “conceal or suppress the face” and as James Hall observes there has been “a shift in focus away from the face to the body which is harder to individualize and memorize...”. This shift suggests our culture may be entertaining a diminished sense of what it is to be human.

I find Rembrandt's self-portraits deeply humanizing capturing character and emotion and hints of moral sensibility all found in the face. I expect that the biblical theme of the “image of God” is at the heart of these deeply personal images found in the work of Rembrandt. His attention to the face affirms the person as subject not mere object and the painting is an invitation to discover through what we see a bit more about who we are.

John.

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