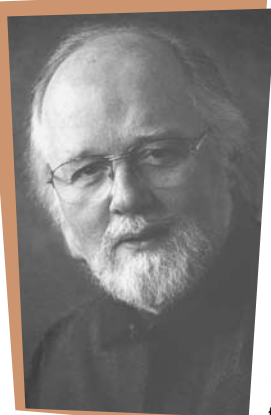


If I were asked what art form I favour I expect my instinctive response would be music. It is not clear to me why this is so. I am drawn to music as to a long time friend – born of an unconscious love and loyalty. Those who love music note how it “speaks” to them – a communication reaching deep into the human soul. You may also hear them acknowledge the power of music to transform the listener. Scottish composer James MacMillan observes, “Music cannot be separated away from the completeness of our everyday lives and boxed off into one little aesthetic corner of our existence.” He affirms music as “the most spiritual of the arts”. Perhaps a debatable point but music’s intangible quality cannot be denied. In what follows I will touch briefly on three themes that may give music its drawing power.

It is common to connect music with emotion. Think of how music can impact your feelings while viewing a film, or how one can be moved by the strains of a familiar tune. Unlike story or image music does not bring its objects with it yet it moves us. Jeremy Begbie notes this in his excellent book *Resounding Truth*. He goes on to suggest that emotion in music is akin to bodily gestures. Music which is joyful will likely move more quickly than music we deem

to be sad. But what is innovative in this is that music is able not only to open us up to what we do feel, but may also disclose to us what we can or should feel. Begbie suggests that music has the capacity to



educate, shape and reshape us emotionally as “Bob Dylan did for a whole generation in

continued on page 4

Metalhead by Michal Tkachenko

In 1991, I packed my bags and boarded a plane to Haiti to live and work as the pharmacist in a small hospital of a village called Limbé. I was 18 years old with no pharmacy background. Upon arrival, Jean-Bertrand Aristide was sworn into power and life dissolved into a series of military coups, evacuations of foreigners, machete attacks and the complete disintegration of law and order. I stayed put through it all and survived. Then came the blow: a car accident in the Haitian countryside that would kill the person next to me, shatter my skull and half of my face, leaving me with three permanent, stainless-steel plates in my head. These are my markers.

Several years after Haiti, I passed by a mirror and caught sight of my reflection. The fractures and misalignments were evident, and suddenly aware of how stripped-down life is, it seemed vital to reflect and re-look. The Metal Head series comes through con-



tinuous hours in front of a mirror, face-mapping for signs and markers that follow a journey.

Michal Tkachenko is a Canadian visual artist. Based in London, UK, Michal received her MA Fine Arts from the Chelsea College of Art and Design, London, England. Her work has been exhibited across Canada, the United States, Africa and Europe and can be found in a number of collections.

Primarily a painter, she is interested in work that stimulates the senses. Past work looks at gluttony and food’s relationship to family, community and social pecking order. Michal is currently re-looking, reflecting and mapping her face, misaligned through a life-threatening accident 16 years ago. Recently she returned from living in Africa for a year where she spent her time documenting the effects of a 14-year civil war through a series of portraits. *Metalhead* is currently showing at the Lookout Gallery at Regent College until Oct. 29th. www.michal.ca ■

Francis Bacon: The Darker Side of Art

This past summer the Metropolitan Museum of Art hosted the first major Francis Bacon exhibition in twenty years. The exhibition celebrated the 100th anniversary of the artist's birth. The British painter has the rare luxury of becoming rich and famous in his own lifetime. By his death in 1992 his paintings were selling for millions and the values have only risen since.

Bacon is a celebrated and controversial figure in the art world or any world at that. One New York Times critic wrote: "If paintings could speak, Bacon's would shriek". Those who shudder in the presence of his works are justified in doing so. The harshness of his critique of humanity is surpassed only by the grotesque nature of his images. Open bleeding flesh, exposed bones and carcasses fill the canvas. His faces and figures are often distorted, made to look broken or mutilated. The violence in his art is palpable.

Critics, art historians and philosophers alike have offered up explanations concerning Bacon's view of life. He was an abused child, a lifelong alcoholic who died from that self indulgence, and reached his prime as a painter during the last years of World War II. His negative view of humankind was not unfounded. It would be false to romanticize Bacon's suffering. He rejected people's complaints about his art being too harsh. "People complain that I show the horrible side of life. I try to show the excitement of life." In some ways, whether the viewer likes it or not, Bacon felt that he was stating the facts, not pushing buttons on our delicate sensibilities. Gary Tinterow, who was curator of the show said this; "Here is the problem. He is constantly rubbing our face in our own mess, the mess that men and women are capable of doing to one another. He is constantly reminding us of our own bestiality.... He would say that his art was the history of Europe in his own time.

Bacon has recurring themes of Christian religious art in his work, recognizing the power of tryptichs and iconography. The crucifixion is especially present, repre-



senting for him he epitome of what horrible cruelty we are able of inflicting on one another. Take *Painting 1946* for example. A faceless crucified figure dominates the backdrop, its skinless rib cage exposed. Above it hangs what looks like sausage from a butcher shop, at the bottom of the canvas are two pieces of carcass. A disfigured man holds a black umbrella in the centre of the painting. Bacon's message is clear; we are meat.

What can a Christian's response be to such art? What should it be? Can we accept the place of violence and darkness in our dialogue with art? Should we take into consideration his contribution to the ongoing debate about human existence? I would be inclined to say we must. We may not like the fact that there is little redemption in Bacon's work, nor are we obliged to agree with his interpretation of the crucifixion. But there is undeniable power in his work and truth in his take on humanity. And for that reason alone it merits our serious consideration.

Jenna Smith, directs Innovation-Jeunes, an arts and nutrition centre for teens in Montreal. Adapted from an article in Christian Week, August 1, 2009. ■



Imago is pleased to present

Jason Carter World Guitarist

In Concert **Wednesday**
November 11, 2009 at 7:30 pm.

George Ignatieff Theatre, Trinity College U of T.

Special guest opening the evening
Singer/Songwriter Dale Nikkel

For details: www.imago-arts.on.ca

What's On

Sarah Walker *Overflow*

On September 13th Sarah Walker held a CD release event for her new CD *Overflow* which has been an Imago project. The venue was The Meeting House in Oakville. To find out more visit: www.sarahwalkermusic.com

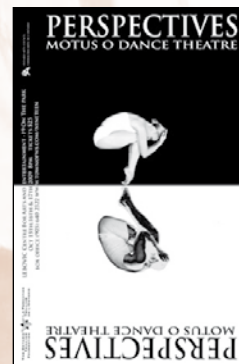


Manufactured Landscapes

IMAGO partnered with STORY Umbrella to present a special showing of the award winning film *Manufactured Landscapes*. The screening took place at the George Ignatieff Theatre, Trinity College, University of Toronto on Thursday September 24th. A conversation with Director Jennifer Baichwal was hosted by Professor Stephen Scharper after the film. The plan is to have more film screenings and conversations in the days ahead.

Perspectives

Motus O Dance Theatre, October 15 to 17 at the Lebovic Centre For Arts & Entertainment, 19 on the Park (Civic Avenue), Stouffville. 905-640-2322 www.motuso.com



Feelings of Restlessness

New paintings by James Paterson

Canadian artist, James Paterson, presently living in Germany, has always been fascinated by movement in his art and enjoys building kinetic pieces that are usually hand-powered. He has been researching line shaft and pulley drive systems such as the ones used in old manufacturing plants where a central shaft with pulleys would have belts that radiated off it to drive various machines. These pulleys have found their way into his paintings and can be viewed as compositional concept sketches for the actual pieces he is constructing, but they are more than that.

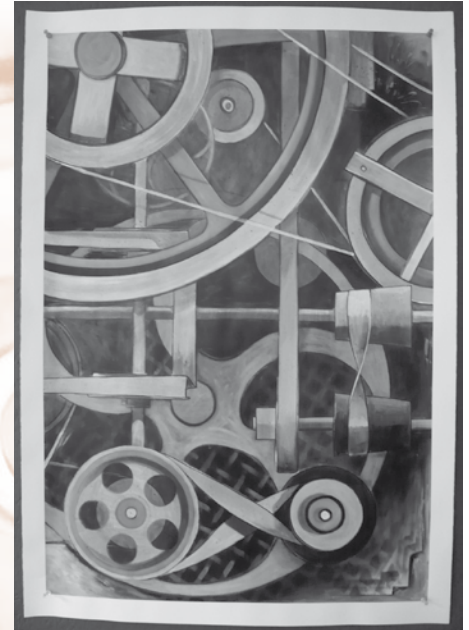
These paintings suggest feelings of restlessness. They keep your eyes moving, always, causing you to contemplate and enter into them as they show you pulleys being driven by belts overlapping more pulleys and belts endlessly interconnected in random ways, serving as a metaphor for the restlessness the artist often wrestles with internally as well as seeking rest for the body.

In the poem, "The Pulley" (1633) George Herbert describes "rest" as the one treasure God withholds when He pours out blessings from all the world's riches on the humans being created. Herbert has God saying that if He bestows "rest" as one of His gifts that the creature will "...adore my gifts instead of me, and rest in nature, not in the God of nature: So both should losers be."

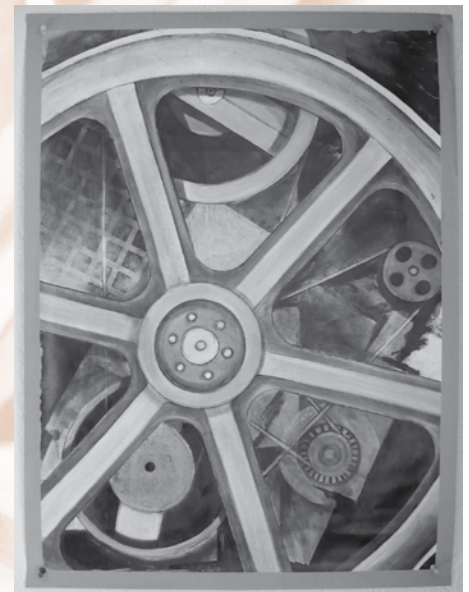
Providing a brilliant observation about human nature Herbert concludes by saying that in the end perhaps it is only weariness due to our restlessness that "May toss him to my breast." That this withheld "rest", this restlessness is the thing that drives us back to our creator.

In the *Confessions* Augustine of Hippo writes: "Thou awakest us to delight in Thy praise; for Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee." Again, the purpose of our restlessness seems to be to drive us towards God.

James says, "I don't feel guilty about my restlessness, as I think it is part of our nature; but like the belt on the pulley as I, in my restlessness, am drawn away from the drive wheel on one side, God is pulling me back again on the other side..." ■



Pulleys by James Paterson,
acrylic on paper, 70 cm x 100 cm.



The invention of the arts, and other things which serve the common use and convenience of life, is a gift of God by no means to be despised, and a faculty worthy of commendation.

John Calvin, 1509-1564

Janet Read: recent paintings

ireland: hem of the sea

Christensen Fine Art, October 2 to 31, 2009.

Opening: Friday Oct 2, 6 to 9 pm

432 George Street North, Peterborough.

705-876-9623 www.christensenfineart.com

Italy, the Artist's Muse

Guest Curator, Bruno Capolongo.

Gallery Hittite, 107 Scollard Street,

Yorkville, Toronto. October 17 to 31, 2009.

Reception October 17, 4:00 to 7:00 pm.

www.brunocapolongo.com

Robert Young: Quotidian View

39 works of art on paper.

September 22 to

November 29, 2009.

Burnaby Art Gallery,

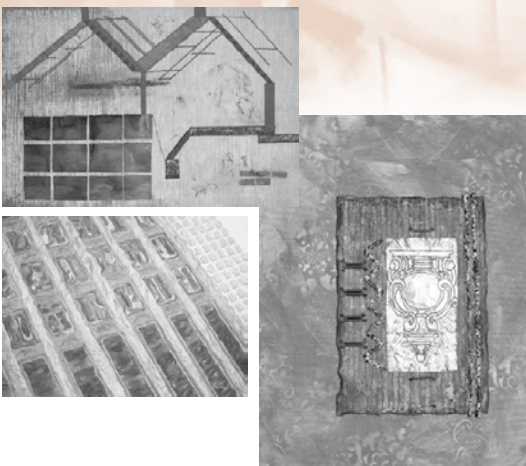
Vancouver.

www.burnabyartgallery.ca

Urban Textures by the Articulation Textile Group

This group of 10 women from 5 provinces in Canada craft their textiles in response to architecture in urban settings. The textures of mortar, brick, gardens and the activity of the city provide fertile subject matter for the textile medium. September 18 to November 14, 2009 at the Mennonite Heritage Gallery, Winnipeg, MB.

www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/gallery



Music...

Continued from page 1

the 1960's or *We Shall Overcome* – did for thousands in the civil rights struggle." What is evident here is music's value not just for the individual but for community.

A second drawing power of music is its nature as play. Most of what we do or what we are expected to do is a means to an end. We are constantly concerned about outcomes and consequences. In fact this is how we choose to value things. The tiring treadmill of productivity makes opportunities for play appealing. Play is not a means to enjoyment it is the enjoyment, it is the very thing enjoyed. So says philosopher Roger Scruton. Play is the place where we most feel at home with ourselves, a place of safety sheltered from the anxieties of the world. In a world where the pragmatic seems so dominant it is refreshing to think about the value of the non-practical. Scruton tells us we need to distinguish between function and purpose. It is said that one function of play is that it is a safe way to explore the world but that is not its purpose. If the function becomes its purpose – then it is no longer play. To put this differently play has an intrinsic value and does not depend on some outcome to make it valuable. Play is its own purpose. The argument is that the same is true of music. It would seem that all art enables us to experience some momentary suspension of ordinary time (which happens in play) where we are nurtured by aesthetic sensibility inspired by sound, image, word or movement.

Finally the "power" of music – and I am thinking here of a spiritual power – a power deeply connected to what it means to be human. There is mystery in this idea so it is perhaps best expressed in story. The story tells of the friendship between a Palestinian academic and an Israeli musician.

Edward Said taught Comparative Literature at Columbia University and Daniel Barenboim pianist and conductor – is one of the most accomplished musicians in the world. They had a chance meeting in the lobby of a London hotel in 1993. There began a deep friendship that lasted until Said's death in 2003. In his book *Music at the Limits* – Said tells this story under the title *Bonding Across Cultural Boundaries*. On one occasion Barenboim was playing a

recital in Jerusalem while Said was making a BBC film on Palestinian life on the West Bank. Within a year Barenboim was invited by the President of Birzeit University to give a recital. This was the first ever recital at the University and the first by an Israeli in Palestine. Said writes: "...everything that evening was utterly transformed, as all of us ...mentally scrambled to grasp what new and unprecedented thing had quite amazingly just transpired."

A second and ongoing story comes out of this relationship. In August 1999 Barenboim, Said and cellist Yo-Yo Ma convened a carefully selected group of seventy-eight Arab and Israeli musicians aged eighteen to twenty-five. This led to the forming of the West – Eastern Divan Orchestra which travels the world making music with its mix of Palestinian and Israeli members from many countries. The social, cultural and religious differences are somehow transcended in the commitment to creating music together. In this they express and exemplify a unity that seems so elusive and even impossible in the ordinary political oppositions between these two cultures.

I don't mean to suggest by these stories that music – or indeed art – is a cure-all for our deep differences. We will not be redeemed by art. But it does seem that art – music in this case – has the power to enable us to "bond across cultural boundaries". I think this is so because it speaks out of and to the mystery of our humanity." Proust calls the work of art the child of silence. If this is true and it seems to be, we may ask from what silence is it born. It may be the silence of cultural conflict, of passing time, of fear, or joy or hope or perhaps the silence of divine presence. What is evident is the power of music to inspire, to inform and to bring transformation in ways we may not have expected.

John

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Books

Forms of Transcendence: The Art of Roger Wagner, text by Chris Miller, foreword by Richard Harries, Piquant Editions, 2009.

An Art Historian's Sideways Glance, Photographs by E. John Walford, Piquant Editions 2009.

With these two works Piquant Editions has now published its third and fourth books in the VISIBILIA series. This publisher is known to many for its outstanding contribution in providing resources on the subject of art and Christian faith. The works of Calvin Seerveld and those of Hans Rookmaaker are

among its publications. VISIBILIA is a recent series that is aimed to provide introductions to the work of outstanding Christian artists. Print maker Peter Smith of London England was featured in the first book in this series and Canadian painter Maria Gabankova in the second.

Chris Miller has provided illuminating and insightful commentary on Wagner's work. This British artist has produced powerful work which brings together biblical story and contemporary life. The images are striking in their colour and subject matter. One example

is the painting, *Surely He Has Borne our Grievs*, "three bare crosses stand in front of the Didcot power station, whose two sets of three cooling towers and single central chimney together make up a Menorah".

The second book profiles the photographs of Wheaton College art historian John Walford. This richly illustrated work traces the author's artistic journey bringing together photographs and images of paintings from past and present. He writes: "If art is to be true to life, it should reflect that reality of irresolution in both its form and content."

Both of these books are a pleasure to look at and to read. www.piquanteditions.com ■

