

I find that my work in the arts constantly poses new issues to be considered and new ideas to be explored. This brief column in the newsletter is a venue for “thinking in progress” and this one is no exception. I want to take up two ideas which have come to the fore in recent weeks. The first concerns how we speak about the arts and the second is a question about what are is able to do.

Recently I was asked to submit a one page synopsis of a document I had worked on. Shortly after I received an edited version to review. What I quickly noted was that the word “use” or some variation on it appeared several times – though it was not present in the original. This got me thinking about why I avoid the word “use” when speaking about the arts. We do of course use art. It is used to decorate, illustrate, learn or just to enjoy. But this has not diminished my concern. One reason I have resisted the term “use” in relation to art is because it suggests that art is to be valued not for itself but for something else. Its value comes from its use or function. This is a particularly acute temptation in our pragmatic consumerist culture.

I prefer the word engage when speaking about the arts. The reason for this is that the word “engage” suggests a two-way relationship. We engage a person in conversation and we use a hammer. In the first case there is some give and take, the observer of art receives something



from the work of art, while in the second case there is a single direction in the relationship, the object is used. In saying this I have no intent to see art as separated from

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Sculptural kaleidoscopes

Since an early age I have been exploring various media and their communicative relationships. Each of my works can be seen as a glimpse through a window into my “processing room”. In this place the mapping of emotions through simple, yet strong use of line, gestural movement, light and textures allows the heart to be revealed. It is a form of visual journaling that goes beyond expressionism for me. Using mostly abstract sculptural language I explore themes that run the gamut from growth, transformation, pain before birth, through to whimsical celebration. This is often a risky adventure to healing. There is something very profound about taking a heavy, layered (and sometimes even flawed) boulder of alabaster and making it fly with life. Digging into the inner life of anything is fraught with danger. Firm blows are required to shape and bring lasting beauty but striking too hard brings pain and heartbreak.

My work, including the two dimensional has always had a sculptural feel. Over the last 20 years I have expressed myself through sculpting, stained glass, fabric art, silk painting, drawing and oils. Stone and glass with their common origin have become my key focus without restricting me to the three dimensional world. At the same time flat glass and other two dimensional media cannot give flight to all of my visions.

I find myself compelled to pursue interactive and spontaneous play within my own work but also within the sphere of other local creators. As an active believer in and developer of artistic community I enjoy interaction with those who have different skills. One time when a particular stone would not open up for me to any design, a friend who is a dancer proposed an alternative approach. By



Untitled, abstract form, bronze patina, 15" high

prayerful movement, and dancing around the stone, meaningful lines began to emerge. (The rest was just hard work.)

In communicating visually, my aspirations are to touch viewers on a personal level. Wanting to encourage the processing of life and perhaps suggest a new view of familiar emotional journeys I seek to bring beauty and breathe hope. When not chiseling stone you'll likely find me out enjoying the pleasures of nature. My main studio is tucked into a forested edge of the Grand River in Cambridge Ontario, just out of earshot of my home and family.

Heidi Antonio Brannan
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Red Tuesday, Bono, and Damien Hirst

By Jason Gardner

It's not every day that perhaps the most famous artist alive provides the front-page image for a daily newspaper. Then again, it's not every day that perhaps the most famous rock star alive gets to edit the British newspaper, *The Independent*.

In order to promote RED, a campaign that aims to involve big business in the fight against Aids in Africa, the *Indie* handed the helm of last Tuesday's (May 16, 2006) paper to RED's chief agent provocateur, Bono.

The first thing the U2 frontman did was to ask Damien Hirst to provide a fitting image to replace the usual front-page splash. He chose a red field, of course, and imposed on it a cross made of icons: a skull, praying hands, a syringe, some pills and, at the apex, a dove.



The headline said simply, 'NO NEWS TODAY' – with a footnote: 'Just 6,500 Africans died today as a result of a preventable, treatable disease.'

Centred above the cross was a Bible reference, Genesis 1.27, to remind us of our common humanity: *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

The Independent should be praised for the way it so often uses its front page to draw attention to those

continuing humanitarian or ecological disasters that too rarely find their way into our papers.

And few people in the world are better at drawing attention to themselves

than Bono. So, it was a marriage – if only for one day – made in heaven.

Some people are critical of the role of celebrities in campaigning. Some supporters of Make Poverty History voiced disappointment over the response of the leaders of the G8 to all the effort of Live8. Maybe celebs just don't grasp the complexities of the issues.

Bono is well aware of his detractors but, as he insisted in his editorial, he has no choice but to act. He has witnessed too much suffering and injustice in Africa to allow concern for his credibility to paralyse him.

"Celebrity is ridiculous," he admitted in another article. "But it is currency and I want to spend mine wisely."

His memories of a continent ravaged by disease spur him to fight for people who are suffering needlessly. So, too, does the cross that graced the *Independent's* front page. I hope it does the same for us.

Taken from a London Institute for Contemporary Christianity email. ■

Writing the World

By Murray Pura

If a painter is a Jew and paints life how is he to keep Jewish elements out of his work! But if he is a good painter, his painting will contain a great deal more. The Jewish content will be there, of course, but his art will aim at universal relevance. Marc Chagall, 1933

I would like to paraphrase what the great painter Chagall has said: If a writer is a Christian how is he to keep Christian elements out of his work! But if he (or she) is a good writer, his writing will contain a great deal more. The Christian content will be there, of course, but his writing will aim at a universal relevance.

There is a lot of fiction writing going on right now in the Christian community. Very little of it ascribes to the noble sentiments set out by Chagall. Genre fiction is written that never transcends its genre to become more than a fast read to numb the mind and escape the week's stress. There is a place for a mindless read now and then, just as there is a place for a hand full of jellybeans. But if your whole diet consists of jellybeans you will die. And if your whole fiction diet

consists of superficial writing with predictable formulas and shallow characterization it will diminish both your mind and your spirit. It will certainly stunt your imagination and limit your ability to understand others and the complexity of their live situations. Or your own. And you will most certainly be unable to grasp the depth and intricacies of the Bible that most Christians consider the Word of God. Its stories, the parables and life of Jesus, its mysteries and conundrums and perspectives will be lost on a malnourished mind. By the grace of God, much can still be seen and appreciated. But it is still a little like looking at sunrise over the Grand Canyon with sunglasses on.

Good fiction develops the imagination and the soul in good ways and necessary ways, even painful ways. Yes there is fiction that is debauchery just as there is fiction that is mile wide inch deep. We seek neither end of the spectrum. We look for fiction that is honest and true to life – no matter what genre it is based in – and which has its goal in the enrichment of the human experience. If it must talk about the darkness it will not stop there, it will talk about the light that can only be seen when it is dark enough. If it must make note of the evil that exists in our

world, it will also make note of the power of truth and forgiveness. Earnest Hemingway said that every true story ends in death. But we can also say that every death ends in the possibility of resurrection. It is one thing to talk about genocide in a way that glorifies it, quite another to talk about genocide in a way that shows it for what it is and also shows that there are those who will not let their souls be destroyed by it.

Writing with power and conviction about the world around us is a far cry from dishonest writing that merely skims the surface and relies on thrills and spills and sensationalism and sensuality to carry the day rather than an honest to God wrestling with the real. Honest to God fiction will still be entertaining but it will also leave a certain strength and revelation behind it no matter what genre it rises out of. Fiction that relies on sensation, predictability or ugliness will only take and leave nothing behind. It is fiction that impoverishes the human spirit and obscures the spirit of God in woman and man and child. What is honest to God, on the other hand, brings light into darkness and becomes for most readers an epiphany. (reprinted with permission) www.murrayapura.com ■



Anton Rodgers as C.S. Lewis.

Beyond Narnia

Suppose you had the chance to sit down and chat with C.S. Lewis near the end of his life. That was the “supposal” that shaped our creative approach to the docudrama *C.S. Lewis: Beyond Narnia*. Producer Karen Pascal (Windborne Productions) assembled an award-winning international team to

make this film including Scottish director, Norman Stone, New York writer, Kenneth Cavander and Seattle composer, Jeremy Soule. They filmed in Oxford at Lewis’ home – The Kilns, The Eagle & Child, Addison’s Walk, Magdalen College and on the streets of Oxford. The film stars Anton Rodgers (*The Merchant of Venice*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*) and Diane Venora (*Romeo & Juliet*, *The Insider*, *Heat*) and has garnered excellent reviews worldwide. *Variety* described it as

“capturing high points of one intriguingly eccentric writer in a divinely concise package.” *The Hollywood Reporter* summarized it as “wonderfully intelligent”. “The film is touching, gentle and warm-hearted without proselytizing” – 4 star top rating *The Financial Times*. We set out to make a very accessible film that would introduce audiences to the man behind “The Chronicles of Narnia”. We have drawn heavily from Lewis’ own accounts of his life found in “Surprised

by Joy” and “A Grief Observed”. Everyone agrees that Anton Rodgers gives a wonderfully nuanced performance as C.S. Lewis bringing the man’s true wit and warmth to the screen. This film was commissioned by Faith and Values Media and premiered on Hallmark Channel and BBC2. It has not been broadcast in Canada but can be purchased by contacting karen@windborneproductions.com

C.S. Lewis: Beyond Narnia was a finalist for the prestigious Templeton Epiphany Award and has recently won the Creation Arts Festival’s Best Docudrama Award. ■



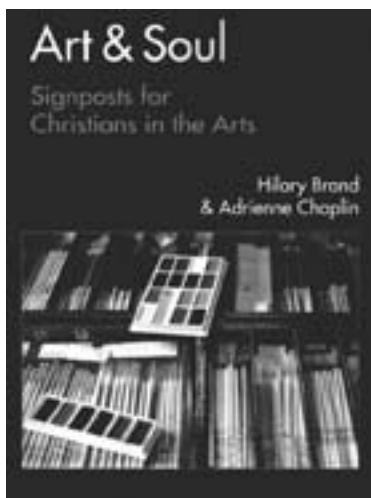
Karen Pascal, Adam, Norman Stone.

Books

Art and Soul is both a guide and a resource of information for those seeking to negotiate the challenging terrain of contemporary art. Hilary Brand and Adrienne Chaplin provide the reader valuable insights

about how to think about art and faith into fruitful dialogue. Into the perplexing world of contemporary art this book brings a good measure of clarity and shows a way forward for Christians who take seriously the world of the arts and the artistic calling.

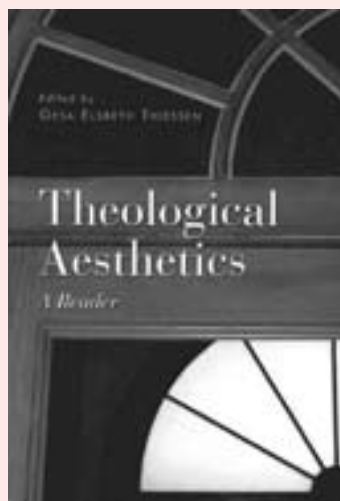
Gesa Elsbeth Thiessen’s reader in *Theological Aesthetics* contains a wide ranging compilation of readings from the early Church Fathers to current authors who are taking up this important subject. This is one more book on a long list of recent works that seek to clarify the links between theology and the aesthetic side of life. There are 125 primary sources covering topics such as Divine Beauty, Iconoclasm, Feeling Imagination and Contemplation and Truth Meaning and Art. It is a rich resource that the reader can return to again and again. Though for the advanced reader it will reward a careful reading from anyone who is interested in connections between theology and art.



In 2005, *The Defilers* won the Best New Canadian Christian Author Award at The Word Guild Write! Canada Conference. The novel is a fast-paced intense drama written in the genre of Frank Peretti and Dennis Lehane. The author, Deborah Waters Gyaopong, is a professional writer

with a journalism career that spans more than 20 years. In this story she applies all her skills to give us a twisting, suspenseful thriller, with great insight into the complexity and sinfulness of human nature and of the supernatural power of a gracious God.

www.castlequaybooks.com ■



“thinking in progress”

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its surroundings, its cultural and temporal situation. Rather I wish to see the perceiver joined with the art in a relationship that is reciprocal. If one listens to the music of Bach, views the work of Giotto or reads the poems of George Herbert the experience is that of receiving, being awakened or refreshed or inspired. But for this to happen there is the need to give oneself in the experience. Clearly one can say that even here art is of some use. But my point is that use is not the heart of the matter.

The opening words of the famous book by Martin Buber titled *I and Thou* capture what I have in mind. *The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with two basic words he can speak. The basic words are not single words but word pairs. One ... is the word pair I-Thou. The other basic word is the word pair I-It. ... The I of the basic word I-Thou is different from that in the basic word I-It. My sense is that placing the weight on the word “use” draws us toward the I of the I-It while “engage” leads us to the I of the I-Thou. Another way to put this matter is to distinguish between possession (object) and gift (relation). Art (and all of creation) is best approached as gift.*

A second matter that has come to my attention is a question about what art can do.

We hear a lot today about transformation. One could say it is a buzz word of sorts – designed to get our attention and convince us of the value of something. Transformation is in. Whether it is personal, social, ecclesial, institutional, organizational or cultural – we are drawn to the idea of transformation. The question is whether the arts have the capacity to exercise a transforming influence on persons or cultures.

Biblical metaphors such as salt and light or yeast leavening bread suggest that the faith community is to be an agent of change for the culture in which it is situated. Memory has the power to transform as does a renewed mind. Then there is the gift of creativity and the engagement of imagination each of which can be a step toward making the merely possible real. The sobering realities of our world call us to be agents of change. But it is not just the large and difficult issues where transformation needs

to take place it also must also occur in those small but significant areas of our ordinary lives. Art is one resource that can be a catalyst for change – an agent of transformation.

And here is the link with what I was saying above. Art seen as mere object has a deadening effect, there is no life, no movement, while art understood as that with which we can engage suggests a dynamic relation to the work and opens the way for artistry to have a transforming influence. One need not rehearse the influence of advertising, the music industry or film in getting large numbers of people to think differently and to live differently. It is not that art is a simple cause of transformation but it serves as an active agent in relationship to what we bring to it to move us from one place to another. One of the ways that the yeast of kingdom presence can be at work in the world is through the arts.

Twentieth century theologian Karl Barth has noted that the task of culture is “the realization of our humanity”. Any nudges we can get to move us to a deeper understanding of what it is to be human and a more faithful practice of our true humanity in matters of justice and shalom are worth affirming. Art is one of the ways we can be nudged toward that true humanity.

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Imago Projects

Arborvitae, Cosmic Camp For Kids, Marianne Karsh, Toronto; **Beyond Magazine**, Karen Neudorf, Calgary; **Big Bible Book**, Jim Paterson, Oakville; **Blue Like Jazz Live**, Jason Hildebrand, Toronto; **Campus Project**, Ruth Douglas, Cambridge; **Canadian Manners And Civility Project**, Judi Vankevich, Langley; **Corps Bara Dance Theatre**, Karen Sudds, Calgary; **Fisheries Project**, Glenn Macdonald, Hamilton; **Flying Bow Project**, Trevor Dick, Guelph; **Gems**, Belma Vardy, Burlington; **Green Ink**, Dennis Hassell, Toronto; **Heal Thyself**, Carolyn Reed, Jonathan Neville, Toronto; **Hope Rising**, Rick Pauw, Hamilton; **Inquest Media Project**, Joel Geleynse, Guelph; **Lost And Found Theatre**, Michael Peng, Kitchener Waterloo; **Martine Project**, Martine Wizman, Montreal; **New Canadian Landscapes**, Hamish Robertson, Toronto; **Oratorio Terezin**, Ruth Fazal, Toronto; **Pilgrim: A Musical**, Suzanne Rutherford, Muskoka; **Sanctuary**, Terry Black, Cambridge; **Some Strange Reason**, David Copelin, Toronto; **Radiance**, Laila Biali, Toronto; **Tricord Film Development Fund**, Karen Pascal, Markham; **The Word Guild**, Wendy Nelles, Nancy Lindquist, Toronto; **Vancouver Arts Network**, Rob Des Cotes

ARTiculate

A group of interested Christians is keen to put art in its place.

“Let’s not confine art to galleries, concert halls and special occasions,” says Doug Koop, editor of *ChristianWeek*. “Art should be at home wherever people live – in our homes, neighbourhoods, workplaces and worship places.”

Koop has been working closely with John Franklin (Imago), Richelle Wiseman (Centre for Faith and Media) and Aileen Van Ginkel (Evangelical Fellowship of Canada) to spur a nationwide initiative on behalf of Christian artists and their work.

Earlier this year this core group convened consultations in Ontario and Alberta that involved more than 20 practicing artists, patrons and other arts-interested individuals. Both groups responded enthusiastically to this effort to recognize and enhance the role of the arts in Christian community and vocation.

“A groundswell of artistic enterprise is blossoming in congregations and communities throughout Canada,” says Koop. “We need to properly celebrate these gifts of God among us and do our part to develop, display and learn from them wherever we live.

“Our faith gains both depth and breadth when we release our artists to develop biblically informed imaginations, refine their crafts and ply their trades.”

Expect to hear more about ARTiculate in the months ahead. ■