

Contemporary Art and the Church: A Conversation Between Two Worlds

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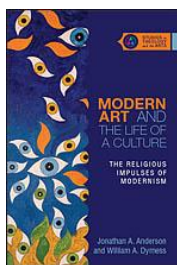
IVP Academic's Studies in Theology and the Arts (STA) series seeks to enable Christians to reflect more deeply upon the relationship between their faith and humanity's artistic and cultural expressions. By drawing on the insights of both academic theologians and artistic practitioners, this series encourages thoughtful engagement with and critical discernment of the full variety of artistic media, which both embody and inform Christian thinking.

IVP Studies in Theology and the Arts

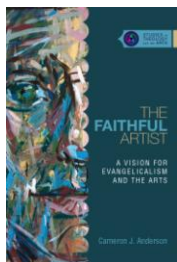
The church and the contemporary art world often find themselves in an uneasy relationship in which misunderstanding and mistrust abound. On one hand, the leaders of local congregations, seminaries, and other Christian ministries often don't know what to make of works by contemporary artists. Not only are these artists mostly unknown to church leaders, they and their work often lead them to regard the world of contemporary art with indifference, frustration, or even disdain.

On the other hand, many artists lack any meaningful experience with the contemporary church and are mostly ignorant of its mission. Not infrequently, these artists regard religion as irrelevant to their work, are disinclined to trust the church and its leaders, and have experienced personal rejection from these communities.

In response to this situation, the 2015 biennial conference of Christians in the Visual Arts (CIVA) facilitated a conversation between these two worlds. The present volume gathers together essays and reflections by artists, theologians, and church leaders as they sought to explore misperceptions, create a hospitable space to learn from each other, and imagine the possibility of a renewed and mutually fruitful relationship. *Contemporary Art and the Church* seeks common ground for the common good of both the church and the contemporary art world.



Modern Art and the Life of a Culture: The Religious Impulses of Modernism by Jonathan A. Anderson and William A. Dyrness was the first in IVP Academic's new Studies in Theology and the Arts series. This volume brings together the disciplines of art history and theology and points to the signs of life in modern art in order to help Christians navigate these difficult waters.



Drawing upon his experiences as both a Christian and a practicing artist, Cameron J. Anderson explores the dynamics of faith and art in *The Faithful Artist: A Vision for Evangelicalism and the Arts*. He considers questions about the role of our bodies and our senses in our experience of the arts, the relationship between text and image, the persistent dangers of idolatry, the possibility of pursuing God through an encounter with beauty, and more. Throughout this study, Anderson's principal concern is how Christian artists can faithfully pursue their vocational calling in contemporary culture.



W. David O. Taylor (ThD, Duke Divinity School) is assistant professor of theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary and director of Brehm Texas, Fuller's regional campus based in Houston. An ordained Anglican minister, he is the editor of *For the Beauty of the Church: Casting a Vision for the Arts*. Taylor previously served as a pastor at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas, where he supervised an arts ministry and the adult education program in addition to serving on the preaching team.

Contemporary Art and the Church

If the church has been called to a faithful presence in the public square, rather than to a retreat from it, and if contemporary art is a significant presence in that public square, how might this calling be made manifest in the actual practices of our artists? In what ways do Christian artists today conceive of their work as contributing to a public dialogue? This is the task that our panel of practicing Christian artists takes up in the book's first symposium. Kevin Hamilton moderates a conversation between David Hooker, Joyce Lee, Steve Prince, and Mandy Cano Villalobos on the role of artists in the public square. Drawing richly upon each of their art practices, the symposium interrogates the roles and responsibilities of the Christian artist when making work for a particular public. We hear from these artists about the calling they carry and the struggles and joys that attend their journeys. Hamilton leads a fascinating dialogue that makes concrete the matters at stake in the conversation between contemporary art and the church – what it takes to relate to the church and to make a difference in the art world at the same time.

If God has made a world with a capacity to generate contemporary art, what does this say about the God whom we worship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? What does that say about the world that God so loves? This is the task that Ben Quash, Taylor Worley, Christina Carnes Ananias, and Chelle Stearns address in their respective essays. Quash deftly articulates several of the most significant dilemmas impeding theology's dialogue with contemporary art, among them the question of criteria and socio-cultural location. In response, Worley seeks to extend the aims of Quash's vivid, theological commentary by reconsidering how faith, hope, and love inform our engagement with contemporary art. Ananias and Stearns offer fascinating explorations of particular encounters with theology and contemporary art. First, Ananias revisits the provocative, conceptual work of Yves Klein and finds there a powerful companion for a Christian theology of *nothing*. Stearns develops a haptic account of Pneumatological illumination in her careful, probing conversation with the immersive and allusive art installations of Ann Hamilton.

Functioning as the second symposium of the book, Nicholas Wolterstorff leads a conversation with Sandra Bowden, Calvin Seerveld, Theodore Prescott, and Marleen Hengelaar-Rookmaker, each of whom has played a significant role in the Christian engagement with modern and contemporary art, particularly in North American and European contexts. This panel of first generation CIVA leaders clarifies for us the sometimes-surprising origins of the work of believer artists over the past fifty to sixty years and also urges readers to preserve the legacy of what CIVA has accomplished over the past thirty-five years.

If worship is the one thing that every Christian does, in all times and places of the church's history, and if there is a visual shape to this experience of worship, might there be something



Taylor Worley (PhD, The University of St Andrews) is associate professor of faith and culture as well as associate vice president for spiritual life and ministries at Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois. In both these roles, he focuses on enabling students to see how their gifts and passions can be leveraged for greater vocational impact in the kingdom of God. He is coeditor of *Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture: Responses to the Work of David Brown*.

distinctive that contemporary art may contribute to our thinking about corporate worship?

Might there even be something positive that the contemporary arts might add to the practice of worship? This is the task that Katie Kresser, David Taylor, Jennifer Allen Craft, and David McNutt tackle in the last section of the book. Kresser elucidates some of the fundamental laws of visual-spiritual perception and suggests a way forward for congregations who wish to integrate worship and the visual arts. In his response, Taylor commends Kresser's liturgically sensible advice, but critiques a lack of specificity about the sorts of art and worship contexts she has in mind. Craft argues that the contemporary arts can contribute to worship precisely by contributing to a congregation's sense of place, its physical home in the world. McNutt contends that, despite Karl Barth's hesitations about art, his own theology points to the possibility that contemporary art can have a legitimate and important place in the life of the church.

The two final essays in the volume offer more personal perspectives on the subject. Calvin Seerveld, in a way reminiscent of Helmut Thielicke's *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians*, furnishes generous and wonderfully practical advice to recent (and often as not, young) graduates in the visual arts. Cameron Anderson wonders out loud how beauty and a distinct sense of Christian calling might become good news for both saints and artists, both the church and the contemporary arts.

– Taken from the introduction by David Taylor and Taylor Worley