

CSF News

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Carl Schmitt Foundation Receives Two Grants from the Connecticut Office of the Arts

Thanks to your generosity, the Carl Schmitt Foundation has received two grants from the Connecticut Office of the Arts (COA) totaling over \$3,200.

In February, the CSF was awarded a \$706 grant from the Connecticut Arts Endowment Fund, established by the Connecticut legislature in 1988 to reward organizations that have reported an increase in private donations in past year.

In August, the COA presented a Supporting Arts in Place award of \$2,542 to the Foundation. These grants are based on the economic impact of non-profit arts organizations on their communities, and must be matched by contributions to the organization.

The CSF plans to use these funds for outreach, archive and gallery support, and longer-term projects to restore and frame artwork, finding lost works, and biographical research. ∞

“Everyone is a Mystic”

For Carl Schmitt, mysticism was not a day-dream, an ineffable reaching for a spiritual unknown. He saw this kind of quest as a hallmark of the philosophies of the East. “The Eastern Nations have stressed the dream, desired too much, and have tended to eliminate the active. The desire is an opiate and is mistaken constantly for mysticism.”

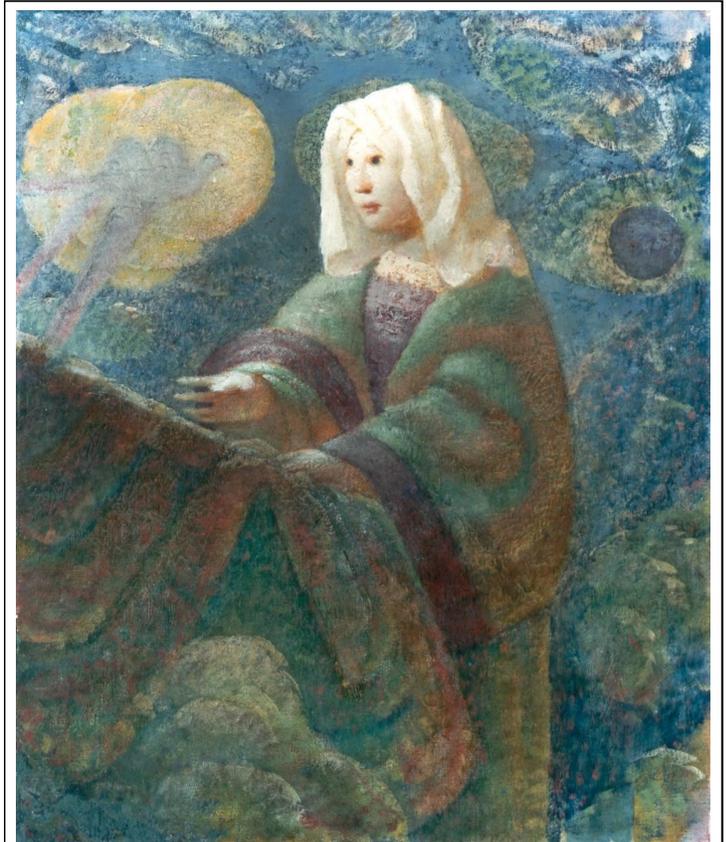
Far from being an attempt to escape reality, mysticism is an active search for the real. Indeed, “mysticism begins with the desire to experience reality.” In this sense, “everyone is a mystic,” as everyone seeks to experience reality. This search is not limited to our sense experience; in fact, it must go beyond it if we are to reach the deepest reality of things. As Schmitt put it, “Mysticism should be a vision of something *more real*, *more* subjective and objective than the natural senses have experienced.”

Mysticism is often seen as a purely religious phenomenon, and Schmitt certainly acknowledged this side of it. But as an artist he also recognized an “aesthetic” mysticism—one of the imagination—which paralleled the more familiar “spiritual” mysticism. This was based on his insight that “materiality or art or imagination is the exact symbol of spirituality.”

Seeing this parallel between religious mysticism and aesthetic mysticism, Schmitt made an intensive study of the former as the basis

for his thought on the latter. The path taken by the religious mystics, one based on what Schmitt called the “mystical virtues” of poverty, purity, and humility, finds a close correspondence in the journey of the artist along the path to full aesthetic vision. From seeing merely the *appearances* of things—what he called the “lyric” stage—the artist must move on to beholding them *in time and space*—the “epic”—all the way to the perception of their *form*—the “dramatic” vision of their full reality.

– Samuel A. Schmitt



“Art is natural religion and its ‘mysticism,’ while paralleling true mysticism, is natural and created.”

Notebook 2A (1921)

Everyone is a mystic.

For mysticism begins with the desire to experience reality.

Carl Schmitt

FEATURED PAINTING: *MADONNA IN WHITE*

Madonna in White is a strange, fascinating painting. As with many of Carl Schmitt's paintings, this work is at once fresh and familiar, routine and revelatory. The image of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child, as old as Christian art, is pictured here in truly modern guise, with bold hues and stylized figures.

A contemporary critic noted Schmitt's remarkable color combinations in this painting, writing that "many of the complex figure groups glow with unearthly fire, as if reviewed through colored gelatin." The artist's underlying intention in these works, however, was less about an exploration of design and color as it was an expression of what he called "mysticism," "a vision of something *more real, more subjective and objective than the natural senses have experienced.*"

Schmitt's work is a marriage of modern training and deep familiarity with the masterpieces of his craft, particularly those rooted in Christian Europe. His studies in Florence in his early twenties, where he saw first-hand the works of the great Italian masters, was a turning point in his life and left an indelible mark on his future work. Although he sketched and studied these works as had so many before him, he was not as much interested in copying their style as their content. He was able to "abstract" the deep

religious "substance" of these works and integrate it into his own style.

Here, Schmitt transforms the solemnity of the old masters to playfulness, their royal court into a child's wonderland. Where the tradition presented the Virgin and Child surrounded in timeless gold, Schmitt revels in deep purples and greens,

heraldic supports."

It is tempting to see in these "four sturdy children" a portrait of the four cardinal virtues: the two "earthly" virtues of Temperance and Fortitude represented by the calm cherub and the brave knight at the Virgin's feet, with carefree Prudence and "blind" Justice hovering above. Each is furnished with a pillar, further suggesting their role as "pillars" of a good life.

Schmitt, however, generally shied away from such direct allegory. The children attend upon the Mother, the "Seat of Wisdom" and throne of her Son, Wisdom Himself. Schmitt reminds us that wisdom is intimately related to our desire to become "little children" as Christ taught. This "childlikeness," far from being weakness or immaturity, incorporates what is noblest in human nature in its ecstatic and its down-to-earth qualities, both that of the stolid man-at-arms and the mercurial dancer.

The Madonna avoids our gaze, as if to direct ours to the



colors very much of our own world. The purity of the Mother and Child is transposed into the world of child-like innocence. Schmitt's friend, the critic and writer Padraic Colum, intuited this shift: "Austerity is not the mark of this religious painter; he gives us rapture most often, he gives us gaiety sometimes. There is gaiety, there is playfulness even in the *Madonna in White*, in which a happy babe is held by a happy mother, and four sturdy children have the place of

Child, who does not sit upon her lap but is held or rather hovers above her knees. The Child, while haloed like his Mother, seems otherwise indistinguishable from his fellow children except in the glow that emanates from his small body, which light is in turn reflected by his Mother. As in so many classic paintings, her face is pensive, as if in shadow, reflecting perhaps upon the destiny of the One she holds in her arms.

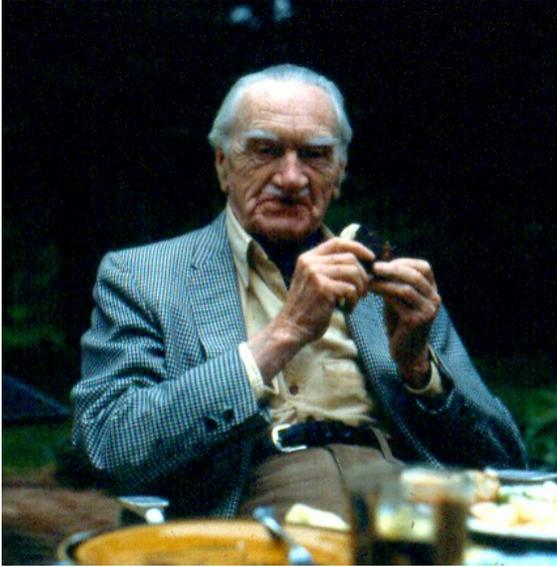
— Samuel A. Schmitt

*Mysticism is of no value if it is an escape into unreality.
It is unfortunate that the word mystic suggests mist. Mysticism should be a vision of something more real, more subjective and objective than the natural senses have experienced.*

Notebook 2-X (1931)

“Consider the Lilies ...”

Jacob A. Schmitt



Carl Schmitt was not the typical artist. His commitment to a contemplative life led him to shun the rewards of a conventional life and avoid even its practical expediencies.

Schmitt was not alone in his dedication to high ideals; his wife Gertrude shared the same pursuit. They endeavored to pass these ideals to their children, emphasizing obedience to God the Father and trust in His Divine providence. He often reminded his children of his favorite passage in the New Testament, “Consider the lilies of the field...” and he lived this simple trust in God.

Schmitt believed that an artist and his work would remain trivial, or immature, if they did not pursue beauty alone. He suggested, therefore, that instead of attempting to persuade the ignorant and encourage the enlightened as the teacher, philosopher, or evangelist might do, the artist must turn rather to praise God directly by creating a great work of beauty. The artist must be the prophet and not the evangelist, or better, the only true evangelist is first the prophet.

Schmitt’s life proclaimed that one should praise and express the beauty and grandeur of the Creator through His creation. When his children were older, he taught them the same lesson, not out of a catechism but through example. How often he would suggest, “Whatever you do, do it for the love of the intrinsic worth of the thing placed there by the Creator, and not for some extrinsic fame or fortune, or to feed your belly.” He lived this difficult ideal.

Many of Schmitt’s business acquaintances thought an artist dedicated to art was one thing, but a Catholic artist dedicated to the pursuit of beauty alone appeared to them to be too idealistic, especially one with ten children. That anyone should entertain this sort of commitment must be terribly stubborn and foolish.

Reflecting upon these criticisms, he once remarked that the apparent selfishness of the artist was like an old clam burrowed deep in the sand. When the clam was gone, what a precious legacy it left—pearls of great value! He knew well that it took years of development to arrive at the maturity, detachment, and strong will to withstand all the vicissitudes of fortune, not to mention the well-intentioned but misguided advice of friends. But he also understood the more difficult fight was to harness the wild horses of the aesthetic muses within, and keep the internal enemies of discouragement and despair at bay.

Jacob A. Schmitt, Carl Schmitt’s sixth son, is a professor emeritus of education. He lives in Delaware.

Reminiscences

William P. Skidd

I will always remember my great-grandfather Carl Schmitt as a warm, wise, and joyful man. Even as he was approaching a century in age, he invariably had a broad smile and fond attention for each of his myriad great-grandchildren. He truly appreciated others and took the time to know each of us young children personally.

In return, he was loved and respected by his extensive family. A stranger walking into the room would know immediately that there sat the patriarch of the family. Despite his great age, he was not parked in his dotage off in a quiet corner or shielded from the mass of unruly young children. Instead, he was the epicenter, engaging and reveling in the great family he had fathered.

Great-Granddad was with us until I was 16 years old. As I grew up, I had the privilege of conversing with him on a more adult level. Only then did I begin to grasp his wisdom and ever-sharp intellect. His vision of truth was never pretentious or academic. It was real. He was an avid writer, capable of great insight, but never strayed so far that he could not stir some mischievous wit.

He lived simply, but with perpetual enthusiasm to share the natural beauty he experienced. In later years he radiated a peaceful dignity, suffused with the joy of a life well lived. It was as if he had already received his reward to look out onto all the good he had nurtured in the world.

A true renaissance man, he was comfortable in his own skin while remaining ever in awe of the wonders of creation. He maintained both a detachment from self-absorption and a love for life in the noblest sense. He was a century-old man with the eyes of a child. 

William P. Skidd is the grandson of Carl Schmitt’s fourth son Peter. He lives with his family in Norwalk, Connecticut.

Comfortably off and cosmopolite [critics] tell me that it is fatal for me to live alone in the woods and paint, that I must not separate myself from humanity, reality. . . .

Humanity? Is there anything more human than one’s own children?

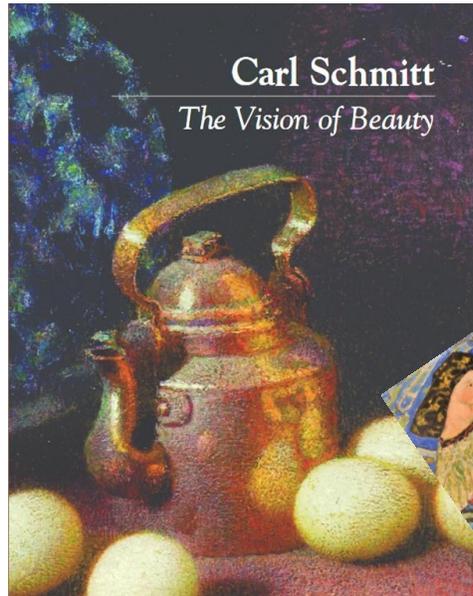
Reality? Is there anything more real than poverty with a family? except death, which is also tasted each day?

Notebook 2-X (1931)

Christmas gifts from the Carl Schmitt Foundation

The Carl Schmitt Foundation is pleased to offer a number of lovely items for sale for Christmas. All can be found at the CSF website, carlschmitt.org. Your purchase helps us make Schmitt's life, work, and thought more widely known and appreciated.

The beautiful coffee-table book *Carl Schmitt: The Vision of Beauty* features over forty full-page reproductions of Schmitt's finest paintings. At carlschmitt.org, you may also order museum-quality prints of selected works of Carl Schmitt—sure to be the highlight of any room.



Carl Schmitt Christmas cards and greeting cards are wonderful ways to share your joy. All of these items also make beautiful gifts. ♪

Thank you for your support!



Man cannot long remain interested in things only.

When he searches for greater happiness, he searches for the reality behind things — he finds God.

*When he finds God he is said to be mystical because he has found a Mystery,
the essence of happiness, a Trinity, the Trinity.*

*When man finds the Reality of the universe, he suddenly sees all things (the natural order, creation) as symbols.
And when he sees symbols, he is a “creator” or artist.*

from the essay “On Mythology,” 1925

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