



# CSF News

Volume 2, No. 2 – Spring 2010

## Welcome Aboard!

The Carl Schmitt Foundation is delighted to announce a new member of its Board of Directors. James J. Frelk brings a keen awareness of the richness and importance of Schmitt's legacy and is eager to share that legacy with a world outside the Schmitt family. "I am honored to be associated with the Carl Schmitt Foundation and its mission to bring beauty to the world through a deeper understanding of truth and Love (with a capital L). Many of my colleagues in the business community today—more than ever—have a great need for the Foundation's programs to help them live more fully human lives filled with dignity as more than just men of work."

Mr. Frelk brings wide experience as a corporate manager and consultant to the Foundation, including service as Deputy Associate Administrator at NASA. He has helped found a number of private companies as well as the non-profit George C. Marshall Institute. 

## “JUST LOOK AT IT”

“Is there anything more discouraging than writing about pictures?” Carl Schmitt asked wryly in one his notebooks. “Just look at it!” he would say to those asking for an explanation. Indeed, the beauty of a painting by Carl Schmitt speaks for itself and can leave a strong impression on even the casual observer. The richness of the color, the perfect poise of the composition, the marvelous finish and artistry of the final “look” of his paintings are indeed a wonder to behold. As luminous as they are on first glance, Schmitt strove mightily to create works that were more than just “pretty pictures.”

Writing about Schmitt and his art is an attempt to penetrate below the surface to the source of his artistic inspiration. Certainly, “pictures are meant to be looked at.” The essays

in this issue of the *CSF News* do not aim to “explain” Schmitt’s pictures as much as present their “language.” A familiarity with this language can help reveal depths of splendor beyond what we may be able to absorb on a first encounter with his works.

One major project underway here at the Foundation is the preparation of a “coffee-table” book about Schmitt’s life and work. Along with reproductions of his paintings, pastels, and drawings, it will include a generous selection of his writing as well as an account

of his remarkable life. The *CSF News* represents a “first draft,” an attempt at articulating something of what “lies beneath” the radiant beauty of Carl Schmitt’s works. Future issues will also highlight various episodes in Schmitt’s life, offering an integrated portrait of Schmitt and his achievement as a man, thinker, and artist.

—Samuel A. Schmitt



*Several people have complained that they cannot understand my pictures and have asked if I would explain them. This lack of understanding never fails to surprise me, as I try to paint only what I see as exactly and clearly as possible. I think pictures are meant to be looked at. If there is a secret – the eye must comprehend it.*

*Notebook 2-X (c. 1929)*

Our crowning selfishness lies in our insistence that others be happy in *our* way. The remedy lies in our trying to make others happy in *their* way, as far as conscience allows.

*For every person has a unique destiny of happiness.*

*Carl Schmitt*

---

**FEATURED  
PAINTING:  
STILL LIFE:  
PEELED ORANGE**

---

No representation can begin to do justice to the vitality, richness, and depth of Carl Schmitt's original still life painting. When viewing—actually contemplating—the original, the words that come to mind are splendor, mystery, fullness, silence, reverence, delight, magnificence. One finds oneself asking, “How can ordinary objects represented on a stretch of canvas so grip us? What is going on here?”

The starting premise is that “there is much more than what meets the eye” behind those ordinary things we come across each day. It is the genius of the artist to communicate that to us. This is what Schmitt meant when he wrote, “the artist is concerned not with *sight* but with *vision*.”

Vision is a penetration into the depth of reality and embodying that insight in a work of art. As Schmitt noted, “reality is the keynote to life and art. To be aware of reality—to be awake, is to be alive. To make paint or stone real is to make it live. A work of art is mature—complete—when it lives and appears real.”

Schmitt's mature work is the fruit of a lifetime of perfecting this aesthetic approach and reflecting that vision on canvas. The composition of a bowl, bottle, and oranges is much more than a photographic representation. The objects reveal more *being*. Schmitt has taken great pains in this painting to capture the form—the active determining principle of a thing—



what makes a thing what it is—its “is-ness.”

This capturing of intangible form was the “Holy Grail” of the great masters. They began with an under-painting in a single dark tone as the basis of the form. They then added a thin layer of color—a glaze of paint—letting the under-painting come through. This technique helped to give their works profoundness and beauty.

Schmitt, intrigued by color and its myriad possibilities, grappled with the problem of capturing a glowing richness of color without hiding the under-painting. His breakthrough was to build form with color. By forming his under-painting with multiple layers of color, then paring and “sculpting” back each layer, Schmitt was able to create a unique depth in his work. The background is no mere flat laying on of paint, but a sculpting of colors which allows each layer to shine through, resulting in a vibrant iridescence of color. The

final step was to add what Schmitt called the “local” color—the blue of the porcelain dish, the orange of the orange peel, and the effervescent green of the bottle.

The artist's treatment of the glass objects in this painting is particularly revealing of his grasp of their substance. The blue of the dish as seen through the glass of the large green bottle demonstrates the skill with which the artist layered his colors. In contrast, the smaller bottles in the background depict glass in a less familiar mode: they seem weighty and almost solid. “My father loved to paint glass,” Schmitt's daughter Gertrude recalls; “it was one of the things he loved to paint.” In this painting, glass is revealed not only as luminous, but dense and substantial.

If the mission of the artist is to get us to raise our eyes from the mere usefulness of everyday things to wonder at their inherent beauty, then Carl Schmitt has succeeded magnificently in this still life. 

*To be aware of reality — to be awake, is to be alive.*

---

## *A Painter for Believers and Non-Believers Alike*

---



Carl Schmitt, *Madonna with Kerchief, or Dalmatian Mother*, oil on canvas, 1926.

*Schmitt gave this work two titles so that his viewers would not approach it merely as a “religious” work.*

---

Once asked my father, “How would you characterize yourself as an artist?” He answered without any hesitation, “I’m a three-term substantialist.”

This answer is characteristic of much of my father’s writing and speaking. He could sound quite dogmatic, but like most good dogmatic statements, this one encompasses a lot to ponder.

By “substantialist” he could mean simply that he was a *representational* painter. He painted real things we actually see in our world—what philosophers call “substances.” And “three-term” could refer to what I have often called Schmitt’s “*trinal* thinking”—his way of looking at that substantial and palpable reality he “re-presented” in his art.

It is important to recognize that “trinal” is a more apt term for Schmitt’s thought than “Trinitarian,”

the latter being a religious term. For Schmitt, religion leads to heaven, to eternal life, but art deals with what we find and see and can contemplate in this world—in *this* life. A failure to take this distinction into account would be to miss the very meaning of his life as a man and as an artist.

It is this failure that leads a lot of people to wrongly categorize Schmitt as “a religious painter,” even if they note that he “also” painted many still lifes, landscapes, and portraits.

Schmitt used to say, “You can’t paint God”—for the beauty the artist seeks is to be found in contemplating what we can see and touch in this world. But capturing the beauty of created reality inevitably includes the tragedy of suffering and death—what he called the “voids”—and the drama of life’s triumph over it.

For Schmitt, beauty in art portrays this full reality. Herein lies the fundamental “trinalism” of his art. It incorporates first of all that innocent and lyric affirmation of life, secondly, the shadows we experience as childhood grows into life in a wider world, and finally, full maturity in the *voids* that go with our finite existence in this world.

Schmitt went beyond the dichotomy of “religious” and “non-religious,” and we should avoid falling into this in looking at his work. He saw his paintings of Christ and the saints not as “religious” works for believers but as depictions of living persons of our world who exemplified the fullness of *human* experience. This why he characterized himself simply as a “three-term substantialist”—as a painter with a full trinal vision of reality we all can experience. With this, he strove to create beautiful work that can truly be appreciated by believers and non-believers alike. —*Carl B. Schmitt, Jr.*

---

## REMINISCENCES

---

*Margo Skidd*

---

Every Sunday afternoon for many years my family and I would walk the short distance to my grandparent’s house for tea. As a young child I was taken with the atmosphere of their home as a place of peace and cheerfulness, a place where things are well-ordered and “the way they should be.” I can see now that this stemmed from my grandfather’s habitual focus on real things, from his profound connection with reality. This was palpable in the respect with which he treated each guest and the deep affection he showed his beloved wife. All this made a profound impression on me.

To me, my grandfather was a “great man,” with his deep conviction and calm self-possession. Yet, although I was not old enough to enter into adult conversation, I was not just another “kid” to him. He and my grandmother were personally attentive to us “little people,” providing each of us with our own small chairs and space in the main room. This affection and courtesy embraced everyone no matter his age. In this I sensed, even at a young age, something of my grandfather’s real greatness.

---

*Margo Skidd is the daughter of Carl Schmitt’s son Peter. She lives in Norwalk, Connecticut.*

*When will we learn that childhood is in a great sense not simply a preparation for adult life but a thing unique and complete in itself — a masterpiece of God.*

*Notebook 2 (January 1925)*

---

## Supporting the Carl Schmitt Foundation

The Carl Schmitt Foundation was established in 1996 to perpetuate the appreciation of the American artist Carl Schmitt (1889-1989). It seeks to make better known Schmitt's achievements as an outstanding man, an extraordinary fine artist, and profound thinker on aesthetics and life.

Right now we are poised to push ahead with many important projects but we need your help. We have hired a full-time Director of Research to prepare a book highlighting Schmitt's remarkable life and work. Many paintings are in urgent need of restoration and preservation. Other long-range ventures such as study days for young artists, symposia for scholars, and research fellowships for graduate students await your generous support.

But the Foundation currently faces a shortfall of \$70,000 for this year and we don't want to lose our momentum!

Please consider making an ongoing pledge to the Carl Schmitt Foundation. Even a modest monthly commitment tells us that you believe our mission is worth supporting. It is affordable for you, yet can prove a significant help for us over the course of the year.

You may use the enclosed envelope to indicate the amount of your monthly, quarterly, or annual pledge, or give using your credit card at [www.carlschmitt.org](http://www.carlschmitt.org). You may also make a one-time gift. This will help ensure that we can continue with our many important projects. ☺ Thank you!

*My philosophy may be summed up thus:*

*First, to receive from God gratefully everything possible that I can get.*

*Second, to give back to God through my neighbor everything which I can give.*

*To give gifts to my neighbor I must use art, because a gift must be made—hence I must be an artist.*

*I believe that God gives me my energy. I cannot earn it.*

*I can only be grateful as a beggar and share as a beggar would.*

Notebook 5 (1933)

## The Carl Schmitt Foundation

30 Borglum Road  
Wilton, CT 06897

Tel. 203-762-8515  
[www.carlschmitt.org](http://www.carlschmitt.org)