



# CSF News

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## CSF 2011 Campaign Receives Generous Leadership Grant

The Carl Schmitt Foundation has launched a campaign in 2011 to reach as many people as possible through a series of online videos, an expanded website, and a handsome “coffee-table” book featuring reproductions of Schmitt’s work.

The Chiaroscuro Foundation of New York has taken the lead in supporting the Carl Schmitt Foundation in this effort. In addition to a leadership gift of \$25,000, the Chiaroscuro Foundation will match funds raised for each of the projects listed above up to a total of \$62,500. “Both as an artist and as a thinker, Carl Schmitt sought to elucidate the objective structure of reality,” says Chiaroscuro Executive Director Greg Pfundstein. “In an age focused on the subjectivity of individual experience, Carl Schmitt’s work is a welcome antidote.”

The Foundation now has the potential to offer a great many people an encounter with the beauty of Schmitt’s work and the integrity of his thought and life. The CSF is most grateful to the Chiaroscuro Foundation for moving this dream closer to reality.

## A SENSE OF PLACE

In conjunction with the recent Carl Schmitt exhibit at the New Canaan Historical Society, I gave a talk on the importance of *place* in the life of Carl Schmitt. The immediate context of my remarks (and what most interested the local audience) was Schmitt’s obvious affection for the village of Silvermine where he lived and worked for most of his adult life. With its natural beauty and proximity to New York, the rustic hamlet has been a center for the arts for many decades.

However, the place of “place” in Schmitt’s thinking goes deeper than his fondness for a particular locality. Just as we speak of a “spirit of the times,” Schmitt spoke of place as having a similar spirit. “A long memory and experience of the place . . . is the base of culture and religion. It is the point where body and soul become one.”

Most often Schmitt’s thoughts revolved around the relationship between place and what he called “natural religion” or “metaphysic,” the acknowledgment of a deeper meaning behind what

we see and experience. For Schmitt, this recognition lies at the foundation of any civilization and finds its highest natural expression in the fine arts. This, in turn, forms the underpinning of supernatural religion. As Schmitt himself writes: “In studying the effect of the place-spirit, one finds that he is dealing essentially with the natural-religion of peoples. This effect of natural-religion is of the greatest importance, because upon this metaphysic is based the entire structure of supernatural-religion. If the natural-religion of a people is reasonably wholesome, then the supernatural religion is sound.”



“House on the Hill” (Schmitt’s house in Silvermine) pastel on paper, 1937

*This morning I experienced one of those intangibles which make one an unconscious unity with that art in which he has matured: the pungent, washed, fresh smell after a night rain mixed with the odor of the first leaves of autumn.*

Schmitt’s decision to settle and raise his family in one place was not a matter of sentiment or necessity, but was rooted in a deep awareness of the effect that permanence, memory, and place would have on his life and that of his family. This should be kept in mind as we trace the story of Schmitt’s discovery of Silvermine elsewhere in this issue.

—Samuel A. Schmitt

In order to have a supernatural religion we must first have a natural religion.

And natural religion comes from the family.



**FEATURED PAINTING:  
STILL LIFE: BREAD,  
WINE, AND KNIFE**

This painting was Carl Schmitt's last, done close to the end of an extraordinary life. Yet it may just be the most ordinary of his many still lifes.

The painting is austere, with little of the stunning beauty of many of his other works.

The bottle of wine, the chunks of bread, and a kitchen knife are ordinary indeed—even stark in their separateness. Yet this very plainness invites a second look and draws us to contemplate: the painting speaks the depths to be found in the ordinary.

The fact that Schmitt gave the work no title reminds me of another painting, discussed earlier here, to which he gave *two* titles—“Madonna with Kerchief” and “Dalmatian Mother.” I noted that there was no duplicity in this, because Schmitt's vision of reality reflected his belief in Christ as God incarnate, one divine person with two complete natures, divine and human. Schmitt never tired of pointing out how this meant that Christ was fully *man* in all of man's created mystery, for the artist must deal with human life in *this* world—the life

Christ shared with the rest of us—showing how human life in its fullest embraces all created reality. It was there, in the ordinary that you and I know so well, that he found the beauty he strove to realize in his art.

This is why Schmitt was totally unabashed about inserting the sublime into the ordinary in a most natural and normal way. Many of his madonnas were really portraits of his wife with one of their children.



His “Madonna of the Milk Bottle” may well be the only one that ever depicted Mary and her Child in this way. Years ago, I asked him to paint a “St. Nicholas” for me. He was just finishing a self-portrait and simply painted in a mitre and a crozier. “*That’s* not St. Nicholas!” I vigorously protested, “St. Nicholas had a beard!” He answered, “How do *you* know? This will do.” I was happy to get my painting at least, but as I walked away with it, my thought was

that perhaps he was trying to tell me something: that a saint can be seen in any man who is striving to be a child of God.

Schmitt discerned the beauty of each of the stages that make up an ordinary life: we have spoken before of how he combined the lyric, epic, and dramatic aspects of life into his art. He saw the dramatic as the key to the fullness of beauty, for it is there that life triumphs over death.

Schmitt's faith found the prototype for this most powerfully in Christ's death and resurrection.

What makes this painting special, however, is not simply that it includes all three aspects that mark it as a late work, but that the painting puts that entire story before us. The knife between the wine and the bread presents symbolically the sacrificial death in which

Christ's body was drained of its blood—almost too dramatically inserting that great “mystery of faith” into the ordinary.

All this I finally saw only when my sister told me it was the last painting he ever did, one he felt he *had* to do despite his failing eyesight. It was for him a kind of summation of his life and work as an artist, and if he had given it a title, it might just have been “The Mass.”

—Carl B. Schmitt, Jr.

The object of religion and the fine arts is to reveal the meaning of appearances.  
The object of art, the fine arts, is to reveal the meaning, or design, in terms of symbols.

## Carl Schmitt's Early Years in Silvermine

*This is the first of a series of articles chronicling significant episodes in Carl Schmitt's long life. Future articles will discuss Schmitt's friendships with the poet Hart Crane and author Hilaire Belloc, and his trips to Rome and Chartres, among other events.*

Carl Schmitt was attracted to Silvermine even before he had set eyes on it. Addison T. Millar, an artist from his home town of Warren, Ohio, beckoned him with a series of friendly letters in the spring of 1907. "We have a beautiful view up the valley, with nothing to obstruct it," Millar declared; "I have never been in such a picturesque country in America. Something to paint on every side, fine stone walls, beautiful groups of trees." Millar also mentioned the many artists that had already begun to congregate there, including "one quite famous, Solon Borglum . . . So we don't feel alone here." He invited the 17-year-old Schmitt, then an art student in New York, to join the "Knocker's Club," a group of established artists who met regularly to "knock" each others' work, staging a yearly exhibit at Borglum's studio.

Millar's wife worked out the details in a light-hearted follow-up letter. "A. T. thinks if you would help around the place, whatever was to be done for the forenoon, you would have your afternoons to paint or meet the girls as you please." One young lady of note in the neighborhood was Gertrude Lord, daughter of prominent New York architect Austin W. Lord, himself an amateur painter and member of the Knocker's Club.

After spending a few summers in



*Carl Schmitt brings his new bride Gertrude to the shack on his property in Silvermine where he had spent his summers. They moved into a permanent home on the site one year later.*

Silvermine, Schmitt was convinced this was the place he wanted to settle and work as an artist. In 1910, he bought a small parcel of land adjoining the Borglum property from Fred Buttery, a descendent of one of the earliest settlers in the area and owner of an old sawmill along the Silvermine River. An ancient stone foundation on Schmitt's property was the only relic of a once-thriving hamlet on the site that pre-dated the American Revolution. Even before he had built a house, Schmitt was camping out on a spot overlooking the river, joined by his brother Robert. He began to exhibit his work with the Knockers later that year.

A permanent home would have to wait until Schmitt had been drafted into the Army and married Gertrude Lord while on leave in the fall of 1918. Built on the old stone foundation, the modest home was described by a contemporary magazine as "very attractive . . . mostly in stucco, [with] a delightful Italian character." Carl and Gertrude would raise their family of ten children in that attractive home, and today, one of his grandsons is doing the same. ❧

## Reminiscences Dave Schmitt

As an adult, I have come to appreciate my grandfather's art and legacy more and more, but as a child he was simply "Bebop." He did not speak to us of his ideas, his art, or his remarkable life and struggles. In fact, while I had seen his paintings around my house and his, I was not really aware of his life's work as an artist. Once, I peered into his studio, but it seemed like a strange world to me, a world he never spoke of.

What strikes me looking back was how ordinary he was; a man of faith who dearly loved his wife, his family, and his New York Mets. As a boy, I was impressed that he knew the stats and salaries of all the players. He got a television only very late in his life when it became too difficult for him to hear the games on the radio.

If one thing stands out for me, it was his seriousness about the Catholic faith. He would ask us children if we knew our catechism, not in an awkward or intrusive way, but naturally, as something that was very important for us to know.

*Dave Schmitt is the son of Carl Schmitt's son Peter. After living for many years in Silvermine, he now makes his home in Stratford, Connecticut.*

*A long memory and experience of the place . . . is the base of culture and religion.  
It is the point where body and soul become one.*

*Notebook 8 (c. 1936)*

## Supporting the Carl Schmitt Foundation

Thanks to a generous leadership gift and challenge grant from the Chiaroscuro Foundation, the CSF's 2011 multimedia outreach initiative is well on its way.

The Carl Schmitt Foundation has proposed four projects aimed at bringing Schmitt's work to the many seeking beauty and an integrated vision of art and life.

- A handsome "coffee-table" publication of Schmitt's artwork including selections from his writings;
- A series of brief films introducing Schmitt and his art, to be posted on YouTube and the CSF website;
- A longer documentary film offering a broader picture of the artist's life and work;
- An upgrade of the Foundation's current website designed to advance the above-mentioned projects and build a vibrant network of support for the Foundation.

In the past few years the Carl Schmitt Foundation has made significant strides in furthering its mission through

this newsletter, a comprehensive website, numerous articles—both in journals and online—and by means of lectures and other public presentations. Most recently, an important exhibition of Schmitt's works, the first dedicated exclusively to the artist in 30 years, brilliantly displayed the breadth and significance of his artistic achievement.

The Foundation now seeks your support to build upon this momentum in 2011. Through the four initiatives outlined above, the Foundation has the opportunity to bring the beauty of Schmitt's art and his profound thinking on aesthetics and life to a great many people.

The Chiaroscuro Foundation has graciously pledged to match any gift to the CSF's 2011 campaign to a total of \$62,500. We ask you to match the Chiaroscuro Foundation's generosity and dedication to this mission with your own contribution. Every dollar you give will be worth double to the CSF. Thank you!

*Do you know the only real argument against Christianity, the Fine Arts?*

*It is this: they are impossible.*

*Do you know the only answer to this?*

*It is: The human being is made to do the impossible.*

*Nothing short of the hopelessly impossible is sufficient to arouse his hopes and efforts.*

Notebook 23 (1961)

## The Carl Schmitt Foundation

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