

CSF News

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Hope for the Future of Art

Carl Schmitt: The Vision of Beauty Receives Prestigious Printing Award

The coffee-table book published in 2013 by the CSF and Scepter Publishers has been named a Silver Winner of the 2014 Sappi Printer of the Year awards.

Granted yearly by the international paper company Sappi, the award recognizes quality and innovation in such categories as general appearance and technical excellence.

The printer of *The Vision of Beauty*, Thomson-Shore, Inc. of Dexter, Michigan, was honored for “exact precision, stunning craftsmanship and a forward-looking vision.”

Though the true depth of color and light can only be seen in the original works, the CSF congratulates Thomson-Shore on this well-deserved award for excellence in printing, and for giving us a glimpse of Schmitt’s greatness.

“We are happy that our presentation of *The Vision of Beauty* was worthy of recognition,” says Nathan Davis of Scepter, “and hope that this award will contribute to a greater awareness of Schmitt’s art and thought.”

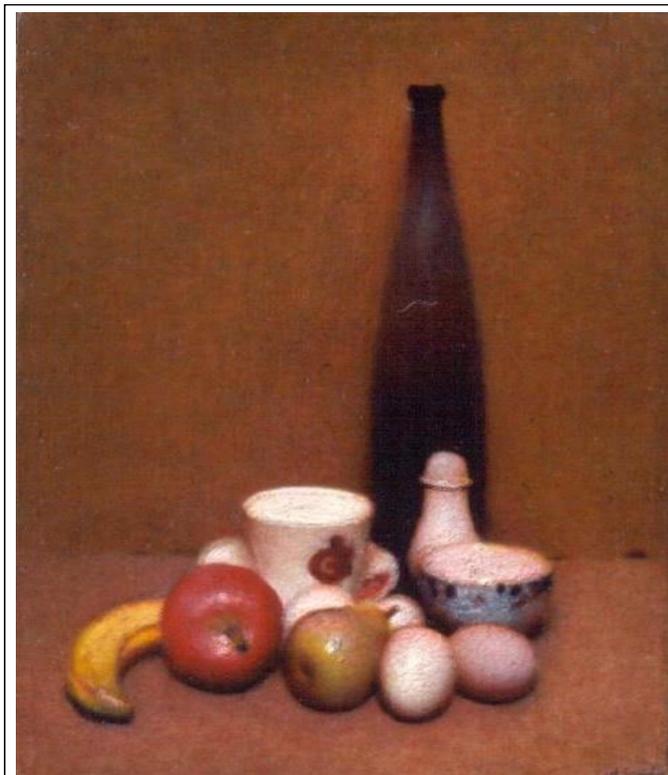
Carl Schmitt once remarked that “there are no longer any old masters because there are no longer any young disciples.” Yet Schmitt’s early work is precisely that of a young disciple. His representational style and choice of subjects (still life, portraits,

ing to develop a vision that would carry the heritage of the masters forward.

Most notable in this regard was his insight that great art, like greatness in a person, is the fruit of multiple stages of development, stages he termed lyric, epic, and dramatic. In art, that meant mastering the use of color, light, and form in a new way. “In effect,” recalls his son Carl Schmitt Jr., “he committed himself to being a disciple who had to learn by constant experiment as he worked to master those stages.”

His experiments through the lyric, epic, and dynamic stages were not random, but always ordered to his vision of a new art that would transcend the customary categories of classical (academic) and emotional (romantic) art. In a 1935 essay, “Hope for the Future of Art,” Schmitt foresaw “an art whose tone is intellectual. This does not mean, of course, a break with the emotional and classical tradition, because an artist weak in emotion and eager for social compromise can hardly support wisdom.” This wisdom, which both inspires and limits innovation, he termed “the ‘conscience’ of beauty.”

The still life pictured here may seem conventional, even derivative, but it is the fruit of his struggle to attain to that wisdom, in which we see not light and shadow but form and void. He is the forerunner in an age of transition, “when man painfully catches up to his prophets.” “However, the question remains, in any age, is not the idea of wisdom in the arts bound to be a rare thing?” — Samuel A. Schmitt



“I’m a visionary, an experimenter. I’m trying to extend the laws of painting; science has introduced hues the old masters never had. I tried to cope with hues and make them organic. That is impressionism, making forms which the old masters didn’t have.”

Newspaper interview, 1978

religious themes) follow the traditions of Western art. He lovingly studied the old masters, and indeed, he could have continued in this style, comfortably painting portraits for the comfortable. But far from a staunch guardian of tradition, Schmitt saw himself as an incessant experimenter, work-

I have turned my back upon the popular styles in an honest attempt to do something toward keeping our heritage of the Fine Arts alive.

Carl Schmitt

FEATURED PAINTING: SAINT KATHARINE

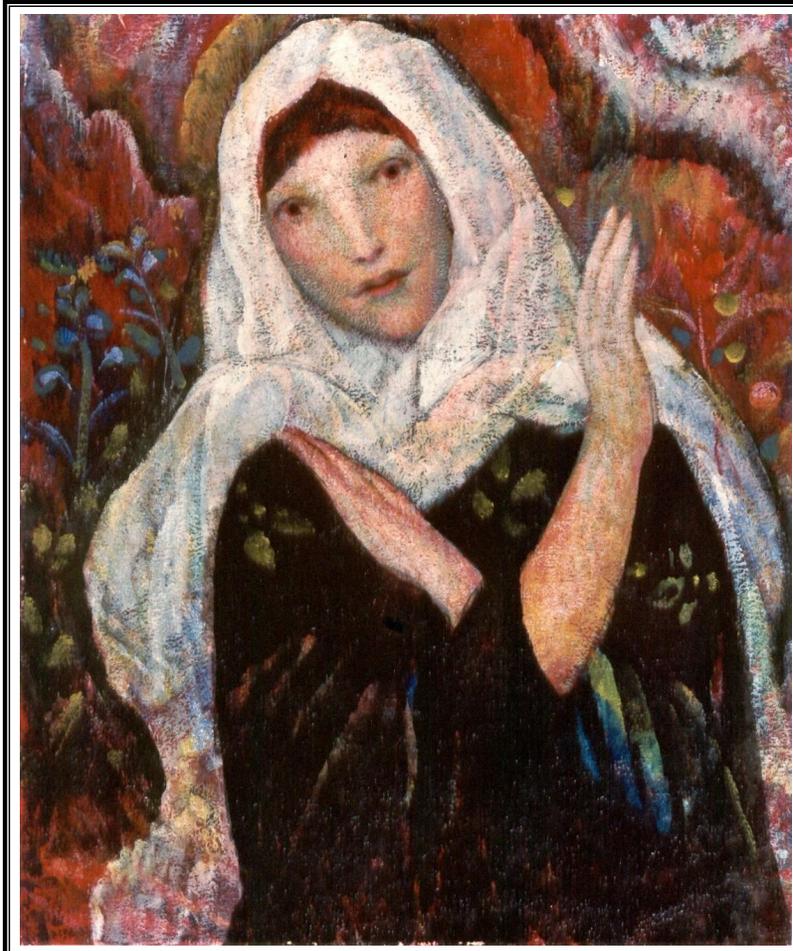
Jacob A. Schmitt

This extraordinary work was the favorite painting of Schmitt's wife Gertrude, who saw it as a likeness of St. Katharine of Alexandria and named it such.

One sees the artist's familiar techniques: the patterns of design, the beautiful handling of glossed-on highlights in the face, and especially in the white shawl against a background of a multicolored halo offering a crisp freshness to its "substantive" quality. One is struck by the exaggerated length of the crossing right arm; yet, if it were any other way, the mystical wonder and prayerful serenity brought about by the balance between arm and the tilt of the head would be lost. Here the crossing of the arms, although popularly conceived as Oriental, seems to counter the tilt of the decidedly Occidental head and the line of the nose.

The lack of articulation enhances the patterns of design. The viewer's eye moves up from the dark mystery of the body with crossed arms, takes in the entire pattern of the beautifully glazed-on color in the white shawl, and is held by the solemn face and intensity of the understanding eyes. There is a mystery of transcendence that shines through the material exposition of the whole picture, from the shimmering top-light in the background to the incandescent cloth.

This is perhaps the beginning of a quality seen in much of Schmitt's work which is rarely found in other artists. It is derived from an aesthetic imagination grounded in reality that is impregnated with a contemplative transcendent wonder.



There are several other developments of note in Schmitt's second stage that he carries out to a fuller degree in his later works. The first is the use of color to give shape to the form of things. Objects are not formed in monochrome and then glazed with color, as with the old masters. Nor is the color dabbed on as seen, as with the Impressionists. Rather, the objects themselves are formed with various colors. Through a process of long experimentation, the artist hit upon a way to build form with color.

Another development is his handling of color itself. All colors used in the picture are seen in every minute part of the picture, yet by a glossed modeling and cutting back to former layers of color, certain colors predominate in certain forms and certain places. Still another aesthetic development is seen here, that each color has a specific role. Even though Schmitt studied in Italy where the use of reds, greens, and blues predominate as "Italianate" preferences, he discovered that whites and yellows move forward to reveal visual shapes (form), blues and blue-greens recede to offer distance to surround form (space), and reds cut away to free form more clearly (voids).

Furthermore, in his thought, these three developmental aspects of form are related to the work of the Holy Trinity in the universe: the first as creation, the second as sanctification, and the third as redemption. All transcendent values, according to Schmitt, are revealed through the natural created order. From this time on all his paintings move through these three levels. The subject matter of the painting becomes almost secondary—whether transcendent, natural or even secular. The main concern is the pursuit of beauty—matter riven with spiritual qualities.

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

Beauty, I am convinced, is the revealing of design in its triune hierarchy: of form in its three planes, of light in its three intensities, of color in its three hues (luminosities), and the infinite action and reaction of one upon the other.

"The Aim of Painting," 1943

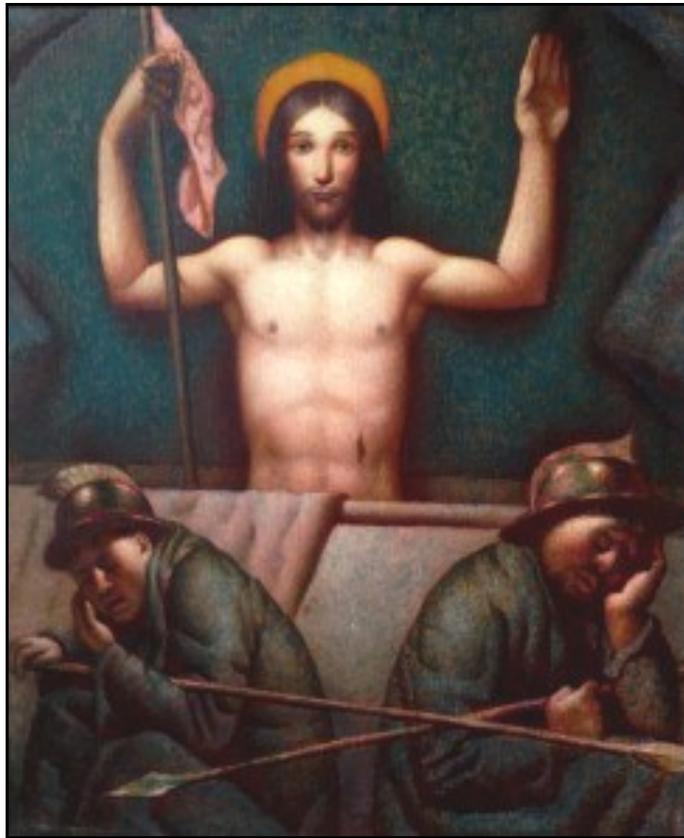
The Flowering of One's Roots Bridget Skidd

Bridget Skidd, a recent graduate of Thomas More College, writes on her search not only for a long-lost painting by her great-grandfather, Carl Schmitt, but for her place in the Catholic tradition. This article appeared originally on the TMC blog and is reprinted with permission.

It's not exactly 'The Road Not Taken' when one walks down Saint Giles' Street in Oxford. One can feel the hum of centuries of living and dying, England pondering, chattering, and murdering that have colored these streets. Man's history is a varied and often sordid thing, but nothing comes from nothing, and it is a great poverty to be without one's roots. Even with all the mistakes of those who have come before, it is still worth knowing and seeking out the past, especially for those times when the eternal beauty of God shines through a human life, even if only for one magnificent moment.

My stay in Oxford was to study the roots of the Catholic Literary Revival in England. As I walked the streets and read the texts of such Inklings as J. R. R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, as well as the authors that gave these men their foundations, such as John Henry Newman and G. K. Chesterton, I sought my own Catholic literary and theological foundations. I not only sought them on the grand scale, however; my meanderings among the cobblestones of Oxford were also pulled by my desire to investigate more personal foundations.

Through word of mouth I had heard that a painting by my great-grandfather, Carl Schmitt, was "somewhere in Oxford." With no



idea of the subject of the painting except that it was religious, and unsure of which of the many houses and colleges might be the home, I set out on my search. Little time in England will reveal the unpopularity of Roman Catholicism to this day, so I soon realized that a Catholic artist would be nowhere except in a stronghold of English Catholicism. This was a breakthrough for my search because, being so unpopular, the Catholics could only lay claim to three of the many halls and colleges within Oxford. We summer students were staying in one, St. Benet's Hall, and when I had searched this from top to bottom, only two remained.

In no time, we had a tour of another of the three, Campion Hall, named after the great English martyr priest St. Edmund Campion. As soon as I stepped in the door, I knew my paint-

ing must be there somewhere. Covering every available display space were priceless works of art from many corners of the world, the work of an amazing Jesuit priest, Father Martin D'Arcy. He had spent many years energetically gathering man's labors to give greater glory to God in art, including noting on sketches by Chesterton: "Father D'Arcy wants this."

After an inquiring word to our guide, he disappeared saying he might know what I was talking about, but had to check. He reappeared holding the very painting itself and I was surprised by the welling of excitement I felt. Seeing this painting of the Resurrection of Our Lord, I "heard" the familiar artistic

voice of my great-grandfather; although I had never seen this piece, I knew it to be his.

Finding this painting was more than a simple homecoming. This small fragment of the past was not simply part of my personal foundation. No, it was part of the unshakable reality of the Catholic Church, especially as I saw it in England.

Suddenly the ground upon which I stood became more solid. I saw that these ideas of Catholic heritage and tradition are not only lovely ideas, but they are real, and I am called to be a part of the story. I, like every other man, have my personal place in this Catholic family. Further, this place or foundation is through no virtue of my own, but the toil and then pure gift of those who have come before me, "in a world not vague, not lonely, not governed by me only" (Richard Wilbur).

*The Church keeps alive from day to day the tradition, the myth, which is eternally true.
Without the memory of the fall from paradise and the Redemption,
no apprehension of the Eternal happiness is possible to man.*

Notebook 22 (1960)

“The life of the soul and the life of the imagination”



As I dug out of one of many big snowstorms this past winter and the dense cover of snow quieted the relentless noise of daily life, my thoughts turned beyond the busyness of the everyday and the “useful.”

The artist, preoccupied with the “life of the soul,” offers us a reminder that our life is not—cannot be—limited to what our senses and feelings dictate to us moment by moment. When we find such a “temporal life” to be tolerable, comfortable, we risk losing the life of the soul, of the imagination.

“The life of the soul, the life of the imagination”—such could be our motto here at the Carl Schmitt Foundation. This is not to dismiss the workaday world. On the contrary, the Foun-

dation itself would not be possible without the tremendous generosity of many friends who earn their living in a world ordered almost exclusively to temporal. These donors are reinvigorated by Schmitt’s legacy—the timeless fruits of the imagination to which he dedicated his life’s work.

One such friend has generously pledged to match all unrestricted donations to the Carl Schmitt Foundation made until July 1, 2015 up to \$5,000. ***We ask you to match the generosity of this friend with your own contribution.*** You may use the enclosed envelope or give online at www.carlschmitt.org. Every dollar you give will be worth double to the CSF. Thank you for your support! 

An unusual snowfall today. Some of the flakes were 3 inches in diameter. They were rather wads of many flakes than single flakes. Soon turned to rain. Very dark.

Temporal life is only tolerable and is tolerated by us only when we have forgotten the life of the soul and the life of the imagination. The spiritual and imaginative life yield their thrills when temporal life is lost.

(Notebook 2, Saturday, November 29, 1924)

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