



## **Artists, the Church, and Leading through Creativity**

John Hendrix, Professor & Chair, MFA in Illustration &  
Visual Culture at Washington University in St. Louis

### **Session 1: What is art?**

What is art? What is Christian art? What about good Christian art? Professor Hendrix kicks off this course by asking these big questions and reorienting our understanding of art into one that considers both mystery and clarity

*When was the last time you had an encounter with beauty that moved you to ask the question, 'What does it all mean?'*

### **Key Terms**

**Art-making:** The enchanted intersection that combines mystery and clarity in new and interesting ways.

**Gestalt:** The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

### **Main Points**

- Art is a reflection of our understanding of the story we are telling.
- Evaluating art is about evaluating our idea for what art is supposed to be doing.
- Art embraces the enchanted intersection of mystery and clarity.
- The Bible captures and engages mystery and clarity in its parables, poetry, and stories.
- Engaging with art, including God's art, requires a willingness to wonder.
- When we engage with art through the lens of the Gospel, mystery and clarity can reflect the truth of the new creation in Christ.



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### **Session 1: What is art? (cont.)**

#### **Content Questions**

- What image comes to mind when you think of an artist? What about a Christian artist?
- What are some of your favorite examples of art? What about Christian art?
- Which buckets of the “enchanted intersection between mystery and clarity” feel more accessible to you? Which feels more difficult to embrace? Why do you think that is?
- Professor Hendrix says that art is a conduit for seeing as someone else does. How can we use this framework to understand those outside of the church? How can we use it to express our understanding of the story of the gospel?

#### **Application Questions**

- How does this framework of art as mystery and clarity compare with the way you see art talked about in your Christian community? How could the Church lead others to experience the story of God’s love through art? Spend some time considering the perceptions of art that are reflected in your communities.
- Who are the artists in your Christian community? What is their involvement in the church if any?



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### **Session 2: The Why of Art-making**

Why make art at all? Who is it for? Professor Hendrix explores the why of art and provides some practical examples of how Christians can engage with art and better understand the character of God through participating in art-making.

*Good theology requires  
great imagination.*

### **Key Terms**

Offices of personality: Three entities you engage with as Christian—yourself, others, and God.

Play: The act of doing something simply for the sake of enjoyment, with no desired outcome and no “wrong” way to engage.

### **Main Points**

- God, in art, made a vessel that is able to communicate something to humanity that can be said in no other way.
- God is a maker, and because we are made in his image, we are makers (or, in Tolkien’s words, “sub-creators”), too.
- Art can be seen as one or all of three things: artifact, process, and experience.
  - Artifacts are what the art is; a painting, a sculpture, a drawing, etc.
  - Art as a process is a way of making things, often called design thinking.
  - Art can be an experience, such as an installation, that captures the imagination of those going through it.



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### **Session 2: The Why of Art-making (cont.)**

#### **Content Questions**

- How have you seen art connect God, others, and yourself?
- Professor Hendrix says that humans are designed to be makers. How does this manifest in your life?
- Have you found yourself in the pit of despair? Did you come through? If yes, how? How can we encourage others that the pit is normal?
- What do you enjoy making? Does your day-to-day work reflect that?

#### **Application Questions**

- What space, if any, does your Christian community make for play? How could you lead others to engage in God's "secret Elvish," as Professor Hendrix puts it, in a way that engages all three offices of personality?
- Consider keeping a sketchbook! Start with a week. Maybe encourage some others in your Church to join you and talk about how the experience of drawing changes your perception of things.



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### **Session 3: The How of Art-making**

How can the Church engage in art? What can be done to utilize the gifts of all believers in our worship? In this final session, Professor Hendrix encourages Churches to find ways to express “unusual beauty,” and assures us that investing in art-making is not a zero-sum game.

*How do we use art in  
the Church, besides  
liturgical banners?*

#### **Key Terms**

**Gesamtkunstwerk:** Total art; making use of multiple forms and many different aspects of art-making to achieve its goals.

**Sacred-Secular Schism:** Francis Schaeffer’s observation that in modern human minds have been taught to divide into two parts: the sacred upper story and the secular lower story.

**Total Worship:** Including the gifts of every believer into the process of worship.

#### **Main Points**

- To engage in “total art,” the Church must confront the sacred-secular schism that keeps many from believing that the Church can and should be a vessel for beauty.
- The Church should seek to include diverse artistic voices, and artists should guard against being snobs and elites.
- Artifacts in the church can express unusual beauty that activate the visual presence of the worship space.
- Investing in the process of art-making means the Church can create a community that makes things together.
- In engaging in art as experience, the Church can create surprising and beautiful encounters.
- The framework of artifacts, process, and experience map onto the persons of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



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### **Session 3: The How of Art-making (cont.)**

#### **Content Questions**

- What examples have you experienced of “total art”?
- How do you see the sacred/secular schism in daily life?
- What examples of “unusual beauty” come to mind for you?
- What could a “maker community” in your church look like?

#### **Application Questions**

- What’s next? Spend some time considering how what you’ve learned about art from these sessions could apply to your Christian community. What conversations could you have about starting to invest in artifacts, process, and experience? What steps can you take to help lead your church closer to “total worship,” using the gifts of all the believers?
- Identify one small step your Christian community can take to integrate art in its “total worship” experience. Make a plan to take that step toward incorporating the gifts of all the believers.