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Culture: Art

Matt Andrade - a God-haunted artist

Matt Andrade of Massachusetts is one of those visual artists laboring in semi-obscurity. He doesn't paint pictures of a blue-eyed Jesus or people rapt in prayer or little children traipsing among the lions and lambs in a new Eden - he paints pictures of cars, and guns, and cathedrals placed in strange landscapes



Matt Andrade

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by Mark Butterworth

Despite what some critics might say about religious people and intelligence, there is a Christian cognoscenti that discerns quality among different kinds of contemporary literature, art, theater, and music.

And while Berean bookstores are filled with religious kitsch and radio stations blast songs of pop Christ or arena Jesus anthems much to the derision of the irreligious, what is frequently overlooked are the hundreds upon hundreds of serious Christian artists in all fields who maintain the great tradition of producing inspired works devoted to illustrating the profound depths of spiritual experience and discovery.

It was my pleasure to discover such an artist through the internet whose work I was able to appreciate at first glance.

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Matt changed high schools as a sophomore to study art under Charles Andres at Berwick Academy. Mr. Andres studied under Harvey Dunn who was a part of group of illustrators called the Brandywine Artists which included N.C. Wyeth (father of Andrew, grandfather of Jamie), Maxfield Parrish, and the illustrator Howard Pyle. An impressive tradition within American art.

His work has a haunting quality, often an ominous undertone; images not terribly riddling or clever puzzles

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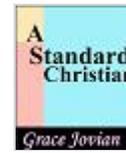
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A Standard Christian: Book Review

meant to be decoded, but symbols held in tension against one another. It is that *frisson* which energizes his canvases and draws the viewer in to contemplate their meaning.



A Standard Christian -
Looking beneath the
surface to a
disturbing subculture

His Cathedral series in particular evokes the power of symbol in an era in which symbols have become trivialized by the exploitation of advertising, politics, academia and criticism, and artists hostile to any and all important symbols in art and daily life.

I wonder when looking at some of the stuff that's being done now if it isn't a spiritual impasse. Especially a lot of what's shock art, the direct descendants of pop art, a lot of it is very nihilistic; trashing the ideas of the culture. It's not even iconoclastic; it's taking the artist's hatred of the bourgeois to the nth degree. What that seems to show is a real lack of hope, spirituality, and originality.

It is refreshing to see that his cathedrals, set in strange locations, resonate profoundly with the human need for both transcendence and reverence, and must affect any viewer who is not wholly committed to cynicism with a sense of the **underlying mystery of being**.

It's Andrade's seriousness and thoughtful quality which has helped him gain local attention in Malden not far from Boston, and also earned an inquiry from a gallery in Los Angeles. Since turning full time to painting two years ago, he is hopeful that the income he is earning from his canvases and giclee (zhee - clay) prints will be able to sustain him and his family.

I asked Matt about whether he considers himself a Christian artist who is making a covert religious appeal to others through his work.

"If I were an engineer who was a Christian would I remotely hope to convert somebody through a bridge?" he says, adding, "I know that nobody's going to look at one of my Cathedrals and say, 'I've just had an epiphany! I'm going to follow God now.' But, of course, anyplace where there's going to be my paintings it's going to have a bio, an artist's statement they can read and it's going to say he does this, explaining the things he sees in general, sees in our society in terms of what happens with spirituality, and in his own life, and they'll go, 'Oh, okay that makes sense.' And maybe they'll think about it a little more. And for somebody who's completely isolated from me, that'd actually be pretty good if it happened. The ability to affect people in that manner is very difficult, and if I can produce an image that is beautiful and thought provoking, that's not just a pretty picture but has some substance to it -- that's just a wonderful thing."

His joy in self-expression which made him take the risk in middle age to quit his job and devote himself to painting is in large part because of his faith and understanding of God's nature.

"What makes you want to do art? My conviction is that

we're all meant by God to be creative in one way or another. God made the world. We can remake it. We are created in his image. Everyone innately is creative," Andrade says.

"I'm not going to create a painting that converts the whole world that we are all made in God's image, conversion doesn't work that way, but I hope as an artist I can first raise my kids to understand what creativity is so they can bring the most out of themselves, but also the other people around me, and infuse them with the inherent level of hope that being creative is being in the nature of God," he adds.

Finally, Andrade recognizes an essentially happy truth, "The Christian message is very simple in what it is, but not that easy to apply to life. Life is hard. If you want to live a godly life, that's hard, too. Anytime you try to bring about a visual message that's based on spirituality that doesn't take into account the difficulty -- it's going to be very flat."

Andrade's work accurately reflects this understanding. It has the depth of the oceanic reservoir which is truth and the desire to know it.

Matt Andrade's [Homepage](#)

John Mark Butterworth is married and has a teenage daughter. He's been writing for 30 years - plays, novels, essays, poetry. He also composes music - rock, classical, jazz, sacred and plays guitar and a few other instruments. He's the author of [Brightness Springs: A parable](#), and writes at [Sunny Days in Heaven](#).



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