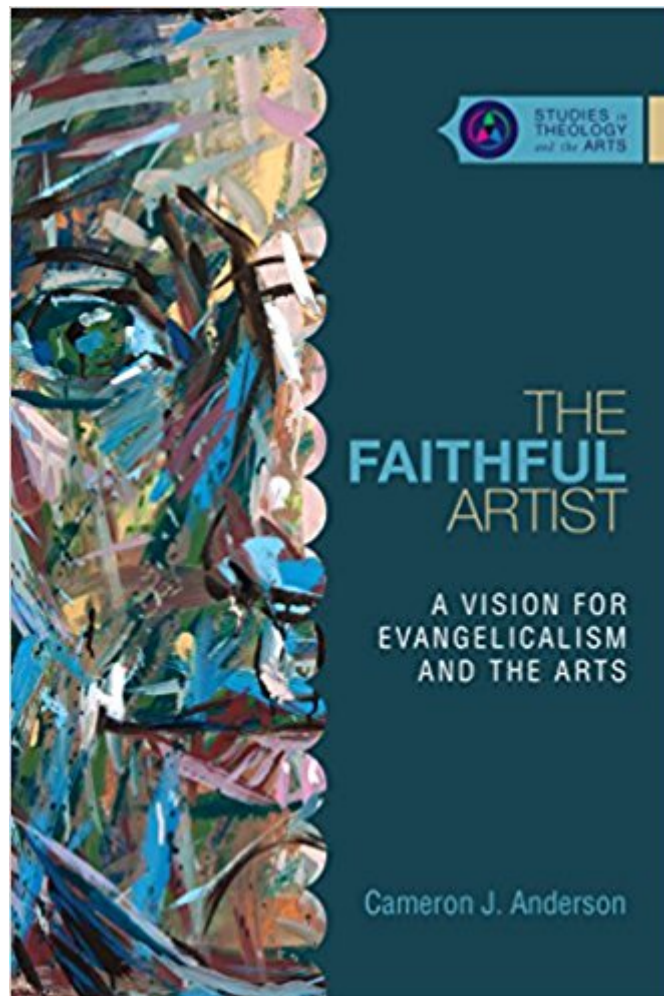




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# The Faithful Artist: A Vision For Evangelicalism And The Arts (Studies In Theology And The Arts)



## Synopsis

The tension between Christianity and the arts is often real. But it also offers a false dichotomy. Many Christian artists think that they must choose between their faith and their artistic calling. Drawing upon his experiences as both a Christian and a practicing artist, Cameron J. Anderson explores the dynamics of faith and art in this latest volume in IVP Academic's Studies in Theology and the Arts series. Tracing the relationship between evangelicalism and modern art in postwar America—two entities that often found themselves at odds with each other—Anderson raises several issues that confront artists. With skill, sensitivity and insight, he considers questions such as the role of our bodies and our senses in our experience of the arts, the relationship between text and image, the persistent dangers of idolatry, the possibility of pursuing God through an encounter with beauty and more. Throughout this study, Anderson's principal concern is how Christian artists can faithfully pursue their vocational calling in contemporary culture. Readers will find here not only an informed and thoughtful response, but also a vision that offers guidance and hope.

## Book Information

Series: Studies in Theology and the Arts

Paperback: 283 pages

Publisher: IVP Academic (November 10, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0830850643

ISBN-13: 978-0830850648

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #602,380 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #244 in Books > Arts &

Photography > History & Criticism > Themes > Religious #509 in Books > Arts & Photography

> Study & Teaching #1337 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Social

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## Customer Reviews

"Cam Anderson has read a lot of good books and that's part of what makes this book so rich and rewarding. But, far more importantly, this book represents a lifelong engagement with the arts and a deep faithfulness to Anderson's roots in the evangelical church. So this is a personal book in the

best possible sense. It is, to quote Eugene Peterson, evidence of 'a long obedience in the same direction.'" (Gregory Wolfe, editor, Image)"Cam Anderson's vision inspires, challenges and encourages me. He is wise about creativity, faithful about imagination and provocative about beauty. We are invited into a deeper humanity and a greater faithfulness to the Artist who made us. I am so grateful for this book and believe many other readers will be too!" (Mark Labberton, president, Fuller Theological Seminary)"This is a thoughtful, remarkable book that will help evangelical Christians face their history of shunning modern art. As a convinced follower of Jesus Christ, Anderson lovingly laments the past evangelical practice of pitting binary opposites against one another: soul against body, word against image, church ministry against being an artist. Anderson shows how the millennia of church history and a fresh biblical stance can overcome these polarities. Through his writing, which is extremely well researched and gives evidence of many years of wide reading, he convincingly shows how visual culture can be central to piety and how artistry is a worthy occupation for believers. This work is exciting, people friendly, deeply faithful and wise." (Calvin Seerveld, professor emeritus of philosophical aesthetics, Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto)"From the perspective of his longtime dual residency in both the modern art world and the evangelical church, my good friend Cam Anderson is uniquely qualified to lead evangelicals and artists to understand and love one another. As I encountered a wide range of modern art in his book (Manet, Monet, Newman, Rothko, Warhol, Pollock and many others) I experienced a sense of wonder at the power and elegance of work that I had not noticed or appreciated before. For Christians seeking an aesthetic adventure in the modern art world and for Christian artists working to fulfill their God-given vocation, this book provides excellent guidance from one who is a faithful Christian and a gifted artist." (Walter Hansen, professor emeritus of New Testament interpretation, Fuller Theological Seminary, author of commentaries on the New Testament, coauthor of Through Your Eyes)"Cam Anderson's The Faithful Artist is the most probing analysis ever written on the roots of the negative attitude of twentieth-century evangelicals toward the visual arts. Anderson knows evangelicalism from the inside. What greatly enhances his analysis is that it is set within the context of a broad, deep and sympathetic understanding of developments in the world of the visual arts in the twentieth century. The book reaches its climax with an eloquent, biblically based appeal to evangelicals to engage the visual arts, both as creators and as viewers. We have needed this very book for a long time." (Nicholas Wolterstorff, Noah Porter Professor Emeritus of Philosophical Theology, Yale University, senior research fellow, Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, University of Virginia, honorary research professor, Australian Catholic University)"In The Faithful Artist Cam Anderson extends an intellectual welcome to readers who may feel that modern and

contemporary art are an exclusive party, a private conversation for an artistic elite. By skillfully unpacking cultural factors leading to the modernist rejection of traditional artistic forms, he reveals some of the reasons for art's estrangement from educated laypersons. Anderson then clarifies for Christians why art still matters in the midst of tensions between traditional religious belief and modern aesthetic sensibility. "In issuing a compelling call for artists to rediscover their accountability and calling within the body of Christ, broken afresh for the life of the world. Additionally he makes a vital argument for why the church needs art and artists, providing genuine answers for how these might once again find their way into healthy communion with one another." (Bruce Herman, Lothian Distinguished Chair in Fine Arts, Gordon College) "In this detailed overview and synthesis, Cameron Anderson opens up the mysteries of contemporary art, describing how works of art may operate as lenses through which to view the seen and unseen within culture. This illuminating book allows the double foci on faith and art to converge, introducing us to the worldview of the Ultimate Artist." (Luci Shaw, poet, writer in residence, Regent College, author of *Thumbprint in the Clay*) "An engaging and carefully researched summation of where Christian faith and visual art have been and where they may be headed. Artists are invited to take a seat at a wedding feast where binary opposition withers and an enriched complexity emerges. Observing how conviction and restless longing coexist in 'the faithful artist,' Anderson sets out to illuminate a way forward." (Lynn Aldrich, artist, Guggenheim Fellow)

Cameron J. Anderson (MFA, Cranbrook Academy of Art) is an artist and the executive director of Christians in the Visual Arts (CIVA). Prior to joining CIVA, he served on the staff of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship for thirty years, most recently as the national director for graduate and faculty ministries. He lectures frequently on the arts, media, advertising and contemporary culture, and he coedited, with Sandra Bowden, *Faith and Vision: Twenty-five Years of Christians in the Visual Arts*.

I picked this book up in a bookstore, and got so engrossed reading it that I bought it. As I write, three people have given it five stars. Five people could give it three stars. One of the blurbs in the front of the book notes that the author has read a lot of books. What he takes from them is fascinating, but what is more fascinating is what he takes from his life, as lived at the collision of faith and art. Books like this always raise questions for me. Who is this book for? I'll answer that myself. I'd say it's for younger people who did not grow up in what he calls the post WW II Evangelical subculture. To the degree that he tells his own story, it's quite interesting. Where, in my opinion, books like this overreach is in cutting far too wide swaths and taking too great leaps of

history. I think it is a mistake to be talking about modernism and then bring in postmodernism (without defining it), not bothering to note they are 100 years apart. Or to mention Walt Whitman and Jack Kerouac in the same sentence (who are also 100 years apart). It was inevitable that the author would resort to shop talk either on the Evangelical front or about the art scene. In this case, it's the latter. I wondered when he would bring in Marshall McLuhan, the Catholic Canadian media 'guru' who coined phrases like "The medium is the message". But when he did mention him, it was one sentence in passing, as if we all knew who he was (I'm guessing some of us don't). Perhaps he makes an appearance later on, but the first meeting is the best time for introductions. If you ask me why this book is like that, it's a problem of editing, which all recent books seem to have, and also because this book, like most good books is a series of essays. Publishers don't like essays, so they insist that the authors pad them and pass them off as a book. For myself, I'd rather the padding was pulled out and I could read the terse, gripping essays, however brief (and brief does not bother me--would that this book was half as long). If someone were to stand in a store and read this (like I did), I'd suggest the chapter, "People of the Book and the Image" and probably the finale chapter. Now I play my hand. I'm a recent Catholic convert. The tortured tone that Evangelicals always have in writing about art is because they have no theology to support them. Catholics have sacramental theology. The seven sacraments are the primary means of grace, but they also view the entire universe and the realm of Creation sacramentally. Man may be fallen, but creation is still good. We are physical beings. Thus the candles, incense, stained glass windows, carved crucifixes, and bouquets of flowers in Catholic worship. A book like this cannot help but retread ground, and I list a few companion books below. But what it offers is an exploration. There are numerous black and white photos of artworks, and a few color plates, not exactly to support a thesis by the author, but to bring the reader into the discussion on the same page, as it were. Also copious footnotes, both to reference works cited, and provide a helpful gloss to the text. There's a very good quote from Jaroslav Pelikan, for instance, in a footnote. The author is at his best in presenting us with an artwork or artist, and helping us to consider it or them from his own viewpoint or experience. The fire is strongest in this book when the artist in the author takes hold of the pen and beats down the academic (who he likely has to wrest it from). The subtitle of this book greatly resembles an excellent (and rather simpler) book by Steve Turner entitled "Imagine: A Vision for Christians in the Arts" also published by InterVarsity Press. My title for this review is the title of a book by British artist and musician, Steve Scott (who is also or has been a member of CIVA). As for the sacramental aesthetic, the very best writer on the topic was an Evangelical and became a Catholic, so his writing displays the best of both worlds. I refer to the inimitable Thomas Howard, author of many

apologetics books, but I here refer to "Chance or the Dance" and "On Being Catholic".

The world of modern art, and the world of faith, particularly evangelical Christian faith have often been at odds with, or not even in conversation with each other. This is the challenge the author has wrestled with since his teenage years as an aspiring artist who embraced the evangelical faith in which he was raised. In the introduction, he describes his own struggle with the absence of mentors, the disregard of his church for the visual arts, and the parallel hostility toward religious faith he encountered in the art world. Much of this work explores the tensions between evangelical faith and modern art. Anderson contends that these collisions of faith and art may "reveal a third way, a great vista where biblical and theological reflection—especially the doctrines of creation and incarnation—become the wellspring of inspiration." Each of his chapters includes models of this kind of biblical and theological reflection that serve, not to give definitive answers, but to point other artists who wrestle with the same tensions toward this "third way" in the practice of their art. Indeed, his conclusion is an invitation to both the church and artists to embrace this work, and for artists to give themselves as called people to the work of culture-making and good studio practice. He writes, "the artists whom most of us deem to be successful share a common trait—they do the work. At some point they set aside romantic ideas about being an artist to the side and commenced doing the artist's work. Arriving at this place requires one to accept delayed gratification, the awkwardness that is sure to come from making bad art and the reality of negative cash flow. Pushing beyond distraction and discouragement, they accomplished something Herculean—they pushed beyond musing and imagining to establish regular studio practices, to take on habits of making" (p. 252). Cameron Anderson is executive director of Christians in the Visual Arts (CIVA) and what he offers in this book is nothing less than an analysis of the recent history of the visual arts and the challenges and opportunities for Christians who are called to work in this field.

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from the publisher . I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own.

The Faithful Artist is far more than an exploration of issues Christians have encountered as they have intersected the visual art world in the last 50 years — although it is that. It is a tour de force of Western cultural in the late 20th and early 21st century. Anderson writes with insight

and uses his broad knowledge of art and writing to raise thought provoking questions about taste, truth, beauty, faith, and the place artists have in shaping/making our world. I'm personally thankful for challenges the book had for me.

Loved this book. This is a much needed historical perspective and interaction with art history alongside the Evangelical response to faith in this history and where we are now, but this book offers much more in terms of a freeing hope for artists to engage with all their sensibilities to create visual art within a Christian based worldview. Anderson finishes last chapters challenging artists of faith by asking 6 questions for reflection. There is wisdom from years of walking this road himself as an artist and academic. Highly recommend.

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