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Faith Shapes My Design

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Faith Shapes My Design

Abstract

"Make art that's so good, the world can't ignore you."

Posting about true Christian art from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/faith-shapes-my-design/>

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

Faith Shapes My Design

▫ inallthings.org/faith-shapes-my-design/

Mark Volkers

Are you involved in the arts?

Are you a Christian?

If you answered “yes” to both of those questions, it’s inevitable that you’re going to get involved at some point with the discussion, “What is Christian art?”

The pendulum swings wide on this one.

At one end, some say, “it’s Christian art if it depicts something that is biblical or obviously ‘churchy.’ You know, Bible verses, crosses, prophets, halos, and such.” (Commence eye rolling for many Christians at this point.)

Oscillating to the other end, we get the “all art is Christian art if you want it to be, because, you know, Kuyper’s ‘every-square-inch’ and all that.” (Let many others commence eye rolling).

Somewhere between these two lies a healthy balance, but I wonder sometimes if we’re asking the wrong question.

Instead of examining the art and looking for tell-tale signs that it’s “Christian,” wouldn’t it be healthier to ask, “Is the artist a Christian?”

What I like about this question is it now frees us to stop looking for crosses and steeples and Bible verses and instructions on salvation and dialogue that’s preachy and WWJD bracelets on an actor’s wrist and ubiquitous white doves that symbolically mean something and background music with a message and all the other things we’ve come to expect in our Christian art, and just focus on the art.

If I know that a painter is madly in love with Jesus, I can assume that his water-color of a plant is Christian art because someone madly in love with Jesus can’t help but paint to His glory.

If I know a filmmaker is a Christian, I can enjoy the film about falling in love and revel in the filmmaker’s mastery of the medium, because she’s doing her storytelling to the honor of God, even if she never once mentions God in the film.

I can hold a clay vase and know that this artifact—this clay turned into a useful thing—is glorifying to God because it was made with Him in mind. It is Christian art.

As someone who works in the medium of film and video, I find it disconcerting for people to assume I’m not creating Christian art because my films aren’t full of Bible verses or don’t contain the shadow of a cross falling across someone’s face at a crucial moment.

Isn’t a constant striving to get better, to perform with excellence and to be a culture maker because of one’s love of Jesus, isn’t that enough?

Would changing the question to “Is the artist a Christian?” instead of “Are there Christian elements in the art?” help us focus more on the beauty or functionality of the art for its own sake?

This is liberating to the artist. The artist can confidently weave, quilt, paint, sculpt, write, and shoot for God’s glory, because if art is truly created for His glory, it is *de facto* Christian art.

Martin Luther said it well: “The Christian shoemaker does his duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship.”

The world is also interested in good craftsmanship. As Christian artists who want to impact the world, just doing something for God’s glory doesn’t mean it’s going to succeed. There are piles of “Christian films” that were commercial disasters and panned by the critics because the producers had good hearts but no skill or understanding of the medium. To go back to Luther, they made bad shoes.

The world will notice our art when it’s done with excellence. Craftsmanship and excellence is a megaphone to those who love the medium of the artist. Excellence builds a platform to speak from. As followers of Jesus, let’s perform with excellence by focusing on our craft for His glory and not worrying so much about making our stuff “Christian.”

Someone asked comedian and actor Steve Martin what they would have to do to succeed in the rough and tumble of Hollywood.

Martin’s brilliant answer was, “Be so good they can’t ignore you.”¹

Christian artist: Make art that’s so good, the world can’t ignore you.

Footnotes

1. Martin, S. (2007). *Born Standing Up—A Comic’s Life*. Scribner. ↩