

PROLOGUE:
CALLING TO WORSHIP

The impulse to consider art, theology, and religious ritual together began early. Roller-skating or biking past my beloved Bethesda by the Sea Episcopal Church, I would drink in its reassuring presence while the memory of the minister's benediction, "The peace of God which passes all understanding..." caressed my soul.¹

Stop, see, and be. That is what I did. Whether through a fleeting tryst in the formal gardens, a stolen peak through a side door, a contrived excursion to choir practice with my brothers, or a moment caught by the wonder of Sunday worship, my head and heart dwelt in this lofty and shimmering place. Bethesda by the Sea loomed large in contrast to the extravagant abundance of little flowers and lush landscape that anchored it. Inside, the radiance of sun-drenched colored glass coupled with the enormity of dazzling sound conspired in worship to conjure up within me a notion that God was real and resided in this place.

Drawing, painting, or building models from scratch, my self-understanding as artist emerged early. How proud I was of my stagecoach, its intricate turnings fashioned from flat strips of balsa wood, its shiny red sides and black spoked wheels the consequence of many sandings and reapplication of Testors paint. When I copied a picture of a princess three times its original size, in comparable format, my mother complimented me so extravagantly that it galvanized a way of thinking about shifting scales. Showered with supplies while simultaneously buoyed by parental encouragement, my aptitude for transcending materials grew. So did my enthrallment. In time, God and place played out as a conviction that the Holy is ushered in through the mysterious alchemy of manipulated materials. Intricately tied to praise and awe, my attempts at creating art became stabs at making those remembered moments of childhood visible. This conviction wrought long ago keeps me in its clutch.

Alongside this reality rests two others, just as potent: one propels me to the studio, the other to worship. Obliquely caught within each of my constructions rests the reverberating markings by which I manage the din of daily coping. In the guise of veiled metaphors for living, my works chart turbulent territory. Through the reconfiguration of materials, I work through the joys and sorrows of living. The makings of my works are forged from creative processes that happen to tug and pull in the direction of belief. Because these processes resonate with the truth of the church's proclamations, they continually call me back to it.

Despite contemporary culture's bias for the autonomy of the artist and her art, I view the art-making enterprise as relational. My work is incomplete

¹ Bethesda by the Sea Episcopal Church is located in Palm Beach, Florida.

until it arrives and lives within the community that commissioned it. Born out of religious community, the work exists for the sake of spiritual community. All I know is that I must create it, all the while striving that it be more than mere illustration and propaganda. The judgment of its merits or lack thereof is someone else's task.

These attempts at making the unseen visible, marking my daily coping, and charting correspondences between my creative process and the church's proclamations comprise a working triad in which one aspect interpenetrates and enhances the other. This complexity not only issues forth in my works but also quickens, by analogy, my appreciation for the possibility of a God characterized by a Triune construction. Predictably, I and oftentimes some of my work land in worship.