



WABASH CENTER

For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



Art Theology - Expanding our Idea of God

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Blog Series: Re/Kindling Creativity and Imagination

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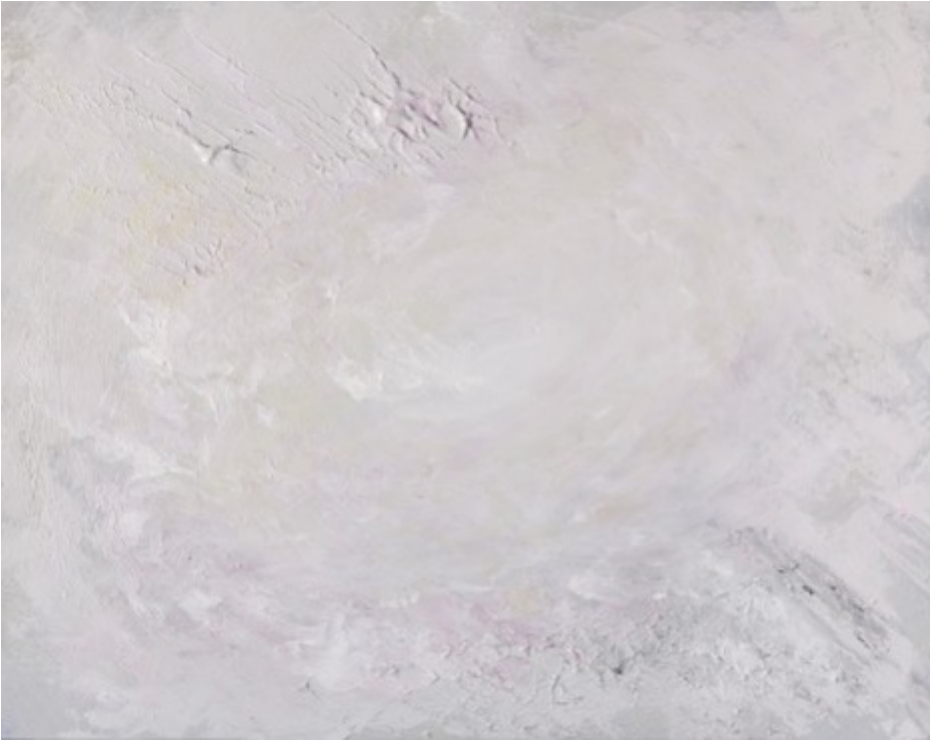
Who or what is God?

Words can only say so much about who God is or what God isn't. Thankfully our thinking isn't limited to words. Through Art Theology -- using the creative languages of the arts -- we can form new ideas, questions, and perceptions about God.

Let the words go and think in color. Thinking back to the very first ideas of God you ever had, what color comes to mind?

Gray...

Gray was the color of the beard of the old man in the sky, the first image I had of God the Father. Gray was the color of the clouds he sat on. In painting this first idea, I used cold, dark, black grays illustrating the vast remoteness of this idea of God. I began incorporating yellows and whites and softening places within the gray, creating warmth in the painting. As I did so I recalled my childhood struggle to comprehend how this cold, dark, mysterious God also made me and loved me unconditionally.



The Cloud of Unknowing

Angela L. Hummel

11x14 Acrylic on Wood

My concept of God changed when I was introduced to the idea of Jesus and the idea of God's personal love. The gray remains but softens even more and I introduce an abstract brown line. God's love expressed through Jesus felt so intimate and personal that I have at times a sense of knowing the nook of his neck, of having rested my head upon that shoulder line. Yet, I could not tell you what his eyes or nose look like. In some ways I do not know him at all. In other ways, that personal love of God is the most real thing in my experience.



Personal Love

Angela L. Hummel

11x14 Acrylic on Wood

Stepping back and looking at the first two paintings I felt a new question arising. I was physically uncomfortable as I reflected on how masculinely gendered my ideas of God had been. No matter what we think and understand theologically about God language, we carry these memories in our bodies. I felt myself reaching for new colors and lines: purples, blues, gold, and undulating lines. This next painting incorporates my reflections on Shekinah. Both women and men are made in the image of God. The divine feminine reveals a love that conceives, gestates, labors, births, nurtures, and sustains.



Shekinah

Angela L. Hummel

11x14 Acrylic on Wood

God is love. This love is mysterious, personal, intimate, boundaried, male, female, non-binary, fluid like water, beyond our comprehension.

How can we reflect the love of God and learn to love in this dynamic way? Regardless of bodily function, all of us can learn to love more deeply by reflecting on how love conceives, gestates, labors, births, and sustains.

The Christian focus on moral theology has led to judgmentalism that has caused some people to reject religion. Why don't we devote as much attention to Christian love -- what this love is and how we live it? We need new ways of exploring this vast idea. We need Art Theology.

Art Theology has helped me to move away from a monologic pedagogy into a dialogic way of teaching. When my students paint the colors and lines of their thinking about God they move into new ideas, questions, and dialogue that discursive reasoning alone could not take us into. The understandings that we have arrived at through this method have transformed my classroom into a dynamic place of collaboration where together we have learned to see God as truly other, for who God is, not constrained by our previous limited definitions and arguments.

Shekinah

Caress the line of her curves
with the
palm of my heart.

Shekinah

Shades of blue waxing and waning
Through my fingertips
along the side
of my body
pulsating strongly
on her waist, on my waist,
waists.

Streaks of golden light
illuminate our way.

Follow her
undulating
lines
like a map.

Place the ear of my heart on her womb.
home.

She houses a constant irritant.
She miscarries love, but knows how to let go
and to just let the blood flow.

Or
she grows it into a pearl.

What my heart heard:

"Can you learn
to take something
that causes you pain
and discern it?"

Whether to let it go or
to grow it inside of you
for 10 months
and turn it into
something exquisite?

Try it,
take it in,
feed it every day,
transform it,
plan for the best -
what do you dream you can turn it into?
Imagine holding it in your arms
giving it a room in your home.

Rub your cheek against this breast
Can you smell the milk ready to burst forth and nourish?"

Her body is ready to nurse
there is a buzzing in the back of her mind
pressure building in her neck and shoulders
all she wants is release.

Latching on - her whole being

drops
into
milk,

nourishing.

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