

FAITH AND ART

Professor J.E. Ziegler

Fall 2000

This seminar explores the ways in which art—and the practice of looking at art—can play a central role in the creation of a meaningful spiritual life. This is not a course on religious art per se, although we will look at how sacred images have been used as devotional and spiritual stimuli. This course is more concerned with us, with the contemporary spectator and with the implications of learning how to look at works of art *closely and carefully*. The foundation of such looking is habitualized practice, the daily repetitive work of seeing one thing over and over again.

The hypothesis I am forwarding in this seminar is that this sort of looking—daily, repetitive, and highly skilled—is a contemplative practice; it develops ‘awareness’ and ‘mindfulness,’ the hallmarks which for centuries in world religions have been vital signs of meaningful spiritual experiences. Emersonian pragmatism (Walden Pond) and even ‘new age’ stress reduction therapy are founded on developing ‘awareness.’

Our readings, therefore, are about how ‘mindfulness’ and ‘awareness’ are conceived in different traditions, from Benedictine spirituality to Jon Kabat-Zinn’s stress reduction theories. In the final part of the course, for comparison with our own findings we will read writers on art who view art, or who interpret art, as a form of spiritual experience.

In addition to the readings, the basis of your work is *practice itself*. Every student will take up some activity in which habitualized practice is the foundation, as long as that activity has to do with creativity, for example, painting, playing a musical instrument, or writing poetry. This aspect of the course will be worked out in consultation with me. The goal here is to experience theory in and through practice. The final paper will discuss this experience, share your findings, and, ultimately, advance your opinion on the degree to which the course has achieved its goals.

*Please note that every seminar will begin with a few moments of silence. Please arrive on time for us to do this as a group.

August 29: Introduction

September 6: J.E. Ziegler, “Practice Makes Reception: The Role of Contemplative Ritual in Approaching Art,” forthcoming in Tom Landy, ed. *Vocation and the Intellectual Life* (Franklin, Wisc.: Sheed & Ward, 2001); and Ziegler, “‘Wonders to Behold’ and Skillful Seeing: Art History and the Mission Statement,” forthcoming in *Conversations*. The xerox copies will be distributed in class.

September 13: Esther de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of Saint Benedict* (The Liturgical Press, 1984).

September 20: de Waal (con't)

September 27: Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are* (Hyperion Press, 1995).

October 4: Josef Pieper, *Only the Lover Sings: Art and Contemplation* (Ignatius Press, 1990).

October 11: John Drury, *Painting the Word: Christian Pictures and Their Meaning* (Yale University Press, 1999).

October 18: Drury (con't).

October 25: Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne* (Fromm International Press, 1988).

November 1: Rilke (con't).

November 8: Presentations of work

November 15: Presentations of work

November 22: Thanksgiving Break

November 29: Conclusion (review of one text, to be determined)

Requirements: It should go without saying that a seminar requires a different level and kind of participation from lecture courses or labs. A high degree of participation is required in this course, which constitutes at least one-half of your grade (participation will be defined in detail during the first class, including how to prepare readings, evidence of commitment through outside activities, preparation of final paper, and so on). The final paper (presentation or project) constitutes the remaining half of the grade.

I will be available for office hours for this class specifically on Wednesdays, after class. It will best, however, to schedule that time in advance whenever possible.

All books are available in the bookstore. I have required you to purchase these books, as I want you to read them carefully and intimately, as you would any written treasure.

My voice mail is X2598; my email address is jziegler@holycross.edu