

Creative Spirituality: The Way of the Artist

Robert Wuthnow

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With the New Age movement comes the changing role of the artist. As spirituality encounters an ever-widening range of definition, not limited to piety and intellectualism, the imagery and symbolism conveyed by artists are increasingly relevant as insights into today's cultural problems. The author proposes that their intuitive sense of the sacred makes artists the spiritual vanguards for this century.

This collection of interviews and insights proves useful to those exploring existential mysteries, religion, and art. Statements such as, "Spirituality, like art, must be practiced," and, "Believing in the possibility of doing" assist the reader in finding similarities among artists and theologians, while testimonies of dancers, poets, musicians, and others demonstrate many differences. Inherent in art and spirituality is the magical experience of moments "when an individual feels transported beyond the realm of ordinary sense perception," claims Wuthnow, a professor of sociology at Princeton.

Wisdom is imparted via little windows of life, as in the case of Nancy Chinn. Working spirituality into her art, she reports on one occasion "a spirit flowed into [me] through the ocean breeze," empowering her with a greater understanding. Expressing herself freely through art, Chinn discovers new aspects of her spiritual side.

Some of those interviewed discuss how the arts (e.g., poetry, music, dancing, handiwork, etc.) "encourage people to seek God." These and other topics work toward the conclusion that the role of the artist in today's society is increasing by including greater "moral and spiritual dimensions."

Heady and controversial, Wuthnow uses his own art form of writing to claim that artists are "pushing out the frontiers of human possibility." The book is a comparative study of religious philosophies and the world of creativity that encompasses numerous points of view.

JILL WANDAS (May / June 2001)

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