

## Interstices and Graceful Emptiness

presented at the symposium *Interstice: Intervening Space*  
MacLaurinCSF, Minneapolis, MN  
December 2, 2011

As [MacLaurinCSF](#) Director Bryan Bademan noted in his announcement of this symposium a couple of months ago, there has been a resurgence of interest in the arts within the Church over the past few years, specifically with regards to our human role as image-bearers of the Creator God. But while there is still much to be said about how engaging and cultivating the world is, as Andy Crouch puts it, the “creative calling” of each one of us, our theme here of “Interstice: Intervening Space” helps us also focus on the arts in social terms, as something that bears directly on our common life together before each other as well as before God. In other words, it directs our attention to the way the arts are interpretive as well as imaginative, the way they are means of translation and reconciliation across boundaries as much as means of creation in the usual sense of “making something new.”

I should say at the outset that thinking about art and artists in social and structural terms in no way minimizes the importance of individual artists or our expressive pursuits, but rather suggests that the full meaning and value of our work is only realized when understood not as the product of the isolated creator, or even as a kind of dialogue with the culture of art itself, but as a gift that emerges from artists’ embeddedness in overlapping communities, and given into the spaces in between them. In sum, I hope to set the stage here for further conversation about the way a fully

Christian (and, I think, a fully human) pursuit of art maintains the tension between individual creativity and relational, social interdependence.

But to begin in earnest, I'd like to explore this image of the *interstice* a bit—as a reminder of the richness of images generally, but also of the appropriateness of this one in particular for talking about the arts in light of the MacLaurin mission; next, I'll describe a couple of examples from my own experience of how and why images and aesthetic objects that give them concrete form are so critical to creating physical and rhetorical spaces in which complex relationships can be negotiated. But it's also important and helpful to locate this effort by MacLaurin CSF in the bigger picture of the renewal of arts in the church, so I want to mention a few of the other groups of Christians who are rethinking and re-enacting that relationship and their different emphases in moving forward. And all along the way I'd like to use this interstice image to highlight a central question that artists face when banding together within or alongside the church: “Are we called to create interstitial space, or to fill it?”

As the openness of poetic and visual images is a key source of art's distinctive role in our cultural interstices, let's begin by looking at the words that make up the two-part title of our symposium, the two subtly different terms *interstice*, (or interstitial) and *intervening*. Depending which on-line or other dictionary one uses, you'll get various auxiliary images to illustrate the basic definition of *interstice* that names it as “a small or narrow space or interval between things or parts, or a gap or break in something generally continuous.” There are interstices between leaves in the canopy of a tree, allowing light to filter to the forest floor below; there are more-regular interstices

between the slats of a fence, making it more permeable than a wall to light and air and sound; or, if you prefer an image more solid still, think of a cleft in a cliff face or tiny crevices in a block of stone. All of these images direct us to think about interstices as spaces of possibility, where things can pass through, be transmitted, or be hidden and sheltered, even as they take on some of the contours of the space itself.

A complementary second sense of the word has to do less with physical space than with time, as an *interstice* may also be a pause or interval in the rhythm of life—a lacuna amidst our activities and striving, a rest from our labors, a stillness. This sense is even more connected to the roots of the word than is the idea of a physical space, since the Latin word meaning “to stand” from which it comes has connotations of “staying put” or “standing still in the midst of things” as much as “standing up” or “standing firm.” And as all musicians know, pauses in time are every bit as necessary and structurally significant as are pauses in physical materials—their “emptiness” gives form to the notes that come on either side and can mark the distinction between music and noise. In both cases, the nothingness of an interstice is really a something of some importance: it’s a paradoxical absence that establishes and negotiates the relationship, the connections between the parts individually, and between the parts and the whole.

But what about the second part of our Symposium title, the idea of an *intervening* space? Is this the same thing? Bear with me for one more minute of etymology because there is a distinction here that may help us think carefully about how we conceive of the place of arts and artists in culture and, especially, in the church. Take “intervening”

apart as we did with interstitial and we get not “standing between” but the more definitive and forceful “coming between.”

Think about the connotations of “intervention” in contemporary speech and you’ll see what I mean, whether with regards to international peacekeeping forces or individual drug or alcohol therapy. In both cases you get a very different feel about what the actions of the interveners and the space they create is about than we did with the idea of interstice: in short, an “intervention” creates a space that, for their own safety, keeps sides apart as opposed to bringing them together. Though often the interveners put themselves in considerable danger by occupying that intervening space, they, themselves, can also become seemingly indispensable to the new order once it is established. Their identity becomes synonymous with the space they create, but then also occupy.

So, how do these subtly different ways of thinking about being in-between play out in thinking about art, especially as part of the MacLaurin CSF mission? The statement of MacLaurin’s goals begins with a recognition that there already exists a gap or space between the university and the church, and that a first response to that gap is to be or build a bridge across it. Bridges are classic and extremely useful sort of in-between space in and of themselves, and spanning cultural divides is a deeply Christian strategy of reconciliation, reflected in the ancient Papal title of *pontifex maximus*, or great bridge-builder, for instance. But the bridge metaphor has limitations, too, because bridges can also be narrow enough to be claimed, controlled and protected, becoming the sites of conflict themselves as well as being sites of parley and peacemaking –

artifacts of *intervention*, in other words. And finally, the purpose of bridges is to carry us above and over the greater in-between-ness that lies below, rather than helping us engage with it directly.

The MacLaurin team is, I think, keenly aware of that last issue, and in another preview of this symposium Bryan cited as worth considering Marc Augé's book on "Non-Spaces," in which Augé argues that the contemporary Super-Modern cultural scene is defined by those transitional zones in which "we tune out, cease being present, and avoid relationship." As these in-between spaces proliferate, it has become apparent to many writers and thinkers that we need to find an alternative to merely spanning or passing over the interstices that have opened in our culture and world, these places that separate and divide our experience of community in both physical space and in time. It seems that a more fruitful if uncertain path lies in understanding, appreciating and reforming such spaces for the common good, principally by going into and remaining in them. Thus we see MacLaurin's mission statement also including the goal of "creating space" in which leaders from various worlds can meet and address "enduring human questions," and we have this conference at which to consider how art – and art imbued with a Christ-centered ethic, especially – is uniquely suited for the job of making spaces from non-spaces. Or, in our working imagery, of articulating and celebrating interstices as spaces of possibility, rather than merely of disconnected nothingness.

So, all well and good to start with the statement that interstices are everywhere in our culture, and even to suggest that art and artists have a role to play in making

them meaningful. But what does this look like in practice? How exactly might art help us understand the connections that can happen in in-between spaces? I'd like to describe two very different contexts where the work of artists plays a critical role, precisely by exploiting the openness of metaphor and image. The first highlights the way we inhabit spaces and our own history with the aid of symbolic forms that give physical shape to complex relationships, the second suggests the way artworks allow us to negotiate meanings even in contested cultural and intellectual grounds – in a way that is not so much polemical as paradoxical.

The first space in which art helps articulate what can be intangible, even ephemeral connections will be extremely familiar to nearly all of you, though it may seem to be the antithesis of an “in-between” space: our own homes. From the mid-1990s until 2002, I worked on an ethnographic investigation of an art market in the Atlanta region that took domestic space, rather than the gallery or museum, as the normative physical context for paintings and other aesthetic objects, from the home studios where most was made, to the home and quasi-home-like commercial spaces where art was shown and sold, and back to the private mostly professional-class homes in which it was placed. In that market, social, personal, even spiritual *integration* was the central aim of the domestic spaces I studied, and facilitating experiences of rich identity formation was one of the key roles of art and artists in those spaces, alongside and in concert with their basic attention to craft and beauty.

In other words, art objects were not experienced just as independent objects of beauty, or expressions of the artists' creativity, but as means by which family and other

social relationships – otherwise fluid, stretched out over time and space – might be embodied and rehearsed, but not contained nor simply illustrated. The two central elements of experiencing art in this way are that the works themselves come into the household with associations of interpersonal relationship, and that they are most often seen obliquely, in passing, in sequence with other objects in the space of the home.

As I have written and spoken on this subject elsewhere (and, indeed, you can find a summary article on this work on my website), I'll not go into too much detail here. But let me ask for a little audience participation to help you connect with what I'm talking about, as it has been my experience that this phenomenon, this role of art in physical spaces, is not limited to just this one geographic or cultural area. First of all, close your eyes if necessary, but think of the works of art you have in your own living spaces, whether large or small, bought, received as a gift, or even found. Now think about how they came to be where they are, and what they remind you of when you see or think of them. While there are certainly exceptions to this rule, and degrees to which it is true, it has been my experience that – especially for those who are not regular producers of their own art – aesthetic objects in household settings usually have some sort of memorial association, whether of personal relationships with the artist, or travel, or other significant occasions in the life of the family. When we look at an artwork at home, we often see much more than its intrinsic arrangement of form and color, we “see” the experiences and connections that it embodies for us.

The space of memory recalled into the present can be thought of as a kind of liminal, interstitial space between the past and the future, an always-evolving now, if

you will, but another aspect of how we experience art in domestic settings speaks a little more directly to the idea of in-between-ness. For we typically do not spend much time looking directly at the art in our homes so much as seeing it on the move, along the pathways we regularly tread in our comings and goings in and out. So think again about your own home and the artworks in it, and how you are likely to see them in sequence moving from bedroom to hallway, to kitchen, to living room, to bathroom, even.

More interesting to me than the idea that a single image often comes to represent a particular event or relationship, is the way that the whole set of objects (including even things like family photos, that get added to and rearranged with regularity) constitute an “ecology of signs,” a system or set of trajectories through multiple overlapping moments and identities. When we move from single objects – and the implied optimal points of view to see them individually – to the whole set of objects seen by bodies and minds in motion, we may recognize that the most vital symbolic space in a house is not the living room, or kitchen, or study, or indeed any one space, but the interstices defined by our movements between them; for that in-between space is where the most complicated combination of aesthetic responses actually occurs, even – perhaps especially – because that mixing occurs at the edges of our awareness, rather than at the center of our attention.

Let me say also that what I have elsewhere described as a distinctive “way of seeing” here is not confined to the strictly visual; that is, the artworks evoke – even amplify – phenomenological space rather than merely pictorial space. Interpersonal



relationships are literally embodied in the regular patterns of interaction between members of a household – patterns that define the space in which they occur as much as they are contained it. We usually live with other people, after all, not just other things. Nevertheless, in order to make these patterns more tangible, palpable and even manipulable, they are focused through and invested in aesthetic objects that represent domestic life and identity more efficiently than trying to realize the whole complex of spaces and habits without some sort of symbolic shorthand.

This is an instance of and a model for how artworks help *shape* the in-between spaces rather than command them, therefore, as each artwork suggests possibility and connection to the others, as well as carrying its own discrete significance. Indeed, this sense of active space and *movement-through* may provide a counter-example to Auge's description of non-places, though not a solution to them, *per se*. Hallways and the like, or even formal rooms that are passed through rather than merely sat in are transitional, but it is the very transition, the moving through a sequence of symbolic objects and images that evokes the dynamism of family relationships and social identity. Even this most intimate or private kind of space contains practical interstices, then, paths that invite connection of the parts when given form through aesthetic objects, but not strictly focused on them. And it is worth considering whether aesthetic objects and spaces in the public realm might play a similar connecting role, as opposed to being merely a set of landmarks or another instance of the near-universal habit of "branding" all things.

So, with that very personal, intimate and even mundane example of how art can help us realize interstices as spaces that actually "make sense," let's move to a very

different kind of social interstice and the reconciling role that art and artists are playing there by helping us dwell in the uncertainty and mystery of the world. For if there is an area of the church's interaction with other realms of culture that is more troublesome and confusing than the arts and faith conversation, it is the science and faith conversation – something I've been involved with as an artist and writer since last November when I joined the BioLogos Foundation as Senior Fellow for Arts and Humanities.

As you may already know, the BioLogos Foundation was founded by geneticist (and now National Institutes of Health director) Francis Collins as a forum in which to seek a reconciliation between contemporary science and evangelical Christian faith – in other words, to be in the interstice between what are sometimes seen as fairly self-contained and opposing communities. My role is to champion the place of mystery, paradox and beauty in both faith and the study of nature through weekly essays on the BioLogos blog focusing on those more “open” aspects of human experience, especially as they lead us to a place of worship. Concretely, this means that I alternate between presenting poetry, visual work, music, and essays on such things as natural symbols in order to return the focus each week to the centrality of Christ in all aspects of our lives as Christians, and to the unity we find in the Church through that focus, no matter what our beliefs are on the specific interpretations of the Biblical and natural record.

But how does art demonstrate connection between these fields of understanding that are so often seen as diametrically opposed, with science purported to be the realm of pure rationality, and faith (and probably also art) being the realm of subjectivity? In

fact, it is the importance of images to both fields that reveals their commonality. Even in church traditions that are wary of actual art objects in worship spaces, all Christians are steeped in the biblical images of shepherds and sheep, of bread and water and wine, of pearls, of lamps, of wheat. But scientific investigation and description of the creation has also always been about giving us metaphors by which to understand and talk about God's engagement with the world and his people, even if His identity is not always recognized or admitted. The persistence of such images as a "clockwork universe," or thinking of biological systems and organisms as "machines," and now the pervasive use of the phrase "it's in our DNA!" even when it's wildly inappropriate, suggests the power of images and metaphors to stand for complex ideas, and to help even non-specialists speak of the implications of science.

As believing scientists, too, try to convey the beauty and intricacy of the processes they see laid out in the natural world, they also must use imagery that comes from the emotional and imaginative faculties as much as from the analytic ones. For coming to terms with such marvelously complicated things as the universe or our own cultures sometimes *requires* methods of inquiry that are less precise, rather than more precise. Furthermore, philosophers like Michael Polanyi have argued that science itself moves forward by imaginative leaps, not strictly objective practices alone. But really, it is the way all images carry additional meanings and connotations that are not strictly scientific or even literally true that opens a discursive space, for just as I began this talk by taking apart the words *interstice* and *intervening*, so do thinking and talking about the social and theological ramifications of likening people to machines or the universe to a

clock allow us to tease apart the material “facts” from what they mean for the human community.

One final point on my thinking about the BioLogos project and the way art is helping shape the interstice between science and the institutional church: it does not emerge from a Romantic notion of the power of art on its own, as if finding new, beautiful images for ideas that some find confusing or even offensive will magically eliminate conflict over their truthfulness. Rather, this call comes directly from looking at how Jesus himself chose to discuss and portray the Gospel message that the Kingdom of God really was finally at hand, coming and already fulfilled in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine.

Aside from His very practical and concrete use of parables and images to re-new Israel’s awareness of how God called His people to live with each other and their neighbors, Jesus also seems to have had a more essential message to convey about the nature of revelation, the on-rushing Kingdom, and how we know what we do about each of them through the gift of Scripture. Richard Farrar Capon describes it as follows:

[T]he Bible is about the mystery of the kingdom – a mystery that, by definition, is something well hidden and not at all likely to be grasped by plausibility-loving minds. . . The mystery of the kingdom, it seems, is a *radical* mystery: even when you tell people about it in so many words, it remains permanently intractable to all their attempts to make sense of it. . . With Jesus, . . . the device of the parabolic utterance is used not to explain

things to people's satisfaction but to call attention to the unsatisfactoriness of all their previous explanations and understandings.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the purpose of Jesus' "art" was to give verbal, visual, and dramatic forms to those complicated and confounding relationships and symmetries and harmonies between Himself (and the Father and Spirit) and the world, ourselves included in the latter. Such creative expressions did and do not make everything clear, but rather resist simple clarity, forcing their hearers to come at the whole complicated, opaque truth from a position of intellectual and spiritual humility. Indeed, the fact that the church (and those outside it) still argue, discuss and wrestle with the stories and images Jesus used is not just evidence of their power in the first century, it continues to be their power now: to keep individuals and communities engaging with each other and the Holy Spirit as they have for two thousand years, opening them always to the way the Lord is renewing minds and hearts. Therefore, following Jesus' lead means learning to hold in tension ideas and essences that don't just *seem* to be paradoxical or incompatible, but actually are in the normal course of human thinking and experience—even those mysteries that we as moderns have done everything in our imaginative (or rather, *unimaginative*) power to dispel, explain and normalize.

Art, then—*images*—have a way of helping us see and dwell in the complexity and mystery of the world while simultaneously appreciating its beauty, primarily by calling us outside our usual ways of thinking into new spaces which it helps create.

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Farrar Capon. *Kingdom, Grace Judgment: Paradox, Outrage and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002: pp. 4-5.

Moreover, because imagery provides invitations to engage with the world and with each other, rather than propositions to be proved or disproved, the creative arts call us towards community even in the midst of our most contentious debates—a distinctively Christian way of approaching (or, rather, receiving and glorifying in) the truth, if we recognize that the incompleteness of our knowledge and the necessity that we “reason together” in that in-between space proceeds from and leads to humility, rather than hubris.

So, with these two somewhat different examples of how art and creative practice plays in the interstices of our individual as well as our societal, even ideological lives, let’s spend just a few more minutes thinking together not just about the arts or art objects generally, but about artists and groups of artists, and how they are and should be living into the interstitial role, beginning with a quick, very selective and highly superficial survey of some who share this vision.

Considering its Executive Director, Cam Anderson, was tasked with leading tonight’s panel discussion, that it was one of the first organized efforts in this most recent (as in 20<sup>th</sup>-century) period of art/church renewal, and was founded just up the road at what was then Bethel College, it makes sense to begin with Christians In the Visual Arts, or [CIVA](#). Cam and others here can give you the specific timeline of CIVA’s history, I’m sure, but I’d like to talk about it as an example of one challenge Christian artists face: identifying and prioritizing the various interstices they encounter and formulating proper responses for each. For indeed, the diverse membership of CIVA and its equally diverse programs and projects over the years makes clear that there is

not just one interstice to live into, but many, and we seem always to be negotiating whether we are Christians ministering to the secular arts world and contending for the faith among our art colleagues, or artists ministering to the Church and contending for the arts with our believing brethren. Especially in the latter context, we by turns seem called to introduce new ways of receiving the Lord or hearkening back to very old ways, instead.

With that complexity in mind, though, my experience of CIVA has been that its heart is really connecting artists of faith – who often feel isolated in local communities and churches – with others who share their passion for both art and the Lord. By building community, CIVA has for many years now sustained and encouraged artists to continue to integrate their faith with their artistic practice, equipping them to serve the local church in whatever ways they are called – making room for those who are focused on liturgical art that gives direct service to local worshipping bodies as well as self-consciously avant-garde art theorists and practitioners who are reaching out from the church into secular spaces. CIVA has also long sought to make high-quality and thought-provoking art available to local churches and other institutions through its traveling exhibition program. Again, this is not so much an “outreach ministry” as a way to support and enrich the worshipping life of churches and the artists in their midst, without insisting that the only art that is fully Christian is art which is suitable for display in a sanctuary as part of a worship service. As CIVA moves through its fourth decade, it seems to me that its identity plays out most dynamically and critically in the in-between spaces of the church itself, perhaps more focused than almost any

other project or organization on the way our identity as humans, all the more as Christians, and collectively as the church, is lived out through creative, expressive and worshipping means.

While CIVA is obviously focused on the visual arts and artists, now including things like film, installation and performance art, as well as painting, sculpture, printmaking, etc., the emphasis at [IMAGE Journal](#) is, not surprisingly, more literary, and its community is focused around the journal itself, a prize-winning quarterly founded and still edited by Greg Wolfe at Seattle Pacific University, which also houses an MFA program in creative writing under Wolfe's direction. This is not to say that the IMAGE community does not engage with the visual arts, though, for essays about contemporary visual artists (including many CIVA members) are regular features. There is a very active on-line conversation among the Journal's readers, as well as an expanding program of week-long workshop retreats each summer in New Mexico and Massachusetts, in addition to shorter single-topic Seminars two or three times a year in various other venues. Both the workshops and Seminars are geared to give both Christians and seekers intensive time with established artists of faith, to receive instruction and to explore the ramifications of Dostoevsky's statement that "beauty will save the world."

The Image suite of programs, centered on the Journal itself, is not primarily focused on interpersonal connections within the church, important as they may be, but seeks to engage those that are at the boundaries, or, yes, in the interstices between faith and non-faith. From its own on-line description here, "*Image speaks with equal force*



and relevance to the secular culture and to the church. By finding fresh ways for the imagination to embody religious truth and religious experience, *Image* challenges believers and nonbelievers alike. [And continuing on another page], “our focus has been on writing and visual artwork that embody a spiritual struggle, that seek to strike a balance between tradition and a profound openness to the world.”

And finally, begun about the same time as *Image Journal* but on the opposite side of the country in New York City, is the [International Arts Movement](#), founded by artist Mako Fujimura. Like CIVA, IAM has been from its foundation a network of like-minded Christian artists coming together because of their shared vision for the way arts can be redemptive, but IAM has been and is yet becoming more focused on local communities, beginning in New York, Tokyo and Los Angeles, and now with chapters or associated groups meeting in cities around the world. And like the *Image Journal* community, IAM is very much committed to engaging non-believers (especially other artists) in a non-judgmental way through art, though IAM conversations tend to be more focused on the possibilities of renewal and reconciliation (undergirded by confidence in the redemptive work of Christ) than on *Image*’s emphasis on the struggle to find and communicate faith in the grittiness of contemporary culture. Their mission is articulated as “equipping the creative community to generate good, true, and beautiful cultural artifacts: sign-posts pointing toward the ‘world that ought to be.’”

As to which interstices IAM is most engaged in shaping, because Fujimura himself was a part of the secular art world in both the US and Japan as his own faith matured, the movement he founded has continued to work in the interstitial space of

the international arts culture. But in each local setting (whether here or abroad), and despite the fact that one does not have to be a professing Christian to be part of the movement, IAM is largely peopled by Christians from within the church whose call is to open and shape a space for hope and propose alternatives to the ideologies that currently dominate the secular art world.

Though they do happen to be the ones with which I'm most familiar and most engaged personally, these three are certainly not the only Christian arts organizations out there, and in each case, there are probably other strategies than the ones each has adopted that would also facilitate the shaping of its specific cultural interstice. I do know of at least one other local community wrestling with art and meaning in the Twin Cities: the Art and Philosophy reading group facilitated by Charles Taliaferro and Jil Evans since 1993. From their example it might also be argued that the most interstitial way of being a Christian and artist is probably to claim both of those identities in the context of non-Christian arts settings, exercising what James Hunter has called a "faithful presence." But all of these together suggest how complex is the landscape of cultural in-between-ness, and how rich are the opportunities to inhabit it via our creative and imaginative faculties, whether as individuals or as groups, in the privacy of the home, the community of the church, or the cacophony of the public square.

In every case, our vision for the arts ought to be fully and deeply re-integrating them into all aspects of our common culture, both inside and outside the church. If interstitial spaces are, indeed, proliferating in the contemporary age, then the work of

artists with this reconciling and connecting vision is all the more important, and we must be always seeking to be in the midst of all things, but without requiring that we should be the center of everything. For given that I think the great power of aesthetic experience and artistic creative practice is to shape the in-between, the greatest danger to our calling as both creatives and Christians is that we succumb to the desire to be a world or a constituency of our own, for our own sakes – that we declare our allegiance to the kingdom of art, forgetting that it is not even a fiefdom in the Kingdom of God, or indeed any kind of “thing,” but rather *a way*. In a culture where art devoid of faith has become a kind of religion in itself, now too-often fully partaking of our obsession with self-marketing, branding, and celebrity rather than seeking transcendent truth, it is tempting to argue too strongly for the power of the arts, and to begin to fill the interstices with ourselves and our art, rather than maintaining the vitality and openness of the space by merely shaping it for the benefit of others.

Following on this caution, then, one final point about the role of organizations may be helpful to keep in mind, considering that it is MacLaurinCSF that has called us together this weekend, and remembering that this symposium is not only making a space here in the Twin Cities to talk about the connections between the church and the university through the arts, but also creating an interstice within the local arts community itself. Looking around the gallery at the artworks that make up the Interstice Exhibit, one finds examples of art that comes from several different spiritual contexts within Christianity, and from several different spaces within the world of art. The pieces on the walls might not ordinarily speak to the same audiences and do not

even seem to speak the same visual language, though they are united by their creators' sense of connection to and activity within the overlap between church and art. So, mirroring and expanding upon the various approaches I've laid out for such groups as CIVVA, IMAGE Journal and IAM, the show can be said to feature works that are directed inwards from within the church towards the church as means of worship (even as experienced as devotion in the home), outward from the church to the secular culture as a means of prophetic critique, and from Christians who ply the space of the secular artworld, engaging it on its own terms while perhaps also reaching back into the church with critique and admonishment.

It should be readily admitted that the differing positions from which the arts/fairth interstice is itself being articulated, the different kinds and aims of the art back at the gallery, do not always get along or (in extreme cases) recognize each other as legitimate responses, or even "true" art. That only-sometimes veiled distrust that can exist among even Christian artists from different faith and aesthetic traditions speaks of the constant danger of making an idol of our creativity, however expressed, and perverting precisely the image-bearing role that makes us distinct in of all of creation. But, by bringing together art and artists who align themselves with different sub-interstices, MacLaurin helps us see the church itself as perhaps the archetypal in-between space. As I noted in a recent [post](#) on the blessed indeterminacy of symbols, we may never be fully comfortable with the people we are called to love, nor with the processes and agents (or artworks) through which the Lord works creation and redemption in our midst. But unity does not require unanimity. Rather, by the Spirit

the Church can actually be what the Lord has called us to be: a community of people whose differences incline them towards argument and who would likely never choose to be associated with one with otherwise, but who join with one another on account of our common fellowship with Jesus

By giving up our claim on the space we have worked so hard to occupy and redeem, in making it and ultimately ourselves available as facilitators and conduits for connections despite ourselves, we are following the example of Christ Himself whose self-emptying in becoming a human child we call *kenosis*. This countercultural kenotic model for being in the interstice is the distinctive charge for and hope of Christian art and artists – for it is when we empty and give ourselves (and our creativity, our craftsmanship) fully to those we serve, that we make room for the Spirit to fill us, the church and the wider human community. When we are weak, then, precisely, we are strong. When we *become* as well as *make* spaces of shelter, shaping our own emptiness into a form ready to receive and then communicate the Lord’s grace, we are also perhaps most exquisitely fulfilling the mandate to create and cultivate the world as – and for – God’s image bearers.