



Walker Evans' "Church of the Nazarene" was taken in Tennessee in 1936. It is included in the Haverford College exhibit.



"Rue de Barres," (1928) a print of a photo taken in Paris by Eugene Atget, is also in the exhibit at the Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery.

The Arts

Show offers font of spiritual insights

By Victoria Demohoe
INQUIRER ART CRITIC

"Spirituality in Art" is an eye-catching, mind-tingling display of recent and centuries-old art in which religion and mysticism are the focus at Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery, Haverford College.

This show contributes something vital and important to the way spiritually themed works — newer paintings and photographs, and prints dating to the Northern European Renaissance — are seen together and interpreted.

In this pristine, supposedly neutral art gallery setting, what is perhaps unexpectedly revealed is a fountain of spiritual insights.

This display organized by William Williams, the Haverford fine arts department chairman, features art from Haverford's and Bryn Mawr College's permanent collections, supplemented by special loans.

These works, though intellectually coherent, are stylistically and generationally diverse. Yet they play off one another in quite stimulating ways that expand this exhibit's spiritual message.



Starting with the early printed word and including a leaf from an actual Gutenberg Bible, together with woodcuts and engravings by old-master artists Albrecht Dürer and Rembrandt, the selection covers 500 years. It shows that the attempt to unravel and appreciate the transcendent power of spirituality in art, while increasingly pertinent, is hardly new.

As it turns out, this display was not held to mark the first anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy. Acknowledging that a keener sense of spirituality is in the air lately, Williams explained that this exhibit took three years to plan.

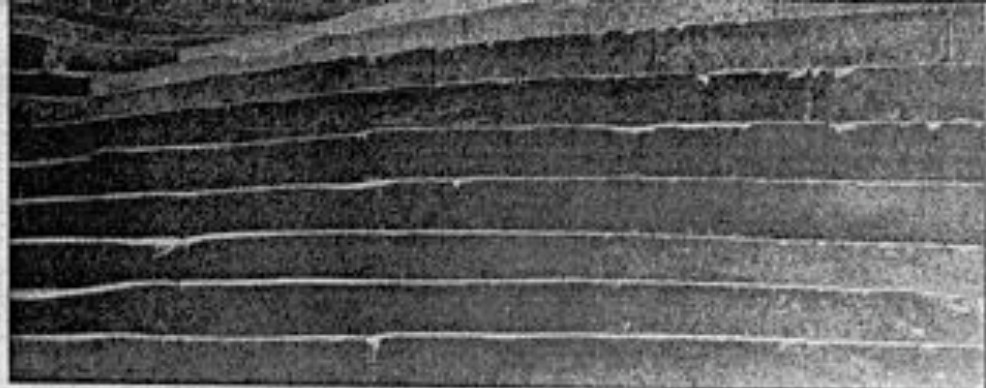
Williams also makes the point that three types of art are represented in this show: themes intrinsically sacred, others of a spiritual nature, and still others — especially certain very old photographs — that in their heyday enjoyed a kind of pinch-hitter status (my phrase).

By that is meant pictures that represented holy or spiritual places for a great many people who, by looking at them, got in touch with far-flung locales they loved but had never visited. Such images include a very old photo of a hillside olive grove mentioned in the Bible, and other early photos of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow, the Taj Mahal and Venice.

High points of the show include Bryn Mawr College's seldom-seen and rare *Madonna and Child* oil (1947), which Rogare Bearden painted before he became a commanding presence in American art as a collagist; and from Hamilton College came Henry O. Tanner's oil *Moonlight, Tangiers* (c. 1912), which is definitely touched by a glimmer of transcendence. Also noteworthy is Wassily Kandinsky's lithograph *Kleine Welten IV*, marked by idealism and mysticism.

This display also bristles with memorable photos by Ansel Adams, Diane Arbus, Eugene Atget, Adolphe Braun, Frederick Evans and Walker Evans, Vida H. Francis, Clarence Kennedy and Paul Strand. The newest work, Vik Muniz's painting *Whisperer* (2002), is a bit of a stretch here, characterizing an artist as a symbol of today's rugged individualist — ambitious, and possibly more ready to act out of self-interest than on behalf of his fellow man.

This fascinating show fulfills a genuine need within the professional art world for consequential exhibits that can occasionally cover a lengthy period of art (exceptionally long, in this case) — something we are quite unused to seeing in the suburbs.



A print of the 1903 photograph "A Sea of Steps," which Frederick Evans took in a British cathedral, is part of the "Spirituality in Art" exhibit at Haverford College.

Haverford College's Cantor Fitzgerald Gallery, Coursey Road, Haverford. To Nov. 3, with a public reception 5-7 p.m. on Oct. 25. Mondays-Fridays 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturdays-Sundays noon-5 p.m. 610-896-1287. Talks at the college related to this show are "Aspects of Spirituality and Mysticism in Art," by William Wixom (Class of '51), curator emeritus of the Cloisters branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 4:15 p.m. Oct. 7; and "Pantheism, Primitivism and Pilgrimage: Spirituality in Modern Art," by Professor Melinda Parsons, University of Memphis, Oct. 25, 4:15 p.m.

Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church. Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church has organized a large group exhibit of paintings, poetry, prose and sculpture to mark the first anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy.

Featured is work by professional and amateur artists and writers, among them Christians, Jews and Muslims. You may want to view this heartfelt tribute on the same day you see Haverford's "Spirituality in Art" show. If so, you will undoubtedly come away chastened by the combined experience.

Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church's Ministries Center, 625 Montgomery Ave., Bryn Mawr. To Oct. 13. On view when the show's two rooms have no meetings. 610-525-2821.

Abington Art Center. In its latest display, "Three Rooms," featuring three temporary site-specific gallery installations by four local artists, Abington Art Center has organized a self-conscious merger of art and context. With the agenda imposed as unsparingly as it is, these artists were forced to work with the hand they were dealt, namely

three mostly bare rooms in Lessing J. Rosenwald's former Alverthorpe Manor home, which is this arts facility's centerpiece. And how did the four respond to the challenge?

Buy Shaver attempts to articulate his installation as a creative sign product and sender of subliminal messages — but what messages? The big and bold painted sign that greets us at the entry reads "One Mile North," giving an expressway look to Shaver's entire room (still almost bare, save for a few simple marks painted with smart styling directly on the walls). With this conceptually provocative, externally sleek, and sophisticated piece overtaking the familiar slow-paced setting of this room, where is this talented road warrior headed?

Carolyn Healy and John Phillips' joint installation tunes the viewer in to an entirely different kind of physical environment that is dimly lit, all-encompassing and eerie both in its sights and interacting sounds and visual effects, enhanced by what apparently is use of filtered flash lighting.

This display shows a knack for iconic presentation and mysterious juxtapositions that set off chains of cultural and scientific associations.

Candy Depew's installation, intended as a response to an Art Deco room, struck me as opulently overdone and relying excessively on curlicues that overstep the slender straight boundaries of a true Deco setting.

Abington Art Center, 515 Meetinghouse Rd., Jenkintown. To Oct. 19. Tuesdays-Fridays 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Thursdays to 7 p.m., Saturdays 10 a.m.-3 p.m. 215-887-4882.

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