

Discernment and the Creative Process of Art **By Cynthia Reynolds, Tending the Holy Participant**

Introduction

“Discernment means living life prayerfully – bringing oneself to God as honestly and completely as possible, seeking God’s guidance as openly as possible, and then, in faith, responding as fully as possible. A life lived this way, trying to bring all one’s faculties into harmony with God’s transforming grace, is consecration in practice.” Gerald May

“The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance.”
Aristotle

“If you want to understand something,” says Bruce Herman, an art professor at Gordon College, *“you have to be willing to ‘stand under’ it.”*

Though I have been involved in the arts for a number of years, recently God has opened up a new world of creative expression for me in visual art. This new avenue of expression has been woven together with a deeper exploration of spiritual development and prayer which God has also opened up in my life. From all I have been reading in this unit on the subject of discernment, it seems clear that this weaving together of understanding art and discernment is the hand of God at work and not just an amusing coincidence. I would like to share in this paper a few of the ways that artistic expression and spiritual discernment have intersected recently in my experience.

Part I: Imagination

Many years ago when my children were young I took them to museums to enrich their lives and expose them to the glory of art. I was often telling them that God made the world and everything in it. That is why He is called the Creator. I went on to say that we are made in God’s image and that means that He has instilled in our very being the ability to create. We may not all be able to draw well, or compose music to be played in a concert hall, or write poetry. But we all have imagination and creativity begins with imagination. Everything that we see that man has made started out as an idea, just as everything that God made started first in His mind. So, off to the museums we went: museums of Science and Industry; Natural History museums, Art museums, even once a museum of chamber pots! I tried not to say too much as we moved through the exhibits. A few comments and answering their questions seemed to be just enough to frame what they were seeing without interfering in the formation of their own impressions. Children are so naturally curious; so hospitable to learning all on their own. And besides how would they learn to think for themselves if I did all their thinking for them? As I was journaling recently on what we have been learning about discernment, I realized that I was not just exposing my children to art and creativity, but preparing them for developing discernment skills.