

art & worship

An Invitation to Community

A Reflection from Mel Ahlborn, Episcopal Church and Visual Arts

Bidden or unbidden, our sense of sight absorbs what it sees, 24/7. The imagery that our sense of sight takes in, and how we interpret its message and meaning, contributes to our understanding of the world around us. Whether we are aware of it or not, visual imagery also influences our relationships with ourselves, with others, and with God.

It follows, then, that the presence of art in church is likely to unpack itself in our lives in a variety of ways. Our spiritual, cultural, and community identities will find nourishment in the visuals that surround us as we pray. The presence of art in the sanctuary will suggest a policy of visual hospitality that at its finest will include images and symbols from the many cultures and traditions present in the congregation and in the surrounding community.

Worship is central to the Christian tradition and welcomes all into the communal mystery that is the body of Christ. Art is a visual language of color and symbol that, like worship, has its earliest Christian usage in the catacombs of the first centuries A.D. The reconciling power of art calls us beyond our spoken and sung rhythms, and extends an invitation to community that each member of the congregation may receive equally.

“We don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are.”

~ Anais Nin, 1903-1977 ~

Ahlborn is the Board Chair and President of Episcopal Church and Visual Arts. You can reach her at illumination@earthlink.net or explore the ECVA website at www.ecva.org.

ECVA is a community of artists, arts' supporters, art historians and theologians acting in support of our common life in the Episcopal Church. It encourages local artists and visual arts communities, assists churches in integrating the visual arts into their worship space and liturgy, develops forums to explore the theology of visual art, and creates a heightened awareness of the spiritual role of the visual arts in Christian life.