



Designs of Faith: Essays and Paintings on World Religions

Mark W. McGinnis

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ARTIST'S STATEMENT: This series of essays and paintings is an attempt to explore some of the religions of the world from the perspective of an artist. When I look at religious structures, I view them as attempts to form order out of the parts of our existence and create a sense of purpose and direction in our lives. My motivation in creating this series is primarily self-education and the need I feel to find more meaning and direction in my own life. In the post-industrial world, the true guidance of religion has been largely supplanted by economic designs that may or may not pay lip service to religion. Most of our lives are guided down a path of consumption and careers that form the purpose of our lives. It is my intent in these essays and paintings to study alternative ways of designing our relationships from many cultural sources. The content of the essays focus on the foundation history of the religions and the basic moral and ethical teachings of the faith. It is not my intent to investigate the many variations, factions, and directions that these basic religions have spawned over the centuries. The series includes Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Baha'i, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Dreaming Religion of Aboriginal Australia, Inuit Spiritualism, Hopi Religion, and Ifa Divination of the Yoruba of West Africa. The Designs of Faith Project was begun in 1992 and completed in 1998. My research approach to each religion begins with reading the basic religious writings of the faith if they are available. I then read a sampling of both the scholarly and spiritual writings on the religion as well. After taking extensive notes, the framework of the essay evolves in my mind and the writing begins. Early drafts of the essay were reviewed by two individuals who have been my valued friends and critics for many years, Tom Hansen and Legia Spicer. The completed essay and research experience form the beginning of the visual inspiration for the canvas. Additional research is done on the artistic tradition of the faith, stimulating many possible solutions on how to express my ideas in the language of design. I then execute an initial 19 ½" X 16 ½" watercolor study, working on five separate pieces of paper to prepare myself for the five section quintych canvas. A second study of the same size is sometimes produced, working out the various inadequacies and problems of the first. I then move on to the production of the 92" X 79" five sectioned canvas, done with heavy textural acrylics. I have also produced a statement of symbolism and sources for each painting to give interested viewers information on the evolution of the imagery of the quintych. I would like to be clear in that I, in no way, see this study as being definitive. Each of the religions covered in the essays and paintings is tremendously complex with an abundance of variations that have grown from the foundation. People approach these religions from many different perspectives and for many different reasons. Their experiences are certainly no less valid than mine. Designs of Faith has been the most thought-provoking and enjoyable of any of the research-based projects I have undertaken in the past eighteen years. I hope I can share some of this enjoyment and appreciation with others. Mark W. McGinnis
1998

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