

[Review] *Art and Soul: Generating Missional Conversations with the Community through the Medium of Art*, by Michelle Sanders

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Saturated with the author's enthusiasm and creativity for engaging non-churchgoers through the arts, *Art and Soul* provides a conversational, somewhat stream-of-consciousness walk through Michelle Sanders's experiences in developing Art and Soul and related programs. Each of the initiatives she describes features arts as a means of reaching Kingdom goals such as healing, social justice, or a deeper understanding of God's character.

In the first half of the book, the author challenges believers to reach outside their fellowship's walls and connect with people who are unlikely to enter a church building of their own volition. Sanders sets the scene by giving statistics on the decline of the church in the West, focusing her comments primarily on the situation in her home country of Australia, but also mentioning the church in other areas of the world (Chapter 1). She then presents theological and biblical foundations supporting a mandate for believers to engage people in the world rather than waiting for them to come inside the church walls (Chapter 2). Drawing additional support from the thoughts of other artistic leaders, Sanders proposes that art, with its allowance for questioning, creativity, and discovery, provides a non-threatening avenue for people to delve beneath the surface of their lives and explore their needs. Ideally, this engagement with the arts would then open these seekers to connect their life stories with God's story. Art provides the secondary benefit of distraction, thereby allowing time for processing new, sometimes confrontational, ways of thinking about self and God (Chapters 3–4).

The second half of the book escorts the reader into settings in which Sanders has applied these theories of creative outreach. For example, she helped plant the Kaleidoscope faith community. Kaleidoscope is an alternative church environment that avoids religious jargon, accepts fluidity rather than rigid formality, and explores new ways to "connect and communicate to the culture" (44). In one of the artistic forms of worship being explored, someone paints the sermon while hearing it preached (Chapter 5). Another program, Art for



Justice, invites artists of all backgrounds to create on behalf of social justice. This arrangement gives musicians, painters, and other artists the opportunity to contribute to something larger than themselves while also bringing them into contact with people who demonstrate the love of Christ. When these artists create in a public setting, such as a marketplace, they engage passersby who might not otherwise come into contact with such social causes or the love behind them (Chapter 6). Sanders has also developed a more formal curriculum, *Art and Soul*, for supporting people who suffer from depression and anxiety. Through teaching, painting, and reflective group conversation, this course addresses nine themes, including loss, grief, faith, and spirituality. As with the other programs described in this volume, the description of *Art and Soul* provides enough information for a practitioner to evaluate the effectiveness of pursuing this program in a particular setting, but not quite enough information to implement the actual teachings (Chapter 7). Lastly, Sanders describes how she has used modified versions of the *Art and Soul* course to support children suffering from anxiety, children with autism, at-risk teenagers and their parents, traumatized families, and prison inmates (Chapter 8). Her conclusion outlines her hopes for expanding this program into additional settings, including working with refugees or with girls rescued from human trafficking.

The author draws from a range of other thinkers throughout the initial chapters, referencing contemporaries such as Colin Harbinson and D. A. Carson as well as church fathers as far back as John Calvin and Martin Luther. Likewise, she draws from experts on psychology and creativity when exploring the power of artistic expression and spirituality. On the other hand, the practical application of her work in arenas involving mental and emotional health would be strengthened substantially by the resources available from art therapy and trauma healing. For example, Cathy Malchiodi's *Expressive Therapies* (2005) systematically details the history, theories, and methodologies of seven types of art therapy and the integrated arts approach of expressive therapy. Richard Mollica's *Healing Invisible Wounds: Paths to Hope and Recovery in a Violent World* (2006) provides valuable insights into the trauma healing process. The Trauma Healing Institute (<http://thi.americanbible.org/>) offers a training program, the book *Healing the Wounds of Trauma: How the Church Can Help* (Hill 2004), and other materials to guide people through trauma healing. While Mollica focuses primarily on storytelling, touching on other creative arts only briefly, the Trauma Healing Institute program includes other artistic activities such as song composition, skit writing, and the creation of personal laments. Developed for multicultural contexts, materials are now available in more than 150 languages. In a similar vein, a faith-based, graduate-level course at the Center for Excellence in World Arts at GIAL in Dallas, Texas (www.gial.edu/world-arts-center/), offers extensive training in integrating the arts in culturally appropriate ways into trauma healing.

The practical nature of the content and the conversational style of Sanders's writing make for easy reading, but her work would have benefited from more thorough copy editing. In addition to various typographical errors, an entire paragraph recurs five pages after its first appearance. Similarly, while the anecdotes sprinkled throughout the more theoretical first half of the book provide helpful illustrations, readers may feel lost by references to programs like Art and Soul that are not described until several chapters later. In order to get the full benefit of the book, the reader should read at least the second to fourth chapters again, or for the first time, after reading the second half of the volume.

I was disappointed that the two supplementary websites (www.michellesanders.com.au, 30; www.artandsoul.org.au, xviii and 54) were nonfunctioning at the time I wrote this review. Nevertheless, a look at Sanders's Facebook page and other Internet references shows that she continues to be active in practicing principles of artistic engagement for missional conversations in many contexts. *Art and Soul* is not a highly polished book, but Sanders herself provides substantial inspiration for the amount of good that can be done and the number of people who can be reached through creative, passionate engagement. Her example is a tribute to the concluding words of her book: "Start small, start simple, but start something" (82).

Bibliography

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