

Life-Affirming Technology in Modern Art:
Reviewing Major Works of the Abstract and Plastic Arts
in Selected Museum Galleries and on Websites

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I. Three Philosophical Matters **[slide two]**

It is worth noting that art is always pro-life in the absolute sense of life-affirming. After all, anyone who creates a work of art wants to convey something about his or her life, whether that is a positive or a negative message, and the mere act of communication is an affirming event. One can even argue that a work of art which transmits a negative message can be life-affirming, if only because the art work, being a reflection or reformulation of the event which happened in the real world, is the artist's way of "dealing with" a sad or traumatic event, the expectation being that the act of processing the negative event through artistic rendition will alleviate or eliminate the negative effects of that event. I hesitate to say "coping with" since that terminology is too restrictively psychoanalytical.

Given this essential philosophical premise, any artifact could be included in this paper to illustrate how art affirms life. However, since this is a technology-based conference, except for a few paintings and sculptures, I will focus on those art works which use technology or technological processes to convey life-affirming positions on the life issues (abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia). A further restriction is that I intend to include only modern art. Finally, given time constraints of this conference and for the sake of convenience, major works addressing the life issues from the last two decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of this twenty-first century are studied.

[slide three] Perhaps a second philosophical question should be answered. In the popular mind, doesn't modern art merely consist of amorphous shapes in sculpture or mere splashes of color thickly placed on the surface of a canvas? Couldn't anybody's grandchild innocently create something just as easily with a batch of dollar store paints? Matching this dismissive approach to modern art is an equally damning claim that all modern artists are just a bunch of leftist, irreligious loons who innocently paint or sculpt nonsense works anyway, so why pay attention to them?

These objections are not groundless. **[slide four]** "Innocent" may not be a suitable adjective for some artistic productions. Two contemporary art works illustrate modern art's intense hostility to things religious (specifically Roman Catholic Christianity). **[slide five]** Andres Serrano may have excited the art world with what was thought to be an innovative use of urine and photography, but he also offended Christian, specifically Catholic, sensibilities when he created *Piss Christ* in 1987. (Note that the attack against Catholic Christianity is evident since a crucifix, not an Orthodox or a Protestant cross, was used in the photograph.) **[slide six]** Similarly, a portrait of Pope Benedict XVI may seem a contemporary example of representational art. **[slide seven]** While

Niki Johnson's use of 17,000 multicolored condoms to create the portrait is as unique as Serrano's artistic product, it is just as confrontational. Johnson's anti-religious intention should be obvious, even though art critic Megan Griffo focuses on topics other than the hostility toward religion when she says that Johnson "hopes to take aim at the church's [sic] stance on using condoms, but also promote sexual diversity and a more open discussion about sexual health."

A final philosophical matter must be considered. One might not think that modern art concerns itself with the standard three life issues of abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia at all. Since the art world has been stereotypically perceived as the province of so-called liberal entities, it could be presumed that life-affirming creations are not possible in a domain populated by individuals espousing anti-life tendencies. **[slide eight]** One thinks, for example, of the feminist artist Cindy Sherman, whose 1991 print portfolio is listed on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's website as benefitting the National Abortion Rights Action League, **[slide nine]** or the listing of Jennifer Bartlett's 1991 work on the Museum of Modern Art's website, clearly showing her anti-life bias. **[slide ten]** In our new century, although technological means used in art have become even more sophisticated, the anti-life bias has not abated, as this commentary on Josephine Pryde's work in the Museum of Modern Art illustrates:

In her series *It's Not My Body*, Pryde makes reference to the history of darkroom experimentation and contemporary medical-imaging techniques. She superimposes low-resolution MRI scans of a human embryo in its mother against desert landscapes shot through tinted filters, engaging questions about the reproduction of images and the impact visuals have on political debates surrounding "personhood" and a woman's right to choose.

Of course, persons who support the first civil right to life will immediately cringe at the use of the neutered possessive pronoun "its" to refer to the unborn child, who should be identified either by the masculine "his" or the feminine "her" or the politically-correct non-sexist formation "his or her." Similarly, that the commentator places the word "personhood" in quotations is not to indicate that it is being referred to as a word, but that the veracity of the term is doubted, as though unborn children have no right to personhood. Finally, pro-lifers have long recognized that the phrase "woman's right to choose" is a logically fallacious euphemism since it omits the object of the verb infinitive (which is that one who supports abortion supports the mother's choice to kill the unborn child).

These linguistic concerns aside, however, if one studies contemporary art further, one may find that, while some art works do not necessarily broadcast pro-life themes in a heavily didactic manner, there is a collection of work from various artists across genres to justify the claim that modern art captures, displays, and promotes life-affirming values. Perhaps the pro-life messages in various art works, even by those artists who may not be aligned with the right-

to-life movement, are inescapable because, as I asserted above, art is inherently pro-life in the absolute sense of being life-affirming.

II. Definitions and the Role of Technology in Modern Art

Several definitions of words in the title of this paper may be necessary to define for this technical audience to frame the following discussion. First, what is meant by *modern art*, *abstract art*, and the *plastic arts*? Second, how does one define a major art work?

Art historians consider the second half of the nineteenth century as the beginning of modern art. Although they use this designation for any work produced since the nineteenth century, what we know as modern, non-representational art became fully engaged in the culture only in the twentieth century. Beyond these mere historical facts, critics are hard pressed to define the art of our age, and the most understandable definition of *modern art* operates in negation, the statement of what something is not. For example, the famous works of modern art are not representational as much as they are abstract; the works do not indicate or refer to objects in the real world. Moreover, modern art works tender political statements much more than representational work used for ecclesiastical or aristocratic adornment. These general statements apply to abstract paintings as well as works categorized as anything crafted, such as a ceramic, or a sculpture (the plastic arts).¹

Perhaps the most striking difference between art pre-Impressionism and the art of the twentieth and our own new century concerns a topic valued by this conference, technology: **[slide eleven]**

In more recent times it was not scientific ideas but technological hardware that stimulated the visual arts. While the result has undoubtedly been a preponderance of very ordinary and much bad art, this is beside the point: oil on canvas is also mostly mediocre. Artists have grasped at the opportunities which technical advance gives them because that is their nature—to seek symbolic languages appropriate to their time and their vision. In some cases the languages used in the second half of the [twentieth] century borrowed from those of the first, merely translated into contemporary terms. Much video-installation art, for example, looks like the kind of thing Dada would have been doing had they been lucky enough to possess D.V.D. On the other hand, because the material from which art can be made has become so radically different, there have been immense changes in what can be produced: stainless steel, plastics, fiberglass, polyester resin, neon, acrylic paints, and N.A.S.A adhesives have all had their effects, as have airbrushes, aerosol sprays, Polaroid cameras, photocopiers, and fax machines. (Blake 11-12)

¹ See John Russell's introductory chapter "The Secret Revolution" in his *The Meanings of Modern Art* (1981) for an expansive treatment of the ideas in this paragraph.

Regarding the question of how one defines a major art work, with one notable exception (an art work which itself was censored by the art community for reasons which will be clear later), I defer to major art museums themselves. Most art museums have always operated under tight budgets; since they must be highly selective about works deemed worthy to be in their collections, the inclusion of a contemporary piece must obviously have been made following not only severe aesthetic criteria, but also limited financial resources. **[slide twelve]** While most museums listed on this slide were those which I have visited in person (those visited only through the Internet are marked with an asterisk),² for purposes of this study all of the museums' collections were searched using the keywords *abortion*, *euthanasia*, *infanticide*, and *reproductive rights* to discover art works addressing the life issues.³

III. Depictions of Motherhood

Certainly, modern art incarnates attitudes about human life which could be construed as avant garde (in the sense of identifying philosophical positions contrary to the beliefs or opinions of ordinary people). That what was once avant garde is now mainstream testifies to the power of artistic work to reshape the cultural milieu by giving people, not necessarily a new vocabulary, but something much more important: a new image, which in turn affects their vocabulary.

Modern art's contribution in reshaping culture is evident in the definition and depiction of a concept of central concern to this conference—motherhood, the definition and perception of which, of course, determines the choice that a mother makes regarding the unborn life she happens to carry. **[slide thirteen]** For example, the image of a mother being life-affirming dominated the arts for almost two millennia; perhaps this can be attributed to centuries of art works depicting the Virgin Mary embracing, protecting, or honoring the Child Jesus, as depicted in Andrea del Sarto's *Madonna and Child* (ca. 1530) held in the Allen Memorial Art Museum on the campus of Oberlin College. **[slide fourteen]** The millennia-old respect for the Virgin Mother as the epitome of motherhood still obtains, and Salvador Dali's *Madonna of Port Lligat* (1949)

² I have had the pleasure to visit the following museums in person: Akron Art Museum, Albright-Knox Art Gallery (Buffalo), Allen Memorial Art Museum (Oberlin), Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University, Cleveland Museum of Art, Columbus Museum of Art, Dayton Art Institute, Haggerty Museum of Art on the campus of Marquette University (Milwaukee), High Museum of Art (Atlanta), National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC), National Gallery of Canada/Musée des beaux-arts du Canada (Ottawa), Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (Kansas City), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Toledo Museum of Art, and the Walters Art Museum (Baltimore). The following museums were visited through the Internet: Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Museum of Modern Art (New York), Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, National Museum of Women in the Arts (Washington, DC), and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

³ Often, the results of the search string included museum entries which had nothing to do with the topics discussed here. For example, some museums collated anything with the word *reproduced* as a result for the search *reproductive rights*.

testifies to modern art's ability to use non-representational and geometric forms to create a masterpiece.

The image of the mother as killer, of course, never left the Western mind; after all, Western culture is based on an ancient Roman and Greek literary heritage which contains examples of mothers who chose to kill their unborn or born children. **[slide fifteen]** William Wetmore Story's *Medea* (1868) illustrates in sculpture a surprising move away from mother as life-affirming force. Although the sculpture is now owned by the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's description is telling: **[slide sixteen]**

To nineteenth-century theater audiences, Medea was a sympathetic character forced to choose between relinquishing her children and protecting them by destroying them herself. Story similarly deemphasized Medea's revenge, leaving to the viewer's imagination the scene of infanticide to come.

Granted that the sculpture's description is a twenty-first century perspective, if the claim should be taken at face value (after all, shouldn't the writer at one of the premiere museums in the United States know what he or she is saying?), then the contemporary viewer may well wonder what happened by the middle of the nineteenth century to make Medea, the ancient symbol of the infanticidal mother, a sympathetic character. Since documenting the historical shift in motherhood is not the purpose of this paper, we must accept the sculpture's description at face value; certainly, it is evidence that the view of motherhood shifted from the perspective of a life-affirming being to a life-denying one.

[slide seventeen] The role of motherhood becomes further removed from that of a nurturing human parent with a late twentieth-century sculptural example, Louise Bourgeois' *Maman* (1999). What may seem a mass of twisted bronze, marble, and stainless steel to one is a spider to another; an art critic, moreover, would delve deeper to see the work as a commentary on maternity. "The title of the piece *Maman* (1999) was by no means incidental," Tuohy and Masters write, "its towering structure and the marble eggs in its sack combining in a contradictory image of motherhood" (28). That motherhood can be qualified by the adjective "contradictory" may be the intellectual result of a century steeped in feminism, modern art merely reflecting the impact of a life-denying version of that cultural phenomenon.

IV. Representative Contemporary Art Works on the Life Issues

Having perused some philosophical matters and offered necessary definitions about modern art, including its technological component, we can now consider two modern art works which use technology in their presentation of one or more of the life issues: Mary Cate Carroll's *American Liberty Upside Down* (1983) and Bill Viola's *Nantes Triptych* (1992). Instead of merely lecturing on these works, I will ask the audience at two intervals to respond to a set of four questions about each work. Thus, this audience activity will meet two goals of any art work: first, just as one would peruse art works in a gallery, the viewer will have time to appreciate the art work, either determining that it

has aesthetic value or not; second, the viewer will be able to determine whether the art work has a wider function, either persuading him or her to engage in some social action or not.

Long before the current controversy involving the sale of fetal body parts by the abortion business Planned Parenthood, the art world faced a serious challenge from Mary Cate Carroll's painting *American Liberty Upside Down* over its content.⁴ **[slide eighteen]** Carroll describes her work thus:

The painting *American Liberty Upside Down*...is a work depicting an American family scene—a man and a woman sitting on a couch, and a child on the mother's lap. But the child is depicted only in red dotted outline. In the middle of the child I built an actual door which the view[er] can open[;] if you open the door you will see the actual remains preserved in formaldehyude [sic] of a saline abortion—a small greenish male fetus/child curled up head down in a real jar.

[slide nineteen] At this time, I ask the audience to consider the following questions. First, is this art work significant enough to merit anyone's attention? Second, does the technological component add to or detract from the art work? Third, going beyond mere appreciation, could this art work lead to social action? Finally, are there other considerations omitted from the above?

What does the conference audience think about this work? Table 1 is an alphabetical listing of comments written by those who attended this paper presentation. Please note that these comments were written before any audience member learned more about the artist, her position on the first life issue, or the circumstances of her work.

Table 1: Representative Audience Reactions to Mary Cate Carroll's <i>American Liberty Upside Down</i> (1983)	
1. Is this art work significant enough to merit	I think this should merit some attention. It is not in itself significant. As a reflection of the larger

⁴ Locating an image of the painting for this paper proved a most challenging task. I am deeply grateful to Bonnie Seers, managing editor and art director of *Celebrate Life Magazine*, which originally printed an article about the censorship of Carroll's work in the February 1984 issue of what was then titled *A.L.L. About Issues*. "American Liberty Upside Down--Aborted Fetus as Art Is Censored" is the earliest coverage within the right-to-life community on this case of censorship of pro-life art that various editorial and library science professionals have been able to locate. I am also indebted to Karen Zoller, Library Director of the Clara Fritzsche Library at Notre Dame College (South Euclid, Ohio) for the alacrity with which she filled my reference request for newspaper articles addressing the ethical issues surrounding Carroll's painting as recorded in print journalism at the time of the event. The earliest news account that could be found in the non-pro-life press was the October 1983 article by Jennifer Strobel in *The Free Lance-Star*. Researchers who wish to obtain copies of these pdf files may email me at DrJeffKoloze@att.net.

<p>anyone's attention?</p>	<p>society, it is not only significant, but damning.</p> <p>No.</p> <p>No. Except for the police, since a murdered human body is on display.</p> <p>Raises interesting question (shows fact that [what] they are smiling [over] is wrong?)—yes.</p> <p>Yes. [three such responses]</p> <p>Yes, because it depicts the ultimate tragedy of the abortion holocaust.</p> <p>Yes, because it presents a question of the picture: why happy when the baby is dead?</p> <p>Yes, very controversial at closer look.</p>
<p>2. Does the technological component add to or detract from the art work?</p>	<p>Add.</p> <p>Add, because it goes to the real purpose of the work.</p> <p>Add, somewhat. It's just a door.</p> <p>Detract.</p> <p>Detract, maybe.</p> <p>It adds it, because it says, in a visual manner, <i>why</i> the child is missing.</p> <p>Not sure.</p> <p>Technological component, other than the fetus, is irrelevant.</p> <p>The technological component seems to make the statement more realistic—gruesomely so.</p> <p>This definitely adds to the powerful language behind this art.</p> <p>What's the truth?</p>
<p>3. Going beyond</p>	<p>It could lead to social action, although it seems like there is</p>

<p>mere appreciation, could this art work lead to social action?</p>	<p>a lot of apathy about a dead fetal picture/image (like Planned Parenthood videos), especially if a person is pro-abortion.</p> <p>Might reinforce either the views of the abortionists or the pro-lifers.</p> <p>Not sure.</p> <p>Probably.</p> <p>Social action appears to be the main point.</p> <p>Social action could follow if one interprets it as a life that “could [sentence not completed]</p> <p>This art definitely inspires me to social action. Why not others? Big yes.</p> <p>Yes. [two such responses]</p> <p>Yes, because [we] see the aborted children could cause social action.</p> <p>Yes, to lead on to see the emptiness stemming from abortion.</p>
<p>4. Are there other considerations omitted from the above?</p>	<p>Does it disrespect the baby’s life that was lost?</p> <p>I noticed the Raggedy Andy inside the door, opposite the aborted child. It says the “choice” is to make even the living child no more than a thing, not a person. There is also an idea of a reliquary, but the door gives an iconic content.</p> <p>Love to see what interactions have occurred.</p> <p>Political questions are relevant but omitted. How is this even legal?</p> <p>Probably.</p> <p>“Reliquary”? Religious connotations.</p> <p>Shows tremendous <i>gap</i> left by our missing children killed by abortion. Title is <i>Upside Down</i>. The question is the art</p>

	<p>work's use of <i>real</i> fetus vs. representation.</p> <p>With so much acceptance of abortion in our culture, what is the family of tomorrow going to look like?</p> <p>Yes, the legal ramifications of displaying a murdered human.</p> <p>Yes, the reason for the aborted children in the context of the picture.</p>
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Besides these audience responses, other pro-life commentary on the value of the painting can be provided. While the facts surrounding the controversy generated by the art work are important, especially since they come from the artist directly, other technical considerations and their effects should be noted, especially since they comport with the focus of this pro-life technical conference.

First is the obvious fact that, although it uses low technology, the painting succeeds in conveying a complex life-affirming message for the viewer.⁵ While the viewer's eyesight may be drawn to various points of the canvas, the ambiguity which greets him or her is the same: if one focuses on the parents, then one wonders why they are smiling at something missing; if one focuses on the outline, one would wonder who the child would have been to fill the gap. If the viewer focuses on the parents and then opens the door containing the unborn child's body, then the viewer experiences psychological dissonance. (Why would anyone—even the most strident anti-lifer, such as, for example, someone working at any of the offices of the abortion business Planned Parenthood—smile at the remains of an aborted child?). Similarly, if the door is opened first and the viewer then looks at the smiling parents, the emotional reaction should be one of repugnance, for no sane person would find delight at the remains of a dead human being. All of these ideas crowd the viewer when he or she realizes that this low-technology painting illustrates the deadly effects of high-tech methods used to kill unborn children in contemporary society. Perhaps the cognitive dissonance which the painting stimulates is the artist's intention, for Carroll herself can testify to the power of this psychological concept: "When I saw an aborted fetus for the first time, I came to a crisis between my feminist beliefs and what I was seeing.... Two years later I became a Christian" (*American Liberty*); ellipsis in original).

⁵ "Participant" may be a better term to use since the art work demands that the viewer engage with the painting by opening the central door to view the unborn child's body. Thus, the visual component is enhanced by a kinetic one, which may be further enhanced by an aural component. When the painting was displayed at a Cleveland gallery in 1994, if I recall correctly, opening the central door activated an audiotape of a scream to symbolize the horror of the act of abortion.

A second consideration is that the painting has a substantial social effect that was barely recognized in the 1980s and needs to be reaffirmed today, especially after the numerous revelations about the selling of fetal body parts by the abortion business Planned Parenthood and subsequent efforts by anti-life groups to censor videos of the transactions made over the unborn children's bodies. Carroll's commentary about the censorship of the painting is crucial for right-to-life history: **[slide twenty]**

I was invited by my Alma Mater to participate in an art show of six alumnae of Mary Washington College. I was told in writing to bring whatever I wanted to show, up to six pieces. I brought a series of paintings which I call the American Liberty Series. Two days after I hung the show and before the opening the college called and said there was a problem with two of the paintings and that they had debated whether to remove both and finally decided that the one *American Liberty Upside Down* would have to be removed and I was to come forthwith [sic] and remove it from the campus. I challenged them on this but they insisted. I called the school and local newspaper. The case escalated into a little national brouhaha when writer/activist Nat Hentoff championed my cause in articles in *The Village Voice*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times*. A detailed description of my case can be found in Nat Hentoff's 1993 book, *Free Speech for Me but Not for Thee*. It should be noted that the censorship of this artwork was not covered by any art periodical or any art critic because I believe the art world while decrying censorship regularly censors the work of what they deem the politically incorrect. It was after all the Art Department that did the initial censorship.

A final, semantic matter can summarize this brief critique of the painting. Throughout this paper I have identified Carroll's work as a painting; that is how the art world categorizes it. However, the more accurate term which should be used to classify the work is one which contemporary society would have great difficulty in understanding. If the classification was challenging for the 1980s, then it is even more so now after nearly forty more years of intense secularization and attacks on religious institutions. As the sole pro-life news account used for this study states, "Carroll considers her work to be a reliquary—a work of art to enshrine the remains of part or all of a human being—usually a martyr" ("*American Liberty*"). The controversy of the work should thus surrender to a more important consideration, for it is clear that the artist herself wishes the viewer to approach the work with the sense of religious awe which it deserves.

[slide twenty-one] The second art work to be considered is Bill Viola's *Nantes Triptych* (1992), which uses that traditional form to juxtapose three life scenes: the moment of birth, a human being submerged in water, and the

moments of an older woman near death.⁶ **[slide twenty-two]** As with Carroll’s work, I ask the audience at this time to consider the following questions. First, is this art work significant enough to merit anyone’s attention? Second, does the technological component add to or detract from the art work? Third, going beyond mere appreciation, could this art work lead to social action? Finally, are there other considerations omitted from the above?

What does the conference audience think about this work? Table 2 is an alphabetical listing of comments written by those who attended this paper presentation. Please note that these comments were written before any audience member learned more about the artist and general critical and my own commentary about his work.

Table 2: Representative Audience Reactions to Bill Viola’s <i>Nantes Triptych</i> (1992)	
1. Is this art work significant enough to merit anyone’s attention?	<p>I don’t think so.</p> <p>Maybe.</p> <p>Need more info—don’t understand.</p> <p>No. [three such responses]</p> <p>Not so sure this merits attention. I don’t get the human submerged in water connection.</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>Yes, I am drawn in. I am intrigued, and I want to learn more and understand.</p> <p>Yes. It catches the eye.</p>
2. Does the technological component add to or detract from the art work?	<p>Add. [two such responses]</p> <p>Definitely couldn’t be done without the technological component.</p> <p>Detract.</p>

⁶ Finding a suitable version of Viola’s work so that an appropriate clip could be shown to the conference audience would have been exceedingly difficult had it not been for Dr. Rolf Lauter’s YouTube upload. Although the commentary is in German and may present challenges for an English-speaking audience, viewers are able to see a sufficient portion of the art work.

	<p>Detracts—too confusing at first.</p> <p>It makes the effective point of saying we float through life from birth to death. It does not give a compass for the true spirituality in his art.</p> <p>Neither.</p> <p>The technological component adds to the interest of the art work.</p> <p>This definitely adds to the real aspect of the art. Much.</p> <p>Yes, but the purpose is not clear. It leaves to the human [an] interpretation of what is being presented.</p>
<p>3. Going beyond mere appreciation, could this art work lead to social action?</p>	<p>I don't know; I am confused. If its meaning was explained, maybe I could better understand. What is the significance of the submerged human?</p> <p>I don't think so.</p> <p>No. [three such responses]</p> <p>Not sure if this would lead to social action. I think it is more subtle.</p> <p>There does not seem to be a goad to social action, but something has to be a source of a rule of life.</p> <p>Yes. [two such responses]</p> <p>Yes, but what action is required?</p>
<p>4. Are there other considerations omitted from the above?</p>	<p>“Float through” life? Don't like imagery. The “dash” on the tombstone. Neither piece of art is necessarily anti-life.</p> <p>Is there significance to the circumstances of each of the three people's lives?</p> <p>N/A.</p> <p>No.</p> <p>Probably.</p> <p>“Triptych” is a divine layout done in art.</p>

	<p>We seek for beauty. Where is the symmetry?</p> <p>Yes. However, I have no context for the art work presented.</p>
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Besides these audience reactions, other pro-life commentary can be provided. While Tuohy and Masters critique the art work as an illustration that “life and death reflect and contain each other” (194), I argue that Viola’s *Nantes Triptych* is powerful not only for what it says, but also for what it does not say. The ideas expressed within the correlative conjunctions can be easily clarified. **[slide twenty-three]** Critical evaluation of the work repeatedly highlights the spirituality of life and death:

Viola believes that art has an enlightening and redemptive function. “Images have transformative powers within the individual self...art can articulate a kind of healing or growth or completion process...it is a branch of knowledge, epistemology in the deepest sense, and not just an aesthetic practice.” For him birth and death, the markers which delineate our life-span, “are mysteries in the truest sense of the word, not meant to be solved, but experienced and inhabited. This is the source of their knowledge.” He believes that in our Western science-oriented culture “issues such as birth and death no longer command our attention after they have been physically explained,” and that it is essential to return to them as “wake-up calls” with powerful emotional and spiritual effects. (Manchester; ellipses in original; internal citations omitted)

If this is what the art work says, then what it does not say is just as worthy of attention, especially among pro-lifers or anyone who espouses a life-affirming approach. The art work does not devalue either the newborn or the elderly. Even though the mother is obviously experiencing the pain of childbirth, the viewer intellectually knows that a child will be born, not aborted, and that virtually all mothers rejoice over the birth of their children despite transitory childbirth pain. The central figure, as in a traditional triptych, illustrates the intellectual point suggested by the left and right panels that all born human beings “float” through life (between the moment of birth and the moment of death) just as the representational figure literally floats.

Similarly, the condition of the elderly woman in the last panel could be construed by anti-life persons as the unfortunate consequence of getting old, suffering needless pain, and losing one’s dignity. However, this is not what the art work says, or, more correctly, should be interpreted as saying, especially when one considers, as Manchester points out, that “Viola filmed his mother as she lay dying in a coma in 1991 as a means of confronting her death artistically.” Would the artist’s intention be as cruel as an anti-life person’s summary statements of an elderly person whose life is without meaning or

beauty? We should presume not and affirm that Viola respects his mother as any son would.

Taken as a whole, from a pro-life perspective, it is obvious that there is no destruction occurring in the first panel of the child's birth. What should be obvious in the last panel is that, although the elderly woman's life is ending, there is no active destruction of her life; nature is taking its course.

Finally, what is especially interesting is that Viola uses the triptych form, customarily used in religious settings, as the frame for the work. Since the form has not lost its religious associations, even by a secularized art world, even the elderly woman's death can be interpreted as an affirmation of and movement of her physical life to something higher, a triptych by its nature affirming the human connection with the divine.

V. Strategies for Discovering and Promoting Life-Affirming Content in Art

[slide twenty-four] It may be helpful to conclude this paper by offering some strategies to assist one to uncover life-affirming and pro-life content in modern art. Five can be enumerated here.

The first two recommendations are personal. First, visit galleries and museums, which are the traditional sites for the presentation of contemporary art. The engineers and technologists in the audience may at first focus on mathematical computations and geometric criteria in art displayed in the galleries, but it is hoped that the scientific appreciation of any work will lead to an aesthetic one encouraged by the humanities.

Second, fill your residence and office areas with life-affirming art. The maxim that a picture is worth a thousand words has obvious application to the life issues. The photos of aborted babies in the 1970s were as effective for the right-to-life movement then as the videos and photos of fetal body parts sold by the abortion business Planned Parenthood are today. Likewise, a positive image of an unborn child or an elderly person may reinforce the value of human life more than reams of well-reasoned argumentation in finely crafted books.

The third through fifth recommendations are social and should follow from the adoption of the first two. Third, be aware of and contest life-denying connotations of words and euphemisms used in titles of art works; for example, just as in the legislative arena, the term *choice* in any art work may refer to abortion. Fourth, suggest that artists use various technological means to illustrate the groups of humans targeted by anti-lifers (the unborn, the handicapped newborn, and the elderly); when they agree, finance their efforts or buy their works. Fifth, use social media to promote specific life-affirming works. I offer my own recent post about the censorship of Mary Cate Carroll's reliquary on Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, and Twitter as an example.

Future research could identify many more art works which address the life issues. It is hoped that this paper will encourage others who have more time and expertise to investigate those works at greater length. It is also hoped that future scholars will expand commentary on the corpus of life-affirming art

work in academic journals which cater to the intellectual elite and that non-academic persons will comment on pro-life art work on social networking sites which serve the informational needs of society, including two important categories within that population (teenagers and college students, the next generation of pro-lifers). Finally, it is hoped that this paper will reverse decades of censorship against pro-life artists like Mary Cate Carroll so that their contributions not only to the right-to-life movement, but also to the larger culture are recognized.

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