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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

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The meaning of life is to see.

Hui Neng

The arts make visible what is often invisible. Like Frederick Franck, the authors contributing to this focus section believe that the everyday eye can become an “awakened eye.” Annie Dillard distinguishes the awakened eye by reflecting on two kinds of seeing. First, “seeing is of course very much a matter of verbalization” (1974, p. 30). Unless we call our attention to what passes before our eyes, we simply fail to see. Then the margins of our lives become cluttered with the unnoticed, the castaway, and the taken-for-granted scraps of life. Such living is thoughtless and unreflective. Ultimately, living in this way refuses self-opportunities to probe and press the wrinkles of human experiences. To guard against such seeing, Dillard encourages us to keep in our heads “a running description of the present” (1974, p. 31). When we see in this way, we pry, poke around, nose in and out of our everyday habits. We live as though we are on to something, probing and pressing the wrinkles of human experience.

Second, “there is another kind of seeing that involves a letting go” (Dillard, 1974, p. 31). Dillard suggests that this kind of seeing empties and transforms us. We see and we are subtly, imperceptibly, changed by what we have seen. Dramatically, perhaps, the stone is rolled back, the veil vanishes, and we know something more deeply and more intimately than we have ever known it before.

The difference between the two ways of seeing is the difference between walking with and without a camera. When I walk with a camera, I walk from shot to shot, reading the light of a calibrated meter. When I walk without a camera, my own shutter opens, and the moment’s light prints on my own silver gut. When I see this second way I am above all an unscrupulous observer. (Dillard, 1974, p. 31)

The artistic images, the imaginative visions, and the creative research included in this section are generous blends of both kinds of seeing.

The articles in this focus section deal with the place of the arts within Catholic education. Each article addresses a particular art form and advocates for its inclusion in the life of the school. Ruth Starratt, an artist and teacher, writes about the visual arts as opening spaces for the human spirit to grow. Ona Bessette, a dancer and high school administrator, offers dance as both the metaphor and the meaning at the heart of Catholic leadership. Kathryn Hendren, a student of Fr. Daniel Berrigan, takes us inside a college classroom where we experience poetry of war and see the soul of a poet in trauma. Rita E. Guare from Fordham University explores the power of literature in awakening consciousness, releasing imagination, and nourishing the life of the spirit.

Each of the articles invites us to look at the world through the eyes of possibility and entertain visions of more just and lovelier ways of being present to each other. Each illuminates the power of the arts in offering life, hope, and light. Each is an epiphany celebrating the mystery and the sacrament of matter through the arts.

REFERENCES

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Dillard, A. (1974). *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York: Bantam Books.

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