

The artistic expression of religious beliefs and sentiments is a recurrent topic in art historical research. The corpus is enormous and open to interpretation. Readings may be mystical, spiritual, institutional, iconographic, psychoanalytical, linguistic, anthropological, or ideological ... the list of viable approaches is very long. As fascinating as these lines of inquiry have been, and continue to be, the blowback phenomenon – iconoclasm – has been equally productive of scholarship, and promises even more in a culture attuned to unwritten histories, the encoding of forbidden knowledge, and the art of ekphrasis. All such investigation is about history, however, and contemporary religious art, in Canada and elsewhere, remains a delicate and sometimes contentious subject. Its chroniclers, curators, critics, and practitioners often camouflage their studies in the secularisms of identity politics and material culture.

But religion matters to many people, whether it actively guides their lives or haunts their memories and imaginations, just as art matters. It should not be surprising that art and religion continue to feed each other, to be complicit in their shaping of contemporary words and images. And it is no wonder that much of this imagery is wondrous and worthy of contemplation and analysis.

Nor am I surprised that the guest editor of this thematic issue has taken on such a challenging topic. Loren Lerner has looked closely at expressions of memory in art, with a focus on the traumas of the twentieth century. Mindful of social actors and their agency in times of trial, and with great empathy, she has also attended to ordinary human experience, the visual representation of life passages such as childhood and aging, and the intensification of being that occurs within certain activities, such as reading or drawing. In all her research projects, Loren Lerner has focused on art that forms bridges between individuals and spans diverse communities.

The springboard of this particular project was ART+RELIGION, the fourth Max and Iris Stern International Symposium organized by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, in collaboration with Concordia University. With the generous support of an Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences grant of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Loren Lerner has developed the findings of that conference into this special issue of the *Journal of Canadian Art History*.

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