

REVIEW



The Artist's Rule: Nurturing Your Creative Soul with Monastic Wisdom

by Christine Valters Paintner

Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2011

173 pages, CAD\$14.67, GBPE10.99, USD\$15.95

Reviewed by Catherine Grytting

During childhood, after several viewings of "The Wizard of Oz," I knew the story by heart. Nevertheless, the movie surprised me when I first watched it in color. The scenes in Kansas, USA, are filmed in black and white. When Dorothy drops into Oz, reds, yellows, and greens burst onto the screen and welcome the viewer to this new world.

Christine Valters Paintner's fifth book evokes a similar experience. In *The Artist's Rule*, the familiar subjects of creativity and spirituality explode into a kaleidoscope of connections that invite the reader into the borderland where these topics converge. Grounded in scholarly knowledge, the book quotes Scriptures, theologians, mystics, psychologists, artists, poets, and others. Yet it reads like a stimulating conversation with a soul friend.

Paintner is a Benedictine Oblate. She commits to living the prayer and spirituality of the Benedictine religious order in her daily life circumstances as a wife, artist, writer, and teacher. The book "began as an online course called *Way of the Monk, Path of the Artist*" (3). It maps a twelve-week journey that blends sparkling elements of creativity with rich values of spirituality. The bones of the book are Benedictine practices such as contemplation, praying the hours, obedience, humility, hospitality, community, asceticism, and service. Paintner fleshes out the content with teachings from early Christian desert fathers and mothers, insights from Celtic and Cherokee traditions, and the intelligence of the Earth's seasons.

After discussing contemporary perspectives on ancient wisdom, each chapter offers contemplative practices that include questions for reflection and a reading to

ponder through *lectio divina*. Then Paintner presents two creative explorations, generally using visual and written forms, with some opportunities for movement. Rather than focusing on artistic products, the exercises foster transformation. Paintner encourages the reader to "give yourself permission to make 'bad' art. By 'bad,' I simply mean art that is purely for self-exploration ... and for honoring the beauty found in truthfulness" (103). Yet sometimes, artistic play uncovers the splendor that dwells in our sacred depths. Poetic gems from participants in the online class shimmer at the end of every chapter. The structure of each creative activity provides support for timid novices while launching bold practitioners.

Written for those interested in spirituality and creativity, Paintner's book speaks to spiritual direction by cultivating awareness of "the sacred presence beating through the heart of the world" (16). Readers can enjoy the book from cover-to-cover, or by engaging with random excerpts. They can be successful alone or as individuals in a group. Spiritual directors might apply this book to their own deepening or recommend it as a resource for spiritual directees.

I enjoyed *The Artist's Rule*. The content carried me over the rainbow to the place where "the monk and the artist are one" (161). Even after creating times ended, they continued to nourish me. I believe they will for you, too.

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