

PRESS RELEASE: Through Fujimura, New York Produces its Bible

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Renowned artist and writer Makoto Fujimura is not shy about the importance of his latest project. “Whether I like it or not, this is what I will be remembered by,” Fujimura asserts. “I don’t think it’s an overstatement to say that it is a commission of the decade, if not more,” says Valerie Dillon, whose Dillon Gallery is the foremost Western gallery representing contemporary Nihonga artists and Fujimura’s main exhibitor.

The commission is an illuminated manuscript designed and illustrated by Fujimura, published by Crossway to commemorate the four hundred year anniversary of The King James Bible. The leather-bound English Standard Version of the four Gospels, printed with a six-color metallic process, will be released January 2011. Five major new works by Fujimura will be reproduced before each gospel and on the frontispiece, making this the first such manuscript featuring abstract contemporary art in lieu of traditional representational illustrations. This unprecedented marriage of a modern, usually secular art form with ancient scripture is what most interests Fujimura, who aims to depict “the greater reality that the Bible speaks of... for the pure sake of integrating faith and art in our current pluralistic, multicultural world.”

The artist is quintessentially multicultural. Born in Boston to Japanese parents, Fujimura lived in three countries before the age of ten. While attending school in Japan and the US, he met and married an American woman, then became a New Yorker. He is both culturally and literally bilingual, a seasoned navigator of the uneasy overlap between East and West. But he also traverses the deeper divide between the art world and the church. As an Artist and a Christian rather than a Christian Artist, Fujimura is Crossway’s ideal candidate, an individual defined by the very juxtapositions this Bible will display.

Fujimura’s work also fits the commission. As a student of Nihonga, a Japanese technique dating to the 8th century, Fujimura and his classmates at the Tokyo University of Fine Art set out to “[break] with tradition in order to revitalize and expand the art form,” according to Dillon. Fujimura created an “entirely new approach to Nihonga,” a synthesis between traditional and modern techniques.

Fujimura is not alone in his complexity. Sociologist Tony Carnes sees Fujimura as part of a “global religious transformation,” the result of blurring lines between mainstream and religious culture. Another recent illustrated manuscript, *Genesis*, by decidedly secular illustrator R. Crumb, is evidence of this shift. Fujimura also recognizes this movement, saying “the Age of Faith is coming.” This illuminated manuscript, painted in Midtown Manhattan by a cultural navigator like Fujimura, will be further affirmation. “Jesus is a New Yorker,” Carnes says. “And he’s got an illustrated Bible.”



Fujimura’s latest show, *Soliloquies*, is a joint exhibition with 20th century French painter Georges Rouault. It is on view at Dillon Gallery through December 24.