

ARTS IN AMERICA

Experts Suggest Religious Art Can Be High Quality

(NAPSA)—Is it possible for a museum to exhibit art that is both religious and high-quality?

Absolutely yes, was the consensus of participants at a recent symposium at the American Bible Society titled *Art and Religion in the Public Realm*. The event was funded by the Luce Foundation.

“Religious art,” said Gustav Niebuhr, visiting fellow for the Center for the Study of Religions at Princeton and former religion writer for *The New York Times*, has frequently “been seen as polarizing and too hot to handle.”

Yet, he noted, “There is a greater public interest now in talking about religious experience.” That, he believes, makes this a time of heightened awareness about religious art.

Other speakers described a “golden age” for religious art in the United States, evidenced by both public and religious galleries in Houston, St. Louis, and New York, among other places, which regularly exhibit religious-themed art.

That interest has been illustrated in the response to the Gallery at the American Bible Society, noted Dr. Patricia Pongracz, curator.

The Gallery is dedicated to the proposition that engagement with the Bible can occur through aesthetic appreciation from works inspired by the Scriptures as well as through reading or preaching.

“It’s accessible on different levels. We’re open to everyone,” she said.

Breaking down the division between art and Christian belief is an ongoing focus of the Gallery at the American Bible Society, noted Dr. Ena Heller, director.



Many experts believe we are living in a “Golden Age” for religious art.

“Being part of an organization whose mission is to engage with the Scriptures, we don’t have to make apologies for organizing exhibitions with overtly religious content and to discuss it as such,” she said.

The Gallery at the American Bible Society is located at 1865 Broadway at 61st Street in Manhattan. Exhibitions are free and open to the public. Groups may book a tour by calling 212-408-1500.

Founded in 1816 and headquartered in New York City, the American Bible Society is a non-profit, interconfessional organization. Its mission is to provide the Scriptures to every person in a language and format each can readily understand and afford. To learn more, visit the Web site at www.americanbible.org.