

God, the Taboo Topic of Art Education

Terry Barrett, Valora Blackson, Vicki Daiello, Megan Goffos

Introduction

A serendipitous match of this journal's call for imagery "that lies *outside* art educators' accepted sphere"—"out of site/sight/cite"—and a (too) rare discussion among art educators talking about God within a secular classroom prompts this article. Concepts of God are generally withheld from the site of public school art classrooms in the United States; many teachers express wariness and fear of bringing artists' sights of God into their public school art rooms, although God and Gods are a frequent subject for artists through time and across place. Further, the topic of God is rarely cited in art education literature. Recently, a group of art educators, including the authors, engagingly addressed concepts of God within a state institution; we wish to formally cite the topic and place this introductory discussion within the literature.

Artists around the world have overtly dealt with concepts of God and topics of religion throughout time. God and religion are topics that artists continue to explicitly address in their art today. For example, "ReJewvenation" is a 2005 conference on Jewish Studies that includes a provocative piece on circumcision by Melissa Shiff (2005), *Gender Cuts/ The Jew Under the Knife*. Our article is informed by an exhibition of new art called "100 Artists See God," curated by John Baldessari and Meg Cranston (2004), that is touring the United States.

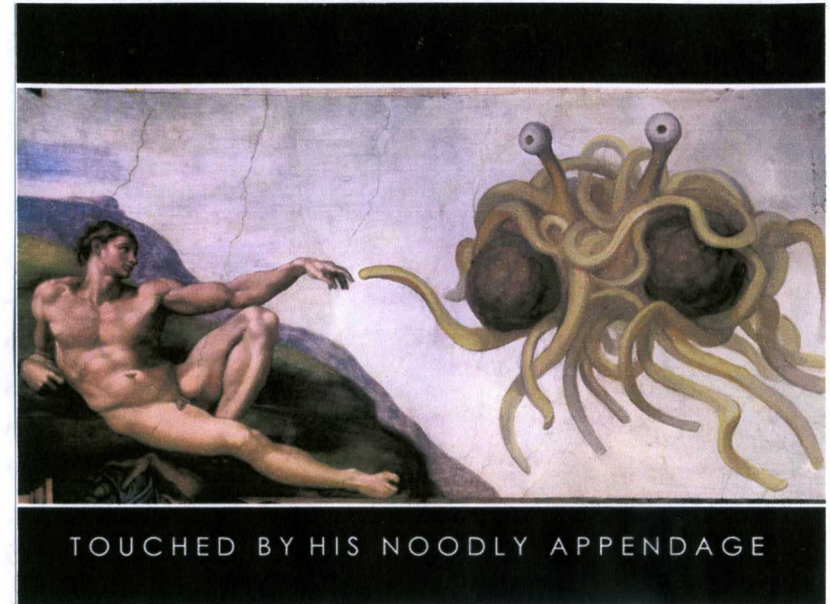


Figure 1: Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, *Touched by His Noodly Appendage*, graphic for free downloading, <http://www.venganza.org/index.htm#wallpapers>, 2006.

Concepts of God are also a topic of explicit interest and expression in the realm of popular visual culture. Bobby Henderson (2006), for example, shows his divine vision on his website. Henderson proclaims his vision of an intelligent God, a flying spaghetti monster that was revealed to him in a dream. Prayers on the site end with "ramen" rather than "amen." Sarah Boxer (2005) explains in *The New York Times* that Henderson asserts his newfound faith in response to President Bush and Senator Bill Frist who are promoting the teaching of "intelligent design" as a scientific theory of the formation of the universe.

The concept of God is unavoidably rooted in the production of culture and holds significant discursive sway in the shaping of the social subject. The purpose of this article is to open dialogue about hotly contested concepts of God that are ignored or avoided in art education,

