



MAKOTO FUJIMURA
refractions

a journey of faith, art and culture



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A collection of essays, thoughts, and prayers from award-winning artist Makoto Fujimura, Refractions brings people of all backgrounds together in conversation and meditation on culture, art, and humanity.

Refractions: A Journey of Faith, Art, and Culture Details

Date : Published February 1st 2009 by NavPress

ISBN : 9781600063015

Author : Makoto Fujimura

Format : Paperback 176 pages

Genre : Art, Nonfiction, Religion, Theology, Faith, Cultural, Christianity, Writing, Essays



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Nathan says

So, so much to digest from these essays. One one hand, the mind & outlook of an artist is on display through life's mile markers, including death, catastrophe, and the arrival of children into adulthood.

On the other hand, the concepts behind various presentations & creators are called into question. Toward the artists, the passages are judgment free, yet there are multiple calls to action steered toward the reader.

Certainly a volume that demands repeated visits!

Mark Oppenlander says

This book is a collection of essays from visual artist Makoto Fujimura. They were originally published as a series of blog posts and in various print and on-line publications. As a Japanese-American, a Christian, an artist and a survivor of the 9/11 attacks (his family lived a few blocks from Ground Zero), Fujimura's topics include art, faith, culture, violent conflict in our world and more.

I enjoyed this book. Fujimura has a gentle and humble writing style that takes a meandering path through his topics, gently resting on one idea before purposefully moving on to the next. The unhurried nature of his rhythms is refreshing. Reading this book, I could imagine what a delightful, thoughtful conversation one might have with this man over tea or coffee. The inclusion of color plates of some of his artwork and photos enhances the intimate quality of the reflections.

Nonetheless, I have to confess that I expected something more. I am not quite sure what. Perhaps I was simply put off by how much of the book deals with his experience of New York City (and the world) after 9/11. My own experience of that event was so different that I found it hard to relate. And I suspected in reading his responses to that ugly historical moment that he and I would probably have different political points of view as well. Or perhaps I anticipated more pithy, crystalline lessons in each of the essays. That's an unfair demand, to be sure, and it doesn't suit Fujimura's style at all. He's not trying to write a book on how to be a faithful artist in the 21st century (although he touches on this theme). But his essays tend to move from specific moments into more diffuse generalizations or abstractions. And I think I wasn't prepared for that; I was expecting something more concrete, I guess.

Still, this book engages some interesting topics and is well written and nicely put together. A reader interested in any of the subjects Fujimura writes about may find this well worth their time.

Matt says

Makoto Fujimura is one of the very few Christian artists alive today who seem able to live out their faith without sacrificing the honesty of their work. 'Refractions' is a beautiful, rambling collection of essays on topics as diverse -- yet somehow related -- as 9/11, Japanese aesthetics, and Finding Neverland.

Amy Neftzger says

This is a nice read for artists or anyone interested in the arts or how creativity can impact culture. The book is a series of short nonfiction pieces on different topics. Depending upon your stage in life, this book may have a more (or less) powerful impact on you, and each chapter may have a different level of impact because each is unique. The author makes some wonderful points and brings perspective to some of life's most painful moments and how art can be a part of the healing process.

Molly Miltenberger says

I love his blog posts... I think this was a little too scattered.

Poema says

A quote from Makoto Fujimura:

"Beauty often resides in the peripheries of our lives."

This was a meditative book written by an artist whose studio was just blocks away from the twin towers that were toppled during the 9/11 attack. The trauma of that event could have discouraged any sensitive soul from persevering in the work, but the hideous destruction served in this case to solidify and fan the flames of the higher call to create.

Makoto Fujimura is unabashedly Christian in his view of culture, but has unique cross cultural contacts and perspectives. The chapters are self contained and often touch on art forms outside of his own expertise. I found his meditations to be thought provoking, elegant, and lovely. This is a book to read slowly and to savor. You will have new eyes to see beauty, while not negating the sacrifice that was required to bring it forth.

Leslie says

Profound, thoughtful words that need to be heard by all Christians in our divided, violent, screaming culture. So many gems that I know I'll need to re-read this one, and I know I'll find fresh insight.

Sarah says

"The church needs to be involved in the arts and even advocate for those outside of faith, precisely because God has poured his grace in all of creation, and every artist, consciously or not, taps into the 'groaning' of the Spirit."

This beautiful book is a collection of profound and thought-provoking essays about art and faith. Author Makoto Fujimura is an incredible artist and his perspective on the mingling of art and faith is especially compelling. Throughout the book, he discusses the use of art in the aftermath of 9/11. He talks about the significance behind The Last Supper, and delves into the ancient history of tea as an art form in Japan. The book is full of different stories and anecdotes, and yet it all flows together in a beautiful and inspiring way. I'd definitely recommend *Refractions* to anyone (especially Christian artists).

Emi says

A personal memoir (written as blog posts and later compiled) in which he reflects on an artist's calling in our current culture/world. Inspiring, reaffirming, helpful, and thought-provoking. Would recommend for "broken, brutally honest, creative ... canaries in the cultural mines" -- one of many ways he referred to "artists" in this book. :)

Sharon Baker-johnson says

The reader's first impression of this book will certainly come from its presentation. The publisher (NavPress) spared no thought in creating a beautiful over sized quality paperback with color reproductions of the author's and other artist's work. I was drawn first to thumb through the book, taking glimpses or tastes of the book before ever sitting down to read it.

Fujimura is an American artist using Japanese-style painting, honored in Japan and the US. In 1992 he was the youngest artist to have a piece acquired by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo. The subtitle of his book is "A Journey of Faith, Art, and Culture." A better word would be journal rather than journey as the relatively short meditations reflect a personal thought process rather than a thorough treatment. This qualifier in no way discounts the value of the book, but it would more accurately reflect what it is.

The backdrop of these reflections is Ground Zero where the artist lives. This is the reflective mirror by which these chapters are written. Art as a means of peacemaking is a major theme though any creative reader will find some thing to mull over. Not to be read quickly, the book invites time and reflection, a soaking in of the reality of the presence and importance of art in our daily living. For the Christian this book will open eyes to the gracious gift of creativity which needs to be recognized and valued in the church. A creative artistic interpretation of da Vinci's Last Supper toward the end of the book was riveting and thought provoking. "The greatest message imbedded in the painting--that Judas, the seed of betrayal, is in all of us (153)."

During the '80's Fujimura experienced a "transfer of allegiance from Art to Christ which he recounts in "River Grace." Tasting this book draws me to search out his memoir as well.

Great quotes:

"What makes us truly human may not be how fast we are able to accomplish a task but what we experience fully, carefully, and quietly in the process (27)."

"My art reaches for the heavenly reality via earthly materials (28)."

"All of earth is 'ground zero' in that our failures and conflicts invade every aspect of our experience, leaving scars (61)."

"Art is an inherently hopeful act, an act that echoes the creativity of the Creator (69)."

"We need more creative visionaries who would dare even to plant seedlings in stone that will mature into trees whose roots will crack open the rock, as if it were a mere egg, spilling its shalom dirt into the hearts of a city (127)."

Jen says

I've been using this book as part of my morning time with God. I love Fujimura's thoughts on God and the creative life. His outlook is refreshing and offers expansive ways of considering life with God.

Becky Pliego says

Very good. I knew, from other articles he has written elsewhere, that I was not going to agree with everything he had to say, but I am grateful for the things he has to say that are biblical and relevant.

Debbie says

What a thoughtful book. I'm currently reading a chapter of Romans and a chapter of this book each morning. As Paul lays out justification by faith, it's a nice contrast to read Mako's reflective book on art and faith and the revelation of God that is all around us if we take time to notice.

Kristen says

A lovely collection of short essays (reworked from blog posts) and art. Lots of food for thought on art, culture, parenting, living in the city and faith. (8/10)

Alexis Johnson says

Fujimura's books have changed my life, and were it not for his calm comprehension and reflection, I would have totally lost my mind this year. His understanding of art and the global cultural need is unprecedented--at least from my perspective. I am very grateful for his work and I hope some day I can tell him that in person.
