



Refiguring the Spiritual (Religion, Culture, and Public Life)

Mark C. Taylor

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Mark C. Taylor provocatively claims that contemporary art has lost its way. With the art market now mirroring the art of finance, many artists create works solely for the purpose of luring investors and inspiring trade among hedge funds and private equity firms. When art becomes a financial instrument, grounded in nothing but itself, it loses its critical edge. Its commoditization, corporatization, and financialization rob us of necessary perspective.

Joseph Beuys, Matthew Barney, James Turrell and Andy Goldsworthy are artists who differ in style, yet they all defy the trends that have diminished art's potential in recent decades. They understand that art is a transformative practice drawing inspiration directly and indirectly from ancient and modern, eastern and western forms of spirituality. For Beuys, anthroposophy, alchemy, and shamanism drive his multimedia presentations; for Barney and Goldsworthy, Celtic mythology informs their art; and for Turrell, Quakerism and Hopi myths and rituals power his vision. Eluding traditional genres and classifications, their work combines spiritually inspired styles and techniques with material reality, creating works that resist merging space into cyberspace in ways that overwhelm local contexts with global landscapes. These artists remind us of life's irreducible materiality and humanity's inescapability of place. For them, art is more than just an object or process. It is a vehicle transforming human awareness through actions echoing religious ritual. By lingering over the extraordinary work of Beuys, Barney, Turrell, and Goldsworthy, Taylor creates a novel and personal encounter with their art and opens a new understanding of overlooked spiritual dimensions in our era.

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