



Joanna Meyer: [00:02](#) Hello and welcome to The Faith & Work Podcast, where we explore our everyday work in God's world. The Faith & Work Podcast is produced and hosted by Denver Institute for Faith & Work. I'm Joanna Meyer, director of events and sponsorships at Denver Institute, and I'm joined today by Dustin Moody, who serves as our director of communications. How is it going, Dustin?

Dustin Moody: [00:23](#) It's going well, Joanna, thanks.

Joanna Meyer: [00:23](#) So fun. Last night was a very special night for us because we welcomed the next class of the 5280 Fellowship. We had about 25 emerging professionals who will be spending the next nine months learning about faith, work, culture, what it looks like to truly embody the Gospel in their daily life and their daily work. It was a pretty moving night, I don't know what your experience was, Dustin. You're actually a fellow this year.

Dustin Moody: [00:44](#) I am a fellow. My wife Laura and I are doing it together. It was actually her idea to do, so I'm excited to-

Joanna Meyer: [00:49](#) Love it.

Dustin Moody: [00:50](#) ... support her in that. I was struck by the diversity of roles that people work in, anything from architects and designers to teachers, attorneys, and nurses. It's just a really diverse group of individuals who I think can bring a lot to this discussion around how do we integrate our faith and apply it to what we do in our nine to five jobs.

Joanna Meyer: [01:10](#) There was even a woman that was a horticulturist, who was talking about how God works through growing plants and shaping communities. It was pretty amazing. I found it moving because I looked at the room and I thought, "What will happen over the next 20 and 30 years as these 25 people are at work in our city and how will God work through them?" A pretty exciting glimpse of how God is at work in and through Denver Institute, so I'm excited for today. Tell us a little bit more about our conversation, Dustin.

Dustin Moody: [01:37](#) Our guest today is Cam Anderson. Cam serves as the executive director of Upper House, which is the center for Christian study at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Prior to joining Upper House, he served a 10-year term as the executive director of CIVA, which is Christians in the Visual Arts. Cam holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting and drawing from the

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, and he had Master of Fine Arts in painting and drawing from Cranbrook Academy of Art in Broomfield Hills, Michigan. He's completed his postgraduate work in art history and aesthetics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Cam lectures frequently on the arts, media, advertising, and contemporary culture. He's the author of a great book called *The Faithful Artist, A Vision for Evangelism and the Arts*. What's exciting is that Cam joins us as our keynote speaker at an event called *The Faithful Artist*, here in Denver on September 26. We're excited to talk to Cam a little bit more.

- Joanna Meyer: [02:25](#) Yeah, super excited.
- Joanna Meyer: [02:33](#) I am excited about our conversation today. We're going to be speaking with Cam Anderson who is a leading thinker and artist who will be part of our arts event, which we'll talk a little bit more about. That's happening in September. But, he's going to introduce a conversation with us about, how do we think well, as Christians, about the role art plays in our faith. One thing that is been fascinating historically is that there's often a great tension between artists who feel like their work isn't understood or valued by faith communities, and faith communities that can often feel a little bit suspicious of artists thinking that, I don't know, that they're maybe dwelling in the world a little too much or that their perspectives might be a threat to the Church. Today, we want to talk about what is the unique role an artist can play in expanding our experience of faith, of communicating to the mainstream culture the principles of God's goodness, beauty, and truth. Our special guest, Cam Anderson, is a wonderful voice to invite us into that conversation.
- Dustin Moody: [03:31](#) Cam, thanks for joining us on The Faith & Work Podcast.
- Cam Anderson: [03:34](#) Oh, it's nice to be with you.
- Dustin Moody: [03:36](#) How are things up in Madison, Wisconsin?
- Cam Anderson: [03:39](#) It's a beautiful sunny, late-summer day, so we're headed to fall, which is, I think, the best time to live here, at least it feels that way today.
- Joanna Meyer: [03:50](#) I would like to know how the arts were perceived in your faith community growing up, and how did that affect your early experiences as an artist.

- Cam Anderson: [03:59](#) Thanks. It's a good question. We're all shaped so much by our early days and our roots. I grew up on a farm in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. My mother, father and six kids in our family all lived with my grandfather and went to a small, conservative, Protestant Church. Half the church was filled with direct relatives of mine. Because we were in a conservative church and in a rural community, I didn't have any exposure at all to what we might call the art world in the first 10 years of my life.
- Cam Anderson: [04:36](#) Only thing that I was aware of is that I like making things with my hands, and on the farm, there was all kinds of things to mess around with, a tool shop and all kinds of materials. I discovered early on that I was a maker, but really knew nothing about what we would call the art world at that stage. It wasn't until we moved, our family moved to suburban Milwaukee later on. Then in high school, I began to know something more about an art world. Then, I went off to college. I thought I'd study philosophy, but my first year I switched to become an art major, and that's probably where I took the deep dive into the arts.
- Dustin Moody: [05:20](#) What prompted the switch?
- Cam Anderson: [05:22](#) I liked philosophy, but I really am first and foremost a maker. I just like to make things and I like to take ideas that come to my mind and work them out in a material kind of way. That whole arena we refer to sometimes as haptic experience or tactile kinds of learning. It's an important part of being for a lot of people. I'm one of those people, so I like to invent and I like to make.
- Dustin Moody: [06:00](#) That's great. Cam, I'm wondering if you could take a step back for a minute and play the role of history teacher. I realize we're kind of oversimplifying thousands of years of history, but it seems like your experience with art, growing up, and being exposed to it kind of mirrors how the church and society has reacted to one another with regards to the arts. I'm wondering if you can give us just kind of an overview of how art has influenced the Church and Christianity over the years, how the Church has conversely influenced art over the course of the years. Because we know that in many churches or contexts today, there's not a whole lot of overlap between the two, so kind of walk us through how the arts has been received by faith communities.

- Cam Anderson: [06:40](#) Yeah, thanks. There's a simple answer, simple view to give a simple picture to draw, and I'll draw that for you. It turns out to not be a true picture, but it's probably the one that comes easiest to our minds. We can kind of imagine a time when after the early church was formed and then for really centuries, the Church was one unity. This is pre-Reformation. The way we kind of imagine it is that the Church was a big patron of the arts, especially into the Renaissance, and a champion of the arts, and that visual literacy was high in the Christian community.
- Cam Anderson: [07:23](#) Then, the Reformation came and for Protestants, at least, then images were banished and sanctuaries whitewashed. Catholics continued on. Protestants focused on the word and not on the image. Then, we got into a late 1800s and then into the 20th century. Then, modern art departed from religion completely. That's kind of the picture that we have.
- Cam Anderson: [07:48](#) In large part, there's plenty of truth to all that, except that it wouldn't be the case before the Reformation that all churchgoers were visually literate or were worshiped cathedrals with Michelangelo on the wall. Right?
- Dustin Moody: [08:03](#) Right.
- Cam Anderson: [08:04](#) It was certainly not the case that all Protestants were against the visual arts. Luther was an enormous fan of the visual arts and associated with very important Northern Renaissance artists.
- Cam Anderson: [08:17](#) My particular interest in the modern period, it turns out that many people, many modern artists in the modern art movement would, fascinated with spirituality, some even with Christian themes, others hostile. But, it'd be really inaccurate to just say that modern art was against Christian faith. What I often say in these kinds of things, there's a broad brush. Right? You can kind of understand things, but the reality of it's actually way more interesting as far as I'm concerned. Faith and art intermingle and sometimes they're in opposition, but sometimes forces all the way through the history of art in the West and probably, really religion around the world.
- Cam Anderson: [09:03](#) But, I didn't know those kinds of things as a Christian growing up in the conservative, Protestant Church. It wasn't until I actually looked at modern art and started reading about the biography of artists, that I began to see the intense spiritual themes, that sort of longing for transcendence, desire to

understand meaning of life, those kinds of things, which are very present through the arts throughout. That's a quick view, but-

- Joanna Meyer: [09:34](#) It's fascinating. Cam, where did you begin to experience dissonance between your faith background and your growing skill as an artist?
- Cam Anderson: [09:44](#) Well, I think that in my case from an early age, I felt a calling to serve God. In the tradition that I grew up in, the people who are most celebrated in terms of serving God were pastors, missionaries, and people who'd given themselves to what we call full-time Christian ministry. In my early life experience, I just didn't have categories for the visual arts as a high calling. I mean, I was raised in a family, my father was a high school guidance counselor, my mother a registered nurse, nursing and constructor; so I was ... My parents were educated people and understood what they did every day as a calling and a vocation to be sure. But, I think there was probably this sense that as I entered into high school and went off to college, that it was just kind of a shame that I hadn't gone into ministry, gone to a Christian college, maybe to seminary, and why would someone like Cam Anderson choose art when he could be doing things for God I think is sort of sense of it.
- Dustin Moody: [10:51](#) Well, and I think to a certain extent we still see and hear echoes of that today. I think we certainly see that in the Church and sort of like certain professions elevated above others. I'm curious how you sort of worked through that. Obviously, your career has been devoted to arts, both as a maker and as an organizational leader. How did you come to see your passion as a vocation and a calling?
- Cam Anderson: [11:12](#) Yeah. Well, if you live long enough, these all become kind of winding trails, right?
- Dustin Moody: [11:16](#) Right.
- Joanna Meyer: [11:17](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Cam Anderson: [11:18](#) After finishing my MFA at Cranbrook Academy of Art, for two years, I taught high school students in a Catholic school, taught in a Catholic school, taught art. That was my first experience to Catholicism. It turned out they weren't any more tuned up to the arts than the Protestant tradition that I'd come from. Right? These sort of stereotypes you have get shattered.

- Cam Anderson: [11:43](#) I maintained a studio at the time, but a couple of years out of grad school, I didn't feel like my art-making was actually going that well. I decided I was willing to sort of leave it all behind, and I thought I would just go into campus ministry. I benefited greatly from InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in undergrad days, and I was attracted to go back and join that ministry, which I did. I sort of thought I'd turned away from the arts, and not even with regret, just that God was inviting me to do something new and that was fine.
- Cam Anderson: [12:17](#) But, it just turns out that I'm an artist and a writer at core. Those things weren't ever going to leave. I kept making things and interacting with artists. It's clear that that was just a piece of vocational territory I was supposed to occupy. That's kind of the story. I think the campus ministry of InterVarsity, though, for me, as a college student, I was an art student then, and felt, I really did feel an endorsement from the campus ministry at that time to be studying the arts and that the arts were important.
- Cam Anderson: [12:57](#) It was in that same period when Francis Shaffer was writing and [HR Rootbaker 00:13:01], and the idea that culture mattered, and participating in culture mattered and that at least, if we were going to be faithful witnesses in their world, we needed to understand our culture. I think the arts felt a lot more relevant because of that.
- Joanna Meyer: [13:17](#) I would love to follow up with that, Cam. In the introduction to your book, *The Faithful Artist*, you explained that early in your career, you lacked a way to see how art could contribute to the Church and its mission. I'm curious to know over time, how has your vision for your art grown to see it as a vital expression of the Church's mission in the world?
- Cam Anderson: [13:36](#) Yeah, I still find that question to be personally, a complicated question. One of the things I've needed to sort through is whether there is something these days called Christian art and whether it's relevant to the Church or not. I'll say what I mean. Probably, a lot of the artists that I know who are Christians would not quickly identify themselves as Christian artists. We would tend to say there were artists who are Christians and make that clear, but we'd probably put it in that order. Many Christians that I know who make art don't make art for the Church and aren't seeking to make art that is, what I would say, explicitly Christian, but many do. I think both sides of that are, both ways of looking at it are entirely legitimate.

- Cam Anderson: [14:32](#) But, there are some Christians who make art, they tell the biblical story, they make liturgical objects, they create spaces and make things to help people enter into contemplation and worship. That's not a dotted line. That's kind of a direct line for how art and faith might connect. On the other side of things, I think artists are just figuring out how to give voice to what means to be human, live in the world and be in a conversation about what's happening. I think it's going to remain a complicated question, and I think depending on what denominational tradition you're in and what philosophy of ministry your church or organization carries has a lot to do with whether there's room for you as an artist or not.
- Joanna Meyer: [15:23](#) I've been moved in preparing for this event by the writings of Mako Fujimura, who has this expression. He uses the phrase, "Artists are often border-stalkers," which sounds so funny, but it's the idea that they are maybe stepping outside the traditional circle of the Church and kind of pushing the limit. It doesn't mean that they're wandering away from faith, but they're taking concepts of faith and stretching them out into connection with the broader world to explore some of those themes of universal truths, of God's love, of truth, of beauty; but in a way that's reaching out to connect with the world outside the Church a little bit more.
- Joanna Meyer: [16:00](#) In that, we can grow because they push our limits of our understanding, invite us to experience God in new ways, but they also can, artists can invite the mainstream world in as kind of an entry point to begin to consider and experience those themes. Essentially, that spirit of a border-stalker, we're not overtly Christian art, but willing to bring the timeless truths of the Gospel and of Christ onto the borders a little bit. I'm curious to know, what do you think it looks like for churches to support artists that may be a little bit on that outlying border where they aren't traditionally producing those overtly Christian work and yet they're deeply passionate about inviting people to think about the things of God. How can we as a Church support people that are on the border?
- Cam Anderson: [16:43](#) Yeah, it's a good question. Let's make the question even a little bit larger, right? Let's say you have a poet in your church community or a musician. Does the musician's work only count when she plays violin or guitar for worship service, but doesn't count if she's holding a recital, whether it's contemporary experimental music or Mozart? Right? When does that work count? Or what about an architect? Does his work only count if

he designs a sacred space, but not an elementary school? Right? We need to just really sort of open all these things up.

Cam Anderson: [17:28](#) I think when we do, we realize that we create some pretty narrow categories sometimes for what does and doesn't count. Wouldn't we want to say that we just think all buildings ought to be well-designed, or music of high quality should be available to lots of people in lots of different forms? I think it's important to kind of open that conversation up.

Cam Anderson: [17:54](#) But, recently in the little church community where I worship, my wife and I worship, Geneva Campus Church. An artist, Leslie Iwai, had been invited to be the artist in residence for InterVarsity's Urbana Missions Conference in St. Louis last year. She had an enormous project that she undertook, an installation that she made. It was just wonderful the way that our church got behind her. One Sunday morning, our pastor invited Leslie up to the front and said, "Look, Leslie has been chosen to do this. We as a church community, we'd like to commission her," and invited anybody in the church who wanted to come, lay hands on her, and pray for, to commission her to this work. There was a moving moment.

Cam Anderson: [18:45](#) Leslie and I talked afterwards and I said, "I've never been in a church where I've ever seen anything like this before. I'm 65. I've never witnessed a church commissioning an artist to do this work." Then even beyond that, she was doing a large, large project with felt, and cutting and stitching things together. Then, invited people in the church to come into a workspace for several days to help her with her production. Then, they did that. Right? It was just this whole thing of the church being able to invest itself, but especially at that point of recognizing that this was something she was called to, the church wanting to bless that, and then get a report from her afterwards on how it went. It's not a small thing. Even though it might sound like a small thing, it's not.

Cam Anderson: [19:34](#) But then, I think in other ways too, we artists are just used to having the Church always wanting us, the artists, to donate things.

Joanna Meyer: [19:43](#) We're cheapskates. We don't want to pay for good art. We want it donated.

Cam Anderson: [19:48](#) Well, right, because we're all affluent, we artists are all affluent anyhow, so we can afford to do that. But, it's just a, there's an



odd disconnect around these things. Right? If you needed a CPA to help you with your finances, I mean maybe somebody in the church would volunteer, but there's certain services we think about paying for.

Cam Anderson: [20:06](#) I won't name the church, but I showed a large body of work in a church at one point in this community where we live. It was up for many months and I felt like I kind of came in, in a stealth manner, hung the show, was there, I guess people appreciated it, sort of took it down by myself. It all seemed to happen with no notice whatsoever. Years ago when I preached in their church, I was given a stipend or an honorarium because I was preaching there, that was valued and important, and given a check. Right? But, when I showed my work, which took a whole lot more time to create than one sermon ... Do we need to be paid every time we turn around? No. But, I think the Church needs to create budget for these things. We certainly do for our musicians in churches where music's important, but usually not the visual arts.

Dustin Moody: [21:01](#) It almost seems like, as I've had friends in different areas of art, the artists who have the easiest time integrating their work at church are musicians. Cam, I appreciate your point earlier to this labeling or this nomenclature essentially of Christian artists versus artists who are Christians. As I think about the industries that Denver Institute serves, we don't apply that label to anyone else.

Joanna Meyer: [21:22](#) A Christian architect.

Dustin Moody: [21:23](#) Or a Christian accountant. Is this spreadsheet a work of your faith? Well, if we believe that all work is important, of course, it is. I think one of the things that we've heard from the artists who are in our community is sort of this sense of isolation from communities of faith or from other believers. I appreciate you kind of speaking to what churches can do to recognize artists and incorporate that work. But, what can artists do as well to create a better connection with their local communities or communities of believers? How can we address some of this isolation that we tend to hear from artists?

Cam Anderson: [21:57](#) Reciprocity is required here. Right? Sometimes to go back to the first part of the question, sometimes pastors will say, "Well, we really would like the arts to be more, to have a higher profile in our church, but I don't, not sure what I should do."

- Cam Anderson: [22:12](#) I say "It's simple. If you have artists and they have openings, you should go to their openings. They listen to you preach on Sunday. Or you should buy him a cup of coffee and/or do a studio visit. Just ask them what they're working on or what they're thinking about." I mean, those are probably some of the most powerful things that need to happen just at that level. But then, I would say, and especially to any artists who are listening, and I'm pretty consistent on this, that for artists who confess to being Christians in some way or another, with that confession is a confession that we do belong to the body of Christ and we do belong to the Church.
- Cam Anderson: [23:00](#) For artists who say, "I'm interested in following Jesus and that's great, but I have no time for the Church. I just need to say and do." Well, then, you don't really understand what following Christ is about because you really have to become part of the Church. All that's to say that I think some artists are attempted to be outliers in the Church or even say, "Well, I've been wounded by the Church, the Church has been hostile to my art-making," and sort of sitting around the edge and the margin.
- Cam Anderson: [23:29](#) Onus is on us too to step in and say, "Well, it's been this way, but that needs to change. We're going to be part of that change."
- Joanna Meyer: [23:39](#) I love it. I love it. I feel like there's many more nuances to this conversation, which is why I'm so excited you're coming to Denver at the end of September to be part of our arts event. I want to give people a plug about what that event's about. It'll be called The Faithful Artist: Balancing Calling & Craft. We're hosting it at a studio, an art studio in town called Studio 1481. We'll have some local artists exhibiting work and some musicians. It'll be a multisensory gathering.
- Joanna Meyer: [24:04](#) Cam will be our keynote speaker sharing some of his concepts specifically for artists, but how do you live in that tension of balancing faith and art, how do you balance that insatiable desire a maker might feel to be creative with the pressure to earn a living, or even how do you shift from having a exclusive focus on your own creation, and the self-focus that maybe come from that to really thinking about the broader good that can come from the work that you've developed. I think there's plenty of room to continue this conversation.
- Joanna Meyer: [24:34](#) We'll also be talking to filmmaker or executive producer Erik Lokkesmoe about some of his vision for Christians in film and

how we can be speaking into that place in between the Church and mainstream culture. I think it will be an intrigue evening. To find out more about that, people can go to either the show notes for the podcast, we'll have a link to the event or [DenverInstitute.org/events](http://DenverInstitute.org/events). You'll find information about The Faithful Artist. That'll be Thursday night, September 26th

Dustin Moody: [25:00](#)

Cam, before we wrap up, I'm wondering how can people connect with you or learn more about what you're doing now?

Cam Anderson: [25:06](#)

Probably, well, the couple best ways, it's already been mentioned that I published a book with University Press in 2016 called The Faithful Artist, so tracking that book down and reading about some of the things I've been thinking about would be one way. Then, probably, going to the website for Upper House located in Madison, Wisconsin. You can see my bio online there, make some connections and see what we're involved in at Upper house.

Cam Anderson: [25:41](#)

I'm working on another book with University Press called God and the Modern Wing, that will probably be out in a year from this fall, so there's more writing going on as well. That's a start, or at least, but always happy to hear from people who are interested and want to be part of the journey.

Joanna Meyer: [26:01](#)

I love it.

Dustin Moody: [26:01](#)

Well, we're excited to host you in Denver in September. Cam, thanks so much for joining us on The Faith & Work Podcast.

Cam Anderson: [26:06](#)

My pleasure.