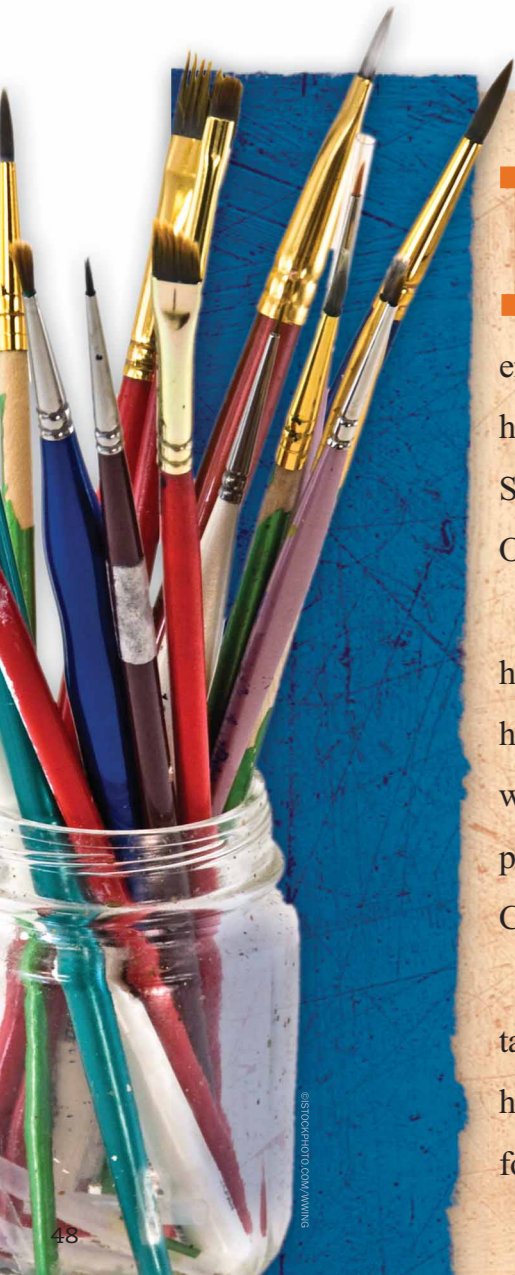


# WHO NEEDS THE ARTS?

Part 2: A Conversation with Christian Artist Ron DiCianni  
BY TIMOTHY PALLA



**R**ON DICIANNI, A NATIVE OF CHICAGO'S North Side, followed his lifelong passion right into the heart of a successful art career. His amazing talent and dedication provided opportunities to work for such high-profile organizations as Eli Lilly, the Chicago Bulls, the Smithsonian Institute, McDonald's, and the United States Olympic Committee.

But God did not create Ron for mere worldly success; He had a higher purpose in mind. In 1989 the Lord stirred Ron's heart with a greater vision: reclaiming the arts for Christ. In a world driven by visual communication, Ron DiCianni has pioneered a media revolution in delivering the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost.

In this straightforward interview, HSE writer Timothy Palla talks to Ron DiCianni about the power of art in our culture and how homeschool parents can begin to prepare their children for a ministry capable of "turning the world upside down."



**Timothy Palla:** Why can't "art" just be "art"? Isn't it supposed to be entertaining or decorative or a conversation starter? Does it always need to have a higher purpose?

**Ron DiCianni:** Art wasn't destined to be decoration. It is a powerful form of communication. Eighteen thousand times a day we are bombarded with various forms of art telling us what to think, where to go, what to buy, and how to react. Our culture has taken art to a high and powerful level of influence. We live in a sight-and-sound generation, and the arts—all of the arts—play a significant role in our thinking.

**Timothy:** Certainly, our culture is embedded with massive amounts of creativity, and yes, it teaches and influences us from many different perspectives. Posters in the children's bedrooms, pictures on the walls, Internet advertisements, our music preferences, and our movie and television entertainment all have the ability to transform our minds.

**Ron:** Yes, Tim, but the problem lies in the fact that, as a culture, the media has been

controlled and taken over by people who hate God. Multi-million dollar companies spare no expense to deliver their message to us, and they do it so well that we buy into it and love it. There is a reason they spend unbelievable amounts of money for a single commercial during the Super Bowl. They show us beautiful horses running through a field with their manes flowing in the wind, people with joy on their faces and a beer in their hand, and then they tell us, "It doesn't get any better than this." They aren't decorating or even entertaining—they are communicating!

Our government doesn't use math to make their point; they use Bruce Springsteen, movies, documentaries, theater, commercials, songs—the arts. It is how we best receive information. Think about this: who gets elevated to the highest levels of recognition in our society? Who gets all the money, awards, and medals? Musicians, sports professionals, artists, dancers, filmmakers, directors, and illustrators, that's who.

Did you know that for every book the average college student reads, he sees twenty-five movies—twenty-five movies! There

**Above:** Christian artist Ron DiCianni works on his recently released mural of the resurrection of Christ. The painting measures 12 feet tall by 40 feet wide and is done in oil on canvas. It is a depiction of the moment of Jesus emerging from the tomb, with waiting angels, fainted Roman guards, and a crowd of Biblical notables excitedly waiting for His exit, including Moses, David, Isaiah, Abraham, Elijah, Noah, Esther, John the Baptist, and Daniel. The mural was commissioned by the Museum of Biblical Art in Dallas, TX.

is an incredible amount of interest and influence in the film industry, and Hollywood fills those films with their own agenda. If it wasn't producing significant results they wouldn't be doing it. This is the state of all the arts today.

**Timothy:** What critical problems do you see in the realm of Christian art today? If the arts are such a powerful medium to convey truth, why aren't we doing more to combat the enemy?

**Ron:** Interacting with countless multitudes of people—in churches and conferences, as



Ron working on The Resurrection mural. Because of the immense size of the painting, Ron used a mechanical scissor lift to allow him to paint all across the canvas

well as mail and e-mail—I’ve become aware of several major obstacles to Christians using art effectively in our culture. I’m going to be painfully honest.

The first aspect I want to discuss is the attitude which many believers have toward developing their God-given talents. Too often they think, “This is *good enough*.” The general public knows the difference between good and bad art, but many times believers think that their gift or talent—

we think that we are better than we really are or that our current skill level is good enough.

**Ron:** But God deserves our best, and the path to honoring Him with our best is demanding and difficult. Christians can be lazy, and they forget that God is interested in holiness—not our happiness—and holiness has a price. With a features-and-benefits, what’s-in-it-for-me mindset, we are reluctant to acknowledge how painful it can truly be to give God our best.

**Timothy:** Ron, you are reminding me of David’s words to Araunah in II Samuel

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because it is from God—doesn’t deserve criticism or need to be challenged in any way. “It is fine the way it is.”

In Malachi 1:8 the prophet of God asked a very pointed question: “If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of Hosts.”

**Timothy:** Wow. Our egos deceive us, standing in the way of discernment, making

24:24 where he said, “Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.”

**Ron:** Yes, and in Exodus 31 we learn that the Tabernacle of the Lord was built by men who were 1) filled with the Spirit of God, 2) knowledgeable in their craft, and 3) skilled in all manner of workmanship. Just because they were God’s chosen people didn’t mean that they could throw something together and expect God to be satisfied.

**Timothy:** Your point is well-taken. Christians are too often satisfied with mediocrity in what we give to God and what we do for His glory.

**Ron:** The second problem is that Christians don’t often see the potential art has as a form of ministry. We should be using everything in our arsenal—art, music, film—to kick down the gates of hell and introduce sinners to the Savior of mankind. Pulling out all stops, we should place the Scripture into the world in every form available . . . and do it with excellence! The Renaissance, through art, theater, sculpture, and music, showed illiterate people what God was all about.

Which brings me to a third issue: Christians don’t know the Word of God like they should. H. I. Ironside once said, “God forbid that we should traffic in unlearned truth.” Too many churches and homes don’t want the truth or live in it; therefore, outreach and effectiveness is lost and ministry potential becomes stalled. We need to know the Word of God if we are going to be “able ministers” of the gospel.

**Timothy:** Ron, I know that you receive a lot of inquiries from homeschool parents. They want to know how to make a practical application from your wisdom. What is your message to the homeschool community?

**Ron:** Understand that visuals have power for Christ. Sixty seconds after someone enters your home, they will know what you are about by the messages you have placed on your walls. In a similar vein, think about the posters that your children have in their rooms. What popular vocal artists, bands,

basketball players, or golfers do they view 24/7, and what message does the lifestyle of those people endorse? Leave your walls blank and the world will fill them in for you, but their message will be anything but biblical.

I could give you plenty of illustrations of how my paintings have influenced the thinking of families, individuals, and children in counseling centers. I had a store owner hang one of my paintings in their window facing the street. They told me that “the delivery man weeps when he sees this in our win-

## “Children . . . won’t start where Rembrandt left off, they’ll start where he started.”

dow.” People need to know that our culture today is visually driven and we can reach people this way.

My friend Max Lucado once told me that he couldn’t remember all the lessons he heard in Sunday School, but when a teacher showed him a picture of Jesus knocking on the door of a house—which had no outside knob—well, it changed his life forever.

**Timothy:** Art has a way of reaching the soul, doesn’t it? So, how do we instill these truths into our children? Where or how do we start to shape their desires so they use art in a Christ-centered way in their own lives?

**Ron:** Proverbs 22:6 is a familiar verse to most Christians parents. The idea of “training up a child in the way that he should go” means to train according to their natural bent. Look at your children’s natural (but not fleshly) bent. Be aware of the gifts God has given them and encourage the development of those gifts.

Homeschoolers involved in co-ops should consider inviting qualified artists, writers, media specialists, photographers, etc. to do a class for students who are interested in those types of careers. Get them to strive for excellence. Find out where things are being done in the neighborhood and take the children to see, hear, and experience good art. Love, nurture, training, and discipline can do wonders. Encourage positive reinforcement. Don’t lie to your children and make them think they are great if they aren’t, but if they have potential, help them to develop it.

Here are some other ideas: Go to a bookstore and have them look at the latest art magazines. Go to a library and encourage them to read up on famous artists, looking at the brush strokes of their paintings through a magnifying glass—I still do this. Show them how to study colors and textures. And buy them sketchbooks. Get them to draw dogs, lamps, the couch—fill up the books. Don’t frame their pictures; let them learn from them. Be amazed at how they’ll learn to draw the insides of objects . . . not just the outsides . . . not just the contour. I’ve said it many times, “It’s not the years you’ve been painting that count; it’s the miles of canvas you’ve used.” Get them to draw or paint or film and do it often.

**Timothy:** These are great ideas, Ron. Even if parents aren’t the “artsy” type, they can still be involved in the progressive development of their children’s skill. The whole family can grow through this. You don’t even have to buy expensive books or kits.

**Ron:** No, you don’t! Children don’t start to learn math concepts with a calculator, they learn from the ground up. They won’t start where Rembrandt left off, they’ll start where he started.

**Timothy:** Any last words of advice for us, Mr. DiCianni?

**Ron:** Yes, let me leave you with these thoughts:

If you want to see where society is headed, look to the arts. If Christians don’t take them

back we will all be in deep, deep trouble.

An artist’s work can never be anything more than what the artist is himself. If artists aren’t struggling to improve their skill, they will never grow. God’s anointing can’t be skipped by talent. Yes, He can use a “David” to kill a “Goliath,” but we still have to “study to show [ourselves] approved unto God.” Well-meaning people submit work to me all the time—and it isn’t good. They need to grow through formal training.

Know that this is an uphill battle. Until this becomes a movement in the church, in homeschools and in the Christian community, we won’t make a significant change. We need to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ to people through a culturally relevant medium—the arts—until they “get it.”

**Timothy:** As Christians we are told to “take up the cross and follow Christ.” He never said it would be an easy road, but we know that it is well worth it. May God bless our homeschools with parents and students who, like Ron DiCianni, heed the call to use our gifts and talents for the enlargement of the gospel message. Amen. 🏠

**Timothy Palla** is a pastor, freelance writer, horseman, artist, and musician, but his greatest joy is serving the Lord and loving the “wife of his youth,” Jennifer. They have five children: Drew, Dane, Aidan, Ethan, and Meghan. Together, Tim and Jenny have been committed to homeschooling since 1993. You may contact Tim at [tpalla@rocketmail.com](mailto:tpalla@rocketmail.com).

## Want some help integrating the arts into your homeschool?

To supplement this series on the arts, Grant DiCiani (Ron’s son) has compiled an extensive list of ideas and activities to integrate the arts into your homeschooling. Use your discernment to determine which ideas and activities are suitable for your family, then jump in! You can access this bonus material FREE by visiting the DiCianni’s website, Tapestry Productions. Just visit the following page that has been set up especially for readers of *Home School Enrichment Magazine*:

[www.TapestryProductions.com/homeschool](http://www.TapestryProductions.com/homeschool)

