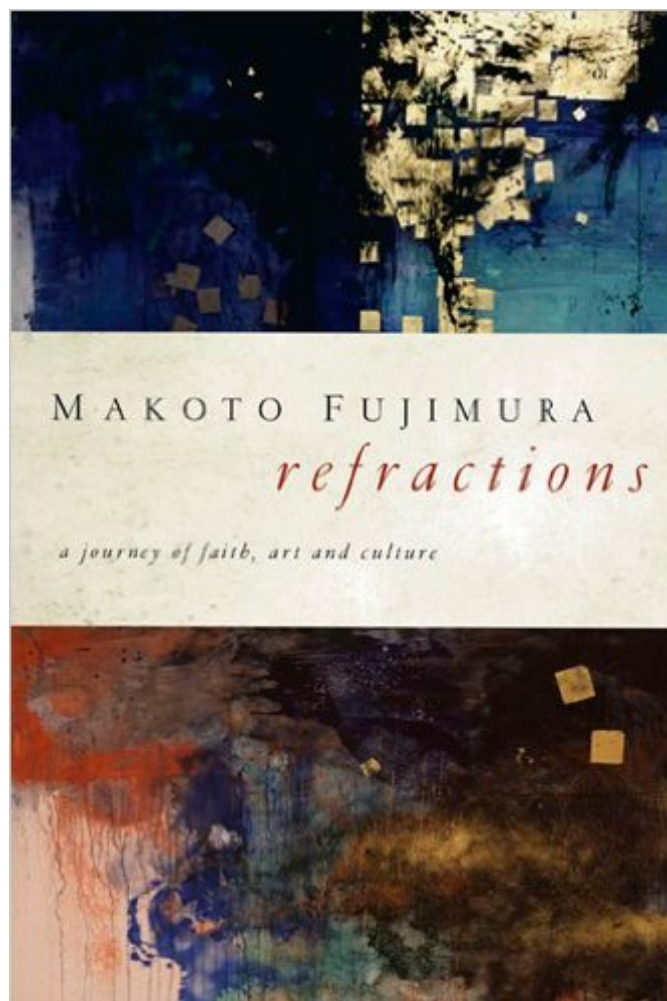


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# Refractions: A Journey Of Faith, Art, And Culture



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

Paperback: 176 pages

Publisher: NavPress; First Edition (US) First Printing edition (February 15, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1600063012

ISBN-13: 978-1600063015

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 0.5 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (31 customer reviews)

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[Photography > History & Criticism > Themes > Religious](#) #428 in [Books > Arts & Photography >](#)

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## Customer Reviews

When I received Makoto Fujimura's *Refractions: A Journey of Faith, Art, and Culture*, I was wowed by the evident care that had gone into its design. It is the loveliest paperback book I've ever seen. I expected to find it interesting, perhaps a little challenging, and certainly full of beauty. But life intervened, first in the form of a traffic collision, then in the form of a layoff from my job. I found myself with more time on my hands than I was accustomed to having, but the last thing I wanted to do was read a collection of meditations by a Japanese-American artist. I read some, found myself foundering, and put it aside. Then, driven by a sense of responsibility to the publisher for sending me a free copy, I tried again. And again. And again. I found after all my trying that the book was better than I wanted to admit. It isn't that I don't like art. It is that I do like logical, well-reasoned argument. I like a straight highway and a car with plenty of horsepower. Instead, I was forced to meander on a country path through unfamiliar landscapes, never knowing quite where I was going or how I was going to get there. It struck me that this was the sort of book my artistic wife would like. I'm not sure she has ever read a book straight through. She reads the beginning, jumps into the middle, skips to the end, backtracks, quits for a week, resumes from a different spot than where she left off, and generally leaves me dumbfounded. If I tried to read like that, my brain would turn to

pudding.(Full disclosure: My wife reminded me that she read *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck straight through and enjoyed it immensely. Incontrovertible evidence that she is a better person than I.)*Refractions* is a book of meditations. I find that I cannot simply read it; I have to join in the meditation. Some of Fujimura's insights are penetrating. Much of what he has to say has been shaped by his proximity to the collapse of the Twin Towers. His studio was covered with dust from the Towers. His child was evacuated from school. He sees the gap where the Towers used to form the backdrop for his working life every day, a gap that seems to him more momentous and intense than any of the presences that still fill his life. Living, as I do, in Minnesota, the fall of the Towers was distant, like the wars that have come since. In fact, the war in Afghanistan has been more present to me because my son spent a year and a half there and is slated to return this fall. But the wars are also outgrowths from the gap where the Towers stood. For Fujimura the absence of the Towers signifies all the absences in our lives that make us incomplete or broken. Every return to Ground Zero is a kind of repentance, acknowledging that brokenness and calling for redemption. He believes that art can facilitate the healing required; that is one of its purposes both for the artist who creates something beautiful and meaningful out of the brokenness and for the one who responds to that creation with understanding and empathy. Fundamentalist Christians may find Fujimura's Christianity too inclusive. For example, he draws inspiration from Matazo Kayama, who was a Nihonga master. But like those who say, "All truth is God's truth," I think Fujimura would say, "All beauty is God's beauty." Wherever the creative process is at work, making something beautiful out of broken pieces, God is also at work because God is an artist.

Makoto Fujimura is a contemporary artist whose home and studio are near Ground Zero. Out of a response to the attacks on 9/11, he began to set aside time every Saturday to write. This was a time to process and reflect on the emotions and changes in his life and city. The result of these writings is this beautifully crafted book. In recent years, we have seen a renewed interest in the relationship between art and theology, and Fujimura offers a significant voice in that conversation. The book is a collection of essays loosely joined by the topics of faith, art, and culture, as the title suggests. While some books seem redundant after the first few chapters, the unique subject and fresh thoughts of each essay pulled me forward into every page turn. What I appreciate most is the awareness that Fujimura displays of his soul and surroundings. He describes this awareness in the book's first essay: "The process of creating renews my spirit, and I find myself attuned to the details of life rather than being stressed by being overwhelmed. I find myself listening rather than shouting into the void. Creating art opens my heart to see and listen to the world around me, opening a new vista of

experience. This is the gift of the 'second wind.' Such a state taps into what I now call eternal timefullness."While I was able to engage and be shaped by his thoughts throughout, it was this awareness that challenged me the most. After finishing the final chapter yesterday, I closed the book and opened my journal. With infinite access to information and social connection, all of us would do well to be a little more connected to our own selves.

Refractions: A Journey of Faith, Art, and Culture collects essays written by Makoto Fujimura to artists from 2004 to 2006. Living in post-9/11 New York City, Fujimura challenges artists: How does your art recognize the brokenness around you? How does your art offer hope and redemption in the midst of it? I began this book months ago. The essays demand to be read contemplatively, even devotionally. I savored it morsel by morsel, letting each piece roll on my tongue, slide down my throat. As I digested it, it became part of me and part of my art. Makoto leads artists toward art that recovers dignity and beauty without becoming sentimental or ignoring the hurt and brokenness of the world. In fact, the path toward beauty moves through brokenness. He encourages artists to take the long view of their art in a time when fifteen minutes of fame, instant recognition, and "[peddling] our goods to find significance and survival" rule the art world. "Artists who labor to develop their craft, artists who are committed to a longer view of their art, suffer" (p. 142). But our art isn't for fame, recognition or even significance. It's to glorify God and offer a sacrament to this world. It is to bring God's power of resurrection to the dead. To do this, artists need the Church to invest in them spiritually and artistically. They need the Church to walk alongside them, to hold them up, even, to support them (emotionally, spiritually, and financially). Fujimura calls for an expanded role for the Church--not just appreciating the arts and using them in their worship (although these things are good), but to train artists and encourage them. Fujimura's writing awakens hope for the discouraged artist. And who among us is not or has not been discouraged? I read this at a time where I realized I had a choice: to take the easier (although not easy) and marketable road of art or to take the longer, sufferable road. I choose the longer road.

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