

Views from the Pews - The Repair Shop

In a crowded reality TV market, what makes this show so popular? Suggestions made on asking around include:

1. The pleasure the experts display in doing something to make someone else happy.
2. The apparent fact that no money changes hands between experts and the articles' owners.
3. The value of skill for skill's sake.
4. The importance of objects in the right context; objects whose value remains wholly subjective. Market prices are never mentioned; odd in this current world. Objects become icons – for reflection.

But value may also lie in something more important. The show is upfront about death, upfront about grief, and upfront about human connections. European society seems to have drifted away from the subject of death and its effects. Modern media reduce death to the discharge of a firearm. Consequences are ignored. We are also guilty of self-centredness, the belief that only we matter. The idea that we ARE our ancestors is too often labelled as primitive and out of date. Among other things the show challenges that. Most who bring their objects in are clear that their identity is inextricably linked with those who have gone before. Many are prepared to consider the possibility of an afterlife.

Perhaps that is getting a bit too theological. Perhaps it is simpler; perhaps the sight of someone doing something for someone else in the expectation of making them happier strikes a chord.

Yes, this is reality TV; yes compromises must be made, like the Christmas Special filmed in May with fake snow that must be vacuumed up later. And yes, TV cameras change behaviour. And yes this is a business.

But it contains important truths about who we are, and about how we are expected to behave. It attempts a template of society as we know it should and can be. We could do worse than to examine that template, knowing its popularity. There may after all be a demand for an afterlife, for a reconnection with the departed.

Can the soul be repaired? Christ thought so, and so is the church a repair shop for the soul? Is the act of repair a metaphor for some form of resurrection? An interesting challenge for a materialistic world.

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