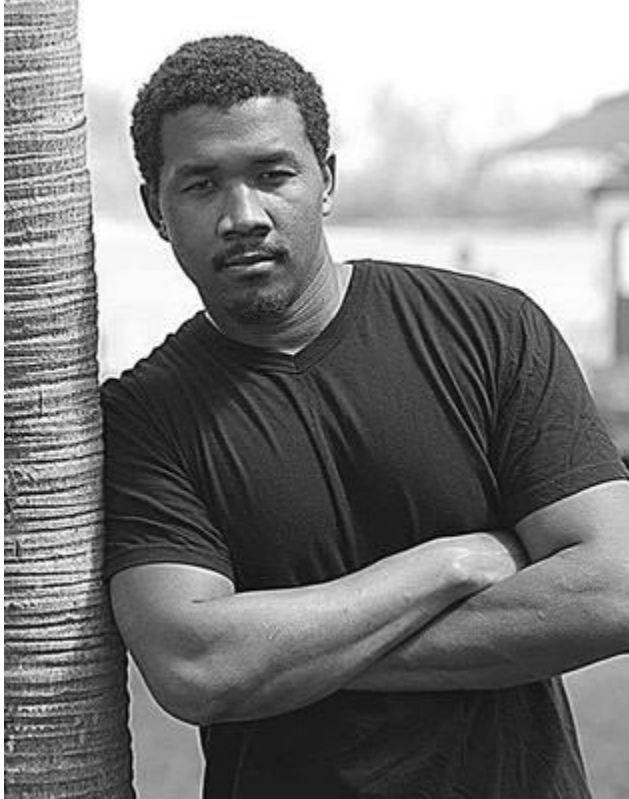


Theophany

Jace's story

[Campus News](#) | Posted on August 12, 2016



Jace McKinney, artist & seminarian

By: Becky St. Clair

So here I am in the MDiv program in the Seminary, a program specifically designed to train pastors, and I have no plans to become a pastor. Let me explain.

Opening Credits

I used to watch TV with my brother as a kid. I was really into [He-Man](#). While watching one day I decided I wanted to learn how to draw muscles, so I'd draw a person and then draw dozens of "muscles" on one arm. They were all lumps—a hill of lumps.

My mom was extremely supportive of my interest and even enrolled me in art classes. Although as a kid I was really fascinated with comic book style art, my teacher—whom I came to refer to as my 'art mom'—encouraged me to focus on the masters like [DaVinci](#), [Rembrandt](#) and [Monet](#). These great artists, along with artists like [Jackson Burnside](#) from my home country, the Bahamas, really influenced the flavor of my work.

In college my art started to talk more about social issues. As I developed it wasn't just a thing of beauty but a thing of message. It was a way I could speak and send a message to others. I had a

responsibility to say something that was relevant and meaningful—something that would impact the lives and actions of others.

I've worked in a variety of media such as painting, sculpture, woodworking, metal fabrication, graphic design and drawing, but my favorite is film. I enjoy the process of drawing an illustration and then painting the images, because the marks made by the pencil and brush are so unique and genuine to me. While doing film in school I lived in the editing room; I felt like I was breathing life into an image and into a story. Film, in my opinion, is one of the highest and most challenging art forms. It demands so much from you and I love the whole process.

Conflict

During this time, I began to wrestle with my faith. I was attending one of the preeminent design schools in the country, and I was learning a lot. Being in such a secular environment gave me a bit of culture shock from my childhood in the Bahamas, but it was an important and beautiful period of growth for me. I took a class in children's book creation, building characters and creating simple, meaningful stories. The work of [Shel Silverstein](#) and [Maurice Sendak](#) really inspired me. Their work was so lighthearted but at the same time it dealt with very serious issues. My art began to develop a storytelling vibe.

In 2006 I felt God calling me. He wanted me to quit what I was doing and work for him. I had a dream in which I believe God was speaking to me, telling me to quit what I was doing, but I swore I had to finish what I'd started. I forgot the dream.

Fast-forward four years and I'm feeling like I'm not where I need to be. I had all these ideas in me to create wonderful things, but I was struggling with the question: "Are these things of God?"

There's always been a wrestle between art and religion and what to say and what not to say. I was a person of two worlds. I was a Seventh-day Adventist but I was also an artist hanging out with secular friends. The two worlds never seemed to connect. Everything was clashing.

When I felt God calling me to work with him, I responded that I would never create another piece of art if that's what he wanted. "But," I told God, "If you want me to do something other than this, show up in my art."

Everything changed that year. My art went to another level. God was working through me and through what I was doing, he gave me a vision to do a show called "Theophany." It was to be a commentary on the state of the world—telling the story that the world has forgotten God as we are wrapped up in the everyday things we consign ourselves to do. The name of the show—"Theophany," meaning "a visible manifestation to humankind of God"—was fitting because I was seeing that manifestation of God in my work, like Moses staring at the burning bush. It was unreal. My work was typically very evident of my personal creative style and this was something else. This was God.

I stayed on the wave where a lot of my work was spiritually influenced. I illustrated Bible stories and philosophies, things I heard in church and was inspired by, themes I researched, studied, or

read. I began to realize at this point that God wanted me to use my gift for him, but I didn't know in what way.

Plot Development

At the start of summer 2012, a friend of mine came home to the Bahamas from where she was attending university. Together we planned and executed a day camp for children called "Conquerors in Christ Bible Camp," based on [the story of David and Goliath](#). Together, we and the kids designed armor and learned about putting on [the armor of God](#). In an interactive way these kids were digging deeper into a much-loved Bible story. Basically, we turned the children's camp into an army fort. We even got volunteers to come in on the last day to play the Philistines so the campers (the Israelites) could role-play the battle.

The night before the big battle, I stayed up all night preparing and mending costumes the kids had worked so hard to create. We'd made fake swords, breastplates, helmets, the whole shebang. When morning came there was still work to be done, and as the kids began to arrive for the day, they walked in and instantly knew what needed to be done. They started working and preparing for battle like a real army. I will always see this moment as one of the most defining of my life and career.

This experience helped me understand what it meant for a body of believers to work together creatively; to accomplish something that enriches the lives of the people involved in a spiritual, creative and intellectual way.

Then one day, I heard God's voice clearly: "I need you to come into theology." Out of the blue, a friend started talking to me about the [Seminary](#) at Andrews. I felt impressed to give it a shot, so I applied and was accepted.

Resolution

So now you know how I got where I am. When God called me to serve him, I don't believe it was to be a pastor; I believe it was to serve him with the artistic gifts with which he has blessed me. If I was to make the decision to go into pastoral ministry for any other reason than being called by God I feel it would be an insult to him and a total lack of regard for what I know he has called me to do. Right now, God wants me to gain this training to strengthen and fortify the content of my ministry.

Now more than ever before the world—including Christians—are turning to films to help them develop their moral compass. Many of the films developed in and out of Hollywood have very rich and complex narrative that contemplate and address social issues such as equality, poverty, social injustice and ethnicity, to name a few. To paraphrase Kevin Mowrer, the creator of the meta-story concept, in an age where governments, public figures and religious leaders are falling, we the people look to the heroes and heroines of film. After all, you won't catch Luke Skywalker in a tabloid scandal.

Looking to the future of gospel ministry, film can be our biggest voice to share the gospel with people. This is by no means to say that preaching from a church pulpit is obsolete, but rather that we need to take the platform of film very seriously.

For a long time I've felt I walked two roads: One in art, the other in my faith. One was locked in the secular realm and the other in religion. I feel the journey on which God is bringing me is breaking down the barriers that have kept these two worlds apart and now I find they are becoming as one. I want to reach 21st century people—specifically youth—with the message of Jesus Christ.

Sequel

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but it surely is worth more than the statement itself. Art and film give people a vision of what could be, whether it's good or bad. Visual narrative has the power to arrest an audience and impact them in a powerful way. While images have the power to mentally scar, indoctrinate and horrify their audience, they also have the power to heal, give hope, and inspire people to a higher ideal. And what higher ideal is there than that which is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

What I do is not a hobby; it is simply who I am and who God made me to be. To turn my calling into a hobby would be acting like the servant in [Matthew 20:1](#) who buried his talent in the ground: It would only be serving my selfish purposes.

Developing the gift God gave me has helped me build such an amazing relationship with him. I don't see my call as something I'm entitled to do, but rather I see it as a blessing. I know my future is not written in stone, but I count each day as a blessing wherever I have the opportunity to connect with God and connect others to him through my art.

The lesson I've learned, I pass on to you: No matter what it is, answer the call God has for your life. There is something God has called you to do and he will put the passion in your heart to do it so that when you face the worst days doing what you were called to do you can always have a smile through the storm. Whatever God has called you to do, do it with all your might.

Related Links

- [Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University](#)
- [Meet some influential Bahamian artists](#)
- [Explore Jace's art blog](#)

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