A Theology of Beauty

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Date: 11 October 2015

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[0:00] Good morning and thank you for coming to my talk on Thanksgiving weekend. I thought everybody would be at home basing the turkey. Anyway, I'm an artist.

My plan with this talk is not to discuss a theology of beauty or theology and beauty. That's a bit like trying to nail jello to the wall for me because I'm neither a theologian nor an art historian.
I'm more applied. So it's simple for me. If I could express what I need to express with math or music or words, I would.
But that isn't the channel God gave me. He gave me my hands and my eyes and a sensitivity to see things. So some things are beyond words, which is why this is a challenging talk to put into words things that are beyond words in some ways.
I came to be an artist through a somewhat circuitous route, as Alexandra has already remarked.
I've been a professional practicing artist for about 18 years now.
[1:07] First 20 years of my adult career I spent as a journalist. To condense the story a bit, I got sick with cancer. I moved to Paris. I was healed by God and came out the other side of the event knowing that I was supposed to be an artist.

I knew from a very early age I was an artist, but I had submerged that identity into night courses and weekends and evenings of painting and drawing and sculpting. I had a realization from when I was really young.
Other people didn't see what I saw. I remember this as far back as kindergarten. I remember those stick figures we all used to draw, you know, the circle head and a little stick figure. Well, and then there was this worm of hair shape over the top of the circle, and people would color it in brown hair, yellow hair, you know.
Drove me nuts. I used to go around fixing all my friends' drawings, you know. There are bangs, there are curls, this is what hair looks like, you know. I was five, you know, so to this day, whatever unique vision is given to me, I'm compelled to share it.
I thought you might find it interesting to hear something about my process and my ideas and how the art gets born. For me, it begins with God, it continues with God, and it ends up with God.
[2:27] The idea or inspiration can come at any moment. I see a loved one through a rainy window, droplets of water on a spider's web, the iridescence of oil floating in the mud puddle, or the internal organs of the human body, or whale bones.

It can all bring me to the point I need to make some art about that visual experience. One thing about the process is mystery. Honestly, I don't know why I'm doing it most of the time.
I'm just being obedient and trusting in spirit. As one of my fellow artists says, getting out of the way so spirit can get the art done. It's really the experience of making art.
A good example of this is one of my first explorations called Body as Soul. After fighting off cancer, I was visiting Florence and came across an astonishing place, La Specula.
It's an 18th century facility for the instruction of art and medical students. The models are life-sized, they're created of wax, and they represent every aspect of the internal human body.
[3:30] Hearts, livers, skeletons, nerves, sinews, joints. They're all extremely realistic. I stood in the middle of the largest room in the complex and wept at the terrible beauty of it.

These are extraordinary landscapes which house the soul. Structures formed by expediency and evolution, and my mind was on fire with the intelligence and humanity of what I saw that day.
That initial exposure to the internal human body at La Specula in Florence led to a several-year odyssey from Italy to Vancouver, Toronto, Cambridge, Vienna, Paris, and Oxford.
And the generous sponsorship of professors at these institutions enabled me to work in their labs.
At the University of Cambridge, I drew and painted during ongoing medical lectures for three

months and worked with students of the Ruskin Art School at Oxford University's anatomy department.
I was struck again and again by the similarity of internal structures of the human body and common landscape features, trees, rocks, water, cloud formations, as though God, having created this wonderful blueprint, decided to use it again and again.
[4:42] So from the original chalk and ink explorations, I branched out, pun intended, into landscape studies and analyzing animal bones as well as internal human landscapes.

You might well be thinking, oh yuck, why would she do stuff about bones and guts? And you wouldn't be the first. Well, I didn't set out to change anybody's point of view.
I just felt compelled to make the art about something so beautiful that it moved me. A few months into my Cambridge sojourn, one of Martin's colleagues and his wife came by for dinner.
She's an ardent, conservative Christian, lovely woman from Northern Ireland, and she immediately started to rail at me. I said, hey, I've heard about what you're doing. Why are you doing this work? It's disgusting. It's gross. It's awful. Why can't you paint God's beauty? Do flowers, trees, mountains. What's wrong with you? This was before she'd seen any of the work.
[5:40] And I tried to defend myself. Finally, I figured she's never going to get it. After a glass of wine, she asked to see some of my sketches. And I said, no, I don't think that's a good idea. I've taken enough abuse tonight from you.

And she came really demanding. She was like, wasn't going to give it. So I finally went and got some of the work out. She looked at it, blinked, and said, but it's so beautiful.
We're so beautiful inside. Where is that in my body? She began to tear up. She had question after question. What's this? Where is that? Is that in me?
Where is it located? And she actually became a staunch defender of my work. She said, but this is holy work. You're giving us a different perspective on the human body.
I've never seen anything like this. Anyway, but I didn't begin thinking, oh, I'm going to set out to change people's views about the human body. I just made what I made because I had a compulsion to express the shocking beauty that I saw in human anatomy.
[6:44] I thought about it quite a bit since because I've had other discussions about this work with other people who had similar response. Kind of a story state of affairs when you think about it, that most of us in this secular age think about our inner structures as something from a schlock horror movie that are sort of gross and disgusting instead of the vesicles of our Christianity, our lived life on earth.

Anyway, here is the first piece that that lady saw. It is a knee joint done in pastel. Well, in order to get some color into the labs, I wasn't allowed to use solvents or oil paint or anything, or even oil pastels, but they allowed me pencil, paper, and chalk.
And with chalk, you can create an almost painterly situation and get more information going. So that's a knee joint. This is human vertebrae.
There are some of the human vertebrae. They're painted in ink on Japanese paper using the Japanese sumi-ei technique. That's ink brush painting that I studied in Japan for a while.
I'll be discussing that technique a little later in the talk. This is, sorry, very, very digitized. Sorry about that. It's an internal landscape.
[8:10] And I'd like guesses. Does anybody know what that is? Yeah, this is the spinal column.

These are the ribs, breastbone, collarbone. Basically, it's unusual. You wouldn't normally be exposed to something like this, but it's a view of the human torso cut open at the shoulder line, and all the organs have been removed in the chest, in the midsection.
It's actually a portrait of generosity. A young man was killed on a motorcycle. When he died at the hospital, he gave all his organs for donation. That was his emphatic last thought was, I'm healthy. I'm a medical student. I know how important this is. I'm drawing into the center of what used to be his chest and midsection, the ribs, the spinal column area. I was weeping when I made this.
He'd been in thoracic surgical lectures that I'd attended, so I actually knew him when he was living. But looking at it without that knowledge I've given you, it's just a drawing.
[9:18] The piece has won an art prize, and it seems to resonate very strongly with some people who don't have that back story, which I find very interesting. This is an installation on our garden deck.

I call it Deck Nerve. It's a drawing I made of the human splenic nerve, which wraps right around the deck on three sides. It's laser-cut, quarter-inch aluminum, and it's anchored in the cedar frame of the handrails around the deck.
My mother, who knows of my interest in human structures, at her first look at it said, Okay, looks like a pretty vine, but it isn't, is it? She does know me well.
So, moving on. This is Caduceus. It's made of green lead crystal glass, which has been cast at a foundry. I sculpted this piece at the UBC Anatomy Labs, and I sculpt in clay or wax as I observe specific, actual human bones.
Then when the clay sculpture is finished, a rubber mold is made, which can be filled up with molten wax. When the wax cools, you have this complete copy of the piece in wax.
[10:31] That wax is covered in yet another mold, which is heat-proof. And it's got little channels running from the interior of the mold to the exterior, which is placed in the kiln.

So you put the whole thing into the kiln. You put a hopper of lead crystal glass positioned on top of the mold with an entry to get into the mold. The molten lead crystal, when you heat up the kiln to a very high temperature, the molten lead crystal flows into the mold, displacing the wax and shooting it out through those little channels in the mold.
This is lost wax casting. It's been used for millennia for glass as well as metals like bronze. The whole process involves flow dynamics engineering in a lot of patients.
The temperature must be controlled very carefully, both during the molten period to reflect the engineer's best guess on flow dynamics, you know, the glass shooting into the mold, and then the cooling off period in which the piece can shatter if enough cooling down days are not programmed into the kiln.
So it's a process. From a distance, it looks green and serpent-like, crouching dragon, the other. But close on, most people recognize it's the pelvis and spinal column holding up most of us.
[11:43] It can be read on a number of levels. I'm afraid I have enjoyed bone surgeons looking at the piece because they frown and look disapprovingly initially as though they've caught me out in a mistake, and then the penny drops and they get it.

The pelvis is an amalgam of the ilia or side wings of the pelvis from a 14-year-old boy. The front, the pubic bone, is a 23-year-old mother, and the sacrum, the tailbone part, is a 93-year-old man.
I combined all the bones into a sculpture which is representative of youth, age, and both genders.
This is a detailed caduceus. Can you make out these ridges there?
I was inspired by my colleague, the sculptor David Robinson. He's the son of our former rector, Harry. He leaves a lot of fingerprints in his bronzes here and there.
Not all over, but just a mark. And you can see them there on the final casting of my sculpture. I started doing the same thing. I think it's nice to have a hand in there.
[12:56] So, here's a separate sculpture of the pelvis called Seat of Being. I have a yen to do this one really big, about 20 feet high, so people could walk around underneath it.

It's such a powerful structure. These are the gates through which most of us come into the world. What a sacred shape. Unless you're a doctor or some other medical personage, you probably never think about your pelvis unless you have problems with it.
In modern life, we can buy chunks of meat in plastic trays covered with plastic wrap that have no bones or any indication the meat was once part of an animal. We've euphemized so much that it is elemental about our lives.
We don't like to think about death or dying or bones. Maybe that's why I'm so fascinated with them.
This is a human heart in pewter.
I was so drawn towards the human heart anatomy when I was first exposed to it. If you cut it open, the interior of our hearts is wildly complex. It resembles a birch tree forest at sunset, really.
[14:02] I wanted to recreate this astonishing shape, not cut open but in its entirety, in another material which would affect a transformation in one's viewpoint about it.

I hoped to elevate it into an object in shining metal which offers a different perspective on the beauty of the actual structure. I recall during my time in Cambridge that one of Martin's colleagues, a very clever mathematician from Trinity College, shared his thoughts about seeing some of my sketches from the anatomy labs.
Gosh, it's all squished in together, isn't it? He remarked as he looked at a drawing of an open torso. It turned out he hadn't thought much about it at all, but his not thought-out impression was that our

insides were like a big, dark, empty space with the odd small organ floating discreetly about within. So I guess maybe my work can be helpful on a basic instructional level, too. So now you know my inspiration can come from just about anything and anywhere and has a lot to do with natural forms. But a few years ago, I connected with the world of man-made structures, specifically telescopes. On a chance tour of the Canada-France-Hawaii telescope on the big island of Hawaii a few years back, I once again fell in love visually.
[15:15] The summit was such a foreign environment. At 14,000 feet in the air, oxygen is thin. Lightheadedness is part of the experience. I kept talking about the place to the point that Martin, my husband, suggested I make the director a proposal.

I did and I was accepted. So I became the first artist-in-residence at a telescope. I was given studio space, access to the workshops, and most importantly, I was allowed to roam anywhere and everywhere and make art about the experience.
The astronomers and astrophysicists, the engineers, and others who work with the telescope and keep it running fascinated me. The mission of probing the outermost reaches of discovered space, which drives these people, was compelling.
The combination of humans, a harsh environment, space-age technology was so exciting visually. This is an oil sketch I did of a dream I had about the telescope before I made the proposal of the director.
So I had seen it, but I was sort of dreaming about it. The hazy memory of that first tour, the drive up to the telescope, which is on a dirt road. We bumped along in the jeep, and we experienced sunshine, rain, hail, and snow in 20 minutes, from 9,000 feet to 40,000 feet, and then suddenly we were above the weather, looking down on storms and things.
[16:33] It was a completely different experience of our Earth from a visual perspective, and I had all these dreams about it, so I made this painting, which is really the beginning of that whole love affair. I really enjoyed the differences between being up at the telescope for a day and then down near to sea level at the offices where my studio was located.

I had to undergo special safety training sessions before I went up during the day with the engineers. This training has to do with being up for a working day with 40% less oxygen than you normally are used to having.
The big fear is altitude sickness. They have to get you off the mountain down to hospital very quickly if you show any signs. Your kidneys work over time, and you have to constantly rehydrate yourself every half hour.
You are in a buddy system with a walkie-talkie every so often. Your buddy checks on you and asks you an annoying math question. On my first morning up the mountain, the engineers in the Jeep on the way up were chuckling when they saw that I had this list, I had a checklist of things that I was going to accomplish up there on my first day.
They all cautioned me to take it easy and keep eating junk food. Oh, yes, all the stuff we avoid down here. Well, up there, your brain cells start dying because the brain runs on sugar, and salt slows down your kidneys a bit, so everyone is eating candy, donuts, Doritos, and beef jerky and washing it down with espresso.
[17:59] It was so great going off Weight Watchers for a while. Anyway, so my first few minutes alone in the lounge, I struggled with my camera. Even in that short time, my brain was adjusting to less oxygen, and it took me about 10 minutes to figure out that the reason everything was black when I looked through the lens was because I hadn't removed the lens cover.

Yeah. So making art in a slightly altered consciousness was interesting. Apparently back in the day, the astronomers who had to stay up there for night observations overnight, now they do it by remote down in the office, but back in the day they'd be up there, they'd think, oh, I've got all this extra time before the next thing I have to watch, I'm going to catch up on writing my academic papers.
Big mistake. It turned out the first thing to go at altitude, like drinking alcohol, is your judgment. So they think they were going great guns, and they get the work back down to sea level, and it was moose drool, absolute drivel.
And so like them, I learned to do my best up there and reserve judgment until I was back down at the office complex in my studio. Often things I thought I'd made were really great up at altitude weren't so wonderful, and other things I did up there and hadn't thought, eh, whatever, you know. They were the keepers. So the engineers themselves have this amazing system of problem solving at sea level and then executing their solutions at altitude using the buddy system and checklist to

ensure everything gets done right.
[19:21] It's really fascinating to watch. One of the main projects I made was two mountains of knowledge. I painted two large acrylic landscapes of Mauna Kea Mountain and the telescope, one by day, another by night, because observations are made both daytime and nighttime.

But they weren't straight landscapes. I asked staff members to tell me about their contributions to the telescope. The quotes came in all the languages of the telescope. Telescopes are really international places.
There was Portuguese, French, English, Spanish, Hawaiian, computer code, bit of math, and Hebrew. I love the Hebrew quote as it's from the Bible in Genesis, let there be light.
I had to look up how to hand letter Hebrew. In gold and silver, I hand lettered all those quotes onto the mountain part of the two telescopes. So the metaphor is that the mountain upon which the telescope is resting is an accumulation of the contributions of the scientists and engineers to the knowledge we have of the physical universe through this particular telescope.
There we go. That's the Genesis. Anyway, it's very specific work, right? It's the paintings of the specific telescope, specific landscape, specific quotes from people that were there at the time.
[20:46] They loved this piece, everybody at the scope, decided to donate the two large-scale paintings. They're about five feet high. They're now beautifully framed in special wood native to Hawaii and greet you as you enter the lobby of the office complex of the Canada-France-Hawaii telescope on the big island.

So, and that's the night one. Don't ever work on the big problems at altitude. That was the director. I like that one. So, years ago, I studied Sume-E, which is inkbrush painting in Kyoto, Japan.
There was an accepted ritual to preparing the paper, the ink, and the brushes, and invoking the gods to inspire your art. It was quite a powerful ritual, and I adapted it to my Christian outlook with a prayer to God to start off my art-making sessions, and I still use this discipline.
There's this very rare plant which exists at the vegetation line on the side of Monacea Mountain. It's found nowhere else on the planet, just on one side of Monacea. It flowers once every 50 years.
It's called the silver sword. It's very striking. It had just bloomed when I arrived, and I got official permission from the national parks who oversee Monacea to gather up the dead leaves from around the base of the plants.
[22:04] I then ground the leaves into a medieval ink recipe involving soot and old red wine and other weird things, and used Japanese inkbrush technique to render images of the plants using their own leaves.

So again, that's sumi, the Japanese technique. And these were beautiful yellow flowers, columns of flowers, and these are the sword-like bottom part of the plant.
I also made portraits of people doing their jobs up on gantries, down at desks, hanging into the center of the optic core of the telescope as they shifted the lens, weighing tons. Here's a picture of one of the tech engineers taking a fresh air break out on the catwalk of the telescope, which is sort of like this belt that runs around the outside of the scope.
He's just having a little break. It's a little nude. Here's one of the optic engineers making adjustments while swinging into the heart of the telescope.
I got this perspective when I talked the crew into allowing me up on a small moving platform 50 feet above them, high inside the telescope dome so I could sketch and take photographs down upon him as he worked.
[23:16] This is one of the more close-ups, but I've also got long shots. Here's, yes, there's a photograph I took out on the catwalk of the telescope looking at the various volcanic cones covered in snow at the summit of Mauna Kea.

It's no vegetation, just the bones of the earth laid bare. It's very lovely. Sometimes I'm moved by a person. This next particular portrait is a friend of mine, Anne Green, who used to go to St. John's, moved to Burnaby a few years back.
Some of you might remember her as Anne Lancaster was her pre-marriage name. She's a computer guru. She's a fantastic Christian. She lives out her Christianity in very tangible ways. Many years she was in charge of the computer systems at Regent College. This portrait is in Oil on Linen. It's a classic tonal method of oil painting. I'm going to describe that to you a bit later.
I aspire to capture Anne's compassion and her love of her fellow man and her courage and conviction in adhering to her faith in Christ. This is an oil painting of cattle grazing in the Scottish

Hebrides.
[24:37] It's a classic pastoral scene. I'm struck by the shapes of the trees looking a lot like lungs. I've worked with in the anatomy labs. This painting is classically painted in the tonal method, which has been used by artists for about 400 years.

I've loosened up the technique a bit with impressionistic wet and wet, where paint is applied over previous levels of paint that have not yet dried. Classically, you would just layer, let it dry, layer, let it dry, so forth, which was more obvious in the portrait of Anne previously.
So a tonal painting is constructed by scrubbing in with gray or umber the overall sketch of the scene. So you kind of scrub it in with a cloth or with a big brush, but that is very turpentine-y.
It's very thin paint. You scrub in tonal values checked against a grayscale of one to seven, lightest to darkest. The painter keeps on a small piece of Carter linen with them at all times to check the values of the light.
Once the values are established, you can add color in various layers, but the colors have to be true to the values. In other words, if the original sketch included a value of six in the darkest green area, the color would be green or blue-green, but the value would stay a very dark six.
[26:01] So in oil painting, it's important to keep adding more linseed oil to the paint as you go on with each layer, thus the old saying, fat over lean. Well, I scrubbed in the initial pass in umber that was thinned with turpentine.

Each time I went in to paint on subsequent painting sessions, I added more linseed oil to the paint. This is what gives oil paintings their luminous quality as the light passes through the layers of color pigment trapped in the oil and then finally you fix it with a final varnish.
Here's another oil painting from the same location in Scotland. Quality of light is so important in setting the mood for a painting of this nature. The light in north of Scotland, similar to Vancouver, it's blue and cool.
This makes the warmth of the cow's hides a wonderful foil for the overall coolness of the water in the atmosphere. There was this little clump of grass in the river in Kyoto.
The sun warmed it and the water sparkled around it and I felt its safeness, like we feel when we're touched by God's protective spirit. This painting is an oil on linen and it's quite small in scale.
[27:09] It's an intimate piece which forces the viewer to get closer when interacting with it. I actually brought it along so we can pass it about and you can see the textures of the piece and the slide is not, you know, the piece.

So if I can pass it about so I was making art in the UK at an interesting junction of legality and public intervention.
While working at the human anatomy lab in Cambridge, there was a scandal about a young artist. He had stolen body parts from one of the labs and taken them home to his home freezer, continued to work with them.
Yeah. One of his pieces, actually, he had cast an elderly gentleman's head and torso. He just took a mold off the corpse. He didn't do what I do. He didn't sculpt. He made a pewter out of it.
The dead man's granddaughter recognized her granddad in the gallery where the piece was exhibited. His body had been left to science and research. The young man was slapped into prison.
[28:21] The body parts returned, but the upshot was that a new piece of legislation came up in the UK. No art was to be made in human anatomy labs anymore. Now, although this person was wrong, he was prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

He did jail time. They decided to chuck all the artists out, everyone. So all the textbook illustrators, the sculptors who create medical models for, you know, for class, for medical students, people like me who just want to make art, we're all banned.
Some of the best UK illustrators have to go to the continent of North America to do their work now. So this law penalizes all sorts of people for the sins of one guy. My time at Cambridge and Oxford bridged this period until 2008.
The legislation wasn't enacted but the last time I tried getting into the labs I was met by very apologetic anatomy docs who said, not anymore, Colleen, law's been passed. One of them, a kind and creative problem solver, a cousin of Martin's actually, asked if I might be interested in the animal anatomy.
I considered his suggestion and he contacted the head and got me in and I fell in love again, this time with a spectrum of animal structures. This is a fetal pig which I find just incredibly moving and

vulnerable and exquisite.
[29:46] They have a saying in Jukasjarvi, Sweden, sooner or later all the crack spots show up at Jukasjarvi. Odd claim to fame for a small town North Atlantic circle, yes?

This is somewhat derisive but it's sort of descriptive because this is where the ice hotel, like Brigadoon, gets created every winter and then melts back into the Torna River. So, several hundred sculptors visit every year from around the globe.
All those artists in one place. They carve and create themed rooms out of ice in the hotel and sometimes materials can really inspire. I wanted to carve a whale bone out of ice and so I did.
This photo is all that remains of the sculpture because it's now melted back into the Torna River. Somewhere north of the Arctic Circle, it's really up there. The relationships of line in a transparent sculpture are complex.
With an opaque bone, you have a lovely shape but you don't see through the piece. You don't see the relationships between the different facets. In transparency, all these relationships are startlingly clear.
[30:56] Not through a glass darkly but through a glass with clarity. Whale bones. Such a visual love affair. Began 20 years ago in Scotland when I first saw whale bones which had been thrown up from the ocean.

They were huge, obviously mammalian, sort of looked related to our bones and they were magnificent. From the first tentative sketches, I produced quite a lot of work, much of it sculptural and in lead crystal.
This piece is different because it's not glass but it's resin. In order to float the flipper bones inside the flipper but still have transparency, I wouldn't have been able to use glass as the temperature would have destroyed the ceramic sculpture flipper bones inside the piece.
In fact, several sculptor colleagues thought it might well blow up simply because of the high temperatures which occur after pouring resin. But we did the pour and we suspended those bones inside and over a 12-hour period it cured.
It reaches over 200 degrees. Fortunately, I had used grog-infused ceramic clay. That's clay that's got little bits of fired clay in it already and that was able to take the heat.
[32:02] So, this piece has roused some interesting conversation. Many have asked me why I have floated human hand bones inside a whale flipper. I point out that if you examine the bones carefully, there are, for example, seven phalanges on the central figure.

We have only three. The wrist bones are compacted, the radius and allness are stumpy compared to ours. So, although whales are our mammalian cousins and walk the earth, they went to sea quite some time ago and their hand bones emphasize flipper functionality rather than digital dexterity.
One comment came from a well-educated fund manager in London who was wildly enthusiastic about this piece. He said, that's exactly how we see life. It's dog eat dog.
To him, the sculpture represented a shark's fin. It's a whale pectoral flipper but he's a shark's fin and the shark is digesting its victim hand in its fin. Made him so happy.
I hope he's better at hedge funding than he is at basic animal anatomy because, as I mentioned, I don't have a lot of control about inspiration. I try to be obedient to it and I certainly don't have any say over how it affects people or how they interpret it.
[33:13] There's another photo of the same sculpture in different lighting. So, as I mentioned before, whales are mammals and have a lot of the same bones as us, only a bit different.

This is a cervical vertebra from the neck of a whale. It's life-sized and based on a sculpture I made from a grail whale specimen at UBC.
It's about the size of a cake box. I mean, you know, we've got ones that are about that big and theirs are this big but it's the same shape of bone. It's quite beautiful. The colors of the whale bones and the colors of most of these pieces are inspired by my first connection with whale bones in the Hebrides.
So, I use colors of sky and sea and kelp and seaweed, blues, greens, iodine, ambers. They're the main colors of the whale dream series. This is a bone which is unique to whales.
It's a chevron. Chevron bones interspersed the caudal vertebra in the whale's lower third of its body towards the tail flukes. It would be a little like if your lumbar vertebra were segmented into a couple of sections for each one.

[34:20] You'd have your processes in one and then you'd have your actual vertebra in the other and they'd be sort of alternated. You'd have remarkable flexibility in your lower spine. The chevrons have slightly different profiles which sometimes actually look like human profiles of people.

One project I tackled a few years ago was drawing my way through all the bones of a single whale specimen. It was a dwarf sperm whale that lives over at the Beattie Biodiversity Museum at UBC and drawing my way through the whale was sort of like a meditation, frankly, on the details of all these beautiful shapes that went to make up the armature of this creature.
These are gray whale discs very much like our own spinal discs. In some of these glass sculptures I combine two main colors such as green and amber or blue and green in the glass.
This is a thoracic vertebra and you can notice the eroded front part aspect. The piece was actually a partially failed casting but I liked how it turned out. I decided to keep it because it mimics something that happens to bones left on the beach in nature.
The calcium structure can leach out and the bone gets eroded and wind and rain turn flakes into patterns like the, similar to this sculpture.
[35:43] This is a bunch of whale ribs. I first came across these ribs at the Beattie Museum bound up in some twine with a little identification label on them.

There's a functional way of keeping them together in the larger specimen box but for some reason I really like them all bound up together like that. It looked attractive like a little rib party or a bouquet or something.
So I fashioned individual ribs in different colors and shapes and sizes and then to display them bound them up in a similar fashion. This is a shoulder blade similar somewhat to ours way bigger. It's a shoulder blade of a sperm whale and I've actually made it only a quarter of size of its reality. If you want to see the reality go to the Beattie Biodiversity Museum where they have big blue and they've got something that shape only four times as big which is, you know, like about a table.
This is the skull of a dwarf's sperm whale which I just got back from the foundry a few weeks ago. I decided to use the green-amber combination.
[36:51] I'm pleased that it has an almost vegetal connotation or it could be a cloud or geologic formation. It's another fantastic blueprint from our creator but that's the joy in all of it for me to keep making from the inspiration of God's beautiful world.

By the way, if you find the work interesting I actually have an exhibition up now in Vancouver out at UBC at the Beattie Biodiversity Museum on East Mall. It's on now and it'll be up until February 14th quite a long time.
Closest parking is the medical parkade behind the hospital. If you pop out of the parkade on the northwest corner there's a sign directing you to the Beattie. Walk towards East Mall you can't miss it because they've got the largest articulated whale skeleton in the world hanging up in their glass lobby.
It's glass on all sides so you can see it from quite some ways away. So that's my talk. Thank you. Questions?
Have you ever read the book Creative Writings of Emily Carr? Yes, yes. I've read a lot of her writings. They're wonderful. She's won Governor General's awards for her books.
[38:06] They're quite magnificent. She describes the creative process so wonderfully. It's very rich. Very beautiful. I'm fascinated by the casting process and the lost wax thing.

I heard that thousands of years ago lost wax was used for metal but glass as well. Yeah, yeah. Before the Romans. Wow. Yeah. So how high does it have to be for the glass?
Now you're asking me the technical engineering stuff. I just sculpt it. You know? The foundry guys they know that stuff. I don't know. Somebody told me it's thousands of degrees.
It's very hot. Yeah. It's actually glass at its peak is hotter than bronze. So, yeah. Are there any artists anywhere working out with the Hubble phenomenon?
Yes. And it seems to be changing the world for a late person. When you're changing the world as strong as you can. It's really amazing. There's an awful lot going on with land observation but, yes, there are projects with the Hubble as well.
[39:18] I first started doing this, I guess, with the telescope about five years ago or something. Maybe a bit more. And I was the first. But now there's just all these other people that have read my blog and went, oh, how did you do that and who do you apply to?

So there's little cadres of artists going around to scopes and working with the Hubble and then, of course, NASA. You know? There's that whole thing. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Don't you have more for us? I've done my 45 minutes. There is a lot more. Actually, you know, you make art for 18 years. There's a lot of different streams that I couldn't include in this talk.
I'm really nuts about the whole Japanese thing and I studied over there and there's lots of black wax etchings of sumo wrestlers and stuff. And, you know, I've done other things but I thought this sort of was maybe more accessible for people than some of the other things I've done.
Maybe not. Yeah. Holly, was there a was there a distinct moment in your life when you realized change was going to happen and then you put aside your journalistic career?
[40:35] Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. The moment I got my cancer diagnosis. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That was the moment. I just thought if I've only got a little time left I'm going to be an artist in Paris.

That was fun. Yeah. Yeah. It just, that lens brought everything into focus for me and that was the gift of the cancer was understanding my own mortality and moving forward in the life that God wanted for me and that was made very clear to me.
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.
Can you describe that therapy? It was almost instantaneous to the diagnosis.
I mean the shock was barely wearing off. It was in the doctor's office and I just went oh wow I've always been thinking I could do this someday. I would do this now.
I don't have much time left maybe as I thought I did. I have to move on this right away and it was just like a real it was very strong very strong yeah. Yes Bill.
[41:50] Your talk reminds me of the verse we read this morning great are the works of the Lord sought out by all those who take pleasure therein seems to be you'll beautifully explain that thank you for that yeah and so I feel as though you have a great kinship with the scientists as well that very text as I recall is carved in oak over the lintel of the new Cavendish in Cambridge oh yes it is yeah oh that's a lovely thought yeah I do love scientists I married one you know I'm almost speechless which never happens but I've enjoyed your talk so much and it's so clear in your talking how you know how your art represents God in the world I wonder if you could speak to reactions that you get from people either Christian or non-Christian about that well I had a really lovely experience of that

I've just opened up this big show at the Beattie and we opened up a couple of weeks ago and I had the opportunity to talk to Tricia and Ross Beattie who endowed the buildings and other things they busy people and we were talking and as we were talking a friend of mine Rob DeCotes who runs a Christian meditation group that I was part of was kind of jogging through the room and waved to the Beatties and they waved back in the middle of our conversation because he was there early because he wanted to see the show but he had something else on that night so anyway running through the exhibition just before the opening and here I am talking to Ross and Tricia Beattie who endowed the building and I said oh you know Rob and they said oh yes and I went you're Christian and they said yes and they said well it's where we did the museum this is like God's wonderful world on display for everybody and I just went well that's where
I'm coming from too and they said yeah that's why it's so good that you're exhibiting here we had this whole talk and I just thought what a blessing I mean before the thing is even open I'm finding out that these people are Christians and they are putting their money into the kinds of things that I'm doing on a much more micro level but I thought that was fascinating isn't that amazing what a blessing that one stalk she had on the ice and it had the whale bone it looked like a whale's hand or something like that yes that's right it's the pectoral flipper bone of a whale actually has sort of what we would recognize as hand bones inside of it that's quite right yeah well noticed yes Olaf thank you Colleen you reminded us that most of us are blind to the works of God that's very sweet I just think the beauty of what you demonstrated is inspiring and reminds us that we need to look more closely at all God's works inside the body or outside or out in space it's a lovely perspective you brought to us thank you very much thank you one of the things really struck me when you were speaking about the deterioration of the vertebra yeah and leaving that in that crystal piece yeah and what it made me think of is Ecclesiastes and the idea that we are we are mortal we are going to be wearing down and you know when when you're faced with your own mortality when you have major surgery or whatever it is this moment where eternity is touching yes yes yes yes and that really just even you saying that made me want to cry because that's exactly why I saved it what you're saying to me are exactly the thoughts running through my mind when they said oh this one blew up

Colleen you're not going to want it and I looked at it and went oh yeah I think I am well and there's something so exciting like the way that our current world thinks about the running down of our bodies is that we are flawed somehow yeah and in fact it is just the way that it's going to happen to all of us yeah most of us here are getting older but there's something to be embraced about that we're our culture is very afraid of it yeah but so all of that was with your slide went up it's like oh thank you thank you very much appreciate that Colleen your comments about how people are so in touch with their own bodies yeah and and and and as you put it the schlock horror idea it's just all gross it's all yucky junk yeah which in the face of all the imaging we now have available and the sort of stuff you've been doing it sounds like it's time for people to to move beyond oh I hope so we really went through a period where the early anatomists were just stealing bodies and chopping them up yeah and uh and human human life was so so cheap a third of the world died in the 1300s and again in the 1600s and uh so people were used to seeing bodies rotting and slowly being exposed everywhere but we then went through a politer time that let everybody sort of
I think the euphemism at this point is just so extreme that I find it very disturbing actually particularly um as I now have you know kind of soaked myself literally in being in labs and looking at all these structures right and analyzing them um and seeing the beauty of them um I it makes me a little angry actually thinking about it bit of a crusader thing there going because uh because that's just wrong that's wrong thinking I don't say we all have to go out and kill a chicken tonight but you know uh you know wouldn't be a bad thing maybe look at where your meat comes from yes Colleen this has just been wonderful and I'm sitting here wondering why don't I see the things that you see and I guess I would I mean I'm going to see things differently I'm going to look at a different style but I think this was partly my education so very linear you know very left brain kind of stuff and um look at what we're missing when we have concentrated on that through generations of educating people and I'm wondering how we could bridge that and get more of the right brain all the way from kindergarten law yeah
[48:58] I don't know that's a very good question about educational reform oh yes laws I mean that's just such a fun thing to toss around especially if you're not in the trenches actually teaching anybody I don't have any children so I have very strong ideas about how they should be raised but no I think you're right I think society is a reflection and education system is a reflection of who we've become and I think we've become very plasticky and apart from nature in not a good way and if my work can open people's eyes to something they wouldn't normally be seeing then I think it's a good thing I don't do it for that reason as I hope I've made clear I operate out of a conviction that I've got to do things and I'm trying to be obedient to that but it has changed a few people the work so thank you

I just found it so amazing how art can transform the science the anatomy into such a beautiful way I remember I remember when I did anatomy for six months it wasn't so beautiful it was very you know the blood the bones everywhere and I don't think I was the only student who became a vegetarian for that period of time I know what you mean yeah I've been in those trenches myself and yes but yeah I don't know I think I think it is going against the prevailing thinking and I'm hoping that you weren't repulsed by anything you saw today yeah hi yes I had just a kind of related topic but I do think you're correct I think we got the idea we need to be coddling our feelings especially children's feelings that mustn't be exposed to anything unpleasant and that's not what life is like and that's not how
God ranges circumstances and you look at perhaps the Bible some classic literature like an unedited version of Fox's book of martyrs is pretty graphic or the mocking poem in the hobbit like the goblins describing explicitly the intended fate of their victims burning trees yeah so I think we've gotten off the rails yeah I think you're right thank you good comment yes I'm just thinking about the human soul and heart and I know you travel quite a bit I'm just wondering what your experiences are with different cultures around the world well I'm particularly interested in Japan but your time there you tell the soul of the Japanese or even BC or indigenous people in your art and other places around the world that part of yeah well like all of us I have great respect for our indigenous people's art
I think it's absolutely astonishingly beautiful as do most of the other people in the world who come here and try to buy chunks of it it's I only know a couple of indigenous artists I don't know a lot about that tribe I did meet artists in other countries in Scotland and the UK and France other places I've worked and I think what surprised me about people that are non-Christian artists is in a way their

practice is also spiritual but they might not recognize it so I think that's really interesting I came across this a number of times where you'd meet somebody and they were kind of operating on the same wavelength as me but not so conscious of spirits intervention maybe so it's really interesting it's almost like you know Paul saying that the gospel gets through even through people that are a bit of a cracked pot you know that you know that I think there's something holy and sacred about this to God and I think that if you're engaging in it even though you're you're not turned to Christianity perhaps there there's some echo of that that impulse in there in terms of souls that are not necessarily churched yet yeah so oh yes Phil have you encountered any deep dyed naturalists in the scientific realm who simply could not share your sense of wonder and amazement and beauty and what you see in the created world who are you as one scientist we heard not too long ago UBC say the universe has no meaning that was and he was just so candid about that wow but have you encountered that sort of person who who doesn't know what to make not many and the one that sort of looms to mind is somebody had a wrangle with recently who is a self-professed anarchist and anti-Christian and he feels that any organization to one's creative life is wrong so painting using traditional methods such as I do or casting methods which are very traditional that's just all wrong

[54:55] I mean if I'm going to be a true creative I've got to throw that all out the window and I've got to be an anarchist and so he is a very angry person very unhappy person but it's not just my work he's targeting he's targeting anybody that creates anything that looks vaguely realistic because we're ripping off somebody else's blueprint and I go yeah we're ripping off God's blueprint you know anyway I haven't met many people like that I've met more people fortunately for me and my career that have been converted to the work so yeah does the anarchist live on commercial drugs but maybe some of his friends do I don't know maybe he has a friend sorry no no no it was just a glancing criticism and then he was out of my life so I don't have to deal with him on an ongoing basis for which

I'm so thankful so we've got Harvey and Olaf yes I mean all that we maybe don't want to go here but someone described modernity I think it's the best description of it it essentially says along with Phil's word the cosmos is a form of violence it's disorder it has no crater it's just there therefore all social order in our world is a form of coercion to control the violence so your anarchist friend wants to be in touch with the real world which is arbitrary freedom I'm doing my own thing does art either affirm that or does it come predictable he sees art as a tool only it's a tool for freeing up the oppression of the masses and I said you know 90% of the political art I've ever seen is crap I'm sorry it just is it's propaganda but feed up to what is for a better order yeah if we were all in chaos he'd be happy yeah I know

I know it's very confusing to me too Harvey it doesn't make a lot of sense but you're right you put it very well Olaf you had something you wanted to say well I hate to follow such a profound I don't know if you had read anything by Ronald Wyde about divine landscapes oh yes yes yes he makes very explicit connections between what he sees in the landscape yeah and the history of the landscape yes and the connections with the Christian authors of the past yes I wonder if there might be something as concrete as that in the development of the ideas that you have spoken what you got some references that might lead us to more concrete discussions about that would be good if I were a theologian or a historian as I said at the top of the talk that's not really my area and I've had a lot of influences even journalists you know for 20 years has informed what I do so there are an awful lot of good materials out there and I recommend that you go out and find them but I can't sort of give bibliographies today because that's not oh yeah no I got to do this stuff

I'm busy so I think that wraps up let me present you this beautiful work oh thank you did everybody get a look at that like close up yeah because the slides just doesn't you know please join me in thanking Kali for an absolutely amazing thank you thank you so thoughtful I'm sure there will be lots of questions after I thank you