

Quench

a Bridge from Charleston to Haiti

Reflections on God, art, water, race and equality

By Robert Maniscalco

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<http://www.maniscalcogallery.com>

Note: 50% of the profits from the sale of this book and the paintings which are part of *The Quench Project* are being donated to Watermissions International and the Bread of Life Orphanage.

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It is my intention to offer these works to those with an interest in the people of Haiti, as a body of work, for exhibition, in order to create awareness for water issues in Haiti and elsewhere, and as an expression of hope for a light-filled future for all humanity.

The Quench Project can be part of your organizations fund raising effort. Contact the author about making ***The Quench Project*** a part of your organizations next event, donating a portion of the sale of Quench Project paintings, giclees and books to generate funds for any organization making a difference for the people of Haiti.



Living Waters, 18x24" oil on panel

(Collection of George and Molly Greene)

“But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” John 4:14

A boy reaches into the spigot of a newly installed solar powered filtration system, compliments of Watermissions International, in a mountain village near Jacmel, Haiti. The water is now drinkable for all who may partake. The purifying qualities of water itself are called into focus. Cate, my loving wife, suggested I eliminate any reference to a naturalistic background to bring this point brightly into the fore. The water in this painting seems to be taking on a life energy. Each droplet appears to have become an individual sentient being, in existence only for a brief instant, in a powerful flash of truth, going before us, as our emissaries.

Keep in mind, the water we are drinking today, is more than a billion years old, having been recycled and responsible for bringing life to many life forms before us.



Plight Into flight

The Quench Project is a series of paintings, included in this book, and a short film, *Quench*, about my experiences on my vision trip to Haiti in November 2014. I raised enough money, using Kickstarter, to pay for the trip, which was hosted by Watermissions International, who were gracious enough to guide me on my quest.

The Quench Project is an expression of hope and human triumph. It is a story of survival, an exploration of human desire and the many ways we cope with our longing. It started with a question: what is it to “quench” our desire? I’m drawn to the metaphor between quenching our thirst for water and our thirst for meaning, indeed our thirst for a loving God. I have come to realize that the desire for anything other than God’s will to be done, is what leads to misery.

As a child, I desired to be loved and cherished because I didn’t feel loved and cherished at home. My parents divorced when I was very young and I was raised primarily by my father, an ambitious artist, who seemed to resent his children for stifling his career. Some combination of my unmet needs for affirmation, and being raised by a man who was uncomfortable with expressing love and appreciation, led to my being groomed and finally sexually abused at the age of 14, by my sister’s fiancé, a doctor at Children’s Hospital in Detroit. He was a trusted authority who manipulated my desire to be among the chosen, feeding my need to feel special, and using it to control me, a child who desired love, brought up in a world where love and safety and belonging were missing. I published a semi-autobiographical novel, *The Fishfly*, which explored the ways I learned to cope with the aftermath of abuse; it asked the hypothetical question, “What would I do if I found myself face to face, today, with the perpetrator?”

I think making sure our children know they are loved is the primary purpose of a parent and indeed of our society. This simple assurance would go a long way to prevent Child Sexual Abuse, along with the many problems which plague our civilization. The abuse I suffered led to thought disorders and a debilitating distrust of authority. I didn’t understand I was loved unconditionally by a loving God until I was 52, when I married my second wife, Cate, a devout Christian, who married me on faith. She was aware of my early experience as a Christian and my falling away because I felt betrayed when my Pastor refused to counsel me after my experience of CSA. Cate could see that light in my eyes, even when I could not; she chose to trust in God, rather than her

When God speaks to me
He speaks to me about
things that have to do
with me and my life. He
does not speak to me
about what others should
be doing with theirs.

ManiscafoGallery.com

own best persuasive abilities, to show me the way. We stumbled onto a church, where my issue with authority was eloquently addressed by one of God's precious instruments, Todd Simonis, the pastor of City Church, in Charleston. Until that moment, when I rededicated my life to serving Christ, I didn't believe I was good enough for God. Why should I care about some abstract universal life force, if such a thing even existed? How and why would such a magnificent being possibly care about me, personally?



The seeming contradiction of believing I was somehow among the chosen among men but also feeling in my core that I was not good enough for God, cost me many years of bliss. My Belief was in my own misery and failure, based on my personal experience with chaos and separation, leading to a life of despair. I clung to this misery paradigm for 52 years, wallowing in the awe and dread of nothingness. It was then that I finally realized God truly loved me just the way I am. I did not have to earn His grace; that it was a gift.

But *The Quench Project* is a subjective meditation on the people of Haiti, seen through the veil of my unique life experience and world view. I make no effort to be objective or journalistic. I endeavor always to be open, to see and accept whatever God presents to me. I am a child of God and I am an artist. I invite you now to visit this, the living canvas of my life.

What I saw in the people of Haiti, trapped in a predicament of monumental proportions, is a microcosm of the many creative ways people can find to rise above the experience of suffering. The faces and places and culture were foreign to me, but the arch toward the light is very much the same as mine, and indeed all humanity.

I make no claim that my insights and subjective observations I make in this book are true, in any absolute sense. The facts have been diligently researched but the rest is simply my perspective, based on my unique life trajectory, which is evolving. Also, I must warn the reader, I make no effort to separate politics and religion.

Maybe I was on the lookout to see examples of love while in Haiti. Maybe it's what I stumbled upon throughout my visit, through some stroke of fate. But that's what I found. I don't want to give away the ending of my story, but here's a hint of where I'm headed: although there will always be plenty of reasons to hate in this world, I have found love always wins, without exception.

Hate has caused a lot of problems in the world, but has not solved one yet. — Maya Angelou

A Religion Based on Desire

Haiti is now 52% Christian, due in part to thousands of missionaries and Haitian natives, who have dedicated their lives to spreading the Gospel. Pastor Medit, whom I will speak of more later as the founder of the Bread of Life Orphanage, wants to enter Haitian politics. He believes the tide is turning in Haiti, slowly but surely, from a culture based on the Voodoo religion to one based on Christian values.

What is Voodoo? Sticking needles in dolls, right? As I understand it, it is a religion based on the satisfying of desire. Voodooists believe in a distant and unknowable Supreme Creator, Bondye. So, Voodooists cultivate personal relationships with the loa (lessor Gods) through the presentation of offerings, the creation of personal altars and devotional objects, and participation in elaborate ceremonies of music, dance, and spirit possession. Voodooism is about using these Loa to get whatever one desires. Voodooists have adapted many of the rituals found in the Catholic Church. Medit tells me that for a person to become a Voodoo priest he/she has to pray in a Catholic Church for 24 hours.



Every ancient text agrees, and my personal experience confirms for me, that focusing on our desires leads only to misery and abuse. I believe Haiti, basing its society on Voodoo, has led to misery and abuse on a national scale. It is clear to me that this cultural predisposition exacerbated the effects of the Haiti Earthquake disaster of 2010. To be sure, I don't believe Vodouism was the cause, as some irresponsible "religious" leaders have suggested. No one but God knows the entirety of God's will. Good things happen, bad things happen and no mortal is privy to know with any certainty, why. Ours is only to ask the question, what good may come from any given situation, either tragic or fortunate.

I was sexually assaulted as a child by a doctor at Children's Hospital, in Detroit. Only God knows the purpose for why this happened. God's will is much larger than we can comprehend. I can tell you God has shown me the path to spiritual and psychological healing and that the insights I have gained by this and many other "setbacks" in my life, have made me a more sensitive, understanding being. Will the benefit ever balance the cost? There is never any way of knowing. Am I stronger, more sensitive or more compassionate? All I know is I'm probably not the man I might have been. Many things are difficult for me that are not so for those who did not suffer abuse. As an advocate for the prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, I have dedicated myself to creating awareness, so that no other children should have to have to ask these questions, the way I had to, the way so many other survivors have to. One thing is certain, giving my life to Christ has made a life of happiness and acceptance possible for me. Visit *Darkness to Light* (d2l.org), an organization dedicated to the prevention of CSA, with headquarters in Charleston, SC.



The apostle James talked about God's will with a very interesting string of adjectives:

The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. James 3:17

God's impartiality stood out for me. His wisdom is balanced and does not favor one over another, even though it might seem to. Some people seem to have all the favor. But we cannot know the fullness of His will. So we pray for His will to be done and trust in faith that we may be guided by His wisdom and favor.

I believe people are innately good, once the ego is understood and carefully managed. Another word for ego in this context might be sin. Whereas self-love is essential, it is only a means to an end. Spending the better part of my life trying to build self-esteem was an empty exercise for me; it always felt hollow. I learned the ancient thought technologies and began doing a better job of managing my thoughts using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, yoga and meditation as well as other mindfulness technologies. But in the end of my struggle I realized self-esteem, self-reliance, self-pride, were ultimately empty endeavors.

Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. Matthew 19:24

What this means, in this context, is that all my best efforts at fixing myself, by myself, for what I believe are my best interests, always will fall short. Until I realized my connection to God, and dedicated myself to serving Him, and by extension, His children, the beings among us, I was destined for suffering. I read the William Ernest Henley poem, *Invictus*, at my father's funeral, because it was a song he lived his life by. I buried the poem with him. Here is its key point: "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul." I have found it a much happier life, knowing God is the captain of my soul. Jesus is my connection to the Universe. Others may call it by another name, but Jesus provides me that "marvelous light," so . . .

. . . for me and my house, I shall follow Him. Joshua 24:15

Out of Darkness, 18×24" oil on board

(Original is part of the collection of Linda Martin)

I met this little girl on a mountain in Jacmel where Watermissions International was finishing it's installation of a solar powered water filtration system, purifying a well and bringing fresh water to this remote location. She was enjoying the incredible pleasure of fresh water from that well for the first time in her life.

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” I Peter, 2:9



Water, Water Everywhere

A larger goal for *The Quench Project* has been to raise awareness of the global water crisis caused by growing populations and wealth inequality. Capitalism, a society based on money, by its very definition, has the wrong priorities. I don't believe money is a "necessary evil." We currently have the resources to end poverty and suffering. All we lack is the will.

There has been a dramatic reversal in environmental regulations, which were put in place to protect fresh water supplies and the quality of life for future generations in our own country. These are battles many of us thought we'd fought and won years ago. Now, the EPA is under attack, global warming is being ignored. There are water shutoffs in Detroit, Baltimore and elsewhere. Lake Erie is under threat once again of becoming a dead lake, after its amazing comeback during the 1990s. We are now dealing with the devastating effects of unregulated fracking. All this needless suffering is a result of political construct called capitalism.



It is likely that wars in years to come will be fought over access to fresh water, rather than oil. As climate change causes shifts in the environment and populations continue to spiral out of control water will become even more of a political issue.

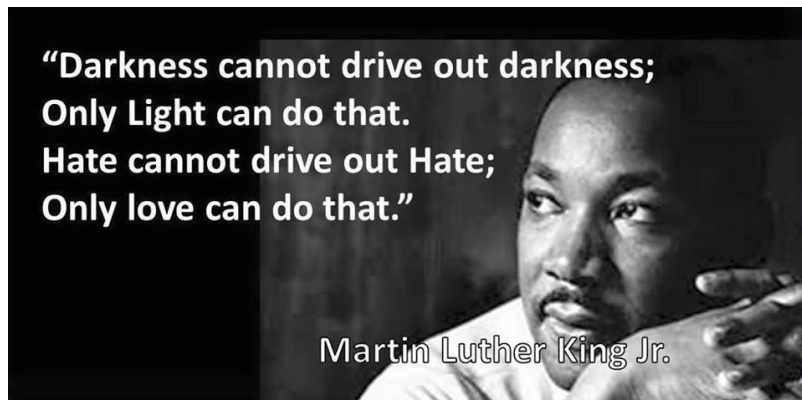


Wealthy citizens in California are demanding to be exempted from water conservation laws. Water bottlers continue, unencumbered, to treat water as a commodity, while vulnerable populations are left without access to water. Clearly, access to fresh water must be protected as a right, not a luxury. The Obama administration recently issued new rules to protect the nation's drinking water and clarify which smaller streams, tributaries and wetlands are covered by anti-pollution and development provisions of the Clean Water Act, despite efforts in Congress to dismantle these protections. The more we use environmental protections as a political wedge, the more we delude ourselves that water issues are someone else's problem, the closer we will be to assuring a future consumed by conflicts and suffering.

Darkness and Light

And yet, even in the midst of all this conflict and strife, God is in the process of bringing humankind into the light of consciousness, a state of being which has no suffering, where there is only peace and love. This is the culmination of His plan. Many of us believe, “the Kingdom of God is at hand,” means we mustn’t wait for the hereafter. God’s plan is meant for us to live, right now, here on Earth. Here is my prayer for *The Quench Project*:

Lord, deliver us from darkness and oppression, in all its forms, economic, psychological, religious, and lead us into the marvelous light. I ask for the freedom from want. I ask that my desires be satisfied or, through your grace, I become free from them. Lord, satisfy my desire for connection, for true human interaction. Set me free in Jesus name I pray, Amen.



Through this adventure, and many others in my life, I have begun to understand the great message of the Bible: I am saved by the grace of God, not by anything I can do myself. I believe this is true both individually and collectively. For me, the missing piece was Jesus, the redeemer. And yet I also acknowledge and understand that others may find a different path to their bliss.

But what is this darkness, this universal place of separation, a common element in all philosophies and religions? What is the nature of this darkness, from which we desire to depart, in the hope we might enter the light? And what is the light we seek? The answers to these questions may be self-evident to some. But not to me.

Some believe it is merely disagreement. “If you don’t agree with me, then you must be in the dark.” This idea of darkness is very limited because it separates us from others. This judgmental way of being leads to suffering. Suffering then, in a sense, is darkness. When we are in darkness, we experience depression, the nothingness of being. Not just a wish for death, but a desire for non-being. Total annihilation. Depression calls for the destruction of all things. Another way of thinking of darkness is sin, an activity which harms yourself or others, which leads to suffering, once again. But then guilt enters, which I have found, leads right back to suffering. The dark side is a cycle of sin and guilt, spiraling toward destruction.

Most of what we consider sinful activity is harmful only because we believe it separates us (or others) from God. We believe we must somehow turn away from God in order to engage in sin, that sin somehow disqualifies us from being in His light. Indeed, this was how it was before Christ sacrificed himself and redeemed us from the weight of our sins. Through Christ, according to the Christian Bible, God promises his children that the light will never turn away from us. He is with us in our darkest hour, even as we sin.

Sinning is not what I was led to believe it was when I was a child. As an adult, I now understand, sin is and will always be with us in our current form. No amount of self-restraint can free us from it. In fact, no amount of restraints we place on others (or others place on us) can free us of it. To be alive, is to consume, to create waste, to destroy others, to sin. Keeping (or failing to keep) the laws better than others does not bring us any closer to (or farther away from) the light, because His light can never leave us; it is always with us. God knows humans will always sin AND He loves us anyway, even as we sin, unconditionally. I have a hunch our "fleshly desires" are part of what He loves about us. As he hates the sin, he loves the sinner.

So here's God's plan in a nutshell: He made us aware of our sinful nature, only to relieve us of its weight upon us, its power over us, by forgiving us through the sacrifice of His son. There is a tremendous disconnect if our "sinful" nature keeps us from serving God's plan for us. In fact, it is our sinful nature itself, which connects us with God. Without sin, we would have no need for God. And since it is impossible for us to become sinless, and that our sins can never actually separate us from God, it is simply a matter of accepting that our sins have been forgiven by a loving God. The good news is that this forgiveness is unconditional, so we need not suffer from the ultimate delusion that we can turn God on or off in our lives, like a faucet, since God is omnipresent. We can run, but we can't hide. We are inextricably connected with God, nature and one another, regardless of whether or not we accept it.

Once we choose to accept God in our lives, our desires naturally change, of course. We are drawn to the light. The desire to do great important things, begins to grow in us, even as we sin. The sin becomes less important a factor in our service of God's larger plan. Though we are never without sin, many of those which seemed once to control us, naturally fall away; they lose their hold on us. The realization that sin no longer stops us or separates us from God then frees us to focus on our calling, rather than being bogged down with our identification as sinners. True freedom from bondage means freedom from the *guilt* of sin, as well as the idea of sin itself.





Therefore, we can say that love is the light of forgiveness, which is omnipresent. Darkness is nothing more than a simple ignorance of His omnipresent love. The light in *enlightenment* is the key to inner peace. Indeed, love is that heaven on Earth Jesus referred to when He said, “The kingdom of God is at hand.”

Giving up the “humanistic” pride we take in our separation from God, the “I can do it all by myself” mantra many of us cling to, is a very liberating experience. Putting the worry and stress in God’s hands has produced a lot of bliss. Regardless of one’s religious beliefs, or not, it is clear that giving up the “I’m all alone” paradigm and connecting to something, the universe or whatever name you want to give it, produces great bliss. I like the sense that I have instant access to all the power in the universe. This is not in conflict with science. Quantum physics proves everything is inter-connected. This is the genius of Christianity. Jesus, who died to forgive us of our sins, took away the one thing that separates us from God and one another, so that we may become more aware and *manifest* these connections.

The choice toward lightness or darkness seems to have little to do with the circumstances into which we are born or those in which we currently find ourselves. I have seen people trapped in darkness from all walks of life, rich or poor, black or white. I found myself relating to the children in Haiti, who barely have enough food to survive, playing in the light, splashing in a puddle of mud, dancing with joy in their hearts. And yet, there have been times in the lives of so many, certainly in mine, when focusing on our desire, we find ourselves moving toward darkness, toward death. Death seems the only way to quiet the terrors of our thoughts. Like an alcoholic, the depressed are always only one thought away from relapse. The thought usually starts, “remember that time when . . .?” Our past is full of thoughts just waiting to trip us up.

Those of us who have been in the valley must take a stand for the light. Those who have a say, who have any influence at all with others, gifted with whatever insights or abilities God has given us, imperfect as we are, must arise and do whatever we can to end suffering and guide the world gently into that “marvelous light.”

One of the keys to finding the light is to cultivate a grateful heart. A grateful heart is a happy heart. So I choose to be grateful.

Dear Lord, give me a grateful heart. Help me to discover your presence today, where I might have missed it yesterday. Give me the gift of gratefulness. Let it well up inside me every day and bring me, and everyone I encounter in my journey, the joy of Your glory. Amen



Christelle oil on linen, 24"
x 40"

The original is part of the
WMI collection, a gift by
the artist.

Christelle was the
prototype for *The Quench
Project*. This was inspired
by a number of
photographs taken by
others who were sent to
document the recovery
from the 2010 Earthquake.
I was struck by her
resiliency, that in the face
of catastrophe, she found
joy in play. Her lightness
of being inspired the entire
series. Indeed, this little
girl I never met, changed
my life forever.



Darkness and Light in Haiti

The advice I received from my pastor, Todd Simonis, before I embarked on my vision trip to Haiti, was that I not try to *make* anything happen while in Haiti, but rather simply walk alongside Jesus in my adventure.

The Haitians I encountered seemed clearly to be searching for a better life. I couldn't help but see that a tremendous amount of hard work being exerted by Haitians to rebuild an infrastructure in Haiti, with what meager resources have been made available, despite misappropriations by a merry-go-round of corrupt governmental bureaucrats. I can't help but hope for the future of Haiti in the hands of men like Pastor Medit.

The message of grace is spreading. I felt a joy and peace among the orphans at Bread of Life Orphanage, run by Pastor Medit, despite horrific conditions. It is at least one ray of sanity and hope in an insane country, where I witnessed firsthand signs of hope being cultivated, one person at a time, during my vision trip in November, 2014.



I'll never forget the orphan children gathering with me one evening and their most ardent desire to pray for me and my family. Coming from my ethno-centric paradigm, I thought I was there to pray and minister to them. It was clear to me at once that these children get what has taken me years to understand: the key to happiness and enlightenment is in the serving of others. Pastor Medit clearly has instilled in them the true message of Christ, to focus one's desire on building others up. Edification is the operative word here.

As a side note of interest. The orphans' prayers for abundance for my family were answered rather dramatically, soon after my return to Charleston. I have been a professional artist since 1980. In those years I have learned not to measure success in financial terms, because, how can I put this delicately, the art business is a very financially unstable career path. I came to Haiti, after dry spell of several months. Within a couple weeks of my return, I was blessed with several major commission portraits that seemed to come from nowhere. Was it a coincidence? In a joyous leap of faith, I'll say "heck no." It was an answer to very specific, intentional prayer by powerful advocates. So, yes, I know where my success came from and am filled with gratitude to the One to

whom they prayed on my behalf.

Being prayed for by these amazing individuals was one of many transformative experiences I had on my vision trip to Haiti. I became even more certain that my art could be a way of making the world better. My work had taken a turn towards social consciousness in

the last few years but after my trip to Haiti, I realize now that my work is, and always has been along, about discovering the innate God-ness in people. As an artist, I began to think if I could express this basic humanity, then it might serve to inspire others to use their gifts as well. If my paintings could convey the beauty of survival, to express the idea that the kingdom of God is at hand, right now, not just in the hereafter, then maybe my gifts might be a meaningful offering in service of a loving God.

As an expressive realist, I find a direct connection to God by painting what I see, as honestly and as eloquently as I possibly can. Expressive realism is a way of revealing the depths of the human spirit in the context of the natural world. My style walks a line between expressionism and photo realism, hence the term, Expressive Realist. I do not celebrate misery but delight in the triumph of the human spirit. My goal is that this energy be made alive in the actual paint, as it is applied to the surface of my canvas. This is what excites me as an artist. This is my mission as a child of God.

I have found that this triumph is not always pretty, however. In fact, the struggle can appear quite ugly at times. The journey is riddled with failure, despair and yes, misery. I often must remind myself, there is beauty in survival. Survival takes many forms; it is a long, often painful metamorphosis. But there is awesome beauty and inspiration in the successive failures, leading inextricably out of the Darkness, toward the light. My mission as an artist is to enlighten: to bring the light of consciousness into the world.



While in Haiti I took over 1,700 photos, scribbled pages of notes and recorded several hours of video, interviewing key people I encountered in an effort to understand the *why* of this marvelous enigma known as Haiti. A short film will also be available soon.

Here is a place of great dichotomies. Total chaos, abject poverty and an entitlement culture forms a back drop for something miraculous. Haiti is also a place of love and a passionate desire for light and a better life. Like anywhere else, some people take great pride in their appearance, some work harder, are more industrious, smarter, more loving than others. Each person in Haiti responds to the adversities and challenges in his or her own way. Some with hope and joy and some with fear and suspicion.

I choose not to adhere to the "us versus them" paradigm. For me, the people I would encounter would not just be Haitians. Nor would I just be an American. One of my core beliefs is that we are all children of God, trying to find our way. We are all humans, trying to find our unique path in a universe gone mad. We must resist the temptation to judge. Our best hope is to discern and if we listen well, perhaps understand.

Culture Shock

I arrived on a Tuesday afternoon. Even getting from the plane to the peaceful fortress that is the Watermissions headquarters turned out to be life altering. I knew Haiti would be crazy, a complete culture shock, overwhelming in its stark contrast to the corporate, antiseptic slickness of the world I know. But no amount of research could prepare me for what I was about to experience.



Basically, I just got on a plane and showed up in this alien world, unceremoniously thrown into this crushing mass of humanity. I was speechless, which worked out well, because far fewer people than I had been lead to expect, could actually understand English. But since I tend to talk too much anyway, this was an unexpected bonus.

In the airport, the customs officials and others dressing themselves to look official, were fighting amongst themselves to do as little as possible for me in exchange for the exorbitant tips from bleeding heart mission workers and tourists like me, which if not given, might lead to a small riot.

My bag was chosen for inspection, and for the life of me, I simply could not explain in Creole (or any other language) the nature of the container of electrical equipment I was transporting on behalf of my hosts, Watermissions International. I even had a letter from WMI but

this didn't seem to help. Was I expected to bribe them? I had no idea. There was no concierge or kind bilingual missionary standing by to ask for help. Eventually, they stamped my passport, for reasons I will never really know.

Finally getting through customs, I left the terminal. Outside there were throngs of Haitians clampering at the partitions as the savvier mission workers planted token gifts and bible tracks in their hands like seeds into their beating palms, opened only long enough to take.

As I walked out of the front doors of the airport, no less than five young men closed in on me. I looked out over the mob, trying to identify my hosts, who I assumed would somehow be meeting me outside the terminal. I wasn't sure how we would find one another. Perhaps they might just happen to notice the conspicuousness of my white skin and my befuddled affect. Somehow, in all my



preparations for the trip, I didn't manage to write down the address of my hosts. Nor did I agree with anyone directly what I should expect to happen when I arrived. I just trusted somehow *something* would happen.

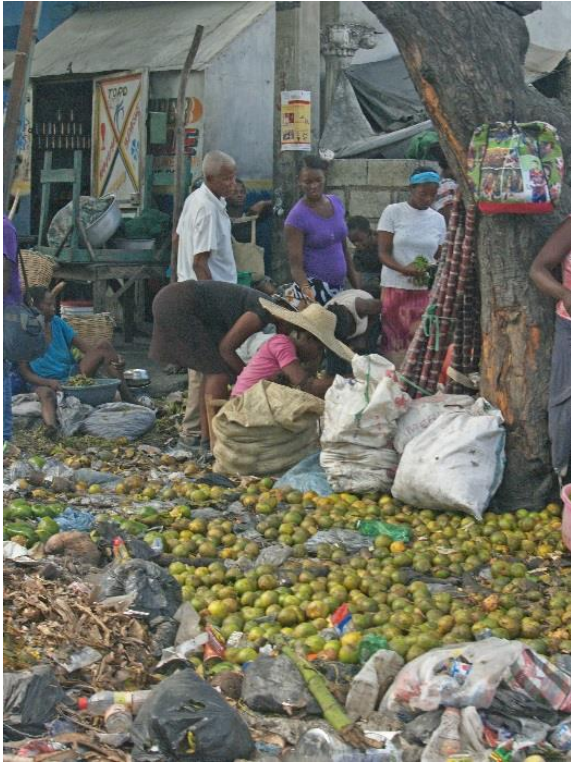
These young men were shouting at each other in Creole, and at me, clearly intent upon an American sized tip. Somehow, in my naiveté, I did not bring a lot of cash with me. I had three justifications for this oversight. Number one, as I discussed above, I was pretty broke, caught in one of those lean moments, between commissions. Number two, I didn't think I'd be needing money in the notorious land of want. It hadn't occurred to me

that although I may not be needing it, others surely might. And let's not forget about number three: I didn't want to be an enabler of beggars, encouraging a dependent, entitlement culture, which enslaves people in poverty everywhere. All of this was, and is, complete and utter nonsense.

I have often justified my lack of generosity by saying I'm an artist and my contribution to humanity is with my art. As with all enslaving paradigms we drag through life, there is some truth to this statement. But whatever bit of truth there may be in this statement, it was lost in my cognitive distortions. The truth is, I am the victim of a *scarcity paradigm*. I have wrongly convinced myself that God does not want me to be prosperous. This belief has never served me or others very well. In fact, it has created crises like this, over and over again, in my life. I would soon learn the true cost of such thoughts.



Thankfully, Aristed, who I would soon learn is a hardworking, loyal engineer, native to Haiti and working for WMI since before the quake, was there, waiting for hours, to scoop me out of the chaos. He was holding a comforting Watermissions International sign. It took me a moment, however, to realize what the sign said. One thing it didn't say was, "Welcome to Haiti, Rob Maniscalco." There was a sign, but it was in French. I'm stalling, wracking my brains, "What is the French word for water, again?"



Once I figured out that this was my official greeting party from WMI, I asked Aristeed to explain to these men, clamoring to carry my luggage, to divide my \$20 tip equally, imagining and hoping it might provide a decent meal for their families. That left me with \$40.

An even more primal paradigm came to the fore, in the form of a surprisingly dark thought that occurred to me in that moment, when I was lost in the crowd, not sure of what to do next. I felt sure that if Aristeed had not been there to rescue me, for any possible number of good reasons, I would have surely *become* the meal for these men's families, rather than its provider. I was petrified with fear that I would be swept away by that throng. I was deathly afraid.

They were the pangs of fear and guilt, paradigms many of us construct, designed to separate us from the moment, from our fellow humans, from our God and from our bliss. I decided instead at this point, to pay attention to the many voices I would hear, both in my head and from the people and experiences in this strange new land. Then, I would calmly challenge these old paradigms and learn what God brought me here to learn about myself and from the people of Haiti. As I've told my kids a hundred times, "fear is only the beginning. Bravery is how the story needs to end."

And so it was that I placed myself into the trust of my hosts. The quake turned WMI from an operation of three to 36. Over 300 water filtration systems and thousands of single molded latrines, designed by WMI engineers for quick installation and years of reliable service, pepper the land from hell.

On the streets, I notice everyone appears to be on the take; no one on the give. Taking is so ingrained into the Haitian culture, and money so tight, that the desperate combination of the two has produced a horrific paradigm, leading to crime and cultural self-deprecation.

The car radio provided background music for the mission jaunts, on which I would tag along, to various satellite water stations, where workers are installing and/or repairing the amazing equipment, designed mostly by WMI founder, George Greene. The scene is overwhelmingly poignant. There are clearly too many people and not enough food to go around. People on the street are haggling over what appears to me to be debris, hoping to get a slight leg up for enough to eat tonight.



Goats, cows, pigs, chickens and rabid looking dogs wander the streets, combing the garbage alongside their human counter parts. I assumed these animals were being eaten periodically and wondered who decided when and where and how such a bounty might be divided.

Here nothing is taken for granted or discarded. If it is discarded, it will eventually be picked up and used by someone else who will recognize its value. Everyone seems busy trying to make something happen.

Where do all the people come from? How can they afford to reproduce? Why do they keep doing it? I joked with my hosts, in typical bad taste of course, that "the reason for Haiti's over population is that the radio only plays love songs." But I know the cause runs much deeper than music and the romantic tropical air.

Through *The Quench Project* I want to give a face to the faceless hordes. I want to produce work that asks more questions than it answers. For instance, when seen as a wash of humanity it is easy to lose sight of the individuals comprising the whole. My goal in coming here was not to document the misery of the masses, or even to find a few representative faces to win sympathy in the states. My goal was to question, through my art, how a people, one person at a time, and in a million different ways, is finding a path to survival.

I quickly realized this would not happen in a car. I needed to be among the people. But being the only white face, not speaking Creole, having zero Haitian street smarts and loaded down with cameras, would make this quite challenging. My fears were reinforced by the very understandable skepticism Haitians often feel toward the well-intended missionaries, and not always so well-intended NGOs, (Non-Governmental Organizations), who so often exploit Haitians by using the sad images they provide to raise money for their organizations. Sadly, the average Haitian rarely benefits from this emotional exploitation. I didn't want to be just another person exploiting the suffering for a selfish purpose and determined that a larger portion of any profits arising from this project, more than I'd originally planned, would go directly to the people of Haiti.



Meanwhile, I realized I was completely dependent on my hosts for my guidance and protection. As compelling as the idea of my wondering independently among the “unwashed hoards” might be, I could see immediately that would not be a wise decision. So I accepted gratefully the constant presence of my hosts during my adventures among the people.

But I still would need to find a way to break through the people's quite understandable mistrust of the “white man bearing cameras.” Thankfully, walking alongside Jesus, I managed to find ways, to break the ice and achieve sometimes brief, yet meaningful connections, allowing me to document something I hoped others might find meaningful with my words and in my paintings.



occasional lulls in my commission portrait career.

I was struck by how many of the people I encountered were managing to find peace, contentment, even joy, in such wretched conditions. But perhaps I am projecting my own belief in my thesis onto them. I want to believe they are a noble people, surviving under terrible conditions, so that is what I see. Maybe it is simply that I am only encountering those few Haitians who have risen to that enlightened place of hope, where aspirations for a better life have drawn them to other sincere people of faith, to those few people who want to make a difference, who want to raise Haiti from the rubble of defeat, and transform it to a functioning, vibrant society.

Maybe, there is some truth to my concern that my perspective is distorted by my beliefs. If my belief in the innate goodness of mankind has distorted my perception, I also can trust that this more complex truth will come out in my work. God knows, I have never been very good at painting lies, which may more accurately explain the



Everyone Must Work, 24×30" oil on board

This painting expresses the desire by most in Haiti, to get the country on its feet after the Earthquake five years ago, which devastated the country. Everywhere you look in Haiti, people are trying to earn a living, trying to make a contribution. The title of this painting is a rough translation of the graffiti tag, spray painted in the background.



The Vision Trip for an Artist

The people of Haiti just want a leg up, a piece of dignity, just like people everywhere. But nowhere is the expression, “It’s a dog eat dog world” more literally expressed, than the streets of Haiti. There is ravenous hunger in every set of eyes I pass in the street, sizing me up for what I might offer to relieve their longing, their suffering, if even for a moment.

Haitian eyes were on me everywhere I went, which was very disconcerting. It took me a while to figure out that they were staring at me simply because I was one of the very few white people they might see in the course of a day, a week or a month.

I imagine the color of my skin must evoke some powerful images for them. Perhaps I am the face of opportunity, the American Dream. I may appear to them as their former master, their oppressor, their

exploiter, and at the same time, their potential liberator.

Even their savior. I find it troubling that every depiction I see of Jesus in Haiti is the same Anglo-Saxon white-bread Jesus I grew up with. Yet, even though I look more like their Jesus than their neighbors, I am clearly *not* one of “them.” I am the other, the foreigner, the alien

Another bit of historical perspective may be in order. The 1804 Haitian Revolution was the only successful slave revolt in human history, and precipitated the end of formalized slavery in Haiti. Since the 1804 Revolt, even during subsequent occupations by France and the United, forced-labor has been systematically imposed by leaders, both black and white. In fact, slavery is still practiced in Haiti today. As many as half a million children are unpaid domestic servants called Restaveks, who routinely suffer physical and sexual abuse.

Despite these enormous cultural underpinnings, I sensed a real desire to connect. I have found in my all my journeys to foreign lands, to China, Europe and Mexico, there seems to be a universal desire toward the light of understanding. Or maybe again, I’m just projecting it into the circumstances in which I find myself, because I believe it so ardently. It’s hard to say which comes first, the

desire to connect or the idea that it is possible. But everywhere I looked in Haiti, I saw the desire for meaning and light: bright clothing, colorful signs and buildings, people working and interacting.

With a 62% illiteracy rate, combined with the highest rate of poverty in the Western Hemisphere, I was amazed by the bustle of economic activity displayed everywhere I went. Very few people seemed to be sitting idle. I saw a lot of entrepreneurial activity, a hunger to learn and a desire to improve their conditions. It's true what they say, *poverty is the hardest work of all*.

Yet, there is a light, universal to all humans, a desire for things to make sense in a senseless existence. Considering the sheer density of people, the apparent chaos, it might *appear* that life is cheap here. It's easy to assume this, as a stranger in strange land. To foreigners who couldn't possibly understand the lives these people are living, I can see how easy it would be to take an impersonal, detached view of the crazy world of Haiti.

But that is not the job of an artist. Mine is a subjective view of the world. I'm not a journalist, in its purist form, taking an objective view of the stories they are reporting. It is my job to respond, to feel, to express and confess my every fear and triumph. In fact, I believe that is my job as a human, as well. To feel, to express, to release. Every breath is an entire lifetime.

That our differences generate fear and often divide us, to me somehow makes my desire to understand even deeper. Perhaps the most essential quality that an artist must possess, is empathy. With focused effort on my part, perhaps I may begin to express the incredible effort being made by the people of Haiti to find the light, a quality which endears these people to me. When we take a moment to imagine and try to understand how each person we see in this vast human array has a unique story, which belies any stereotype we can possibly project upon them, then we may begin to understand the many ways we are connected.



My Safe Haven

Back at the Watermissions headquarters, the fan is rumbling now, covering the sounds of screams, barking dogs and gun fire, coming from beyond the 14' barbed wire walls, protected by guards toting assault rifles. The AC goes off with the generator around 6 pm. This diesel powered monstrosity is the only source of energy, as the utilities have all been cut off by the government for the last several months. The heat quickly sets in and this spoiled, pampered American begins to sweat and realize just how much he takes for granted.

Inside the WMI fortress is a garden of soft green grass and tropical palms and exotic plants, coiffed and glowing in the romantic moonlight. If not for the hell transpiring beyond these walls, it would be heaven.

Julio and Elsa Paula, my Portuguese hosts have been married for 37 years. Julio sounds like Manuel from my favorite movie of all time, *Captains Courageous*. Their deep faith has sustained them in the darkest days in some of the scariest places on Earth. He originally came to set up a recovery mission in Haiti and move on. Soon after he arrived, the Earthquake changed everything. What started as a three person operation became 36 and Watermissions soon became a model relief effort.

Julio doesn't believe in free handouts. He has personal experience with the success rate of giving water to a community versus asking them to invest in its success. He has found getting something for nothing only teaches dependency. So he encourages people to set up businesses around their WMI water systems. Prices are set to undercut other pure water alternatives, however, because he also doesn't believe water should be an expensive commodity. He believes water is a right. All water in Haiti must be purified because there is no fresh water purification system provided by the government. The water table itself is polluted, even in remote areas, so even well water is not drinkable. Imagine an entire country where there is no plumbing, sewage or waste collection. All the things we take for granted in America, are simply not available here.



Haiti at Night

Night has fallen and a mosquito net, suspended from the ceiling, caresses me. I call her, Annette, and she is my protector. Each mosquito carries the potential for a variety of exotic diseases. I received full vaccinations the day before I left for Haiti, but still the fear lingers of some dread disease from a mosquito, like Chikungunya, which leaves its victims in constant joint pain and lethargy for the rest of their lives. This is but one of the many horrific dangers to consider when deciding to visit Haiti. As I pass into sleep, I hear the faint sounds of many dramas taking place just beyond the walls of the compound. I hear people screaming, dogs squealing, guns shooting. But I am safe for the moment, amidst the abject want surrounding me, just over the walls. An armed guard stands watch against anyone who might dare to scale the 12 foot walls in search of a better life.

Tomorrow we travel through the center of hell where I'm told we may encounter marauding vagabonds with guns and feted meat, blackened by a hundred thousand flies, and desperate, begging children. As thrilling as that may sound, I can honestly say, fear has been successfully planted, like a weed, in my overly creative mind.

We will be traveling to the southern shore, where the wealthy still prefer to vacation. This is where The **Bread of Life Orphanage** will give me shelter until Friday. I have arty goodies for the 21 orphans, small tokens which represent my belief that anyone can be an artist, if they have desire and the basic tools to accomplish their goals.



I pray for the people of Haiti, as well as all beings on Earth, that they may find their way toward the light.



Loise Noel 18" x 24"
oil on board

Loise is the loving mother of Pastor Medit, my gracious host at the Bread of Life Orphanage in Jacmel, Haiti. I plan to do a number of paintings of the beautiful people I came to know at the Bread of Life Orphanage. Loise was always smiling, as the 22 orphans played and worked around her. Her kind, gentle energy seemed to ground everyone in the compound. We spoke only in smiles, as I didn't speak Creole and she didn't speak English. I was so drawn to her spirit.

The Bread of Life Orphanage

We were up early the next morning and hit the road moving. The *tap tap cars* and trucks are one reliable mode of transport of goods and people. They are everywhere, bright and joyful with slogans and scripture to attract their next passenger. The riders of this transport are taking their lives into their hands. In Haiti, getting around is fraught with an exhilarating danger, we in America reserve for amusement rides.

The four hour road trip is treacherous, through the mountains, around sharp turns, narrow passes, steep climbs and crumbling roads. If not for the beauty of the country side to distract me, I would surely be car sick. There are too many near death experiences to recount. So I simply utter a grateful prayer that we survived.

Pastor Medit Sanon is in charge at Bread of Life missionary orphanage, in Jacmel. Julio, the WMI crew and I are welcomed with warm embrace. No doubt, a hug is the best way to begin any great friendship. Clearly, this orphanage is very near and dear to Julio. And very soon, I sense, it will be to me as well.

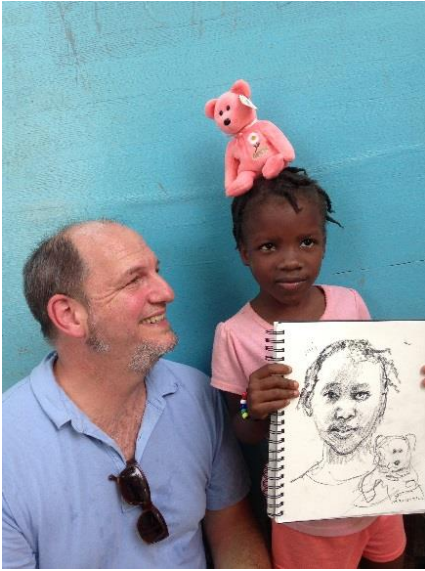
The kids are everywhere, busy in classes every morning, doing chores in the afternoon and a healthy amount of play for the rest of the day. Everyone does their part. The children of The Bread of Life Orphanage are fortunate to have found one another. Lifelong bonds are being forged by these 21 brave beings, made homeless by the Earthquake and Hurricane of 2010.

Back in 2010, when Pastor Medit returned to his car after ministering to the sick and injured, he found 3 children sitting in his car. Thus was the beginning of his true calling: raising these beautiful children to become some of the most loving, caring, dignified, generous people I have ever met.

I was taken aback by Job and the other teenage boys, who seemed far more interested in taking care of my needs than seemed natural for that age. It didn't jive with my American paradigm of narcissistic teenagers. Here, there was no apparent strife or the resentment one might find in a group of kids from America. The kids range in age from about four to eighteen. Everyone is gracious and joyful. None of the adults are yelling or having to ask anyone twice to do something.



Beanie babies arrive from a good Samaritan from Charleston.



Jasmin posing with her sketch

I have to ask myself, “What is their secret to happiness?” Is it their well-ordered existence?” I see love demonstrated, everywhere. Why are they so loving? What is operating underneath that makes these kids different than mine, say, or any other typical American kid? I notice they seem to be very grateful. They feel blessed, or what a non-Christian might call lucky. They seem to realize they have been afforded an opportunity others in Haiti are not. They feel cared for. They feel they are being favored among their contemporaries, who they know are suffering beyond these walls. They have been taught not to feel special or entitled. They do not just feel compassion, they act upon it in every moment. They would soon teach me the meaning of wealth and an appreciation for whatever one has. And what do we truly have, after all the stuff has been stripped away? We have only each other.

Job is tall and thin. He pulled my glasses up when they slid down my face, wiped my stinging eyes when the sweat mixed with bug spray, as I was sketching the orphans. Sketching is kind of a love language for me. Who doesn’t like to see what an artist sees in them? I notice, as I sketch and interact with my new friends, that these kids are going out of their way to take care of one another. There is also great respect given to the adults,

those on staff to cook and clean. Job, a teenager leads the others by kind example, helping the sweat old Louise Noel, Medit’s aged mother, with her shoes. Soon, he and Ricardo and the others will help me to see with more than just my eyes.

A brand new orphan arrived today. Lonía was just dropped off by a government social worker. This was the same social worker who, a few days earlier, cited Bread of Life for having more than two children in a room. Lonía came from an abusive aunt who was beating her and forcing her to clean a huge pile of laundry. She was one of the restaveks, enslaved children, I mentioned earlier. Suffering from malnutrition she is safe now and getting the love and care she so desperately needs. Now Pastor Medit has 22 orphans to feed and educate and protect. Some of his kids don’t leave, well into adulthood. One girl from the orphanage went off to Port-Au-Prince and has become a nurse. But she moved back to the orphanage, the only home she ever knew.

This is what I learned about how orphanages work in Haiti. The government mandates the kids must leave when they turn eighteen. But they’re not paying the bills, so most orphanages do what



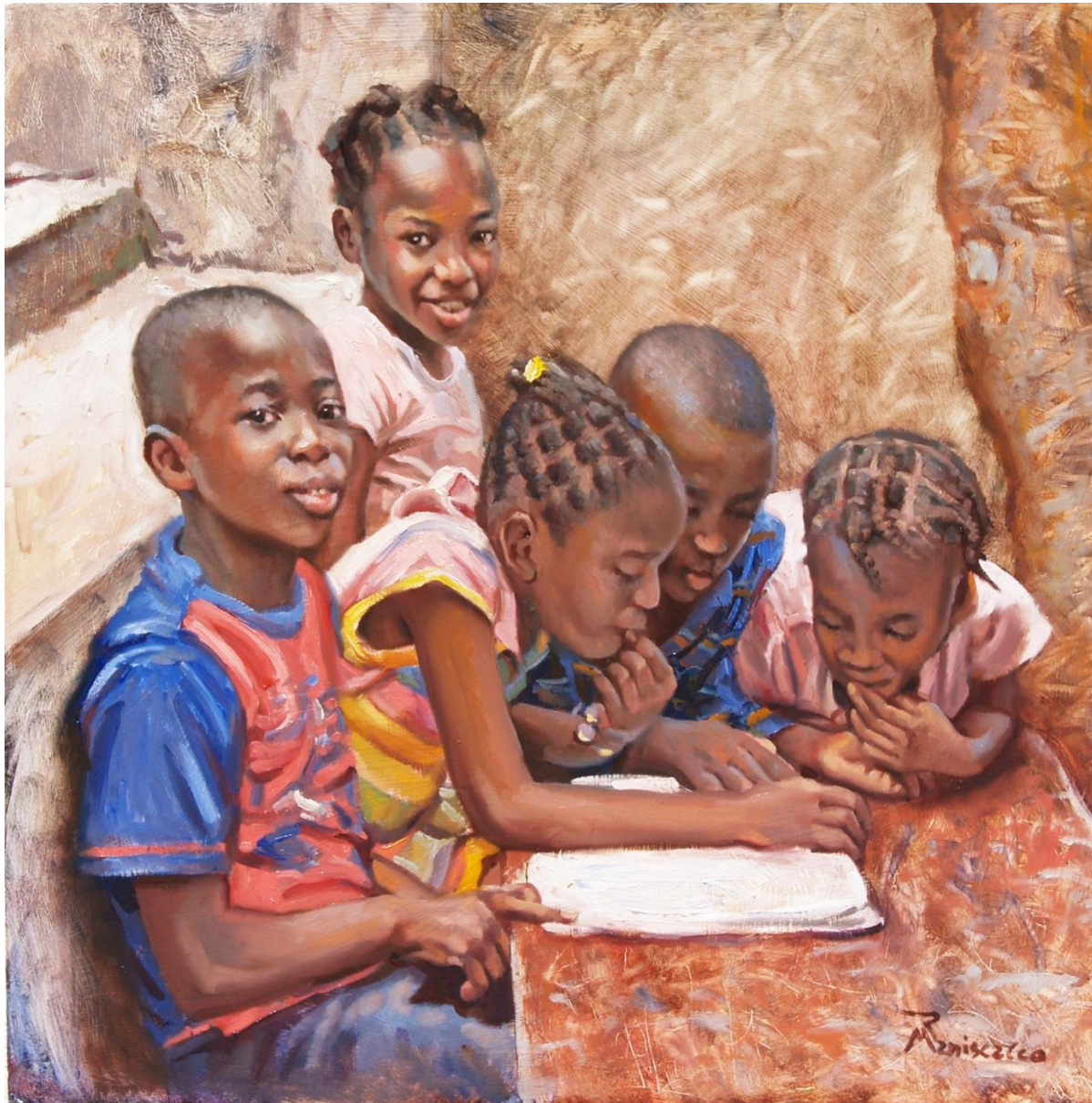
Lonía has just arrived



they please. I heard stories of orphanages where abuse and neglect are rampant. Orphanages are not well regulated in Haiti. Pastor Medit pays the Government \$1,500 a year for his license to run the orphanage.

An American wanting to adopt a Haitian child will likely have to pay a small fortune in extortion money. My understanding is that the process of adopting and bringing a child to America is very difficult. Otherwise, I probably would have been tempted to adopt all of these beautiful human beings, on the spot. It's definitely something one must be called to do. Personally, I realize it would require a huge paradigm shift in my thinking about scarcity and abundance. Currently, I have found my wife and I can barely support the two kids, one adult child, over two households. Knowing how little money these 22 children are living on, and seeing how happy they are, it is clear that there is no *real* relationship between money and happiness. And yet, it would be easy to assume how grateful would these children be to magically find themselves in the land of plenty. I can't help but wonder if suddenly being moved into the American context would alter their attitude toward material things. In America, having one's own room, having the latest electronics, owning a car, going to college, all seem quite ordinary. My ethno-centric American sensibility tells me having more equates to opportunity, success and happiness. We all deserve a shot at the American dream. But I have my doubts whether having more opportunity would make these kids happier and fulfilled than they already are. So the question isn't whether adopting is practical or desirable but whether I actually have what it takes to

continue to build in these kids that sense of gratefulness and feeling of favor they already possess. I wish I could say yes, but I'd be lying if I thought I could, with all the pressures they would face in America.



Readers 2 deals with the desire to be more, the desire to learn. The joy of reading and growing is one aspect of daily life in the Bread of Life Orphanage that really struck me. That desire is being quenched, with daily classes and music and art. I was so moved by the way they take care of one another, the older children, teaching the younger. The haven is all about love and loyalty. They know how blessed they are and appreciate deeply every opportunity they have to learn and grow.



A service taking place during daylight in one of the spaces Medit showed me that evening. Photo by anonymous

Candle Light Service

I already mentioned the circumstances of how Pastor Medit and his wife Gerda started an orphanage after the Earthquake. But the real reason came out of their deep desire to have children. They were having difficulty getting pregnant and prayed over the years that God would grant them children. "Be careful what you pray for," Medit said with his charismatic grin.

Medit received his calling to become a pastor, years ago, in the form of repeated requests that he takeover as Pastor at the church in which he grew up. He had left the church as a youth minister to study in Port-Au-Prince. But they never forgot him. Medit resisted the call for many years but finally no longer could resist the call. He threw himself into pastoring. He soon recognized the need was deeper than pastoring his old church and he began planting several churches throughout the perilous mountains around Jacmel.

His father found Jesus when Medit was six and converted from Voodoo. He still remembers the Voodoo ways and is committed to bringing the teachings of Christ to the darkest recesses of Haiti. Medit has a humility and air of purpose about him I find very inspiring and contagious.

Medit has invited me to church this evening, which involves driving up broken mountain paths just as dusk is turning into the blackest of night. He says he goes through a lot of cars in his ministry; it's easy to see why.

The only light is coming from the headlights, a full moon, flashes of lightning from a dry electrical storm and the occasional candle, flickering from the windows of the huts and homes we are passing. There is no electricity tonight. In fact, they don't expect the government to provide electricity in the mountains until January, at the earliest. Fuel for generators is at a premium and consequently, so is light. My eyes are useless. So I turn up my other senses.

Medit informs me he's not sure if there will be a service because they do not have a janitor. On the way to this service we make a few stops, to a couple other churches where he is also pastor.



Pastor Medit with his Mom, Louise Noel

One space is very large, considering how remote it is. I'm guessing it is remote, based solely on the sheer time and difficulty it took to get here. I cannot assess the condition or density of the housing because I cannot see beyond my nose. I begin to wonder if there really is a service tonight. Medit seems more intent on showing me the buildings than participating in this supposed service.

Finally, we pass through a gate, into a completely black open space. I'm wondering why he's brought me to a vacant lot in the pitch of dark. He leads me through the darkness on foot, the moon providing the faintest of light. My eyes have adjusted to the intense darkness, but my heart is pounding rebelliously. My imagination is filling in the visual details.



In the veil of night, I hear what sounds like crying in the distance, which grows louder and more urgent as we approach. We step into the door of this small tabernacle in the mountains. The sound that greets me is like a rushing river; it is as if I were a witness in the upper room with the original disciples. The service is being led by another man, calling out in multicolored, passionate, rhythmic complex vocalizations, while the nearly invisible room full of people respond in near perfect unison. I hear children's voices as well as adults. It is an organized cacophony of creole, sung and shouted.

Here in the shadows there is what sounds to me like the howling of angels, singing into the suffering souls being laid at the feet of Jesus. It is a transformative writhing and spiritual euphoria. I remember hearing the sound of people speaking in tongues and chanting when I was a kid. It sounded exotic and lush. But my suburban Pentecostal experience literally couldn't hold a candle to the primal experience unfolding before me. I had been to what we called "candlelight service" in America. There were literally two candles in the room filled with 30 people, possibly a hundred. It sounded like thousands.

I thought to myself, what a privilege to witness with my ears and heart, such a powerful outpouring of passion and love. Turns out Creole is the official language of the Holy Spirit.

After an intense, and long outpouring of worship, they asked me to speak into the darkness which by now seemed more like light. I had not expected to be asked to speak so I didn't have time to get nervous or "prepared."

There was a strange comfort in the fact we could only see vague impressions of each other. Our forms were not important, only the spirit within us was real. I told them of my mission and purpose for being here, while Medit interpreted. They laughed at all my jokes, and gasped at all the right places, delayed only slightly by interpretation. How grateful and humble I was to be given this opportunity to experience such a pure outpouring of spiritual fervor.

I realized many or most of these people must have converted from Voodoo, so some of what I was seeing, at least in form and style, most likely derived from the practice of Voodoo. I think the energy of worship and devotion can take many forms, and that God uses what is familiar to people to give them access to His light.

I told them of how I had given my life, my art, my talent to the Lord. That I was walking in faith alongside his plan for me. I told them about my mission, about The Quench Project. About how I had come to be a light and how surprised I was to be the one receiving the light, even in the darkest of the night. I promised I would share my experience with as many people as I could, through my paintings and words, to convey the love and power of God's presence I was experiencing in this room right now. It was a most extraordinary experience.

God speaks a language
with a million times more
words than any language
man has ever uttered. It
is the language that can
only be understood in
silence. And yet it can be
heard in a thunderstorm
or a child's laughter.

ManiscalcoGallery.com



The Readers 1, 30×30" oil on panel

The Readers depict three young men getting into trouble. The kind of trouble that comes from expanding their mind, using the powerful weapon of their imagination. Job (smiling) and his friends enjoy a good book and good fellowship in the knowledge they are deriving.



An Art Lesson

As lunch approached the next day, Pastor Medit asked me, “Would you eat a hot dog?” But with his thick Creole accent it sounded like “old dog.” I told him, “No, I wouldn’t even eat a fresh dog.” He looked at me perplexed, until it dawned on me what we were talking about. I explained what I thought he said and we laughed over a nice serving of old dog. Actually, it was the tastiest sausage, part of a most delicious Omelet.

One thing I found a bit disconcerting is that Pastor Medit and I ate meals separately from the children. It seemed clear that the kids were being fed very well and at regular intervals but the best food was reserved for us. I had to remind myself to accept these cultural differences around paternal and religious authority in honor of my host. But I would rather have eaten with the children.



A fine spread at lunch

After lunch I presented an art lesson to the kids, introducing the art materials I brought for them, along with a few pointers on drawing. Pencil and paper is a rare commodity so they were pleased to receive the sketchbooks from Artists and Craftsman, along with the paint sets from Weber Paint. They enjoyed working with charcoal as well. I discovered that the charcoal they cook with, which is very common and available all over Haiti, can also be used to draw. It is almost the same as the very expensive vine charcoal I use in my work. With a bit of guidance they were drawing very accurate expressive pictures of their own hands. Pastor Medit interpreted my lesson but most of what I taught was unspoken, and much appreciated by my budding pupil artists.

After drawing together for a good while, Job said, “now that you’re finished with the small art lesson, we want to paint big.” They want to put murals everywhere. Indeed, murals are all over Haiti. All their advertising billboards are hand painted. Every store and “tap tap truck” is brightly painted by someone. Haitian art is widely collected in America. It is my hope that some of these kids might catch fire. Perhaps, with sufficient inspiration they might find a way to make a living as an artist. I was encouraging them to think big.



Drawing and painting lessons



A man, draped with machetes, sells his wares in the market

The Open Market

The next morning I went on some errands with Pastor Medit. We took a ride into downtown Jacmel where he had some business at the bank. He asked me if I wanted to wonder *alone* over to the nearby open market to take pictures, without a guide of any kind, for the first time since my arrival. I was afraid but agreed to the adventure.

As soon as I left the bank, people were staring very intently at me. Young men were poking my cameras,

seeming more threatening than curious. They spoke in Creole, referring to my cameras.

They followed me, becoming more and more aggressive. I made it about five minutes, shooting from the hip with my camera and letting my video camera run the whole time to record the chaos. Walking out into the market, alone, was a very intense experience, to say the least. There was so much to take in, which was made almost impossible by the fear that was growing inside me every second I was remained vulnerable to the unknown.



The open air market was filled with both danger and exotic delights.

I'm not someone who thrives on danger. I've structured my life around avoiding it, which I think has held me back; I've missed so many opportunities to test my mettle. But I made the correct decision that this was not the time or place find out what was on the other side of my fear. I made my way back to the bank to find my friend Medit.



Valentine making deals

Out next stop was to see a man named Valentine who moved here from Miami a few years back. He was in the hotel business, but recognized a sound business opportunity in Haiti when he saw it. He now has a successful import business. Here's how it works: he goes to the U.S. and hits the resale shops, picking up all those small TVs, and other electronics, the must-have junk which was all the rage five years ago, along with last year's fashions, all the *stuff* everyone's getting rid of in America, and ships it in huge containers to Haiti. He will buy a TV for \$5 and sell it in Haiti for \$20.

Valentine occasionally takes special orders. Today, he gave Medit a couple wireless microphones for use during church services. The kids were very excited when we got back to them as well. They are really looking forward to using them for some Karaoke time between services.



A Father's Love, 18×24" oil on board

The painting features Zegan Louis with his beautiful baby. *A Father's Love* expresses the tender moment of a father's loving care. She has the serene assurance of one who is being cared for and loved. Her parents support the important work at the Bread of Life Orphanage in the town of Jacmel, in the south of Haiti. She is one of the lucky ones. The twenty-two (at last count) orphans are under the care of Pastor Medit, who allowed me the privilege of getting to know these amazing children. He has given these kids a home and built a loving, caring atmosphere. I have never met children who had such humility and character. Thanks to Pastor Medit and his amazing mission.



An Evening of Sharing at Bread of Life

That afternoon, I joined in a pickup soccer match with the orphans and a few other kids from the area. I scored two goals (I'm sure they were being gracious) before getting so winded and sweaty I had to drop out. After a spell, I came in as goalie; Medit put the ball right through my legs (Nutmeg!) for a goal. Even though their shoes provided little protection from the rocky field, they played with 100% commitment, as if this were the final game of the World Cup, complete with super-human leaps and dramatic saves. After a while, I realized the orphans were the only ones wearing shoes; the others were playing barefoot. Soccer is a great escape for Haitians; it's the only thing the TV plays. I *Facetimed* my kids, so they could see and hear the passion in the kids at Bread of Life.

That evening I was gathered with many of the children in their makeshift class room. We decided to have a sing-along. Here, everybody sings. We couldn't find too many songs we all knew, but we did our best with some familiar church songs, like "Amazing Grace." After a few songs I asked to see the guitar and played the only three chords I knew. We made up a silly song about my new brothers and sisters. We all sang together and laughed, the way friends do.

After a few songs, we talked about all kinds of things. Even though language was a challenge, we managed to cover a lot of ground. They spoke about what it was like for them as orphans and coping with their desire for what is gone. How do we deal with such catastrophic loss? It dawned on me that we all experience loss; it is a human condition. What has their loss, at such an early age, taught them about life? And why are they so joyful in the midst of all their tragedy? I thought about my mom leaving me when I was a baby and growing up in a dysfunctional household. People die. They leave. God has a way of healing anything, if will only let Him. But what is it about these children that gives them such incredible perspective? Clearly, this cycle of loss is crucial to our well-being if we know how to process it. Suffering is only one option. I think about the intensity of suffering my daughter experiences when doesn't get her ice cream cone. How strange in contrast to what I see in these children, who have lost everything. How can I help her manage her desires and cultivate a grateful heart?

The children and I seemed to agree that our purpose in life is to make the most of the hand we are dealt. The thought that we are entitled to anything seems to be what trips us up. Having to do without cultivates a sense of perspective. They have what is most important. They realize they have each other, a loving father figure, Pastor Medit, and





most importantly, a loving Father God. Some people are lost and all alone in the crowd and have no one. And as terrible as it was for them to be lost, separated from the life they might have had, they were taught to realize their loss was not a curse. These children understand the beauty of their connection to God and to each other, an understanding I came to much later in life.

They wanted to know all about me. By now, we had already made quite a connection. Then Ricardo told me very fervently that he would be praying for lots of commissions and great success for my family. I'll be honest. It was my understanding I was here to pray for and minister to them. Ricardo and Job, the senior young men at the orphanage, opened my eyes to far more than anything I could paint or draw. He and the others were teaching me to see in a much deeper way. Praying for those who have more, who seem more "well-off," is just as important as praying for those in desperate need.

We all need prayer and support. Giving that prayer and support to others, regardless of whether we think they need or deserve it, is the key to happiness and fulfillment. We are all entitled to God's love. I'm not sure we're entitled to anything else. Each of the children told me they would be praying for me. This was the secret to the peace and joy they exuded in their beings. God knows our needs, even when we don't see them.

So I pray a grateful prayer for these wonderful beings. I pray for my children, that I may find the wisdom to teach them how to be grateful for what they have. Dear Lord, help me to convey the joy that can be experienced, not by quenching our desire for things, but by Your deeper presence in our lives.

The new girl, Lonia, so sad when she arrived the day before, watched her new found brothers and sisters take up for me and one another and seeing God's love in action. She was already beginning to smile. It was beautiful to watch her as she discovered she was now safely home. I found myself envying the wonderful world they had created for themselves, as humble children of God, in the midst of such intense suffering.

My improvised comedy routine, which was more physical than verbal, really made them laugh. These kids are very funny and understand deeply both the irony and beauty of their situation, as they recognized and enjoyed the kindred, playful spirit in me.



Jasmin is a beautiful child of God

The little ones were fascinated by my soft hair and could not stop touching it. A most beautiful little girl, Jasmin, was particularly fascinated by the palms of my hand, and admired that the cracks had no pigment. She said my hands were "good" and hers were "bad." This comment left me speechless for a moment. I couldn't imagine how someone as beautiful and adorable as she could envy some bald, overweight, middle-aged, white dude. I found myself empathizing and admiring her openness in her struggles with her identity and self-image.

I found myself giving back to them, exactly what they had just given me. I told her and the others that God made us all good and beautiful. I told her we all have to find a way to love ourselves, exactly as God made us. I admitted I wasn't very good at loving myself until I started really loving God and connecting with others, through love. I let them know they were way ahead of me in that department.

That experience taught me what I thought I'd learned long ago: acceptance is not enough. Embracing one another and ourselves is the path to peace and harmony. These children taught me how to love without condition; they are living proof of the power of love. I learned more about love in that one evening than I'd ever thought I knew.

What Jasmin Taught Me About Racism

For this little girl, Jasmin, and for so many children in Haiti, and indeed for many people of color throughout the world, there is an uncomfortable, deeply imbedded longing to be white. They are taught at every turn that to be black is a sin, a curse. Imagine an entire race of people feeling accursed. And in Haiti, a nation dedicated to Voodoo, they feel gripped by a dark spirit of oppression, fear and self-loathing. The Voodoo solution produces selfishness. The Christian solution produces gratefulness.



But the plight of the dark skinned among us cannot be removed by deferring responsibility to them. I cringe every time I hear the pretty blond hosts on Fox, calling black men thugs and suggesting they “stop acting like children,” and for them to “pick themselves up,” while ignoring the deep seated internal struggles and challenges they face. It is absurd to blame the poor for their condition, like we do in America. I hear so many voices saying, “It’s not my fault. I didn’t create slavery and oppression.” Their words sound so empty, particularly after what I experienced in Haiti.

Racism is not something people can just “get over.” It is not the responsibility of the oppressed to stop the oppression. It is the oppressor’s responsibility to stop oppressing. Even though many individuals rise out of oppression, despite all odds, it will always remain impossible for the minority who are oppressed, to rise. Without control of the mechanisms of society, they are at the mercy of a benevolent majority to stop oppressing. When the oppressor denies that the oppression even exists, let alone admit something has to be done about it, then riots and revolution are inevitable.

The time of blaming the victim must end. Institutional racism will continue undeterred, unless we wake up and smell the oppression. The first step is to acknowledge that it continues to be a part of the legal make-up of our society. It is deeply imbedded in our laws and customs. Equality is an empty word unless it truly applies to everyone.

The feelings of hate and fear, associated with racism are an entirely different matter. These individual feelings go both ways. But they must never be confused with the fact that the ruling majority, the ones making and enforcing the laws, need to create a level playing field for everyone. Until the laws are changed and enforced, these individual feelings of resentment will continue to divide us. Institutional changes start with each of us cultivating an understanding and appreciation for our diversity, rather than focusing primarily on our cultural differences. Our “tolerance” for others is part of the problem. The fear mongering must end. We must do

more than accept our differences. We must understand one another. We must develop empathy and sensitivity for others. Complaining about how “political correctness” is killing our country must stop. Insensitivity to others is the only thing killing our country. I see an urgent need now to embrace one another in loving solidarity or we will not survive as a species.

The Dominican Republic has just renounced the citizenship of its Haitian inhabitants. Why? Because their skin is darker than their own. Is the imminent apartheid and mass refugee problem in the Dominican Republic the product of racism? Yes. But the abuse is the result of the majority in power oppressing the rights of the minority. At this very moment, there are millions of Haitians living in abject terror and fear of losing the only home they ever knew. And they are powerless to stop it.

On June 17th, 2015, nine African American *human beings* were gunned down at historic Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, by a 21 year old white supremacist. What happened in Charleston is the product of racism, the product of hatred, for the sole purpose of generating fear and terror. The reason it is terrifying is that it was perpetrated by a member of the ruling majority, many of whom believe they are being threatened by African Americans. Many whites believe their way of life is being threatened by minorities, such as blacks or gays. They fail to realize that by definition, *the rights of the majority cannot be threatened by a minority*. That is why we are asked to pay more attention to hate crimes against minorities. We can no longer think of these incidences as the random, isolated acts of “crazy” people. Since the beginning of time, the only purpose of racial terror and hate has been to keep the oppressed, those in the minority, in fear.

The responses by the oppressed are many and varied. It was a beautiful thing to behold, the way the Charleston community came together after the massacre. But until our "separate and unequal" version of justice ends we will also continue to see rioting and unrest, like what happened in Baltimore. Equal rights must truly be the enforced law of the land if we want to see an end to racism.

Following the Charleston massacre and the gracious response from the community, there was dramatic change in the hearts of the ruling majority in South Carolina. But along with the uproar over removing the Confederate flag, there were a number of unexplained church burnings, which were caused by either by lightning or arson. If arson, the motive would have to be either insurance fraud or racism. We may never know. But the real question we need to address is this: why should we accept living in a world where we are left wondering whether a church fire was caused by a racist, a bolt of lightning or an insurance scammer? The reason we do, is because of terror, instigated by some very disturbed extremists, living among us who place that possibility in our minds. These alleged extremists are being tacitly defended by a not-so-extreme ruling majority, who insist these are isolated incidences, that race really isn't a problem. Such is the power of terrorism. Such is the nature of racism.

I think it is human nature to fear what is different, what is foreign. Those of us, black white or anything in between, who choose to be ruled by these fears are called racists. Those who act upon these feelings with hate crimes are only the tip of the iceberg. When those

who call out racism are considered the “real” racists, we know society has a big problem. It really comes down to a choice about the kind of world we want to live in. It is a choice we are called to make, every day. I think God is calling us out to examine our own heart.

When will this scourge of racism end, Lord, God? It will end the moment we realize that that murdering white supremacist kid is *us*. Those people in the Dominican Republic are *US*. Those of us who allow such terrible acts to continue by blaming others are to blame. This is our world and **WE** need to change it.



I'm a Christian. I believe Christ is the way the truth and the light. But there were many people grieving here in Charleston, people of many faces, races and beliefs. We stood together in the heat, arm in arm. We all came together in hope for a better world, a world where this doesn't happen.

So I call upon all those multitudes throughout the world, who believe in hope. Peace and empathy must rise from every soul until it cries out with such a powerful groan, that it will open everyone's heart, turning it outward, connecting us all in loving solidarity, determined that this can and must not ever happen again. Anger and despair is the result of our nagging failure to understand one another. The end of despair can only be brought about by speaking loudly for peace and understanding.

The little girl, Jasmin, who was taught to believe she was ugly because she was black, and the people of color throughout the world, who may never express that feeling with such rawness, are struggling. They are engaged in a centuries old awakening; they are finally waking up and beginning to identify with their own culture, a once rich and proud culture, a culture that has been systematically decimated and oppressed for thousands of years. Tragically, they are waking up to a world that doesn't care about them, or their cultural identity. Because their identity is not our identity. It is not our culture. The dark-skinned race has been systematically

removed from the insulated world we have created, which does not want them. They have been left behind.

And still we hear the voices, “None of this is my fault. Only 1.4% of whites in the south owned slaves. It’s not my fault they’re culture is arrested.” And then they always say, “I’m not a racist,” meaning, “I like most black people, the ones who act like me. You know, the nice ones, who aren’t lazy or disagreeable, the ones who aren’t ‘thugs.’” When will we stop deluding ourselves with this nonsense? People of color, and those of us who are empathetic to their plight, are quite understandably outraged by those among us who prefer to bury their head in the sand. This, of course is true for other minorities as well. Gays may have won marriage equality this year, but they still don’t enjoy full equal rights.

There was a brief awakening to the issues of race, during the fight for Civil Rights in the 60’s. But the promise of that awakening, equal opportunity for all, was never fully realized. In fact,



progress has steadily reversed. Millions of children in America are starving, deprived of a good education, healthcare, voting rights. They have been systematically deprived of the opportunities so many of us, in the majority, take for granted. It’s no surprise to me that the outrage that has been buried for years is now resurfacing. Yet, the oppressor’s response is still the same, “It is they who are to blame, not me. They’re racists too. I am not responsible.” But if not me, then who? Those who enjoy majority control are the most logical agents for change. Some might say the terrorists who engage in hate crimes are the only racists. But those who stand by and do nothing, or worse, rationalize and defend the majority’s benevolence, are also racists. The scourge of racism takes many forms, sometimes even posing as a good Christian, just trying to “protect” his nice



family from “trouble.”

In Haiti, I perhaps played a very small role in the beginnings of one girl’s fateful awakening. Making it clear to Jasmin that she was a beautiful child of God, equal and worthy as any of God’s children to stand tall and be proud for who she is and where she comes from, was to open that Pandora’s box a tiny crack, a door which must now be flung open. None will be free until all are free.

Sometimes I think "white guilt" is experienced by all the wrong people. The ones who should feel guilty, often don't. The ones who so often accuse me of being plagued by "white guilt" seem to be quite adamant, as if they are perhaps covering for a deep seated guilt for insulating themselves, defending a racist heritage, blaming the victims, might be part of the reason so many people are feeling oppressed and shut out of the system. And not just black folk. The "us versus them" paradigm it eating into everyone's well-being. Maybe more empathy and less blame is the way out. Maybe it's just simple compassion. What I experienced in Charleston from both black and white, coming together after the Mother Emanuel tragedy seemed nothing short of miraculous. It has given me hope that love might break through. People are beginning to wake up to the simple astonishing truth that no human being should be okay living in a world with such injustice and oppression and not want to change the system.

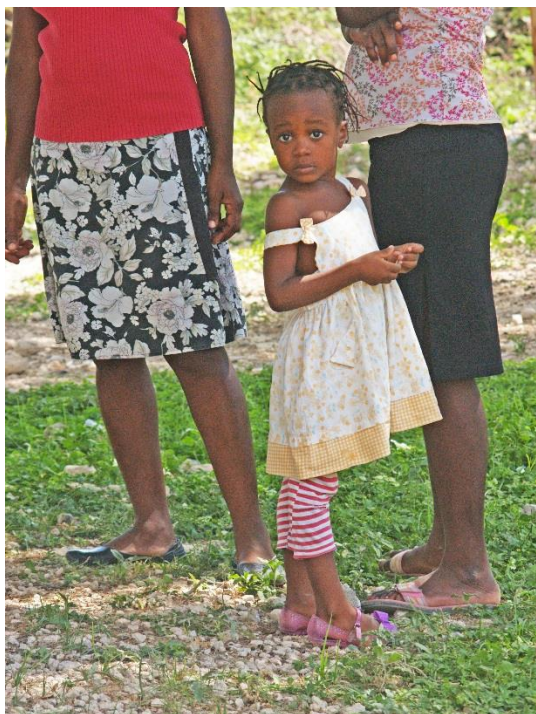


For any number of reasons, all humans fear what is different from themselves. Perhaps a useful survival method in primitive man, this pack mentality, which leads to a preference to be around "our own kind" is no longer necessary for our survival. It is buried deep in our psyche, however, and it can only be changed by first acknowledging it is there and then being intentional in changing the paradigm. Currently in America, we are now able to arrange our lives to have extremely minimal contact with those who have a different color skin, sexual orientation, political views, religious beliefs, etc. Despite the potential for social media to connect us, we have become more segregated than ever.

So, how will we change? For me it means painting and telling stories. It means listening more and talking less. It means taking on responsibility for others and not just ourselves. All the unity in Charleston over the Mother Emanuel massacre is great, but change won't happen unless we keep the conversation alive and kicking. A friend posted on my FB wall that she'd seen a few too many Confederate flags on my wall in the aftermath of the tragedy, all in protest of course. She seemed to be suggesting that she was ready to move on. Others have called me an instigator, a reverse racist, overly judgmental or self-righteous. But I think the point is many among us simply can't and won't "move on" until a critical mass decides racism must end.

Work on our hearts, as individuals and through the actions of families, schools, religious or non-religious institutions, is a huge part of the paradigm shift. But we also need to de-institutionalize racism. Until we have evolved, as a species, and we no longer feel threatened by those who are different than ourselves, equal opportunities need to be guaranteed and enforced by fair laws.

Saying "all human life matters" subtly suggests there's not a problem with race in this country, which is false. It's only not a problem so long as blacks "mind their place." Charleston's loving, peaceful response must not be confused with indifference. We have a long way to go before we have equal opportunity for all.



What Guns Have to Do With Race

Yes, removing the Confederate flag from government buildings in response to the Mother Emanuel Massacre in Charleston was a great idea; it should have been done years ago. But now it is time to step up, to wake up to an enlightened way of being. Why do we choose to accept, live in and defend a world that needs assault rifles to protect itself? Why not choose to live in a different world, and work, with everything we have, to make that world a reality, rather than accept the notion that such a world will never be possible? The reason we think it isn't possible is because it is not YET a reality. Democracy wasn't a reality until people MADE it a reality. The end of slavery wasn't a reality until people MADE it a reality. Women's suffrage wasn't a reality until people MADE it a reality. Equal rights wasn't a reality until, well, we're still working on that one. In every case, people said, "enough is enough!"

Some will say, "you guys are a bunch of dreamers. It's a bad world, with bad people. We *must* defend our right to protect ourselves." This is true, the world is a bad place. But the world of peace, the one we ALL want, will never become a reality unless we chose to make it a reality, today. We can't wait for some utopian future where people all get along. Why? Because if we don't change, that world will never come. People are dying, right now. Yes, fair gun laws are a painful choice, it might mean compromising on rights many of us hold dear. It might even mean a loss of life, initially. But great ideas require monumental effort, commitment and sacrifice. Yes, it is a difficult choice, but IT IS A CHOICE.

Some estimates say that there are over 260,000 illegal weapons circulating in Haiti, which has been suffering from an epidemic of gun incidents, with homicides on the rise again, since the earthquake. People have tried Food for Guns programs. One thing is certain: more guns have only led to more gun deaths in Haiti. The same is true in this country, where there are more gun deaths per capita, than in any other Western nation. Easy access to guns is killing people who would not otherwise have to die.

Terror is an attempt to generate fear in order to paralyze/control people. That's what the Mother Emanuel shooter wanted to do, as well as all the shooters in the countless massacres we've endured in the U.S. Whether race related or not, they are intended to instill fear, to instill an almost primal need to protect ourselves, any way we can. These incidences are used to further separate us by color or religion. Why is it we only call it terror when mass gun violence is done by Muslims? Many have no problem labeling Muslims "terrorists," or black people "thugs" or white criminals "isolated cases" or a million other labels. Neatly categorizing gun violence into little categories only diffuses the issue of gun access.

A friend pointed out to me, "human beings have 'natural' rights and the government's role is to secure these rights." Are all the rights enshrined in our beloved constitution natural? If so, why did it take mankind so long to finally invent a government to secure these rights? The truth is our government is in the process of evolution, as is society as a whole. We are engaged in a continuing process toward what Lincoln called, "a more perfect union." People have fought and died over which of these Constitutional rights we want to keep. At one time, we had the "natural" right to own a slave. It once seemed natural that voting be reserved only for white men. Alcohol was banned by a Constitutional amendment which was then reversed when we realized, quite naturally, that that wasn't such a good idea after all. Who says the second amendment is a natural right? It's an amendment. And my first amendment right, gives me the right to challenge the second amendment, which I do not believe is "natural" in any way. It was written for a different time.



The Corrupt Politics of Haiti and in the U.S.

As I mentioned earlier, Haiti is now 52% Christian. Medit and a group of Christian pastors are thinking it may be time to run for office. Along with a platform of ending corruption, Medit is also firmly against gay marriage. I wasn't about to argue the point, but opted not to go there, partly because of the language barrier, and partly out of respect for my gracious host. But mostly I didn't because I realize prejudices such as these can only be alleviated after a functioning Democracy is in place. It was only this year that our own Supreme Court ruled that gays have the same right to marry as the rest of us. Political change takes time.

Currently, Haiti charges money to run for Parliament, so the motivation is there to buy and sell influence. I pray most ardently that if Pastor Medit becomes a politician and that this most kind and pious man does not fall prey to the temptation for corruption. Christian principals provide excellent guidance for leaders, but I will always support a clear separation between church and state. Historically, no other form of government has been more abusive than a Theocracy.

Likewise, the U.S. has fallen into a period of out of control corruption, particularly since the Citizens United decision by the SCOTUS. Legislation is written by corporate lobbyists and our Democracy is blithely being sold to the highest bidder. When unlimited money is deciding policy, we are on the verge of becoming a full blown Oligarchy. I pray that both countries find the collective wisdom and will to separate money from politics, which is the sole cause of corruption.

Healthcare in Haiti and U.S. Aid to Haiti

Jeonson has suddenly been taken ill this morning and Medit is taking him and the new girl, Lonia, to the doctor. All the kids are praying for him and putting baby powder and ointments, and laying hands on him. There was a bad fever last summer; this is probably how it spread. Jeonson is scared but he is one of the lucky few, who are able to receive not only love from a supportive family, but proper medical attention as well.

Although Michael Moore famously boasted that Haiti offers free health insurance, going to the hospital is not free, especially to their poverty stricken citizenry. You better show up with cash in hand or there's a very good chance there might not be treatment for you.

The health budget is low in Haiti. There has been a transition away from an emergency humanitarian, relief-based response towards a development, recovery-based one. While this is crucial for building a proper and functional health care system, it seems to be coming at the expense of Haiti's capacity to respond to emergencies in the present.

According to the U.S. State department, the results of U.S. aid to Haiti in the years since the earthquake include:

- Some 328,000 displaced Haitians housed,
- 2.7 million cubic meters of rubble removed,
- 6,000 jobs created at the Caracol Industrial Park in Haiti's north,
- Tens of thousands of Haitian farmers have higher crop yields and incomes,
- A new 10 megawatt power plant is providing electricity in the north,
- The Haitian National Police is stronger with the addition of more than 3,000 new officers,
- More Haitians have access to police services as a result of new police commissariats built in areas not previously serviced by the police,
- Some 600 semi-permanent classrooms were constructed enabling 60,000 children to return to school, and
- Many basic health indicators, including child nutrition and mortality and HIV/AIDS are improving.



Pastor Medit measures for a new pair of shoes.



Thirst 18×18" oil on panel

Thirst captures that precious moment when that thirst for the object of our desire, is finally quenched. It is an inner ecstasy. It is God speaking directly to our soul. It is satisfying on the deepest level because it connects us with others who understand this feeling. It is immediate, it lasts but an instant. It is deeply personal and yet filled with light and peace.

My kids have four parents and all the trappings of American culture, which I think interferes with their ability to understand this simple key to happiness. Perhaps true gratefulness only comes to those who have had to go without.

It was a profound experience to be with these children as they realized that pure, drinkable water, something so many of us take for granted, was now accessible and available.



Ricardo waters the new plants around Medit's father's tomb.

I Final thought about The Bread of Life Orphanage

I will never forget Ricardo insisting that he pray for my family and for much success with my project. I thought I was here to pray for them. But he and these children know something so many of us have forgotten: we are all here to serve others. Job said, "a lot for me but a little to you." There is so much need here. And yet it feels like abundance. They are receiving the best care but more than that, they are part of a family forever.

Leaving the orphanage the next morning was sad and we were desperate to remain connected. I apologized I didn't bring more cash with me. I promised Medit I would send a money order through Western Union when I returned and keep them updated on the project, sharing profits with the Bread of Life and WMI. I will be back, next time with my wife.

*God bless Jasmin, Paul, Job, Mr B, Ben, Mia, Ricardo, Jeonnson, Lonia
and all the other children at the Bread of Life Orphanage.*

If you are led to support a specific project, rather than simply sending money to the Red Cross or other high visibility organizations, where more is often spent promoting the need for donations than actually serving those in need, please send contributions to ***The Bread of Life Orphanage***. I used Western Union to transfer my funds. It's easy:

Pastor Medit Sanon
Bread of Life Orphanage
45 Cyvadier Jacmel
Haiti
Phone 509 367-15947

Also, please volunteer and/or contribute to Watermissions International, headquartered in Charleston, SC. Here's their website:



The Pois Thrashers, 24×36"
oil on board

Part of the Quench Project, this painting is a depiction of a common scene in the mountains of Jacmel, in the south of Haiti. These subsistence farmers are practicing an ancient art, very similar to the rice thrashing the enslaved African-Americans practiced two centuries ago in our country. Madame Rolande, featured, is the mother of Renauld, who gave me an impromptu tour of the farm and nearby village. Madame Rolande's hands, the focal point of the painting, are worn with work and dedication to her family and community.



Water Projects Calling

Today, we are traveling to a remote mountain community, "la Vallee de Jacmel" to continue work on a water treatment facility, drawing water from a 240' well and purifying it to serve the people up here. I helped a little, separating gravel into fine grains, for use in mortar. They had many on hand to help, including many from the community.

Joelle took me on a tour of the little village, along with his children, who lived in the area, while Renauld and the others finished the highly skilled work on the water treatment. Joelle spoke *un petit English* but we talked using gestures and I related to him and his kids about beauty, making animal noises, pantomiming the things we saw and admiring the beautiful views and the many lovely features of the environment.

He touched my protruding belly and I proved to him it wasn't just fat. That actually, under that belly was an overdeveloped diaphragm. I sang a few loud notes operatically. They laughed and laughed.

I learned how to say "Bo je benu" ("God bless you") and found many reasons to say it often during our tour down many paths and pockets of homes and businesses. But truth be told, I am the one receiving the blessings.



Joelle brought me to farm where everyone was working. An elderly woman in a white shirt, Madame Rolande, was separating the seeds from the chaff, while her son, Jean-Boursiquot, was beating pea stalks "pois" to get the seeds for to planting. The bean is a staple in their diet.

Renolds is a blacksmith who was fixing chair. I told them my last name means blacksmith in Italian. I really enjoyed making connections with the people I met along this mountain journey. We made our way back to the well, where the WMI were putting the finishing touches on their latest system.





Merite, the Farmer, 18×24"
Oil on board

Merite Bas' takes a break from tilling the harsh red soil in the mountains of Jacmel, Haiti. Merite is not an example of excess, but he is an example of success. He has dedicated his life to hard work, for his family, his community and the people of Haiti. His face shines with the satisfaction of being who he is, possessing the grace, wisdom and contentedness of an enlightened soul.



Living Waters Flowing

Back from my tour of the mountain village, the water was now flowing and the people have continued to gather. Word had spread quickly, helped by Renault, who was calling out in Creole, "good news, fresh water is here!" And the people came and drew fresh water.

At the fountain, a girl named Joelle began speaking to me at length from her heart, in Creole. I had no idea what she was saying but somehow I don't think it mattered. Her words were full of passion and gratefulness. She was pleading in a language she clearly realized I did not understand. After she finished, I prayed over her troubled yet loving spirit, for restoration, healing and peace. I know she didn't understand me any better than

I understood her, but somehow it was okay. I believe God understood exactly what our hearts were saying. This connection was happening, while the fresh living waters flowed to the people.

The ride back was treacherous but Renault was indeed an equal for any crazy situations we faced. I took a lot of great photos on the fly. I gave and received a lot of thumbs up and smiles too. It was eerie at first that everyone was staring at me, because I'm one of very few white people they have seen. But it is handy for taking pictures.

Naturally there is a deep reluctance among Haitians about having their photos taken, mostly because the NGOs have come promising to help in exchange for some photos to use as tools to help them. More often than not, the NGOs receive the benefit and little relief money actually trickles down to the people who need it most. That's why I have decided to donate a portion of the sale of this book, paintings and reproductions to the Bread of Life Orphanage and the WMI mission in Haiti, so that they can continue their work on behalf of the people. Yes, people in the US need help too. But I consider the Haitian people my people too. We are all connected now. The world is not just what I see in front of me. There are people everywhere in need. Wherever I help one, I am helping all.

I consider myself a patriotic person but I personally do not think much of those who put their own country above others. I put my family first, with God at its center. Then I do what I can for my community, which is the entire world of fellow beings. It is the Earth community in which we live. One thing of which I have always been most proud, which many among us take for granted in the U.S. is our safety net. At one time in America, if someone was ailing, unable to keep up, we had systems to deal with them. Our safety net was one of the crowning achievements in the Western world. Even after years attempting to dismantle it by the right, America's safety net is really the one thing that distinguishes our society from places like Haiti.

Before we call for the defunding and dismantling of the Federal government, consider Haiti. The central government is corrupt. So is ours. We know this. Here in Haiti, most money is going to the very rich, and the politicians and the super-rich are the only real beneficiaries. But this government provides virtually no public services that might benefit its people. Even after five years, the infrastructure is in disarray. Utilities and sanitation are not a government priority. It is almost complete anarchy. There is no safety net, virtually no investment in the people on the ground. I see everyone working hard, desperately trying to make it, to pull themselves up. But its dog eat dog in Haiti. The economy is completely polarized. The poor are at each other's throat, fighting for what few resources are available. Equal opportunity is a not within the realm of possibility. Let's not let that happen to our beautiful country.

Thanksgiving

I now understand whatever talents I may have are gifts from God. And even the energy and hard work I've put into developing them comes from a deep desire, placed there by God, to overcome the many obstacles I've faced, to become the best being that I can be, for the sole purpose of glorifying Him.

Being broken, not being good enough, used to cause me to suffer. But now, knowing God is my strength, has taken the burden from me to be special. As a result, He has given me talents, insights and abilities I never believed possible in me. I know I am part of a larger purpose, which connects me to the entirety of creation. For that I am eternally grateful. *rm*

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A Question of Faith

I'm back at the Watermission Headquarters, where every weekday morning they hold a devotional meeting. It begins with songs, then a bible reading, followed by a conversation among the 30 employees preparing to go out into the community, installing and maintaining water systems, testing water purity, etc.

Today the question comes up, "What is faith?" At the devotional, a gentleman suggests faith is a belief in something which cannot be seen. After some silence, I suggest they might look at the mountains, the sea, a child's face, our own face, and yes, a rabid dog. I suggest that there you will see the very face of God the Father. God's face doesn't jump right out. Our faith comes from being able to stay with something long enough to begin to see the God in it. We had some wonderful conversations during these devotionals.

As far as my faith goes, whether the Christian story is literally true or not doesn't concern me. There is truth in the story about our trajectory as a species. It is a true story because what it tells us about the nature of mankind is true. That it

helps us understand ourselves, makes it truth. That the story enlightens, makes it true. Even though many have used and manipulated the Christian faith to further their own nefarious purposes, the story remains true and has resonated with humanity and provided a blue print for a happy, mission-driven, blissful life for thousands of years. It is both familiar and exotic.

The acceptance of any explanation for how we came to be and why, even a scientific theory, requires an act of faith; that's why they are called theories. Ultimately, we choose the story which resonates with us.

I read with great interest about Jimmy Carter's decision to "Lose his Religion." Frankly, I agree that losing one's religion is the first step to true spiritual freedom. After all, what is religion but an invention of men to control others. As a positive organizing force throughout history, it has certainly had its ups and downs.

I am a follower of Jesus Christ, who was not a member of any church or sect. I did not return to Jesus to please anyone, to fit in, to avoid eternal damnation or to make myself better than others. I came back to Christ after many years as a non-believer, as a result of repeated encounters with a loving God, to whom I want to be closer.

My gnosis with God, who has no religion, does NOT include identifying those who are, or are not, going to heaven. Nor is it about determining who might be greater or lesser sinners than myself. Nor does it involve the endorsing of hateful political practices. God speaks to me through the beauty of nature and the majesty of how we are all connected. God urges me on in the loving acceptance of what I cannot understand, namely the inner workings of others. No one's perfect.

And yet, the Bible and other ancient texts, tell a magnificent story of His creation and profound influence on the evolution of human enlightenment, a story which is too astounding to ignore. So I don't. It is a story that speaks to me. The only thing "nonbelievers" are missing is an imagination, the ability to appreciate experiences beyond their five senses. Some people call this "having an open mind." But even the belief in nothing is a belief. Some feel they are called to serve God. Some feel they are called to serve science or art or pizza. Some, like myself, see no contradiction in the myriad of human thought with the crazy world described in the Bible. Quantum physics theorizes that we are all connected, in ways most of us will never comprehend. My art points me in a similar direction, as does my relationship with God.

It's actually pretty simple. Since no one can actually know or prove some all-encompassing truth of how this universe, in all its vast complexity, really works, any attempt to assert what is true, is a willful act of the imagination. If what another imagines does not resonate with us, we label them as delusional or a heretic. They have failed to "capture" our imagination; we remain unconvinced. If we, on the other hand, agree with their imaginings we call them enlightened. Their story makes sense; it appeals to us. We then accept it as truth.



For me, the story of Jesus resonates. I feel a calling to do whatever I can to be closer to God, to give up my will in service of His. The world makes a lot more sense to me now and I am a lot more joyful, knowing I'm connecting to something much larger than my puny little self. He sparks my imagination and that makes me happy.



Quench 18×18" oil on panel

Quench captures that indescribable moment when fresh water became available to this remote mountain village near Jacmel. The shouts in Creole of “Come to get Fresh water” called out and people from the village came to celebrate and drink.

Watermissions

International installed one of their solar powered filtration systems to this abandoned, tainted well, transforming it into an endless source of drinkable water. This is one of over 300 such units scattered across remote areas in Haiti.



Authority and “The Strong Man”

The few wealthy individuals with money who control politics in Haiti believe if you keep the poor in chaos and deprive them of opportunities they will destroy one another and solve the problem that way. Harsh but true. After the Earthquake, there were suddenly more jobs and fewer people seeking them. It's also true that famine, lack of sanitation and endless wars goes a long way to reduce over population. These are considered viable options by members of the Illuminati, a small group of mega-wealthy men who feel wealth inequality is in the best interest of the new world order.

But this “father knows best” thinking has led to nothing but misery and undermined the sanctity of the individual. These 40 or so super rich men, never elected to any political office, are in control of the world economy. Their goal is to keep us at each other's throats, pitting Democrat against republican, black against white, Muslim against Christian, hoping we will destroy one another in an increasingly desperate attempt to get more stuff than our brothers. The more strife, the better. What better way to tighten their grip than by reducing the size of government. A smaller, less effective government will eventually lead to privatization and more and more power going to fewer and fewer people, who are insulated

from the electorate. Without an effective central government, lifting up the people, providing infrastructure and making it safe and possible for everyone to succeed, we will end up with a completely polarized economy, just like Haiti's. This would suit the Illuminati just fine. In the new world order, the individual will have less and less economic stature. Isn't it ironic, that as the right believes they are fighting for individual liberties they are actually giving away more and more of our freedoms. A well-educated middle class is the last thing they need.

There is no middle class in Haiti. As the U.S. middle class disappears, our political squabbling is creating a diversion, allowing the Illuminati to strengthen their control of the world's wealth. Fighting for continued tax breaks for the rich, decimating Social Security, refusing to raise the minimum wage and eliminating opportunities for the poor and disenfranchised may seem like good ways to encourage independence and self-reliance, but it is really a smokescreen to move more wealth to the few who already enjoy it. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, the wealth share of the top 0.1% has increased from 7% in 1979 to 22%, as of 2012, a level almost as high as in 1929.



It may seem ridiculous to compare Haiti with the US but abject poverty is the inevitable result of the kind of redistribution of wealth that we are seeing in the US. The American Dream, which has become little more than an empty slogan, is being held up to manipulate the poor and disenfranchised. Greedy people use these pleasant sounding ideas to justify their Ponzi scheme, moving money up the economic ladder, never down. Nowhere is the inevitable result of that process more evident than in Haiti.

I realize many of my readers may see feel just the opposite; they cling to the failed idea that wealth will trickle down or that they will one day magically become rich. Hard work and perseverance is the key to success. Of course there is great truth in this but there are no guarantees. Ambition cannot be legislated.

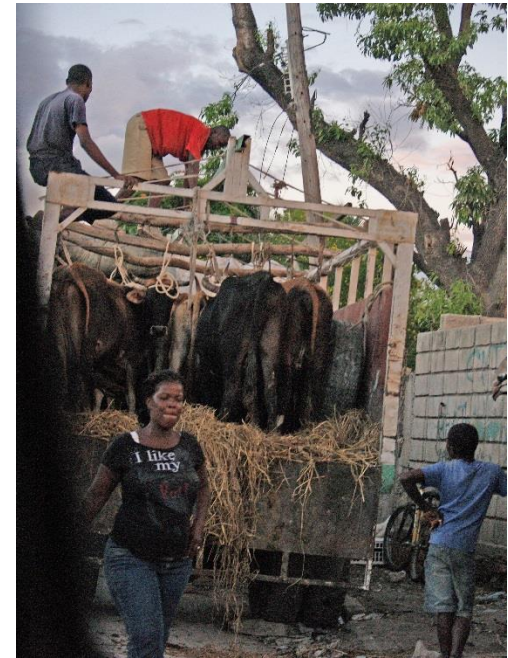
From the perspective of the extremely wealthy, mostly inherited, how is it in their personal interests to let their money trickle down when they can use it to acquire more wealth instead? It is human nature to build on what you have, whether that's a smelly stuffed animal in a hut in Haiti or a billion dollar trust fund in NYC.

The near majority of Americans who believe the Federal government is the problem and wants it weakened to the point of collapse, where people are left to fend for themselves, may realize too late that chaos and anarchy are no alternative to an effective Federal government, which is investing our taxes into producing jobs and creating opportunities for everyone to succeed. And if you don't like what they're doing, we can at least try to vote them out of office. Try voting Sam Walton out of office.



The Citizens United decision by SCOTUS in 2010 created the legal doctrine of corporate personhood, meaning corporations can now control politics with unlimited political contributions. The voice of the individual has been

almost completely drowned out. Unless we get a constitutional amendment to reverse that decision, Democracy as we have always known it, will become only a fond memory.





Peace on Earth

I was in lock down at the Watermissions International compound for the weekend so I prayed about what I might do for my hosts in gratefulness for their kindness to me. I decided to make the best use of time by painting an eleven foot wide mural of DaVinci's, "The Last Supper" (just slightly less than actual size) on the WMI headquarters wall. It would be a celebration of Christ's sacrifice as well as a reflection on the WMI mission, in the hopes of inspiring others to dedicate their talents to making the world a more compassionate and peaceful place.

I'm one of those Christians who is uncomfortable proselytizing, so I prefer to let my actions speak for me. I attend weekly JA (Jesus Anonymous) meetings, at City Church in Charleston, which is helping a little. I love my church, the people and my dear Pastor Todd. I've prayed, as many Christians do, about how best to serve. In life groups we talk about how we can align our life and work with our Christian walk. The idea of creating my art as a form of worship, as a way to convey the pure Christian message of peace and connection, has always resonated with me.

It is my hope that my art expresses this peaceful connection, that we all may one day accept that this is the essence of all great religions. Yes, religion, as a political force, is mired in human ego and desire. Far too often, religion has a devastating impact on our lives. Religion enslaves many, when it should provide their freedom. The failures of religious leaders nearly destroyed my faith. My pastor turned her back on me when as a child I told her about my being sexually assaulted. Many have been betrayed by authority. I'm not the first and I won't be the last. But in its purist form, Christianity, as well as the other great religions and the ancient texts, have stood the test of time because they hold the keys to happiness. When they become a cause of strife and anguish, that is not God. That is man, "creeping in his petty pace, signifying nothing." Out Father God is unlike any human authority, in His desire for goodness.

In Haiti, there is a struggle between the Voodoos and Christians. Those newly converted to Christianity are being asked to discern the spirit of good from evil. "How do we know," one man asked, during one morning devotional at WMI. My answer: "if it asks you to do good things, to pray, to take action for healing, connection, for love, then it is a good spirit. If it asks you to do harm, leave it alone. Focus on God and good things will manifest."

The Last Supper



I accomplished the Last Supper in one weekend simply by giving myself over to the Holy Spirit. There is no other explanation for what happened. I was careful not to turn it into a dare, calling on God to bring a miracle, like a short-order cook. I had to humble myself, truly accepting that I could never recreate this masterpiece in any edifying way without a Holy intervention. I knew trying to do this on my own would be foolhardy at best. This was truly a leap of faith for me.

I was armed only with an I-pad, and some of the Premalba oil paints I'd brought, intending to give away to the serious art students I'd hoped to meet. I laid out the architecture, according to the original DaVinci. I soon became confused with the geometry and found myself having to give up control, in order to continue.

I turned it into a meditation on the moment when Christ introduced Communion for the first time. There too, two thousand years ago, there was much confusion and uncertainty as to the future of the mission Jesus had begun. I allowed myself to be ok with my confusion and trepidation, simply ignoring the voices in my head that were telling me how absurd this project was and what a grand failure it would be.

I focused instead on channeling DaVinci. I wanted to understand who these people were as he saw them in his time. I gave myself over to Jesus and the work He accomplished through DaVinci.



I learned things I didn't know. For one, there is a demon perched on Judas's shoulder, which was very eerie for me to paint. I meditated on the role Judas played in the miracle and how Jesus forgave even he who would betray him. Also, oddly, that there are no glasses of wine in the painting, no holy grail. I made no attempt to alter the original in any way, although clearly, through the process of re-creation, I strayed from the original. The controversy over whether Young John was really Mary Magdalene will have to remain a mystery. He/she looks

like a transgender to me, so that's how I painted him, but I didn't feel it was my affair to make that determination, as the artist.

I did have the pleasure in 2001 of seeing the actual, recently restored and hermetically sealed "The Last Supper," in Milan. After they removed all the previous restorations, leaving only what DaVinci himself had put on the wall, the images were barely visible. That is an affect I wanted to express in my version as well.



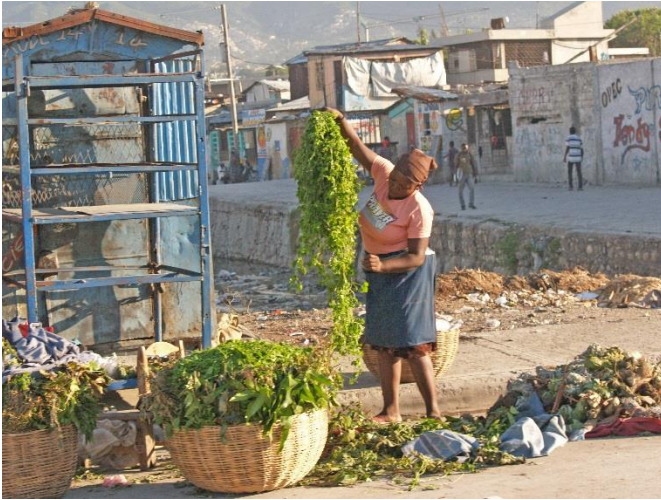


Elsa and I enjoy our last supper in front of "The Last Supper"

I experienced something truly miraculous during the process, however, which I must report. I honestly felt the presence of God guiding my hand. I was making a million adjustments, working very rapidly, almost in an unconscious state, a spiritual frenzy. I was not aware of what effect this giving up of control might have in the final work. My concern that I might mess up was overshadowed by something greater. Not confidence. It was a complete leap of faith on so many levels. I could not believe when I had finished how moved I was personally by the experience. I started on a Saturday morning and finished by dinner on Sunday. Blessed is the Lord.

I did have a chance to talk about the face of Jesus during our devotional service on Monday morning. I explained to the 25 WMI employees who attended that morning's devotional services, that the Jesus in this painting could have been, and in fact is, the face each of us sees in the mirror, the face we see in a mountain, in a broken home, a rabid dog, indeed wherever we look. Because God is everywhere. He could be Chinese or Pekinese. I

certainly considered the possibility of depicting a black Jesus, but when I considered that the face of Jesus in DaVinci's painting is only one depiction, just one of the billions of the manifestations of who God really is, if we choose to see Him, I was content with the result.



The God Factor in My Art

Most theologies would support that God is more about how things are connected than about how they are separate. Drawing is a celebration of the connections between forms. Therefore, these connections might be thought of as a celebration of God; the more connections, the more God. I've always believed that finding these connections, then, is a form of worship, sort of an exegesis with nature. If the disciple's goal is to be closer to God by doing what God might do, then one's creative process might aspire to the level of His creative intelligence.

But are we playing God or merely emulating His wisdom? In the universe of a work of art before us, we often find ourselves doing both. It is a give and take, a conversation between our own will, our own knowledge and that Universal

knowing, we call the collective consciousness or the God factor. Many of us have had the experience of a knowing which is beyond our own comprehension. It's as if we've tapped into something beyond our own ability, as if we are channeling some cosmic Other. We are on fire with an idea and it seems to take on a life of its own. We become servants to the idea, as if directed by an outside force. Beethoven described this phenomenon, as have many great artists. Some call it being in the zone. Others call it a groove. But it always seems to involve discovering connections between an unlikely combinations of seemingly random thoughts. To recognize these connections means giving up our own ideas, to be open to new ideas.

We are also celebrating how things are different from one another. Discernment of a thing's uniqueness is another miracle of the creative process. The combining of these processes, seeing how things are the same but also different, gets us closer to the *Theory of Everything*, where everything somehow makes sense, when we feel as if we are one with all.

A work of art is like a poem, capturing in images, the wanderings (and wonderings) of the human spirit. I want the viewer to wonder what my subject is thinking. I want them to empathize, to connect deeply with their own lives. A portrait is a story in poetic images. Sometimes, the story is captured in an energetic brush stroke, or a flash of light, or the way the skin glows. Sometimes, the juxtaposition of objects, poses and expressions generate a question which compels the viewer to action.

Creating art with a social conscience is a high ideal. It is one I have set for myself as well as a challenge to other artists. I hope my work lives up to this bold artist statement. But, as a work in progress, I am always striving to hit a higher mark or at least shed some light on the attempt.

The Apprentice



I'm so excited to have found some time today to work with my new apprentice in Haiti. Wisler wants to learn the secrets of the masters. He is a natural and really eager to learn. We will be keeping in touch. Thanks to The Quench Project's product sponsors: Weber paints and Artist and Craftsmen store in Charleston for providing materials for Wisler and the several interested artists I have been sharing with here in Haiti.

His pencil work was very meticulous and detailed, working on discarded file folders or any scrap of paper he could find. He was clearly pleased to receive the painting and drawing materials. He clearly exhibits the tenacity and dedication it will take to become a fine artist. Julio wants him to create paintings to liven up the water process centers, to make them more inviting to the communities they serve.

I explained to Wisler, through an interpreter, that giving oneself over to observing our subject is like listening to the voice of God. Obsessive regard for our drawing is a function of the ego. Better to focus on our subject. Perfection can be a curse when it separates us from God and others. Perfectionism takes the humanity out of the process. Learn, give yourself everything you need to succeed. Then turn it all over to God. We had a portrait lesson and took turns drawing a very pretty fellow WMI employee, named Sandra.



I was teaching a drawing method I've developed over thirty years of teaching, starting with a gesture, a blobby mass. This is followed by carving the mass into straight lines and containing it in an envelope. Every shape in the universe has its own unique envelope. The smaller shapes live in this envelope and evolve as the drawing develops. Each of the smaller shapes have their own unique envelope as well. Drawing for me is a celebration of how things are connected. I see drawing as a way to deepen our connections to the world around us and the people we encounter. I find many parallels between drawing and life.

Wisler's father worked for former president Preval and when he left office, the family was destitute. Wisler is a shy man, who tasted wealth and prosperity, only to lose it. I pray his unique life perspective will deepen the work, to which he has dedicated his life. I pray that he enjoys much meaning and success in his artistic pursuits.



When Cute Little Children Grow Up depicts a fun loving child of God. I wasn't able to catch her name while visiting a school outside Port-Au-Prince in Haiti. But her playful soul came to life when she saw my camera and began posing for me, stealing the show for a moment from the cute little children, practicing their grammar. The irony, in this context, really struck me.

When Cute Little Children Grow Up begs the very difficult question very few people want to ask: what do we do with cute little children when they grow up? Every day we are bombarded with cute children and furry animals, who pull at our heartstrings. They are the ones on the posters and commercials. We are asked to contribute to one worthy cause or another, to give generously to the children a fighting chance at a happy life. Unborn babies have more of a right to life than abused children from Mexico. Abused children from Mexico have more of a right to happiness than "thugs" fighting oppression in our own communities. It all depends on one's perspective as to who is more or less deserving.

Ageism and Authority

When Cute Little Children Grow Up is about what happens when people grow up. So many adults simply disappear from our view, as if to say we have only one chance to make our case for success and happiness, when we are young and cute. This attitude pervades every aspect of our lives. We tend to rally around potentiality. Our society has an obsession with youth, beauty and anything new, which is fine, except when it isn't. We're all about who's hot and who's not. I have become more aware of the insidious nature of ageism, noticing "emerging artists" are rarely over thirty. If you haven't emerged by then, you have a tough row to hoe. Reinvention is riddled with obstacles. I consider myself blessed having gotten in on the ground floor.

We need to be working toward a society where all living things are able to achieve their fullest potential. Until we can learn to love the rabid dog, the crotchety old man, the "lazy bum," as much as we love cute little puppies and children, then we really won't know love, as a species.

Julio had to learn not to ask for help from the community. He said, "You have to demand it. You don't ask, you tell." He found out that "the people of Haiti, a former French slave colony, respond better to authoritarian leaders." As sad as this fact is, he has exploited it in order to get things done. "This cultural characteristic makes people fall prey to the despot; it will take decades to be changed. Julio and Elsa encourage creative problem solving, asking their workers what they think should happen, given what you know right now. "Education is all rote. Students are simply repeating whatever the teacher says." I observed fist hand, witting in on several class sessions in different communities. "There has to be a balance. And it will take time."

This authoritarianism extends into every aspect of Haitian life. The Haiti government determines how all the foreign aid will be used, so if they choose to build a bridge below the water line, or use shoddy materials and pocket the savings, that is their right. Daniel Gerard Rouzier nominated as Martelly's prime minister. A Christian, is friends of Julio. He was rejected. In Haiti there is no future, no planning. There is only the present. Haiti is creating roads and highways, but they are a long way from having a reliable infrastructure.

Rosamond outdid herself today. Whipped Militoun (like squash) with butter, cream and placed back in its skin, is awesome. Marinated (salt, garlic, butter, boiled meat goat or chicken, little paprika) then flash fried, red beans and rice just like momma used to make if she had been born in New Orleans or Haiti. Whatever plans I had for losing weight in Haiti will have to wait until I get back to the states.

Rosamond and I play a little game whenever she serves me. Whenever she politely reaches to remove a fork or dirty napkin, I quickly slap her hand. We laugh and laugh at this. There are many ways to communicate and say I love you that do not require language.



Art with a Social Conscience

If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him. JFK

Some people believe art's sole purpose is to decorate. Others believe art is a conversation with one's self that is really a conversation with everyone, an interactive process. I believe great art must speak to us about our lives, our world and the human condition. Art has the power to make us more aware of what's happening in our world AND also be beautiful. Artists are the conscience of society. I believe for art to be vital, it must serve this higher purpose. If art is truly a necessity, which I believe it is, it must not merely be a reflection of society but a call to action.

I paint in a style I call "expressive realism." I believe in exploring beauty. I am a painter. But painting pretty pictures is not my end goal. Not to

say I haven't painted my share of typical subjects, like flowers, sweet children, majestic landscapes. But I think my best work goes beyond merely presenting these subjects. My father used to say, "It's not what you paint, it's how you paint it." I try to ask, what is it about this thing that has captivated my eye? What is it that speaks deeply to the human condition?

My work, certainly in *The Quench Project*, has turned even further in the direction of having a social conscience. As a Christian and a survivor of CSA, my work asks, what can I do as an artist to further the conversation about survival? How can I shine a light on the triumph of the human spirit? How can I celebrate the God-factor in nature and the beings who inhabit this Earth?





***Tap Tap
Journey***, 24 x
30" Oil on
panel

This precarious scene is a common sight in the Mountains leading from Jacmel to Port-Au-Prince and indeed throughout Haiti. The natural colors of the majestic mountain backdrop is in stark contrast to man's attempt to attract attention. I enjoy the complimentary colors.

Recovery versus Relief - Community Development

Haiti is now in a recovery stage; the emergency relief aid has died down as time has passed since the tragedy of 2010. Part of my intention in **The Quench Project** is to keep stay focused on the tremendous need which continues in Haiti. Recovery is not as emotionally poignant as relief, but it is every bit as important, if we ever want to see a strong, self-sufficient Haiti.

Today we went out to a community development meeting about 40 kilometers from the WMI base. The purpose of the mission was to get community support for a new water system. Only about ten members of the community were present, so the water system, which has already received funding (through Mission of Hope Haiti) cannot move forward. They will setup a third meeting after distributing flyers to get more of the community involved. Experience has proven that without community support the system will break down and the resources will be wasted.

WMI has installed about 300 water systems throughout Haiti. Most of the original systems are no longer working, which is heartbreaking. Julio tells me they have seen evidence of considerable looting and vandalism. WMI teams have been chased away with machetes when trying to remove broken or obsolete equipment in order to repair or replace it with newer equipment. But those systems created in the last couple years, installed with community involvement, are still in place and have become an essential part of the Community. George Greene, founder of WMI, the engineer who is responsible for the solar powered, water filtration system WMI is famous for, has also developed a one-piece cement latrine. These elegantly designed latrines continue to be installed in communities throughout Haiti. It is grueling, dangerous and expensive work.

Julio explained to me how **recovery** is far more difficult a proposition than **relief**. Giving to those in desperate need (relief) is actually easier than building a community (recovery), where a reciprocal response and involvement is required and expected. Julio has set up a payment for water scenario to encourage a personal investment and community commitment. If someone is motivated to protect and maintain the system by profiting by its continued functioning, the system and the community will flourish. This is supply and demand in its purist form. Of course the cost for fifteen gallons of WMI water is only three goodez rather than 36, which is the going rate for drinking water in most of Haiti. It is just enough money to pay a member of the community to maintain the system, creating jobs within the community and keeping the water flowing.

WMI has about 12-15 pending requests currently which have funding in place. But only those with a strong community development in place will receive the systems. The recovery process takes much more time and effort but it is far more beneficial in the long run for all concerned, than simply dropping supplies and perpetuating dependencies.

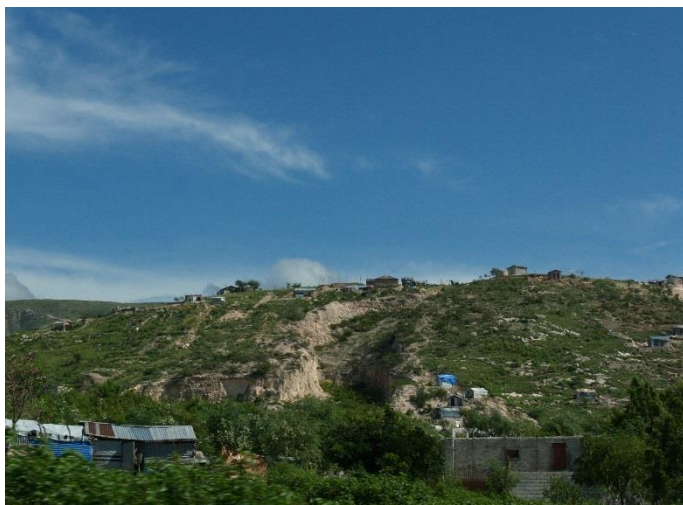
Today, the electricity from the government has just been turned back on here at Watermissions, after a three month interruption. It is now on a few hours during the day and just after midnight. During other times most NGOs and certain individuals have diesel generators and batteries to maintain partial electricity. So tonight, my last night in Haiti, I may actually be able to sleep in an air conditioned room. Yay!

There is no trash collection, sanitation or running water in Haiti. There is sporadic electricity, if you're lucky. In Jacmel, they are expecting a total blackout for the entire month of December. We made our way via a major roads project through the mountains, en route to and from Jacmel. We passed a huge cement bridge under construction. But because it is being built below the high water line, it will be under water part of year. There were stretches of fabulous highway but every few miles, we ran into long, barely passible sections of unfinished construction. The materials used in road construction in Haiti are those rejected by the rest of the world so it won't be long before these roads too, if ever finished, will crumble.



This bridge looks impressive for now, but come spring, it will be under water.

Haiti receives billions in foreign aid, considerable charitable aid through numerous agencies. So where does the money go? The Haitian government determines how all the foreign aid will be used, so if they choose to build a bridge below the water line, or use shoddy materials in the construction of never completed roads projects, pocketing the extra money, that is their prerogative.



Mass graves from the 2010 Earthquake are separated with a wall from the mountain village, called Obama 2.

Today, we passed the mass graves of thousands of Haitians killed in the 2010 earthquake. A cinderblock wall separates the graves from the general populace. The famous tent city stands on the side of the mountain, which has since given way to a shanty town called Obama 2. There is little building of actual homes there, even after all these years. Apparently, the Red Cross was very good at collecting relief money but not so good at building the homes it promised. And so, the people go on suffering and overcoming, each in their own way.

There are people suffering everywhere. But there also are people filled with joy and peace everywhere. Circumstances and geography may change but how we respond to our challenges is one of the only things we can control. When we

examine, verify and challenge our thoughts, we begin to deal with what is real. Our thoughts are not real. Most negative thoughts are the result of misguided ideas about reality.

I truly love the people of Haiti. They are sinners, struggling valiantly to find the light. They live the Gospel loudly. It is precarious, and filled with life or death drama. Nothing is certain here. They are all of us, magnified by a thousand.

The teenagers I encountered at Bread of Life were respectful, well-mannered, grateful, compassionate, generous and dignified. The men and women I encountered, who work at WMI and in the fields, in the mountains, in villages and towns, reflected similar values. They had every reason to be angry and resentful of the plight into which were born. But they learned that they are in control of their thoughts, just as they have learned to depend on a loving God. In short, they are nothing like the entitled, brooding, lost narcissists we often encounter in the U.S. Do people have to live through earthquakes, hurricanes, and the tragic loss of their parents in order to learn the grounded humility that the people of Haiti demonstrated? As the bible asks us,

For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?

Matthew 16:26

I have learned humility through much humiliation over the years, pursuing the dreams others had for me, trying to please people who didn't care about pleasing me; I was miserable. Now I do only what I do as an offering to my family and my God; I practice being grateful.





My final thoughts on The Quench Project

I believe everyone deserves happiness, and I respect each person's right to pursue it in their own way. And I realize I have little influence over those outside my very small circle of influence. Therefore, for me there are no others in the world where my passion matters more than with those who love, understand, respect and value me. Without that mutual contract there can be no meaningful exchange. Things and people may come and go, giving or taking that contract away, but I now know God values me and hears every utterance, even this one.

I have no burning desire to convert, to please, to convince anyone else about anything, least of all my worth as a human. Others may scorn or ignore my best efforts but I am certain I'm in the process of learning my true value and what I have to offer others. I understand my true purpose is

love. I am forever grateful to have the love of those key precious ones in my life and even more, the wisdom and courage to act upon it. That is my reason for being. The rest is just a silly game.

When I received Kickstarter funding for The Quench Project, a vision trip to Haiti, I was ecstatic. I traveled to Port au Prince, Haiti in Nov 2014, where I stayed with the Watermissions International team there, Julio and Elsa Paula. I was very nervous about stepping out so boldly. But I have faith the Lord is leading the way. I am grateful to WMI and all my sponsors for making this project possible. The exhibition will be traveling to a variety of exhibition venues, highlighting the importance of water and the work of Watermissions International, as well as The Bread of Life Orphanage. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of artwork and books will go to the WMI's mission. But the glory will go directly to God.

A Final Psalm

Opening my eyes to the God I see in you. Help me to see myself being seen in loving praise of all that is. Now, dear other, cry for the children without the words to plea, the savvy to endure, the tenacity to wait, unprotected by the healthy boundaries those of us, longer in the world, in seeming strength, take for granted. Free us from the limitations which now confine us and from which we long for release. We give thanks for the openness and vulnerability of the children, the very wildness of youth. Together, we honor their trusting, loving clarity, even as we arm them against the harshness of the world. Knowing it is the very innocence of their blind certainty that will teach us to see God in all things.