

Speaker 1: 0:00

Did you ever take art in high school?

Speaker 2: 0:05

Um, I think I had a choice in college between art appreciation and music appreciation. So I took music appreciation. You appreciate music now ? I don't remember much from that class.

Speaker 1: 0:17

Yeah, it's pretty, I mean, it's a , it's a lot of information to cover in a 16 week, semester.

Speaker 2: 0:24

Yeah. Okay. Welcome to hyphenated life. This is Andrew Dardy . And on today's episode, my cohost David [inaudible] dues sat down with our very own Waverley Matthews to talk about spirituality and the arts Waverly , who , uh , is somebody who is a missionary for the artists gospel and the reclamation or recovery of the visual arts as a medium for spiritual enlightenment and spiritual growth. I think in a lot of ways, at some point you could say truth and beauty and goodness used to , uh, to, to be together. And in certainly church spaces speaking as a pastor , uh, and hundreds of years ago, the church was this repository for the visual arts, a real hub of a sacred art, or even common art being a way to access the divine. And so some of those themes will play out on today's episode. And David, I look forward to hearing the full interview today, thanks for sitting down with Waverley and bringing some of that to life with his work and teaching the arts and his brand new podcast interviewing artists.

Speaker 1: 1:31

Yeah, it was a hundred percent. My pleasure. I've known Waverley for several years now. He's been an inspiration to me for learning about art, the visual arts for , um, inspiring me to go out and, and experience art. I've been to more art galleries and art museums in the last two years. And I had in my previous 36 years, and, and that's a hundred percent I owe to Waverley Matthews his classes that he does on a weekly basis. It gets you to really think about what's all around us because we are creative beings, right? If we are made in the image of God and the first thing God did was create, then we are compelled to be creative. And the arts are absolutely a critical way that we do that. So spirituality and the arts have always been and are completely intertwined in, in a, in a really important way.

Speaker 2: 2:36

Yeah. I mean, his passion is I have to say the word contagious these days, but he's just, he's just infused with this passion. And I know I've quoted this novelist a lot, but I love this quote. And I think about Waverly when I think of it, it's someone has found their vocation when they find something that keeps making more of. And what I love about Waverley is his passion is so present in who he is and he exudes that. And I love the way he talks about, you know, his impact is helping others make an impact and doing that through spirituality and the arts. And he has such a , an indelible background being trained as a pastor, being a pastor for a while. And now being on this journey where he is discovering art, as what he, I believe says is an accessible medium for people who are spiritually longing, who are trying to have their imaginations stoked and fired up about a way to see the divine through visual art. It's an extraordinary, well, I'm going to be a pastor nerd and say, it's an extraordinary ministry he has. But I think it really is. And, you know, there's the , uh , image of the starving artist who creates all of this

beautiful artwork. And I think in a lot of ways, the church has been starving because there's not been a place for artists within it in such a long time. And it's hard to find churches that are really using certainly the visual arts specifically as a serious component of their own DNA. And I think the church has lost a lot by taking beauty, deeming it heresy, and burning it at the stake and some sorts of ways where it's like, where, where are the visual arts in the church? Because we're so word centric, but that's part of the problem, how beauty, I don't mean this literally, but when it comes to visual arts, beauty being banned by the church, because we became so focused on words and in telling and not showing if there's anything I remember for my sixth grade English teacher, she always pressed us in our writing to show and not tell. But I think that's the power of visual arts now is it shows whether or not you it's, you don't have to read some big book to experience art firsthand and how that impacts you. The aesthetic power of encountering a piece of art that speaks to you beyond words, that's the power of poetry. It's the power of fine art like painting. Maybe I should become a painter. Maybe I'll just start. Maybe I'll just go get a canvas and start splashing, paint all over it and see what happens.

Speaker 3: 5:22

That's a good place to start. Yeah. I mean, that'd be afraid. Welcome to hyphenated life. We invite you to join us on this journey to explore the connection of the sacred and the secular that inspires us to become more fully alive.

Speaker 1: 6:01

Thank you for being with us today. Waverly, thank you for having me. I'm glad to be here. Waverley Matthews is a graduate of the university of Virginia in Charlottesville, the Cavaliers with a bachelor's in religious studies, also a graduate of union theological seminary with a master's in divinity, as well as I left school of theology in Denver with a master's of theological studies and an emphasis on the philosophy of aesthetics. He, uh, considers himself a missionary for the artist gospel. He's also an independent educator who for the last seven years has taught classes on the intersection of the arts and spirituality. Recently Waverley started a podcast called whammo art asylum to explore the wisdom of the arts spirituality and the great ideas and discover meaning and mission in a post religion world. So I want to start right away that this idea that we live in a post religion world, what, what exactly does that mean?

Speaker 4: 7:00

Well, ever since Nicha came along and announced the death of God, uh, he has proved prophetic. Uh, the West, especially I especially has become more and more secularized and institutional religious organizations have had less and less influence as a result. And, you know, you can see it in church attendance, uh, attendance at synagogues and temples of, uh, of all sorts of faiths are losing congregants, at least in the West, uh, and particularly the North. So you really see that in this community right here, Boulder, it's one of the most secular communities in the United States. And of course, uh, Europe has been secular for quite some time. There's so many empty chapels and cathedrals on Sunday morning.

Speaker 1: 7:47

Well, that's interesting. So this idea that religion is a thing of the past. And yet I think if you walk down Pearl street, our main tourist attraction site here in Boulder, Colorado,

you asked a hundred people. You'd probably get about 70% of them saying , uh , I'm spiritual, but not religious. How is religion important for spirituality?

Speaker 4: 8:11

Well, I think a lot of people only associate religion with dogmatic declarations from loud mouth ministers, honestly, which is completely inaccurate. Uh , for most religious organizations, people declare themselves spiritual, but not religious because they want to have an experience of something beyond themselves. Something transcended . They want to live for something more than just their own immediate needs. And so they are spiritual and all of us are spiritual. Religion has traditionally been a place where spiritual people can gather as a community and share their journey towards the spiritual life together and encourage one another. And that's really what religion at its best is all about. You have a few bad apples though, over the years. And then of course, all the religious Wars are done 17th, 18th century, and that sort of thing. But, but now you have a few bad apples who , uh , pick it the funerals of , uh, former soldiers , uh, and, and give everybody a bad name and , uh , give all religions a bad name. And so it's , it's pretty sad that people have given up on religion because in their journey towards a spiritual life, they really could be aided, I think most effectively by joining a religious community of some kind.

Speaker 1: 9:36

What about , uh, religion's role in providing a social and culture , cultural narrative to a spiritual experience, such as creation stories , um, uh , concepts like that and, and how, how can religion help , uh, prop up spirituality in that sense as an exp as a human experience?

Speaker 4: 9:59

Well, religion has always been the repository of our great myths and some people think of a myth as simply an untrue story, a lie, but myths are stories that contain the most profound truths of existence. They're vital for our journey towards meaning and purpose in life. And once we understand myths as embodying significant truths about who we are and our place in the world, I think people will be much more sympathetic to what religious communities can do because religious communities do share these myths. That's the place where , uh , we find the most easily. Now for me, I also believe these myths are contained in the arts as well. And that's why I try to share the arts. And I , I use the arts because of the arts are an accessible medium for people who are turned off by traditional religion. They can still encounter these myths encounter and experience of transcendence outside of religious communities. But I still encourage people to, to find a community where they can go along the journey with other people. And that's usually found in religions,

Speaker 1: 11:15

The idea of art leading to transcendent experience. I happen to agree with you transcendent experience for me is the sort of end goal of, of artistic expression and experience. Um, w what are some , what's an example how that was formative for where you are today in your life?

Speaker 4: 11:36

Well, I'll tell you one of the most formative experiences of my life. I was in seminary in Philadelphia, attended a seminary for a couple of years. There didn't graduate from it transferred. But while I was in Philadelphia, I heard about a special exhibit of the Barnes

foundation collection, which is one of the greatest, and post-impressionist collections of art in the world. And I didn't know anything about art. I hadn't taken any art history courses at that time. I just knew I liked looking at it. So I went to this exhibit and it was as if I had gone to some kind of spiritual revival and heard it, heard a message and had this profound experience almost out of body experience. And I didn't understand it though. I didn't have a way of, of interpreting it. I didn't have the vocabulary or knew none of the history. And so I left the museum that day, sort of in bewilderment, but knew that I encountered something sacred. I didn't know how I had encountered it because the seminary at the time I was, uh, the seminar I was attending at the time, definitely taught that revelation only comes through the written word and only through a very specific collection of the written word, namely the Bible. And now I'd had this experience of revelation outside of the Bible, and I didn't know how to make sense of it fast forward, six more years. Uh, that experience is still with me. And I went back to seminary to get a master's of theological studies and really look at the spiritual power of art. And that's basically what I studied when I got my master's of theological studies. I had to figure it out and then, uh, gave myself basically an art history education by teaching our classes. That's how I, I learned. And from that, I really realized that art is an expression of a profound experience of the artist. All revelation is interpreted experience, though. Okay. It's filtered through the person who experiences it. And so the greater the artist is whether they're writing it down in the form of scripture or literature or poetry, or whether they're expressing it through music or dance or film, or through painting or sculpting the greater the artist, the more accurate they, the art reflects the experience. And so that's why we're drawn to certain art. And it's the great art it's recognized as the great art. And that's why we also call it the Canon. We have a Canon of scripture, but we have a Canon of art as well. And it's the art that's in our greatest museums.

Speaker 1: 14:17

So I, I love this idea of art being reflective of transcendent experience, being a, almost a, a language and a pallet, if you will, for visual art, um, how can the artist's palette be enhanced by their understanding of everything that came before it? So you mentioned a couple of times you immerse yourself in art history in the way you did that was to create a series of classes on that. How has art history enhance someone's ability to experience and create art at a spiritual level?

Speaker 4: 14:54

Well, I think it just helps people understand it at a deeper level. It's equivalent to what I studied in seminary, church history and theology, the history of theology. When you trace the way we think the way we experience our world over the course of history, it just gives you a better perspective on your own experience and helps you understand your own experiences better. And so in that regard, I think an artist's understanding of themselves and their own journey is enhanced. And that I think eventually comes through their art.

Speaker 1: 15:31

So knowledge is, is a critical component to the equation, right? I, I, I believe I've actually heard you say, and I can't remember who it's attributed to, but wisdom is knowledge plus perspective. Um, in wisdom is a pretty critical component, I think, to, uh, to human experience at a spiritual level here on our planet earth. Um, the, this idea of, of artists creation being divinely inspired as if they're, there is a concept of a

metaphor of like a divine antenna. It's you expound on that concept a little bit, you know, I've heard in , in performing arts, the idea of flow state , um, where you just sort of tap into that transcendent wavelength, so to speak , um, artists that are whose work is now a part of that Canon that you mentioned that that provides almost a whole, a whole spiritual narrative through art, to our spiritual experiences here on earth. How , where, where do you, what are some thoughts around that idea of those artists and creators being divinely inspired, being plugged into a divine wavelength, so to speak?

Speaker 4: 17:02

Well, a lot of artists have expressed that they feel something channeling through them when they're creating art, they hadn't , and sometimes it's defined as a flow state in the flow state. Many people don't accept the idea of divine inspiration, but what is being channeled then is something deep within them, perhaps something in the unconscious, perhaps , uh , the collective unconscious has Carl Young put it , uh, the archetypes that sort of are wired into our brain, that we don't have ready access to at the conscious level, but through the creative process, we can go pass the conscious level to the unconscious and allow sort of , um , those deeper , uh, important myths that live within us to come out and express themselves artistically. So we don't necessarily have to speak only about divine inspiration. It can be , uh , channeling something that's deep within us that we normally don't have access to, but it's still is it feels to the person expressing it as if something beyond their self is , is , uh, wanting to express itself through them. And so that's why I used the term revelation, whether it's coming from some transcendent realm, metaphysical realm, or whether it's coming from someplace deep within us, it's still revelation because it's not something that's readily available to us at our conscious level.

Speaker 1: 18:32

Do you feel like there are any kind of specific references in the Bible speaking specifically of Christianity that, that emphasize the significance of the creative experience, either through creation , um, humans creating or humans experiencing creation that sort of might help bridge that gap between the westernized , um, giant wall between sacred and secular.

Speaker 4: 19:02

I think we are closest to source God, whatever you want to call it when we are in the creative process, because that is the primal act. It's the very beginning of the Bible. It's our introduction into who God divinity is. Divinity is pure creation. And , uh, I'm a fan of , uh, the philosopher, the Catholic Jesuit tow yard dish Chardon , who believe that God has always creating creation has never stopped. You know , there are fundamentalist groups that believe no creation happened once. And, and it was long time ago, like 6,000 years ago. And , and, and that sort of thing, but obviously scientifically, when we look at what's happening, this creation going on all the time, you know, look at evolution, that's an example of creation. And we participate in that evolution, that creative process to process theologians believe that God is constantly evolving and expanding. And , um, and we contribute to that process through our own experiences, God adorns, our experiences, our creativity. And I love that quote from William Blake , uh , eternity is in love with the productions of time. Um, when we create, we are participating in a divine act , um, we are becoming godlike ourselves. We're tapping into our own divinity when we create something. And that's why so many people experience , uh, art and, and

creating art as a spiritual experience. You know, I know a lot of artists who don't believe in God, but they say, but my spirituality is my art. It's, it's the creative act. That's I feel that other, whatever it is, and Henry Miller, the writer, uh, he said, uh, I don't know if he was a believer in any kind of traditional God, but he definitely believed he was channeling something greater. He referred to it as it speaking through him. So all artists experience that and we experienced it. We don't have to be artists. We can experience it when we create something ourselves.

Speaker 1: 21:13

So this idea that the divine can be found in, in every one of us. Um, I know for me that, that, that speaks, that preaches as they say to me. Um, and I think part of the call, if you've experienced that in you, you know, what that is to feel you want others to feel that as well. And I think that that, that starts bridging the concepts of evangelism and witnessing, and this idea of divine witnessing, recognizing, and trying to bring out the divine in others and everyone around you. Um, what are, what are you doing today, um, in your life? Um, what, what kind of pursuits are you doing to, to work towards, uh, helping others to recognize, learn about and experience this opportunity for channeling the divine within them, whether it's through experiencing art or whether it's through creating art or learning about it? Well, I definitely do it through my writing.

Speaker 4: 22:17

You were teaching, but that is to a local community. And that's why I started the podcast. I wanted to get that message out to a broader audience. And the web is a fantastic tool for that. And so I've started the podcast and then I'm also going to broaden out my audience for my classes. And based on the feedback, people really do feel like their perspective is expanding as they engage with the arts and as they learn about arts. And of course, like you said, um, wisdom is knowledge plus perspective as their perspective broadens and their knowledge, uh, their capacity to make wise decisions in life and to come up with better solutions to societal issues, uh, is expanded as well. And so my impact that I want to make through my podcast and through my classes is to help other people make their impact, whatever that is. And if I can be a part of that and help them along the way, then, um, it's been worth it,

Speaker 1: 23:18

Absolutely Waverly, Matthews, WEMA art asylum, where you can explore the wisdom of the art spirituality and the great ideas and discover meaning and mission in a post religion world. I want to kind of close today's conversation here with, you know, the pervasive thing that's happening in on, on the planet today is the COVID-19 pandemic. Um, and obviously that's impacted every of life. And the arts to experiencing are creating art, um, in this world where all that has been changed so dramatically, what have you seen happening or experience happening in the world of spirituality and the art and the arts that's making you come more alive?

Speaker 4: 24:05

Well, seeing creative responses, particularly among entrepreneurs, and I consider entrepreneurs, artists of business, they create something new, whether it's value, service, whatever it is, a product, uh, they have to be very creative artistically speaking. So I'm excited to see about the responses. The creative imagination has been sparked through this because, um, traditional businesses have suffered and owners of these businesses have had to become very imaginative or they have to close. There's

no choice, same with artists of all kinds trying to sell their work. And it's very difficult when you can't get in front of the face of a buyer and show them your work. And so they're having to be very , um, show some ingenuity and that's good for them. It's good for everybody. And I think culture as a whole grows most during crises because we have to think differently to respond to it effectively. And so I see this pandemic , um , tragic as it is for many people as a great opportunity also for culture broadly speaking to advance itself as well.

Speaker 1: 25:20

That's awesome. I think I, I agree with that 100% , um, for harmony contentment, peace and stillness, the trials and tribulations of adversity must fill us. Thank you Waverly for being on with us today, here at hyphenated life. Again, you can find his podcast. WEMA art asylum , uh, every Sunday at 10:30 AM, wherever you get your podcasts. And , uh, so thank you again for being with us. Very glad to be here. Thank you so much for inviting

Speaker 3: 26:18

Hyphenated life.

Speaker 1: 26:19

There's a production of pine street church in Boulder, Colorado hosted by Andrew Doherty and David [inaudible] .

Speaker 3: 26:25

The podcast is produced by Phil Norman and executive producer, Alexi Molden special thanks to our guests today and the Leal Hill trust of Boulder, Colorado. [inaudible] .