

# CONVERSations

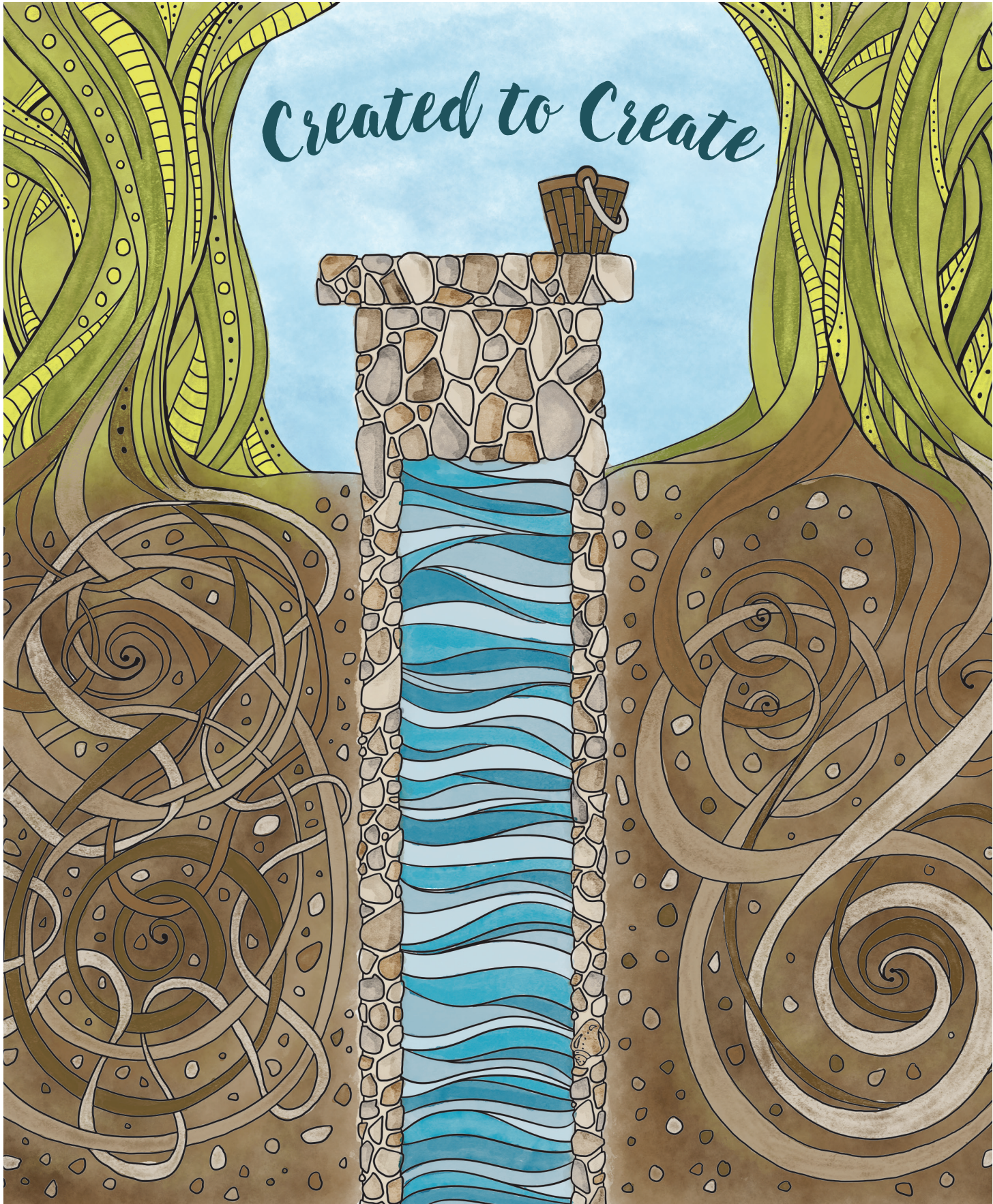
A FORUM FOR *Authentic* TRANSFORMATION FALL | WINTER 2016



volume

14.2

*Created to Create*



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# CONVERSations

A FORUM FOR *Authentic* TRANSFORMATION

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FOR RADICAL  
TRANSFORMATION  
IN CHRIST.

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HUNGER AND  
ILLUMINATES THE  
PATH BY DRAWING ON  
CLASSICAL WISDOM  
AND PRACTICE,  
EXPLORING THE VITAL  
ROLE OF COMMUNITY,  
AND ILLUSTRATING  
THE JOURNEY WITH  
REALISM AND HOPE.

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# CONVERSations

volume  
14.2

IN KEEPING WITH THE IDEA OF THE SOUL AS A UNIQUE REPRESENTATION OF UNITY AND DIVERSITY, THE FORMAT OF CONVERSATIONS INCLUDES FIVE CONTINUING THEMES, EACH REPRESENTING AN ENDURING ASPECT OF THE SOUL—THOUGHT, EMOTION, BEHAVIOR, RELATIONSHIP, AND INTENTION.



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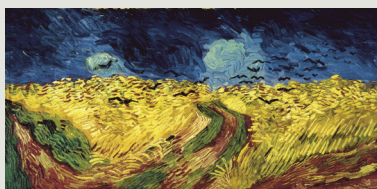
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## UNFINISHED WORKS BY JOANNAH M. SADLER

**W**ITH BUZZWORDS like “hand crafted,” “curated,” “artisan,” and “small batch” peppering our lingo lately, it seems as though our culture has a renewed appreciation for the concept of creativeness.

Could it be that these marketing buzzwords are onto something? Why do we crave the personal connection to the things we consume—be it food, material goods or even art?

In preparation for this issue I’ve been re-reading our previous issue on *Spirituality and the Body* (vol 9.1, Spring/Summer 2011) I was struck by a footnote in Steve Wilkens’ article, “More than Just Stuff: Why Creation Means Transformation for our Bodies, Our Selves.” He says, “The reference to ‘without form and void’ in Genesis 1:2 is often overlooked as a significant aspect of God’s creative process here. The point of creation is not simply that God can make stuff, even out of nothing if God so chooses, but that he lovingly gives it form, fullness and purpose.”

This issue, *Created to Create*, is the bookend to that notion of our bodies and our beings formed with careful attention into the image of the Divine Artisan. We’re exploring the arts and formation and how living out our purpose (*telos*) is to join God in creation.

Growing up in the restaurant industry played a big part in shaping who I am. I learned at a young age the value of work and discipline, and the importance of family. Even though my parents owned three restaurants, we knew that family came first for them. Sometimes that also meant that if we wanted to spend time together, it was at work. For as early as I can remember, three generations gathered at their restaurant on Friday evenings for a Southern supper. Dad would take a break to come join us, and we would earn our dessert by clearing tables or rolling silverware. Mottos like “the customer is always right” drove me crazy, but I somehow learned to follow them. After I discovered that I’m an Eight on the Enneagram, my difficulty with mottos began to make sense—because often the customers *weren’t* right, but we served them anyway.

The restaurant was a center for creativity. There was *always* a kitchen full of food. If my little brother

went missing, we could usually find him in the walk-in refrigerator, looking at all the vegetables, or with one of the grandmotherly cooks, helping her make biscuits or pies. The kitchen staff worked sunup to sundown, collaborating on new recipes and the day’s menu. The place was buzzing with activity, yet as a child I was sometimes bored and unimpressed by it all, or even resentful of the energy that creativity required. I imagine that my parents experienced those same emotional ebbs and flows owning a business—it’s something artists feel, too.

The last of the family restaurants sold while I was in college, so I can no longer go to those busy, loud, and stocked-with-food kitchens of my memories, but I still hold onto a gift that those restaurants gave me. Spending so much time around food and serving people naturally gave me a love for cooking and hospitality. Preparing a meal is a way for me to decompress at the end of a day and make something tangible for the people I love. Creating something that has a beginning and an ending, like the preparation of a meal, has become important foil for me to the work I engage in the helping field and the work I engage in as a parent. Mary Pipher says, “Therapy is so damn ambiguous that we need to see a finished product now and then.”

For me, that finished product is a well-cooked meal. I’m also eager to try my hand at my first adult coloring book, thanks to the art on the cover of this issue!

But what about unfinished work? Art that just won’t complete itself because the artist loses interest, gets interrupted, or changes direction? The Met Breuer Museum is currently running an exhibit highlighting unfinished works of art. A signature piece in the exhibit is a canvas Andy Warhol created as a nod to the popular paint-by-number craze. The curator of the exhibit notes that perhaps Warhol’s intentions were for the viewer to finish what the artist started.<sup>1</sup> The artist allows the viewer into the creative process—the imagining, the sketching, the painting—on purpose.

<sup>1</sup> Met Breuer Museum of Art, *Unfinished Thoughts Left Visible*, <http://www.metmuseum.org/press/exhibitions/2016/unfinished> (accessed September 23, 2016).

Could it be that the “unfinished works” in our lives are an invitation?

As believers we have a front-row seat in the mystery of the already and not-yet of the kingdom of God. Our Creator, so detailed in his crafting and skill, has left us with artistry that cries out with “eager longing” to be set free.<sup>2</sup> God’s creative work is not yet finished, and yet it is complete. This issue has me thinking about how creating and being creative releases us to be our true selves. The transformative power of creating allows us to model our Creator and his intent for us.

I’m reminded of the scene in C. S. Lewis’s *The Last Battle* as Aslan was leading the children further up and further in. Despite all of the changes they had undergone, their view of London was oddly familiar. That strange familiarity—both for the Pevensie children and for us—is hope. It’s our evidence of redemption, of things to come. Participating in creation reminds us to hope for renewal and redemption in our own lives and the kingdom of God. Christie Purifoy says it best: “Whether we speak of poems or paintings or places, all art acknowledges an absence and dreams of something other, something more. Art is the material form of hope.” You can read her article on page 86.

In this issue, we’re exploring the ways art forms us spiritually and brings us hope. We invite you to consider how you’ve been created to create. We have an amazing lineup of contributors who’ve shared honestly about their art and their struggle in making it with us.

Makoto Fujimura, visual artist and author, challenges us to consider the cost of cherishing beauty in his harrowing piece, “Beauty and Sacrifice.” Jake Wiedmann, one of only twelve master penmen in the world, shares how his faith informs and shapes his incredible dedication to his art. Burnt-out worship leader Raul Cruz makes the case for music as a place to feel God’s pleasure, and not just as a form of service. And Carin Huebner challenges us to evaluate how seeing is a redemptive act.

In “A Path to Healing,” Gayle Irwin explains how creating art offers a “back door” to our souls, an important thing to remember for those of us who just don’t feel “creative” or “gifted.” Her story encourages all of us to engage creatively with God in order to find healing and intimacy. Jan Johnson reveals how a tortured artist from the past began to speak to her in one of the darkest times of her life, and how Van Gogh’s journey and art gave her hope for her own future. And Juanita Rasmus, a pastor in Houston, shares how her journey with cancer led her into a redemptive relationship with the arts, which resulted in a ministry to the poor and homeless in her neighborhoods.

In “Creative Expression,” Cindy Bunch describes how a lunchtime art group became a place of redemptive community where Christ drew close through the art and stories of others. And Sheri Abel walks us through a process for incorporating art viewing and art making into our conversations with Christ.

Singer-songwriter and Renovaré’s new director of education Carolyn Arends makes a clear case for the importance of engaging with the arts as a spiritual discipline as we train to be like Jesus. Father Vince Hovely tells us about the serendipitous time he joined a tour of the Cathedral of Chartres that became a peak experience in his life, shaping his wonder for the beauty and truth in his world, and the artwork of his inner life. Steve Stuckey discusses the power of metaphor in spiritual direction by connecting a visual image with what God might be speaking to his directees.

Many of the writers in this issue have also provided additional questions or exercises at the end of the articles to help us explore what God might be inviting us to learn about this theme. I hope you’ll indulge your creative side and find a quiet space to spend time reflecting on the cover art and coloring the image by illustrator Daniel Sorensen. You’ll receive more encouragement to this in our feature O Taste and See. Then Val Starkgraf shares with us about the unexpected gift of coloring on page 77: “All that is required of me is to open myself to what God is speaking to me through the images and text. Coloring brings spiritual meditative focus to a visual plane in a readily accessible way.”

Matt Rhodes, creative director for *Conversations*, gives us a glimpse into what designing each issue looks like in a new twist on “Join the Conversation,” found on page 6. Plus, discover more behind-the-scenes bonuses featured in the content for our digital issue and on our web site. Visit [conversationsjournal.com/behind-the-scenes](http://conversationsjournal.com/behind-the-scenes).

By participating with God in creation, we also taste in the goodness of the redemption and renewal he brings to all things. The good news is that while it might seem like the work of spiritual formation is never quite finished, the gospel reminds us that our Lord did accomplish the work he started in the garden, with Jesus at the cross.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Joannah M. Sadler has been the managing editor of *Conversations* for ten years. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia with her family, and is a licensed marriage and family therapist with a small practice in the heart of the city. You can continue the conversation with her at [contact@conversationsjournal.com](mailto:contact@conversationsjournal.com).

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:18–23: “For the creation waits with eager longing to be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. . . creation cries [groans] inwardly for adoption, to be set free.”