

A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS:
A STORY ABOUT STAR WARS, CHRISTIANITY, AND ART.

BY

SARA PAIGE HOAG

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*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*¹

The universe was created with words, and those first words were, “Let there be light”². Everything afterwards was called into existence by God’s word. All of creation is His story. We are all stories created by God, to be a part of His grand narrative whether we realize it or not. One thing that sets us apart from the rest of the world, as intelligent humans made in the image of God³, is the need to tell stories. Literary scholar, Marshall Gregory, sees storytelling as a defining characteristic of humanity: “From the time we are born, the narrative cradle of story rocks us the collective heartbeat of our species, ushering across the threshold of consciousness and into the domain of humanity.”⁴ Story does more than make us human, however; it shapes our view of the world. Just as God formed the universe with his words, we come to form our understanding of the world through stories. Karen Coats writes, “in the process of structuring the world, stories structure us as beings in the world. We begin to tell our own stories, fashioning a self out of the stories and narrative patterns we have received from our culture.”⁵ Like Coats, I believe we make sense of our lived experiences by placing them in a narrative. Even though I do not write stories, I make art with the intention of crafting an experience in which audiences can create their own stories for understanding spiritual concepts.

Artists, at some point, get asked the question, “How long did it take you to make this piece?” It is a question I’m always tempted to answer with, “My whole life.” Even though it may seem like a snide remark, it is quite an accurate answer. Much of our lived experiences construct the way we see and understand the world, which influences the kind of art we make. The stories I have inhabited, from childhood to the present, have been a tremendous inspiration for my artwork. The inspirations for my recent work began when I was about eight years old, when I witnessed my parents going through a divorce. The divorce caused some rather traumatic home experiences, which I often experienced alone. I’d retreat from the pains of that world, into the realm of fantasy, by creating my own stories of adventures and friends. This was how my creative imagination became an outlet and means of escape, which would later influence my art making. I always dreamt of a world full of magic and wonder. The more I read books, like the *Harry Potter*⁶ series,

¹ John 1:1-5 NASB

² Genesis 1:3 ESV

³ Genesis 1:27 ESV

⁴ Marshall Gregory, *Shaped By Stories: The Ethical Power of Narratives* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2009), 1.

⁵ Karen Coats, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire, and Subjectivity in Children’s Literature*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2004), 1.

⁶ Harry Potter is the main protagonist in a series of 7 books. He is a boy wizard in a magical world who must battle evil with the help of his closest friends.

the more fantasy merged with my reality. I honestly believed at several times that I had magic powers. This sense of magical wonder plays a role in the art I make now.

Not only did I escape through books, I entered new worlds through movies. Having an intuitive visual understanding of the world, movies spoke a great deal to me. I believed that what I saw was real. The time spent watching a movie or show was time in which I was transported mentally to another world. Everything in *this* world would disappear, and I would find myself *in* the movie, experiencing everything the characters did. *Star Wars*⁷ was an ever-present part of my childhood; I remember going to the theaters to watch the prequel trilogies⁸. As a young and lonely child, eager for adventures, the character of young Anakin Skywalker⁹ definitely resonated with me. However, it probably wasn't until high school, when I befriended other *Star Wars* fans, that my deep admiration for the original trilogy really took root. By later befriending a fellow *Star Wars* fan in undergraduate school, my fandom grew exponentially. *Star Wars* was the fictional narrative through which I metaphorically understood the world at large. However, towards the end of my undergraduate studies, I went through a rather life-altering experience, which would shake the fundamental framework I had laid down.

In the spring of 2013, I had an experience in which God made himself known to me. I was in deep despair, when He spoke hope to me. I was tremendously moved, unlike anything I had experienced before. My mind opened up to a higher level. At first I was terrified, but that terror transformed into an overwhelming sense of comfort. I knew in my soul that I was experiencing the presence of God. This experience is something that I try to recreate through my work.

Before becoming a Christian, if I had to identify with a belief system other than atheism, I would have said I was a Jedi¹⁰. I idolized the Jedi morality and saw their mythology as a way to understand the world. After becoming a Christian, I still hold close to many of my fandoms, but my understanding of the world is now based in biblical truth. I have been able to look more objectively at these narratives and identify where truth is being spoken and where it fails. Although my conversion caused me to reevaluate the narratives that have shaped me, it also led me to discover a deeper meaning in these stories.

Stories like *Star Wars* give me a visual register for deeper and more intricate concepts of my faith. Even though there are some key differences between the Jedi mythology and Christianity, I'm struck by the shared language and themes of darkness and light as a device to understand how an unseen world works. For example, the novelization of *Star Wars: The Force*

⁷ An American epic space opera, with its first film installment, *Star Wars: A New Hope*, released in 1977. The subsequent two films to the original trilogy were *Star Wars: Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (1983).

⁸ *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* (1999), *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2002), and *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* (2005).

⁹ A fictional character in the *Star Wars* universe, who was initially introduced as the main villain, Darth Vader, in the original trilogy. Vader's backstory as Anakin Skywalker was central to the later released prequel trilogy.

¹⁰ The main protagonists in the *Star Wars* universe who are an ancient monastic group.

*Awakens*¹¹ opens with a poem [left], which is not unlike a passage you might find in a book of the old biblical prophets [right]. Both passages set up a separation between light and dark, and describe a perception and discernment about deeper truths, such as right from wrong.

*First comes the day
Then comes the night.
After the darkness
Shines through the light.
The difference, they say,
Is only made right
By the resolving of gray
Through refined Jedi sight.*¹²

*Then shall your light
break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall
spring up speedily;
your righteousness
shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord
shall be your rear guard.*¹³

This parallel in language and themes has expanded my understanding of my faith, allowing me to attach new, and more personal, meanings to these beloved stories. This more nuanced connection between my faith and fandoms sometimes creates slips in reality for me. Marshall Gregory describes this relationship well in his book, *Shaped by Stories*, when he describes “perpetual presences” as “a comparisons between, or associations with, real events and fictional events that give me a constant set of references that allow me to toggle back and forth between fictional world and real life, deepening my understanding of both.”¹⁴ Inevitably, I will read or watch a story, and an event or situation resonates with me. Through these moments, I get a metaphorical understanding of a theological concept. Specifically, concepts of God’s presence have been revealed through cinematic and narrative uses of light. I take themes about light and dark, which are represented in both *Star Wars* and the Holy Bible, and intermingle them in a way that helps me better understand each. I will elaborate on this more in a discussion of representations and metaphors in relationship to my faith, fandom, and art. First, I will better explain the need for narratives and their role in understanding spiritual experiences.

The Grand Narrative

CLARA

Is this a story or did it really happen?

THE DOCTOR

*Every story ever told really happened.
Stories are where memories go when they’re forgotten.*¹⁵

¹¹ The first installment of the *Star Wars* sequel trilogy released in 2015.

¹² Alan Dean Foster, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (New York: Del Rey, 2015), 3.

¹³ Isaiah 58:8 ESV

¹⁴ Gregory, *Shaped By Stories*, 13.

¹⁵ “Hell Bent,” *Doctor Who*, Directed by Steven Moffat. BBC, aired August 17, 2015, transcript, bbc.co.uk.

What I love about this brief dialogue from the British science fiction television series, *Doctor Who*, is the idea that every story originates from actual events. We as human beings are obsessed with telling stories. We thrive through them. Every culture, no matter where or when, tells stories. Joseph Campbell, in a well-known comparative analysis of mythologies says, "Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, myths of man have flourished."¹⁶ These epic stories fuel so much of our understanding of the world, specifically, the spiritual realm. A literary scholar and evolutionist, Jonathan Gottschall, describes the importance of story and faith as such, "In traditional societies, truths about the spirit world were conveyed not through lists of essays- they were conveyed through story."¹⁷ A culture is defined by the stories its peoples tell and all stories must have some kind of origin. We must have, at some point, started telling and sharing these ideas. Where do stories come from, and why are there similar elements present in various kinds of myths? Campbell says, "That myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into the human cultural manifestation."¹⁸ He believes that myth is nothing more than, "spontaneous productions of the psyche."¹⁹ However, writers such as, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis offer another way to consider myths and their origins.

I believe these narratives, consistent throughout the ages and different cultures, point to an underlying truth. What if there *is* this grand narrative that all these other narratives are based on? What if it isn't just a narrative made from human consciousness, but is one originating with God? A professor from the local theological seminary once told me a story about an evening stroll that J.R.R. Tolkien, Hugo Dyson, and C.S. Lewis once took. According to the story, in the Fall of 1931, the three gentleman began to talk about metaphor and myth just after dinner and had continued the conversation as they strolled along Addison's Walk near Lewis's room in Magdalen College.²⁰ This conversation was described in, *The Most Reluctant Convert: C.S. Lewis's Journey to Faith*:

Tolkien and Dyson, who shared Lewis's reverence for myth, romance and fairy tale, showed him that mythology reveals its own kind of truth and that Christianity is true mythology. Lewis had insisted that myths were nothing more than 'lies breathed through silver,' but Tolkien and Dyson answered that myth was better understood as 'a real though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human imagination.' They argued that on the great and universal myths, that of the dying God who sacrifices himself for the people, shows an innate awareness of the need for redemption not by one's own works, but as a gift from some higher realm. For them, the incarnation (of Christ) was the pivotal point at which myth became history. The life, death and resurrection of Christ not only fulfilled Old

¹⁶ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. (Novato: New World Library, 2008), 1.

¹⁷ Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*. (New York: Mariner Books, 2012), 118.

¹⁸ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 1.

¹⁹ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 2.

²⁰ David C. Downing, *The Most Reluctant Convert: C.S. Lewis's Journey to Faith*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 146. A book based upon letters that C.S. Lewis wrote to his brother Arthur during his spiritual conversion.

Testament types but also embodied – literally- central motifs found in all the world’s mythologies.²¹

This conversation would later encourage Lewis to commit his life to Christ and become a Christian. He was inspired by the ideas presented to him by Tolkien and Dyson and later investigated them in his own writings. In an essay, *Myth Became Fact*, Lewis writes:

Now as myth transcends thought, Incarnation transcends myth. The heart of Christianity is a myth, which is also a fact. The old myth of the Dying God, without ceasing to be myth, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It happens – at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. We pass from a Balder or an Osiris, dying nobody knows when or where, to a historical Person crucified under Pontius Pilate. By becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle.²²

Tolkien and Lewis were solidifying their views about the factual qualities and mythical relation to the story of Jesus right around the time Joseph Campbell published *Hero With A Thousand Faces*. In this book, Campbell introduces the concept of the “Hero’s Journey”, the mold into which most myths about heroes fit. In keeping with the views of Tolkien and Lewis, I can see similarities between Campbell’s Hero’s Journey and the story of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, and will compare them here.

Campbell describes the Hero’s Journey as, “The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation – initiation – return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth.”²³ He further describes these passages as, “a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return.”²⁴ I will parallel Campbell’s stages of the Hero’s Journey with passages from the New Testament recounting the story of Jesus Christ.

Separation

Call to Adventure-

Signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown.²⁵

The next day John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ I myself

²¹ Downing, *The Most Reluctant Convert*, 147.

²² C.S. Lewis, *God In The Dock: Essays on theology and ethics*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 66-67.

²³ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 23.

²⁴ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 27-28.

²⁵ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 48.

The first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon force he is about to pass.²⁶

The crossing of the first threshold-

The hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the 'threshold guardian' at the entrance to the zone of magnified power. Beyond them is darkness, the unknown, and danger.²⁷

The belly of the whale-

The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed in the unknown, and would appear to have died.²⁸

Initiation

The road of trials-

Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials....it may be that he here discovers for the first time that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage.²⁹

Atonement with the father-

did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." (John 1:29-31)

And the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. (John 1:32-34, Luke 3:22, Mark 1:10-11, Matthew 3:16-17)

Jesus enters into the wilderness to fast for forty days and forty nights and encounters the devil who tempts him. (Matthew 4:1-2, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-2)

Here there is a death of Jesus' human self, through his fasting and overcoming the temptations brought forth by the devil. Jesus dies to his human need for food and dies to his human want for power. (Luke 4:3-13, Matthew 4:3-11)

This would be the phase of Jesus' ministry. During this time he travels with his twelve disciples and uses the power of Holy Spirit to perform miracles, all the while avoiding persecution from the Pharisees. (Matthew 4:12-27:31, Mark 1:14-15:20, Luke 4:14-23:25, John 1:35-19:16)

²⁶ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 57.

²⁷ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 64.

²⁸ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 74.

²⁹ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 81.

Atonement consists in no more than the abandonment of that self-generated double monster – the dragon thought to be God. (superego) and the dragon thought to be Sin (repressed id). But this requires an abandonment of the attachment to the ego itself; and that is what is difficult. One must have faith that the father is merciful and then a reliance on that mercy.³⁰

The Ultimate Boon-

This is the highest and ultimate crucifixion, not only of the hero, but of his god as well. Here the Son and the Father alike are annihilated ...³¹

Return

When the hero-quest has been accomplished, through penetration to the source, or through the grace of some kind, the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy.³²

The crossing of the return threshold-

The two worlds, the divine and the human, can be pictures only as distinct from each other – different as life and death, as day and night. The hero adventures out of the land we know into darkness; there accomplishes his adventure, and his return is described as a coming back out of that yonder zone.³³

Master of two worlds-

Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and back.³⁴

Here God seemingly abandons Jesus on the cross as he cries out “My God, why have you forsaken me?” Then through Jesus’ death our sins are atoned for so that God can show us all mercy. (Matthew 27:45-46, Mark 15:33-34, Luke 23:44-46)

This stage would represent the three-day burial of Jesus Christ, as many during that time believed he was truly dead. (Matthew 27:57-61, Mark 15:42-47, Luke 23:50-56, John 19:38-42)

Jesus’ return is his resurrection. This is the key to the Christian gospel, that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead to bring us life. (Matthew 28:2-6, Mark 16:4-6, Luke 24:1-7, John 20:1-10)

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to several people: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, his twelve disciples, a crowd of 500, and Saul (later known as the apostle Paul). (Matthew 28:9-10, Mark 16:9-14, Luke 24:13-43, John 20:12-21:8, Acts 9:3-7, 1 Corinthians 15:6)

Jesus now has all authority over life in heaven and on earth while also having full power over death. (Matthew 28:18, Revelation 1:18, Hebrews 2:14,

³⁰ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 110.

³¹ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 164.

³² Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 167.

³³ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 188.

³⁴ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 196.

2 Timothy 1:10)

Freedom to live-

What, now, is the result of the miraculous passage and return?³⁵

The result of Jesus' death and resurrection is freedom from the power of sin and the gift of eternal life for all who believe in him. (John 3:16, Romans 6:23, 1 Corinthians 15:56-57, 1 Peter 2:24)

Joseph Campbell concludes that, "The goal of the myth is to dispel the need for such life ignorance by effecting a reconciliation of the individual consciousness with the universal will."³⁶ I insist that this "universal will" is none other than the will of God. Jesus' story is the perfect story of a man who submits completely to the will of God. As Jesus says in the Lord's prayer, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."³⁷ This is why Jesus is the example all Christians must follow so that we may also reconcile our sinful ways to the will of God. When we help bring His kingdom, we become a prominent part of His story.

Whether the story is intended to reflect the image of God or not, there are traces of Him in every story ever told. He is the supreme storyteller. I'm fascinated that these common themes in myths and popular narratives are signpost towards God and His grand narrative. This realization has led to a whole new appreciation for epic narratives. As I stated above, I'm a huge fan of the *Star Wars* saga. This is possibly one of science fiction's most grand narratives. Writer and director of the saga, George Lucas, was a fan of Campbell's writings. He intentionally incorporated key elements of myth in the *Star Wars* narrative. In an interview with Bill Moyers, Lucas said, "I consciously set about to recreate myths and the classical mythological motifs. I wanted to use those motifs to deal with issues that existed today."³⁸ I believe Lucas knew there would be a primal connection to the characters in his movies because he spoke with the language of our core need for a hero narrative. Moyers tells Lucas that many people have found ways to relate aspects of the *Star Wars* narrative to their religion or faith. Lucas attributes this connection to the introduction of "the Force". The Force is described in *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, by the master Jedi, Yoda, "Life creates it, makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us." When Lucas was asked if the Force is God, Lucas replied, "I put the Force in there to try and awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people, more a belief in a God than any particular religious system. The real question is to ask the question. Because if you haven't enough interested in the mysteries of life to ask the questions 'Is there a God?' or 'Is there not a God?' then that for me is the worse thing that

³⁵ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 205.

³⁶ Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 206.

³⁷ Matthew 6:9-10, ESV.

³⁸ Lucas, George. "The Mythology of Star Wars." Interviewed by Bill Moyers. *Public Affairs Television*, 1999.

can happen.”³⁹ This is one of the main reasons why I engage with spiritual themes within my work. I seek to have people ask themselves similar questions.

Narrative Experiences in Art

One way that I engage with these kinds of spiritual questions is by creating intangible experiences, which are not unlike most spiritual encounters. One thing I love about movies, like *Star Wars*, is that they create immersive experiences for viewers that are similar to spiritual encounters. Marie-Laure Ryan describes the unique quality of movies:

In contemporary culture, moving pictures are the most immersive of all media. Until Virtual Reality is perfected and becomes widely available, no other form of representation will approximate their ability to combine the spatial extension and fulness of detail of still pictures with temporality, narrative power, referential mobility (jumping across space and time), and general fluidity of language.⁴⁰

This is why the *Star Wars* saga is an inspiring narrative. Also, as stated earlier, *Star Wars* holds a specific significance for me in my understanding of my newfound Christian faith.

Star Wars has given me a certain frame of reference in understanding theological concepts, primarily through metaphor. Peter Stockwell explains the two parts to a metaphor:

[M]ost definitions of metaphor involve an understanding of two or more conceptual domains. Traditionally literary criticism has differentiated *tenor* (the familiar element) and *vehicle* (the new element which is described in terms of the old familiar element).⁴¹

For me, the *tenor* would be *Star Wars*, the narrative that I grew up with and through which I had already come to understand the world. The *vehicle* is my Christian faith, or theology. Stockwell goes on to say that, “Cognitive linguistics models the process of metaphor as a mapping of properties between the two space or domains.”⁴² This helps explain how I relate concepts or themes from *Star Wars* to similar concepts or themes in the Bible. Stockwell acknowledges that it is not unlikely that many come to form their philosophical worldview according to this kind of metaphorical mapping, rather than, directly from the objective world. He further describes this mapping:

Cognitive linguists prefer to see this way of conceiving reality as an ‘experiential myth’. It is *experiential* because it is set against the ‘objective myth’: both are equally representational,

³⁹ Lucas, “The Mythology of Star Wars.” 1999

⁴⁰ Marie-Laure Ryan. *Narrative as Virtual Reality 2: Revisiting Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2015), 85.

⁴¹ Peter Stockwell. *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*. (London: Routledge, 2002.), 106

⁴² Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, 107.

the experiential basis of cognitive science offer an understanding of language and thought that is grounded in human experience.”⁴³

Rodger Schank describes how experiential myths may be built:

“We seek to retrieve stories that seem to us to be identical. We are looking to say, in effect, *Well, something like that happened to me too or I had an idea about something like that myself.* In order to do this, we must adopt a point of view that allows us to see a situation or experience as an instance of ‘something like that.’ In other words, we must evaluate experiences with an intention of matching them to what we already have experienced.”⁴⁴

When I’m watching *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, and I see Rey⁴⁵ encounter the Force for the first time, I experience it as I experienced my first encounter with God, and likewise, the narrative encounter helps me understand my first experience God. Through metaphorical mapping and experiential myths, I hope my work will create an encounter with spiritual truths for the viewer.

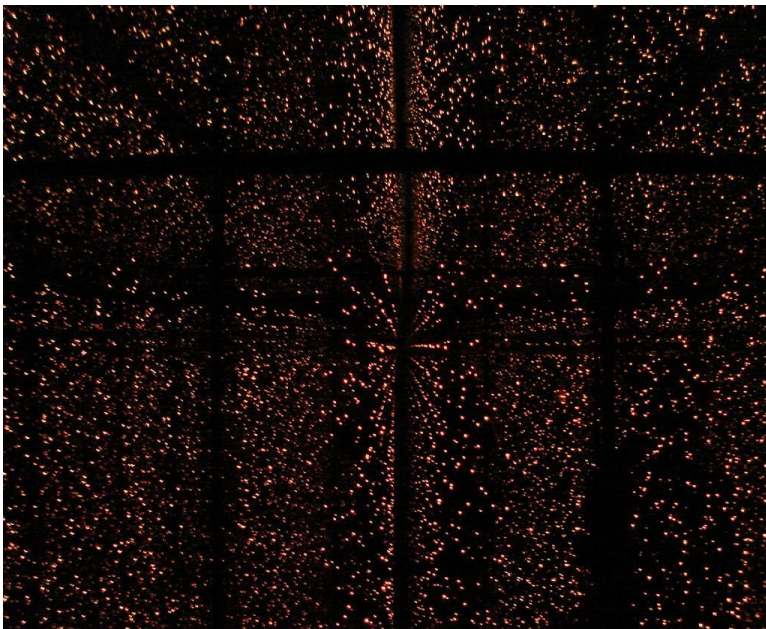


Figure 1. Stanley Landsman, *Walk-In Infinity Chamber*, 1968. Wood, glass, lightbulbs, and electric circuitry, 138 × 138 × 138 in. Milwaukee Art Museum.

The first time I experienced Stanley Landsman’s piece, the *Walk-In Infinity Chamber (1968)*, I was at the Milwaukee Art Museum with a friend. We were meandering, as one does in a museum, when I entered a room and a huge, black box-like structure in the corner. Around the side of it, against the wall, was a small set of stairs leading up to a platform, which turned into a doorway. I walked inside the box; it was dark and warm. I held my breath shortly upon entering, for I was rather taken aback. I seemed to have entered an infinite star field. (See Fig. 1) All around, below and above me, were tiny points of light. I felt like I was floating in space. I could feel my feet on the floor, but my imagination

was carrying me off to an expansive space. The space I physically inhabited was rather confined, but distorted, and I felt tiny, within an endless environment. I was captivated and mesmerized. I

⁴³ Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, 109.

⁴⁴ Rodger Schank. *Tell Me A Story: A New Look as Real and Artificial Memory.* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 24.

⁴⁵ The main female protagonist in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, 2015.

believe this was mostly due to the fact that I did not expect to have such an encounter, that the surprise of the event is what captivated me. Still, years later, I went back and encountered the piece again, this time with expectation, and it did not disappoint. All I had to do was let my imagination go, and to, once again, forget all that I knew prior to entering. What is so important about Landsman's piece, is how it made me feel small, regardless of its *physical* dimension. I was humbled.

I'm in love with this kind of deep, soul-touching humility. It is a feeling of being a tiny speck in an overwhelming expanse. It is as if you become aware that you are a part of something bigger than yourself. This is not a terrifying feeling for me; it is one of comfort and excitement. It is the realization that my existence is limited, that so much has come before me and will continue after me. It's a way of understanding my existence, such that I am eternally grateful for it; a realization that life is a gift, a blessing, which I would never want to give up. This grand narrative, of which I feel a part of, remains beyond my comprehension. Landsman's *Infinity Chamber* has greatly influenced my recent work and I have created environments attempting to achieve a similar experience.

One of the first inspired installations was *Be Still and Know* (2015). This installation was a 9-foot cube room, which was completely black on the inside. Before the visitor could enter the room, they had to blow out a candle near the entrance. Then, they peeled back the black curtain and entered the space. Once inside, complete darkness hindered any visibility. As their brain was deprived of visual stimuli, they might have seen images or patterns in the dark, resulting from their imagination. The smell of incense lingered in the room and the humming sound of pink noise could be heard. The walls and floor were hard, as to withdrawal any stimulating texture. When the person inside of the room remained still for a short while, a tiny light would come on. A small single black globe with holes of light shining through it, hung from the center of the ceiling. If they remained still long enough, their eyes might begin to adjust and notice the subtle light reflected on the black walls and floor, creating a faint glow. (See Fig. 2) The longer they sat in the light, the better they saw. If they moved then the light flicked off and remained off till they were still again. People's experience was different and what he or she encountered was only what he or she brought in with them.

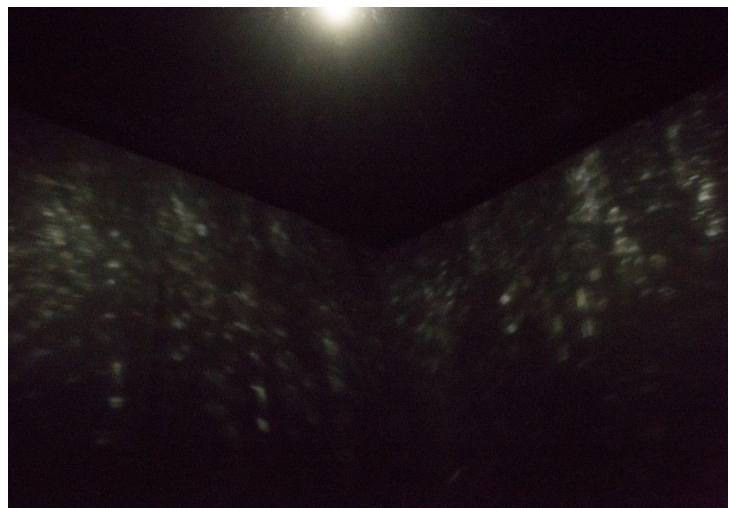


Figure 2. Light pattern cast onto the black walls. Sara Paige, *Be Still and Know* (2015). Light Installation, 9 x 9 x 9 feet. Champaign, IL.

I love to gather people's responses after they have interacted with my work. It is encouraging to read how the work affected them and what kinds of stories they made up. Some responses that I think really capture the kind of experience I intended:

Once I got in, I froze in the dark. I figured it would take forever for my eyes to adjust to the pitch black, so I reluctantly started feeling my way across the wall. Where was the piece? Couldn't feel a piece. Am I about to step on something? Then a light came on. First I was surprised, somewhat unpleasantly, that there was nothing actually in the room but me. And a light. But it turned off so I continued to feel my way across the room, noticing when I got to a corner it turned back on. I'll admit I was a little enthralled. The layers of metaphor had not escaped me and actually applied all-too-well to my currently discouraged self. I felt God say, "I see you." I was warmed.

-Meg Sikes⁴⁶

There was an overwhelming sense of peace while I was in there. It was very isolating but in a good way, I felt like my mind was finally separated from all the stress and distractions of everyday life. The darkness was actually very comforting. When the little light came on, it didn't disrupt any of the previous feelings. It was like there was another presence in the room. Now I believe that God is always with us, but there are times that His presence feels so close and almost tangible. That was the feeling I had when the light started to glow. As I lay on the floor watching that glowing orb appear to subtly morph and change color, I felt like a celestial being watching the birth of a universe.

- Josh Silic⁴⁷

In my recent installation, *Presence*, the viewer becomes surrounded by hundreds of lights, similar to the feel of Landsman's *Infinity Chamber*. I also play with this idea of being on a journey and being a part of a grand narrative, by creating an environment to be traveled through. As you move through *Presence*, you enter into a different world, one of darkness, where ambient light reflects off clear strands, like dangling vines. There is a pathway cleared through the middle, the opening is conveniently human shaped, to invite one into it. There is a tiny light in the middle at the top, just barely illuminating the way and pulling you into the piece. You move forward into the work. You're in the middle of it, looking up at the tiny drop of light. All around you lights start to cascade down around you, as if it were raining light. Looking out into the dark room you see tiny

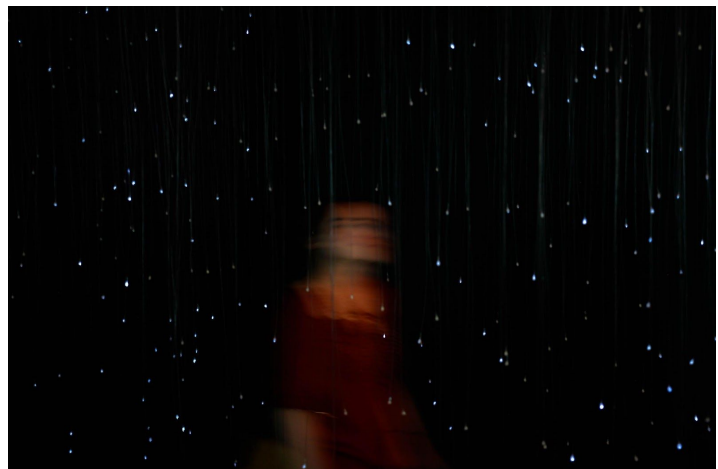


Figure 3. Courtney Cross moving through the lights. Sara Paige, *Presence*, 2016. Light Installation, 4w x 9h x 7d feet, Krannert Art Museum.

⁴⁶ Meg Sikes, Facebook message sent to Sara Hoag's account, February 24th, 2015.

⁴⁷ Josh Silic, Facebook message sent to Sara Hoag's account, March 3rd, 2015.

droplets of light tinkling all around you. Then the rain suddenly freezes and you are in a still star field. (See Fig. 3) Every point of light illuminates the space around you and your body glows in the subtle, but overwhelming, light. You reach for a droplet of light and hold it as it illuminates your hand. Then the light goes out and you're cast back into darkness, where you began.

As mentioned above, I enjoy hearing the ways people experience my work.

I am staring into a sky and know that something dictates lights; I don't know what it is. That is to say: I can see that the stars are arranged. Still, they unsettle me. I am in a tunnel of pinpricks that seem to spark too perfect. The drip on each side elucidates time. I never expected to experience light moving.

- Jack North⁴⁸

I like Sara's raindrops. So many raindrops. The room was dark and the rain made it lighter. I liked when they light up I could put them in the flower to give it rain.

-Eleanor Kloepper (3 y.o.)⁴⁹

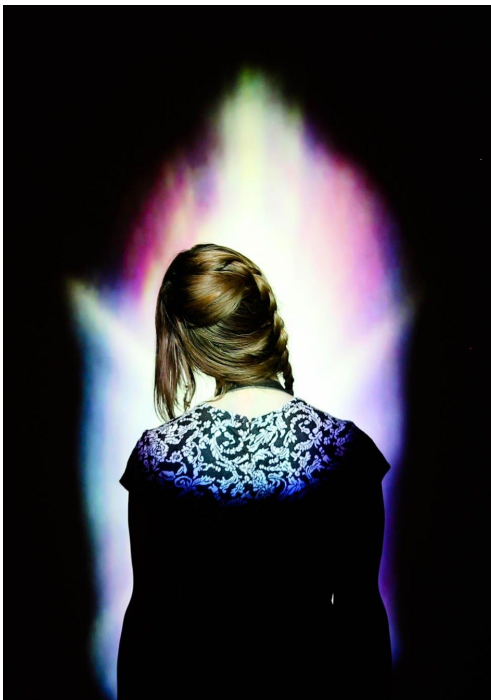


Figure 4. Sharayah Honeyager admiring the light. Sara Paige, *Being*, 2016. Video Installation. 6w x 12h x 4d feet, Krannert Art Museum

A piece that was created parallel with *Presence*, was *Being*. My intention with *Being* was to facilitate an encounter with something larger than one's self. Imagine you walk into a dark room, and there is a low humming sound coming from one end. The vibrations are centered around a 12-foot vertical screen on the wall. In the center, just above eye-level is a tiny dancing light that seems tied to the sound as if it were generating it. It draws you in. About 3-feet away from the screen you trip an invisible trigger with your movement. A loud flashing sound is heard overhead. The tiny dancing light has now expanded to almost the size of your body. (See Fig. 4) Standing in front of the projection, the upper half of your body is lit up and you see your silhouette before you in the middle of glimmering light. The light is like a colored aura. The center is pure white and as the rays shine outward they give way to the hidden color inside the light, producing an outer ring of vibrant colors. There is a louder humming sound from above, and your whole body is caught in vibrations. It is like you've

encountered another being floating there before you. Or, perhaps it is like a magical mirror, and it reflects you as being of light. Feeling perhaps a little overwhelmed you move back and the sound flashes off as the light shrinks back down.

⁴⁸ Jack North, Facebook comment on Sara Hoag's status, April 12th, 2016.

⁴⁹ Eleanor Kloepper, as transcribed by Kim Kloepper, Email to Sara Hoag, April 21st, 2016.

With *Being*, it was really interesting to watch the hesitancy with which most people approached it. The sound could be rather ominous at first and when the light expands upon being triggered, it would often startle people. However, once they knew what was coming and how their movement triggered it, they were able to engage with it more enthusiastically, or contemplatively. This is reflected in some of the responses I received:

You know how in old sci-fi movies, they go into warp speed and the lights around them have this elongated effect? That's how I felt, like going into warp speed.

-Gergana Slavova⁵⁰

My kids both really enjoyed *Being*! My 3 year-old liked the surprise of when the light would get bright as she ran toward the wall and then played with her shadow. My 16 month old laughed at the "power" of turning on and off a light just by moving his arm!

-Kim Kloepper⁵¹

One thing that I did not anticipate is how children would interact with works, like *Presence* and *Being*. Kids have a fascinating imagination, and it was satisfying to watch the wonder on their faces as they interacted or played with my work. I believe that they felt something like the wonder I felt when I first entered Landsman's *Infinity Chamber*. I even heard people refer to my work with the word, "magical." It makes me think about the transformative power of my childhood narratives and the magic I experienced. To know I captured a certain kind of magic with my work excites me.

"This Weapon is Your Life"⁵² (Lightsabers)

In *Being*, I used the sounds of a lightsaber to augment the experience, creating a sonic blanket over the environment. Sound is such a weird, ethereal thing. It's invisible but felt. As Michael Bull describes, "Sounds are as close to us as our thoughts. Sound moves through the body and feels amorphous."⁵³ It is merely vibrations in space, yet it has the ability to move us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. In the *Star Wars* universe, a Jedi's lightsaber hums at a specific frequency, attuned to them alone, and it has the ability to increase Force meditation. The vibration created by the crystal in the lightsaber helps the Jedi center themselves and find balance in the Force. The lightsaber is an extension of a Jedi's Force awareness. They meditate in order to forge the connection between the crystal inside the lightsaber and its power source. During their meditation they recite this mantra:

⁵⁰ Gergana Slavova, Facebook comment on Sara Hoag's status, April 13th, 2016.

⁵¹ Kim Kloepper, Email to Sara Hoag, April 21st, 2016.

⁵² Obi-Wan Kenobi, *Star Wars: Episode II Attack of the Clones*, 2002.

⁵³ Michael Bull, "Auditory," in *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art*, ed. Caroline A. Jones. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 112.

*The crystal is the heart of the blade.
 The heart is the crystal of the Jedi.
 The Jedi is the crystal of the Force.
 The Force is the blade of the heart.
 All are intertwined;
 the crystal, the blade, the Jedi.
 We are one.*⁵⁴

The mantra they recite while forging the connection reminds me of the unity of the Trinity. I could describe the complex nature of the Trinity through a similarly formatted mantra.

*The Holy Spirit dwells within Christ.
 The Holy Spirit's home is with God.
 God dwells with his people through the Holy Spirit.
 The Holy Spirit was given to us through Christ.
 All are intertwined.
 The Holy Spirit, Christ, and God.
 They are one.*

This is another example how I may come to understand theological concepts by mapping metaphorical meaning on ideas I already understand. From initially understanding a Jedi's deep connection to his or her lightsaber, I'm coming to know of a deeper connection I can have with God through the Holy Spirit. One's connection with God can be strengthened through prayer and meditation on the Word. Caleb Grimes describes how meditation with the Force is similar to one's experience of God, "The Force all around us is also roughly similar to slowing your mind through concentration and meditation, which leads to the realization that we can connect to God. We can tap into his creative energy, which is in everything, including ourselves, because he made us. This is called General Revelation."⁵⁵ General Revelation or Natural Revelation is a term used to describe the awareness of a higher power, being God. Beyond the meditative power of the lightsaber, I'm also drawn to another aspect of it; the visual representation evoked by the sound of a lightsaber; that the sound is a representation of its light.

The sound of a lightsaber, in the context of its containing, cinematic narrative, is that of energy and light. Outside of its narrative space, however, it is created by the hum of an idling movie projector and interference picked up by a microphone near a television set. Interestingly, these sounds still have a relationship to light. The projector is designed to use light shining through the film, while a television set uses light bulbs to illuminate a screen. Nonetheless, I included the sound of a lightsaber in *Being*, as a means to tie the sound of light to the projection of

⁵⁴ Daniel Wallace, *The Jedi Path: A Manual for Students of the Force*. (California: Chronicle Books, 2015), 62.

⁵⁵ Caleb Grimes. *Star Wars Jesus: A spiritual commentary on the reality of the Force*. (Enumclaw: WinePress, 2007), 124.

light. It was a way to give the viewer a full experience of being in the light. As eluded to, I chose this sound for its identifiable narrative association, to provide an entrance into the themes that connect the science fiction of *Star Wars* with Biblical narrative.

“In You Must Go”⁵⁶ (The Dark side of the Force)

In *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, Luke Skywalker is training with the Jedi master Yoda in the ways of the Force. During training one day, Luke encounters a dark and cold tree cave, which is strong with the dark side of the Force.

YODA

“Run! Yes. A Jedi's strength flows from the Force. But beware of the dark side. Anger... fear... aggression. The dark side are they. Easily they flow, quick to join you in a fight. If once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny, consume you it will, as it did Obi-Wan's apprentice.”

LUKE

“Vader. Is the dark side stronger?”

YODA

“No... no... no. Quicker, easier, more seductive.”

LUKE

“But how am I to know the good side from the bad?”

YODA

“You will know. When you are calm, at peace. Passive. A Jedi uses the Force for knowledge and defense, never for attack.”

LUKE

“But tell me why I can't...”

YODA

(interrupting)

“No, no, there is no why. Nothing more will I teach you today. Clear your mind of questions. Mmm.”

LUKE

*“There's something not right here.”
“I feel cold, death.”*

YODA

“That place... is strong with the dark side of the Force. A domain of evil it is. In you must go.”

⁵⁶ Yoda, *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, 1980.

LUKE
 “What's in there?”

YODA
 “Only what you take with you.”⁵⁷

Yoda sent Luke to go into the cave and face the dark side. (See Fig. 5) Similarly, in *The Force Awakens*, Rey encounters the main villain, Kylo Ren, for the first time in an open crevice or



Figure 6. Rey's encounter with Kylo Ren in *The Force Awakens*. 2015

cave-like environment. (See Fig. 6) My project, *Presence*, references these moments by simulating a cave-like environment. These kind of confined spaces create experiences that one must confront in a specific way, where

there isn't a quick or easy way out. Such confined moments of confrontation are much like spiritual conviction. We are forgiven once we confront our sin, the inner darkness, which separates us from God. We must walk through it by confronting and acknowledging it, and then repenting. This figurative movement represents a sort of passage from one way of being into another. In my work, it's by moving through the space that you encounter the light.



Figure 5. Luke Skywalker going in to the cave on Dagobah in *The Empire Strikes Back*. 1980.

However, darkness is just as much a part of the work as the light. Before there was light, there was darkness. Darkness can represent several ideas, themes, or concepts. It holds the unknown; it is vast and seemingly endless. Darkness can trigger fear and anxiety. As described in *The Art of Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, “The Force's dark side feeds off fear. And there is no more base human fear than fear of the dark.”⁵⁸ Our imagination runs wild inside dark voids. More often than not, however, our worst fears are not in the darkness, but inside us. It is this inner darkness that Luke must face inside the cold, dark cave. He encounters a vision of Darth Vader, whom he battles only to defeat and see his own face inside the helmet. As Yoda said, what's in there is only what he took with him. This was much like my installation, *Be Still and Know* , where whatever the person encounters inside the room was only what they took in with them.

⁵⁷ Lucas, George. *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*. Directed by Irvin Kershner. By Lawrence Kasdan. Performed by Mark Hamill and Frank Oz. United States: Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation, 1980. Transcript.

⁵⁸ Phil Szostak. *The Art Of Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. (New York: Abrams, 2015), 66.

Even one's expectation of what to find in there would alter their experience. One visitor responded:

"I spent most of my time pawing around in the dark trying to figure out what I needed to do in order to make something happen. I never got the memo that I was "actually" supposed to be still. I was too busy trying to "figure" it out. In all my frantic searching I was never able to find the light I was seeking. As well, the moment I was finally still, my back was turned to the light, so I never saw it. Kind of ironic and poetic."

-Russell Dietrich⁵⁹

Even though Russell thought he knew what to do, perhaps out of a small amount of pride or arrogance, in this case, it prevented him from seeing the piece as it was meant to be experienced. Russell's experience with *Be Still and Know*, reminds me of Luke's encounter with the cave, where he saw his face inside of Darth Vader's helmet, a reflection of the dark side within himself. As stated by Lucas, "What these films deal with is the fact that we all have good and evil inside of us and that we can chose which way we want the balance to go."⁶⁰

When in darkness and in silence we wander to the dark corners of our mind. What troubles us will always be waiting there for us, until we confront it and defeat it. As Caleb Grimes also points out, "Yoda calls the cave a 'domain of evil.' How do we become aware of our own potentially evil side? Part of the answer is that we must be active in rooting out evil, however it pops up throughout our lives."⁶¹ In order to overcome darkness, one must become aware of the contrasting light.

"It's Always Been There"⁶² (The Light Side of the Force)

In *The Force Awakens*, the Force calls to Rey and she is drawn into the dungeon of Maz's⁶³ castle. Rey walks down a dark hallway and as she comes to a stop in front of a closed door, the lock is mysteriously opened and she walks into a dark room full of crates and barrels. On top of a box is an old wooden chest; she is compelled to open it. Inside is a lightsaber, specifically Luke Skywalker's first lightsaber, and the same one that belonged to Anakin Skywalker. Rey reaches for the lightsaber and upon touching it she is pulled into a Force vision. Several scenes flash before her eyes and she struggles to comprehend it all. She stumbles back out of the room, overwhelmed with a sense of fear, and Maz quickly approaches her side.

REY

⁵⁹ Russell Dietrich, Facebook message sent to Sara Hoag's account, March 5th, 2015.

⁶⁰ Lucas, "The Mythology of Star Wars," 1999.

⁶¹ Grimes, *Star Wars Jesus*, 117.

⁶² Maz, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, 2015.

⁶³ A supporting character to the protagonists in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*.

What was that? I shouldn't have gone in there.

MAZ

That lightsaber was Luke's. And his father's before him and now, it calls to you!

(Rey stands, fast. Still overwhelmed, emotional, speechless.)

REY

I have to get back to Jakku.

MAZ

Han told me.

(reaches out, holds Rey's hand)

Dear child. I see your eyes. You already know the truth. Whomever you're waiting for on Jakku, they're never coming back. But... there's someone who still could.

REY

Luke.

MAZ

The belonging you seek is not behind you. It is ahead. I am no Jedi, but I know the Force. It moves through and surrounds every living thing. Close your eyes. Feel it.

The light. It's always been there. It will guide you. The saber. Take it.⁶⁴

As Maz says, “Close your eyes. Feel it. The light. It’s always there.” The way in which the light side of the Force is imagined in *Star Wars* is how I understand my Christian God and third part of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. As the Jedi are Force users, Christians are imbued with the power of the Holy Spirit. I envision the light within as the Holy Spirit. There is a connection between the Holy Spirit and I, I just have to acknowledge and listen when the Holy Spirit speaks. I used this underlying presence of light within my installations.

Some of my recent work features a single light source when no one is moving around or near it, or when it is not activated. With *Presence*, this consisted of a tiny little droplet of light in the very middle of all the lights. (See Fig. 7) In *Being*, the small light projected in the middle of the screen stays there and continues to

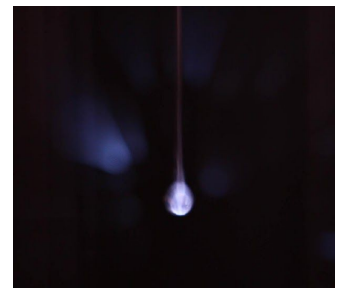


Figure 7: Single droplet of light, Sara Paige, *Presence*, Light Installation, 2015. Krannert Art Museum.

⁶⁴*Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. Directed by J.J. Abrams. By Lawrence Kasdan, J.J. Abrams, and Michael Arndt. Performed by Daisy Ridely and Lupita Nyong'o. Burbank, California: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2016. Transcript. 64-65.

flicker while no one is around. Since the light inside of *Be Still and Know* only comes on when there is no movement, it is always on when no one is in the room. This autonomous state of being is a central feature, a representation of a system or entity that is not contingent upon your presence. While it exists separate from you, you can choose to enter into a relationship with it.

Light is a key visual theme throughout the Holy Bible because it represents the presence of God. God is light and Jesus is the Light of man.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.⁶⁵

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."⁶⁶

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.⁶⁷

For it is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness.⁶⁸



Figure 8: Dessa Thompson playing with their shadow in the light. Sara Paige, *Being*, Video Installation, 2016. Krannert Art Museum.

When we are in the light, we are in the presence of God. Bruno Forte describes this presence of God's light so eloquently, "This light which shines from the abyss of the beginnings and of the eighth day is nothing other than a mysterious sharing in the life of God the Trinity, the womb and guardian of everything that exists: all things are created by the Father in the eternal generation of his Word, the Son, and the Spirit is the manifestation of this Word, the light shining from the Word, in which each of the creatures called to existence finds light."⁶⁹

When we are within the light of the Lord we know the truth about ourselves. This is how to identify one's inner darkness, by comparison to God's light. As yet stated beautifully again by Forte, "It is only by divine light that everything is truly illuminated, and so it is only in that light that everything finds its true place and full meaning: the vocation and mission of human beings, the encounter with the God who saves."⁷⁰

⁶⁵ 1 John 1:5-7

⁶⁶ John 8:12

⁶⁷ Revelation 21:23

⁶⁸ Psalm 18:28

⁶⁹ Bruno Forte, *The Portal Of Beauty: Towards a Theology of Aesthetics*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 67.

⁷⁰ Forte, *The Portal Of Beauty: Towards a Theology of Aesthetics*, 69.

I envision the light within my work as a representation of how God is present in our lives. It surrounds the viewer as they are situated inside of it, as in *Presence*. With *Being*, the viewer's presence activates the light. The projection covers their body in light. It becomes a mirror, reflecting an unseen nature. Their shadow casted upon the wall signifies this split nature between dark and light. (See Fig. 8) They are simultaneously surrounded by light, but become the absence of it. We are made aware of God's holiness in comparison to our fallen ways. However, the halo of light surrounding the person can be read as emanating from the person recalling Matthew 5:14, "You are the light of the world." The projection of light also creates another body in relation to the viewer. The viewer can choose to be in the light or stand outside of it. They can either see themselves in the light or as merely sharing a space with it. This interaction with the piece establishes the importance of a relationship with the work, which hints at an underlying aspect of the production of these installations – that they involved a collaboration with my community.

"Together We Can Rule The Galaxy"⁷¹ (Community)

I've recently begun to invite others into my art making process. With one project, I had a soldering party as a local maker space. People I had never met showed up to help. I remember one comment someone made: I thanked them for their help and they expressed their pleasure to help since it made them feel like they were a part of something bigger. That comment and expression of joy has stuck with me. It was in that moment that I realized what kind of art I really want to make. I want to make something that any person can feel a part of. Even if people can't contribute with the physical work, there have been other ways in which I've invited people to be a part of it. Supplies for *Presence* became quite pricey so I put a call out for donations to all my friends and family. The full cost of the project was almost covered within a couple weeks. Some people even directly donated supplies too. Furthermore, since the work is quite technical I'd occasionally have to call upon others to assist me with debugging, or overcoming programming and code errors. I'd say the communal aspect of making this work is very much a part of it, and that is reflected in how I expect others to engage with the pieces.

What makes a journey great is that it is not traveled alone. Amongst all these grand narratives is the importance of relationships: the relationship of the hero to the mentor and/or



Figure 9. Kate Norcross and Lynette Strickland gazing upward at all the lights. Sara Paige, *Presence*, 2016. Krannert Art Museum.

⁷¹ Darth Vader, *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, 1980.

helper(s). Much of a good story is carried upon the relationships that the characters build. In the *Star Wars* saga, Luke may be the main character, but he is tied to and surrounded by many other strong characters, such as Han Solo⁷² and Princess Leia⁷³. More so, the story is truly that of his relationship to his father, Darth Vader.

One aspect that I love about being a big fan of a popular story is being a part of the fan community. There is something magical about creating a connection with another human being based solely upon a shared fondness for a story. Jonathan Gottschall points out the importance of story in a community by stating, “Story –sacred and profane- is perhaps *the* main cohering force in human life. A society is composed of fractious people with different personalities, goals, and agendas. What connects us beyond our kinship ties? Story.”⁷⁴ After *The Force Awakens* was released in theaters, I was invited to join a discussion group on Facebook⁷⁵ where fans talked only about ideas related to the movie. The group became a breeding ground for theories about questions raised by the movie, such as “who is Rey?” Some theories started to feel canonic based upon how many other people would agree with it. Schank explains, “Learning which stories can be told as new ones and which ones are part of the subculture is what understanding the world you live is all about. Each subculture has its own official stories. Knowing them means gaining what one needs from the subculture.”⁷⁶ Those of us in the group would get so hyped up about ideas that they just seemed like they were a part of the story whether or not the writers intended it. We started building our own story of the story. These ideas of who Rey could be altered how I would understand plot points upon multiple viewings of the movie. The stories we told each other altered our experience of the story.

What fascinates me so much is how we all began to live in this world, believing certain things to be real. These characters were actual people in our minds. We all shared this longing to be a part of this larger fictional universe. It is obvious that the writer and director of *The Force Awakens*, J.J. Abrams, was aware of this effect because of the very nature of the story. He says, “How *Star Wars* relates to our lives is everything. What’s my place in the world? How am I connected to everyone else? The light and dark – the Force is a critically important component in this. It’s about belief on some level- and the ability to be aware of your place in the world.”⁷⁷

My work is very much about building communities and creating a space for an experience; an experience for someone to encounter something that will trigger their imagination and spark the idea of being a part of something bigger than themselves. It’s about creating a moment for them, one that cannot be simply captured in a picture. The work is not easily photographable. The image of the work isn’t the point. We long to capture images in order to evoke memories of an experience. We think images have the power to hold a story, and they might, to an extent. What I

⁷² A supporting character to the main protagonist, Luke Skywalker.

⁷³ A supporting character and sister to the main protagonist, Luke Skywalker.

⁷⁴ Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How stories make us human*, 138.

⁷⁵ Social media networking website.

⁷⁶ Schank, *Tell Me A Story: A New Look as Real and Artificial Memory*, 195.

⁷⁷ Szostak. *The Art Of Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, 69.



Figure 10. Eleanore Kloemper and her flower. Sara Paige, *Presence*, 2016. Krannert Art Museum.

want is for the work to inspire the viewer to go tell a story, to tell others about their experience with the work. I want the viewer to leave with nothing but a memory and a story to tell.

The importance of community most likely comes from my involvement in my faith community. I have personally learned to love and appreciate all types of people by existing in diverse communities where the only thing holding us together is our shared faith in Christ. I have grown close to people I normally would not have befriended, if it were not for us belonging to the same body of believers. As in my fandom communities, there are people I may barely know, but if we share a similar fondness, we can talk about it as if we had known each other for a long time. This lack of judgment, and vulnerability to a new relationship, has to come from a humble place. Communities only work well when each person is willing to work with and serve the other. Forte speaks of the importance of humility,

“self-sufficiency destroys human beings: being humbly receptive to and grateful for the light, instead, raises them up and allows them to attain beauty, toward which their deepest being is destined to journey.”⁷⁸ When we are able to connect to something larger that ties us all together and be aware of our place in it, then can we start to play our parts in this grand narrative where God is the author.

“Always In Motion Is The Future”⁷⁹ (Conclusion)

I’m still learning my part as I go, since much of my recent work has been a new experience. I’m discovering new ways to integrate technology into my art, and I’m letting my relationship with Jesus play a role in the process of making it. Watching how others have interacted with work I’ve made has given me wonderful moments of joy and realization that some areas need improvement. I have learned how the environment in which the work exists, is very much a part of the piece as well. Controlling the environment is another aspect to creating the work. If I want the viewer to feel transported to another realm, then I must make it feel as if they have fully left this one. I consider my work successful when people let their imaginations go and exist in wonder.

Watching as my friend’s children played and reacted to the work with a sense of wonder, made me aware of the importance of the public viewer. I can see my work existing in a more

⁷⁸ Forte, *The Portal Of Beauty*, 72.

⁷⁹ Yoda, *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, 1980.

public space in the future. I hope to expand the range of people who can engage with it; that people of all ages and physical abilities will be capable of interacting with the work. I look forward to seeking out public spaces or community galleries where I can continue to create magical moments for people.

If someone can be so captivated and amazed by beauty that for a brief moment they forget about the here and now, then I have succeeded. If my art can open a portal for someone to walk through and encounter something greater than themselves, then I have fulfilled my purpose within that moment. If I can make art, which brings joy or peace to another, then I am satisfied in my role as an artist.

I have also been called to missionary work. Understanding this call has greatly influenced my recent work. I'm helping build a community and create a space where people can experience something greater than themselves, artistically and spiritually. Where a church acts as a space for believers to encounter God, my work creates a space where one can hopefully encounter the idea that there is something bigger than themselves. The integration of my art making practice and my missionary calling is slowly being revealed. I can't quite explain it yet, but I'm starting to see how making art has given me skills and knowledge that will prove useful in ministry.

The light that is God, is something we all have the ability to possess and be a part of. As Forte beautifully states, "this light, which shines forth from the depths of creation both as it first was and now continues to be, as well as from the riches of the redemption offered to every creature, holds together beginning and fulfillment, like a hidden web which keeps in existence everything that exists."⁸⁰ We just need to choose to enter into it and exist within it. My goal is that my work will facilitate this. I will leave you with the eloquent words of two wise beings who have trained me well in the ways of the Light, so far.

*For my ally is the Force.
And a powerful ally it is.
Life creates it and makes it grow...
It's energy surrounds us
And binds us.
Luminous beings are we
Not this crude matter.
Feel it you must.
Feel the flow.
Feel the Force around you.*
-Yoda⁸¹

*The light is among you
for a little while longer.
Walk while you have light,
lest darkness overtakes you.
The one who walks in the
darkness does not know
Where he is going.
While you have the light,
Believe in the light, that you
may become sons of light.*
-Jesus⁸²

⁸⁰ Forte, *The Portal Of Beauty*, 67.

⁸¹ *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, 1980.

⁸² John 12:35-36, ESV.

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