

# Course of Nature

Abby Moore Keith · Jun 1, 2016



It's hard to tell if Nathan Bertling is a painter, a poet, or a prophet. On paper—well, actually on canvas—he's an artist, pulling masterpieces directly from real life. From his “bat cave” studio in the winding cavern of the Taylor's Mill, Bertling quotes Bono and Robert Frost in the same breath, breaking out into phrases of pure poetry. But it's the prophetic piece, his determination to use art to call people's attention to what really matters, that ultimately inspires.

Bertling grew up in Spartanburg with an affinity for art and a curiosity toward the divine, but it wasn't until his college years in Furman's art department and, later, his experiences at seminary, that his faith took form. In 2002, Bertling moved to Asheville to study under the realist expert Ben Long. As his artistic prowess grew, so did a great anxiety, and Bertling turned to heavy drinking. On completing his art studies, he returned to Spartanburg a functional alcoholic, longing to shake the addiction and reinvigorate his faith.



“There’s something about going through brokenness that shapes people. Artists have to suffer,” Bertling shares with conviction. “If you aren’t pressed into the crucible of suffering, you can’t possibly know the power of resurrection.”

Bertling’s resurrection—spurred on by detox and encouragement from family and church—is portrayed in his self-portrait *Post Tenebras Lux*, or “out of darkness, light.” Bertling encapsulates a certain determination, mirroring his own resolve to abandon the darkness of addiction and turn toward healing.



Not limited to oils, Bertling is also a draftsman. His charcoal drawing *Donnichee* captures the searching soul of a homeless man. Like *Post Tenebras Lux*, it’s one of several pieces betraying his prophetic nature, his earnest desire that his artwork speak “cultural messages of hope.” It carves a tangible depth, a reflection of reality that hints at something eternal.

“When we’re talking realism, it’s not just about reproducing something you can see to prove your talent. It’s about being moved,” Bertling explains. “It’s much like the difference between hearing a recording of your favorite band and then getting first-row seats. I want to paint from the first row.”

See more of Bertling’s work at [nathanbertling.com](http://nathanbertling.com)





Moore Keith, Abby: "Painter's Perspective: Nathan Bertling Views Life through a Refined Lens," TOWN Magazine, Vol. 6, No. 6, June 2016, p. 53-54