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We Create Because God Created First

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Abstract

"As art helps us ask good questions about life's experiences, how do we interpret and respond correctly to the questions it often raises?"

Posting about God's gift of creativity from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/we-create-because-god-created-first/>

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Comments

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in things

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Kim Brinkerhoff

A few weeks ago, my parents dropped off a box in my garage. I stood there, pried back the cardboard flaps, uncovering four years of books, papers, notes, photos, and artwork. When it came to the books, title after title had to do with my art major: *Wheel Throwing, The Complete Printmaker, Drawing Structure and Vision, Art History*, etc. However, what caught my attention was a sketchpad where, from time to time, I would write down small notes about art.

I flip through the pages and a phrase catches my eye: “*Creatio ex nihilo*” –Latin for “Creation out of nothing.”

“In the beginning God created” (Gen. 1:1). The first thing we know about God and His character—before anything else—was that He created, profoundly speaking the very existence of something into being without canvas, brush, paint, wood, metal, or even clay for that matter. In contrast, I have moved paint, formed clay, pressed prints, etched glass, and pushed lead—but I have *never* created anything out of nothing.

Another phrase catches my eye: “*Imago Dei*” – Latin for “Image of God”

“So, God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them” (Gen. 1:27). How incredible to think there are eight billion ways to make men and women, and He continues to come up with new combinations of personalities, body types, skin tones, and skill sets every day. To each new person He also instills creativity, this innate desire to imagine, dream, and experiment.

We all have it, all eight billion of us, because we are made to imitate God. We create because God created first. Human beings were made to be creative. In fact, it could be argued that some of the best art that has ever been created and the most talented artists that have ever existed haven't necessarily been sympathetic to the Christian faith. It is here that we can see God's common grace at work in all image-bearers whether they acknowledge God as the gift-giver of their talent or not. Art reflects the way people see the world and even its brokenness. Whether we realize it or not, we are all "makers," all "artists," and it is deeply embedded in our culture from creatively packaged commercials on TV to even what we choose what to wear in the morning. Art is everywhere and as we influence society by making art, art turns around to influence, shaping and molding us in return.

So, have you ever stopped long enough to notice just how much art drives culture? The artist presses into our everyday experiences and teases out the most compelling and profound reflections. This causes us to resonate with their experience whether we agree with their conclusions or not. Their perspective is their reality but is it to be yours? Is it to be mine? Have you ever watched a movie or listened to a song and thought, "that's exactly what I feel like"? On many different levels, art allows us to relate, identify, and connect as human beings. The common denominator of life's experiences regularly overlaps with other human beings. Often, artists are the script and song writers that connect one person to another.

What you experienced is part of your personal story inside the larger story of life. The art you make or see is an expression of what you feel and think as it connects to an important question we all should be asking and that is, "who am I?" The artist is always asking or stating something. Art does that. Good art keeps us coming back for more—to keep looking, listening, and seeing.

So, as art helps us ask good questions about life's experiences, how do we interpret and respond correctly to the questions it often raises? In his book *Art Needs No Justification*, Hans R. Rookmaaker says, "Art cannot be used to show the validity of Christianity; it should rather be the reverse. Christianity is true; things and actions and human endeavor only get their meaning from their relationship to God; if Christ came to make us human, the humanity and the reality of art find their foundation in him."¹ Good art reveals something about the world that is true. Beautiful art reveals something about the way God made it to be.

What is Rookmaaker saying? I think he is saying that because we all create, we need the lens of scripture and God's character to help us see correctly in order to "do humanity," or art, correctly. We do not need to be afraid of reality or what creativity can show us. Rookmaaker also says, "Contact with reality at a deep level is part of the Christian's life.

He enters into reality, rather than trying to pull away and escape from it. The flight from reality is a mark of Eastern and classical mysticism, not of Christianity.”² Creativity before the fall was perfect, beautiful, and flourishing. Now it is riddled with the effects of sin. Because of sin, art is also broken and can never fully depict the truth of God’s world. Even though it is broken, art provides a way for us to see both the simplicity and complexity of life. It helps us think about the way life was, the way it is now, and the hope of the restoration to come.

Creativity is part of God’s good design. *The Journal of Positive Psychology* published an article entitled, “Everyday Activity as a Path to Flourishing.”³ Within their research they surveyed 658 students and asked them to keep a journal for 13 days, recording their positive daily behaviors and noting their effects. Every day they logged the amount of time they spent being creative. The overall outcome was that the students who engaged in more creativity throughout the day led positive, fulfilled lives. Being creative like our Creator connects us to our design and purpose and in turn, leads to greater fulfillment. The work of our hands and the meditation of our hearts should reflect Him. We are most happy when we are doing what we were created to do, becoming more like the person we were made to reflect.

The last phrase that got my attention was “Christian” –Latin for “*Little Christ*” or “Follower of Christ.”

True fulfillment comes from being conformed to the image of Christ. As artists, we want to make art that reflects God’s character of truth, goodness, and beauty. Eight billion unique artists were made to create this kind of art. One day we will see what we were making with our whole lives, whether it was pointing to the Artist of all artists...or to something far less inferior. May we find satisfaction, joy, and contentment in the “doing of art” as it drives us to connect with the Artist who does all things well, and to this day, has a brush and pallet in hand when it comes to the canvas of you and me.

FOOTNOTES

1. H.R. Rookmaker, *Art Needs No Justification*. Regent College Publishing, 2010. Quote retrieved from goodreads.com
2. Ibid.
3. Tamlin S. Conner, Colin G. DeYoung & Paul J. Silvia. “Everyday Creative Activity as a Path to Flourishing.” *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 13:2, 17 Nov. 2016: pp. 181-189