



Creativity Matters

Nurturing Beauty



May 2022

Welcome to a Month of Nurturing Beauty

Beauty always has rules. It's a game. I resent the beauty game when I see it controlled by people who grab fortunes from it and don't care who they hurt. I hate it when I see it making people so self-dissatisfied that they starve and deform and poison themselves.
Ursula K. Le Guin

One of the huge confusions in our times is to mistake glamor for beauty.
John O'Donohue

Beauty is a complicated topic for many of us creatives. Culturally warped understandings and images of beauty twist our own thoughts about it and can even bring shame into our efforts. At the same time, our personal sense of “the beautiful” is our secret muse and guides every step of our work.

I took a painting course years ago at the University of Washington from an amazing and accomplished watercolor painter who was in deep professional pain. She confided in us that she was tired of not being able to embrace beauty as a value because of the modern academic view that there was no objective beauty.

I connected to it through my own feminist lens. The concept of beauty expressed through our culturally patriarchal view has far too often left me and my art seeming wrong, less beautiful and less legitimate.

So maybe our work this month is not simply to nurture beauty, but to nurture a *healthier view* of beauty. To reclaim our right to define beauty for ourselves. To assert versions of it that affirm our unique selves. And to turn it into a force that challenges, rather than serves, our culture's worst understandings of it.

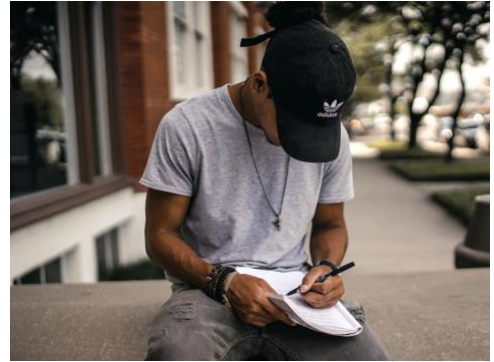
We know that beauty frees us. Maybe it's time for us to help free it.

Elizabeth
Soul Matters Creative Works Coach

Your Creative Journal

Our packet starts with questions/prompts for your Creative Journal. The creative journal work is here to help you “prime the pump” and slowly work your way into our monthly theme. It will also likely give you some fodder for whichever monthly project you pick.

And most importantly, by doing this monthly journal practice, you will end up with an amazing documentation of your work and ideas throughout the year. Your 2021-22 themed journey will be captured all in one place!



Here’s a video tutorial to get you excited about our regular journaling practice, with some tips about how to get the most out of your engagement with it:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ezE0FVdp9afT3TCsCFvcetKI30PSIHbq/view?usp=sharing>

Opening to Joy - Creative Journal Prompts

There is no “right” way to do this. Have fun, experiment and practice your creative courage. Pick whichever questions capture your imagination. Answer with words, images, collage, colors... whatever form of expression that the question or prompt evokes! Come ready to share from your Creative Journal and discuss your insights with your Creativity Matters group.

1. Define what beauty is to you? What experiences led to that understanding?
2. What cultural understanding of beauty have you most struggled against?
3. Do you aim for “beauty” in your work? Or does something else serve as your loadstar?
4. Do you consider yourself beautiful?
5. Have you ever been healed by beauty?
6. Have you ever been protected by beauty?
7. Do you believe that beauty teaches us anything? Or is meant to teach us anything?
8. How has beauty been a doorway to the divine for you?

Project Options

Take your pick! At least one, maybe more! Go as deeply as you desire. The important thing is to commit to doing the work - “make a mark!” To make it easier for you to do a project during the month, the project options have varying levels of complexity and time commitments.

Remember often the most powerful project experiences involve “mistakes” and unfinished attempts. Bring those “wonderful mistake” experiences with you to share with your group.

Most important of all, practice letting go of self-judgment and any expectations of professional or “artistic worthy” quality. The quality that matters is the quality of the experience, the richness of your personal journey. These projects are here for you and your journey of discovery.



Option A Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

Look at your own beauty through metaphor and simile! Here are your steps:

- Look into a mirror and sketch or write a minimum of 10 things that you find beautiful about the way you look.
- Then take those ten things and describe them lovingly using figurative language, especially similes. For example, “My hair is like golden thread,” “I have the smile of a fox in a henhouse,” “My eyes are as blue and deep as the ocean,” “My skin tells the story of my years,” or “I have a face as imperturbable as fate.”
- Use those images to create a drawing/collage/painting/artistic word cloud.

The goal is to represent and relate to your beauty in a whole new way!



Option B

You & Nature's Beauty

Everyone agrees that nature contains beauty, but each person's take on that is different. Celebrate your unique understanding of nature's beauty using one of these three exercises or create an exercise of your own.

Option One: Is there a time of day that best captures nature's beauty for you? Capture it in a painting, writing, photograph, etc.

Option Two: What happens to and inside you when you experience nature's beauty? How might you depict that?

Option Three: Images of nature usually involve the widest view possible. For instance, we love landscapes. But isn't there also beauty in leaning in close rather than stepping back? With paint, words, sketches or a photograph capture a part of nature "up close."

Option Four: Nature is usually lifted up in its blooming stage. Or when drenched in golden sunlight. But what about nature in its fallow form? What about a dying or broken branch? What about a sunless sky? Isn't there beauty in that? If you think so, prove it!

Option C

The Beautiful and Ugly Words We Carry

We've all been labeled. We've all been broken or healed by the words of others. These labels liberate and confine. We carry them with us, for better or worse.

Use this video to think about the ugly and beautiful labels/words that others have put on you: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNS_D-pw8y4

Use your reaction to it to create a piece that represents your own journey with the ugly and beautiful words you've been given.





Option D

Your Beautiful Story

Imagine you've been invited to a storytelling event, like [The Moth](#). The night is devoted to the theme of "Finding Beauty." Your job is to tell a personal story about a "beautiful moment" or a time when you encountered beauty in a unique way.

- Pull one of those moments into your mind.
- Jot some notes.
- Pull up a recording app on your phone.
- Record your story in 4 minutes or less.

Option E

The Ugliness of Culture's Beauty

When it comes to culture's warped views on beauty, we are often like that proverbial frog in boiling water: We are so saturated with distorted notions of beauty that we no longer recognize them as distortions.

So what would it look like to expose the ugliness of our culture's twisted images of beauty? Use your chosen modality to give it a try!

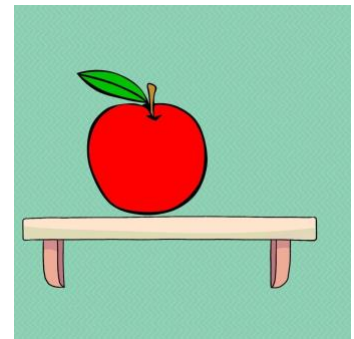
Option F

A Beauty Shelf

It's not easy to see the beauty in the ordinary. Some say the only way to fully appreciate ordinary objects is to pull them out of their normal context so they can be seen more fully. Think of it as putting them on a pedestal or using them to create a single-piece still life.

So give it a try. Clear a shelf, side table or coffee table. Treat it as your ordinary object pedestal for a week or so. Each day pick an ordinary object from or around your home and place it there to be contemplated... and appreciated.

Image an iron or an apple. A single flower from your garden or that picture of



your grandmother. One day it might contain a wine glass and the next it might feature your child's toy. The goal is to look around and notice which of the ordinary objects around you deserve a second look. Which ones seem to have a unique beauty of their own that deserves appreciation.

Take a picture of your favorite ones and bring them to your group to share.



Option G

Engage in “Nurturing Beauty” Using Your Favorite Modality

This is our standard and open-ended option. Simply use your favorite modality (i.e. form of creative expression: draw, paint, collage, movement, film, taking pictures, etc.) to represent your take on the monthly theme: Nurturing Beauty

For instance it might be about representing what you've learned from life about Nurturing Beauty. Or maybe it's something that captures your struggle with it.

As always, you are encouraged to begin with brainstorming ideas. Then consider playing with shapes, images, ideas or words that come up for you. Then based on that, create your piece.

Don't feel hemmed in. Let the general theme of Nurturing Beauty take you where it will. Come to your group ready to share not only your end product but also your process and what new insight/perspective you gained from it!

Grab Bag: Some extra sources of inspiration:

- Why Beauty Matters: <https://topdocumentaryfilms.com/why-beauty-matters/>
A provocative video essay claiming that 20th century art, architecture and music have turned their backs on beauty, making a cult of ugliness and leading us into a spiritual desert.
- 15 Beautiful, Abandoned Places Around the World:
<https://www.afar.com/magazine/beautiful-abandoned-places-around-the-world-that-you-can-actually-visit>
- Reclaiming UGLY as an Act of Queer Pleasure
<https://queerhealingjourneys.com/vanessa-lewis/>

Reminders

Don't forget about our FACEBOOK GROUP!

Here's the link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/777039013057350>

This is a great way for you to connect with Creativity Matters folks from around the country. Throughout each month, share creative inspiration about the theme and update others about your process and progress on your monthly projects. And see how others are progressing as well!

Make sure our PLAY LAB is on your calendar!

The PlayLab is for *everyone* in a creativity Matters group. That includes all the UUs from around the country.

This is not about presenting final projects. Rather it's a time to share our "in the middle" progress and work on our projects in the "virtual company" of each other. It's also a time to get some coaching on various creative techniques.

The Play Lab is held on the **second** Saturday of each month at 10am Pacific time (11am Mountain / noon Central / 1pm Eastern).

To join use this Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6385943428>.

This is the same zoom link to use each time.

For the first hour of our lab, we will have an open-ended space focused on show and shares.

For the second hour, this month, Elizabeth McKoy, our Creativity Matters coach and packet developer leads a mini workshop (45 minutes or less) on a creative skill or technique. To find out what each month's workshop will be on, check out the Creativity Matters Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/777039013057350>)



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