

3 Principles of Creativity from God

God's Word is a rich source of wisdom for understanding creativity. Discover principles of creativity from the tabernacle art, beauty lost in Ezekiel, and a woman with perfume. Learn practical lessons on the beauty of wholeness, engaging ugliness, and aesthetic actions that leave a legacy.

Brian Chan, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, is passionate about Biblical beauty that leads to a love for God. Before joining the DTS family, he served for 18 years as a pastor in Los Angeles and taught integration courses for 17 years as a professor at Biola University on a theology of beauty, art, and film. He is a workshop instructor and conference speaker in Hollywood on story, creativity, and beauty. As a pastor, he disciplined entertainment industry professionals and innovated creative outreaches to the community. As an award-winning fine artist, Chan has exhibited around the U.S. and is a member of LELA International Artists. As an accomplished martial artist in multiple disciplines of kung fu, he is a certified Wing Chun master (sifu) and worked as a fight choreographer, stuntman, and trainer for actors. As a writer, he is the author of "The Purple Curtain: Living Out Beauty in Faith & Culture from a Biblical Perspective, Not Easily Broken" (a novel), "Shadow" in "It Was Good: Performing Arts to the Glory of God," and "Movies: Celluloid Sanctification" in "Ordinary Saints." His other interests include geekdom in pop culture of comics, backpacking in nature, traveling, and bonsai art. He is married to his soulmate and journey mate, Ellen, and is the proud dad of his son. Chan's mission is to create beauty out of brokenness, exhibiting the beauty of Christ in all of life.

Scriptures as a source of wisdom on creativity

Format for this session:

1. Biblical Aesthetic
2. Principle of Creativity
3. Examples of Art

I. First Principle

1. Psalm 27:4-5

"Beauty" - נָאֵם (na'em):

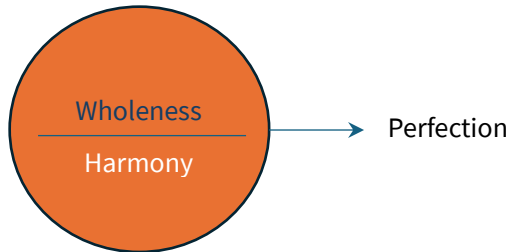
- Isaiah 33:17
- Psalm 50:1-2

2. What did David see? 2 Samuel 7:2 – the "Tent"

Tabernacle Art & the Attributes of God

- Gold: **divinity**
- Rams skin dyed red: **grace**
- Black goat hair: **mysteriousness**
- Altar of shewbread: **providence, immanence/presence**

- Altar of incense: **sweetness, holiness**
- Cherubim: **transcendence, heavenliness**
- Menora with flowers: **immanence/presence, hope, goodness**
- Ark: **king, majesty, faithfulness, righteousness, holiness, transcendence, mercy**



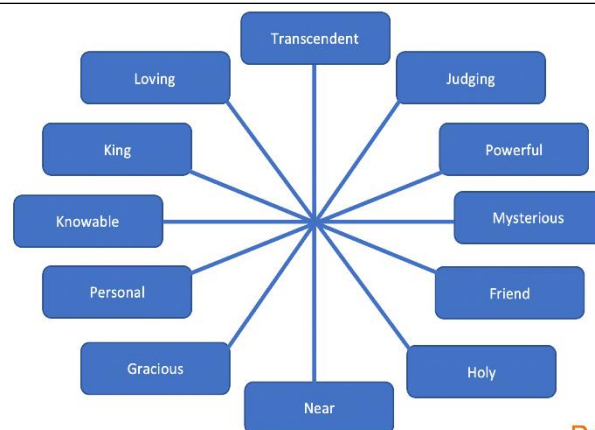
“Harmony is not the absence of but the **equilibrium** between opposites... a **polarity between two apparently contradictory aspects** that become harmonious only because they are in opposition to each other. And once these aspects are transported to the level of visual relationships, the result is symmetry.” (Umberto Eco, *History of Beauty*)

Thomas Aquinas, ***Integritas*** (*Summa Theologiae*, I, 73, 1c.)

“The first type of perfection is present when the thing has all that makes up its substance. The whole object’s form is its perfection and arises out of the **integrity of its parts.**”

God’s Beauty in Wholeness & Perfection

Symbolized in Art of the Tabernacle



Perfection

I. First Principle of Creativity

Create **wholeness** through proportions of juxtaposed parts that establish balance and harmony

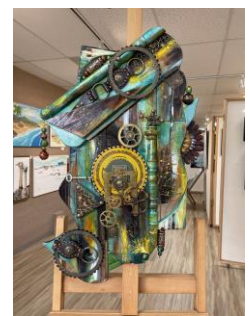
A key to balance is a tension by juxtaposition



Maui, Photo by Brian S. Chan



Art by Brian S. Chan



Carlsbad, CA artist

3. Wholeness by juxtaposition in stories?

Shrek: Shrek + Donkey, *Up*: Carl + Russell, *Elemental*: Fire + Water,
Inside-Out: Joy + Sadness, *Avengers*: Ironman + Captain America,
Star Wars: Luke Skywalker + Han Solo



4. Wholeness: the yearning of the human soul

5. How can the beauty of God of wholeness displayed in the Tabernacle Art inspire your creativity?

II. Second Principle

How do we deal with ugliness?

Ezekiel 16:9-14 – adorned with beauty

Ezekiel 16:15-17 – beauty lost

Ezekiel 16:35-37 – ugliness incurred

1. Vivid, aesthetic imagery & visceral language:

- wrapped in fine linen and covered you with silk
- adorned with gold and silver, and clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth
- Grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty

contrast

- played the whore
- lavished your whorings on any passerby
- nakedness uncovered in your whorings with your lovers
- will uncover your nakedness to them
- they may see all your nakedness

2. God portraying ugliness and creating discomfort by

- vivid imagery - description and details
- visceral language - poignantly charged terms
- contrast and contradiction to beauty
- quantity (58 verses) for inundation, so you sit in it

Ugliness is **ruin** as a moral consequence – **the tragedy of ugliness is a fall from beauty**

3. Change will come - Ezekiel 16:53-63

II. Second Principle of Creativity

Create works that engage the audience with an experience of ugliness, in order to viscerally move them to a realization of a **need** and the **need for change**

Francis Bacon

“For his power to transmute sheer anguish into visual form he had no equal among twentieth century artists...”
(Janson, *History of Art*, 825)

Alberto Giacometti
Man Pointing (1947)

“Giacometti sculptures are evocative, speaking to the pervasive despair in the aftermath of world war.” (*Gardner’s Art Through the Ages*, 1036-7)



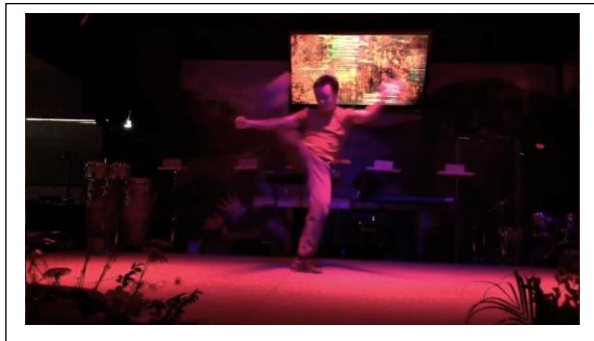
Julie Mehretu
Cairo (2013)
at the Broad Museum, Los Angeles

Presenting “the ancient Egyptian city caught in a furious wind blowing off the Sahara” and the work raises “the world’s consciousness about government suppression,” the city life and “the complexity of its continued existence.”



Dramatic Kung Fu performance of “The Fall”

Performed in Culver City, Los Angeles (2017)



III. Third Principle

Aesthetic Actions that Leave a Legacy

Mark 14:1-9

Verse 9: And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”

1. Mark 14:1-3a – The Setting

- Almost time for the Passover + reclining at the table

2. Verse 6: “She has done a *beautiful thing* to me.”

- Beautiful thing: *kalon ergon* – a beautiful, pleasing action or deed
- An aesthetic action

3. Why did Jesus find her aesthetic action beautiful?

- In contrast to others who were “indignant” toward her action

1) ...she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. (Vs. 8b)

Gospel-oriented, Gospel-reflecting, and Gospel-incarnated aesthetic action

2) For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. (Vs. 7)

Mindfulness to following the Holy Spirit in aesthetic actions

3) 3. She has done what she could... (vs. 8a)

Surrender in serving with all you have to make beauty to Jesus

II. Third Principle of Creativity

Create a legacy by producing aesthetic actions that are beautiful to Jesus in gospel-orientation, mindfulness to the Spirit, and surrender in serving Jesus



Sailing Away (2019), Brian S. Chan



Bring Beauty (2023), Brian S. Chan



Hope Emerging (2008), Brian S. Chan

Fight for Human Dignity Benevolent Art Event



Cameron Dunbar



Summary:



3 Principles of Creativity from God

- Create wholeness from juxtaposed proportions that achieve balance
- Envelop an audience in an experience of ugliness to generate a realization for change
- Produce a legacy with aesthetic actions that are beautiful to Jesus in gospel, mindfulness, and surrender