

## Make Passionate Art

Imagine:

- Ideas bubbling up in an exuberant flow.
- Loving your work & wanting to share it with others.
- Creating freely in a style that is uniquely your own.
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## Have You Received Your Gifts?

**Do you think it's better to give than receive?**

*“And still, after all this time, the Sun has never said to the Earth, ‘You owe me.’ Look what happens with love like that. It lights up the sky.”*

*-Rumi*



December is the month for giving and receiving gifts. I hope you have the opportunity to give and receive many gifts this holiday season.

Merriam Websters says "**a gift is the unconditional bestowal of something of value for no payment.** It is also a talent, endowment, aptitude, or inclination".

At birth, **you were gifted with certain abilities and strengths that are yours alone.** Have you considered your gifts recently? Could you make a list of them?

Do you experience synesthesia around color or music? Does your body move through space with grace and ease? Do faces light up when you walk into a room? Are you someone who can repurpose castoffs into an enviable style? Are you tuned into the thoughts and feelings of others? Can you make a meal from just 4 ingredients? Or a sickly plant bloom?



### **Accepting Your Gifts:**

When I think of my friends and family their gifts are apparent to me - Many of them have a gift for making abundant gardens and welcoming homes. My niece's gift for poetry astounds me, my mom effortlessly models elegance for me, my sister keeps her head and sense of humor in the midst of chaos and makes over-the-top florals and ruffles enticing, or there's my dad and brother who are legendary for fixing broken stuff and turning blocks of wood and nails into beautiful and useful things.

My own gifts seem to be more elusive, at least to me. I have a gift for

creating community and a gift for planning, drawing figures comes easily to me, I can explain difficult concepts in a way that's easy for my students to understand and I think I have a gift for being a mom. Perhaps because **my gifts are things that are easy for me I do not value them as much as the skills I worked so hard to develop.**

What are your special gifts? What have you received through grace alone? Were you given beautiful eyes? A strong and healthy body? A sense of rhythm? A connection with animals?

**Your unique gifts were given to you with love from your creator.** You have the freedom to choose whether to accept the gifts or refuse them.

**Do you judge your gifts and find them unworthy?** Do you hold them back and suppress them because others judged them unworthy in your past? Did you discard them or give your power to someone else? Are you afraid of the power of your gifts? **Do you fear becoming the person your gifts are asking you to be?**



**The Cycle of Increase:**

**Giving and receiving are different aspects of the same vibrational flow of the energy of abundance.**

Giving is only one-half of the law of increase. Receiving is the other half. Giving opens the way for more receiving.

**Receiving well blesses the giver. Receiving without gratitude takes away the pleasure of the giver.** When you refuse a gift you block the flow of abundance in your life and in the life of the giver.

As a recovering people-pleaser, I am much more comfortable giving than receiving.

I really don't like receiving gifts and often feel there is a hidden transaction fee, a judgment, or that nothing is really "free". I have trouble asking for help when I need it and I have the belief that I should never be a burden to others.

When I offer my help to others I am being genuine and I truly want others to take me up on my offers. My gifts to others are carefully selected and prepared love offerings that demonstrate my ability to recognize and acknowledge the unique individuality of my family and friends.

**When people turn down my offerings and my help, it activates my feelings of unworthiness - maybe they don't trust me, I'm not good enough, brushed off.**

When I say "no thanks" to others who are offering to help me, perhaps I sending these same messages to them without even realizing it!



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### **Giving Well:**

Giving and Receiving have so much context from my childhood; they probably do for you too. My self-worth is wrapped up in the story of what I earned, what I deserve, and what it's OK to ask for.

Shifting my mindset from worrying about burdening others to creating the wonderful flow of giving and receiving, you and I can choose to **allow others to care for us, to “have our backs,” and we can honor others by trusting them to help us out.**

If **every gift is an act of love** giving to someone is passing your love to them. The more I give to those I love, the more love I feel in my heart.

On days when I am not feeling loving towards others, giving more abundantly to them opens my heart again. These are my tenets for healthy giving:

- **A gift is the unconditional bestowal of something of value for no payment.**
- It must be given from a place of love.
- It must be given without expecting anything in return.
- **A gift with strings attached is not a gift. It is a power transaction.**

Giving and receiving are two sides of the same coin. Giving and

Receiving are the two loops of the infinity symbol. They are Yin and Yang. The act of giving cannot be complete with its receiving opposite.

There has to be a balancing flow of Giving and Receiving. Energy flows out when we give freely and energy flows into our lives as we receive gratefully. Giving and receiving keeps the abundance vibration of the universe circulating throughout our lives.

If every gift is love, then gratefully receiving that gift is accepting the offering of love.

**Courage is needed to break through old mindsets and open yourself up enough to let that love pour freely into you.**

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## 2. The law of giving & receiving

- Everything in the universe operates through dynamic exchange
- Giving and taking are different aspects of the flow of energy in the universe
- If we stop the flow of energy, we interfere with nature's intelligence
- If we want love, learn to give love, if we want material affluence, help others to become materially affluent.
- By our willingness to give that which we seek, we keep the abundance of the universe circulating in our life



### **Receiving Well:**

When you give to someone and they fully receive your gift, both of you are validated and blessed.

However, **when you give to someone who is unable or unwilling to receive your gift then a debt is created.** If the other person cannot receive with gratitude or happiness and instead

feels powerless or guilty **anger and resentment will build.**

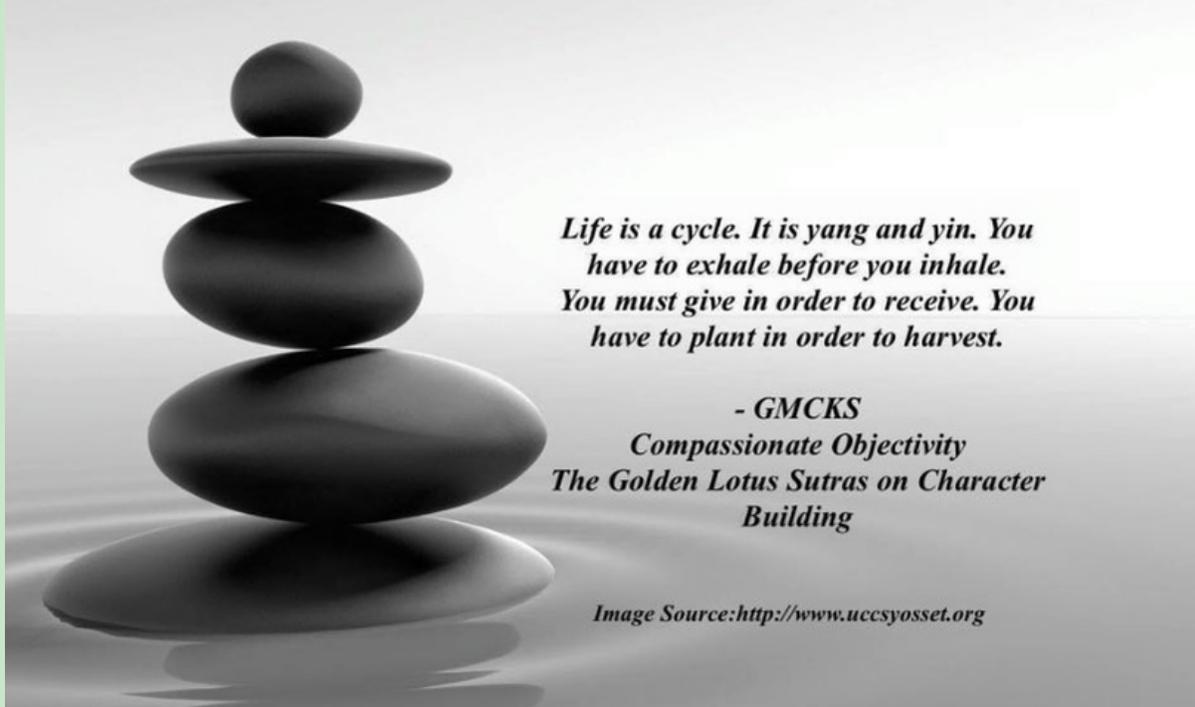
The giver feels bad because his/her love has grown and is not being reciprocated. In this case, giving more only makes things worse because the circle is closed.

The same with those who give to you only to entice you into doing something you would not do otherwise. True giving is always based on love. **If someone is giving with strings attached, they are engaging in a power transaction, not a gift** - be aware of the distinction.

When we learn to receive and enter the cycle of increase, giving takes on a whole new meaning... Receiving becomes Giving... and Giving becomes Receiving.

Develop your Receiving muscles and loosen the grip of old habits and vulnerabilities with these practices.

1. **Accept all good things that are offered to you with gratitude.** If someone wants to give you a gift, recognition, or pay the bill in a restaurant do not decline.
2. If you receive something you don't like or don't need, pass it on to someone else who will use or enjoy it. **Do not block the flow in the giver's life.**
3. **Accept sincere compliments** - let the giver do his/her part... and acknowledge the part of yourself receiving the compliment.
4. **Practice Gratitude** - Count your blessings every day – make it a daily routine and feel the energy of receiving your blessings.
5. Allow yourself to be YOU - **accept yourself with all the strengths and weaknesses you may have.** No need to pretend to be perfect, showing only your 'greatness' – be authentic.
6. **Stop complaining** – When we complain we are saying we're not happy with what we are receiving. We are not grateful and don't appreciate the given.



### **Giving Gifts:**

Whatever it is you wish to have more of in your life, **causing another to have it first will bring it to you in abundance.**

**Giving is a circulation of increase** and not just an outflow, whatever you give you will receive enough to allow yourself to grow and give even more. If you allow it, **what you receive will come back to you in unexpected and unimagined ways.**

**Give to people who inspire you, help you, nourish you, and love you.** The abundance loop expands when you give to those people and things that bring you the most joy.

That way your gift can be combined and transformed into something even better and given away again.



## **Nature's Gifts:**

We are stewards of the gifts of our planet and have a responsibility to keep her resources circulating endlessly. **Every day our earth provides us with the gift of food and abundance for our shelter and beauty for our enjoyment, air to breathe, and companionship only a short arm's length away.** Like Rumi's sun, life is ever-giving of itself, we must receive, utilize and extend her gifts.



## **Have You Received Your Gifts?**

Circling back to the gifts you were given at birth - have you received your gifts?

Are you grateful for your beautiful eyes, your elegant hands, your infectious laugh, and your ability to connect with others? Do you appreciate and accept even the uncomfortable aspects of your personality?

**Have you fully acknowledged how special and unique you really are?** Or, are you closing yourself off from the flow of joy and abundance by limiting or denying your special gifts and talents?

I can help you to receive, claim and develop your artistic gifts. **Please**

reach out to me if you'd like to explore your artistic talents and inclinations in more depth. I welcome the conversation. I'm always looking for new connections and collaborations.

## With Light and Delight

Reach Out to  
Me

*Susan Convery*

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### Quote:

A gift comes to you through no action of your own, free, having moved toward you without your beckoning. It is not a reward; you cannot earn it, or call it to you, or even deserve it. And yet it appears. Your only role is to be open-eyed and present. Gifts exist in a realm of humility and mystery—as with random acts of kindness, we do not know their source.

- Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

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### Sketchbook Prompt:

Envision one of your personal gifts as a character or totem animal. Which animal or character would you choose? What colors and aspects show off the gift?



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## Being YOUnique

### Afraid you're a copycat?

*"The things that make me different are the things that make me ME."*

*-Piglet as A. A. Milne*

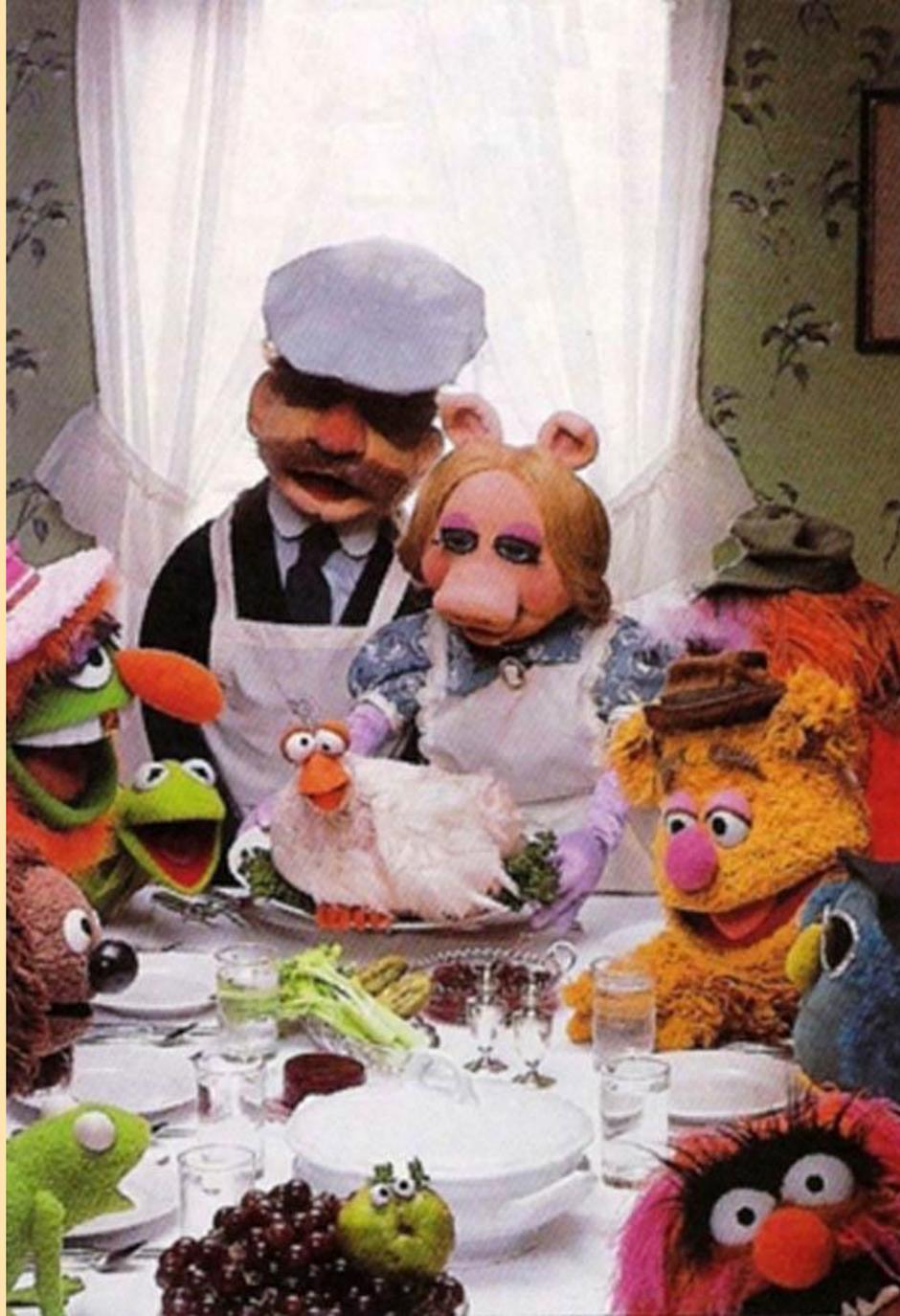


Norman Rockwell's "Freedom From Want" appeared in the March 6, 1943 edition of the Saturday Evening Post, it depicts a white, middle-class family seated around a crisply adorned dinner table. As was common for Rockwell, his models for the painting were his friends, family, and neighbors in the town of Arlington, Vermont, whom he photographed in his studio and painted into the complex composition individually (they never sat together).

**You were born an original.** Your unique set of characteristics, traits, talents, interests, and skills has never been seen before you arrived and will never be seen again after you depart. When you follow the crowd and copy the trends you will never get the chance to **be who you were born to be...**

Learning something new starts with imitating others. As children, we copy our parents, friends, teachers, and role models. Copying is a critical step in the learning process but too much imitation becomes boring and cliché.

**Did you know November 3rd is National Cliche Day?** Cliches are terms, phrases, images, or even ideas that may have once been striking or thought-provoking but have now become **obvious and overused**. How remarkable and funny that we have a national day to celebrate the opposite of originality!



Just because a phrase is overused doesn't mean it's a cliché, and because a phrase is a cliché doesn't mean it isn't true. **A cliché conveys an idea or message that is easily recognized and understood but loses its point through over-usage.**

The first conclusion people jump to when they see clichés is that the artist is unoriginal. While that may not be true, you don't want to set yourself up to be knocked down.

Here are some overused examples of verbal clichés:

- Time heals all wounds
- All that glitters isn't gold
- All for one, and one for all

- Kiss and make up
- He has his tail between his legs
- And they all lived happily ever after
- Cat got your tongue?
- Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed
- We're not laughing at you we're laughing with you
- A diamond in the rough
- The calm before the storm



The same is true for certain cliché images.

- **The Big Family Thanksgiving Dinner with a Turkey**
- The path which divides into two
- The nude woman on a couch
- A lighthouse on a cliff
- Palm trees along a beach
- A vase of red roses
- Women with shopping bags
- A man slipping on a banana peel
- Praying hands

Notice how many of your first ideas for new projects are actually clichés.

Because clichés are easy to understand and recognize we often start our search for a topic with something familiar. When I work with students I like them to come up with about 20 variations for their assignments. **It is usually around the 6th attempt when boredom sets in and frees the creative mind to really play with the idea** and introduce something a little outrageous. That's when the excitement begins...

PRESERVE THE AMERICAN DREAM



Playing with cliches can be fun. You can take a cliché idea and **find your unique way of conveying that meaning without recycling words and images** that have been used a million times. I had a blast finding these parodies of Norman Rockwell's painting.

Being the first one to have a thought isn't what matters. What's important is that you **take a thought or idea and make it completely your own**. Your interpretation should relate to what you already know and your idea should wear the color, the precise shade, and the distinguishing marks, of your own way of thinking.

A vase of flowers could be generic and cliché, or it could be exciting, new, and fresh with your personal imprint.



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Finding a worthy role model to emulate, whose characteristics you wish to adopt as your own is a great way to elevate your character and expand your artistic repertoire. **You are not a copycat when you copy to extend your capabilities. You are not a copycat when you reference the work of others.**

Austin Kleon, the author of *How to Steal Like an Artist* explains it this way: “You don’t get to pick your family, but you can pick your teachers and you can pick your friends and you can pick the music you listen to and you can pick the books you read and you can pick the movies you see. You are, in fact, a mashup of what you choose to let into your life. **You are the sum of your influences.**”

The German writer Goethe said, "We are shaped and fashioned by what we love."

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Since it's November let's reconsider the cliché Norman Rockwell image of the big family sitting down at the table for a giant Thanksgiving turkey dinner. You've seen some examples of what others have done.

How might you **play with that image to make it your own** ? What does Thanksgiving look like in your home? Is it Norman Rockwell-esque? Is your family entirely white? Does your turkey dinner arrive in a bag from Whole Foods? Does your family eat out? Are you home alone with a TV Dinner or a turkey sandwich? Do you work in a soup kitchen serving the homeless?

If you replaced the people in the image with turkeys what might they be serving on a platter?

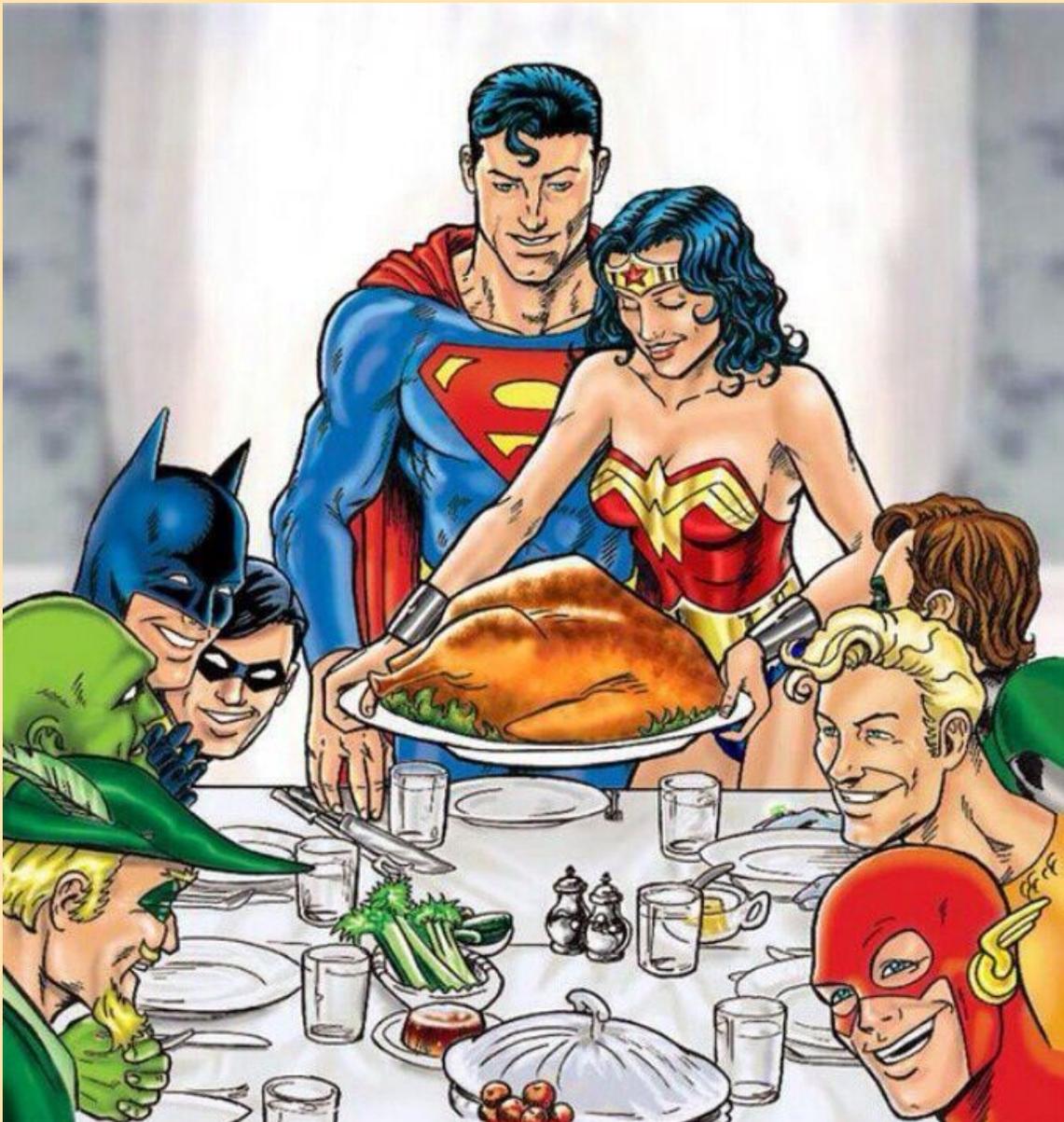


Being original is defined as being **creative in thought and action**; the source or cause from which something arises. When you cultivate your own history, style, tastes, and personality, not only are you genuine and authentic, you're more exciting and attractive to others.

Let go of fear and embrace your uniqueness. **Make your art and your life an expression of who you are.**

According to [EssentialLifeSkills.Com](http://EssentialLifeSkills.Com) some of the **benefits of "Being an Original"** are:

- You are true to yourself, therefore derive greater personal satisfaction and fulfillment.
- You are more noticed, interesting, and attractive to others.
- You are willing to take risks, think originally and be creative, therefore are open to greater career opportunities and advancement.
- Due to a willingness to let go of convention, you live life to the fullest and on your terms.
- Whether in your career, the arts, or in your community, you offer a fresh, new, diverse perspective.
- You are usually a trailblazer, set new trends, and discover new ways of doing things.



[Wiki How](#) suggests these steps if you would like to cultivate your own uniqueness:

### **How to be original:**

- Embrace who you are
- Acknowledge your uniqueness
- Have confidence in who you are

### **Express Yourself Creatively:**

- Try new experiences
- Have a creative outlet
- Develop “your” style
- Take risks and let go of perfection
- Present yourself uniquely

### **Think outside the Box:**

- Brainstorm your ideas
- Take action on your ideas
- Take breaks when you get stuck
- Notice what you like in others’ work - develop your taste
- Collaborate with others
- Work with a mentor\*



Before you can be yourself, you must know who that is, and then be true to that self. Centuries ago Socrates wisely observed that self-knowledge is the pillar of all virtue. Without it nothing else is genuine.

### **How do you arrive at self-knowledge?**

Trust your intuition and instincts. Part of **knowing who you are is trusting your intuition and instincts.** We all have an inner gauge that guides us along our most fulfilling path. For me, things that are aligned with me create a warm, vibrating resonance deep in my gut, things I should stay away from are like a cold, hard stone in my lower belly. I have to turn off the voice that is always "shoulding" on me to perceive my own truth.

Reach Out to  
Me

Look deep within to find the answers to your life. **No one is better at knowing what you need and want from life than you. Express yourself by cultivating your own style, tastes, and personality.**

\*If you are looking for help in uncovering your inner artistic voice I would love to work with you. Please reach out to me with your comments and thoughts. I welcome the conversation.

**With Light and Delight,**

*Susan Convery*

Visit my website

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### **Quote:**

*These words were taken from a Donna Ashworth poem. I couldn't find it again to check if I got the words right, but I send it to you this way as my blessing for you all in this month of Thanksgiving:*

*Say your truth  
Live your own way,  
Be yourself  
Share your dreams  
Honor your desires  
Chase your ambitions  
Let yourself be peaceful  
Let yourself be accepted by you  
No one else matters  
Let peace be your goal every day*

- *Donna Ashworth*

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**Sketchbook Prompt:**

Select a cliché phrase from the samples above or one of your personal favorites. Try to come up with an original interpretation of the cliché that relates in some way to your personal history.

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## Pumpkin Spice Painting

### Seasoning Your Art

*"Spring passes and one remembers one's innocence. Summer passes and one remembers one's exuberance. Autumn passes and one remembers one's reverence. Winter passes and one remembers one's perseverance."*

– Yoko Ono.



With all the energy of a loud fireworks display, **pumpkin spice** exploded over the horizon on September 1st. It was this year's first signal that we were finished with the cool, and fruity beverages of summer.

**I was not ready for the change** and I found myself indignant about how many things are now made with pumpkin spice. These are just a few pumpkin spice items that caught my attention:

**lattes, granola, pancakes, protein bars, cookies, doughnuts, nut butter, rice cakes, cheerios, ice cream, smoothies...**



Summer is my favorite **season**. I love the warmth, the color, the freedom, the exuberance, and the energy of summer. It got me thinking about the many ways we **embrace and welcome each season of the year**.

From ancient times to the present moment the **Japanese people have meditated on the seasons as a metaphor for life**.

Each subtle change in season is celebrated for its beauty and brevity while being symbolic or representative of a particular moment in the **cycle of life and the deeper truths** of the human experience.

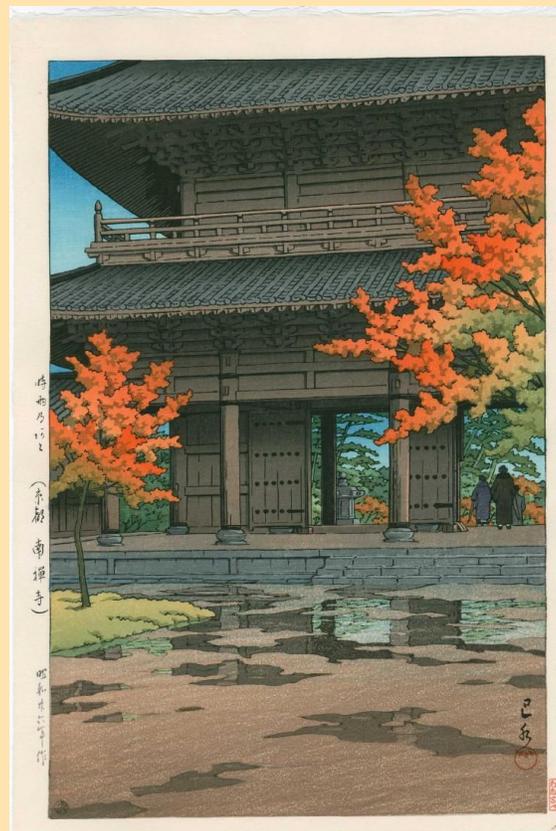
Sensitivity to seasonal change is an important part of Shinto, Japan's native belief system. Japanese artists and poets honor the Shinto cycles of the earth and the annual agrarian calendar but also capture an awareness of **the inevitability of change**, a fundamental Buddhist concept.



The practice of depicting **the seasons as a poetic metaphor** is almost a convention in Japanese art. To the Japanese, there are more than four seasons. Each month the environment shifts in subtle ways and their **artists notice and capture these fleeting transitions.**

Cherry blossoms signal the fleeting qualities of youth, chrysanthemums and persimmons dangle from leafless branches symbolizing the costs of bearing fruit, and Geese announce the coming snows.

Often, the Japanese employ these natural elements as highly stylized decorative motifs to heighten their ornamental effect. These visual scenes might also have literary references, **heightening the image's mood and cultural meaning.**



I started wondering about **our own cultural conventions for each season** and how we might weave them into our work to deepen the layers of meaning.

Whether you are an abstract or representational visual artist, a poet, or a writer it seems to me that using **seasonal symbols**

**engages artists in embracing the sensory qualities** of the natural world and the complicated emotions we experience as human beings.

When you add **seasoning to your food the flavor is enhanced**. The season does not need to be the subject of your piece, your seasoning element could be in the background adding extra complexity, richness, and meaning to your art.

Seasonal nature references can inspire us as we **create a detailed present moment** for our viewers to explore and to find correlations in their own experiences.

Part of **finding your artistic voice is digging around in your emotional and cultural history** to uncover meaningful events and symbols.

I became curious about what I connect with each of the four seasons. I grew up in the rural northeast where big transitions occur each season, so **my symbols and favorite holidays are probably different from yours**.

I made lists of things I notice and connect with each of the four seasons then I turned these lists into visuals to share with you. Let me know if these resonate with you.

# Symbols for Fall



Time of Life:  
Midlife, Maturity

Time of Day:

Sunset

Metaphor:

Mastery, Completion, Harvest

Mood:

Reflective

Colors:

Orange, Red, Gold, Olive

Animals:

Canada Geese, Deer, Foxes, Turkeys, Spiders, Bats

Plants:

Chrysanthemums, Dahlias, Pumpkins, Gourds, Maple,  
Hay, Grasses, Grapes, Trees with colored leaves

Shapes:

Leaf or Pumpkin Shape

Weather:

Cloudy Gray or Orange Skies

Energy:

Introspective, Giving

Foods:

Heavy, Building, Soups, Stews,  
Pies, Cookies, Pumpkin Spice

Texture:

Wooly, Rough, Crackly



Fall now includes pumpkin spice!

This month as I journey through the northeast USA countryside I am appreciating and becoming present to many of **fall's sensual experiences**; the colors of the trees, the fresh, crisp air, the smell of ripe apples, the taste of squash and pumpkin everything, the joy of hiking through the fallen leaves and eating pumpkin spice ice cream at every opportunity...

My Autumn list also references the **shift in energy from summer's expansive ebullience to more reflective and peaceful energy**. It is a season for **completions, for reaping the abundance** from years of hard work.

I hope you will find some time this month to **rest, reflect on the spectacle of the changing leaves and enjoy a pumpkin spice latte**. Take a moment to **be grateful** for your journey and all you have experienced that brought you to this **season of harvest, abundance, and completion**.

In an earlier season of my life, when I was in high school, I went up on stage to read a few of Shakespeare's sonnets to an auditorium full of people. This one has always stuck with me:

*"That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.  
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day..."*

Sonnet 73 uses the metaphor of late fall to reference Shakespeare's late-in-life love for a young girl. The poem is more poignant now that I am past the summer of my life and it gives me a melancholy feeling about my own future.

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# SYMBOLS FOR Winter



TIME OF LIFE:  
OLD AGE

TIME OF DAY:  
EVENING OR NIGHT

METAPHOR:  
DORMANCY, REST, WISDOM

MOOD:  
PEACE, COZINESS

COLORS:  
COOL PASTELS, SHADES, TEAL, BLACK

ANIMALS:  
CARDINALS, CHICKADEES, HIBERNATING ANIMALS,  
REINDEER, RACCOONS, POLAR BEARS

PLANTS:  
HOLLY, POINSETTIA, EVERGREENS

SHAPES:  
SPIKY SHAPE

WEATHER:  
OVERCAST OR SNOWY SKIES

ENERGY:  
RESTFUL, HEALING, NOURISHING.

FOODS:  
SWEET, HEAVY, RICH, ROASTS, CAKE,  
CHOCOLATE

TEXTURE:  
SOFT, WARM, FUZZY



As a Floridian, **winter** has lost the harshness it once had and it has also lost some of its **coziness and darkness**.

The softer, brighter southern winter has become a comfortable place to pass the closing season of life. Can it still be **a season of reflection and healing?**

How is the **eternal summer** of Florida a metaphor for extending aging and endings? I find this too to be a meaningful meditation. I foresee a lot of inspiration in this inquiry.



# Symbols for Summer

Time of Life:

Adulthood, Prime

Time of Day:

Noon

Metaphor:

Ripeness, Fullness, Expansion

Mood:

Joy

Colors:

Bright and Saturated

Animals:

Hummingbirds, Crickets, Butterflies,  
Parrots, Otters, Gulls, Bluebirds, Golden  
Retrievers

Plants:

Sunflowers, Rose, Hydrangea, Palm trees

Shapes:

Round, Biomorphic

Weather:

Sun with Blue Skies

Energy:

Active, Purposeful, Movement

Foods:

Sweet, Fresh, Raw, Watermelon,  
Cucumber, Tomato, Salad

Texture:

Smooth, Shiny

Does the idea of **seasoning your paintings** inspire you?

I start every artwork with an emotional mood and then adjust and adapt my reference photos to support that mood. Many of my

compositions begin with **joy and summer** as their setting.

Would deliberately including seasonal metaphors and references **deepen and enhance your compositions?**

When you look at your work in front of you, ask yourself if you could adjust the colors to heighten the connection to the emotions and sensory experience of the season.

Could you adapt or add an animal or plant more in keeping with the **mood of the season?** What about the sky, what color **connects best to the season?**

# Symbols for Spring



*Time of Life:*

**Youth**

*Time of Day:*

**Dawn**

*Metaphor:*

**Rebirth, Renewal, Beginnings**

*Mood:*

**Optimism**

*Colors:*

**Warm Pastels, Bright Green**

*Animals:*

**Babies of all kinds, Bunnies,  
Chicks, Ducklings, Robins**

*Plants:*

**Narcissus, Crocus, Sprouts, Peony,  
Iris, Lilac, Flowering Trees**

*Shapes:*

**Seed Shape**

*Weather:*

**Rainy or Pale Skies**

*Energy:*

**Expansive, Hopeful**

*Foods:*

**Astringent, Light, Bitter, Dry,  
Asparagus, Lamb**

*Texture:*

**Diaphanous, Crinkly, Sheer**



Reach Out to  
Me

Please let me know if my work and writing inspire you. **I welcome your thoughts and curiosities as a guide to my future work.** It makes me happy to support you in your artistic growth so **please reach out** if you'd like to learn more about working with me.

With Light and Delight,

*Susan Convery*

Visit my website

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**Quote:**

*“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:  
a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;  
a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.”*

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

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### **Blakesley on Blakesley**

If my work has a purpose it is the eternal one of trying to maintain a positive attitude in a seemingly indifferent world – the struggle is everything. Despair, hopelessness, etc. seem obvious or too easy. The negative does not exist as art.

When I draw a subject I hope to become one with it – a child, landscape, animal – I like to be part of good things.

The excitement is in trying to get even closer; the discouragement is from falling so far short.

The incentive comes from the illusion of improvement; that the next experience will meet the goal.

The rewards are too numerous to mention but financial and honorary are not on the list.

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### ***Sketchbook Prompt:***

Pick up a leaf from your yard, Observe it carefully, and look at the shape, the veins, the curl of the edges, and the shadow it casts on the Table. - sketch it in detail. Add color.

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Susan Convery Art | 6601 SW 20th St | Plantation, FL 33317 US

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## Make Passionate Art

Imagine:

- Ideas bubbling up in an exuberant flow.
- Loving your work & wanting to share it with others.
- Creating freely in a style that is uniquely your own.
- Nurturing your creative flow and inner muse.
- Sharing your passions through your art.
- Belonging to a community of inspired artists.



Illuminate your authentic artist voice with **Susan Convery**

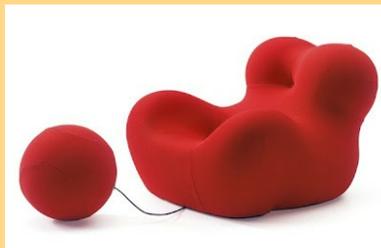
*Let's create something beautiful together*

## Radical Joy

### From Small Seeds Big Things Grow

*“There is no joy in the rectangle, the triangle, the square, I try to create with shapes that are friendly. I try with my work to give a positive feeling, something opposite to the news” - Gaetano Pesce*

Gaetano Pesce Chair



What a wild, strange and weird reality we are living in right now!

My conversations this month have circled around fear - of climate change, of civil war, the end of times, world war, inflation, depression, homelessness, doom scrolling, drought and disconnection from nature.

For many of us disorder appears to reign.

Large and small offenses without consequences have created the impression that rule breaking is the norm rather than the exception and a sense that lawlessness will only increase.

It depresses me to know that more than half the world's population now lives without access to nature in rigid boxes that are more

canvases for the display of status, ideology or brand identity, than spaces for the cultivation of joy. Work has become about endless productivity gains, rather than the joy of craft or creation. School has become a push for achievement rather than an exploration or an adventure.

Bland good taste is associated with safety, with righteousness, with a disciplined form of goodness that suppresses our childish love of color and play in favor of a monotony of sharp corners, harsh lighting, lifeless gray beige and institutional drab dullness.

It's no wonder you and I feel pushed down. When we're stressed or anxious we are less tolerant of ambiguity and risk, which in turn makes us more likely to reject ideas that are strange, offbeat or new and hold onto old rigid ways of being.

It feels to me like the joy is being squeezed out of daily life and that our culture has declared joy to be superfluous - the icing on the cake rather than an integral part of the cake itself.



What would it be like for us to face our fears, and feel them all the way down to the abyss of powerlessness?

What if we surrender to our grief and let it spread all the way to our toes and wiggle it out?

Could you sing into your pain? Could you create the silliest song you ever sang?

What if you paint your rage bright red and splash it with glitter?

What would it be like to dance with the great**bear** of your fear?

Could humor, curiosity, creativity and contradiction interrupt the rigid framework of what Margaret Thatcher called TINA (There Is No Alternative) thinking?



**Joy** is a high energy form of happiness characterized by the intense momentary experience of positive emotion, one that can be recognized by certain telltale signs; **smiling, laughing, and a feeling of wanting to jump up and down.**

**Joy** evolved for the express purpose of **steering us toward conditions that encourage us to flourish.** We feel **joy** most strongly in the presence of nature, rich colors, abundance, in community, in celebration and surprise.

Think of the last time you were suffused with **joy**.

- Where were you?
- Who was there with you?
- What was happening?

Chances are you were feeling healthy, abundant, connected and enlivened.

**The drive toward joy is synonymous with the drive toward life.**

**Joy** has the power to free us from the rigid framework of our physical and mental environments.

It can remind us that nothing is irredeemable in this world, nothing so ruined it is ever beyond hope. The things that bring us **joy open our hearts, our minds and bring us back back to life.** Even the smallest efforts to share our **joy** have an infectious quality that can **begin an upward spiral that elevates us, our homes, our neighborhoods and our communities.**

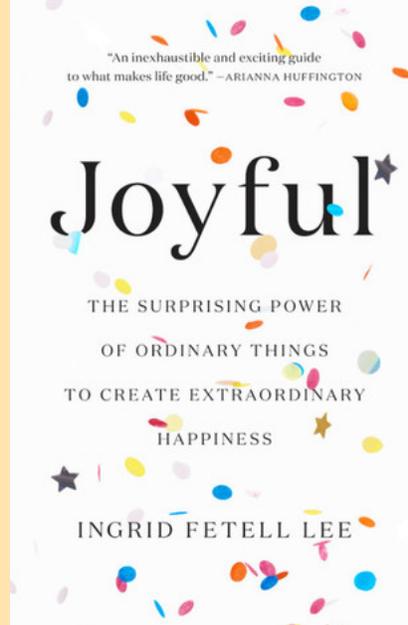


My inspiration this month came from the book [“Joyful: The Surprising Power of Ordinary Things to Create Extraordinary Happiness”](#) by Ingrid Fetell Lee.

If you have the opportunity I highly recommend that you spend some time with all of the research and insights in this book. I couldn't put it down.

Ingrid identifies nine aspects to the power of **joy; energy, abundance, freedom, harmony, play, surprise, transcendence, magic, celebration and renewal**. Each of these categories has its own aesthetics, vibration and opportunities to add more joy to our surroundings.

One or more of these aspects will resonate with you and may provide you with some inspiration for ways you can bring more **joy** into your life, your surroundings and your art.



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The **energy** of **joy** is vibrant, **colorful**, invigorating, exuberant, enlivening and dynamic. **Joy** is **twirling, skipping, giggling, and dancing**. Bright vivid **colors** animate music festivals, fairs, parks, parties and playgrounds.

**Color** pulls **joy** to the surface. Consider how we associate **color** and feeling in our language; we are *caught in a black cloud, feeling blue, our life is golden, we are green with envy, in the pink, lighthearted...*

**Color and light have an alchemical relationship. Light energy is color's power supply.** Our eyes cannot perceive **color** without the vibration of **light**. Each **color** has its own frequency and our eyes can only see a limited range of the **color** spectrum even in the best light. At night they say, all cats are gray. Their true color never changes but we cannot perceive color in darkness.

Over millions of generations of evolution, **bright saturated color so reliably predicted nourishment that it became intertwined with joy.** **Color** gives a vibrancy that lets us know our surroundings are alive and can help us to thrive.

Johannes Itten, the German colorist said this *“Color is life; for a world without color appears to us as dead.”*

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Joaquin Sorolla "Mending the Sail"

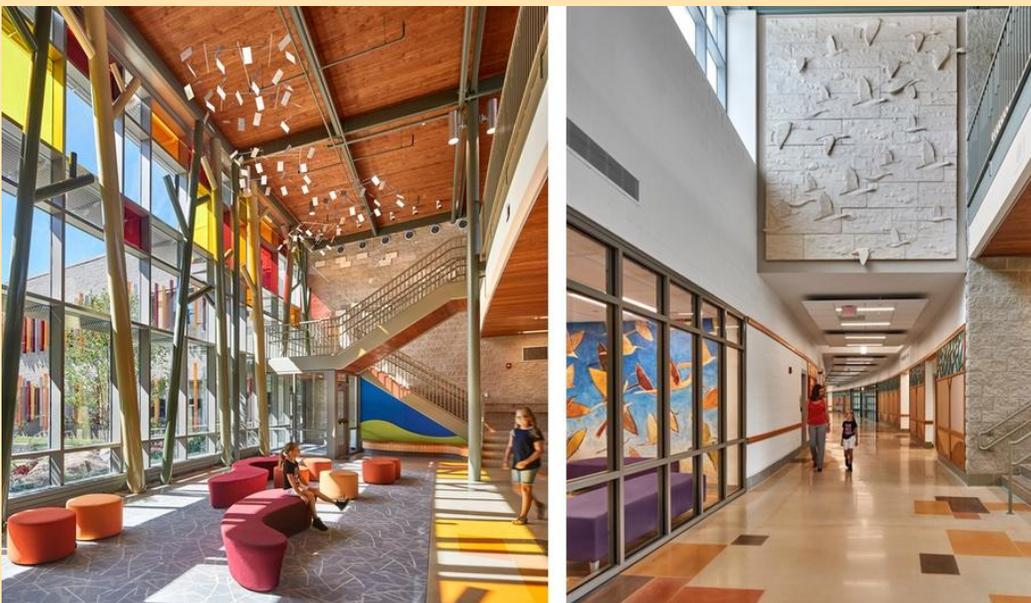
**Light and color** also have a profound effect on behavior. In a study of nearly a thousand people in Sweden, Argentina, Saudi Arabia, and the UK people working in **bright, colorful** offices reported being more alert than those working in duller spaces. They felt more **joyful**, interested and confident than those working in drab buildings and offices who reported feeling restless and unable to concentrate. Teachers and students say they feel safer and attend with more regularity in brightly **colored** schools. In a study of elementary schools, students in classrooms with more **light** learned faster in reading and math.

The fluorescent blue **light** of most office buildings resembles a cold and cloudy day and interferes with our perception of warm colors. Notice how these solid, unchanging indoor environments drain your **energy**.

Last month when I visited my ob-gyn I noticed how the whole office was designed to be cold and sterile rather than welcoming. The lights are cold, flat & blue, the wall colors and the cushions are dark green

and black. Everything is rectangular. All the paintings were old and faded and sunlight entered only in the lobby. The staff were nice enough but hardly warm and welcoming. I imagine that it feels depressing to work there and the turnover must be high. It made me want to redesign the whole space for them and add some **joy**.

Hospital patients assigned to sunny rooms are discharged sooner and require less pain medication than those in rooms with less **light**. Variable sunlight is best, but broad spectrum artificial **light** has been shown to alleviate seasonal depression and can be as effective as antidepressants in treating depression. **Bright light** can even reduce both depression and decline in Alzheimers patients.



The inspiring interior of the new school built to replace Sandy Hook Elementary school after the shooting

For brighter **more energized space**, or painting, consider reducing dark, light-absorbing colors and **infusing bright warm colors like yellow and orange in shadowy corners or adding small pops of vivid or fluorescent color** for more warmth and life. The shape of **joy** is curved and flowing, soft, organic and enveloping.

**Abundance** is **overjoyed**, brimming with happiness, lushness, sensory overload. **Abundance awakens all of our senses**. It is small things repeated many times, like **confetti, sprinkles, glitter, pattern, rainbows, fields of flowers, buffets, jelly beans,**

**candy stores, farmers markets, shopping malls, sparkling lights, polka dots and stars.**

**Abundance** is the opposite of impoverishment and it tells the story that we have more than enough energy and vitality to share. Adding layers of patterns, dots, stripes, bouquets, etc. enhances the fun for both artists and viewers.



© National Watercolor Society

My friend Judy Nunno's award winning watercolor painting "Eye Candy"

**Freedom** is unconstrained. It is open spaces like fields, lakes, parks, gardens and beaches, wide blue skies, forests and connection with nature.

Contact with and views of the green natural world relieve stress and have a restorative effect on our minds. **Access to nature improves sleep quality, decreases blood pressure and lowers depression and anxiety.**

Did you know that more Americans visit zoos than attend professional sporting events?

Artistic motifs for **freedom** include **landscapes with wide open vistas, sunrises, sunsets, sailboats, soaring birds, verdant greenery and loose curvilinear mark making.**

Consider where you feel most unrestricted; is it sleeping under the stars, riding in a convertible, skinny dipping, out in a boat, at sunrise yoga?

**Harmony and order** suggest the presence of an animate force and the smooth flow of energy that order creates. **Our brains release the pleasure hormone dopamine in environments with enough complexity for us to identify patterns, connections and correlations.**

Disorder gives us a feeling of powerlessness and anxiety while **order is the tangible manifestation of unseen harmony working to sustain us.**

**Harmonious** environments are stable, complete and inclusive. They are characterized by symmetry, rhythm, and balance. There is **harmony** in a circle, no hierarchy in a round table. You might employ **circles, complex geometric forms, grids, bilateral or fractal symmetry** to invoke the energy of **harmony.**



Lynn Hoeft is a fellow artist at the Old Sculpin Gallery on Martha's Vineyard who does beautiful watercolors playing with harmony and order

**Play** is our greatest means of accessing delight.

**Play** allows us to practice giving and taking, empathy, fairness, flexible thinking, problem solving, resilience, imagination and frolic. Think back on your favorite childhood games and toys. Did you save some of them? **Do you have a special collection of “Joy Toys” that make you smile just to look at them?**

Some examples of **joyous play** might include **hula hoops, kiddy pools, bubbles, balloons, balls, googly eyes, squiggles, splotches, splats, gooey, giddy, giggly, stretchy, bombous, bulging and other organic forms.**

Our mind associates curved forms and oversized eyes with safety and positivity, they send the message that we are operating in the world of imagination where spontaneity, whimsy and silliness prevail.

Stuart Brown of the National Institute for Play says *“The opposite of **play** is not work, its depression”*.

**Play is something we do solely because it produces joy,** it can be the ideal reset button when we are feeling blocked or blue.



*My Neighbor Totoro is a wonderful film from Studio Ghibli*

When you wish to reverse the constant feedback loop of anxiety, failure and fear nothing beats the power of **surprise**.

The expression of **surprise** is closely related to the expression of fear; wide eyes, dilated pupils and an open mouth prepare the body to react to a sudden threat.

**Surprise** redirects our attention, alerting us to **an unpredictable gap between what's happening in front of us versus what we had anticipated**. **Surprise** engages us in the contradictions between the strange and the familiar.

The unforeseen pleasure of **surprise** incites curiosity, invites exploration and increases the chances that we'll interact with others in ways that keep the positive vibe flowing.

**Surprise** welcomes the weird and the whimsical, it is the antithesis of restrained good taste, **plastic flamingos, giant balloon animals, pinatas, mystery vacations, colored linings inside drab coats, Easter eggs, yarn bombing, pothole gardens, tiny fairy villages, tree faces, Jack in the boxes, towering**

**sculptures of ordinary objects and pop-up cards** all encourage us to approach and engage with the unexpected.

**Surprise has the power to puncture our worldview and force us to reconcile new information with previously held beliefs.**

In this state of **joy** we are more likely to accommodate a fluid and accepting mindset.



*My friend Mandy Gordon often uses her flock of plastic flamingos to make a surprising statement*

Like surprise, the **joy** of **transcendence** is a wondrous shift in perspective from the mundane to the elevated.

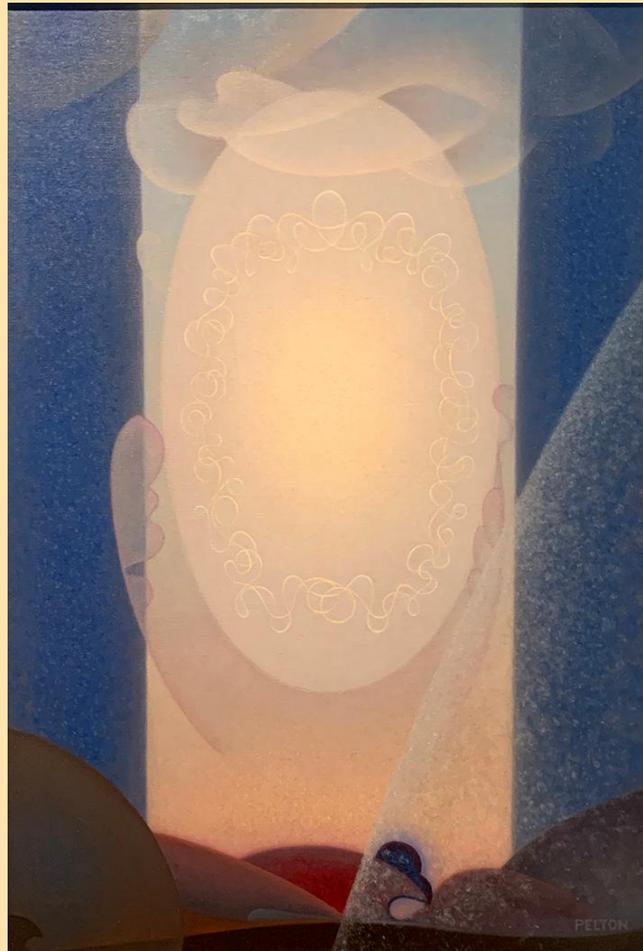
**Transcendence** lifts us up from the pull of gravity to the feelings of **walking on air, on cloud nine, swept off our feet, in high spirits, elevated to a place where we see the light.** Elation can be magical in its ability to clear our minds and open up the space for joy.

We find **transcendence** in **mountain tops, canyons, tree**

houses, towers, cathedrals, skyscrapers, domes, Ferris Wheels, zip-lines, rockets, gliders, kites, balloons, and everything that floats or flies.

**Transcendence** is closely associated with the feeling of awe - a connection with divine presence where the sense of peace and purpose is so vast it is outside our usual frame of reference and overwhelms the senses. In **transcendence** our small self experiences a **sense of oneness and euphoria that dissolves the boundaries of nationality and culture** and is vital for giving our lives meaning and purpose.

As artists we can invoke **transcendent** joy using upward sloping lines, curvilinear movement, light, sky-like colors that shift in upward gradients, tall trees, a bug's-eye view and subjects that appear to soar and float.



Agnes Pelton "Transcendence"

Arthur C. Clarke, the great science fiction writer said, "Any sufficiently

advanced technology is indistinguishable from **magic**” We live in a moment where technology is redefining our world at a dazzling rate, making what was once impossible possible every day.

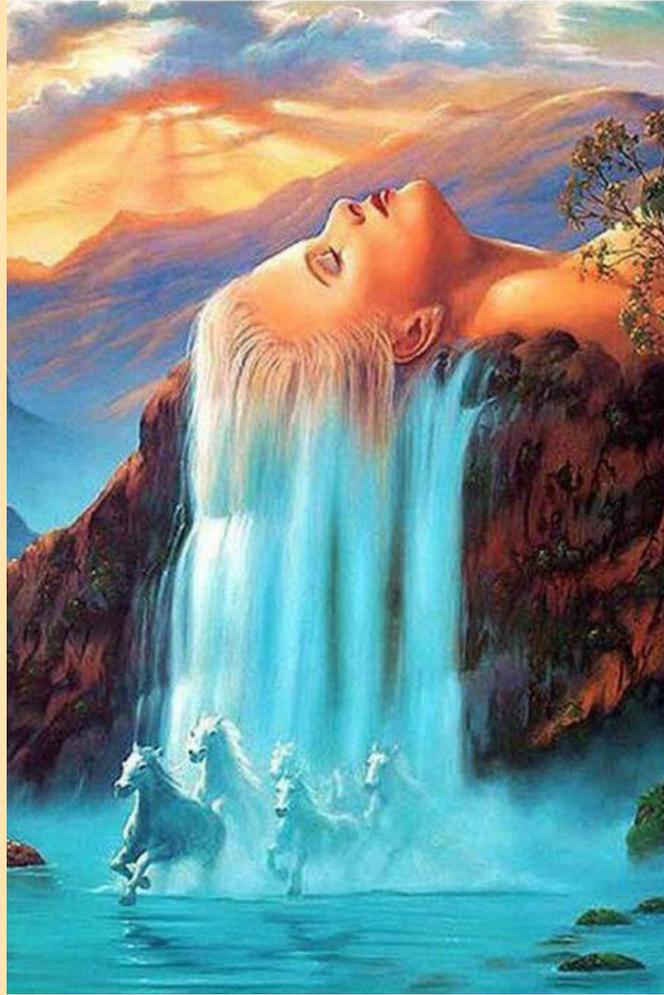
Have you experimented with the visual AI Dalle-E who produces images to match the phrases you submit? It looks like **magic** to me! Try out [Midjourney](#), [Stable Diffusion](#) or [Craiyon](#).

The **joy** we find in **magic** stems from **a deep impulse towards expansion of the mind and the human condition**. The realm of magic is the world of story where **big dreams are within reach, enchanted creatures roam the earth, caterpillars transform into butterflies and where coincidences, luck, spells, and superheroes break the fundamental laws of physics every day**.

When we find ourselves in situations rich in ambiguity we call on **magical** thinking, superstition and even wonder. Wonder overlaps with awe when it ignites our curiosity about the boundaries of the world we live in.

In our love of **rainbows, comets, fairy tales, unicorns, mermaids and elves** is a belief that **the world is bigger and more mysterious than we ever dreamed it could be**.

Extraordinary **magic** surrounds us everywhere we look and as artists we can call on **optical illusions, mirrors, mysterious lights, invented creatures, invented worlds, mirages, extreme magnification, iridescence, angels and other spirits** to invoke the joyful possibilities of **magic** and make the world richer than we have dreamed it to be.



Jim Warren "Daydreams"

The essence of **celebration** is that it is a participatory form of **joy**. **Joy's** highest highs bring us into a collective experience of belonging and attunement.

**Celebrations** mark the pinnacles of joy in our lives; **marriage, birth, harvest, growth, victories, new beginnings** with ritual **feasts, toasts, dances, costumes, bonfires, singing, kissing, embracing and the relaxation of societal hierarchy**.

Sharing a group affiliation makes us more comfortable with less personal space and we exhibit greater trust in ourselves and in others. We are more likely to sacrifice for the benefit of others when our focus moves from our own needs to the needs of the group. Heart rates and movement synchronize in coordinated song, dance, chant, and movement with the group.

The physical movement of **celebration** expands our bodies as **joy**

courses from the center of our hearts to the ends of our extremities.

**Celebration** is about the bigness of our feelings. Big objects signal the bigness of the emotions - giant cakes, parades, fireworks, tents indicate something different and important is happening in the life of a community. The **joy of celebration** magnetically draws others into our circle to join in our delight.

**Celebration** can also facilitate an ecstatic release of energy allowing latent emotions normally kept under wraps to emerge in communal catharsis and healing.

How might you expand your own circle of delight and **celebration**?

How can we use **celebration** to become more inclusive, unified and interdependent? Pay attention to the aesthetic cues at your next **celebratory** event - look for: **garlands, glitter, disco balls, sparklers, tinsel, rhinestones, ribbon, ruffles, fans, pompoms, lanterns, feathers, inflatables, banners and streamers...**



Out of destruction, **renewal** creates beginnings. The energy of **renewal** reminds us that **every joyful beginning is also the end of something else.**

We may be at the end of an era, the end of a way of life that is familiar

and comfortable, but it is also likely that we are at the beginning of something new that just might be **joyous**.

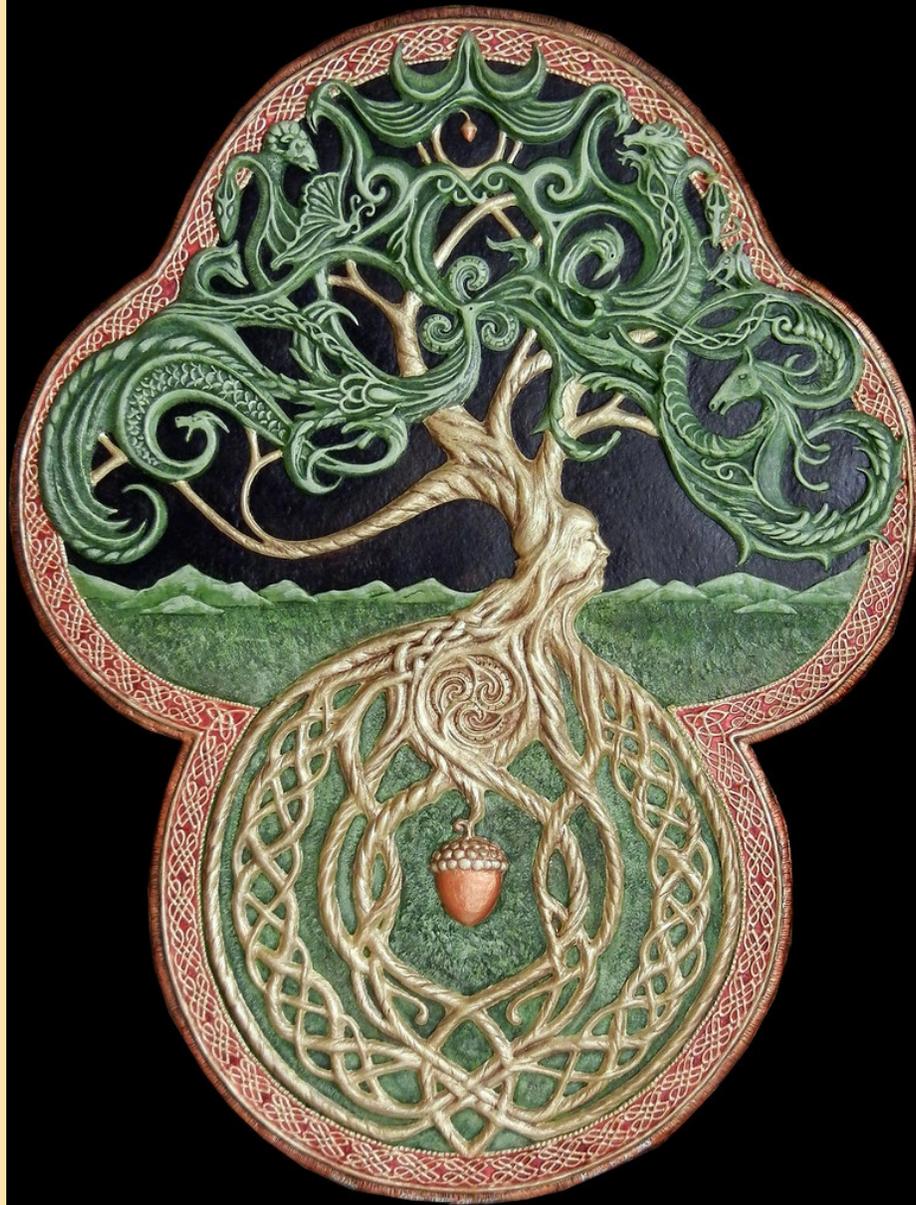
The relentless drive of nature to endure and propagate reclaims every space where humans have lost interest. The great city of Troy was only recently rediscovered, a magnificent tomb just uncovered in Egypt, The wreckage of Chernobyl now hosts the return of endangered wolves and lynx.

Environmental **renewal** is at the center of our attention every day. As we debate how to repair the damage we have done to our fragile ecosystems with our sprawling development and ravenous appetite for natural resources we need to also consider what else we humans need to thrive and flourish on this planet.

**Without joy we may be surviving, but no matter how comfortable and well fed we might be, we are not thriving.**

Can we follow the guidance of **joy** to things that animate, stimulate and sustain us?

The lesson of **renewal** is that from small seeds, big things grow. Even our smallest efforts, a single flower, a painting, a party, a mural might be **the beginning of an upward spiral that changes a community, a neighborhood, a life.**



Ceramic Celtic Emblem

In my search for ways to use my creative gifts to make the world a kinder, more hopeful place Ingrid Fetell Lee gave me many suggestions for creating a bright life raft of **joy** in the sea of negative thinking that often overwhelms me.

I love the idea that I can use humor, curiosity, creativity and contradiction to interrupt the pervasive gloom in the media and conversation and send up a signal flag of hope.



Vincent Van Gogh "the Sower"

## Reach Out to Me

I think the most radical resistance we can offer to the anger, fear and anxiety spread by both the red and blue teams is living lives filled with as much **joy** as we can handle.

Would you like to join in becoming a Joy Ambassador - spreading a pandemic of color, fun and surprise? **Let's scatter seeds of radical joy and bring rainbows that swell into the empty spaces in our lives** - blighted downtowns, oppressed communities, or hearts ravaged by loss.

Together we can manage **joy** in the opposite way that we manage money. Let's spend it every chance we get!

Do you hear laughter? Do you have paint, glitter, music, and balloons? Let's broadcast **joy** far and wide so others can join in. Because **the more generous we are with our joy, the more we will have**

**for ourselves.**

We are here to see rainbows and to paint them, to be tickled and enthralled, to eat a second gelato with a sprinkly cupcake if we choose.

Let's create art that lights us up inside. If you are already spreading radical **joy** please share your experiences with me. If you'd like to work with me to make your own life more **joyous** please reach out. I welcome the conversation.

**With Light and Delight,**

*Susan Convery*

[Visit my website](#)



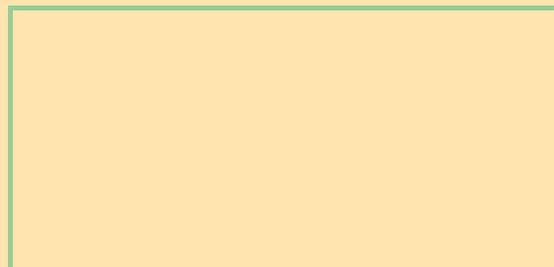
### **Adding Joy**

This summer I decided to add some joy to my entry way. Using some of the shapes and colors suggested by the book I definitely feel more uplifted when I come home. I added bright spherical baskets for my hanging orchids, a macrame hammock chair, some more colored pots, sparkly rainbow crystals, the rain chain and I repainted the bench in bright colors. The tile mosaic was done a couple of years ago.

### **Quote:**

*“When we dream alone it is only a dream, but when many dream together it is the beginning of a new reality”*

*- Freidensreich Hundertwasser*





These are two Hundertwasser buildings

## Sketchbook Prompt:

### *Joy Grid:*

*Make a grid in your sketchbook. Lines of neat boxes outlined in black marker that are waiting to be filled. Now draw a little thumbnail sketch in each box according to the theme.*

*Think about the things that bring you joy. Start with your favorite breakfast foods, cars, book characters, hats, footwear or type of flower. You do not need to accurate or observe closely. Symbols are fine.*

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