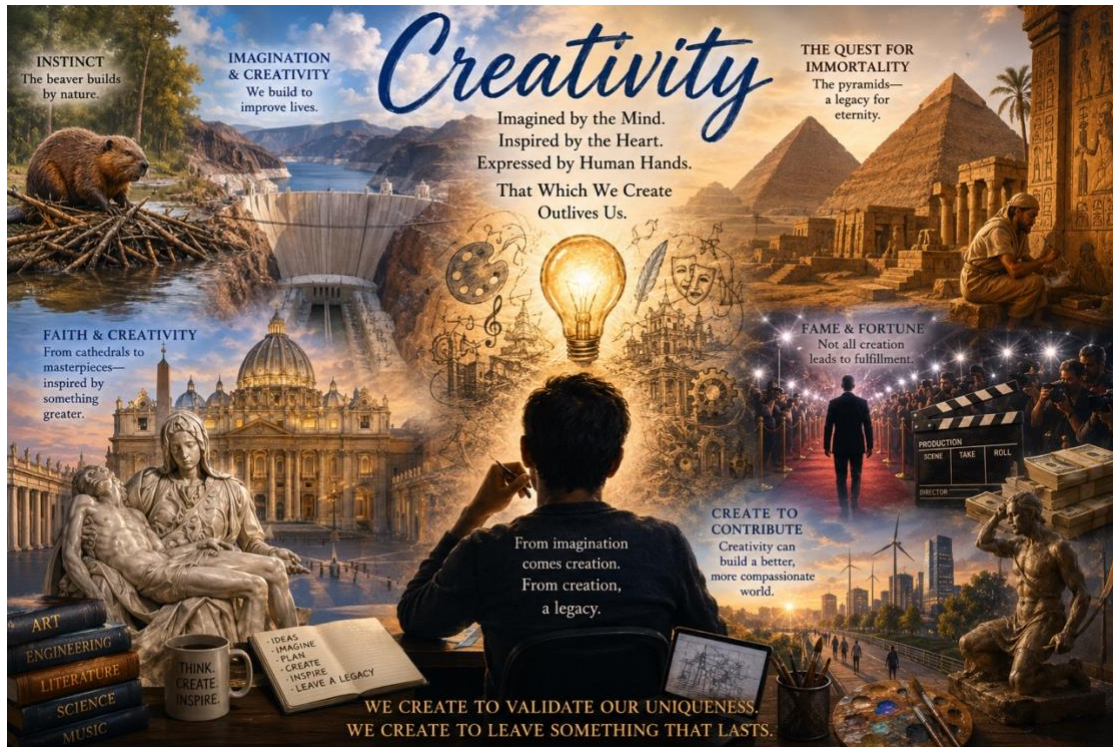


Creativity

Reflections by Curtis Jerry Smothers



Creativity arises from a sad realization.

The so-called "Human Condition" brings us mortals to the stark realization that everything we know and everyone we love will someday pass. That sadness and inevitable suffering may be the main impetus for our creativity.

As we face reality, we can visualize an alternative to or improvement in the "Human Condition" through the creative process of imagination and the empowerment of experience and ability. When we create something, we somehow validate our uniqueness.

Creativity goes beyond instinct

Humans are unique because our creativity does not arise from instinct. For example, the beaver manipulates its environment by creating beaver ponds

and dams - a significant alteration in its environment, but still an instinctive behavior.

Contrast a beaver dam with the Hoover Dam, with its millions of tons of concrete and astonishing size and engineering. From the standpoint of the imagination and skills of human engineers, our Hoover Dam is to a beaver dam as an atomic bomb is to a mosquito bite. The massive structure was inspired by imagination and creativity and it improves the lives of millions.

Creativity, then, seems to be the actual obverse of the two-sided coin of our "Human Condition."

Creativity was the Egyptians' attempt at immortality

What we create can outlive and outlast that which dies and is forgotten. At the risk of citing a far-too-obvious example, let's look at the Egyptian pyramids. Aside from the fact that no one has fully figured out how the behemoth tombs of the Egyptian pharaohs could have been constructed given the technology of the time, the pyramids also represent a unique form of human creativity that has to do with our self-concept, the eternal and the afterlife.

The Egyptians buried their god-kings with what they figured was the wherewithal for navigation and entry into the higher plane of eternal life. The Egyptians created a pantheon of gods and a hierarchy of temporal rulers (priests, nobles, and the pharaoh) that provided a structured society based simply on nature worship.

The creative application of their state religion spilled over into every aspect of Egyptian life, from crafts to art and pictographic literature, and brought Egypt to dominate its part of the world, until other more creative cultures conquered and overran the land of the pyramids.

Christian applications of creativity

In a relatively more contemporary vein, to get the full flavor of the impact of creativity on the universe of human culture, one only has to visit St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. In Rome, the legacy of creativity inspired by theology

is nearly everywhere, but a tour of St. Peter's brings the first-time tourist to almost a point of overload.

Vatican architecture, paintings, frescoes, and statuary that date back hundreds of years are the best proof of man's creativity. Like the Egyptians, Christian art is based on religion and the creation of a theology that promises transcendence of the "Human Condition" through faith.

Michelangelo's Pieta and the creativity inspired by faith

A striking example of breathtaking creativity and an artistic statement of faith is St. Peter's is Michelangelo's Pieta. It is a marble sculpture of the crucified body of Jesus held tenderly in the lap of his Mother, Mary. The elegance, emotional expression, and sadness of this work defy description.

Created just seven years after Columbus sailed to America, this masterpiece lives on 450 years past its creator's death. Here Michelangelo seems to speak out from the grave: "This is my masterpiece of creativity. It was inspired by my faith."

Creativity can earn money but often falls short.

Of course, human creativity is often inspired by less altruistic motivations. Some people do it just for the money and end up creating nothing of lasting value. It is interesting to observe, however, that many who achieve wealth and fame by creating nothing that lasts seem to be somehow dissatisfied.

The Hollywood actor, who makes millions in a short-lived blockbusting movie, for example, will want more - to be more involved in the creative process of production. Some become more politically or socially active in the hopes that they can help create a better or more compassionate society. It is as if some higher need is not met simply through making money.

The bottom line

So creativity seems to be our ingrained response to the "Human Condition." From the writer to the artist, from the computer programmer to the design engineer, we seem to create to validate our individuality.

More importantly, however, for the truly creative it is more a driving force somewhat akin to a hunger or craving to bring to fruition what was previously only imagined. Human imagination and its offspring, creativity, can only be validated through its actual and physical expression. Left unexpressed, it is merely one of the millions of examples of unrequited genius.