

Seeing Blind

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Several months ago, on a fateful day, a sudden idea came to me: I found myself envisioning an intriguing possibility - inviting an artist to engage in a thought-provoking dialogue with me. I desired to delve into the realms of the art world and explore their perspectives on being an artist. Yet, after much seeking, I couldn't find anyone suitable. Interviewing someone just for the sake of it would undermine the purpose in this work. It would be embarrassing to contradict myself.

Perhaps hard work pays off: after several more months of search, I happened to have the valuable chance to meet with Dr. Susan Wong, a mentor at the Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre, on the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. Many people are deterred by the mention of religion, and artists are even more unsettled by discussions about 'Jesus' for various reasons. One after another, preachers scare away those who approach with questions in their heads, with words like "you'll go to hell because you did this". I did not intend to seek redemption or solutions from the interview, as I am fortunate enough to be leading a life of comfort; perhaps this also indicates that God's arrangement has always been here for me.

This article records the entire process of the meeting, including (1) the impact of "excessive criticism" in art on spiritual enlightenment, and (2) the topics of personal identity and ideological packaging.

9 October 2023

Before our meeting commenced, I explained to Dr. Wong the immense pressure I felt regarding artistic creation and the excessive criticism I had subjected myself and society to. This pressure has exceeded the limits of what I can handle, resulting in a chain reaction of emotional responses.

Dr: People are like Russian dolls, needing to fill many identities. "What kind of artist am I! What kind of employee am I!" We spend much of our lives looking for the 'answers' to all of this simply because in society, we need an identity, we need roles. But in ourselves, there are many more selves, namely the "ideal self". You came to see me today, maybe hoping that your exhibition will go smoothly, or hoping to get closer to God. That's perfectly fine! It's a good thing to search for your purpose, but it can also put a lot of pressure on you. Our innermost self is often conservative, constantly doubting our decisions and planning for the 'best' outcome for ourselves. You are afraid of insecurity, afraid of stagnancy, just like a computer that is running on default settings. This could be from the artist deep inside you. You are highly sensitive to the surroundings. If there is a scale for the pain in the world, what others may feel to

be a level two could appear to be a level seven for you, because you are an artist. Artists are wound healers, so we can feel things that others cannot, because we are so highly sensitive to everything around us - but these qualities also emerge as we grow. In *Psalm 139*, it says, "You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book." God sees you, the one He created in His image. Just now, you also felt that God is guiding and protecting you. You don't have to be unyielding, you don't have to sow or reap, as God will take care of it all. In that is peace and freedom within oneself, because "*I am who I am*".

Mindful breathing is an important part of life, and not just something associated with other religions or trends as people might think. In *Genesis 2*, it says, "*Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*" God breathed life into our ancestors, so we should pay attention to what this "breath of life" really means and also pay attention to the presence of God.

K: Actually, I feel frustrated. I often feel the need to meet different demands from myself and society. The pursuit of art, or being in this "circle," is always about seeking

opportunities. Artists, unlike regular employees, don't have a superior evaluating their everyday performances, so they need to be self-disciplined. I also hope to visit other countries and, hopefully, achieve some kind of historical significance. Because of art, I have read countless books, done numerous creations and preparations... I have pursued my profession tirelessly.

Recently, I have been reflecting on why I keep on "creating," what my motives are, or what is guiding me to repeatedly invest myself in it. Why was I bestowed with this "talent"?

My mother used to take me to church since I was young, but I stopped some time later because churches are quite "worldly" and surrounded by controversies. During my teenage years, I quietly "let go" of it. In recent years, I have started to pray again. I pray, "If it is what you have arranged, then give it to me; if not, please don't give it to me." Little did I know that within one short year, I have been granted far beyond what I prayed for, and it started to frighten me. I believe that receiving "rewards" in life is only because there will be bigger and more challenging trials ahead. I did not feel proud of all that I have been given by heaven; instead, I worry even more.

Dr: Trembling in fear, right?

K: Yes. I also think that while I haven't shaken off this feeling of fear, I should continue to do what I want to do and strive for everything I want to achieve. I should also do something for God with the talents and opportunities He has given me.

Dr: I heard something. You said that you have let go of your attachments, and that is very important.

K: Because the reality is "If it is not mine, that will never be mine."

Dr: Very good. Our mission is not accomplished by ourselves, but by following the Lord. If you were born as a lily, then be a beautiful lily. Don't expect yourself to survive the dry season, because you are not a cactus. Cacti don't need to be lilies, they don't need to grow in the wilderness. So, the turning point you have realised is crucial, letting go of the notion of "what you want to become." When you release that attachment, your true inner self can shine through. Our soul is like clay, when you become softer, then God can shape you and reveal your most beautiful form.

K: I used to fight against the world, to achieve certain things at all cost, but it didn't turn out as expected. Deep down, we already know whether we will succeed or fail.

Dr: When you exert force, as you have mentioned, it feels as if "the soul is being dragged by the body." The fact that you are now holding Father's gift in your hands and feeling bewildered invites you to touch base with your original purpose, and you may not be able to immediately figure out the reason. In reality, each step we take is a lesson in trust, and you have experienced all of these, you know it is achievable. As long as we don't use excessive force, there are bound to be people who appreciate what we do. The creations of an artist are unique, and each artist will have their own type of audience. There are so many artists in the world, but no artist can please everyone. Your realisation is good.

K: It's amazing how I was summoned. I rewatched "*The Prince of Egypt*", which is my childhood favourite "heroic story" of Moses parting the Red Sea. It moved me to tears when I first watched it. Then, one day at Eslite Bookstore, I bought a book that I thought was about conversations with God, but the content was bizarre, so I ended up throwing it away. I used to be afraid of

the Bible as it impressed upon me to be lengthy and incomprehensible. My mother even made me copy the Psalms as a punishment when I misbehaved. But after throwing away that heretical book, I suddenly felt the urge to download the Bible app. I realised that the versions currently available are actually very clear and easy to understand. Times have changed! Gradually, I found my way back to God.

A sudden vision of "Tao Fong Shan" also prompted me to find guidance. I often observe the consciousness of society, and I found that modern people are increasingly afraid of hearing about "Jesus," while listening about other religions doesn't generate the same aversion. Maybe by incorporating elements of the Father into art, perhaps through colourful "finger paintings," which is a very traditional and stereotypical image, we can try something more "contemporary" and tell everyone to pay attention to ppl the things around them. But I don't know how to get started.

Dr: As a young person. So tell me, why do young people or the people around you resist it so much?

K: Because they don't understand it.

Dr: That's right. And, as you just mentioned, the fact that you were punished by your mother to copy the Psalms multiple times is also one of the reasons. People may wonder, "Why is everything a 'punishment'?"

K: It seems that "Jesus" is too serious a topic, and one is prone to criticism.

Dr: It's still too authoritarian. The church is authoritarian and sees itself as 'superior' in a sense. Like you mentioned earlier, you are afraid that things like crystals, which are popular now, are considered "evil" by the church, and you seem to be very averse to it. But in reality, there is nothing to be afraid of. It's not about forcing you to believe in these things, but rather because everything is created by the Father, right? Just like crystals, they are just stones created by the Father for us; the Israelites worshiped the golden idol in the book of Exodus because they worshiped other gods, but that golden idol was just a created object, not the source.

K: Is the problem about essence then?

Dr: There's nothing wrong with the essence; they are just objects. The problem lies with people.

K: The problem lies with the people.

Dr: Exactly. This is why people don't like to hear about "religion," because it is often too dogmatic. Mine is right, yours is wrong; mine is sacred, yours is evil. So how do others perceive you when they interact with you?

Just now, you mentioned using your artwork or yourself to spread the message, but first, you need to work on yourself. How your life is, how your artwork is. If you want to testify for the Lord, then don't aim at just figuring out how to "incorporate" it into your work, but rather how you are as a person, and how your "production" is. It's all natural, and it takes time to immerse in it. Also, don't resist the "stereotypical" art that you mentioned earlier, as it is given by the Lord to previous generations. You can also study where those iconic works come from, with humility. Some "spokespeople" in the past didn't do a good job in this. My son says it the same way, "I'm not disbelieving! I just don't believe those 'spokespeople'!" As long as you realise this, your artwork will be different too.

K: My work, in a nicer way, is about "thinking and attempting to point out some problems," and in a more critical way,

it's about criticising other people's problems. In a few months, I will have another exhibition. This time, my main goal is to highlight and question why we seem to frequently use various theories, myths, and philosophies to showcase our work as being more profound and intellectual than others. Why do artists seem to have a unique "persona"? When viewed by others, "artists" are characters who cannot earn money and insist on standing their ground in universal values. Why do we always see ourselves through different lenses? If we discard this "persona," we are all the same.

Dr: So, how do you incorporate these concepts into your artwork?

K: My work makes use of ready-made objects with a strong sense of modern design and adds texts or reproduces them on top, creating a correspondence between the objects and the texts, satirising the various issues I have noticed. Others would describe it as being more conceptual, for pointing out certain problems.

Dr: I see. So, let me ask you again, why do you enjoy satirising or pointing out problems in others/society?

K: Because I enjoy uncovering the absurdity in life, including myself.

Dr: From what I understand, it seems like you enjoy inspiring others to 'awaken', calling on them not to do ridiculous things.

K: Yes.

Dr: To discover blind spots, to call out to them, to awaken them. Am I right?

K: Yes, that's correct.

Dr: So, what is your intention for calling out people?

K: Because... I feel that souls need to be awakened so that they can quickly start doing what their souls should do, our eyes have been blinded.

Dr: After awakening them, what's next?

K: I don't intend to preach, but I want everyone to be a "good person."

Dr: What is a "good person"?

K: Someone with a clear mind...? Someone who acts justly.

Dr: Here's the crucial point. This is the mechanism in your mind: you wish eagerly to satirise social problems, awaken others to see what they cannot see, and even do so by satirising yourself, but it's not enough. This approach will never progress as criticism must be coupled with guidance. Each of us has blind spots, even if something is considered worldly, such as pop music by such celebrities as Keung To and Joey Yung, your mind also works to find out "why" we should be able to accept them. It is burdensome for someone who is constantly in a "critical mindset" because their perspective becomes narrow overtime.

K: I have also realised this problem.

Dr: Artists should see beauty in the least expected, even in those who seem lacking. We are only bound by external constraints. Let us observe these things and beauty from within ourselves. No amount of "satirising social problems" will actually change humanity because the world is good at forgetting. However, if people are

attracted to beauty, then there is a chance for change. Just as when your mother forced you to copy the Bible, it didn't make you like it, it was too "cruel"! Nothing good comes from doing things out of fear; it should come from love. So, Kaio, if you choose to walk this path, it should come from love and beauty, not from rules and punishment.

In the *"Song of Songs,"* it says, *"I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awaken love, until it please."* God will not give you anything until you are ready for it. Your work should not be dogmatic! Rather, it should be about speaking to the beauty of creation. Art is also a form of practice, and things are not as we think they are; we must learn to let go. It is difficult to learn to let go in your early twenties, but our soul needs peace. *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."* How do you feel about this so far?

K: I feel like there's a sense of *"out with the old, in with the new."*

Dr: New life, life in Christ. Free, lightened and protected.