

*"It's ok. We are art."*

*By, Kelly McGuffie*

*"God has filled us with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all the craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs...for work in every skilled craft." Exodus 35:31-33*

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My mom made it her personal mission to culturally educate her children during summer breaks from school.

She tirelessly piled my older brother, younger sister, and I into the minivan for adventures to the public library. We gathered armfuls of sticky children's books (though I had a propensity for choosing foreign cookbooks), and quickly scribble entries on our reading club worksheets in hopes of earning elusive and grandiose prizes.

When the local community college offered workshops on topics exposing young minds to everything from earthworm composting technology to mastermind chess techniques, my mom was the first to sign us up. That is the story of how I once toured a dump and why we still tease my sister for being a chess nerd to this day.

The love my parents had for culture, history, and art saturated our family vacations. No matter what city we visited, we always stopped at three places:

libraries, museums, and cemeteries. (The latter deriving from my dad's fascination with genealogy. "Hold up your fingers for how many "greats" this dead uncle is to you and say "Cheese!")

On one trip to the Portland Art Museum, which promised the wonder of ancient Egyptian creativity, my siblings and I were surprised to find that we were standing in a room full of nude sculptures. Our innocent faces showed our mortification as we realized our mother had brought us to Satan's playground.

We looked at my mom with the same look we shot her when a movie character uttered words like "ass" or "damn." It was a self-righteous look that said, "Mother! How could you let us be exposed to such filth?"

On this day at the art museum, my mom did not reply with the usual, "Sorry, kids." She didn't apologize for bringing us to a room with life-sized naked people with penises, hairy parts, and breasts.

"It's ok, kids. It's art."

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On man's first day, when God breathed life into Adam, I wonder if there was an audience. I wonder if the birds hovered in the trees waiting for the man to wake up. Perhaps the marching ants stopped their procession for a moment to end the debate over whether this new creature would walk on two, four, six, or eight legs.

Artists are often shy about their creations, with an innate desiring to wait until the piece is complete before revealing it to the public. Even then, the perfectionist natures of many artists lead them to conceal their full talent from the public.

The painter cares deeply for what is taking shape on her canvas. It takes time and precision, but the artist knows the art is worth her investment.

How much more then does our heavenly Creator love his greatest creation—us, the only creation that is continually made new?

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The universe came about with simple words.

Human life was birthed with a single breath.

God created a lot of things in those first days, but the greatest was humanity: the creation made in the image of God.

*Selem 'elohim*: picture or likeness of God. But the Israelite's did not separate between physical and spiritual realms.

In the Ancient Near East, when a work of art was constructed in the image of a god, three things were believed about that painting or statue. In addition to a spirit of that god living in the statue, the likeness had the power of and the functional surrogate abilities of whatever god it was made to represent.

Growing up in a Pentecostal denomination, I heard many sermons limiting the Holy Spirit to a moment at an altar: "getting filled," "speaking in tongues," "being endued with power," "when the Holy Ghost comes upon you..."

I may not speak Hebrew or Greek, but I've heard the tongues of men and angels. Pentecost didn't just start happening fifty days after the resurrection.

Pentecost was happening that first day of Creation when God said, and it was.

Pentecost was happening when God breathed into Adam, and he was.

Pentecost happens every time we use our God-given creativity, and we are.

When we are brave enough to invite the Holy Spirit into our worlds, we are saying yes to a full partnership and participation in the power and function of the God whose image we bear. Imagine what humanity can do with all its voices calling out into the void, hand-in-hand with the Holy Spirit, creating something new.

Humanity was given a unique gift at the moment of its creation; it was given the image of God. We have the power of the God we represent. We have the spirit of our God living inside of us. We can function as a surrogate of our God—hands and feet that do the dirty, thankless work of loving and creating.

The sculptures in the museum that day weren't the only things in the room deserving the distinction of being called "art."

Humans are living art who are full of the Spirit of the Great Artist, working as co-artists who participate in the restoration of Creation to the Creator.

It's ok. We are art.