

Lesson 4 Spark Your Creativity

Seeing the Extraordinary in the Ordinary

Creativity. When you hear this word, what instantly pops into your mind? You may think it is a quality that only artists and writers possess— some special talent you are either born with or without. Many people accept the idea that we can be divided into two groups: those who are creative and those who are not. This common belief, however, is far from the truth. Everyone has the ability to be creative. Finding creativity inside yourself just takes a little effort.

Some artists, for example, spark their creativity by looking closely at ordinary objects. They try to discover the beauty hidden within these common objects and then turn them into works of art.

Giuseppe Arcimboldo

Look at these two paintings. Believe it or not, they both depict the same person, Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II. The one on the left might look familiar, as it is a standard style of portrait that you would see in a gallery or an art book. However, the one on the right, called *Vertumnus*, is very unconventional.

Created by a 16th-century Italian painter named Giuseppe Arcimboldo, the painting shows striking creativity and originality. Fruits, flowers, and vegetables are arranged like the pieces of a puzzle to create a human head. A cherry and a mulberry become the dark eyes, while an apple and a peach act as the pink cheeks. This painting is representative of the artist's signature style of "composite portraits." He used plants, animals, and other objects to create many other portraits like this.

Another good example of Arcimboldo's unique creativity can be found in *The Gardener*, one of his "reversible" paintings. When viewed normally, it is just an ordinary still life of vegetables in a bowl.

However, when flipped upside down, it is magically transformed into a smiling face! Experts have studied this painting, along with Arcimboldo's other reversible ones. Their research showed that he first painted them as still life paintings and then turned them upside down and made some adjustments to create faces. X-ray examination revealed that he sometimes changed the positions of some of the fruits and vegetables. Why did he make his paintings reversible? It was probably because he wanted to add an interactive element to his work by doing so. Viewers feel as if they are playing a visual game, which brings them a sense of pleasure.

Each of Arcimboldo's works is a careful study of everyday objects. When he looked at typical objects, such as a bowl of vegetables, he saw the artistic and imaginative potential in them. His innovative approach to art inspired many great artists who came after him, including Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí, and René Magritte.

Helga Stentzel

Take a look at this picture. Do you see a horse standing in a field? Or is it simply a collection of clothes hanging on a clothesline? This witty and amusing creation is actually a work of art created by the visual artist Helga Stentzel. Using everyday items, she creates playful visual illusions that force you to look twice in order to confirm what you have just seen. Her unique style has been called "household surrealism."

Stentzel is perhaps best known for her *Clothesline Animals* series. She got inspiration for the series while she was hanging her laundry. By simply adding some colorful clothespins and a dish towel, she was able to transform her black sweatshirt and dark grey pants into a horse. Other creations followed, including a brown cow standing on some hills and a zebra crossing the desert. All of these works were created from nothing more than laundry and household items.

Another series that highlights Stentzel's astonishing creativity is Edible Creatures. For this series, she arranges food items you can find in any kitchen to create cute animals. The stars of the series are Brad Pet and Crunchie, a pair of puppies made of sliced bread and lettuce respectively. Stentzel says she came up with the concept of Crunchie while putting together a salad for her family.

What do you think her secret is? Stentzel says that it is her active observation skills that allow her to make magic out of the ordinary. As a child, she would spend time staring at the patterns in the wood of her bed, trying to find different animal shapes. She admits that even today she stares at things longer than is acceptable in society. This keen observation is what enables her to continuously produce creative and imaginative works of art.

Creativity is not some kind of exceptional skill that belongs to exclusive groups of people. It is actually a part of our daily lives, a power that we can display anytime we choose to. Whether we realize it or not, we are constantly using our creativity to adapt, adjust, and rearrange the things around us. By doing so, we are turning the ordinary into something extraordinary—something that has never been seen before. Take a look at the things around you, but don't just give them a quick glance. Look carefully, and you might discover something that sparks your own imagination and creativity.