

Neuroaesthetics

Art & Your Brain

The Modern Creative Woman

The artist is in a sense, a neuroscientist, exploring the potentials and capacities of the brain, though with different tools. How such creations can arouse aesthetic experiences can only be fully understood in neural terms.

-Semir Zeki

Semir Zeki is a British and French neurobiologist who has specialized in studying the primate visual brain as well as the "neural correlates of affective states," such as the experience of love, desire, and beauty that are generated by sensory inputs within the field of neuroesthetics.

Presence - Mindset - Purpose

1

Presence

Your presence includes getting out of your mind and getting into your life, making contact with the present moment and seeing yourself as the "context" for your life experiences. Your internal presence can be whatever you decide it to be in each moment of your life.

2

Mindset

Your mindset includes acceptance of what you are currently thinking and feeling as well as the circumstances you are facing. Acceptance of what currently exists is necessary before attempting to make any changes. Mindset also includes forging a new working relationship with your thoughts and practicing conscious & creative thinking.

3

Purpose

Your purpose includes both your personal values and the action steps you take in alignment with your values. It is through your purpose that you engage with your life, choose what is most important, and make committed actions to demonstrate your values to yourself and others.

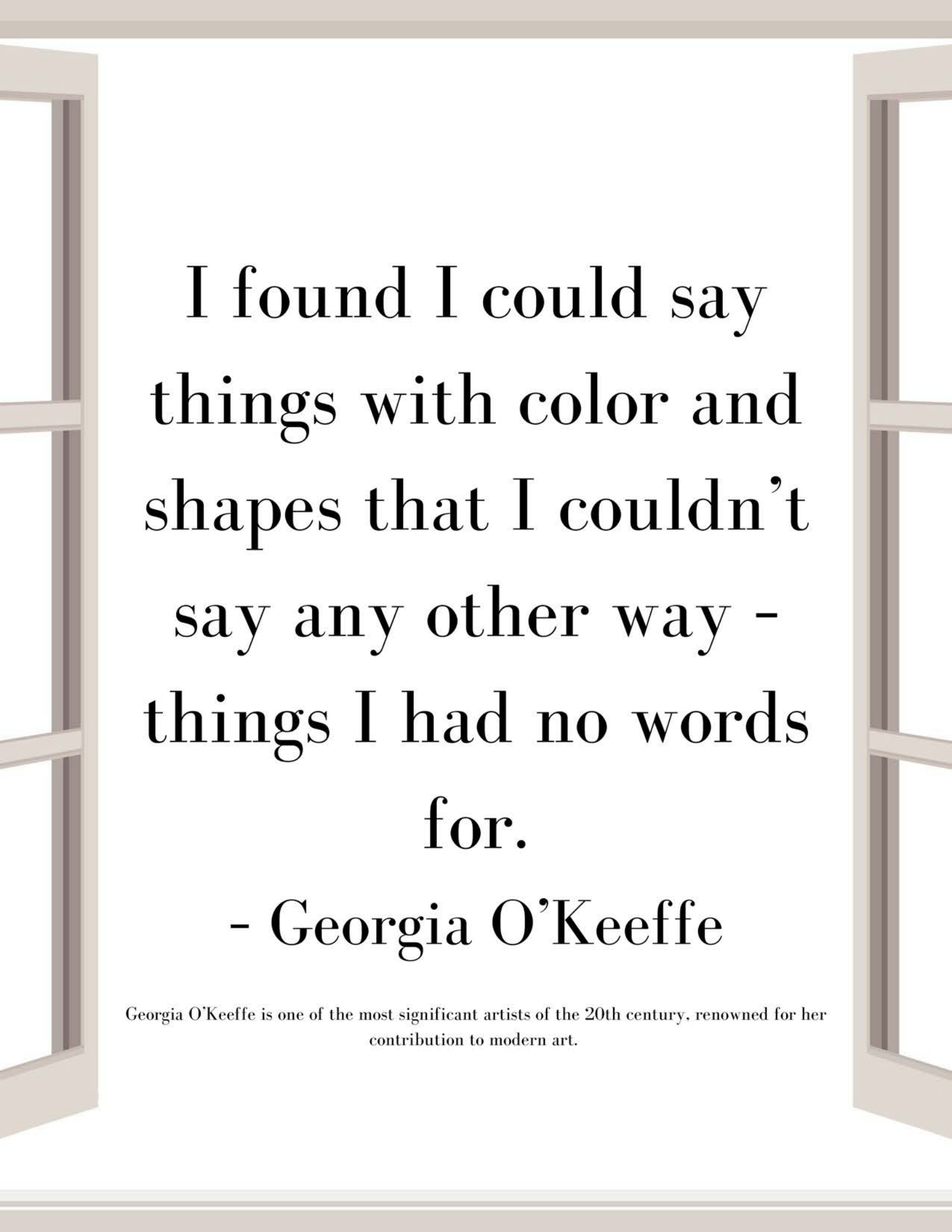
PRESENCE

Present Moment Awareness & Yourself as Context

Presence - your ability to make contact with the present moment, separate from your thoughts and feelings about it. This means observing what is happening outside of you as well as observing your thoughts and feelings in the present moment.

Self as Context - Seeing yourself as the context for your life means you are the anchor. Whatever happens inside of you (thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations) as well as whatever happens outside of you (people, places, circumstances) is separate from your experience as a human being. You might think of your "context" as your spirit, your core self, your essence. In other words, you as the context is the view of yourself as the person experiencing your life. For example: you are the journal on which your story is written. Rather than being the story itself, you are able to truthfully see yourself as the journal on which the story is written. Another example: You are the canvas on which you create the painting of your life. Instead of being the paint, you accurately see yourself as the canvas.

Remember, your presence includes getting out of your mind and getting into your life, making contact with the present moment and seeing yourself as the context for your life experiences. Your internal presence can be whatever you decide it to be in each moment of your life.



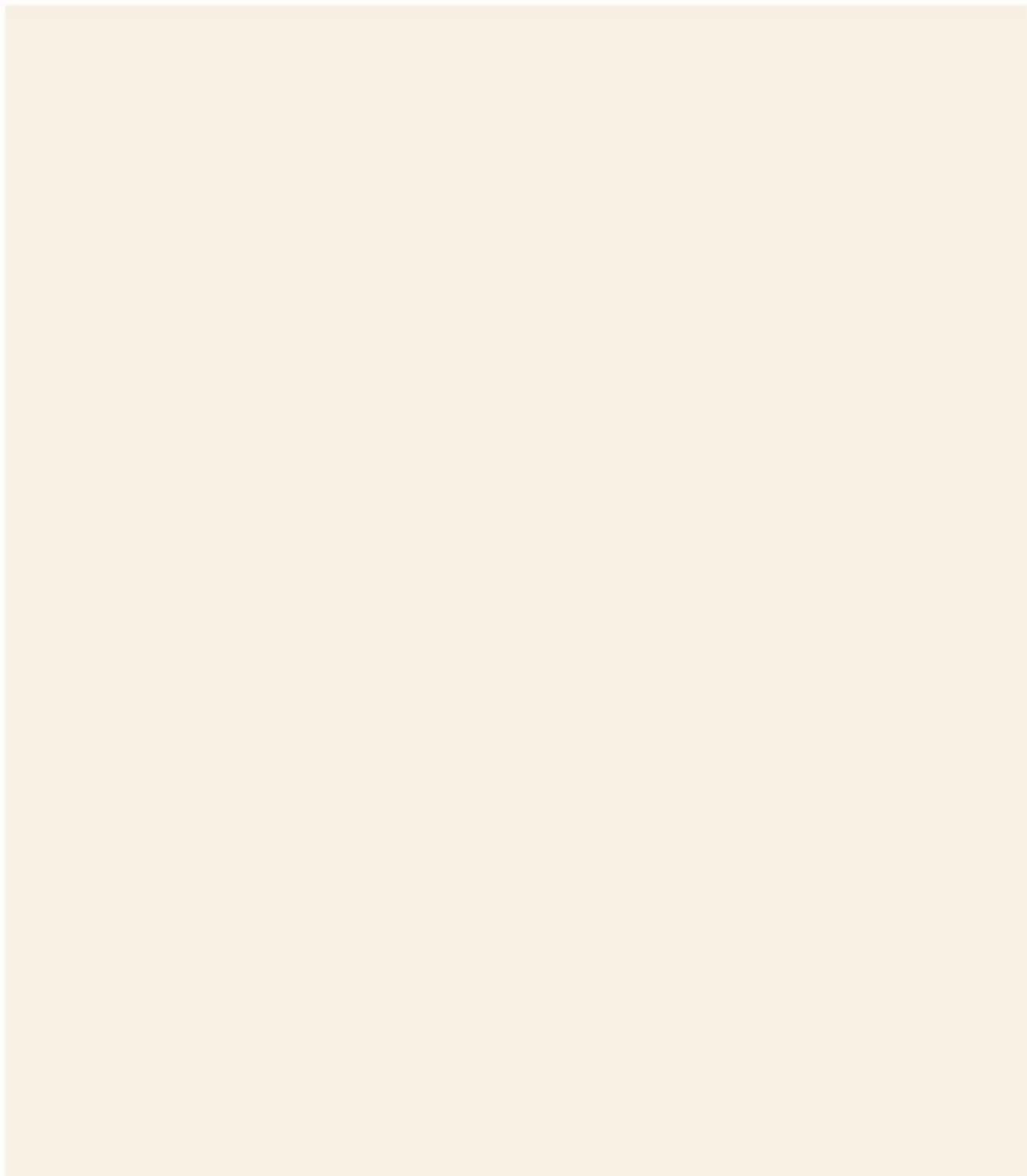
I found I could say
things with color and
shapes that I couldn't
say any other way -
things I had no words
for.

- Georgia O'Keeffe

Georgia O'Keeffe is one of the most significant artists of the 20th century, renowned for her contribution to modern art.

INTENTIONS

Are you ready to build your brain and creative process? What are you hoping to get out of this class? What emotions would you like more of? What would you like your brain to do better?



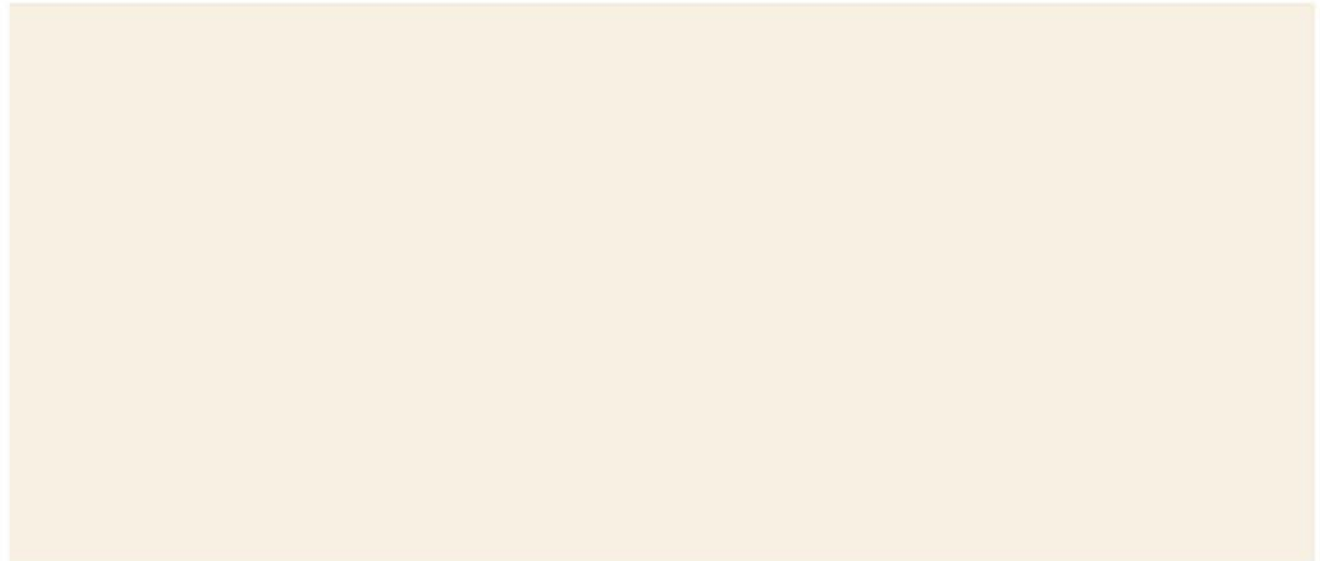
First things first

The first step to understanding what your brain likes aesthetically, is to go look at some things and see how you feel. Make contact with the present moment and look around you. In other words, pay attention to what is happening around and inside of you. Specifically look while noticing what is outside of you is distinctly different from your thoughts and feelings about it. You decide what you gives you pleasant feelings.

What percent are you in the moment right now? Give yourself a score 0-10. What do you think about this? Are you usually at this level of present moment awareness?



Look around you for a few minutes, notice your breath and carefully observe whatever you are looking at. When your brain starts thinking of other things, return your attention to your breath and looking around you. Without judgement, describe 2-3 things what you see.



How do you feel in response to what you are seeing? Is is a feeling you like? Are you making judgements about the space around you? Can you let go of the judgement and just see?



What is the most pleasing object or space you see right now? What do you like best about it? (Color, shape, function, texture, form, placement, arrangement, sentimental aspect, etc). 1. Describe the object or space. 2. Describe your feelings and reactions.

What is the least pleasing object or space you see right now? What do you dislike about it or what is not quite right about it? (Color, shape, function, texture, form, placement, arrangement, sentimental aspect, etc). 1. Describe the object or space. 2. Describe your feelings and reactions.

Is there anything in the room you would change? Why do you think that change would be pleasing? Would it look "better?" Would you feel differently? How would you feel if you made that change?

Describe the most beautiful place you have ever seen - in real life or in a film. What about that place is pleasing to you? What qualities make it beautiful to you?

What is the least beautiful place you have ever seen - in real life or in a film. What about that place is dis-pleasing to you? What qualities make it unattractive to you?

Where is a place you would love to visit? Why? This could be a place you have visited before or would like to one day. This could be a place for vacation or a "usual" place you like to go.

Where is a place that some people seem to enjoy, yet you have zero interest in going there?

What is your favorite color? Where do you use that color? (your wardrobe, home, decorations, etc.)

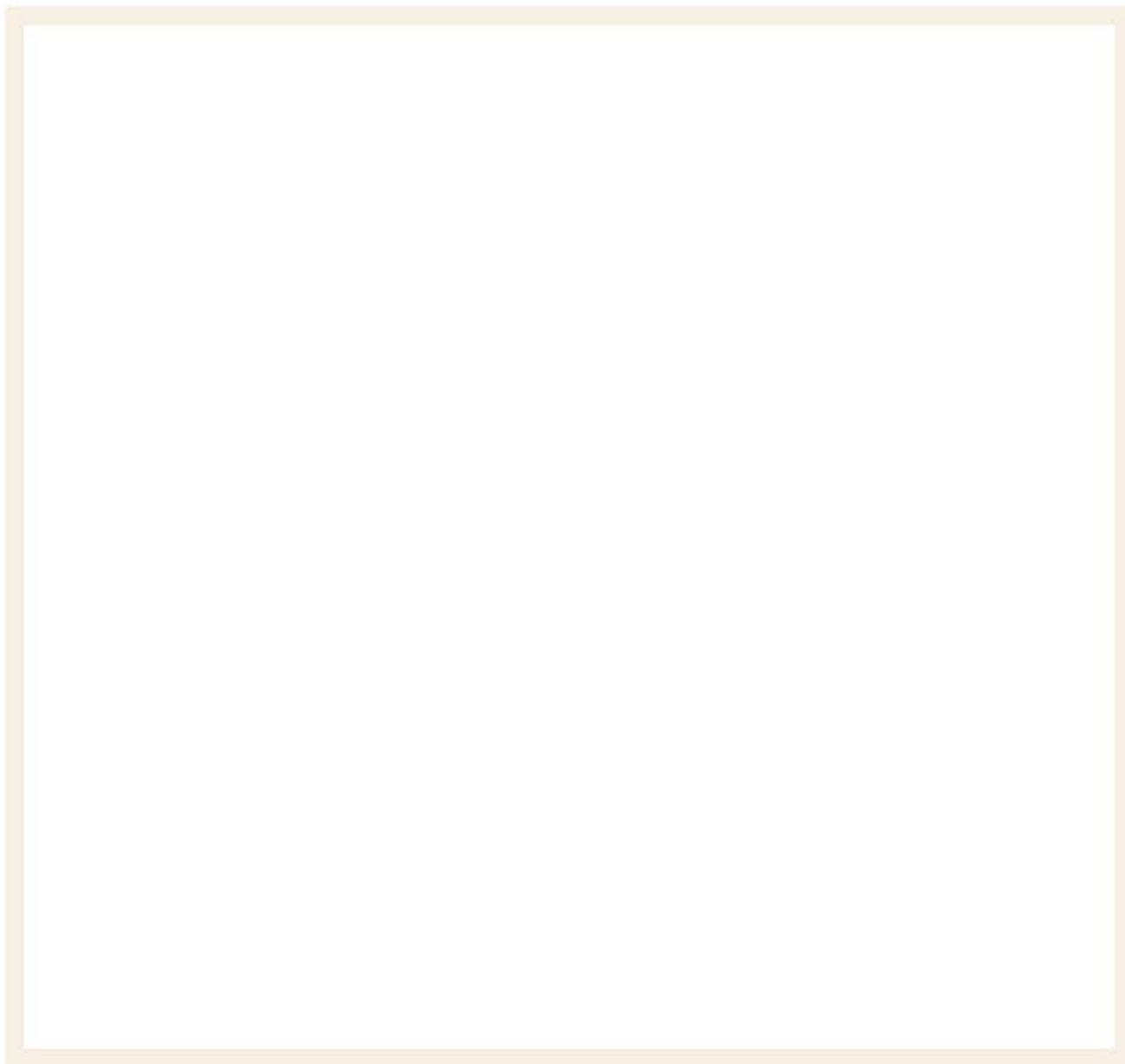
What are some of your favorite things to touch or feel? In other words, what feels good to you when you touch it? (For example: petting your dog/cat, inhaling the smell of hot tea, running your hand across a brick building, your favorite sweater, the texture of leather, wood, glass, wool, the taste and feel of cookie dough, etc.)

What is your favorite time of the day or night? What makes that time your favorite? What do you notice around you at that time of the day or night?

How do you think paying attention to your environment helped you be more focused and in the moment? Why do you think this is good for your brain?

Visual Expression

Using lines shapes and colors, depict what is looks like when you are fully present and in contact with the present moment. Enjoy the feel of the materials. You might like to try using oil pastels or crey pas. Avoid thinking too long about it and just be spontaneous. Be sure to answer the questions below when you have finished. However you do it will be great!



Title:

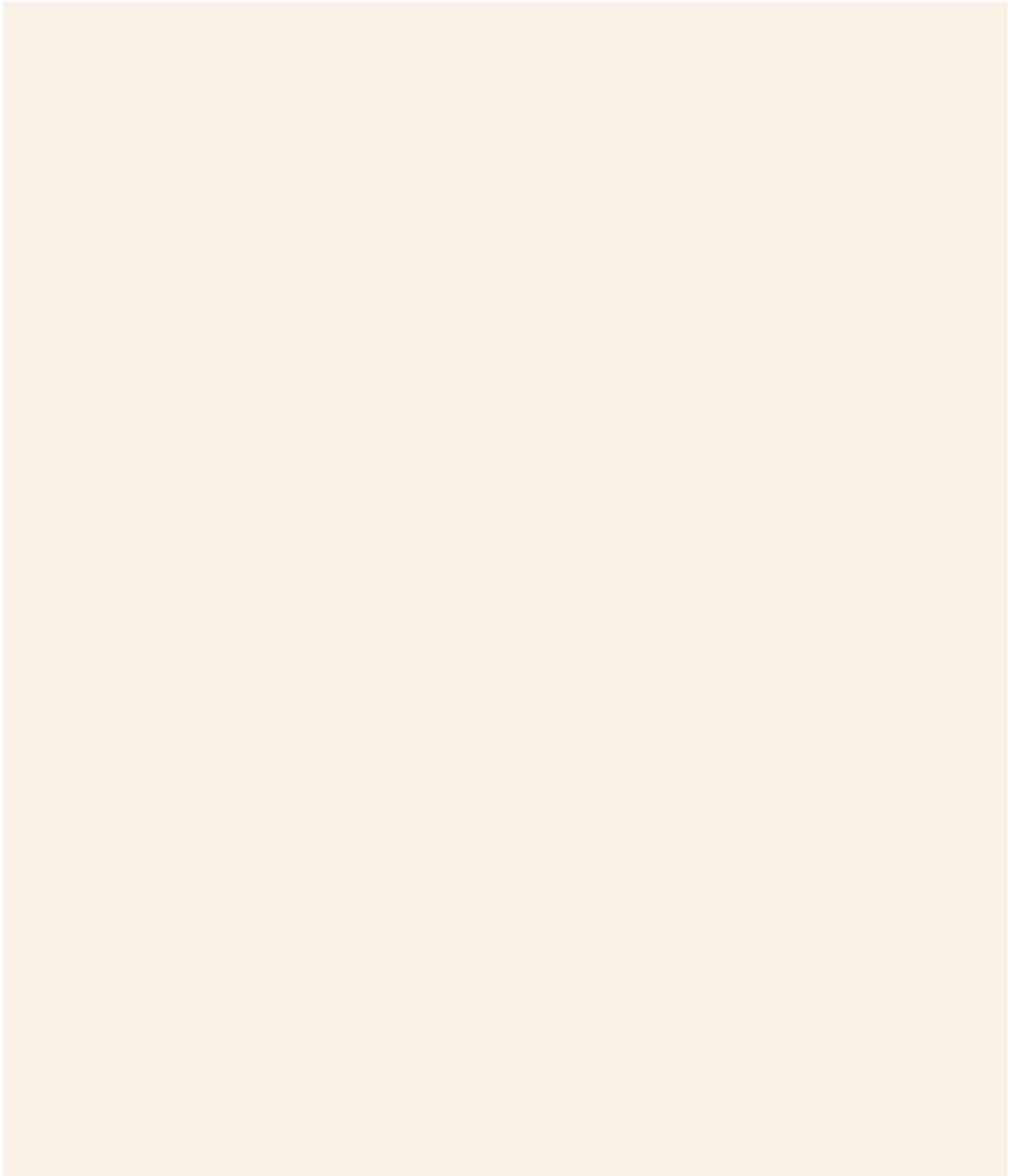
Three words or phrases to describe your art.

-
-
-

How do you feel?

REFLECTION

Reflect on what you have learned about your presence this week and how you are focusing on your environment and what you see, feel and taste. Avoid judging yourself for what you did or did not do this week.



MINDSET

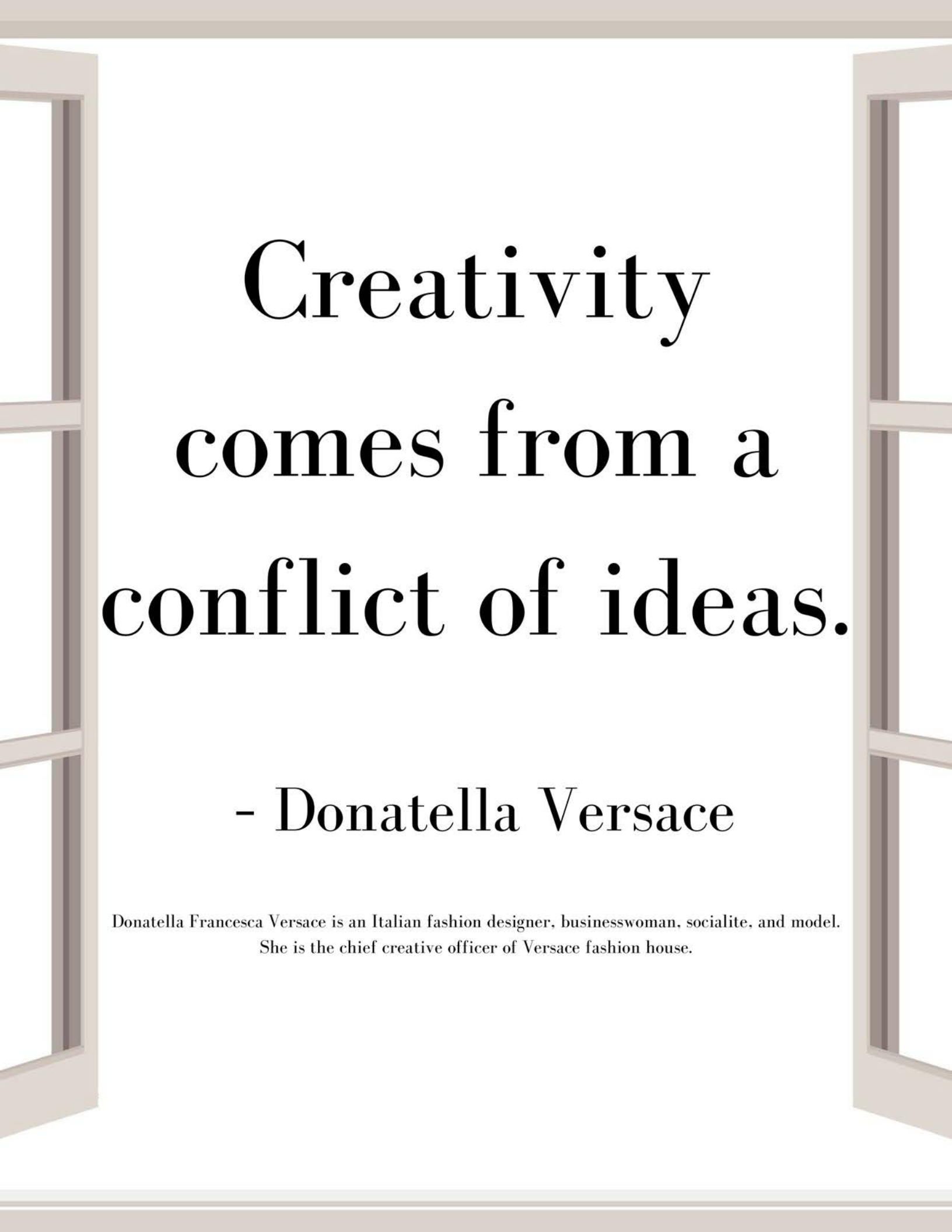
Acceptance & Relationship to Your Thoughts

Acceptance -Acceptance is your ability to see things for what they are. You understand your thoughts as "just thoughts" instead of perceiving your thoughts as "true" or facts. Acceptance is a core concept in changing your self-talk and beliefs about yourself. For example, if you have a negative thought about yourself, it is only a thought. You might be able to find piles of evidence to support your thought, yet a thought is just a thought. It is your brain firing - that is all. Acceptance also helps us be better in relationships by not taking things personally. For example, if someone says something to us, we can allow it to be what it is - just a comment.

Acceptance means we avoid distorting the comment into something negative or personal. This one change in your life can completely transform your relationship with your significant other, friends, family and coworkers.

Relationship to your Thoughts - Changing your relationship to thoughts frees you from negative self-talk and low self-esteem. Then you can transform your behaviors for health, recovery, and happiness. Your thoughts stem from your brain - not from your essence, spirit or core self. Thoughts are merely a product of your brain. Make your thoughts work for you instead of being swayed by negative thoughts. Start by observing; say "That is just a thought" each time you notice a thought.

Remember, your mindset includes acceptance of what you are currently thinking and feeling as well as the circumstances you are facing. Acceptance is necessary before attempting to make any changes. Mindset also includes forging a new working relationship with your thoughts and practicing conscious & creative thinking.



Creativity
comes from a
conflict of ideas.

- Donatella Versace

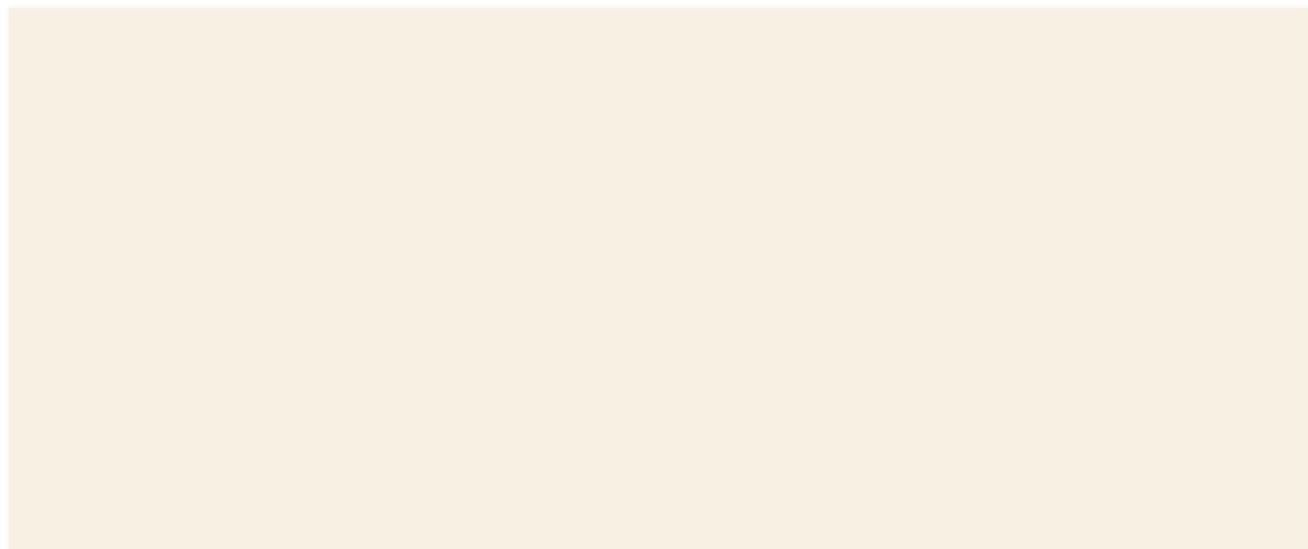
Donatella Francesca Versace is an Italian fashion designer, businesswoman, socialite, and model.
She is the chief creative officer of Versace fashion house.

INTENTIONAL THOUGHTS

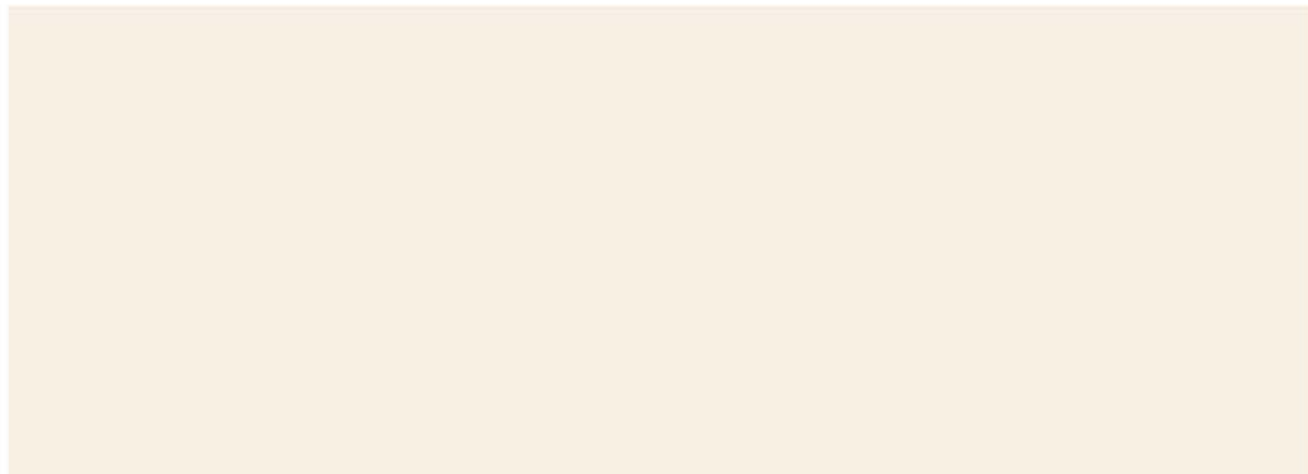
When was the last time you updated your thoughts on pleasure? It is time! Choose your thoughts carefully. Your thoughts inform your feelings, which in turn, inform your actions and the outcomes.

What thoughts do you need to let go of and what new thoughts do you need to think to bring yourself more aesthetic enjoyment? Answer the questions below.

What thoughts do you need to let go of? Write down any old, repetitive, negative thoughts as well as any usual/common thoughts that come up when you look around your house. For example, "I need to dust, this place is a mess, why does nobody help me, I wish I had a housekeeper" etc.



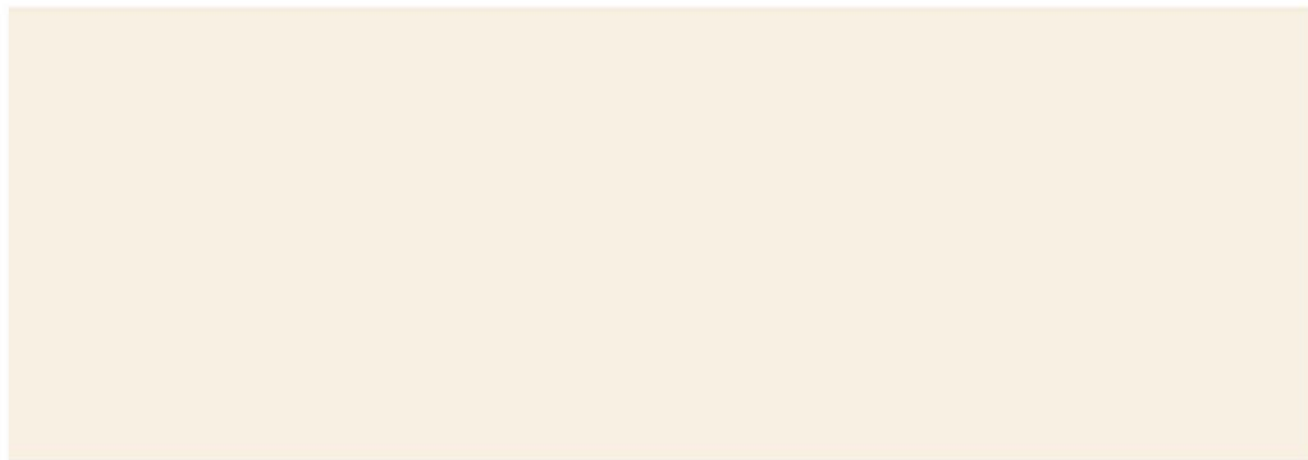
Where did these thoughts come from? Do you think these old thoughts and judgements are true or serve you now? Do you want to carry them forward? Are you ready to let them go? Do you have judgements about turning your focus to enjoyable aesthetic experiences? Do you think it is frivolous or you should focus on "more important" thoughts to help you feel good? Where did *these* thoughts come from?



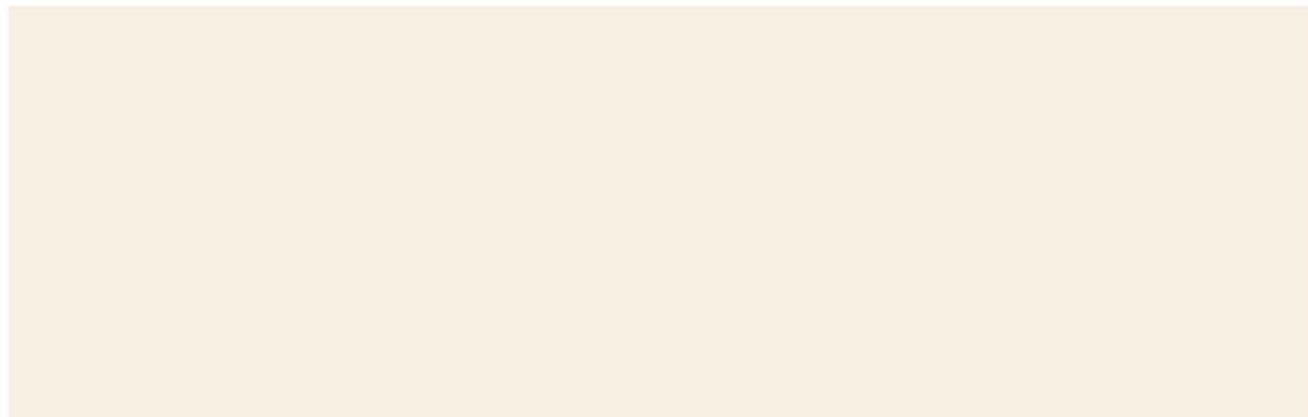
INTENTIONAL THOUGHTS

It is impossible to turn old, negative thoughts into something positive. Instead, we can accept that these old thoughts will sometimes emerge, especially when we are stressed, sick, angry or tired. It is essential that we replace old, negative thoughts with new, helpful and productive thoughts. Overtime, the new thoughts will help you overcome the negative ones. Answer the questions below.

Start by imagining what a confident woman thinks about her aesthetic experiences? What does she value in her home, kitchen, neighborhood, car, and body? What aesthetic experiences does she look for each day to feel good?



Perhaps the thoughts you wrote down seem too extreme or far away for you right now. If that is the case, remember, it was your brain that thought of those confident thoughts! You created them! Practice reading and thinking the above thoughts every day. If you think you would have difficulty believing the thoughts you wrote above, you can modify your statements. Craft a few more moderate thoughts that will serve you if the above statements seem extreme, and for days when you are feeling down. You can add the following phrase in front of the statement: "It is possible...." For example, "I go slow and make time to choose an outfit that feels good to me" can become, "It is possible that I can still choose pleasing colors to wear today, even if I am feeling a little down". Write a few thoughts that will serve as a "ladder" to the stronger statements you wrote above.



Reflections on Your New Thoughts

Remember thoughts are just one neuron firing to another neuron. Thoughts are not true - they are neurotransmitters engaged in a biological process in your brain. Research shows we need positive thoughts about ourselves, others, our circumstances and the future. Write a reflection below describing an ideal aesthetic, pleasing day for you. Write as if it already happened today and you are reflecting on how good you felt and how grateful you are for such amazing aesthetic experiences and positive emotions. Write in as much detail as possible using colors, textures, patterns, taste, smell, sounds, and what you touched.

My Aesthetic Preferences

"Aesthetic pleasure" means where you find enjoyment, satisfaction and pleasure. It is far more than what you just find to be "beautiful." For example: perfect amount of salt on your popcorn, sounds of the birds in the morning, beautiful patch of greens in nature, feel of holding a loved ones hand, gazing at a favorite piece of art, wearing your favorite color, sitting up straight, eating something with your ideal texture, feel of a hug, sensation of sand on your bare feet, an engaging song, performing your favorite dance move, dropping a letter in the post box, wrapping in your favorite blanket, smell of a candle or perfume.

The options are endless. Describe 9 places/areas/things where you currently find aesthetic pleasure.

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2

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4

5

6

7

8

9

Planning My Aesthetic Moments

You can find aesthetic pleasure any time using your values. See where you have aesthetic pleasure in each area below. In meditation, you might notice the pleasure of your breath.

Struggling in some areas? If you find little pleasure in managing your money, you could call your banking time a "money date", drink hot tea, and sit in a nice environment while reviewing your accounts. This primes you to notice aesthetic experiences. You might find you enjoy the sound of your pen on paper or the click of your keyboard while doing your banking. However you do this will be great!

1

solitude/meditation

2

learning

3

caring for your environment

4

physical health

5

mental health

6

managing money

7

passion project

8

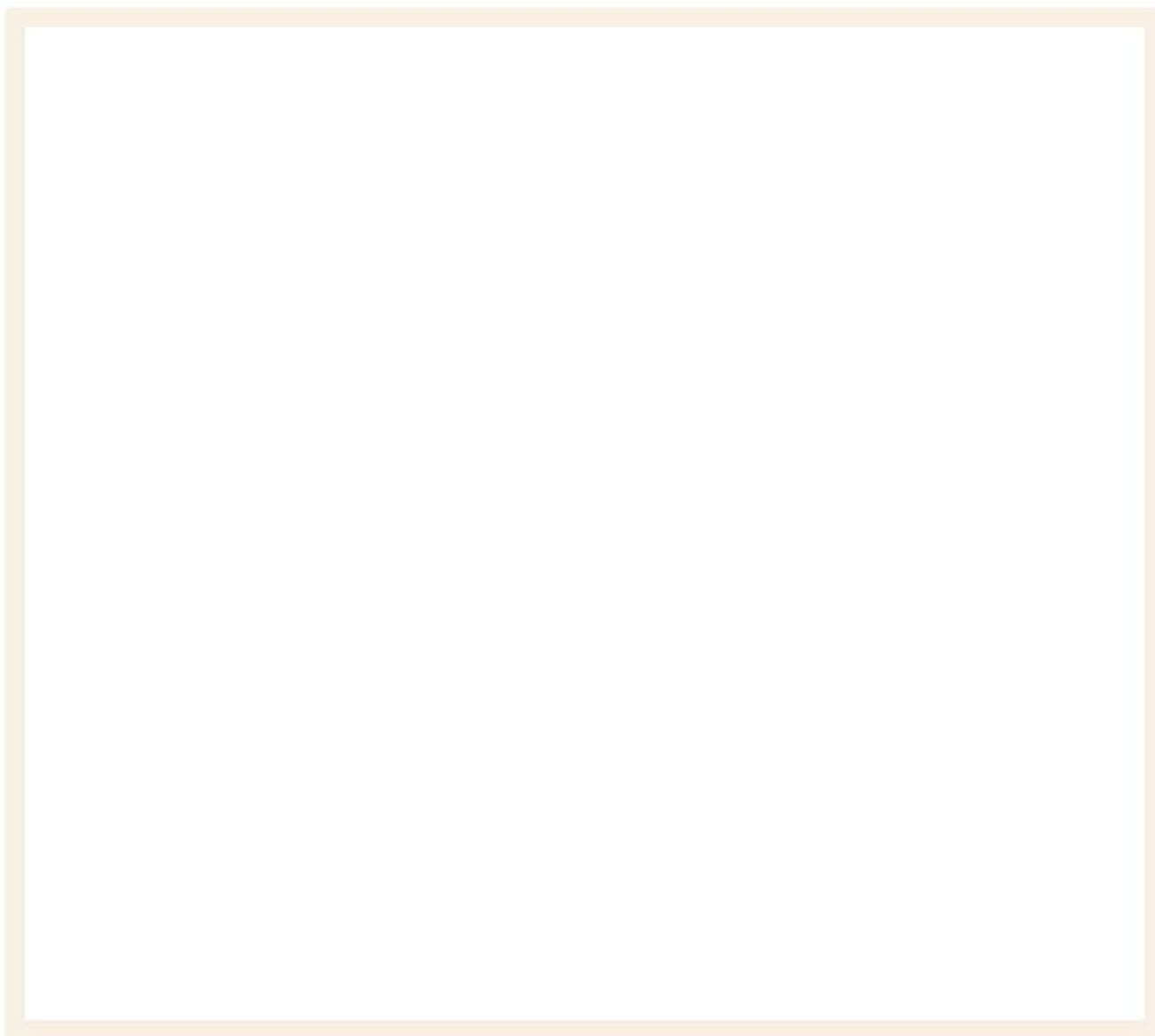
work (home or office)

9

social time

Visual Expression

Find three images on Pinterest or in magazines that show some of your favorite aesthetic experiences. Avoid thinking too long about it and just be spontaneous. It's ok if you are unable to explain in words why the images "work" for you. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words! Paste the three pictures here, in your journal, or on another piece of paper. Be sure to answer the questions below when you have finished. However you do it will be great! Perhaps you can hang the images where you can see them and be inspired.



Title:

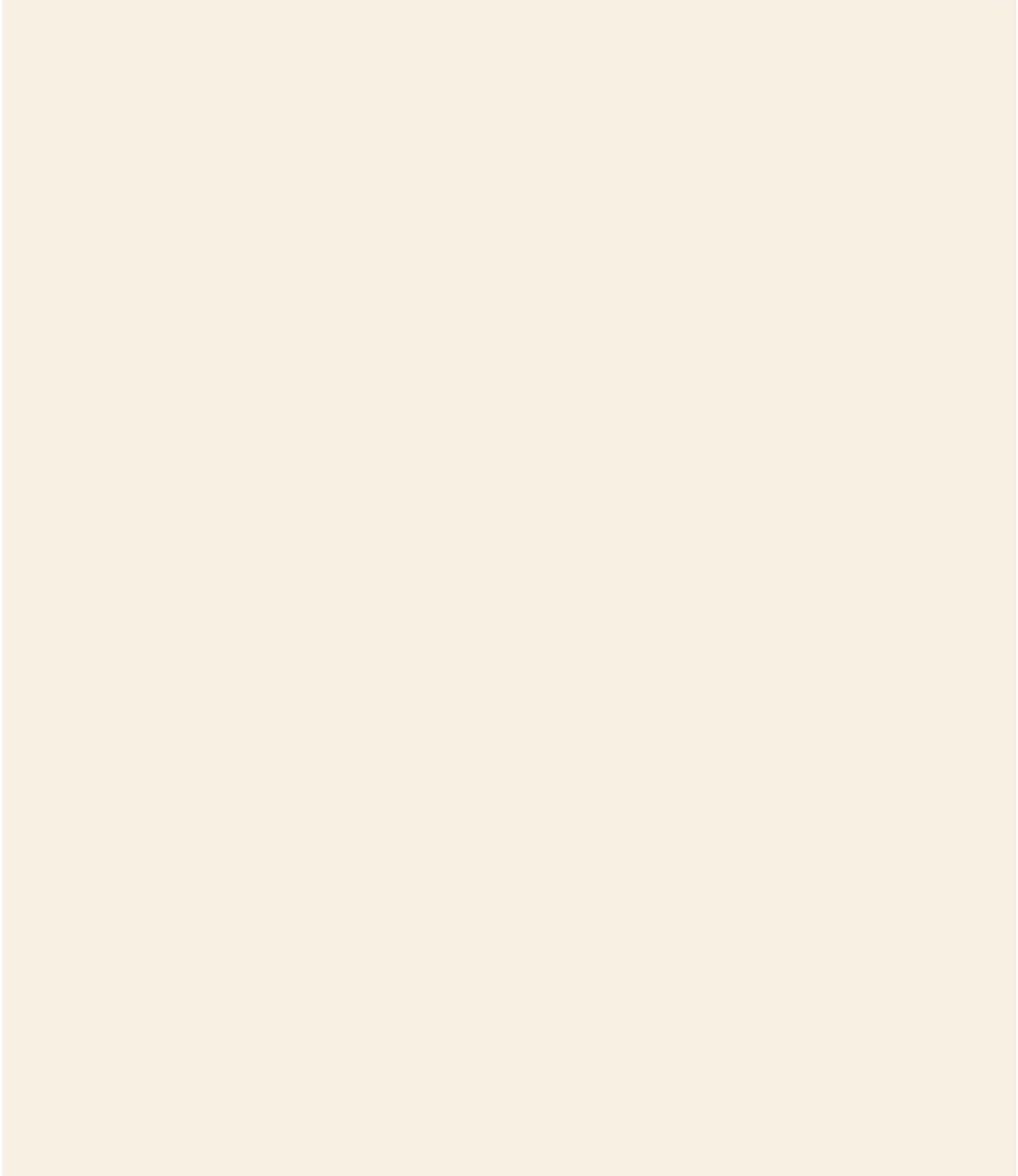
Three words or phrases to describe your art.

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How do you feel?

REFLECTION

Reflect on what you have learned about your mindset in regards to aesthetics. Why do you think constant awareness of your aesthetic experiences is important?
Avoid judging yourself for what you did or did not do this week.

A large, empty rectangular box with a light beige background, intended for reflection.

PURPOSE


Your Values & Committed Actions

Your purpose includes both your personal values and the action steps you take in alignment with your values. It is through your purpose that you engage with your life, choose what is most important, and make committed actions to demonstrate your values to yourself and others.

Purpose - your chosen presence and actions in the world. Your purpose is something you decide based on what you enjoy, have an interest in pursuing, and have an ability/aptitude for doing.

Values - what you decide is most important to you. You have values in many areas such as, health, intimate partner relationship, education, family, friendship, parenting, sports, spirituality, work/vocation, community, creativity, service, school, personal development, hobbies, etc. Your values are what YOU want to bring to each area and has nothing to do with what others are doing or even if they like what you are doing. For example you might value honesty in work. When you come across someone being dishonest at work, your values help you commit to acting honestly, even if you feel resentful, angry or tempted to become dishonest when you work with a dishonest person.

Committed Actions - how you demonstrate your values through your actions. Your actions directly reflect your values. Committed action is how you show your values to yourself and the world. Notice this is action, not thoughts or beliefs. If you live your values, they will show in your behavior. For example, if you truly believe in your health, then your behavior will show it through healthy food choices, exercise, managing your mind, learning what you need to know, practicing body care, and investing time and money in your health. If you only think or talk about your health, then it is a wish, instead of a value and committed action.



Art is the only way to
run away without
leaving home.

- Twyla Tharp

Twyla Tharp is one of the world's leading and award-winning
choreographer, dancer, and author.

Aesthetics is your

Imagine yourself sitting under a beautiful tree in your favorite place in nature. You are gazing at some little specks of dust floating in the sunlight. You admire the way the specks seem to sparkle in their movement. You notice how they interrupt the light as they float down to the ground.

Your noticing and looking carefully is your aesthetic experience.

Are you valuing the dust or are you valuing your appreciation and awareness in the moment? More than likely, that aesthetic experience was about you being in the moment and noticing some aspect of nature that pleased you. You pausing in the moment to notice the specks of dust in the sunlight reflect your awareness of something outside of you and your decision to find it pleasing.

Remember there is nothing inherently beautiful - only that you decide something is pleasing to look at, taste, hear, smell or feel. It is a decision we make and it is different from culture to culture, and from person to person. That means you can decide what is beautiful and pleasurable. This is good news because you can decide your home is beautiful, your body is beautiful and anything you see or feel can be an aesthetic experience.

Try this exercise: Look around you and find something to focus on for an aesthetic experience. It could be art, a corner of your room, a window, a table, a pencil...anything will do. Set your timer for 2 minutes and just look. After 2 minutes of looking, write down what you see, describing the beauty and pleasure in it.

There is no right or wrong. However you do it will be great.

Creativity Brain Game

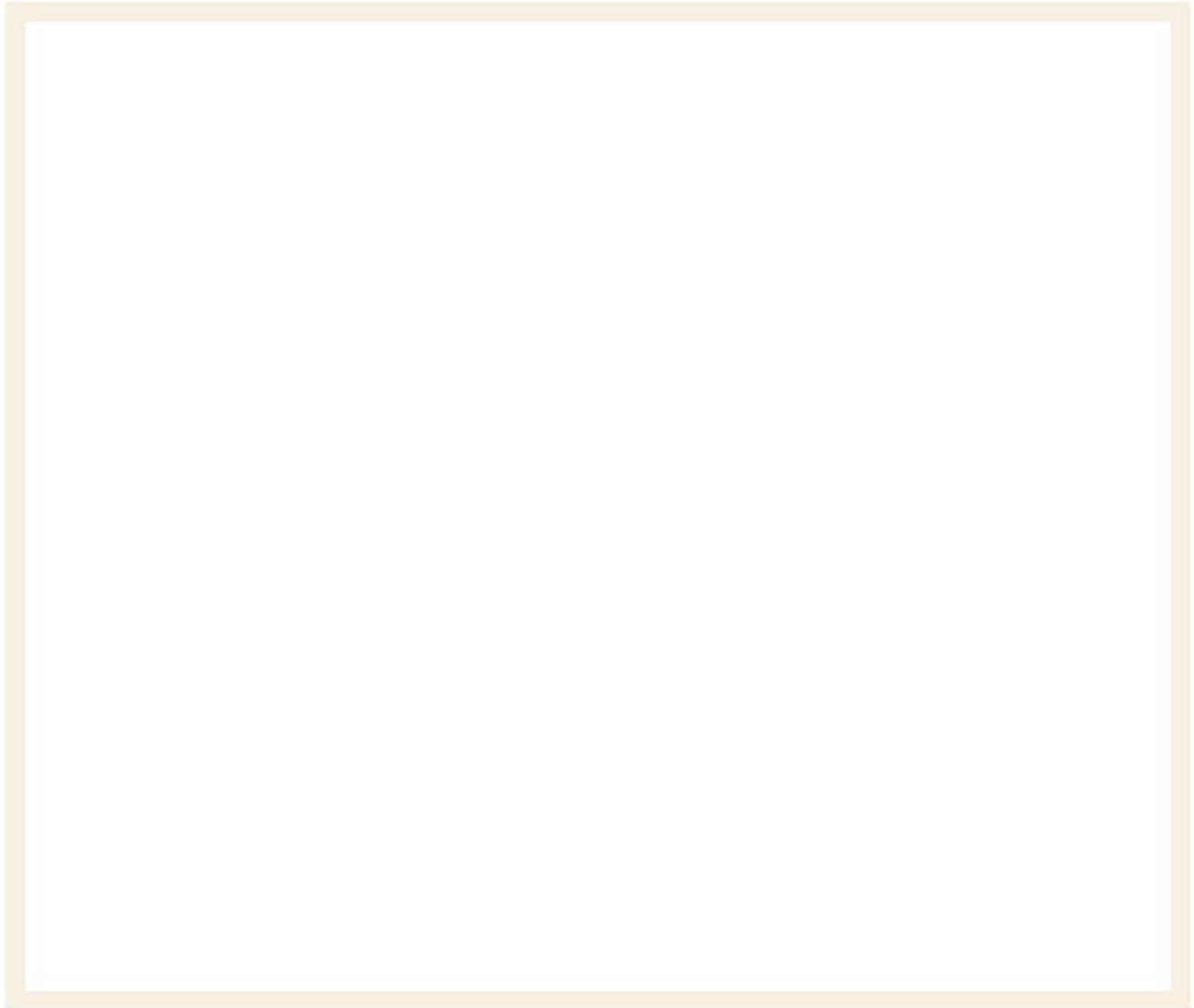
Set your timer for two minutes. Get ready for your creativity assessment.

Write down as many ways as you can think of to use a sock. Be creative and clever - think outside of the box, think of ways you can solve problems with a sock.

Ready - Set - Go!

How many ways did you think of to use a sock in 2 minutes? _____

Pause for a moment and see if you can think of one more. _____



- What strategies helped you think? (eg. look around, close your eyes, chew on your pencil, etc.)

- How did your mind help you or interfere with the process? _____

- Did you enjoy this exercise? Why or why not? _____

Neuroaesthetics Brainstorm

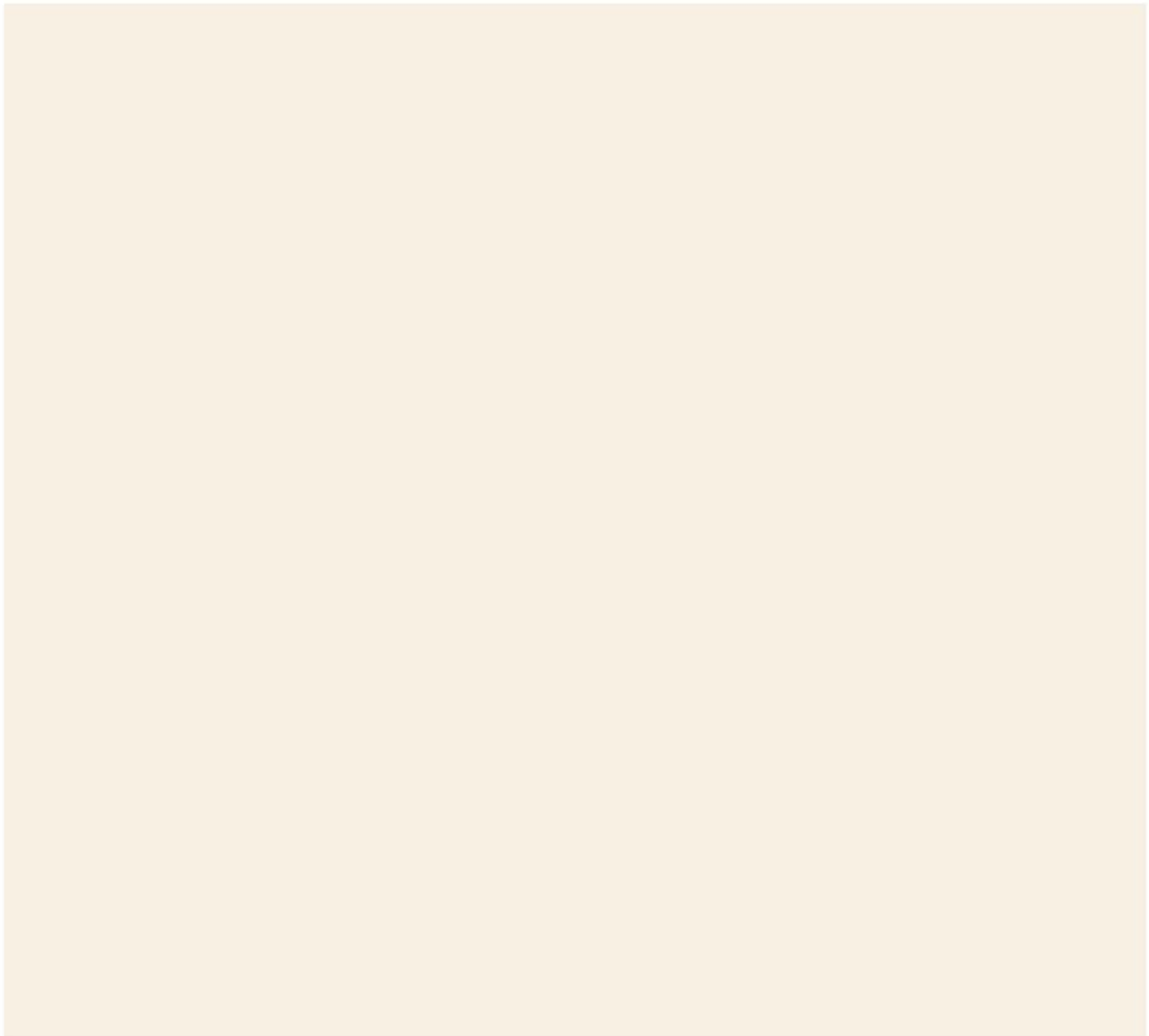
Time to enhance your aesthetic experience. Review what you wrote about in week 2 and consider which area you would like to focus on.

solitude/meditation, learning, caring for your environment, physical health, mental health, managing money, passion project, work (home or office), and social time

Pick one area and decide how you can enhance it.

For example, if you choose solitude/meditation, you could add sound to your experience with *new* music. You could add a *new* smell to your experience by lighting a candle or turning on a diffuser with a new oil. For example, if you choose work at home, you could make yourself a beautiful lunch, put *new* music in the background, add a fresh cushion to the seat of your chair, buy a fluffy rug and wiggle your toes on it, etc.

Brainstorm your list and select just one to do this week. Making small changes like new music can have a big impact on your mindfulness and presence.

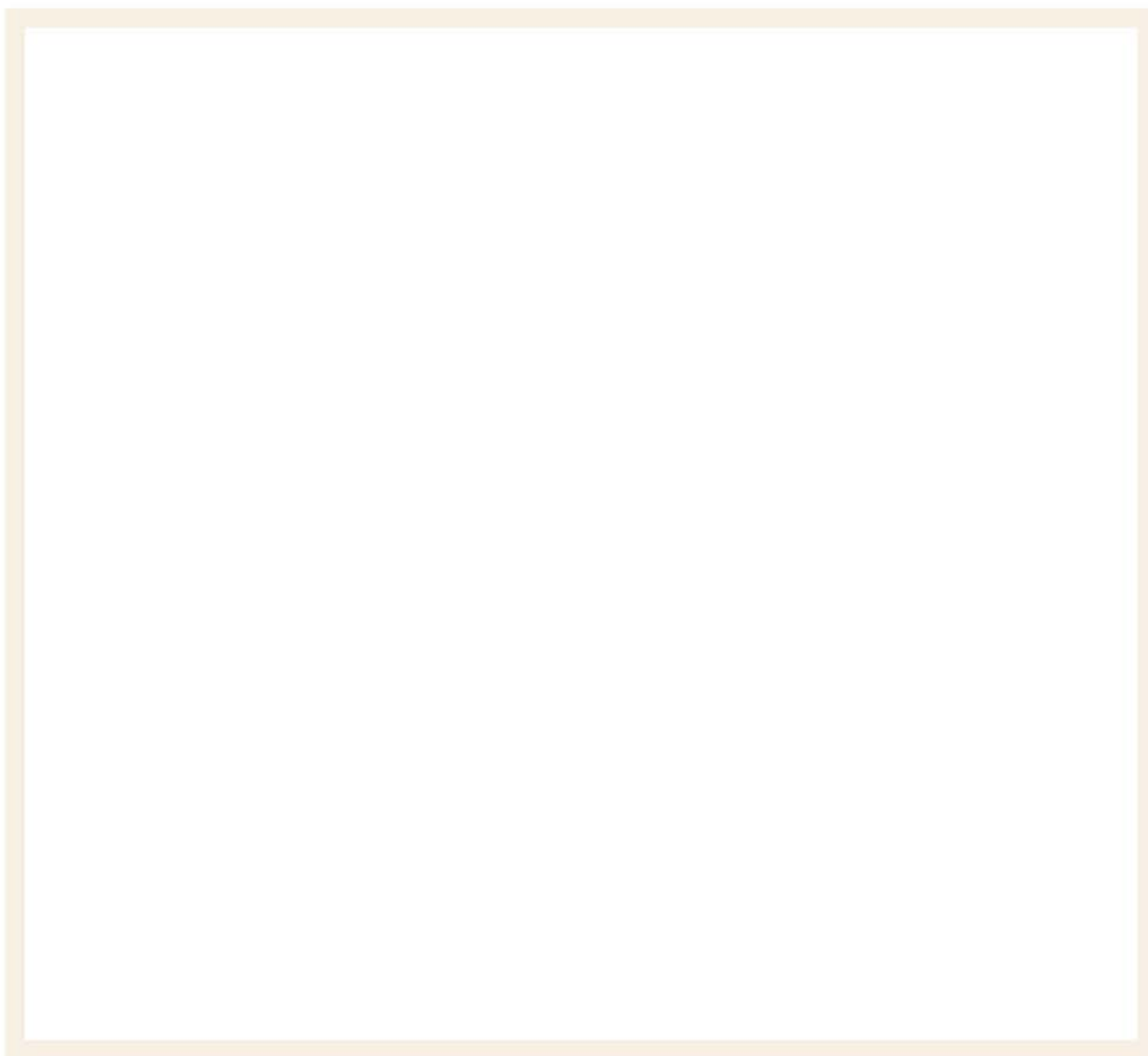


REFLECTION

After you implement your new aesthetic experience from the above exercise, write about making that small change. What did you enjoy? What will you try next? What do you now know about aesthetic experiences? Why are aesthetic experiences personally important to you? Have these been important to you in the past? Why or why not?

Visual Expression

Return to Pinterest or your stack of magazines. Choose one or several images that reflect your new found sense of aesthetics and pleasure. You do not need to have a verbal reason for choosing your images - use your intuition to find pictures that reflect what is pleasurable to you. Arrange them artfully below, on a separate piece of paper or in your journal. Answer the questions below.



Title:

Three words or phrases to describe your art.

-
-
-

How do you feel?

REFLECTION

Reflect on what you have learned from this month about the importance of having aesthetics experiences and knowing what appeals to you. Notice your thoughts, feelings and actions in alignment with the idea of neuroaesthetics. How did you feel paying such close attention to your personal neuroaesthetic experiences? Was it fun? Uncomfortable? Whatever comes up for you is welcome in your writing.



INTEGRATION

Celebrate!

Recognize and celebrate your presence, mindset and purpose this month. Celebration creates motivation for your next level of growth and change. You can celebrate anything you accomplished, a time you remained calm under stress, your self care, a new way of relating to your thoughts, your increased time in the present moment, your creative expressions, your actions in line with your values - anything you should be celebrated!

1

My increased presence I am celebrating this month...

2

My intentional mindset I am celebrating this month...

3

My purpose (values and committed action) that I am celebrating this month...

4

What external celebration I will have this month...

(flowers, book on aesthetics, manicure, etc.)

NEUTOAESTHETICS

You have completed a month of neuroaesthetic awareness!! Congratulations on all your brain and creative progress! What new thoughts will you keep? What new actions will you take to engage more with your values and aesthetic experience?

I am delighted you joined this community of Modern Creative Women who are living more compassionately and making the world a better place. Living your values and passions is part of creating a better world. Imagine if everyone focused on living their values...the world would be a happier place indeed!

If you are excited about continuing this work, reach out to The Art Therapy Center of San Francisco for more workshops. Consider the VIP package in San Francisco or Paris, the Women's Search for Meaning individual program, or mentoring.

It is my pleasure to share the evidence-based information which has helped people all around the world. I look forward to hearing from you about what you learned in this workbook. Please send me a testimonial that I may share with others so they know the benefits of being a Modern Creative Woman.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amy'.

Amy Backos, PhD, ATR-BC
Licensed Psychologist & Board Certified Art Therapist

RESOURCES

01

Art Therapy Center of San Francisco

Center for creative expression, psychological wellness, positive psychology and value-based living. Email for complementary 20 minute consultation. Amy@amybackos.com

02

Instagram: @dramybackos

Join me each Friday at noon PST while I gently guide you to strategies to live a meaningful and joyful life.

03

Book: PTSD and Art Therapy

By Dr. Amy Backos

A book about using creative process and thinking to overcome traumas. Includes a history of trauma therapy and approaches to trauma treatment as well as art interventions and personal reflections.

04

Book: ACT Art Therapy

By Dr. Amy Backos

A book about how to live a value-based life using mindfulness, creativity, and connecting to your highest self.

