Faith & Reason Honors Program

SENIOR THESIS

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Dance, a Gift Stolen

What does it mean to be a true artist? This is not a question that can be answered quite simply as it is not a question that has a simple answer. I am certain that the debate of the true artist could stretch on for days without ever having been resolved. In fact, the definition of art has been debated, changed, and elaborated on since the time of the earliest philosophers; and still, a solid definition has not yet been reached. This having been said, if the product known as art cannot be defined, how can the one who creates the art be defined? And if there is not one definitive definition for the artist, then how can one ever know what it means to be a true artist?

This seems to be a question that has been debated for centuries among artists who desire to be true in their work. However, trending throughout the quest for true artistry has always been the idea that art was given to humanity by a power much greater than us, God. Pope John Paul II describes artists as “something of the pathos with God at the dawn of creation looked upon the work of his hands” (Paul, 1). This idea of God being at the heart of all artistic endeavors has been prominent in all forms of art throughout history. If this is true, how then have we consistently managed to be selfish in our art? If God was truly at the center of all works of art artists would, in turn, need to be consistently selfless.

“Artists who are conscious of all this know too that they must labour without allowing themselves to be driven by the search for empty glory or the craving for cheap popularity, and still less by the calculation of some possible profit for themselves” (Paul, 4). God emitted through art is a belief that has been tossed around for centuries. However, it is obvious to see that we have never truly let God into and throughout our work as artists. If we were to truly let God embody our work, then both our art and our artistry would cease to be self-centered. Still, there is a constant deviation of artists away from God; retreating into themselves. The mere existence of the connection of God and art throughout time proves that we must know
this to be true. However, if we know this to be true, then why is it that we still cannot bring ourselves to be true artists?

To discuss all art as one entity would be an insult to the unique features that differentiate one form of art from another. Therefore, I would like to focus only on an art form that I am particularly familiar with. Dance, although truly a gift from God, has been snatched up by society and taken into human hands without giving credit to the original Artist (Paul, 1). It is this act of theft that has prohibited the discovery of true art. Although God meant for us to have the gift of dance, we seem to have forgotten where this precious gift came from. Although dance is a gift, it is a gift meant to be shared “With loving regard, the divine Artist passes on to the human artist a spark of his own surpassing wisdom, calling him to share in his creative power” (Paul, 2). Not only have we failed to share this gift, we have taken dance into our own hands and we have placed upon it our own rules and expectations. In addition, we seem to be under the impression that we are dancing to our full potential. Despite all of our selfish actions, we still dare to search for the meaning of true art. For centuries, dancers have attempted to pursue truth in their work, and still, we are blinded by our own selfishness. Moreover, this selfishness is a product of the environment that we created when we stole the gift of dance.
Planted in Selfish Soil

The acer grandidentatum, or bigtooth maple tree is known for its undeniable beauty. With leaves that radiate vibrant reds and oranges, it is a tree that is truly aesthetic in character. A unique feature of the bigtooth maple is the rare structure of its roots. While many trees possess either taproots or heart roots, the bigtooth maple happens to possess both (Reynolds, 1). Taproots are types of primary roots that support the weight of the upper tree. The taproots happen to be the deepest roots of the tree, and these roots will continue to grow as the tree matures. Heart roots are also types of primary roots, and these roots may be visible at the base of the trunk. Heart roots will drop numerous secondary roots into the soil and it is these roots that search for water (Reynolds, 1). One unfortunate truth about art is that it has taproots in an era that was popularized by its ideas of individual expression and earthly existence. Just as the artistic movement was taking off, so was the humanist movement. Art was raised by the humanist era.

The period from 1400 to 1650 is commonly referred to as the era of humanism. Humanism is the term that was given to this era based on its social and intellectual philosophies. During this time, society began to take on a great appreciation for worldly pleasures, personal independence, and the philosophy of secularism (Kreis, 1). While all of these ideas were highly influential, none had a more potent effect on dance than the idea of individual expression. Although dance was not necessarily viewed as an art form at this point in time, the seed was still planted in this era. Artists started to create works of art that focused on human interests. Instead of being concerned with the supernatural, they were more concerned with earthly matters. The mentality of the artists during this time period “stood at a point midway between medieval supernaturalism and the modern scientific and critical attitude” (Kreis, 1). As the portrayal of human interests became more prominent, thoughts of the supernatural were left to only the most
devout Christians. As art escalated, so did pagan beliefs. Art became highly influential of the lifestyles during this time. Therefore, as society became more concerned with the “here and now”, the art not only resembled those beliefs, but it also fueled their ideas (Kreis, 1). The humanists began to form a new way of measuring what is meaningful to existence. Practicality was now gauged by human experience and man himself, rather than the eternity of the soul.

During this time, beauty was believed to be an extension of a transcendental existence. Therefore, in an effort to ignore the existence of a higher power, humanist artists referred to their work as an aesthetic movement. Rather than portraying the supernatural, the artists focused on human relationships. The humanists were merely interested in a happy and fulfilled life on earth, and they attempted to portray these thoughts through their art work. While the former is all considered grounds for selfish creativity, there was one more idea that catapulted humanists into a completely self-contained world (Grudin, 5). The idea of individualism inflated the egos of artists, making them more self-centered in their work. This new trend emphasized intellectual freedom; what they believed to mean freedom from any supernatural morals. Individual expression was especially important to the artists of the time period as it gave them the freedom to be curious without boundaries. To the artists, this not only meant creative freedom, but it also gave them reasons to create. Individualism sparked selfishness in these artists. Not only did they believe that they were solely responsible for the ideas behind the work they created, but they also took full credit without giving any glory to God.

What is particularly interesting about the humanistic thoughts on beauty and aesthetics is that the two terms actually seem to go hand in hand. Aesthetic is often used to refer to something that is beautiful; likewise, beautiful things are commonly referred to as aesthetics. In fact, the term aesthetics is defined as the study of the mind and emotions in relation to the sense of beauty
(Aesthetics). How then did the humanists not see that aesthetics were a product of the supernatural that they were so fervently trying to ignore? They did not make the connection between God and the human relationships that they were portraying. The beauty of the human was perfectly crafted by God, and somehow they chose to ignore this. Where did they think the beauty was coming from? The people of this time period chose to believe that they were the be all and end all of life. They did not want to give credit to the Craftsman that created all the aspects of life that they were so deeply inspired by. The humanist era marked a time when humans decided that they did not desire to answer to anyone, and so they chose to ignore the existence of a higher power. They wanted free range of their desires and pleasures and so they selfishly took the gifts that were given to them. With these gifts, they did what they pleased. Art became a human possession; tainted with the defiance of absent morality.

Today, one reason that artists fail to be selfless is that they never fully recovered from the radical ideas of the humanist era. Like the bigtooth maple tree, art—despite its many roots- the taproots are placed deep within the soil of a time period in which artists thrived on individualism. Just as the taproot grows with maturity, the roots of art have continued to grow, but they are still planted in selfish soil.

It is at this point that I would like to diverge and say that while the majority of artistic thought was submerged in selfish creativity, there were few artists who remained true to the Artist who entrusted His gifts to us.

“Michelangelo who in the Sistine Chapel has presented the drama and mystery of the world from the Creation to the Last Judgement, giving a face to God the Father, to Christ the Judge, and to man on his arduous journey from the dawn to the consummation of history.” (Paul, 9).
In the midst of self-centered artists who were desperately trying to deviate from the idea of the supernatural, Michelangelo created a masterpiece that embodied the Christian faith. Despite the cultural norms of the time period, he was still able to glorify God through his work, and in turn, he created one of the most famous masterpieces of all time. Michelangelo was inspired by the transcendent and used this inspiration to create these beings in human forms. By doing this, he was still able to show the beauty of humans and nature, but he was also able to give credit to the grand Architect behind his work “This extraordinary complex is a remarkably powerful expression of sacred art, rising to heights of imperishable aesthetic and religious excellence.” (Paul, 9).

In relation to the bigtooth maple tree, Michelangelo, and other artists who emit God through their work, are comparable to the heart roots. Although they are physically smaller, the heart roots are essential to the life of the bigtooth maple tree. Without the heart roots, the tree would perish. At first glance, if one were to look at the bigtooth maple, he or she may only notice the large taproots extending from the base of the tree. However, with a closer look, one will find that the heart roots, although smaller, are still visible at the base of the tree. These heart roots are essential to the life of the tree as they are the roots that provide water and nutrients for the tree’s survival. Artists who practice their art in a selfless way have continued to keep the beauty of art alive despite having been dominated by societal norms. Like the heart roots absorbing the water and sending it throughout the tree, true artists draw their inspiration from the world created by the grand Artist. They then proceed to give Him credit by sharing their glorified art with the community. While the taproots can hold the tree up, they cannot give it life; that is the job of the heart roots.
Specifity That Yields Selfishness

Dance as an art form has always been highly specific in the selection of those worthy of portraying it. The evolution of dance as an art form has proven to be dependent on economic status, self-expression and physical appearance. Why is this? The answer is simple, we made it so. When humans took the liberty of claiming dance, we added our own parameters as to who would be “worthy” of sharing this gift of dance. As a race, we decided in which areas of society dance would flourish. Blinded by our own ego’s we seldom used dance to glorify God but rather to claim social strength and identity (Mackrell, 6). This “segregation” began to happen as early as Ancient Greece. Politicians and citizens with enormous amounts of wealth would put on dance dramas to ensure the loyalty of the city-state (Mackrell, 6). Instead of sharing their creations with humanity, they simply shared it with those whom they knew would give them political and social security. Therefore, dance only thrived in the small circles in which the Greeks kept it in. Over in Europe, during the reign of King Louis XIV, French nobles began to use dance as a means of appearing more sophisticated than the rest of the citizens. Suddenly, noblewomen and noblemen were expected to appear more effortless in an attempt to create a more dignified look. Eventually, the French courts thrived on dancing, they reveled in the way the dance made them look and feel superior, majestic, and even transcendent. They did not share it with creation as intended by God. Instead they kept the gift within their courts and high orders. Indulging themselves in the wonder of the gift, they became more and more self-indulged. They did not see God in dance, and their inspiration came from within their own walls. They had followed directly in the path of the humanists, only now they had added dance to the mix of arts that were being mistreated. The story of the evolution of dance may be even more selfish than the evolution of art itself.
Lord of the Dance

The most skilled seamstresses had been brought together from all over France. They were united for one sole purpose; to make elaborate couture costumes. Specially selected French citizens were diligently working to learn new movements. Selected court officials were instructed to send invitations of a lavish social event with eloquent attire. The ‘Court of Louis XIV’ was about to put on its first performance. *Le Ballet de la Nuit (The Ballet of the Night)* would be known as the first official ballet performance, and it was about to revolutionize French culture. King Louis was about to become known as the first male principle dancer, and he was about to take on the title ‘The Sun King’. A new vision for art was emerging. Ballet was being introduced as an art form equivalent to that of painting and sculpting. *Le Ballet de la Nuit* was about to pave the way for the art of dance. Artistic creativity was in its prime during this time so it is no surprise that society quickly welcomed the art form. This new desire for artistic movement, although revolutionary, continued to follow in the footsteps of the humanists. However this time a new agenda was incorporated, and this agenda was not one of Christian morale.

King Louis XIV took absolute power and reign over the French monarchy in 1653. He had many lavish ideas as well as a great appreciation for the arts. Towards the beginning of his reign, French nobles had ownership over most of the territory. These nobles also repeatedly attempted to rebel against the French king. Louis, wanting more power and control over the nobles, knew that he had to create a “dependency upon his crown” (King, 1). King Louis XIV had seen the effect of paintings and sculptures on the public, and he had inkling that adding movement to art would be even more influential. He devised a cunning plan that would control
the nobles and also bring a great amount of wealth to his court. His plan was somewhat of an attack on social status, and he was to use dance as his weapon.

“Yet King Louis needed something in which to modify the noble's behaviors into role functionaries to the pomp and circumstance of his envisioned central royal court culture of The Versailles Palace and it's emerging adjacent community - likewise developed by Louis - where everyone who was someone, personally selected by his crown officials, were likewise to move to from Paris” (King,1). For this, the dance was a perfect tool. With dance, Louis was able to instruct his dancers to act out his expectations of French society rules and behaviors. The choreography emphasized how he wanted to the nobles to behave. The dance portrayed proper etiquette, and most importantly, proper behavior. In addition to portraying his desires, King Louis XIV also made dance “one of the most important social functions at court” (Social, 2). By doing this, he was able to maintain unity and control. He wanted to establish his belief in the divine right of kings and therefore he presented himself as a deity in both the messages of the ballets and also in his balletic roles (Social, 2). In Le Ballet de la Nuit, Louis performed as Apollo. This is where he established his title as ‘The Sun God’. Through this ballet, Louis was able to portray himself as the rising sun. During this role he equated himself with the sun, the source of light and energy to the universe (Lee 68). With this ballet, King Louis XIV had reassured France that he held absolute power over the country (Social, 2). Anyone who was of noble or high status would attend these ballets. These high officials not only began to desire invitations to the ballets, but they also desired roles in them. With the ballet at the center of French court, all nobles and high officials were expected to move with grace and dignity. Soon it became a great honor to dance beside the king in a ballet; especially if one’s noble status was not particularly high. While the ballet was much about social status, King Louis would not cast a noble who did not possess grace or talent. Therefore, it became extremely important to all those of high status to excel in dance. Without
excelling in dance, one would be looked upon as undignified. Through the ballet, King Louis was able to achieve the control and power over the nobles that he so greatly desired. In an account of everyday life of courtiers under King Louis XIV, the importance of dance in maintaining social standing is clear (Social, 3).

“A son of Montbron...had been asked if he danced well; and he had replied with a confidence which made every one hope that the contrary was the case. Everyone was satisfied. From the first bow, he became confused, and he lost step at once. He tried to divert attention from his mistake by affected attitudes, and carrying his arms high; but this made him only more ridiculous, and excited bursts of laughter, which, in despite of the respect due to the personage of the King, degenerated at length into regular hooting. On the morrow, instead of flying from the Court or holding his tongue, he excused himself by saying that the presence of the King had disconcerted him, and promised marvels for the ball which was to follow... As soon as he began to dance at the second ball, those who were near stood up, those who were far off climbed wherever they could to get a sight; and the shouts of laughter were mingled with clapping of hands” (Hilton, 15-16)

Louis XIV was so successful in his effort to maintain unity and control amidst the nobles that dance became a part of French culture, especially amongst the nobility. The desire to please the king through dance became so great that in 1661 Louis XIV created the first formal ballet school, L’Académie Royale de Dance (Royal Academy of Dance). Although Louis believed that the dance should remain within the nobility of the courts, he also knew that if he wanted to continue to use ballet as a tool for political persuasion he would need to have the most skilled dancers performing his works. Because so few nobility proved worthy of dancing in the court’s ballet, he used the Royal Academy of Dance as a means of “re-establishing the art in its perfection” (Social, 3). In order to achieve the results he desired, Louis kept all artists under his organization. He made sure that they were all learning proper technique, and no performances were to be put on unless they were permitted by him. To even further gain authority, Louis XIV made certain that all dancers in Paris were registered with the Royal Academy of Dance. Due to this, King Louis not only gained control over dance in his court, but he also gained control over dance in
the city (Social, 3). King Louis had complete control over the art of dance. “The modes of fashion, etiquette, and dance which were set up in the French court for the king’s own political reasons dominated the culture of Europe for nearly two centuries.” (Social, 3).

Not only does dance stem from humanistic art, but it also stems from plots of political and social power. King Louis XIV used dance as a means of control and absolute power. Louis XIV abused the gift of movement to manipulate French society. As a result of his actions, many other European countries established dance based on the parameters that Louis created. It is apparent throughout his reign that King Louis believed himself to be the creator of the dance. He did not see dance as a gift from God to be shared with society, rather he saw dance as a way of making himself appear godlike. King Louis took full credit for the creation of ballet within the French court. It is clear that he believed he was in control of the art form as he decided who could partake in the dance, what type of performances would be created, and what type of movements should be learned. He even went so far as to decide who was skilled in the art of dance and who was not. King Louis controlled just about every aspect of ballet and dance during his reign. It is unfortunate that ballet was born for manipulative and selfish reasons without ever having been acknowledged as a beautiful gift that could have only been given by a transcendent power. People of the time period did not question Louis’ regulations of the dance for they all simply saw him as the creator. During the time of Louis XIV, dance instilled two main emotions in French society; fear and self-admiration. People danced in fear that they would lose their social standing, and they also danced in hope that they would one day be able to say that they danced besides the king.
Unquenched Thirst

According to Greek mythology, there once was a man by the name of Tantalus. Tantalus, believing that he could outsmart the god’s, decided to kill his own son and serve him to them. He did not believe that the god’s were all knowing, and so he did this in an effort to test their “power of observation” (Ovid, 1). To Tantalus’ surprise, the god’s recognized the crime that he had committed. As punishment, Tantalus was forced to stand knee deep in a pool of water beneath a fruit tree for all eternity. However, when he attempted to quench his thirst by drinking from the pool, the water would drain and Tantalus remained thirsty. If he became hungry and tried to eat the ripe fruit that was suspended above his head, the fruit would move beyond his reach. Therefore, Tantalus was punished to a life of constant hunger, thirst, and temptation for his ignorance in defying the gods (Ovid, 1). Although the creation of modern dance is often recognized as a huge milestone in the history of dance as an art form, taking a closer look at the evolution of modern dance, modern dancers seem to suffer the same fate as Tantalus.

Modern dance was born in America during the turn of the 20th century (Brown, 2). Modern dance was created as a means of rebelling against the main form of dance during that time, ballet. The artists of modern dance rejected the disciplined and imperial structure of ballet that King Louis XIV had created centuries prior. Therefore, modern dance developed for the sole purpose of opposing the rules of ballet. There was an eagerness for change in minds of 20th century artists, and with this desire for change came years and years of searching for the purpose behind this new art form. Ballet was created for the purpose of political gain and control of social classes. Therefore, the art form came into being for self-centered reasons of power and control. King Louis XIV took full responsibility for ballet and never integrated the idea of a transcendent being into his work. In fact, he used ballet as a campaigning tool in an effort to appear godlike.
Due to this, all subsequent ballet artists did not have God in mind when they practiced their craft for the artists were looking to King Louis XIV as the creator. The artists of the 20th century wanted to recede from the parameters that still lingered as a result of King Louis influence over dance. The pioneers of modern dance felt that such rules hindered artistic creativity. Hanya Holm, a modern dance pioneer explained her frustration with limitations placed on dancers,

“You should not dance academically. It has no departure, no breath, no life. The academician moves within a group of rules. Two plus two are four. The artist learns rules so that he can break them. Two plus two are five. Both are right from a different point of view." (Miller, 1).

The pioneers of modern dance seemed to have a grand idea in rejecting the expectations that were created by a man playing God. However, they got to this conclusion not by realizing that King Louis XIV had been playing God, but by desiring a lack of discipline and more individual creativity. Therefore, the evolution of modern dance became increasingly similar to the formation of art as a discipline during the humanist era. Now, instead of one man creating all the art, each artist desired his or her own individual freedom to create. Yet again, God’s gift of artistic creativity goes unnoticed by the artists whom He entrusted it to. However, at this point, it is seems difficult to blame the artists for not being able to recognize God in their creativity. During the humanist era, society made a conscious effort to shy away from Christian ideas. Art was born out of this selfishness. Ballet was discovered by a man who deemed himself a god. Therefore, it is no surprise that the modern pioneers were only thinking of themselves in the formation of their craft; modern was a decedent of generations who did not recognize God in their work. While it is unfortunate that these artists hardly had the opportunity to see the presence of God within their art, they are still responsible for turning a blind eye to His existence.
In an effort to move the art of dance away from the rigid structure and technique of one man’s prior authority, they looked further and further into themselves. Because the original purpose of modern dance was to oppose the strict rules of ballet, modern pioneers gave themselves permission to attempt to redefine the art of dance. In order to do this, they looked to themselves; they looked to self-expression. Modern dancers of the 20th century felt that those who partook in ballet dance were not given the opportunity to express their ideas and feelings as they were always adhering to a codified technique. Therefore, the purpose of modern dance in America became the free use of constant self-expression. However, it is interesting that modern dance fell into the similar pattern that ballet did. Even though, they did not base their technique off of one person’s guidelines, certain modern dancers gained immense amounts of popularity. These dancers became forever known as the pioneers of modern dance, and in turn, they each gained power over their specific style of dance. As modern became more popular, the pioneers gained many followers who desired to follow in the footsteps of a specific style. Loie Fuller experimented with the effects of gas lighting on silk costumes. Her movement vocabulary mainly consisted of movements of the upper body (Brown, 2). Isadora Duncan took it upon herself to discover and define the essence of dance as movement; however she looked into her own emotions to do so. Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn created ethnically-inspired movement that became known for its theatricality (Brown, 3). All of these pioneers gained great support throughout their choreographic careers and as a result they each became “gods” of their own craft. All of the pioneers were interested in sharing their own thoughts and emotions with the community and entice audiences to feel a certain way when observing their choreography. During the 1920s, the next wave of influential modern dancers began to study under the pioneers. At this point in time, the next generation of modern dancers were still inspiring new
forms of movement, however essences of the pioneers existed within these new styles due to training under their authority.

"Martha Graham had also begun to develop a new dance technique... For the first time American dancers were creating new movements for new subject matter, and reflecting their own era rather than a previous one. Their movements evolved from the meaning of the dance, rather than from previously learned steps developed by peoples of a different culture. In the process of finding new techniques to express their art, these modern dance pioneers broke the existing rules; indeed, that was their intent, for they were... anti-ballet, anti-the past." (Miller, 2).

The second generation of modern dancers had been working so diligently to stray from tradition that they did not realize they had fallen into the same pattern as the ballet dancers however it was not as obvious because there was more than one technique. With ballet, it was easy to see that the artists were loyal to a certain technique, and that specific technique was easily traced back to King Louis XIV. With modern, the same trend was happening, except for that there were multiple techniques involved. When the first and second generations of modern dancers gained popularity, they also gained followers who studied their specific techniques. Therefore, certain techniques could be traced back to one person, similar to ballet dance. However, these artists were so into freely expressing themselves that they did not realize they were taking on the same role that Louis XIV did.

It was not until the third and fourth generations of modern dancers that artists began to realize they were straying from the purpose of constantly exploring new possibilities in movement. Artists became excited to practice the techniques that had already been created. As a result, the new purpose of modern dance was to take what they already had and make it better. In order to do this, artists realized that they needed ballet in order to strengthen their modern technique. Although the general technique of ballet dance remained the same, suddenly the
expectations of the technical skills were heightened. With these new expectations emerged new ways to abuse the gift of dance.

As ballet became more physically demanding, the art form became highly selective of those qualified to participate in the art. Throughout time, dance evolved into the physically demanding discipline that it is today. Although dance was no longer used as a means of political gain, and more of a means of portraying beauty, the characteristics of the art form remained the same. While this may seem like a step towards the appreciation of the gift of dance, dancers continued to remain blind to the presence of God in their work. Therefore, the idea of beauty was still coming from a place of individualism and self-expression. Extensions soared to unseen heights and jumps bounded to higher altitudes. The complexity of the ballet rose exponentially as did the expectations of both teachers and audiences. With expectations rising, dancers needed to train more vigorously. Many schools required their dancers to move away from home in order to be completely focused on dance. With such pressure and seclusion it seems unavoidable for the main focus of a dancer to become the self.

The obsession over lines and body image soon became distinguishing characteristics of ballet dance. Dancers began to mold themselves into the images that society wanted them to portray. They began to train harder in order to gain better extensions, higher jumps, and more powerful turns. All of the extra training meant more time spent looking in the mirror. With all of the pressure to appease society’s view of dance, dancers pushed harder to achieve skills that seem physically unattainable. Despite the attempt of modern dance to stray from the strict discipline of ballet, dancers seemed to become more involved in placing guidelines on their art. In effect, the selectiveness of dance continued to heighten; body type, strength, extreme lines. All of these new parameters added to the already rigid discipline began to create an environment in
which the self became the main focus. Now, instead of being absorbed in self-expression, dancers became absorbed in the appearance of everything they did. They began to constantly check their lines in mirrors and obsess over the forms of their bodies. Again, when artists decided what would be best for the art of dance, they looked to themselves. With no direct purpose, the dancers of the day were in search of ways to better their craft. However they consistently looked in all the wrong places.

"By the 1960s, technical proficiency had become an end in itself for modern dancers, rather than the means to an end. Technique became set and strict, codified in the style of the originator, with emphasis on greater and greater achievement. Only those teaching in the Laban-Wigman-Holm tradition included improvisation in their classes. Aspects of ballet were incorporated increasingly into modern dance classes, ballet barres were installed in modern dance studios, and many modern dancers took ballet classes regularly. Thus the wide philosophical gap between the two dance forms began to narrow." (Miller, 3)

Due to this, it becomes apparent that modern dance has suffered an “identity crisis” throughout its evolution (Miller, 3). Some modern artists believe that the purpose of modern dance is to keep the original philosophy of always exploring new movement, while other modern artists believe the purpose is to perfect a technique. Some even venture to combine a use of both purposes. During the eighties and nineties modern dancers were once again attempting to continue the philosophy of the original modern dancers and continue to work against established techniques. Modern dancers, once again, desired to dance without rules and be free to express themselves. With all of this constant change, it is hard to imagine what direction modern dance will take off in next. However, it can be predicted that the art form will continue to move in circles if the artists do not halt their constant belief that they are in complete control of the gift of dance.
Modern dance artists began to suffer the same fate as Tantalus; consistently attempting to quench their thirst for a purpose behind their movement. Everywhere they reached, they could not fulfill their constant desire for an absolute purpose. Each bit of inspiration they received seemed to lead to emptiness and, in response, the need for a new purpose. Similar to Tantalus believing he knew better than the gods, the artists believed they were the masters and creators of their craft. They believed that they could achieve the best creativity by taking complete control of their artistic endeavors. This however proved to consistently lead them to dead ends which would require the re-evaluation of their philosophy. Should artists begin to realize they are the “craftsmen” and not the “Creator”, they will begin to have direction and intention, and therefore they will be fulfilled in their work (Paul, 1).

It is time for artists to give back that which they have stolen; the gift of dance. Modern and ballet dancers throughout history have consistently failed to see God in their work. They look upon their work as masterpieces without giving any recognition to the original Artist. How can these works be masterpieces if they are missing from them the very being that gave them life? God gave artists the gift of dance to be shared in, but he never intended for this gift to be taken. Dance is truly a gift and if artists are to embrace the essence of this craft, they need to first begin by giving dance back to its original Creator. Only then will artists be able to embrace the true meaning and purpose behind the art of dance. Only with God will dancers be able to see their full potential as artists because He is the one who holds the key to true inspiration.

Everything the artist is inspired by could have only been crafted by a transcendent being. Moreover, the artist’s ability to create could only be a gift given by a transcendent being “something of the pathos with which God at the dawn of creation looked upon the work of his hands” (Paul, 1). Artists, including myself, need to begin to recognize the role that God plays in
their work. Only then will we be able to see our true potential and become closer to being true artists. The path to becoming true artists begins first with the task of becoming selfless.
Divinely Designed

As artists, we can only begin to become less selfish by recognizing the existence of God in our creativity. It is interesting that dancers have been able to ignore the obvious presence of God within their talent and inspiration. For the dancer, the body is the instrument. The ability for dancers to move their bodies in such patterns could only be due to the generosity of a transcendent being. Our ability to ebb and flow did not appear by mere accident, it was designed in the image of the divine. As dancers, our bodies are essential to our art making. The blood that courses through our bodies needs to be able to supply our muscles with the proper amount of oxygen need to carry out our artistic endeavors. Evidence of the existence of God runs through our veins every day; take the hemoglobin molecule for example. Hemoglobin is a protein that is found in red blood cells and it is used to carry oxygen to the tissues in the body. A single hemoglobin molecule can bind four oxygen molecules. It is the oxygen carrying capacity of hemoglobin that determines how much oxygen is carried in the blood. There are certain factors that affect the affinity of hemoglobin for oxygen. The oxygen dissociation curve clearly depicts the relationship between hemoglobin and oxygen. The partial pressure of oxygen in the blood will determine the saturation of the hemoglobin molecule. However, these other factors that affect the curve are the concentration of CO₂ and temperature. In the case of dancing, as the muscles begin to work, H⁺ is released into the muscle causing the pH to decrease. In this case, more oxygen would need to be released into the muscle in order to restore the pH back to a normal level. Therefore, the oxygen dissociation curve will shift to the right so as to reduce the affinity of hemoglobin to oxygen. This reduced affinity, will cause the hemoglobin molecule to release more O₂ into the muscle and therefore restoring the pH level (Transport,1). Similarly,
when dancing, the temperature in the muscles will also rise. This scenario will also shift the curve to the right as depicted by the graph below.

![Graph showing the shift in Hb-O2 affinity with temperature and pH changes.](https://www.boundless.com/biology/the-respiratory-system/transport-of-gases-in-human-bodily-fluids/transport-of-oxygen-in-the-blood/)

This clever design of the hemoglobin molecule to properly supply our body with oxygen could have only been crafted by a master Architect. The strategic shifting of the affinity of hemoglobin to oxygen seems like a carefully choreographed dance. These microscopic molecules are only one function of the highly complicated yet wonderfully crafted body, and they are able to say so much about the Creator who crafted them.

“In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there: I might possibly answer, that, for any thing I knew to the contrary, it had lain there forever; nor would it perhaps be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place; I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given,—that, for any thing I knew, the watch might have always been there.” (Paley, 1)

This argument by William Paley is testament to the existence of God and His creation. Paley argues that just as there must be a maker for the function and complexity of a watch, there must also be a maker for the function and complexity of the universe. Likewise, just because one
may not know the watch-maker or the process that went into making the watch does not mean that said watch-maker does not exist. He also explains that the watch had to have been put together using a specific combination just as the universe was divinely designed. For those who believe that there must have been a law that disposed the watch to be in a specific form, Paley argues that there must have been a law giver. Through this analogy, Paley is able to better explain the existence of a transcendent God. As artists, we need to realize that we were designed with a specific purpose in mind (Archie, 1). Not all are called to be artists; therefore, there must have been a grand designer who created us with the specific ability to create. This ability to create mimics the creativity of the original Artist. This having been said, it would be absurd to think that this creative ability happened by chance and is the complete product of the human artist. Artists who believe that they are the sole creators of their work will never reach their full potential because they will be selfish in their creativity. A selfish artist will never be able to complete the task that was given to him by God, for it is the vocation of the artist to give the world a glimpse of the transcendent masterpiece created by the original Artist.
**Ignorance is not Bliss**

The evidence of the existence of a grand Artist is hard to ignore when we take the time to ponder all of the countless ways in which our artistic creativity did not just happen by chance. Once we have recognized God in and throughout our work, we then need to realize that our ability to dance is truly a gift. If we can see this, then we can begin to be humble in our work and creativity. God did not create all humans to be artists and yet He “has wished in some way to associate” us with “some echo of the mystery of creation” (Paul, 1). It is for this reason that we cannot continue to dance only for ourselves. If we continue to be self-centered in our work, we will deprive the community of the mystery that we have been chosen to share in order to inspire others. The sooner we acknowledge dance as a gift, the sooner we can start to become true artists. Only if we return the gift of dance to its Creator will we be able to truly share in it.

“That is why artists, the more conscious they are of their “gift”, are led all the more to see themselves and the whole of creation with eyes able to contemplate and give thanks, and to raise to God a hymn of praise. This is the only way for them to come to a full understanding of themselves, their vocation and their mission” (Paul, 2).

Artists, given the ability to create, often take all of the credit for their work as they see their products as visions of themselves. While this is true, they also need to recognize that God radiates his grace through every artistic idea and inspiration. Self-centered art does not allow the artist to see artistic ability as a gift, and therefore artists are not completing the task that was granted to them by God. Artists often confuse themselves for creators when in reality they are truly the craftsmen. God is the Creator for he is the one who created something out of nothing. This type of creativity could only come from a transcendent being; an original Artist. Therefore, because artists create their work from already existing inspirations, they are not creators, but craftsmen.
“The one who creates bestows being itself, he brings something out of nothing—*ex nihilo sui et subiecti*, as the Latin puts it—and this, in the strict sense, is a mode of operation which belongs to the Almighty alone. The craftsman, by contrast, uses something that already exists, to which he gives form and meaning. This is the mode of operation peculiar to man as made in the image of God” (Paul, 1).

This task of creating art that was given to artists by God is not a task for the simple soul. Artists must learn to create, not for their own glory, but for the glory of God. Artists are important to society as their work brings inspiration to the community. However, for this inspiration to be for the common good of the community, they must be selfless. Artists must start to recognize that while they create, they are not creators, they are the craftsmen.
Completing the Connection

Once artists begin to recognize the presence of God in their work, they will then be able to complete the connection between morality and artistic ability. This is the most important connection that artists must make if they are to become true artists. This connection between moral and artistic aspects however, is often left disconnected. The artistic abilities begin to overpower the moral aspects of artists’ works and the connection is never reached. While all humans are created to be the craftsmen of their own lives, the job of the artist goes way beyond this. Artists must speak to others through their creations.

“Not all are called to be artists in the specific sense of the term. Yet, as Genesis has it, all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece. It is important to recognize the distinction, but also the connection, between these two aspects of human activity.” (Paul, 2).

Artists are not only responsible for their own morality, but they are also communicating their ideas to the community. Through their art, they are able to express themselves but it is important for them to remember that their morality should not be defined by their art. Rather, their art should be a means of spiritual exploration. If artists recognize their artistic ability as a transcendent gift then they will have sound morals embedded into their work. When an artist does not make the connection between morality and artistic ability, his work has the potential to remain self-centered.

“The distinction is clear. It is one thing for human beings to be the authors of their own acts, with responsibility for their moral value; it is another to be an artist, able, that is, to respond to the demands of art and faithfully to accept art's specific dictates." (2) This is what makes the artist capable of producing objects, but it says nothing as yet of his moral character. We are speaking not of moulding oneself, of forming one's own personality, but simply of actualizing one's productive capacities, giving aesthetic form to ideas conceived in the mind.” (Paul, 2)
Artists need to remain faithful to their craft. Hard work and dedication are key traits that the true artist must possess, and with that he must remain humble in his work for he knows he is the craftsman. The true artist’s mission is one of constant “artistic service” to the Artist who granted him the ability to create (Paul, 3). The true artist will use his gift to communicate the glory of God to others while also revealing his own spiritual morality.

“The distinction between the moral and artistic aspects is fundamental, but no less important is the connection between them. Each conditions the other in a profound way. In producing a work, artists express themselves to the point where their work becomes a unique disclosure of their own being, of what they are and of how they are what they are. And there are endless examples of this in human history. In shaping a masterpiece, the artist not only summons his work into being, but also in some way reveals his own personality by means of it. For him art offers both a new dimension and an exceptional mode of expression for his spiritual growth. Through his works, the artist speaks to others and communicates with them.” (Paul, 2)
Conclusion

As artists, we cannot learn how to be selfless if we are to continue to believe that dance is ours. To be a true artist and to portray true beauty, one must learn to be selfless. This act of being selfless has been consistently lost throughout the history of art as a discipline. From the time of the humanists, we decided to take art into our own hands instead of sharing it with God. For centuries, only a few artists have been able to conclude that they are not able to create to their full potential when God is missing from their work. Too long have artists been creating for themselves, and too long have they taken all of the credit. These so called “masterpieces” that artists claim to create are simply the mere work of human hands. Had they been using their abilities to radiate the glory of God through their work, true masterpieces would have been created. A true artist will recognize his ability to create as a gift, and he will desire to share that gift with the community. The value of the true artist’s work will come from a place of transcendence, and he will be humbled. It is time to give art back to its Creator so that we can begin to create to our full potential.

“Those who perceive in themselves this kind of divine spark which is the artistic vocation—as poet, writer, sculptor, architect, musician, actor and so on—feel at the same time the obligation not to waste this talent but to develop it, in order to put it at the service of their neighbour and of humanity as a whole.” (Paul, 3)
Works Cited


