



SHARING

**Exploring
connection
through
the arts**

Beauty

LAURA SAVINI





Photo by Clem Onojeghuo on Unsplash

I am a purveyor of beauty. I cannot paint or dance, and I definitely cannot sing. What I do is share the beauty that is shared with me.

Beauty, art in any form, matters. It matters to our mental and physical health. Study after study suggests that art and creativity can improve our mental and physical wellbeing. But what I am referring to isn't about science.

This is about the pure joy and emotion that art passes on to person after person, endlessly impacting each individual that experiences a song, painting, poem, feat of nature or piece of architecture or sculpture.

There are seminal moments where I learned the power of art. The first time was at age 23. I was part of a massive crowd around Michelangelo's "Pieta." Even from the disadvantaged vantage point of my tippy toes, I was brought to tears by this masterpiece. My father caught my eye in the crowd; I could see he was crying, too. This 500-year old sculpture continues to evoke emotion. I was with the "Pieta" for only five minutes; but today, the "Pieta" is still with me.

Another moment was at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. I was consumed with following the Met titles, to see the translation of Verdi's words. My date covered the titles and said, "No! Feel it! Feel the opera!" Within moments, the way I experienced art changed forever.

Many of us consume only familiar art, music and beauty. But as Banksy, the anonymous English street artist proclaimed, "Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable." And that leads me to my third monumental art moment: Damien Hirst. I didn't like his work. It was controversial, often coarse.

But I wished to see the world with a wider lens, so I went to see Hirst at The Tate in London. The Tate is the United Kingdom's national collection of British art as well as international modern and contemporary art.

Hirst is famous for art made out of cigarette butts, pills and dead animals. I do not care for any of those things. As I walked between the tanks that comprise "Mother and Child (Divided)," a cow and calf each split in half and floating in formaldehyde, I actually had vomit in my throat. I had to lean against the wall of the gallery to catch my breath. But you know what? His art made me feel something. I have grown to appreciate his work. Take a look at "Lullaby, the Seasons," if you are not familiar.

While these moments were happening in my personal life, I was living out my mission of sharing beauty in my professional life, live on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). I saw the impact of public television firsthand — from the woman in the produce aisle who wanted to talk about Bob Ross, to the young Latino teacher in the subway who thanked me for Sister Wendy and other art programs, to the landscaper truck blasting Yanni music as I bicycled passed.

One rewarding moment was an Andrea Bocelli concert I attended in 1998 at the Nassau Memorial Coliseum in Long Island. It was early in Bocelli's career, and it was obvious our station played a huge role in filling that venue. We aired his special countless times. Throughout the live concert, the audience was stomping their feet, pounding the floor with work boot-clad feet. They were hollering and whistling like it was a rock concert. This was opera, mostly. And he was singing in Italian, mostly.

This audience, 50 miles away from the crowd at The Met, knew that they were experiencing joy and the power of art. And this scene was being repeated around the country.

Public television shares beauty. It doesn't matter where you live or how much money you make, you have access, and I get to be a part of that.

You can share beauty in your own way. Post a poem on Facebook. Share a photo of a bird in the park or an intriguing shop window on Instagram. Even with one "like" you have made an impact. Bring a friend to see an art exhibit or concert. Or better yet, listen to a friend's playlist or go to the museum they choose. Push yourself. Discover beauty. Share beauty. See it everywhere.

Laura Savini is a public-television host and producer of "The Kate" public-television music series. She works closely with her husband, songwriter Jimmy Webb, to share his music, words and stories with the world. She recently joined the Growing Bolder team as a host during their August TV special.

Sharing Beauty: Exploring Connection Through the Arts

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1. Art and creativity can improve our mental and physical wellbeing.

True / False

2. How can art expand our worldview?

3. Which famous artist said, "Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable."

4. What is different about experiencing art by yourself versus in a group or as an audience at a live show?

5. In what ways can non-artists express themselves creatively and share it with others?

