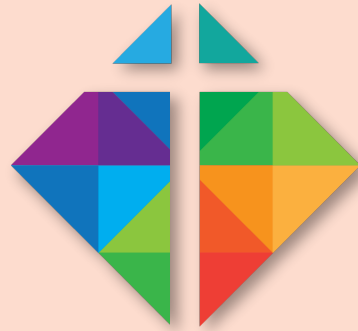




SEVEN WAYS TO COME ALIVE TO
BEAUTY IN YOUR DAILY LIFE

By Peter Darcy



WHY BEAUTY?

“The whole earth is a living icon of the face of God.” – St. John Damascene

Beauty is a transcendental value. This means that it is inherent in the beautiful things of this world but also transcends them to signal a deeper, more permanent Beauty that makes the world a “living icon” of the Lord.

As pilgrims passing through this life, we can train ourselves to become more perceptive of the deeper aspects of beauty around us. It’s not hard to do. It just takes a little attention and focus.

In fact, it’s one of the best things you can do for yourself. Your life will become more deeply enriched the more you come alive to the beauty around you and see the transcendent wonder of the world with new eyes.

— Way 1 —

SLOW DOWN!

There is no such thing as a drive-by experience of beauty – deep beauty, that is. Superficial beauty will always tantalize and excite momentarily, but that takes no special training of the senses. Real beauty always demands something of us. It requires focus, attention, a quiet soul to perceive it. By slowing down the frenetic pace of our lives and separating ourselves from the chaos of life (at least periodically), our souls automatically become more receptive and alive to beauty.



Visualize: Ever wonder why museums are so relaxed and quiet? A museum environment controls both activity and noise and therefore provides optimal conditions for experiencing beauty.

How: Develop regular “time out” habits for freeing your consciousness of the stresses and dampening influences of life. Days off, non-work-related vacations, spiritual retreats all fit the bill.

— Way 2 —

LOOK AT BOTH THE FOREST AND THE TREES

To “see the forest for the trees” means that we have an ability to look at both the individual details of something and its larger context. Both views of things are important because, together, they reveal different aspects of whatever it is we are looking at. Neither view in itself provides a comprehensive picture. Strive to see both the forest and the trees for the fuller picture.



Visualize: When driving through a highway interchange you see only the roadway in front of you, but if you fly over the same interchange in a helicopter, you see the engineer’s marvelous design for the complex of roads: a cloverleaf.

How: The habit we must develop is this: first zoom in to see the details of something, then zoom out to see the wider picture.

— Way 3 —

OPEN THE SENSES

The ancient philosophers knew that all knowledge of the world comes through the senses. But the senses are passive faculties. They “register” impressions but do not appreciate what they perceive until the mind interprets the sensory data. When the senses are dull, the mind doesn’t have much to work with. When they are unencumbered, crisp, clear, and sharp, the mind feasts on their perceptions.



Visualize: The lens of a camera registers light that enters its viewport, but if the lens is dirty, the light cannot get through, or it produces a distorted picture

How: Cleanse and open the receptors. Practice sense discipline: look carefully, breathe/smell deeply, touch discerningly, taste perceptively, listen intentionally.

— Way 4 —

BE CAPTIVATED BY RADIANCE

The ancients, again, believed that the prime quality of beauty was its radiance, a term that means the inner glow, shine, clarity, or vibrancy that “radiates” out of things. Radiance is much more than a burst of superficial beauty. It designates the inherent vitality or light that exists in both animate and inanimate things.



Visualize: Mother Teresa saw the inner radiance of the poor because she looked beyond the outer shell and acknowledged the intrinsic value of that person made in the “image and likeness” of God.

How: Allow yourself to evaluate the deep quality of radiance in things. It’s easy to find radiance in a Tiffany lamp, but look for it in less obvious places: nature scenes, people, simple objects, animals.

Way 5

NOTICE COLOR

There is hardly a more obvious quality of beauty than color. It is a primary aspect of radiance. The human eye can see seven families of color (hues) in the spectrum of the rainbow. With attention, you can also identify the intensity of colors and their value (light or dark character).



Visualize: Vincent Van Gogh was a master at using hue, intensity, and value; his paintings are stunning mixtures of vibrant colors. Pastel colors, on the other hand, have lower intensity and values but have their own beauty.

How: Look at something carefully and name its hue (perhaps it's a mixture of two or more color families); also identify its intensity and its value on a scale of 1-10.

— Way 6 —

DISCERN PROPORTION

St. Augustine once said that “beauty is proportion,” which is not a term that describes physical size. Rather, it has more to do with the “harmony” of something, how its parts fit together, or its essential balance. The beauty of physical things increases as the harmony and balance of a thing is more perfect.



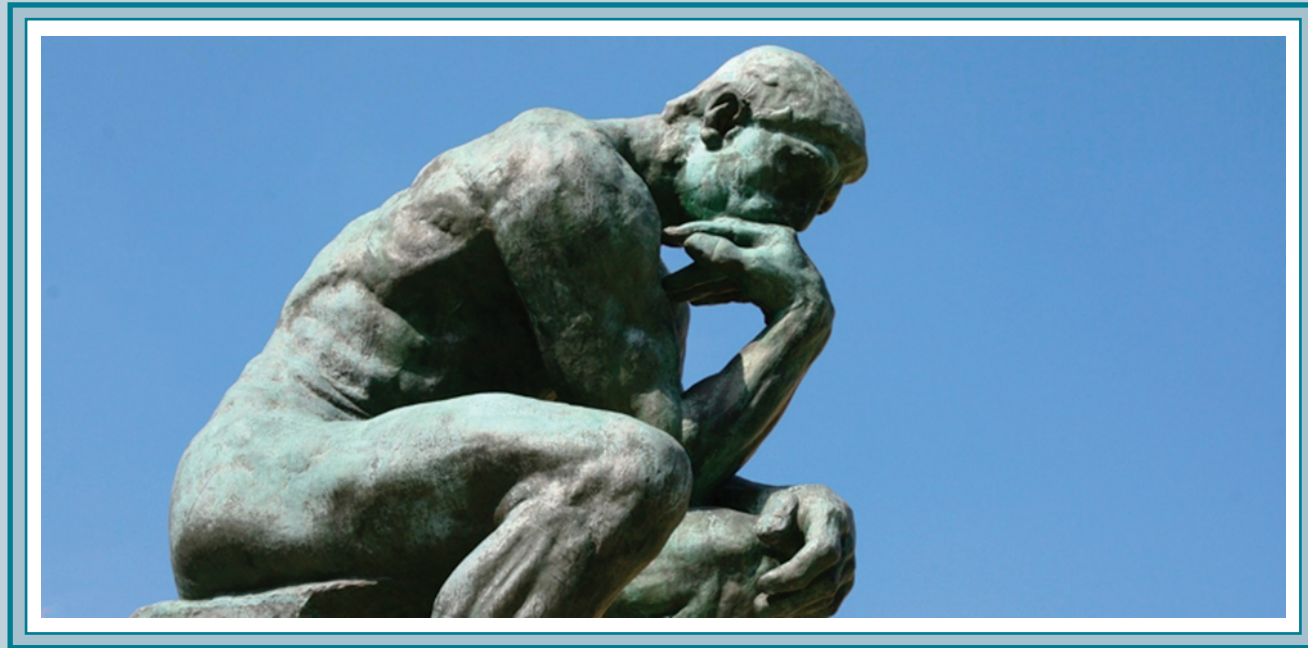
Visualize: You will rarely see a TV model whose facial features and bodily proportions are not perfectly balanced. Advertising requires perfect proportions because they are more attractive and therefore more likely to persuade and sell.

How: Discerning proportion is usually a matter of intuition: consult how you feel when you observe something. The feelings of disorder, on the one hand, and harmony, on the other, signal the two ends of the proportion spectrum.

— Way 7 —

OBSERVE-REFLECT-REPEAT

We began with the idea that we can only perceive beauty through a quiet focusing of our attention on the things around us. *Observation* is paying attention to the data our senses give us about people, things, and situations. *Reflection* deepens our ability to appreciate what we take in. *Repetition* matures the habit of getting under the surface of things to see their transcendent character.



Visualize: If you've ever re-read a book, you'll understand why going back over something a second time helps to apprehend its deeper messaging, characterizations, and details.

How: Observe-Reflect-Repeat explains itself. You just need to develop the habit of doing it in everyday life so that you can better recognize and appreciate the immense beauty shining through the sacred windows of our world.



COME ALIVE!

Now that you have seven habits of perception, it's time for you to come alive to beauty!

Develop an artist's eye for seeing both the obvious and the hidden beauty.
The world of nature is ravishingly beautiful. People are deeply and inherently beautiful.
Even simple objects often have a radiance, proportion, and beauty all their own.

Find the beauty.

It's there for anyone who has eyes to see.



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