

CREATIVITY AS A TOOL  
FOR SELF-DISCOVERY

EST ————— 2021

# BORN TO CREATE

DIALOGUE WITH CREATIVITY

PANEL DISCUSSION

# CREATIVITY AS A TOOL FOR SELF-DISCOVERY

Creativity as a Tool for Self-Discovery arises from a reflective dialogue hosted by Born to Create, bringing together artists, educators, and practitioners working across visual arts, performance, writing, and movement. Rather than framing creativity solely as a specialised skill or a means of producing finished work, this text explores it as a deeply embodied and relational process, a way of engaging with the self and the world that shapes how we understand identity, purpose, and meaning. The conversation unfolds through shared reflection and personal experience, resisting simple conclusions in favour of ongoing inquiry.

This essay has been shaped into a cumulative reflection that interweaves personal insights with contemporary perspectives on identity and creative practice. It invites readers to consider creativity not as a fixed attribute or output, but as a living, exploratory practice that opens space for curiosity, ambiguity, and transformation. Through creative acts—whether solitary or collaborative—individuals can discover new dimensions of their potential, passions, and place in the world.

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Creativity is often framed as a capacity to produce objects, performances, or ideas, yet its deeper function lies elsewhere: in the process through which individuals encounter themselves. As a mode of inquiry rather than output, creativity operates as a reflective space where inner experience meets external form. Through making, improvising, and experimenting, people gain access to dimensions of thought, emotion, and perception that remain inaccessible through purely analytical or verbal means. In this sense, creativity is less about talent or expression and more about orientation, a way of paying attention to one's inner life and its relationship to the world (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

From a psychological perspective, creative processes have long been associated with self-exploration. Humanistic psychology, particularly the work of Carl Rogers, frames creativity as an outcome of congruence between lived experience and self-concept (Rogers, 1961). When individuals engage creatively, they are often negotiating this relationship, testing what feels authentic against internalised expectations or social roles. The uncertainty inherent in creative work—its lack of guaranteed outcomes—mirrors the uncertainty of identity formation itself. Rather than revealing a fixed “true self,” creativity allows identity to emerge as something fluid, provisional, and continuously shaped through experience (Erikson, 1968).

Creative practice also functions as a narrative tool. People make sense of their lives by constructing stories about who they are, where they come from, and what matters to them. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur described identity as narrative in nature, formed through the ongoing act of interpretation (Ricoeur, 1992). Creative processes—whether through writing, movement, sound, or visual form—externalise these narratives, making them visible and revisable. By shaping material, individuals simultaneously reshape their understanding of themselves. This reciprocal relationship between making and meaning highlights creativity as a site where self-knowledge is actively produced rather than passively discovered.

Importantly, creativity enables access to forms of knowledge that are embodied, emotional, and relational. Contemporary research in embodied cognition suggests that understanding is not confined to the mind but arises through bodily engagement with the environment (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991). Creative acts such as dancing, crafting, or performing activate this embodied intelligence, allowing individuals to think through sensation, rhythm, and gesture. These modes of knowing often surface insights about desire, resistance, limitation, or possibility that remain unarticulated in everyday life. In this way, creativity becomes a method for listening—to the body, to intuition, and to forms of intelligence that operate beneath conscious reasoning.

Creativity also mediates the relationship between the individual and their social context. Self-discovery does not occur in isolation; it is shaped by cultural narratives, power structures, and collective values. Engaging creatively can make these forces visible, revealing how personal identity is entangled with broader social conditions (Bhabha, 1994). At the same time, creativity offers a means of renegotiation. By reworking symbols, roles, and stories, individuals can loosen the grip of inherited definitions and experiment with alternative ways of being. This is not an act of self-invention detached from reality, but a reflective process of positioning oneself within it.

Rather than promising clarity or resolution, creativity as a tool for self-discovery embraces ambiguity. The creative process often raises more questions than answers, unsettling established self-images and exposing contradictions. Yet this uncertainty is not a failure of the process; it is its condition. Psychological development rarely follows a linear path, and creativity provides a container in which confusion, doubt, and experimentation can coexist productively. Through repeated engagement, individuals learn not only about who they are, but about how they change (Bateson, 1972).

Ultimately, creativity supports self-discovery by cultivating a relationship to oneself that is curious rather than judgmental, exploratory rather than fixed. It invites people to encounter their inner landscape with openness, recognising identity as something continually formed through action, reflection, and relation. In this sense, creativity does not offer answers about purpose or potential; instead, it provides a practice through which these questions can be lived.

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Taken as a whole, this reflection positions creativity not simply as a means of personal fulfilment or expression, but as an ongoing practice of inquiry into self and world. Creativity does not offer easy answers or fixed identities; instead, it cultivates openness to complexity, uncertainty, and transformation. It is less a tool for self-improvement and more the relational condition through which new understandings of the self—and one's place in the world—can emerge. In this way, creativity becomes a mode of attentive being, inviting us to stay with ambiguity and, through that endurance, imagine alternative ways of living and relating.



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