

UNITED WISDOM

Creative expression of what does not yet have words

The Person and the Inner World

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Epigraph

“feelings he has lived through”

Leo Tolstoy, What Is Art?, Chapter V; a fragment of his definition of art, in Aylmer Maude's translation. The Russian version uses our own translation of this fragment.

What this article is about

Sometimes a person can describe what happened in detail and still cannot find words for what matters most. The meeting ended calmly, the work was completed, and nobody said anything hurtful. Yet a strange heaviness remains, which the person does not want to call either tiredness or irritation too quickly. A drawing appears in the margin, a tune keeps returning, or a few disconnected lines seem more accurate than a ready explanation. This is not yet a message to others or a discovery of one's personality. It is an attempt to give experience a form with which a conversation can begin.

Creative expression is understood broadly here: a line, a sound, a movement, a short text, or an arrangement of objects. Trying it does not require identifying as an artist. This article explores how form can help hold uncertainty, what it allows us to notice, and where its persuasive power begins to mislead. The practical aim is more modest than a promise of healing: to distinguish a created image, one's interpretation, and a possible action, while keeping the right to show nothing and to explain nothing yet.

I. There is space between an event and its name

The absence of a suitable word does not mean the absence of experience. However, it does not follow that a finished message is already hidden inside, waiting to be decoded. Sometimes a person lacks time; sometimes too many people are listening; sometimes the familiar vocabulary roughly groups different impressions together. The word “fine” can conceal satisfaction, caution, or a wish not to discuss the issue. Until distinctions emerge, keeping several possibilities is more honest than selecting the most dramatic one.

Consider a hypothetical example. After a successful presentation, Irina draws a small square surrounded by dense lines. She expected joy, but now looks at the drawing and thinks about confinement. It would be premature to conclude that the square represents a suppressed

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personality or a proven workplace problem. She might be drawing a cramped room, the concentration preceding her presentation, or simply a convenient geometric shape. Meaning is not contained in a line like an address on an envelope. It arises partly from the questions Irina asks about her drawing.

The first useful distinction is between the accuracy of a fact and the accuracy of an impression. We can correctly state the meeting's time, its participants, and the decision made, yet inaccurately name our relationship to those events. Conversely, an expressive drawing can convey experienced tension without providing reliable information about someone else's intentions. These two kinds of accuracy serve different purposes. They do not need to compete for the right to be the only truth.

The beginning of a creative attempt can therefore be phrased without a grand declaration: this is how it looks to me now. Such wording gives the image space while limiting its authority. It shows a present way of seeing the situation. Details might change tomorrow, and this need not mean today's drawing was false. It may have been an accurate record of today's attention rather than a final description of an entire life.

There is also a simple material reason to choose form: comparing two visible versions can be easier than holding two vague states in memory. A person draws a cramped square beside a spacious one, rereads two lines with different rhythms, or changes the distance between objects. In each case, a difference becomes available to notice. This is the article's own practical reasoning; it is not presented as an established mechanism of creativity or a universal psychological law.

II. Form lets us pause over a distinction

A created thing is useful partly because it does not vanish the instant a mood changes. A line remains on paper; a recorded sound can be heard again; chosen words can be rearranged. A person can return to a detail previously lost in an overall impression. They do not have to explain the whole immediately in order to examine a part.

In our hypothetical example, Irina notices that her attention is drawn less to the square itself than to the almost nonexistent distance between it and the surrounding lines. She makes a second drawing with a small gap. The question changes: does she need to disappear from the situation, or to have a little more space within it? This distinction was not extracted from a secret dictionary of symbols. It was suggested by comparing two versions of her own. If neither fits, she can make a third or leave the question open.

The possibility of editing matters here. Form is often perceived as a sudden revelation that should be obeyed. Yet a drawing can be turned, a text shortened, or a tune played more slowly. A change does not betray experience; it helps test which part of the image matters. If

everything seems equally accurate after rearrangement, perhaps only a general atmosphere has been found so far. If a slight change sharply alters the meaning, that detail deserves attention without being turned into a diagnosis.

Another hypothetical example concerns writing. A man writes three sentences about a family conversation, repeatedly replacing the verb: “I endured,” “I stayed,” “I participated.” The event is the same; the positions differ. It becomes clearer that he is experiencing not only tiredness but also a question about his own participation. That question may prove useful in the next conversation. The literary value of the three lines is entirely optional.

We cannot promise that form will always lead to clarity. Sometimes examining it again only increases confusion. Then changing the task can make sense: record the known facts, do an ordinary activity, or set the page aside. Being able to stop belongs to this practice as much as being able to continue. If obtaining the supposedly correct answer requires endlessly intensifying tension, the way of working itself deserves reconsideration.

Usefulness can be assessed through a small, observable result: a distinction emerged, a question became possible, a request was easier to state, or the need for a pause became clear. These outcomes do not amount to the revelation of a profound truth. But they are concrete enough for a person to decide whether returning to the chosen form is worthwhile.

III. Communicating a feeling and expressing it privately are different tasks

In Chapter V of What Is Art?, Tolstoy defines art through communicating an experienced feeling to others. This is his aesthetic position rather than a scientific criterion. For our subject it raises a useful question: is a recipient needed now?

Not every creative attempt is directed toward communication. A note that nobody will read may help its writer distinguish two wishes. A tune someone hums only on the way home may remain a way of acknowledging a mood privately. These actions need not be proved to meet a definition of genuine art in order to matter. A personal draft and a work intended for the public can exist beside each other without taking the same examination.

When a recipient appears, the task becomes more complicated. An image of one's own cannot automatically be treated as a shared language. To its creator, an empty chair means waiting; to another person it means relief after a noisy meeting. The difference need not indicate anyone's insensitivity. Each brings their own context to perception. The creator can explain which detail matters and ask what the other person saw. Conversation begins with a difference instead of a demand to guess.

Suppose Irina decides to show the drawing to a colleague. “Look how you cornered me” would turn the image into an accusation and assign blame in advance. “After the meeting, I wanted to draw this; I think I need more space to respond” leaves room to discuss specific conditions. The colleague might agree, clarify the circumstances, or suggest a different allocation of time. The drawing helps open a conversation but does not replace checking what happened between people.

There is also a difference between an invitation and an obligation. We can invite someone to hear a short text without demanding an immediate emotional reaction. We can ask whether now is a convenient time to look at a drawing. Declining to listen today does not establish the work's value or the relationship's overall meaning. If the creator needs support, stating that request directly is better: it matters to me that you listen for a few minutes without judging the quality.

This offers a reasonably considerate route from private form to communication. First, a person notices what they have made. Then they identify what they want from a recipient. Next, they choose how open to be and leave the other person the right to their own perception. No stage guarantees understanding, but each makes the conditions of conversation clearer.

IV. Colour is not a ready dictionary of personality

In Section VI of Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Kandinsky connects form with inner meaning. This is the author's artistic and spiritual conception. We do not turn it into a diagnostic dictionary of colours or shapes.

An appealing idea can easily become excessive at exactly this point. Someone draws a black stripe, and another person announces that it proves a hidden fear. They choose red and are assigned aggression. Such certainty releases the interpreter from the need to ask the creator. Yet the stripe might result from the only available marker, red might recall a festive fabric, and a circle might simply be a pleasant movement of the hand.

The material also participates in expression. Thin paper quickly becomes wet; a pencil leaves a different trace from a brush; a recorder amplifies some sounds and loses others. An accidental feature of the result need not become a message about personality. Before looking for the hidden meaning of a tear in the paper, it helps to find out how the paper was torn. Attention to circumstances does not impoverish an image; it protects it from someone else's overly convenient story.

If the person themselves says that a stripe is associated with fear, that is important evidence of their present understanding. Even then, we can clarify which event they fear, when the feeling occurs, and what might help test the supposition. The meaning of a colour does not make

those questions unnecessary. It may direct attention, but it does not answer for the person or establish causation.

Consider another hypothetical situation. Two participants draw the same ladder. One thinks about career advancement, the other about constantly having to prove their right to remain. The external similarity conceals different concerns. If a facilitator already knows that a ladder always means growth, the second participant loses the opportunity to articulate their own experience. Careful interpretation therefore begins with a question about meaning instead of a declared answer.

This boundary matters especially when an image seems powerful and beautiful. Aesthetic persuasiveness is not the same as the reliability of a psychological explanation. A striking image can be accurate for one minute and unsuitable for another. Its value is not diminished by being open to revision. On the contrary, the person remains free to use it without granting it authority over all future decisions.

V. A draft needs a different measure from a finished work

A creative attempt can stop before it starts if a person subjects it to the requirements of a finished work. They wanted to mark an unfamiliar feeling but are already judging composition, rhyme, and the possible public response. The task has quietly changed: instead of distinguishing experience, they have entered a competition in skill. Returning the measure to the original intention can help them continue.

A draft can be given a very small frame. For example, choose three lines, two short sentences, or a minute of sound. This limit promises no effectiveness and is not a rule for everyone. It merely makes the selected attempt manageable to inspect. What matters more is understanding its task: right now I want to notice the difference between anticipation and disappointment rather than create a persuasive account of my whole life.

In a hypothetical scene, a beginning writer describes a separation and discovers that every sentence sounds like a familiar song. They may conclude that they have nothing to say. But another conclusion is possible: a ready cultural language is currently moving faster than their own attention. Writing one specific detail can then be useful—the cup they habitually placed on the table for the absent person. This detail does not have to prove the magnitude of loss. It may simply allow a beginning with what was actually noticed.

Skill and sincerity do not exclude each other. A person is entitled to learn drawing, read good texts, and change a form after advice. Technical revision, however, answers a question about how to express something rather than whether the feeling is legitimate. A poor rhyme does not make experience unreal; strong composition does not confirm every thought of its creator. Confusing these judgments forces a person to defend too much at once.

There is also an opposite danger: declaring every first attempt final merely because it is sincere. That may be sufficient for a private entry. A public work raises other questions—the accuracy of facts, the rights of people mentioned, and the clarity of its address to a reader. The right to expression does not cancel responsibility for publication. Keeping a draft, showing it to one person, or developing a finished work therefore deserves a separate choice.

A small form is convenient because it is reversible. It can be set aside, rewritten, or left unfinished. Not every act of expression has to become a project. Sometimes the word found does all the work needed, and further artistic development belongs to a different aim.

VI. Recognising an image does not explain its origin

A strong sense of recognition can be useful, but it does not establish why someone is in their present situation. They look at a drawing and think: this is exactly about me. The next question should preserve the difference between a match and an explanation. What matched—a mood, a recurring scene, a wish, or a fear of the future? Which part of life does the image fail to fit?

Suppose a person writes a short story about a bird in a cage. They feel the cause of all their difficulties is now obvious: others have always restricted them. Yet the story does not show who made a particular decision, what opportunities were available, or why they themselves did not choose one of them. External pressure may indeed matter. They may have accepted a narrow arrangement for a particular benefit. Opportunities may now be fewer for entirely material reasons. Each account needs facts of its own.

The image can be used as a source of questions. Where is the door in this story? Who can open it? What will the bird lose if it leaves? These questions are not a personality test. Their value depends on whether they help someone see real alternatives. If the answers begin to sound like an inevitable destiny, leaving the story and naming ordinary circumstances is useful: an agreement, money, time, responsibilities, and available people to consult.

Checking alternatives does not destroy emotional truth. A person can feel confined even if they accepted the conditions themselves. They can regret a decision that was once reasonable. Acknowledging this is harder than appointing one culprit, but it creates the possibility of discussing changes to the conditions. Artistic form holds the tension; factual clarification helps choose an action.

Creating an opposite image can also be useful, without requiring belief in it. If the first scene shows only confinement, the second might show only freedom. Comparison sometimes reveals the cost of both extremes. The second drawing should not forcibly correct the first or persuade the person that their distress is unjustified. Its task is to test what the original picture leaves out.

After that check, the original image may be kept. It need not turn out to be mistaken for the work to be useful. Sometimes only the caption changes: “my whole life” becomes “how I felt on Tuesday evening.” A narrower formulation makes the image more honest and allows it to avoid automatic application to every new event.

VII. Another person does not have to decode your drawing

The right to create a personal form includes deciding to whom and how to show it. At the same time, a recipient has no obligation to extract its one correct meaning. When this distinction disappears, creative expression can become a hidden test of intimacy: if someone truly loves me, they should understand without words. Failure in such a test hurts but proves nothing reliable.

In a hypothetical example, a woman sends her partner a short text about an empty home and expects an invitation to talk. Her partner replies that the text is beautiful. She hears indifference, although they may not have known that she expected a different response. A clearer address need not destroy the text's subtlety: “This is connected with feeling lonely today; could you spend a little time with me this evening?” Artistic form and a specific request can exist in the same message.

Sometimes a creator wants only someone's presence; sometimes a question; sometimes help with form. These responses differ. Advice about rhyme may be inappropriate when someone has shown a private entry for the first time. Emotional support may fail to meet the request when the person actually wanted their poem edited. A brief clarification of purpose saves time and frees both participants from guessing their roles.

A listener can also be given an understandable route. They may say that they are unsure of their understanding, name a noticed detail, or ask for clarification. “I see distance between people; is that close to your intention?” offers an account that can be corrected. “Obviously, you fear intimacy” turns perception into a verdict. The difference concerns the creator's right to clarify their own meaning, rather than how beautifully the words are phrased.

Publication requires another boundary. A text may contain other people's actions, recognisable circumstances, or information shared in confidence. Separately checking what the creator is entitled to disclose, and whose experience is being described, is useful. Replacing a name does not always make someone unrecognisable. The decision to show a work to a broad audience cannot therefore follow solely from the relief felt after making it.

Creative openness is not measured by the number of details revealed. Sometimes showing a rhythm, an image, or one phrase is enough while circumstances remain private. This restraint can be a conscious choice of form and recipient. A person does not have to turn their entire experience into material available for others' interpretation.

VIII. Sometimes the outcome is an ordinary sentence

The most useful outcome of a creative attempt may be entirely unartistic. After several drawings, a person finds a simple sentence: I need more time; I do not want to discuss this now; I am happy and anxious at the same time. Form helped approach words and then made room for them. Its task is complete even if nobody ever sees the page.

Return to Irina. Comparing two squares did not reveal the secret cause of her life. She noticed that during the meeting she agreed to suggestions too quickly, before managing to formulate a question. She can now test a specific step: ask to receive materials beforehand or leave a few minutes for clarification at the end. If this does not change her experience, new information will emerge. Failure of the step will not invalidate the drawing; it will limit the earlier explanation.

Sometimes there will be no suitable action. A person distinguished an experience but has not decided what to do with it. That is also a legitimate stopping point. Time, conversation, or clarification of circumstances may be needed between expression and decision. Requiring every image to become a useful result immediately makes creativity another system of compulsory reporting. For a personal attempt, that measure is often excessive.

It helps to keep the distinction between expressing and intensifying. Repeatedly producing one image may help a person understand it better, or may merely make it more familiar. The question of outcome stays open: have new distinctions emerged, has an available request changed, and is it clearer which facts remain unknown? When nothing changes, choosing another way of paying attention is possible without accusing oneself of insufficient depth.

Finally, creative form need not end with a verbal translation. Music can remain music; a drawing can remain a drawing. A person may know that returning to this thing matters to them without offering a final explanation. But if a decision affecting others is based on it, more explicit grounds will be needed. Personal meaning and shared agreement operate under different rules.

This preserves two freedoms: trying to express what has not yet been named, and declining to make the resulting form a final authority. We can trust the attention that emerged during the work while checking our conclusions. Creativity can then participate in life without promising to explain a person completely.

IX. Form does not replace an answer to a shared question

Not every life task can be resolved by an expressive gesture. When people need to agree on a time, divide costs, or establish whether an offer has been accepted, a sufficiently clear agreement matters. A drawing can convey an attitude toward the discussion but does not establish consent. Quietly performing a song does not automatically answer a question about willingness to join a project. These limits concern the structure of communication rather than the value of creativity.

Consider a hypothetical case: instead of answering an invitation, someone sends a photograph of an empty road. The recipient sees a wish to visit; the sender meant a need to be alone. Neither was obliged to guess the meaning. But ordinary clarification is needed before buying tickets. The photograph can be kept as a significant image, with the addition: I will not come today; I will return to our conversation tomorrow. This does not impoverish expression; it defines an action.

Distinguishing two things is especially helpful: what I want to show, and what the other person needs to know to make their own choice. Someone can withhold the reasons for refusing while naming the refusal itself. They can leave a feeling unnamed while specifying when they will answer. Creative uncertainty then stays where it belongs without passing the obligation to make decisions by guessing to someone else. Mutual space emerges through sufficiently understandable conditions as well as through profound understanding.

What this means in practice

Choose a small hypothetical scene or recent episode that you are willing to consider. First write two known facts without interpreting motives. Then try one available form: several lines, a short text, a minute of sound, or the arrangement of three objects. Give it a limited purpose—to notice a distinction that remains hard to express. Keep the possibility of stopping the attempt.

Look at the detail attracting your attention, and change only that detail. Compare the versions. Instead of asking what the drawing proves about your personality, ask which question has now become possible. Then check whether the answer concerns facts you do not yet know. An image of someone else's silence does not explain their intention; an image of confinement does not determine who created it or how.

If you want to show the result, specify the response you would like beforehand: presence, a question, technical help, or discussion of a specific request. You are entitled to keep the work private. For a decision in a real situation, translate the distinction into an action that can be checked, or keep a pause. The useful result may be very small: a more accurate word, a clear

boundary, or a new question. None requires treating artistic form as a diagnosis or proof of a hidden truth.

Key quotation

> *“FORM IS THE OUTWARD EXPRESSION”*

Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, VI; fragment of a statement about the inner meaning of form, in Michael T. H. Sadler's translation. This is an artistic position, not a diagnostic rule. Our own translation is used in the Russian version.

Connections between traditions

Comparison	Shared attention	Significant boundary
Tolstoy ↔ private draft	Feeling takes form	A private entry need not have a recipient
Kandinsky ↔ our comparison practice	Meaning of form matters	Colour does not establish a diagnosis
Aesthetic expression ↔ factual clarification	Experience becomes available to examine	Beauty does not prove a cause

The latter two practical comparisons are editorial distinctions made in this article; they do not prove a common doctrine across all cultures.

Primary sources

• Leo Tolstoy, What Is Art?, Aylmer Maude translation, Chapter V. The definition fragment and its immediate context were read.

• Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Michael T. H. Sadler translation, VI and VIII. Selected paragraphs about form and artistic expression were read, rather than the entire book.

Tags

creativity, expression, words, experience, form, image, drawing, writing, music, movement, draft, art, Tolstoy, Kandinsky, aesthetics, attention, distinction, uncertainty, interpretation, context, recipient, communication, boundaries, request, choice, facts, metaphor, revision

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