Doorway to Artistry

Attuning Your Philosophy to Enhance Your Creativity

Esther Lightcap Meek

Foreword by Makoto Fujimura

Illustrations by Martyn Smith

CASCADE *Books* · Eugene, Oregon

DOORWAY TO ARTISTRY
Attuning Your Philosophy to Enhance Your Creativity

Copyright © 2023 Esther Lightcap Meek. All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical publications or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher. Write: Permissions, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3, Eugene, OR 97401.

Cascade Books
An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401

www.wipfandstock.com

PAPERBACK ISBN: 978-1-6667-6968-5
HARDCOVER ISBN: 978-1-6667-6969-2
EBOOK ISBN: 978-1-6667-6970-8

Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Names: Meek, Esther Lightcap, 1953– [author]. | Fujimura, Makoto, 1960– [foreword writer] | Smith, Martyn [illustrator]

Title: Doorway to artistry : attuning your philosophy to enhance your creativity / Esther Lightcap Meek.

Description: Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023 | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: ISBN 978-1-6667-6968-5 (paperback) | ISBN 978-1-6667-6969-2 (hardcover) | ISBN 978-1-6667-6970-8 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Creative ability—Philosophy. | Creation (Literary, artistic, etc.). | Philosophy. | Arts—Philosophy. | Ontology. | Knowledge, Theory of. | Christianity—Philosophy.

Classification: B105.C74 M44 2023 (print) | B105.C74 (ebook)

05/08/23

For my Grands:
August, Joanna, Magdalen, Melanie, Anastasia, Gilbert, and Polly

Contents

Foreword by Makoto Fujimura | ix

1 **Threshold** | 1
Who We Are, Where We Come From, and the Welcome before Us

2 **Hearth** | 37
Beginning within the Welcome

3 **Study** | 67
The Lively, Welcoming Real

4 **Study, Next Day** | 87
Everyday Jewels of the Real

5 **Garden** | 119
Beauty Integrates It All

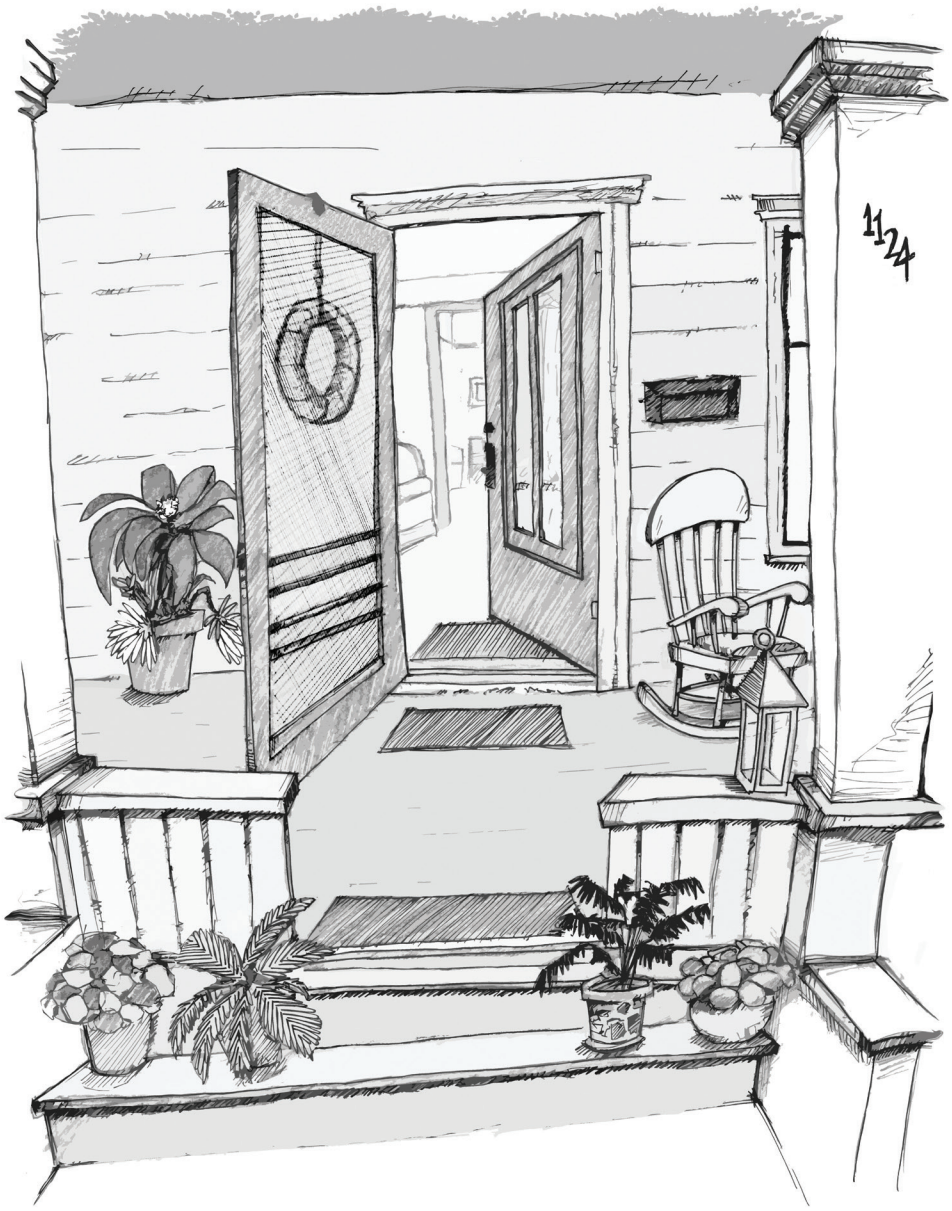
6 **Workshop** | 141
Artful Discovery

7 **Veranda** | 165
Artists on Artistry

8 **Feast** | 205
Crowning Our Venture and Taking Our Leave

Gratitude | 227

Works Cited | 229


11/24

1

Threshold

"Welcome!"

Who We Are, Where We Come From, and the Welcome before Us

As its subtitle states, this book aims to attune your philosophy to enhance your artistry.

Your philosophy. *Your* artistry. It may be that you have never thought of either as being yours particularly. I'm going to insist that they are. You are *already* philosophical—you only need to have been born. You are *already* artful: you already put things together creatively to produce new things. You are both of these things, even if you have never made a profession of either of them, even if you didn't already realize you are. So I mean this book for you.

How can you or I be something, at the heart of who we are, and not have realized it? This suggests that there might be a problem—something longstanding, engrained, but askew. Indeed, there is: there is a prevailing mindset, an implicit everyday outlook that most of us inherit just by being born into what we call the modern age. Living from an implicit outlook is natural to human persons; but you want it to be healthy and authentic, not skewed.

The implicit mindset of the modern age discredits both philosophy and artistry. That can't be good if you are to thrive as a philosophically attuned, abundantly artful person. To carry out this book's purpose we must

first expose and address this dominating but damaging outlook. We need a healing alternative. We need to restore the philosophy and artistry that lie at the core of who we are as human persons.

Philosophy concerns the most fundamental and shaping ideas of any person and any endeavor. What is the meaning of human existence? What is really real, and how is it that I go about knowing it? You don't need to have studied philosophy to be living out responses to these in every step you take. You don't even need to be aware that you are. It's more like you wear them. To be human is to be philosophical; philosophy concerns who we are at the core.

Philosophy—at least the philosophy I have in mind—isn't abstract and theoretical and distant. It is concretely felt. It concerns our simplest involvement with the world. So philosophizing *here*, close to us, pays off *here*, close to us, in everything. Its simple profundity is meant for us, and it is meant for wonder and perennial joy. It is meant for what I call astonished belonging to the world. It is meant for shalom.

There are many deep dimensions in our lives: spiritual, psychological, physical, social, artistic. We can have issues in each. But intertwined and permeating is a deep-level philosophical dimension, with its issues. My mission is to attend to it and attune it—for the sake of your artistry.

Artistry is a venture in our lives that also lies at the core of who we are. Artistry is especially sensitive to things philosophical. Artful ventures require an honest authenticity that lays us open. Matters of our humanness, our world, how we understand it and how we respond—all philosophical—are embedded and on display. To me, artistry seems like liquid philosophy.

So our artistry is especially in tune with the philosophical. Something like the skewed modern mindset can thwart our efforts. Artistry involves us in working these philosophical matters out. Philosophical healing restores and unleashes our artistry. It even unleashes our artistry in turn to nourish our philosophy.

I share my philosophy because I believe that it offers the philosophical healing and restoration that artistry needs. I offer it to attune your philosophy to enhance your artistry. I invite you to the philosophical awareness, the philosophical life, the philosophical birthright that is already yours.

It may be that you are a practicing artist. You make art. It may also be that you can't bring yourself to see yourself this way. I maintain that, nevertheless, there is artistry in your life, a creative producing that matters deeply to you. It may be that this book brings you to see yourself afresh as involved in artistry. I believe it will unleash and enhance your making.

I mean this book for everyone. But perhaps you especially need it and are ready for it—because you, like I have, are running up against cultural presumptions that are thwarting your efforts. You are stuck in issues that

block your creativity, and you sense that they might have a philosophical dimension. You are already primed to know that artistry and philosophy interpenetrate. May this conversation bring the insight, restoration, and flourishing that you long for.

Perhaps you already know my work. This book applies my distinctive approach to knowing to the specific arena of artistry. But I also am expanding it here with some fresh proposals about the real that we seek in our knowing. When I speak of *the real*, I mean simply *everything that exists*. Both knowing and the real matter deeply for artistry. Before this, I have offered my creative proposal about *how we know*. Now, in this book, I launch out to engage *the real* that we seek to understand. Both knowing and the real matter deeply for artistry.

Hospitable Welcome

In this book I reflect, in an everyday but wonder-filled way, on the real and how we are involved with it in our artistry. Inspired by the idea of *Doorways*, I cast this book as an event of hospitable welcome.[1] *Welcome* supplies the philosophical key to understand ourselves and our involvement with the world. I want to say philosophically that the lively real is hospitably welcoming us. And we respond in kind in our artistry and discovery. I want this book not to just talk about welcome, but to enact this hospitable gesture.

Imagine my welcoming you, a thoughtfully artful person, to an event in my home. You and I have met out in the streets of our lives. We have begun a conversation and an acquaintance. We find we both care about making sense of life, and our involvement with it. We care about matters that lie at the heart of who we are as human persons. We especially are attuned to beauty, creativity, to art and artistry, but always desire to understand them more deeply. We'd like to pursue the conversation.

As a next overture, I extend an invitation to you, along with some others, to a gathering in my home. I am holding a workshop to pursue these deep matters we care about. I envision probing conversation, as well as hands-on activity, within this gesture of celebrative hospitality. (A day might be too short. We may need to imagine that it takes place over a week. Or periodically over a year. Indeed, I imagine differing seasons outside the windows, according to which one especially lends itself to making this or that space inviting.)

1. My book editor, Revd. Dr. Robin Parry, suggested a Doorways series, each volume taking my philosophy into a different area of life.

The titles of the chapters that follow designate rooms in my home into which I invite you for conversations especially suited to each. But more is going on than organization of ideas. Moving together through these room-set conversations, we also trace the artistic process as an act of responding to the real, reciprocating the real's welcome.

Since as human persons we live and enact our implicit philosophy, attuning philosophy cannot be merely a matter of providing information. It involves a reorientation to the real at the deepest level of our being—more like therapy. In this book, we are carrying forth philosophical therapy.

I've crafted *Doorway to Artistry* to welcome you in. *Put yourself in the venture*. Your doing this is critical to the philosophizing I have in mind. As with a hospitable welcome, you simply cannot enter in without *entering in.* The real's welcome calls for this response. The venture of artistry, which this book enacts, requires it also.

One consequence of this philosophical therapy is that I repeat key maxims, so that you can grow into this approach to the real and your artistry. Each time you hear them you can gauge your gentle reorientation and your healing. Also, I go at this conversation meditatively. And so we listen to indwell the wise comments of many people.

Our room conversations trace the vector of our involvement with the real. On this Threshold we consider who we are, where we come from, and the real's welcome before us. Hearthside, we begin within the welcome. In the study we encounter the lively, welcoming real. On another day in the study we attend to "the everyday jewels of the real"—Things. In the garden we find how beauty puts our whole venture together. In the workshop, we enact our process of artful discovery. On the veranda, we listen to artists speaking of artistry, comparing their thought to the approach of this book. Finally, we feast: we celebrate the crowning of our venture, and we take our leave.

1124

Welcome! I issue forth from my front door to greet you as you approach my home, and we move together toward it as we talk. Up the sidewalk, up the steps, we gather on my wide old porch, early on a sunny summer morning.

As I welcome you, let me tell you about my home, 1124. Under the encroaching shadow of the pandemic in 2020, the surprising and prudent opportunity arose to move to this house in my daughter's neighborhood. Not only has finding my way back from an isolated time to my family made this place delightful; the move has also coincided with entering a new chapter of

life and possibilities beyond academics. I've also moved to a new state. Quite a doorway for me personally.

1124 is a 1915 Craftsman home in a turn-of-the-twentieth-century neighborhood on a bluff just west of the Ohio River. Especially after my newer suburban home of seventeen years, I soak in this home's woodwork and leaded windowpanes, its high ceilings, with tall old windows admitting sunlight and vistas of clouds, snow, stars, and neighborhood. It has its share of cracks, creaks, and drafts, gently undulating floors, and doors that won't close in one season or another.

In a way, 1124 is welcoming me as well as you. Its distinctive workmanship and design, its charming homeyness, its well-worn surfaces invite, envelope, and settle me. I have many old belongings that I have carried through life, things passed on from an earlier generation. As I have settled at 1124, it's as if my belongings are saying, Ahh, thank you for bringing us home! And 1124 seems pleased to have found this appreciative match. 1124 seems especially welcome to artful effort.

We gather on 1124's capacious porch. It is just the place for gathering friends stepping out of the streets to convene a visit. The porch columns have that cedar-sided, larger-at-the-bottom, Craftsman look. My generations-old night-blooming cereus and other shade-loving plants and flowers thrive here in the summer. A couple painted wooden rockers and other chairs await us. Kindly sit, morning coffee in hand, as the early summer sun finds us. From this sheltered remove, we overlook the street from which you have arrived.

On the nearside of the threshold, our beginning conversation inaugurates our hospitable gathering. We settle and talk together here, not at all to put off the moment of entry, but to contemplate it. We get acquainted, frame our agenda, to reflect on where we've come from.

Getting Acquainted

We have been getting acquainted from the moment we began talking together: as we met in the streets, as we planned this get-together, and now as I greet you on the porch. Conversation on my porch consolidates this.

A unique, personal journey has brought you here to this conversation at the intersection of artistry and philosophy. And now I will ask you:

> *By what journey have you come to my doorway? What are your forms of artistry?*

There is something unique and profound about you that comes to expression in all you are and do. Anyone who knows you well can see it, feel it, and delight in it. It just is you, your deepest orientation to the world. And your artistry is of a piece with this.

> *Who would your dearest friend say that you are? About what gestures of yours would they say, Oh! That is so like you!—?*

I have suggested that you are philosophical and artful at the core of your being. I suggested as well that there is something about the modern age that is adversely impacting this. In our time together we will flesh out these suggestions. But tell us:

> *How do you see these things being true in your life? What—besides my personal invitation—draws you to this book and conversation?*

As we talk, each of you enters into each other's stories. Why don't you imagine that it is your special group of friends gathering here? Imagine how each of them would be responding to these prompts. Or better yet, read *Doorway to Artistry* together and respond in person!

Your Host: Longing for the Real

As part of welcoming you, I tell you my philosophical story that shapes this venture.

I was born into a family replete with musicians, who were already making exquisite music and offering it to others. I was surrounded by voice and keyboard mastery. I came to feel about myself that, by contrast, nobody wanted to hear *me* sing or play, when they could hear my relatives.—An unnecessary, unsupported conclusion about their motives and about myself, I confess.

"—And so you became a philosopher!" a friend once quipped. There is definitely something to that! But now that I look back, even if I had had the perseverance to study music and practice, I would still have needed to philosophize.

I was just thirteen when I ran up against the modernist mindset—though it took some years to figure out what it was. Once I realized that my questions were philosophical, and that it was possible to study philosophy, it took only a few hours to decide that I should pursue this quest—even for a lifetime.

At thirteen, I became a skeptic, it seems: I found myself doubting that I actually could know the world outside my mind, or that I could actually