

2026-05-31 Welcome Message

Hello, I'm Roberto Sabas, and I welcome you to New Covenant Fellowship's Worship Time. Pastor Melissa asked me to share about my creative journey and thoughts about art. It's fair to say that the term *subcreation*, coined by J.R.R. Tolkien, applies accurately to art. This concept holds that humans are "sub-creators" made in the image of God, the ultimate Maker. We can't make something from nothing, so we have to borrow ideas, things, & images from the primary world to build secondary worlds, like Tolkien's Middle-earth. All story, art, and language is subcreation according to Tolkien, in his essay "On Fairy-Stories" and his poem "Mythopoeia."

All my life, I borrowed from others to create a mythical world. Around age three, as my Auntie Flora was babysitting me, I made my first subcreation, a crude drawing of a tricycle. Her delight and wonder that a toddler could draw was relayed to my mom, Cecilia Sabas, who loves to regale me with the anecdote, I presume out of parental pride, or maybe she just likes to tell a good story.

Growing up, I borrowed from many artists, one of whom was my father, Francisco, a mechanical draftsman who liked to write poems and paint watercolor sketches in his college notebooks. His ink still flows through my pen onto the pages of my art and poetry.

Other artists whose work I admired include comic book artists and abstract painters, like Barry Windsor Smith, Moebius, Todd Holland, and Wayne Thiebaud, whose color palette appears in my early paintings. Willem De Kooning's abstract canvases opened my eyes to sublime & ineffable imagery. And notably, I was enriched by Georgia O'Keeffe's timeless studies of the desert and of floral shapes, their hues deepening my visual vocabulary. It's not just one, but all of these luminaries who inspired me to pursue illustration.

The romantic me remembers this period of my life as a long, gradual journey, like rowing a boat gently down a stream—what a dream! BUT the reality is that my creative path was interrupted many times by life. What helped me was the realization that facing life (its circumstances and difficulties) allowed me to learn the most important lessons: how to love truly, how to serve humbly, and how to wait patiently.

After high school, I applied to the Pasadena College of Art, but wasn't accepted. Instead, I went to the University of Guam to take Gen Ed courses. While studying, I was hired on at the Andersen Air Force Base Exchange, where I learned the trade of visual merchandising, letterpress, and sign-making from a very skilled mentor, Rey Abadam. When I embraced my faith, I prioritized work over study and church ministry over personal career goals. Even so, God gave me opportunities to develop my creative skills.

In my mid-twenties, I got a job with Jews For Jesus and worked in their print shop. At that time, I met my future wife, Cheryl Zimmerman, a stage actor from Champaign who came to San Francisco on the promises God had given her! Her dedication to writing, history, and Shakespeare inspired me, and I got excited again about my possibilities. In 1996, I left JFJ to start my own illustration studio. After ten years of business, reality disrupted the dream again. In total surprise, Cheryl and I were blessed in our mid-40s with our third child, Richard.

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Meanwhile, I was burned out from years of mind-numbing technical illustration. So God gave me a new role born of need. I applied to the U of I, where I was hired in time for Richard's birth to be fully covered. Starting at McKinley Health Center and later transferring to Technology Services, I did not see how I could use my art skills.

Ironically, I had to use these skills eventually to compile my knowledge and expertise into a tome titled "The Assignments Group Reference Manual," which served my successor well. I now see a pattern into which my creative efforts have been interwoven, and it's clearly one of grace and love through the people God put in my life.

These insights help me now, as I set my sights on new creative goals. Since 2018, I've tried my hand at exhibiting in galleries, art shows, selling my work at art festivals, and online. I've also learned how to self-publish through Amazon KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing). Since 2025, I've been building a YouTube and social platform dedicated to helping others develop their own imagination and creativity. It's been a long, strange trip, but I wouldn't trade it for any other.