

Boredom is just "What's the use?" in disguise. And "What's the use?" is fear, and fear means you are secretly in despair. So put your fears on the page. Put anything on the page. Put three pages of it on the page.

The most potent muse of all is our own inner child.

THE ARTIST DATE

STEPHEN NACHMANOVITCH

At the height of laughter, the universe is flung into a kaleidoscope of new possibilities.

JEAN HOUSTON

The other basic tool of *The Artist's Way* may strike you as a nontool, a diversion. You may see clearly how morning pages could work yet find yourself highly dubious about something called an *artist date*. I assure you, artist dates work, too.

Think of this combination of tools in terms of a radio receiver and transmitter. It is a two-step, two-directional process: *out* and then *in*. Doing your morning pages, you are sending—notifying yourself and the universe of your dreams, dissatisfactions, hopes. Doing your artist date, you are receiving—opening yourself to insight, inspiration, guidance.

But what exactly is an artist date? An artist date is a block of time, perhaps two hours weekly, especially set aside and committed to nurturing your creative consciousness, your inner artist. In its most primary form, the artist date is an excursion, a play date that you preplan and defend against all interlopers. You do not take anyone on this artist date but you and your inner artist, a.k.a. your creative child. That means no lovers, friends, spouses, children—no taggers-on of any stripe.

If you think this sounds stupid or that you will never be able to afford the time, identify that reaction as resistance. You cannot afford *not* to find time for artist dates.

"Do you spend quality time with each other?" troubled couples are often asked by their therapist. Parents of disturbed children are asked the same thing.

"Well . . . what do you mean, 'quality time?'" is the usual weasely response. "We spend a lot of time together."

"Yes . . . but is it quality time? Do you ever have any fun together?" the therapist may press.

"Fun?" (Whoever heard of having fun in a rotten relationship like this one?)

"Do you go on dates? Just to talk? Just to listen to each other?"

"Dates? . . . But we're married, too busy, too broke, too—"

"Too scared," the therapist may interrupt. (Hey, don't sugarcoat it.)

It is frightening to spend quality time with a child or lover, and our artist can be seen as both to us. A weekly artist date is remarkably threatening—and remarkably productive.

A date? With my artist?

Yes. Your artist needs to be taken out, pampered, and listened to. There are as many ways to evade this commitment as there are days of your life. "I'm too broke" is the favored one, although no one said the date need involve elaborate expenses.

Your artist is a child. Time with a parent matters more than monies spent. A visit to a great junk store, a solo trip to the beach, an old movie seen alone together, a visit to an aquarium or an art gallery—these cost time, not money. Remember, it is the time commitment that is sacred.

In looking for a parallel, think of the child of divorce who gets to see a beloved parent only on weekends. (During most of the week, your artist is in the custody of a stern, workaday adult.) What that child wants is attention, not expensive outings. What that child does not want is to share the precious parent with someone like the new significant other.

Spending time in solitude with your artist child is essential to self-nurturing. A long country walk, a solitary expedition to the beach for a sunrise or sunset, a sortie out to a strange church to hear gospel music, to an ethnic neighborhood to taste foreign sights and sounds—your artist might enjoy any of these. Or your artist might like bowling.

Commit yourself to a weekly artist's date, and then watch your killjoy side try to wriggle out of it. Watch how this sacred time gets easily encroached upon. Watch how the sacred time suddenly includes a third party. Learn to guard against these invasions.

Above all, learn to listen to what your artist child has to say on, and about, these joint expeditions. For example, "Oh, I hate this serious stuff," your artist may exclaim if you persist in taking it only to grown-up places that are culturally edifying and good for it.

Listen to that! It is telling you your art needs more playful inflow. A little fun can go a long way toward making your work feel more like play. We forget that the imagination-at-

The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves.

C. G. JUNG

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play is at the heart of all good work. And increasing our capacity for good creative work is what this book is about.

You are likely to find yourself avoiding your artist dates. Recognize this resistance as a fear of intimacy—*self-intimacy*. Often in troubled relationships, we settle into an avoidance pattern with our significant others. We don't want to hear what they are thinking because it just might hurt. So we avoid them, knowing that, once they get the chance, our significant others will probably blurt out something we do not want to hear. It is possible they will want an answer we do not have and can't give them. It is equally possible we might do the same to them and that then the two of us will stare at each other in astonishment, saying, "But I never knew you felt like that!"

It is probable that these self-disclosures, frightening though they are, will lead to the building of a real relationship, one in which the participants are free to be who they are and to become what they wish. This possibility is what makes the risks of self-disclosure and true intimacy profitable. In order to have a real relationship with our creativity, we must take the time and care to cultivate it. Our creativity will use this time to confront us, to confide in us, to bond with us, and to plan.

The morning pages acquaint us with what we think and what we think we need. We identify problem areas and concerns. We complain, enumerate, identify, isolate, fret. This is step one, analogous to prayer. In the course of the release engendered by our artist date, step two, we begin to hear solutions. Perhaps equally important, we begin to fund the creative reserves we will draw on in fulfilling our artistry.

Filling the Well, Stocking the Pond

Art is an image-using system. In order to create, we draw from our inner well. This inner well, an artistic reservoir, is ideally like a well-stocked trout pond. We've got big fish, little fish, fat fish, skinny fish—an abundance of artistic fish to fry. As artists, we must realize that we have to maintain this artistic ecosystem. If we don't give some attention to upkeep, our well is apt to become depleted, stagnant, or blocked.

Any extended period or piece of work draws heavily on

Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up.

PABLO PICASSO

During [these] periods of relation after concentrated intellectual activity, the intuitive mind seems to take over and can produce the sudden clarifying insights which give so much joy and delight.

FRITJOF CAPRA
PHYSICIST

out. To the artist who says "I won't sell my work," I say, nobody should have to sell his work. Instead you should share it, exhibit it, have it sponsored, have it purchased. It should also be hung so the comments, dialogue, and intrigue are brought to bear on our culture. Art is meant to be a commitment to culture, and selling it is not selling soul. It simply is not a prostitution to offer your work to others at a fair cost.

When I think of Artists Identity I see Georgia O'Keeffe in my mind. I see an artist who dressed like herself, lived as herself, and acted as herself. I don't think we need to wear tuxedos or cowboy boots or spiked hair to our shows—we need to wear an expression of ourselves, because as artists we are those who are in the practice of expression.

When we write a resumé, why must we pack it full of words and lists that really have little consequence to the reader? I am often tempted to refuse to even have a resumé, for I have seen so many that are full of meaningless information. In the story *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo, the hero is an ugly, criminal man who deals with the human condition as anyone could. Like Hugo's tragic hero, we are sometimes tempted to steal and cheat and lie. In our effort to redeem our souls we, too, encounter the greatest grief and the greatest joy. Let us grieve over our inability to be significant without the meaningless lists. Let us have joy as truth and sincerity become the hallmarks of our value.

Our attitudes bespeak our practices. As artists, we are honorable people who have somehow lost, in a few places, the thread of integrity that brought us to the art we make. Unless we examine these issues and reach agreement, our future is foretold, and there can be no joy in Mudville if the great Casey strikes out.

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Create for Your Inner Voice by Barbara Dougherty

One of the greatest challenges in art today is "What should I paint, photograph, or sculpt?"

Sometimes, we know, certain subjects have a commercial appeal. These subjects are dear to the American public and include dolphins and whales, horses and cowboys and Indians and wolves, flowers, and young children.

Sometimes it is almost demanded that art have no objective appeal, as in those exhibitions calling for "contemporary art." In this case the word

"contemporary" is supposed to mean abstract.
Contemporary is supposed to mean abstract.

you make your images in a traditional, realistic, impressionistic, or nonobjective fashion?

Embedded in all of these distinctions and descriptions is the issue that is bringing artists to their knees in this country. For whom do you create?

I propose that you create for only one voice; your inner voice. If you like to paint or sculpt in a style, then do it. Face the fact that it has already been done before you. Face the fact that very little in this world is completely original.

Find inspiration where you find it. The task of an artist is not first to make original work—the task is to find that magic energy that keeps you bringing into reality your inspirations.

The task of the artist, more closely defined, is to search for inspiration, identify that inspiration when it is experienced, and to create an image to share that inspiration. We are not essentially making art, we are essentially caretakers of inspiration.

One artist might be inspired by a black line crossing a host of other lines. Another artist might be inspired by the light as it leaves the day. This is what we ought to be sharing with the public. The distortion has been our own fault—images are not of subjects, they are of inspirations.

And inspirations have no limits. The products of our inspiration, and what we do with these, is another story.

I think the best approach to marketing is to share. Share the extent of your inspiration and your willingness to undertake to handle the materials. If an artist is skillful in the use of certain media, this is information for marketing and resumé. If an artist uses found objects or nontraditional materials, then the intention is the information needed by the marketer and the potential customer.

The point I'm making is that the business of art and making a living as an artist must be rethought. We as artists are not selling works, images, products. We are selling creations—the images created from our inspirations. Therefore our first effort must be to share the experience of searching for and resolving inspiration.

Thus, I believe an artist's statement is a critical item in the sharing of our work. That statement is not a psychological unveiling of our innermost being. It is a carefully articulated rendition of our experience as artists—a mission statement, if you will. I do not believe that the statement should be longer than two sentences. My statement is, "My art work is dedicated to the vanishing agricultural lands." This doesn't say anything about my media or my journey to this point. It does, however, state clearly and in a powerful way exactly the experience that is my inspiration. And I believe it is all that is necessary.

It is up to us artists to rebuild our economic foundations; galleries are changing and failing, and many nonprofit institutions lack appropriate and sufficient funding. I believe the key to a successful restructuring is to look

at the presentations we make and to have more clarity and force. We feel things in mostly overwhelming ways. This cannot be easily dealt especially if our resumé and statements look the same as those in professions.

We can reidentify our lives and our efforts. By doing this, once we discover why the world loves its artists.

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ARE YOU HAPPY?

Taking Stock
by Constance Hallinan Lagan

No, this article is not about investing in the stock market. Nor is it about stock photography. It isn't even about inventory control. It is about you!

It is a good idea to take stock occasionally—of ourselves. Are we doing what makes us happy? After all, that is why we chose to pursue a career in the creative arena of art and in the autonomous world of self-employment, right?

As a career counselor I have often found that people who chose to tread "the path least traveled" years ago assume they are doing what they really want today. What has vanished from their lives as they live them today, however, is the singular spark, the unbridled energy, the unquenchable thirst which characterized their lives when they first chose their creative careers and independent lifestyles many years ago.

If you often ponder one or more of the following questions, it may be time for you to take stock:

- Why do I put off getting started on my work every day?
- Why do I find reasons for frequent breaks from my daily routine?
- Why do I turn "quickie" phone calls into in-depth discussions so often?
- Why do I find myself tired and irritable these days?
- Why do I constantly insist upon tallying up the negatives of being self-employed when I used to see only the positives?
- Why am I browsing the classified employment ads every Sunday?
- Why do I turn away business because the account is "too much trouble" or "not challenging enough"?

Reassessment is a necessary part of every life and of every business plan. Looking at what is going on today does not necessarily mean you will reject your current lifestyle tomorrow. Many times a reassessment leads to renewed effort, to revitalized determination, to restored belief, to rejuvenated energy—to a reborn entrepreneurial artist.

Happiness guru Barbara Sher advises us to ask ourselves four questions to determine what life's work will best fulfill us. I suggest we ask ourselves these same four questions when taking stock and reassessing our current life's work.

1. Who do you think you are?
2. What do you love—what would you do if you knew in advance

that you could not possibly fail?

3. What did you enjoy doing when you were a child?
4. What is stopping you from pursuing your dreams?

I would ask you a fifth question to get a complete understanding of your aspirations: What would you love to do if you were not dependent on it for income—in other words, what would you do if you were independently wealthy?

You may find you are doing exactly what's right for you. If that is the case, wake tomorrow giving thanks to your Higher Power for allowing you to be in exactly the right place at exactly the right time doing exactly what fulfills you. Having done my own reassessment recently, an old French proverb comes to mind: "It is by believing in roses that one brings them to bloom."

If you find you are no longer fulfilling your inner desires, set about changing. Years ago you set out on the path you most desired. You can do it again. After all, "Life is always at some turning point," advises philosopher Irwin Edman in *The Uses of Philosophy*.

Keep in mind that The Answer is not always the answer. Sounds paradoxical, you say? Well, it is: the answer is often the question. Nineteenth century Scottish philosopher James McCosh wrote, "The book to read is not the one which thinks for you, but the one which makes you think." If McCosh were pondering the nature of questions today, he might say, "The question to ask is not the one which gives you an answer, but the one which makes you question."

Recommended Reading

- Brown, H. Jackson, *Life's Little Instruction Book*, Rutledge Hill Press, 1991.
- Brown, Melanie, *Attaining Personal Greatness: One Book for Life*, William Morrow & Company, 1987.
- Dyer, Wayne W., *Real Magic: Creating Miracles in Everyday Life*, Harper Collins Publishers, 1992.
- Jampolsky, Gerald G. and Diane V. Cirincione, *Change Your Mind, Change Your Life*, Bantam Books, 1993.
- Kaufman, Barry Neil, *Happiness Is a Choice*, Fawcett Columbine, 1991.
- Robbins, Anthony, *Awaken the Gift Within: How to Take Immediate Control of Your Mental, Emotional and Physical Destiny*, Summit, 1991.
- Sher, Barbara, *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was: How to Discover What You Really Want and How to Get It*, Delacorte Press, 1994.
- Sher, Barbara, *Wishcraft: How to Get What You Really Want*, The Viking Press, 1979.

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Creative Blocks
by Bruce M. Holly, L.C.S.W.

Creative blocks—writer's blocks, artist's blocks, conceptual blocks—in general fail to do any kind of creative work when we consciously want to and are equipped to do so—how do they happen? What can be done to reduce or eliminate them?

Most of us procrastinate at some point in our daily lives. We put off doing things we find unpleasant, tedious, or fearsome. Sometimes, we put off actions when we are irritated or dissatisfied with a person who would benefit from what we do. And sometimes we are confused about what to do; as we become aware of this confusion, our anxiety builds until it seems overwhelming, and rather than take action to clarify the situation, we avoid it completely. In another type of procrastination, we sometimes avoid doing pleasurable activities. Who has not put off doing something fun in order to prolong the anticipation? Moreover, the tension of not quite knowing what will happen is often seductively pleasurable in its own right.

Similar forces operate for artists engaged in creative activity. Many of us go through periods of inactivity when, if we feel confident, we merely say we are fallow, allowing ourselves to rest before moving on to new work. Temporary resistance to action can often be a useful experience and sometimes serves as a conscious or unconscious means of protecting ourselves from action we are not ready to take. The very notion of being "blocked" as an artist can be reassuring, as only people with the capacity for creativity are able to feel blocked.

However, when we are less sure of our resources, we often call ourselves "blocked" to describe feeling thwarted by an imaginary wall which separates us from the ideas, processes, and products we desperately want to engage in and create. At worst, it feels like we are literally cut off from the very activities that define our identities as artists—blind to ideas, deaf to the music waiting to be created, and mute when we want to sing.

Images abound for the experience of being blocked: the "blank canvas," the "white page," the wall-like immobility of the eternal second before doing. Creative blocks have been the stuff of legend in the art community since art began. Art is a solution to humanity's need for beauty, and the first purposeful chip of a stone beyond that called for by utility freed us all from the original creative block. As with sin, however, blockage of creative expression has manifested itself in various forms, unique to each individual sufferer, down through the ages.

Some artists speak of blocks which arise from fear—of failure, of success, of being criticized, and so on. There is a parallel between artistic blocks related to these fears, and the phobias which inhibit people in other areas of life. Fears and phobias often arise and can be understood as rational responses to commonplace events that make us feel threatened, rejected, or abandoned in some fashion. For artists, negative criticism, skeptical or inattentive audiences, and lack of personal focus and understanding are potent sources of anxiety. When fears become phobias, and fearful self-doubt becomes a barrier to art, however, we are dealing with irrational intrusions and limits on functioning, which often become sources of further anxiety in themselves, feeding a cycle of fear and avoidance.

For very few people, however, is a creative block a life or death matter, a means of protecting oneself from a self-destructive process which makes creative use of extraordinary sensitivity, and in so doing consumes the identity of the doer. For these few, the failure of art is protective, for madness happens when there are no defenses, when the dancer and the dance are one, and no more; when the author is his story, and no more;

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when the painter and his image have no surrounding frame, and the actor acts alone.

Others speak of blocks as arising because of the absence of structure. In unbounded situations, with a myriad of potential choices, we can often feel overwhelmed by freedom. As in the dreams people have of being alone in the midst of a wide open plain, going in any direction is possible, but the first step seems so hard to take. We anticipate feeling, in the vastness, as if we haven't moved at all. Or we fear that by making a choice we lose options which might be more valuable than the one we are taking. And so stand frozen.

Pursuing this image, what can often change things is to mindlessly force a first step and then turn around and appreciate the single track we have made for its full impact on the situation. By making one step, we can learn concretely that we close off no potential alternatives, and in fact we define and give meaning to the entire environment by action. We are no longer frozen points on an unchanging plane; we are pilgrims on a pathway.

The mark of a creative person is that he or she is willing to stay with anxiety and do something, anything, in response to an evolving situation. According to Rollo May, an artist and psychologist intimately concerned with creative processes, "The anxiety of a creative person] does not run away from non-being...but by encountering it and wrestling with non-being, he forces it to produce being. He knocks upon silence and meaninglessness until he can force it to mean."

Some describe blocks as an experience of emptiness of energy; ideas, the ability to employ discriminatory skills—a sense that the well, once full, is now dry, or sealed. Engaging creatively in art takes a subtle form of courage, commitment, and energy. In exhaustion, sometimes anger and emotional confusion—many things can drain the elements, at least temporarily. The task becomes to take care of the drain, either by giving oneself permission to be fallow for a while, taking a creative rest, or taking the initial action of taking care of oneself by whatever way works: acts of faith, self-discovery, therapy, changes of life—to allow the action then to shift to the stroke that begins painting, the word that starts the novel, the note that begins the new song.

In a nutshell, then, movement around or through a creative block is a matter of doing something, anything, and then solving the specific creative problems created by that action, and so on and on to a conclusion. One can make this initial action possible by realizing that in every case, one can choose to do something. Thus, "I can't create (write/sing/act/etc.)" is inaccurate: it is more truthful and more useful to realize "I won't draw (write/sing/act/etc.)."

The most minute, and often sloppy, careless, and awkward action begins the creative process. There is no such thing as wasted time, effort, or material in art, if one continues to act long enough. And in the moment one acts, one becomes an artist, a pilgrim on a plane of unbounded possibility.

It is important to realize that creativity is an activity of the spirit entering unknown ground. Staying in familiar territory is the work of artisans. It is also important to realize that as all people are unique, we all have creative potential, and if we act long enough, creativity then becomes unavoidable.

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▲ ON CREATIVE BLOCK

Recently, I received something very precious—useful criticism. A few weeks after I'd spoken to a local art association, I called the woman who had organized things and asked for her comments. I heard two observations: I hadn't talked loudly enough for everyone to hear, and I hadn't answered the practical questions many people had come to hear me address—mostly about working through or around creative blocks.

These days, talking to groups has become a clear gamble, for me and for the group that asks me to speak. I used to think I could speak well, with wit, animation, and some sense that I knew what I was talking about. Nowadays, things still go well sometimes—I say things that meet what the audience needs, and they and I enjoy the experience. Things “click.” On other occasions, things go “clunk,” and both I and my audience find ourselves disappointed. Sometimes I'm off because I'm nervous, uptight, confronting my own demons of fear and foolishness. But sometimes, I think it's because I make some assumptions that turn out to be incorrect. For example, I will assume that what I have to say about being productive is already common knowledge amongst artists, or so simple as to be simplistic. Or that because it has been said or written about before, it doesn't need saying again.

I wonder where I got such strange ideas, as I write them now. I know enough about how humans learn and work to realize that while these assumptions are all true—that we as artists do “know” what we have to do to produce work, that the basic principles that lead to creativity are “simple,” and that most of us have heard the ideas expressed before—the ideas are worth hearing again and again.

All good speakers and teachers know these things. What makes some speakers stand out, however, is that they convey these ideas with a personal conviction and clarity that allows their audience to respond with their own creative action. And the key word here is and always has been: “action.”

It is possible to frame the notion of a creative block as a creative choice to make a personal statement by avoiding action. (But one must realize: it's been done before, and isn't very creatively unique.) As much as it feels like an inability, it is a choice.

There. We have confronted the hardest part of the truth about blocks. We consciously or unconsciously *choose* to be unproductive. Believe that, and if you are struggling with a creative block, you are at the crux of your problem, and ready to deal with and resolve the reasons why.

And dealing with the causes is another choice. Another truth: each action leads to *another* choice, “Do I *keep* acting?”

The blocks most of us stumble against in art are made from the clay of our own experience. We may butt up against walls which separate us from our desire to create and swear by all that is holy that we are mystified by why they are there. But they are there for reasons, and they have to do with our needs, our ways of defending ourselves, and the unconscious influences that shape each of our lives in powerful ways.

There are several possibilities for removing these blocks. The most obvious—we can wait them out, or grind through them. Most of us slow down or slide to a temporary halt on occasion, often when we are fatigued or distracted by events of everyday life—births, deaths, anniversaries, disappointments, love affairs, and the like. When circumstances change, or we get enough rest, we get back to work fairly easily. Or if we've been grinding along, the work becomes easier.

We can use our own resources—introspection, constructive criticism, brainstorming with friends—to search out the reasons for blockage. The reasons might not be

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obvious, but are waiting to be noticed, to dawn on us if we let them—boredom, insecurity, anger at ourselves or others, disappointment with our creative direction, and so on. In these cases, the resolution of the block comes from putting our finger on the source of creative discomfort, and addressing it through consciously changing direction, resolving a specific conflict, or developing needed skills.

Or we can suspect that in some cases, the very mystery and strength of the blocks suggest that they are serving a defensive purpose, buffering us from awareness of aspects of our lives that would feel overwhelming to us if they were to be expressed. In these cases, the usefulness of a personal psychotherapy is not to be underestimated. The forces which are acting to thwart creativity may feel overwhelming but once brought to light and explored in a supportive relationship with a sensitive therapist, they can become a vast source of new creative energy.

How do you tell what you need to do? By using a simple yardstick. If you can act creatively at all, you are not blocked. But more relevantly, if your work takes an inordinate amount of will and energy to do, and does not respond to your efforts to wait the difficulty out or work it through on your own, and if you are truly blocked rather than simply uncommitted to doing art, therapy is the way to go.

This particular essay comes with a guarantee. If you do the following things, you will become a producing artist. Your art may be different, at least for a while, than what you want it to be, or it may be unpleasing to you, or unpredictable ... but, you *will* be productive.

1. Get started. Do something, anything. Right now. If you are a painter, drop this book, get your paints and make a mark on whatever you use, paper, canvas, whatever. If you are a sculptor, go find a chunk of something and give it a judicious whack. If you are a choreographer, get up and move. Just do it.

Bruce M. Holly

2. Once you've started, keep something going, all the time. Get in the habit of starting something new while you're still working on something else. I've taken up using my leftover paint mixings for one piece to start another canvas, kind of like sourdough starter.

3. Promise yourself you'll take a risk each time you work on a piece. Deliberately cause yourself some trouble on at least one piece each time you work. Then work it out. You can always throw it out. But don't.

4. Cezanne took the attitude that each painting was "research." Take the same attitude. Learn something new. It's there. Honest. In each piece. Look for it.

5. Never "finish" a piece. Just allow yourself to stop somewhere. Picasso knew this, now you do.

6. Look. Study. Think. Always, always keep a pencil and paper with you. Use them a lot. Record thoughts, images, details—for no specific reason. Write legibly.

7. Pay attention to the little thoughts, the subtle "self-talk" you're doing in the back of your mind about what you shouldn't or can't do. Write these thoughts down as you become aware of them, and examine each, mechanically asking yourself the question "What if the opposite is true?" Then, try doing the opposite, and pay attention to what happens inside you and in the art you produce.

8. Realize that each piece says something to someone. Never underestimate this. No message is unworthy of respect for this reason.

9. Find people who appreciate what you are doing in your art. Show them your work, and use what they say—not as gospel, but as energy.

10. Think of your life as a work of art, the result of a series of choices leading to action. Document it as much as you can.

▲ THE HEART OF IT

At first, I didn't worry too much about what was in the offing. My daughter's school was sponsoring an art auction by a large commercial dealer as a fund-raiser. I was one of the volunteer laborers who turned out early one Saturday morning to help set the thing up. I figured it would at the very least be an interesting day, an opportunity to see a little art, watch people throw a few bucks at some offset prints, have a few drinks, and eat like a horse. I didn't figure on going through a major existential crisis, a trauma of the soul, which, by the end of the evening, is what I later figured out had happened to me.

Oh, my dear Lord. What happened was astounding.

A van rolled up, filled with framed pieces, fresh from what I now imagine is a vast warehouse somewhere in the heart of darkness in UPS Zone Two. A young man began handing us pictures off the back and we humped them into a large hall filled with tables against the wall. As we carried the stuff in and leaned it on the tables, it became apparent to me that the pictures were not my cup of tea. Most were prints, parts of huge editions, some signed. Some of the pictures were originals, the kind of art you might see on a movie set replicating the interior of a stereotypical Middle-American white-bread home. Stylized Caucasian-looking women in kimonos with their bare backs "S"-curving through the center of the pictures, a series of brightly-colored neo-primitive American town scenes, the odd smattering of Norman Rockwell offset prints of Tom Sawyer *et al.* That kind of thing.

I figured I would at least eat well during the evening. I knew then I wouldn't be spending much on art that night, and I figured that anyone dropping more than thirty or forty

dollars on any of the pieces would be doing so out of a charitable heart, and would be likely to be a little morose as well as hung over the next morning. They'd at least get a fairly decent frame out of the deal.

Oh, my dear Lord. How out of touch could I be?

That evening, my wife, a couple of friends and I showed up. So had several hundred other folks. I grabbed a beer and a handful of cheese and bread, and looked around again. I was mildly surprised at the apparent level of interest many of the people were showing in the art. Egocentric as I am, it's always at least a mild surprise when it dawns on me that my likes and dislikes aren't necessarily shared by every other member of the human race.

Soon, an auctioneer appeared up on the stage at the front of the room—a handsome dark-haired devil (Mephisto?!)—resplendent in a shiny black tux and a lapel brooch, for heaven's sake. He began by explaining the drill for the evening and making a bit of light banter. By this time, I was getting a bit stupefied on beer and cheese and the general scene, and both awed and appalled at the notion that apparently there were people who *liked* some of the pieces on display.

(Technique Number One: Give 'em time to have a couple of drinks before starting—it loosens things up.)

Mr. Mephisto soon proved himself a consummate master of orchestration, timing, and psychology—a Master Salesman! I became fascinated, repulsed, awed, overwhelmed. He started off with a few small prints of Norman Rockwell illustrations.

(Technique Number Two: Nothing too hard at first—make it easy to get the first bid.)

Somebody started bidding as if by reflex, and someone else jumped in, and we were off for the evening, it looked like. No real surprises yet. A comfortable, cheery evening, watching a master at work, and nice people being a little bit

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generous so the school would be able to roll in a little dough.

Then things began to get really weird, really fast, at least for me.

After a couple of small sales, Mephisto signalled to his cronies to set up one of the larger Kimono Lady paintings on the auction block. Then—and this sends chills down my spine—he ... began ... to explain why this picture was ... IMPORTANT!

Oh, my dear, dear Lord.

(Technique Number Three: Tell 'em why they should BUY THIS PICTURE!)

He said things that had to do with "... Number One painter of this genre at the moment ... Note the poodle in the corner—the most valuable and collectible images he's painted all have poodles in them ... He's our most popular artist this year ... and, we have a buy-back policy!"

I was in a swoon.

Then the world got even more intensely strange—he announced the minimum opening bid—\$9,200!

I felt disembodied, like I was floating around observing myself in a scene from the depths of a schizophrenic seizure—what the hell was going on? Where is the meaning here? Am I nuts, or what? The piece was something I would not be able to tolerate in my house for ten minutes. It was, in my view, likely the ten-thousandth in a series of repetitive, bland, clichéd, trivial, no-account chicken-art simulations that are to art as a two-minute five-dollar quickie in a doorway is to making love.

And then, the numbing, predictable, banal, inevitable next event: people actually bid on the thing, and someone—a merciful God will keep his awesome idiocy intact—actually bought the thing for several hundred dollars more than the initial bid.

(Technique Number Four: Land a big one early enough to influence the rest of the fish to bite big.)

The rest of the evening was anticlimactic. I don't remember much else, except for the occasional phrase from Mephisto as he described the "worth" of subsequent pieces: "... This one has a lot of green in it. It would go well in a green room ... A charming piece. Paintings this size usually sell for \$400 ..."

I left feeling like I had been at a slave auction. What should have been an evening filled with soul and heart and magic was more like watching wretched, painted waifs being peddled like so much dried meat. I could not believe my response, given that in my line of work I tend to see some massively strange and crazy situations as a matter of daily routine. Until this particular evening, I had a sense that I understood what "beyond belief" meant. I now have a new understanding.

Creative art, in my mind, is anything done by a human being that goes one stroke beyond the functional. But understand the word "functional" in this context: phony, crass, and dastardly functional pseudo-art abounds, ranging from the black-velvet metallic paint Big-Eyed Elvis paintings that some poor *campesino* in Juarez knocks out for a few cents for someone to sell at your local gas station to the slickest of gallery-packaged well-framed torn-paper abstracts that sell big-time uptown. The function these serve is to be "valuable," their meaning convertible into some form of exchange—money, prestige, power—for someone, be it the maker, the seller, or the buyer. Their intrinsic value as living expressions of a human heart or psyche is, and always has been from their conception, *secondary* to being "valuable."

Friends, never ever underestimate the art market. In fact, I would at this point say it is impossible to underestimate what can be sold. But never, ever confuse success in the market with a means for measuring creative worth.

As for me, I've decided I clearly can't handle warehouse-packaged fund-raising art auctions. The experience is much

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too intense for me.

But—wait! Of course! The power of it all! It's taken me until this very moment to realize ... this is the only way I can make sense of it ... the whole auction was a powerful piece of *performance art*! It had to be. It just had to be. It *must* have been somebody's genius statement about the valuation of art, about the perception of "art," about the monstrous capacity of well-intentioned people to tear the living soul out of even the holiest endeavors.

Now I feel better.

Next time, though, I'll volunteer to set up a Tupperware party instead.

(7)

The Mystery Buster!

Twelve Blocks to Artistic Success

by Jack White

"Making it" as an artist: is it a mystery to you? Here are some typical stumbling blocks. Armed with knowledge, you can avoid or overturn these obstacles.

The phone was picked up before the first ring finished its cycle. Not expecting such a quick answer, the caller spoke in a startled tone, "Hello!" Never before had her best friend answered the phone so quickly.

A tiny whispered "Hi" came from the other end of the line.

"Is that you, Craig?" the caller asked hesitantly. In an even fainter reply the muffled words answered, "Yes, ma'am."

"Is your mother home?" she asked. Again little Craig replied in his soft tone, "Yes, ma'am."

"Could I speak to her?" The lady asked. It seemed like an eternity before young Craig responded. She could barely hear what he was saying. "No, ma'am."

"Well, is your father home?" she asked as confusion began to set in. Again, the same faint answer: "Yes, ma'am."

"May I speak with him?" Craig's whisper was even softer, "No, ma'am."

A little frustration began to build. He asked, "Why not?"

Once more the small boy waited to speak. After what seemed like another eternity, he replied, "They are busy."

Knowing the father had been away from business, she was not sure she wanted to know the answer, but curiosity got the best of her, and she asked, "What are they doing?"

This time young Craig whispered immediately. "The policeman and the fireman are here talking to them." His voice was so faint she was not sure she heard him correctly.

"Did you say the police and firemen in your house? What are they doing?" she asked urgently.

Craig whispered, "They are looking for me."

In North America an estimated 22 million people are called artists. Fewer than 10% earn \$1,000 a year or more from the proceeds of their art. Are you one of the millions hiding where no one knows how to find you?

Most artists remain in the group earning less than \$1,000 a year for several reasons. This article goes briefly into the Top Twelve.

1. No one can find you.

Perhaps you are like little Craig hiding in the closet, whispering. People who care are looking, but you are so well camouflaged not even those closest to you can find your location.

I am speaking metaphorically, of course; not that they cannot see you, but you have been hiding your light under a basket for years. You do busy-work and play artist, but you have yet to lift the cover and expose your ability.

One of the things I hope to do in this article is show you how to let people see your talent, so you move past the masses earning less than \$1,000 a year. Meet that milestone and you'll be among the top 10% in your field. Many of you are hiding in broad daylight, and you have done such a wonderful job of it, you have managed to escape selling enough work to pay for your supplies.

No one will reach in and grab you by the nape of the neck. I will show you the route, but only you can decide to walk it.

2. Lack of focus.

More artists fail for lack of focus than any other reason. I know a wonderful artist who changes styles with the flip of the calendar. He tries contemporary, representational,

impressionistic and *trompe de l'oeil*. He cannot stay focused long enough for any one style/voice to be heard. He ends up whispering like little Craig in the closet.

Until artists find a voice/style that connects with the buying public and sticks with it long enough for it to take root, they will always be way back in the pack of failures, and angry because they have not been discovered.

You will face boredom and frustration your entire career. You will get frustrated seeking a voice/style that collectors can connect with. Once you accomplish that voice/style people are clamoring for, you will become bored doing it.

Many begin the course, find a medium they love, and even land on a style/voice people are willing to pay for. Just about the time the noise from their hiding place is being heard, they get bored and literally go back into hiding by changing medium, style, voice, subject.

The most negative statement I hear from artists is, "I get bored." If that's "you," then my suggestion is to get a day job. Earning a living is not something you should try to do in the art field.

The reason is this: you must be able to remain focused and stay the course to reach the other shore. No sailor would start a transatlantic voyage and get bored halfway there because of the doldrums. He would hoist canvas and keep plodding along until a fresh wind filled his sails.

Focus or fail. You cannot serve multiple masters.

3. Distractions.

Artists see movies of fellow travelers on the Art Road sitting around sipping wine, eating bread, and exchanging scintillating ideas.

The truth? The great ones barricade themselves in their studio and work. Those who fail find excuse after excuse not to produce work.

"If only I had a larger studio" is an enormous excuse for distraction. Get over it. The great Bonnard had to paint in his bathroom because it was the only blank wall large enough to hold one of his thumbtacked unstretched canvases.

For a while during our travels, my wife and I lived and painted in a 25th-floor condo in downtown Honolulu. My mate painted for a one-artist show and I completed a life-sized portrait. The entire complex, including our work space, living space, and a tiny lanai, was only 670 sq. ft.

We met a local painter who was complaining he could do nothing in his cramped quarters. When we asked him how large his apartment was, he sighed, "Only 1,900 sq. ft." My mate blurted out, "How many live with you?" He said, with sadness wanting sympathy, "Me and my cat."

We jumped on him with both feet. We hired a taxi and took him to our home/studio. A month later he was a happy camper talking about what a wonderful space he had to work in.

Our Honolulu space was so small I had to crawl under my easel to get from the painting side to the eating side! Before Mikki and I started traveling, my studio was larger than 6,000 sq. ft., with 18-foot ceilings, hardwood floors and a wonderful north light. However, the portrait I executed in Honolulu was equal to any I had ever painted in my Masters-sized artist loft.

If they are not complaining about where they work, many artists are out chasing rabbits. The one thing a foxhunter does not want are dogs that chase rabbits instead of foxes. Many artists let the telephone, friends, family, excuses, depression, substance abuse, addictions, and things I could never think of, distract them from working on their craft. Hemingway said, "Man starts to succeed in his art and then decides to build a house, which will be his demise."

Some artists build houses, others buy boats, and a few just chase rabbits. Anything to keep from working on what they must do in order to succeed.

4. Lack of business savvy.

The thing I most admire about craft artists is that they see their art as a product. They understand they are in business to earn a living from what they produce with their hands. They have no problem being commercial. On the other hand, those whose minds are warped by the "art talk schools" see selling what they make as "prostituting themselves."

Another big reason artists remain in the under-\$1,000/year income bracket is they never build a business plan. "No business plan" means certain failure. They get hung up on "creating," not figuring out how they will sell all the stuff they create. Unless you can see your art as a product and yourself as a businessperson selling that product, then you will forever remain at the bottom. Art is a business, just the same as clock-making. The only difference? People need clocks. What we make, people don't need; we are selling "wants."

5. Jealousy.

Picasso was jealous of Braque, and Braque was jealous of Othon Friez. For those of you who have never heard of Othon Friez (1879-1949), he never achieved much fame. However, when he and Braque painted together for a few years, he had a much easier time executing his work than Braque, hence the jealousy.

Once I heard an artist say he was jealous of young child-artists becoming so famous, so young. I explained he only knew part of the story. One of the young superstars I know came to America with her parents from Bosnia. She was eight years old when they bought books for her on famous painters, put her in the basement, and told her to paint. They found a promoter who decided to market the child as a prodigy. He invested \$200,000 and began the process of setting up a marketing plan. The first five years, he took 75% of all the money earned. The young lady became a star and the promoter got filthy rich. "Why be jealous of a child who has been robbed of her youth?" I told him. "We have met

her on two occasions and she has sadness in her eyes. The only person who is hurt by jealousy is you."

To my knowledge, my mate and I harbor no jealousy. Eliminate that word from your life. Even if it doesn't directly make you unsuccessful selling your art, it will destroy your happiness. Happiness is more important than money any day.

6. Unrealistic pricing.

Art is only worth what people will pay to own it. Art is not something you do by the hour.

We received an e-mail from an artist who told us she had done two paintings. People were telling her to charge \$50,000 for the larger one. My thoughts were, she could paint 12 of those a year ... if so, she could be earning some serious money, and fast. The only problem was, where in the heck would she sell even one?

Mikki and I look at our art as something we do where people pay us to learn a trade. Each time a piece sells, we need to replace it. We can use the money received from that sale to live to paint another one.

Collectors are paying for your education by purchasing your art. You become good in art by doing art. The more you sell, the more you must produce.

So, the price we sell things for really is not important. What is important is that we sell art that has to be replaced. Artists fail because they get a skewed idea of their worth.

As long as your art is selling "too cheap," then you will be selling. I suspect the lady who had set her price at \$50,000 may have been wiser to reduce it to \$500.

7. No direction.

Let me pose a question to you. "How are you going to know when you get there, if you don't know where you are going?" Successful artists don't just get up and think because they hang that tag around their neck one day, they will make it. I write in great detail in my book (see below) about a marketing plan, spelling out where you want to go and how you plan to get there. Failure to set