

ALMOST AN ARTIST

Ten Truths to help you make the transition to Artist



The path to becoming an artist is not always easy...but for every challenge encountered and met with dedication and spirit, an enormous, unparalleled joy awaits you. (The word "sublime" springs to mind!)

The following pearls of wisdom are designed to help you negotiate your way through the early days of art making and to encourage you to pull out all stops and *achieve your dream*. If you give this amazing profession the very best of yourself, you will experience an intoxicating sense of pride and privilege as you earn entrance to that hallowed world known as "art".

Remember: persevere, persevere, persevere! It may take a few tries to get it right, but even the most challenging days will make you stronger and increase your skills. I promise you, the journey is worth it.

Truth #1

You will NEVER be bored again.

This was such a HUGE bonus of becoming an artist that I put it at the top of the list.

Once you plunge headlong into a creative life, it is almost a given that you will never have a moment's boredom. Because once the artist's eye gets switched on, it stays on.

You know that old maxim about suddenly seeing a certain car colour/ make/style everywhere when you want to buy a car? The same thing happens when you fill your head and heart with art. Suddenly, you see art in everything and it can feel like you have your own smug, secret source of entertainment.

Ordinary objects mysteriously acquire the power to melt you with their beauty or sensuality. Everything you see now has the potential to become art, lead to an idea, trigger a subtle (or not so subtle) change that will make all the difference to a work. Next time you hear someone say, "I'm bored," you'll realize what a long way you've come.

Boredom is not part of an artist's vocabulary.

Truth #2

Your self esteem will soar.

When you start to draw on your creative powers, it triggers something inside you that quietly affirms your uniqueness in the world. And as you dare to experiment and to expand your skills, your self respect seems to grow in proportion. During those magical times when your art really begins to come together, there's a good chance you will realize (justifiably!) that you are, indeed, a "special" person with unique talents. Art is truly one of the most healing pursuits on this planet – for the maker and the viewer.

Truth #3

Your self esteem will plunge.

Alas, this is also true - because, perhaps more than any other profession, art making is so intensely personal. You'll definitely have your good days and just as definitely your BAD days...those despair-inducing times when no matter what you do or how you do it, everything seems to turn to absolute sh-t.

When you invest as much time and energy into your work as artists do, the shitty times are guaranteed to make you feel useless, talentless and totally pathetic.

The good news is, ALL artists experience this, and it will ALWAYS pass. It just goes with the territory of being extra sensitive, tuned-in little poppets. So hang in there...

Happily, the belief that a crisis precedes a breakthrough is generally true. More often than not, a crisis will be followed by some cheeky new discovery and fresh action.

Truth #4

Art is not always black and white.

Sometimes we don't really know, or cannot explain precisely, what it is we're trying to express. Many artists go with a "feeling" rather than a plan or schematic purpose. If that's you - then don't fight it. For you, that's the purest way to make your work. Let your art speak for itself. If it's true, in time it will find its own voice.

Truth #5

Some people will love your art, others will hate it.

This includes your family.

You are never going to please all of the people all of the time. After all, do you like every piece of art that you see?

The simple answer to this fact of life is to make art that pleases YOU. And this is also the surest, strongest way to invest a work of art with that special quality that makes it stand out - the quality that art lovers, gallery directors and clients recognize and respond to.

Truth #6

Not all art you make will work.

Even the masters didn't kick a goal every time, so don't beat yourself up if not everything you create is successful. What the "failures" will do is to teach you what doesn't work, and maybe act as a catalyst for new, more successful work, or even a whole new series. Failures can be invaluable as transitional pieces, helping your mind to filter and hone in on what really does work.

Failures are assets for an artist. They are the tools for success. Don't be afraid of them!

Truth #7

Perfectionism can be your enemy!

I've sometimes lost my best pieces by going that extra mile, attempting to "tidy up" a painting, reduce ragged edges or straighten a crooked line. In doing so, I've destroyed the quirky charm that made the piece work in the first place.

To see a maker's mark on any piece of art, a tiny "error" or stroke out of place or a thumbprint, can invest an artwork with a unique quality. (Wabi sabi is based on this lovely premise). It reminds us that this is an original work by a human being and not a mechanical construct.

Renowned artist Frederic Hunderwasser (whom I met while dining alone in a gorgeous beachfront restaurant in Greece - read my memoir!) was against perfect, straight, ruled lines on principle - believing them to literally make people sick!

Truth #8

It 's essential to communicate with
- and even better, be friends with
- fellow artists.

Artists are generally sensitive people and more than any other people I know, can feel like failures when they are unable to get their work finished, shown, sold or taken seriously. In addition, apart from that other can of worms about how original your work is, technical problems can crop up at every stage of art making.

Having friends who are also artists is a means of keeping your sanity and your dignity – not to mention the fact that they make great, interesting friends! You can vent to them, share your failures and successes and learn from their experience.

I speak from the heart when I say that just knowing that others go through what you are going through, can be an enormous comfort. It also makes you feel less alone in the world (another thing common to artists!).

I really couldn't get by without my artist friends.

Truth #9

When you start out, relying on your art for ALL your income is a bad idea.

This is an area where I really came a cropper - and I'd hate you to make the same mistake.

Art doesn't flow well when it's made under "bad" pressure (versus an exhibition deadline), such as to pay a pressing bill. Such art can turn out to be hastily made and lacking in spirit. Even though the finished product may be "passable", it can do you a disservice down the line or - at the very least - leave a disappointed taste in your mouth.

I've been in the situation where there was no work available to supplement my art practice. And my art was in the making, not selling stage. Such a situation is stressful and can undermine both you and your art – especially if you are not yet organized or completely certain of your path.

Before you take the plunge and throw away your day job, try to find a source of income other than your art. Maybe you can reduce your current job to part-time. If there aren't great jobs on offer, jump in and take what's available until something better comes along. It will free your spirit to make the kind of art you were meant to make.

p.s. I found the book, "Creating a Life worth Living" by Carol Lloyd extremely helpful in choosing the right part time career to match different artist personalities.

Truth #10
Your work is unique.

No one will make art EXACTLY the same as you. Because no one has your exact history, background, thoughts, feelings, hopes, dreams or intellect – all of which will manifest themselves, however subtly, in your work.

Even if your work is similar to that of other artists, the more you put your heart into what you're doing and the more you practice, the stronger your own voice will come through. So don't go ripping up your artwork in the early stages! Persevere!

Sooner or later, you (and hopefully, the rest of the world) will be surprised by what a singular talent you have.

If you've truly been bitten by the art bug, making art can be the most edifying, intoxicating, magical career you will ever find. Often financially challenging, yes, but in every other way, a dynamic, heavenly pursuit.

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