BEING AN ARTIST

Unlocking Your Creative Potential

by Daniel Paulo 2008

Cover image:
"Quiesce" by Daniel Paulo 2005

Contents

Introduction

There are many unique individuals in the world creating unique and individual works of art, and this book is about opening up your own individuality. Art, **real art**, is waiting to come out of you; it just needs to find its right and proper channel. This book will encourage you to find *your* way forward and is full of ideas, advice and theory. The latter is always aimed to be clear and intelligible without being over intellectual, but it may come across as somewhat obscure and mysterious to the artist in the earlier stages of his or her career. Rest assured these concepts will become clearer with time as you go deeper into the great unexplored ocean that is your own art. The public face of art is often confusing, even infuriating, in its multiplicity of forms and publicity hungry character. The sensationalist aspects of art and artists belong in another book. Here I am only concerned with what art really is, and that is the unleashing of creative potential from within.

This book is an attempt to approach the matter of artistic creativity, to investigate and understand the many angles and facets. I want to push you outside of any notion of 'amateurism' and instead look to guide you to a much more rounded, better informed, 'sophisticated yet simple' approach to making art, the results of which will enrich your life.

'Art is the proper task of life' wrote Friedrich Nietzsche, and it is so, for in making art you are truly living; the thing that makes us human is finding its voice.

And who is this book for? It is certainly for artists at the very beginning of their career, as it aims to simplify and

demystify some of the more arcane and obscure aspects of art, but also for artists no matter how far advanced on the winding road, whether they are in need of a fresh perspective or some inspirational words. This book may even have a wider purpose: if life is art, and art is life then the ideas and tenets herein may have relevance across many, or even every, aspect of our existence, but that is not for me to say, and idle speculation of this ilk should not be found in the subsequent pages.

This book is not a hands-on guide to making art. There is barely any advice on media, or supports, types of brushes, or how to paint anything. These things emerge through making art, and whilst you may appreciate some pointers to start you off, you should never take too seriously the contents of those instruction books with their rules and regulations which seem to discourage creativity rather than promote it.

A lot of quotes will be used, some from very well known names, others less so. All are relevant, and words that come from artists themselves have great value in encouraging understanding, appreciation and empathy for the great roles that they have undertaken.

At intervals, for those who like such things, there will be lists of examples of particular concepts and ideas, which are designed to be followed up with visits to libraries, book shops and search engines. These lists are never exhaustive and represented the merest tip of the iceberg, but are there to allow the reader to expand on any area of interest.

Like many acts of creativity, this book came about through unexpected means. In fact I didn't see it coming at all. My partner, Ann, made a big decision to channel her creative impulses into a new area: painting.

I couldn't resist myself, and I found that I was regularly advising her on aspects of her work. As times this probably came across as bossy lecturing, but I was finding that I was verbalizing things that I have never put into words – abstract notions about 'shoulds' and 'shouldn'ts' - whilst always being clear that there no rules as such. All these thoughts are a regular ingredient of my practice as an artist, and only now were they finding a voice. Previously they only existed as abstractions, fuzzy keystones in the mind, each one essential in the process of making art.

We started to joke that I should write all this down, and each time I gave Ann some advice we would give it a chapter number. Then it actually seemed like I *should* write it all down, and I regretted not starting right at the beginning with the first bit of advice that I had given, because there was from the start, a logical progression from A to B to C and so on. As the artist develops so more sophisticated notions can be ingested, and that is how this book aims to approach the subject.

I must apologise if the text sometimes reads as being aimed towards painters exclusively. Being one myself, and being slightly in awe of the sculptor's skill, I am certainly more equipped to write as a painter, but I believe that much of the content herein is relevant to creators in all fields, and the basic principle of being an artist, whatever the media or means, is what this book is most truly about.

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1 The Purpose of Art

> We are ourselves, creations. And we, in turn, are meant to continue creativity by being creative ourselves.
> Julia Cameron.

> I am in the world only for the purpose of composing.
> Franz Schubert.

> The artist's calling is an attitude towards life and it embraces everything that you do.
> Daan Van Golden

> Art is a human activity which has as its purpose the transmission to others of the highest and best feelings to which men have risen.
> Leo Tolstoy.

To many the purpose of art is to bring 'culture' into the world, to share and spread experiences, to enrich our understanding of ourselves and the world around us, and of course, it can be said that the purpose is also to create paintings, sculptures etc, and perhaps even make some money out of doing it.

But to you, the artist, the real purpose is that art is a kind of self development, as life experience hopefully creates a more rounded, wiser (gentler?) personality, so does the creative experience support and encourage this process. And creative experience **is** life experience.

> To follow without halt, one aim; there is the secret of success. And success? What is it? I do not find it in the applause of the theatre. It lies rather in the satisfaction of accomplishment.
> Anna Pavlova

So the real purpose of art is the unlocking of creative potential. My definition of success in art has nothing to do with money or status, but rather the fulfilment of

creative potential. This occurs when all the creative juices are flowing in the right direction, when intuition is finely honed, the hand-eye co-ordination perfectly balanced, and the Journey is fantastic – enticing, changing, developing, exploring, discovering. This is what we make art for, when it just…. works! The result is a piece of art, and some of our creative potential has found its form. An inscrutable, indefinable part of ourselves has become externalized and has found a physical presence in the world. Look at the work of Paul Klee and you'll see exactly what I mean; all of his paintings reveal a completely unique and private fragment of a universe unknown to any other person. If Klee had not been such an intensely prolific artist we would never have been allowed such rich visual access to this remarkable mind. Klee is just one example of many, and each artist has something to offer which is unique to them.

There are so many variables in the production of art that often it can feel like a grim struggle, so when it all comes together you **know** that you are really living! This is best kind of life experience!

Is there a spiritual side to this – you bet there is! In the following 'God' may be substituted if you prefer, maybe for 'Art' or a word that is more personal to you.

> The only successful manifestation is one which brings about a change or growth in consciousness; that is, it has manifested God, or revealed him more fully, as well as having manifested a form…
> David Spangler *'Manifestation'* from *'Creative Visualisation'* by Shakti Gawain.

I believe that you emerge a better person after indulging in this process, it is where the joy of art lies. The need to create goes very deep. Women have an advantage in life in that they can achieve the ultimate creation – that

of another life. In a way art is the next best thing; Edvard Munch regarded his works as his 'children' (he was otherwise childless), and the creation of a new object that previously did not exist is one of the great satisfactions of being an artist.

> The purpose of art is not a rarefied, intellectual distillate – it is life, intensified, brilliant life.
> Alain Arias–Misson.

> All art is concerned with coming into being.
> Aristotle.

So the evidence of the artist's struggle is a piece of art, often with 90% or more of its history buried beneath the surface, but hopefully with the visible 10% (or less) showing the maker at his of her best, until the next Journey/artwork begins! (The next painting will always be your best one, of course).

The object you have made has itself many purposes, but most importantly it acts as a learning tool to inform you, the artist, not only what you have done, and how you have done it, but also what you may do next. As such, every piece of art is a landmark in your career, and your life, it is a pointer on the bigger journey. So look at your work always and take from it clues and ideas. The next painting will be better informed, and the one after that better still. Upwards and outwards!

Dostoevsky wrote in *"The Idiot"* (1868):

> In every serious idea born in anyone's brain, there is something that cannot possibly be conveyed to others, though you wrote volumes about it and spent 35 years explaining your idea; something will always be left that will obstinately refuse to emerge from your head and that will remain with you forever.

This is another fundamental reason for art, as unique individuals we all have a need to express ourselves in one form or another. The barriers of expression are felt by all, sometimes we all wonder if we are speaking the same language as other people. Art is always another form of language, another limb with which we try to stand solidly on the earth and declare our voice to be heard.

Herbert Read defined the function of art as the need *"to express feeling and transmit understanding"* (from *The Meaning of Art* 1931). This is perhaps an old fashioned view; today art has become more obtuse and esoteric in character, whilst understanding as such is probably the wrong word to apply – does one ever understand music? – and even the use of the word "feeling" is dubious. That art is an expression of our humanity is perhaps enough. It is a major by product of our consciousness which sets us apart from non humans, and is in turn one attribute through which we can grow and enrich the world for ourselves and for others.

The purpose of art is clear; it is a force for good, it makes us better than we were, and by expressing ourselves through art we find our place in the world. It is a powerful form of language which crosses cultural boundaries and allows us another means of interacting with our fellow beings in the hope that the resistant barriers of communication may be broken down.

> Art is the only means by which one soul can truly touch another.
> Curtis Verdun.

> Art is a necessity – an essential part of our enlightenment process. We cannot, as a civilized society, regard ourselves as being enlightened without the arts.
> Ken Danby.

2 Who Are You?

> A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What one can be, one must be.
> Abraham Maslow.

> An artist is someone who produces things that people don't need to have but he ... thinks would be a good idea to give them.
> Andy Warhol.

You are an Artist.

> A picture is a work of art, not because it is "modern," nor because it is "ancient," but because it is a sincere expression of human feeling.
> John F Carlson

Many artists, especially those in the early stages of their careers, can be reluctant to call themselves 'artist', and their work 'art'. I think this stems from a feeling that the word may somehow be too big or grand to be used for their modest efforts. After all, weren't Michelangelo and Picasso 'artists'? Is it right to call oneself in the same category? Well the short answer to that question is most definitely 'YES'! Art is a very big word indeed and encompasses a huge range of activity. To confirm whether you are an artist or not let us try to attempt a definition of this big word.

A Definition of Art.

Ultimately all art stems from human beings, it cannot come from anywhere else, and whenever a person stands in front of a painting, sculpture, assemblage or etching plate with the intention of interactively working on the object, either building it, transforming it, reading it and reacting to it, they are, unwittingly or otherwise, opening a part of themselves up, a part which is fundamentally creative. The results may vary greatly in

quality and intention, but an object or image emerges. It may convey little of what its maker intended, but the determination to make something was there. The line between whether this object is craft or art is very blurry, but art emerges when there is a psychological depth to the work that reflects the innate personality of the maker. It is an (often veiled) attempt to communicate something, and even art which attempts to convey nothing at all is still making a statement.

> If there were only one truth you couldn't paint a hundred canvases on the same theme.
> Picasso.

As Picasso suggests, when an artist creates a work there is no reason ever to believe that this piece is a definitive, one off statement. Neither life nor art seems to work like that, and the need to revisit themes endlessly is one of the apparent prerequisites of all artists. One paintings or sculpture is never enough, somehow each one scratches the surface of the artist's need to create, or communicate, and over time a body of work will reveal the larger scope of the creator's vision. Over a lifetime this scope may be very significant indeed.

Considering the above, then, I would define art as:

An interpretation of the human condition.

And therefore an artist is .....

An interpreter of the human condition.

Now, if you do not regard yourself as an artist, then what ***are*** you doing!?

Some Definitions of Art by Artist and Writers.
That is my preferred definition as to what art and artists actually are, but there are many other valid thoughts and ideas on the matter. No one definition could ever completely be enough to cover such a vast subject.....

Paul Klee **–** Art is not an object but a process, the artist contributes the original force, over which he watches and nurtures to a full flowering.
Alan Davie – Art is a revelation of something hitherto hidden.
Mary Daly – Art is the creative potential in human beings that is the image of God.
George Kneller – Creativity... consist of rearranging what we know in order to find out what we do not know ... hence, to think creatively we must be able to look afresh at what we normally take for granted.
Herbert Read – Art is pattern informed by sensibility. Art is emotion cultivating good form. Art is mass confined in measure.
Paul Cezanne – Art is a harmony parallel with nature. Painting is nature seen through a temperament.
Carl Andre – Art is an intersection of many human needs.
Pablo Picasso – Art is the elimination of the unnecessary. Art is a lie which makes us see the truth.
Friedrich Nietzsche – Art is ... the affirmation, the blessing, and the deification of existence. Art is the proper task of life.
Amy Lowell – Art is the desire of a man to express himself, to record the reactions of his personality to the world he lives in.
Henry Miller – Art teaches the significance of life.
John Ruskin – Art is that in which the hand, the head, and the heart of man go together.
Michele Shea – Art is seeing something that doesn't exist already. You need to find out how you can bring it into being and that way be a playmate with God.
Honore De Balzac – Art is nature concentrated.
Trevor Bell - Art condenses the experience we all have as human beings, and, by forming it, makes it significant. We all have an in-built need for harmony and the structures that create harmony. Basically, art is an affirmation of life.
Annie Bevan - Art is our memory of love. The most an artist can do through their work is say, let me show you what I have

seen, what I have loved, and perhaps you will see it and love it too.
Sergei Bongart **-** Art is more than a product of your efforts – it should be about feeling, life, attitude, soul.
Chantell Van Erbe **-** Art is a series of evolutions. Numerous characterizations and endless connotations. Tremendous power in three letters
Gary T. Erbe **-** Art is man's response, reaction and subsequent by-product of the world around him combined with his inner world.
Kenneth Rexroth **-** Art is... the reasoned derangement of the senses.
Paul Gauguin – Art is a mad search for individualism.
Jacques Lipchitz - Art is an action against death. It is a denial of death.
Alev Oguz **-** Art is the journey of a free soul.
Dorothy Parker **-** Art is a form of catharsis.
Ignace Paderewski **-** Art is the expression of the immortal part of man.
Brett Whiteley – Art is the thrilling spark that beats death.
Maria Eskenasy **-** Art is trapping states of consciousness on a particular media.
Ayn Rand **-** Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value-judgments.
Randy Sanders **-** Art is what is unnecessary, but necessary only to that artist.
Damien Hirst – Art comes from everywhere. It's your response to your surroundings.
John Cheever – Art is the triumph over chaos.
Edvard Munch - Art is a transformation in which imagination collaborates with memory. One reproduces that which is striking, that is to say, the necessary.

Roles of the Artist.

Artists make art, that is what they do. But who *are* they? Who should they be? Is more expected of them than that?

Many commentators over the years believe that artists provide the truest mirror of the times, not by direct interpretation but rather by living and literally 'being' in

that era. The results of their artistic practice, if honestly felt, reflect this and can often come to be regarded as one definitive 'snapshot' of the age it was made in. For example the 1960s saw many definitive moments – The Beatles, the Cuban missile crisis and Kennedy's assassination to name but three; but the art of the time is also very much a part of that decade – one thinks of the works of Andy Warhol, Bridget Riley, Richard Hamilton and David Hockney. It was a time of a surge in pop culture and art clearly reflected this.

Continuing the theme of artists as commentators, we also see many examples where the artist has willingly used their skills to comment more forcefully, indeed politically; for example Goya's series of etchings entitled *"Disasters of War"* (1810-20) and Picasso's *"Guernica"* (1937). The idea of the war artist eventually became an accepted role sponsored by governments who implicitly understood that artists record and interpret in ways both more direct and more subtle than those of the documentary photographers.

Artists have also been architects, particularly the great Renaissance masters. We do not tend to see artists diversifying so much these days. The phrase 'Renaissance Man' acknowledges that artists of that period were often adept at many fields, Leonardo Da Vinci being the most famous example. His expertise included: scientist, mathematician, engineer, inventor, anatomist, painter, sculptor, architect, botanist, musician and writer. Wikipedia suggests he is "perhaps the most diversely talented person ever to have lived."

The maker of public art finds the creative process also involves dealing with administrators, funding bodies, engineers and industrial processes to achieve their vision. The result is often inspiring and on a huge scale,

transforming and enriching towns, cities, parks and rural places.

Another branch to the range of artistic practice is art therapy where the positive force of creativity is used as a means to improve and enrich peoples lives and:

> increase insight and judgment, cope better with stress, work through traumatic experiences, increase cognitive abilities, have better relationships with family and friends, and to just be able to enjoy the life-affirming pleasures of the creative experience.
> from Wikipedia.

Art is intrinsically therapeutic because it opens up our souls to the light of day. We feel that we are giving something of ourselves everytime we make a mark or a form, in a way art is a human being's gift to the world.

> Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.
> Picasso.

> Making art is the most relaxing, joyous, therapeutic stimulating way to spend your time, as you unleash the part of your brain that's been itching to get at it.
> Harley Brown.

> Art is like singing, some do it better than others, but everyone can and should be doing it for their soul.
> Barbara Mason.

This book is mostly concerned with the individual creative act, that self contained power which is at the root of all art, and there are many sources available should you wish to enlarge on any of the above subjects. In the meantime we will look closer at who or what is an artist.

Artists Are Not Just Painters and Sculptors.

> All art forms, including painting and music and poetry, are vehicles for us all to participate in being alive. Whatever adds richness to the experience of being alive is an art.
> Quang Ho.

Artists operate in a wide variety of media, and the time when art was exclusively made of paint, stone or bronze has passed. In fact many prolific and imaginative creators will never touch these at all, and many artists settle into a preferred medium usually after years of experimenting with others, and it is necessary to invest time into learning what doesn't work for the individual. We need to close old doors whilst opening new ones at the same time. Ultimately the media one works in is determined by a response to the creative need, it is the one which allows the channel the flow most effectively, the one that presents the least resistance to the art that is trying to force and push its way into the world. The available range of media is potentially as vast as imagination itself. Here follows a list of some unusual examples:

Chris Ofili – Elephant dung
David Hockney – Fax machine
Marc Quinn – Human blood, frozen flowers, bacteria
Tracey Emin – unmade bed, tent
Bill Viola – video
Damien Hirst – pickled shark
Marcel Duchamp – urinal
Anselm Kiefer – straw, lead
Jeff Koons – helium balloon, topiary
Naum Gabo – perspex, nylon string
Claes Oldenburg – soft sewed forms
Chris Perry – T shirts
James Turrell – a mountain
Pieter Wiersma – Sandcastles

Should Artists Have Obligations?

> The position of the artist is humble. He is essentially a channel.
> Mondrian.
>
> I succeeded simply at attending at the birth of all my works.
> Max Ernst.
>
> Art is a collaboration between God and the artist, and the less the artist does the better.
> Andre Gide.

At the bottom level an artist has no obligations to anyone, possibly not even to him or herself. When the artist is engaged in a Journey of creation there is nobody else, no-one is watching, there is nothing but the Journey itself. The above three quotes are indicative of how many creators feel that they are channels, merely conduits, for the release of a higher power – the creative force, or, if you prefer, something God-like. It is an understandable feeling especially when one encounters better, more incisive, creative results when the conscious mind is diverted or muted. When painting is going handsomely well the feeling is almost as if a greater force is in control.

Despite this, artists, being the opinionated characters that they usually are, have had much to say to define who an artist is, and what they should do. Kandinsky wrote at length on this matter in his classic *"Concerning the Spiritual in Art"*, and he defined the 'Inner necessity' of artists as follows:

> Every artist, as a creator, has something in him which demands expression.
> Every artist, as a child of his time, is impelled to express the spirit of his age.
> Every artist, as a servant of art, has to help the cause of art.

There are also responsibilities...

> He must return the talent he has.
> His actions, feelings and thoughts, like those of every man, create a spiritual atmosphere which is either pure of infected. His actions and thoughts are the material for his creations, which in turn influence the spiritual atmosphere. The artist is a king ... not only because he has great powers, but also great obligations.

These statements hearken back to my earlier comments about one of the roles of the artist being that of commentator of the age. Kandinsky believed that the 'spiritual atmosphere' of an era was a central subject of art and therefore artists were obligated to convey this (though, to be fair, most do it instinctively rather than consciously: the best art is always unforced and is not premeditated). He also wrote that *"every artist, as a servant of art, has to help the cause of art"*, so we are standard bearers, proudly celebrating our ideal of what art is and should be.

It is possible to over analyse anything until it becomes stale, but the more you know about every aspect of art, the better placed you will be to interpret your own work as well as that of other artists, and in turn this will allow you to go deeper into the vast well which is your creative potential.

It probably all sounds a bit daunting to the casual artist, but the deeper one goes into art the more understandable and recognizable this staunch attitude becomes. Art can be as serious, intense and obsessive as you want it to be, and the more lightly and casually you treat it, the less you will achieve.

Attributes of an Artist.
Here are some key attributes that an artist will find useful in their Quest. If you possess most (preferably all) of these you are probably well placed to fulfil your creative potential. Some of these attributes may be

acquired, some may be innate, all may be developed and encouraged. You will probably recognize some of them in yourself already, but do not despair if there is something in this list which you feel that you do not possess or feel capable of. A passion for art alone is a great thing to have, and my assumption is you certainly do have that (for you are reading this book!) – the rest may come through application. Don't be disheartened when the stuff you make doesn't match up to your hopes and expectations, this happens to all of us.

> It is precisely from the regret left by the imperfect work that the next one can be born.
> Odilon Redon.

This very wise sentence from Redon sums up why we constantly need to create, and all the previous experience gained from making can be fed into the next work, which will be better every time. It is necessary to struggle as well as rejoice in art, and, as in all things in life, far more is always learned from the difficulties and problems. If you wish to improve and develop your art you will recognise 'down' periods as a time for learning and interpreting where you have come from and where you may be going (see the chapter "Dips and Troughs").

So here is the list of artist's attributes, the first one being by far the most questionable.....

1) Talent.

> I don't have a lot of respect for talent. Talent is genetic. It's what you do with it that counts.
> Martin Ritt.

What is talent? Is there even such a thing? Is talent just enthusiasm and skill made evident? Look now at how 100 metre runners are still breaking the world

record. How can they keep doing this when surely there is a limit to the capabilities of the human body (or are we evolving slowly…)? These sprinters, for the 10 seconds that they are running, are alive in the extreme. Every ounce of power and will is channelled and focussed by absolute determination; it couldn't be any other way, for if they were a fraction of a percent short they would not prevail. There is no such thing as a half-hearted sprinter. These are prime examples of people who are using their physical and mental attributes wholly, in other words their truest, most perfected talent has been made apparent.

> If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astonish ourselves.
> Thomas Edison.

Oliver Sachs has described artistic aptitude as being "the by product of a brain that has functionally organized itself in a qualititatively different way". This makes sense, and in understanding how your brain is wired, so you will know what you are good and not good at.

As we mature we lose the flush of invincibility which we kidded ourselves to have when we were youthful, and by maturing we learn what our limitations are. The same applies to the artist and the early years of creating are a period not only of learning what we can do, but also what we can't. A lot of doors will be closed before an artist develops a mature style. There are very few Picassos and Michelangelos around, extraordinary individual apparently capable of *anything*. The history of art shows these people to be exceptions and most artists have worked steadily towards fulfilling their creative potential by narrowing their field, and by limiting the available possibilities so the sprit of exploration within those boundaries would allow for major breakthroughs. In other words: LIMITATION ENCOURAGES CREATIVITY!

> Forcing yourself to use restricted means is the sort of restraint that liberates invention.
> Picasso.

> I believe that (artists) are individuals who somehow 'catch on' to ways of shifting to brain modes appropriate for particular skills.
> Betty Edwards *"Drawing on the Artist Within".*

So is that talent – the total absorption of one's capabilities to the task, and the proper and correct usage of the self? By the latter I mean the knowledge that the individual is using him or herself to the utmost – their physical, emotional and mental capabilities are channelled to fully bring out their innate ability. Talent? Or just correct self application?

I believe that all people have a talent, one which they would excel at, if only they could know what it is, if only the prerequisites of day to day living would not disallow them the chance to make this discovery, and in so doing give them the wings to truly fulfil their existence. How can you ever know what you excel at? This question is difficult to answer, and perhaps the best advice is to keep doors open, and only close them when you are sure that that passageway is dead.

2). Intuition.

> One must learn to have faith in the intuition which 'knows' without knowledge.
> Alan Davie.

Whilst some of the characteristics in this list may appear to have obvious practical worth, intuition is, in my mind, the one above all other. Intuition is a kind of filter which, at any and every point in the creative process, is working away tirelessly in the back recesses of the mind. Here's a slightly bizarre analogy: if your art is a giant steam engine, the hot coals are your energy and power

and the resultant steam is the piece of art being worked on. Meanwhile, driving air into the coals to make them glow red hot are the bellows – intuition – without which the fire would be dull and slow.

Once a work is begun, the channels, doorways, directions and avenues of possibility grow and grow and grow to near infinity. It is the task of your intuitive powers to recognize: a) where you are now, and, b) where you could go next. The choices are vast, and may be consciously reasoned, but when intuition is accurate, finely tuned and working well and the right choices are made, that is when the creative process, which could be simplified into a semi-chaotic sequence of decisions, becomes a true and accurate channel for what is in you.

Make the wrong decisions and the work disappears into stodgy tightness, and yet, the next minute, the slightest new idea, which may have a minimal effect on the piece of work, suddenly reveals a brilliant, satisfying image. This is one of the wonders of the creative process – from dull stodge to breakthrough in a second! I can think of so many times when this has happened, and after four hours of muddled frustration, unexpectedly hitting a concentrated half hour of incisive action and renewed motivation. Intuition is the key to this, it is a great attribute in every aspect of living, and in art the only way to develop it is to create, create, and then create some more!

> Trust in yourself. Your perceptions are often far more accurate than you are willing to believe.
> Claudia Black

Interpret what you do. Your intuition tells you what is and isn't working. The more you use it the better it gets.

3) Enthusiasm or Passion.
Is it possible to be an artist without enthusiasm? It is a stupid question, for take enthusiasm away and you are left with an uncreative hollow person. Never do art out of obligation to others because the fullness and presence which it demands is the first thing to be lost if enthusiasm is lacking. This feature may also be one of the key points to talent also, and an enthusiastic person has an advantage over one who isn't. The more you learn about the field of Art, the vaster you find it to be (again, it's like life!), and passion will open doors, keeping it fresh, and keeping it vital.

4). Vision.

> An artist can't produce great works unless he has a philosophy. A man can't say something unless he has something to say. He can see things that a camera cannot see. A camera is a very wonderful piece of mechanism but an artist has his emotions, he has his feelings, and he puts those feelings into any work he is doing. If he feels strongly for his subject he will do it the better.
> L S Lowry.
>
> You only have to work up imagination to the state of vision.
> William Blake's advice to a young painter.
>
> Art arises when the secret vision of the artist and the manifestation of nature agree to find new shapes.
> Kahlil Gibran.

Do you have a vision of Art? Is it a kind of abstract ideal in your mind, a mythical place where you are directing your creative flow? Or do you just make a painting, and then make another one and another and so on? Is there an all encompassing belief that you are doing the right thing, and that the next piece of work will be your best yet? Do you feel like you and your work have a true place in this world, even if no other person will ever see it? Do you believe that you have something to say

which is of value because it comes from human experience? All these questions relate to aspects of 'vision'. It may be possible to be an artist without vision, but these questions suggest that to possess and encourage such a thing will give you and your art a fuller, rounded and, even, a more essential, nature. Many artist's visions are centred around their fellow people (such as Francis Bacon and Antony Gormley), some deal with the natural world (Samuel Palmer, Paul Nash, Georgia O'Keefe, Andy Goldsworthy), whilst others look to express high abstract ideals such as Rothko, Newman and Still. Your attitude to and place in the world are bound up with what your vision is. In a way every work by an artist is a kind of self portrait, and it says as much about the maker as what he or she has made. Your art is always **you**, and for that reason it will always be unique.

5). Bloody Mindedness.

> If you think you are an artist you must be a fighter. Fight to shine and illuminate the world.
> Todd Plough.

...or determination, guts, heart, spirit, fortitude. You know what this is and I'm sure you know what it is worth. "Don't let the bastards grind you down" was advice given to me at college by a visiting artist (the fine abstract painter Bert Irvin). It is a familiar and memorable phrase, and it just about sums up what you need to do, or be. It is often hard to embrace such a deep life (and I say life because art is more than a job, more than a career, more than a vocation, it is a whole life) because art is the ultimate demanding mistress.

> Painting is stronger than me; it makes me do its bidding.
> Picasso

It will want everything of you, and more. Sometimes you are in charge of it, sometimes not. Sometimes it feels easy (almost…!), often not. Sometimes you just need to push it away to stop it eating you up, and when you do, don't feel that you are letting yourself down. It is more of a case of letting off some of the pressure. Sometimes you are allowed to be less of an artist for a while, it is for you to know when, and then when to come back to it refreshed and ready.

The pressures in the wider world can sometimes make you feel as though everyone and everything is trying to stop you, and you may tire of self promotion and endlessly staging exhibitions. Don't feel obliged to put your work out, you are its maker and keeper first, and will do the right thing for your progeny.

Peer pressure and public expectation can also be stifling. You may end up churning out uninspired stuff just to keep them happy, but a creative person should never recycle the old simply to appease other's expectations. Allow yourself to change radically or subtly at any time.

6). Technique.

> Not a thought about the technical problem of representing it on paper could be allowed to arrest the flow of my feelings. Rodin.

Yes it is true that technique and ability has its place, but as mentioned elsewhere it is a means, never an end. It is something that may be cultivated by you to the 'nth' degree; just don't take it too seriously. If there is nothing else in your head other than the desire to paint brilliantly then your work will be very dull.

You and Your Art are Individual.
The super fast sprinters mentioned previously are a rare breed. There are very few people on the planet with similar physical capabilities but the nature of modern living is such that there will be many people who *could* have become a sub-10 second sprinter, but instead were steered into a 'normal' job, and their innate supertalent remained forever undiscovered. This is a fact of life and many of us will never find out where our true talents lie. As an artist it is in your hands alone to open up your creative self. No support team of doctors, nutritionists or fitness coaches is required. Other people can offer moral support but ultimately nobody else can make it happen for you. To deeply push into your artistic depths you need most or preferably all of the attributes mentioned above.

We are all aware that everybody is an individual, even identical twins are not clones of each other. We are innately aware of the fact that there is no one other person exactly the same as ourselves anywhere on the planet. This is not only for genetic reasons, but also for aspects of culture, family, peers, childhood traumas and influences and social background which are all determinants of differences between people. We even all look different and there is a shock of recognition when we spot someone famous in real life. Somehow we know automatically that this is not a double, or a near double, this is the actual familiar face itself. Though we are not familiar with billions of other faces, we know that this person really is who he or she is.

There is the fact also that every individual's brain (still bearing the label of the most complex known object in the entire universe!) is such that there will never be two the same. By extension to this fact you, the artist, are equally as individual, and your art will be unlike any

other. This is no exaggeration. However you may find it hard to shake off your influences, to be wholly yourself. This takes time, often many years, but the real you, the innate real artist that you are, is there from the start, and desires to be uncovered and revealed like the centre of an onion is revealed by the peeling of many layers. Hopefully finding your artistic centre will not be as tearful a process as opening up an onion, and in fact doing so will have a beneficial effect on every part of you.

David Smith: The Artist and Identity.
One of the most significant sculptors of any century, David Smith not only proved that you don't need an exotic name to be a great artist, but was also very concerned with notions of the identity of the artist.

His writings are well worth seeking out (see www.davidsmithestate.org). He had clearly defined notions about the role of the artist and how, regardless of whatever other job one was obliged to perform (he was a skilled industrial welder), the artist always came first:

> Identity can never be two things. It has one master. The practical question of survival whilst holding this identity I have not yet solved. But I do know that if I am forced to teach or work in a factory for survival, I am the artist who labors temporarily. The identity does not yield. I am never the teacher or factory worker who makes art.

Always remember this point – always! - you are the artist **first**. Art has always been about identity, and the identity of the artist is what we always consider when dealing with understanding the complexities of any piece of work. The first art; that of primitive man, can be clearly seen to be concerned with the same thing. For, as well as images of beasts they wished to hunt and kill, they created hand prints, made by blowing earth colour

through their hand and onto cave walls. These crude 'self-portraits' were the first examples in history of an individual saying 'this is me, I was here'.

David Smith's Questions.
In 1953 David Smith wrote an unpublished list of 'Question to Students'. It is a highly challenging list and you'd be unlikely to answer in the positive to most, or even, many of them. But their value lies in their thought provoking insight into the inner world of an uncompromising artist, and many of the issues brought up may be addressed by yourself to improve areas of your practice. When the work is going badly look at these questions – the answer may be here. When you are looking to expand your artistic horizons or are concerned about being more professional in your approach, or any single facet of being an artist – look here.

Visit www.davidsmithestate.org for the list of questions.

So....
...this chapter has looked at who an artist is, and has attempted to define what art itself is. The definitions of both are hazy and highly subjective, and over time you will develop your own opinion as to what, for you, they really are.

3 The Significance of Form

If you think art is the correct depiction of the external world then you probably should be reading a different book to this one, and the thing that separates painters from real artists is, I think, a lack of understanding and appreciation for the formal aspects of art. Painters may want to faithfully depict what they see, that may be painting, but it is not art. If your thoughts are rigidly stuck in this groove, your 'art' will never progress. Perhaps you will achieve some kind of technical perfection, but your work will be sterile and purely pictorial with no depth or substance.

Understanding form opens up a thousand wonderful and mysterious doors, and is the key to all art which is non-realistic in character. There are many artists whose output is fundamentally about form itself, meaning that the subject of the work is effectively itself.

Without really knowing what it is, it can appear very cold referring to art in purely formal terms. Rest assured, when you are creating anything, formal questions are flashing through your artistic brain all of the time. What goes where? What should go next to that? What if that area is partially obscured? Should that be darker? Should this form be more rounded? When you are creating effectively and fluidly these questions exist at the back of the mind and are barely noticed, but the issues remain, and good art is as good for the reasons of its formal makeup as for any and all other reasons.

All image and object making has a formal element, it is inescapable. By appreciating this fact, you are stepping into a more sophisticated sphere, where art is much

vaster in scope, and is capable of far much more than attempting to mirror nature.

What is Form?

> Remember that a picture – before being a horse, a nude, or some sort of anecdote – is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order.
> Maurice Denis

> Artists can colour the sky red because they know it's blue.
> Jules Feiffer

The two statements above define pretty well what form is. It has been said that painting is about putting the right colour in the right place at the right time. There is a lot to be said for this simple statement, but notice how the subject, which could be anything, is disregarded because, formally speaking, the subject has no place in pure painting (see Mondrian and Malevich). Most of us however seek to achieve a balance between form and content and the most satisfying art combines the two in a sophisticated blend.

The word 'formal' can seem quite daunting to the unprepared artist. It suggests something cold and unfeeling, not related to the emotional struggle of the average artist, but at its simplest the formal aspect of any piece of work refers to its shape, colour, tone and composition. More specifically, formal aspects include the thinness and thickness of lines, the size of painted marks and the textures.

In other words, everything in a painting or sculpture - or any created piece of work - has a formal dimension. Whilst some art is very formal in character, and is literally about colour or tonal relationships, or juxtaposition of masses, the best art uses form as a

means, and the end result is greater than simply the building blocks that it is comprised of.

The writer Herbert Read suggested that the understanding of form is innate within us, but also is in need of development:

> The instinct that leads us to ... match our socks and ties, or hats and coats, that makes us put the clock in the middle of the mantelpiece ... is the primitive and uneducated stirrings of the instinct that makes the artist arrange his motives in a pattern.
> Herbert Read, *"The Meaning of Art"* 1931.

Read also provides us with a good parallel between form in art and that of an athlete:

> ...when he carries no superfluous flesh, when his muscles are strong, his carriage good, his movements economical....
> *Ibid*

....the same applies to any work of art. Remove what shouldn't be there, and the painting is probably finished. Nature assails us with a mass of clutter and objects and it is for the artist to know what to filter out, presenting instead the essence of nature, rather than its intricate reality. Even photographs cannot capture every detail this, as in extreme blow up they are inevitably composed of grainy mush.

> Art is the elimination of the unnecessary.
> Picasso.

To understand greater what form is, take any representational painting and turn it upside down. Now you are looking at an abstract painting where conventional logic and perspective have disappeared. Instead you now see shapes and colours, line and tones, busy areas, emptier areas, and large shapes interacting with smaller shapes. This is the essence of form, and

whilst in this instance it probably looks chaotic and 'wrong', the fact that you are reading this 'wrongness' means that you have a ready intuitive grasp of the rights and wrongs of form. *(Having said this, any work in progress may be inverted to gain a new appreciation of the formal makeup of the piece, and often improving the upside down image will also have a positive effect on it when viewed the right way up.)* As an artist you are obliged to not only be formally aware and attempt to create works which not only express your inner vision, but are also visually satisfying, with an interesting, vibrant surface which should hopefully not bore the viewer. Use all the visual tools at your disposal to achieve this, and enjoy doing so, for there are few things more satisfying than the sensuousness of art materials, and seeing all the loose ends tied together; the result being a balanced, taut work with depth and quality. Line, colour, tone, texture – it's all there to be used – they are the building blocks for the task; the formal means to creating art.

When shapes and lines interact with each other, we are entering into the realms of composition, and at all times during the making of a piece of work composition is being taken into consideration.

> Touch one part of the canvas and something immediately happens to some other part.
> Eugene Speicher.
>
> It is necessary that the various tones which I use should be balanced in such a way that they do not destroy one another.
> Matisse.

A blank piece of paper with a small line drawn on it has suddenly been transformed into a simple composition. Is it central? Off centre? Above centre? Long? Short? Thick or thin? Symmetrical or asymmetrical? These are all formal questions. Add another similar line and the

complexity has just increased manifold. Does the next line cross the first one? At what angle? Or is it far away at the edge of the image? Does it taper from fat to thin? Should the colour be different to the first line? All these are very basic formal considerations, and every mark you make with brush, pen or chisel is being informed by these questions. They may not necessarily be consciously considered questions, but your intuitive artistic brain is constantly stewing over these issues.

As the work grows in complexity so you are feeling more and more keenly how the painting is growing and because you are considering all parts of the surface at the same time, so it grows with balance and maintains a steady organic flow. The latter is key to developing formal balance, and working outwards from the centre of the painting is an amateurish mistake which leads to complications later on, as formal problems mount up.

Some examples.
Here are some examples of artists' innovative uses of form.

- Van Gogh's landscapes with low or high horizons, off centre trees and daring slabby marks, which were an extension of the much softer, airier mark making of the Impressionists.
- The bizarre and unsettling way Munch composes *"Virginia Creeper or Red Vine"* (1900) and other similar works, with the head of the central figure cut off by the bottom of the canvas.
- The stark, empty landscape of Friedrich's *"Monk by the Sea"* (1809-10), dangerously close to an 'abstract' painting, but made 100 years earlier than the first non-figurative art.
- Crivelli's startling use of ultra deep perspective in his *"Annunciation"* (1486).

- Malevich's total negation of the image with his painting *"Black Square"* (1915)
- Both Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth sought to change the dynamic of their monumental rounded sculptures with the introduction of holes right through the pieces.
- *"The Last Supper"* (1498) by Leonardo Da Vinci, with centrally placed long table, the perspective suggesting a real room behind the 13 figures, and the vanishing point centred on the head of Christ.
- Picasso's decision to paint *"Guernica"* (1937) in monochrome intensifies rather than lessens the power of this massive painting.
- The careful placing of vertical masked strips (or 'zips' at the artist called them) amongst vast fields of colour by Barnett Newman.
- Andy Goldsworthy's decision to form large blocks of ice into an arch at the North Pole (1989).
- Paul Klee's use of a continual line to create fluid forms, a technique he called "taking a line for a walk".
- The remarkable sculptures and paintings of Alberto Giacometti, where the human form narrows to insubstantiality.
- Likewise with Modigliani's elongation of the same subject.
- Georgia O'Keefe's inclusion of a red border on either side of the painting *"Cow's Skull: Red, White and Blue"* (1931)
- The use of the golden mean in every aspect of Seurat's enigmatic *"La Parade"* (1899), and the same artist's use of tiny dots of pure colour to create vibrant colour sensations.
- Mondrian's purely formal juxtaposing of blocks of primary red, blue and yellow amongst a grid of black lines.

- The accidental cracking of the glass in his *"The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even"* (1915-23)) led Duchamp to finally declare the work finished.
- The work of Roy Lichtenstein which is superficially in the style of cartoons, but painted on a vast scale.
- Notice how in Munch's most famous work *"The Scream"* (1893) the perspective of the bridge literally takes the viewer outside of the image, or rather it would do if not for the device of two shadowy figures at the left hand edge of the painting which act as a block to force the eye back into the image.
- Look at *"The Dynamic Hieroglyph of Bal Tabarin"* (1912) by Gino Severini. Here the painting is a riot of angled shapes which combine to suggest an exciting dance. There is no quiet resting place on the entire surface. Notice also that despite the heavily fragmented forms there is still a sense of perspective as smaller forms and figures crowd the upper (and therefore, the rear) part of the painting.
- Another artist who regularly created all over compositions was Kandinsky who categorized these works as 'symphonic' in character, with "various forms subjected to a principal form". Often these images had no one centre of focus. A painting dominated by one "obvious and simple form" was described by Kandinsky as 'melodic'. (See *"Concerning the Spiritual in Art"* by Wassily Kandinsky.)
- Jackson Pollock's late 'dripped' paintings are also characterized by an even application of paint across the entire surface (which tends to trail off towards the edges).
- Constable appears to be a landscape painter with a 'true' to nature approach, yet he rebuilt places

on his canvases to make them sit better, the famous church at Dedham Vale, for example, was often relocated to make more satisfying compositions.

- The formal devices used by the Cubists were a response to the desire to widen and add to the standard three dimensional views we have of all things. The resultant images attempt to break down then reconstruct form as if we are viewing the depicted objects from multiple angles at the same time.
- Ben Nicholson's cool white on white reliefs of simple circle and square combinations.
- The use of black on white silhouetted dogs and people in the foreground of Breughel's *"Hunters in the Snow"* (1565), a colouristic theme continued by the flying magpie in the distance.

To sum up, form is an intrinsic part of any piece of work, no matter what it is, it is an inescapable element, as essential and inextricable as the very stuff the object is made of. It is for you, the artist, to decide what you want to do with form, how important it truly is; whether it is a dominant factor, such as in the art of Mondrian, Malevich, Frank Stella or Ellsworth Kelly, or if it is to be finely balanced and complimentary to the content or subject matter of the work. To paraphrase one of the above examples – Munch's *"Virginia Creeper"* – yes, it can be regarded as a formal issue that the head of the figure is cut off by the bottom of the painting, but Munch's decision was emotional first, symbolizing man's despair and impotence in the face of nature's all powerful forces. Here, then, is a typical example of an artist combining form and meaning at the same time.

Embrace form, and the doors to art open infinitely wide; ignore form, and your work will always be one dimensional, undeveloped and amateurish.

The Golden Section.

Sounding far more mysterious than it really is, the golden section, or golden ratio is the mathematically defined ratio of 1 to 1.618. This ratio first emerged in Ancient Greece, mathematicians of the day noticed it frequently appearing in geometry. These proportions began to find their way into architecture and art, and were regarded as a compositional device to create idealized conjunctions of harmonies. Paintings using this formula had the positioning of their main masses, horizon lines or walls, for instance, determined by the ratio. The resulting images were regarded as intrinsically perfect in their formal makeup. There are artists who are particularly associated with the use of the Golden Section, such as Leonardo and Seurat, and a search on the internet will reveal many uses in all branches of the arts, but there are many examples in art history of artists using this ratio unwittingly, the inference being that an artist's natural eye for harmony does indeed tally with this ratio.

Significant Form.

The concept of 'significant form' was devised by Clive Bell in 1913 in his essay *"Art"* to determine art which possesses *"the power to provoke aesthetic emotion in anyone capable of feeling it"*. Bell lists example as being the stained glass at Chartre, Mexican sculpture, a Persian bowl, Chinese carpets, Giotto's frescoes, and works by Poussin, Piero della Francesca and Cezanne.

Of course this short list is the merest tip of the iceberg, the common link to all these disparate objects being *"lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, (which) stir our aesthetic*

emotions". He also adds that *"it is the business of an artist to combine and arrange them that they shall move us"*.
Bell's points are in a way a further extension of the value of form and composition, and when there is an all encompassing 'rightness' about the work in front of you, almost an inevitability as though the forms present had always existed even though you had just created them – this is significant form. It is where art parallels music closely. Harmony in music is usually apparent to the ear, in art it is less obvious, and an unobservant person who is incapable of 'reading' or responding to art will not register the harmony that has been achieved. When the coming together of form reaches this level of timelessness then we are possibly in the realm of great art. Bell thought so, and when the eye and mind are stimulated, satisfied, *entranced* even, by what they are beholding then we are surely in the realm of significant form and significant art.

The Birth of Cubism.
Bell also applied the concept of significant form to so called 'primitive' art admiring its *"absence of representation, absence of technical swagger, sublimely impressive form".* One of the major turning points in the development of modern art was the discovery of African masks by artists such as Vlaminck, Matisse, Picasso, Kirchner and Derain. In searching for new forms and new ideas they realized that these startling and formally daring objects were an important trigger in the push away from conventional representation and towards a new surge of image making possibilities. Once an artist was freed from the specific notion that facial features, for example, were restricted to being placed in the familiar, 'right' place on a face, then an explosion in art was inevitable. Most famously the notion was developed

by Braque and Picasso into Cubism, and representation would never be the same again.

> When we discovered Cubism, we did not have the aim of discovering Cubism. We only wanted to express what was in us.
> Picasso.

It is an interesting comment by Picasso, implying that their discovery was as much an accident as anything (of course it also owes much to Cezanne also, who sought to simplify nature into the "cylinder, sphere and cone"). By searching, inquiring, experimenting and exploring - all part of the necessary attributes for any artist to use – so breakthroughs are achieved, most of them are obviously not quite so earth shattering as Cubism was, but the same principal applies. One can imagine that, having achieved this breakthrough, the excitement of this huge door opening must have been immense...

> (Cubism was) like a perfume – in front of you, behind you, to the sides. The scent is everywhere, but you don't know where it comes from.
> Picasso.

Cubism has so fully absorbed itself into the psyche of artists today that most of us are adopting its principals without even realizing it. It was as necessary a development in art as the discovery of fire by prehistoric man – and both art and man would have deteriorated and died without these essential ingredients.

In conclusion...

...this chapter has considered the role of form in art, and far from being a dry and sterile matter to consider, it is in fact a rich and intrinsic element to every work of art. An image that is formally poor or unsatisfactory will, regardless of its creator's intent, always be hampered

and greatly lessened in power by its deficiencies. Most people would not want to listen to 'bad' music or poetry, and the same applies to visual art. It is your duty to create images that engage the viewer, encouraging the eye to explore the surfaces, and in turn engaging the mind to interact with its message, in other words to make art that is quite simply *worth looking at*. A work of art draws the viewer in, weaves a spell even, and has much to reveal. A few seconds will determine whether a work is formally uninteresting, whereas a balanced, successful image may have no limits whatsoever to its visual, emotional, intellectual and even spiritual impact.

> The true work of art continues to unfold and create within the personality of the spectator. It is a continuous coming into being.
> Mervyn Levy.

4 Your Practice

> It seems to me madness to wake up in the morning and do something other than paint, considering that one may not wake up the following morning.
> Frank Auerbach.
>
> While I work I leave my body outside the door.
> Picasso.
>
> Every painting I do is related to the last one: it may be a continuation of a previous painting or it may be a reaction against it. When I grow tired of grey I long for colour so I use colour.
> William Scott.

How you work is **very** important. In fact it says everything about you. The environment you create, and the practices you perform are so inextricably linked to what you create that you have to think seriously about the whole thing, from top to bottom. Okay, maybe that is not the case if you are working like a demon, endlessly producing a string of brilliant works. But in reality what is around you may be hindering as much as helping.

Here are some questions:

Do you need silence so as to work well, does the slightest sound jar and disrupt you? Or perhaps you like the chatter of a radio, speaking voices? Do you need to hear what they are saying? Music? Loud or quiet, soft or intense, deep or trivial? The sound environment of your studio is crucial as it is constantly jabbing away at your conscious and subconscious mind, feeding it with extra information. This may be good or bad, only you know which.

> I love working at night, when everything is still and peaceful, and drowned in silence. Often I play the gramophone… Lowry.

Personally my practice has developed quite strangely. I always paint with music or cricket radio commentary, and in roughly half hour blocks, interrupting myself to find a trivial excuse to move away from the work for a few minutes (empty the bin, check emails etc). In this way I don't get too bogged down, and by shifting my brain's gear for 5 minutes, I return to the painting, and often then see more clearly where it should be going.

The space you work in is crucial…
...here are some more questions:

Do you like clutter or does it annoy you? Does the studio need to be like a minimalist zen space? Kandinsky's was like a spotless pharmacy, whereas Bacon's was a chaotic mess. Look at their work, the Russian was interested in cool, formal relationships between shapes, whilst Bacon's work was full of alienation, rage and violence. The studio says a lot about you!

Is it a place of contemplation, an enclosed and isolated chamber of meditation, or is it open to other people, maybe you *need* people to help the process? Can you work with your own finished artworks visible, or should they be out of the way and not be allowed to interfere with the current production? Do you need everything close at hand, or can you bear to leave your work for a few precious seconds or minutes to find a colour, or brush, or chisel?

Space is indeed the final frontier, and it is a major ingredient in encouraging or stifling your flow.

Is it okay working on your lap, or a table top, on an easel, on the wall, in a deserted factory, in a shared studio? Do you need to stand back twenty or thirty feet to really appreciate your work? Should canvas be unstretched and pinned to the wall (a la Bonnard for example), or on the floor where you can be over it, even *inside* it (as Pollock famously did)?

Do you have a garage with a car in it? This may be an opportunity to do some large, ambitious works - turf the car out and get some big canvases in!

Does the world cease to exist as you work, do you need to disappear into your own headspace?

Do you work at home? Do you need to get out of the house and spread your wings? Is the proximity of domesticity holding you back, or maybe it is a part of your work?

Do you have a work ethic? Must you work all day every day like Frank Auerbach and Lucien Freud, or at least feel you have done something, no matter how small, every day? Do you make art five days a week and regard the weekend as the opportunity to acquire new life experiences, which in turn will inform your work next week and in the future?

Can you just sit down and start working from where you left off, be it an hour, day, or a week earlier? Or do you need to 'warm up', and almost lead yourself back into the activity with a preparatory period of appropriately stimulating activity? This may be physical, intellectual, emotional or spiritual, aimed to get you in the right state of mind. And then do you find that you're only really flowing well after two hours have passed?

Do you like the idea of commuting to your studio, putting yourself in a situation where home life cannot intrude, and then use the travelling time in getting to the studio to prepare your mind for the creative activity of the day to come?

What about an open plan group studio, there are many around? The stimulation and cross-pollination that can result from interacting with other artists can be invaluable. Maybe your practice is enlivened and improved by interacting with other people, by staging workshops, visiting schools, colleges, and of course, by teaching. The latter can have the opposite effect, and after a day or week of helping other artists with their work, will you have enough charge left in your own creative battery to fulfil your own creative needs?

Perhaps you are the kind of person who works well within a group, or with one other artist as a double act (three examples being Gilbert and George, Jake and Dinos Chapman and the Singh Twins). Maybe you thrive in a situation where art is produced for the community, where in some ways you are as much a team leader as a creative force.

The One Essential Ingredient:
You may think that a large well equipped studio is the most important factor in your work, and some fine quality materials would certainly help, but in fact there is only one ingredient which is genuinely essential, and that is **time**.

Time is the greatest resource of all, in life and art, and it is the only one that truly counts. Without it, you are nothing and there will be no art. How you can create time, stretch it, and manage it will largely determine not only how much work you can do, but also how

effectively you achieve your goals. After all if you harbour any ambitions to develop your work, to push ideas and deeply explore your subject/vision, much time is required.

If you have enough time to create, then 'bravo', enjoy it, and never take it for granted. If not, which is more likely, you want to seriously look at your day to day schedule and ask yourself what can you do about it. Many ideas have remained undeveloped through lack of time, and for one thing it may simply be better to focus on one strand, rather than a multitude of ideas and approaches.

Maybe you have a weakness for football? Each match kills two hours of possible creative time, so listen to it on the radio while you create. You may be surprised to find that while your conscious brain is involved with the match, your subtle art brain is solving formal problems effectively. Do you spend time babysitting? Bring the young ones into your studio and put some appropriate music on. If they are older get them to paint or sculpt too. Enjoy giving them gentle words of advice. You can learn from them as well as they can learn from you.

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

Save time with cooking by making huge pans of thick, healthy soup, which can be refrigerated and frozen, and will last for days. If you are addicted to coffee keep a filter machine running which will save many trips to the kettle.

Maybe you can generate an hour a day before you go to work, or at the end of the day before sleep. This hour, with foresight and preparation, could be richly rewarding

and productive. If your mind is ready you can make it so!

> It is better to paint for one minute a day than to think about it for 24 hours a day.
> Andrew McDermott.

An understanding spouse or partner is also a major factor, and I would say: always encourage their creative side also. The more they understand and appreciate the value of what you are doing the better for all concerned. Maybe instead of you both spending an hour at the supermarket every week, you could take it in turns. That's another hour gained every couple of weeks! Better still, use the internet to get the weeks shopping delivered to you.

The holy grail may be to have a full day a week to make art – find a way, work towards making it happen!

I could go on and on, the point is that if you are serious about making art you will be serious about managing your time to make the most of your talents.

Every painting and sculpture needs time to properly unfold, like the petals of a flower gradually forming inside the stem of a plant to at last open to the rays of the sun. You probably will find that your biggest frustration is that you do not have enough time to properly explore and engage in the mysterious new world of your latest artwork, and there are so many aspects of your working practice which you will need to think about to try and help force open these half closed doors. The multitude of questions above is designed to help you think about these aspects. Work with and improve them, and then ***art***, which is the most important thing of all, will come more effectively and fluidly.

Art Materials.

> For the first time I saw clay, and I felt as if I were ascending into heaven.
> Rodin.

And what of art materials? I would put these as only third on the list of necessary requirements after time, first, then space. This is because in many ways the materials that an artist may use are considerably less important than what he or she actually does with them. If you have plenty of money then expensive highly pigmented paints are an absolute joy to use, but you will not be a better painter or artist for it.

Don't get hung up on materials; anything is suitable to make art nowadays, and that is why art has such broad appeal; it can reflect any aspect of our lives.

Jackson Pollock used all kinds of industrial paints: embedded into his paintings can be found nails, tacks, buttons, coins, broken glass, paint tube tops and matches, all evidence of his presence above the painting as he poured, flicked and dribbled controlled flows of liquid paint.

Jean Dubuffet's paintings are largely composed of non-art materials such as cement, tar, gravel, leaves, silver foil, coal dust, ashes and sand, whilst Alberto Burri made paintings using hessian, such as *"Wheat"* (1956). There's a list on page 52 with many more examples.

All media are a means to an end, and art always transcends the media, the 'stuff', from which it was made. This is why materials are so much less important than time and space. It is the intention behind the use of the material which gives it artistic value.

Consider a hypothetical situation where you have no artistic materials at all, not a stick, tube, brush, or sheet: nothing. Suddenly you are in a new and resourceful place – what can you do with what is around you? Scour the house, garage and garden and you will find all sorts of shapes and colours – 'things' – which now have a new appeal, a new potential. And in your mind cogs and wheels are spinning – this could go anywhere!

Think about this point, and look at Picasso's assemblages where he took a model car and turned it into a baboon's head, or the magical transforming of some bicycle parts into a bull's head. This transformation is at the crux of art and it is not restricted by the media used.

Going farther still, consider how Duchamp named a urinal as an artwork. Aside from the contentiousness of this gesture, it is the intention that has created a new value from a familiar object. And whatever you think about this artistic 'act', it will be discussed and debated for as long as art and humanity exists!

The Pallette.

The notion of the curved wooden pallette with thumb hole and eight or nine little blobs of colour on it now seems very old fashioned. It is probably a method only used by conventional painters who are certainly not looking to encourage or induce expressive and accidental effects in their work, and instead seek excessive and stifling control, in effect deadening their creative and artistic centres. There is some idea in the use of the conventional pallette that by having a rigidly set array of colours always in the same place on the pallette, this will somehow improve workflow. A pallette is better and more useful when it has grown out of the work being

produced. For example, as a painter of large oils, I use a piece of glass on a flat table top (not picture framing glass as it is too thin) which has the underside painted with white enamel or gloss paint. The unpainted side faces upwards and is now a perfectly flat white, and easy to clean surface. As the work gets bigger more sheets can be added to accommodate greater quantities of paint. At any time an area of totally clear glass can be cleared regardless of how dry the paint has become. In my large acrylic paintings I prefer to mix up large quantities of paint in small plastic snap top pots (such as those used for storing food). These may accumulate in number as the painting progresses but there is no problem of the colour drying out as in the air tight pots it can stay usable for months or even years. When a colour has outgrown its usefulness or when I want to free up some pots then I may combine some to make unusual muted tones, or it becomes an opportunity to try out some of the 'Ideas for Painting' and the unwanted colour is splashed, sprayed, dripped or smeared to trigger off new images.

The Sketchbook.

Most art teachers are very keen on their students keeping a sketchbook, and this is because the mental processes behind the creating of the work can be revealed by the development of ideas through the pages of the book. Ultimately a sketchbook is just another tool which may or may not have a use for the artist. Do not feel obliged to keep one if it feels like a chore using it, and there are many artists who prefer to work through ideas on the actual main piece of work itself, and eschew the need for preparatory sketches, colour studies or maquettes. This is the purest, most direct and intense way of working, where non-predetermined changes can drastically alter the direction of a major piece.

Using sketchbooks as a means to develop an idea to then copy on a larger scale is a time honoured method, but deliberation and predetermination is implied by this, so that one comes to create the main piece already knowing how it should be. This means there are no more creative decisions to be made, and the artistic Journey has effectively ended in the sketchbook before the main piece has even been started. You might guess I am not a fan of this approach and I believe that any creative act is best achieved with as little forethought as possible, the result being a pure outpouring of creativity, or art.

Lighting.
Good lighting is worth the cost and the trouble. Get some daylight bulbs in, they are much cheaper to buy these days, and the low energy versions are at last becoming more affordable. The colour temperature of these bulbs is pretty accurate, and will allow you to see your work correctly at all times of the day and night.

Most artificial lights have an orangey glow about them with the disconcerting result that last nights painting (painted under artificial light) looks completely different this morning (in daylight). If you intend to exhibit your work then most galleries have some daylight - the more the better - and tend to use very white bulbs in their lighting rigs.

The bigger your studio is the more bulbs you should get in, one alone would cast very harsh shadows. Two or three could be spaced around the room, preferably with only reflected, not direct, light on the work being done. This can be achieved by taping pieces of white card from the ceiling so they hang in front of the bulb (not too close though...!), thus preventing any hard shadows on the area where you are painting. This should allow the

area to be bathed in diffuse 'daylight' and will ensure consistent light at all times. If you have real daylight available then do use it, but again if direct sunlight is interfering with the painting area, then use thin blinds or curtains to diffuse it.

Lighting is very important to artists, and many exhibitions see the lighting specifically tailored to the work. There are no rules to say you shouldn't work in dull light or harsh shadows. In fact unexpected results would certainly be achieved by painting in a very dark room, for instance.

Care of Work.

Storing art can be a pain. Not only does it pile up quickly, but the space available to store it diminishes equally as fast. Large plan chests are very desirable, and very expensive, even second hand they are hard to get hold of for a decent price. If you are a sculptor then I sympathize even more; a lot of forethought is sadly necessary before large work can be undertaken. After all, at some point you will probably have to put it away somewhere, though it would be nice to think there is a public art trail, corporate foyer, urban courtyard or large art gallery which is prepared to install your work.

Anything on paper stores flat fairly indefinitely, and you may wish to place thin sheets of acid free paper in between works. Stretched canvas is more bulky, but if the canvas is removed obviously more work can be stored, and the stretchers reused, whilst work on panel may be piled up vertically.

Once a painting or drawing is promoted to framed status then the storage situation becomes more complex still. For one thing always stack framed works face to face and back to back, so the fixings are less likely to scratch

the glass or the frame itself. Use cardboard sheets as spacers between the frames. Again, as with sculptures, it's always better to have the work out in the world than piling up, gathering dust and in your way.

If you have enough height in your storage area you could introduce some racks hanging from the ceiling which would free up valuable floor space.

Taking the Work Out Into the World.
In transporting framed work, bubble wrap becomes very useful, and you would be wise to buy it in a large roll from an industrial source (see Ebay or the Yellow Pages under Packaging Materials), as it becomes far cheaper in quantity, whereas a smallish roll from a high street shop is ridiculously expensive for the amount purchased. Small frames could be carried in a box, with the cardboard spacers in between, and clods of bubble wrap or foam material preventing them from flopping about in transit. This box can then be put on the back seat of a car and held in place by a seat belt, which is a very secure way of transporting a number of smallish works. A few large works can be placed flat, but it would be better to stack them vertically on the side wall of a van, with plenty of strapping to keep it all together, and lumps of bubble wrap in key spots where movement could occur.

Invest time in packing your work, and in arranging it in the car or van, the end result will be frames and pictures which have a much longer life span, and which should arrive at the gallery in pristine condition and be ready to hang.

5 THE FILTERING PROCESS
What is that makes Art?

> The transformation of the experience: that is pure art.
> Rebecca Horn.
>
> Take what is in your mind. Process it though your heart. It comes out through your hands – Art.
> Lena Lucas.

Mirroring nature is not art; it is merely the beginning of the process. Nature may be a source – the initial 'thing' which triggers the coming into being of an artwork. This 'thing' can be anything, it can exist in the real world as an object, a place or a concept, or it can be a formal idea – *"it was interesting how pink and brown suddenly came into the last painting, so let's see where I can take that next"* – for example.

Mirroring nature is impossible anyway, even cameras can't do it perfectly, so why should you try? No, art is the result of the filtering of experience through the human mind. Take a simple idea and push it through a dense web of subconscious, of memory, of moods and stresses, of preoccupation and concerns, or of high ideals, of tiredness or intoxication (if you must…), of hopes and fears, of peer pressure and confidence (or lack of), of mental strength or frailty, of determination, examination, exploitation or investigation. I could go on and on – your mind is simply awash with avenues, and any idea could go anywhere!

The painting you make today, this week, this month, or this year will be necessarily different to the one you make tomorrow, or next week (and so on). In your head there are a hundred billion brain cells all busy growing, learning and dying. The human brain is so complexly wired and many layers of waves are pulsing

through. Tomorrow, things are already very different in your head! Thankfully, though, the brain is capable of great consistency, otherwise chaos would rule. However there are subtle movements at work, and no human being could ever be exactly the same person year after year for all of their life. For one thing most of the body's cells are totally replaced every few years with brand new ones!

What I'm saying here is that art is the result of the outside world entering into this maze, and emerging out of the other side having been intensively processed. It has been humanized, you could say, for above all other considerations, art is absolutely human. Art is transformation; remember the definition from above: *"Art is an interpretation of the human condition"*.

Rarely are big changes noticeable from day to day, but over the course of months and years development becomes clear. Look at the career of any artist and you see a progression, usually from a fairly generalised approach, to one highly specific, individual and sophisticated. This gradual organic process represents a cumulative change that is literally from one day to the next. Yes, there are leaps, when, for example, a new medium is tried, or perhaps a move is made from 2D to 3D, but mostly the changes are subtle and emerge over a long period. Artists can take many years to move from figuration to abstraction or vice versa and most of the dramatic changes seen in the careers of artists have often been effected over the period of months or years.

A lifetime is needed to truly explore one artist's mind. Matisse's last words were said to be "at last I am beginning to understand", which seems a bit sad – if only he could have had another 20 years to explore this new understanding! But the point is that the

development never stops, and it never should be allowed to stop.

When an artist achieves a 'mature' style it can appear to the layman that they are just repeating themselves, but what in fact is happening is that the maker has found his or her personal language, or style if you like, and is exploring this narrow field and the infinite possibilities contained within. Rothko immediately comes to mind as an example of this. Look at his later work – in 1948, at the age of 45, and after 25 years of artistic activity, an image emerged in his work which he was set to explore for the remaining 22 years of his life. This can be loosely characterized as human sized vertical canvases, with floating horizontal bands of colour. Rothko had found his own narrow framework, within which the possibilities were enormous. The processes leading up to these immensely powerful late paintings can be traced back, and so a history of development can be observed.

This is true of all artists and also applies to yourself. When your life's work is analysed major changes will be observed, but at any one time you are never really aware of where you are in the sequence – is this the beginning of a new phase or the end of one? Is this work merely the prelude to a big creative explosion, is it the explosion itself, or is a blind alley very close by? More likely you are somewhere in between, only time will put into perspective where todays work belongs in your oeuvre.

6 Subject, Style, and a Bit of Art History

As mentioned elsewhere in this book, art can be all things to all people, and some artists regard subject matter as basically irrelevant. If this is the case then the subject of the work is effectively itself, and the artworks self referential nature is intended to draw the viewer into considering pure form, devoid of any further meaning.

> The form of my work is the content.
> Ellsworth Kelly.

> Purely formal characteristics exercise the senses as do string quartets and piano concertos ... I think of painting without subject matter as music without words.
> Kenneth Noland.

This is a highly sophisticated and refined approach to making art, but may not be substantial enough for many makers who, instead, are looking to finely balance form and content.

The subject of an artist's work tends to emerge over many years, yet it also may be innately present in the very earliest works. Any artist who feels deeply, with a thirst to explore and inquire, will find that subtle forms, motifs or preoccupations will appear in their work. These will eventually (and it can take some time) be recognised as significant, and then developed and encouraged. This is central to what art is all about, and why you as an individual will produce art that is peculiar to you alone, and, over time your work will become more and more identifiable as being by you, and less likely to be confused for anyone else's work. This is, put

simply 'style' or 'language', and when it becomes yours alone, that is when the creative pulse that is in you has found its true expression. It necessarily takes time to achieve this, as it is evidently not an easy thing to extract from the complexities of the mind, and rightly so; wouldn't life be dull if you could pick up a chisel, and first time round carve out *'David'*; even Michelangelo wasn't that good!

Even when this style is achieved it can take longer still for it be recognised and acknowledged by the artist, whereas an objective onlooker would probably realise that the creator has made a significant breakthrough.

Style grows out of the subject, and developments in the one influence the other. They evolve together, refining over time.

What you create ultimately says much about you, and you will learn over time what is and isn't right in all aspects of your work. Many artists use themselves and their own places in the world as the subject (Tracey Emin, Frida Kahlo, Edvard Munch), whilst many more seek to turn away from themselves into something completely 'other' (Mark Rothko, Caspar David Friedrich, Andy Goldsworthy).

A Short History of Style, Subject and Art.
Once upon a time artists were almost universally obliged to adopt purely religious subjects as they were financially dependent upon the Church, which was usually the only possible patron. As patrons evolved into wealthy individuals and eventually the general public, so artists' works have become highly individual and personalized. Even in Renaissance times however, and despite the reliance on familiar biblical themes and an obligation towards 'conventional' figuration, the styles of

many artists from the era are clearly defined. For example, Titian's late work is amazingly impressionistic, with loose, expressive painting; Botticelli's forms were always precise and clean with effortless draughtsmanship; Leonardo's 'sfumato' saw figures realistically modelled with softened glazes whilst Michelangelo painted flat, bright figures. And look at Piero della Francesca and Fra Angelico, wonderful painters of silent, pale and deeply felt paintings. You would not, however, confuse one for the other; they are distinct, despite the apparent closeness of style.

Caravaggio comes to mind as one of the earliest artists who sought, somewhat obliquely, to filter out the religious themes. Even paintings such as *"The Incredulity of Saint Thomas"* (1601) show a basically real situation, the figures are not ciphers, and there is no religious glow or ambience, his work instead resembles a kind of secular realism.

Velazquez's *"Las Meninas"* (1656), ostensibly a family portrait, is wry and knowing, an astonisingly sophisticated work for its era, not only featuring a self-portrait of the artist at work on the canvas itself, but also reflected in a distant mirror are two figures – King Philip IV and his Queen - who are effectively the 'observers' of the painting itself.

The same individuality applies to Goya, Hals, Rembrandt and Vermeer; all utterly distinctive painters who operated within the confines of figure painting.

Two important developments in possible subjects for art were Goya's "The Third of May 1808" (from 1814) and Theodore Gericault's *"Raft of the Medusa"* (1820) which were very early examples of social commentary as a central ingredient in a work of art.

The key moment in art history which eventually led to artists moving into esoteric and increasingly more personal territory, was the development in the late 1800s of a new form of art which had no reliance on subject matter whatsoever. The Impressionists were interested only in depicting light as it fell on a landscape or a figure; there was no narrative or sentimental connection with the objects in the painting. By making art that was purely about the observation of light, painters such as Monet, Renoir, Pissarro and Sisley removed all traces of meaning from their work and in so doing opened up the possibility for art to become something – anything – other than the narrative story telling it had always been.

James Abbott McNeill Whistler also strove towards this with his paintings of the late 1800s which were ostensibly townscape or figure portraits. However the tiles of such works ("*Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl"* [1862] or "*Nocturne in Gray and Gold, Westminster Bridge"* [1871-4] to name but two examples) indicate that he was concerned more so with colour and tonal relationships, which, for its time, was a radical and sophisticated concept.

Vincent Van Gogh was influenced by the style of the Impressionists, but he always felt that art should be driven by subject, and became wholly engaged in the developing of an intense, emotionally wrought and highly personal vision, which has inspired both non-artists and artists ever since. Once such was Picasso who admired Van Gogh's purity of expression, calling him "the first true artist". Picasso succeeded in living the dream of the artist's life, a dream which Vincent had yearned for and ultimately failed to achieve.

The 20th Century, thanks to Picasso in part, would see a remarkable flowering of artistic innovation, and it was now acceptable to explore esoteric, obtuse, awkward and psychologically based forms of expression. Part of this process was influenced by the far reaching discoveries and theories developed by people such as Einstein and Freud. All boundaries and rules restricting what was acceptable form and content were broken by diverse artists such as Pollock, Giacometti, Dali, David Smith, Malevich, Munch, Brancusi, Duchamp, Klee, and, of course, the ubiquitous Picasso. This is just a brief list, and the fuller story is well worth reading (see *"The Story of Modern Art"* by Norbert Lynton, Phaidon Press). Use search engines to find images from all of these artists and you can see how barriers in subject and style were broken by these great innovators.

The conclusion to this little history lesson is that it is in your hands to create, develop, explore, discover and grow, and in so doing, achieve your own subject and style without fearing boundaries of acceptability. Art is much too vast to be bounded by such limitations and this is another example of how it reflects the human condition. There will always be innovators in all fields of human possibility, thankfully, and it would be a sad day for humanity if this situation were ever to change.

As a further footnote to this matter there is much to enjoy, learn and savour from delving into the annals of art history. The biographies of so many artists are well worth reading, and are dramatic in their own right. They will help you better understand what art is all about, where it comes from, what kinds of people make it, and to put it all in context. The history of art is rich, complex, and ever evolving, and as well as the big and familiar names, there are countless worthy creators who are less well known. Do not think that you have no

place in this immense history, as there are still many artists today who are contributing to the story: Tracey Emin, Andy Goldsworthy, Antony Gormley, Jake and Dinos Chapman, John Virtue, Damien Hirst, James Turrell to name but a few.

Gimmickry.

> True creativity is not superficial and does not consist of striving to be different or provocative.
> Heather Spears, *"The Creative Eye"* (2007)

Art is an easy prey to gimmickry, but the true test of an unusual and esoteric approach is whether the same artist is still excitedly exploring within the same stylistic confines 20 or 30 years later. The human mind struggles to cope for too long with bland repetition, and in this way shallow ideas should hopefully be flushed out. I say should, because unfortunately it does occur that such images may sell, and then the maker becomes entrapped or obliged to recreate them over and over again ad nauseum. At that point they have stepped outside of the realms of real art, and instead have become some kind of one person, semi-industrial production line. Shame!

Some artist's 'mature' styles:
This list very briefly indicates the recognized mature styles of a number of artists, in almost all of these cases this style was achieved after many years of work.

Van Gogh – slabby strokes, loose outlines, complimentary colours.
Rothko – floating bands of vibrant colour.
Lowry – blackened figures and buildings on crusty white grounds.
Freud – rich and sensuous painterly nudes.
Pollock – scribbled dripped paint producing harmonious whole.
Mondrian – severe blocks of primary colour in black grid.

Josef Albers – squares within squares with subtle colour and tone.
Frank Auerbach – heavily textured muddy paintings.
Pierre Bonnard – rich colour, intimate domestic interiors.
Caravaggio – stark, realistic figures, no background.
Giorgio De Chirico – stark delineated objects amid empty townscapes.
Lucio Fontana – bright flat canvases with cut surfaces.
Naum Gabo – curving weave of nylon amid soft organic structures.
Philip Guston – chunky, slightly cartoon-like figures.
Peter Lanyon – abstracted landscapes inspired by glider flights.
Fernand Leger – chunky heavily outlined figures, bright colours.
Roy Lichtenstein – large blow-ups of cartoon imagery.
Morris Louis – soft saturated colour poured through unprimed canvas.
Joan Miro – calligraphic shapes float on featureless background.
Richard Serra, huge simplified sculpture, disconcerting spatial effects.
Mark Tobey – pale delicate fields of calligraphic strokes.
Franz Kline – very large black calligraphic shapes on white.
Bridget Riley – colour used to create optical illusions.
Clyfford Still – heavily laden big canvases with jagged colours.
Eduardo Paolozzi – massive totemic figures using casts from machines.
Seurat – stiff formalized figure paintings made up of dots of colour.
Giacometti – craggy, very narrow figure and head sculptures
Klee – small, colourful, bizarre abstracted figures and creatures.
Kenneth Noland – flat painted target, chevron, lozenge shapes.
Joseph Cornell – box structures with assembled objects and texts.
Will MacLean – box assemblages with found beach objects.
Antony Gormley – body casts in metal sometimes life-size sometimes massively scaled up.
Morandi – understated and muted still lifes of bottles.
Monet – softly dissolving vibrant landscapes.
Andy Goldsworthy – rearranging of natural objects into simple sympathetic patterns and structures.

Henry Moore – monumental rounded softened figures.
Franci Bacon – twisted human figures isolated in domestic settings.

Some artist's visions/subjects:

In contrast to the previous list, the one below is more about the actual subject matter of the work, or the underlying philosophy of the artist:

Van Gogh – nature is God, God is nature.
Munch – insanity and fear is everywhere, nature is fecund.
Rothko – the mysterious, tragic, sublime infinite.
Pollock – drawing through air.
Stanley Spencer – God is here, now.
Lowry – people are strange and fascinating, but life is hard.
Bacon – people are will-less pieces of meat.
Turner – nature is vast, humanity tiny.
Cezanne – nature is the source of a new monumentality.
Warhol – art is a commodity.
Picasso – time is my enemy, I create endlessly to defeat it.
Boccioni – modern life is dynamic, vital and fast, all is motion.
Arthur Dove – nature and mystery.
James Ensor – Paranoia, horror and alienation.
Naum Gabo – transcendental order.
Gauguin – the barbaric splendour of the primitive.
Giacometti – modern man is vulnerable and fragile.
Edward Hopper – modern life is empty and anonymous.
Franz Marc – nature and man in harmony
Matisse – balance, purity and serenity
Seurat – formal harmony depicting everyday Paris.
Monet – light, light, light!
Antony Gormley – my body is the mould for a new monumentality.
Braque – the reinventing of observation.
Josef Albers – the harmony of cool abstract colours.
Mondrian – calm, pure, formal relationships.

The Self-Portrait.

We have previously determined that art is a response to the wider world, yet there always seems to be an aspect of self obsession to artists. There is a feeling that no

matter what we produce there is always an element of self portraiture to the work. After all any Van Gogh looks like a Van Gogh, a Picasso looks like a Picasso and your work looks like you. Maybe not literally, but your work **is** you. To extend this idea to its logical conclusion artists have always made images of themselves. The self portrait is a venerable tradition which dates back to early Renaissance times. Rembrandt is upheld as one of the greatest self portraitists, and his life story is told through many remarkable paintings from fresh faced youth to wrinkled and saddened old age. The psychological depths of these works is undeniable, and such intimate soul searching, such *"who and what am I?"* is also seen in many great self portraits by Albrecht Durer, Van Gogh, Edvard Munch, Egon Schiele, Francis Bacon and Frida Kahlo who were all particularly prolific with this subject. Most of the artists mentioned in this book have also explored the self portrait and it is comforting to know that there is always a model readily available to work from, the one that is seen in the mirror. Do with it what you will, from deep self examination to drawing practice, your reflection will always provide you with plenty to think about.

7 The Journey, or, What the Process of Making Art Really is.....

> Paintings are but research and experiment. I never do a painting as a work of art. All of them are researches. I search incessantly….
> Picasso
>
> I am aware of a striving, a yearning, the making of many impossible attempts at a kind of transmutation – a searching for a formula for the magical conjuring of the unknowable … I have in the end reached some enlightenment in the realization that my work entails a kind of symbolic self involvement in the very processes of life itself.
> Alan Davie.
>
> Sometimes the painting starts to relate very directly to either sights seen or experiences felt, other times, it goes off on a tangent that you can't really articulate.
> Susan Rothenberg.
>
> One does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time.
> Andre Gide.

Once a piece of artwork has been started, and received its first divine breath from its creator, so the Journey has also begun. The Journey is a mysterious, exciting, twisting, and sometimes infuriating rollercoaster ride; a Quest through an undiscovered country, with the possibility of gold, or hobgoblins around every corner. Out there is the mythical Holy Grail. You begin the Journey and do not know where you are going or what you will discover, and, equally importantly, you cannot know how or when this Journey will end. It sounds like life itself!

The Grail as such is truly mythical: it doesn't exist. What does exist is a kind of exalted vision of what your art could be, and this Journey – the beginning of the latest piece of art - is the latest in a lifelong series of attempts to reach this place.

> Have no fear of perfection, you'll never reach it.
> Salvador Dali

It is important to accept that there is no perfection. Consider this: you paint the perfect picture today, and then what? Presumably stop forever. The knowledge that you will never paint the perfect picture is a curse, a blessing, and the very root of the obsession, and even when you are painting as well as you ever have done, you know there is a hundred or a thousand other possibilities to try.

> What moves men of genius …is their obsession with the idea that what has already been said is still not enough.
> Eugene Delacroix

> One continues, knowing very well that the nearer one gets to the thing, the further it moves away … it is an endless quest.
> Giacometti.

There is no end to the Quest, no end to the desire to reach the Grail; it is always there, yet almost always it is vague, amorphous, shape shifting, flashing in and out of existence, flickering and ephemeral, yet as permanent as life itself. Does this all sound a bit fanciful? When you are in the midst of the Journey, in the wilds of this new country, exploring and discovering and opening up new facets to your work and your life, then it is there in all its glory!

This dream always lives, and drives all artists, it may be expressed in varying ways, but always there is an idealized internal vision of what the work *could* be. It is this Grail which is the intended destination for every Journey.

> Sometimes I think I paint simply to find enlightenment and revelation.
> Alan Davie.
>
> Painting is an adventure to an unknown world.
> Ratindra Das.

Each artwork is a Journey to this 'no place'. The result is a piece of art, but the *Journey* is the real reason. Physical art is merely the by-product of these releases of creative potential. We artists live for these Journeys, they are where the pleasures lie.

> I begin with an idea and then it becomes something else.
> Picasso.

No Journey is ever the same as another one, and there is no reason in attempting to repeat one. You may wish to copy a painting, but if so it is merely technical practice, not a Journey in itself. There is a great tradition of artists who have sought to reinterpret other artists' work, which *is* a valid part of the Quest. Look at Picasso's reworking of Velazquez's *'Las Meninas'* for a classic example of how one painter has taken the results of one remarkable Journey from the 1700s, absorbed it, and reinvented it in the 1950s. Such an approach is highly valid and there should be no boundary to stifle the creative process – using another artist's work is just another way to enlarge and intensify the Journey.

> Bad artists copy. Good artists steal.
> Picasso

On the way....

...the mountains may be high, the valleys may be deep, but when we artists engage in pure creativity, the results are usually of interest, even if they have ended at an impasse.

> It is almost a form of intense concentration, which involves a process of illumination, of connections, of lightning gaps, of the movement of a current of electricity between apparently disparate things: and for a moment you feel that they are connected and you feel, yes, you can make a shape out of this, you can really do something with this and express it…..
> P J Kavanagh

Part of each Journey may well involve encountering and interacting with a series of archetypes or motifs; mysterious recurring forms and colours which keep on emerging and declaring with force their presence in your work. These motifs evolve over a lifetime, but the common link is always *you.* You are the carrier for all of the stuff that makes you human, and because of your humanity, you are an artist.

When your work has a ubiquity, or timelessness about it, that looks as though it has always existed, then it is *really* happening…

> I would like to think a picture is finished when it feels not new, but old. As if its forms had lived a long time in you, even though until it appears you did not know what it would look like.
> Philip Guston

> When you start a painting, it is somewhat outside you. At the conclusion, you seem to move inside the painting.
> Fernando Botero

In other words, a harmony, or communion has been achieved between maker and the creation. This state is achieved when the process is at its most deeply satisfying.

Another factor that contributes to this satisfaction, and it may sound paradoxical, is the successful consummation of an image by means that are as unconscious and as accidental as possible:

> I believe it was John Cage who once told me 'when you start working, everybody is in your studio – the past, your friends, enemies, the art world, and above all, your own ideas….. But as you continue painting, they start leaving, one by one, and you are left completely alone. Then, if you're lucky, even you leave!
> Philip Guston

….with the result being a pure, uninhibited Journey. If you can cultivate your intuitive, unconscious side, and somehow lose the self consciousness and obligations to all and sundry, *then* you are properly tapping into your creative self.

> I foresee it and yet I hardly ever carry it out as I foresee it. It transforms itself by the actual paint. I don't in fact know very often what the paint will do, and it does many things which are very much better than I could make it do.
> Francis Bacon.

> We must continue to pay as little attention as possible to the end towards which we are moving – allowing the end to come when it comes, that is, at the end, when the right moment arrives.
> Alan Davie.

How does one encourage the creation of art by unconscious means, yet without descending into chaos? The next chapter will provide many clues.....

8 Ideas for Painting

> Why do two colours, one next to the other, sing? Can one really explain this? No. Just as one can never learn to paint.
> Picasso.

> Painting is a very difficult thing. It absorbs the whole man, body and soul.
> Max Beckmann.

No self respecting book on any aspect of art should dare to inflict on its reader a treatise on how to paint. There are many books that do this, but what do we gain from them? The right colour? The right tone? The right perspective? As a creative person you are unique, an individual, and there is nobody else on the planet with the complexity of interconnected levels which your brain has. It is this almost infinite breadth of human variety that makes art, and those instruction books on technique only serve to narrow the possibilities. As an artist you want doors to open, and that happens through engaging honestly and with focus on your personal quest, not allowing anything to stifle your creative flow.

> Art? You just do it.
> Martin Ritt

So what can I say to you, other than "just do it"!

There are many things you can do to enlarge the experience of painting, and sometimes the old fashioned way of using brushes is the last thing to try. Brushes are great tools, but you can get very tight using them. Technique has its place, but it is only ever a means to an end, and you know you are painting well when technique is no longer an issue.

> I want to get to the stage where nobody can tell how a picture of mine is made … I want nothing but emotion given off by it.
> Picasso

You know you are painting **really** well when the process is almost automatic, and it just happens:

> The emotions are sometimes so strong that I work without knowing it. The strokes come like speech.
> Van Gogh.

In the Beginning …is the Idea.

> I don't go into the studio with the idea of 'saying' something. What I do is face the blank canvas and put a few arbitrary marks on it that start me on some sort of dialogue.
> Richard Diebenkorn.

It is not necessarily a good thing to start a work with too definite an idea because then there is a danger of becoming a slave to an idea that is not working, or is preventing the work from developing further beyond and outside of the original idea. The image may be trying to push you away into more interesting and unexpected places, and you, in your faithfulness to the original concept, may keep pulling it back, to eventually get bogged down into a stodgy and overly literal work. Poetry in art arrives when the subconscious is allowed to play and interact with the conscious effort, and this free and easy push and pull of the deliberate and the accidental creates the best results. Being slavish to the original idea can suppress the subconscious poet within. Don't love your ideas too much or they can kill the art!

The Painter's Fear of the Blank Canvas.

> A flaw in the canvas, a stain in the board, may suggest the beginning of a picture.
> Joan Miro.

> Usually I don't (start a painting) with a calm and quiet mind, but with noise, desperation and confusion.
> Peter Hasson.
>
> You have to systematically create confusion, it sets creativity free.
> Dali.

There's nothing worse than the hours, minutes or seconds spent before the start of a new painting, and the longer you take to begin, the longer you will take, as demons appear on your shoulder, taunting you: *"how pure that expanse of white is"*. Your first task is to destroy its purity forever.

Do it, do it quickly, but also savour it! Because now you are away, and the Journey has begun. Do not feel as though the first thing you do to a blank page or canvas has to necessarily define what the work will be. This simply need not be the case. As layers form so the earliest marks are often lost, and the first marks on a support may possibly be regarded as a 'key' to work against. Better than straining to impose perfection against that already perfectly blank surface.

So here is a list of techniques and ideas which can be used to kick start a painting, or push one that is already advanced into new and unexpected places:

- Put the support flat on the floor or on a table. Splash colour, spray colour (using coloured inks or diluted acrylics and a spray diffuser). Push the wet colour with sharp squirts from a plant spray.
- Use torn newspapers, rags, cut edges, or more regularly shaped objects as templates to spray over. Tearing paper always gives it a more interesting edge. Build up layers of templates and use different sprayed colours to get

unpredictable bleeding effects. Spray through hessian to get nice weave effects.

- Use a hairdryer to speed up drying times, there's no fun in watching paint dry!
- Try lots of different surfaces to work on; canvas, hessian, paper, panel, metal, silk; some of them will work better than others, and each surface presents a different set of technical questions the answers to which can take you to new places. Even with paper there is so much scope with unusual handmade papers, tissue and crepe (interesting transparent effects...?), and watercolour surfaces from very rough to very smooth. Some artists even make their own paper giving them greater control over their work.
- Different degrees of priming on a surface have a dramatic effect on what you can do. Gesso primer is chalky and slightly absorbent. Many layers of gesso sanded back provide a soft, silky smooth and absorbent surface, whereas acrylic primers allow the paint to sit very much on the surface. At the other extreme, by working directly into unprimed canvas the paint is obliged to merge directly into the very fibre. Look at the work of Morris Louis who skilfully controlled flows of colour into unstretched, unprimed canvas.
- Light is in itself a kind of medium, and transparent films, plastic and glasses allow for a vibrancy that paint alone can never match. Stained Glass is a rich and technical medium, but the results are often a joy for anyone who loves colour (and if you are involved with colour at all then that means you...). Coloured perspex is an easier and more practical alternative. A lightbox is always a useful device to have in the studio, and they are not difficult to make. Try painting

on glass, perhaps even creating an image that can be viewed from both front and back.

- Make a large area of flat, dark colour, then draw into it with bleach (experiment with diluted bleach, using it neat would be too severe and smelly and would also possibly corrode the surface in the long term).
- A dry painting on glass or any smooth non-absorbent surface may be delicately scratched back and drawn into to reveal the raw surface.
- Use awkward, metallic or fluorescent colours. Often strange and unusual combinations will lead to new discoveries; the more art is taken into unfamiliar territories (and out of the comfort zone) the more it will grow. Try metallic leaf for that rich contrast between painted and metal surfaces.
- Likewise use compositions which are unbalanced and awkward to generate new ideas.
- The diptych or triptych is a time honoured tradition and many artists relish the possibilities of expanding the image beyond one panel (see Francis Bacon, Max Beckman, David Blackburn, John Virtue). But the idea needn't stop there and many multiples of images and combinations of shapes may come into conjunction to form greater, unrestricted images.
- Mix media. Media do have limitations and boundaries if you are to follow their instructions correctly, but we relish pushing the boundaries and breaking the rules, and will mix anything with anything else to see what happens. Oil based and water based media will find their place side by side on the same painting if you wish them to be there. Oil pastel is great for creating a surface for watercolour to resist against.

- Combine techniques – painting with photography, or with sculpture (ie. Jasper *Johns "Target with Four Faces"* [1955]) or printmaking, or ceramics (look at the work of Grayson Perry for some very modern and beautiful work using these methods). Unusual combinations allow for unexpected results.
- Don't think about subject yet, build up a surface instead. When the surface itself becomes interesting the subject you introduce will have a definite advantage.
- Use a lining pen to draw continuous lines of colour, keep them fluid and abstract. Later on build forms from the lines (see the work of Paul Klee for many examples of this). Or use a proper ink pen with variable nib sizes.
- Use an eye dropper to drip a single drop of pure rich colour (use acrylic ink) into a wet field of contrasting colour. This achieves a vibrant, startling effect, and just watching what the colour does as it intermingles is fascinating.
- Start large and small works at the same time. Let them feed each other, even merge into each other.
- *"I often use old canvas and I particularly enjoy painting over something I've already done, allowing bits to come jumping through accidentally."* (Myfanwy Pavelic)
- *"An artist's job is to surprise himself. Use all means possible".* (Robert Henri)
- Enjoy the free and loose distribution of colour. If you liked splashing colour to start an image, put it to one side and do another, and another, and another! The more space you have the more paintings you can begin in one go. Then you can come back into the studio the next day and know

you have loads of vibrant, rich images to start working into.

- Use a large soft brush in a calligraphic way (see Chinese art, or that of Franz Kline who did this kind of thing on a very large scale), or even remove the watercolour block from its pan, dip it in water and draw with pure colour directly onto a dry or wet support.
- Use your 'wrong' hand to draw or both hands at the same time.
- Stick an object to the support and work against it, a well known technique known as *'Collage'*.
- Try *'Fumage'*, a technique developed by the Surrealists which involves holding paper above a candle to generate random patches of soot.
- An extension to Fumage is to attack the image with a blow torch, a method used by Yves Klein in his beautiful *"Fire Paintings"* in the 1960s. More recently Anselm Kiefer has also used a torch to blacken the surface of his densely worked, apocalyptic images. Be very careful, though... please!
- Or *'Frottage'*, used extensively by Max Ernst and similar to brass rubbing, where paper is laid over objects and rubbed to reveal the texture.
- Or *'Decalcomania'* which is where paper is laid on random patches of wet colour then rubbed or drawn into so that the colour underneath becomes inscribed into the surface (see Paul Klee).
- Or *'Decollage'*, that is collage in reverse; a surface is created by *removing* a stuck object.
- Collagraphs are similar to monoprints, except the plate is also collaged resulting in prints which have texture and relief.

- Cyanotypes are a type of photographic process, and potentially quite painterly, as objects placed against specially prepared paper using light sensitive emulsion, are then fixed as ghostly negatives on the print after exposure to light.
- An extension to collage is what Matisse used in his later works, large pieces of coloured paper, cut to create large abstract composition such as *"The Snail"* (1953*): "cutting directly into colour reminds me of the direct action of the sculptor carving stone".*
- Max Ernst anticipated the works of Pollock by many years when he experimented with suspending a tin of paint with a tiny hole in its base over a flat canvas. The swinging tin would produce a completely random 'automatic' painting.
- A technique called 'distressing' involves the scratching, gouging, cutting and removing of parts of the surface of the painting or support. Try this with heavyweight watercolour paper and see how far you can go. Holes right through may have their place also. This is also a way of generating a clean white area in a heavily worked painting. A very sharp nail or Stanley knife may also be used as a drawing tool to generate extremely fine white lines when carved through dry or wet paint.
- Mondrian used collage to generate a composition, moving chunks of coloured paper around until the image was ready to paint.
- To achieve a dead matt surface experiment with mixing wax with the paint – see the work of Brice Marden for examples.
- Start a painting from the outside and work towards the middle, a new and unexpected formal balance will be achieved.

- Break up the rectangular shapes of the image, use collage to extend the painting beyond the usual edges, or cut unusually shaped panels to work on (see the work of Anthony Green).
- We usually work from light to dark as a matter of rule, or habit. Instead start a painting with a black surface, and 'carve' light and colour into it.
- Shut your eyes, even spin around whilst sightless, making marks on the image in a completely uncontrolled way!
- Visit toy shops and marvel at the wide range of paints and mark making tools which are available. They are cheap also, allowing for plenty of experimentation.
- Apply cling film over heavily daubed paint, when dry it peels off easily leaving a richly textured surface.
- Get some paint rollers, and spread colour freely creating delicately textured surfaces. Rollers can be made of sponge or rubber (which are used for inking up prints), and can be very small (from toy shops) or very large (for painting walls).
- Fabric can be very sensuous, visit a craft shop and introduce some into your work, maybe it can be collaged in scraps, or painted on directly, tousled up and glued down with PVA, or even stapled over canvas stretchers to provide a new and unusual support. Rather than prime the surface, size it instead with binder or rabbit skin glue, so that the colour and pattern of the fabric becomes the base for a painting.
- Allow paint to run, even blow it with a hairdryer.
- Flick paint off the brush, or use a toothbrush.
- Use a piece of stiff card to drag around slabs of colour.

- Use charcoal dust, which can be even sprinkled then drawn into with a wet or dry brush, and highlights lifted out with a putty rubber.

- Use geometric tools such as protractors, angles and compasses.
- Cut up an unsuccessful painting into strips or blocks, reassembling them into a new image.
- Use masking tape or fluid.

Starting Too Well!
Sometimes it can get very daunting when you make a really good start to a work; you've got some shapes and colours down and they are sitting really well. Suddenly you think *"what happens next?".* You may well now be in a fraught situation where the fear arises that from here in you are likely to spoil such a good beginning. And you start getting tighter and tighter, dibbing and dabbing away, scared to obscure any of your nice bits of work. This is obviously not a good state of mind to get into. There are two possible courses of action:

(1) Put the painting to one side, there will always be a next time to come back to it, to see it afresh and take it further. It may even be finished, and may have 'caught you out'. You need to be open to the possibility that sometimes images come together very quickly and don't need the days/weeks/months of work that you would ordinarily apply to them.

(2) Carry on painting, but *let it go*. Forget the good beginning you had, open up and throw yourself at it. Don't fear losing the painting. No painting is ever lost and next week or next year you may return to recover it. The painting is always there, ready for you to take it on again.

> The work of many days will be covered up with despairing gestures or obliterating forms … quite frequently, such expressions of despair will lead to a kind of re-birth, a new found surge of creativity.
> Alan Davie.

Most of the time painting is an intimate two way relationship between image and self, but sometimes the image wants to rule you. That's good if it is going somewhere interesting and exciting, but sometimes you need to intercede, and ignore its demanding awkwardness, instead directing it somewhere else, because there always is another place that the current work can go. It is never fixed in time, ever! Until you allow it to be by calling it finished.

So whilst I've given here an example of how a good start can tie you up, it can also work the other way around. In starting a painting with a badly formed mess, you have every opportunity to grab hold of it and force it out of its malaise, and when the painting clicks into its newly resolved state – order from chaos – the result is very satisfying.

Reinvigorating a Dull Painting.

At any point during the life of a work it is your prerogative to take it by the scruff of the neck and brutally push it in a different direction. Depending on what your hopes and expectations are you may find the current painting is stuck in a safe place, and is not really extending you in any new direction. This is where you can apply any of the above mentioned techniques to attack and reinvigorate a dull painting, and you may find that a splash of quick, expressive colour can lift a work and suggest a new direction.

Turn it upside down; you certainly will be looking at the same painting, but now it will be totally unfamiliar. It may also look much better than what you was working

on. If so then be prepared to go with it and follow this new avenue.

Use a mirror to look at the work backwards; again it will appear like an image you've never seen before, yet strangely familiar, and doing this will help show up formal, compositional and drawing deficiencies. Try this also with portraits; if it looks right in reverse, it probably is right. One day Kandinsky saw a painting with "extraordinary beauty, glowing with an inner radiance", then realized it was his own work upside down!

Go digital. Technology is our friend (…sometimes...), and PCs have the power to manipulate imagery fast and effortlessly. Take shots of your work with a digital camera, upload them, and fiddle with the colours, change the tone, reverse, apply textures, flip, mirror or make them into a negative or a monochrome. Any one of these digital tricks may help suggest where to take the painting next.

Try different supports. The absorbent qualities, texture and colour of the support all affect when happens when stuff comes into contact with it. Paper is a wonderful support, and the unpredictable, soft effects produced by applying plenty of wet colours are many. Try it, and watch what the colour does; there is something very meditative about this subtle absorption and intermingling. Panels such as MDF and chipboard are very durable and will take everything you throw at them. Using gesso primer will allow for degrees of absorbency. Canvas is still regarded as the ultimate surface for painting onto, though it feels quite mechanical and artificial compared to paper. It is easier to exhibit canvas paintings which often don't need framing. If you do this, paint the visible edge of the canvas a colour which compliments the painting. Don't continue the

painting around the sides of a stretched canvas, it just *doesn't* work!
Know the colour wheel and understand what complimentary colours are and how you may use them to intensify colours (by placing complimentary colours side by side), or as a mixing tool. For example, greys can be mixed, and the bright edge of a colour can be taken off by adding a touch of its complimentary. Look at Van Gogh's work for a master class in the use of complimentary colours. If it is of particular interest why not explore further the science of colour, artists such as Kandinsky, Seurat and Albers did. A fine book on the subject is *"The Art of Colour Mixing"* by John Lidzey, Jill Mirza, Nick Harris and Jeremy Galton (2002 Quintet Publishing).

Try using a limited palette of, say, 3 colours. Doing this allows you to explore individual colours in greater depth, achieving a more harmonious whole and also is a great way to learn colour mixing.

Force a change in your work by working on horizontally shaped works if your work is always vertical, or if your preferred image shape is always square, then try working on long, thin paintings. Don't just work standing up, or sitting down, on the wall, or on the floor. Mix it up; every difference encourages freshness.

Don't ever spend too long at a time on a painting. How long is too long? Generally always stop whilst you are painting well. When the flow is good it is always better to stop sooner rather than later, always when fresh, and leave the studio with a good feeling, rather than a frustrated ache that you just overworked something good. Next time you can return to the work and see it with fresher eyes, seeing a painting that hasn't gone too far which is still ripe for further exploration.

The experienced artist has no fear of 'allowing things to happen', and trusts that some accidents can be good in a way that a conscious mark may not be. Always encourage accidental effects, not only to generate new ideas but to move the painting forwards. Random splashes, involuntary brush marks, sprayed colour, rubbing off colour to reveal a haze of what is underneath, or going further, and taking the surface back many layers, perhaps even to raw canvas or paper, providing a clean surface as a white highlight, or to glaze transparently providing a vibrant area amongst otherwise heavily worked stodge. Or glue a scrap of paper or canvas to the image thus creating a new area. These latter two methods are a great way to enliven a painting which is getting dull from overworking.

> A discovery is an accident meeting a prepared mind.
> Albert Szent-Gyorgi.
>
> All painting … is accident.
> Francis Bacon.
>
> Effective surprises (or accidents) … have the quality of obviousness about them when they occur, producing a shock of recognition.
> Jerome Bruner, *"The Conditions of Creativity".*

Less is more – this is one rule always worth adhering to – and if you can visualize your painting with bits removed you may find yourself looking at a better composition. Use your hand, finger, piece of paper, anything at hand, to mask areas thus allowing you to see the work with less in it. Also make a viewing hole with finger and thumb, or 2 'L' shaped pieces of card, travel around the surface of your painting varying the size of the hole, and find mini compositions within the larger whole. Not only may these surprising and

previously unnoticed sub-paintings trigger new ideas, but you may find such a fragment delivers a far more satisfying result – they may well look better than the whole; and you find your large painting which isn't really working is made up of 4 or 5 good small paintings. Time to get the scissors out! Don't be afraid to cut up a painting into smaller, better pieces.

If your painting is drifting aimlessly draw in a defined image, perhaps a face or figure. It will give the piece a sense of focus, and may be the difference that allows you to finish it. (We regard Pollock as very much an abstract painter but it is very interesting to see how the figure re-entered his last works.)

Keep standing back as far as you can, you need to be always able to read the image in its entirety; by doing this you are more likely to instinctively feel where it is unbalanced. Being too drawn into any one area will encourage an awkward, lopsided result. Try unfocussing your eyes, or squinting, so that individual details recede, and the major masses and tones of the image dominate.

Longevity.
Despite all the wild and random painting techniques and ideas listed above, there is also a place for proper technique in the building up of layers of paint. If you wish your work to last a hundred years or longer, then you do need to be conscientious about this issue, read up on the matter (see '*The Materials and Techniques of Painting'* by Jonathan Stephenson, Thames & Hudson).

When is a Painting Finished?

> An artist never really finishes his work; he merely abandons it.
> Paul Ambroise Valery.

> A painting is never finished – it simply stops in interesting places
> Paul Gardner.
> Painting is a continuous process which really has no beginning or ending. There never really is any point in time when painting is **not**. Alan Davie.
>
> I work on my canvas until I am finished. Often I recognize my subject at completion of the picture and again I may wait a long time before I know what it is about.
> William Baziotes.
>
> I would like to think a picture is finished when it feels not new, but old. As if its forms had lived a long time in you, even though it appears you did not know what it would look like.
> Philip Guston.

The subjectivity of knowing the answer of when a painting is finished is absolute, but the better you are painting and the more finely tuned is your intuition, the more likely you are to know. Pissarro said that when he felt there was no way he could improve the painting, then it was finished. This is a good philosophy to start with. You know when you are really concisely summing up your statement, both formally and through the subject matter. When the image has no flab on it, no unnecessary passages, no pretty but useless areas (remember Herbert Read's analogy of the form of the athlete); when the drawing is simple, economical, expressive and descriptive; when the tones balance; when the composition inhabits the four edges of the painting, and is not too big or small; when the painted surface excites, intrigues, entices, and the colour sits in larger blocks juxtaposing with smaller, more detailed incidents; then the painting may well be finished. These may all sound like requirements for an abstract painting, but they are considerations for all paintings regardless of type.

A Short Note on Representative Art.
The world has seen truly great achievements in purely representational art, and I believe that for art to be created today which aims to represent the real external world, then it has to be very, very good. Lucien Freud springs to mind immediately.

If you wish to do this you need great technical skill and dexterity. Know perspective, draw accurately and constantly, preferably from the life model, which is always the greatest challenge in drawing. Hopefully you can get to an open non-judgmental life drawing class, where you can draw without being judged, graded, or being watched over your shoulder; in other words where you can just go and draw. Try and get the model to do very short poses – 5 minutes, even 1 minute – not only are these good to 'warm up' but also there is great skill in the extreme economy of mark making needed to sum up a pose in such a short time.

The Difficulty of Titling a Piece of Art.
Titles are prescriptive and, unfortunately, many viewers of art take them very seriously, as if the title was somehow telling them more about the work than the work itself. I've mentioned elsewhere the frustration of seeing visitors in galleries who spend more time reading the captions and statements than looking at the art, and titles sadly encourage this. If all art was 'untitled' then we would be forced to look at *it* rather than be expecting a title to give us a clue as to what we should be looking at. I'm not advocating that, though, what I would like to say is that titles can used to complement a work, but they shouldn't have an explanatory quality, unless the explanation offered by the title is the obvious, prosaic one. In other words a painting can be called "Man and

boy", but not "Tense Familial Relationship" for example – why use words to explain away a painting when the painting should speak for itself and offer multiple interpretations to different observers? Rothko's titles are a good example of this: he could have titled a painting "Tragic Void", but no, we always got something like *"Red, Orange, Tan and Purple"* (1949). Rothko was never going to allow the mystery to be lessened by the restrictive, prescriptive title.

> To explain away the mystery of a great painting – if such a feat were possible – would do irreparable harm. If there is no mystery then there is no 'poetry'.
> Georges Braque.

> It is impossible to explain a picture. The point is it has been painted because there is no other way of explaining.
> Edvard Munch.

Scale. It's a big issue.

> I paint large pictures because I want to create a state of intimacy. A large picture is an immediate transaction; it takes you into it.
> Mark Rothko.

When confronted by an over life size figure sculpture by Elizabeth Frink the feeling is of a threatening presence, a feeling which would be substantially lessened were the figure smaller than us. In the same way Rothko's large late works were intended to be looked at from close to, so that the viewer is obliged to engage fully, even submit to, the vibrant image.

At the other end of the scale, visit the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and ask to look at some etchings by Samuel Palmer. These tiny, intensely deeply etched landscapes are as compelling and engaging as many large paintings, each one inviting to viewer to explore and discover a micro universe.

These examples represent the extremes of scale, and as an artist you will address the issue every time you start a work, and may even consciously choose to push scale to a new extreme to help encourage a new departure or direction. The latter is certainly a good way of forcing change in your work.

Some artists who worked large:
Sculpture: Henry Moore, Antony Caro, Robert Smithson,Richard Serra, Christo, James Turrell.
Painting: Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, JMW Turner, Picasso,

Some artists who worked small:
Sculpture: Giacometti, Naum Gabo,
Painting: William Blake, Cecil Collins, Paul Klee, John Marin, John Virtue.

There are other aspects to scale, for example, the scale of mark you make on the image. Over time you will learn what marks, and what scale of mark is more 'you', these are all parts of your personal language. Two extremes in terms of the scale of mark making may be found in the work of Franz Kline and Mark Tobey, two contemporaneous American painters. Kline painted large monochrome canvases with massive black calligraphic shapes, using the largest brushes available, whilst Tobey's works were also large, but were encrusted with delicate, small, pale 'written' shapes.

A third aspect to scale is the scale of your subject matter itself, and again, this emerges over time. As themes are developed so a preference is formed for close-up flower studies (such as those by Georgia O'Keefe), still-lifes (Morandi), intimate figure paintings (Lucien Freud), crowd scenes (Lowry) and wide landscapes (Turner).

The examples in brackets are the merest tip of the iceberg. As your art unfolds and grows so you may find that the very scale of your subject becomes a recurrent theme in itself.

9 Some Thoughts on Drawing

> Drawing … seems to me to hold the position of being closest to pure thought.
> John Elderfield
>
> Drawing is like making an expressive gesture with the advantage of permanence.
> Matisse.
>
> Drawing and colour are not separate at all; in so far as you paint, you draw.
> Cezanne.

The boundaries between drawing and painting are blurred to the point where they become totally subjective, and most, if not of all, of the 'ideas for painting' in that chapter could also be regarded as 'ideas for drawing'. Yves Klein regarded line as 'colour compressed', whilst colour is 'line expanded and exploded'; in other words line and colour are basically the same thing, differentiated only by their mass.

Heather Spears book *"The Creative Eye"* (2007 Arcturus) provides a good argument against the use of line. It is instinctive for us to naively place lines around the objects we see in the world, but the reality is that lines do not exist, only forms overlapping other forms. This is the realm of pure perception. Art, of course, has long since taken perception and turned it on its head and inside out. The line portraits of David Hockney immediately come to mind to demonstrate the virtue of the line. No less remarkable are the atmospheric soft conte drawings by Seurat which are without line, using tone only.

William Blake loved line, it was the key to his vision; *"Nature has no outline, but Imagination has"*, it was the

means, together with the written word, by which his unique world could be conveyed.

Jackson Pollock also used line, and his vast paintings were composed of the intensive activity of days and weeks of drawing *above* the painting with loose, liquid colour; in other words gestures through air were entrapped onto the canvas via the impacting of paint.

Drawing from the life model is always the best way to train the eye to see keenly and accurately, and the technique acquired by doing this will stand you in good stead regardless of whatever medium or method you choose to follow. Nowadays it is acceptable for artists to have no drawing ability whatsoever. This hasn't always been the case and it still seems strange to read of how the Impressionists were castigated for their apparent lack of drawing technique. The narrow mindedness of these artists' critics show explicitly how trapped most people are in the age they are living in. The best art is of its age, but also transcends it. However, I still stand by the first sentence of this paragraph; like all skills, it is better to have the facility than not.

In drawing the life model look for awkward poses, ones that are harder to depict convincingly. Remember the skeleton underneath, this will encourage believability. (If you have the stomach for it there may be opportunities to draw from the cadaver – to literally get under the skin.) Look for alternative and unfamiliar ways to make marks. If you use lines a lot, then use blocks of tone instead, or vice versa. Take a line for a walk, as Paul Klee did, not removing the drawing implement from the surface until a complete image has been generated. In the same way that we are apt to see lines around objects which do not exist, so we tend to draw objects from the outside in. Try the opposite, working from the

centre of a form outwards towards the point where it disappears (which is the point we usually indicate by line). This will instil a much better appreciation of the roundedness, or three dimensional shapeliness of any form.

A very memorable drawing session I had at college saw the model in continuous motion, moving slowly around the room. The resultant drawing was less a depiction of her, and more so of the *space* that the model was moving through. Many of Giacometti's drawings were of people who were occupying a specific space (usually his studio). This artist was, if anything, *more* concerned with the context than the person, and the sense is that every mark made was an interpretation of the space between Giacometti's eyes and the object being focussed on. As a sculptor foremost he was driven towards depth and form and his visual approach is understandable and effective.

Drawings, like paintings, form like sentences and paragraphs, and the mark making used generates a flow around the whole image. There is a force to every stroke, and likewise to every negative area defined by that stroke. If you draw a line upwards, the movement, or flow of that line is inexorably up, not down. This sense of direction is intrinsically encoded into the line and is one of the key tools in the armoury of a painter or draughtsman.

10 Some Thoughts on Colour

> Colour possesses me. I don't have to pursue it. It will possess me always, I know it. Colour and I are one, I am a painter.
> Paul Klee.
>
> Colour is my day long obsession, joy and torment.
> Monet.

For any artist, and especially if you are a painter, colour and yourself will have a significant and personal relationship. It is an all-encompassing all-powerful passion, one which has driven most artists for all of their lives. In the same way that subject matter can define an artist so can their use of colour. This list emphasizes a number of very distinctive artists with their own colouristic styles:

Giacometti – just greys
Franz Widerberg – just primary colours
Mondrian – black, white and primary colours
Philip Guston – dirty pinks
Franz Kline- black and white
Eileen Cooper – red and black
Andy Goldsworthy – nature's colours
Edvard Munch – colour always used symbolically, especially red as blood
Van Gogh – subtle and sophisticated use of complimentaries
Seurat – tiny dots of colour creating vibrant effects
Josef Albers – subtle closely toned colour
David Hockney – bright flat colour
Roy Lichtenstein – flat colour simulating newspaper cartoon print
Bridget Riley – closely interacting colour creating optical effects of movement and depth
Ad Reinhardt – black on black
Ben Nicholson – white on white

This list could potentially be expanded almost indefinitely to include subtle quirks of many artists. Let it suffice to say that your relationship with colour will determine where your art goes (as a painter and possibly as a sculptor also), it may even prove to be the main driving force behind the work.

For their extraordinary usage of colour the above mentioned artists should be looked at, the following are also very relevant: JMW Turner, Monet, Matisse, Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Chaim Soutine, Willem De Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, Wassily Kandinsky, Alexei Jawlensky, Marc Chagall.

11 Dreams and Creative Play

> Most of my land and townscapes are composite … made up; part real and part imaginary … bits and pieces of my home locality. I don't even know I'm putting them in. They just crop up on their own, like things do in dreams.
> Lowry.

> Art is both creation and recreation. Of the two ideas, I think art as recreation or as sheer play of the human spirit is more important.
> Lin Yutang.

> Creative work is play. It is free speculation using the materials of one's chosen form.
> Stephen Nachmanovitch.

For those involved in any serious activity, 'play' seems to be a dirty, irrelevant word. It implies looseness, childishness or lack of focus, a drifting of attention from the high seriousness of the activity being undertaken. One dictionary definition reads: *"To deal or behave carelessly or indifferently; toy"*, alternatively *"to do something for amusement".* In other words the levity of play has no place in any serious business, has it?

Music also is play-ed, and art and music do co-exist quite happily (see Kandinsky for instance), so here is a converging of the word 'play' towards something more acceptable.

Thankfully art is one field where play not only has a place but it can be regarded as an essential attribute towards developing exciting art, and all of my 'ideas for painting' in the chapter of the same name have a playful edge. These are all about developing new and unexpected ways of making images, and in so doing, opening doors to greater creative exploration. The notion of generating an accident, then working with it, is

pleasurable, exciting and progressive all at the same time.

> The artist has the ability to mix established patterns and make unique new ones, to play seriously, and to work playfully.
> Heather Spears, *"The Creative Eye"* (2007)

> The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity.
> Carl Jung.

> Play is the exultation of the possible.
> Martin Buber.

Incorporating a playful, almost childlike aspect into your work is the surest way to brush out cobwebs, and push upwards and outwards to new heights and widths. A playful mind is alert and ready to accept accidents as possible new breakthroughs.

> A creative train of thought is set off by: the unexpected, the unknown, the accidental, the disorderly, the absurd, the impossible.
> Asger Jorn.

> I throw down the gauntlet to chance.
> Joan Miro.

A stiff academic artist would never have transformed a toy car into a baboon's head as Picasso so memorably did (*"Baboon and Young",* 1951), instead he or she would have sought to depict the primate with conventional materials, achieving – yes, you guessed it – a conventional result. The inventive and supremely creative appetite of Picasso can be seen right through his work, and he is a prime example of the value of play to the artist.

> The chief enemy of creativity is 'good' sense.
> Picasso.

Analytical cubism sounds like a very cold term, but in the hands of Picasso we get *"Man Smoking A Pipe"* (1911), full of playful invention of shapes and angles loosely derived from the original subject. Paul Klee is another great example, devising any and every possible means to create whimsical, imaginative images of creatures and figures which previously existed only as vague archetypes in the artist's head.

If you've only ever worked at an easel with brushes, and wonder why your work is not really evoking your inner vision, or feel restricted by your methods, then try something, *anything,* that is different, that takes your familiar tried and tested methods and turns them upside down. This is not creating chaos for its own sake, it is encouraging a change; a change which your artistic brain yearns to savour and be stimulated by. New forms will arise, new colours appear and new ideas are created. This is what the creative act, and what play, are both all about.

The Small Theatre of the Brain.

Robert Louise Stevenson wrote that dreams occur in *"that small theatre of the brain which we keep brightly lighted all night long".* When we sleep our minds are still busy. Dreaming is one of the mysteries of nature, and no one seems to definitely know why we do it. It does seem clear, however, that dreaming is highly self instructive, and at night our artistic brains enjoy piecing together seemingly random bits of memory and subconscious. The results are often ludicrous; the odd time lines, the confluence of factors which could never physically meet, the abstracted tensions generated from incongruous happenings, the recurrent themes which develop over years. You would not want to live these dreams for real.

In the first half of the twentieth century a number of artists, loosely labelled 'The Surrealists' sought to open up and exploit this great slumbering resource, and make visible images never seen before. The results were often memorable, and almost always disturbing: Dali's melting watches, De Chirico's haunted townscapes, Ernst's mysterious ziggurat structures.

At their best there is a logic to these images, in the same way that dreams sometimes merge incongruent themes into a new revelatory form. Some famous examples include: Paul McCartney dreamt the melody for *"Yesterday"* (1965); the poem "Kubla Khan" (1797) was dreamt by Coleridge, then partly forgotten after the poet was famously interrupted by a visitor from Porlock. Major scientific discoveries have filtered through the dream world and into the minds of Otto Loewi and Friedrich August Kekule….

> Most so called 'intuitive' discoveries are such associations made in the subconscious.
> Otto Loewi.

….whilst Robert Louis Stevenson, whose quote opens this chapter, was regularly inspired by the stories created in his dreaming mind, and regarded them as more entertaining than any literature.

It's as if the sleeping brain is literally *playing*; trying this, trying that, experimenting, alchemically mixing unlikely potions of nonsense. This state of play is obviously natural, and nobody can reasonably suggest that the oddness of dreams is 'wrong'; they are a part of every one of us, a part which enriches our lives greatly.

Dreams have their place in the make up of an artist, after all if you regard imagination as a useful attribute,

then your brain is exercising it on autopilot every night – very useful!

Art as Refuge.

> I have made my world and it is a much better world than I ever saw outside.
> Louise Nevelson.
>
> If there were a hiding place in my work, I would slip into it.
> Chagall.
>
> Art is an effort to create, beside the real world, a more human world.
> Andre Maurois.

Art is all things to all people, and there are many reasons why people make it. As the above quotes suggest, art may be made for very personal reasons such as a safe haven from the world at large. Many artists have created an alternative universe - their art is rich and diverse enough to be regarded as such – and one feels there is such conviction in the works of Miro, Klee and Ernst, for example, that the artists were exploring new, personal and alternative realities; real places which have been born through them. Here are some more quotes which indicate this:

> The safest way to avoid the world is through art; and the safest way to be linked to the world is through art.
> Randall Jarrell.
>
> Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time.
> Thomas Merton.
>
> Art is my world the way I want to see it. It's a refuge, a joy, and makes living in this difficult world much nicer.
> Janet Toney.
>
> We bring vast imagination and fantasy to people, a reminder to keep going, even when people say we live in another world

and our feet are not on the ground. A good response is, "Well, my world is rather nice--why don't you visit it sometime?".
Corrie Scott

12 Fear of Abstraction
(Don't Be Afraid...)

> I'm not an abstractionist ... I'm not interested in relationships of colour or form or anything else.
> Mark Rothko.
>
> Forms that mean nothing and represent nothing and remind one of nothing, yet that will move one's soul so deeply, so strongly as before only music has been able to do.
> Robert Delaunay.
>
> Even an abstract form has to have a likeness.
> Willem De Kooning.
>
> Nothing as drastic an innovation as abstract art could have come into existence, save as the consequence of a most profound, relentless, unquenchable need. The need is for felt experience – intense, immediate, direct, subtle, unified, warm, vivid, rhythmic.
> Robert Motherwell.

Art Historians trip over themselves in trying to determine which was the first ever 'abstract' painting – it probably occurred around about 1910 and was painted by a Russian – either Kandinsky or Malevich. At last here was an image that refuted all pictorial, narrative and representational ingredients – it was a moment that art had been waiting for; the bomb which finally exploded the 'old', and heralded the 'new'.

And the 'new' prospered; dull Victorian solidity gave way to Modernist vogue; artists used colours, forms and ideas previously undreamt of; intellectuals were inspired and found that there was a worthy cause for their rhetoric, and as art revelled in its new ubiquity so people took really seriously the issue of abstraction versus representation. From a distance of nearly a hundred years such issues seem to be missing the point by a few light years. The need to remove the subject from art

has been a concern of very few artists, and the best abstract art is far more satisfying *because* it deals directly with subject, in other words it has grown organically from an initial subject base which underpins and provides the work with a rock solid foundation and reason for existing.

> There is no abstract art. You must always start with something. Afterwards you can remove all traces of reality. There's no danger then, anyway, because the idea of the object will have left an indelible mark.
> Picasso.

By comparison, subject-less art is flimsy and unsatisfying, it is pretty room decoration best left as filler on a back wall, perhaps to brighten up an otherwise dull hotel foyer or restaurant wall. Which takes us to Mark Rothko, a shining example of depth and meaning in abstraction, whose works famously occupy a room in the Tate Gallery; one of the most intense rooms you may ever enter.

Equally famous as the work itself is the original intended location that it was commissioned for. This was the Seagram Restaurant in New York, one of the most prestigious and expensive places to eat in the city. It is one of the mysteries of art that Rothko even considered providing his dark, intense paintings for such a place. Perhaps he really did want to *"ruin the appetite of every son of a bitch who ever eats in that room"* as he was quoted saying. But in the end, he withdrew his work and in a protracted process it ended up going to London. Perhaps he feared that his paintings would be reduced to mere background in the restaurant, a sad hypothesis implying that abstraction could never be as cruel and torturous as a comparative figurative work could be. So, the restaurateurs of New York were saved a possible appetite killing display of art (interestingly they do have

art by Frank Stella, one of the few abstractionists serious about removing all traces of subject matter), and the people of London instead gained some of the finest paintings ever made. They have recently and memorably been described as:

> …lovely in their oppression, erotic in their cruelty. These are paintings that seem to exist on the skin inside an eyelid. They are what you imagine might be the last lights, the final flickers of colour that register in a mind closing down. Jonathan Jones "*The Guardian"*, December 7 2002.

Rothko's art, as well as that of the American Abstract Expressionists Pollock, De Kooning, Gorky, Baziotes, Motherwell, Tobey, Kline, Still, Newman and others, was bound up with the desire to express the artist's personal vision. Subject was more important than the mere stuff on the surface, and Rothko himself denied that his work was abstract as the quote at the beginning of this chapter states. So a question arises about abstraction: are we just kidding ourselves by using this all encompassing word 'abstract', because it seems to be a much too lazy way of defining a painting? There is also the spin-off 'abstracted' which implies a much softer, more acceptable form of image making. In this case the word applies to the removing of a form from the specific reality of its representational appearance, and any removal whatsoever could be described as 'abstracted'. Perhaps the reader may understand that these are just words and poor attempts to apply classification, in the same way that human nature seems to need to classify and name all that we see.

Artists engaged in the topsy-turvy, obtuse and ever winding Journey of their art are on another *planet* to those people who seems to have a desperate, gnawing and intrusive need for classification. Whilst we are creating we are beyond words, beyond interpretation;

we create shapes, we destroy shapes, always creating, always destroying. Somewhere at the edge of all this activity finished paintings and sculptures get spewed out, born and left to fend for themselves amongst the critics (and everybody is one, of course).

Today (as an example) I may be painting a picture where the subject has been corrupted and diminished and remoulded and reconstituted and stripped down and built up and thoroughly effaced yet suggestively indicated; pushed away and driven back, playfully expanded upon and cruelly reduced; where I was aware of it, then lost it, then found it somewhere else (next week); where it gripped me, befuddled me, switched me off, then galvanized me immensely …. and some people seem to mostly be bothered as to whether it's 'abstract' or not! The point ultimately is that art is about the release of creative potential and those people who are getting hung up on what it should and shouldn't look like are missing the point. Be yourself – it can be hard to *find* yourself sometimes, but you know when it is right.

> In the process of making a painting in an abstract way, the painter is in search of a reality. Not one of realistic objects, but of the complete end result. The painting is experienced as a whole, and must evoke in the painter the absolute conviction that this is how it should be and no other way. Paul Burlin.

Painting is ebb and flow, push and pull, a constant attempt to balance the voice of the painting with the voice of the painter. Sometimes you go with the flow, sometimes you wish to guide the image more forcefully. Sometimes the recognizable image prevails, sometimes not. This is what the joy of each Journey is all about.

Art and Music, the ultimate abstraction.

> Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposively, to cause vibrations in the soul.
> Kandinsky.
>
> A painter (who is) longing to express his internal life, cannot but envy the ease with which music ... achieves this end.
> Kandinsky.

The first Kandinsky quote above allies art and music together into a seamless whole, as does Delaunay's quote from the beginning of this chapter. These and many other artists from the early 1900s emerged from the modernist explosion realizing that the pure abstract form of music was something to aspire towards in painting also. Going further back in time, Delacroix regarded his palette as a scale on which harmonies were composed.

There has always existed a kind of frustration about the effortlessness of music compared to all other art forms – Walter Pater had said that "*all art aspires to the condition of music*" – a truism that left all creators in other media trailing in the wake of the ultimate expressive medium. The frustration lies in the fact that music seems so readable, and that our brains are so capably wired to interpret totally abstract audible harmonies (or dissonances), and yet so awkwardly struggle to 'understand' abstract painting. It seems that a few years at art college helps this process immensely, but what of those people who haven't been able to invest the time and energy into a visual education? Are they permanently to be denied the pleasures of abstract art through a lack of training? Alas it seems for many people that the only way to open the door of understanding is to offer *words of explanation,* which

then of course begs the question – 'why paint when words will do?'.

Giving a painting time is the best thing to do. Painters don't make subject-less paintings to be deliberately obtuse: give them time, but try and disable the analytical, pragmatic side of your brain – it's the wrong side for art! The creative side of the brain is soft and yielding, dreamy and poetic, emotive and riotously imaginative, and it is the side which reacts to art at its deepest levels.

13 Putting it into Perspective, or, Grading the Ungradeable

> Art is about what you see, it's not what you hear, what other people say or what teachers say, it's what *you* see, and then what you feel that counts.
> Jim Dine.

Art can be a frustrating thing to do. I mean, who knows what is good and what is bad? And why are they right … or wrong? Is what anybody ever tells you relevant and useful? How do we grade art? Should it be graded?

Lots and lots of questions. Eventually you will find yourself in a situation where your work is being compared, classified, called 'better than' so and so, or 'not as good as' so and so. Do the opinions of these observers have any weight to them? Unfortunately the answer is not yes, or no, but *maybe*! There are some very observant people out there, and many others who are not so, such as the type of person who believes that a glance at a painting has magically told them the full story, and they do not need to look again, ever. You may think these people do not exist but they can be seen at every art exhibition, and somehow it is more sad than amusing to see them spending more time reading the caption on a pictures label than looking at the picture itself. There follows a curious glance at the painting, 'oh, so *that's* what the caption meant' …. next picture!

Many of us will also have chastening experiences at Art College, and it is unfortunate that to fund a qualification in the creative act it is necessary that some grading is applied. You can be lucky and get good, responsive tutors. That is a big help because if you can convey to

them, or if they are good enough to elicit it from you, what you are attempting to do, so they can put it into perspective, and apply advice, and ultimately, a grade. But it is still a subjective and cursory summation of your work, it can never be any other way. You are dependent on the power of your intuition; you already know you are your strongest critic (aren't you?), and in time you will know what is good and what isn't. The eye learns with everything it sees, and experience is the great teller of the truth.

There is another way, a method which can help weigh up what an artist has done, and that is by comparing intention with result. If it were a formula it would read something like:

*Quality of Intention + *Quality of Result = Grade

(Quality, of course, is a contentious word, and all readers are directed to Robert Pirsig's "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" for its remarkable thesis on Quality.)

Generally artists with big ambitious ideas have a lot further to go to make their vision flesh. One would certainly give points for trying such grand ideas and the depth and vastness of art is such that ambition need have no limit.

A practical (and perhaps facetious) example of the notion: one would give Michelangelo a top grade for painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. I mean ….look at the intention… and the execution!

Likewise with Rothko, who was also at the very zenith of his field: large paintings of bands of colour, apparently non-objective, yet deliberately imbued with subject: tragic, boundless, religious, violent. How he did it is a mystery, and if you don't see it, then sit in front of a

cluster of them in the Rothko room at the Tate Modern. These large paintings are subtle, yet incredibly active in the space they inhabit, recently described as *"a room full of violence"* (Daily Telegraph 6/5/2006), and *"one of the most compelling experiences to be had in any gallery in the world"* (Ibid). The paintings are significantly more than just the colour on the surfaces; they seem to possess a dark effervescence, even soul, as if you were looking right into a fragment of living consciousness.

The sensory result of this 'abstract painting' is literally phenomenal, and I believe it to be one of the greatest achievements of all time.

These are two extreme examples of grading art by intention and results, but you can try applying this principle to all you see, and it should help you get a better grip on what the artist wants you to see, versus what you actually do see.

As far as intention is concerned, try to aim high, for you do not want your work to be seen as facile and flaccid, do you? Consider Cezanne's apples, and make no mistake, these are not a bog standard still lifes; those apples are the most monumental apples in art history. Cezanne sought to infuse all his subjects, whether people, objects or the Mont St Victoire with this same definitive intensity, so much so that paintings took weeks or months to make, and even a single brushstroke could take hours to consider.

> If a painter performed each new work with that thirsting of mind and humility of purpose with which he did the first, how intense would be the result.
> Samuel Palmer.

Cezanne did just that, and he will always be regarded as one of the greats.

14 Dips and Troughs, or, Navigating Through the Dark Times

> In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.
> Albert Einstein.
>
> If you want to change your art, change your habits.
> Clement Greenberg.
>
> The wretched artist ... is alternatively the lowest worm that ever crawled when no fire is in him; or the loftiest God that ever stood when the fire is going.
> Caitlin Thomas.
>
> Art is like a lover whom you run away from but who comes back and picks you up.
> Tracey Emin.

There can be a rollercoaster quality to the production of Art. The highs can be very high, when the juices are flowing wildly and everything that flows from your mind and hands works. But the lows are every bit as low, and when that sense of bleakness kicks in, it can loom like a cloud for... well, *ages*.

In the same way that there are many stimuli which encourage artistic products, so there are nefarious and sneaky demons determined to nip it in the bud, and spread vile canker in what was once a burgeoning garden of Art. These demons are often created by everyday things and situations. Stress most definitely is not conducive to art, and in fact, a calm balanced mind, is the most suitable state.

Art is always yes, but sometimes art is also no.

Am I being overdramatic? No!

The fact is, there are times when it comes out all wrong, when nothing works. If you are lucky this lasts for minutes, hours or at worst, days. Unfortunately it can just go on and on. It also occurs that your mind empties, maybe even gets 'burnt out'; there's nothing left upstairs and everything feels stale. As an artist it is a very bad feeling. What can be done?

For starters refer to my 'Ideas for Painting' chapter, which can be regarded as a resource for finding something else, *anything else*, another way to making images. Also refer to David Smith's questions which are to be found at www.davidsmithestate.org. These searching questions are aimed at students of art. Written by a master sculptor, they are thought provoking, awkward, even infuriating, but always they are true to the core of what art and being an artist is about. They may help you see another way through your malaise.

What to Do in the 'Down' Periods.
Sometimes the best thing is just to stop creating, get the batteries recharged, live a little without this big 'ART' cloud always hovering above you. Perhaps, dare I say it, even *forget* about art for a while. Whilst creativity lies dormant you can, in the mean time, continue the work in other directions:

- Stretch up new batches of canvas or paper.
- Learn how to make picture frames.
- Learn how to make paper so you can better control the surfaces you work on.
- Or, if you know how to make frames, select a number of your best works and frame them.
- Read up on art history, there's a lot of fascinating stuff out there, and expanding your knowledge about it can only be a good thing.

- Go deeper into the subjects of your work; what can you learn about it? Maybe there's a new line of research to follow.
- Take a course to learn a new skill or facet – printmaking, photography, ceramics, something musical or literary – it's all relevant to the creative act.
- Go life drawing, go to an open class (not one where you will be judged and graded), use a mirror to draw yourself, savour the technical challenge.
- Visit exhibitions of new and old art, and also museums.
- Start building a website (see the chapter entitled *"Getting Online")*.
- Work on your CV for approaching galleries.
- Brainstorm a list of possible exhibition venues and apply to them with examples of your work (see the chapter 'Approaching Galleries'). Getting a show might be just the thing to get the creative juices flowing again.
- New experiences, new stimulations, new places. The mind likes new things, so help it along….

> ...the unconscious, …will not produce new ideas unless it has been painstakingly stuffed full of facts, impressions, concepts, and an endless series of conscious ruminations and attempted solutions.
> Morton Hunt, *"The Universe Within".*

15 Approaching Galleries

Most artists will probably end up exhibiting their work in art galleries. This need not be a traumatic exercise, and many not only enjoy doing it, but also regard it as a necessary part of their practice – the culmination, or logical conclusion of the creative act. There is no shame in admitting that the public perception of your work is very important to you, but of course, art that is simply made for the edification of others will always have an empty, arid quality, as if it was skilfully manufactured, rather than soulfully created, and the reader of this book so far will understand how personal and absolute the creative act is.

So rather than being some kind of corporate exercise, exhibiting may be a legitimate extension to your art. It could be the public face of your creative quest, the visible results of the ongoing journey.

It is a whole new ball game once you decide to take the results of your artistic explorations and actually release them into the wide world. What could prompt you into doing this?

The Real Value of Exhibiting.
There are many reasons to exhibit: a reaction from other people, an affirmation that what you have made has worth, approval from your peers and other artists. When artists appreciate your work it is a good sign that you are on the right track. And also money may be made from exhibiting, but don't expect too much of that!

I think, however, that there is one very good reason to exhibit which may not have occurred to you. That is to

see your work properly presented and in a well arranged group, and to *learn* from it.

In your studio there is rarely an opportunity to really *look* at your work, and place it in context with itself. This is the real value of exhibiting. Suddenly you see complex interrelationships between works: now you can see how a painting you did nine months ago saw the first subtle emergence of a theme which is now central to the latest paintings. Or look how there is an undercurrent of blues coming into the work. Simple boxy shapes have become broken up into more complex forms. Or perhaps the opposite has happened. And that figure form you started using is now looking more interesting and definitely needs a new series of works to be developed. The scale of the work is a bit constrained – must start some larger ones! Or maybe you now see that the more successful works are the smaller or more detailed ones.

The point here is that the development of your art is now made visible; it is there to be reacted against and the clues as to what you do next are there to be interpreted. Every exhibition you have gives you this opportunity to explore and interpret your own work. So even if you have no need for the other reasons to exhibit, this one alone gives it genuine value and reason.

Practicalities.
In approaching galleries, firstly, be creative! There are many possible spaces that do not bear the tag 'gallery', and a bit of brainstorming will open up many other avenues that are equally valid. For starters: churches, church halls, cafes, empty shop units, libraries, offices, hotel foyers, public art trails.

In identifying venues the next logical step is to visualize how your work would actually 'go' in the space. The basic rule is don't bother approaching galleries or other venues if your work is obviously not appropriate to their 'house styles'. The more sympathetic your work is to the venue, the more likely you are to be accepted as an exhibitor, and the less effort you'll have to put in hawking your work at unresponsive gallery owners. The last thing you want to encounter is indifference, and the wrong type of venue may well appear to be very uninterested in your artistic journey.

There are many ways to introduce your work to a gallery: a well written letter (not too detailed, and which is tailored to the style of the venue as you perceive it), pictures or video on CD, high quality photographs, slides, links to your website or myspace page. Try to use the name of the gallery owner in your communication, which is always better than 'Dear Sir or Madam'. Use whatever means you are most comfortable with, and what you are best at. In my younger, braver days, I would drive to many galleries in a single day, armed with a box of paintings; literally cold calling, and with some success. Gallery owners are just people after all, and they like (or should like) to see new work. Be positive!

If you are not great at taking images of your work, get some advice from the Internet, or buy or borrow the services of a good photographer (maybe he or she will do you a free photo session in return for a small picture). It is mostly common sense – good, even daylight and a stable camera are the two most important factors. Centre the painting as accurately as possible and get as close as you can whilst maintaining focus. The resultant images need not be perfect, as digital manipulation software such as Paint Shop Pro and

Photoshop are excellent at tidying up, cropping and improving digital photos. Obviously the better the original images are the less struggle you will have making them look good, so put the greater effort into the actual photographic process itself.

Follow up after a few days with a phone call if you are brave enough, and don't be too disheartened if the response if a brief negative. Things are different in the 'real world' and that's how it is sometimes. C'est La Vie!

You may prefer to wait for them to get in touch with you, sometimes the stock answer is "we've put your letter and images on file", so you probably won't hear from them again! If the response is in the positive, then don't leave them waiting. Get in touch and move things on to the next step, which may be a visit to the venue with examples of your work, or maybe they will come to you, looking to spend time in your studio to get a deeper feeling of the quality and variety of your work.

Pricing your work is a thorny point, one that is hard to give advice on. The gallery owner may have some good points to make concerning how to pitch the prices, and you can also try and research this issue yourself by looking out for similar types of work to your own in other galleries. Obviously if your work develops a track record for selling at a certain price then this job gets easier to do.

Be serious and professional in all your dealings with the gallery. Remember that you reflect your work. Be proud of it, you are its current keeper, you are the conduit through which it came, and you are the mouthpiece through which your art finds its champion. In conveying your attitude to your own work you are

giving the gallery many clues as to how seriously you should be taken.

If a compromising situation does arise where, for example, your deeper and more impressive works are being passed over in favour of more trivial sketches, then keep your head and think about how important this gallery is to you at this time. Sometimes it may be worthwhile to go ahead, sometimes not; it is for you to know what is right for your art.

Take advice also, some gallery owners do know what they are talking about (not all of them, though…), and a perceptive person might have some good points to make. Objectivity is often a good thing, after all you can't see your art objectively at all – don't pretend that you can! – and they may be able to suggest better ways of framing a work, or have spotted an interesting theme, perhaps a vague undercurrent not noticed by you, but one with a wealth of new possibilities, or maybe he or she is right that an aspect of your work which you've previously not regarded as that important, is in fact so.

Constructive criticism is far, far more valuable than mute acceptance, so encourage it, certainly don't expect that your work is beyond that, because you will never go forward with such an attitude.

Dos and Don'ts.
To gain a wider reach for your show try and develop a mailing list, and get in touch with newspapers and magazines well in advance (if your gallery doesn't already do this). Use the internet to find addresses and details of relevant contacts.

Put time into writing a statement, even if it is only three or four lines. Most people appreciate a 'lead in' to

looking at art, and anything that encourages understanding and acceptance is worth the trouble.

If the gallery doesn't do the press release, write one yourself. It's not as difficult as it sounds. No press officer wants to read a long winded press release so keep it short and relevant stating the venue, dates and times of opening, title of the show, anything that is particularly appropriate to the publication (for instance if you were born in the area, or if the work is specifically inspired by a local landmark), a short statement about you and your work (they like a bit of biographical interest) and if you have a good quote from a reviewer about your work use that too.

Be professional. Always be on time, do what you have agreed upon, respect the gallery owner's need to make a living, respect their advice, but always make your point if there is a reason for any awkwardness they might perceive in your work. Art is allowed to be obtuse and awkward!

Read contracts properly before signing. Make sure you know what costs will arise and what commission the venue will take on sales.

If an image of your work is included on the exhibitions invite or poster, make sure that piece is in the show. Who knows; somebody may travel a hundred miles to come and see it…

Know the gallery, know the owners, know what makes them tick, and try to determine what they expect of you. Do they have a good mailing list? A good reputation? Are they well situated with lots of passing trade, or is their mailing list so good that they prosper even though they are miles from a centre of population?

A good mailing list is very, very useful. Certainly you should send invites to future exhibitions to all who have bought your work.

If you are sharing a show with other artists, be interested in them and their work. You may strike up a productive partnership, and they may be able to help you as well as you help them. Altruism is a wonderful thing!

If you make 2D as well as 3D pieces then use the opportunity to pair works so they bounce off each other. You may not think there is a striking link between them, but of course there is, the link is **you**!

If a display cabinet is available put in sketchbooks, maquettes, small paintings or photographs and objects relevant to the pieces on show.

Make sure you know well in advance how the work will be hung – string or mirror plates. Do you need your own plinths? If so make sure they are in good condition before using them. Plinths are mute, semi-invisible and neutral supports which aim to promote the pieces sat on them whilst drawing no attention whatsoever to themselves.

The same goes for framing (see the chapter on framing). Make sure the frames are in good condition, you really don't want people not buying your work simply because the frame is tatty! Always polish the glass on framed paintings; the last thing you want the viewer to see is a smudgy fingerprinted mess on your masterpiece!

Should the painting be exhibited flat on the wall (Mondrian's preference), or tilting forward (a la Malevich)?

Be critical when visiting other artist's exhibitions, learn from the good things you see, and the bad.

If you have free reign over hanging the show, consider it as a whole. Think about the entire look, perhaps the walls are the wrong colour, maybe the lighting should be dimmed. Design a flowing sequence of images, don't just group large pieces together, but instead create a kind of visual narrative between all the works, so that the visitor is taken on a journey from A to Z.

Don't bring work to the gallery in a drastically different style from what the owner is expecting. Remember they okayed your work based on what they saw in those earlier meetings, so make sure there are no big surprises on the day of hanging!

Put effort into packing the work so it arrives in as good a condition as the day it was made.

Don't rush hanging the work, the look and feel of the show is as important at the work itself, and deserves proper time and attention to details. If you are supplying labels make sure they are computer generated, preferably laminated, with your name, the title of the work, media used, and selling price. Paint mirror plates the same colour as the wall, with a steady hand so you are painting the mirror plates not the frame….

Don't say yes to anything until you are ready to do so. The gallery may be interested in an exclusivity deal, and if it's a good gallery with an international reputation, it would be hard to refuse, but you need to seriously consider whether you want to sign away your other options, and for how long.

Keep in touch with the gallery whilst the show is on, but don't pester them. They will be pleased to know you are interested in the welfare of the show, but don't expect major developments every day. If you are able to, make yourself available for 'meet the artist' days and be prepared to meet potential customers and interested parties at the gallery.

At the end of the show try and put in perspective what you have achieved. Where can this go next? How can it be made better? Did you get a newspaper or magazine review? Has another gallery owner been on the phone with an offer of an exhibition? Did it sell well, or at all? Did the work look good? Was it the right space? What does the gallery owner think? Was he or she right for you? Perhaps this show was a small trial of your work and now they want to call you back for a full blown one person show. That would certainly be a result.

Maybe once is enough for exhibiting, perhaps you have learnt that you do not need to do this, or maybe you will become the indefatigable exhibiting artist, like Edvard Munch, whose 'Frieze of Life' was incessantly shown all over Europe in the early 1900s. It is for you to know which course is the right one, and if you are in doubt then try it again before giving up completely.

Framing.
Put a frame around your painting and in a way you are telling the viewing public exactly how **you yourself** see your work.

After years of experimenting with framing I would say that there are two possible approaches.

1) The frame is a discrete support for the painting
2) The frame is part of the painting

Option 1 is all about the work in the frame, and the frame itself is neutral, unobtrusive, modest and undemanding. Perhaps the painting within the frame shouts at the viewer 'look at me'! But whilst this is happening the frame is retiring quietly and modestly, in other words, the picture is doing all the work and the frame is functional and silent. By following this approach you can standardize your framing, probably using neutral colours: ivory mounts and natural wood coloured mouldings. Nothing fancy at all. These neutral frames can be used over and over again and will never smother the picture contained within. They are very suited to recycling and will hang well on most people's walls.

Option 2 is where your creativity can really kick in. The frame now is an extension to the painting, it may even be more powerful than the painting itself (though that would suggest a certain lack of confidence in the work). Look at a Russian Icon and consider how the frame is an intrinsic part of the entire piece; scintillating and harmonious, an organic growth from the image at its centre. Or the paintings of Howard Hodgkin; they are richly vibrant, the fluid painting continuing beyond the conventional edge of the support until the frame and the painting have fused into one.

Whilst some of the elaborate gold monstrosities seen on many old master paintings seem to be utterly unsympathetic to the work, there is a case for decorative gold on a frame if you painted like Gustav Klimt for example.

If you were to adopt this idea, then there would certainly be a lot of experimenting to do to find an individual and successful design, and each frame may take longer to

make than the painting itself. The end results, however, may well be worth it.

The principals of presentation are basically very simple: to show off your artwork as clearly and effectively as possible, and common sense applied to the matter will yield effective results. Know the limitations of the space it is going into and the process becomes much easier.

16 Getting online

A few years ago a gallery owner said to me that soon, if you didn't have a website as an artist, it would be the equivalent of not having a telephone number. Well, we haven't got to that state yet, but there can be no denying the use of a website nowadays: an accurate and informative introduction to your work that is immediately accessible to anyone, anywhere in the world – sounds quite handy!

Your first reaction to this may be something bordering on consternation. After all, isn't there *enough* to do already? It looks like a pretty big undertaking with a steep learning curve and it is true that a large site with hundreds of images and texts would certainly need a lot of building. But once built it is a tool you will use again and again and, thanks to the power of the search engines people will come to *you* without you needing to lift a finger!

Where to start

The key, as in all things, is to start at the beginning with the essential basics. The overall design comes first and the site soon grows with adding one or two pictures a week (or more if you please).

Define what you want the site to be – is it a basic showcase for your work or a fully fledged selling site? It may be somewhere in between, but it is not difficult to integrate full credit card and shopping cart facilities into a website (via Paypal, for example), and there may be a handy income stream achieved as a result of doing this.

When you have decided on the purpose of the site, design it on paper. By all means borrow design ideas

from other sites, and pay special attention to navigation. The last thing you want is your visitors struggling to get around your site – keep it simple and self-explanatory.

The standard types of navigational links include:

- Home
- Galleries
- Biography/CV
- Contact the Artist
- Statements/Press Coverage
- Exhibition Schedules

And if you are hoping to sell your work

- View Shopping Cart

Use a few decent sized images on your home page, which can then link to longer pages with a greater variety of works. Perhaps split the galleries up into themes, or years. Don't put too many images on any one page – whilst internet speeds are getting faster all the time, it is still hard work scrolling down really long pages.

As well as designing the front page, adopt its style for all the pages on the site, and create a site map which shows how everything links. This will help you visualize the site in its entirety and make it easier to build. Always make every page link back to your home back, so visitors can go back to the start instantly no matter how far into the site they are.

What is your name?

Choosing a name of the website is also important because not only is it the address which you will hope everyone remembers, but also the search engines will catalogue your site according to its name. They will also consider other factors, in particular the quality of the

text which should be well written, informative and scattered with relevant keywords.

As an artist the name of your site should certainly be your own name and if you find it to be already taken then you could add 'art' afterwards. As a suffix 'com' is the dearest option but also seems to be the most desirable, and is the one with the ubiquitous international appeal. 'net' is also a possibility, or a suffix which is particular to the country you are in (in my case .co.uk)

Building It

Site building software is very user friendly these days, and you can easily build a site without knowing any code, or even having to design anything. They can generate links and thumbnail images automatically, which saves a lot of work. Be sure, however, that your design isn't compromised by the style of the templates supplied with the software. Generally too many graphics or decorative features will detract from the presentation of your work.

You can take web design much further by using WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) editors such as FrontPage and Dream Weaver which allow huge flexibility in building exactly the right site. Or, for the ultimate in dedication, delve into the mysterious and arcane world of scripts for ultimate control over your site.

ISPs

Finding an Internet Service Provider (ISP) can seem daunting simply because there are so many of them, and with prices to suit all pockets, including free. Make sure if you do have a free site that it doesn't flash adverts all over your work, and you probably will also find your web

address is compromised to include the host's name in it, for example: www.danielpaulo.anysite.com.

Even well featured hosting packages can be very cheap, and an impressive list of features is available, most of which you won't need. A serious artist's site has no need for fancy graphics and sound, but you may find use for streaming video or wish to provide video downloads. You shouldn't need to spend too much per month to get a website which has plenty of scope for expansion, and you can always upgrade later as well. Many of the ISPs also encourage customers with special prices for the first few months.

How to get your site online

These days ISPs want to make it as easy and as pain free as possible to get your site online, and many of the complexities of the field need never bother you. This is one of those technicalities which may be as simple or as in depth as you please.

Basically speaking, files from your PC are uploaded to the ISP's Host server via File Transfer Protocol (FTP). The host will usually provide an online webpage which will allow you to do this without any effort, or, if you prefer, very cheap (or free) software is available to do this. A username and password (supplied by the ISP) will be needed to login every time you need to upload files. Not only will you need to upload the files of the web pages but also all images and graphics used. Everything needs to reside in the same place on the host's server so you won't have any missing bits in the online version of your site.

Once online, your site is stored in your ISP's Host server, and it is from there that all visitors actually access it.

Visibility
A great looking website is a fine thing, but not much use if no one is aware of it. Visibility on the internet is a big deal, and to be well placed on Google is to be well seen and heavily visited. The search engines are your friend, they will catalogue your site, and then all of their visitors will be given the option to visit your site, or similar other sites, depending upon the keywords they have entered. As mentioned before, keywords are important, and you should brainstorm a list of ones relevant to your site, and then integrate them into your text. Don't overload or endlessly repeat keywords; search engines are wise to this and regard it as a form of 'spamming'.

The titles of your pages are also a factor and when your site is shown in a search engine listing the title of the page is usually featured. Get some keywords and your name in the title for your home page and keep it no longer than about 10-15 words. Use different titles for other pages, so they accurately tell the viewer and the search engines what is on those pages.

It is very easy to submit your site to a search engine, many of them will ask simply for the web address, and then they will do the rest, sending an online robot, or spider, to visit your site and weigh it up. There are free submission services that will bulk submit your site to a cluster of search engines, which will save some time. Only do this once a month, however, as the search engines are very powerful, and if you do anything to upset them, such as submitting too often (considered to be spamming), they may blacklist you. It is also possible to pay internet companies to do huge submission sweeps of your site to many online directories and search engines. The value of these services is questionable, as is the genuinely visibility of most of the places where your site will get listed. It is

probably best to find out which are the top 10 search engines (find this out …. by using a search engine!) and stick with those.

Use your web address in all communications, it is potentially as important as your phone number, physical address or email address.

I'd like a website, but…
....it looks like a lot to do! The truth is, once it is all in place, your website will be out there 24/7, always visible, and anyone from anywhere may be looking at anytime! Once built, maintenance can be a few minutes a month, perhaps just to include a new newspaper review, or exhibition details and sometimes more pictures will need to be included.

It is possible to have a site made for you, and the people who do this kind of thing professionally will usually make a very slick, well designed site, but it won't come cheaply. If you do take this option you must be provided with the facility to update the site yourself. After all, your site may look great today, but soon it will need new information and pictures adding. This is easy enough to do, but only if the web designers build in the capability.

17 Ambitions

Once you have developed a body of work, cultivated a personal vision, and unlocked the latent creativity which you have always possessed…. well, what then? It may be such an intuitive and impulsive act that you just have to carry on doing it, without a care for peer acceptance, and you feel that the build up of paintings and sculptures is just an avoidable by product of the process. You may even begrudge them cluttering up your zen-like headspace. Artists who create with no intention of exhibiting their output are to be greatly admired, for they are the truest artists; making without foresight, without inhibitions or self-consciousness; always making. It could almost be something to aspire towards….

On the other hand perhaps you have exhibited your art many times and have a feel for how your work fits in the wider world, but maybe in recent years you have settled into a productive but relatively undemanding ease (for example). Yes, every painting and sculpture is a challenge, but now the challenge isn't big enough – you need to be stretched to go onto the next stage, the next rung up the ladder towards… what?

Maybe now the time has come to make a more ambitious statement, and the nature of the ambition is as unique and personal as is the individual him or herself. Working bigger is the obvious thing to do, but maybe you could instead work smaller and aim to exhibit 1000 4cm square paintings on a large wall, and with open air sculpture the sky is literally the limit.

There's nothing that focuses the mind as well as being offered an exhibition. Look at the space: is there scope

here for a new idea, a new, superannuated version of your work, which will see you breakthrough to a new level? Such an opportunity may be too good to miss especially is you have a good length of time to prepare the show. Imagine what you could do given 2 years and a big gallery……

Look at your work and try to give it some perspective; is it 'in between' – neither what it was nor what it could be? Is it ripe for being kicked up the rear, supercharged and expanded? Is it bitty and unfocussed, in need of refining and clarification? Is it time to know more about what you are doing: are you an authority on your own works subject matter, or is there more to explore, understand and discover? The power of the internet now allows us to enjoy access to almost any aspect of our field without leaving the house. What a great time to enter into a research program, to later emerge fully informed and artistically buzzing.

Set yourself a task. If you have an exhibition space to work towards then make it the target, and watch doors in your mind start to open. It is a good place to be, a period of intense productivity and focus to really savour. The end result is an exhibition that truly justifies its location and is also of a standard to inhabit many other galleries if you so desire.

The above is the first step in pursuing a more ambitious approach to your work. There are also other aspects, such as turning your honest labours into good income. If you feel it is there to be done, then do it! Don't expect riches or fame, though. The latter are both impostors with no real place in the artist's make up.

> Success is dangerous. One begins to copy oneself, and to copy oneself is more dangerous than to copy others. It leads to sterility.
> Pablo Picasso.

And he should know…..!

An ambitious work: The Large Glass

You may not like the work of Marcel Duchamp, it is often awkward and seemingly deliberately contentious in nature. However, as a study of the development of ideas, and the application of experimental ingenuity to the creating of art his work bears much examination, in particular his most famous piece *"The Bride Stripped Bare By her Bachelors; Even"* or *"The Large Glass"* (1915-1923). It is an example of how one piece can consume an artist and become an epic in the making. To describe the work fully one has to also discuss what preceded it, in particular Duchamp's studies into 'stoppages' which were metre long threads dropped from the height of one metre, the resulting line being fixed by glue, and also repeated in a wooden 'ruler' cut to the same shape. The stoppages created in earlier works appear again in *"The Large Glass"*, together with three shapes informed by photographs of a cloth blowing in the wind, holes in the glass which were found by firing a model cannon with paint-tipped capsules, and a number of elaborate technical drawings.

The Value of New Experience

Maybe this is the time to travel. Many artists find that they can enrich and enlarge their vision by visiting unfamiliar places and absorbing foreign cultures. This makes sense as the sponge-like human brain prefers to soak up new experiences, and doesn't enjoy over familiarity or repetition. If you have been inspired by a

place briefly visited years ago, go back now and learn more. Much of the exotic tropical imagery of Rousseau's work was based on memories of being posted in Mexico many years earlier.

18 If You Are Interested In... Look At:

This chapter is simply a list of artists relevant to particular fields; it is by no means exhaustive, but there's plenty here to start with, and the wonders of the internet will allow you to go much further into each category. Many of the artists mentioned here cross over into other categories, and each one offers much to explore and discover. Don't be daunted by the magnitude of these names – remember that in their day they also had to start somewhere – genius takes a lifetime to grow, and in learning from other artists, the only way is to learn from the best!

Figure Painting: The Romans, Greeks and Ancient Egyptians, Goya, Poussin, Titian, El Greco, Tiepolo, Raphael, David, Manet, Toulouse-Lautrec, Velazquez, Caravaggio, Rubens, Gauguin, Munch, Picasso, Lucien Freud, Francis Bacon, Paula Rego.

Portraits: Hals, Velazquez, Goya, Holbein, Rembrandt, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Gainsborough, Modigliani, Munch, Francis Bacon, Picasso

Landscape: Breughel, James Ward, Constable, Turner, Friedrich, Van Gogh, Munch, Andy Goldsworthy, Emil Nolde, Samuel Palmer, Cezanne, any of the Impressionists (Monet, Renoir, Pissaro, Courbet, Boudin, Corot)

Still Life: Chardin, Morandi, Picasso, Braque, Cezanne, Van Gogh

Figurative Sculpture: The Romans, Greeks and Ancient Egyptians, Churches and Cathedrals, Donatello,

Michelangelo, Bernini, Rodin, Picasso, Jacques Lipchitz, Giacometti, Antony Gormley, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Eric Gill.

Abstract Sculpture: Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, David Smith, Naum Gabo, Anthony Caro, Brancusi, Louise Bourgeois, Richard Serra, Andy Goldsworthy, 'Primitive' Art

Religious Painting: Giotto, Duccio, Fra Angelico, Masaccio, Piero della Francesca, Sassetta, Michelangelo, Botticelli, William Blake, Stanley Spencer, Cecil Collins

Townscapes: Canaletton, Atkinson Grimshaw, J M W Turner, Pieter Breughel, L S Lowry, David Greenwood, Jane Fielder, Giorgio Di Chirico

Interiors: Vermeer, Edward Hopper, Bonnard, Matisse.

Abstract Painting: Islamic Art, Paul Klee, Kasimir Malevich, Wassily Kandinsky, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, Jackson Pollock, Adolph Gottleib, Willem De Kooning, Barnett Newman, Franz Kline

Colour: The Impressionists, Bonnard, Seurat, Derain, Albers, Van Gogh, Matisse, Rothko,

Drawing: Picasso, Van Gogh, Leonardo da Vinci, Durer, Egon Schiele, Seurat, Toulouse Lautrec, David Hockney.

Visionary Landscape: Van Gogh, Redon, Munch, Samuel Palmer, Turner, Caspar David Friedrich, Emil Nolde, John Martin, Georgia O'Keefe, Lyonel Feininger

Photography: Man Ray, Alfred Steiglitz, Edward Steichen, Ansel Adams, Robert Mapplethorpe, Cindy Sherman, Eadweard Muybridge.

Assemblages: Joseph Cornell, Picasso, Alexander Calder, Louise Nevelson.

Surrealism: Dali, Picasso, Miro, Klee, Yves Tanguy, Giorgio De Chirico, Max Ernst.

Muralists: Rivera, Picasso, Siqueiros, Orozco.

Relief Sculpture: The Abyssinians, Ancient Egyptians, the Parthenon Friezes, the Alexander Sarcophagus, Ben Nicholson, Charles Biederman, Louise Nevelson, Eric Gill.

Prints: Hokusai, Goya, Rembrandt, Munch, Andy Warhol.

Formal Painting: Seurat, Mondrian, Kandinsky, Malevich, Klee, Frank Stella, Ad Reinhardt

Collage: Kurt Schwitters, Picasso, Braque, John Heartfield.

18 In Conclusion...

...this book has attempted to deal with a lot of stuff, but its main purpose, before any other, has been to instil enthusiasm and passion for art in the reader, followed by an attempt to demystify some aspects of art which seem daunting to those 'not in the know'. Art is intrinsically mysterious, in many ways beyond explanation, especially so as it is mostly the product of an isolated individual in a kind of creative communion with him or herself. Despite this, art does connect on many levels to many other people, crossing all possible boundaries of language and culture. It is a peculiarly human activity in which our humanity, perhaps more purely and directly than by any other means, is expressed.

In dealing somewhat briefly with such an enormous field as being an artist, it may appear that there is just so much to *do,* but at the root of it all is simply the creative act, and that is what this book celebrates. There is something of a subtext here which suggests that by inducing a good dose of semi or sub-consciousness into the act, a more true and pure result will occur, and a richer springboard for the development of an art which is less hindered by the sometimes dulling effect of literalism and ideas. Of course this won't work for everyone and the real answer is to create, create, and create some more; the real artist emerges with time.

> Time and reflection... modify, little by little, our vision, and at last comprehension comes to us.
> Cezanne.

Most of the practical advice in this book is from experience, but there are always other ways, other methods, other ideas. Try them. There is never a fixed right way. It is one of the great faculties of human

nature that we are prepared to try things that have never been done, and in art this will continue indefinitely. Pablo Picasso, the ultimate creative machine, whose thirst for art remained passionately strong for all of his 92 years, has been quoted more than any other artist in this book, and the last words come from him:

> I am always doing things I can't do, that's how I get to do them.

Bibliography and suggested reading

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Lowry by Julian Spalding – Herbert Press and South Bank Board
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The Creative Way to Paint by David Friend – Watson Guptill
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