

Creative Wisdom

By M.E. "Mike" Bailey, NWS

There is a personal wisdom that successful artists adopt. While all are serious about growing, they have learned to enjoy the process including the defeats and well as the successes. They are having fun!

Recently, I met and visited with a fellow artist, Mr. Robert "Bob" Burridge. It was one of those unusual times when you realize you are in the presence of someone who truly lives the way you think. Bob *seems* wild and crazy, but he is very wise and absolutely resolute about keeping his creative pathways open and flowing. In order to do so, Bob discards conventional wisdom and hacks open new and interesting avenues to creating.

Visit his website at www.robertburridge.com and look at his paintings. You will quickly see that Bob can take a mundane subject and turn it into something entirely fascinating and extraordinary. Bob is genius at making the usual seem terrific. I could write a long discussion of *how* he does it in artistic terms, but his artwork and his actions are exactly the product of how he thinks. Bob and I believe that the process of painting is actually more the product of attitude and how one thinks about themselves, their art work and the way they control that chatter in our heads.

As you may know, painting beyond the obvious is more about thinking and

removing obstacles to success rather than a study of techniques and methods. Bob has published what he calls "Bobisms" about that very thing. It's your attitude. It's about allowing yourself the freedom to fail. It is about not forcing success. It is about letting the little girl or little boy inside of you come out to play . . .and not to be concerned about what others think. It is about letting the natural evolutions of developing ideas happen without steering them.

There is an 'urban legend' about the pottery instructor who told the two halves of his class that they would be graded using two different methods of judgment. One half the class would be graded on *quality*, while the other half would be graded on *quantity*. Those who were in the 'quality' half would be required to turn in only one piece at the end of the semester, while the biggest grades for the other half would be given to those who turned in the most work. The latter work would be weighed! The most pounds wins!

Of course, you already know that the best work came from the second group who were slamming out the pounds of clay without regard to quality. The

moral is to do a LOT of work. Breakthroughs happen. They aren't hatched or manufactured. They occur unannounced and when you are not trying to control the outcome. They just show up.

There is attitude in that process of letting things happen and producing lots and lots of experiments or output. The attitude is very simple. Burrige says it all in his "Bobisms"
Consider them. Memorize them. Most of all, follow them! He knows what he is talking about!

You cannot wait until you get better. Do the best you can now, today. And you will get better at what you want to create.

I'm not good at a lot of things but it never stopped me from doing my best work.

I practice warm-up exercise painting daily. Before working on large formats, I paint several small "what if" paintings to teach myself about painting.

Good work habits and daily painting routines will lead you to your next best work.

Right now, you are the best of who you are. Your work will not get better by itself... and you are the closest person to your next best work.

Remove the concept of "fear of failure" and the concept of "fear of success" from the

creative process. Add instead, "what if" to your creative self – I'm more interested in what I don't know than what I can do.

Passion is more conducive to a creative result than technique.

You get more creative by doing more creative works, not less works.

My biggest creative breakthroughs arrive unannounced during my non-logical, unfathomable thinking process.

While I am doing my work, I am aware of the fact that there are 1000s of other artists right now in their own studios going through the same mind-chatter and fears that I'm going through. Simply, artists learn how to proceed, or they don't.

Believing you are creative is 50% of the creative process.

Notice that Bob speaks of "your best work." There is huge wisdom in those words. Your best work is that which you flex all of your painting muscles for the absolute best possible outcome of which you are capable, and take advantage of the new challenges that show up **right NOW!** That means being in the moment and not wishing you had twenty more years experience under your belt so you could compete with, or paint better than, your friend, your instructor or your self. It is about owning what you do NOW. It is not about "if only I was _____ (fill in the blank)."

In that same context, your best work can only come right now. And next week and the month after that . . .but only after you have arrived at that point in time and experience. Beginners do not remain as beginners. But they can do their best work at any moment. Best work does **not** mean *a masterpiece compared to all the other paintings that are out there*. It simply means the best of what you are capable of right now.

Being disappointed and ashamed of your work because it doesn't look like someone else's paintings is a huge mistake.

Being a painter also means taking an active and accepting part in the processes of the journey toward mastery. Living in the possibility of being a master is not shameful, but always being disappointed and ashamed of your work because it doesn't look like someone else's paintings is a huge mistake. Compare yourself to no one. Accept your new work as being a new high or a new accomplishment and experience the excitement of it. You weren't this good ten years ago, so why be upset about what you do now? (Think about that one). Be prepared to look at your work through the same eyes that you had when you first began painting. You will

see the accomplishments more clearly then.

The biggest step in becoming a great painter is to (ahem!) get over yourself and quit worrying about whether or not your work is 'good,' or if your spouse will like it, or if it follows the rules, or if your teacher likes it, or . . .
_____ (fill in the blank). **Let go and PAINT !**

The simplest and most effective way to *become creative* is to just play "what if" with your paints. Experiment and don't worry about wasting paper, canvas or paint. PAINT ! Paint a lot and try all sorts of things. Lock people who have opinions about your work out of your studio (and your mind) and just go play. Find out what will happen if you _____ (fill in the blank) with your paint. In other words, make trying new things, learning and growing your goals. This is a sport of little tiny incremental changes. Some of which are not noticeable at first. Put in the time and quantity and you will see the changes and the improvements.

Lastly . . . have a good enough time doing it that it causes you to giggle or shout or scream with excitement. Make it fun! After all, isn't FUN the reason you started painting in the first place?