

WHAT'S THE MYTIQUE OF BEING AN ARTIST ?

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There seems to be some sort of magic or mystique to being an artist. . . . Many who paint, or sculpt or perform do not call themselves artists.

Apparently, there is a dual meaning to the word artist. That is, if one is especially skilled at something . . . cooking, building furniture, writing, silk-screening, . . . whatever . . . they are often referred to as *artists*. That is, they are thought to be so skilled and so unique that they deserve the moniker of *artist*.

"Balderdash!" someone said. The true artist is always at struggle.

Then there is the person who labors daily in their studio grueling out some sort of something on their paper or canvass . . . or desperately trying to bring to life a lump of clay or stone. They read, they study, they work through the night, they imagine, they copy, they report, they draw, they rehearse, they sing only to think of themselves as failures. After all, if they were truly artists, they would succeed each and every time, without failure, without doubt, without wonder or indecision.

They would merely proceed to turn out masterly work time after time!

"Balderdash!" someone said. The true artist is always at struggle. Always unsure of how their audience will respond. Always nervous. And, yes, always a little bit afraid, though they may never admit it. Afraid to put it in the kiln; Afraid to spoil another canvas; Afraid to use this color because someone may think of it as 'garish.' Or, simply afraid of what their spouse may think of this attempt. Or worse, they are afraid of what their clientele might think! No matter the source or the professional name for it, it is plainly called performance anxiety. It is the fear of failure.

So, what do most do 'artists' do to guard themselves from this fear of failure? It is so simple: They copy an already accepted technique, style or subject. Now, mind you, there is plenty to learn when trying to become a painter, a sculptor, a violinist, a singer, an actor or . . . whatever. Most of what the beginner wishes to focus on is technique: How to get the paint on the canvas in precisely the right way, or how to rise into another octave without seeming clumsy, or exactly *what pigments* to mix in order to copy, exactly, a specific 'local color.'

Face it, there is comfort in hiding behind the already accepted methods. There is safety in painting the (already painted thousands of times) Yosemite's Half Dome . . . or to sculpt an angel . . . or to continue to play the 'old favorites.' There is protection in the 'traditional' . . . there is shelter in doing what is already accepted. All one need do is paint like the Impressionists, or act like Sir Lawrence Olivier, or sing like Pavarotti,

or sculpt like Rodin or to take on the fingering style of Itzac Pearlman. The mistake is to believe that the *technique and the subject* will be instantly recognized as fine art . . . and thus, earn the maker the title of 'artist.' In some circles, this approach may earn the craft person the name of artist, but they miss the most important ingredient

In our culture, there is a perception that results are most important. And not only that, but results "by the rules," is all that is acceptable. In other words, the means must be justifiable. The means must be in the tradition of proven method in order to be "blessed." Is this mystique? Is this magical? Just stand outside of any good gallery and listen to the people talk among themselves as they leave and comment on the work, "Did you see thaaaaat? His painting looked just like a photograph!" "It was so real!" "I couldn't believe the details in that painting!" Those who comment like this believe that ability to copy or to mimic is 'art.'

Rarely do we hear, "The way that painter divided space was mesmerizing! Did you see (hear / feel) the passion in that piece? Did you see how unusually he managed color contrasts?" Or . . . "I felt the mood just sweep over me as I stood in front of it." Perhaps you have wept at a stage performance . . . at the soulfulness of the actor. Or, maybe you have stood in front of a particularly exquisite piece of blown glass and just could not resist the magnetic pull to touch it, even if only just once.

That to which we respond so emotionally is in the museums of the world . . . and in the studios of the artists who are reaching to create

something rooted in their deep, passionate feelings of some emotion. . . .
. . . To express some personal measure of content . . . to expose their heart in such a way as to fully *show* their reason for doing what they do.

They, most usually, are the compromised result of failure followed by failure, after failure, after mediocre outcome, after failure.

It may be as simple as the drudgery of finding and creating a perfect shape, or it may be as complex as finding precisely the right pigment compounds to extract a sparkling mauve and bring it to light in the interior of some inspired dark obelisk. On what ever it might be painted . . . paper, canvas, or in bronze, or in sound, or in words, these accomplishments do not come with merely just slight of hand or voice. *They, most usually, are the compromised result of failure followed by failure, after failure, after mediocre outcome, after failure.* These are cast aside again and again in favor of another attempt. All the while, new art is being created. Moreover, most artists only rarely immediately recognize their own work as successful, much less revolutionary or special. It is the act of creating . . . of experimenting . . . of reaching further than the last artist did . . . of swallowing hard the fear and pressing forward to see if the much

awaited result is just on the other side of this attempt.

The mystique of artistry is, therefore, in the courage. It is in the drive to do better. It is in overcoming the fear. It lies in the commitment to be different. The magic lies in the endless labor of trying again and again and again. The title of artist is for those who declare themselves as such and follow the deep desire to create and put aside the opinions of those who have never taken up a sheet of music, or a brush, or a clump of wax to make a mold. It is for those who long for the approval not of others, but of themselves. It is for those who believe that it can be done, in spite of the doubt and the mind chatter. It is for those who can and will not only swallow, but who will digest the failures. It is for those who will make every failure their companion. The mystique of artistry is to be admired *for it is all about courage and the desire to make better and better art!*

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