



Persist: How to avoid creative outbursts



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21.9.2013

Photography thanks to:
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Last night I got a bit frustrated with myself and the inconsistencies in my drawing talents, and had what I like to call an "artistic outburst".

Sometimes I can crack on with a sketch and everything is great. I feel confident in my abilities and proud of my achievements. Then there are those other times where I get so wound up with my disabling lack of talent that I throw my sketchbook across the room and sulk.

After a while sat staring at the lifeless book lying crumpled on the floor, I tried to explain my actions to Pete, who subtly moved from sitting at my side to hiding behind the sofa.

Trying to get through those times when no matter how hard I try that stupid pencil won't do what I bloody well want it to, it feels like I'll never be able to draw ever again. Like all the talent I've ever possessed is slipping through my fingers like sand.

That irritating little voice in my head yells like a ringing in my ears "this is what you're supposed to be able to do for a living!" It needles at my brain and my confidence until that little swell of pride I had in myself and my works bursts with a deafening bang. The worst is the inconsistency. Being able to draw to my hearts content one day, and then the next not being able to even hold a pencil properly. The voice bullies me, screams "I know you can do this! I've seen you do it before!!" but alas, those shapes on the page just don't come together to form a whole.

My first anger-fueled reaction was blame. When you're angry, it always feels better to point the finger at someone else, rather than force all that negativity down your own gullet. I went on a long, hateful and completely illogical rant at the shortcomings of Coventry University's Illustration course before directing my aggression towards the old classic - my tools. My poor sketchbook had already taken a heavy beating, and the pencils were next in the line of fire. When anger and frustration drives you, you become blind and a little bit bonkers.

The truth is I can't really blame anything, not even myself. There is no blame in a situation like this. Sometimes, it just doesn't flow. And as crazily irritating that is, beating myself up for getting it wrong is not the way to go. Because when it comes to creativity, there is no wrong answer. And that's the part I love most. So be still tiny annoying voice in my head, I shall tolerate you no longer!



I wanted to write about this because I know for any type of artist it can be hell to have one of those days, weeks, months where you just can't get it right. Failure latches onto your soul and sucks away any good feelings you had for yourself and your capabilities. Even to the point where fear of failure prevents us from trying - not just in art, but in life - and that's never a good thing.

I made a list to encourage me to persist, looking back on all my creative endeavors to gather a few lessons that put things into perspective for me. If you're ever in that dark, angry, throwing-art-supplies kind of place I recommend the exercise, at the very least to save a mug or two from ending up against the wall...

Take a break.

The first thing to do if anger strikes is walk away. Clear your head and calm down before indulging in something completely stupid like sketchbook flinging. When we're angry the logical part of our brain gets cut off, and our decision making skills suffer. Leave it, go for a walk, get a cup of tea, relax. Try not to break anything expensive.

Try again.

Don't give up! Just because you can't do it now, doesn't mean you'll never be able to. After having a break you can come back to it with fresh eyes. If you don't hit the mark the first time it's fine to give it another go, no matter how long the first try took. Persevere.

Push the boundaries.

As skinning metaphorical cats has always taught us, if it's not working the way you're doing it, there are an infinite amount of brilliant and creative alternatives. That pesky box is dying to be stepped out of; outside it are so many weird and wonderful creative methods of execution, by the end we'll be dying to explore every last one. Try looking at it another way.

Practice, practice, practice.

Why, after almost a year without character study and almost 7 years without life drawing experience, am I so shocked to find I can't really draw people all that well? Those skills need to be maintained, like any workman's tools. Time invested in creativity is time not spent hulking out and pulling this face D:<

Remember you're awesome.

My favourite part of creativity - there is no wrong answer. So even if at the very least you're just having a go, you're already achieving. You don't have to be a master, you don't have to be the same as everybody else and there's no need to compete. If you don't try, you'll never know. If you do try, you're already winning.

The suffering of my poor little sketchbook is perhaps a lesson to me in maintaining perspective. The squished and folded pages of what used to be a very lovely and crease-free log of my art shall forever be a reminder of the importance of clear thinking. May it be the last sketchbook to suffer such a fate...