



WHAT WILL I BE  
WHEN I GROW UP?



# 9 Things They Never Taught in Art School

By Crista Cloutier

the  
**WORKING**  
artist™

What do artists do? Artist Grayson Perry recently spoke about a group of schoolchildren who were asked that question by a museum curator. One little girl offered, "Artists are people who sit at Starbucks and eat organic food."

But after touring the museum, the curator asked the question again. This time the little girl said, "Artists notice things."

It takes a special kind of person to notice things. And it takes courage to create something from those observations. I believe that the best artists are makers; they notice, they think, they work, and they do.

The real art world is a far cry from how popular culture views us – the slothful drunk, the starving dreamer and the Starbucks-sipping hippie. But being an artist goes beyond those labels into how we view the world and the choices that we make.

For making art is not just what artists do, it's who we are.



# Dance to Your Own Music



Studies show that 60% of Americans fully regret their career choice. Are you part of that majority?

I once had a thriving career in the glamorous world of contemporary art. I was an international art dealer, I was the head of a renowned studio where I worked with significant artists on important projects and ran an award-winning gallery.

My life made beautiful music. But I hid a deep secret. As much as I loved my job, it had stopped playing my song. And no matter how fast I danced, I could never pick up the beat.

So I quit. I left my company, sold all of my possessions and moved to the French countryside all by myself. And I don't speak French.

With nothing but the quiet whispers of my own thoughts to guide me, I slowly developed my own voice, my ideas, and before too long I was singing my song loudly and dancing in time. And more importantly, others began to dance with me.

Are you singing your song? Or someone else's? Who is listening?

# Love the Questions

**"H**ave patience with all things unresolved and learn to love the questions themselves." - Rainier Maria Rilke

Artists are endlessly curious. But in life, we spend a lot of our time running away from questions, we want to know everything right now. Yet it's only by following the questions that we find where the true answers lie.

Artists are often the victims of too many ideas, too many answers it would seem. By applying critical thinking, asking questions, we are better able to clarify our ideas and see how they best fit and complement one another. This is where life begins to work with us and reveal its magic, and the struggle is abandoned.

In a world where everything can be googled, questions are more important than ever. Because the most important answers aren't found online, but within.

When I first started to realize that I needed to make some changes in my life, I began with asking myself each day

What do I really really want? I asked it all the time and listened deeply, without censor, for what came up.

To each answer I would ask Why?

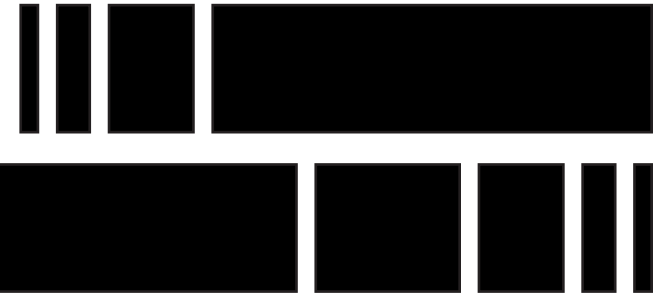
To each problem or setback I would ask How can I make the most of this?

Choosing to embrace the questions instead of scrambling for answers begins the journey toward real creativity. Don't be afraid to ask big questions, for the bigger they are, the deeper you will go.

The crystal ball into your future lies in your own hands. Just ask.



# Do the Work



After I moved to France I was completely cut off from everything and everyone I had ever known. Even worse, I didn't have my routine. I had to create a new one.

I discovered that I write best in the mornings. In fact, I found that I do all the hard stuff best in the mornings: exercise, writing, marketing, and administrative duties for my business.

After a late lunch I take a long walk, carrying a notebook to capture my ideas and a camera to capture images. I walk for miles. I walk in the hot sun if I'm visiting my family in Phoenix, or the cold gray rain when I'm at my current home in London. I walk without an umbrella, letting life hit me full force, waking me up, my face red and wet and stinging.

The pavement is where I feel my most

creative, where my best ideas come from, my best work gets done, my best decisions get made, not sitting in a car waiting for traffic to move, not sitting behind a desk staring a screen, but outside where I can engage with the world on its own terms.

To the untrained eye, I look like a lazy slob taking a carefree stroll in the middle of the day. But other artists view me in conspiratorial understanding "Artist at work."

It's important to connect with your natural rhythms. Forget the conventions and schedules that have been thrust upon you and start from scratch. When do you work best? Where do you connect with the flow? How do your ideas come?

Discover that which works best for you. And then work it.



# Stop Chasing Stuff, Chase Life

**G**rayson Perry said, "Artists are pilgrims on the road to meaning." I find it best to travel light.

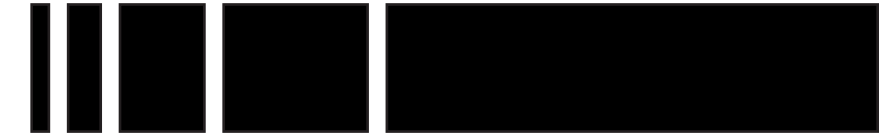
When I first settled on the madcap idea of leaving everything behind to live in France, I had no idea how to fund it. There was no silver spoon in my mouth and no room left on the credit cards.

I ran the problem round and round my head until I took a look around me and realized that the answer was right there. Sell my stuff!

Shopping can be a drug, trust me I know. I was living in a big house stuffed to the rafters with stuff. Each weekend saw me coming through the front door with more bags of stuff. I was a shopping addict.

But it was when I began the arduous task of selling my stuff that I really came to terms with the extent of my problem. I was only using a fraction of all the stuff I surrounded myself with. Most of it, I realized, was bought in an effort to fill a hole inside.

The temptation to buy more stuff doesn't just disappear either, you have to find other ways to feed yourself. Buying stuff is like eating junk food, it just leaves you



hungry and wanting more. It doesn't make you a better artist or a better person.

Stuff imprisons you. Experiences empower you.



# You Are Not Alone



The one thing I missed the most when I moved to France by myself was community. Art does not live in a bubble and I don't subscribe to the lone genius theory. Art is a reflection of the time and space in which it lives.

Artists who are part of a community make stronger work, and they feel more supported – because they are. Artists who are involved with a community are engaged in the economy of ideas, and if you've heard me say it once you have heard me say it twice: ideas are an artist's currency.

Much in the same way that bankers deal in money, artists deal in ideas.



So it's important to create an atmosphere where ideas thrive and are nurtured.

That's not to say that you must attend every opening, every art event. I used to do that and it's both exhausting and soul destroying. But find that which has heart and meaning for you, find your people and support them, go to their events, read their blogs and posts, leave positive comments, share. Too often artists get scared that they have to do everything. You don't. Narrow your focus and do it well and with generosity.

Find your people.

# What's Your Story?



A "friend" was recently arguing with her Companion. (not me, I never argue!) In my her anger she ran the story of the argument again and again through her head. It was interfering with her work so I asked, "This is your story, but what is the story that Companion is telling himself?"

They talked about it and upon hearing one another's stories, their focus changed to one of mutual understanding. They didn't mean to hurt one another, that was just the picture they painted.

We all paint pictures in our heads, tell ourselves stories. These stories define us and define how we feel about other people, experiences, everything really. But we often forget that our stories are just that – stories. They are not fact but subjective interpretations, selective memories.

The beauty of this is that you can always write a new story, and paint a new picture. If you can remember this, you will always be free.

# Everything is Self-Expression



**Y**ou know, building my own art and writing practice and my subsequent business has been a tremendous undertaking.

I'd already had a career. Was I too old to embark on another? I may be 50 years old before I started to see a return, and in exchange I would be giving up so very much, my friends and family, a home, comfort.

But I told myself that with any luck, someday I would

be 50 anyway. Who did I want to be at that age? What did I want to show for it? What could I build that would fulfill me for the next 50 years?

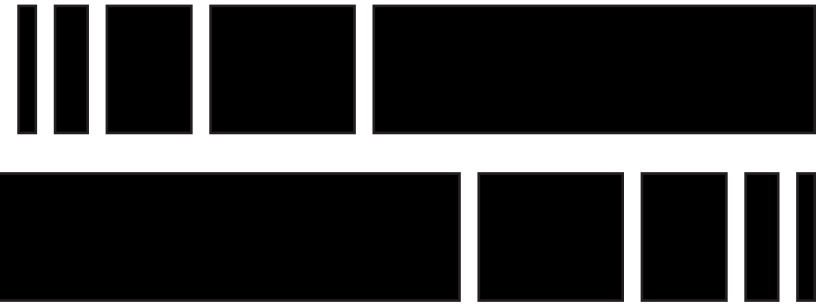
I don't particularly enjoy networking, learning about marketing, social media, selling myself, but I made a vow that has helped me immensely. Everything I do must be infused with creativity, authenticity, and fun. Even the hard stuff.

Life is your coloring book. Dare to go outside the lines.





# Never Stop Learning



Curiosity is the trademark of successful artists. It's in our DNA. This is how we experiment, come up with ideas, create new work.

Though too often, artists stop their curiosity at the fun things such as *I wonder how batik is made? I wonder how to shoot film instead of digital? I wonder if I can include wood in my work?*

But when I mention "marketing" or "business plans," all that curiosity stuff stops. Artists shut right down, often covering their ears, closing their eyes and repeating *I can't hear you. I can't hear you. I don't know how to do that stuff.*

I will tell you how to do that stuff. You learn.

You educate yourself. Yes, it's not as much fun as making art, but it is what makes you a professional. And there's the difference.

Challenge yourself to master those things that hold you back, find a coach and mentor, resources do exist.



# Jump Into the Unknown



I'm not encouraging you to quit your job or change your life. I'm not suggesting that you sell your possessions and move to France (though I do highly recommend it!).

What I am asking you to do is to begin asking deeper questions of yourself. Listen to that small voice within, don't doubt it and never mock it. Just ask the questions

and pay attention to the answers that come up.

If the answers scare you, and they will, don't run away from them. We are never given a desire without the ability to make it happen. I know this to be true.

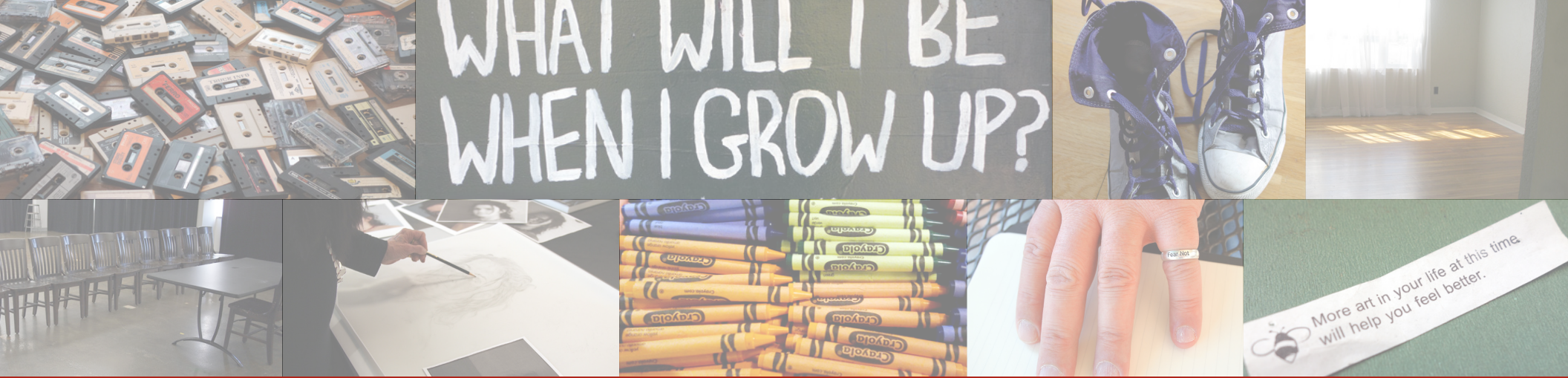
Be prepared to work hard but always move from a place that is authentically, deeply and truly you. Take risks. But only follow what has heart and meaning.

The world is in a world of hurt right now. We aren't going to find our way out of this mess by doing the same things or following the same people. It is creative thinking that will save the world.

The world needs new results, a new reality. Let it begin with you. By following your creative urgings you are part of the solution. You are saving the world.

So jump.





**Crista Cloutier** is the founder of The Working Artist, an online resource for visual artists and photographers who believe in the work.

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