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ASK THE EXPERTS

Studio Craft: Restarting Your Art



"By the Easel" by Norwegian artist Carl Dørnberger (1888)

Ask the Experts: "It's been more than a decade since I painted. I used to show in galleries and had the start of success, then some personal issues sidelined my art career. I've felt like there was something missing in my life ever since, and I want to start making art again, but I just don't know where to begin."

A: We would urge anyone who feels as you do not to let another day pass before rediscovering your art! That doesn't mean the same thing for everyone, however, and you may find that your priorities, goals and expectations have evolved. You're probably more disciplined with better life skills now, and those skills will be the key to making time for making art.

Loosely define your priorities

After several years, it may be that what you need and want from your art may be different from when you laid it aside. It's likely that income from the sale of art is not a top priority compared to things like refreshing your process and discovering new themes, ideas and subjects.

Use the Buddy System

Art doesn't have to be a solitary pursuit. Reach out to peers who are still active in the arts or in the same situation you are, and tell them what you want to do. Other artists will understand that art isn't just a hobby you can pick up casually, and will know that this is a serious decision. Consider partnering with a fellow artist who is also ready for a reboot, so you can help each other stay on track.

Set up your work space

The more comfortable your studio area, the more likely you'll use it. A comfortable chair, good lighting and a solid easel with adequate features are a must. Invest in furniture, studio lights, storage equipment and other assets to make the most of your hard-earned studio time.

Read an artist's biography

The lives of artists are filled with the same setbacks, challenges, distractions and tragedies we all share. Reading a true account of an artist's life helps give perspective on one's own experience, and helps us

forgive ourselves for the times when we had to set aside our own art in order to keep up with the demands of life.

Set goals, but be flexible

Set goals designed to motivate you, especially at first. Productivity targets can come later, after work habits are stable. The main goal may be just to spend an hour a day in the studio.

Single session paintings

Any artist returning from a long hiatus needs to experience the feeling of finishing a painting. A great way to get there fast is by making a painting from start to finish in a single session. One-session pictures are usually small scale, alla prima works that are broad and expressive rather than tight and detailed. There's no guarantee that every one will be a "keeper" but even the less successful works may be the basis for something more involved later.

Don't Neglect Photography

Document your finished art as well as you can, but also take time to record the process of your re-entry into making art. It's an interesting story that many will want to hear!

Worry about galleries later

If you used to exhibit frequently, you might feel pressure to return to that situation as soon as possible. In the beginning, however, it's best to make studio time the first priority so you'll have some new work to show. It's understandable to feel discouraged if your connections are a little stale, but remember: you were an artist before your work was in galleries, and you didn't need the pressure of exhibition to motivate you when you were first starting out.