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ASK THE EXPERTS

Studio Craft: Work Like A Professional Artist



Francis Davis Millet with studio assistants ca. 1900

Just because you don't exhibit or sell your work doesn't mean you aren't serious about making art. Even artists who don't consider themselves professionals can learn some of the habits of full-time pros. Adopting a professional approach when you're making art for fun can help you work more often, make more of the time you can spend making art, and get better results!

Schedule Studio Time:

Making art is a lot like learning a language: if you don't practice, you'll never achieve fluency. Reserving studio time each week gives structure to your work and helps maintain sharp skills. If you work in series, scheduling each session ensures continuity from one piece to the next.

Use high quality materials:

Use the best colors, brushes, canvas and paper you can afford. Good quality materials make it easier to achieve the results you want and encourage you to work more. Lower-grade materials may have a cheaper per-unit price, but in the end they cost more because they don't go as far and, more importantly, don't handle as well or look as good. And, if your studio time is more enjoyable, you'll naturally look forward to it more!

Develop a critical eye:

Even if you mainly make art to please yourself, the ability to look at your work as though you're an outside observer can be incredibly valuable. When you're having a hard time resolving a piece, put it away for a while. The next

time you look at it, you'll have a fresh eye and it'll be easier to get the results you want.

Take presentation seriously: If a painting is worth framing, it's worth framing well. A good frame can't improve a painting, but a bad frame can ruin a good one. Presentation materials don't have to be expensive to complement and enhance your art as long as you choose them as carefully as you crafted your work. Framing and matting also have an important role in protecting artwork, especially works on paper, so make sure to use archival-grade boards and UV protective glazing.

Take good photographs: Keep a good photographic record of your work. It's easy to achieve great photos with moderately priced cameras or even cell phones. Invest in a roll of seamless background paper for polished results. Take your time positioning lights and camera to minimize post-processing and cropping.

Keep a sketchbook: An artist's sketchbook is a private place to experiment, play and practice without outside criticism. Keep yours with you all the time, and fill it with the ideas that will become full-fledged artwork later. In years to come, your old sketchbooks will give you some perspective of your artistic development.

Value your work:

Right now you may think making art is more of a pleasant diversion than a serious vocation, but don't undervalue how much of yourself and your time is invested. Don't throw anything away- keep your finished art so you can see how far you've come later. If you give away your work for free, make sure it goes to a worthy cause or to someone you know will treasure it.