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ASK THE EXPERTS

## Studio Craft: Restarting Art



Jacob Alt, "View from the Artist's Studio" 1836

**Ask the Experts:** "My mother used to paint professionally, but gave it up when she became a single mom. I know she misses it, and I want to help her start again. What can I do to help get her back on track?"

**A:** Life is complicated, and it can be challenging to make time for things we want to do. It can be daunting for artists to return to their work after long periods away, but maturity and life experience count a great deal in art, and that experience doesn't all need to happen at the easel.

It's important not to allow apprehension and guilt to delay getting back in the studio. Those feelings tend to vanish once work resumes- sometimes just a few minutes spent sketching is all it takes to jump-start the process. Friends and family of an artist can show support by understanding the key factors that sustain a second act.

### **Check condition of old supplies**

If paints and brushes have been in storage for a while, they may not be in optimal condition. Some items may need to be replaced, and colors and other consumable supplies will need to be replenished.

It's usually not difficult to determine whether older containers of paint and mediums are still good to use.

Tightly capped paints often store well in mild indoor temperatures- oil paints can last years or potentially decades- but acrylics can dry out, or suffer diminished quality from cold temperatures. Antimicrobial ingredients in water-based products can also lose potency over time, leading to mold growth. Any paints that have hardened, heavily skinned over or developed a clotted appearance should be replaced.

### **Privacy**

Any artist rekindling their work is going to need some freedom from scrutiny and consequences while they shake off the rust. Sketchbooks are important at this stage, because any artist coming off hiatus will need a lot of practice without worrying about criticism. Rough newsprint and charcoal are a staple supply for any artist, especially when doing large volumes of quick sketches for skill-building. Studio furniture that can hold and conceal in-progress work is a big advantage, but cardboard wet canvas carriers can serve the same purpose.

A flexible schedule helps a great deal, too. There are no typical hours for creativity. Sometimes evening or early morning is the best time to work, if that's when inspiration strikes.

### **Start small, but leave room to grow**

An abundance of small canvases and panels is important when starting back up, because when you're trying to hone skills, you don't want to be worrying about running out of painting supports. It's a good idea to keep a few larger canvases and full sheets of good paper handy when ready to scale up.

### **Organize for efficiency**

Artists who also need to keep up with a job, family and community involvement need to make every minute in the studio count. That means minimizing materials preparation, setup and cleanup to preserve as much time as possible for making art.

Factory-prepared canvases and panels eliminate the need to stretch, size and prime supports in the studio. Artists who prefer hand-primed supports may want to prepare a large number of canvases or panels in advance, all at once. Watercolor paper sheets can be stretched in advance on sealed boards, but if space is limited, consider using watercolor blocks with gummed

edges to save space. Palettes with peel-off, disposable sheets eliminate the need to wipe and clean.

### **Work the Room**

If space allows, working on several paintings at once makes productive use of limited time, and prevents overworking one single piece. The freedom to leave a work of art alone without ending the session is a great advantage when balancing productivity with time constraints. In addition to a full-sized studio easel, many artists use lightweight sketch easels to hold studies and alternate paintings so they can move instantly from one to the next.

### **Clean and tidy**

Most people who come back to art after a break will be working in their living space, at least for a while. Until a permanent area can be dedicated as a studio space, the artist will want an easel that folds for storage, a paint box that holds everything but is easy to unpack, and a brush cleaning system that keeps mess to a minimum. A French Field Easel satisfies all these requirements in one briefcase-sized package. Brush care and storage supplies are essential, because leaving high quality brushes to soak isn't an option. A palette with a tight fitting lid helps save leftover paint and prevents children and pets from getting into wet colors.

### **Plan for Presentation**

There's no bigger boost to morale than seeing a finished painting in a frame. Instead of going to the expense of custom presentation, select high quality factory assembled framing to standard picture sizes, and use stretched canvases and panels in matching sizes. Artists who favor works on paper can use standard matting, or invest in a good mat cutter to make mats in-studio

### **Please Yourself First**

It's important to address the self-care duties we all tend to defer when helping others. At any stage of life, art can be one of the most enjoyable ways to support well being. For artists who choose to return to the studio after time off, this is the time to start delving into personal interests. Subjects, concepts, materials and processes should be ones that are significant to the artist themselves. This will help make a fluid transition back into studio art, and the resulting work will be all the better.