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ASK THE EXPERTS

## Studio Craft: There's No Such Thing as Wasted Art Supplies



Helene Schjerfbeck, Unfinished Portrait, 1921. Abandoned work of art, scratched out, discovered on the reverse of a different painting

**Ask the Experts:** “Every time I sit down to paint or draw, I feel pressured to make it work. I was raised not to waste anything, and if something doesn’t work out, I feel guilty. Any suggestions for getting past this worry?”

**A:** If you always feel pressure to achieve a finished piece of art, you may be overemphasizing the painting as a product and not placing enough value on what is gained in the process. Our philosophy is that, as long as you’re deriving some benefit from the experience, there’s no such thing as wasting art materials.

The concept of “function guilt” describes the emotional limitation of creative activity which doesn’t begin with a defined problem-solving or production objective. This concept is sometimes associated with

inventors, engineers and software developers, but artists also sometimes feel great pressure to focus studio time on fulfilling defined goals.

Artists tend to pressure themselves to conserve studio time and supplies as finite resources, but art supplies are consumed in the process of making art, no matter how thrifty the artist’s habits may be.

All professions require regular skill maintenance and training, and art is no exception. Training sometimes takes us out of the comfort zone, pressing abilities and knowledge past the point of guaranteed results, even to the point of controlled failure. For artists, this means that certain exercises will not result in a presentation piece, or even a finished object at all.

Under pressure of deadlines, there can be a temptation to put production before practice, but time invested in practice for practice sake pays off in better skill and the ability to bring work to completion in less time.

Use inexpensive materials for concept sketches: One option for managing the expense of high volume sketching is using inexpensive paper. Rough newsprint is a staple for warm-ups and rapid sketches, but it is a temporary material which yellows and becomes brittle. If you wish to keep your finished sketches, consider using an economical, lightweight sketch pad instead.

**Be Reasonable with the Budget:** Most artists have a thrifty instinct. Within reason, thrift helps maintain abundant on-hand supplies and stretches the studio budget. When taken to extremes, however, being too stingy with materials can stand in the way of achieving goals. Any artist who is serious about their work, whether for pleasure or profit, needs to give themselves permission to purchase and use materials. This means setting a budget according to the type of work you do, and your productivity goals.

**Reusing Art Supplies:** As a last resort, once it's been determined that a work of art will not be completed or presented, unfinished paintings and drawings can often be reclaimed as supports for other works. Depending on the materials used and thickness of application, abandoned works can be primed over, sanded or scraped away, or flipped over to use the reverse side. New work can either totally cover the original, or incorporate earlier markings to give the effect of a palimpsest.

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