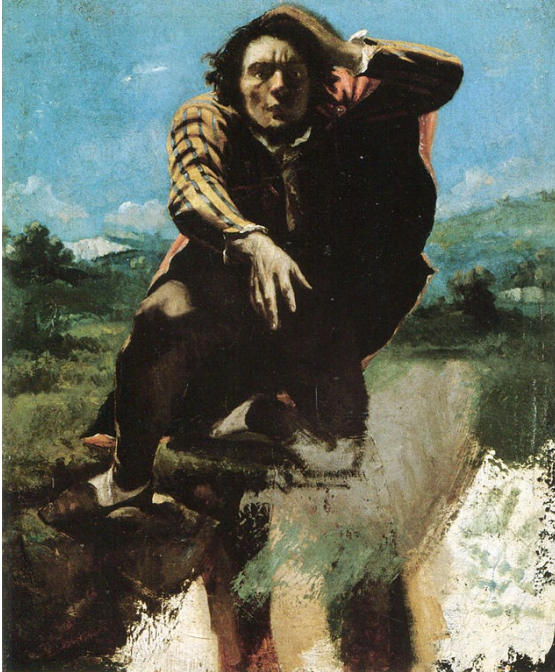


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ASK THE EXPERTS

Studio Craft: Face Five Hard Truths and Succeed



“The Man Made Mad With Fear” Gustave Courbet, 1844

Making art may be one of the most enjoyable things a person can do, but it’s not always easy. Over a long career, there will be obstacles and difficulties standing in the way of achievement. If art is a way of life for you, facing these challenges head on can determine whether making art is a passing interest or a permanent path.

Launching a career may take a long time: It’s not unusual to wait years to connect with a good gallery or get a solo exhibition, and even longer to grow a self-sustaining studio. Waiting for opportunity can test your patience and self-confidence, but it’s important to remember that an early start isn’t a guarantee of sustained success, and there can be some distinct advantages to making your debut later, at the peak of technical and expressive ability. Mature artists’ work has an authenticity and sincerity which is impossible

to achieve in any way other than through life experience. Time spent waiting for a career breakthrough is a chance to hone skill and style while learning the business of the studio. As an added benefit, artists who emerge at a later phase often have financial reserves that can be used toward expenses like framing and advertisement, making a first show all the more impressive.

Long periods away from art are unavoidable: There are times when family, education, health and home need to come first. Sometimes that means taking time away from the studio. Although not every biography tells this part of the story, many of the most respected artists had long gaps in productivity for all the same things we deal with today, like health emergencies, child care, even military service. It’s natural to feel some guilt when taking a break, but there are ways to stay connected to art even when you’re not actively working. Spend time with art books, follow cultural news and visit museums and galleries if possible. Often, artists who step away for a time return to the studio with different perspective and clearer priorities.

Artists outgrow galleries: Galleries that are appropriate for an emerging artist may not be a good fit when reaching mid-career. Venues for emerging artists are more focused on launching careers than managing them over time, and tend to attract collectors looking to get in on the ground floor. Early on, exposure and an opportunity to exhibit publicly are critical, but after a career gets going, expectations grow. A gallery that shows new artists might not be structured around cultivating long-term relationships or progressively increasing sale prices. When it’s time to move on, look for a gallery that will bring your art to its best advantage through a display environment, promotion and collector interaction that leverages your years of development and accumulated achievements.

Taste and trends change whether you like it or not:

The forces which influence taste in art are changing constantly. It's important to be aware of how culture is evolving, to gain insight into how viewers will perceive your work. Even if your work doesn't directly respond to changing trends, over time you'll certainly encounter new expectations for framing, presentation and promotion. Just because a given style falls out of favor, however, doesn't mean it's necessary to reinvent your personal style. Some of the most celebrated works of art went through a period of under-appreciation before achieving the status of timeless classics. One principle never changes: if it's good, sooner or later someone will love it.

Another artist has advantages you don't:

Sometimes good fortune gives us access to travel, education, and free time, and other times we have to work and struggle more. It's true in art, just as in every field, but artistic achievement takes more than luck and money. There's no shortcut around practice and study, no matter how lucky we may be. When we feel tempted to compare our progress to that of successful peers, there's a danger that we may really be looking for excuses. Focus on the advantages you earn for yourself instead: hard work, skill, and a love of the craft.

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