

## **Art and Fear**

Becoming an artist consists of learning to accept yourself, which makes your work personal, and in following your own voice, which makes it distinctive. The best you can do at any moment is the best you can do at that moment. Your job is to learn to work on your work. You learn how to make your work by making your work – make art you care about, and lots of it. The function of most of your work is to teach you how to make that small fraction of artwork that soars. When the artist becomes a form of identity, when the artist is identified with self, then flawed art means a flawed self, or no art means no self. When the pain of working is less than the pain of not working you get down to the work! Those who continue are those who have learned how to continue, or not to quit. Artists quit when they lose the destination for their work – for the place where their work belongs. Fears (like I’m no good, I’ve nothing worth saying, or no one likes my work) have less to do with art than with the artist or individual artworks. What separates artists from ex-artists is that those who challenge their fears, continue; those who don’t, quit. Fears arise when you look back, and when you look ahead. The artwork that seems so profoundly right in its finished state may earlier have been only inches or seconds from total collapse. Uncertainty is the essential, inevitable and all-persuasive companion to your desire to make art. And tolerance for uncertainty is the prerequisite to succeeding. You make good work by, among other things, making lots of work that isn’t very good, and gradually weeding out the parts that aren’t good. The parts that aren’t yours. Decisive works of art participate directly in the fabric of history surrounding their maker – you have to be there. New ideas come into play far less frequently than practical ideas – which can be used for a thousand variations. Veteran artists have engaged the issues that matter to them – they’ve learned how to get on with their work. Artists learn how to proceed, or they don’t. The individual recipe any artist finds for proceeding belongs to that artist alone. Art is hard because you have to keep at it so consistently.

## **Art & Fear: Observations On the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking by David Bayles & Ted Orland**

Art and Fear is a non-fiction book written by artists for artists. The point of the book is to help the young and/or struggling artist survive in the art world and to conquer the various difficulties, obstacles and fears that the developing artist faces. These difficulties come in two varieties: internal

and external. Internal obstacles are those obstacles that the artist has within herself, such as fears about herself, fears of others, an inability of the artist to find her own work. External obstacles are the difficulties one faces in the world of art, such as managing art production, finding time to pursue one's own work, teaching in the academy, interacting with the art community, managing one's art network, and so on. The authors divide the book into two parts, the first concerns internal problems, those associated with the individual creation of art; the second part concerns external problems, dealing...

Art-making is a struggle. The authors point out that much art is unfinished, inauthentic, repetitive, juvenile, and overdone. This will lead the artist to ask how art should be done, and why the artist sometimes fails. Art may be harder to create today, as individuals have more liberty to create and less institutional structure to inspire them. Art involves doubt, departing from others; there is no Church to dictate what is beautiful. Further, art-making is not based merely on talent, nor that talent is innate. Talent, luck, fate and tragedy all matter, but they do not aid in the day to day creation of art.

So the authors make a few assumptions on which the rest of the book will rely: (1) Art-making involves skills that can be learned; (2) Art is made by ordinary people; (3) Making art and viewing art are different at their core; and (4) Art-Making...

Most artists quit. This is not necessary. Further, they quit due to human troubles; those who continue must learn not to quit. Figuring out how not to quit is crucial. Artists will quit at particular moments that feel appropriate or when they lose sight of the purpose of their art. All artists have these fears and it is beating the fear that matters most. Quitting, further, is distinct from stopping. Quitting requires stopping and not starting again. To be an artist, you must always start again. Further, one must not lose motivation when the original destination of the art evaporates; say the show where the work was to be presented is canceled.

This is a particularly difficult problem for students, who graduate with no support network. The authors recommend that students form networks with other friends, so as to not have their support system disappear when they graduate. They...

One debilitating fear is the fear about one's self. Some fear that they are poseurs, mere pretenders of doing art. Many worry that they are faking it.

When the artist is not extraordinary, she sometimes feels fake. Further, young artists often become self-conscious about their work, and over think, obsessing about their every move. The authors advise artists to stop focusing on themselves, but instead focus on the art. A person can pretend to be an artist, but she cannot pretend to be making art, even if it is bad.

The authors turn to talent. Many worry about whether they have talent; the authors claim that this is a waste of time. Not only can talent not be controlled, but it is only a small part of what matters. Since talent is "what comes easy," talent cannot be all that is required. If only talent mattered, the greatest works...

Art is usually made alone, but the reactions of other people still matter. Whether or not they should create problems for the artist, they do. Sometimes we imagine critics surrounding us, become paralyzed by positive distaste, or follow the priorities of others. Artists only care about impressing others when they feel uncertain or insecure. One should seek constructive criticism, but remember that one's art is one's own.

Artists often look for understanding. This affirms one's humanity, but it imposes a risk because it gives power over you; they have the power to hurt you. The artist should place time between finishing the art and showing it to others, so she can make her own judgment about the piece. Further, do not worry about being misunderstood because bending to the understanding of the many produces bad art.

Next, the artist should be careful about seeking acceptance. Caring too much about...

Art is always bound up with what the individual desires. Feedback is total and our art is always tied to who and what we are. Whatever we put in is what we get out. The scary thing about art for this reason is that it does not lie to you. If you are lazy, your art will be. If you work hard, your art will show diligence. The true artist always bears this fact in mind. She never feels unafraid of it; instead, she learns to master it rather than letting her fear of the truth overwhelm her. Instead, the feedback she receives from her work improves her.

One of the most serious barriers to doing good artwork is letting feedback throw the artist into uncertainty. If an artist is creating a work and does not know how it will turn out, she may fear that it will reflect...

Chapter 6 begins Part II of the book. These cover matters of art and fear once a work of art is completed. New problems arise after this has occurred and they must be addressed separately. These problems force the artist to interact with the rest of the world; the authors refer to these problems as "ordinary." However, they emphasize that the problems are not of no consequence.

There is more to art than simply producing artwork. Sometimes one must manage a gallery, clean one's studio, and mail various items. Funding matters, education matters, publication matters and exhibition matters. Sometimes these activities help to promote one's artwork but other times the outside work gets in the way. In many cases art is quite expensive. Further, artists have bad reputations to the outside world, particularly because their work is often subversive.

Accordingly, the author must be aware that there will...

The authors argue that art programs in college have an important and positive function, but this is an unpopular position in the art world. The authors admit that these programs are not that important, but they are still important. Most artists dread the idea of being a faculty member, as it would crush their creativity. The idea of going to school is also thought to bring about conformity. Further, art teachers have bad reputations.

Unfortunately, the cards are stacked against art teachers. Hiring committees rarely select primarily for teaching talent, and judging teaching ability is difficult. Further, many universities want the artist to have a specialty, which may limit the artist's interests. Many MFA graduates are destroyed in the very process of applying for jobs. Newcomer talent is ignored in many cases. Teaching experience is often measured in terms of years rather than any other metric.

The authors note that Henry James asked three questions of the artist, only the third of which is surprising: (i) What was the artist trying to achieve? (ii) Did he/she succeed? And (iii), Was it worth doing? The first two questions are practical, and they help to focus the artist. The answers also help to group artists into schools and understand them in these terms. However, the third question must now be asked. The artist must consider why she does what she does, what she values in her art, and she must structure her artwork accordingly.

The best art will bring something good out of both the viewer and the creator. It should challenge both. One must resist aiming at perfection, but simply achieving challenges. Those who do the best simply aim at the

best practice of their art as they can. The artist should seek the challenge not only...

Art and Fear confronts the obstacles to making art. They want to communicate the difficulties in the work and then allow the reader to clear her own path. However, there is no one way to overcome your fear as an artist. Instead, the authors suggest that the young artist focus on answers to a set of questions. The best artists will be those who ask the best questions. Some of the major questions that produce fruitful answers are asking what artists have in common, how artists become artists, how artists secure time to pursue their own work, and how artists create work that satisfies them. Further, the authors recommend focusing on why so many quit art. These questions may have answers, but any answer is going to be hard to articulate.

While many features of artists vary, there are still constants, such as the stress of art, the...

While "the artist" is no particular person, s/he is the main character of the book. The authors are writing for the artist, the one in search of how to best engage in her profession, how to navigate obstacles inherent in artistic practice and how to create great artwork that reflects the personality, ideas and world of the artist. The artist faces numerous challenges throughout the book, but they can be generally divided into two classes—internal and external challenges. Internal challenges are those within the artist herself. The artist can often be the victim of her own fear. These fears are made possible by her expectations, uncertainty, imagination and the gap between her vision and execution. Even her materials can limit her in ways that cause anxiety and apprehension.

The great fears, however, are fears about herself and fears about others. The artist often fears that she will annihilate her...

"Look at your work and it tells you how it is when you hold back or when you embrace. When you are lazy, your art is lazy; when you hold back, it holds back; when you hesitate, it stands there staring, hands in its pockets. But when you commit, it comes on like blazes."

"To require perfection is to invite paralysis. The pattern is predictable: as you see error in what you have done, you steer your work toward what you imagine you can do perfectly. You cling ever more tightly to what you already know you can do – away from risk and exploration, and possibly

further from the work of your heart. You find reasons to procrastinate, since to not work is to not make mistakes.”

“What you need to know about the next piece is contained in the last piece. The place to learn about your materials is in the last use of your materials. The place to learn about your execution is in your execution. Put simply, your work is your guide: a complete, comprehensive, limitless reference book on your work.”

“For most artists, making good art depends upon making lots of art and any device that carries the first brushstroke to the next blank canvas has tangible, practical value.”

“To the critic, art is a noun. To the artist, art is a verb.”

“The difference between art and craft lies not in the tools you hold in your hands, but in the mental set that guides them. For the artisan, craft is an end in itself. For you, the artist, craft is the vehicle for expressing your vision. Craft is the visible edge of art.”

“Look at your work and it tells you how it is when you hold back or when you embrace. When you are lazy, your art is lazy; when you hold back, it holds back; when you hesitate, it stands there staring, hands in its pockets. But when you commit, it comes on like blazes.”

Selected Passages from: **Art and Fear**  
by David Bayles & Ted Orland

Making art is difficult; and it is made by ordinary people.

“Even talent is rarely distinguishable, over the long run, from perseverance and lots of hard work.”

“The function of the overwhelming majority of your artwork is simply to teach you how to make the small fraction of your artwork that soars.”

“The best you can do is make art you care about.....and lots of it!”

“When you act out of fear, your fears come true.”

“Fear that you are not a real artist causes you to undervalue your work.”

“Even at best talent remains a constant, and those who rely upon that gift alone, without developing further, peak quickly and soon fade to obscurity.”

“Artists get better by sharpening their skills or by acquiring new ones; they get better by learning to work, and by learning *from* their work.”

“What you need to know about the next piece is contained in the last piece. The place to learn about your materials is in the last use of your materials.”

“Put simply, your work is your guide: a complete, comprehensive, limitless reference book on your work. There is no other such book, and it

is yours alone. It functions this way for no one else. Your fingerprints are all over your work, and you alone know how they got there. Your work tells you about your working methods, your discipline, your strengths and weaknesses, your habitual gestures, your willingness to embrace."

"Unfortunately, healthy artistic environments are about as common as unicorns. We live in a society that encourages competition at demonstrably vicious levels, and sets a hard and accountable yardstick for judging who wins."

"To make art is to sing with the human voice. To do this you must first learn that the only voice you need is the voice you already have. "

The authors state in the introduction that "*the difficulties artmakers face are not remote and heroic, but universal and familiar*". In other words, we think that as artists we all face unique problems that we must suffer through alone, but it turns out that we're all in the same boat. So although we may not be as unique as we think, we don't have to suffer through these fears and doubts alone.

Here are just a few of the themes and excerpts from this amazing book:

### **Great art does not depend on great talent. . . .**

"This view is inherently fatalistic and offers no useful encouragement to those who would make art. . . it is a species of fear—the fear that your fate is in your own hands, but that your hands are weak. But while talent—not to mention fate, luck, and tragedy—all play their role in human destiny, they hardly rank as dependable tools for advancing your own art on a day-to-day basis."

"Artmaking involves skills that can be learned. . . In large measure becoming an artist consists of learning to accept yourself, which makes your work personal, and in following your own voice, which makes your work distinctive. . . Even talent is rarely distinguishable, over the long run, from perseverance and lots of hard work."

### **The need to separate the artist from their art. . .**

" 'Artist' has gradually become a form of identity which (as every artist knows) often carries with it as many drawbacks as benefits. Consider that if artist equals self, then when (inevitably) you make flawed art, you are a flawed person, and when (worse yet) you make no art, you are no person at all!"

### **Why an artist's vision will always exceed her grasp. . .**

What's so hard about that first sentence is that you're stuck with it. And by the time you've laid down the first two sentences, your options are all gone. ~Joan Didion

"Vision is always ahead of execution. . . The artwork's potential is never higher than in that magic moment when the first brushstroke is applied, the first chord struck. . . It's the same with all media: the first few brushstrokes to the blank canvas satisfy the requirements of many possible paintings, while the last few fit only that painting. The development of of an imagined piece into an actual piece is a progression of decreasing possibilities. . . Finally, at some point or another, the piece could not be other than it is, and it is done. That moment of completion is also, inevitably, a moment of loss — the loss of all the other forms the imagined piece might have taken."

### **Those who demand perfection end up with nothing. . .**

"To require perfection is to invite paralysis. The pattern is predictable: as you see error in what you have done, you steer your work toward what you imagine you can do perfectly. You cling ever more tightly to what you already know you can do, away from risk and exploration, and possibly further from the work of your heart. You find reasons to procrastinate, since to *not* work is to not make mistakes."

"To demand perfection is to deny your ordinary (and universal) humanity. . . yet this humanity is the ultimate source of your work"

### **Your work is your guide. . .**

"The seed for your next art work likes embedded in the imperfections of your current piece. Such imperfections. . . are your guides to matters you need to reconsider or develop further. It is precisely this interaction between the ideal and the real that locks your art into the real world, and gives meaning to both."

The answers you get depend on the questions you ask. ~Thomas Kuhn

"The lessons you are meant to learn are in your work. To see them, you need only look at the work clearly—without judgment, without need or fear, without wishes or hopes. Without emotional expectations. Ask your work what it needs, not what you need. Then set aside your fears and listen, the way a good parent listens to a child."

### **Opening our work up to criticism by others. . .**

"You're expected to make art that's intimately (perhaps even painfully) personal, yet alluring and easily grasped by an audience that has likely never known you personally."

"In making your real work, you hand the audience the power to deny the understanding that you seek; you hand them the power to say, 'you're not like us; you're weird; you're crazy.'"

"The lesson here is simply that courting approval, even that of peers, puts a dangerous amount of power in the hands of the audience. Worse yet, the audience is seldom in a position to grant (or withhold) approval on the one issue that really counts – namely, whether or not you're making progress in your work. They're in a good position to comment on how they're moved (or challenged or entertained) by the finished product, but have little knowledge or interest in your process. Audience comes later. The only pure communication is between you and your work."

### **The value of quantity over quality. . .**

"You learn how to make your work by making your work. . . and lots of it!"

"The function of the overwhelming majority of your artwork is simply to teach you how to make the small fraction of your artwork that soars. One of the basic and difficult lessons every artist must learn is that even the failed pieces are essential."

"The ceramics teacher announced on opening day that he was dividing the class into two groups. All those on the left side of the studio, he said, would be graded solely on the *quantity* of work they produced, all those on the right solely on its *quality*. His procedure was simple: on the final day of class he would bring in his bathroom scales and weigh the work of the "quantity" group: fifty pound of pots rated an "A", forty pounds a "B", and so on. Those being graded on "quality", however, needed to produce only one pot -albeit a perfect one – to get an "A". Well, came grading time and a curious fact emerged: the works of highest quality were all produced by the group being graded for quantity. It seems that while the "quantity" group was busily churning out piles of work – and learning from their mistakes – the "quality" group had sat theorizing about perfection, and in the end had little more to show for their efforts than grandiose theories and a pile of dead clay."

### **The only way you fail is to stop trying. . .**

"What separates artists from ex-artists is that those who challenge their fears continue; those who don't, quit."

"Those who would make art might begin by reflecting on the fate of those who preceded them: most who began, quit. To survive as an artist requires confronting these troubles. Those who continue to make art are those who have learned how to continue – or more precisely, have learned how to not quit."

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The authors emphasize the relation between you and your art, and the way a sort of dialogue exists between you and what you create – look for what to do next in what you’ve done, in the past or what is in front of you. They put you firmly in the driver seat, without anxiety. The only way to exorcise your fear is to create. Avoidance only installs your fear as a permanent companion and favours failure by your own criteria.

You have to live with falling short of your expectations, and move on to the next act of creation. It’s in the nature of making art.

“Look at your work and it tells you how it is when you hold back or when you embrace. When you are lazy, your art is lazy; when you hold back, it holds back; when you hesitate, it stands there staring, hands in its pockets. But when you commit, it comes on like blazes.”

*Fears about art making fall into two families: fears about yourself, and fears about your reception by others. In a general way, fears about yourself prevent you from doing your BEST work, while fears about your reception by others prevent you from doing your OWN work.”*

“Making art now means working in the face of uncertainty; it means living with doubt and contradiction, doing something no one much cares whether you do and for which there may be neither audience nor reward.”

“Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy.”

— Dale Carnegie

The first few brushstrokes to the blank canvas satisfy the requirements of many possible paintings, while the last few fit only that painting — they could go nowhere else. The development of an imagined piece into an actual piece is a progression of decreasing possibilities.

“Look at your work and it tells you how it is when you hold back or when you embrace. When you are lazy, your art is lazy; when you hold back, it holds back; when you hesitate, it stands there staring, hands in its pockets. But when you commit, it comes on like blazes.”

“A finished piece is, in effect, a test of correspondence between imagination and execution. And perhaps surprisingly, the more common obstacle to achieving that correspondence is not undisciplined execution, but undisciplined imagination.”

— ~David Bayles and Ted Orland

"Art is a high calling - fears are coincidental."

— art & fear

"Recently a painter of some accomplishment (but as insecure as the rest of us) was discussing his previous night's dream with a friend over coffee. It was one of those vivid Technicolor dreams, the kind that linger on in exact detail even after waking. In his dream he found himself at an art gallery, and when he walked inside and looked around he found the walls hung with paintings — amazing paintings, paintings of passionate intensity and haunting beauty. Recounting his dream, the artist ended fervently with, 'I'd give anything to be able to make paintings like that!'

'Wait a minute!' his friend exclaimed. 'Don't you see? Those were your paintings! They came from your own mind. Who else could have painted them?'"

— David Bayles and Ted Orland

"One of the basic and difficult lessons every artist must learn is that even the failed pieces are essential." Art and Fear

"When Columbus returned from the New World and proclaimed the earth round, almost everyone went right on believing the earth was flat. THEN THEY DIED—and the next generation grew up believing the world was round. THAT'S how people change their minds."

— "Art & Fear

"The world we see today is the legacy of people noticing the world and commenting on it in forms that have been preserved."

— Art & Fear

"To demand perfection is to deny your ordinary (and universal) humanity, as though you would be better off without it. Yet this humanity is the ultimate source of your work; your perfectionism denies you the very thing you need to get your work done. Getting on with your work requires a recognition that perfection itself is (paradoxically) a flawed concept."

— Bayles & Orland, Art and Fear

Making art now means working in the face of uncertainty; it means living with doubt and contradiction, doing something no one much cares whether you do, and for which there may be neither audience or reward. Making the work you want to make means setting aside these doubts so that you may see clearly what you have done, and thereby see where to go next. Making the work you want to make means finding nourishment within the work itself.

-Art and Fear by Bayles and Orland

"fatalism: ...a species of fear - the fear that your fate is in your own hands, but your hands are weak."

— "Art and Fear" David Bayles & Ted Orland

"Quitting is fundamentally different from stopping. Stopping happens all the time. Quitting happens once. Quitting means not starting again - and art is all about starting again"

— Art and Fear

"Talent may get someone off the starting blocks faster, but without a sense of direction or a goal to strive for, it won't count for much. The world is filled with people who were given great natural gifts, sometimes conspicuously flashy gifts, yet never produce anything. And when that happens, the world soon ceases to care whether they are talented...

...Talent is a snare and a delusion. In the end, the practical questions about talent come down to these: Who cares? Who would know? and What difference would it make? And the practical answers are: Nobody, Nobody, and None."

— Art & Fear

"Uncertainty is the essential, inevitable and all-pervasive companion to your desire to make art. And tolerance for uncertainty is the prerequisite to succeeding."

— from Art & Fear

"But until your ship comes in, the only people who will really care about your work are those who care about you personally. Those close to you know that making the work is essential to your well being. They will always care about your work, if not because it is great, then because it is

yours - and that is something to be genuinely thankful for. Yet however much they love you, it still remains as true for them as for the rest of the world: learning to make your work is not their problem."

— Art & Fear

"Art making involves skills that can be learned. Art is made by ordinary people"

— Art and Fear

"When you act out of fear, your fears come true."

— David Bayles & Ted Orland

"Annihilation is an existential fear: the common - but sharply overdrawn - fear that some part of you dies when you stop making art. And it's true."

— Art and Fear (pg 32)

"Each new piece of your art enlarges our reality. The world is not yet done."

— Art and Fear

"In the ideal, that is to say, real, artist, fears not only continue to exist, they exist side by side with the desires that complement them, perhaps drive them, certainly feed them. Naive passion, which promotes work done in ignorance of obstacles, becomes - with courage - informed passion, which promotes work done in full acceptance of those obstacles."

— Art & Fear

"But the important point here is not that you have—or don't have—what other artists have, but rather that it doesn't matter. Whatever they have is something needed to do their work—it wouldn't help you in your work even if you had it. Their magic is theirs. You don't lack it. You don't need it. It has nothing to do with you. Period."

— Art and Fear

"People who need certainty in their lives are less likely to make art that is risky, subversive, complicated, iffy, suggestive or spontaneous. What's really needed is nothing more than a broad sense of what you are looking for, some strategy for how to find it, and an overriding willingness to

embrace mistakes and surprises along the way. Simply put, making art is chancy - it doesn't mix well with predictability. Uncertainty is the essential, inevitable and all-pervasive companion to your desire to make art. And tolerance for uncertainty is the prerequisite to succeeding."

— David Bayles and Ted Orland

Art and Fear = Amazing.

"For you [the imperfect human artist], the seed for your next art work lies embedded in the imperfections of your current piece."

~Art and Fear, Bayles and Orland, pg. 31

"You make good work by (among other things) making lots of work that isn't very good, and gradually weeding out the parts that aren't good, the parts that aren't yours. It's called feedback, and it's the most direct route to learning about your own vision. It's also called doing your work. After all, someone has to do your work, and you're the closest person around."

~Art and Fear, Bayles and Orland, pg. 26

"Both making art and viewing art require an ongoing investment of energy—lots of energy. In moments of weakness, the myth of the extraordinary provides the excuse for an artist to quit trying to make art, and the excuse for a viewer to quit trying to understand it."

~Art and Fear, Bayles & Orland, pg. 24

"Vision is always ahead of execution, knowledge of materials is your contact with reality, and uncertainty is virtue."

— ART & FEAR -David Bayles

"Artists don't get down to work until the pain of working is exceeded by the pain of not working. — Stephen DeStaebler "

-David Bayles, Ted Orland

"Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy."

-Dale Carnegie

"Art is like beginning a sentence before you know its ending. You may never get to the end of the sentence at all - or having gotten there, you may not have said anything."

— Art & Fear

### **Art & Fear: Observations On the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking by David Bayles & Ted Orland**

Those who demand perfection end up with nothing. . .

"To require perfection is to invite paralysis. The pattern is predictable: as you see error in what you have done, you steer your work toward what you imagine you can do perfectly. You cling ever more tightly to what you already know you can do, away from risk and exploration, and possibly further from the work of your heart. You find reasons to procrastinate, since to not work is to not make mistakes."

"To demand perfection is to deny your ordinary (and universal) humanity. . . yet this humanity is the ultimate source of your work"

What I learned was it's ok to be afraid. It's what we do with the fear that matters. Pushing through it means we are taking chances and this is how we grow as artists and people.

That's the thing about a lot of these fears is that they seem to lose some of their power over us once they are shared and exposed to the light. You do learn that it's okay and "normal" to be afraid and that it's simply a part of the process.

Read more at:<http://skinnyartist.com/an-artists-bookshelf-art-and-fear/>

"The best you can do is make art you care about—and lots of it! The rest is largely a matter of perseverance."

"Making art now means working in the face of uncertainty; it means living with doubt and contradiction ... making the work you want to make means finding nourishment within the work itself."

"In large measure, becoming an artist consists of learning to accept yourself, which makes your work personal, and in following your voice, which makes your work distinctive."

"The function of the overwhelming majority of your artwork is simply to teach you how to make the small fraction of your artwork that soars. ... even the failed pieces are essential ... art is all about starting again"

"Vision is always ahead of execution, knowledge of materials is your contact with reality, and uncertainty is a virtue"

"All you can work on today is directly in front of you. Your job is to develop an imagination of the possible."

"Uncertainty is the essential, inevitable and all-pervasive companion to your desire to make art"

"...to require perfection is to invite paralysis .... the seed of your next art work lies embedded in the imperfections of your current piece"

"The problems arise when we confuse others' priorities with our own"

"The hardest part of art-making is living your life in such a way that your work gets done—over and over—and that means, among other things, finding a host of practices that are just plain useful."

"By leading your viewer to experience the world through the very different sensibilities of the artist, a good work of art inevitably calls the viewer's own belief system into question."

"...competition centers not on making work, but on collecting the symbols of acceptance and approval of that work—NEA grants, a show at Galerie d'jour, a celebrity profile in The New Yorker and the like"

"What we really gain from the art-making of others is courage-by-association"

"In making art you declare what's important"

"The only work really worth doing—the only work you can do convincingly—is the work that focuses on the things you care about. To not focus on those issues is to deny the constants in your life."

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Some more comments:

1. There is a wonderful condition in which the work seems to make itself.

And if you're lucky, people like it. There are ways to "tap" in. In my experience it's called practice. And some people can practice and practice

and practice and not tap feel like they are tapping in. But in all cases art is true expression whether we think it's good or not. The mere act of doing it results in an individual expression. That's why it's impossible to make exact replicas, to the nth degree. And why should we.

2. Courting approval, even that of peers, puts a dangerous amount of power in the hands of the audience. The only pure communication is between you and your work...

Well, this is the tapping in I'm speaking of. When this happens everything else disappears for a while. Time is no longer regarded the same. As a performing artist and composing artist I have two different experiences. Both are affected by this comment. It's a fine line we all must draw and walk for ourselves. I believe that the audience is the final step in the process. Without them the work is for the self, but I believe the work should be shared, like food.

3. Plato maintained that, "all art is a gift from the Gods, channeled through artists who are "out of their mind when making art."

If "the Gods" is a euphemism for "the Cosmos," I think I can go along with Plato on the first half of the quote. But regarding that "out of their minds" thing, well... might I say that I resemble that remark.

4. The artist's life is frustrating not because the passage is slow, but because he imagines it to be fast....

Absolutely. We have to learn to put things on the shelf. Walk away, but not lose the connection with that thing. Unless you're a genius. But I can't speak to that process.

5. Artists are those that have learned how to not quit...

I think this is just talking about the idea that there are all kinds of excuses you can use to not do art but those that do continue have figured out ways of not quitting.

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"Artmaking involves skills that can be learned. The conventional wisdom here is that while 'craft' can be taught, 'art' remains a magical gift bestowed only by the gods. Not so." Art and Fear, page 3.

"Even talent is rarely indistinguishable, over the long run, from perseverance and lots of hard work." Art and Fear, page 3.

"The function of the overwhelming majority of your artwork is simply to teach you how to make the small fraction of your artwork that soars." Art and Fear, page 5.

"To all viewers but yourself, what matters is the product: the finished artwork. To you, and you alone, what matters is the process." Art and Fear, page 5.

"You learn how to make your work by making your work ... art you care about -- and lots of it!" Art and Fear, page 6.

"What separates artists from ex-artists is that those who challenge their fears continue; those who don't, quit." Art and Fear, page 14.

"Most artists don't daydream about making great art --- they daydream about having made great art." Art and Fear, page 17.

"The artist's life is frustrating not because the passage is slow, but because he imagines it to be fast." Art and Fear, page 17.

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What I appreciate most about Art and Fear is the unsentimental focus on the work itself. On the actual thing, the physical object, and the process. Essentially, if we spend too much energy on our internal issues, we become caught up in fears about ourselves. Conversely, if we impart too much attention on our audience, we become caught up in fears about others. In either case, our internal or external focus grants us paralyzed. The only alternative, they argue, is to extend our focus to the work itself. In their words, "The lessons you are meant to learn are in your work."

Again, their focus is on the artwork itself and they sum up their position gracefully when they write, "There's a difference between meaning that is embodied and meaning that is referenced."

Art and Fear successfully describes and helps to resolve many issues and fears that painters, writers, photographers, dancers, actors, filmmakers, and anyone else drawn to an artistic pursuit must confront. I appreciate their gentle reminders and motivators to just get back to work already.