

"It was a rekindling of my artistic being." - Kevin J. Taylor

# SUPER ARTIST

HOW TO  
TAKE FLIGHT  
AS A CREATOR



DAVID CARUS

Super Artist - How To Take Flight As A Creator  
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## DEDICATION

This is for the artists of the world, whether they call themselves one or not. Deep down at our very core, everyone is an artist.

To the artists that have inspired me: John Steinbeck, Charlie Chaplin, Bob Dylan, Walt Disney, Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, Tupac Shakur, Pablo Picasso, Mahatma Gandhi, Stan Lee, Michelangelo, William Shakespeare, L. Ron Hubbard, John Lennon, Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, Jackson Pollock, Naoki Urasawa, James Dean, Frida Kahlo, Bob Marley, Elon Musk, Harry Houdini, David Blaine, Ray Bradbury, Will Smith, Martin Scorsese, Malcolm X, Leonardo Da Vinci, Jose Saramago, Mos Def, Osamu Tezuka, Michael Jackson, Nicola Tesla, Jack Kirby, Jeff Smith, Stephen King, Tom Cruise, Robert Heinlein, Ayn Rand, Hermann Hesse, Eminem, Galileo, Christopher Reeve, Jim Lee, Todd McFarlane, Khalil Gibran, Walt Whitman, The Wright Brothers, Harriet Tubman, Joni Mitchell, Lauryn Hill, Talib Kweli, Chuck D, Garth Brooks, George Strait, Daniel Robinson, Ludwig Van Beethoven, Stanley Kubrick, Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Alan Jackson, Muhammed Ali, Salvador Dali, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jack Kerouac, Jimi Hendrix, Miles Davis, Che Guevara, the Dalai Lama, Alfred Hitchcock, George Orwell, and so many more.

## FOREWORD

Name an artist. Name a critic. See? Nobody remembers critics. Artists are the truly living and critics are just dead inside. By the way, was that your name up in lights just now? If not then this book has arrived in the nick of time. Don't worry, by the time you finish this read you may have looked over your shoulder at your old sidelined dreams. And guess what— that's all it takes to bring them back to life. That's right. Just take a look at the first time you can remember creating anything. Crayons, paint, pots and pans, dancing on the couch or under a tree. The dreams are still there as bright as the day you conceived them. They didn't change. Something else did.

So what happened. Long story, no doubt. Short story, for sure. And the wrong stories to get hung up on. This book, this handful of pages, is the road back to the dream maker in you. More correctly, the dream maker that you are.

One of my fave quotes is from Henry Ford when he said “Whether you think you can, or you think you can't— you're right.” Truthfully you still need to “Make it so” because dreams need to be made real. Here you will find out how to bend the universe to your own vision of rightness— check the chapter on Universe Development. Another on Strategy. Grab a cup of your favorite and settle in. Screw the world.

This is a private conversation.

Maybe the best way to tell you is to say what I wrote before this book existed. I know this is an introduction and I should be impersonal and very academic and profound but this is from experience and that makes all the difference.

"If I could walk up to your front door and tell you face-to-face I would. There is no other way to communicate the enthusiasm I have experienced from reaching out— from being recognized as an artist— being seen, being understood— having my voice come out from the wilderness and projected forward to the world. It was a rekindling of my artistic being. And the word went out from there."

I can let you in on a few lines from my initial words to David Carus after he worked his magic— "Shit man, you can write my eulogy!" And, "I am sitting here elated that SOMEONE got it. Someone took the ride I had to offer. Someone got some poems and some poetry got made!" That's David Carus and I would introduce him to any artist friend I have.

Kevin J. Taylor, poet

## INTRODUCTION

Awesome! To be reading this book means you're not only an artist but you probably view artists a little differently than the rest of the world. If you're like me, you see them as powerful individuals with the capability to change the world and you're most likely looking for a way to be a better artist and have your work create bigger effects. Even if you're not looking to have every camera in the world pointed in your direction, and all you want is a little boost in confidence, this book will give you that.

Whether you're an artist, writer, musician, photographer, sculptor, poet, actor, director, singer or business executive, if you consider yourself a creator, someone that makes things, this book is for you. You won't find any specialized manual inside that was written for one type of artist. Instead, you'll find everything you need to know about how to be a successful artist and no matter what changes technology brings or how different the world will look tomorrow, the lessons inside this book will still apply. These are the exact things you need to think with as you approach being a creator.

You might be looking for a blueprint to fame and riches or you might just want your work to be good enough so you don't feel nervous showing it to people. This book will help you with both and a lot more. I've been an artist most of my life and at one point I was looking for the knowledge to be a better artist too. What you're about to read is everything I discovered on the subject, broken down to its

simplicity. I wrote this book because I want to help artists. I want to see them doing well and winning. With enough artists being artists and creating art, there's no limit to what this world can be.

Artists Run This Planet,  
David Carus



## 1. ARTISTS ARE SUPERHEROES

Capes are not always easy to wear. They get caught on things, they're prone to tearing and tough to keep clean. However, their biggest problem is the one that keeps most people from wearing them every day: they generate attention. For an artist, sometimes attention can feel like someone slapped a "kick me" sign on your back, but for the super artist, attention feels more like everyone giving you a high five when you walk into a room. It's time to take off the glasses, unloosen your tie and hop into that phone booth you've been eyeing for so long. Grab your cape (leave the mask behind) and get ready to take flight!

What is an artist? The super simplicity is that an artist is someone that communicates really well. What is communication? It's definitely not just talking. When's the last time you heard the Mona Lisa's vocal chords? Communication basically means you have an idea you send across to someone else and they understand it. If you've ever seen a movie you scratched your head over, the filmmakers didn't quite communicate to you. Ever wonder why foreign films aren't more popular? It's because they're created for a different audience than you. Communication, when in the hands of a true artist, knows its message, selects its receiver and executes its delivery with skill. There are a lot of ways to communicate, tons of tools at your disposal, but whether you paint, sing, direct, write or dance, the purpose for making art should be the same: to

communicate!

When you take a look at the world, watching people in their daily activities, you'll notice that people are communicating more than we usually give them credit for. Every day they wake up and pick out an outfit that says something to the world. It might say, "I'm just trying to blend in" or "I like to be comfortable" or "I am important" or "Damn, I look good!" Standing in line at the checkout counter we see the clerk who can either smile and say good morning or look miserable. We go to the bank and the stiffness of the security guard or his relaxed demeanor communicate something too. Everywhere we look the world is communicating. What makes the artist so special? He is a master at it.

The artist has an important role in the world. He literally paints the future. Want something new? Want the world to go in a new direction? The only person capable of this is an artist. Whether you call him a writer, inventor, engineer, architect, illustrator, composer, or photographer, the ideas and inventions that progress mankind forward are all dreamt up into reality by some artist somewhere, whether he even thinks to call himself one or not. The Wright Brothers were artists. So were Steve Jobs, Nicola Tesla, Mark Twain, Thomas Jefferson and pretty much anybody else you can think of that had a positive impact on the world. You want to be an artist? You are in some excellent company.

A couple of years ago I was busy promoting my music online. I'd post links to my songs on Facebook and elsewhere and I noticed I'd only get the occasional like here and there. At first I thought,

“Did I miss the mark? Maybe my work isn’t good enough.” No, I knew that wasn’t the case. Then I got the idea to see what response my artist friends were getting when they posted links to their work and lo and behold, they were also getting about the same response I was getting. It was then that I had my eureka moment. I said, “Wait a minute, Artists Run This Planet! Don’t people know this?” Nope. They generally don’t understand how important artists are and the role they play in society. How would they? They don’t teach much about art in school these days. There’s no big government agency called the Department of Art. Most importantly, I couldn’t think of a single person talking about this to people. It was then that I decided to pick up the hat and wear it. I’d be that person talking about it.

I started writing the words “Artists Run This Planet” when I shared art and posted on Facebook and something funny happened. At first I got quite a few people saying, “Oh, wouldn’t that be nice if that were true.” I knew what they were implying was that the guys really running things were the politicians, corporations and bankers and it was a hopeless situation to go up against those guys and I was basically a wishful dreamer. I didn’t feel bad. I understood my idea was new to people, that their initial reaction was only based on ideas of the past and that I had work to do. I kept writing those four words “Artists Run This Planet” and slowly people started clicking that like button more and more. They even left comments saying things like “You’re absolutely right” or “Thank you for posting this” and “I feel the exact same way!” Little by little I found

my message reaching people and those initial comments of disagreement vanished completely. I had found my audience, connected with artists from all over the world and my message was reaching.

Why did I say “Artists Run This Planet?” I looked at the world and I saw it differently. I wanted other people to share my viewpoint and I also wanted to shift the balance of power in the world from the hands of governments, corporations and banks to the artists who have always kept the world moving forward, despite all the wars, depressions and suppressions. I didn’t need an army of men wielding rifles and blasting bombs to overthrow the powers that be. All I had to do was recognize where the real power was, with the artists. An army of artists wielding pens, brushes, cameras, guitars and laptops are way more dangerous than any army using violence and force. Look at what Gandhi was able to achieve half-naked with a spindle and a walking stick. Why do you think copies of *The Grapes of Wrath* were burned in Steinbeck’s (and my) hometown of Salinas? Ideas are more powerful than anything and the artist communicates them better than anyone.

Sometimes I get the occasional “Artists Rule The World” instead of “Artists Run This Planet” and I try to correct it when I can because I don’t want artists to “rule.” Ruling is something those politicians, corporations and bankers try to do. I say “run” because artists keep the show moving. We keep it running. That requires a lot of skill and who but an artist can be counted on for that?

It’s been said that everyone is essentially an

artist. The problem is that too many people are not being themselves. They spend a lifetime trying to be some sort of imagined concept of what they should be based on things they see in advertisements or elsewhere. There's nothing wrong with wanting the hairdo of a famous actress or the sports star's sneakers, but there is something wrong with wanting to wear a personality that limits and restrains you to being superficial and unimaginative. It is far better to be yourself, create your own universe and when you step into someone else's universe, you're aware and doing it from your own free will.

Picking up the daily paper or watching the nightly news gives you the impression that the planet is brimming with death, disease and peril around every corner. However, when you walk outside and take a walk, surprisingly, things are not violently exploding all around you. When you drive your car, sure, sometimes there's traffic and the occasional reckless driver, but there are not as many car wrecks as you'd expect for a society the nightly news depicts as dangerous. Take a closer look and what do you see? People playing their favorite radio station loudly, kids watching a Pixar film in the backseat and most cars making it to their destinations just fine. Go to someone's house and try to find some law books, business magazines or banking literature. Now go looking for CDs and DVDs. Do they have a music or movie collection? You bet they do. Open up their laptop. Scroll through their smartphone. Find any more music or movies? Take a look at their bookshelf and try to

find some novels. Any artwork on the walls? When you actually look, you see that we don't live in the society CNN gives us, we live in a society artists give us and their ideas are in the very fabric of our daily lives.

It's important to know why you make art. It matters more than most people think. It's one of those things so obvious that people don't spot it. Without art and without artists, the world is just a boring, unchanging, lackluster, uninspiring, desolate landscape no one could stand to live in. It would actually be impossible to live in a world without change, without progression towards something else. Without purpose or aim there is no life. So, how important is it that art exists and that you make it? You hold the power of life itself in your hands. You create the world every day, you imagine where it will go tomorrow. There is no one more important than an artist and here you are, an artist.

Everyone is being an artist to a greater or lesser degree, even those politicians, corporations and bankers. We've all heard the story that Adolf Hitler was once an artist, but he went into politics, took control of the German government and sent the world into war. He was definitely communicating, unfortunately it was a message of hate, violence and oppression. What a horrible work of art! So making art and being an artist isn't enough. What the artist chooses to communicate is of the utmost importance too. What we say with our art matters, especially when so many bad artists find an audience through censoring good artists and injecting degraded and demeaning messages into

the mainstream.

Several years ago televisions were filled with shows with names like “Happy Days,” “Good Times” and “The Wonder Years” but now they’re filled with shows like “Desperate Housewives,” “Masters of Sex” and “American Horror Story.” We went from Batman going “Ka-Pow!” to the gritty, gruff Christian Bale version. We went from Elvis shaking his hips to Miley Cyrus twerking. Society has shifted because artists chose their message, targeted an audience, and their ideas stuck. Although we are free to express ourselves however we see fit, there is also the greater point to all of this. What is the reason for making all of this art anyway? Is it to uplift mankind or not? If it’s not helping people, maybe the artist should find a different approach, because if you’re not making people better, you’re making them worse. And when the world gets worse, so do you.

One of the most memorable lines in comic book history was spoken by Peter Parker’s (Spider-Man’s) uncle Ben, “With great power comes great responsibility.” Those words are especially pertinent to the artist as he makes his art. We have this amazing gift, this talent to communicate to the world, but it comes at a price. The way we move, the things we say, our thinking, our ideas, are all saying something to our audience. Some artists are aware of this and put out art that makes people feel good. Other artists don’t give it much thought and make art for art’s sake, failing to recognize the impact their art will have on others. It is the very rare case when an artist creates art intentionally to suppress

people. The evil artist is rare because most artists and most people don't want to harm one another. We want to help people and create some beauty for the world when we make our art, right?

When you stare at that blank paper or canvas, know that what you create should have a positive purpose behind it. It doesn't mean you turn into a prude and make lame art that's meant for only babies or old people, no. I'm challenging you to go from being an artist to being a super artist. Play a larger part in the shaping of this planet we live on because you're the closest thing we have to a super hero.

Back in the 1930's a couple of teenagers were going through some tough times. They liked to read science fiction, enjoyed tales of circus strongmen and had big imaginations, but they weren't like the other kids and got picked on and bullied. One of the pair lost his father to a violent crime and instead of feeling helpless and weak, he put his energy into writing. Together, the two friends created a new kind of hero, one with incredible strength and ability, who righted wrongs and looked out for the little guys like them. Their work was rejected by publishers for a few years but finally saw publication in 1938. Their creation would capture the imaginations of millions, establish an entirely new genre of literature and entertainment in the process, and their ideas influenced and permeated everywhere on Earth. These young men made a work of art so powerful that it continues to help people decades later, inspiring mankind to reach greater heights. The two artists were Jerry Siegel



and Joe Shuster and they created Superman.

Every time I make art I think of what these two teenagers accomplished. To the world around them, they were about as powerless as you can get. They were physically weak, socially rejected, picked on and had a different viewpoint than other people did. Despite the obstacles they found a way to redefine the world to include the idea that we should help others, stand up for the little guy and fight for justice and truth. Comic book creators today may look at the current scene as challenging but can you imagine trying to break into the superhero field before it even really existed? Why did they succeed? They persisted in presenting the world with art that communicated a better vision for mankind, something to strive for that they wanted to be. These two young men inspired people to reach for more and in the process achieved a level of success no one could have predicted.

Today the world is filled with people who were raised with the ideas and ideals of superheroes. It doesn't matter what job a person has, at any moment when confronted with evil, he might turn to the values of a superhero and approach the situation from that viewpoint. There is no way to measure the true impact of a creation like Superman, but for being around humanity only 75 years, he sure has made his mark. Imagine what the world will look like after 1,000 years of having him around.

Each of us may not experience the kind of success that Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster found when they created the Man of Steel, but we can

definitely strive for it. What did they do right? They had a good purpose behind the making of their art, they knew their audience well, they had something to say and they delivered it perfectly. What will your art communicate? What do you have to say? Who will you say it to? These are the fundamental questions to ask before embarking on the actual making of your art.

Whether you're a writer, poet, painter, musician, singer, seamstress or entrepreneur, you have the power to shape the world into what you think it should be. You are an artist and I have no doubt you can hop into a phone booth. Remember your cape, let it flap in the wind, make the people on the ground see that an artist can fly.

## 2. UNIVERSE DEVELOPMENT

You might think there is only one universe but there's actually many. Sure, there's the one universe we all share, but everyone has their own unique universe too. Some have great, big powerful universes and some have microscopic ones, but the strength and reach of your own universe will determine where you go in this big ol' mess of a universe we all find ourselves colliding in. You might disagree and say, "Isn't a universe supposed to be a huge thing? I'm just this tiny little guy over here!" Well, if that's the case we have to start thinking like that John Mayer song, because you're bigger than your body. Remember, your ideas and art reach way out there, and it's time to go from being the Starship Enterprise to being as big as that space it's traveling in. You want to conquer the world? You're gonna need a universe to do it.

When we first start making art, so many of us become inspired by something we see or hear from another artist. It could be the first time we saw our favorite movie in a theater as a kid or when we heard our favorite singer on the radio, but something somewhere made us feel like, "Hey, I want to do that too!" and from that moment we were on an artistic path. There was something about the way that artist was communicating. They were powerful and whatever they had to say reached us and we definitely got it. You know what that was? Their universe.

A funny thing happened next. We wanted to go

live in their universe. We applied for citizenship, and if we got denied we illegally immigrated there. Nothing would stop us from being a part of their world. We bought all their albums, watched all their movies, and wore their t-shirts until they faded, or maybe until that artist's universe ran out or we found a new universe we liked better. We might have even hopped from universe to universe, like some crazed beast, gobbling up everything in sight until we were so full we almost burst. Why did we embark on these travels that left Columbus in the dust and made Marco Polo look like an amateur? We didn't think to pay any attention to our own universe. Hell, we didn't even know we had one!

Once the hangover passes and the only place we want to venture to is bed, we realize that maybe there's another way to tackle this art thing. Instead of sitting in the audience, maybe we can stand on that stage too. And so began the adventure of what many call "finding your voice." It's something that has to happen. We need to move past the imitation and emulation of our heroes and become someone else's hero. This is when our ideas need to be fleshed out and really known, our message made crystal clear, otherwise we risk being swept away in the river of copycat mediocrity where all the Milli Vanillis of the world go to drown. Don't be left on the Titanic, be James Cameron instead.

One of the world's biggest universes actually sprung from the mind of a guy ready to jump ship. Stan Lee had been working in the comic book business fresh out of high school and over the years his boss had him chasing down the latest fad,

whatever was popular at the time. For awhile it would be westerns, then it'd be detective tales, then war stories would be a hit, and then back to westerns, leaving Stan Lee feeling the total effect of everyone else's universe. After years of this he'd finally had enough and was ready to quit so he could go write a novel or find some more meaningful work. The day he planned to spring the news on his boss, he got an unusual request from him. His boss had recently discovered that their competition had struck gold with a superhero team-up book called *The Justice League* and wanted Lee to come up with a superhero team for their company. It was an unusual request that made him postpone telling his boss of his plans to leave, at least for the day.

When Stan Lee came home from work he was more confused than ever. Should he create a superhero team book like his boss wanted or was it just the latest craze to be imitated until something else came along? He didn't want to get stuck chasing other people's ideas for the rest of his life. When he mentioned this dilemma to his wife, she made a great suggestion. She said he should make the book exactly how he wanted and if his boss didn't like it he could fire him. If he got fired, fine, he was going to quit anyway, but if his boss liked what he came up with, he'd get to do the kind of work he really wanted to do without having to leave the company. So Stan Lee set out to create a superhero team book he'd want to read, *The Fantastic Four*, and ended up igniting the Marvel universe.

Stan Lee was tired of reading stories about perfect, flawless heroes. He wanted his heroes to

have problems like everybody else and when he created The Fantastic Four and other new characters, he made sure to give them interesting problems to make them more relatable to readers. There was one story in particular he was very excited about. It was about a weak, nerdy teenager that was picked on by bullies, couldn't score with the ladies and had an aunt and uncle watching over him. The character was Peter Parker who miraculously gains the abilities and powers of a radio-active spider that bites him, transforming him into Spider-Man. When Stan Lee took the idea to his boss, he rejected it. He said kids wanted their heroes to be big, strong and good looking, not small, weak and full of pimples. Plus, he said everyone hated spiders. Fortunately, Stan Lee didn't accept his boss' ideas and made a very bold move. He inserted his Spider-Man story into the final issue of a soon to be cancelled comic book called *Amazing Fantasy*. When the sales figures came back a couple of months later, it was discovered that the issue was a phenomenal hit. Spider-Man would go on to become Marvel's most popular superhero.

What did Stan Lee do right? He stopped chasing other people's universes and focused on and created his own. He was willing to risk his steady job for it because he knew some things were more important than money. He wanted to be an artist. He wanted to create the stories and characters he envisioned and because he chose to do so the world now has an entire universe that continues to grow, even without him. Lee not only created Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four, but also The Mighty Thor, The

Incredible Hulk, The Invincible Iron Man, The X-Men, Silver Surfer, Dr. Strange and many more unforgettable superheroes. He changed the entire comic book industry by giving readers believable heroes with real human problems. For the first time people could see themselves in the comic book pages.

Creating your own universe and finding your voice also involves a bit of thinking outside the box. There's an imaginary path we are all supposed to take in life. Get good grades, go to college, get a job, get married, get a house (make sure it has a white picket fence), have some kids, get a divorce, get a sports car, get married again, get divorced again, retire, now you get to live! Okay, maybe that's not the exact path for everybody but usually society has certain expectations or suggestions. There's stuff that everybody does and so you're supposed to just do it too. This goes for individual professions as well. Each industry has it's sort of expected pathway to success and if you don't follow it you run the risk of never making it and all of your peers assemble in a big room and laugh at you for the rest of eternity, right? Wrong. There is always the road less traveled and especially the road never, ever traveled, and one of your jobs as an artist is to find the right road for you.

One of my biggest pet peeves is running into some young kid who has their heart set on going to college. I like to ask them what they plan on majoring in and most of the time they don't know or have some vague ideas. I was at Starbucks recently and some kid was interviewing with someone to get

into Columbia. He said he wanted to study to be an engineer, which was great, but when he was asked about his plans after college he said something very telling. He said he planned to get an internship and work his way up at his father's friend's company; he was an engineer. I thought, "Why don't you just do that right now?" The idea never occurred to him because he was so sold on the idea of first going to college.

Now, there are some careers you probably can't escape going to college to be but it usually boils down to wanting to be a doctor and if that's the case, hey, go take out those loans and do it, but for pretty much everything else you most likely can skip the college trap. People should intern, apprentice, or go to the library for four years instead (it's way cheaper). We have the internet now. MIT makes all of their courses available for free online. What can't you learn these days with just Google and a search topic? The bottom line, don't think you have to go down the same path everyone else does because most of the people you look up to and admire didn't take that same path, they blazed a new trail and so should you.

Ever had thoughts of becoming a filmmaker? Someone might tell you that the only way that'll happen is if you get into film school at NYU or USC, but they'd be wrong. The biggest director in the world, Steven Spielberg, took a very unusual path. He found a way onto the studio lot that is so unbelievably simple you wouldn't believe it. Things don't have to be complicated. It's way better when they're as simple as his path was to creating his



universe at Universal!

He made home movies as a kid. When it came time to go to college he wasn't accepted to film school at USC and although he enrolled at California State University, Long Beach, his real education came in a very different form. He was able to gain a one-week internship in the editing department at Universal Studios. It was far from where actual filming occurred but he showed up in a suit, carried a briefcase with nothing in it except his lunch and waved to the security guard each day. When his one-week internship was over and his pass expired, the ambitious guy just kept showing up and the security guard kept waving him in.

Spielberg managed to make his way onto film sets, asked questions, made friends and even found an empty office space he claimed as his own by simply placing his name on the door. It wasn't long before he went from helping others make movies to directing his own. After seeing a couple of short films, studio executives signed him to a seven-year contract and he became the youngest director ever hired by Universal. He experienced breakout success with *Jaws*, the film that coined the term "blockbuster." It was the highest grossing film of all time but he would go on to break his own record twice more, earn several Oscars for Best Director and have his films gross more than 8 billion dollars. He didn't have to go to a prestigious film school, all he had to do was show up and create.

You might think, well, he's a special exception, the guy must walk on water and not everyone can be a famous movie director, right? Well, how about

Kevin Smith? The guy was working in a convenience store but loved movies, wanted to make one but had no connections and was broke. His solution? He sold his comic book collection, maxed out some credit cards and pooled together about \$20,000 to finance a movie he shot at the convenience store he worked at while they were closed at night. He only had a few days to film, played one of the roles himself, shot it in black and white, but made the movie. He submitted it to the Sundance Film Festival and it became a hit, earning him a distribution deal and he's been working in the movie business ever since. His movie was *Clerks* and spawned an entire universe of sequels, cartoons, comic books and action figures.

Today's artists have even more opportunities to create their universes. With advancements in technology you can shoot a film on your phone that looks better than some classics. You don't need expensive studio time to record an album, just a laptop and a microphone in your bedroom. Want to write an epic novel? You have it a lot better than Hemingway did punching those heavy keys on a typewriter. And today, the internet makes finding your audience so much easier too.

You have the tools at your disposal and you have lots of legends to learn from but at the end of the day you're going to have to pick up a tool and build your universe. It doesn't have to be filled with dragons and spaceships or lend itself perfectly to toy merchandising. The biggest webcomic in the world uses stick figures (xkcd.com), so don't think you even have to draw really well either. Your ideas and

message are the most important things and as long as you take steps towards communicating them to people, your art will get better, your audience will grow and so will your universe.

Have too much to say? Too many directions you want to go in? Just start creating at one thing and when you gain speed you'll figure out how to incorporate the rest. Creating a universe and establishing your voice doesn't have to be complex. It just has to be. You're you. As long as you communicate what you're about then you're creating your universe. Just because you didn't make the Star Wars trilogy yesterday doesn't mean you couldn't write a script this weekend. Stop looking at the limitations, the barriers and all the reasons why you can't create and just start doing it. Spielberg made home movies first. Do you think Steve Jobs' first computer looked as nice as the one I'm using to write this? Everyone's universe starts in a garage, a bedroom, a backyard, somewhere, but where it ends up is totally up to them. An artist creates and his most important canvas is his own universe.

### 3. HELLO PUNCHING BAG

You're an artist, you know why, you've got your own universe going on, that cape is flapping louder now and people are starting to notice. What happens next? You get attacked. Wait, what? Yep, you're now a target. That feeling of getting slapped with a "kick me" sign is in full effect and if you're not careful you might actually get kicked. You are officially a punching bag, but don't worry, there's hope.

So what makes someone turn on the hate and want to throw a punch in your direction? Or even worse, why would they want to land that slow knife in your back and smile as you bleed out? It's simple. They have totally bought into all the lies of the world, gave up on their own dreams so long ago they don't even remember them and see you as a threat. They see you for what you are: a powerful, creative entity capable of great things. They see themselves as small, insignificant, only capable of harm, hurt and deceit. According to their "logic," if you have power, then they don't, so they have to bring you down a few pegs. "You conceited, cocky bastard, time to accept reality like the rest of us!" It may be hard to accept but those guys you've been worried about and scared of are actually worried about and scared of YOU!

It probably started a long time ago. You were in school and some kid saw you draw something awesome and said it wasn't so good and he could do better. You felt bad and thought maybe he was right

but strangely you never thought to ask him to go ahead and draw something. This happened a few more times throughout school because let's face it, most schools are ripe for this kind of thing. The kids aren't encouraged to be creative individuals and spend most of their day being told to get in line, memorize facts and raise their hand if they want to ask a question. By the time you get to college the teachers don't expect you to say anything anymore but the artist, who somehow managed to keep at his art, gets even more scorn coming his way. Young men and women who have already signed on the dotted line for a career of servitude to some government entity or multi-national corporation look at your painting or guitar playing as useless hobbies only the truly foolish would take up. "How dare you," they think. The truth is they are envious, jealous, "hating" on you and just wish they could be making art too.

Once you are an official grown-up, a full-fledged member of the adult race, if you are actually brave enough to pursue a career as an artist, that *Jaws* theme music plays everywhere you go. It doesn't play over the radio waves or come loudly down the street with a marching band. Instead, it comes silently, suddenly, in little jabs here and there. Your friends and family sometimes bring it, other times strangers or new acquaintances will, but whoever brings it with them, doesn't mind the tune at all, in fact they think they're doing you a favor playing it. You should be pursuing something else after all, remember? They want you wearing a suit, looking forward to vacations, and collecting that 401K

package so you can be safe and secure too. So it's basically their duty to say things like "That's nice," "Have you actually sold any yet?" or "How long are you planning on doing that?" Sometimes words don't do the trick so they have to turn on the silence. You say, "I'm having a show next week," "You can get my book on Amazon," or "I just started this mural downtown," and they look at you for a moment as you disappear from the room and their gaze goes somewhere else, the silence switch was flicked. You turn your head to others in the room and you realize you're an attendee at the Silence Convention and everyone's got a booth.

At first, when things like this happen, you're confused. You're thinking "Aren't these people my friends? Shouldn't my own family support what I'm doing? I just met this person, why would they say that?" You're confused about this because you think they think like you. You see, you've taken this art thing too lightly. It comes so easy to you. You've been doing it so long and you can't imagine not creating art...but them? They don't reach for pencils and pens or want to walk into art stores. They're happy watching that football game every Sunday and having a few drinks, why would they want to spend their day-off painting or writing? They see you doing it and think you're weird. And you are weird, to them. Aren't they a bit weird to you too? You have to understand that you are different, in a good way, in the very, best possible way. There are few people in this world that can do what you do. The proof of this is in the way people react to your art. If you get attacks, barbs, criticisms, looks or

silence, be happy because that means you're being an artist. If you weren't out there communicating with your art no one would think of going after you. You see, you communicated; it's just that sometimes your message isn't what some people want to hear. The good news is that way more people want to hear than don't.

Sometimes we lose sight of the big picture. One person says one bad thing and we crumble, failing to look around and notice all of the other people clapping their hands together in applause. We don't live in a perfect world where everyone agrees and it's impossible to make something so perfect that every last person gives it two thumbs up, five stars and runs wildly around telling their friends about it. Go to Amazon and read the reviews for any classic film or literary masterpiece or album of the year and you'll find people that didn't like them. Someone didn't like *Avatar* or Michael Jackson's *Thriller* or even *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* so don't take it too bad if someone doesn't like your art. Enough people will like it, so focus on them instead. When someone throws a punch in your direction you'll hardly feel it if you've got tons of fans in your corner cheering you on, but you won't get to that point if you give up.

One of the most famous movie stars in Hollywood history took plenty of punches on and off the screen. Before he was the legendary actor we all know him as, Sylvester Stallone was the definition of a struggling actor. Everyone told him he wouldn't have a career because he didn't look like an actor and he talked funny. No agent would take

him on as a client but Stallone kept showing up and eventually got one. He did extra work and landed small roles as tough guys and gangsters but his acting career wasn't very financially rewarding. He didn't have enough money to heat his apartment and one day, to get warm, went to the New York Public Library. It was there that he stumbled upon a book by Edgar Allen Poe. He immediately connected with the author and became inspired to write. When he came around with the script for the movie *Rocky*, Stallone's entire life was about to change, but at the time, no one else could have known where he was about to go with his career.

He had interest in his script and was offered \$125,000 for it, but someone else would play the lead. Stallone said no. He knew this was the role he was destined to play and he could nail it. They hit him again and doubled their offer to \$250,000 but they wanted someone else to be Rocky. Stallone said no. They hit him again. \$330,000 for the script but someone else would get the part. He said no! He believed in himself, knew that the money wasn't his biggest motivation, acting was, and he was never going to get a role like this again. People doubted his ability to act in a leading role and wanted Robert Redford or some other experienced, well-known actor. Stallone stuck it out, getting the Rocky role when he sold the script for just \$35,000. *Rocky* became the most successful film of 1976, both at the box office and at the Academy Awards, winning Best Picture, and launched Stallone's career into Hollywood history.

Sylvester Stallone is definitely not the only artist



to be a punching bag for the unimaginative. In the early 60's Bob Dylan exploded onto the music scene with song lyrics mainstream culture had never heard before. The young man was political, poetic, and a visionary songwriter that had the ability to communicate to his entire generation. There were plenty of critics that didn't understand his songs and bashed his fans, who they thought didn't really understand them either. Dylan cleverly brushed aside the barbs and the criticisms from journalists and media types but he later found himself with an entirely different kind of monster attacking him: his own fans.

In 1965 Bob Dylan, who up until this time played acoustic sets, decided to go in a different direction musically, incorporating an electric sound into his performances and recordings. When he premiered his new style at the Newport Folk Festival, lots of fans booed and started calling him a sell out. They viewed his switch in sound as a betrayal of folk music for the more popular rock and roll music of the time. At a show in England someone famously shouted "Judas!" at Dylan. He could have easily walked off stage or said something back angrily, but instead told his band to play louder and replied to the heckler simply, "I don't believe you. You're a liar."

It's tough to hear criticisms, especially from people you think of as supportive of you. Dylan had a large following and a good amount of them were booing him at every concert. Most people can't handle that kind of rejection without getting flustered, upset or bothered by it, but Dylan payed it

little mind and confronted the booing by turning up his sound. The songs he was making at the time are all classics now and some consider his single “Like a Rolling Stone” the greatest rock and roll song of all time, but back then quite a few people were booing it.

Our job as artists is to create the future. Bob Dylan made groundbreaking hits that were ahead of their time and because of it faced some opposition. It’s important to know that not everyone booed and even the people that booed were clapping during his acoustic set. If you can look towards the future, see the big picture, the small blows coming your way today seem much smaller and you won’t even feel them. Have confidence in what you are doing, see the value of it and understand its place in the world. Ignore the comments of the critic who is pretending to help and just get out there and do what Dylan did, turn up the volume and play louder! The one that makes the most noise wins right? Don’t let the non-artist with their poor communications knock you off your stage, trust me, you can outlast them all.

Being an artist means you are pretty much disagreeing with the whole world. You’re telling them that you’re making a new one. They’ve gotten too comfortable with the one they’ve got to let you pull the rug from under their nice comfy sofas. Expect the attacks. Better yet, want them to come your way. If you’re not getting attacked, you’re not communicating to enough people. Every great artist has been attacked, doubted, laughed at, ridiculed, and told to throw in the towel. Someone told Walt

Disney he had no imagination. Someone else fired Steve Jobs. Charlie Chaplin was kicked out of the United States because he was seen as a threat to the powers that be. Beatles records were burned. The attacks don't stop when you get famous, they get bigger. Imagine how many times you've heard a celebrity or an artist being laughed at or sued by someone. Tabloids and paparazzi have an entire industry built around attacking artists. But don't think it's impossible to beat all of this; winning is actually easier than you think.

Take a look at the people around you and know who you're dealing with. If they lift you up, encourage you and make you feel good from being around them, hold onto them. If they make little remarks, don't give genuine smiles, knock you down, lie, spread gossip, are dishonest, make you feel bad, and leave you feeling slimed, cut those people out. Some of those bad characters will pop up from time to time, don't keep them around very long. Don't give them any ammunition, smile and kill them with kindness and move on quickly. There's way too many cool and awesome people in this world for you to spend your time trying to make a bad guy think well of you. There's nothing you can really say to change the fact he's out to get you and bring you down, whether with big fireworks and explosions or slowly slipping you poison.

Ultimately, the best weapon against these artist attacks is to keep winning as an artist by continuing to make art. You see, the only reason you've ever stopped making art or have had thoughts that maybe you weren't good enough, came directly from

these despicable artist bashers, whether you noticed them or not. When it comes down to it, there's not too many of them; most people are good and even the bad ones are good — deep, down. As long as you keep making art and sending it out to the world you'll defeat the naysayers and critics of the world. Don't worry if you get knocked down from time to time. It happens to the best of us. The important thing is that you get back up and keep fighting. Life isn't meant to be this fragile thing, easily broken and needing of constant protection. It's there to strike, so get your hands dirty and don't worry if you come home with a torn shirt and bleeding. There's always more life to be lived, more art to be made and no amount of insane and useless words of scorn should ever keep you from dipping your brush and splashing colors all over this thing we call a planet. Galileo was locked up for pointing a telescope at the sky and proving the world didn't work the way everybody'd been taught. Don't be surprised when someone points a finger, throws a comment or sends silence your way. The future is in the hands of the artist and history will show who won our tomorrow.

## 4. THE ART FACTORY

Henry Ford didn't invent automobiles but he sure figured out a good way to make a lot of them. Whether he made the world's greatest cars is up for debate but he definitely communicated with them in a big way, putting more on the road than anybody else. He made so many vehicles that the world transformed and shifted from horse and buggy to automobile and everywhere you looked people were driving. How did he make so many cars? He had a factory.

Artists don't like to think of themselves as factories because that sounds a little bit too much like being a machine. Obviously people aren't machines, your body is one, but you're not. Artists also don't like to think of themselves as factories because that'd be too close to some big corporation spewing pollution into the atmosphere and exploiting people, right? You're a human being, you care, you're not some cold factory or a sell out looking to make millions from your art. I get it. However, all of those connotations aside, a factory is exactly what you need to be.

Factories make stuff. They can be big and noisy or clean and efficient, that's up to you, but either way you need to crank out that art. You need to pump up the volume and take your production to higher levels. Why? Because Stephen King didn't write one book and stop. Martin Scorsese didn't stop at one movie. Michelangelo didn't climb that ladder and paint for a day satisfied he'd done

enough on that ceiling. Your whole career as an artist boils down to being an art factory. Show me an artist that only made one work of art and threw in the towel. They don't really exist. Making art is a continual occurrence. It starts when you're a kid outlining your hand to draw a turkey for Thanksgiving, all the way into old age, the Louvre filled with your modern impressionist paintings of turkeys (just kidding, but you get the idea). You've been an art factory your whole life. The key is cranking out more work.

I have to stress that in no way do you have to skimp or give up on quality to produce more. You're an artist and an artist is supposed to communicate with quality, however, if you want to really communicate to people, you're going to need to send your art flying off the shelves into the hands of your audience. Quantity is super important. It's important for basically two reasons, one, you want your art to reach as wide an audience as possible so it can positively impact the world and two, the only way you're going to get really good as an artist and ever create a masterpiece is by painting a whole bunch of non-masterpieces to get there. Remember the famous quote from Thomas Edison? After someone noted his failures regarding the lightbulb he said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." No one wakes up in the morning with the idea to be a composer and by breakfast is conducting an orchestra with the newspaper headlines claiming Beethoven has been dethroned. If you want any chance of dethroning Beethoven, you'll have to put in the work learning,

mastering and composing music.

Van Gogh was always interested in art but he didn't give it a real go as a painter until his late twenties. However, when he took up painting, he really painted. In a little over ten years he amassed over 2,100 works of art, 860 of them oil paintings and 1,300 watercolors, drawings, sketches and prints. What happened as a result? His most well-known works of art were created in the last two years of his life. He wasn't making classics from day one. He just kept making art, getting better with each one, until one day he was finally painting masterpieces. He also did this without the internet, the art store down the street and every other luxury we have today to make art easier and faster.

Have you ever tried to learn to play the guitar? It's confusing at first, you don't know where to put your fingers, what the different notes are and the noise you're making sure doesn't sound like "All Along The Watchtower" when Jimi Hendrix plays it. After awhile your fingers hurt and you either give up on the idea of being a rock star or you persist through the uncomfortable strain on your fingers and eardrums and one day end up on stage at Madison Square Garden.

There are lots of ways we get better as artists. We watch our idols, read books, watch tutorials, take lessons or figure it out on our own, but whatever path we choose, it's important to know it's a path. Dorothy doesn't walk out of that house, the good fairy godmother waiting with the ruby slippers in her hand and one of those bubbles ready to take her back to Kansas. What kind of fun would that be?

She's got to follow that yellow brick road and so do you. There's gonna be wicked witches and flying monkeys but there'll also be munchkins, wizards and all the rest. Your journey to being a super artist has to include the making of lots of art. There's no getting to the top without some sort of a climb.

What kind of art factory you're going to have is yours to create. You might like the idea of having a huge company with hundreds of people all working for you to get your art out to the world or you might feel better going solo. Either way, art has to be cranked out. J.D. Salinger wrote the phenomenal classic *The Catcher in the Rye*, then became the world's most famous isolated author when he decided to hole up in his home in New Hampshire and skip interviews or going on book tours. From the 1960's until his recent death, no new J.D. Salinger books were published, but that didn't mean he stopped writing them. He had been writing the entire time and planned for the world to read his later works after his death. Despite keeping his art locked away from people (which is the biggest violation an artist can make), even history's most famous recluse creator kept an art factory going.

I don't recommend the J.D. Salinger hermit route because he couldn't have been too happy and so many people missed out on experiencing his work. Whether you turn into the Bill Gates of the art world, holding a monopoly on living room walls or if you decide to keep your manuscripts locked away in a filing cabinet somewhere, you must crank out art. This means you have to get rid of that self-doubt and those thoughts that what you're making isn't



good enough. You might be right, your art may not be as good as you'd like, but it's never going to be good enough if you don't put in the work to create all of that work that won't measure up to a Picasso painting. The way you get to be Picasso or Hemingway is by experimenting, trying different styles, becoming familiar with all of your available tools and approaches. Watch the movie *Pollock* starring Ed Harris. The painter Jackson Pollock goes through so many different styles of painting before he strikes gold with the splash style that made him famous. What did he do next? He cranked those babies out.

The Beatles had to play tons of gigs in small pubs in Hamburg, Germany and god knows where else before they were on a plane headed to America and the Ed Sullivan Show. You don't get screaming fans drowning out their music at Shea Stadium without The Beatles finding out what worked and what didn't on those small crowds in Germany.

Putting in the work and making art is the best way to grow as an artist. Pretty soon you learn things. You'll know that when you use a certain pitch in your voice, the girls all swoon and when you harmonize they sing along. You'll learn what too much blue is and what too little blue is. Books become easier to write when you know how to write a believable character and can effortlessly guide him through a story. You can become expert at making people laugh or cry or get up and dance. Artists are powerful because when they are on top of their game and doing it right, there is nothing to stop them from influencing culture and making the

world go where they send it.

Art factories can be fragile things, ready to collapse when that Big Bad Wolf shows up, but as long as you build them with bricks you'll be just fine. Bricks are laid one at a time. Eventually you'll know how many you can lay without quality suffering or anything else. One of the best ways to make sure plenty of art leaves your factory is to keep track of it all. If you're an author it's good to know that yesterday you wrote 1,000 words so there's no reason you can't write at least 1,000 words today. You might be able to get it up to 3,000 words or 5,000 words but whatever that number is, it can motivate you and keep you on track to producing at a level you should be producing at. If you've been writing a new song every day for the last month and all of a sudden a week goes by without a single new song, you'll know that something must have changed and you can look back to one week ago, find it and handle it. When you go willy nilly into the ether and sit around waiting for inspiration to strike before you do anything, that's when you fail to wear your hat as an artist. That beret belongs on the head of the guy that knows what he wants to communicate, who he wants to communicate it to, and goes about creating his art. When you take the time to count, measure and compare your work to your previous work, you have something extremely valuable that you can use to propel your career forward.

Writing a novel can be an overwhelming target that's immediately brushed aside by the amateur or the average person when they think about the time

it will take and the words needed to fill so many pages. However, to the professional writer it doesn't look overwhelming at all. Why? Because they know all they have to do is show up every day and write and if they keep showing up and write, eventually they'll have a book. They keep track of their word count and page count. They know when they've had a rough day and also when they lit that laptop on fire. Those numbers mean something to the professional writer but there are important numbers in every artistic field. How many hours did you spend playing that violin this week? Or painting? How many photos did you take today? How many people did you talk to? Using numbers and statistics take a lot of the guess work out of creating art. If you know last month you painted a dozen paintings but this month it doubled, there's a good chance your income doubled too, and more importantly, you'll think of finding what caused that spike.

Want another reason to get your art factory pumping out art? Think about how many factories are pumping out things like AK-47s, tanks, stealth bombers, poison, cocaine, genetically engineered food and tax forms. The world and the people in it are busy producing stuff, some of it good and some of it bad. When you decide to dedicate your endeavors towards the manufacturing of art, you're not only directly uplifting mankind but you're also indirectly stopping all of those bad products from being made, just that much. What if one of your poems made some kid ditch that idea of going into politics and instead of manufacturing laws he

started manufacturing art? It not only could happen, it did happen, to me.

I was a student at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. majoring in Government, interning at Capitol Hill and well on my way to political office, when one poet changed everything for me. I was at Blockbuster Video and stumbled upon this independent film *SLAM* starring Saul Williams. In the movie Saul Williams finds himself locked up in jail and two opposing gangs want him to pick a side. They start to close in on him and he dives into delivering a powerful poem filled with metaphor and ideas unlike anything I'd ever heard. He stopped everyone in their tracks with his wordplay and escaped having to take the same path as everybody else. His disagreeing with the way things were and choosing self-expression to change the world around him were exciting to me. I went and bought all of Saul Williams' books and even got to meet him. That single poem led me to write my own poems. Then I got the idea to let people read them. Soon I was performing them. By the time college was over I was no longer headed to the White House, I was headed to my art factory.

When you walk outside and see more art and less flashing lights you'll know you played a part in the shaping of the world when you sat down and cranked out that work. Everyone shouldn't have to live in identical looking houses, drive identical looking cars and dress like the GAP. Everyone is unique and has their own ability to communicate and their art should be projected onto this universe steadily. Imagine what the world would look like

with art factories on every street. What would people look like and how would they interact with each other?

For me, the most exciting thing about being an artist is creating a vision of the world that doesn't quite exist yet, but could, and setting out to make it happen. When we crank out art and send it down that assembly line towards waiting trucks, we are changing the landscape of society just as much as fulfilling our need to communicate and make art. Yes, we want to make a good living and be acknowledged for our work, but we should also want a say in how things go outside our factory doors, because without lifting a brush to the outside world, we leave it to be painted by others. If we want to continue making art, communicating our ideas and expressing ourselves, we're going to have to build our art factories with the same metal they used for Captain America's shield, and run our equipment day and night. If we do that, we may just have a chance to paint the sky the perfect blue and leave some yellow brick roads for people to follow.

## 5. DUMBO EARS

I've always liked the Disney movie *Dumbo* and now that I have a two-year old, I'm not surprised he likes it too. Something in the story and in that character resonates so strongly that despite the fact it was created way before computer animation, back in 1940, and is about something as unbelievable as a flying elephant, it continues to communicate to people of all ages. In many ways *Dumbo* is the ultimate tale of an artist. He isn't like everyone else, he's picked on and laughed at, possesses a unique talent that astounds everyone and he's ultimately rewarded with accolades of admiration.

Recently the well known street artist Banksy created a short video titled "Rebel Rocket Attack" depicting Dumbo being shot down by some happy Middle Eastern rebels. At the end of the video an angry kid kicks one of the rebels for bringing down the cartoon elephant. The video is one of those great viral sensations, but more importantly it's a powerful statement on war and who and what it really takes aim at. For the evil men of the world what better target could they pick than Dumbo? He symbolizes imagination and what's possible if we just believe in not only that magic feather, but in ourselves.

You'd be surprised what a guy can do with big enough ears. If he had Dumbo-sized ears he'd not only fly, but he'd soar over the entire planet and any other he could dream up. Now, I'm not suggesting you rush off to a plastic surgeon and get ear lobe

implants. What I mean is, you should put some attention on those two contraptions on the side of your head and use them — really use them. It's time to add super hearing to your list of super powers and here's why: art is about communication and to communicate you can't just shout at people, you should also kind of listen to what they have to say or at the very least make sure they heard you.

Some people mistake communication for talking. Talking is just one part of it. If you're not being heard there's no communication happening. To have meaningful, lasting communication you're going to have to listen too. This doesn't mean you turn into an effect, bending to the every whim of your audience, far from it. It means that when you make art and show it to people, you listen in and find out what they thought of it. You discover the response it had. Did they laugh? Did they cry? Did they miss the message completely or did they get it so well they scooped up all of your work and needed help carrying it to their car? What happens when your art hits an audience is important and you need some way of gauging whether or not the art you made did it's job. Without some great, big Dumbo ears you're not going to know what works and what doesn't when it comes to making art and you won't be likely to improve as an artist. But if you're listening and paying attention, you can harness the power of audience response to communicate better than you could ever imagine and make the message of your art strike the hearts of your audience every time. Isn't that worth looking a little funny to others when they see you with those giant ears?

Listening is something super artists do. Like Superman with his super hearing, floating above the Earth, listening for where people need saving and where they don't, we can observe from an empowering vantage point when we take the time to listen. It's also important to say that listening should definitely include looking. Sometimes people won't say a thing and you'll have to look at their facial expressions and body language. Other times you're looking at statistics, internet reaction and sales figures. All of it adds up to listening. You're observing to find out what's going on every time your art flies out the door and lands in someone's lap. If he holds it dearly and yaps about it day and night to his friends, you did your job, but if he tosses it aside, you're going to have to switch something up, either the art (which includes the marketing of it) or the audience.

There's a famous quote by Andy Warhol where he suggests a somewhat different approach. He says, "Don't think about making art, just get it done. Let everyone else decide if it's good or bad, whether they love it or hate it. While they are deciding, make even more art." I agree with him on emphasis. I'd have to say making art is the senior thing and you should never stop or slow down, however, for something to be art it has to communicate and what Warhol, like lots of others, may have missed is that communication is the interchange of ideas between two, it's not a boomerang meant to come back to you. A shotgun blast is a communication. It starts one place and ends up somewhere else. That somewhere else, when it comes to art, is the



audience. You're going to want to know if it hits them or not. You can definitely slave away towards perfection in the privacy of your home, letting the paintings and poetry pile up all around you until the day you die, but that's not fulfilling the real purpose of art because it's not really communicating.

So, once again we have to confront that ravenous, dangerous entity called the outside world, right? It's not as bad as your television makes it sound. Truth is that the most dangerous people around are the artists, and you being one of them, should be able to walk outside as cool and calm as Clint Eastwood. Your secret weapon? You've got about a million of them but why not use your Dumbo ears? You'd be amazed how far they can take you.

Probably the biggest producers of art for the masses are the motion picture studios of Hollywood. They specialize in making huge blockbusters seen by millions across the world. They do this on a regular basis. They're not perfect at cranking out a blockbuster every time but they're smart enough to make more money from their blockbusters than their flops. Some of the most successful movies today earn more than a billion dollars at the box office, not to mention earn even more selling merchandise like toys, clothing and video games. The amount of effort that goes into making a single blockbuster hit is tremendous. You have hundreds, maybe thousands of people working to produce it. The budget is in the millions so there's little room for error. How do they manage to pull off more hits than misses? They got their Dumbo ears

pointed all the time.

A new book is gaining popularity, Hollywood snatches up the rights. An actor is on fire creatively, the studios fight over casting him in their next big production. There are many ways Hollywood keeps an ear to the ground but one of the best ways is by testing things out. They get a new script and they don't start shooting right away. Nope, they get some artists to draw up storyboards and they look over what the movie might look like before they film it. They hire actors by doing screen tests, giving them lines from the film and going through lots of readings, listening and looking until they've got their cast. They get opinions from each other as to how it could be made better, what doesn't need to be there and eventually they have enough feedback to start creating the movie.

After a film is made it's not even really finished because next comes test screening the film with an audience. An early screening of *Toy Story* was really bad. Tom Hanks' character Woody came across too unlikeable and the guys at Pixar had to practically start over from scratch, but it was listening to audience reaction that found the problem and led to a film so successful that it changed animation forever. Ever wonder why there's so many sequels? It's because Hollywood listens. Sure, sometimes the sequels aren't as good, but that's because they didn't listen enough.

I do have to stress the danger that comes from listening. When you listen, if you're not careful, you might just stop one of the most essential aspects of being an artist: your creativity. When you have one

person tell you it should be more blue and another telling you there shouldn't be any blue, it should be black, and another says bigger when another says smaller, and so on, it can be tempting to try to please everyone but yourself. You will end up with a hodgepodge of clutter that no one will like, especially you. The world is the way it is and an artist is supposed to create something new, otherwise what's the point? So you don't want to ditch your creativity and ideas for the old, recycled concepts coming filtered through other people. When I say listen, it doesn't mean you react and incorporate every comment. You just listen. If the movie ends and everyone in the theater is sleeping, that's something to notice. When the audience laughs every time an actor comes on screen, you should remember that. Do they clap? How long do they clap? Listening too much or in the wrong way will lead to box office flops but listening just enough will make Steven Spielberg wanting to know your secret.

Art is meant to communicate but in order to do so it has to get the audience to participate. What you're listening for is the participation. Did they participate or not? Ever watch a movie and you knew what was going to happen every step of the way? If it's too predictable it's probably not a great movie. Have you seen a movie that was too confusing or vague and you weren't sure what was happening? You probably didn't like it very much. A talented director knows how to guide the audience towards participation in just the right balance. One of the best things about Joss Whedon's *The*

*Avengers* is how the punchlines land in the right spots and the audience laughs, the fight scenes balance out with the drama and you leave the theater feeling great. The film did what it set out to do. It was everything people wanted from a superhero movie. My guess is that Whedon looked and listened over the years when he was working on past television shows and films. Interestingly enough, he co-wrote *Toy Story*.

Steve Jobs was also involved in the making of *Toy Story* as a co-founder of Pixar, but when it came to his company Apple, he had a unique perspective on listening to what the people wanted. He believed that market research didn't have much importance because he was creating products that no one had ever seen before, so how could people know they wanted them? That approach led to Apple introducing products like the iPod, the iPhone and the iPad. I mention it to highlight the point that when it comes to creating art, you should strive for making something like Apple did: new and never seen before. However, this doesn't mean they never listened.

You see, the listening really comes after your art is made. Apple learned plenty by listening to their customers after one of their new products launched. Users, including Apple employees, discovered weak points and ways to improve their products after using them for awhile. If they didn't, they would have stopped at the first iPhone and we'd never arrive at an iPhone 5. Despite the ideal of creating something without market research, feedback from listening is almost unavoidable, so you might as well

use it to your advantage. If it wasn't for all of the feedback Steve Jobs got from making his earliest computers, it's very unlikely he'd have imagined gadgets as innovative as iPhones and iPads. Completely original thought is more than obtainable but very often we ignore how much the reality level of the world has to do with where we choose to go next, because without other people to connect to, what good is our art to the world?

Whether the artist paints realistically or abstractly, whether he writes non-fiction or fantasy, he is communicating a message that either hits or doesn't. Communication with other people can't be stressed enough. Without it you won't know your audience or the possibilities you have to reach the world and influence it. The rapper Kanye West has been known to test punch lines on people around him and use the ones that get a reaction in his songs. The poet Kevin J. Taylor, often walks up to total strangers when he's out and about and reads them a poem he's working on to see what their response will be. He uses the feedback to improve his poetry and know what to publish.

I've always been a fan of comic books and one country is hands down the world's leader in comic book production: Japan. They don't call them comic books, they call them manga, and in Japan, you'll see adults as well as kids reading them. They actually account for more than 40% of all printed material in the country. Why are comics more popular in Japan? There are several reasons but one jumps out. The manga industry listens to their readers big time. They constantly survey their

readers about the stories they read. The Japanese like to publish manga magazines with several different stories collected within one book and ask readers to rank them. As the stories progress, some get dumped and others make it to the cover, but overall Japan has created an atmosphere where its stories are strengthened through interacting with fans. Manga has become so popular that they now have their own section in most bookstores across the world.

One of the easiest ways to break out those Dumbo ears and listen is to point them at the internet. Using social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are great ways to judge audience response to your art. An artist can post pictures of their work and determine by the number of likes, comments, retweets and shares, which ones worked best and which didn't. If you're online following continues to grow, then you know you're doing something right, and if it doesn't you have to switch things up.

Communicating online is an art in itself and one that should come pretty easy to most artists. One artist in China exploded onto the international scene because of the way he used social media to actually create his art. Ai Weiwei, considered a threat by the Chinese government because he continuously challenged them with his art, found unique ways to engage his fans and got them to create with him.

When the government said it couldn't give a tally of the number of victims of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, Ai Weiwei organized his fans to go out

and collect the names of victims, many of them children, and used the names and their tally to create art. He blogs every day and tweets like crazy to get his message out and in the process keeps his finger on the pulse of his nation and makes his audience participate. He's championing the cause of human rights with every picture he posts but it's unlikely he'd have such a big audience without some pretty big ears.

## 6. TO BE OR NOT TO BE RICH

Most artists don't make art to be rich, at least not financially rich. If you talk to enough artists you'll discover that money is not their biggest motivation. They'll say things like: "I just like doing it," "I've always made art," "I want to add some beauty to the world," "I want my art to help people," or "I couldn't see myself doing anything else." Mostly, artists are making art because that's what people should be doing.

Naturally, we are all artists seeking to create effects upon the world through our communication, but somewhere along the line things got a little serious. They got so serious that a lot of attention went onto the subject of making money, for good reason, because without money, at least on this planet, you'll starve and shiver in the cold and the only art you'll have is a tombstone. So the super serious subject of money has consumed many artists to the point that some have sold out, others have given in or given up, but all made a choice whether to be or not to be rich; that is the question.

All right, so we start out with this great, big, beautiful dream of being an artist and then we start hearing things. "You're going to starve," "Life isn't easy for an artist," "You'll have to find a rich husband," "Why not do it on the side?" "There's no money in it," and so many other opinions that pretty soon we're thinking maybe it wasn't such a good idea. However, despite it all we kept going and made our art anyway. We didn't care about the



money, we just wanted to make art. Then we went to the mailbox, looked at that pile of bills and went, “God damn.” Possibly the art became less and less as we focused on more lucrative endeavors but that need to make art kept coming back every time we looked at that guitar in the closet or those paintings on the wall in the kitchen. Something had to be done, but what? Everyone knows you can’t make money being an artist, right? Wrong.

Walk over to your TV and turn it on. See that show? Those are artists on there and not only did they get paid, they probably got paid pretty good. Now walk over to the radio and turn that sucker on. You hear that artist? Yep, they’re making money too. Now take a drive around your town. See those businesses? Artists started them, designed the buildings they’re in, made the logos and interior design, and if you look close enough you’ll find more businesses in the works. All around you is proof that artists are not destined to a life of struggle, eating crusty bread while the rest of the world pigs out on Wolfgang Puck’s. The things that separate the starving artist from the affluent artist are not many, but boy are they important to know, because without them you’ll spend a lifetime scratching your head.

First, the starving artist has some false ideas. They think stuff like luck, knowing the right people, being born to the right kind of family, having the right materials, going to the proper schools, and lots of other minor factors are actually major ones. They have accepted ideas about the way the world works that are not necessarily true and in fact, only

became true the moment they decided they were. The successful artist is able to disagree with whatever ideas or opinions, no matter how convincing they sound, come his way. He knows what he wants to do and goes about doing it, ignoring the generalities and craziness spewing from the mouths of not only non-artists, but people that have no real understanding of art.

Secondly, the starving artist is lacking the know-how of making money from his art. This is such an obvious truth that many artists don't think of it but when led to its answer, know it to be too true. Most artists spend their time making better art, not becoming better at exchanging their art with society in order to have the wherewithal to afford to pay their bills and be able to make even more art. When you master the ways of making money with your art you put yourself in a position of being able to be a better artist because instead of filing paperwork or being confined to a cubicle, you can now spend those 40 hours or more a week making more art, getting better the whole time.

Many artists work on art in their free time, usually evenings or weekends, often sacrificing time with family or friends or household chores for time at that easel or strumming that guitar. The path to being a better artist has a lot to do with how much time you're able to make art, so knowing how to make money from your art is well worth the pursuit because it lets you make more art. Already spending 30 hours a week on art? What could you do with another 30 hours?

You should be clear about something. Making

money as an artist does not mean you are a greedy, sell-out, hell bent on the world emptying their pockets so you can live the good life in some mansion where you lounge around the pool with half-naked servants feeding you grapes. You don't have to be Scrooge McDuck swimming in a vault of gold. If you want a mansion and a vault of gold, that's fine, just know there is nothing wrong with having money and definitely nothing wrong with making it from your art. In truth, the world needs you to make money with your art because when you do, it shifts the economy and places value on art instead of the usual, materialistic items people pine for.

So let's get into the meat of it; how you actually make money, not because you necessarily want to be Batman and have a butler named Alfred, but because you make art and the world should reward that. To make money from your art requires that you have art people can and will buy. Having a bunch of unfinished works isn't going to get you anywhere and neither will warehouses full of bad art. So get those incomplete works to a done and make sure they're good enough. If they're not, you'll find out quick and all you have to do is go make more, focusing on improving quality. For all the confident artists, sitting at home surrounded by masterpieces, knowing full well your work rocks, the next piece in this puzzle, the road out of obscurity and rumbling stomachs rests where you always knew it did: promotion.

If you think being a promoter means spiking your hair up like Don King and hyping up a crowd

to watch a blood bath, you'd be a bit off the mark, but definitely in the ball park. Promotion doesn't mean you run around with a megaphone, shouting like a lunatic, annoying the hell out of everyone in the world. Sure, that's one way to promote and it works for some, but not for most people. There are infinite ways to promote your art. I'll bet you're already promoting to some extent and for a few, you may have found your promotional actions hitting a brick wall. For those brave souls already traversing the rough terrain of Middle Earth, trying to bring your art, your "one ring to rule them all" up that mountain in Mordor, I applaud you, but it doesn't have to be that perilous. There's always catching a ride on one of those giant birds, but how can you when you don't know they're there or can't see them?

Marketing and advertising serves a purpose, but they're usually done wrong. A walk through Times Square shows you how much is competing for the attention of your average person, however, looking at the scene more closely reveals the major error most marketers make: they assume and guess. Ever seen an advertisement that didn't make sense and you wondered what the product actually was? How about an advertisement for something you actually wanted but it didn't tell you how to get it?

The purpose of advertising is missing from too many ads. We start to have the idea that advertising, marketing and promotion don't really work or only work for the large companies with enough money to put them out with enough consistency. It's true that consistency works, but

good, effective ads work better. Marketing, promotion and advertising are fields of art badly in need of good artists. Without good artists working in these fields, tremendous opportunities are lost and the art we really care about will never feel the warmth of a spotlight.

Smarter promotion and marketing actions need to occur if artists are going to make money. They have to be as well thought out as the actual art they're trying to sell. Ads must communicate a message and be executed with skill. They either make the audience want the product or they don't. Your sales figures and statistics will tell the tale. One of the best ways to ensure success in promotion is to clearly define your audience and survey them as to their interests, finding out what they will respond to. Coming up with a great marketing campaign becomes easy when you know who you are communicating to, what they like and how to get them to take action. Know them better than you know your best friend. Where do they hang out? What do they like to eat? What style of clothes do they like best? What subjects interest them? Present your work to them in terms they can relate to and understand, and you'll soon find them reaching for their wallets.

Nowadays there are limitless ways to advertise and promote, many of them affordable and specific when it comes to targeting your audience. No matter how thin your pockets are, I'd recommend setting aside a small percentage of your income and putting it towards promoting your art. If you make \$10 from selling one CD, take \$1 and put it into

some Facebook ads. Just got a check for \$250 for a painting? Take \$25 and make some fliers you can use to drum up some commission work. You should re-invest some of the money you make from your art right back into promoting it. Sure, new supplies and equipment are good investments too, but don't substitute your marketing budget to get them. Spending money on promotion ensures you'll have more money coming in to buy those new supplies and equipment and anything else.

No money? No problem. Promotion isn't limited to paying for ads. Word of mouth is the most powerful form of promotion there is and there's nobody's mouth more powerful than your own when it comes to promoting your artwork, and guess what? It doesn't cost you anything. You can walk up to anyone you want, open that big, beautiful mouth of yours and promote anytime you want. No one will stop you, except maybe you. I know, I know, when you go talk to people they might put that ski mask on and take out that chainsaw and go to work on that weak frame of yours, but you'd be surprised how many people won't do that. I should also mention that despite the bleak picture the evening news and the politicians present us with, when you get down to it, people actually have money in those wallets and purses they carry around every day. If you can find a suit of armor laying around somewhere, and if it fits, venture out into your neighborhood, or two towns over if that's easier, and start talking to people about your art. You'll be amazed how many people will support you, buy something, follow you online, book you for a

gig, mention you to a friend, introduce you to someone in the media, or just encourage you to keep going.

There's a reason Tom Cruise and every big movie star goes out and does interviews right before one of their movies hits theaters, they want to get the word out. Do your best to get talked about and if you can't book the Tonight Show or David Letterman, don't hesitate to knock on some doors. When I started my music career it couldn't have been at a worse time. It was 2003 and the whole music industry was on the verge of collapse. It was before Facebook and YouTube and no one had a smart phone yet. The music industry was suffering from declining sales and music stores were closing left and right. I remember being so excited when I received a shipment of 2,000 copies of my album, but then frustrated when I realized I couldn't get them into many stores. What did I do? I went knocking on doors. I got the word of mouth out there myself by carrying a bag full of CDs, fliers and some headphones. I ended up selling all 2,000 CDs in a few months.

Walt Whitman sold his book *Leaves of Grass* door to door. Singer-songwriter Daniel Johnston recorded his quirky rock songs onto cassette tapes, drew funny pictures on the covers and passed them out to his friends. Word of mouth spread all the way to Kurt Cobain who made Johnston famous when he was photographed wearing a t-shirt of his album *Hi, How Are You*, saying it was one of his favorites. Today, all it takes is the right YouTube video and the word of mouth effect becomes a viral wildfire.

Stars like Susan Boyle are overnight stars from one performance. A YouTube video played on the Ellen Degeneres Show can launch a career. Justin Bieber found his audience on YouTube but it's interesting to note how many times he also went out and performed in the real world too. The key is to get out there and promote. Whether it's in person or in front of a computer screen, people are more than willing to take a look at your art.

Lastly, there's also the factor of the brilliant marketing campaign. A few years ago Prince decided to give away copies of his latest album, *Planet Earth* to everyone that bought a copy of a London newspaper. He gave away 3 million CDs for free but sold out 21 shows in the UK generating millions of dollars in profit. His previous album had only sold about 88,000 copies in the UK. Brilliant. How about Radiohead making their album *In Rainbows* available on a "pay what you want" basis? It became number one upon its release, went on to sell 3 million copies and earned a couple of Grammys too. Remember all of the hype around the movie *The Blair Witch Project*? There was a mysterious looking website you could visit that made the movie seem like it was based on real events. It had hardly any production budget, unknown actors and yet managed to generate nearly \$250 million dollars. How? Brilliant marketing.

With the right idea put on the right lines to travel on, any artist is literally seconds away from creating promotion capable of launching their career. We've seen unknown artists become famous and those at the very bottom end up at the very top.



The idea that it takes money to make money is not true. It takes a great idea to make money. Who can come up with ideas better than an artist? There's no reason for an empty bank account other than lack of creativity. Forget the failures of the past. Every day is a new opportunity. Your art is capable of impacting the world and the world will gladly pay you for it. Just make sure it's damn good and you let enough people know it's there. If you do you'll be rich whether that means money or anything else you can think of.

## 7. THE SPIDER-MAN STRATEGY

Being a super artist definitely requires a lot of different skills but there's never been a better time in history to be one. Advancements in technology have made it faster and easier to create and share art. An artist today can communicate with the world whenever he wants and if he communicates a powerful enough message that resonates, his work can literally change the world overnight. With that kind of potential in the hands of any creative and ambitious person, the role that the artist plays in society continues to grow and ideas have become more important a commodity than ever. Today's artist armed with the blueprints for tomorrow is truly a superhero and like Spider-Man, he simply casts his web.

Any great movement starts with a great idea and the artist must push his out to the masses someway, somehow. With the internet in our pocket the ideas of the world find their way to us faster and more effectively than ever before. A long time ago the only place you could watch a movie was in a theater, now you can watch one anywhere, anytime, with a simple click. Any song you want is available instantly. Books are no longer heavy, they're weightless on your mobile device. Anything you want to know about is within your grasp right now. For the world's creators the internet is a giant playground to get dirty in and, above all else, leave your footprints in.

The great thing about Spider-Man is that he

knows how to use a web. He shoots it from his wrists and it lets him do many things. It propels him through the air as he swings from one building to another, over the traffic below, quickly getting him to whatever destination he pleases. His web serves another useful purpose. It can be used to capture the people he's chasing. They get caught in his web, like a fisherman's net, and he can leave them there while he swings away to pursue others. An artist has to be like Spider-Man when it comes to using the internet. You should shoot as much webbing out of your wrists as you can because the more you shoot, the greater chance there is that someone will get caught in your web. You want people to find you online and in order to do that you have to make your presence known by leaving a trail of webs so sticky even the spiders will get stuck to them.

Sometimes people look at the internet and see an overwhelming tidal wave of confusion coming, so they just run away. There's too many websites, too much social media to keep up with, and it's not like they taught this stuff in school either; your dog is older than most of these tech companies! I can definitely understand how people get overwhelmed and turned off by going online. New things can appear risky or dangerous but only because knowledge of them is missing. Once you know how to use something like Twitter, all of the danger is gone and you're left laughing at how simple it really was. These websites are just like anything else, you get familiar with them, you handle them a bit and before you know it, you've made them part of your routine and don't give them much thought. They've

become automatic and you're posting to Facebook in your sleep and tweeting with one hand tied behind your back.

I'm still amazed when I run into people that have reservations about the internet so much that they're not on Facebook or if they are, never use it. It's because they don't understand what it is and why it's important. If this is you, I'm about to clear this whole thing up and make it super simple. Mark Zuckerberg was a young college student that knew how to write computer code. He also saw the importance of people being able to connect with one another and wanted to make that easier to do. He believed that by connecting people together and letting them share information, people would get smarter and solve problems faster. Sure, it was a place to socialize but it was also a place to exchange ideas.

Facebook and sites like it are perfect places for sharing your ideas with the right audience. When someone skips out on Facebook, they're really skipping out on the ideas and communications of their friends, family, colleagues and groups. They're missing an opportunity to grow ideas, re-invent the conversation and shift the direction society is going. And whoever communicates the best, wins. So wait, the whole fate of the planet rests on what you post online? Pretty much. It's where the world now goes to learn. The ideas that are there matter. The internet is not porn, pictures of kittens and Russian spambots. The internet is everything mankind thinks up and is interested in. It's the ultimate canvas. You should be painting there.

Is your Spidey-Sense tingling yet? Wondering where you should aim your web first? An important thing to know is that the internet is a shifting landscape as diverse as the people that use it. Today's popular site will most likely be overshadowed by a newer one the moment you master it. Technology is growing at a fast rate so don't get too hung up on finding the right sites to use or how to use them perfectly. Each site evolves and changes over time. Don't worry if you can't figure out half of the features and think you're doing everything wrong because most people won't know all the features either and doing it all wrong is still better than doing nothing. Over time you'll figure out more and more and one day you'll be using that confusing social media site like a pro. If you get stuck, you can Google anything. Hell, the reason you're doing all of this is so that when someone goes to a search engine like Google, you'll be the one popping up. Rome wasn't built in a day, but you can build a nice looking Facebook page in a couple of minutes. Tackle it all on a gradient.

Internet presence is important but so is content. You can have a profile page on a hundred different websites but if you don't update them regularly with engaging content, they'll be of very little use. It'd be better to have one website profile and flood it with content on a continual basis. What kind of content you create is up to you but it's really a reflection of you as an artist. Are you a photographer? Post photos. Do you paint? Share pictures of your paintings. Are you a writer? Start blogging. Aspiring filmmaker? Start a YouTube Channel. Good content

is like the web Spider-Man casts to capture guys. Continually posting content is like shooting that web for the purpose of swinging from building to building. You keep posting and it builds momentum and pretty soon you're moving incredibly fast and no bad guy can stop you from saving the city.

Building a following online is one of the smartest things you'll ever do because it makes communicating with your audience easier. Many artists are abandoning the old model of being signed to a corporation to go the independent route. Why? Because they no longer need middlemen. The internet has leveled the playing field and any artist is capable of building a following without the strings and limitations that come with being signed to a big label. Now, the artist makes his art, lets his fans know with the click of button and his art finds its way to them immediately. Communicating has become easier and because of it, artists have gained more power and influence. When an artist has something to say he just types a few lines on Twitter and millions of people will read it. Ideas are flowing faster than they've ever traveled and artists are building armies to rival any government. The power has shifted.

What is power? It's being able to pick up a phone and reach someone that will help you do whatever you need done. Imagine the President's cell phone. If there's trouble in Brazil, he can get the President of Brazil on the other line. Anything he wants can be done if he has the right person stored in his phone contacts. He's as powerful as the people he knows and can communicate with, and so

are you. Anytime you go online you should be trying to beat the President's cellphone.

Your power comes from the people connected to you across the web. When you build real relationships with people and they're not just numbers or nameless identities, you have a power base. You truly communicate with them and they'll care about what you have to say. You can show them your art and they'll support it. You ask them to share something and they'll share it. But if you carelessly communicate and consider your fans, followers and friends as nothing more than profile pictures with no real human beings behind them, instead of your Facebook wall, you might as well be posting on your bedroom wall. When you consider your contacts as valuable, building them up and providing them with meaningful content, posts, information and art, and you really communicate with them, you'll find yourself with some real power.

There's a reason Mark Zuckerberg is a multi-billionaire. He put hundreds of millions of people into communication with one another; that's a pretty remarkable work of art. Despite the global success of guys like Zuckerberg there are tons of creators and artists that have also found success using the internet to cast their web, and although they may not be household names just yet, they are definitely famous in the circles they have created for themselves.

Randall Munroe's webcomic xkcd is about mathematics, science and romance and is one of the biggest webcomics in the world. His site gets over

half a million visits a day and he makes a six-figure income from selling t-shirts. The best part? His webcomic characters are stick figures. How about YouTubers like the duo Smosh who command a viewership of 17 million subscribers and have over 3 billion views? Any major television network would love to have that kind of following for a show. Self-taught photographer Brandon Stanton moved to New York in late 2010 and started taking pictures of New Yorkers and posting them on Facebook. Today his page Humans of New York has over 3 million followers, has inspired hundreds of other photo blogs with “Humans of” in the title and his *Humans of New York* photography book went to number one on the New York Times Bestseller list.

The internet has empowered artists everywhere with tools like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, Instagram, Reverbnation, iTunes, Amazon and others. Websites like Kickstarter and Indiegogo have also enabled artists to raise funds for projects. When musician Amanda Palmer used Kickstarter to raise \$100,000 for an album and tour, she surpassed her goal by raising \$1,192,793 instead. When the popular webcomic Homestuck used Kickstarter to raise funds for a Homestuck video game, they raised over \$2.4 million dollars. Never underestimate what a strong following can accomplish. It should be noted that one of the reasons Homestuck is so passionately followed is because it not only communicates video game culture to its audience, it’s interactive and gets readers to participate in the story.

Just having a following or fan base isn’t enough.



They must be connected, given something to do and mobilized. What good is a group without some purpose driving it? Today's artists often sit on their fan base without doing anything with them. The super artist has to envision his fan base as a team he must inspire and lead out onto the field. A well prepared group, united around an important cause are a powerful force. Today we are just starting to see artists flexing the might of their followers' muscle. The world is full of problems worthy of attention, and it may be that only an artist's voice can bring enough people to address them. The internet, with it's friends, followers and subscribers, suddenly becomes more than a popularity contest. It may be the best way to win this game called mankind.

Swinging through the city on webs and leaving them on streetlights may look messy and hard to do but once you climb to the top of a building, suddenly the other buildings don't look so tall. Looking down at the cars and people on the streets, it's easy to get dizzy with uncertainty, the whole world moving fast beneath your feet, but know that you're faster. All you need to do is take that first leap and throw out some web, then tug on it a little and use it to propel yourself up higher, then throw out another web and tug on it, until you're swinging and it feels like flying. You'll get to a point where you can swing, fly, lift cars, break down walls, make yourself invincible, grow wings, teleport to the moon or run faster than a sports car. You are an artist and that means you create the type of world you want to live in every time you walk out the door,

especially every time you go online.

Being a super artist is quite rewarding. Money becomes more than obtainable. Influence is a certainty. Art can travel fast. Ideas start to take hold and suddenly the world looks different. The days of being the odd one or the loner are gone. Today's artists now have the benefit of easily finding other artists. John Lennon rightly stated that he may be a dreamer, but he wasn't the only one. The world may have plenty of bullies, lots of Doc Ocks and Dr. Dooms, but it also has more than one Peter Parker in it. Go looking for other super heroes and you'll find them everywhere, whether fighting crime in some dark alley or on a stage somewhere. These heroes are finding each other and teaming up, just like they do in the comic books. There are Justice Leagues and the Avengers and you can join them.

Don't like what you see outside your window? No problem. Now you can change it. All you need is the decision to and the rest will fall into place. The resources and help are waiting for you. The world lays waiting for your masterpiece to be painted upon it and you don't even have to take a trip to the art store. Your hands are the brushes, your mind is the paint. It's time to give the world some more art. They're ready to get caught in your web.

## 8. SHERWOOD FOREST

I've always felt a connection to the story of Robin Hood. It wasn't about a guy stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. It was about a guy staring right into the face of injustice and unblinkingly making sure justice was done. He didn't have material wealth, his riches came from good deeds done, the damsel rescued, happy villagers, his friends safe. He didn't need a throne or a crown to be the most powerful man in his kingdom. All he needed was his skill and ability to communicate and hit his target. He was never alone and always more powerful with his merry men. His story laid the foundation for the modern superhero and whether he was real or dreamt up, he definitely impacted the world. He could climb a castle wall with ease but his home was always Sherwood Forest.

Artists usually view themselves as islands of creativity, lone rangers without as much as a sidekick named Tonto. We enjoy isolation and our own thoughts just a little too much. We love to escape and be left alone to create. Time alone is definitely valuable but so are collaborations. Working with other artists and teaming up with them can be tough. Each wants their vision to be the brightest and thinks the other's not as compelling. Third parties get involve and what started out with the highest of hopes and the best of intentions sometimes turns into a quarrel, a break-up, a fight, a nightmare. Why don't more collaborations occur?

We've all seen the magic of them when they're pulled off. Audiences love to see them. Maybe it's time to deliver them more often.

Relationships with other artists are vitally important. Artists, being the most powerful people around, need to recognize that they are more powerful when they're working together. Fortunately, many artists do collaborate. Every band is proof that artists can and do team up. We've also seen lots of bands break-up and when they do we wonder what must have caused it. Was it the fame or the money? No, mostly it was because they didn't approach their relationships with the same artistry as they approached their instrument playing. You see, communication is not only crucial to making good art but also to the making of good relationships. When you can communicate well with others, especially other artists, you take your ability, your power and strength as an artist to the next level. Everyone wants to work with you, support you and see you succeed. The ego maniac who wants his m&m's sorted by color before he eats them and only signs autographs and smiles when the cameras are around is a sad character and can hardly be called an artist because he's lacking in the most important way to be one, with others.

I've witnessed some spectacular collaborations in my life and history reveals many more. Louis Armstrong is fantastic but I'm glad he also recorded songs with Ella Fitzgerald. The fact remains they don't happen as often as they could. We see them more on the silver screen, each picture switching up the actors quite often, but isn't it a special thing

when we see the same actors and directors working together on film after film. We admire Johnny Depp teaming up with Tim Burton or Leonardo DiCaprio teaming up with Martin Scorsese half a dozen times. We look at that type of relationship and can't help but admire it. We know they could make any movie they want to make with whoever they want to make it with but somehow they pick their friends to make art with.

Why does "We Are The World" impress us so much? Why are we thrilled to see Ellen Degeneres' "selfie" at the Oscars with Hollywood stars? Why does the black and white photograph of all those artists standing in front of a building in Harlem make us feel in awe? How about seeing Gandhi and Charlie Chaplin together or Mohammed Ali joking around with the Beatles? These moments are special because people recognize the power that comes from powerful people coming together. Imagine if these moments happened more often. The world can only benefit from artists coming together and collaborating to make art. As an artist, make it a priority to build relationships with your peers and do whatever you can to collaborate with them because when you do you will have created a work of art worth any amount of effort to create because friendships are the best kinds of masterpieces.

Robin Hood and his merry men find themselves away from the usual activities of the kingdom, enjoying nature and each other's company, until something outside of Sherwood Forest sends them into action. It'd be very easy for them to ignore the calls for help and stay merrily in their forest,

enjoying life and giving no thought to the outside world, but of course, that's not what they do. Instead, they leave the safety and security of their home and march straight into traps, armed soldiers, a devious Sheriff and a bloodthirsty king. Why do they risk their lives and put themselves into harm's way? Being a good guy means you help other people who need it.

The world is bigger than just your forest and sometimes you have to go fight because it means a better world for everybody and mostly because it's the right thing to do. Artists are no different than other heroes. We see the world in trouble and we want to go right at the fire breathing dragons with our swords held high. The only problem is that we often fight alone when it'd be much smarter and more effective to go in with some merry men or Little John. Hell, even going in with a drunk Friar Tuck would be better than going it alone.

Once you've reached a comfortable position as an artist, your career secure, your place in the art world unquestionable, if you haven't already, you're going to need to branch out, open your eyes wider and take a good, solid look at the whole world beyond your front door. You know that starving kid you see on TV with the bloated belly and flies buzzing around him? You should do something about that. You remember that war going on in the Middle East? The one that started about twenty years ago and is still causing death? Yeah, you should do something about that too. Why? Because you're in a position to do something and if you don't do it, who will? You don't have to win the Nobel

Peace Prize tomorrow, but at least think about tackling an important issue with your next project. You don't even have to do it alone. There's lots of other artists that care about this planet too and if you get together with them, you might actually have some fun, strengthen key relationships and of course, help some people that need it.

Artists are no strangers to incorporating good causes into their work. Who gets called every time the world gets hit with a tragedy? Artists. We go on television and raise money. We lend our voice and rally support. No one communicates better than us. That's why we get those calls, but maybe it's time we're a little more pro-active and tackle some world problems before they explode. Let's find some bubbling or brewing, or better yet, invisible ones. Let's point people in the direction they never thought to look. Finding injustice to fight should be easy for us, we've fought so much of it on our way to becoming an artist. We see what most people can't see, and shouldn't we at least try to get them to look? If you're already doing it, you're a super artist. If not, it's time to really own up to that cape.

There have been some incredible artists lifting up mankind and infusing their art with a bigger purpose. During the Spanish Civil War, Pablo Picasso chose to take on war itself with his painting "Guernica," depicting the horrors that wars cause. Kurt Vonnegut did the same thing with his novel *Slaughterhouse 5* and Charlie Chaplin's film *The Great Dictator* was so effective in challenging war that the U.S. Government kicked him out of the country.

Instead of exposing war, some artists have depicted peace. Most notably, Gandhi was an artist of life, showing how non-violent protest could yield results with a spindle, a walking stick and some salt. He defeated the British Empire. The author D.G. Flamand writes non-violent children's books, creating stories with people and places that don't exist, but should. He literally creates ideal scenes for people to aspire to. Recently, the most popular song on the radio was Pharrell William's "Happy," a completely positive, feel-good song meant to bring people up. The fact that it became the number one song in the U.S. is an indication that people want positivity and will support artists communicating it. Its success disproves the notion that society is completely degraded and too far gone to be helped.

There are powerful artists on this planet operating with big purposes. The name of Elon Musk comes to mind. When Robert Downey Jr. was trying to figure out how to play the role of Iron Man, he was told to go meet with Elon Musk because he was the closest thing we had to a real life Tony Stark. Who is Elon Musk? Well, he co-founded PayPal, is the CEO of Tesla Motors, the electric car company, helped get Solar City off the ground, and is also the CEO of Space X, a privately owned company that sends spaceships into outer space better than NASA can. If you were to ask Elon Musk why he's doing what he's doing, he will tell you that he sees the best hope for mankind's survival when man becomes an interplanetary species. He wants to help mankind literally own the stars by being able to travel to and live on other planets. That's what



gets him out of bed in the morning, not being a billionaire. His purpose is higher than most and because of it the money thing works itself out.

Blake Mycoskie was taking a trip to Argentina when he noticed so many kids without shoes on their feet. He wanted to help get them shoes, and while still vacationing in the country, met with shoe makers. He had an idea. He'd create a shoe company and every pair of shoes purchased would also pay for a pair of shoes for a child in need. It was a unique combination of business and philanthropy that sparked his imagination and by the time he left Argentina, he boarded his plane with a couple hundred pairs of shoes. He didn't know a thing about the shoe business but managed to get his shoes into a store or two, and one day a reporter from *The Los Angeles Times* walked into one and wrote about his unique company. Within hours Blake soon had hundreds of orders he couldn't fill, but he somehow figured out a way and kept his fledgling company moving forward. Today, Tom's Shoes, the company Blake founded, has donated more than 10 million pairs of shoes to children in need in over 60 countries around the world.

Artists, creators and inventors, are visionaries changing the course of human events with every step they take towards the future. They inspire man to reach greater heights and without them the world would never progress. Things get better or get worse because someone decides that's the way it's going to be. Someone says, "From now on, we're all going this way." Others stand up and say, "No, we're not. We're going this way." Evil men exist and some of

them are artists at how bad they make the world, but a true artist creates positive effects and wants to see mankind flourish and prosper. A battle is always being waged between those that want mankind to fly and those that would rather see him crawl. The side that wins is the side that creates the most, that communicates the strongest and leaves an impression on the world that can't be ignored or brushed aside. This contest of wills is fought in every work of art, in every effect created and every idea communicated.

If the artists of the world are to win, we'll need to work together and join forces as much as we can. We have to cast aside the urge to criticize our fellow artist and instead find something to praise him for, if only for the fact that he made something. We can not become what has challenged us so often and direct its force at one another. We have to imagine ourselves in Sherwood Forest, our bows and arrows ready, screams sounding in the distance and we're the only ones that can get there in time. We hear them. All artists hear them. We can't ignore the cries any longer. We can't let our fear of any king, sheriff, soldier or even guillotine dissuade us from saving the day and placing justice in the way of tyrants.

The unimaginative brutes of the world want us to fail. They want us to be like them: cruel, unfeeling beasts with no concern beyond their own dinner plate. Our ideas alarm them. Our art scares them to death. It should. Things are not like they say. The world is not what they make it to be, what they want us to see it as, it can't be. The world is whatever we

say it is. We create it, not them. We have solutions and hope, our art takes man and shows him he's more. Every time we pick up a paintbrush, let our fingers touch keys, make our voices carry and get someone to turn their head, life has won. When those heads fail to turn, it won't be because madmen shackled them; it'll be because we failed to paint something better than chains.

Whether you're trapped in some dark dungeon somewhere or have built one of those Swiss Family Robinson tree houses smack in the middle of Sherwood Forest, it is my sincerest wish that you succeed at your art and become the very best artist you can be. We are each capable of creating miraculous effects on this planet and in this universe. You are more powerful than anyone will say, so it's time for you to say it.

Make art every chance you get. Don't just make it when your studio is packed with empty canvases. Make it when you're away from any studio and the only canvas you have is the outside world. Create everywhere you go and make something special at every turn. Look at people as more than an audience. Turn them into apprentices, collaborators and masters of art. Uplift mankind with every breath, grow your universe with every step and always keep moving forward. Charge the gates of evil by painting the kingdom of better. Chisel that marble sitting in the middle of your mind and shape it into a million clouds. Let the water fall, the rainbows form. Artists Run This Planet.

## BONUS CHAPTERS

The following chapters were originally published on my website. They are the most popular of the many blogs I've written to help artists. I decided to include them here for anyone that hasn't read them and for the people that have, to read them again. These writings helped form the ideas of *Super Artist* and there's some great stories and knowledge in them. I hope you enjoy what you're about to read and if you do, sign up for my free newsletter so you can receive future posts. You can sign up at [davidcarus.net/ mailing-list](http://davidcarus.net/ mailing-list) Enjoy the bonus section!

## 9. HOW TO BUILD CONFIDENCE AS AN ARTIST

I recently decided to ask the following question to all of my artist friends: “What’s the one thing that stops you the most from being a successful artist?” I got back more than a hundred responses and I was actually surprised to discover that one answer was overwhelmingly at the top: lack of confidence. It was so popular that it more than doubled the number two answer. I was surprised for two reasons, one, I consider myself confident when it comes to being an artist and two, I consider artists extremely talented and skilled individuals, which should make them automatically confident, right? Well I quickly realized having confidence is something lots of people struggle with and artists more than anybody, and here’s why:

Simply, artists have to communicate their ideas but other people, not so much. Artists put themselves out there (with their heart and soul embodied in their work) and when you do that it’s like waving a big sign that says, “Hey everybody! Look at me! I’ve created something new!” We live in a world where too many people are comfortable and don’t want the boat rocked and here you come with your art, rocking it! Anytime they see an artist you’re reminding them of what they should be doing: creating! So what happens next? “Oh, that’s nice.” “I had a friend that tried doing that.” “Is that what you do for a living?” “What’s your real job?” “Well, that’s nice.” “Good luck with it.” There’s this

inescapable tenseness that travels from them to you leaving the thought, “I should keep practicing because maybe I’m not good enough yet.” Let me tell you something — YOU ARE GOOD ENOUGH.

Why? Because no matter how bad you might think your art is, at least you’re making some. All of the people you’re worried about pleasing aren’t artists and if they are they’re probably not making much art. Here you come with your finished piece of art. There they are without one. Luckily, they don’t have to matter much because there are plenty of people that support artists. If that wasn’t true then you wouldn’t be able to watch a movie, listen to an album or read a book. There are millions, if not billions of people on this planet right now that support artists and the art they make. You just have to weed out the ones that don’t by standing strong, flourishing and prospering in the face of opposition. You just have to keep lifting up, extending out and presenting your art to people — no matter what. Don’t let one hater prevent everybody else from loving it.

Finally, Rome wasn’t built in a day. You don’t have to be Bob Dylan the moment you pick up a guitar. So you’re not Hemingway yet and they haven’t put a Nobel Prize around your neck, who cares? Know that you’re always going to make the best art you can, so why beat yourself up over it? The real reason any of those haters or critics can set you on fire is because you’ve got some small pile of firewood laid out somewhere inside you. Guess what? You don’t have to be society’s idea of what a successful artist is, you just have to be YOUR idea of

what a successful artist is. As long as you can do that you won't have any problem walking up to somebody and showing them what you made. Be confident knowing you're doing something most people can't and every time you do it you're getting even better at it. Build confidence like you'd build a house, one brick at a time. And there's no reason you can't be a skyscraper.

## 10. MY SECRET TO CONFIDENCE, READ ALL ABOUT IT!

As a kid I always considered myself shy. I was a bookworm and on Saturdays I'd rather stay inside reading or drawing than go outside and play. As I got older, being in the smart kids class didn't help my social standing too much, and although I was far from being Peter Parker before he got bit by that spider, I definitely wasn't the most popular guy in school either. My confidence level wasn't strong enough to break out from the crowd and I could have easily stayed hidden there if it wasn't for a funny thing that happened just after middle school.

I was faced with a free summer to do whatever I wanted and realized I might just be old enough to get a job. It turned out the only job a 14 year-old could get was selling newspaper subscriptions. My first day, I got into a van with a bunch of other kids my age and we were dropped off in pairs at various shopping center parking lots. We were given a clipboard with some sign-up forms, a pen and a stack of *The Salinas Californian*, our local newspaper. We didn't have any real training, the guy just sort of dropped us off, said he'd be back later and I was left standing there with some newspapers and another kid. It turned out the other kid was laid back and didn't really care too much about how many subscriptions he sold. I looked at him and I looked at all of the people walking to their cars from shopping at Target and knew that the only way to do this would require talking to people, lots



of them.

This weird feeling hit me. How could I just walk up to total strangers and convince them to buy a newspaper subscription in the time it took them to walk to their car? For the first time in my life I had to really confront the people of the world. This wasn't like going to school where I didn't have to talk to anybody but the teacher and my friends, no, this was completely different. The kid that joined me was sitting on the metal railing of the shopping cart return area and for a moment I considered joining him but then I thought what that meant. I wasn't going to fail at my first job. I wanted to do well. It meant I was going to have to go talk to some people.

I'd never even read the newspaper before but I quickly looked it over and decided it was something people should have. I then mustered up some courage, talked to people and found out that I was in fact, still alive, no one had killed me for having the gumption to ask them about *The Salinas Californian*. My first few conversations were shaky and uncertain but after awhile I started to relax and had worked out my speech. I noticed what worked and what didn't and by the end of the day I had actually signed up some people! The other kid managed to sign up one but my first day I must have had about 5. What I learned that day was that sitting around didn't get the results that walking around did. The more people I talked to, the more success I had.

Here's where it really took off. I quickly became the top salesman in that van of kids. I was hanging

around FoodMaxx, a large grocery store, day after day and I noticed I wasn't the only one with a clipboard. The Democratic Party had workers set up right at the front entrance of the store, registering people to vote and their boss started to notice how good I was with my newspaper sales. He asked me how old I was and I told him I was 14. He thought for a second, then asked me if I'd want to come work for him. At the time I was making pretty good money with my newspapers and wasn't so sure I wanted to make a switch. I asked what the pay was and found out I could make \$2 for everyone I registered. I did the math and figured that because it was free to register, then it must be easier than getting someone to pay for a newspaper subscription. I made the switch and instead of walking the parking lot, I was right at the front of the store and had to communicate much faster and more effectively than ever. I was talking to more people than I ever had and learned how to get better with my communication. By the end of that summer I'd made enough money to buy my first computer and had registered more people during that election than probably anyone in the whole city.

By the time I got to high school I wasn't the shy kid I'd thought myself to be. I was confident and knew I could talk to anyone, because I literally had. I doubted if any other kid my age, in my whole high school had talked to more people in their entire life than I had in a few months. What my experience also gained me was the ability to talk about taboo topics like politics, which interested me. I even took a big step my Freshmen year by running for class

president. It came down to me and my friend and I remember they told us we'd have to give a short speech over the intercom. I didn't think much about it but the idea of confronting the whole school was too much for my friend and he backed out of the race because of it. I showed up, my speech was simply me saying my name and that I was running for class president. It took a couple of seconds but my willingness to talk over a microphone to the school is what made me class president. All I had to do was show up and say something! It didn't even have to be good, it just had to be something.

I was in student politics all throughout high school, went off to study government at Georgetown University in Washington D.C. and years later actually ran for political office. While at Georgetown I took up spoken word poetry and remember memorizing a ten-minute long poem I'd written and performed it in front of hundreds of my peers. When I became a recording artist and couldn't get my CDs into stores I went knocking on doors. I couldn't get the radio to play my music so I landed a job working at the radio station, not only playing my own music, but getting to talk to thousands of listeners several times a week. When I moved to New York City with a couple of duffle bags, I had confidence knowing I could survive by talking to people and selling them my music.

Most of my career I have managed to have confidence, but it all started in a parking lot when I was 14. Faced with either working or not, sitting or walking, avoiding or talking, I decided to just go for it. Sure, some people brushed me off, ignored me,

became upset and even yelled and screamed (crazy people do exist) but there were always way more people that were willing to communicate. I found that people wanted to talk and I took advantage of that. I listened and learned. I could soon differentiate between someone lying and someone telling the truth, someone knowledgeable and someone out of the loop. I learned so much about other people and about myself every time I chose to show up and talk to people.

Most of the time I take my confidence for granted. I scratch my head when I see someone struggle with confronting or communicating. The reason is because it's been so many years since I developed my ability to have confidence. Because it's something that I worked at and isn't something I was born with, I quickly assume other people also worked this out for themselves, but that's not the case. Fortunately, gaining confidence is super reachable. All you have to do is talk to enough people. You don't have to be a charming, eloquent bastard out the gate, just a pipsqueak with enough courage to walk up to a baby, and then a kid and then an adult. And then lots of adults and then groups of adults and so on. Pretty soon the squeaky voice disappears and all that's left is a towering giant no magic beans can touch. If you want more confidence, find more people. You'll see them everywhere: working, going to school, sitting in parks, shopping at stores, and reading newspapers.

## 11. HOW TO MAKE A LIVING AS AN ARTIST AND SAVE THE WORLD AT THE SAME TIME!

When I was younger I knew I should go to college. How did I know this? It was encouraged at every turn I took. My parents, my teachers, the television; seemingly everywhere I looked the message was clear — go to college! I did. I was well on my way to a promising career as a lawyer and then into politics where I would someday work up the ranks of elected office until one day I was President of the United States and then I could save the world. It seemed like a perfectly logical and reasonable plan that everyone I knew was totally backing me up on.

So what happened?

Well, I was interning on Capitol Hill, flying through all of my Government major at record speed and was confronted with the opportunity of throwing on a second major. I chose English. All of a sudden I was reading tons of novels again, discussing their importance and meaning. I realized I had way more fun and passion for books and poetry than I did for politics and then an idea struck me: who impacted the world more, a politician or an artist?

I knew government extremely well and I had to honestly say that the work of any one President could easily be wiped out by the next guy and very few politicians made lasting legacies and how valuable were any of them really? I looked at

famous writers and thought to myself, wow, someone like Shakespeare has been influencing the world like crazy and he's been dead for centuries. Hmmmmmm.....the answer was clear. Ideas were the thing. Whoever created them and could have them spread, won. And when it came to expressing ideas there wasn't a better person to do it than an artist.

I started writing poetry which turned into spoken word poetry and by the time I graduated from college I was determined to be a novelist. I returned home with my degree (everyone was happy) and got a job as an English teacher at my old high school. I would write in my free time until I could make a full time living as a writer. It was a logical plan and once again all was right with the world.

So what happened?

Let's just say it wasn't an ideal place for a politically minded, self-determined individual such as myself to make into any kind of a permanent gig. I did my best though. I was most proud of one thing I used to do with my students. I took a stack of blank white paper and gave each student a sheet. I then told them they had 15 minutes to come up with something, an idea, anything they wanted. At first they were like deers in headlights but I encouraged them with further explanation. I told them that the piece of paper was their only barrier to having whatever they wanted. I asked, "Who wants to be a millionaire?" and practically all their hands went up. I said, "Good, so here's your chance. Put a million dollar idea down on that paper. You can write a song, an idea for a movie, the start of a story,

invent something that will change the world for the better." The lightbulbs shined brightly above all of their heads and I walked around the room for 15 minutes continuing to encourage them.

As time went on I left teaching in very dramatic fashion (I wrote a whole book on it called *Hip Hop Will Save The World*) and found myself having to confront making a living as an artist. You see, I had started recording hip hop music just months before I decided to leave teaching. I was making about \$100 a day as a teacher and I quickly realized that if I just walked around and talked to people I could easily sell 10 CDs at \$10 each and make the same amount of money. Once again it sounded like a logical plan — and it was!

I spent the next several years making a living as an artist selling my music one by one to the people I met. I set my own hours and I met tons of interesting people. And this was before the era of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube! Anytime I walked outside and communicated with people, it was a successful action.

Fast forward a few years. I'm married now. I have a son. I live in New York where it snows. We have the internet on our smart phones so..... Yep, I stopped going outside like I used to. My music and my art was still reaching people but not enough that I could make a living off of anything. I scratched my head and wondered what I was doing wrong and then it hit me. There was a time when I was making a living being an artist and then I stopped. I realized that what I was doing back then held an answer to all this. It could be boiled down to one word:

## COMMUNICATION.

What does an artist do? He communicates! But, what does that mean? Well, to communicate you have to have something to say, sure, everyone knows that and boy do people have a lot to say, but it's more than just talking and saying stuff. Communication is a two way thing. Someone on the other end has to listen, duplicate you, understand and then they get to say something back! This is basically how people become (wait for it) — friends. Friends? You might say, "I have 2,000 friends on Facebook but they don't pay me to be an artist!" My response: Have you really been COMMUNICATING with your "friends" and are they really your friends?

We all have something we want to tell the world, and in getting our message out we know it would enhance the world and make it a better one to live in, but in order to be heard we all have to do a better job hearing other people. They have something to say too and when you listen to them they listen to you. I know you have friends, real friends that you'd support if they all of a sudden had a book they self-published or were performing in a local play. Who wouldn't support a friend? They're your friend after all. When you have lots of friends boy you can get stuff done. Selling a book, an album, a movie, anything, is super easy when you have lots of friends. Real ones that care. In order to get those you have to genuinely care too. (Think about all those big stars that thank their fans and seem to genuinely care about them.)

Now, not everybody is going to be a perfect match to be your friend, so you have to go find your



friends by communicating with lots of people. With the internet it's now incredibly easy. You can find people's entire profiles filled exactly with what they like, and if you like what they like, there's a good chance you'd be friends. Imagine if you made tons of friends, how easy would it be to make a living as an artist or at anything else for that matter? Real power comes in numbers. It doesn't come from staying locked indoors or not interacting with people.

My approach is now completely different. I don't just post my stuff and expect people will respond. I post other people's stuff, interact with them, become really interested in what other people are doing and somehow they become really interested in what I'm doing. This isn't a trick, it's not something faked. It's all about finding people you can connect with and communicate with. An artist communicates and when you look at any great artist, what did they do other than communicate with a lot of people? You have that opportunity every moment. When you go to the store, when you pump gas, when you go online, when you visit your kid's school. Make friends, communicate, build an army of support for yourself and not only will you make a living doing whatever you really want to do, you can topple any opposing force with ease because it's not just you at that point, it's a whole army fighting for you to win.

This isn't an easy solution. It takes hard work to be a good friend. But isn't that what makes it valuable?

## 12. NO TIME TO MAKE ART? 5 WAYS TO MAKE ART ANYWAY

We live in a world with lots of noise, distractions and pressure. There's the stress that comes with commuting to work on crowded trains, grinding it out in heavy traffic or trying to find parking. Sometimes we have to work jobs we're not completely happy with because bills have to get paid, food has to be put on the table and at some point we'd like to buy ourselves something nice. The kids scream, people call, friends want to go out, you want to go too, the new season of your favorite TV show just got added to Netflix and oh yeah, you're tired. You're an artist but what do you do when there's no time to make art?

Let's think about the statement "no time to make art." There's obviously not "no time" because we have 24 hours in every day. It's simply that we're using our time for other things, leaving us with "no time to make art." There are definitely things we have to do, like go to work, but if you take a look you'll probably find a lot of things that aren't mandatory, and even some of those can be worked with. You'd be surprised how much time you can find or make for creating art.

### 1) GET SOMETHING TO MOTIVATE YOU

Money can be a motivation for some people, to pay bills and all the rest, but there are actually much better things to use for motivation. A true passion

and love for what you're doing is a great motivator. You'll often hear people say they'd do what they do even if they didn't get paid for it. When my son was born I had much less free time but got more art done than I ever had before. Why? My son was my motivation. Other motivators? How about a sense of duty? How about helping others? Making the world a better place? Think big and you'll find your time making art getting big too.

## 2) HAVE TOOLS READY TO USE

Having the right tools, materials, software, space etc. can be a barrier to some, but usually it's just a handy excuse to not make art. No laptop and desk? Carry a pen and small notebook in your pocket. No canvas and easel? Put some markers in your backpack and find some old worn out posters to reinvent. No microphone or studio? Record those moments of inspiration on your smart phone. It's amazing how much you can create these days using free apps.

## 3) INCORPORATE ART INTO YOUR ROUTINE

If you take a look at the things you do each day you'll find lots of ways to inject some art into them. Watching your favorite show on TV? How about sketching the characters in your notepad or using elements to inspire your next story? Have to do the dishes? Instead of zoning out, come up with a new idea for a future project. Talking to your family on the phone? Talk about art or survey them for useful

data you can use. Commuting to work on the train? Download a free music making app and make an album's worth of songs by the end of the workweek. The possibilities are endless.

#### 4) WAKE UP EARLIER, STAY UP LATER

Assuming you are motivated to make art, waking up earlier or staying up later shouldn't be difficult. When you're excited about your art you won't even think about the time, right? Try waking up fifteen minutes earlier or staying up fifteen minutes later and work on your art. You don't have to wake up at four in the morning and feel drained throughout the day. Start off on a gradient and find a schedule that works best for you. It's important to sleep well and also get the right food to eat. Junk food will make you crash and then you really won't be able to wake up early or stay up later. Do what feels right but know that when you're on fire about an idea you won't even notice you're sleeping less.

#### 5) SMALL STROKES MAKE BIG PICTURES

You might think you need six months of isolation in a cabin in the woods to write that novel you've been putting off but you don't. Recording an album doesn't require Rick Rubin sending a private jet for you so you can finally make the music you want to make. A great work of art isn't made in one day (even if it's completed in a couple of minutes) because every artist must reach greatness by putting in the work little by little. If you don't have much

time to make art, use the time you do have and make something, no matter how small. Writing a novel? Write a paragraph while you're waiting for the bus. Making a short film? Use your iPhone and get some raw footage you might be able to use while you're on your lunch break. Eventually, all of the small pieces will form into one big whole. An additional idea would be to take your small pieces and share them online, generating interest and building an audience for your project before it's even completed. It also documents everything for you in a place that's easy to get to. Focus on the small piece. It's the only way you get to make a masterpiece.

## 13. IF YOU HAVEN'T DONE THIS ONE THING, YOU WON'T MAKE IT AS AN ARTIST

Whether you want to perform to sold-out concerts all over the world or want to create from the comfort of your home and send your work with the click of a button and watch that PayPal account send you to the promised land, the key to success requires the same one thing. You can list every possible successful action you can take and list all of the barriers standing in your way, but without this one thing, the closest you'll get to conquering the world will be watching some other artist conquer it on television. It's time to put down that foam finger, walk away from that top row seat in the back of the stadium and make your way onto the field of this game called being an artist.

So what is the single most important thing you need to make it as an artist or anything else? Well, it's beyond simple and it's the kind of thing where everyone says, "well, duh, of course, everyone knows that!" and then immediately casts aside and never thinks about again. That one thing is DECISION. This is where you go "duh" or maybe, "huh?"

At one point you made a decision to be an artist and make art. You made a decision to achieve a certain level of success at it too. Whether success meant standing on the world stage dipping your paint brush in gold or writing underground novels under a pen name in your parent's basement,

somewhere along the line you decided something. You might be thinking “wait a minute, I remember what I decided I wanted and my life doesn’t look anything like it!” Well, here’s the kicker: you made another decision after that one, and probably a lot of them. In fact, you might have made a new one every hour of every day since that original decision. Those decisions might have been stuff like “this looks hard now,” “maybe this isn’t right,” “I should have something to fall back on,” “I’m hungry,” “I’m tired,” “look what’s on television,” “I don’t have the money for supplies,” “only a few people make it because they have connections,” “I’m not that good anyway” and “I’ll just do it when I feel like it.” You know what? Every decision you ever made is playing itself out right now. Some of them were really firm, strong decisions, others were weaker and in the end you have a life that is the culmination of all of these.

You ever look at a successful artist on the big screen and wonder what they did to get there? I’ll tell you. They decided to be there. No matter what happened and no matter who told them they couldn’t do it, they held onto their decision to be an artist. Everyone told Sylvester Stallone he’d never be an actor because he talked funny and didn’t look like a leading man. He just kept showing up and when roles didn’t come his way he created them. He knew he wanted to be an actor and decided that was what he would be, and he was one. The same goes for any of the great artists. Stephen King decided he wanted to be a writer. Walt Disney decided to be an animator. Elvis Presley decided to be a rock star. Pablo Picasso decided to be an artist. They held

onto their decisions and didn't let them blow away with the wind, even if the wind looked like a hurricane, a tornado or the end of the world, and neither should you.

You're an artist. You create. More than anything you need to create what being an artist means to you. If you don't decide and keep it there, you'll find yourself stuck somewhere you don't want to be or blown in every direction. Write down what you want. Stick it on the fridge. Make posters. Tattoo it on your body or better yet, your soul. Memorize it. Be able to tell anyone at the drop of a hat who you are, what you do and why you do it. If you can't, then you haven't made a decision yet. Life is your canvas, and your decisions are the paint. To get a masterpiece you gotta know what you're painting. Just decide!

**THE END?**



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- David Carus