

We are all creative. Creativity is the hallmark human capacity that has allowed us to survive thus far. Our brains are wired to be creative, and the only thing stopping you from expressing the creativity that is your birthright is your belief that there are creative people and uncreative people and that you fall in that second category. Shelly Carson

Only one category- creative

There may be confusion surrounding who attends the open community studio. Some may think the studio is for artists. If we ask *Who is an artist?* Then we may discover grey areas. Surprisingly many participants don't consider themselves artists perhaps more than half of the participants prefer student, dabbler, or amateur. Carson will answer there is just one set of people for everyone can be creative. Artistry is not defined by two categories, in or out but a diverse range. A decade has passed since I first detailed this in the Open Figure Drawing philosophy. We believe everyone is born with potential and abilities develop as people exercise their skills. The seeds of creativity are within each person, waiting to grow. Artistic development is seen a continuum that we can alter at any time. If there are no "in or out" and we all carry a mix of different abilities waiting to developed, why do so many disavow their birthright? Picasso may have identified the problem when he said *"Every child is an artist. The problem is to remain an artist once they grow up."*

At some point, as early as in middle school a division may occur. Children may begin to specialize in particular areas as expressive language, music, physical activity, and so visual literacy may take a back seat. If there is no proof the skills are available, people count themselves out. If they are told they aren't good enough, or make their own comparisons and decide they can't measure up, they simply stop trying, and curtail their development. Many factors can derail the process but particularly - judgment. Feeling of inadequacy can rob people of developing to higher levels. The requirements for being an artist are so ill defined, I know people of little skills who claim to be artists by mere force of will rather than credentials. I know people of extreme talented who disavow any form of the title of artist. Certainly the personal expectations associated with being an artist control how we embrace our abilities. Manifesting our abilities may be as simple as believing in oneself. If you believe that you are an artist, you become one. National Geographic photographer, Dewitt Jones, has an interesting twist, saying *"When you believe it, you will see it!"*

Identity switching

If only it were that easy. The label of artist is often an arbitrary distinction. People have their own ideas about what makes an artist. A universal definition of artist is extremely difficult to produce but this is not an academic question. How individuals in the studio view their stand on artistry is important to their development. Many people say they know artistry when they see it and they don't have it. Participants may feel somewhat skilled but feel they lack certain elements to be an artist. These are grey areas. I don't believe people wake up on day and decide to call themselves an artist rather they phase in and out over time. Some days at ease with being an artist, other days disheartened and not believing in their abilities. Identity shifts back and forth, depending on who they are presenting themselves to (such as other artists that may readily accept or reject them) and other circumstances such as those needing some sort of proof. Perceived need for credentials can take many forms from simple business cards or portfolio or website, to lists of awards and exhibits. Issues often concern not only quality, or quantity of work but also the mindset of artists and economics (Some definition requires artists to make some portion of their income from their work). We feel it is not important that people become artists but they should be able to experience the joy of creativity. People can join our studio without worry of credentials, labels, or outward signs of 'talent'.

Doubt lives in grey areas, choosing to believe being artist or not. We call studio attendees 'participants' or 'people with interest' rather than confronting the artist issue. Beliefs do shape our future. In my opinion people need support to persevere more than the technical information about how art is made. The joy of creation can be easily erased by rejection, negative critique or unkind commentary. Finding the strength or will to endure is not taught but so necessary for survival in the arts. Too few external rewards exist to propel artists (accolades, awards, sales). When doubt clouds the internal compass, family, friends, and peers should step up for support. It is not only the access to materials and information but a culture of the valuing of arts, which keep people on track for developing artistry. The only characteristic relating to *all* artists I have seen in literature is perseverance. There is no line that people cross over. Self-limitation happen when people assume there is a condition called artistry and they do not belong in the category. Some people put less conscious effort into activating their skills while others put in a great deal of work for small gains however OFD's message is anyone can develop talents with proper support . Then the grey areas become less important to participants.

The artist fantasy scenario is worthy of investigation. While many studio participants do not claim to be an artist, many may have a secret aspiration to become an artist. Desires are tempered by their ideas of talent, current abilities and construction of a body of work. Intellectually they think know their faults and may lack the money, temperament, time or dedication to become an artist but emotionally they would like nothing better to draw figures all day. They cannot imagine becoming good enough to sell their work, they cannot rationalize giving the effort it would take to accomplish all that an artist does yet they take pleasure from what pieces they can do, draw the figure. Drawing, however, changes people. The more drawing that is done, the more fluent one becomes. Like traveling the world vacation plans, becoming an artist may be on the bucket list. In the back of people's mind may be - someday when the time is right they'll do this. There is no better time than now.

Some participants try on an artistic identity within the studio knowing they could not maintain it for more than a few hours a week. Some know they do not want to become artists but simply want to partake of the joys of creativity without commitment or risk. For a few, this time is all they need. For others it becomes a stepping stone towards their aspiration. A few may chose the studio as a plan to become better. Others will inadvertently find that the title of artist suits them and gain confidence in their abilities as well as skills needed to become an artist. This wide range of goals and dreams exist together, from just wanting to observe and draw, to becoming better, to becoming an artist part time, or full time. These diverse motivations are in flux, shifting from day to day (like the title of artist), sometimes becoming closer to reality, other times fading under negativity or failure. Acceptance and confidence are two aspects of artistic identity that are often unstable. Luckily the environment of the community studio allows a kind of stability to develop. Without explicit expectations the studio becomes a safe zone to test out skills, to explore change, and to find belief in an identity.

Development

Long ago, an artist was defined by specific knowledge, skilled use of special tools, and a connection to beauty. Today these criteria have been changed; beauty is fallen from art discussion, tools have become 'smart', and widespread education opportunities have spread artistic concepts. Since the turn of the last century educational trends have been to offer more people access to training in the arts. Barriers once keep training to only those who exhibited talent. Public school offers art as a standard part of their curriculum. Concurrently Marcel Duchamp and other artists ushered in conceptual art, altering the role of the artist from creating with special skills and materials, to ideas and found art. This shift in

conceptualization allowed huge inroads into rethinking of who is an artist. The arts were beginning to be accessible to anyone. Traditional skill was no longer necessary to a definition of artist, even more so in the past twenty years of the digital (or information) age. The identity of an artist was more open and perhaps less clear. In the past fifty years the rise in numbers of art guilds and open community studios has added to the number of people enjoying artistic activity.

Artistry develops in many ways, some more mysterious and less evident than others. Support can come in many forms. There are many combinations of learning styles; self-taught (experimentation or books), formal instructors (teachers), informally from friends, peers, or mentors. The latter is at the heart of studio learning, as well as practice. *Practice* is always required to link knowledge and physical skill, deliberate practice is a buzzword that describes obtaining high levels of skill. Deliberate practice includes training with a mentor. Pace is affected by opportunity, individual temperament, and the right match of the above influences. Numerous contemporary studies show that world class abilities require as much as 10,000 hours of deliberate practice. Those numbers are impressive for young Olympic hopefuls but consider a past time stretching over decades, people can be hopeful of obtaining their objectives. In this fashion, belief in artistry is formed.

Throughout history technological invention has spurred artist endeavors allowing more casual participation. Art was made more accessible through advances like manufactured paper, the invention of the printing press, the camera, and now the computer. Digital art is the current game changer; everyone will soon have access through devices like tablets, iPads and phones where programs will supplement artistic skill. In cyberspace we may re-engineer our art and our representations. Even our concept of beauty may change. Techosublime refers to an electronic, non-mechanical sublime, flawless and infinite. The ability to record what the eye see and alter it as the mind sees has never been so effortless and instantaneous and non-physical. While there are some drawbacks such as no originals, only copies of virtual art, no smell or tactile input, dependency upon machines, there are many positives such as short training, speed, no risk experimentation, and no cost of virtual materials. I foresee a huge rise in the number of people exploring art in nontraditional ways.

Defining Success

Participants may now be seeking personal success, not a perfect drawing or one with culturally impact, but an experience which is satisfying. Art will become more about the expression of the individual. I think the emphasis will shift to process rather than on the products. People will be enticed to release their creative acts through recreational art. In other words people will explore the work of artists (the joy of observation, translating 3D into 2D, the sensuality of materials, the hunt of aesthetics in subject and representation) without consideration of being an artist. They may produce a finished image or not, and not be burdened with selling their work. Some people may follow up with exhibits and sales but many more will be satisfied with just doing the work and perhaps inadvertently becoming more proficient. The possibility for an artistic career may exist but participants will not have economic need because they have other employment or are in retirement. The studio will provide time to work for oneself, a pursuit to fulfill the birthright of creativity and nothing more. Younger members may have time to hone skills for more choices in future workplaces. Participants will make meaning in the action of artists by finding the joy that drawing offers, not the title of artist.

The Studio Specialty

The role of the studio will be fueling passion. With this, the mission becomes slightly different than providing opportunity to draw from a live model. Instilling, rejuvenating, and maintaining passion is a lofty goal. It requires participants sharing an unconditional support, faith in the development of abilities, that creativity is alive in each one of us, that together we are capable of more. The open community studio is where creativity does come into action, where dreams are fixed onto paper, and where like spirits soar together. How might the identity of an artist be affected by working alongside others? Comparison to peers is a natural consequence of observation and self-ranking. The living library of peers demonstrating their work helps to extend each other skills. Diverse abilities will consolidate skills through creatively addressing the current challenges of figure drawing. While the observable portion of the work appears as material practice, the identity of an artist is also being bolstered. People find their identity may vacillate as they shift in the continuum of development.

Here is a scene from a few weeks ago, it is often repeated. A talented model inspired a handful of core members to create some exceptional drawings. As the evening progressed a rather new member was vocal about the quality and quantity of work... *"This side of the room is on fire!"* His comment focused even more participants to view the work being made. The excitement became contagious. At pack up there was more review and discussion about the evening. There is a good chance these drawings will resurface in the group show and catalog and be remembered for some time. This is one example of how passions are fueled. New participants are inspired by the imagery, exposed to a variety of techniques and become hopeful. Core members are acknowledged and rewarded for their efforts. Models are appreciated and their contributions noted. A win-win situation had occurred. To refer to Dewitt Jones again, there was not a single perfect image waiting for a single artist to find it but hundreds of potential images to be found. The focus was on celebrating what is right, not what is lacking. The positives propel us, inviting us to return and to find joy in our successes which make the journey a pleasure.

How might the identity of an artist be affected by a model? Models provide a fascination and an impetus to return. They provide a challenge and a subject that can bring another source of outside expertise to the work. We may ask *"who is a model?"* The criterion is slightly less vague than who is an artist. It may be said appearance is most of the work. Models appear nude, find a pose (either through trial and adjustment or direction of the artist) and then hold the pose while an image is made. Although appearance is important, a snap shot of model would not be useful in determining the quality of their modeling. Modeling is an action of inaction (a verb rather than a noun). I would summarize the essential qualities of model in dependability, nudity, stability, and creativity.

Modeling is open to any able body person. Some people may hold onto myths that only particular body types can be models (true mostly in fashion and advertising) however the youthful and well-toned may be close to an ideal but not the only body types need for figure work. The thin and the overweight, tall and short all fulfill the criteria for modeling. Seasoned models can bring an aesthetic that elevates an artist's work as well as the novice whose naiveté can inspire them. I believe without question that modeling can be an art form or performance art and that artistry contributes to the art of figure drawing. The collaboration may be silent but an important component of studio work. Models can provide a slice of life, a movement from a dance or sport, or a dramatic, emotive, interpretative stance. The contribution of the model should never be discounted for they are also responsible for a successful, inspirational image.

A photo of a person peering from an easel doesn't say much about their work. Any person can look like an artist, stereotypically donning a beret and smock, or just working at an ease but appearance doesn't go very far. The criterion for being an artist is producing Art. The rub is that defining art is so open that

the lines of who is an artist become blurred. The postmodern dilemma Duchamp created with his premise that art was made by calling things art- short circuited skill and that by extension everyone could be an artist. However, some people particularly academics, other artists, gatekeepers of galleries and museums as well as critics still hold onto (personal) standards for artists. Their opinions apply to what is art and what is not. If an artist chooses to believe in those standards and criteria or not, then one can accept or reject the judgment of others. Belief therefore can play a large role in the identity of the artist. The studio role is to help find, develop, and redefine personal beliefs.

Individuals and movements stretch the boundaries of what has previously accepted. Through time, the identity of the artist undergoes evolution both personally and culturally. Subjectivity and authority will have a role in shaping the identity of the artist. Gatekeepers may make judgments on statistical rarity. That is, common work is devalued and the uncommon is highly valued much like the economics of supply and demand. The community studio viewpoint stands in opposition to that philosophy. Individuals are unique in being privy to the personal value of their art. While not usually in the position of being able to rate their work in the larger context of art, we trust individual's process. Spending time in the Community Studio may be instrumental in allowing people to rank their standing without judgment or critique. There are the difficulties of being a big fish in a little pond, moving to another studio setting may present another set of communally developed standards. In this way, the community studio can also be a shaper of broader artistic identity as well as individual identity.

Part of this discussion should include the issue of quality verses value. Both are difficult to define objectively but an integral to the identity issue. Part of the problem is that quality doesn't reflect personal value. In the studio new advances for an individual may be highly valued for personal learning but still lacking in overall quality. Artistic development comes in bits and pieces requiring practice to integrate into a whole. These new discoveries help advance individuals while external judgment can overshadow the learning. If we wish to incubate new skills we need to be supportive in finding what is right rather than focusing on what could be in one opinion, wrong. I refer back to Dewitt Jones motto of celebrating what is right and along with that his belief that there is only a small shift (time, perspective, distance) from ordinary to extraordinary.

I believe most people are sensitive to what needs work, illustrated by why so many claiming not to be artists. Everyone I know likes some aspect of drawing, even as simple as a doodle. It is the case however that some people ashamed of their inabilities, believing that they should do better. While this failure to recognize practice as a means of improvement holds some people back, others persevere, knowing that they need to advance through their endeavors. They become better because they have applied themselves, not because of their DNA. If other family members have already manifested their skills, family history can offer support. If the studio is to support new learning (which is difficult to externally detect), then it must allow for mistakes and future alteration. Current work is a stepping stone to future work. Like the snap shot of a model may not indicate quality, an image may not be useful in determining the quality of an artist. The qualities we value within the studio are invisible; perseverance, personal creativity, acceptance, optimism and evolution.

In summary

So the role of our studio is to spread the joy of creativity through drawing, not to create artists. There are psychological blocks to progress when people believe they lack ability (the mystical or inherent) to become an artist however and by working together in the studio with diverse abilities the mythology of in or out, artist or not, can be dispelled. When people are exposed to a range of abilities, all advancing at different rates, they can see for themselves the fun at any level and the potential for progress. They are freed to become more, even an artist if that is what they desire (overtly or a wish not recognized).

Without mandates or pressure to perform (or conform), practice is more enticing. With the philosophical openness and the rich environment, learning comes naturally.

The OCS allows people to try out the identity of an artist through experimenting with the actions of artists. As people phase in and out of accepting the title of artist the studio offers incentives to be like an artist, along with hopefully minimizing or eliminating the factors that push people away from artistry. As people are allowed to try on and explore identity they get a sense of what the work of artists is all about. The studio allows the expression of the individual within a collective effort. This facilitates exploring their interests within a safe, failure free zone that provides pre-established networking opportunities for growth. Negatives eat away at self-concept so the studio is founded on mutual respect between artists. This extends to models as well. Participants perform important steps, recognizing their abilities (accomplishments can be highlighted as in the above story) as well as identifying their weaknesses in the privacy of their sketchpads. Inspiration helps continue practice and works positively on shortcomings. Testing out the label of artist allows participants to see what parts fit their personal definition and what areas need work. Eventually with support, luck, and perseverance the label sticks.

We feel everyone may want to be an artist but self-doubt holds them back. Being an artist does not need to be full time profession but a part of a full life. Studio participation grounds people within the process. We believe ability changes. There is never a lack for potential ability but a lack of faith that people can change, and achieve what they want. The studio helps people reach their aspirations by reinforcing the potential that each person carries. It offers a flexible pace which not only fits into their life schedule but can echo their desire to reach their goals. Working with passion creates a shield which blocks the everyday problems and distractions of life. Working with passion focuses on the positive and propels people on their path. Working with passion is joyful, energizing and contagious. The studio environment helps unlock creativity and everyone is welcome to experience it. Our image of participants is they are capable of reaching any level. There is opportunity for change rather than expectation, multiple perspectives rather than a single standard. Belief in creative potential is deeply rooted in the community studio and this facilitates belief in identity and artistic growth. Participants can recapture the childhood love of creativity, lose the fear of drawing that some adults hold, and find the passion that artistic people share.