



# Creativity Killers

*What's holding you back from making art? Learn to stop the excuses—before they stop you.*

BY MARION CORBIN MAYER



They seem harmless enough at first, but creativity killers can pose a serious threat to your artistic lifestyle. They start out as simple excuses; maybe you don't know how to begin a project, or your schedule is a little hectic. Soon, these doubts grow larger and more complex, until you begin to wonder why you ever thought you could be creative in the first place. Before you know it you've resigned yourself to a life without creativity—and the creativity killer has succeeded.

In the more than six years I've worked as a creativity facilitator, I've seen many artists move past their creative blocks to achieve their dreams and even go beyond them. You can too: The trick is to identify creativity killers like the ones I've listed here, and then use the solutions that follow to battle them once and for all. Once you've banished the beast, you'll be creating in no time.

**just don't have the time!**

You say you can't paint because the house isn't clean, the kids need you, your work takes 60 hours a week, etc. Maybe the problem is actually that your vision is too small. It's important to remember that your dreams are worth the time you devote to them—how you choose to spend your day is how you spend your life. Everyone is busy, and we're all overscheduled, but must your needs always come last? While it's nice to be needed by your friends and family, it's also perfectly legitimate to say, "I'm working now" if it's time to paint or write.

One solution might be to barter with friends and family to create pockets of time for your creative work. For example, you could swap baby-sitting duties with a friend so you each have some time for your artistic projects. Another solution might be to make an idea jar. Use 3x5



index cards (or scraps of paper if thoughts come to you while you're on the go) to jot down ideas for different projects that take about 10 minutes to do. Put these cards in a jar and leave them in a prominent place. When you find yourself with a little downtime, pull an idea out of the jar and make something from your cards.

You can also create a time log of your activities for one week. How much time do you spend on your own projects compared to the time you spend helping others? How much time do you spend reading trashy novels or watching television instead of working on an art project? Once you become aware of how you spend your day, the more prepared you'll be to say "no" to the activities that take away from your artistic goals or discover creative solutions for activities that consume the most time. One artist I know created an easel to slip over his steering wheel so he could paint in the parking lot during his child's soccer practice! No matter how you do it, learn to write yourself into your daily planner.

## I can't do anything original, so why bother?

How many times have you said to yourself, "I couldn't possibly do anything that has not been done before, so why try?" American impressionist Thomas Trausch shared recently that on any given Saturday morning more than 3,000 paintings of barns are created. With that knowledge, how can anything new be said or done? Well, perhaps there's never been a barn painted in your particular way. Remember that you're the origin of your work, therefore it's always original to you. You bother because you're human and it's in your spirit to create. Your work is important if it gives you the courage to follow your dreams; your story is important simply because it needs to be told.

Because artists commonly create in isolation, we tend to view creative roadblocks like this as indications of personal failure rather than simply a part of creative life. If you're feeling particularly fragile, you may take these complications as signs that you're not meant to do this work, whatever the project. At times like these it's extremely helpful to enroll in a painting workshop. Many craft stores offer demonstrations and free or minimal-fee classes. Painting with a group can both challenge your current skills and ease your insecurities. It's comforting to

know that everyone's work can be awful at some point in the process, and wonderful at other times. It's also nice to be reminded that good art doesn't just materialize; it takes time and patience to perfect your craft. When working alone, you often think you're the only person with these artistic issues. In a group you realize that these complications are simply part of the job description.

You could also make a commitment with art buddies to meet weekly and play around creatively. Check out a store where you can paint your own pottery. Bead stores are incredible places to begin, too. If you're having trouble coming up with project ideas during these outings, pretend that you're making a gift for someone else. This often helps you get past your creative block.

Another inspiring field trip to take is to a local art fair. This is a great place to see artists of a variety of skill levels. Many times you'll see an artist whose style inspires you. Collect the free postcards that are commonly found in these showings, and keep them in a notebook to remind you of what you'd like to do with your work. In other instances, you may find successful artists whose work you may not particularly like, but who are paid to create. Remember: If they can do it, why can't you?



## My family, friends and location aren't supportive of my work.

Friends and families don't really mean to stop us from creating, but if we're in the habit of abandoning our projects for others', perhaps it doesn't occur to those around us that we might already have plans. Do you have a space for creating, even if it's a small corner of the house? Before I founded my studio, Creative Catalysts, I claimed a small room in the basement as my studio space. However, it soon became the dumping ground for whatever chaos was cleared from the first





floor when company was expected—and I was the one doing most of the dumping. Once my art supplies were covered in boxes of unrelated junk, there was no way I could grab what I needed when I felt the urge to create.

The time you take to organize your space will repay you with clear thinking and productivity. I needed to honor my space first, then train my family to respect it. One of my challenges, for instance, is to get my daughter to knock on the door frame at home instead of standing silently next to me and scaring me half to death when I'm writing or sketching. Friends also need to be trained that you're working. Let the answering machine pick up instead of stopping every time the phone rings.

Friends and family also need to be trained to respond to your work, or you need to care enough to protect it from their offhanded comments. Early criticism can kill a painting or story project. You don't need to beat up on yourself for the parts of your work that are weak, because they'll develop with practice. "Tell me what you love" is a good first suggestion if you feel a need to show your work. "Help me build on my strengths" is another. Otherwise you attract negativity and the insecurities of those around you. This is basic boundary work that can change your life.

## I don't know how to start!

What if it doesn't matter how you start? Simply start somewhere. If you're afraid to paint, get out all your brushes and make sure they're in good shape, or organize your pastels by value instead of color. Take out a set of watercolors and play with scrap printer paper, or gather everything in your space that remotely resembles art materials and just play without a goal in mind. Use big sheets of white paper and tempera paint to create designs that look appealing to you. Just do something—inactivity is the enemy to creativity.

A great exercise I often use in my classes is what I call The Treasure Map Collage. Without judgment, tear pages out of old magazines (*O the Oprah Magazine* and *W* are perfect magazines for this project) and find images, words and phrases that describe what you would like to do and have in your life. Use a glue stick to overlap your pictures—they don't have to make any sense together, and there are no restrictions on reality, money or time. Every collage looks great and, in the end, each one embodies ideas that are important to you. Save these collages and look back at them every few months to remind yourself of the possibilities your life—and art—can hold. s

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