



The Painting Cave

Art Space Solutions #007

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Good Practice for Artists

ARTIST: Yes, of course I've seen a horse.



by **Jacqui Simpson** 2019

Over the years, on my journey to becoming a professional artist, I learned numerous lessons on what it takes to get there. To be honest, many lessons were learned the hard way.

I often talk about this in my group classes and was asked to create this list as these can perhaps get you started on the right foot so to speak.

I can only assume that every artist, whether they are a beginner and 14 or 50 years old, want to improve. We never stop learning and constantly strive to be better and to use our creative ability to express ourselves. Always improving and pushing our limits just a little every time we make art.

There are many techniques to do this. I have learned from other artists out there who are willing to share. This brings me to my very first “good practice” tip for you.

1. YOU ARE NOT AN ISLAND

You are unique. Your style is your own. Your art is as unique as a fingerprint. Know this, believe this and live it. In order to develop that style, know too that it requires experimentation and practice. You cannot learn what you don't know without someone else who has walked your path or is on a similar path. The same way you needed people to talk to you, in order to learn to talk. Art is not a mystical divinely inspired, in the blood kind of thing. Sure you may have a penchant for art, but you are by no means good until you have been taught by those who came before you.

When I was learning I had no clue, no mentors and no internet. I found books in libraries and studied the Artists whose work I loved. It took forever, but I was relentless. I harassed older Artists (I was 14 years old). I begged them to show me or teach me. Sadly, they were too busy to be bothered with a lanky kid who asked too many questions. However, there were moments when they would throw little gems my way and I would use them. I will talk about these gems later on, but my message here is – find other artists to be around, work with or learn from.

The internet is loaded with information. There are so many tutorials, podcasts and art history out there. There are Art communities on Facebook and many websites where you can share and chat to each other. It is important that you do. You are going to meet artists who produce better work than you do, or maybe you will attract a following of people who love what you do.

Too often I see artists who reach a level where they are afraid to share because they believe that someone will steal their ideas, copy their work or because they fear criticism. So they work in a bubble. Repeating the same type of work over and over and even become bitter when they see other artists excelling or selling their artwork.

Don't be that person. Celebrate good artists. Congratulate them. Ask questions and learn. The world today is a lot different to how it was in the 70's and 80's and artists love to share their processes and their experiences. I follow many fantastic world-renown artists on various platforms. I was overjoyed when I could ask a question and receive a two-page letter back from the artist giving me pointers and advice. Being polite, precise and to the point in my questions helped enormously too.

Never ask them to critique your work, unless you are prepared to pay for it. This takes an enormous amount of time especially if the response is written. That is where community platforms work.

Also, don't ask for a critique if you are not prepared for what you may hear. In 2009 I met up with a London-based artist called Henderson Cisz. I took along a photo coffee-table book of my art and he offered to critique my work. English is not his home language, so in his very broken English, he told me WHAT I NEEDED TO KNOW, but it hurt like hell!

I remember he used the word "sheet". A lot! I held it together till we parted then sobbed all the way back to where I was staying. I sat down and wrote out everything thing he had said to me on each piece he looked at. In detail. I put it away and only looked at it again a week later on the airplane coming home.

I removed the 'emotion' from the critique and for the next year, I worked on all the areas that he thought were 'sheet' and applied all the advice that he offered. The advice that he gave me was priceless. My work changed in a massive way. Suddenly my sales and commissions started happening and my volume of work doubled.

Be sure you are emotionally ready for a critique. It is not something to be taken lightly. Critiques are NEVER easy. You hear things that you don't want to hear even though in your heart you know that it is true. It is extremely personal and because you are an artist, and you put your heart and soul into your work, you cannot help but take it personally. Being emotionally mature enough to separate the emotion from the fact is crucial or it could break you and destroy your dream of being an artist.

Obviously, not all artists use strong language or cut to the chase, but I am so grateful that it was Henderson who offered me this advice because he didn't waste my time and he gave me the facts that I truly needed to hear.

2. WHAT YOU PUT IN IS WHAT YOU WILL GET OUT

Talent is overrated. There I said it! Hard work beats talent at every turn. Having a full-time job and raising a family is hard work and I know many artists are there right now. They are frustrated simply because they need to express themselves and it's like they are being stifled when they cannot work.

I get it. I really do. Let's be honest, it is not easy. It calls for sacrifice if it is really what you want. It means switching off the television and getting into your studio or your art space, or getting up an hour earlier to do the same. It means creating a routine and sticking to it, no matter what. IT MEANS SHOWING UP!

Pretty much like an athlete trains his body or a musician learns his music. It is no less and no more. If you are training your body, you start by jogging short distances and you increase the distance slowly until you have created a habit. You run every day. Come rain or shine. You go for short runs or long runs, either way, you run. Art is the same way. No different to training your body.

A ten-minute doodle is your short run. You do it every day, several times a day, for a few weeks or even a month. You create a habit first and then you set your goals. Whether it be an hour a day, or two or 8 - depending on your goal. Speaking of goals, what are they? To say "my goal is to be a great artist", is every artist's goal, but this is our long term goal.

To say, "I am going to complete one drawing every single day for an entire year" is a goal. It's a big one, believe me, but it is doable. And more so, it is going to bring you a lot closer to actually becoming that great artist in your long term goal.

If you are just starting out, set an achievable goal. If it takes you 10 hours to create a good drawing, then set your goal at one drawing a week. The better you get, the quicker you'll get. Soon you will be doing 2 drawings a week and so on.

The more you put in the more you will get out; it is all on you. Show up, even when you are tired or feeling uninspired. Inspiration meets you halfway. It won't show up till you are ready to receive it.

3. UNLESS YOU HAVE A PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORY, DON'T RELY ON IT.

Often I hear artists say that they like to draw from their imagination. This is wonderful, beautiful and really exceptional to have a great imagination that allows you to do this. Never lose this. Write down your ideas. Draw thumbnails. **Then learn how to draw!**

Whether you are drawing a fairy or an elf, dragon, butterfly or face, unless you understand the human anatomy or the anatomy of a wing, or feather, you are actually creating bad habits that become harder and harder to break. Understand how an eyeball sits inside a socket, how eyelashes grow out of the skin. Make the effort to learn these things so that your renderings are believable.

Picasso said "learn the rules first" and he did. If you study Picasso, you may not fully understand his work, but look at where he started. Look at his early work. He learned about the human form, he painted still -life and nature. He studied colour, shape, texture, and form.

Then, he got to a place where he could break the rules. In fact, he utterly destroyed them, but he never lost sight of the elements and principles of art. That is why he is who he is., and why we all know his name.

One of the earliest gems I remember receiving from an artist was simply this. Copy! Copy everything and anything. Copy from photos if you must, but if you want to learn quickly then copy from life.

4. RESPECT YOUR WORK AND RESPECT YOURSELF

Ask yourself this. Why do you create art? If your answer is because you find it to be a way to express your thoughts and feelings or a way to relax and just be you, that's because you are an artist.

Jordan Petersen said, " Life is too dismal and tragic in the absence of the sublime." We absolutely need art in our lives. It's not an option.

What you put down on a surface, is you. It's a piece of you. It comes from you.

Sometimes your artwork doesn't always turn out so well. Ok so let's be honest, we create a LOT of bad art in the beginning, but if you treat every work that you make like this is your masterpiece, knowing that it is your voice, you will produce work to be proud of.

Consider your surface. What if you create a surprisingly beautiful piece of art on a scrap of paper, simply because you didn't believe that you were able to produce such a great piece? How sad will you be when your paper turns yellow? Or you drew it on a sheet of lined notepaper?

Had you just considered your surface, you may have been able to frame it or even find a buyer for it? Yes, these are frustrating moments. Be prepared and you won't ever need to face that disappointment. Keep your work clean, neat and presentable. Put everything you have into it. Give it your best- every time. Seriously, until you have experienced this, you may not fully get it, but take my word for it, you will want to kick yourself.

I work on good paper all the time. Even my doodles are on archival paper. Why would I want my art to shrivel and die? How could an art lover or buyer take you seriously when the work in your portfolio looks like the scraps of paper inside a rats' nest?

When you respect yourself, people respect you. This applies to your art too. Treat it like it is a precious, valuable piece of history in the making and people will believe you. Work on the best surfaces you can afford. This won't break the bank. Just do your homework and spend your money on the right materials. Bad choices cost money. Not good ones.

5. ARTISTS AREN'T AIRY-FAIRY SPACE-CADETS!

To be a good artist, you need to be organized. You also need to have a business sense. Unless you can afford an agent or have an impresario, you are the one making sales, connecting with clients, packaging your artwork and corresponding with followers, fans, and buyers. It is your duty as an artist to show your work, otherwise, why do it?

A student asked me a question the other day. She said, "if there is a valuable piece of artwork buried under the ground and an explosive device is covering it. No way to see it without setting off the bomb which will destroy it. Is it still valuable art?"

Obviously, the answer is no. What value can you put on something you will never see, touch or feel? Art NEEDS to be seen. Otherwise, what is the point? Whether it hangs on a wall in your house or you post it online, it needs to be seen. If you post it online, let it be the best photo that you can possibly take, before you post. A bad photo of art is as good as bad art.

Artists may be a little eccentric or passionate about what they do and therefore are viewed by the general public as being a little different. That's ok. Celebrate this. Own it, but don't buy into the whole, 'starving artist, whack-job that bounces off the walls' label. This isn't who we are. It is something that really irks me when people assume that because you are an artist you don't have business savvy.

I have taught students who are doctors, lawyers, and professionals who have full-time jobs, but also are incredible artists, who are balanced and very capable human beings that also successfully show and sell their work. I have met and spoken to artists who are as young as 24 years old and running successful art careers full-time.

I have also met those on the other end of this. They anguish over their struggling art careers and bemoan the fact that their art doesn't sell, but when I really get into it with them, I realize that the 'idea' of being an artist is stronger than the small quantity of bad art they are producing. Art is a way of life, not a fad.

I know that there are some people out there who may think that art is not something they want to take too seriously. It is just something they want to do for themselves. "A way to relax" is a phrase I have heard often.

Yes, this is true. This is something that people do. I too have a hobby.

I took up piano just 5 years ago. I am by no means good, I am still learning. But I have a teacher, who pushes me all the time. She encourages and helps me to get better. Because even as a hobby, I need to know certain things in order to create music. It would be crazy to try and do this on my own when I know so little. More importantly, I would probably just play really badly and even worse, think I was good.

My philosophy in life has always been, if you are going to do something, do it well, or don't bother. Educate and skill-up. Never underestimate the intelligence of art lovers and buyers out there, and don't overestimate yours. Ignorance is not an excuse for bad art.

6. RESPECT YOUR FELLOW ARTISTS

I find it overwhelming when I see the number of paintings that artists produce that are blatant, albeit bad copies of other artists' work, and then have the audacity to sign the work with their own names.

It doesn't matter whose art it is, you still do not have the right to claim it as your own. Picasso said "Bad artists copy, good artists steal" Don't misinterpret this. What he was referring to is stealing ideas. Using an artwork to generate or inspire your own creation makes you a good artist. But to go and copy a piece of art thinking that no-one is going to know this artist, (simply because you hadn't until you found a photo of his work) and therefore you can repaint it and then call it your own is really bad practice.

Exactly the same goes for using a photographers photograph (because you found it on the internet and therefore it is free)

Newsflash! It's not.

A photographer is an artist too. By reproducing a photograph that he took, without his permission, and then passing it off as your own inspired creation is bad practice. If he is a good photographer, he can and very likely will sue you for copyright. Be very, very careful people. I could tell you stories of this that will shock you. Copyright is very real and alive in the art world and just because you don't know about it, don't think for a minute that it cannot touch you.

Copyright on artwork and photography exists for 50 years after the death of an artist. Unless the artwork is managed by a trust after death (which may extend the copyright for a further 50 years). You will need permission from someone managing their trust to reproduce their work. I used a tiny thumbnail of one of Picasso's artwork in a teaching blog on my website about 10 years ago. I then happened to meet a lawyer at a Professional Artist Seminar where he spoke about copyright. After spending some time with him, we obviously swapped business cards with our details on and he went to look at my website. Then I got the call. I was told, very nicely, that I have 5 days to remove the Picasso image from my website or pay a tidy sum to leave it up, or they will sue me. They hold Picasso's copyright and I was using it illegally.

It is even worse to see artwork reproduced from the art of a living artist. I attended an exhibition of an art group in a neighboring town and saw reproduced artwork of Jack Vettriano, Francois Neally, and numerous others with great big bold signatures of the

person who painted it with absolutely no mention, whatsoever, of the original artist whose work they had copied.

There is a way to copy a piece of art – precisely the way the artist created it (if you can) and legally too. It is quite simple. Give the original artist the credit.

I went through a time when I was absolutely in love with Gustav Klimt's art. He used gold leaf and incredible mark making and textures. I had to master this. It was something that I felt I needed to do. So I painted his pictures and signed them 'Klimt by Jax'. I didn't try and own his work. His work is just so brilliant, and because my paintings were undoubtedly from his work, I gave him his dues. Even though he has been gone for way over a hundred years, his work is recognizable and therefore I couldn't possibly pass it off as my own. Besides, it would just make me look foolish to anyone who knows his work. This is good practice.

If you want to use a photographer's photo, track him down and ask his permission. He may ask you to buy a print and then give him credit for his photo too, in that when you hang it in a gallery or put it online, you simply mention the photographer's name. Fair? Yes, I think so.

As artists, we need to stick together, be a community even though we may be on different continents. Let us take pride in our talents and be the best artists that we were born to be. Let us learn from each other and be humble.

Life has a way of giving back to those who give. If your art lifts just one struggling person from a dark place, you have achieved the highest accolade that an artist can. Don't hide what you have. Enjoy it and celebrate it.

There are obviously many more good practices that we as artists need to consider, but I am hoping that the few I have given you today will get to thinking.

I would love to hear from you and attempt to answer questions that you may have.

Have a wonderful week

Love Jax



Who am I?

My name is Jacqui (Jax) Simpson. I am an artist and teacher and have taught many students over 30 years.

I am passionate about Art and about those who want to learn how to create art.

I will be sending out tips, tricks, and advice to you on a weekly basis.

I am here to help you and I would love to hear from you.

Stay in touch with us!



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