

Michael Christidis

THE ART OF CREATIVITY AND VISUALIZATION



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I would also like to extend my thanks to everyone who has been part of my creative life in any way. This ebook is reflective of the many interactions I've had over the years which have, ultimately, inspired me to write it and share it.

An ebook by Michael Christidis

...for anyone wishing to
become more creative.

An exploration into the nature of creativity, visual design and the appreciation of art.

I wrote this ebook to share, with fellow artists and photographers, what I've learned about becoming more creative. I will present my approach to creating, to show how our inherent creative capacity can (and should) find a means of expression.

Taking a holistic approach to being creative can provide insights into how to better understand and ignite creative abilities and even our entire approach to photographing and making art.

There are no magic bullets or secrets, only the things that work which I will be addressing in this ebook.

I will explain how and why my creative process works and provide examples demonstrating an effective approach to thinking and growing creatively and composing visual imagery.

Hello.

My name is Michael Christidis. I am a full-time Canadian artist. I am also someone who purchases and collects art.

Over the years, I have engaged in many interesting exchanges on the subject of creativity with creative professionals, fine artists, teachers, architects, curators, art gallery owners, printmakers and photographers. The scope of these discussions has varied, but the underlying theme has revolved around how to enhance creativity and focus creative drive.

As an artist, I found myself questioning:

- Why, after a period of gestation, I would sometimes change my mind about how I felt about a work/photo.
- Why some of my images seemed to me to be stronger and have more impact than others.

It may, at first, seem that the obvious reasons for this must somehow be related to the ambiguous concept of artistic vision. Though partially true, the more precise answer to these questions can be attributed to one factor: that of “directed intent” (working with purpose) when conceiving artwork and photographs.

I came to the conclusion that I was, sometimes, perhaps not taking all of the right things into consideration when planning and designing my images and this is what led to what I considered to be my more marginally acceptable artwork and photographs.

This is also why, when looking at work after putting it aside for a time, the perceived calibre of it either:

- declined, revealing oversights on my part or
- increased in situations where I simply “got lucky” and managed to (unconsciously) make enough correct decisions to pull an image together

I felt that I had acquired sufficient knowledge about, and developed adequate skills in, my chosen mediums, so there must have been some intangible gaps in my approach that were responsible for work that I was not completely happy with. This is not an easy thing to admit, reconcile and deal with for any artist. The common belief and proverbial advice of “sticking with it and keep going” does absolutely nothing to help with gaps in knowledge and approach. Wow... It was time for some serious change.

I concluded that documenting my thought processes and activities related to both the creation of my art and the subsequent assessment of it over time, would benefit me by validating my approach to creating and contributing to my artistic growth. It made perfect sense to organize all of my notes in the hope that this exercise could provide more artistic clarity and direction to make me a more well-rounded and capable artist, someone who consistently creates fulfilling artwork. These notes have culminated in this ebook which explores the advantages of applying an approach specifically designed to empower visual creativity and support artistic growth, to improve one's art (regardless of knowledge, skill level, formal training, chosen medium or experience).

The method I documented concerns:

- Artistic Intent: An artist's "vision"— inspiration, deriving meaning, defining a message to convey and developing a concept for an artwork.
- Artistic Seeing: Analyzing subject matter from a design perspective and making choices regarding how to best convey artistic intent.
- Visualization: Forming a mental image of an end-result.
- Artistic Growth.

This is an approach to creating that can work for anyone. In this document, I will outline the very method I use to create my own paintings and photographs. I will be addressing two interrelated but distinct processes:

1. The "*creative process*"
2. My approach to creating art and growing creatively

Applying the concepts presented in this ebook and the related web content WILL improve the quality of your output to some degree.

Every individual brings two important ingredients to a creative work:

1. The inspiration to conceive artwork
2. The originality that sets it apart from other artwork

Every person harbours a unique collection of impressions, memories, interests and ideas that can inspire them and channel their desire to create (anything). The combination of inspiration and originality provides infinite potential for creative endeavours. I truly believe this.

I hope that you enjoy this ebook.

Michael Christidis

An ebook by Michael Christidis

...for anyone wishing to
become more creative.

The Premise:

1. The degree of enjoyment and satisfaction one gets from practicing their art is directly dependent on their creativity and ability to work in a chosen medium(s).
2. Aspects of visual creativity share a common attribute with technical skills: they can be learned.
3. Online learning options and workshops do not necessarily provide a framework that supports progressive learning and are only a fragmented learning experience with regard to personal creative growth.
4. The best (and only) way to truly learn to be more creative is via an approach that is specifically designed to advance one's ability to conceptualize, analyze and visualize imagery.
5. This ebook is about empowering personal creativity and artistic growth.

What is in this ebook?

Part 1: What is art?

Part 2: Creators of art

Part 3: Artists and making art

Part 4: Defining visual creativity

Part 5: Being creative

Part 6: An artistic mindset

Part 7: How to create consistently

Part 8: My approach to creating art

Part 9: My reasons for using a specific approach

Part 10: Learning the right things

Part 11: The psychology behind my approach to creating art

Part 12: Empowering personal creativity

Part 13: How you can make it work for you

PART 1

WHAT IS ART?

WHAT IS ART?

This is what I have come to believe about the nature of art:

1. Art is an expression of a perspective, understanding, or appreciation of aspects of one's environment, life experience, or idea. It is an exercise in exploration, observation, imagination, construction and communication.
2. Art is the direct result of a personal internalization of something that has been observed, packaged and formed into an expression of a message.
3. Art should move us (as creators and/or consumers) and make us experience something new and/or realize something we hadn't before.
4. The subject of an artwork is the message that the artist intended to convey, not necessarily the objects within the frame.
5. Art should communicate a message or emotion and needs to be engaging; it, therefore, must have an element of drama and/or aesthetic appeal. The arrangement of objects within the frame and the interplay of light (value/tone, harsh/soft and colour) in a manner that supports artistic intent is how the artist's message is conveyed to the viewer. Treating your subject in ways that make it stand out from other objects in your composition is what brings meaning and depth to an image.

PART 2

CREATORS OF ART

AS AN ARTIST...

Many artists invest substantial time analyzing their subject, exploring a variety of approaches and techniques to devise a concept and develop a plan to produce their finished work. They often make notes, drawings or paint sketches of their subject to gain clarity helping to visualize their final work. Some rely solely on photographs as reference material for making their art—this is fine as long as they are skilled photographers (to avoid making marginally acceptable paintings from poor photographs). Photography can be a valuable tool for investigative, inspirational and creative purposes.

Depending on the type of artwork and approach taken, an artist may simply begin working with minimal concept development and pre-planning letting their art evolve with a “life of its own”. With the exception of “stream of consciousness” abstract work, taking a relatively random approach often produces work with marginal depth and appeal and, over time, can become a repetitive exercise for the artist that constrains artistic fulfillment (a creative rut). Art should not strictly be a result of an arbitrary experience

of creation; art is a form of communication and requires a degree of context and purpose to make a connection with and engage a viewer.

Artists who paint and draw have virtually complete creative freedom; they start from a blank canvas and have a toolkit at their disposal to develop a concept for an artwork. Complete freedom poses a challenge: how to make the best choices.

Adopting an approach leveraging fundamental aspects of being creative provides artistic clarity and direction for the development of any work.

AS A PHOTOGRAPHER...

Photographers enjoy a virtually instantaneous creation experience. The nature of the photographic experience provides them with a tremendous advantage over other visual artists, as, once they “capture” their subject, they can immediately move on to another. This means that photography provides numerous opportunities to practice composition and artistic seeing over other forms of art.

Many photographers could benefit from seeing the world more from an artistic perspective versus a photo-centric one. I believe that every photographer should pursue learning about and utilizing an artist's toolkit when making photographs to avoid creating images with marginal consideration. Artistic seeing is the most important consideration in making images that have substance regardless of medium.

Many people who photograph for the love of it constrain their artistic development because they don't believe they have what it takes to be creative enough, therefore they are not motivated to learn and develop artistic skills...this is truly unfortunate. Seeing the world with an artist's eye is what creative photography should be premised on.

To improve photographic imagery, we have to step into the world of design and art. Camera technologies, post processing, lenses, special effects and techniques, discussions about the "creative process" where approaches are only inferred and not clearly defined...all of these topics are relentlessly discussed by the online photographic community, yet there is little information of significance available about designing images and artistic growth...only sparse advice, ideas for experimentation, and vague statements about personal vision and artistic

journeys. Improving photography involves thinking like an artist and directly applying this to making images.

Photographers should approach their work with a more considered creative approach to enable them to grow as artists and learn to consistently produce fulfilling work.

WEARING BOTH HATS

Visual arts and photographic knowledge and skills can powerfully complement each other in the development of artwork to result in work with more depth, vision and appeal.

Artists should work at becoming better photographers, and photographers should work at developing better artistic creative skills and approaches to creating their art.

This image...



Two things caught my eye about this building. The first was the sheer size of the metallic neon blue wall of panels and the second, the contrast created by the curving organic shape of the stairwell emerging from the flat side of the building.

Though interesting, this aspect alone would not result in an interesting image...an interesting building, yes. Photographing this on a sunny day literally lit up the side of the building. This also created dark shadows cast by the stairwell that served to make the stairwell stand out from the building side even more. I photographed from an angle where the curved top edge of the stairwell breaks the roof line of the structure. This serves to imply height and a sense of grandeur. I chose to include the sun's reflection in the windows, and I printed the image on the dark side to capture a feeling of drama and light.

PART 3

ARTISTS AND MAKING ART

ARTISTS AND MAKING ART

Artwork is purchased by individuals for the love of it unless it is for commercial, investment or tax relief purposes.

Art is a communication and the role of a creator is to communicate meaning and/or evoke emotion.

This is why artists should always be challenging themselves to produce great work and only share work that is representative of their best efforts.

Continuing to produce new work premised on prior work, does not support creative development in any meaningful way. Working in this way, over time, can simply become a mechanical exercise and not a new, fresh creative experience. It is at the point of initial inspiration and the development of a concept for an artwork where creative learning really takes place.

Artists need to be aware of aspects of visual creativity and apply this knowledge to the best of their abilities when creating new work. They need to learn how to produce the best work possible to be able to reach people through their creations.

To get to this point, creatives need ways to:

1. Set artistic goals.
2. Govern their approach.
3. Record their experiences.
4. Identify strengths and weaknesses to show where and how to improve.
5. Continuously refine their approach.
6. Inform and guide their artistic growth.

This degree of artistic self-awareness, visual creative capacity and skills development does not necessarily come naturally over time or increase with the amount of work produced. Artists need to be purposeful about how they generate work by using a planned approach for improvement and dedicating their efforts to developing their knowledge, awareness and skills in all areas of “what it is to be a creative”.

CREATIVITY IS INSTINCTIVE

Creating is a process (much of it subconscious) that occurs every time, even in the taking of mundane snapshots with a phone—someone's life experience is being captured and recorded for the purpose of sharing a message.

Our mental creation process is straightforward and is the same every time for everyone regardless of medium, tools, training, knowledge or experience.

Reflecting on the conscious aspects of how we create yields insights into our “behind the scenes” thought processes and how we perceive. This, in turn, helps us to gain a better understanding of how we can improve our efforts to create more engaging work. Being mindful of how we create can often ignite our imagination motivating us to create new work because it forces us to pause, ponder and look deeper into what we are experiencing.

WHY BE CREATIVE?

Well thought out and executed artwork has the potential to impact people by evoking an emotional response or connection with the work. This is the experience of “visual language”.

Confronting the world with our art or camera adds another dimension of engagement with our daily lives. Being creative is part of experiencing the world around us—we see it, we feel it, and we can capture moments and experiences through what we create. The feeling that a good photo or artwork portrays never diminishes, and the power it embodies can grow stronger over time.

This is why it matters to make art or take pictures with some degree of purpose and attain a level of competence working with the medium(s) and tools you use to be able to create freely.

Everyone should strive to liberate and express their creativity—it's a part of all of us.



This image...

This photograph almost didn't happen. Upon arriving at the top of this hill and doing a walk-around to get a feel for this place, I decided on my approach and started working away when I came to the conclusion that things weren't quite working out even though I had taken some decent photographs of this location. So, I decided to simply leave. I was not wrong in my original intent for this image, but I got caught up in the excitement of the light at the scene and hadn't considered my subject and what I wanted to convey nor my options for doing so, quite carefully enough. The ironic thing is that I did not "see" this image when I first approached the lighthouse site, but it all came together afterwards. I'll share more about my experience and how I made this image later.

PART 4

DEFINING VISUAL CREATIVITY

VISUAL CREATIVITY

Creativity involves many things: perceiving, interpreting, finding inspiration, analyzing, visualizing, deciding on what to do, how to best approach it, planning, doing, and...being passionate each step along the way.

Anything can spark our creativity and motivate us to act. We must learn to recognize and focus on what specifically inspires us and know how to develop a concept and plan to successfully convey our message with our art.

Photographers need to be able to visualize how to manipulate their photographs to move beyond simply rendering what is in front of them; artists must learn to paint what they want their canvas to convey. This is precisely how artists draw: they draw an impression of the shared boundaries between things, not the objects themselves. It is the *canvas* and their vision for the work that becomes their "reality", not the actual subject that initially inspired them. An assessment of a subject from conceptual and design perspectives is needed to inform the visualization of an end result...in essence, finding ways to consolidate visual elements into a cohesive message

about a subject. This involves considerations beyond simple appearance to articulate and convey a message...like looking through lime green glasses with x-ray vision seeing deeply into your subject beneath its surface to isolate its essence! Artsy...like my hat below:



This image... Nothing special here—just a paint sketch of me walking around.

How do we make insightful observations about our subject matter, be creative and able to visualize a desired result? What is artistic seeing? How about this for an answer to these two questions:

Technique leads to
Craftsmanship which empowers
Inspiration that results in **Expression**

Technique refers to developing the fundamental skills required to work in a given medium.

Craftsmanship represents a level of competency with a medium to be able to create freely which, in turn, empowers...

Inspiration, which is the result of combining one's understanding of, and skills in, a medium with ideas to enable visualization of a final artwork which can result in...

Expression, which refers to the acts of planning and execution to produce the final finished artwork in alignment with an artist's vision for it.



This image... Forest light after an early morning downpour. There is often a greenish tinge to the air after a heavy rainfall. Making a landscape panoramic image can, at times, be quite challenging due to the fact that the composition has to achieve a sense of expanse, light and depth while working with a vertical space constraint. This triptych (3, 16x20 inch paintings) is the result of several iterations of reflection and experimentation regarding how to best capture the light and mood of the scene. Our impressions of our subject need to be visually "transcribed" and represented in ways that encourage a viewer to sense what it must have been like to have been at the scene. This is the challenge for creatives. It's not often that images work this well in a panoramic format but this one does because:

- *The minimalist composition of each panel allows the viewer to focus on light and mood*
- *The focus on the same type of light contributes to the sense of depth/space in each panel*
- *Each image can stand on its own as an individual painting from a composition perspective*
- *When combined in this order, the overall image expresses an enhanced sense of depth*

PART 5

BEING CREATIVE

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Even though I make most of my final paintings in the studio and do edit the majority of my photographs, I do as much as I can when in close proximity to my subject. I believe that, for me, working in this way contributes to artistic visualization, and minimizing or avoiding this altogether can often result in a missed opportunity, which ultimately compromises a final work/photograph in one or more ways. This is why:

- **Being creative is never an accident;** it is the result of the merging of two or more elements into something new. The process of creativity “constructs” through the power of our intuition, imagination and intellect. This happens regardless of our degree of awareness of any process taking place.
- **Creativity has no distinct rules.** It is a thought process with only guidelines and underlying principles to empower it. It begins when inspiration hits and is realized through the engagement of the subject.

Albert Einstein said "A new idea comes suddenly and in a rather intuitive way, but intuition is nothing but the outcome of earlier intellectual experience."

- Einstein interview with Dr. H.L. Gordon, 1949

This is precisely why we should be sensitive to, ready, and in a good position to act, whenever and wherever a creative opportunity presents itself and inspiration hits. In the case of photography, this means that a photographer should work in a deliberate manner whenever possible to visualize their desired image then, identify and make the correct decisions to realize their creative vision.

We get exposed to much fragmented information on the topic of creativity which involves ambiguous concepts that are just out of reach of our ability to isolate and understand. This information often lacks appropriate context to fully comprehend and to support learning. It often doesn't effectively distinguish between the creative process and growing creatively as an artist. Artistic growth involves working in a disciplined manner over time—it's about familiarity, practice, challenges and learning. What is truly interesting is that, although you may follow a specific approach to creating your art, each iteration ends up being a unique experience!

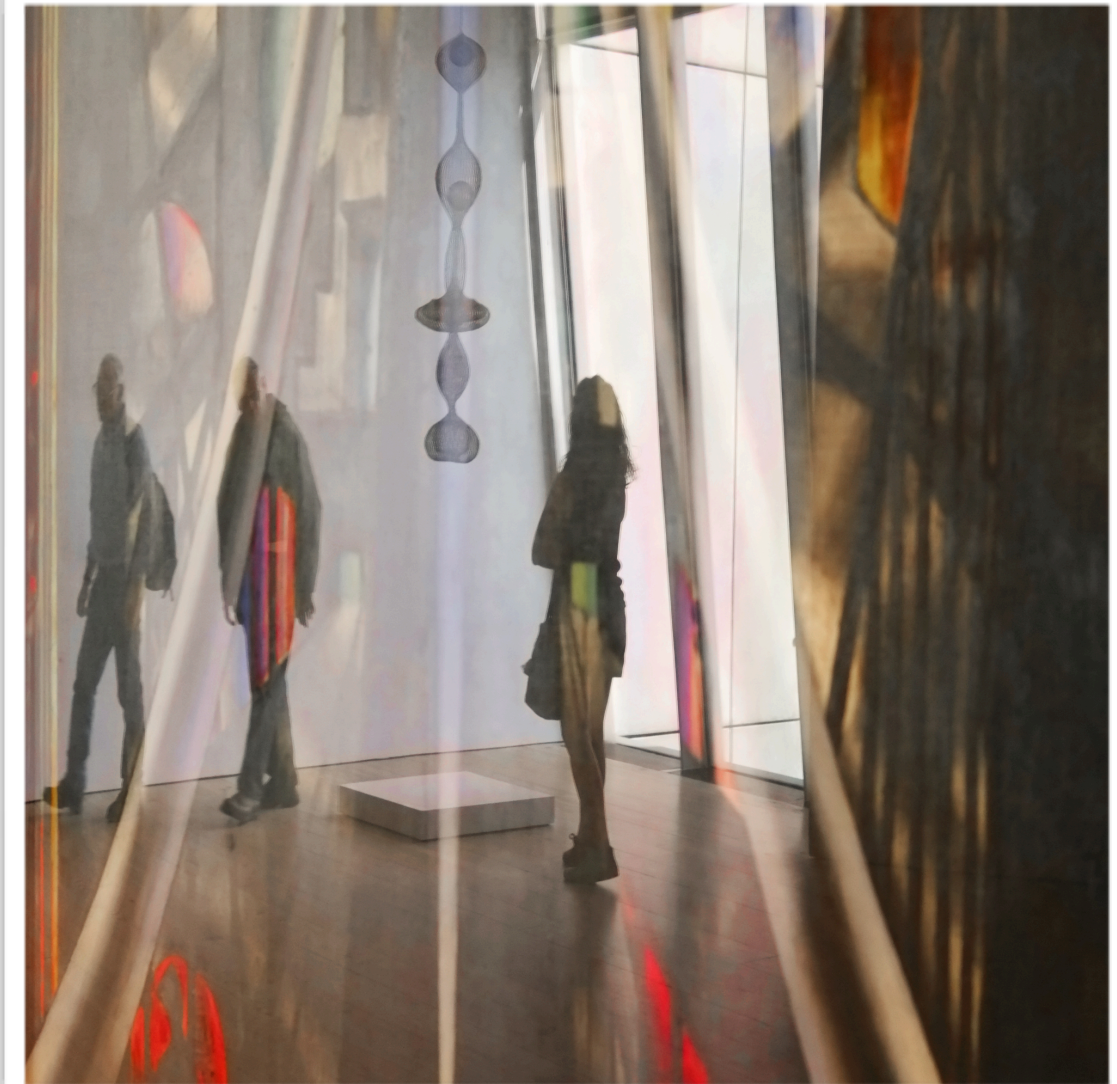
I believe that using a thoughtful approach ultimately results in art with more depth and appeal yielding greater artistic fulfilment and satisfaction and that visual artists who work in this way end up working with more conviction.

PART 6

AN ARTISTIC MINDSET

HOW CAN THIS WORK IN PRACTICE?

Having an artistic mindset provides a basis for visual interpretation and it supports creativity.



Adopting an artistic mindset empowers creativity by focussing attention on elements of being creative over logistical craftsmanship ("how to") concerns. It is a way of responding to the images one sees in the world without any imposed preconceptions or concerns and where inspiration and creativity truly come from the heart.

What is an Artistic Mindset?

The short answer...

An artistic mindset begins with the initial “seeing” that fuels our creativity and motivates us to take action. It focusses on “what” fuels our creativity. The elements of an artistic mindset are:

1. Sensing Light
2. Seeing Shapes
3. Image Design
4. Craftsmanship

The first three contribute to the majority of creative success. Once you know how to sense and work with light and arrange compositional elements in ways that add interest to engage the viewer, most of the creative aspects related to defining a vision for an artwork or photograph have been done, and all that remains are craft considerations that support and help convey your vision for it.

This is essentially how it works, though a slight oversimplification. Knowledge and skills related to craftsmanship inform other elements of an artistic mindset. So, this implies that we can often find further inspiration for new work while creating our art!

An artistic mindset is not necessarily about learning to do a better job working with your subject matter or in a specific medium; rather, it is simply a way of seeing images and being able to visualize an end result.

It is something that is dependent on environmental factors and how you happen to be feeling about your subject at any given moment. For example, you can return to a

What is an Artistic Mindset?

location and end up with quite different photographs, paint sketches, drawings... than what you had done previously.

An artistic mindset is about a permission to create without any imposed guidelines or adherence to aesthetic benchmarks. You “feel” your way around considering a variety of factors and options (light, shapes, composition, perspective) until something starts to come together, and then you make refinements in support of your vision as necessary.

True artistic freedom always challenges us to think outside the box, to imagine. The “box” defines us and also limits us because it represents the acceptance of our own personal limitations. Focussing solely on images (the initial “seeing” that fuels creativity and motivation) is how children naturally create...because they don’t allow the “how” of making art to constrain their efforts and spoil their fun. Things seem to just come together without preconceived ideas or judgement. Children relish exploring the actual experience of creating.

For those who prefer a more visual or technical explanation, here is how things may look in terms of math:

Composition = Shapes + Space

Mood = Light + Composition

Creativity = Mood x Inspiration

Artistic Visualization = Creativity + Craftsmanship

This image...



This sculpture is over three metres tall and is situated in the middle of a church courtyard isolated from anything else. The figure has elongated proportions. Its arms reach for the sky and its head is tilted backwards looking straight up. This gives the illusion of virtual weightlessness and being able to rise upwards...appropriate given the setting. I needed to include some context for the figure in alignment with the sculptor's vision (reconciling faith and reaching for the heavens) and wanted to convey this in my photograph. In my composition:

- *I took my shot virtually head on with a slight upward angle and purposely excluded everything below the torso so as to not show any connection with the ground.*
- *I shot from an angle that placed the figure's face just above the roofline of the church. This served to reinforce the sense of vertical lift.*
- *I centred the figure in the frame on the vertical axis (implying stability and calm), and I cropped in from both sides to ensure that the figure remains the central focus.*
- *I placed the right arm of the figure to slightly overlap the side of the church tower to imply an association between the figure and the church and, thus, the figure and the ground. This introduces some tension/drama and is in contrast to choices I made that encourage a sense of vertical lift.*
- *Both arms stretch upwards beyond the height of the church tower.*
- *I also placed the figure's hands close to the top of the frame (providing a sense of height and a vertical orientation).*
- *It was late in the day and the sun was going down and casting shadows in the courtyard. I waited until the golden sunlight was just catching the figure's hands to below the wrists. This placed an emphasis on the figure's hands (in support of the sculptor's vision).*

This image...



This photograph was taken through a screen looking out into a courtyard. I wanted to capture the sense of space, the light and the feeling of a breeze blowing through a screen. I liked the mood of the scene: sun breaking through storm clouds and illuminating the courtyard. The position I took the photo from does not quite give a perfectly symmetrical representation.

This introduces a slight "imbalance"...an uneasiness that encourages the viewer to explore more of the image. Some of the visual elements that contribute to making this image work are:

- *Lines - Vertical repeating lines (the glass pane supports), depth perspective introduced by the ones on the left, the white paved areas drawing the viewer's attention towards and also "past" the far side of the courtyard (two white paved ones, their reflected "continuation" at the far side of the courtyard and the left line reflected in the glass panes).*
- *Texture - The texture of the screen that covers the entire image serves as a visual "barrier" that separates the viewer from the scene and creates some tension/drama.*
- *Colour - The scene had a timeless retro feel to it so this is what I attempted to convey.*
- *Anomalous Elements - The tree on the far right and the glass doors serve to "stabilize" the image. Try covering each up with the tip of your baby finger to see the impact on the image without them!*

PART 7

HOW TO CREATE CONSISTENTLY

HOW TO CREATE CONSISTENTLY

All artists have experienced “creative” or “artist’s” block—a condition where one feels uninspired and unmotivated to create new art. When artists experience creative lows, it is directly attributable to gaps in how they approach creating.

Being able to create consistently requires that all of the fundamental building-block concepts and tasks related to visual creativity and the production of work are addressed. This includes everything from inspiration and motivation to forming an idea/concept to determining how to best approach, execute and convey a message.

Working with a defined approach helps keep one focussed on doing only the things that matter to growing artistically and remaining motivated to produce satisfying work.

When it comes to the creative process itself, success is not necessarily guaranteed by anything. **You need to work in a thoughtful and deliberate manner to reconcile your**

achievements with what inspired you and your original intentions so that you can properly judge your work.

Following a process is how this happens...period! This is how organizations achieve their goals. There is simply no other alternative to ensure successful results on a consistent basis.

Being able to create consistently and grow artistically is about being creative in a deliberate manner using **a framework comprised of knowledge and guidelines applied with purpose according to a logical system that supports creative judgement.** The framework I developed and use:

1. Helps me to clarify my inspiration, vision and make decisions regarding how to proceed.
2. Guides my progress and provides visibility into my decision-making along the way.
3. Provides context and ways for measuring my success.
4. Helps me assess results to determine how I can improve.

ATTRIBUTES OF GOOD PROCESS

1. Every process should have a specified goal and set out a path to follow with clearly defined steps.
2. A good process should be straightforward, and you should never find yourself wondering about just how it's all going to come together. It should “flow” logically.
3. A good process guides correct decision making along the way.
4. A good process is reliable and efficient.
5. Good processes (such as those for conducting analyses and ones related to manufacturing design or quality assurance) can promote learning and growth by helping to pinpoint vague problems or gaps in knowledge and practice that negatively impact results or impede progress.
6. Good process can improve productivity and the quality of results by providing a standardized way of working that helps you trim unnecessary steps and wasteful habits. It focuses only on the necessary steps that contribute to achieving results.
7. A good process should be able to **measure progress** in a meaningful fashion (the right things and at the right time) because **metrics influence behaviour**. In this way, it supports continuous improvement.
8. Good process helps you see the big picture. It provides context to assess and judge results.
9. Working with any good process becomes intuitive over time by imparting a continuous improvement mindset.

HOW PROCESS RELATES TO BEING CREATIVE

I trained and worked in the visual arts and then made a difficult choice to return to school in my late twenties and move on to a new career. This provided me with the financial freedom to practice my art and with opportunities for travel to other countries and remote locations.

My personal approach to creating is not solely based on arts-related academic training or my professional experience as an architectural photographer, printmaker and layout professional. I have a deep understanding of the value of process methodology because I left a career as a business analyst focussed on corporate performance improvement to become a full-time practicing artist. Yes, I really did...

Over the course of my business career, I worked for large organizations in several sectors and also developed courses and taught at the college level.

I'm well versed in the application of process and the use of metrics to yield insights into performance and results quality improvements. This is precisely what enables growth and continuous improvement.

And here's the kicker: My business background is what ultimately led to my desire for having a greater insight and deeper understanding into how I create my artwork and is what ended up igniting my artistic pursuits and creativity!

Yes, believe it. I didn't, initially. More on this coming up...

PART 8

MY APPROACH TO CREATING ART



THE MC ART FRAMEWORK™

I have compiled everything I've learned about visual creativity and the making of art into a four-part, eleven-step visual creativity empowerment and artistic growth approach I call the "MC Art Framework".

I identified key practices for developing creatively and assembled a selection of design protocols to use with elements of design for constructing strong compositions and images with impact. I then devised and refined an approach to systematically apply all of this to the creation of my art and the making of photographs.

This is how I create my artwork today, and I fully credit this approach for enabling me to live the enriched and creative life that I do.

About...

THE MC ART FRAMEWORK

1. It incorporates concepts related to creativity and visualizing imagery to help produce visually powerful images and facilitate artistic growth by focussing on what we see, how we perceive and what we feel.
2. It is an ordered approach to concept creation, image analysis, visualization and design. The framework leverages visual design concepts and elements applied with purpose to create engaging artwork and teaches how to isolate abstract elements and see compositions.
3. It leads to an improved understanding and sense of inner clarity regarding how to approach making art by targeting personal knowledge and skills gaps providing insights into how an individual works.
4. This framework is unique in that it is not about just learning and doing some things (like in a course or workshop) to make you a better artist, rather, its true value goes far beyond this as it is a system for lifelong learning that keeps making you "better". The framework can do this because it is not focussed on any single act of creating but on a cycle of continuous improvement that supports progressive artistic growth applying insights and knowledge gained from past works.
5. It is a true end-to-end complete approach to both creating AND becoming more creative.

MC Art Framework Core Concepts

#TruthBomb...

If you are not working
along these lines, you
are not producing
your best work.

The stages and steps of the MC Art Framework

– The complete creativity development and image design system

Conceive

1. Find
2. See
3. Feel



Define

4. Clarify
5. Know



Construct

6. Connect
7. Plan
8. Execute

Evolve

9. Evaluate
10. Learn
11. Aspire



The MC Art Framework

Since we're talking about images... What constitutes a successful image anyway? I believe the answer is that:

1. Art should "mean" something. An artist should have some sort of message or experience to convey through their artwork.
2. Success is achieved when the viewer senses the artist's perception of their experience and/or the message being conveyed through their art.

How can this happen?

A successful image is achievable through the visual and aesthetic elements in the work/photograph that provide the stage for communication to take place. To convey meaning, we use light and shapes and arrange them within our frame in ways that "turn up the volume" on our message.

This is achieved through the selective application of various design protocols and elements. This is the process of visual design.

This works...not by magic but because of psychology and brain physiology. Our subconscious recognizes patterns. This is actually how we read (letters are patterns arranged in various configurations forming words that convey meaning). It happens completely automatically. With regard to composition, being cognizant of various patterns for arranging elements within a frame primes our subconscious mind to instantly recognize them whenever we encounter them—this is artistic seeing.

PART 9

MY REASONS FOR USING A SPECIFIC APPROACH

WORKING WITH A FORMAL APPROACH...

- Inspires me to create new artwork.
- Inspires me to experiment to find better ways of artistic expression.
- Motivates me to continually improve my skills in my chosen mediums.
- Enables me to evolve as an artist by helping me to improve my creative, visualization and technical skills with every work I complete.

Many people invest considerable time on the internet, on YouTube and end up purchasing courses and ebooks, joining online groups, subscribing to newsletters...all without achieving any substantial, measurable results in terms of being able to produce progressively better work and growing as an artist. It's not quite right that all this time investment results in marginal increases in knowledge and skills. Your time, your life experience. We must ask ourselves why this is...

Most such information targets novices and/or people with some skills and is of a "how to" nature helping to improve craftsmanship. Though valuable, such information does not represent a complete approach yielding tangible results in terms of improving one's creativity. What is truly needed is an approach that can be leveraged in the creation of art to help one grow artistically to become a better artist. This is the **only way to learn to produce artwork that is truly your own** and this is what the MC Art Framework does for me.

If we don't learn to create in proven and measurable ways, we stagnate both artistically and technically, and we end up being inspired and influenced by unique work that others are producing; our art begins to look the same as everyone else's and is not something that comes out of our own hearts and minds.

I believe that this is a truly unfulfilling existence for anyone who wishes to be a creator of original work. This is the reason I decided to stop living this way and search for ways to be a happier, more capable and better artist.

How can using a "system" to create art actually work?

#TruthBomb...

The reason for using a system for creating art is that it forces one to separate the "what" (our inspiration and motivation to act) from the "how" (approach) and the actual creation of the work thus driving the development of necessary skills and knowledge (both aesthetic and technical) and providing insights and awareness into all aspects related to the creation of art. Yes, this can be done and is, in fact, the only way to truly evolve as an artist.

At first, it may seem unnatural to impose a defined multi-step approach to creating, especially when simply taking a photo for example. After all, we are a productive and inspired bunch, and we want to accomplish things. Many people simply start working on their artwork or taking photographs immediately upon being inspired to act without much of a plan. This compromises our every attempt, our results and our ability to learn and improve as artists due to taking an unmeasured, random approach to creating. There is, in fact, only one way around this: use a **proven systematic approach to guide our thinking**.

People rely on working habits that have evolved over time to create their art. For many, this is done intuitively and automatically without an awareness of any process taking place. An example of this is the taking of multiple photos of a subject where we sense (and hope) that additional attempts might somehow produce a better result. This happens when we rely too much on chance and our subconscious when creating. Due to insufficient consideration of our subject and/or message and/or our approach, we're not quite certain of just which attempt might be our best and why. Perhaps none and we've missed our opportunity completely...?

How can using a "system" to create art actually work?

#TruthBomb...

Imagine the possibilities if subconscious elements of how we visualize images could be directly leveraged... Our complete thought process for creating would be available to learn from and used to make the best images possible with every attempt—getting it right the first time knowing that we really did our best. We know that this is highly unlikely because our subconscious mind is well...subconscious. However, by taking a thoughtful approach to creating and applying the right working habits over time, we begin to train our subconscious to recognize and respond to elements in our environment and to ideas—this is where intuition and inspiration come from and where our imagination lives.

Here is what Albert Einstein had to say about all of this:

1. "Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited; imagination encircles the world." - G.S. Viereck interview, 1929
2. "I believe in intuitions and inspirations." - G.S. Viereck interview, 1929
3. "A new idea comes suddenly and in a rather intuitive way, but intuition is nothing but the outcome of earlier intellectual experience." - Einstein to Dr. H.L. Gordon, 1949

This last quote implies that intuition and intellect are mutually dependent. This speaks to the important role of intellect (analysis and process) in developing intuition and evolving creativity. Art is not unlike the world of science where results are achieved by identifying a problem (subject), developing a hypothesis (idea/concept and potential solution) and using a systematic approach to test and validate the hypothesis to develop a solution to the problem.

FOUR reasons that inspired me to map out a formal approach to creating

Given that art is subjective and often ambiguously positioned and tenuously linked to current events, global concerns, explorations of the psyche, historical events, philosophy, and an artist's personal vision/investigation etc., what inspired me to create a formal approach to creating art?

Reason 1: This quote

"But this marvelous world which we bring forth by means of our sympathy and penetrate through our intuition, will we ever come to know it? Perhaps we will be able to lift the vague indications of our intuition out of their limited sphere into the precise and clear plane of intelligence. But such triumphs are bounded by our capacities and we cannot rise above ourselves—that is the drama."

– From "Reflections on Painting" written in 1950, quote from Jacques Villon

Reason 2: My wish to better understand how to make art that is more appealing to art buyers and the art establishment.

Reason 3: I decided that I was spending far too much time looking at and reading about art and creativity online and that this was no longer the most productive use of my time (though entertaining, somewhat enlightening, it did provide some value). I found so much rehashed information out there in the virtual void related to technique, handling materials/tools, basic composition and rules to break, developing productive work habits, building an art business/brand, selling your artwork...all the time wishing there was more useful information available relating specifically to developing aesthetic judgement and creativity, and learning how to apply these concepts to the creation of my art.

Reason 4: Above all, I wanted to grow as an artist, to hone my artistic skills, become more creative and put myself on a path of continual artistic development.

My first step was to identify personal artistic and technical challenges, and behaviours that may have been constraining me. I needed to decide who I wanted to be as an artist, so I decided to:

- Define a direction
- Set appropriate goals for myself
- Find a clear path

- Plan and manage my time to focus my efforts on only what relates to the achievement of my goals relating to my creative development, my art and my business.

The second step was obvious: I had to find ways to become the best artist I could possibly be and didn't want anything to hold me back or waste my valuable time! A lofty goal, yes...but genuine, ongoing and something that has improved my life.

This is ultimately what inspired me to want to investigate making art in a more consistent and creative fashion.



PART 10

LEARNING THE RIGHT THINGS

LEARNING CHALLENGES

1. The Internet and YouTube typically provide out of context information...tips on specific topics, "how to" and other info resulting in a fragmented learning experience not generally presented from a context of creative development. I imagine that most people would find it challenging to write a thousand words or even list a few bullets about what they've learned about creativity from watching YouTube or spending time on the Internet in the last year.
 2. Workshops are generally considered to be a good learning experience providing tips, techniques and opportunities for practicing a craft and meeting people. Many attend workshops to learn to emulate the work of the instructor—this is what workshops are typically designed to do..."how to". Attendees are challenged with absorbing and retaining everything covered in a workshop and are left with a workbook based on discussions, notes, videos or recordings they may have made and their memories of the event. Workshops are not tailored to individuals and personal requirements. The instructor must divide their time amongst all attendees with the ones requiring the most attention typically getting more than their share resulting in a learning experience that is like being in a row boat: you can only row as fast as the slowest rower and you are not steering the boat. I don't believe the workshop experience is an ideal vehicle for long-term artistic growth.
 3. Online courses offer some good learning experiences. The vast majority, however, are designed for a general audience and utilize an exercise-based approach to cover lesson material. They are not a tailored learning experience for addressing personal knowledge and skills gaps over the long-term nor are they meant to be.
 4. Books and ebooks can be a valuable way of learning. What is important, however, with respect to becoming more creative, is **exploring the concepts of creativity and artistic growth whilst producing your own artwork**, not to simply read about someone else's experiences.
 5. Having a mentor works. It's personal and it's work-based learning.
- What then is the best way to learn the specific things each of us needs to know to be more creative? Wouldn't it be nice to have the answer to this ultimate question?

PART 11

THE PSYCHOLOGY BEHIND MY APPROACH TO CREATING ART

WHY REFLECT ON HOW WE CREATE?

Using an approach aimed at developing and applying creative skills that provides a system of working and learning not only generates real results but also saves time.

Results matter, and people are outcome driven. If we adopt a process which is designed to deliver great outcomes, we achieve on a regular basis.

We all have some inherent creative potential. Unless you adopt a way of working that specifically targets developing your creativity, you may never grow creatively or reach your full potential and, when creating new work, you are likely only producing more of the same work and not necessarily **evolving creatively**. This is because, when we don't work according to a pre-defined method, we cannot measure our progress and gain insights into how things are occurring. We are, effectively, constraining our potential to learn and grow.

An important factor in any approach that claims to actually work is to be able to clearly identify exactly **what to measure and understand how to interpret** results.

To grow creatively, we must be able to understand, measure and assess our creative practices and also our creative output.

Another reason for adopting a more disciplined way of working to become more creative...

"I'm not lost for I know where I am.

But however, where I am may be lost."

— A.A. Milne, author of Winnie-the-Pooh

Practice without knowledge is useless and knowledge alone is not enough. Knowledge needs to be thoughtfully applied with guided purpose using a planned approach in order to yield tangible results = You need to follow a method that you can trust and believe in.

"No one is an artist unless he carries his picture in his head before painting it, and is sure of his method and composition."

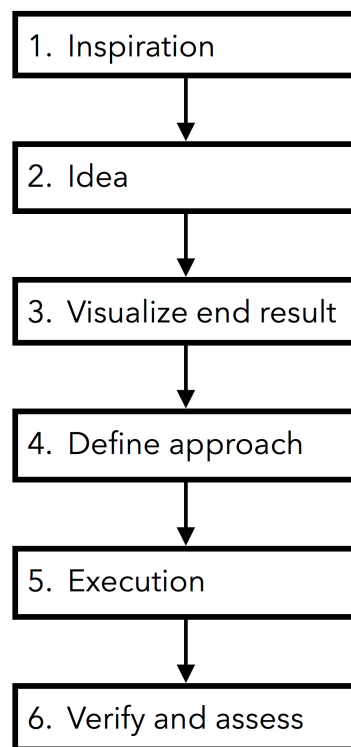
— Claude Monet

Growing creatively requires a thoughtful approach and, if you don't have one that you trust and believe in, you won't adopt it and it won't help you in any significant way.

Please read this page again—it's important.

HOW IT WORKS

Visual creativity is about finding ways to associate compositional elements and ideas to best convey artistic intent. The creative process and making art:



Being able to visualize an end result (step 3) is reliant on one's perception of a subject or idea. The ability to perceive is not simply the result of a passive experience but is shaped by one's learning, memories, expectations and attention abilities...a wholly personal and subjective interpretation.

Perception can be split into two phases:

1. Processing of sensory input which transforms low-level information to higher-level information (e.g. extracting shapes for object recognition, recognizing patterns and repetition...).
2. Processing visual information according to an individual's interpretive biases and expectations. What our eyes see is not the same thing as what our minds perceive. Our brains provide context and meaning to our experiences based on what we know—we each have filters with which to perceive the world.

"All perceiving is also thinking, all reasoning is also intuition, all observation is also invention."

- Rudolf Arnheim

Rudolf Arnheim (1904-2007) was an author and Harvard professor of the psychology of art. He was strongly influenced by Gestalt psychology (which dealt primarily with sensory psychology and the perception of form, as well as with art).

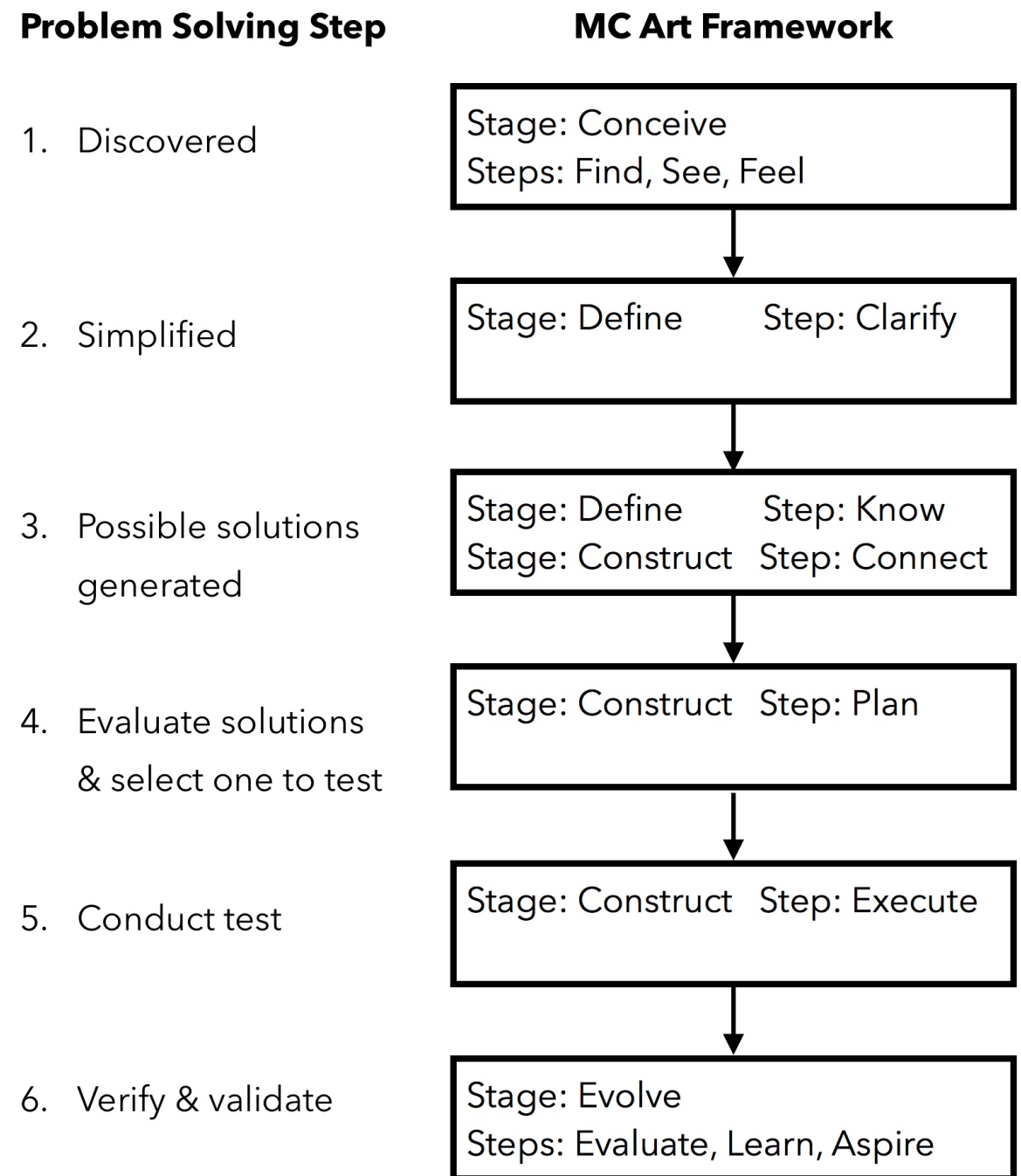
"A traditional scientific experiment is based primarily on breaking down its object into individual parts and defining

them thus the object is considered to be the sum of its parts. By contrast, the Gestalt psychologists, referring among other things to the arts, emphasized that there are common connections in human nature and also in nature in which the whole is made up of the interrelationships between its parts and that the sum of the parts does not equal the whole. Gestalt theory also says that the factual world is not simply understood through perception as a random collection of sensory data, but rather as a structured whole.” - Rudolf Arnheim

Perception itself involves elements of structure and order, as does art. An analogy can also be drawn with music where the arrangement of notes, symbols, tempo, instrumentation etc. reflect the choices of the composer to define the experience of the piece.

The processes of creating art and artistic growth share common elements with problem-solving; they rely on routine habits and cognitive skills to develop a concept, identify potential solutions, test, validate results, learn and carry on. These shared elements are all found in the MC Art Framework for visual creativity empowerment and artistic growth.

Here is how problem-solving steps correspond to using the MC Art Framework (reference page 37) to create art:



Growing creatively requires a thoughtful approach because:

1. Visual creativity is reliant on one's perception which is subjective and continually evolving (= a moving target).
2. The act of creating art involves problem-solving concepts. Both are instinctive with learnable aspects.
3. Using a structured approach (process) supports creative learning and artistic growth.

CREATIVITY AND HOW OUR BRAINS WORK

Here are some interesting statements from John Medina who is a developmental molecular biologist, professor and founding director of two brain research institutes.

This selection of quotes are taken from his New York Times Bestseller book: Brain Rules. He came up with twelve brain principles for learning, surviving and thriving.

- "Repetition fixes memories."
- "Emotions get our attention."
- "We don't pay attention to boring things."

- "Meaning before details."
- "We are better at seeing patterns and abstracting the meaning of an event than we are at recording detail."
- "We are powerful and natural explorers."
- "We never outgrow the desire to know."
- "Research shows that the brain is wired to keep on learning as we age".
- "Visual processing takes up about half of everything your brain does..."
- "Multitasking, when it comes to paying attention, is a myth. The brain naturally focusses on concepts sequentially, one at a time."

These quotations touch on topics mentioned thus far in this ebook and on concepts that the MC Art Framework is premised on:

- Creativity is instinctive: "We are powerful and natural explorers."
- We react to emotion.
- We are good at seeing patterns and abstracting meaning.
- Visual processing is most of what our brains do.
- We need to intentionally focus to achieve.
- We learn continually through repetition (= process).

WASSILY KANDINSKY

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) was a Russian painter and art theorist who is generally credited as the pioneer of abstract art. Here are some of his thoughts concerning art:

Art and Process

"The sequence is: emotion (in the artist) → the sensed → the work of art → the sensed → emotion (in the observer).

"Everything starts from a dot."

"Colour is a power which directly influences the soul."

"The composition is the organized sum of the interior functions of every part of the work."

"There is only one road to follow, that of analysis of the basic elements in order to arrive ultimately at an adequate graphic expression."

Art and Music

"Colour is the key. The eye is the hammer. The soul is the piano with its many chords. The artist is the hand that, by touching this or that key, sets the soul vibrating automatically."

"The two emotions (inner-artist, outer-observer) will be like and equivalent to the extent that the work of art is successful. In this respect painting is in no way different from a song: each is a communication. The successful singer arouses in listeners his emotions; the successful painter should do no less."

The Artist

"The artist must have something to say, for mastery over form is not his goal but rather the adapting of form to its inner meaning."

"Emotion is always seeking means of expression, a material form, a form that is able to stir the senses. The determining and vital element is the inner one, which controls the outer form, just as an idea in the mind determines the words we use, and not vice versa."

"The artist must train not only his eye but also his soul."

"That is beautiful which is produced by the inner need, which springs from the soul."

"Art is not vague production, transitory and isolated, but a power which must be directed to the improvement and refinement of the human soul."

PART 12

EMPOWERING PERSONAL CREATIVITY

EMPOWERING PERSONAL CREATIVITY - KEY POINTS

1. Being creative is the result of an idea that is manifested by the merging of two or more elements into something new. We all do it to varying degrees in our everyday lives. Some people focus and work on their creativity more than others; this simply comes down to a personal choice of dedicating some time to creative pursuits.
2. Being creative is simply about a personal experience; it has nothing to do with meeting some defined standard or measure of perceived success.
3. Aspects of creativity can be learned and improved upon. The process of creation “constructs” through our intuition, imagination and intellect. It is a frame of mind and a matter of execution. You need to follow a process that develops the right working habits over time to produce great work.
4. You need a plan (know and do the right things) in order to learn and grow creatively. You need to know what to consider and track and how to assess both your approach and results in order to improve. This is straightforward and is the same every time for everyone whenever creating anything.

The MC Art Framework with its accompanying set of tools and knowledge:

- Is a method that anyone at any stage of their artistic development can use to improve the way they approach their art and photography.
- Guides the adoption of a system that supports the creation of art by introducing working habits that, over time, evolve into an intuitive way of seeing imagery, working and being inspired thus **enabling one to create their best work**.
- Provides an approach to visual creativity and assembling images that facilitates artistic growth.



This image...

Water challenges artists no matter how skilled and experienced one might be. This is one of my more successful waterfall photographs. I try to photograph waterfalls from below to make them seem taller and, in the case of this image, more grand. It was a windy, cloudy day (nice) with sunlight falling in key areas due to a break in the clouds (better than nice) and, soft filtered light (past better to almost perfect) on the mist and precipice of the falls into the distance. I feel that this photograph does a good job of conveying the vastness of this waterfall. The beautifully lit area on the left, the highlighted water and the visible areas of the falls through mist, all work to add a three-dimensional depth to the photograph. The lack of colour serves to focus the viewer's attention on the textures, the movement of water and mist and the light present in this scene.

PART 13

HOW YOU CAN MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU

EMPOWERING YOUR VISUAL CREATIVITY

I hope you enjoyed reading about how I approach my paintings and photography and how I continually strive to become a better artist. The MC Art Framework evolved over many years and works very well for me.

The bottom line with becoming more creative is...you just do it. You simply have to decide to start...right here at this very moment...just decide. Nothing more is required.

To begin, you have to know where to start from and how to move forward. I've provided a framework (reference page 37) to guide you in the right direction.

You can use this as a template approach, do your own research into each step at your own pace and find ways of incorporating what you learn along the way into the creation of your art. Alternatively, I created a toolkit with summary sheets for applying and working with the MC Art Framework for those who may wish to consider investing in actively pursuing developing their creative abilities.

Go back and look more closely at some of my artwork contained in this document and imagine how some of the MC Art Framework concepts (page 37) may have been applied and, then, decide if you too can benefit from this system of creative empowerment.

I am an artist, teacher and process improvement professional who truly knows, understands, and has experienced, first hand, the power of process. I can virtually guarantee that the MC Art Framework will help you (as it has helped me) become more creative.

Using this framework is the ONLY way to benefit from it. You will need to invest a little time following each of the MC Art Framework steps. There is not much else that can be said about this.

Being creative is part of experiencing and appreciating the world around us. Through what we create, we reflect and convey our emotional responses and experiences preserving moments and feelings for history. This is why everyone should strive to liberate and express their creativity—it's a part of all of us.

It is our competencies as creatives that determine the depth of the artwork we produce and how our work touches others. Everyone can benefit from adopting a

pragmatic approach to creating, learning and growing artistically. It's not hard—it's a natural evolution and something you can simply choose to do at any time. Shortly after you begin using the MC Art Framework, familiarity and momentum start to kick in, and then there's no stopping. It is a complete creativity development and image design system. Get this holistic approach to artistic growth with the tools and knowledge to put it into practice immediately, [here](#).

You can learn more about and **see the MC Art Framework in action** [here](#) where I provide examples of how it's been

applied to the making of paintings, photographs and drawings and provide visual analyses of images.

You can find more of my artwork and articles [here](#) on my website.

I hope you found this ebook interesting and that you've taken away some useful information that you can put into practice to help you in your own creative journey. And I hope that you will decide to work with the MC Art Framework to do so.

Michael Christidis

