

Notes From a Creative Soul: Inspiration & Ideas

Text and Images David Julian

For me, art and science are inseparable. I am as interested in learning how our creative minds work as I am in creating art itself. Besides my readings on the subject, I talk frequently with others to learn how they approach their art. What follows is a peek into what I know best—my personal creative cauldron— where something is almost always brewing.

Whether you're new to photography or a seasoned professional, finding inspiration and staying motivated is as essential to the success of one's art as developing an artistic eye and technical skills. This is true for almost any creative pursuit, from art-making to zoo design. As diverse as our personalities are, so are our recipes for creative expression. In a sense, some artists are like gourmet chefs, though I'm more often a short-order cook in my commissioned work. I think of my own creative process as a "combination plate" full of intention, inspiration, spicy motivation, and a side order of happy accidents.

As most of my commissioned client work is fairly conceptual and requires quick problem-solving, I have to be logical as well as artistic on demand. With both sides of my brain chugging away towards those goals, I am fairly good at

brainstorming— but sometimes I become temporarily stuck for good ideas. Other parts of life just sometimes get in the way of my creative flow. When it happens, one natural tendency is to become frustrated, which only further blocks one's creativity and problem-solving abilities. When that occurs, it's time to shift gears and change the frame of mind. I might do a different task for a while to "unlock" my mind, have an off-topic conversation or get some exercise to relax so I return more refreshed.

When I need to contemplate solutions or write some notes, I sometimes leave my studio, as it is like a miniature jungle where diversions abound, potentially capturing my distractible mind. I formulate my initial ideas best on paper. I usually write on spiral-bound or tracing pads, preferring the tactile feedback of pen on paper more than being at my computer keyboard. There is nothing mechanical, and no software interface to get between my brain and the words and simple sketches. I write and draw without interruption or editing, as if having a one-way conversation with another self. I also keep a small pad in my camera bag for notes, sketches or sudden sparks of ideas that I want to review during downtime. I also list words and phrases, and make diagrams during the collaborative brain



Managing Key Performance Indicators

storming sessions I have with visionary clients and creative teams.

Whether working alone or in collaboration, it is important not to 'nay say' ideas as they flow — just jot them down and keep moving forward. Revisit and refine the best ones, and seek an objective opinion whenever possible. The best



Mask

of these ideas and sketches get added to my current sketchbook, or tacked up for quick reference. I advocate that every artist has a space

where they can pin up a variety of favorite references, images and inspirations, like a visual diary. The constantly-changing scraps are very revealing of ourselves, and can be swapped out as we discover new and interesting things. I periodically store the scraps I remove in file folders so I can easily retrieve an earlier reference. Going through these on occasions, it's nearly a diary of my visual life. It's a trip down my personal memory lane of former inspirations.

My work spans several art genres, from serenely rich landscapes to conceptual montages, to

documentary and imaginative narratives. I used to shoot first, take notes later. I now "check in" with my senses before using the camera, so that smell, touch and sound inform my impressions of the place or event. That helps me for a connection. For instance, when I first arrive at a seaside location, I take time to really savor the air, handle some stones, sand or shells. I will check out the waves and wind, and the behaviors of whatever wildlife I see. In a foreign town, I do roughly the same, sitting awhile and observing the pace and style of local life, getting to know it somehow before trying to interpret it with images or words. I may have an internal conversation to reinforce my intent. I wasn't always this way. I used to rely mostly on my spontaneous visual instincts as if hunting with the camera. The adrenaline from working a foreign street scene or facing the unknown sharpened my instincts and focus. I enjoy all these approaches, and through each of them I make a certain style of image to round out my abilities.

Something that has also helped me focus and make the most of my imagination has been to write down my thoughts when I first arrive at a location, before I set out to work with a camera. I am not referring to formal writing, but just jotting down words, phrases, paragraphs or even loose "thumbnail" drawings from your stream of consciousness or plucked from your surroundings. Some of us write down our dreams as a way of

recording them or clearing our mental slate for the day. I rarely seem to remember mine upon awakening, but they come back to me when doing other tasks. Several of my favorite images have resulted from recreating those surreal nocturnal scenarios. Though I also enjoy spontaneous reactive photography, sometimes going to a favorite relaxing place or a new environment



Balance

triggers my chemistry, allowing me to access a heightened awareness that in turn helps me focus and use my imagination. This awareness is often subconscious, and lays the groundwork for inspired ideas that I can turn into something tangible. I have not practiced meditation in the classic sense, but I can often access a similar state of quiet clarity that in turn enables me to contemplate and envision my ideas.

Though we all may have different approaches, everyone can practice some kind of mental exercise that will enhance their ability to connect their heart and mind for their art. It is very important as an artist not to become isolated, so finding community, going to gallery walks, taking workshops and attending seminars will help keep ideas flowing.

I found that teaching opened me up to a world of interesting and diverse, creative people. Inspiration, personal expression and gaining control of our creative and technical tools are the cornerstones of my creative digital workshops. As we share our ideas and work as a group, the combined creativity is very stimulating. The participants' contributions and their resulting work amazes me every time.

Stay tuned, as next time I'll continue with the topic of generating ideas and developing what I call the "Cranial Crowbar."

If you'd like to share your ideas on how you stay creative, submit them to editor@photoworkshop.com.

If you'd like to expand your creative powers and learn new Photoshop skills, save your place in one of David's upcoming workshops at: http://www.doubleexposure.com/DJ_Events.shtml

You can keep up to date with David's workshops and see more of his work at: <http://www.davidjulian.com>

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Venetian Angel