

# The Creative Process of Art

By Paul Wagner

**NOTE: Article may be reprinted without permission so long as content and credits (at bottom) are included.**

Want to know a little secret?

Have you ever wondered why great artists' drawings and paintings are timeless and honored forever, and other paintings by not-so-great artists pictures end up with no life at all?

Close your eyes and imagine yourself in the last Art Museum you walked around in. Think about the paintings that attracted you. What made those vivid paintings so different from stuff you see, say, in common galleries? If you think carefully, about which compositions are most valued today, you'll see the answer . . . as plain as the expression on your face...

## **Life and Times.**

That's the secret. The greatest artists captured "a moment". They took a "snapshot" into the lives and times of their period. Their pictures told a story.

And everyone simply LOVES a good story.

## **Think Story.**

How many times have you heard a story that you found fascinating. It was colorful, well "drawn" and left powerful images in your mind. You remembered that story and could re-tell it faithfully using only the deep currents of your feelings—you could "feel" your way through re-living the story in your head.

We are ALWAYS in search of stories. Stories to be entertained, stories to learn by, stories to express ourselves. When we read a good book or see a great movie we just can't WAIT to tell our friends about it. No, we insist they go see that great movie. "Here I'll pay for it—I think it's that good. My treat! We'll sit up front." And so on.

We see good stories in good advertisements...and they're only 30 second scripts...But some can bring us to near tears in just 30 seconds. That is truly amazing.

The great artists of yesteryear were *telling us stories*.

Ever hear of Norman Rockwell? Of course you have. An amazing storyteller. And each and every painting he did would illicit a strong emotion—funny, sad, thoughtful, indignant, voyeuristic, insightful. Each illustration that he painted was literally a self-contained book.

If you haven't already figured it out, to create a picture; you only need create a story in your head.

It begins with an erratic spark

## **Know what it is you are trying to create.**

When I was in art class years ago there was an exercise in painting about drawing fruit in a bowl. It seemed so boring.

Fruit.

Bowl.

Yawn.

But I began to think in terms of story. And suddenly I came up with one.

I put all my fruits in the bowl except the tomato. I mean after all, the tomato is officially classified as a vegetable even though it dehisces (falls from the vine). Some awake people saw the humor immediately, others not. OK, I agree it was a stretch BUT it was a story, especially when I titled it "The Fruit Party". Here's the fruit all sitting in the same bowl but the tomato, a.k.a. "vegetable" is sitting on the outskirts, lonely, uninvited.

It was a story.

Here's the point. People liked it without necessarily knowing WHAT it was that they liked. I hit the story nerve. And here's the key. If you can think of a story around the objects or places or people you are drawing or painting and practice it EARLY ON, the inspiration will always be with you. In fact the reverse effect will occur. You will see scenes in your life and your brain will "photograph" them for later construction on the canvas.

Here's an example of "photographs" that I took in my head that is yet a story unpainted but very, very still clearly there.

I was walking around in the City of Santa Monica, California, USA years ago. Now, Santa Monica near the Third Street Promenade is famous for its eclectic culture. And there are stories everywhere, anytime. Once I passed a “mystical” book store with books arranged on shelves sitting out on the sidewalk. As I navigated my way past them, one person was standing reading fervently, unaware of the passerbys.

What made the story was the feather duster under her arm.

The story was obvious. A worker and an avid reader, was dispensed out to the sidewalk to dust off the books...and was suddenly caught by the title of book that she most had to open and began reading in earnest. She simply could NOT put it down. The image is warm, inviting, funny, engaging and VERY human. And I’m certain you can see a picture in your mind that would be a drawing or a painting—capturing the intense intrigue on her face, the dusty obstructing racks, and the oblivion to her customers. A “snapshot” of Life was all right there for the taking by any good artist.

Every day you have these stories that you can be “snapping”.

Every day you either engage or pass by people or places that inspire you, humor you, invite you, and are just, well, human.

You have now begun the groundwork in the Creative Process, the most important element of all in art!

It begins with **The Story**.

And it’s easier than you may think.

The stories are actually being created for you. All YOU need to do is open up to receive them. You just need to observe events and people happening. Listen for Life and Times. You need only open your mind up to the beauty and events of people, animals, butterflies, flowers...whatever.

**Thinking “story” supplies you with a never-ending supply of creative stimulus.**

That’s because there is ALWAYS more going on than you can draw or paint in your lifetime. That unto itself that should be great encouragement for you in finding subject matter.

## **Train your Brain.**

It is nearly unbelievable how fast we fixate on what is vs. what could be.

It is like that in art.

When you are drawing, there is a great tendency to commit too early and keep what you have drawn static. To keep your mind in the creative state try to stay uncommitted, much like a blurred photo. Keep your lines loose and your mind open. Training your mind in this way will open your mind wider and keep it open longer.

And thus, those sparks will fly around more often.

## **Luke, Know the Dark Side of the Force.**

Whatever you believe is going to be fixed in your mind. And whatever is in your mind is likely to become fixed if it stays there long enough.

End each practice positively. Don't ever walk away negatively

Whenever you finish a drawing session, stand up and walk backward and look at your drawing. Find something about your drawing you really like. It can be the entire drawing, a part of the drawing—it really doesn't matter—and compliment yourself. Feel a good feeling.

This from Miguel Ruiz from the Four Agreements:

*Be impeccable with your word. Means you never use the power of the word against yourself in the creation of your story. Impeccable means "without sin." Anything you do that goes against yourself is a sin. When you believe in lies, you are using the power of the word against yourself.*

## **Living in the Moment**

Living in the moment is the biggest secret that any good artist can share with you.

Artists, Performers, and even Olympic class athletes describe it as being "in the zone"—those moments when **nothing else exists** and you are "one" with whatever it is you are doing.

Creating a work of art—moving beyond the casual doodler to the expressive and creative artist that lies within is a **matter of choice**. As my wife puts it in Freedom's Formula, freedom is all about our choices.

Choice is our ability to move through the fear or self-doubt. It is letting go of the embarrassment or pain that you may be holding on to from the beliefs you created “way back when”.

How many children’s dreams of art were dashed after having taken “odd” media forms and painting the living room wall in bold beautiful strokes...only to be punished for “destroying” the wall (look, my hand is raised).

But you and I have **the choice** to go beyond the child’s misunderstanding. And whatever happened then can be changed right here and now, right in this paragraph, as a conscious choice for that child’s dream to be reborn and for the incredible potential that is lying dormant, just behind the old belief.

Creativity itself then, is simply making a choice.

But practice and commitment will also be required.

## The Bigger Picture

Any lasting endeavor comes from a place of total commitment.

Even Art can have a permanent place inside you.

And by the way, if you ever have to “stop” drawing for whatever reason, once you learn how to draw you never really forget it. It’s just like getting on a bicycle after many years; you’re a little rusty, but it’s not too hard to re-acquaint yourself getting your balance back.

But what happens when your adventure in **drawing just plain stops**. Or maybe you **couldn’t even begin drawing**. This could happen to you and I want to address it right here and now.

It’s much like writer’s cramp. We become sullen. Or we “find” another adventure. Or we become bored. Or, or, or. In short, **we just get stuck**.

What stops the flow to commitment is that incessant chatter that has you saying you are:

- Too Young / Too Old
- Too Rich / Too Poor
- Uneducated / Over-Educated
- Good / Bad

- Right / Wrong

That's right. Odd as this list is, any of them can create your beliefs. It is a reality that we sometimes succumb to.

Let me allow you to read a paragraph that Kira Wagner ([www.freedomsformula.com](http://www.freedomsformula.com)) wrote for me on the subject of never beginning art. She and I had a long discussion for this article about why some people started art and then (for reasons explained herein) stopped.

Here then, a short excerpt of her thoughts:

*This list includes mom's lipstick, the contents of your diaper, the handy colorful palate of crayons often found in a child's arsenal of "quiet activity" toys. These were all an attempt to transfer what you, as a child, saw in your mind's eye to the world where everyone might enjoy the image. The only challenge seemed to be that the adults in your world didn't have that same appreciation of artistic flair that lay within you. Any number of conversations (albeit one-sided dialogues) and actions may have ensued. The mildest of which is that you watched as they erased your beautiful creation and suggested that you use a piece of paper the next time. However, your vision did not belong on that tiny 8 ½ x 11 piece of paper. It was to be BIG. Really BIG for the entire world to see and appreciate.*

*Now it was gone. All traces of your glorious effort removed. The decisions you made in that moment may have resulted in the reluctance to even try to pursue that creative side of your existence. We decided to agree with our parents or teachers—we weren't good enough.*

*Regardless of your experiences, you have persisted and found your way here. You have made a choice to explore that artistic flair inside and you now have an ongoing choice—continue to create, to have fun, embrace that part of you that connects with the beauty around you...or you can listen to the self-doubt, the chatter. You even have the choice to engage in conversation with it (yourself) and choose to stop the forward momentum. Only you can make the choice.*

*The ultimate question will be 'Are you finding a sense of freedom / joy as you progress on your journey?'*

I agree. You are here to rekindle the childhood fantasies in the land of your imagination and dreams. That is very cool.

## The Last Stroke of Your Brush.

Stop, already, trying to achieve perfection. I can't begin to tell you how many great artists' works are NOT perfect. I've had many discussions with great artists walking through books with them. You just assume they're good because they were published. Rubbish.

But they withstood hundreds, if not thousands of years.

Why?

The answer, of course, was—**The Story**.

They told a story.

So you can tell a story.

Bring your imagination to life.

Become the art genius that you were born to be, showing your mind, just how you like it. Just like you are now walking.

So, go start the Lessons. I've made them fun so you can be relaxed so you will do better. Didn't the best teachers you ever meet also possess the best humor?

And as that last stroke of your brush (or pencil) goes down upon the paper, and you know it without hesitation, sit a moment, and enjoy what you have done, even part of what you have done, and know that you are becoming more than that in which you began.

You: The Creator. Pretty cool, huh?

To your Creativity and Imagination,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul".

Paul Wagner  
Founder, Art Training International  
[www.how-to-draw-online.com](http://www.how-to-draw-online.com)