

TEN TIPS FOR EXPANDING YOUR REPERTOIRE

Eric Maisel

OVERVIEW

There may be new creative projects that you want to begin or new ways of marketing and promoting yourself that you know would be smart to attempt but something seems to be holding you back. Here are ten tips for expanding your repertoire of creative projects and/or self-promotional efforts.

TIP ONE: KNOW WHAT YOU CURRENTLY DO

Because our lives rush along, providing us with no chance to catch up with ourselves, we often don't really know what we've been attempting or accomplishing. When was the last time you had a conversation with yourself about what sort of art you're making or what sort of marketing efforts you're attempting? It's harder to know what new things to try if you don't know what current things you're doing. Settle in and spend real time discerning your current situation.

TIP TWO: DETACH FROM THE IDEA OF "ONE WAY"

In part because it reduces our experience of anxiety, we often decide to do things one way—paint one sort of painting, market in one particular way—and then refuse to think about or discount the desirability of other art or marketing efforts that we might make. Maybe we think that only the gallery scene is for us and that marketing our art online is beneath our dignity. Try to let go of the idea that there is just one way to do things and find the courage to investigate other ways of making art and marketing art, even those that at first glance look completely uncongenial.

TIP THREE: INVESTIGATE YOUR DISLIKES

If you dislike realistic painting, why do you dislike it? If you dislike abstract painting, why do you dislike it? If you dislike talking to gallery owners, why do you dislike those interactions? If you dislike studio visits, why do you dislike them? We often make snap judgments about our likes and dislikes and subsequently never investigate those like and dislikes again, responding instead with a knee-jerk reaction. Take a good, hard look at those things you claim to dislike and see if they really are so unlikeable.

TIP FOUR: INVESTIGATE YOUR FEARS

We often hide from ourselves the fact that something is making us scared or anxious. Maybe we have real fears that our drawing skills aren't up to snuff but keep dodging that painful information and paint abstractly not because we genuinely want to paint abstractly but because we know that our realistic paintings wouldn't measure up. It is very brave work but very valuable work to look your fears and anxieties in the eye. Only then will you understand your true situation. That understanding is bound to open the door to courageous new efforts.

TIP FIVE: ARTICULATE YOUR POSSIBILITIES

What new art do you want to attempt? What new marketing efforts do you want to try? If you don't get them named, it's unlikely that you can pursue them. If, on the other hand, you can say clearly to yourself that you want to try your hand at some Calder-esque mobiles or that you want to learn how to affiliate market your paintings, that clarity of expression will help you begin to move in new directions.

TIP SIX: MAKE A STRONG CHOICE

Let's say that you have several kinds of new art that you want to make: a venture into sculpture, a multi-media project, some monoprinting, a new style involving personal history, and so on. It is exciting to want to do many things but it can also prove paralyzing to have too many simultaneous choices. Choose something strongly without second-guessing whether it is the best choice and without grieving that you can't do x or y today because you are

doing z. Until we make strong choices of this sort, we tend not to get anything done.

TIP SEVEN: STRETCH IN A NEW DIRECTION

If you're moving in a genuinely new direction, that movement is likely to feel risky as well as exciting. Remember that risky things actually feel risky in the body! Don't be surprised if your stomach gets queasy or your palms sweat—and don't use those feelings as excuses to stop what you're attempting. Instead say, "Okay, I'm making myself anxious here—and that's okay. Onward!" If you've been painting your whole life and now you're starting to sculpt, isn't it likely that that will feel like a stretch? Accept that reality.

TIP EIGHT: ACCEPT BEING A BEGINNER

If you are trying something genuinely new, say for example moving from watercolors to acrylics or moving from studio visits only to gallery efforts, you must accept that you are a beginner and that you will stammer more than you would like, stub your toe more than you would like, and on some days feel completely lost at sea. Do not let these realities become the excuses you use to return to more familiar ways. Expect them, accept them, and persevere!

TIP NINE: ACCEPT THE REALITY OF LEARNING CURVES

Not only may you be a genuine beginner at this new painting style or marketing technique, you will also have to endure the learning curve that comes with any new effort. Just picture the learning curve required to go from first piano lessons to playing Bach at Lincoln Center! Don't let the fact that a learning curve is coming daunt you or deter you. Accept the reality, forgive yourself on those days when you make "too little" progress, and keep the payoff in mind—your growth and success as an artist.

TIP TEN: PARLAY WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW

Even though you may be a beginner at some new painting technique, painting style, or marketing strategy, you are not a beginner at life. You can parlay all that you've learned over the years and make your current experience easier than it might otherwise have been if you had been a novice at life. If you remind yourself that you know a lot and that you intend to bring all that knowing to

your current efforts, you will do a better job of maintaining your enthusiasm, optimism, and focus.

ABOUT ERIC MAISEL

Eric Maisel is the author of more than 30 books. His recent books include *Brainstorm: Harnessing the Power of Productive Obsessions*, *Mastering Creative Anxiety*, and *Rethinking Depression: Shed the Label, Reclaim Your Power* (2012).

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