



What Happens in the Lives of Artists When They Go Pro

A

s editor of *Professional Artist* for three years now, I've never thought much about our name because it seemed obvious. "We're a business magazine for visual artists," I say when I introduce myself. Then, last month I was reading Steven Pressfield's book *Turning Pro: Tap Your Inner Power and Create Your Life's Work*, and I came across these words:



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When we turn pro, everything becomes simple. Our aim centers on the ordering of our days in such a way that we overcome the fears that have paralyzed us in the past. We now structure our hours not to flee from fear, but to confront it and overcome it ... Turning pro is a decision. But it's such a monumental, life-overturning decision ... Often it's something we've been avoiding for years, something we would never willingly face unless overwhelming events compelled us to.

Many of our readers know the moment Pressfield is writing about. Because you wouldn't be reading a magazine called *Professional Artist* unless you were no longer an amateur.

Do you have a moment? For some it might be a series of moments or small steps over time until you suddenly wake up one day and realize you're on the other side.

I was curious about that moment and how our readers experienced it, so I put out a

“When I went pro, I found out what I was made of, how hard I could work and how much I could get done. ~ Juliana Coles

call to six artists to ask them about the moment they turned pro and what changed afterwards. Did it happen to them or did it happen after they made a decision? And then what? How did it affect their daily life?

This is what I heard from six artists including a filmmaker, photographer, public commission artist and painters.

Take these words and claim your moment. Turn pro or turn up the heat. Use these daily habits as examples of what you could do. Everybody's turning pro will look different. But one thing is common: once you turn pro, there's no going back.

Artist comments have been slightly edited for clarity and conciseness.

THE MOMENT YOU “TURNED PRO”

Gigi Rosenberg: *Do you remember the moment you decided to commit to being a professional artist? Where were you? Who were you with? Tell me in detail what happened.*

Sally Cooper: In 2004, I received a telephone call at home saying that I won first place in the Abstract/ Experimental Category of *The Artist's Magazine's* national competition. That was the moment. There were over 13,000 entries in that year's competition. This achievement gave me the courage and mindset to call myself a professional artist.

André Joseph: I was 27 and only 4 years removed from graduating college when I made my first feature film. Unlike school, there was no curriculum to follow in life except to pursue my dream. So each week



[2] *Eyes of my Own*, 2016, by Juliana Coles. Mixed media on paper, 12" x 17". Copyright © 2017 Juliana Coles. Used by permission of the artist.

[3] André Joseph on the film set of *The Saxophonist*. Copyright © 2017 AJ Epyx Productions, LLC. Used by permission of the filmmaker.

I wrote down my short-term and long-term goals in a notebook like a course schedule so that I had a new objective each week to accomplish.

Juliana Coles: As an epileptic, having a 9-5 job wasn't possible, so I learned to use my creativity and direct it in ways that would support me. When I graduated from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco in 1992, I thought, now I'm an artist! About a year after graduation, I moved to New Mexico where I painted pottery for income, worked on my art, volunteered at an art center for the homeless, began developing a process of visual journaling I created that eventually led to a full-time career and fell in love. We survived mainly from my partner's income as mine was pitiful. When we broke up, he



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said in anger: "You will lose the farm (our property), you can't make it without me." That was the defining moment; I was determined not to be someone who needed to be taken care of. I worked my ass off, day and night, in between seizures. I am forever grateful to him because that was the push I needed. I had always held back, not believing in myself or thinking that because of my disability I couldn't do it.

Lynn Basa: I had a day job as the curator of a hospital's art collection where I worked about 30 hours a week and then 40-50 hours a week in my studio. I took writing gigs on the side, not for the money, but because I was hungry to learn as much about the art biz as possible. While writing an article for *Fiberarts* magazine, I interviewed an artist who made hand-dyed silk scarves. She started selling so many that she hired her sister to work for her, but even that wasn't enough help. Then her husband, an accountant, said he was going to quit his job to help her and she freaked out, "You can't quit your job! We need the security!" And he said, "Which is more secure, helping someone else grow their business who could fire me on a whim, or spending the same amount of energy helping you grow yours?" That logic hit me like a thunderbolt. It completely changed the way I thought about job security and my time.

Ruth Chase: I was 49 years old, with a ten-year-old daughter, a



"I realized that all of the obstacles (time, money, job, family) couldn't keep me from working, and that I didn't have to *feel* like working, or *feel* creative, or even be inspired to work. ~ Shelley Hanna



Lynn Basa: I replaced the time I spent working for someone else with the business aspect of my art practice. I still work about 10 hours a day, 8 on weekends.

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Ruth Chase's 10 Steps to a Professional Artist Mindset

As a Professional Artist, I will:

- Keep a media trail going; every step can be a story.
- Act as if I'm already a professional.
- Stay active and in touch with the people who follow me.
- Talk about others (fans) more than myself.
- Never take no as a no, look at it as another opportunity to try again.
- Ask for help. It's amazing how many people I know that have connections to opportunities that I didn't know until I asked.
- Stop judging my work. Focus on the quality of my intentions.
- Stop leading my "ART CAREER" but follow the road signs and be willing to change with the tide.
- Be willing to hear negative feedback then decide if I agree and do something about it.
- Take my desire to serve the world with my art way more seriously than I ever have. Be willing to be totally afraid and do it anyway. For example, speak in public, ask for a publication, call people when they tell me no or when they don't reply, be totally nervous to approach a gallery or person of power and do it anyway — even if my voice is cracking and my body is shaking. This is my life. At the end of the day it's on me to take me where I want to go. No more excuses.



“The term ‘turning pro’ for me is a title that gives me permission to devote the majority of my day to the creative process.” ~ Sally Cooper

Ruth Chase: I started waking up at 4 a.m. before my young daughter, utilizing the time like it was my only hope. I followed every thread that felt right. If it was working, I did more of it. If people loved it, I took note. If no one commented on it on Facebook, I was open to changing my ideas; I was no longer afraid of hearing what wasn't working. I was willing to change.

Shelley Hanna: I no longer have to *do* anything to get in the mood, or the mindset, or the zone. I started photographing more, and more regularly, and with less preciousness about doing it. I was no longer attached to the results of a particular photo or shoot.

HOW YOUR DAY CHANGED

Gigi Rosenberg: *Is there some way that you use mornings, afternoons or evenings that's different now than when you were an "amateur?"*

Lynn Basa: I answer e-mails in the morning, get to the studio around 11 a.m., meet with my studio manager, answer more e-mails, deal with the inevitable problems with my building (I own the building where my studio is located), and the project space I run in the storefront of my studio. Then, around 2 p.m., I can finally get myself settled enough to paint — on a good day. In the evening, I go home, sit in my "wallow" with my cat and work on drawings and applications for public art commissions while I watch TV. I also go to lectures and friends' openings.

André Joseph: I'm more strict about my time during the mornings and afternoons. When I was an amateur, I was much more whimsical with my time which often made me feel overwhelmed.

Juliana Coles: My life — morning, noon and night — is all about being an artist and everything in my life and everything I do supports that. When I was afraid to name it or be it, everything felt separate, unrelated and unimportant.

Shelley Hanna: When I was an amateur I would think or worry or be excited about the shoot, or the project. I would work myself up, and freak myself out and be mentally and emotionally chaotic, trying to psych myself up. Now I just handle it like it's neutral work that I do well.

Colored Pencil CPSA Thanks...



Life is Like a Flame (15 x 30) colored pencil. Cecile Baird, CPSA (Ohio)

The **Colored Pencil Society of America** is a nonprofit organization of artists who are passionate about colored pencil as a fine art medium.

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The Artists

ANDRÉ JOSEPH is an independent filmmaker based in Staten Island. He graduated magna cum laude from Emerson College in 2006 where he received a Bachelor's Degree in Film. In 2008, he formed his own New York-based independent film production company, AJ Epyx Productions, LLC and his first feature film, *Priceless*, premiered at Tribeca Cinemas. His second feature film, *Dishonorable Vendetta*, won the award for "Best Firefight" at the Urban Action Showcase sponsored by Cinemax. For details, visit ajepyxproductions.com.

JULIANA COLES, 2017 Clark Hulings Fellow, received her BFA from the Academy of Art University San Francisco. Coles developed Visual Journaling as a tool for self-expression now used by therapists and artists around the world. Her Journals have appeared in over 30 books and as part of the "1000 Journals Project" exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. A 2016 artist residency in Morocco has greatly influenced a new body of work that will be expanded upon at Otis' Residency program in 2017. For more, see julianacolesart.com

RUTH CHASE, a graduate of the San Francisco Art Institute, lives and works in Northern California. Currently, she is completing the West of Lincoln Project, a painting series portraying the powerful relationships individuals have with their history. She was awarded an individual artist grant and served as Artist in Residence at the Millay Colony for the Arts, New York. She's been published in *Catapult Art Mag* and the *Huffington Post*, and taught at the Crocker Art Museum. Her latest solo exhibition was at Venice Arts. Visit ruthchase.com.

SALLY COOPER is a Signature member of the National Watercolor Society and six-time winner of *The Artist's Magazine's* annual national competition. Her work has been featured in the Fall 2016 issue of *Acrylic Artist* and the May 2015 issue of *The Artist's Magazine*. Her work has been included in publications *Eyes on Abstracts* and *Best of American Acrylics*. For details, visit sally-cooper.com

LYNN BASA's work can be found in public and private collections around the U.S. In addition to doing site-specific commissions, she has a studio practice making objects around themes of accidents, awkwardness and secrets. She is the founder of Corner, a neighborhood storefront gallery for artists who experiment with installations that intersect with daily life. Basa is the author of *The Artist's Guide to Public Art*, which was based on a course she developed while teaching in the Sculpture department at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. For more, visit lynnbasa.com.

SHELLEY HANNA has been a photographer since she was eight years old when her great grandma bought her a camera because she "stared at things too much." She has a BA in cinematography and returned to photography after shooting experimental short films in Olympia, WA and Seattle in the 1990s. Now based on Vashon Island, Washington, she works in 35mm film and digital. Currently her projects include *Small Towns*, about Washington towns, a miniatures project and a portraits project. Visit shelleyhannaphotography.com for details.

Ruth Chase: I take time to keep my desk and studio clean, way more than before.

YOUR NEW MINDSET

Gigi Rosenberg: *What else can you tell me about the new mindset you had after you made the decision to "turn pro?"*

André Joseph: As an amateur, I wanted to retain the feeling of being a kid filming my friends in my neighborhood; however, the realities of the film business and making a quality project made me realize that in order to turn pro, I had to become confident not only in my abilities but also in being realistic about my limitations and where I can improve.

Lynn Basa: The biggest change I noticed is that once I decided to take myself seriously enough as an artist to make the leap to full-time, so many more opportunities opened up for me because everyone else started to take me more seriously.

Shelley Hanna: It's easy to work now, and less stressful. I can get caught up in problem solving a shot, idea or situation, but that's all in the spirit of getting it done. It's not frantic or thrilling. It's what I do, rather than what I want to do, what I want to be or who I am. I am an artist. I do my work.

Sally Cooper: The term "turning pro" for me is a title that gives me permission to devote the majority of my day to the creative process. This process includes play, exploration, experimentation and risk-taking and brings happiness to my life. **PA**

Gigi Rosenberg is an author, artist coach and editor of Professional Artist. She wrote The Artist's Guide to Grant Writing (Watson-Guptill) and coaches artists to help them find funding, blast through creative blocks and launch vibrant marketing plans. To sign up for her smart, art-filled news, visit www.gigirosenberg.com/blog or email her at grosenberg@professionalartistmag.com.