

chapter one

How to Assess, Plan, and Take Action

This chapter asks you to stop and reflect on what you wish to accomplish in your career. The fact is that no one is coming to “save” you, but you *can* save yourself, if you know which way you are headed. You seldom get into a car, hop on a train, or board an airplane without a destination in mind. The same should apply to your professional life, whether you are just beginning a career or are somewhere in the middle. This chapter introduces long- and short-range planning as a means to organize, structure, and sustain your artistic and personal life. Even if you are doubtful that a process like this will work for you, the information covered in this section lays the groundwork for the rest of the book. Don’t skip this chapter.

An art career comes in all shapes and sizes.

Almost everything you do as an artist is self-generated. There is no boss impatiently stamping his or her foot, demanding overtime to get a job done. There are no classroom assignments or end-of-semester critiques to pace you. It is a challenge to continue pushing yourself creatively as an artist year after year. Unfortunately, many of us tumble into the dark vortex of less and less art making as time goes by. Even if you do manage to remain resolute and self-motivated, your day job and personal life compete for meaningful time with your art practice. When life gets complicated and squeezing in more hours at the studio feels impossible, having an overall vision and a plan for the immediate future will help steady the chaos and sustain you in a more productive manner. You have already beaten incredible odds by committing to a life as an artist. You have developed your own process to generate ideas and have made the works of art that surround you in your studio. *You have a vision of*

what you wish to create; now you need to pair it with an equally powerful vision of how you will proceed with your professional life.

During the first year of the Rotunda Gallery, I was so focused on getting through eight exhibitions that there wasn't a moment to think further than the next show. But once I had installed the last show of the season, I realized with rising panic that another one was only two months away. This meant coming up with a new round of exhibition ideas, artists, fundraising, and promotion *while* tending to daily gallery tasks. I realized that I couldn't continue to work on such an ad hoc basis. I needed to get better organized and make a plan in order to manage the gallery's program over a longer time span. I started by assembling a list of all the deadlines the gallery faced: grant due dates; financial and program reports for quarterly board meetings; development, selection, promotion, and installation dates for each exhibition. There were so many of them! Every deadline had a host of tasks leading to it. For example, to submit a grant application required doing research, creating a project budget and proposal drafts, editing and assembling support materials, and—if we got the grant—writing regular reports. Looking at these lists was overwhelming. I pinned a year-long calendar on my office wall and began filling in all the deadlines. I color coded each exhibition, major grant, and report. Seeing everything visually laid out helped me feel more comfortable with what needed to be done. It was a lot of work to put the calendar together, but its stabilizing structure helped me manage different tasks and deadlines. Every morning I could glance at the calendar to see what had to be done that day.

As the gallery's programming became more ambitious, with added staff and a bigger budget, my planning had to encompass more variables and longer time spans. I had to execute fundraising proposals that not only gave regular reports of the gallery's current activities but also covered programs we expected to present two to three years in advance. I had to make time to assess the gallery's accomplishments, identify areas needing attention, and reflect on where the program was headed. I had to reach out to the board, gallery staff, and community to make sure we were on track and our plans were relevant. As I juggled more chores and deadlines, I relied more and more on the planning process.

Even on those days when the task list looked endless, I could see how my daily actions directly related to deadlines and reinforced short-term goals and how all actions and goals supported the gallery's future plans. I could focus on what had to be done today because my calendar listed tomorrow's tasks. I began to apply the planning process to my studio work, so I could get the most out of the little bits of time available at home. It helped me hang on to my painting practice despite a demanding job. Little did I know that, eight years later, this planning process would prove to be indispensable, giving me the confidence to leave the gallery and pursue my art career.

The Rotunda Gallery benefited and grew through planning. I was always looking at the overall picture, envisioning what needed to be accomplished long-term, setting specific goals, and assigning tasks that needed to be done in the short-term. Everything had to fit within the gallery's overall mission.

Planning isn't just for organizations. You do it all the time, although you might not be aware of the process. Think of all the steps you go through to show up on time at your dentist's office for a regular check-up. Or consider a more complex goal, such as enjoying a relaxed vacation. You begin by considering your needs and desires, ask for advice, do some research, determine how much you can spend, save money, organize your schedule for time off, make reservations, and travel—all this activity just to lie on the beach. Whether the goal is big or little, the process is similar in each case: there's a specific goal to be achieved, it's based on something you value (the health of your teeth, stress reduction, or pleasure), there's a series of actions to be undertaken, and you encounter some deadlines on the way to reaching it.

My career path took a 180-degree turn the day that I realized the planning process I had practiced to develop and manage the Rotunda Gallery could be applied to my art career. For the first time, I allowed myself to dream about *the life I wanted to live*. I envisioned what it would look like in five years' time, filling that picture full of details. That life appeared both tantalizingly wonderful *and* impossible to achieve. I didn't know exactly how I was going to make it happen. In spite of my fear, I clung to the vision and, as I did each year for the gallery, made

Planning can be applied to anything—creative, artistic, personal, and criminal.

—Colleen Keegan, creator,
Creative Capital Strategic
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myself map out a series of interim goals and tasks that I would need to complete in order to build that life. Knowing what I wanted to accomplish in five years gave me a framework from which I could take action. I had a reason to take specific steps I wouldn't have done otherwise, such as realizing an upcoming scheduled trip to a board meeting in Washington, D.C., was *also* an opportunity to make contact with art dealers in that area. In the past, I had only attended the board meeting and a show or two at the National Gallery. This time, because my long-term goal was to connect with art professionals who would support my work, I took different actions. I researched and made appointments to introduce my work to art dealers, adding half a day to my trip. I packed my portfolio in my overnight bag and didn't let the fact I had a three-month-old baby stop me. He came along too. At the end of the Washington weekend, the baby and I rode Amtrak home with board meeting notes as well as new connections with potential art partners. That's the awesome power of planning. Lots of little actions can eventually add up to bigger things. Some of those appointments developed into art partnerships that continue to support my work twenty years later.

Why Should You Make a Plan?

Planning helps you address the daily question “What needs to be done now?” within the framework of your larger goals. Following a plan counters the passivity of waiting for something to happen by directing you to take meaningful action now. It provides clarity to help you create, assess, and pursue opportunities. Taking action within a plan helps you calm down when feeling overwhelmed or paralyzed by what needs to be accomplished. Moving toward the career you desire will no longer seem an amorphous, haphazard, or formidable undertaking. Most importantly, planning is the foundation for shaping the world as *you want it* instead of trying to fit into what *you have been told* is possible. Each one of us has a different view of what makes a successful career, and we will achieve it in our own way. There are no cookie-cutter approaches—go to this party, meet this person, make this kind of art, or be included in this show—that guarantee success. If that were true, you wouldn't need to read this

book, and we would all be showing up at the same party. There are as many definitions of success as there are artists. What's yours?

Whether you are just starting out or farther along in your career, making a plan will give you the insight to determine what you want to develop or revitalize in your professional life. *The planning process will help you understand where you are now and reveal where you wish to go. Planning provides a path to connect the two.* As an artist you are already process-oriented, for without a system, no matter how intuitive or haphazard it may feel at times, you couldn't create works of art. The planning process operates in tandem with the one you use for your artistic practice. It may feel like an awkward partnership at the beginning, but in time and with a little patience, you will discover how to manage the two.

The next section will take you through a series of steps to begin the planning process. These steps are:

1. Dream big: Create a vision of what you want to achieve.
2. Write your obituary: What do you value most in life?
3. Set your goals: Generate long- and short-term goals.
4. Establish your action plan: Determine what you need to do and a timeline for it.
5. Take action.

Each step includes exercises to help you flesh out your ideas. You don't need to do them all at once. Spend some time each day, week, or month working through the exercises until you have gradually completed them. This is an opportunity to be as open and honest with yourself as you can be. Listen to yourself without judgment. I realize that can be difficult to do. Try to tone down the inner critic and the skeptic.

Have fun with these steps. Don't feel the need to rush through the process. Seek out a place where you can work on each one. It may be in your peaceful studio or a noisy coffee shop. It is okay to draw pictures, doodle in the margins, or gaze out the window. Don't censor your thoughts. In the spirit of discovery, enjoy whatever ideas come to mind. Laugh out loud. Allow for surprises. If you get stuck somewhere, move on, and return to that step later. Make this process your own.

Success isn't something that happens to you, it's something you create.

—Joanne Mattera, artist

Success is to be part of the [art] conversation.

—Ellen Harvey, artist

You will need to write everything down to lay a solid foundation for your plan. There is a lot of power in putting things in writing. Most of your thinking is unconscious, a flowing stream of thoughts from which you consciously harvest only a few. Good ideas are too easily lost if you rely only on your ability to recall them later. How many times have you regretted not jotting down that flash of inspiration? At that moment the thought will seem so real and vivid that you're sure you will never forget it. Yet hours later, when you try to recall it, it's gone. Writing things down activates the process and preserves your ideas. You have something tangible to work with—to examine, question, revise, and follow later on. Writing down your plan puts your unconscious on notice and imposes a sense of entitlement to what you desire. You will be more motivated to follow through.

Write in a sketchbook, on legal pads, on sheets of cheap drawing paper you pin up around the studio, or in a secret folder on your computer. Throughout the process, allow yourself to write without judgment. Try to open up a clear channel from your thoughts to your hand to the words that flow out onto the paper or computer screen. Do not edit your writing. Allow yourself to be surprised, amused, and even confused. This is your opportunity to explore the unknown, the unacknowledged you.

Remember, there is no right or wrong response to any of these exercises, only *your* answers. Take your time. Allow your thinking to develop and grow.

The writing you do for these steps is for your eyes only. Find a safe place to store it so you can be as honest with yourself as possible. Just as you would when making a new work of art, don't ask for help or seek the judgment of others. You don't want to be subjected to another person's limitations or expectations. When I wrote my first plan, I didn't share it with anyone, not even my husband. I was afraid my friends and family would laugh and tell me my plan was ridiculous, a waste of my time and meager resources, and impossible to achieve. I was already scared to death about what I had envisioned. I couldn't have coped with other people's doubts and fears. I only shared tiny bits and pieces of my plan with those closest to me on a need-to-know basis. When I began achieving some of my goals, I was able to open up and reveal more.

Once you have finished the following steps, you'll have established an overview of what you want to accomplish and a series of immediate actions to get you started. Think of this as a new beginning. Try to do the steps in the order listed here. As you proceed, there will be lots of opportunities to refine, reevaluate, and tweak your plan to better suit your needs.

All my decisions come from wanting to make art for the rest of my life.

—Janine Antoni, artist

Step 1: Dream Big

CREATE A VISION OF WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE.

Yes, dreams can come true, but only if you allow yourself to have them. I realize that at this point you may be feeling skeptical. That's okay and perfectly normal. The concept of planning seems counter-intuitive to an artist's life. So many factors are out of your control. How can you predict the future? How can having a dream help your career? Isn't it all about talent and knowing the right people? Right now you'll just have to trust that entering into this process will quell some of your doubts and help you move ahead. Let your natural curiosity take over. It's similar to the questioning process you use to make your art: a willingness to explore unknown territory, engage multiple possibilities, and follow a line of thinking to see what happens. Now is the time to be equally curious about yourself.

One of the features of planning is that you'll never achieve more than the vision that guides you. For example, no athlete is ever selected for the Olympics by sheer accident. To prepare to compete at that level, Olympic athletes begin with an innate interest in a sport and some natural abilities that they hone through years of hard training motivated by a compelling vision of their future gold-medal performance. *Your* vision is comprised of your needs, desires, and abilities all working together to shape *your* destiny. Now is the time to imagine how you would like your artistic life to unfold.

For this exercise, let go and freely imagine what you want. Remember, you don't need to broadcast your vision to the rest of the world, but you *do* need to write it down and acknowledge it to yourself. Begin by quieting your mind, and allow the fuzzy images and stray

thoughts to gradually come into focus by asking yourself the following questions:

- What would make me feel successful as an artist?
- What would make me feel successful in my relationships with my partner/spouse/children/family/community?
- What kind of life would make me truly happy?

As you envision the answers to these questions, write down what you see. How does it feel? Who is around you? Where are you located? What are you doing? Try to make your answers rich with details. Allow yourself to dream as big and as colorfully as you can. Write in a stream of consciousness without worrying about grammar, spelling, or even coherence. Don't forget to include your life outside the studio. What is your relationship with your family/partner/spouse/children? Let this be an honest assessment of what you want for your life in a global sense, not only your art career. Be as honest as you can to reveal *what you want, not what you have been told you should want*. Again, do not edit. Allow it to flow. Make it as expressive and detailed as you can. Try to cover two to three pages, but if you're going strong, don't stop until you're finished. You have a complex life; there are no short answers.

If you are having trouble imagining what you want, try to think about what brings you pleasure. Draw a picture if that works better. Collect a stack of images, and assemble them into a collage. Walk around with a camera, and find your own images. Remind yourself that you have the right to be happy and this is what it would look like. Pretend you won \$40 million in the lottery, and money was no longer a barrier. What would you be doing? Save everything you have written and collected.

Step 2: Write Your Obituary

WHAT DO YOU VALUE MOST IN LIFE?

Your vision needs to be aligned with your values. You cannot pursue a goal that works against a deeply held belief. For help in defining what is

most significant for you, one of the best exercises is to write your own obituary. I know this may seem morbid, but your plan will be better informed if you have an ultimate destination in mind, and there is no end like death. How do you want to be remembered? Who will speak at your memorial service (friends, family, lovers, neighbors, colleagues, etc.)? What will each one say about you? What will you have accomplished? When I wrote my obituary, I imagined myself very old and resting peacefully on my deathbed. I visualized who would be standing around me and what thoughts or regrets might be going through my head. If your death is too gruesome for you to imagine, pretend that it's your seventy-fifth-birthday party or a taping of an episode of *This Is Your Life* and everyone special has gathered to celebrate it with you. Who are they, and what would you like them to say about you? What impact have you had on their lives?

Writing my obituary made me reassess the kind of parent I wanted to be to my children and the kind of partner I wanted to be with my husband. When my children were small, it helped me choose to stay home at night reading and tucking them in rather than heading out to art openings. I would need to find another way to promote myself. In writing my obituary, I was also surprised to discover how important it was to me that I continue to play a role in strengthening my artist community. At the time I wasn't sure how I'd do this. I put the thought away for later. As I came to understand who and what was most important in my life, my obituary helped me prioritize my time and goals. It helped me understand my motivations and clarify my objectives so I made better choices at forks in the road. It showed up in hundreds of tiny decisions I made each day.

Writing your obituary is a similar process to revealing your vision. Allow yourself to enter into a state of active imagination, enjoy the details that emerge, and *write it all down*. You could format it like a *New York Times* obituary, as an entry in a daily journal, or as a long newsy letter to a good friend who couldn't attend your seventy-fifth-birthday party. You

In terms of building a career, I think one of the most important things to start with is to understand with as much clarity as you can muster at the moment, what it is that you really want. What exactly is the kind of career you want? Artists will very quickly say, "Well I want a great career," but does that mean a career that has gotten significant curatorial attention, a career that's significant in a museum context, or a career that's significant because it's paying your bills and supporting your family? Does that mean . . . you're an art star? There are all these different levels. Be specific about it, because the clearer you are about what you want, the more you can understand what approach is going to fit that. Also, I think you need to understand as a young artist, this is going to change. That what you want today and what you want tomorrow might alter.

—Kurt Perschke, artist

Putting your subconscious thoughts into words does control the agenda and makes one proactive rather than reactive. . . . It becomes the story that you tell yourself. It is your essential truth, and you can build everything else from that.

—Colleen Keegan, creator,
Creative Capital Strategic
Planning Program for Artists

could bring friends into the exercise by videotaping their fond remembrances of you. You don't have to complete this step in one session. Let it sit over time, and add or revise it as needed.

When you are finished, find a quiet place, and read through all you have written in "Dream Big" and "Write Your Obituary." Ask yourself if the person described in the obituary matches up with the life imagined in "Dream Big." Notice any discrepancies between the two. Are they both articulating the same values? What have you left out? Have you missed something significant in your vision? (e.g., Where's my travel lust in this picture?) Comparing the two is a way to see where your vision may be limited, unrealistic, or off track based on your deepest desires.

These two steps contain a vision of your life comprised of your deepest desires *and* your values. Planning books refer to this combination as your life's mission. Like a compass, they will keep you pointed in the right direction. They provide the reason why you do certain tasks and help you understand how those actions fit into the bigger picture of your life. Don't let the magnitude of your vision overwhelm you. Much of it will seem impossible to obtain, but who knows? In five, ten, twenty years' time, anything can happen. In a few years you might find that your life looks amazingly like what you imagined, or you might find that your goals have changed along the way. Your vision can always be rewritten.

Step 3: Set Your Goals

GENERATE LONG- AND SHORT-TERM GOALS.

Goals are those things you wish to accomplish. They are generated from your dreams and an understanding of what you value, making them the third step in this process. A goal identifies where you want to be at a later date and is comprised of the many small steps you need to take to accomplish it. Some goals will take years or a lifetime to be realized, while others will be completed in just a few months.

The first part of this step is to brainstorm a list of goals. What are all the things you wish to accomplish over a period of time? I like to break it down into five-year chunks. For me, five years is far enough into the future to project ambitious accomplishments, yet not too far away that I

feel snowed under by the possibilities. You can select a shorter or longer time frame if you prefer—three, ten, or fifteen years. Don't make it shorter than three, because you need to allow some time to let your plan develop and mature.

Pull out a blank sheet of paper, write at the top "IN FIVE (or whatever) YEARS I HAVE," and begin listing all the things you have accomplished during that period of time. Do not censor yourself. Write down *all* of your ideas, no matter how farfetched, dumb, frivolous, or impossible they may sound. *There is no such thing as too many items on this list.* Write them down as if they have actually happened; use action verbs: completed, awarded, secured, created, won, etc. The best goals are concrete—they state a specific action or event. Go through your list, and make whatever adjustments necessary to change vaguely worded goals into specific actions and events. Finally, make sure you have listed goals for your personal life as well as the artistic.

You may find this to be a difficult exercise, as helpless feelings arise when your list gets longer and longer. The expression of your desires feels insurmountable. How can you get to all of them? You may also start wondering if you are worthy of some goals. Don't panic and shut down the process. When I brainstormed my first set of art career goals, I remember thinking to myself, "Who do you think you are?" I ignored those doubts, and for now you should too. If you are doing this exercise well, you will generate far more goals than it's possible for any human being to realize. You are still in the brainstorming phase, and more is good. Later there will be plenty of time to sort, evaluate, and prioritize.

The second part of this step is to sort everything into long-term and short-term goals. Look through your lengthy brainstormed list, and next to each item indicate whether it is a short-term goal (SG)—something to be accomplished within the next year—or a long-term goal (LG), to be accomplished in two to five years. Some of your short-term goals may be achieved in a week or two; others will need to gestate longer or require interim steps before they are completed. On new sheets of paper, separate your goal list by writing long-term goals on one page and short-term goals on the other. Read through the long-term goal list, and

Listen to what you are telling yourself. Accept who you are. Pay attention to what you have been telling yourself since you were a child, because all the seeds you need for your work are right there.

—Morgan O'Hara, artist

We found with strategic planning that bigger plans are always easier to reach than smaller plans.

—Colleen Keegan, creator,
Creative Capital Strategic
Planning Program for Artists

see what smaller tasks need to be accomplished this year; add them to the short-term list. If you end up with too many items on the short-term list, don't worry—there's always next year.

Look over the two lists. How do they compare with your imagined life from “Dream Big”? Are any goals in conflict with your values expressed in your obituary? Have you forgotten something important? Add or adjust where necessary.

Goals exist to serve *you* and make *you* happy. You don't exist to serve them. Just like your art practice, your goals need to be generated from your needs and desires. What makes you happy and satisfied with your life is personal and cannot be determined by anyone else. As you pursue a goal, if it doesn't make you happy or add to your sense of accomplishment, modify it. Your list of goals will include tasks you don't enjoy and ones that challenge your abilities. I have found that identifying the reason why I have to do something motivates me to do it in spite of my dislike. It's like balancing your checking account or sending a thank-you note. These tasks may be bothersome, but they support your other efforts.

At this point, you can file away your long-term goals. They have been instrumental in getting you to this point and can be reviewed once a year. Our next step will be working exclusively with your short-term goals.

Step 4: Establish Your Action Plan

DETERMINE WHAT YOU NEED TO DO
AND A TIMELINE FOR IT.

Planning is an opportunity to think systematically about opportunities and assess what you need to do as determined by your goals. An action plan establishes a timeline of activities that need to be accomplished on the way to achieving your goal. It is an integrated series of small steps that helps structure your life so you can accomplish more. Think of it as a roadmap that guides you from point A to point B, the travel directions you get online, or the navigation system in your car. Following its step-by-step directions helps you complete one constructive task after an-

other. *Your anxiety about the outcome of your goal will be replaced by directed activity.* As you are pulled into a course of action you will have less time to fret about its result.

Practice developing an action plan for one short-term goal. Go through the following steps to get you started:

1. Look over your short-term goal list, and choose one to accomplish in a month or two.
2. On a sheet of paper or on your computer, write the goal at the top of the page. Underneath, list the actions you will take over the next few days or weeks to complete the goal. List specific actions, such as researching information, making a phone call, or taking a digital image of a recently completed work. List them consecutively.
3. Next to each action write in the date you plan to complete it. Think practically and be realistic about how much time you have to devote to it.
4. Do the actions as planned, by either writing up a weekly to-do list or posting this sheet of paper where you will refer to it daily.

Practicing on one short-term goal will help you understand how easily something can be achieved when you keep your focus on it. By listing a date next to each action you have committed yourself to doing it and can monitor your progress. You can also assess how much you can take on and still juggle the rest of your life. Working toward your goals is easier if you can sustain minimal effort over a long time rather than loading yourself up with an unrealistic number of tasks all at once. Your initial enthusiasm will be maintained if you don't allow yourself to get bogged down by trying to do too much.

Make yourself write it all down until you have established a few new habits, such as breaking big steps down into smaller ones, making a task list, and regularly reviewing and evaluating your progress. As you internalize this process, your own system will emerge, and you'll create shortcuts. In time this process will feel less cumbersome. Mastering

how you go about achieving one short-term goal provides a model to tackle multiple goals with a yearly action plan.

Mapping Out Your Yearly Action Plan

Strategic planning at its core is simple. It sees that all information is good information. It is an honest assessment of exactly where you are. It is an eyes-open opportunity to not only deal with your present reality but also [to look] at how you shape your reality.

—Colleen Keegan, creator,
Creative Capital Strategic
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You have spent time identifying your dreams and the long-term goals that will help you make them come true. Each long-term goal will take years to accomplish and is composed of many short-term goals. A yearly action plan will help you organize these short-term goals. Planning always works *back* from your goal by identifying the actions you need to take to move *forward* to your goal. This rule applies whether it is a long-term goal or a short-term goal; the only difference is the timeline. For this next exercise you will refer to your list of short-term goals. These are the tasks you need to accomplish this year. Your yearly action plan will help you figure out how and in what order you'll tackle them.

You can start with any date that works well for you. Schedule a few hours all to yourself. For years, I used the September to August academic/gallery season, but a few years ago I switched to the calendar year. I found early January an ideal time for me to curl up with a notepad and a fresh new calendar to make a yearly action plan. If you are reading this book mid-year, you don't have to wait for New Year's Eve or September to get started; apply this exercise to the months remaining.

I begin by first reflecting on what happened to me last year. I'll refer to my list of long-term goals to see which ones still resonate and which ones need updating or elimination. Then I'll make a new list of short-term goals for the upcoming year. I see this time as a wonderful gift to myself. I take a lot of pleasure in crossing off completed goals from last year's list. It's easy for me to forget about what I accomplished and only fuss over what I didn't do or still need to do. Use this time to enjoy what you have achieved, no matter how minor it may seem. Don't berate yourself for those goals you haven't completed; use it as an opportunity to assess where you are and what you need to do. If you aren't making any headway with a strongly desired goal, this is the time to rethink it. You may need to approach it differently, modify it, get help, or give it more time than you had expected. Maybe you need to discuss it with

someone else to get outside feedback. If this goal still feels vital to you, roll it over to the coming year's list. As I begin to brainstorm my short-term goals, I get excited. Taking this time to think about the totality of your life is healthy, so make sure your list includes your professional *and* personal life.

When you create your yearly action plan, you may find that some of your original goals no longer seem relevant. Changing life conditions precipitate different goals. Each decade of my life I have thought differently about my art practice. What were once burning dreams and desires have gone cold, and new ones have replaced them. I remember feeling certain I would never relinquish my studio work to write a book. Just the thought of it terrified me. Writing this book was a goal that slowly crept up on me over several years until I could no longer deny its importance. I wrestled with the idea, as I knew it would have an impact on my time and energy to make art. I made my living from the studio—what would happen to me if I let it go for a book project? What would happen to the partnerships I had cultivated over the years? Would I be forgotten as an artist? Would the art world let me back in? I couldn't answer those questions. As I debated with myself, however, I began to talk with other people about writing the book. I noticed my energy and excitement for this project grew. I was as interested in talking about it as I was about my painting. That surprised me; I usually loved talking about what was going on in the studio. Finally I embraced the book as a new long-term goal and generated a new list of short-term goals to make it happen.

Artists Matthew Deleget and Rossana Martínez manage a busy studio practice and an online curatorial project, MINUS SPACE. The sidebar describes how they do their planning and have fun at the same time.

Doing my yearly evaluation, I always uncover a few neglected goals. For some reason they never get done. I take some time to explore why I am stuck or procrastinating. Is this goal still really important to me? Is it being stopped by something else that needs to be done first? Am I scared

Every year we set new goals in January. We actually go to Puerto Rico to visit [my wife] Rossana's family for the holidays. So for two to three weeks we are on a beach in Puerto Rico super far from our studios and the rest of the art universe. And we are thinking, what would be the next step? Where do we want to take it? What would be the strategic way to move this project? Where are we getting the most resistance? Where are we getting the least resistance? And a lot of times you move in the path of least resistance for obvious reasons, but we evaluate every year. We actually do it on a regular basis, but that's our big [moment to] figure out where we want to take the project the next year. . . . That's the same time we evaluate our work too. We sort of envision what we want to focus on in the next year. The kind of work we want to make, what we want to think about.

—Matthew Deleget,
artist and cofounder, MINUS SPACE

of it? If I am, what can I do to make it less intimidating? I try to come up with one small step to get engaged in it. Sometimes, I realize that this goal is no longer of interest to me. Other times, I see that my plan is developing differently from what I had originally imagined, and my long-term goals need to be modified. If you get stuck spinning your wheels on some task, analyze what help or support you might need to pull yourself out and move forward and whom you could ask for assistance.

To help you figure out a system for organizing the year's work, complete your yearly action plan by transferring your short-term goals to a calendar. First, fill in important deadlines such as paying taxes, grant due dates, freelance or job commitments, commissions, and exhibition schedules. When I first began doing this, I took my twelve-month calendar apart, laying it out on a large table so I could see the whole year when I filled things in. When I was done, I would hang the current month and the upcoming month above my desk and keep the rest nearby. Now I do it on my computer and print out any month as needed. It's up to you to figure out what works best.

Chapter 9 will discuss organizational systems in the time management section. For now, begin with your calendar: take a little time each week, go through what needs to be done, and make a plan for the next five to seven days, tweaking it as you go along. No matter how intuitively you work, it's helpful to have a short to-do list somewhere in a visible place so you will be reminded of the actions you need to take. Get to know what you can realistically accomplish in seven days. Review your action plan at the end of the month. Are there more steps, and do you need more time than you initially projected? Have you uncovered information that shifts your goal? Modify, and move on. You will eventually discover the appropriate amount of time you need for detailed planning: monthly, quarterly, or semi-annually.

Step 5: Take Action

All this planning is of no use unless you follow through by taking action. You have invested a lot of time identifying your goals and creating these lists. Don't put off doing them. I find it fascinating that some of

my students who have readily engaged in all the planning exercises find this step the hardest part of the process. I've noticed that they love dreaming and scheming, but neglect following through with action. Their plan is comfortable as an imagined possibility, but their anxiety brings up the paralyzing fear of failure. Yes, a plan may look daunting, but taking the first steps will relieve some of the anxiety you feel. If getting started is hard, find one concrete action you can take. As you become engaged, your actions will replace your anxiety. Even if the results are not exactly what you expected or don't work out at all, they will produce new information to help determine your next move. Good luck, being in the right place at the right time, and being prepared are more likely to happen when you are actively engaged in your plan.

It will take many small steps to accomplish a big goal. The sooner you start taking responsibility for your life, the more energy you'll generate to propel yourself forward. Even doing something minor—making a new contact, organizing your desk, downloading an application—should be seen as a step forward. Set up rewards to release good energy into your plan by celebrating completed actions. When I met my first year's financial goal in just six months' time, I immediately felt empowered and successful, even though I still had much more that needed to be done. I took a moment to really savor how good I felt. As I sat on a bench by the Hudson River and watched the sun go down, I could feel a huge grin spread across my face as the thought kept flashing through my head, "Maybe I *can* do this." Nothing feels better than beginning to make progress on what you want.

If you are reading this book, you have already beaten the odds and are willing to try something new. I know getting to this point hasn't been easy. Take a moment to acknowledge what you have achieved so far, ignore the negative messages that hold you back, and allow yourself to begin thinking differently. Like any profession, achievement takes talent, hard work, and yes, a little luck. You will face moments of suffering—that's the human condition—but they don't have to be what defines you.

An art career is different from other businesses and professions. What you are creating is deeply personal; you are challenged to remain

Right now, I am preparing for a show. Because my work is fabricated and made in different ways, [these sheets] on the wall are like the map of the show: the ideas, images, calendar, and dates. I can look at the date and what has to happen so that everything is done on time. I can work backwards. I can just sit here and see the whole show and think about it.

—Janine Antoni, artist

vulnerable and open to the creative spark. The concept of planning can feel contrary to the creative process. Yet being an artist isn't just about making art. You have many other responsibilities—managing a studio, looking for opportunities, identifying an audience for your work, caring

for and protecting what you have created, and securing money, time, and space, in addition to whatever is happening in your personal life. All of this will be accomplished better if tackled in a strategic and focused manner. Whatever has happened to you in the past does not have to predict your future. Planning is your opportunity to assess, take positive action, and begin producing results.

Initially, it may feel awkward and cumbersome to write things down and follow a weekly, monthly, yearly, or life-long plan. But don't let that stop you. Planning gives you permission to ask for what you want and design a path to achieve it. You already understand process; your art comes out of one you've spent years developing. Think about your first drawing class: how awkward a piece of vine charcoal felt in your fingers and the struggle it took to manage the complex relationship between your eyes, your hand movements, and a crumbly line. After a few weeks, as you grasped concepts of positive and negative space,

composition, and shading, your confidence grew. Becoming comfortable with planning will be a similar experience. It takes practice to make it work for you. In time, you will internalize many of the steps outlined here and find your own ways to do planning quickly and efficiently.

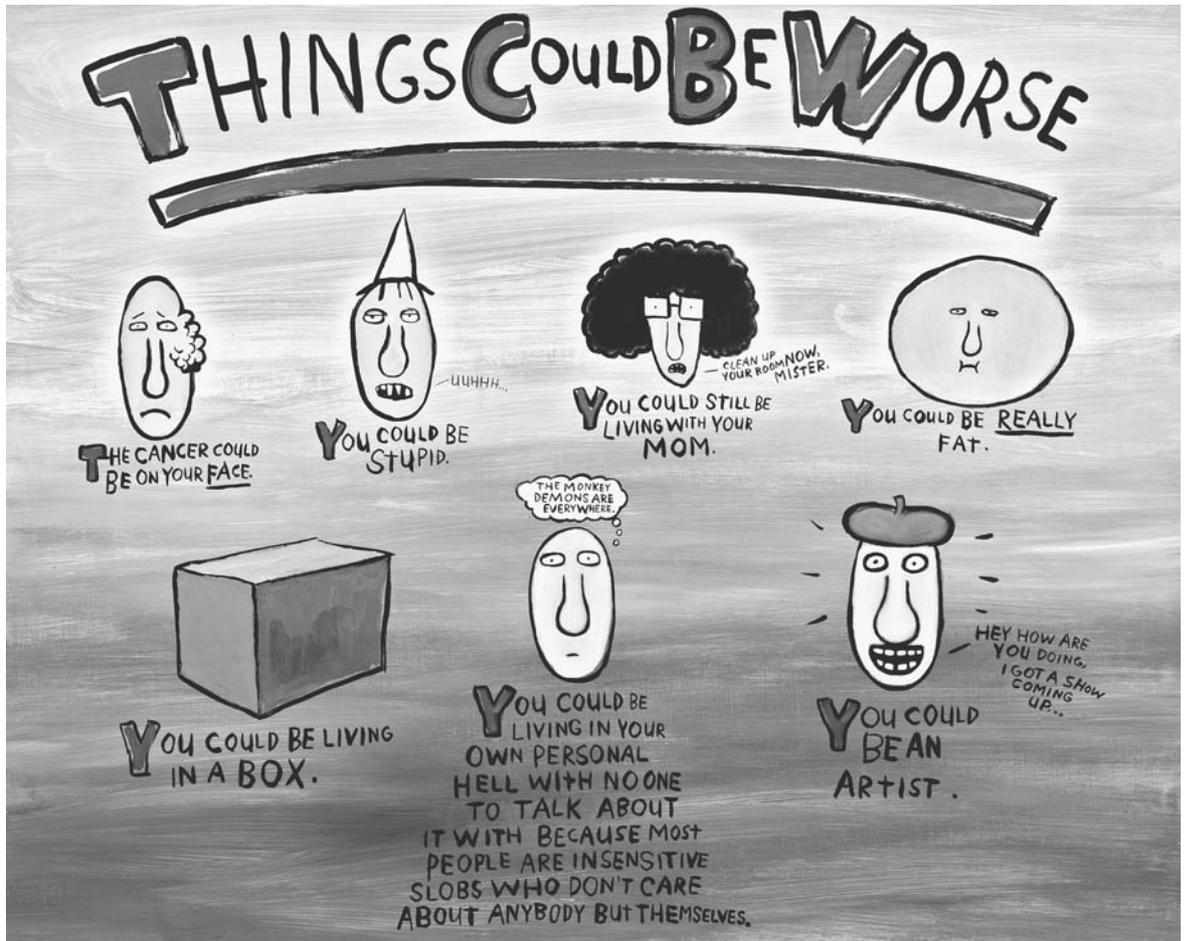
Bookstores offer shelves of books dedicated to mastering the planning process. Ambitious people everywhere are looking for ways to be more productive and manage their lives. You may wish to browse through them to explore other planning methods and pick up new tips.

You are committed in that you have told people what your plans are. You have written them down. You are constantly keeping that in [the] forefront. Your vision of your career is always there up front. So when opportunities present themselves, wherever they are, at a meeting, an event, or somewhere there are networking opportunities, you are able to take advantage of them, because you have said in your mind this is what you are doing. It isn't a matter of "What if I can do it?" but "How can I do it? What steps can I take? What things can I take advantage of?" The business plan and structure, your legal issues, and your marketing are all important tools, but they are meaningless without your vision and drive to accomplish your dream.

—Jeff Becker, artist and executive director of Arts Incubator, Kansas City

Counter the Van Gogh Myth

Our culture promotes a skewed view of artists. It's much more interesting to make a movie about Jackson Pollock's unruly life than Hans



JIM TOROK

Things Could Be Worse, 2007

Acrylic on panel

37 x 48 inches

Private collection, courtesy of the artist and Pierogi

Hoffman’s more balanced existence. To make my students aware of these pervasive messages, I do the following exercise:

On a chalkboard or large sheet of paper, I write “A VISUAL ARTIST IS” and ask them to complete the sentence. Words and phrases come flying: creative, starving, disorganized, bad at math, dyslexic, poor, struggling, visionary, crazy, insane, on the fringes, free, nomadic, bad at following rules, antisocial. You may have a few words and phrases of your own to add. As the class looks over the list, they notice immediately that most of the words and phrases are negative. Their preconceived idea is that being an artist automatically makes a person crazy,

poor, and disorganized. I refer to this association as the “Van Gogh Myth,” because these negative terms reflect the public misperception of the artist as madman. Many artists’ earliest visions of pursuing a career are merged with the impossible task of living a good life. They are defeated before they have even begun. I have found that all too often artists are conditioned not to ask for what they want because they have decided that it is impossible to achieve. Doing this simple yet revealing exercise with my students helps to get those unconscious associations out in the open, where they can be challenged and overcome.

There is no single way to proceed with an artistic career. It is your job to individualize your direction and make a plan based on your own needs and values. To begin, you must first identify what you want to achieve. Once you have done that, you will be able to break it down and create manageable tasks to get you rolling. Only by having the big picture in mind can you work toward fulfilling your goals.

Start here. This chapter is about spending time with the most important artist in your universe—YOU. Get to know what you really want. Hold on and treasure your vision. Acknowledge that your life is a work in progress and that your goals will change and develop over time. Knowing deeply what you want to accomplish shores up doubt, builds fortitude, and pushes you to take more action. This awareness changes how you hear and use information. Your senses will be sharpened. You begin to listen to everything differently; you interpret what you read, what you do, and whom you meet with your goals in mind. You will ask better questions of those around you and seek more meaningful help. All of this will produce a subtle yet profound shift in how you proceed and the actions you take. It will reshape your life and have major consequences for your career.

You may feel burdened with counterproductive beliefs that keep you from succeeding. In spite of the things that have gone well in my life, I still struggle with mine. My demons and my inner critic make me feel unworthy and incapable of reaching ambitious goals. Sometimes I feel as if I have one foot on the gas *and* one foot on the brake at the same time. I have learned to listen to my unpleasant critical inner voice to help me understand how it influences my behavior. Through planning

and taking action I have learned to override and silence it. For a delirious moment, my foot is completely off the brake, and I'm gleefully shooting ahead.

Try it. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Resources

Covey, Steven R. *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Anniversary edition. New York: Free Press, 2004.

- I picked up this book twenty-five years ago to help me develop strategies for setting goals. I especially appreciated Covey's emphasis on the importance of aligning your goals with your values.

Gelb, Michael J. *How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci*. New York: Dell, 1998.

- This book contains some great exercises to enhance your thinking and a system of goal setting and mind mapping that appeals to visual thinkers.

Sher, Barbara, with Annie Gottleib. *Wishcraft: How to Get What You Really Want*. 2nd edition. New York: Ballantine Books, 2003.

- I read the first edition of this book years ago when I first began setting goals. It is filled with fun exercises to help you identify your strengths, skills, and interests. It also has a great chapter on handling the fears that come up when you reach for ambitious goals.