



The book your  
inner critic *really*  
doesn't want you  
to read!

1-Everyone Is Creative

2-Excuses Are the Enemy

3-Labels Are for Canned Peaches, Not People

4-Blank Paper Can Be Blinding

5-A Green Eye Is a Green Light

6-Your Inner Critic Is a Big Jerk

7-No One Can Wrestle the Pencil Out of Your Hand

8-Failure Leads to Genius

9-Creating in a Vacuum Sucks

10-Blocks Are Meant to Be Broken



If you're creative (which, you  
certainly are—see truth #1), it's all true.  
And it's all explained here, in ten encouraging  
chapters that reveal how to accept these  
truths as part of your artistic process and keep  
moving forward to make good work.  
Starting. Right. Now.



WWW.CHRONICLEBOOKS.COM

\$16.95 U.S./£10.99 U.K.

ISBN 978-1-4521-4844-1



KRYSA YOUR INNER CRITIC IS A BIG JERK

CHRONICLE BOOKS

801

YOUR INNER  
CRITIC IS A  
BIG JERK

AND OTHER TRUTHS  
ABOUT BEING  
CREATIVE



DANIELLE  
KRYSA

PAINTING  
BY MARTHA  
FRITCH

# CHAPTER 1: EVERYONE IS CREATIVE



**"Art Facts: First, art is fun. Then, art is creative. Finally, art is beautiful. ART!!!!" —Esmé, age six**

Very wise words from a very smart little girl. Whether you paint, or sing, or write, or dance, I'm sure you remember feeling that kind of joy, even if it is a bit foggy now. That's why we need clever kids like Esmé to remind us that everyone—and I mean *everyone*—is creative.

That's a fact. Every single one of us is born with an imagination, and a primal urge to make things—things like fire, and cities, and cakes, and books, and shoes, and vegetable gardens, and breakfast. There are a ridiculous number of ways to be creative. Look at you, for example. Whether you're currently living a creative life or not, you want to. There's no way you'd pick up a book about "inner critics" and "other truths about being creative" if you weren't creative.

I wish I had a dollar for every time someone said, "Me? No, I'm not creative." I would be a gazillionaire. The thing is, that's not really them talking, it's their jerkface inner critic. Okay, so maybe you haven't made anything in a *very* long time, but that doesn't mean you're not creative. What it means is that, somewhere along the way, you became *really* good at saying, "Me? No, I'm not creative." (Cha-ching—there's another dollar in my pocket.) If you feel that way, let's change your mind.

Perhaps that's modesty talking, but isn't it interesting that "yes" doesn't come quickly and easily? It is a little reassuring, though, to realize that these successful, full-time, working artists have to convince themselves that they too deserve this title. Calling yourself an artist may be something you need to work on—quite literally. I've started practicing in the mirror. "Yes, I'm an artist. I'm a collage artist?" *Note: Try not to make it sound like a question next time.* Trey Speegle, a very successful New York-based artist, who has worked on projects with Stella McCartney and Michelle Obama, told me an amazing story around "owning it." This is how Trey learned how to use the "A" word:

"I got a job working for a magazine at age seventeen, while I was still in high school. I was an art director by age nineteen; and at twenty-one, somehow, I ended up in New York at *Vogue*. I was friends with a lot of artists, photographers, and performers in New York City in the mid-eighties but I had a 'real' job, so I kept making art on the side while working at my day job. Until I inherited my dead friend's paint-by-number collection and merged it with the word-art I was doing at the time, I really never even thought of calling myself the 'A' word. I had so many successful artist friends, like Keith Haring, Kenny Scharf, etc., that I couldn't really call myself one and mean it.

"I think the first time I ever admitted it was filling out one of those landing forms when you are reentering the U.S. I wrote 'Artist' under 'Occupation.' I was sure that the agent was going to see right through me and ask for proof. I did that again and again, until I could finally say it out loud. 'I'm an artist.' It doesn't matter if anybody else thinks you're an artist—if you believe it, and say it, then you are. That's how it works."

Yes. I will *totally* do that on my next flight—and I won't include a question mark.

## NURTURED VS. NOT SO MUCH

The people closest to us when we're young are often the ones who give us our creative confidence, whether they realize it or not. When I was three, my mom (who is a very accomplished painter) let me use her oil pastels—risky with a preschooler, but she was always very generous with her supplies, no matter how messy they were. I did a drawing of a very big bird on a very little tree. As I was working on the finishing touches (a tiny yellow sun in the top left corner, of course) my dad leaned over my shoulder for a closer look. He picked it up and said, "Well, we need to frame this." He set up all of the special tools and supplies that he used when he framed my mom's work—he even cut a custom, fancy gold frame for my masterpiece. I remember this like it was yesterday. I remember the overwhelming pride I felt. I remember thinking, and believing, "I am a *real* artist now"—clearly, fancy gold frames from your parents have a lot of power. I still have this drawing hanging in my studio today, and it's still awesome.



Teachers have enormous influence as well. I heard renowned Canadian painter Ian Wallace speak at an event at Emily Carr University in Vancouver. He told the story of his very first breakthrough—the moment he realized that he could be an artist when he grew up. In 1953, Ian was nine years old and his family was about to move away from his very small town. He had

always liked art in school but hadn't given it much thought. His teacher, on the other hand, saw great potential; and so as his going-away gift, the class presented him with an oil paint set. A real one. For grown-ups. Until that moment it had never occurred to Ian that "being an artist" was something he could actually do—his wonderfully supportive teacher and that oil paint kit were the beginning of his path toward a very successful, lifelong career as an influential Canadian artist.

Sadly, not everyone is nurtured in that department. Without support and encouragement from a young age, it's difficult to keep those creative fires burning. Support, or lack thereof, can make a shocking difference in how you view yourself creatively. Yes, I know you're not supposed to care what other people say or think about your work; but we're human, and it's hard to not care. When we were kids, we used our imaginations with complete confidence; but the moment that someone *else* told us that our creations weren't good enough, or, "Hmm, I think you're a better athlete than an artist"—that outside influence started to change how we saw our creative selves. Because of this, many of us give up on our creative pursuits much, much too soon.

We'll talk more about those unwanted bits of criticism later, but the reason I mention them here is just to say, if you believe you're not creative because someone told you that years ago, it *doesn't* mean that you can't find your way back to a time when being creative truly was fun. Here are a few projects that will take you back there, right now.

## Projects from the Kindergarten Drawer

- **Macaroni Masterpiece:** Grab one bag of hard noodles (macaroni, wheels, shells . . . something fun!); pompoms/feathers/glitter—i.e., anything you can find in your house or dollar store; construction paper/cardstock; and, most important, GLUE! I don't need to say anything else, do I? Let the magic begin.
- **Fresh Air Foraging:** Go for a walk, and look for artifacts that you can collect and bring home—rocks, bottle caps, and flowers or leaves that you can press in a book. Whatever you find, stack it up or arrange it on a piece of paper, and then photograph your final composition. You can stop right there, or you can use this photo of found bits and pieces as the starting point for a collage, painting, sculpture, story, or poem.



- **Pancake Pictures:** Get yourself a funnel and a hot pan. Pour the pancake batter through the funnel and draw yourself some breakfast. Animals, flowers, the Eiffel Tower—anything! The fantastic thing about this fun, weekend-morning project is that even if it looks terrible, it will still taste delicious. Add whipped cream as needed.
- **Blind Contour Buddies:** You can do this in a mirror, or with a friend. Look at your reflection (or at your friend) and draw the image without looking at the paper. And, if you want to make it even trickier, don't lift your marker off the page! It will be crazy, and look nothing like your subject, but that's kind of the idea. It's not meant to look perfect; in fact, it's impossible for that to happen. This is a fun thing to do at a dinner party, over drinks.

Well, there you have it—art is fun! There are no rules, and no way that you can make a “mistake.” All of these projects exist purely for the joy of creating. No pressure. Just silly. An excuse to open a fresh box of crayons. And there’s not one cranky first-grade teacher in sight to give her unsolicited opinion.

### NO SUCH THING AS “TOO LATE”

Far too often, people tell me, “I wish I hadn’t given up on art [for dancing, acting, writing, music], but it’s too late now.” What! Why? I don’t believe that for a second. Many amazingly talented people didn’t hit their stride until their thirties, forties, or later.

As far as famous painters go, you don’t have to be a child prodigy to be considered one of the greats. Vincent van Gogh didn’t start painting until his late twenties and Claude Monet didn’t find success until his mid-thirties—late in life for both of them, considering that the average life expectancy was around forty-five! And what about kitchen maven Julia Child? She only began cooking in her late thirties, and didn’t publish her first cookbook until she was fifty. One of my favorite stories: Minnie Pwerle, an aboriginal artist whose paintings are shown in prestigious galleries all over Australia, started painting when she turned *eighty*. Yes, I said eighty.

See? It’s never ever too late to jump-start your creativity. Have you always wanted to paint? Paint! Sign up for a class, or just get yourself some supplies and start experimenting. You’ve always dreamed of being on stage? Join a community theater. You don’t have to be a star out of the gate, or sell your first painting for ten thousand dollars—just be creative because it brings you joy.

### OWN YOUR CREATIVITY.

Creativity comes in so many shapes and sizes. All too often we equate “being creative” with painting perfect portraits, or writing the next great American novel. Why do we do that to ourselves? Throw all of those stupid (sorry, but they *are* stupid) thoughts out the window and decide what being creative means to you. Maybe cake decorating is your jam. Maybe it’s the thrill of taking photos from a point of view that is solely your own. Or perhaps you find a tremendous sense of creative freedom in your garden. You might not even know where your sweet spot is right now, but I hope that by the end of this book you feel excited, supported, and ready to stand up and say, “Me? Yes, I’m very creative.” If your jerk of an inner critic disagrees, shut it down immediately (we’ll talk about *how* to do that in chapter 6).

Regardless of your past experiences, I *know* that there is one fantastic creative memory that you’ll never forget. You know the one I’m talking about. When you start to hear your inner critic whispering in your ear, find a quiet spot, take a deep breath, close your eyes, and transport yourself back to that moment. Remember the joy. Remember the pride you felt in yourself for creating that amazing [insert crazy creative thing here]. Remember Esmé’s wise words: “Art is fun.” Now come back, bringing along a bit of that magic in your back pocket, and get to work.

