

THE ART OF YOU

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDEBOOK FOR

RECLAIMING YOUR CREATIVITY

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 **sounds true**
BOULDER, COLORADO

CONTENTS

Foreword by Lalah Delia xi

Introduction: Start Where You Are 1

PART ONE: Yin: Creative Being

Chapter 1: The Art of Doing Nothing 13

Chapter 2: Setting an Intention 25

Chapter 3: Guides and Inspiration 37

Chapter 4: Cultivating Intuition 49

Chapter 5: Creativity and Emotion: A Love Story 63

Chapter 6: Imagination: Seeing with Your Third Eye 75

Chapter 7: Intervention with My Inner Critic 91

PART TWO: Yang: Creative Doing

Chapter 8: The Myth of Perfection 99

Chapter 9: Finding Your Style 115

Chapter 10: Inspiration Is a Habit 129

Chapter 11: Experimentation and Play 143

Chapter 12: Launching Your Work 157

Chapter 13: Going Pro 173

Chapter 14: The New Renaissance:
Creativity and Social Impact 189

WORKSHOP: Your Creative Signature

What's Your Creative Signature? 213

Afterword: Creativity Is Your Nature 223

“Sing Along” (a Poem) 226

Bibliography 235

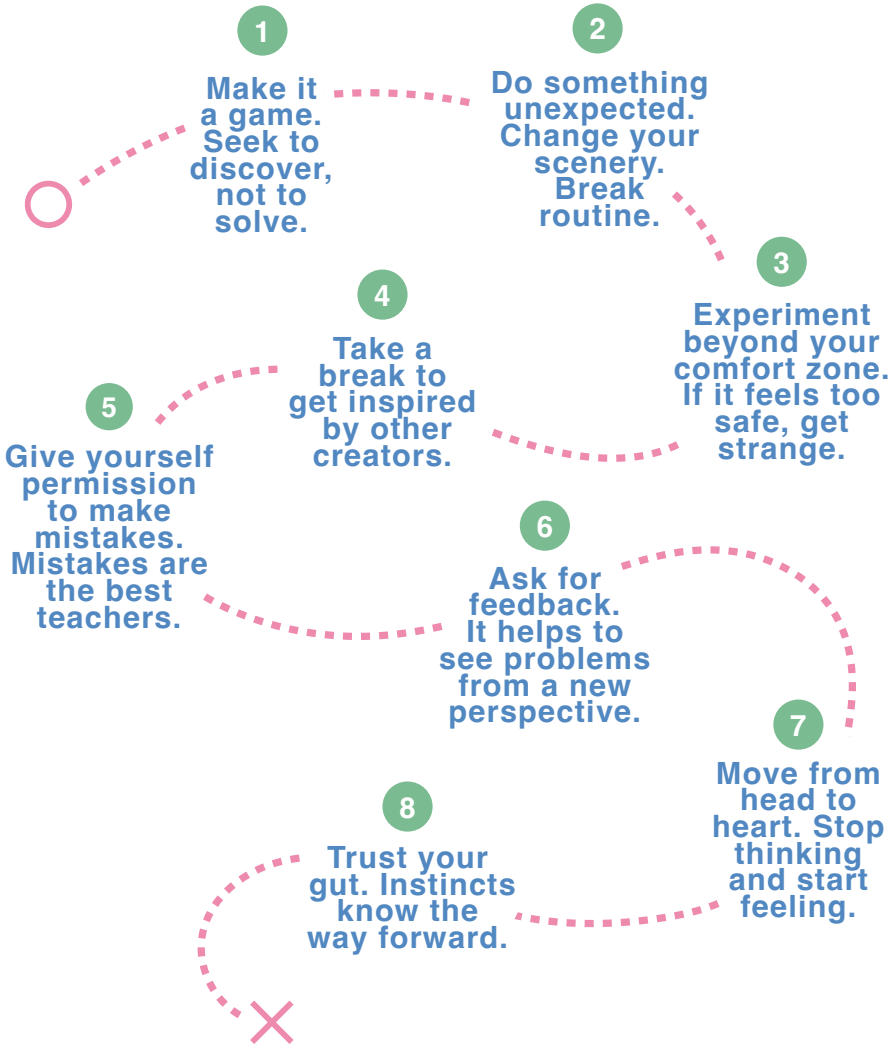
About the Author 243

“I feel like I’m channeling ideas from somewhere else. I believe we all are. I believe we are vehicles for information. When it’s ready to come through, it comes through. And the people who have good antennas pick up the signal.”

– Rick Rubin

CREATIVE TRAILMARKERS

(IN CASE YOU GET LOST)





REMINDER: YOU ARE HERE

FOR ONE BRIEF MOMENT

TO REVEAL THE LIGHT AND LIFE OF CREATION

THROUGH IMPERFECT HUMAN EXPRESSION

Introduction

START WHERE YOU ARE

TO BE HUMAN is to be creative. You don't have to be a professional artist or blessed with rare talents. Having the ability to tap into an invisible realm to imagine something that doesn't exist—and then to shape and bend the material world to make your imagination real—is perhaps the most defining characteristic of being human.

The act of creation (making something out of nothing) is equivalent to magic, and each person is a magician. This is true for the accountant as much as the artist. To be alive is to be in a state of constant cocreation with the universe. We create our relationships, our careers, our home environments, our routines, our belief systems, and the messages we share with the world, which we broadcast, either subtly or overtly, in every conversation and social media post.

Art is not restricted to traditional mediums like painting or literature. Being an artist isn't about fitting into a predefined template. It's about returning to your nature, being an independent thinker, and actualizing your unique purpose. Creativity is natural. The same way a bee's nature is to make honey and an apple tree's nature is to grow apples, it is human nature to create. It is an energy that flows through us.

A podcast can be art. Social media content can be art. Creating and marketing your business is art. Music and fashion are art. Memes are art.

Hosting a dinner party can be art. Developing an app is art. Even if you don't make anything tangible, you create your life. You make your career, your relationships, your home. When done with intention, even sex is art. An artist is anyone who uses the power of imagination and creativity to birth a new idea into existence. You create your life in each passing moment. The question is: *Are you creating with conscious intention, or are you reacting to external circumstances and creating by default?*

As we grow up, it becomes increasingly difficult to live and work from a place of intuition and curiosity. Society doesn't always support our natural creative talents. Being an artist, we are told, is not realistic. It is a privilege reserved for the chosen few. We are taught to follow rules, conform to social conventions, and work to support top-down power structures instead of investing our energy toward actualizing our own unique visions for the purpose of healing and evolving ourselves and the world around us.

We are each born on a mission to manifest the most authentic expression of ourselves. But millions of gears in the socioeconomic machine are engineered to make us disempowered and forget who we truly are. Our magic is real, but we've been taught all the wrong tricks.

The creative initiation.

These days, many people feel lost or disoriented because society fails to provide them with meaningful initiations. "Go to college; get a job" is the prevailing rite of passage into adulthood. But this pseudo-initiation feels shallow. We are told that finding a profession is more important than finding a purpose. Instead of advancing to the next level of an empowering game, we shrink ourselves to fit into socially constructed boxes.

Creative people in particular suffer from a lack of meaningful initiation. In a world where data and productivity are valued over imagination, it's often difficult for writers, artists, and creatives to find their place. More often than not, creative people compromise their natural gifts in

order to function within the factory of society. And while we may maintain a creative project as a hobby, it's likely that we will dedicate less and less time to these passions as the pressures and demands of "real life" take center stage.

Although we are all born with creative potential, creativity and inspiration are like muscles: we have to nurture them or they will atrophy. The good news is that it's never too late to reawaken the curious artist and child inside. But without an established social road map to help us walk the creative path, it's up to us as individuals to make a personal commitment to nurture the gifts of imagination and expression.

This book is a road map for the creative journey. Of course, a definitive rule book is impossible. After all, creativity is a living phenomenon. There are no absolute rules. It's about capturing the spirit in the moment and following where it leads you. What works for me might not work for you. What works today might not work tomorrow. Like a spontaneous jazz band, creativity is about awareness and action in the moment—trusting yourself to take small leaps of faith again and again.

After decades of trial and error, I've gradually discovered the keys to conscious and consistent creativity. Each creative process follows certain stages. To master these stages is to enter a state of effortless flow. These stages can be broken down into two main categories: yin and yang. Yin is about *creative being*: setting an intention, finding creative guides, having a curious mind, and cultivating intuition and imagination, which we'll cover in part one. Yang is about *creative doing*: finding your voice, experimenting with technique, launching projects, growing an audience, and making an impact, which we'll cover in part two.

In our materialistic, yang society, the conventional wisdom is to focus on the end result first. If only we can *have* what we want, then we can *do* what we want, and finally we can *be* who we want. But the opposite is true. If we want to *have*, first we must *do*. And before we can *do*, we must *be*. All doing is born from presence. All having is born from being.

Cultivating inner presence is the first step of creativity. But it's not the last step. We must also take action to create, experiment with technique, edit our work, and find the courage to share. Each of these stages requires a different approach. The open-minded, intuitive yin that inspires an idea is not necessarily the best mindset to drive that idea to fruition.

The creative process is similar to farming. First you must prepare the soil, gather and plant seeds, and nurture the sprouts with water and sunlight. These are yin activities. The soil represents the fertile subconscious. The seeds are the influences we feed ourselves: the books we read, the music we listen to, and the people we surround ourselves with. The soil of our subconscious mind will inevitably produce the fruits of the seeds we plant. These fruits are our thoughts and ideas.

Once the crops are grown, an entirely new set of actions is needed. We must harvest the crops, clean and store them, and eventually cook them into a meal that can be served and enjoyed. These are yang activities. The crops are our ideas. We clean and store them by choosing which ideas to develop. Cooking a meal is the art of creative execution, which requires time and patience to learn. And finally, we need to take our work public. After all, art, like food, is meant to be shared and enjoyed—to provide nourishment and pleasure to others.

According to traditional Chinese medicine, when one aspect of the body is out of alignment, the entire body may suffer or break down as a result. The same is true of the creative process. Creativity is a living energy that flows through us. When the energy gets stuck in one place, the whole process breaks down.

Different people get stuck in different places. Some people have vivid imaginations but are unable to finish and launch projects. Others may be superproductive, but their work is lacking the purpose and depth that comes from intuition. No matter where you are on your creative journey, this book is designed to help you return to alignment and flow.

“Every child is an artist. The problem is how to

remain an artist once he grows up.”

PABLO PICASSO

How this book came to be.

I've been an artist my whole life, starting with my childhood in a small Minnesota town. Sometimes I've been paid for my work. Sometimes I've done it only because I had no other choice—something inside me wanted to come out. I've created advertising campaigns for big brands, and I've scrawled poetry during my lunch break while working odd jobs making minimum wage. I've graduated from art school and worked as a professional graphic designer. I've filled stacks of notebooks with musings that nobody will ever read, and I've created memes that have gone viral around the world. I've been a starving artist, and I've led advertising teams on Madison Avenue. I've been rejected by countless book publishers, and I've written bestselling books that were translated into languages around the world. I've been a painter, recorded a spoken-word poetry album, made more mistakes than I can count, and gradually learned how to grow an audience and turn my creativity into a business. Today, I work with clients and teach classes on conscious creativity. I'm also the founder and host of Sunflower Club, a podcast and global community dedicated to creativity as a tool for personal healing and social transformation. All of these experiences—though not always successful—were instrumental in shaping who I am as a human and a creator. And somewhere along the way, I learned how to claim the identity of an artist.

While living in New York City and working in the advertising industry, my creativity hit a dead end. My open-minded curiosity had been replaced by tight deadlines and office politics. But I rediscovered my

inner artist when I began exploring mindfulness and spirituality, including meditation, yoga, Eastern philosophy, and the teachings of Ram Dass, Terence McKenna, and Alan Watts. Seeking to balance my busy outer world, I began a diligent mindfulness practice, often sitting in meditation for hours at a time. Eventually I started attending plant medicine ceremonies led by shamans from Peru and Mexico, working with psychedelic substances like psilocybin and ayahuasca.

Everything changed. I realized that my creative process had become too one-dimensional. In Taoist terms, there was too much yang (force and effort) and not enough yin (allowing and flow). So I began to slow down and cultivate a receptive presence within myself. My channel of inspiration opened wider than ever. Instead of standing in a small, shallow pond, I was swimming in a vast, deep ocean.

Perhaps the most important lesson my creative journey has taught me is to recognize and honor creativity as a sacred path unto itself. This path isn't about having tremendous talent, perfect technique, or an impressive education. It's about unlearning the limitations and conditioning that separate us from our intrinsic and spontaneous creative nature. This nature—no matter how far away we have strayed—is always within our grasp, one shift in perception away.

Creativity is more important than ever.

Our world is quickly changing. The rate of novelty, driven by technology and social disruption, is accelerating each year. With increased change comes increased uncertainty. The comfortable known has been replaced with a vast and murky unknown.

This uncertainty can cause us to freeze in fear and confusion, unsure which direction to take. What worked in the past is not guaranteed to work in the future. We need new ways of thinking, working, and living. This is a call for radical creativity—an opportunity to imagine, design, and build the future we want to see. We need creativity now more than ever.

Creativity is about being an independent thinker. You don't need tremendous talent; you just need the courage to question conventional wisdom. Your life isn't a movie that you're watching. It's a game that you're playing—a game that's fluid and ever changing. There are no rules, just a collection of socially reinforced agreements.

**“You never change things by fighting the existing
reality. To change something, build a new model
that makes the existing model obsolete.”**

BUCKMINSTER FULLER

Creativity represents the freedom to think for ourselves instead of following the rules bestowed upon us by others. Every valuable contribution to society came about by taking risks and dreaming outside the collective comfort zone. Creativity is the key that opens doors to new businesses, new relationships, new communities, new politics, and new solutions. Without the key, we are subject to the authority of social conventions. With the key, we become magicians, casting spells to align our lives with our soul's calling.

You are an artist (yes, you).

In the age of the internet, social media, and decentralized platforms like podcasting and live streaming, each person is an influencer and media channel unto themselves. More than ever before, we are living in public, broadcasting our thoughts and ideas to the world. This rapidly changing media landscape has huge implications on how we communicate, do business, and make and consume art.

The line between art and artist is starting to blur. The content creator is just as important as the content. In both business and art, authenticity is more important than ever. Your brand is your message, and your message is you. In the digital age, creativity is about establishing a real and direct relationship with your audience. The more honest and vulnerable you can be, the better. Your authenticity is your currency. The lessons in this book will help you step out of the closet as an artist, a thinker, and a creator.

All artists—in fact, all people—are transmitters of vibration. Imagination and intuition are antennas that pick up signals from unseen dimensions and download messages to the hard drive of conscious thought. The mind then works with the body—activating hands, fingers, and vocal cords—to share the transmission as creative expression. We are carriers for the thoughts, ideas, and art that pass through us.

If you feel a desire to create, to share, to step up and be seen and heard, this isn't an accident. There is an energy, a transmission, that has selected you to deliver its message. Making art (whatever art you choose) and cultivating your creative genius are about living in service to your higher purpose. To discover and embody this purpose is the sacred mission of your life.

We often take our own gifts for granted. But here's the truth: the world needs what you have to share. Somebody out there is looking for the exact message that comes naturally to you. People are starving for authenticity, for something real. Nobody else can replicate the energy you offer. Your words, your art, and your being are medicine for the world.

Art is alchemy. It transmutes pain into beauty. When we create art, we open a tiny portal to the soul that brings light to a world of darkness. And in doing so, we give others permission to do the same. It's time to boldly share your vision with the world.

We are waiting for your transmission.