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Ya Gotta Have Art

COVER PHOTO: DON FUKUDA

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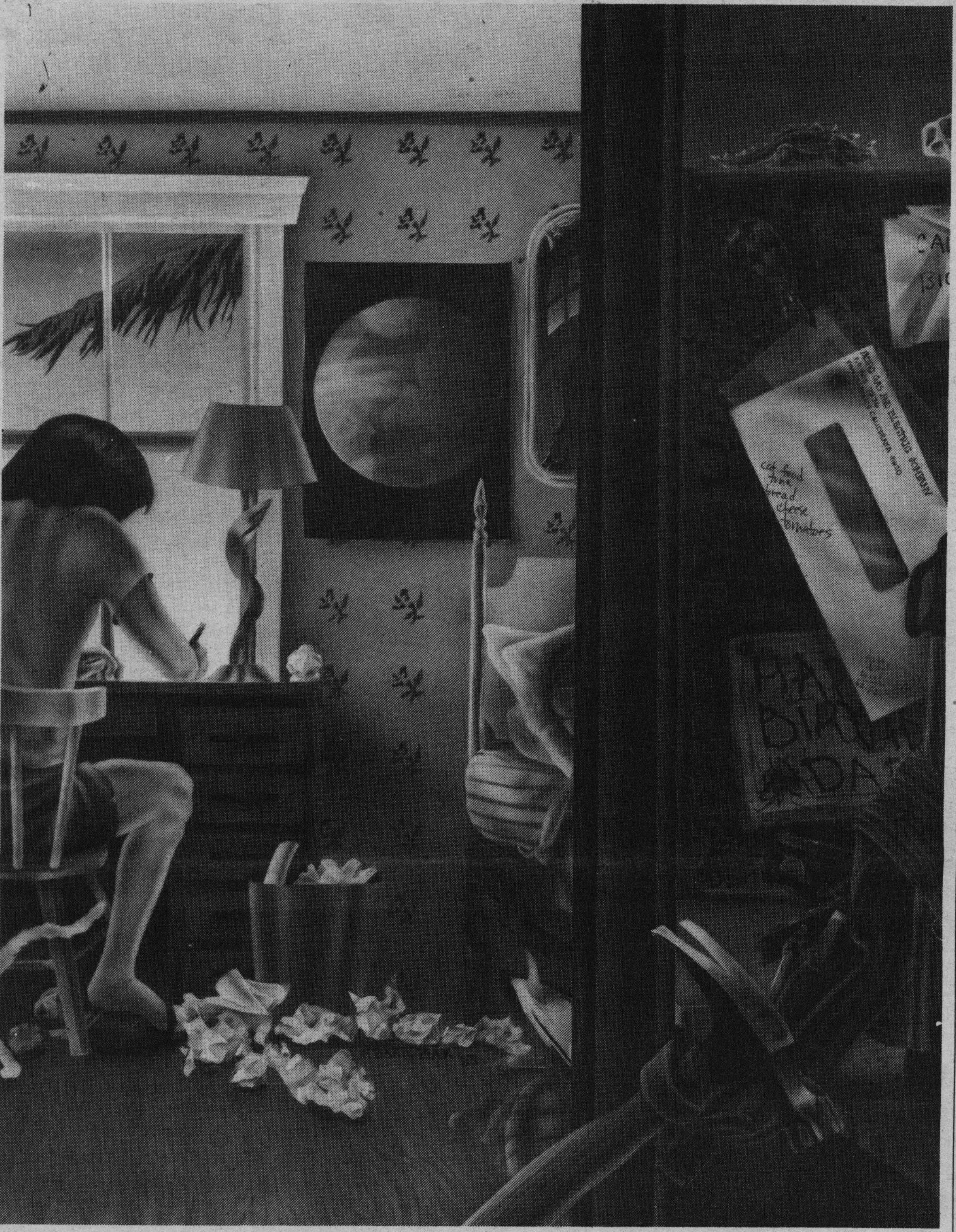


ILLUSTRATION: PETER BARTCZAK

The Truths Behind the Myths

Dave Hechler

Stereotypes of artists are an easy sell. (We all buy the myths and some of us even buy the art.) There's the blocked writer, driven by loneliness and artistic impotence to drink. There's the moody, eccentric painter unable to connect with her times. There's the film director obsessed by a monumental vision, undone by an ego that's larger than life. And, of course, there's the brooding, surly composer, convinced of his own genius, but resigned to an out-of-tune life of poverty and obscurity. Sound familiar?

Where does this cast of characters come from? Are they from art or life? The answer, undoubtedly, is both.

Stereotypes may contain anywhere from a grain to a sizable chunk of truth. They are generalizations, and, moreover, generalizations that may be based on the exception rather than the rule. There may be many more poets who lead quiet, unremarkable lives like the one led by Wallace Stevens, poet and insurance executive, than the flamboyant, self-destructive one that left Dylan Thomas dead at 39. But which is likely to receive greater attention?

Each year the lives of famous artists are chronicled in articles, books, plays and films. Some of these portrayals are fairly accurate. Often in the popular media, however, they are distorted — sensationalized or romanticized in an effort to make them more entertaining. Since most people know artists only through the media, many form impressions of the "artistic personality" on the basis of books and films about a select few — frequently the most talented and the most troubled and, almost invariably, the most famous. From them come many of our stereotypes.

But that is not to say stereotypes are without basis in fact. Nor can we dismiss them all simply because some prove inaccurate. In an effort to examine some of the more common stereotypes, interviews were conducted with 22 local artists. These 22 were chosen more or less randomly. All have enjoyed at least a certain amount of recognition, but there was absolutely no effort made to find the "best" or the "most acclaimed" or the "hardest working" (even if it were possible to do so). Twenty-two others could have been interviewed.

It cannot be claimed that those interviewed constitute a sample representative of the local art community. An effort was made only to interview a diverse group of working creative artists (several also perform, but the focus here is on their work as creators, not performers). At least two artists from each medium were selected. Some have been practicing their crafts for many years; some only a few. They range in age from a 24-year-old photographer to a 68-year-old landscape architect (who is also a painter).

Judging by the Cover

Look again at the cover and at the other photographs accompanying this article. Look carefully. Can you pick out a sculptor or film director? Can you find an architect or painter?

"There's a stereotype of what painters look like," says Theresa Ellis, a painter herself, "like that painters have long, slender fingers. Plenty of painters have short, stubby fingers. And there are ones who look like businesspeople and ones who look like eccentrics and every possible thing in between."

Perhaps the most common physical stereotype is that artists are shabbily clothed and generally unkempt. In addition to their bedraggled appearance, there is something about them that conveys the impression they're a little "off." There's a wildness in the eye or a nervous tic — something tellingly compulsive.

Tics aside, part of the stereotype may derive from the art establishment itself. "When I was in graduate school," Ellis recalls, "women who wore make-up and dresses weren't taken seriously as artists . . . . If you were serious, you wouldn't spend five minutes a day putting on make-up because all your time would be devoted to art."

Architectural designer Mark Primack has observed the same pattern. "One of my better friends in college was a painter and a jock. He lives a very quiet life. He runs 16 miles a day. He doesn't look like an artist at all. When you go to art school now, you see people who are trying to shoehorn themselves into the stereotype that they believe will allow them to be the artist. Does a writer have to chain smoke cigarettes and sip a bottle of brandy all night?"

Born, Not Made

Another pervasive stereotype is that artists are born, not made. You either have it or you don't. Those who have it are the lucky ones, the "gifted," the chosen few. Luckiest of all are prodigies — young Mozarts. It is believed that they are the greatest and the truest artists, their destinies are clear from the moment a crayon is first picked up or the neighbor's piano plunked.

Gordon Mumma knew by the time he was five that music was the most important thing in his life. Roy Rydell and Richard Buckminster were very interested in drawing well before they turned 10. Likewise, Peter Beagle and Joe Stroud were enthralled by poems and stories as far back as they can recall.

Some chose their careers while young, yet didn't consider themselves particulary talented until later. "Some of my classmates were equally as good — maybe better — than I was," remembers Futzie Nutzle, painter and cartoonist. "Fear took over and they quit. I didn't have the sense. Like I say, I wasn't that good. Drawing hasn't been a real natural thing to me."

"I used to do drawings and stuff when I was a kid, but I was always about the third best drawer in the classroom," recalls Eduardo Carrillo, a painter and muralist. "Guys that were first then, you know, they ended up pumping gas," he adds laughing.

Some took up crafts as a result of inabilities as well as abilities. "I grew up thinking I wasn't that bright," says photographer Gypsy Ray. "Here I could draw well, so it seemed like that's what you did. If there was one thing you could do and you were told you couldn't do something else, you drew."

Novelist Peter Beagle believes he started writing because he came from a family of painters and found he couldn't paint.

Quite a few of the artists were and are attracted to arts other than the ones they presently practice. Beagle considers himself a frustrated musician. Stroud says he's a frustated musician and painter. Drawing was writer Nate Mackey's first love. Both Dennis Britton and Roy Rydell were trained as painters before they turned to architecture. And choreographer Beverly Brown was drawn first to music (and has come full circle, having collaborated recently on several compositions.

Some took up their crafts in a manner which made the choice seem anything but predestined. "My brother became an electric guitar player for a band," says composer Phil Collins. "I wanted to be part of that scene. I saw him getting all these girlfriends. He quit playing because he wanted to become a doctor and I took his guitar over."

"I've always thought that I got into art by mistake because it was a required minor in school when I got out of the navy," confesses sculptor Holt Murray, who had never been inside a museum before college. Theresa Ellis remembers that when she returned to college for her junior year, "I suddenly had this moment of insight that if I became an art major, I'd never have to write another paper."

But a predilection or a haphazard decision — or even talent — does not a career make. Almost every artist meets a moment of truth when he or she makes the commitment to art. Although he wrote poetry all through high school, Stroud majored in zoology before he jumped to English. "Reading and writing seemed so normal to who I was," he explains, "that the idea of majoring in it in college hadn't even occurred to me."

Primack first decided he wanted to be an architect at age eight, but art school made him reassess his plans. "I started having to take all these architecture courses. I had to stop and ask myself whether I was doing it because of a decision I made when I was eight. Someone advised me that I should stick with architecture, because if I tried to be an artist and I couldn't make it, then architecture was better than driving a truck. That kept me in it my sophomore year, and by the time I was a junior I felt I could be an artist and epxress myself through architecture."

While natural talents and inner propensities are important, environmental factors significantly influence an artist's development. Parents nurture early interests, teachers lend encouragement. Often there is recognition from peers. As Nutzle puts it, "Art was a way of getting attention."

"If the need for creativity is there," says sculptor Fred Hunnicutt, "it will manifest itself. I think I would say 'born to be an artist' is too narrow in concept. One is born to be creative. [British sculptor] Henry Moore, for example, could have been one hell of a scientist. Or he could have been one hell of an actor, or whatever, with his creative spirit. I think that is, perhaps, what we're born with. The other thing — how we use [the creative spirit] — I think perhaps is more a matter of environmental conditioning."

PHOTO: DON FUKUDA

Mark Primack, Roy Rydell & Dennis Britton

Every artist interviewed was involved in the "making of things" at an early age. Several changed paths before finding a niche in the art world. All feel they were born with a certain amount of that "creative spirit."

In the final analysis, however, it takes more than creativity. It seems it takes commitment as well. Commitment is why Carrillo has persisted, even though he says, "I don't have natural gifts. I have to really struggle, so in that respect I don't know if I was born to be an artist." His classmates, some with more natural talent but less commitment, are pumping gas.

"Even if you're born an artist," says Nutzle, "you still have to develop it. So it may not make too much difference."

Free Lunch

Stereotype: the problem with artists is that they always insist on making such a big deal of what they do. Generally, they'd be better off getting *real* jobs and doing art in their spare time. But they'd rather whine about how poor they are and how hard it is to be an artist. Then you see those same "poor artists" in cafes by day and bars by night, hobnobbing with all of their "artist" friends. Chip away the gilding and you have a lot of lazy sponges looking for handouts.

There are many people who call themselves artists who fit the stereotype above. "I've known people just looking for the easy life," says Rydell, "but I don't think that they're artists at all. They're just hangers-on. They're bums."

As Nutzle points out, real artists do not spend most of their time hobnobbing — they're home or in their studios working. "There are all these people claiming to be artists," he says, "and all they do is drink coffee. It doesn't take any talent to drink coffee."

The problem is that one can't distinguish the genuine artists from the pretenders by looking at them or listening to them or watching them drink coffee. The imposter may appear, in all ways, more "artistic" than the artist. One doesn't usually have the opportunity to observe the artist at work. Still appearances may be deceiving.

"The act of creation," as Nate Mackey reminds us, "*is* a mystery." Most artists experience periods during which they are not particularly creative. Some choose to keep working, others abstain. The choice does not necessarily separate the industrious from the indolent — work habits seemingly have nothing to do with creativity.

Singer and songwriter Lisa Pawlak used to write a song almost every day. Her standards are higher now, and she labors longer to write far fewer. Nor do usable ideas come as readily, but that does not mean that as a composer she is idle between compositions. "I'm taking things in," she says. "I'm always thinking, always looking for ideas for songs."

Similarly, Joe Stroud used to write every day in order to hone his skills. Now he generally writes only when he has something important to say, but sees the interim between poems as a necessary "period of gestation."

Several others work irregularly in this manner. Richard Buckminster paints either every day or not at all. He has gone through several lengthy "dry spells." At such times he involves himself in other projects and refuses to worry. Even during a hiatus that lasted over a year, he never doubted he would return to his chosen craft.

Ellis works excessively for a time, then stops. Unlike Buckminster, however, she feels guilty and often unhappy when not painting. She admits, "I have not been very good about painting regularly."

Although artists put in long hours, they sometimes are perceived as lazy or idle simply because their work schedules don't conform to the normal patterns of the work-a-day world. "I've put a lot of energy into my painting," says

Burt Lewitsky. "A lot of people call an artist a bum, but I look around at some of the work I've been doing for 18 years. I'm always working at something. But it looks like I'm idle because I'm not at a 9 to 5 job. So most people on the outside look at you and say, 'This guy — what's *his* trip?' "

Most artists work regularly at their crafts. Some do so out of necessity. "I've never been able to afford to wait for the lightning to strike," says Beagle. "Writing is all I've got." Some do so out of a need. "I write because I have to. I write because I don't feel good unless I'm writing," says Mackey.

And yet, creating art is not always seen as real work. There are three reasons for this. One is that many of us believe the artist creates in a trance-like state of pure joy called "inspiration." In our culture, at least, work is not supposed to be joyous; it's supposed to be...well, work. Inspired work (which many people imagine art to be) sounds less like business than pleasure, and therefore is suspect.

Secondly, in our culture work is generally thought of as something one does in order to earn a living. If one makes little or no money while engaged in a particular activity, it's fair to wonder whether it is work at all. "People start to take you seriously as a writer," says Beagle, "if you make a lot of money. And if they don't associate you with that, then obviously there must be something else you really do — this is just play."

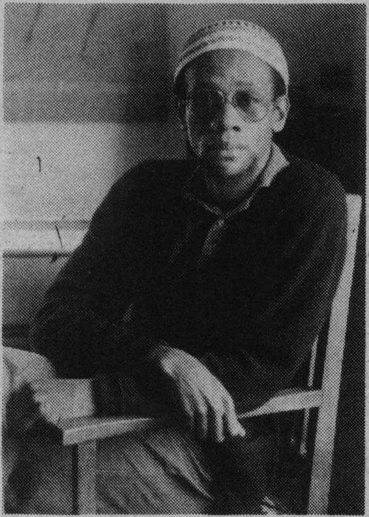


PHOTO: CHRIS MACAULEY

Nate Mackey

"Everybody wants the financial validation," agrees Buckminster. "People remind you everyday by asking you if you're making money at what you're doing. And if you're not, they want to know, 'Well, why are you doing this if you're not making money?'" The answer, some might suggest, is that art must be Buckminster's hobby — something he does for fun rather than his work, his job.

This brings us to the third reason art is not always seen as legitimate work. Many people who make things they call "art" do not see the activity as work. For them it is not; it is their hobby. "Part of the problem," Holt Murray points out, "is our language when we use the word 'art.' Art is something that children do. Children squish mud around and push paint around in school. Art is also something that we do for old people just before they die. Art can be the making of pretty pictures. Sculpture can be making little doggies. We have this one word that means so many different things."

Few would contest that when Fred Hunnicutt spends 15 hours a day welding the large steel or aluminum figures he fabricates, he's working. It's just as clear that when an architect designs a building, that is work. Filmmaking may seem like too much fun to be work to us, but most people, according to independent filmmakers Dan Bessie and Helen Garvy, do respect the business side of the art and the large financial commitment it requires.

It seems to be less clear to some that painting is work. Says Ellis, "I get the comment a whole bunch, 'Oh, I'm going to do that someday when I have the time' — as if all you need in order to paint is the time to sit down and do it."

Buckminster adds, "You read where movie stars are quoted as saying, 'I love to paint to relax.' I don't understand how anyone can paint to relax. That certainly hasn't been my experience."

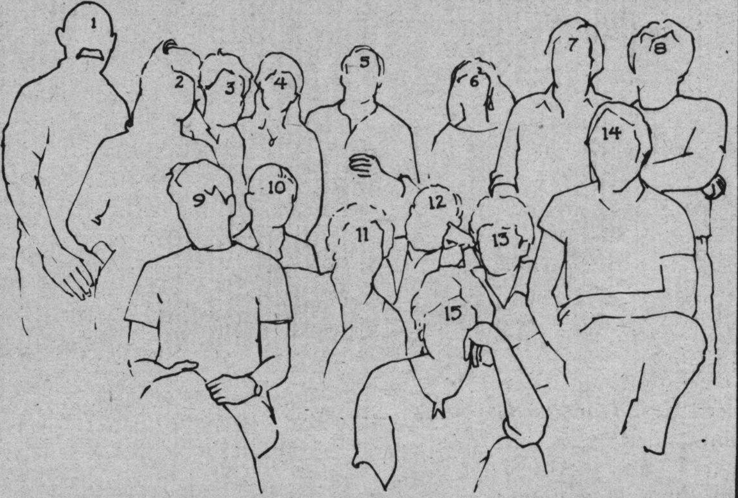
Carrillo speaks of the "struggle" of painting as a physical challenge that requires stamina. "You have to train like a distance runner to endure," he says.

The art form that may appear to require the least work of all is photography, with poetry a close second. After all, everybody takes photographs (you don't even have to know what an f-stop is anymore), and local cafes are filled with poets who can churn out five poems for each cup of cappuccino. Where's the work there?

The difficulty, of course, is producing a photograph or composing a poem *that is a work of art*. Being able to produce them with some regularity is what separates the poets from the scribblers, the "snapshooters" (as Tomas Spangler calls them) from the photographers.

It is doubtful many people know that Spangler literally had to submit thousands of images before he received his first assignment from *National Geographic*. It really isn't strange, then, when people don't understand hazards involved in his craft. "People will ask me the price of a print, and they'll say, 'Well, you

This Week's Cover Kids



1) Fred Hunnicutt
2) Helen Garvy
3) Gordon Mumma
4) Gypsy Ray
5) Phil Collins
6) Theresa Ellis
7) Dennis Britton
8) Eduardo Carrillo
9) Lisa Pawlak
10) Roy Rydell
11) Tomas Spangler
12) Dan Bessie
13) Mark Primack
14) Burt Lewitsky
15) Peter Bartczak

take your slide and it only costs you $25 to have that print made.' What about the tickets to Nepal, or the two years of school? How can you price that or the time I almost lost my life falling off a yak in Nepal?" Another time, Spangler recounts, "I got stoned. Literally. Pelted. That was fruit, though. Fruit and vegetables. In Guatemala. Two hundred women throwing fruit at me. And vegetables."

Regardless of the public's attitude toward their work, again and again artists talk of the importance of working, the need to keep working, the wish that there were more time to devote to their work. Many of them speak more highly of the work ethic than a Republican candidate in an election year. "I've seen extremely gifted people who didn't work at it," says Beagle. "To use a parallel, I've seen baseball players who ought to have been superb, but who never worked at it, never paid enough to be what their gifts had given them the chance to be. I say 'paid' deliberately. If there's one thing I know, it's that everything has to be paid for — gifts included."

PHOTO: DON FUKUDA

Dan Bessie & Helen Garvy

Zero Dollars, No Sense

"Probably one of the main sources of insecurity you're going to find interviewing all these artists," Buckminster predicted in one of the early interviews, "is the subject of money, because a lot of people have a brother that's an attorney or a sister that's a doctor, and when the family gets together at the reunions, [the artists] have to somehow justify their existence and the validity of practicing their type of art."

By and large, that prediction was accurate. The issue of money and practicality came up again and again. The words of Gordon Mumma's found many an echo: "I'm 48 and I have a two-year-old kid and I'm not sure I'm old enough to be a father. Furthermore, my mother still wants to know what I'm going to do when I grow up."

For some, the matter has not posed great problems. "We all have relatives who think what we're doing is cuckoo," says Rydell, "but once you're publicized — I've had a lot of my work published — people are very impressed by that sort of thing." Fellow architect Britton has also prospered. He was a builder for 12 years, and feels the practical and business experience have stood him in good stead. But Rydell and Britton are engaged in an art that has an obvious utilitarian value.

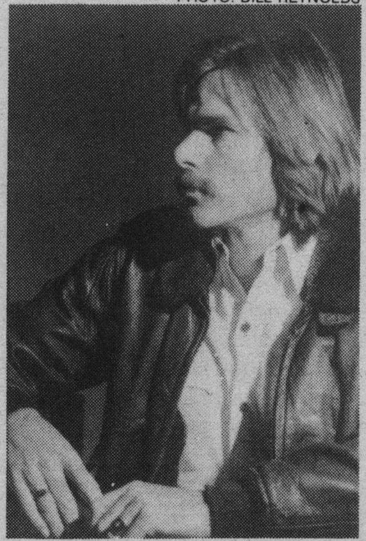
Many others — in fact most — readily admit an inability to function effectively in the business world. Seven have found refuge in a common sanctuary for artists: the halls of academe. They all agree it has been a compromise of sorts, a trade-off. Teaching was an option most saw as eminently practical. It is a profession which takes them away from their work as artists much of the time, but which brings them a certain financial security that doesn't require "business sense," and that doesn't depend upon the vagaries of whether their art will sell in the marketplace. "If I want to make my living in art, then business is part of it," is Holt Murray's attitude. "You've got to have some money sense. You've got to play your cards smart."

Some of the artists have worked hard to acquire business acumen. "Much of my life I simply didn't want to think about money," says Beagle, who once relied heavily on his literary agent. "I didn't know how to balance my checkbook. In the last years, I've had to learn it. I even have a couple of investments, of all things." Phil Collins has taken fund-raising seminars and has solicited the business community in order to garner support for the New Music Works, which he co-founded.

"Dance can't even happen without a certain amount of people and money — that's one of the big dilemmas," laments Beverly Brown, who spends half of her work time tending to the administrative demands of running her own dance company.

Filmmakers Garvy and Bessie spend about a third of their working lives raising funds. Currently, they're attempting to raise $800,000 to make a feature film. They sometimes make commercials and educational films to pay the bills and help finance projects of their own choosing. The bottom line has to be faced. "If I want to do what I want," Bessie says, "things have to succeed in the commercial market place." The cards are on the table, according to Garvy: "If you're self-employed, you have to be a businessperson as well as an artist."

PHOTO: BILL REYNOLDS



Futzie Nutzle

Gypsy Ray, who has had a number of her photographs published and is currently at work on a book of her own, makes less than $100 a month from photography. She has had to support herself working a second job, which usually doesn't pay very well and leaves her with little time, energy and money to devote to her craft. "It's depressing," she says, "if you work hard at a [second] job. You're barely making your rent. It's real hard not to have the money to do what you'd like. I'd like to print more, but I can't afford to. I'd like to have a darkroom, but I can't afford to have a darkroom."

Futzie Nutzle has also had to scrape for a living at times. "I'm not going to starve," he says. "I've gone through two, three, years of not selling anyting. And if it means mowing a lawn, I don't care. What do I care? Washing someone's car? I'll do it. I mean, I'm not proud."

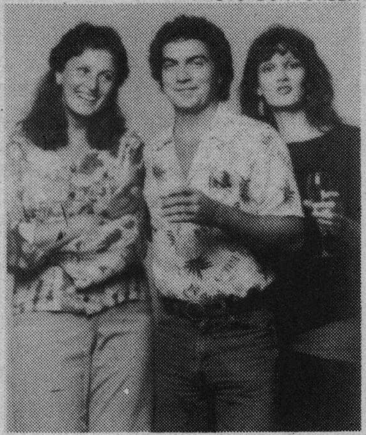
Primack has steered a course some would call impractical in the extreme. His true calling, he feels, is botanical architecture, and he's spent a great deal of time imagining and drawing dwellings that could be built in and within trees. The architectural designing he does for clients pays the bills and allows his dreams. "The nice thing about the way I work is that I have lots of things I want to do, many of which don't make money," he explains. "So I take the jobs when they come, and the jobs generally come when I need the money."

Could Primack design condos? Could Gypsy Ray photograph weddings? Could Futzie Nutzle work at an ad agency? The answer to all three questions is "yes." (Nutzle did, in fact, work briefly for an ad agency years ago). Burt Lewitsky was a commercial artist at one time. Why did he quit? "I made a pretty good living, but I always came home and painted at night. That was my true calling."

But selling out is not the fear. Doing something practical or making money isn't the problem. The artist's fear is that what is created will be directly or indirectly influenced by what will sell or what has sold in the past (which is one of the reasons Hunnicutt prefers to delegate to a San Jose gallery the responsibility of selling his work).

Primack puts it this way: "I'm a firm believer that the best thing you can do is not to sell yourself, but to perfect or advance your art. Because if nobody's paying for it, you don't have to please anyone. And an artist feeling like he has to please someone is on a dead end street."

PHOTO: DON FUKUDA



Gypsy Ray, Tomas Spenglar & Theresa Ellis

Artists have to do things in order to please people — Primack when he designs a building for a client, Garvy and Bessie when they shoot a commercial, Beagle when he writes a film script, Rydell when he designs a landscape. But they do other things to please themselves alone — or at least themselves first.

Because they are committed to pursuing art that may not have commercial appeal, they have had to make certain "trade-offs." "My wife understands the need to drive a 1961 Falcon with a leaky radiator. I spend as much for one tool as a decent car would cost;" observes Hunnicutt. "I can go out and spend $100 on photography sometimes, but I can't spend $100 on clothes," says Ray. All have had to make certain accommodations in order to be artists. But they do not speak of them with rancor or regret. That is why many of them resist using the word "sacrifices."

"If I had gone the practical route," says Murray, a man who spent seven years in a cannery and three at Lockheed, "I would probably be very unhappy now because there wasn't that extra dimension. It probably has to do with being able to play. Maybe the polite way of saying that is it didn't allow the 'artful life.' There wasn't any scope, any depth."

Is the pursuit of art, then, invariably impractical? Perhaps in a certain sense it is. "I sell a work," says Carrillo, "and in a few months the money's gone — or a few weeks or a few days. Doing it is very satisfying, because you're really pulling in out of the air," he says, reaching up and pulling invisible strings above his head. "You've got to pull all these images out of nowhere and make them work, make them real for me, for other people."

On the Subject of Self

"There is a tremendous amount of ego that goes into the making of any kind of art," says Stroud. "I don't mean that necessarily in a bad way. It can get out of hand in a person's personal or public life. But it takes an ego to make art. Something has to shape, something has to form, something has to do it. Unfortunately the word 'ego' has so many bad connotations: somebody stuck on himself, or who thinks he's above everyone else or whatever."

Ego, as Stroud says, shapes art. It also supplies the artist with confidence. A thick skin and unflappable conviction seem to be prerequisites for anyone who enters a field in which rejection is inevitable.

In the beginning, says Carrillo, "You've got to do the work and spend several years doing the work without thinking you're ever going to make anything out of it or anyone's ever going to look at it." Hunnicutt has learned "to balance rejection with the small successes." Murray believes, "My work — and my age — has given me the confidence to go up to people and say, 'This is what I do. Just take a look at it.' I can handle rejection now."

Beagle recalls the second time he was turned down by the same producer for the same script. "I threw a fit," he remembers. "I cried. I raged. I did everything but roll on the ground. When I came out of it, I resolved I was never going to do that again — at least not for a goddamned producer."

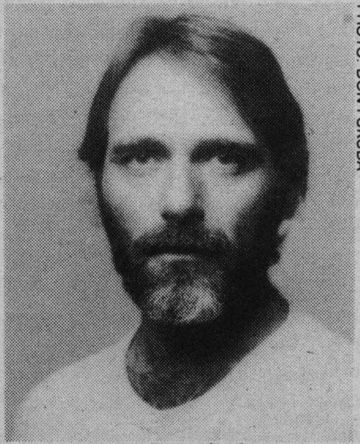


PHOTO: DON FUKUDA

Burt Lewitsky

Carrillo had to overcome the most devastating experience an artist can face. The Palomar Arcade mural he (and his students) spent eight months painting was destroyed on the instructions of the manager of Monterey Savings and Loan. It took him years, he says, to feel the full pain of that rejection — and then recover from it.

But, in Hunnicutt's words, the artist must learn to balance the rejections with the successes, to dwell on the latter rather than the former. Carrillo has done that, and the fact that others have persisted is, by itself, a triumph of sorts. As Pawlak says (having arrived in town a year ago, knowing no one), "I feel successful just in the fact that I'm supporting myself playing my music."

It is interesting to note that all the artists interviewed say they feel basically successful. They are willing to acknowledge the limitations of their success, but view themselves as successful nonetheless. Almost all relate success directly to their crafts — the continuing pursuit and the advances made in that pursuit. "My job, basically, is to work as hard as I can to develop my skills, my talents and my thought processs to their greatest potential," is how Primack puts it. Just as rejection is balanced by success, pride in success is balanced, for most, by a respect for its limitations.

"Something about designing or painting or drawing is that you can do them for your whole life and never even really feel that you've scratched the surface," says Britton. "There's an element of frustration in realizing you'll probably never be as good as some people. But it's still very enjoyable, and you have the opportunity to just keep getting better."

Beagle says, "I no longer feel I can write everything. You see that thing you want to get down on paper and it won't go down on paper. You can't do it. That's all there is to it."

At best, there is a precarious equipoise in all this, with the artist's ego in the balance. It is that delicate balance that can make artists "difficult" for those who live with and around them. When the balance is tipped, sometimes their relationships grow tumultuous. On the other hand, relationships can help stabilize the balance, secure the scale.

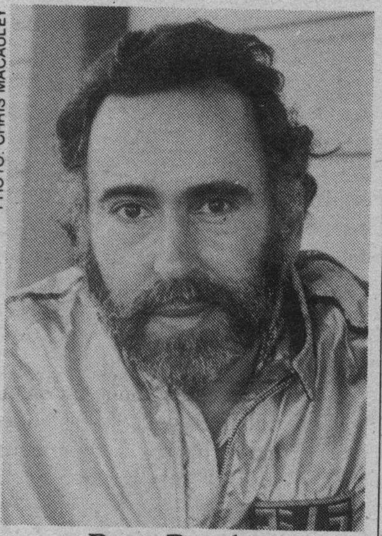


PHOTO: CHRIS MACAULEY

Peter Beagle

"I've had terrible times with relationships, wanting to be a normal person, and at the same time being very resistant to giving up my creative station and sharing space," says Phil Collins. Britton, who has been divorced twice, says, "I've had a number of relationships that were really important to me fall apart with most of the negative credit going to working too much — being too involved with my work. I had a good friend of mine say, 'Dennis, being with you is a lot like being alone.'"

One of the problems, Britton explains, is that architecture is such an intense part of his life and such a strong team effort, "that it's very hard to find that in your personal life...I mean in your life after work."

Carrillo feels self-absorption is necessary to an artist. "You have to be passionate about what you're doing," he says, adding it is also important to be aware of one's egocentricity. "I would be more self-absorbed than I am — I could go into the studio and spend days there. But my family doesn't let me. The community, I think, keeps you balanced...for your own good."

PHOTO: DON FUKUDA

Eduardo Carrillo & daughter Juliette

The conflict between the bulging ego that may be required to make art and the world in which that ego can seem a trifle overweight may not be insoluble. Artistic goals that bring the craft into a larger perspective seem to help some artists strike a balance. "My passion" says Ellis, "is not for art as much, but for spiritual ideals that try to change the world — to make a world filled with less cruelty. And the art is the means I choose towards doing that." Says Collins: "I can't see doing anything that is not either a message of worldwide harmony or love, or something positive or political." Garvy and Bessie want to make films that will teach people that they can change their lives, and Spangler has similar hopes for his photographs. Mackey publishes a literary magazine (*Hambone*) to provide a voice for the literary community at large. Carrillo sees the painting of murals as something he contributes to the community. "It's the job of the muralist partially to educate, partially to cure — not just the artist himself, but society."

Does this mean artists are all selfless humanitarians? If one is left with that impression, it must certainly be the result of that sleight of hand for which artists are notorious and which is their stock-in-trade. Beagle warns us to be wary: "I suppose artists are by nature self-absorbed, but the degree matters a great deal. There are artists for whom nothing else exists. I don't think I'm like that. I'm capable of being very egocentric at the same time that I'm telling myself that I'm not. And that's probably my oldest trick. I know artists who are absolutely impossible and monstrous, while I can pass myself off these days as not only normal, but positively cuddly, and yet I'll be doing exactly the same thing as they are."

The Quasimodo Complex

Many artists recall having felt "different" or "alienated" from an early age. I never thought of myself as alienated, just weird," says Beagle, "because the whole block had told me I was. I've always had a tendency to withdraw, to live in my head where it's quiet and I can sort things out. There's physical, obvious alienation; then there's that strange 'going away.' 'Going away' is comforting yourself. I used to hide under the stairs and tell myself stories, which I'm still doing."

Others had very different experiences. Although Stroud spent a great deal of time alone — time he "cherished very much" — he was a star athlete and very popular in high school. Mackey was also an athlete and grew up with a "most likely to succeed image."

"In high school I always felt like I didn't belong," remembers Carrillo. "As soon as I went to UCLA, I found people that seemed like I was meant to know them. There was a lot of comraderie. It was a great time for me." Others had similar experiences. Whether [or not] they felt isolated in high school, for many there was a new sense of belonging in college. They became members of a community of artists — at least temporarily, that is. For it is one thing to be a student artist; it is quite another to be an artist "period." In Nutzle's words: "Academics is where it starts, but that's not where it stops. You graduate from school; you say goodbye and get into yourself."

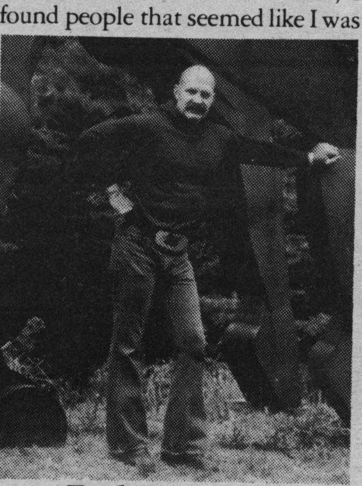


PHOTO: DON FUKUDA

Fred Hunnicutt

Artists are not unique in having to relinquish a sense of community upon graduation, but there are several ways in which the experience can be particularly difficult for them. "If you want to talk about the loneliness that artists face, it's probably that insecurity of wondering if they're making the right decision to be an artist," Buckminster suggests. "Approaching a type of work like this, especially one without an orderly plan of progress — there's no blueprint for it and you can never repeat the careers of the people you admire or watch. No one's career can be duplicated."

"An artist has to have something to say. There's this problem of going from high school to college, from college to an art form and not really giving themselves the opportunity to have something individual to say — to have the experience. You see at art schools people who go out and just throw themselves into the weirdest situations because they feel they need to accrue, like college credits, a number of diseases, injuries, arrests, drug habits or whatever to be able to function as a world-wise artist."

There is an important paradox here. The making of art usually separates the artist from the world. But the raw material from which it is fashioned is to be found "out there," not in the studio. While Nutzle speaks of "getting into yourself," he also hastens to add, "I'm inspired by the outside. I'm not the kind of artist who goes home and stares at the wall and comes up with an idea. I might get an idea driving down the street and seeing something happen."

Although the process of creating a work of art takes an artist out of the world, it doesn't necessarily require solitude. Many of the arts involve a group effort of one sort or another. The filmmakers, photographers, and architects almost always work with others at least some of the time. Mumma and Collins have both collaborated on theatrical productions (Mumma has also worked extensively in film), and both composers also perform music. Therese Adams spent six months choreographing a recent work, after which, she says, "I have all that behind me, and now it's a group process." Even in sculpture, Murray explains, "Many times you need somebody else to hold the other end of the stick, or you have to get technical information, or get somebody to apply technical stuff to your work."

Painters and writers (and composers who don't collaborate or perform) are probably the most likely to feel isolated. "When I'm painting," says Ellis, "I'm just home all day long. I go stir crazy after a while. I feel like I could easily become totally involved in my work to the point that it's hard for me to carry on a normal conversation." Beagle speaks of that same tendency to withdraw.

On the other hand, Mackey suggests, "The solitude of the artist is populated by people who are not necessarily there. A lot of dead people, for example — people I've never met, people who are in a certain sense absences, but who are curiously presences in my life: musicians, sculptors, painters, philosphers, people I read."

Mumma and others suggest artists are *less* lonely than others because they find solace and companionship in the company of their work. In that sense art can be, in Stroud's words, "a strategem against loneliness."

Stroud also sees a way in which art brings the artist into *closer* contact with the world. "I don't live to write poetry," he maintains. "I write poetry to help me live. I think the function of art is to enlarge our lives, enlarge our understanding, sharpen our perception, our awareness of who we are and the nature of what it is to be human and alive. I think that art is a means into the world, not out of it."

In any case art may begin in solitude, but if all goes well it doesn't end there. All of these artists feel it important that their work find an audience, and all feel it is valuable for them to have a small network of peers — often other artists — to whom they can show their work and receive honest, informed criticism.

Artists may detach themselves from the world in order to create, but the hope is that a temporary detachment will create a new bond between artist and world in the form of the work of art. Through painting, Buckminster says, "I'm sharing something about life with other people." Mackey believes, "Most writers are thirsting after community, thirsting after contact. That's one of the reasons they write. They're not basking in solitude. Solitude is a condition of getting the work done."

Carrillo sees an important motivation for artists in "the desire to be accepted and loved. It's probably stronger in the artist than in other people," he says. "The worst thing for an artist is to be ignored."

"Everybody feels lonely at times," says Pawlak. "I don't think artists are necessarily any more lonely than anybody else." Mackey agrees and adds, "Work has a solitary component in most fields of endeavor. In the case of a lot of art, that condition becomes the subject matter of the art. You'll have painters or sculptors title their work 'Solitude Study #2.' That's different from a shoemaker who works alone in his shop for years but doesn't advertise the fact. You're not wearing the 'Solitude Sandal.'" ☐

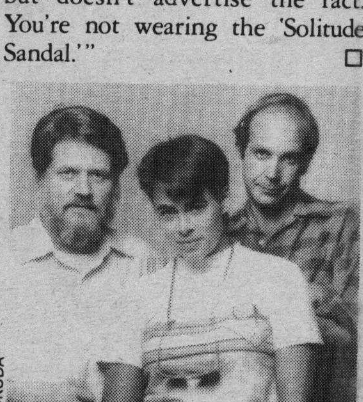


PHOTO: DON FUKUDA

Gordon Mumma, Lisa Pawlak & Phil Collins