**Van Gogh**

What you think or believe is of no consequence, the only consequence is what you do. If you are hungry, to satisfy your hunger you must take some kind of action. You have to make something to eat or go to a restaurant. You cannot just sit there and expect your hunger to disappear. In order to have a chair, you have to go to the furniture store and buy one or go down to your workshop and make one. You cannot simply wish to have a chair. You have to take some kind of action. Similarly, you cannot wish to be creative. You have to act.

Vincent van Gogh is considered to be one of history’s greatest artists and his art had a far-reaching influence on 20th-century art. His artistic accomplishments are not an accident, not a result of some easy magic trick or secret, but a consequence of his nature to work persistently on his art every day. He revered “the doing” in art. He wrote about his hard work many times to his brother Theo. In a letter he sent Theo in 1885, he stated that one can only improve by working on your art, and many people are more remarkably clever and talented than him, but what use is it if they do not work at it.

He did not begin painting until his late twenties, completing many of his best-known works during the last two years of his life. In the first years of his career, van Gogh displayed no natural talent. David Sweetman’s biography “Van Gogh: His Life and His Art” gives a detailed description of his intention to be an artist and his insatiable capacity for hard work to become one. He turned himself into an artist by acting like an artist and going through the motions by turning out mostly bad innumerable rough sketches, day and night. In Van Gogh’s own words he said, “In spite of everything I shall rise again and take up my pencil and draw and draw.”

His advice was if you do nothing, you are nothing. You must keep working and keep working come what may. Even when your final goal is not clear, the goal will become clearer and will emerge slowly but surely, much as the rough drawing turns into a sketch, and the sketch into a painting through the serious work done on it and through the elaboration of the original vague idea and through the consolidation of your fleeting and passing thoughts on it as you work. In the end, Van Gogh produced 2000 works of art between 1880 and 1890 (1100 paintings and 900 sketches). That’s 4 works of art a week for a decade.

**Dali**

 In the history of art, most people could easily argue that Salvador Dalí is the father of surrealistic art. Surrealism is the art of writing or painting unreal or unpredictable works of art using the images or words from an imaginary world. Dali’s art is the definition of surrealism. Throughout his art he clearly elaborates on juxtaposition (putting similar images near each other), the disposition (changing the shape of an object), and morphing of objects, ranging from melted objects dripping, to crutches holding distorted figures, to women with a heads of bouquets of flowers.

Dali was intrigued with the images which occur at the boundary between sleeping and waking. They can occur when people are falling asleep, or when they are starting to wake up, and they tend to be extremely vivid, colorful and bizarre. His favorite technique is that he would put a tin plate on the floor and then sit by a chair beside it, holding a spoon over the plate. He would then totally relax his body; sometimes he would begin to fall asleep. The moment that he began to doze the spoon would slip from his fingers and clang on the plate, immediately waking him to capture the surreal images.

The extraordinary images seem to appear from nowhere, but there is a logic. The unconscious is a living, moving stream of energy from which thoughts gradually rise to the conscious level and take on a definite form. Your unconscious is like a hydrant in the yard while your consciousness is like a faucet upstairs in the house. Once you know how to turn on the hydrant, a constant supply of images can flow freely from the faucet. These forms give rise to new thoughts as you interpret the strange conjunctions and chance combinations.

Surrealism is the stressing of subconscious or irrational significance of imagery, or in more simplistic terms, the use of dreamlike imagery. Dalí’s absurd imagination has him painting pictures of figures no person would even dream of creating.

**Da Vinci**

I first learned of this “connecting the unconnected” thinking process from Leonardo Da Vinci who wrote how he “connected the unconnected” to get his creative inspiration in his notebooks. He wrote about this strategy in a mirror-image reversed script “secret” handwriting which he taught himself. To read his handwriting, you have to use a mirror. It was his way of protecting his thinking strategy from prying eyes. He suggested that you will find inspiration for marvelous ideas if you look into the stains of walls, or ashes of a fire, or the shape of clouds or patterns in mud or in similar places. He would imagine seeing trees, battles, landscapes, figures with lively movements, etc., and then excite his mind by forcing connections between the subjects and events he imagined and his subject.

Da Vinci would even sometimes throw a paint-filled sponge against the wall and contemplate the stains. Once while thinking of new ways to transport people, he threw a paint-filled sponge against the wall which produced a scattering of irregular shapes. Trying to make sense out of the meaningless shapes, he imagined one group of shapes to resemble a rider on a horse. He perceived the bottom half of the horse’s feet as resembling two wheels. Thinking of a horse on wheels, then of a structure that resembles a horse on wheels, he realized people could be transported on two wheels and a frame that resembles a horse; hence, the bicycle which he invented.

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