

Artist Block or Visual Overload?



Although this article was originally written for polymer clay beginners, you may still find it of interest, regardless of preferred art medium.

Having a sketch book/journal to sketch or note ideas can be a crucial source for future inspiration and reference. I have one in my car, one beside my bed, and sometimes one is in my tote, and of course a stack always remains in my studio. I always take one with me when I travel. With over a dozen sketch books loaded with ideas for this and that project, I still have a tendency to forget about them. I think it may be partly due to an abundance of visual distractions. I call this "Visual Overload". I believe it has the power to influence our creativity far more than we may realize. While it's necessary to study further in order to accomplish your best; too much visual stimulation, especially in the creative arts, can actually have hinder one from further developing his or her unique style. Let me explain.

I first came across polymer clay (pc) in early 1990. It has come a long way since then. I remember when I saw it for the first time and how taken I was by the works of only a few professional pc artist during this era. I simply couldn't resist exploring the possibilities of it being incorporated into my art. Most information about this new medium was limited to a few brochures that accompanied the clay displays in the store. A few years later I was able to purchase a few books, although limited. A few popular pc websites began to appear. I couldn't wait to

absorb all of this new information. There was so much to see, so much to learn, so much to buy, and yes, there was so much to create. It was overwhelming, but in an exciting way that only we creatives can truly appreciate.

The pc newness eventually wore off and before I knew it, over a decade had passed since I had last played with clay. By 2008 I had some serious catching up to do. Polymer clay heaven once again. Round two, and with far more information and products flooding the market since the 90s. Between the books and how to tutorials, social media and websites with Q&A resources to galore, and now with an array of pc colors and specialized tools; the visual stimulation was refreshing.

I had collected and read every pc book you could think of, minus the ones for tots. I knew the clay jargon, the techniques, and saved the links to the best websites, and yet for some reason I wasn't creating works I could call my own. I knew how to manipulate the clay and loved what I had created, but I felt it wasn't really my own. As with anything in life, one must eventually explore his or her own path in order to discover that personal uniqueness that we in the art world refer to as artistic style.

Have you ever seen art so unique that it captured and held your attention? You loved it, and in the back of your mind wondered why you couldn't come up with something original. Even though this is especially true of the beginner, we have all done it at some point. The truth is, while it may appear natural for some artists; at least that's the myth; they actually have learned when to move on with newly acquired skills and knowledge. Even still, a well seasoned artist can occasionally experience artist block, depending on the type of distractions the artist may be experiencing. Visual overload can be one of the main reasons. There are a few methods to help defeat artist block and instead trigger what I call a "visual flash". A disciplined artist values the process and follows through by sketching or painting a study of the vision he or she has recently experienced. Some artists will even go so far as to create on the spot.

I believe visual overload may be one of several factors that links to artist block. Or at least it has a great affect on my creative process. There's nothing wrong with being influenced by other artists that you admire, or with learning techniques and

skills from another. You do however owe it to yourself the willingness to move forward and create your own mark. Learning when to move forward may be key to avoiding or overcoming visual overload, and even possibly avoiding artist block.

Discovering your own glory isn't always that easy. While there's a lot of visual stimulation that will inspire you, remember that too much of a good thing can also distract from discovering your own destiny. I'll admit that coming up with new ideas doesn't always just appear naturally. My visual flashes appear when they please, and are never as detailed as my finished work. But I also have ways of stimulating my creative muse to give them up if possible. When they do appear, I see them as a gift not to be wasted. They instinctively motivate and excite me so much that I can easily spend an entire day and most of the night in the studio.

Here are a few habits that help me experience a visual flash. Maybe this list will help you as well.

- ✚ For me, there is nothing like searching through my sketchbooks. Only I can see the creative possibilities behind those childlike scribbles.
- ✚ Sketch or doodle with no particular idea in mind. See where it takes you.
- ✚ I also refer to my photography for inspiration and reference material. They remind me of the emotional connection I experienced at the moment they were captured.
- ✚ Organize your creative space. Just handling paint and art materials puts me in creative mode.
- ✚ You can also try relaxing with some good music and a glass of wine or tea.
- ✚ Meditation helps surface repressed visions. A relaxed positive attitude can go a long way.
- ✚ Go biking or take a nice walk with your camera. Remember to get those close-ups too.
- ✚ Live a healthy lifestyle: Get plenty of rest, exercise, and healthy nutrition.
- ✚ Spend time laughing with those you love. Avoid other's drama if possible.

I enjoy researching and reading lots of art related material. It's a major part of what is required of me. Therefore, I have to stay aware of possible visual overload. Too much visual stimulation could easily led me off path. If you think

you may be experiencing visual overload, no matter how inspiring it may be at the time then take a break from the source. You can always go back to it later. Focus some attention on developing your composition and design skills, or studying other topics that may help further your creative success.

Do your best to avoid overexposing yourself with too much visual stimulation, especially when you are new to an art medium. Take your time. Polymer clay isn't going anywhere. Remember to always keep a sketch book handy. Make a habit of recording your ideas while still fresh in your mind.

Here are a few more tips to help inspire new ideas while learning about pc. Add to the list as you discover what works best for you.

- ✚ Look elsewhere in your everyday surroundings for ideas and textures. While there are endless texture surfaces available for purchase, unlimited free textures are all around you. Anywhere is game for the sake of art.
- ✚ Keep up with the trends for ideas and for what's in and what's out. This is especially worth doing if you have interest in designing and selling jewelry and accessories.
- ✚ Study how to apply what you have learned through composition and design elements. It's very important to expand beyond just knowing how to apply techniques. Your art will not succeed if it doesn't connect with the viewer both visually and emotionally.
- ✚ I'll say it again. Practice, practice, and then practice some more. Enjoy what you're doing. Depending on time invested, it can take years to become professional in a medium that stirs you. So explore, experiment, and create. The visions will follow as you develop your own unique style.
- ✚ Remember to be good to mind, body, and spirit. You deserve it. See the positive in all that you create. A mistake is a lesson that you have to experience to improve your skills. A negative attitude will only hold you back from discovering your unique style.

Explore! Experiment! Create!

C. F. Jernigan