

If you are addicted...

Living with an artist isn't easy, particularly if you are the significant other. So, after living with and working with artists for over 20 years I've put together a few suggestions for you to share with your partners. One of the first things most non-artists have a hard time understanding is the concept of addiction and how it is related to art making. Most artists I know go through classic symptoms of withdrawal when deprived of their work environment for too long. They get grouchy, irritable, may suffer from physical complaints such as headaches, body aches and often times find themselves depressed for no reason. These symptoms miraculously disappear when they are given the opportunity to work again. The primary reason for this is artists are wired differently than the rest of us. While most of us can get by with the basic elements of Maslow's theory, food, shelter, etc...artists need to be able to create as much as they need food or oxygen. It is so much a part of who they are, that to deprive them of it would be like asking you or I not to talk, not to eat, not to breathe. They have been given this gift in the same way we were given blue eyes or brown. Making art is not an option for them, it is a necessity.

Occasionally, I will get an artist who asks me to tell them my opinion of their work. It is a question I try to discourage. Unless you are asking an art critic or an art historian, most people are not qualified to comment on the aesthetic value of the work. Galleries may be able to comment on the marketability of the work, collectors may be able to say if they like it. But, mature artists shouldn't pursue seeking an opinion of their work. Your work is your work, period. Someone will either like it or they won't. Nothing you say or do can change that. Now, you may be able to convince someone to buy it, but, in regards to liking it, it is a primal reflex based on the accumulated history of that person's visual information and experience. So what does it *really* mean when someone doesn't like your work. It means one person doesn't like your work. That's all it means. It doesn't mean you are a bad artist or a bad person or should stop making art (as if that was really an option). In almost all cases, when an artist asks what you think of their work, they are asking to connect with that person by sharing an intimate part of themselves. Realize that when an artist asks what you think of their work, they hear the answer as it relates to them, personally. It is a vulnerability that mature artists struggle hard to overcome.

The concept of "working" was a hard one for me to understand. Often times I'd go into my husband's studio and see him sitting on the couch with the television on or listening to the radio...staring at his paintings. I'd been at my office all day, talking on the phone or busy with clients. This was not my idea of "work." It wasn't until I really understood the process of making a painting that I realized how much of the work is in just

looking...thinking...imagining what it would be like to do this or that. Mental activity that to the lay person looks like relaxation. I could accept the fact that slathering paint around was work...but, sitting and staring, that was hard for me. What I came to learn was that the "looking," is the hardest part. It was kind of like hearing about the way Mozart wrote music. He wouldn't write anything down until he could hear it all in his head first, then he would write it out perfectly in a matter of minutes.

Contrary to the common stereotype of artists as slackers, artists are incredibly industrious and hard working. In most cases, regardless of what they do for a living, they are working on their obsession 24/7. Acknowledging this, can help tremendously in understanding an important aspect of an artists' character...and saving a relationship.