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Play from the Heart: Five Notes on Creativity **by Bryan Furuness**

So you're a writer. Or maybe a rapper. Or a lady who carves the likeness of famous poets into gourds. Or a guy who is making the World's Largest Map Entirely Out of Sparklers. Whatever. My point is this: you make things. And making any thing—from a rap anthem to Alfred Gourd Tennyson—is a creative act. Therefore, you are a creator.

If you're anything like me—and for the first four notes, I'm going to pretend that you are—this act brings you both joy and consternation. You'd like to increase the joy-to-consternation ratio, and you'd like to make better things.

Yes?

Here's how:

1. Stop playing it safe. Society is designed to grind down your rough edges. It wants to make you smaller, safer, less...problematic. And hey, let me be the first to say, Thank God. I have no urge to live in the Thunderdome.

So go ahead and be careful and considerate in real life, but when you go to the page, or the canvas, or the pumpkin patch with your scrimshaw kit, that's when you have to Get Big. Open your head and let out the weird. Make the thing you're afraid to make. Err on the side of awesome.¹

Oh, but Bryan, I'm worried that my family/co-workers will think I'm a freak.

They're not thinking about you, son. Those people have their own problems and, frankly, you're not that important. Unless you fire up your sparkler-map on their front lawn, they probably won't even notice what you've made.

But the weird stuff that's in my head—who would want it? It's not like other stuff that's in the world already.

Do you have any idea how much I read, looking and praying for some spark of originality? Some new way of seeing the world, some new way of playing with language? I'm not the only one. Billions of people are looking for that spark. If you've got it, who are you to hide it? Get out of the way. Get out of your own damn way.

2. Work at the intersection of Joy and Urgency. All the time I have conversations with writers who are hemming and hawing about what to work on. "I should work on X," they'll say, and follow this statement with five or six rational, strategic reasons. X is hot right now. X is what the market wants. My agent wants me to do more X.

But when I ask them what they really want to work on, the answer is almost never X.

The rational mind is great at making business decisions, but it's a shitty crucible for making art.

You can push through the project, but by the time you finish, the trend for X will have probably passed. Or you'll have made a bloodless clone. And even if your X is good and still trendy, making it probably felt like drudge work. Your joy/consternation ratio was totally upside down.

Fuck trends. Fuck the market, because it will surely fuck you if it gets half a chance. What do you feel compelled to make? What thing, while making it, causes you to think, If anyone sees this now, they'll think I lost my mind? What would you make if you knew no one was ever going to see it?

Do that.

3. Make a hole. You say, This all sounds great, Bryan. I'll write/rap/decoupage when I have time. Someday.

You will never have time. You will always need to make time. Make a hole in your life. I'm talking about a regular time when you do nothing but make your things, and a place where you show up to make those things. Schedule it, commit to it, and defend it against all usurpers.

Here is the belief about art that I cleave to when all other beliefs have fallen away: If I keep showing up and putting in the time, something good will eventually come out of me.

4. Don't be precious about your hole. Some people (read: me) get all fussy if the hole isn't quite right. If they don't get in their full allotment of time. If they don't have the "right" notebook. If someone is sitting in "their" seat at the coffeeshop.

These people do a great job of getting in their own way. Mostly what they end up making is excuses.

Remember: the routine serves you; you don't serve the routine.

If the conditions aren't ideal, adapt. Can't write for an hour on Monday like normal? Sneak fifteen minutes in the office bathroom.² A little is better than nothing. A little is still progress.

Can't do anything at all? Just let your mind be fallow. It'll be okay. Maybe even better in the long run, because you'll come back to your hole all fresh and charged up.

5. Make your own Notes on Creativity. So you've probably figured out that I'm really talking to myself. These commandments are my Notes to Self, reminders about what works for me. One or two of them might work for you—I hope they do!—but the real value won't come from following someone else's path; it will come when you discover what works for you. Make your own Rules for Making.

Then get back to your hole. That lawn isn't going to cover itself in sparklers.

¹ I mean this in the old-school sense of the word. Like in Romantic poems, when the sight of a mountain would fill the poet with wonder while making him wet himself in terror.

² Executive washroom is best. Silver medal goes to handicapped stall.