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*The previous article in this series discussed commitment, hard work, mastery of one's craft, and defining a personal vision--all of which represent the serious part of the process of being an artist. This article considers a "lighter" side of making art.*

Children are artists with a spontaneous creativity untouched by the prejudices we learn as we grow up. A frequent topic of discussion among artists, the question arises, should the artist seek to undo or suppress the corruptions introduced by being a responsible adult in society? Or are those acquired ideas as important to the creation of art as the workings of the inner child? In other words, should an artist become his/her inner child while s/he is making art?

I believe the conflict between adult responsibilities and childish freedom to be a never-ending and constantly changing influence within each individual artist. In one breath, an artist might abandon the self-imposed guidelines of adulthood, while in the next, s/he might consciously or unconsciously apply them with intense diligence. Artists must be true to their inner selves. However, the self is a combination of what we were born with and what we experience. Perhaps these attributes are not mutually exclusive and, in fact, are simply parts of the whole person. This being the case, they may appear either separately or together in art.

There is no doubt that both innocence and spontaneity are necessary to the process at one point or another. Moreover, they seem to be more difficult to come by as we get older, although they're the reason we started taking photographs in the beginning. Wasn't it in an unexpected and happy moment of visual discovery that you snapped your first creative photograph? Did your heart give a little leap of excitement when your picture magically appeared in the developing tray or opened on your computer screen? Aren't those experiences just plain fun? How and why did they happen, and how can you keep them happening as you immerse yourself in the art of photography?

Sometimes, we become so wrapped up in process and work that we forget to play. I remember one particular day when I was taking my photography and myself very seriously, and a good friend came to my rescue. Several people had told me that the next step was to put together a body of work, develop multiple series, and start pursuing venues for showing. I walked into the studio where I worked and was faced with a solid wall of art books--a wonderful library, but suddenly I was completely overwhelmed by the challenge of becoming a photographic artist. In a state of numbness with no desire whatsoever to take photographs of anything, I shared my feelings with an inspired artist and fine photographer. He turned to me and said, "Maybe you should just go back to having fun taking pictures. Go play." I followed his advice, and gradually my desire to take photographs returned. It took a long time and the fear factor still lingers in the back of my mind--fear of all the work required, fear that no one will respond to my images, fear that if I become too serious again, I'll lose another block of time.

Fear in all its various incarnations plus lack of spontaneity keep artists from working in the "zone." When you enter the zone, you lose your self-consciousness and forget your hang-ups about equipment and technique. You eliminate your pre-conceived ideas and completely connect to the moment of photographing. For painters, the zone offers a sense of flow, an energy that is released on canvas or paper through their use of color and texture. For photographers, the camera is no longer a barrier or a voyeuristic tool. We forget it's there and simply move into a sense of participation and communication. However, your sense of communication will not be reflected in your images unless you have sufficient technical expertise to express it--the same sort of failure a painter will suffer if s/he doesn't understand how to use color and brush. But the real key to the "zone" is the delight of release--just letting the photograph happen!

To find that release, play is essential. Do you remember how? Must we teach ourselves to play? Perhaps. One of the most important steps in playing is to get rid of labels and other formal definitions. Stop calling yourself a "photographer." Definitely stop calling yourself a "landscape photographer," a "portrait photographer," or a "street photographer." Free yourself to be only someone who loves to take pictures, someone who wants to share his/her perceptions just "because"--not necessarily to sell or to satisfy a curator or even to make a political statement. No one tells you what kind of photographer to be. You're the one who makes the choice to shoot in a certain way. After you do, people will look at what you do and attempt to assign you a category--or two, if you're lucky. Playing with your work allows you the freedom to challenge their paradigm--along with your own--about what kind of artist you are. Don't allow yourself to become pigeonholed.

Experimentation is fun and opens doors. If you shoot black-and-white, try color. If you always make 8x10 prints, try a 2x2. If you shoot in the studio, leave for a while. You might quickly choose to return to your preferred process--after all, you prefer it for a reason. But what can happen is that you'll bring new perspectives back with you. If you've already experimented technically, experiment with ideas. Change something; step out of familiar routines. It's really easy and fun to experiment when you aren't expected to know what you're doing. Sometimes people are afraid to say those magic words "I don't know" followed by questions that open opportunities for learning. You don't have to know it all to be a good person or a passionate artist. We don't expect children to have answers; we expect them to have questions. It's a wonderful moment when you ask a question and discover an answer that enriches your life.

So, here's the fact: in life and art there are more questions than answers. That's a good thing. It's a dynamic way of being filled with frustration followed by questions, followed by answers and more questions. When an artist thinks s/he has all the answers, his or her life will become stagnant and her work will follow. In the end, unless you maintain a healthy combination of working and playing, being an adult and being a child, it's highly unlikely that you'll preserve the passion and persistence for making art. Laugh at yourself; laugh about your work. Admit to ignorance so that learning becomes possible. Life is short. Your art may survive you, but don't take it too seriously. Take a lesson from Picasso and other great artists: be a little silly sometimes and lighten up.

*The opinions of Marsea Wynne are her own. Working with Artists is a nonprofit art school featuring programs that offer artists and aspiring artists the opportunity to intensify their involvement in fine art photography. One of the most popular workshops "Defining a Personal Vision" with instructor Grant Leighton, starts May 3, 2004. You can reach Working with Artists at 303.837.1341 or online at [www.workingwithartists.org](http://www.workingwithartists.org)*