

A woman with blonde hair is sitting at a desk, working on a collage project. She is using a pair of scissors to cut out a piece of pink paper. On the desk, there is a green cutting mat, a pair of scissors, and various pieces of paper and fabric. In the background, there is a wooden shelf with some books and a red chair.

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO:

FOSTERING

AGENCY

CREATING CONSISTENT

ACTION

AND FINDING AN

AUDIENCE

FOR YOUR ARTWORK

ARTIST TOME

BY:

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INTRODUCTION

I am an artist, making a story about my skin. Skin is my muse, and has been inspiring me to make art for the last 13 years. It all started with a skin condition, some kelp, and a few doodles. The rest is history, and now I'm sharing my story with you in hopes that it will help you find your path to art as well.



Flora, c-print, 20 x 24 inches, 2006

Skin to me is a source of inspiration and joy, as well as expression. But it hasn't always been this way—for years I struggled with my skin's sensitivity, ashamed and embarrassed of it. You see, I have a condition called dermatographia (which means 'skin writing'). Due to this, if my skin is lightly scratched, I get huge, temporary welts that flare up and turn red, but are painless. It also means that my face blushes easily, and I have to be very careful of touching my skin, otherwise I might look like I got into a fight with a raccoon.

Back in 2004 I had recently started school at the University of Washington in Seattle. My artwork was about organic textures and surfaces that reminded me of the human body. One thing I love about Seattle is its proximity to the ocean. There is some beautiful kelp around there! The kelp I found in Seattle has strange shades of pink, red, and brown that remind me of skin. With my interest in organic material and skin, this seemed like the perfect thing to photograph. So I took some home, and staged it around the house for photos, like this one.



Kelp in Sink, traditional color print, 2004

While I was doing this, I scratched my knee a little bit. Of course, welts appeared about 5 minutes after the scratch, and I noticed how similar they looked to the texture of the kelp. Since I already had my camera out, I started to

photograph my leg instead, making intentional patterns on my skin for the camera.

A week later I had my classmates and professors in my studio for a critique. The kelp photos were up, and those skin photos were on my desk. Rather than talking about the kelp photos that I thought were going to be the subject of the critique, everyone was drawn to the skin photos instead. People were so curious about how I made them, and what it was that I had, and if it hurt, and all the things I always get asked. Nobody even cared about the kelp photos, they were totally into the dermatographia stuff! At that time I didn't know what I had was a thing with a name, nor did I think photographing my skin would become my art. But with the encouragement of my peers and dedication to my practice, I built a life of art with my skin.

Dermatographia has been the source of my work ever since, and has led me to a community of people all over the world who also have this condition. Dermatographia also inspired me to write this book about creativity, inspiration, and skin...to share what I've learned over the years as a working artist on a unique path. This path hasn't always been easy, but it sure has been rewarding. I have my skin to thank for that.

This book is broken up into sections, one for each of the 3 A's of creating: **Agency, Action,** and **Audience.**

It takes dedication, Agency, to maintain a creative practice, to find space in your busy life to build a place to work and spend time in it regularly. We will call this place your studio. Once you get yourself to the studio, it's all about what you do in there, the Action taking place. Taking Action brings beautiful things to life, and these things need to be seen by your Audience. Your work transforms once it's viewed, and goes on to live with the viewer.



Playing around with photographs in the studio, 2012

Within each section are exercises to help illustrate the concepts I discuss, and I encourage you to spend time doing each and every one of them. Have fun, and you will get a lot more out of the process ;^)

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ACTION

Creating Your Space:

Staying Inspired And Facing Your Fears In Order To
Create A Consistent Process

ACTION

All right, you showed up! Now, what do you do in the studio? Make things. Take action. Clean, organize, shuffle papers and old artwork, play. Whatever you have to do in that space, just be in action. Thinking is required for making, sure. But when thoughts just stay in your head, they don't *really* exist. Externalize those thoughts—write, sketch, draw, paint, or photograph—make them exist, make them known. While in action, your ideas are developing a life of their own and thus spawn new ideas. You're creating a family of work in your studio—a beautiful family that's a full on reflection of you.

Don't censor yourself while making these things because you can always edit later. No matter how silly or weird it may seem, everything you're doing is generating energy toward self-expression. One thing leads to another, so honor what comes out. Let the process guide you.

I was just talking with a fellow artist the other day about some of the anxiety that happens in the studio. One day, we'll feel super excited and inspired by what we're working on. Then, the next day we show up to the studio and hate everything we've been making that week. We oscillate between fear and love, anxiety and excitement, but no matter what, we always keep taking action. Feelings about the work change from day to day, but that just means we have to keep up the work.

IDEAS:

Let ideas come. Don't question them, theorize, or dissect them.

Welcome ideas, and be open to trying new methods and techniques that you hadn't thought of before. Don't judge anything that comes when you're brainstorming—you can sort it out later. When writing and making, remember you can always edit later. Trust your spontaneous inspiration, and show up in the studio and for journaling so the ideas have a place to go. The worst thing you

can do is to over think something before you've even given it a chance. If I had been too shy or embarrassed to show people my dermatographia doodle photographs, I never would've found the support and courage to continue exploring that direction. We are our own worst critics—let that go because it prevents the flow of inspiration and creation. Don't worry; someone will be around to criticize you eventually! Leave it to them.... but then, what others say about you is none of your business anyway ;-)

“AN IDEA THAT NEVER INCARNATES, THAT NEVER BECOMES PHYSICAL AND GROUNDED IN THIS WORLD, WILL EVENTUALLY FEEL LIKE THE MOST PAINFUL BURDEN YOU EVER HAVE TO CARRY—ONE THAT YOU CAN NEVER PUT DOWN.”

–CAROLYN MYSS

Incarnate those ideas—make tangible, give birth to, what didn't previously exist. It's fun, so don't be too serious about it. Enjoy your creative process and relish how it flows out of you and lightens your load, once action is begun. Then, you can share your ideas with others so they don't burden you... they become gifts.

In order to make the world a more beautiful place, don't be afraid to put yourself forward. Spend time with your ideas and inspiration too. It's all about showing up, devoting time and energy to making. What does it mean to show up to/for something? It means you're there, you're present, and you're ready to create. The key is being present! You can't fake it. But, if you show up for studio time and feel distracted, don't let that discourage you. In this case, fake it till you make it.

Sometimes I get to the studio and am so antsy and distracted, I don't know what to do with myself. So I'll clean up, go through old notes, get organized, listen to inspiring and fun music, shuffle photographs around, or

whatever else I need to do to get in the mood. Then inspiration shows up, I get present to it, and awesome things manifest in that space. I definitely need to be committed to the space of creativity and making in order for that to happen.

Another thing that helps me is to dance around the studio to loosen up and get in the mood. Having a playful spirit in the studio is probably the most important and crucial thing I can do (besides showing up of course ;-)

EXERCISE:

Do a self-portrait series. This includes documenting your world in the media of your choice. It could be photography, painting, sculpture, writing, singing, performing, etc., just make something that reflects the core of who you are and your surroundings. It can be literal or vague, but push yourself to explore how you live your life and the ways you view yourself. Share ideas and thoughts about what's important to you. Be as specific as you like, and make as many iterations as you feel are necessary to express yourself and your world.

MAKING A SPACE FOR CREATIVITY = YOUR STUDIO:

After writing some thoughts in the studio it's sinking in that this is becoming a sacred space or creation, more and more each day. Not only creation of my art, but creation of myself, and all that I'm meant to be. There is no separation. All of me and all I do are one. The studio is a space not only for creation, but also for reflection, inspiration, release, love, and safety. I bring this sense of comfort with me in

everything I do, being authentic in the process. Authenticity trumps strategy any day of the week.

It's important to have a dedicated creative space to call your *studio*. It can be a shed, office, bedroom, desk, closet, couch, garage— or anywhere you have a space to call your own, anywhere you feel comfortable working. This way it's easier to develop a consistent studio practice because you make a sacred space for yourself to show up in.

Studio practice: show up! That's the number one rule. Do whatever it takes, but be there in that space of creation on a regular basis. Even if you just sit staring at the wall for 30 minutes before delving into a project (even cleaning your space can be a project), make yourself show up on time. Being present is the only way to get powerful things accomplished.

The studio should be aesthetically pleasing to you—make it reflect your tastes and style. Make it beautiful. Make it you. You want to enjoy spending time in that special space!



A shot of me in my studio, Los Angeles, CA, 2015

TYPICAL STUDIO DAY:

I always have coffee and/or water with me, plus snacks (because I get low blood sugar and crash if I'm not careful). I keep my notebook out to jot ideas anytime, and refer to what's already been written in previous studio days. Words come to mind as I'm working on ideas, and I look up the words in my computer dictionary. Words inspire me, and so do their meanings (which I like to twist and play with, applying words and meanings unconventionally). Titles come to me as I work on each piece. I write it all down, and sit with it.

The work is having a conversation with me, which will then translate to the viewer. I listen to what my work has to say, take note of it, learn from it, give it space to grow and blossom.

There's no internet at the studio, and that helps me stay focused. I'm usually working on a few things at once, so there's always something to do. I play music, dance around a bit, tidy up if needed, and work! I document the work as I go along (usually with my phone camera), just to have a record of the process and stages of a piece. It's a very playful vibe up in here ;-)

//JOURNAL ENTRY FROM A DAY AT THE STUDIO//

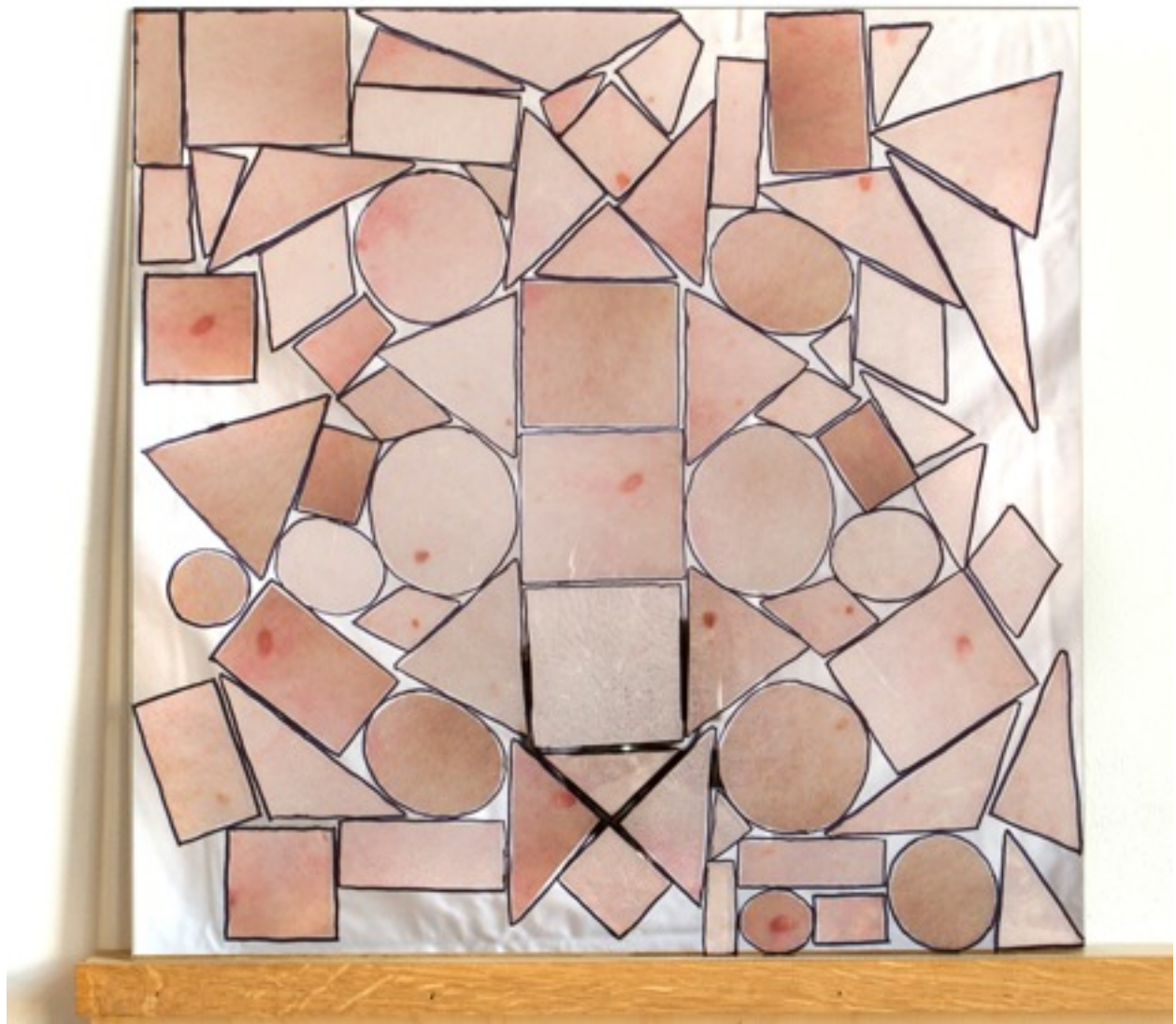
September 17, 2014

Today I got a lot accomplished. I made (well, started) a new collage of temporary tattoos on mirror. In order to use the tattoos, they need to be placed on my skin first. So I cut them into shapes, put them on my skin, then peel them and place them on the mirror, one by one. As I was making the piece, I thought of how much of my DNA is on this mirror!

This process is an engrossing one, so most other things slip away. I'm anxious to complete the piece, but there just isn't enough time. Perhaps I rushed myself a bit because of that anxiousness. I like how it looks so far though. I'm also thinking about who will buy it. It's a nice object, and I want someone to enjoy it in their space like I enjoy it in mine.

The collage is just a bunch of shapes put together, and I work intuitively—certain parts will be mapped out at a time, but I put it together as I go.

Each shape is then outlined with black Sharpie to give definition to the forms. I work slowly and smoothly to get straight lines as I trace each shape. The overall look is that of a stained glass window—I'm thinking about skin as a window to the soul...



The other stuff I'm working on is making inkjet transfers on paper. To do this, I lay the printed sheet in a tray of water, careful not to distort the ink too much. Then I place the wet transfer onto paper and manipulate it into a form, while moving the ink around a bit (the ink becomes runny once the sheet gets wet). These are fun to make—it's like a cross between a photograph and a watercolor painting. The ink takes awhile to dry so I play with it, moving it around on the paper. And today I made a drip from the ink. There's definitely some action happening in these pieces—they are visceral and full of motion.



I think that these inkjet transfer pieces really epitomize my intuitive process. To some extent the paper and ink can be directed, but a lot of it is left to chance/serendipity, and sometimes that means I make a mistake. Sometimes mistakes need to be made, to learn from. And

sometimes mistakes need to be made... in order to be used. I'm pleased with the results of this dual nature of my process.

As I was looking at the transfer pieces I realized that the material is mimicking how I was manipulating some temporary tattoos a year or so ago—distorting the figure and making it more abstract, giving it a different sort of life. There are many paths taken and explored, but the starting point is always me, my body, skin, and viscera. These are the channels of experience.

CREATIVITY

Feeding the Growing Need for Expression

Creativity brings out different parts that need to be addressed and acknowledged. It keeps me excited! It keeps me in touch with myself, and my place in the world. Creating is an outlet for love and understanding, growing and learning, because it forces us to externalize our innermost parts. Don't stay hidden! Creativity brings forth expression—show the world your love and beauty, even if it makes you feel vulnerable. Each and every one of us has a unique message to share, and we are all leaders and lovers. Often the thing that makes us the most vulnerable is the thing that makes us the most powerful. Vulnerability and power go hand in hand.

It's important to exercise your imagination and build the muscles of creativity. By doing this, you're cultivating nourishment and inspiration for your self-expression, like growing a garden. It takes time and space to do this, but

it can happen anytime, anywhere. For example, even If you live in a big city, but need nature, you can pepper your apartment with green plants, even though there's no backyard for a full size garden.

I find it helpful to think about the studio as a plot of land. Tend to that space of making, get creative about feeding the need of your soul to express itself and be fed with inspiration. Pepper your life with ideas that grow, and make space for them to flourish.



Dreamy succulents that I saw at *Huntington Gardens* and want in my house!

EXERCISE:

Have you ever collaborated with someone on a project? Is there anyone you want to collaborate with? Get pushed out of your comfort zone and ask for help. This exercise forces you to give up control and leave some of the decisions to someone else.

Make a collaborative project. Work with anyone, your kids, a friend, family member, lover, coworker. Share ideas and thoughts about what's important to you, and choose something to work on together, equally.

Recently I did a collaboration with an artist that I've admired for years. She makes beautiful, intricate work that is all about the body and science, and I'm a huge fan. A couple years ago I sent her an email asking if she'd like to meet up for a studio visit. She said yes (even though she didn't know me), and we've since become friends.



Convergence, collaboration with Laura Splan, installation view, 2014

Laura and I decided to do a collaboration based on pattern, decoration, and skin. Together we came up with a damask design and put our interpretations of it together. Here's a photo of my version in the studio—I traced the pattern onto a photograph of skin and used an exacto knife to cut it out:



Working with someone else is a great way to learn how another works, their process and habits, and how they know when something is complete. I highly recommend the experience.

HOW TO FIND INSPIRATION

Write stuff down, make lists of things that matter to you. Journal. Play. When you're done playing, sit down and take notes about what you played.

Get out of the house/studio for a bit. Go for a walk, a swim, or both if you can. There's nothing like getting outside to get things moving.

Keeping a dream journal is always a great idea. I have had dreams of specific art pieces that I want to make, but then I make them and they never end up looking exactly like they do in the dream. It gets me playing around though, and I'll explore a new process or work with a different material after I've dreamt about it.

Still feeling stuck? Keep moving—make something, however small. Or clean your workspace. Go through your materials and organize them. Play with the things you have around you, whether or not they're designated art making materials.

I used to eat a lot of bell peppers—the yellow, red, and orange ones mainly. I always thought the seeds were cool looking, so I started saving them. One day while working in my studio, I started gluing those seeds to the wall in different patterns. I loved how the seeds looked on the wall, the depth and texture, and so I was inspired to glue other things on the wall as well.

This is how I came up with the idea to make wallpaper with photographs of skin:



I cut the photographs into shapes resembling the seeds, glued them to the wall, and eventually came up with the idea for Mantle. It all started by playing with pepper seeds, and eventually turned into a full wall installation at an art gallery in Lake Tahoe!



Mantle, photographs of skin on board, 2006

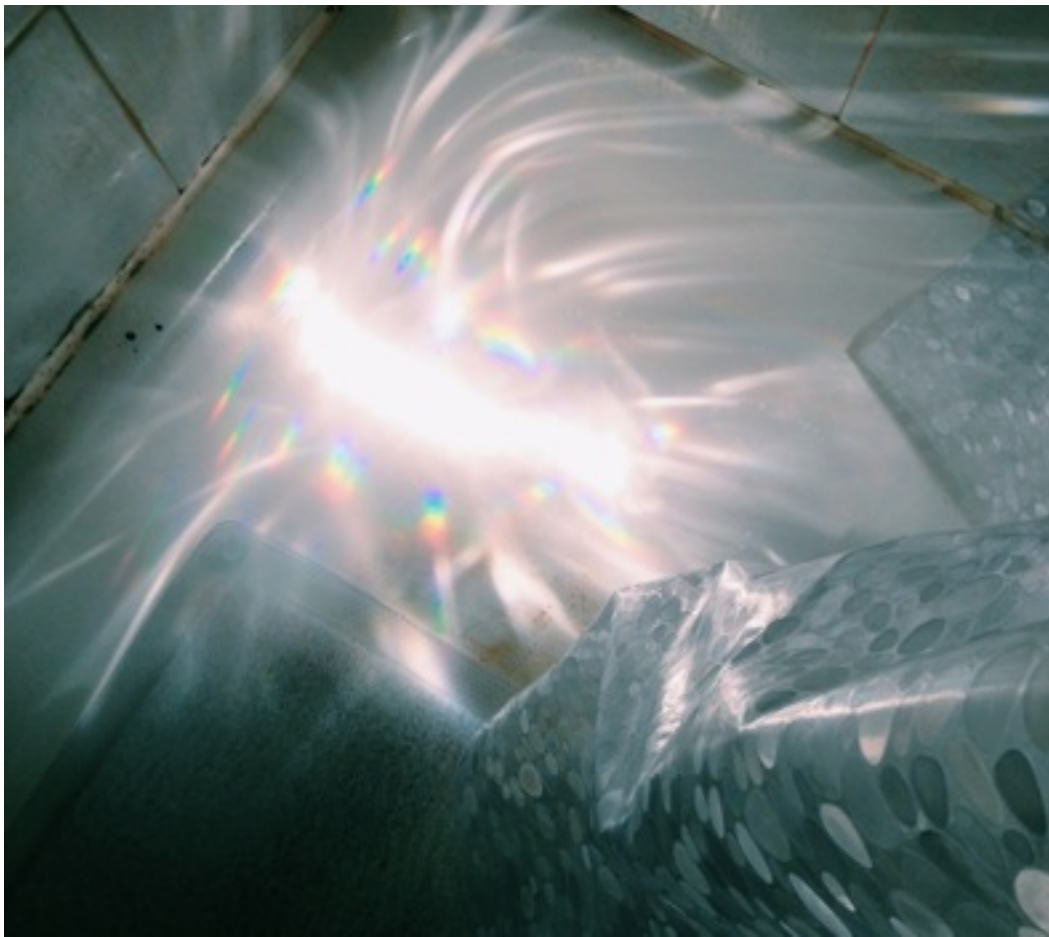
EXERCISE:

What objects and materials are you attracted to? Make a collage with twigs, seeds, spices, ribbon, fabric, or yarn—whatever you have lying around. The key is to feel free in this—don't think about who will see it or what anyone will think. You don't have to show anyone what you're working on! It's all about **EXPRESSION**. There are so many crazy things I've made that nobody (thankfully) will ever see, including those pepper seeds glued to the wall ;-)

Okay so you made a funky collage that maybe is for your eyes only... what came up for you in the making process? Did thoughts of the past or the future come up? Did you have ideas for other materials to use, people, or ideas for other things to make? Write about it all. Let it all come out...

THE LIGHT

Find the light and the dark in yourself. Light plays an important role in art—it illuminates things, brings focus and clarity, and shows the shape of objects and designs. The darkness is important too because it helps us notice the light more, and it gives contrast to what we see/experience in a work of art. Of course, this is true for your life as well. With dark and light, strengths and weaknesses, love and fear, we learn what makes us who we are. It's important to pay attention to all those aspects when being creative. Where are you stopped? Is there a light you could shine on it by becoming aware of the blockage? Most definitely! Write a story about your fear, frustration, whatever is stopping you from expressing yourself. If you can't find anything, make it up. Give life to your darkness and confusion, give it a name, and make it a character in your life. Then you can turn around and ask it for help. I really love the analogy of light, especially because I'm a photographer, and there is no photograph without light to expose the image.



Light shining through my shower curtain, making a prism worm in the bathtub

THE SHADOW

(Commonly known as fear)

There are two types of fear that come up in the studio: **the kind that's based in vulnerability, and the kind that's based in self-doubt.** The zing of something challenging that scares you is a sign you're doing the right thing. It's also excitement, a new sensation that will make you feel vulnerable because of how much you're putting on the line (the investment of your heart and soul!) Push past that fear and let yourself be known—you won't regret it.

Self-doubt fear is when you don't want to release something until it's 'perfect,' or you stop yourself in the midst of working through an idea and give up because you're worried about what people will think. That feels more like straight anxiety and a dispersal (rather than a focus) of energy. Work through it anyway, push past that fear too.

It takes faith to be an artist: believe in what you're doing. Keep the faith despite what anyone says. Working through your fear and doubt in the face of rejection is part of staying creative, it's part of being an artist. Just don't block the flow of ideas, and you're staying authentic in the studio. Sublimation and creation are needed to have a healthy, holistic psyche in which you honor your power and drive to create. Develop a new relationship to fear: it's just a voice in your head—work through it, past it, and acknowledge it. Some of the best things happen when I leave my comfort zone and feel that zing of fear and excitement—the good kind ;-)



Collage made from photographs, 2012

EXERCISE:

36 of One: document an object about the size of a bike or car. Choose something that is meaningful to you, make it interesting. You are going to document the entire object, inside and out, in 36 photos. The number 36 comes from film days—rolls come in 24 or 36 exposure. This gives you a limited number of photos to work with, so be intentional with each shot. You can use digital or film, it's up to you. Challenge yourself with a variety of angles, differing distances from your subject (close and far), and pay attention to everything inside the frame/space of the photo.

WANT MORE?

If you liked this chapter and are ready to go even deeper, head over to www.skintome.com for the complete Artist Tome. I promise it will be one the best investments you'll make in your art career.

If you'd like to work with me one-on-one for more detailed guidance on making powerful artwork and gaining an audience, I am available for consultations, studio visits (both in person in Los Angeles and virtual), and workshops. Email me at arianapage@gmail.com to find out about my rates and packages. Happy creating and thank you for showing your support!



Self-portrait with dermatographic hearts (made by lightly scratching my skin with cookie cutters), 2014