

The things I learned how to do during my first year of ONLY1JEY ART

1. Facing The Unexpected (another good reason to have savings and multiple side hustles)- When starting a business you never really know what unexpected events will take place during any year. I have a financial background and before I started my business in 2019, I had an emergency fund for the business saved up with enough to cover a years' worth of my expenses like rent and utilities. I would have never expected that in my first year of business our Country and around the world would be hit with a Pandemic of the COVID-19 Virus causing small businesses likes restaurants, bars, and other “nonessential” businesses to have to close their doors for what started as 2 weeks, but stretched on for a few months (what seems like forever). During the shutdown I was not burdened about how I was going to pay for my expenses because I took the steps to prepare for unexpected events and I had side hustles to fall back on.

I used the fearful time instead to first actively remain calm. I took the recommended precautions, but I rejected hosting the fearful ideas in my head because that's not how you grow in any situation. I had to look at life's positives. For me, it was a time I could use to work on my business planning, hone in on all my finances, do the things I never seemed to have time to do at home, and get more skillful in my artwork with no interruptions. The facts were my studio was closed to the public and I wasn't able to sell anything there, but that didn't mean I couldn't create art to sell or be working on getting more interest in commissions.

I was sad and somewhat emotional that I couldn't sell my work in a studio setting, but the shutdown was a time I could create new ideas and come up with new ways to move forward in my business. As an Artist it is literally my job to show viewers a different perspective and this time forced me to look at myself in a new perspective in return. I learned to focus on ONE project at a time because I wanted to get things done. I found that I was putting my attention into too many things at once and I felt like I wasn't growing in any of those creative ideas. Focusing on one project at a time helped me grow in those skills I used to finish that one project.

Advice for others starting out: Calculate your yearly expenses before going into business and have this amount saved so when a tragedy or unexpected emergency happens you are not worried about your business.

2. Pricing my work – This is difficult for all new artists and I found that true with even the most experienced artists. I struggle with how to price my art in different environments. I want my art to be accessible to all groups of people, not just be reserved for someone I may not even be able to relate to. As I establish myself more my prices will scale up, but for now I keep my smaller paintings on a reasonable pricing scale for the everyday customer and my much larger paintings are priced to compete with what I know I am worth in my time taken to create them. I need prices that extract sales to cover operating expenses and my pricing needs to be able to cover those costs in order for my business to stand long term. The US Department of Labor lists

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the average hourly wage for a Fine Artist as \$24.58. I keep this number in mind when setting the size prices to help estimate and cover all of my costs.

3. Planning everything out and writing down a solid business plan (goes hand and hand with pricing)- The majority of my business research concluded that when starting your own business, it is always wise to have a second source of income to offset expenses. It takes time to get into a rhythm of owning your own successful business and while you probably did a lot of research to get an idea about what kind of income you can make from your own business there is always that trial and error period that most definitely happens during your first year of learning the business.

I started my business before I had a business plan because the available studio space fell into my lap and I pounced on it before the opportunity was taken by someone else. My business plan wasn't finished until 8 months after I was in my space. Given I work at an accounting firm full time and I was able to get a sales tax license and form a business entity right before moving into my space on August 1st of 2019, but my solid business plan and structure formed from trial and error. I had another job to fall back on as I slowly figured out what I needed to do to become a successful artist in my community. Something that constantly takes energy in order to get my art out there. At times it was as simple as making sure to post some of my art on my social media platforms just to be seen in the eyes of the public and potential buyers. Other times it was the effort of finding events and business offices where I could display my work and promote my name.

4. Accessibility and getting my work out there- Having a studio located inside another business and on the 3rd floor has been a learning experience. For one, the establishment my studio was in would attract individuals that would enjoy that fine dining atmosphere. A fine dining experience can be intimidating for some people to begin with. Especially if the downtown market or laid back restaurant setting is more their style. Sometimes walking into an establishment makes people feel obligated to buy something even when their sole purpose was to just walk around the city to enjoy viewing art. Being on the 3rd floor of a building with no elevator has also reminded me how important it is to submit my work into shows at other 1st floor level venues. There are potential buyers that might not be able to walk up the stairs (in my case my Father will never be able to see my studio because he can't walk upstairs). In order to reach the viewership of those non-stair users it was very important to show elsewhere. During the summer months of the COVID-19 season I had the opportunity to display my work outside on the streets of York, PA and I was tickled with the interaction and response I received from passerbyers to stop and look at my art. This is something I didn't find as often upstairs in my studio space.

5. Developing my Personal Style- When I was in art school I found that I would draw, paint, and create the way I was told to by my Professors. I also found that I would get better grades if I researched the Art Professor's work and created my work that would mirror theirs.

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College was a great way to learn new techniques and information to develop my hand, but my own personal style is something I am working on even more so now that I am not in school. I was told by another local artist that I shouldn't worry so much about creating my own style. Instead, I should just keep creating new work and my style will just show through. This year has proven that my personal style is beginning to show through.

6. Struggling Talking about My Own Work – Because I was in retail sales for 7 years, I tended to fall back into a habit of being able to talk about others work vs my own. I sold things for a living, but it was for a larger company not myself. I struggled with being confident and comfortable to talk about my own work, so when people entered into my shared art studio, I would instantly begin by introducing my studio mates' work first even when she wasn't there. How I realized I did this was because of a few close friends and my significant other who pointed out this habit loop after my studio guest would leave. I had no idea I was doing it until my close network supporting me along my journey pointed it out. This learning experience is a two in one. I need to be confident in my own work and keep a good support system around. They go hand in hand for checks and balances.

7. Facing Debt- During my first year of business I had to make a decision. Did I want to continue working a 3rd job to cover expenses or could I take a leap and cut down to just my full-time job and add more time to my business? I had to do the math over and over again when it came to how I was going to be able to manage my debt. I came up with a plan to pay off my car within a time frame (and using a tax refund/Christmas bonus/windfall stimulus check with no big vacations this year) so I wouldn't have that burden hanging over me. I could manage just my full-time pay and focus more on my being an Artist if I didn't have a car loan to worry about. COVID-19 for me was a blessing in disguise because it cut out a lot of distractions and helped me focus on crushing debt.

Debt balances beginning of 8/1/19= Car Loan \$5,392.57 and Student Loan \$18,465.15. Debt Balances as of 8/1/20 (after 1 year in business) Car Loan Paid Off 3/18/2020 \$0.00 balance owed and Student Loan \$9,000.00 balance owed. It was a huge win and affirmation that staying focused pays off. I was raised that if I don't have the money, I don't spend money. The burden of debt creates more worry than just paying for what I need straight out of pocket and avoiding purchases of things I don't really use or could go without. After my first year in business and carefully following my plan I am so happy to be walking forward with a lighter pack and smaller burden of debt I plan to tackle quickly.

8. Everyone has a good idea, but not everybody's ideas align with what you want (or can afford) - I learned that I don't need to take everybody's advice. I have a vision for what I want my business to be and not everybody understood what that vision was. Opinions and information can be helpful when researching the market that your business is in, but I had to run my business the way that worked for me. I had to get comfortable with getting uncomfortable to put myself out there, but it was just me and I had to learn to say no to a few not so great offers

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because they were stretching me thin and taking my focus away from better offers. When I did seek out advice for my business I sought out Professionals and family mentors who had many successes of their own.

9. Inviting people to come into my studio anytime -Art is a way to release and express emotions. It can be an escape. Often art spaces draw in individuals who can in fact be emotional. I am a people pleaser and I have this crazy idea that I want to help everyone, but I soon realized I can't help everyone if I am not helping myself first. I invited friends and viewers to come into the studio anytime I was there. I soon found out that the time somehow would turn into a therapy session or prevent me from working on any of my art all together. I needed to have a better balance for time to focus on work as well as have visitors. I had to learn how to say no here as well and balance out time for myself to do what I loved first for my own mental health and for the sake of a successful business. You can't help anyone if they pull you down too. And You can't accomplish being a successful Artist if your time is being taken away from creating the art.

10. Say Thank You- Having the opportunity to be an Artist is a gift and it wouldn't be possible to be in business without people who purchase my work. I try not to take for granted how lucky I am when I get a commission and I feel like a big thank you goes a long way. Success for me is knowing I haven't given up on following my passion of being an Artist.