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As told to Grashina Gabelmann, 1565 words.

Tags: Art, Film, Process, Money, Collaboration, Identity, Day jobs.



On finding different ways to be creative

Conceptual artist abcde Flash discusses turning her personal explorations into art, only recently discovering that she is creative, and the value of a day job unrelated to your artistic work.

You had mentioned to me before that you used to believe that you aren't creative. Obviously you are. Can you tell me more about that?

It's an interesting topic. Even though I did not consider myself to be creative, feedback from friends would be that they consider me a creative person, and I never understood why because I didn't feel like I was creating anything. And it's only since I've been making films and other things that I've realized that I'm more of a conceptual artist. I actually have no technical artistic skills. I will always have to ask other people to support me and help me in executing the ideas and images that I have in my head. I can't edit, use a camera, paintbrush or make music. I will always rely on others to help me realize my visions. I think that's why it was also such a long process to realize that I am creative.

Maybe not having skills that are traditionally seen as being creative hindered you for a while to express yourself?

I think I have an amazing imagination and am really good at making up stories but it's difficult for me to bring it on paper or on film without the help of others.

How do you work with others to externalize what you are imagining? I imagine that could be quite difficult.

That is true. So once I have an idea I usually feel a strong urge to realize it. I can become quite impatient once I start having visions in my mind of what I need to do. With my latest film I already started having the idea a year ago, and I only executed the shooting of the film last month. So it was really a lesson in patience and including lessons learned from my previous film projects. I already learned that I can take things slowly. I don't need to rush stuff. And, of course, it's about finding people that match with me and my perversions. Because I have a full-time paid job, I also have financial means to get people on board. I think that also helps a lot. And though I get people on board because I need help to realize my vision, it's also really important to give them enough room to play. I trust their expertise and creativity. I also want the people I work with to have fun and experiment.

You call yourself a "sexploratory artist." How do you define that term?

My artistic focus is on the sexual processes that I go through. With these processes I'm trying to, in a playful way, gain a better understanding of myself and my sexuality and face mental barriers.

What was the process of you starting to explore your sexuality through art?

I've always been very interested in sexuality from a young age. I also focused on sexuality throughout my studies. For my BA degree I focused on sexuality from an anthropological-psychological perspective. Then I did a MSc in gender and sexuality with a focus on sexuality.

I was always very sex positive and sexually active and curious about the subject. And then eventually, I started getting more in touch with people who were doing art and sexological bodywork and workshops in the field of sexuality. So I moved away from the academic and theoretical field into more of a hands-on field. I met various people who are either sexological body workers, artists working with menstrual blood and so forth, and I ended up being part of the Vagina Monologues. And then it just snowballed from there. I began by discovering my vulva, learning everything about that to the point where I realized, or I had known for a long time, that something was not 100% aligned within my sex life. So I ended up getting in contact with a male sex worker, who then introduced me to the world of BDSM and shibari. I deep-dived into all that. Within six months of starting that exploration I made my first film, which focused on the journey that I'd undertaken with the male sex worker.

When you really deep-dived in your sexploratory journey, when you started working with a male sex worker, that's when you started making art. Do you think those two events are in direct correlation?

Absolutely. Especially because that sex worker is so creative and amazing in how he sets up BDSM sessions. I was able to suggest anything to him and he didn't judge me. Not meaning there were no boundaries but there was always a beautiful, honest exchange happening. It definitely opened up my creativity. Being able to explore sexual curiosity in a framework of having paid someone to cater to my needs and desires was really liberating, and I felt really safe. I learnt how to ask for things I want and reflect upon them.

Understanding yourself better helps you to make art and it's also what your art is about.

Yeah, definitely. Like my newest film is about my menstruation. It's something that I've struggled with for many, many years. I've tried to understand the challenges of PMS and the debilitating effects that it has had on my mental wellbeing, my work life, and my personal relationships. Last year, a play partner and I started looking at my cervix with a speculum and taking photos of it at different times of my cycle to see how it changes. I shared some of these photos on Instagram, and the feedback was very interesting because a lot of people are not even aware what a cervix looks like. There's an educational gap. So I then had this idea of doing a film around my menstruation and all the different phases of the cycle. And initially, the idea was also that I was going to juxtapose images of my hairy vulva with my groomed vulva, just because I was curious to see what the effect of these images might have on viewers. Some of the images, when I look at them now, are still a bit too much for me with the hair, but I do think it'll be something that I'll desensitize more and more to.

Would you say that when you give Q&As at film festivals, it's also a performance?

Absolutely. I have social anxiety, and I find it challenging to be in groups, but I do love Q&As because I would say abcde Flash is quite funny. I think I do resonate well with audiences because I'm quite authentic, I get intimate, and I make myself vulnerable. I am quite a good storyteller, and I don't spare the details.

Even though there's obviously a serious undertone to everything that I do, and there's a reason why I do it, I do like to approach all of it in a very playful, humorous way. I laugh a lot in my work, for sure.

And maybe back to the feeling you used to have about not being creative. Where could that belief come from? Is it rooted in some societal belief?

Right. I think you are onto something when you say that there's certain types of creativity that are more valued in society. Because I didn't know how to express my creativity I didn't. If you would've asked me five years ago, if I thought film would be a way for me to creatively express myself I couldn't have imagined it. But I think it's the same with other things, as well, no? There's certain types of intelligence that are way more valued in society than other types. Right?

Yeah.

I think a lot of us also grapple with not feeling very intelligent. I think every person has creativity in them, but it's also about whether they will find the right outlet to express their creativity. And whether they have the means to do so.

For me, sometimes I do have a full-time corporate job of 40 hours a week. So I sometimes struggle with the transition from that to my art. Having enough time and the mental capacity. On the other hand, I have the means, the financial means to make my art. But because I don't always have so much time for my art it becomes more impulsive.

abcde Flash Recommends:

Hilde Atalanta celebrates and educates about vulva diversity through sharing vulva portraits and personal stories in the Vulva Art Gallery and also the beautiful book A Celebration of Vulva Diversity

Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men by [Caroline Criado Perez] (<https://carolinecriadoperez.com/books/>) is a well researched book that exposes the gender data gap.

Xplore Festivals are three-day immersive events that offer workshops from incredibly talented knowledgeable persons about sexuality, BDSM, bodywork and ritual. For anyone who is interested in consciously expanding their sexuality.

Marilyn Nova White is an international multidisciplinary drag and performance artist, who is so talented and inspirational and made their debut in queer porn recently with the film Letting Go with Finn Peaks

Created and curated by Shine Louise Houston, PinkLabel.TV is an ethical, independent adult film platform that is a sustainable model supporting the filmmakers, while showing a wide variety of films, including award-winning films from adult film festivals worldwide

Name

abcde Flash

Vocation

conceptual artist

Fact

Anais Stein

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