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As told to Loré Yessuff, 2059 words.

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# On replacing anxiety with inspiration

Filmmaker and entrepreneur Gabriel Gomez not being afraid to create your own opportunities, overcoming creative isolation, and making art that's rooted in fascination.

**I would love to know how you describe yourself, where you're from, what you do, how you define your work.**

I'm from Brooklyn, born and raised, and I grew up on the south side of Park Slope. Both my parents were artists, hippies that knew how to save some money. I was fortunate enough to go through art school basically my whole life. I was immersed in the arts from a young age and I tried everything. I did singing, dancing, all that stuff. I played sax for a while, but I really fell in love with skateboarding, right when skate videos were becoming a cinematic experience. That was the fusion of my artistic upbringing, paired with my love for skateboarding and my fascination with video and music and rhythm, and all of the way those things work together.

I went to LaGuardia High School, and I was an actor there, so I had this whole company of actors at my disposal, and we were all acting, and working together. When I got into film, I basically started making films with those actors, which was incredibly exciting, and we were just way beyond our years at the time and I don't mean in terms of our skill, but in terms of our ambition and gusto. Man, we were telling big, heavy, very dramatic stories, and we were just 16, 17 year old artists.

I went to SUNY Purchase for a second, but I left after a semester. School is great for a lot of people, but I felt like I was relearning a lot of things, and I was really curious to get my hands dirty. I wanted to be on the front lines of what was coming. The rise of the digital camera, DSLRs, Pocket Cinema, and all that stuff. I was like, "I want to be right there, ready to go, and learn all of this." I started Crooked Letter when I was 19 with a business partner. We do so many different kinds of work, big and small, but the main priority for me is—no matter what story we're telling—finding the soul of the narrative and the subject.

We do a lot of documentary work, so talent is the most important aspect of a project. If the person in front of the camera is not feeling their truest self, then we've failed.

**Was there a specific artwork—be it a movie, or a skater, or an album—that you encountered, and felt really infatuated with? What was the gap like between being inspired, and making your own work, finding your artistic voice?**

There was a video that came out Yeah Right!, and it was a really popular one that Spike Jonze was involved in. When I saw that, that blew my head apart. I was completely blown away by what they were capable of doing.

It was the culture of skateboarding, because it was just the raw material of a skate video. It was truly storytelling, with an emphasis on music, and the power of music, and rhythm, and how that keeps stories going.

And then I went to the Sundance Film Festival with my best friend Jeremy [Allen White] when we were 15 or 16. I remember being there, and going to the screenings, and seeing this powerful art, and being with my friend, and then getting into parties, and schmoozing. I remember coming back from Sundance and just being

like, "That's what I want to do for the rest of my life. Some semblance of that."

**It seems like collaboration and community are really central parts of your work, both the themes you explore in your work, as well as the ways that you go about executing different projects. I'm wondering how that takes shape in your day-to-day life? Are there a group of people that you are always collaborating with, or does it kind of switch up depending on the project?**

I truly feel like I've built such a family of friends, such a chosen family. And it's vast. A lot of friends, in a lot of different areas, and I carry those friends with me. My favorite thing—it's almost a kink—is putting all those people together, and seeing the connections that are made. I just love the anthropology of people being together.

As that pertains to the creative process, I've been working with the same group for years now, and there are puzzle pieces that I switch out every once in a while, depending on what the project requires, and who's telling the story, and what story we're telling. I direct a lot of the work I produce, but sometimes it's not my story to tell. So, it does shape shift a little bit.

But the core of my creative foundation for Crooked Letter, is more or less the same folks every day. And I guess just a thing that's really been on my mind, and is in some capacity, going to be a part of our mission statement for the next however many years. As soon as I passed 30, I was surveying the landscape of freelance artists, and just how freelance anxiety is such an isolating feeling, and yet I'm surrounded by people experiencing it.

There's something that we as freelance artists need, and I'm trying to seek to explore that, and offer a space where those kinds of solidarity communications are just happening more frequently, because I really think that's something that needs to be looked at, and fixed in our industry—the time that is put into things, and is not compensated for: decks, pitches, holding dates, and then rug pulls from all of that.

We are independent artists, and we do rely on people hiring us for things, but at the same time, they rely on us to create things. And I think feeling disposable is so common. And I'm really trying to—whether it be through my work, or how I conduct our productions—I really want to change that, and I want to make the industry a better place for us all.

**It is hard, especially, in this hyper digital age where people are just naturally isolated from each other, working from different corners of the world, different neighborhoods, etc. It's naive and silly to think about community, and how to work with other people, if you're not thinking about the conditions that we're working under, and how they impact us, so it's awesome that you bring that up. On a similar note, how do you navigate the difficulties of making money? How do you trudge through that?**

Oh man. It's a never ending cycle of balancing fear and reward. Money is a hell of a thing. We rely on it to make good work, big work. We all deserve a quality of life, whatever your standards for that may be, and it's hard. It's really hard to find that balance. I grew up in a middle class family, so it was fine. But there is no daddy money coming through the door. So, I think this notion of being self made, I take a lot of pride in, but at the same time, it's a double edged sword.

That is such a huge issue that gets really complicated for me, just mentally, and emotionally. But, I've taken my business infrastructure very seriously. I have not skimped on finding a great lawyer, an amazing bookkeeper and an accountant. All those nitty gritty, annoying things that I knew I didn't want to do, that I'd rather pay somebody to do, and form a relationship with somebody very good at doing those things.

It's the greatest investment I've ever made, because I've fostered relationships with these people that really do take the edge off of the unpleasant parts of running a business and they help me immensely, and I'm just so grateful for those people. They really have been guiding lights. Finding that support is crucial. I mean, my god, there are pros, and cons to running a business, but I'm really grateful I have this business, because it's not just me.

**What are some rituals that help you recover from self doubt, and low periods?**

I do a lot of yoga. I'm kind of a yoga freak. I love physical work—biking, skateboarding, yoga, working out, any of that stuff. As of late, dancing is a therapy for me.

I said to somebody recently, I'm actively trying to replace anxiety with inspiration. So, if I'm feeling that revved up, concerned, manic nature, I'll just go consume something, whether it's a beautiful dinner, or a film, or some show. Trying to immediately replace that moment of stewing with something new. That's been really helpful, so I'm going to keep rolling with that stuff.

**You're involved in a lot of different mediums, and projects, but do you have a favorite kind of project to work on? Or maybe a favorite project you've worked on recently?**

Yeah, so I just directed my first feature documentary.

It was a labor of love. It was just me and Alice, the co-director. We did everything on it and we made it through the pandemic. So, that was incredibly therapeutic for us, to make something about it kind of, but also through it. And I'm really proud of that, and we're waiting to hear back from film festivals right now, and just to be able to share that with more people will be very special for me.

And the process of making that was amazing. We collected footage for almost two years, and then we didn't know when we were going to start it. It was so daunting to start it. We didn't have funding, or anything like that. It was just us. And then omicron kicked in, and everybody was staying home, and we did that whole shit again. So Alice and I were like, "All right, let's make our movie." I saw nobody but Alice, and my girlfriend for like a month and a half, and we just hunkered down and made this thing from scratch.

That was an amazing process. I remember the day we wrapped, and we were about to premiere it the next night, and I was like, "Wow, we just made a feature. We can just make another one." Making a feature is such a thing, and then you start to take stock and you're like, "Well, I did it, so let me do it again, if I want."

I've always said, I think if I could make a living, just meeting people, and connecting with people, that would be a fulfilling life for me. Going back to the Sundance Film Festival moment, I just like being in a room, and finding connections, and finding avenues into people's hearts, and vice versa. Just seeing how we can build together as a group, as a community. So, that's where I'm at right now. I think I'm finding a lot of creativity in just the process, which has been beautiful, and I'm going to keep rolling with that. Ideally, we would be making a couple films a year, so, we'll see how that goes. I think we're kind of on target right now.

**That's really lovely. I hope the documentary gets picked up by some festivals.**

Thank you. We just need one. Honestly, even with skateboarding, I remember just being like, "I just want a part in a skate video, and I want a magazine ad." And I got both, and the second I did, I was like, "All right, I can say farewell to this sort of professional ambition right now." That's kind of how I feel with the film. I just want one festival to take it, have a beautiful night, give it some life, and then maybe share it publicly, and say goodbye. Because once you make a piece of art, and share it with the world, it's not yours anymore. I try to respect the symbiotic nature of releasing work.

Gabriel Gomez Recommends:

Fred Again

Fire of Love

In Love: A Memoir of Love and Loss by Amy Bloom

Promises by Floating Points, Pharoah Sanders, and The London Symphony Orchestra

therapy

Name

Gabriel Gomez

Vocation

filmmaker and entrepreneur

Fact

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