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As told to Loré Yessuff, 1161 words.

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On the pleasure of switching things up

New Media-Strategist Christine Mai Nguyen discusses how to avoid burnout, the importance of community, and why it's ok to enjoy the work you do. You've been on YouTube since the mid-2000s. What has it been like to build your art practice via the internet? Do you ever get burnt out?

It's been good so far. Being online, you do get a lot of criticism. You get a lot of instant feedback, some horrible, some irrelevant. Overall, it's been good. I mean, I wouldn't be doing it if it hasn't kept growing in a positive way. With all the different things I do, when I get burnt out, I just take a pause, and then I move on to something else. With YouTube, for a while, I was only making beauty videos. When I get burnt out from that, then I switch to apartment tours or short films. It's so vast. But that goes with everything else too.

When making things, it can be very tempting to get caught up in trying to one-up yourself or other people. It's so hard to avoid that mind space. Do you ever get tempted by those distractions?

Yeah, from time to time. Sometimes, I'll look at someone's project and be like, 'Man, why didn't I get that job?' But then when you think about it, you realize, their success doesn't take away from your success. It's not like tit for tat. You can keep building up. It is discouraging sometimes, but you can just keep building, with thicker skin.

You make videos and ceramics, you DJ and do photography. I'm wondering how you approach pursuing so many things. Specifically in terms of time and money.

Well, I think I'm just really lucky that I started YouTube so early, because everything that came afterward, like photography, DJing, people from my YouTube channel followed me along and encouraged me to move forward in a way, so that's nice. I don't feel like I'm a good DJ. I look at other technical DJs and they're fantastic, they're really good at beat matching, and they know music very well. They can serve every genre. They can play for any crowd, they can read the room. But I don't have the skillset for it to be lucrative or to make a living from it.

Those people who only focus on one thing like photography, for instance, I admire that so much because it takes so much focus just to do that. I have a friend who is a technical E-commerce photographer. She's always like, "You do so much other stuff and if you get bored one day, you move on to something else, and if something's not serving you, then you can move on." But the thing is, I've never mastered that one skill, photography, or DJing. If I could only focus on that one thing I think that's so admirable, but I just don't. I don't have the patience for it, I guess.

What do you think are some of the upsides to having so many different art forms that you're interested in?

I think the upside is that I'm never bored. I always keep myself entertained. I'm lucky that I have people supporting me so that they can follow me along with any hobby that I pick up. So I'm not scared in that way to experiment with different things. If I didn't have that support, if I didn't have that backing, then I don't know if I would have tried so many different things.

Are there any resources that you rely on as a freelancer?

Oh, man. Oh, gosh. I live in LA and grew up in Orange County, so I know a lot of people in different

fields. I rely on the community here that I have here. It's hard for me to be like, "Oh, I'm going to move to New York one day." I feel like I'd be really lost because I really rely on the community that I have out here. Everyone supports each other. That's how I got a lot of my photography jobs and my DJ gigs. I get many of them from other DJs who are like, "Oh, shoot, I'm booked that day. Can you fill in?" Not only do I kind of learn from that experience, but I score a gig. And then someone in the audience might come up to me and say, "Hey, I work for this company. Can you do a gig for this event?" So it kind of grows from there.

It's really nice that you've been able to sustain community. It can be hard for adults to make friends and form reliable connections, personal or professional, that don't feel so slimy and competitive.

Networking.

Exactly. How do you like avoid relationships like that?

Oh, man. I'm still working on that. I've always been really bad with boundaries. I give people chances over and over and over again. Then over time, you just kind of realize, "You know what, like every time that they've contacted me, it's been for something, they want something or they need something or they're trying to get a contact or hook up somewhere." So maybe that's not like the best relationship to keep.

What are some of your favorite daily or weekly routines?

Routines. Well, I kind of have the same routine every morning. I like to ride my bike to a coffee shop. I like to get some sort of workout in. My days are scheduled so strangely as it depends on whatever I'm working on, or like whatever project I get assigned that week. Yeah, I don't have a typical nine to five. Sometimes, I think people just think that I sit around and watch TV or do nothing all day. But in terms of hours, I put in more hours of work than the average person. I work late nights a lot because that's when I get most of my editing done. That's when I have the most focus, later at night. So I do work a lot in comparison to before when I was working full time. That's a kind of misconception of people who are in the new media content space.

Many people, including freelancers, don't realize there's a lot of things that may not look like work but are totally work.

Yeah, just because something's a pleasure to do doesn't mean it isn't work. That's really hard to explain to my parents. Last week, I went home to pick up some mail. My mom always asks me about work. She has no idea what I do. I told her, "Yeah, it's going really well." And then she's like, "Okay, yes, I still don't understand what you do." I'm like, "Well, this is what..." I show her actual evidence of what I do. Videos on websites and different campaigns I worked on, and she still doesn't quite get it because she thinks it's just fun. She's like, "It seems like you're just having fun." Yes, but work can be a pleasure, too.

Name

Christine Mai Nguyen

Vocation

New-Media Strategist

Fact

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