To help you grow your creative practice, our website is available as an email.

April 19, 2022 -

As told to Grashina Gabelmann, 1801 words.

Tags: Art, Photography, Process, Inspiration, Success, Failure, Creative anxiety.

On what we can learn from uncomfortable emotions

Photographer Klaudia B. Lewandowski discusses the importance of taking up space, accepting every feeling, and what failure teaches us.
Tell me about all the different things that you do.

I am a photographer, yoga teacher, and I worked as an interior designer for a long time. I have always been obsessively interested in the subject of space—in all its forms. I feel how my interest in space, spirituality, and yoga are a very important base for my creativity and are essential for my work. I see myself as a space explorer.

How does that manifest?

I am very sensitive to the spaces I enter. Designing and physically standing in a room and seeing the transformation, shaped my eye and the way I perceive forms, materials, colors, and the subtlety between people and space–which also made a huge imprint on me as a photographer. With Yoga, I started to explore another level of space: the inner one. While I was getting to know myself, I kept moving things around the flat and asking: How can I arrange the space I create for myself, so that it may enrich my life and align me and my dwelling?

As a child I didn't have much space to express myself so I created spaces within myself, little worlds to feel safe. And now I do the same with outside spaces. I'll even rearrange things when I check into an Airbnb apartment. I'll buy flowers and candles and add whatever else I need to feel at home. And so in this way, I started to explore what space means to us and how it can serve us. I started to figure out what happens when you take something out of a room, move it around—what changes? What does an empty corner feel like, what does it feel like to be in a room alone or with others?

Do you have to feel in control of the space you are in to be creative?

Yes, definitely. Sometimes it can take hours or even days before I can let my creativity flow. Sometimes I don't know what's missing and then I start looking. I need a certain light, or music, and I need spaciousness. If there are too many objects in the room I need to get rid of them similarly to having too many thoughts in your head. I'll often sit in the middle of the room and I'll look around and see what it is that's distracting me and then I start rearranging and that makes me feel like I'm rearranging from within.

It's interesting because I usually hear about rearranging before sitting down to work as a means of procrastination but for you it seems like it is already part of the creative process.

Sometimes I do ask myself if it is a distraction. I actually really don't know. But I have accepted it as a part of my process and it works even if it can take days for me to get there. My last photography job took me over a month to do because I rearranged my space so much. But I know myself, and I know that this is my process so I can trust it. In the end, what happens often is that I'll wake up, I won't even put on clothes, I take my camera and finish all the photos in an hour. It's a moment where the space feels very raw and nothing is in my way.

Something has slid into place.

Yeah. That's why it's sometimes hard for me to let clients know how many hours I'll need to complete a project.

Maybe I'm wrong but I imagine it took a lot of time for you to get to know yourself and trust yourself that it's okay if it takes you a month to prepare your space before you start to work.

I think I learned that in the last year. I used to look at myself from the outside, judge myself for just sitting there with "nothing happening." But once you consider yourself as a friend or a child you stop being so hard on yourself. It's a process of trying out, failing, re-trying, readjusting, and having the courage to not always be perfect and letting go of that which does not serve your purpose. Sometimes you'll make something that you think is not good enough but others will like it. Sometimes you're like, "Oh god, it's the worst thing I've ever done" and people think it's beautiful. It's interesting. The moments of failure are the moments that taught me the most, especially to let go.

I listened to a podcast that was talking about our inner voice of judgement. The advice was not to push that voice away but to actually listen to it and see what it is trying to tell you.

I've realized that every emotion is a teacher, every emotion is a little gift that can tell you something, but we tend to push the emotions away because they might carry something uncomfortable. In my experience, the voice just becomes louder and louder when you try to suppress it until your space is so full of the emotion that you can't move anymore. Sometimes I just sit there and listen to it and this voice tells me that I'm a weirdo, or that I'm not enough and I surrender to that voice and ask it what it wants or needs. Suppressing it doesn't work, at least not in my world. I tried that for a very long time without success. Sometimes those voices take up so much space that they become a part of you so you identify with them but once you listen to them they eventually leave. And then often we can feel empty afterwards or we can even miss them because we had gotten so used to it.

It's like an empty house where all the possibilities fit in, but once all the walls are full, we start piling things up or putting things in the middle of the room for lack of space, and then we can see less and less, move less and less.. even get use to it. That's why I strongly believe that we must first create space to let in the things we want. Space where creativity can flow freely.

I think that's what it's about in the end… allowing yourself to be full of every fucking emotion, whatever it may be. Allow everything in order to create space. Even if you end up crying in front of your friends every day and they think you are too much, or too emotional. Let them show up for you. We are who we are and so what. Suppressing and keeping ourselves small does not serve anyone.

When we create, who are we creating for? Do we want to please others with what we are making?

I think I was or maybe still sometimes am a people pleaser. It was a big obstacle in my creative path because at some point I wasn't sure if I was creating for others or for myself. But what if I please myself by accommodating others? If seeing others receive support is my motor to be happy and fulfilled and makes my work worthy? And I also think: what if we were to please ourselves because when we are content and happy we can bring that energy into the things that we do and the interactions we have.

Pleasing is also connected to self-worth. I've met a lot of creative people who have self-worth issues. I see it more of a gift than anything though. It's a process to realize that we are worthy and enough just the way we are. I think very interesting work gets created when you work from this "I'm not worthy" part of yourself. There's something really humble about it. The art tends to be delicate, vulnerable and very open. And from there this little seed emerges that you need to tend to. It needs time to develop into a beautiful tree. Over the years I learned to be thankful for my creativity coming from a place of challenge. I was suffering from depression for a long time and would ask myself: Why me? Others are able to function. Why did I have a weird childhood that left me with so much stuff to deal with? But I realized that everything I went through made me become the sensitive person that I am and that's why I can do the art I do. So something I saw as a burden is now serving me.

I imagine that on the one hand your creative practice helped you turn your burden into a gift and at the same time the gift is your creativity.

Yeah, it's like looking for something and realizing that the thing doing the looking is the thing you've been searching for. Once you take the step to look a bit deeper into your inner space or your inner world, there is no way back. Sometimes I ask myself why I've gone and lifted the lid. It seems to be a lot easier for people who just function and don't reflect their childhood or problems but I don't want to change how I am. And it's so important to me that my friends take care of their inner worlds. I think by taking care of your inner worlds you can take care of other more easily.

I want to create a safe space within me and by doing that I want to create a safe space for the people around me, a space where they can be vulnerable. This is probably why I'm so into space in general. I want to take the best out of people. I love it when people come to me and feel safe and comfortable and we can have honest conversations, really see one another and support each other in our higher purpose. I want to move and be moved. Deeply and truly. And sure, it's unpaid work. A lot of work. And maybe even the most important work that exists.

Klaudia B. Lewandowski Recommends:

The Moon List – a guided analog journal workbook

Writing love letters to friends and tell them what you love and appreciate about them.

Ryoko's "Okiyome: Purification & Protection Set" to arrive wherever you are

Are.na platform to collect and organize all your thoughts, ideas and to get inspired and connect with like minded.

Mimi Ritzler, an inspiring artist everyone should know

Related to Photographer Klaudia B. Lewandowski on what we can learn from uncomfortable emotions:

☐ Artist and poet Tanasgol Sabbagh on giving yourself permission to create

☐ Photographer Eylül Aslan on becoming yourself through your work

☐ Photographer and cultural producer Heryte Tefery Tequame on leaving a trace

The Creative Independent is ad-free and published by Kickstarter, PBC. See also: Terms, Privacy Policy.

✉ 📶 🐦 📷 ✹

↑