

a good  
start  
with help  
from a  
**BOOK**

# THE ARTIST'S WAY

## A PRACTICAL COURSE IN CREATIVITY

---

FOR YEARS, JULIA CAMERON'S BOOK, *THE ARTIST'S WAY*,  
AND ITS CORRESPONDING COURSE HAVE BEEN A GO-TO  
RESOURCE FOR PEOPLE WANTING MORE CREATIVITY IN THEIR  
LIVES. JOURNALIST CAROLINE BUIJS DECIDES TO GIVE IT A TRY.

---

'Become an illustrator.' For a long time, this has been my answer to the question, 'But what do you really want to do with your life?' It is a question that often pops up late in the evening, long after the wine has been opened and my friends or husband get in the mood for soul-searching conversations. Okay, so maybe becoming an illustrator is aiming a bit too high, but it's always good to have a dream, and even just having a little bit of creativity in my daily life would make me really happy. But who has the time? My work, husband, kids, friends and family are always competing for priority status, and I give it to them. And then of course there's that annoying voice in my head that is whispering things like: You don't really believe you can draw, do you, let alone become an illustrator?

### HOW TO BEGIN?

I decide it's time to take action in the form of the twelve-week course *The Artist's Way*, which is based on the book of the same name by American author Julia Cameron. It says right there on the website:

'The Artist's Way has helped millions of people around the world discover—and recover—their creativity.' It sounds like just what I need.

How do you make time for your dreams? How can you get more inspiration in your day-to-day life? An international bestseller, Cameron's book is a practical guide that includes a list of questions to answer at the end of each chapter. They're really fun to think about, too. For example, 'If you had five other lives to lead, what would you do in each of them?' or 'Describe your childhood room'. Another suggests writing a letter to your current self from your 80-year-old self, and to consider what advice you would offer about which dreams and interests to pursue.

Good questions, but I know that left to my own devices, I would probably never get through them all, because I won't make the time. With a course, on the other hand, I will stick with it, because the participants do assignments in the classroom. And so on a Wednesday night, I go to a class in Amsterdam that is given by Frederike Dekkers, who has been giving classes based on *The Artist's* >

**'KEEPING MORNING PAGES ARE A GOOD WAY TO WHINE AND COMPLAIN WITHOUT THE NEED FOR A LISTENING EAR'**



Would you like to start writing morning pages? Read the feature on page 48 about the advantages of writing every day. There is even a little notebook between pages 50 and 51 to help you get started

## **'AN ARTIST DATE IS SOMETHING YOU DO BY YOURSELF AND REQUIRES THAT YOU FREE UP TIME EVERY WEEK TO FEED YOUR CREATIVE AWARENESS'**

Way for years. My fellow classmates are three women who are also looking to 'make more space' for creativity.

### **THREE WHOLE PAGES**

Our first assignment is also the foundation of the book: Write three pages every morning. Three whole pages! It doesn't matter what you write about; you just have to write. Even if you don't know what to write about, just write: 'I don't know what to write about'. Personally, I'm always happy to have an excuse to buy a pretty

notebook, but filling three pages every morning seems like a lot. The idea, Dekkers explains, is that everything you write down in the morning—often complaints about having to go grocery shopping or work—is what is standing between you and your creativity.

Cameron also prefers that we get up half an hour earlier every morning, but this is taking things too far for me. So I decide to write my pages on the train on my way to work on weekdays or, during the weekend, lying in bed, and—if I have to—in the evening. And after a while, I really enjoy it. It helps me organize my thoughts

### **ABOUT SUSANNE RANDERS**

---

The illustrations were drawn by Denmark-based Susanne Randers, who read 'The Artist's Way' and took the course in 2013 after she ended up on extended sick leave. "During that period, I realized that I prefer to work with my hands, instead of spending the entire day in front of my computer," she says. "I wrote a blog every day during the course, mostly about how much I enjoy making things, and that

it's not so much about the results. I also realized that there is inspiration all around, and all I have to do to see it is open my eyes and try to live in the moment. Before I read the book, I would dream about living a creative life, but never had the courage to start. The book taught me to take small steps, and I started to believe that I could make my dream a reality. I also formed a lot of new

habits during the course that have actually lasted, such as drawing my morning pages instead of writing them, taking a weekly walk as an 'artist date', and making a 'ta-da!' list instead of a to-do list. Every Sunday I focus on all the good things that have happened during the past week."

You can see more from Susanne on [mitkrearum.dk](http://mitkrearum.dk) (Mitkrearum is Danish for 'my creative space') and Instagram: [@mitkrearum](https://www.instagram.com/mitkrearum).

---



and focus on my work more during the rest of the day. Besides, the pages give you a great way to whine and complain without your husband, friend or co-workers having to listen to it.

When I read in the book that the morning pages will also lead you to your 'inner critic', something actually starts occurring to me. Of course: That annoying little voice in my head that keeps telling me I can't draw is my inner censor. I also learn that these negative opinions are not the truth. Let them talk, I now think when the volume of those toxic voices starts increasing, or, as Dekkers recommends, I write down what they are saying. I am only now starting to clearly see what a big mouth those voices actually have.

### A PROMISE TO YOURSELF

Another important basic concept in the book is 'the artist date'. My initial thought is: Great, I'm being given permission to hit the town with a wildly attractive sculptor. But this is unfortunately not the case. An artist date is something you do by yourself,

and requires that you free up time every week to feed your creative awareness. You do this by taking in and storing new images, and paying attention to details—by taking a new route during a walk, for example. This could also be spending a few hours taking pictures in the city, looking at art books or browsing in a second-hand store at your leisure.

During class, each of us comes up with ten ideas for an artist date and shares them with the group, giving us a list of 40 ideas in total. For my first date, as I walk around a part of town I'm not familiar with, slowly and attentively studying the details on facades and tiles, I realize that this is actually similar to the walks I used to take with my children when they were little. They would also stop and stand still endlessly during these walks, even though all they were studying was hubcaps on cars and spokes on bikes.

### MEDIA-FREE WEEK

The next assignment is a media-deprivation week, and this announcement is met with a lot of protest. Using my phone as little as possible will be difficult enough as it is, but avoiding reading is also part of this assignment, and I can't imagine doing that. Books, newspapers, magazines: I read every day. My children really love the idea, and are more than happy to keep an eye on me. Even when I pull the newspaper out of the mailbox one afternoon and, by force of habit, start reading it as I walk up the stairs, my son pulls me up. "Just reading a little bit of the back page is surely okay?!" I protest, but he is relentless. My daughter even stands guard outside the bathroom, because that is the ideal opportunity for me to check my email.

The first two days take a really concerted effort on my part, but after that, I slowly start seeing the advantages. I have so much more time. I realize that, almost subconsciously, I was always constantly reaching for my phone or something to read, in bed, on the couch, while cooking, on the train and even in the car. Now that I have stopped doing this, I see what I am replacing it with. Before, as soon as the kids >



went to bed, I would normally grab the newspaper or my phone, but without that option now, I just sit on the couch for an hour, until it gets dark, watching how beautiful the sky is as it changes colors. I also paint a chest of drawers that has been waiting for a facelift for a long time, sew cushions for the couch (and rediscover how much I love working with fabric), write letters to friends, play old albums and experiment with India ink. These are all things that I wouldn't have done if I had automatically picked up the newspaper, watched a series on Netflix or browsed through Instagram four times every hour.

IT REALLY IS POSSIBLE

Cameron is convinced that hobbies are useful. This is good news for me, because I discover, during my media-deprivation week, that I like sitting at the sewing machine, particularly after working all day. Messing around and making things really soothes the soul. Just as fun is seeing immediate results, at least as long as the things you are making are small and can be finished in a day. They actually have a purpose too, since, as Cameron says, "Hobbies stimulate the artistic brain and can also lead to enormous creative breakthroughs".

The nice thing about a hobby is that it often causes our inner critic's voice to fade into the background. Cameron suggests doing something every day that stimulates our creativity. I cut out pictures of messy interiors, buy a pretty postcard, fill my pockets with

**'HOBBIES STIMULATE THE ARTISTIC BRAIN AND CAN LEAD TO ENORMOUS CREATIVE BREAKTHROUGHS'**

shells, and spot fabric, ribbons and paper. This brings me much closer to creativity and it literally becomes more of an everyday thing. "It's better to make small changes, very slowly, to the situation you are in now," Cameron says. This means that I should also do something (instead of just complaining) about not having my own workspace. Instead of wallowing in what I don't have (and according to Cameron, this is what blocked creative people love to do, since taking action would also mean taking responsibility), I should make do with what I do have.

I take a good look around our home. Our bedroom is actually pretty big, so what am I moaning about? I buy a simple shelf and put it up on my bedroom wall. A nice little chest of drawers that was just waiting around for a new home goes under the shelf. I buy an office chair and make a cushion for it, and I cover the wall with pictures I like. And *voilà!* Instead of whining about something that's unachievable, I now have my own little spot at home where I can work and maybe even create illustrations. And all it cost me was an afternoon and a few euros. The likelihood that I will take an illustration class is now a lot higher, as I now know that I truly am capable of freeing up time. ●

MORE CREATIVITY IN YOUR LIFE

Courses based on 'The Artist's Way' are taught around the world. Search on Google for one in your area. You can also read Julia Cameron's book, 'The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Creativity'.

TEXT CAROLINE BUIJS ILLUSTRATIONS AND PHOTOGRAPHY SUSANNE RANDERS