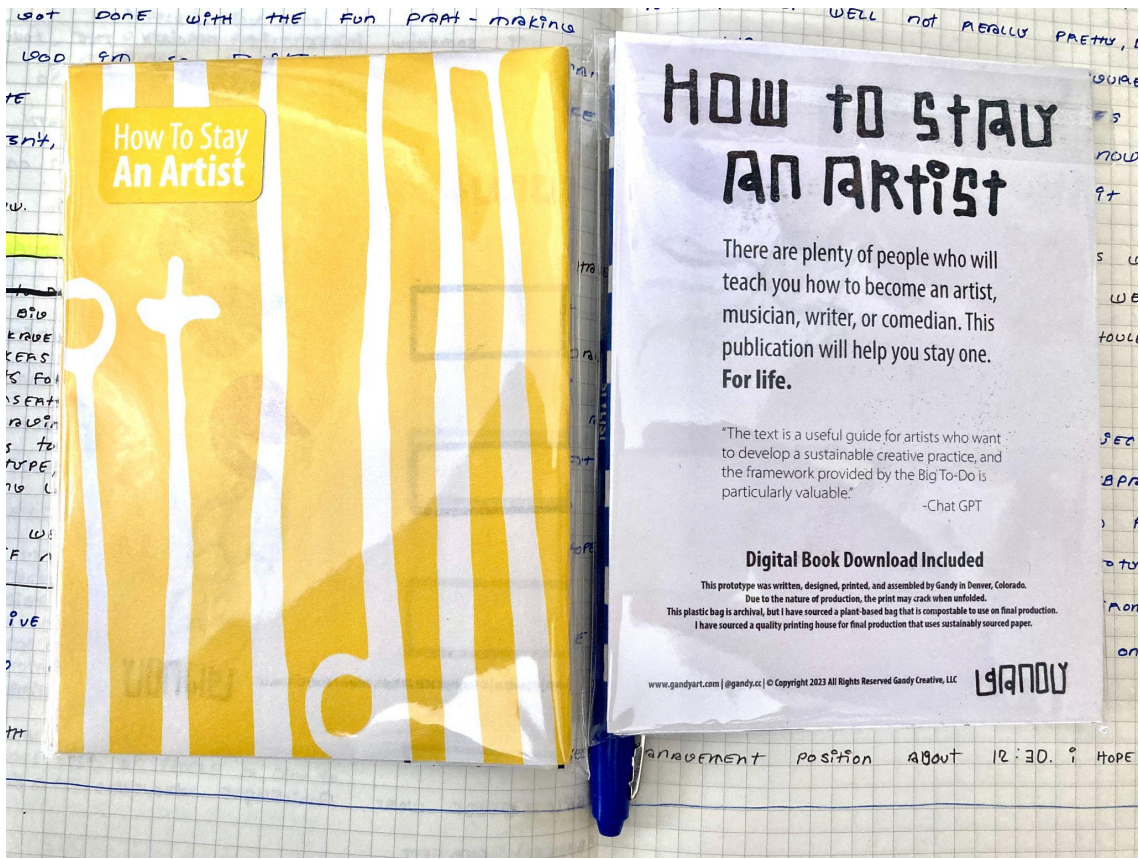


HOW TO STAY AN ARTIST







6 MONTHS SECURITY

DEBT



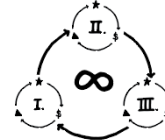
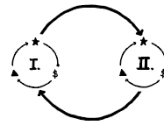
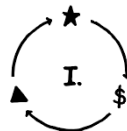


THE BIG TO-DO



PHASES

	I. FOUNDATION	II. ENDURANCE	III. STRENGTH
★ MAKE ART	FIND ROLE IN ECONOMY	PLAN TO GROW ROLE	ACT ON PLAN
⌘ MAKE MONEY	EMERGENCY MONEY	6 MONTH SECURITY	SAVE 50% / INVEST 50%
▲ BE THE BEST ME	BE CLEAN & ORDERLY	HEALTHY DIET	BE ACTIVE



MONEY

\$100 / MONTH FROM ART

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EMERGENCY MONEY

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6 MONTH SECURITY

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DEBT

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ONE AND DONE

- OPEN A H.Y.S. ACCOUNT
- OPEN AN INVESTMENT ACCOUNT
- GET A LIBRARY CARD
- GET A PASSPORT
- OPEN AN IRA
- MAKE A BUDGET

EXTRA CREDIT

READ 10 BOOKS

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VOLUNTEER 6 TIMES

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HOW TO STAY AN ARTIST

BY: GANDY

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(Note: This is a working version. If you notice anything that should be changed, corrected, or improved upon, please let me know.)

FORWARD

See it big; keep it simple.

It's the first lesson Greg Gandy and I were taught in our freshman design class at the University of Southern Mississippi in the fall of 2008. I had met Gandy two summers prior, at a summer camp for high school artists at the now defunct Memphis College of Art. His easy and welcoming demeanor made electing to share a dorm with him a no-brainer when we ran into each other again at USM's open house for high school seniors. Our time together at USM was but the first leg of a new professional-facing journey with art, and while our paths would ultimately fork, we learned a lot from each other. Perhaps the biggest lesson Gandy took from those days was that first one.

I do not believe I've ever known anyone with quite the ability to grasp so much at once, to really see it big, as Gandy. The initial idea behind any of his ventures has always been his drive. The details are always just logistics. Whether staging a 24-hour performance at the Mississippi Museum of Art, launching a non-profit art journal, or hosting festivals and happenings, there never really seemed to be a question (from the outside at least) of whether these things would happen. The big idea was there, and so it must be, simple as that. The logistics of how these things were to be funded was a matter of breaking each part down into easily digestible checklists: find a pro bono lawyer to help establish the 501(c)(3), ask local businesses to advertise in the pages of the journal, present a show in such a way that the venue simply has a hard time saying no, etc.

That's what this book-and-poster is. It's just a checklist. Many of these things may seem obvious. The beauty of this package is in its simplicity. The value is in its concision. So, we have our big idea: *stay an artist*. (You're on your own figuring out how *to become* one.) Through all the things life will throw our way, how can we maintain that connection to art making? The poster provides a checklist of items we must

work on. The book provides explanations for these items. It is a simple system, but the way we each arrive at these goals will be unique to our own experiences. Simplicity here allows for a vast plurality.

If I don't know anyone with a vision as large as Gandy's, I also don't know anyone who is as devoted to art-making. Since I have known him, he has been engaged in making art – *a lot* of art. Gandy has made more work at a more consistent rate than anyone I know. This system has been developed with that same level of intense focus and drive over the entire course of his career so far. Books and books and books, stacks of them, filled from cover to cover with notes, all of them directed at this singular big idea, presented here for you as simply as possible.

Hang the poster in your space. Work towards the goals. **Keep making art.**

-Nathan Mullins

Nathan Mullins is an Assistant Teaching Professor at the University of Southern Mississippi, where he teaches foundation drawing and design classes as well as beginning and intermediate painting. His paintings have been reviewed in The Washington Post and were published in New American Paintings #142. His drawings were featured in Dustin Pearson's collection of poems A Season in Hell with Rimbaud, published by BOA Editions in 2022. He lives with his partner and their two cats in Petal, Mississippi.

INTRODUCTION

I remember being 15, sitting by Lake Caroline where my close friend, Lanie, had just died. She and I would exchange paintings. Her work was always better than mine, but she would offer encouragement and praise. I decided on that day in May that I was going to be an artist. I was hurting. I was searching. *I was going to be an artist.* I applied and was accepted into a newly opened High School for the Arts. Alongside math and marching band (drumline), I studied painting, film, and digital design. Everyday we learned from artists new and old. I remember the feeling. The flood of information was exciting and overwhelming, but what was never discussed was how to actually survive in the world as an artist - practically. At University I studied painting & drawing, grew creatively, and made lasting connections, but when it came to being a **professional** artist, the best advice offered was "you'll figure it out".

For the past 18 years I have made paintings, led social movements, curated museum art shows, directed music festivals, and promoted creatives through thousands of printed publications - all while working unrelated day jobs. I was making my art, but I wasn't a **professional**. When I turned 26, I only wanted to do one thing: to figure out how to make being an artist economically viable. I moved to a city with an economy (Denver, Colorado), set up a new studio, and spent the last 7 years developing, implementing, and fulfilling a process. A process that was tested by a global pandemic, layoffs, hospitalization, violence,

death, isolation, and mental illness. A process that has kept me in the studio making work daily and gave me the resources to access any supplies or tools I required to express myself fully. I still don't know if I'm a professional, but, if you are open to it, I'd like to share with you what I wish I was told starting out at 15.

THE GOAL

1. MAKE ART

This is the only time I'm going to mention it: you should be creating almost everyday. Art, whether it is painting, design, music, film, dance, or stand-up comedy, is a process. You have to be engaged and invested in that process to make successful work. You should be thinking and writing about your process. Your system. Very few make it far without a system. It is up to you to find your own.

2. MAKE MONEY

Studios aren't free. Paint isn't free. You are going to need income - which most likely means a job. Willem de Kooning was a production designer (like me), Mark Rothko & Georgia O'Keefe were both educators, Jean-Michel Basquiat sold shirts and postcards, and Ellsworth Kelly was a soldier. Personally, I have maintained a studio practice by working in positions that range from hard manual labor to design and many things in between. It is tough, but doable. Health insurance and a 401k don't hurt either. Once you have income, you will need a plan to either transition into art full time or into a role that allows you to expand creatively. You will need a budget.

3. BE THE BEST YOU

If you want to make art for as long as possible, you will need to take care of your physical and mental wellbeing. What happens in your creative space is between you and your creations, but outside of your studio you will need to have your life set up to support your art, not hinder it. Eat well, exercise, and keep your living space clean. From experience, being an artist is hard enough without health complications and addiction. Give your mind and body the space and ability to perform when needed.

THE BIG TO-DO

In your pack is a Big To-Do. It has taken years of trial and error to create and refine. It is separated into 4 sections: Phases, Money, One-and-Done, and Extra Credit. It took selling Art, working a day job for less than \$20 an hour, and much self-reflection/development to reach every goal on this list, but once I did, I was in a better position to act on opportunities, weather hardship, and move freely through life as an artist.

PHASES

Each goal (Art, Money, and Life) is separated into three phases: Foundation, Endurance, and Strength.

ART

FOUNDATION: FIND ROLE IN THE ECONOMY

Look at your past experiences. What connected with audiences and also resulted in a commission, purchase, or positive comments? Have you been attending markets and noticed that some things sell more frequently? These are valuable clues. When a patron pays you for your work, they aren't just giving you money. They are saying, "I value your Art more than the money I earned through my work." Discover the value you provide. Learn to articulate it on command. The goal is to make at least \$100 a month, every month for a year. It is up to you to keep your integrity.

ENDURANCE: PLAN TO GROW ROLE

After you've begun making at least \$100 a month from your art, your next goal is to make a plan to double it. If you think these numbers are low, you are right. The purpose isn't to quit your day job at this point. It is to establish consistency. Make a plan. Anyone can sell a painting once - the trick is to do it frequently. You need to figure out a way to keep increasing your income until it matches or surpasses your cost of living.

STRENGTH: ACT ON PLAN

You've made your plan. Now it is time to act on it. If it doesn't work, go back to the Endurance Phase and make a new plan. Keep trying until you find something that connects. When your work does connect, keep going back to the Endurance Phase and try to make it even better.

ONE AND DONE

GET A PASSPORT

Life can move fast sometimes and opportunity can come out of nowhere. Do yourself a favor and get a passport now.

EXTRA CREDIT

BOOKS

Read 10 books that will help you achieve your goals as an artist.

MONEY

FOUNDATION: EMERGENCY FUND

Those financial gurus on the internet are right about one thing - you need an emergency fund. You never know when life will hit you. Medical emergencies. Car problems. Sudden relocation. Death. You name it. This should be financial priority number #1. It may be hard if you've never saved money before, but you will thank me later. It needs to be liquid/accessible. I keep mine in a no-fees checking account that is only used in case of a serious emergency. You may feel better keeping it in cash. It is up to you.

ENDURANCE: 6 MONTHS SECURITY

Take your monthly budget (*yes you will need a budget*) and multiply it by 6. That is your new savings goal. This money will be your security net and will allow you to maintain your practice even if you lose your job. If you are making your living from Art already, this will keep you from having to get a job if sales dry up for a period. This is very important and should not be neglected. I keep mine in a High Yield Savings account that compounds interest daily.

STRENGTH: SAVE 50% AND INVEST 50%

I am not a financial advisor - this is just my approach:

Every dollar of every Art sale, film, comedy show, or project that I receive payment for goes directly into my retail stock account and my high yield savings account 50/50. Stock accounts for growth. Savings accounts for taxes and accessibility.

If a 20 year old sells a painting for \$100 and puts \$50 in the stock market, that money has the ability to turn into upwards of \$4,417. If they do this twelve times it has the potential to turn into over \$53,000. If invested for long-term growth, they aren't selling \$100 paintings. They are selling paintings for over \$4000. \$30 paintings are actually \$1325 paintings. All it takes is time and a general understanding of the stock market. Turn on the DRIP (Dividend Reinvestment Plan). Educate yourself.

(Source)

ONE AND DONE

MAKE A BUDGET

Sit down and figure out what your average monthly spending is. Set limits and stick to it. A minimum of 15-25% of your day job income should be going into savings and investments.

OPEN A HIGH YIELD SAVINGS ACCOUNT

There are many online banking options for this. It should have a high interest rate, no fees, and interest should be compounded daily. Do your research.

OPEN A RETIREMENT ACCOUNT

Decide between a Traditional IRA and a Roth IRA and set up automatic contributions to coincide with your paycheck. If your employer offers a 401k match, contribute up to the match as well - it's a 100% return on your investment. Do your research.

OPEN AN INVESTMENT ACCOUNT

Find a broker that doesn't charge fees for trading. Investment is personal. Do your research.

DEBT

You spent it. You pay it. Do not go into debt for an Art master's degree.

LIFE

FOUNDATION: BE CLEAN AND ORDERLY

First things first - your studio/creative space is up to you. Only you know how best to produce your work. This phase is about your spaces outside of the studio. Make sure your living space, vehicle (if you have one), and digital spaces are clean and orderly. You only have so much energy during a day, but taking the time to maintain a tidy world around you will free up head space and allow you to focus on your creative mission.

ENDURANCE: HEALTHY DIET

A poor diet will limit how long and how well you are able to produce your Art. Take a look at what you currently consume and see what you can cut or replace. During the writing of this, I removed nicotine for 3 years, caffeine for 2, dining out for 1, and alcohol for 6 months. It was difficult, but I felt healthier and was able to reach my financial goals much quicker.

STRENGTH: BE ACTIVE

This was the hardest for me. I played sports throughout grade school, but as an adult I've always found physical activity more of a chore than a joy. I'd rather be in my studio making things. I tried running, pushups, sit-ups, and other solo exercise activities, but nothing stuck. I needed structure and a group setting. I landed on Jiu Jitsu, but the pandemic put it on hold. I now rock climb at a gym 2-3 times a week. It may take some effort to find your thing, but it will pay off when you are 60, healthy, and still producing great work.

ONE AND DONE

GET A LIBRARY CARD

A library card will give you access to a vast quantity of books, movies, CDs, and educational resources for free. Many libraries provide access to video streaming services, audio books, and one on one counseling for things like copyrighting, patents, and trademarking. Many also have free online learning tools where you can learn skills like graphic design, video editing, animation, and more. Take advantage of these wonderful resources.

Sidenote: If they don't have the book you are looking for, ask them to buy it. They have money set aside for acquisition.

EXTRA CREDIT

VOLUNTEER

As artists, we can get very introspective and self involved. Break the pattern by giving back through volunteering. I've planted trees at parks, picked up trash, mentored college students, and taught free art lessons to hundreds of children. I can tell you from experience - I've always felt fulfilled knowing I've helped make my community a little bit better than it was before. Plus, you never know who you'll meet.

CONCLUSION

The goal is to make Art, make money, and be the best you for as long as possible. This process may take some time, but it will put you in a position to keep spreading your message, mission, and perspective for the entirety of your life. I believe in you.