

Introduction

I am really smart for forty-five minutes each day. This occurs in the morning, before 9:00. I think my best thoughts, get my best ideas, and feel my most confident. My brain works at top speed; my thoughts are clear, deep and far-reaching. This burst of creative energy fuels my work for the rest of the day.

But there are specific requirements. These forty-five minutes must be preceded by a short, brisk walk, where I am exposed to the outside world. I must be in a café, one that has enough people and diversity to provide a humming backdrop. Coffee, i.e., caffeine, is necessary (but not too much!). And I must have a sketchpad, a notebook or a computer—something in which I can record my thoughts.

I jump from one idea to the next, one project to another. I let the thought process flow, unedited. If I happen to glance out the window and see a truck with a huge, colorful image on its side, I take the time to watch it pass by, and then I make a quick sketch to plant a seed for future use. Or I eavesdrop on a too-loud cell phone conversation at the table next to mine, and remind myself of John Cage's philosophy: "Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating." In other words, I trust that the culture surrounding me has a valid place in my creative process. Instead of considering these digressions as an interruption to my work, I use them as essential ingredients. I know that they will, in one form or another, show up in my art.

There have been times when my forty-five minutes are neglected. Life gets in the way, and must be attended to. Or I lose confidence, and berate myself for being unproductive. But over the years, I have learned to say, "I need to protect this time and space. I must not give it away. This is what I need in order to make my best work."

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Non-artists look for the most direct and efficient route from point A to point B. Artists seek the opposite. It is this circuitous path that offers up treasures, revealing the insights and passions that make your work meaningful.

When I say do not compromise about your art, I'm not referring to your final product. Instead, I am saying do not compromise about what you need along the way. Not compromising means finding, committing to, and protecting your own unique requirements for making your strongest and most relevant art.

In *Art Without Compromise**, I ask you to look at what you see everyday, and place it in the context of your art making. My goal is to inspire you to reconsider the way you understand your creative landscape. The society that supports (and restrains) you, the media that informs (and misguides) you, the tools that aid (and confound) you, the culture that inspires (and challenges) you—these are just a few of the subtle, often invisible influences that affect the art you create, and how your art is perceived.

My hope is that this book will change with you. A chapter that you read today will mean something different when you read it in a month or a year. The order in which you read the chapters will change as well, depending on your interests at the time of reading. As the cultural critic and philosopher Roland Barthes believed, the meaning of a text does not come from its author; it comes from the reader. A text comes from a thousand sources of culture, and “...there is a site where this multiplicity is collected, and the site is not the author, but the reader.”

Most of all, I hope that this book will help you to immerse yourself in your own circuitous route, and to trust and protect what *you* need along the way.

—*Wendy Richmond, Art Without Compromise**