

“Translation” from “The Creative Act: A Way of Being” by Rick Rubin

Art is an act of decoding. We receive intelligence from Source and interpret it through the language of our chosen craft.

In all fields, there are different degrees of fluency. Our level of skill influences our ability to best articulate this translation in the same way that vocabulary affects communication.

This is not a direct correlation. It's a fluid relationship. When learning a new language, you may be able to ask a question, speak a beautifully memorized phrase, or accidentally say something humorous. At the same time, you may feel unable to share bigger ideas, more nuanced feelings, and express the fullest extent of who you are.

The more we develop, expand and sharpen our skills, the more fluent we become. We can experience greater freedom and less sameness in the act of making. And vastly approve our ability to manifest the best version of our ideas in the physical world.

For the sake of both the work and our own enjoyment, it's of great value to continue honing our craft. Every artist at every juncture in the process can get better through practice, study and research. The gifts of art are more learned and developed than innate. We can always improve.

As Arn Anderson once noted: “I'm both a professor and a student. Because if you're no longer a student, you don't have the right to call yourself a professor.”

If you feel unable to hit a note or faithfully paint an image, it's helpful to remember that the challenge is not that you can't do it, but that you haven't done it yet. Avoid thinking in impossibilities. If there's a skill or piece of knowledge you need for a particular project, you can do the homework and work toward it over time. You can train for anything.

While this framework will broaden your ability, it won't guarantee you become a great artist. A guitarist could play the most complex solo and while technically impressive, it might not connect emotionally. While an amateur could perform a simplistic three chord song and move you to tears.

At the same time, there's no need to fear learning too much theory. It won't undermine the pure expression of your voice if you don't let it. Having the knowledge won't hurt the work. How you use the knowledge may. You have new tools, you don't have to use them.

Learning provides more ways to reliably convey your ideas. From our enlarged menu, we can still choose the simplest, most elegant option. Painters, like Barnett Newman, Piet Mondrian, and Joseph Albers, were classically trained and they chose to spend their careers exploring simple monochromatic geometric shapes.

Consider your craft as an energy alive in you. It's just as much a part of the cycle of evolution as other living things are. It wants to grow, it wants to flower.

To hone your craft is to honor creation. It doesn't matter if you become the best in your field. By practicing to improve, you are fulfilling your ultimate purpose on this planet.