

I always appreciated art, but to say I am an artist, I am not. I never thought of myself as an artist and probably never will.

When reflecting on my art career, I go back to elementary school. I can remember my elementary school art class. Boy, did I look forward to this *special* every week. It was a time away from the rote learning and a time for me to draw, color, design, and create. A time for me to be me. My art teacher was so creative. She was so eccentric. I just loved the smell of the classroom. The smell of the crayons, oil pastels and the paper for which we would be creating our artwork on. I loved the look of the classroom, too. It was messy with paint drippings on the floor and by the sink from the class before, but the atmosphere felt so much more at ease than the regular education classroom where everything was organized in bins and so structured.

I would walk into the art class every week always trying my best. But, week after week, project after project, year after year, my masterpieces were nothing compared to those certain gifted-artistic students in my class. I would be proud of my work until I looked over at theirs and saw a true masterpiece. I don't exactly know where my lack of confidence came with art. Maybe it was the way the teacher would inadvertently gush over the artistic ability of others that made me feel less of an artist than my fellow classmates. But art class is just one facet of art.

I took gymnastics class when I was younger. I was so excited and nervous to perform for our recital. Granted it was just for the parents and in the basement of a church, but it was still a recital. Everyone did their front rolls and applauses were heard all around. Now, it was time for the back rolls. This was so challenging for me. I took a deep breath, tucked my head in, pushed backwards and rolled. I felt my body swing to the right. My roll went crooked. Then, just like the movies, I heard the laughs from the parents. I got right up and ran to my mother in tears. She

said, “Carmen, they aren’t laughing at you. They just thought it was cute.” From that point on I was finished. I never took gymnastics again. My self-esteem in the arts was crushed, or at least I thought it was.

It wasn’t until high school that I began to see art as not having to be “perfect”. It could have flaws and still be “perfect”. In fact, the more “flaws” it had, the prettier it was. It was ceramics class that I learned this lesson first hand. I can remember it like yesterday. I was throwing a pot on the Potter’s Wheel. It turned out really nice, but it wasn’t symmetrical on both sides. A classmate of mine was quick to point it out. I went back to the wheel and tried straightening it. My teacher came over and asked what I was trying to accomplish. I informed her my artwork was uneven, and I couldn’t sculpt it to be symmetrical. To my surprise, she never helped. She never even offered a suggestion on how to fix it. Instead, she looked at it and told me, “Sometimes that’s the nature of the beast.” With that statement. I realized she was okay with it, so why couldn’t I be? I cut some designs out in the pot, put on a glaze, and turned it in to be fired. While I submitted it for the art show, I didn’t place, but I was proud of myself for not quitting. I still have my pottery piece. It sits on my bedroom dresser as a reminder of “sometimes that’s the nature of the beast.”

I am not an artist, I am not afraid to admit it, and I am also not afraid to try. If I don’t try, I miss out on so many of life experiences. When I reflect on my life experiences with art, I would say they are similar to that of others. We all have the people who come into our lives and advertently or inadvertently offer words of discouragement and others who offer words of encouragement. When faced with these words, it’s hard not to focus on the negative. But, in darkness, light

shines though. I've found those times to be far and few between when someone compliments the work completed, but I have held onto those words of encouragement and persevered.

When I sit here and reflect on life, no one is perfect. No art is perfect. Art is truly in the eyes of the beholder. I feel as long as I am giving my all and doing the best that I can do, I should feel proud of my work, regardless of what other think.

This assignment couldn't have come at a better time. My eight-year old daughter came home from school with construction paper rolled up like a scroll wrapped with a rubber band. She said, "Mommy, I made abstract art in class today, and a girl in my class ranked the students' artwork in order from best to worst. Mine was the worst." It breaks your heart to hear this on so many levels. However, before letting my real thoughts come out, I calmly asked her to see her work. I unrolled her masterpiece while she explained the project requirements. I took one look at it and said, "Cecilia, I love it. It's beautiful. You know where something this pretty needs to go? On the refrigerator for everyone to see." I loved her design. I could tell she really took her time, her coloring and lines were spot on. Sure, the face was a little lopsided and the eyes weren't even, but it was still her art. It was beautiful.

Do I feel like I have been successful in art? I have been as successful as I can be. I give my best and appreciate the work I do. Could I be better? Yes, but can't we all? However, I am always willing to learn and incorporate new techniques into my work. And, with an attitude like that, I know I will continue to be successful.

To me, the definition of art is anything that one makes, creates, designs or imagines that beautifies life or tells a story.

I feel like my entire life has shaped my viewpoint on art and my attitude towards art. I remember how I felt with comments made both negatively and positively regarding my art. With those life-lessons I experienced, I was never going to forget. I would apply them in my own teaching. With those life experiences and all the life experiences I encountered, they made me into the educator I am today. I believe all children can learn, and the teacher becomes the key determinant on whether or not learning will occur. I recognize and accept the teacher does make a difference in a child's success. A teacher must embrace all children. I accept that not all children learn in the same way at the same pace; and therefore, it is my responsibility to find and create different ways for children to learn. I believe children should have choices in the way they learn, process information, and how they are evaluated in the classroom. Finally, I am there to guide students through inquiry learning so they can make the connections of the event that occurred and relate it to real-world situations. I don't want anyone to feel anything but a sense of accomplishment in their art and learning.

I would like to end this paper with the following, "Do I feel like I have been successful in art?" If I would define art as teaching, then, "yes" I have been successful with art. I look forward to each and every day. I cannot wait to wake up and start on my project. There might be twists and turns, there might be squiggly lines that others won't see the beauty of, but for me, those twist and turns and squiggly lines are what makes my masterpiece one of a kind. That masterpiece I helped to create couldn't be more beautiful. It's mine. I did my very best.